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# Myanmar-India gas pipeline



From the recent media reports, it appears that Bangladesh is going to miss an opportunity of earning a huge amount of money as transit fees of gas. Bangladesh has reportedly attached some conditions like reduction of trade imbalance with India and use of Indian transmission line to import electricity from Bhutan with the proposed gas pipeline through Bangladesh. But India insists on bilateral discussion of those problems with Bangladesh. Since

Bangladesh did not agree to allow gas pipeline through its territory without discussing some other bilateral issues with India; India and Myanmar are reportedly planning to build the pipeline bypassing Bangladesh. If the pipeline is built bypassing Bangladesh territory, Bangladesh will gain nothing. The status of the bilateral issues with India will remain the same as it stands today. India and Myanmar will derive benefits from the pipeline while Bangladesh will

stand as a spectator. Contrarily, if Bangladesh does not include other bilateral issues with India to be discussed and accepts the pipeline through its territory, we shall earn reportedly around US\$125-500 million a year as transit fees of gas that is no small amount of money for Bangladesh. One major problem of Bangladesh-India dispute non-settlement is that India always emphasises upon bilateral discussion and Bangladesh always puts all the disputes at a

time. If any issue involves more than two countries, what is the harm to India if it is discussed in the full forum? India did not allow Nepal to be included in the discussion on Ganges water disputes, although Nepal could do immense help building water reservoirs in Nepal's territory. In fact, welfare of all the people of this region lies in the settlement of these bilateral or trilateral disputes not in the sustenance of those. So, all countries of this region should take realistic measures to solve those issues. Other than appearing with a bundle of issues, Bangladesh should talk with one issue at a time, like allowing its territory for gas pipeline in exchange of the use of Indian transmission lines to import electricity from Bhutan. There are reasons: we shall receive gas transmission fees from India and Myanmar allowing gas pipeline through our territory, and in exchange we shall pay fees to India for electricity transmission from Bhutan. This sounds logical. However, in the case of gas pipeline, even if India does not want to discuss any other issue and does not allow India's electricity transmission line for import of electricity from Bhutan, it is in the interest of Bangladesh to allow gas pipeline through its territory without anything in exchange. We will be getting gas transmission fee that is our benefit. This opportunity must not remain untapped.

People concerned should consider these points.  
**Dr. Md. Abdur Rouf**  
 Associate Faculty  
 Dhaka Centre, Royal Roads University,  
 Canada

## Violence cannot redress grievances

I was disappointed to read the editorial "Violence cannot redress grievances" of the 24/05/06 regarding the recent protests by garment factory employees.

I believe you failed to touch on the key issues and took up position with the owners of these factories.

You condemned the poor workers for their natural outburst, on whose toil and blood, garment factory owners have become millionaires. You said that deeper causes must be solved, but failed to mention that the low

wages in the garment sector are due to powerful lobbies who are able to convince the government that an increase would be unproductive.

Over 20 lakh people are employed in this industry and their wages are only

Tk 500 to Tk 1,500 (per month) for a 12 hour day. This equates to a paltry 6 cents per hour, as against 20-78 cents in other countries. Garment factory workers have time and again asked for the legal minimum wage of Tk 930, but the government was very apathetic. Remember that many MPs are garment factory owners.

You also failed to mention that garment owners, while reaping in profits, show little or no regard for the welfare of their employees. In recent years, there has been a large number of deaths of workers due to fire or building collapse. They work long hours in the most unhealthy of environments, are not entitled to public holidays, medical facilities, or even maternity leave.

The unrest and the subsequent violence is the result of years of deprivation, certainly no "mystery".  
**P.Choudhury**  
 Dhaka

## Doctors and commission

A doctor at my university medical centre wants me to go to a certain diagnostic centre. But I am ever reluctant to do so since I can easily go to a better one in Chittagong city. When will the doctors follow the medical ethics and refrain from imposing such things on the patients?

They seem to understand nothing beyond commission!  
**Astudent**  
 One-e-mail

## Load-shedding hindering progress

Joypara, an ideal village of Dohar upazila in Dhaka district, is undoubtedly a developed village in all aspects. It has many schools, colleges, a madrasah and government offices and banks.

We know that the more the nation is educated the more the

nation will be prosperous.

Joypara has been brought under electrification. But it is a matter of great regret that discontinuation of the supply of electricity hour after hour, every day, has paralysed life in the area. Students are the worst sufferers.

If the students cannot take good preparation, they will not be able to attain good results. The literacy or the illiteracy rate of a country determines whether it is rich or poor, developed or undeveloped. If load-shedding continues, people will suffer endlessly.

So I would like to request the electricity authorities to take necessary steps in this regard, so that the students can continue their studies and life doesn't come to a standstill.

**Md. Abdus Salam**  
 Joypara Pilot High School, Dohar,  
 Dhaka

## Agitation and agony

The country has a history that shows that whenever there was a political or social crisis people would come on to the road to protest or agitate to fulfil their demands. In most of the cases the shows on the road would end up in peace with some negligible violence. In the Language Movement or the struggle for independence, the protesters were peaceful until the rulers turned extremely oppressive. There was no wanton violence. But the recent trend of agitation is becoming a matter of concern. These agitators are making it a point to make their presence felt by everyone through carrying out senseless destruction on public and private property. I support those fighting for their lawful rights, but

that does not mean that you can do whatever you like.  
**Kabir Hossain Taposh**  
 Paribag, Dhaka

that does not mean that you can do whatever you like.  
**Kabir Hossain Taposh**  
 Paribag, Dhaka

## Anti-drug law

I know that an European girl faced death sentence because she was found carrying drugs through Kuala Lumpur airport on her way to Australia. Anti-drug laws in Malaysia are tough and they mean business.

Here in Bangladesh one wonders what the anti-drug laws really mean.  
**Sikandar Ali**  
 Riverside, CA, USA

## Mobile pornography

It's noticeable nowadays that besides CD, VCD & DVD, pornography through mobile phone is very common and popular (!) among youngsters as they find it easy to download porn clips by using their handsets having all kinds of multimedia facilities. Most of them even watch those movies in classes in presence of their teachers. Instead of sharing good books and movies, they share porn videos and it has become an open secret. The boy whose porn collection is the richest among friends is now treated as a VIP and everyone comes to him for getting some tits.

It must be checked.  
**Abrar Mahmud**  
 Chittagong Medical College, CTG

## Forex bungling

A few forex booths of different banks have been functioning inside the arrival hall of the Zia International Airport to facilitate the passengers as well as air crew members to convert their foreign currency into local currency at official rates, and also to directly induct the valuable and much sought after foreign currencies into the country's forex reserve. But in reality what takes place in those booths in broad daylight is just anybody's guess.

The exchange rates displayed are not even as per the daily published rates. Usually, lower rates are displayed. Some of them even display blank rates. Here lies the trick. Passengers mostly aware of the prevailing rates get confused and start grumbling. The dealing clerks start whispering and convince the customers to exchange the currencies at unofficial but higher rates, needless to mention without any documentation thereby depriving the state reserves. Moreover, the way the dealing clerks start wooing the passengers is very unpleasant and below the dignity of an international airport. Such scenes are not to be found anywhere. Anyone passing by the counters may witness the drama. Foreigners do feel irritated and embarrassed. Unless they have personal interest they will not be so aggressive. It

seems instead of the state a few individuals are reaping the benefits and becoming rich overnight.

Taka has become unstable and getting devalued with each passing day while we are even unable to take care of the foreign currencies that enter the country legally through the entry point. This also affects our local markets where prices remain uncertain creating tension in the minds of the common people of limited fixed income. Foreign currencies are getting rare day by day. God knows what the many private money changers outside ZIA are doing. Value of taka will get stronger subject to country's economic strength and also how much dependent we are on our own resources. Every second item of daily necessity is a foreign one, as if it is an import based country.

It also depends on forex reserves, which can only be boosted through legal conversions and by stopping flight of foreign currencies through smuggling.

I suggest all foreign money changers be put under strong surveillance and each penny must be transacted legally.  
**A.B.M. Zakaria**  
 East Shewrapara, Dhaka

## Listen, politicians

Several instances of people's no-confidence against the government give us one clear message that these incidents are the outcome of our poor politics. Generally, we are a peace-loving nation. That does not mean that people are not capable enough to shout against misdeeds, as they did in 1971. The very recent events in Kansat and Demra are examples of their strength and unity. If they want they can achieve their rights. So this is the first warning to the politicians.

Moreover, the politicians should change their mentality and turn it to the mass people's interest in order to avoid unwanted circumstances.  
**Saumitra Sarder**  
 Zigatola, Dhaka

## Shocked or saddened?

No one will live forever. Death is inevitable. Some die young, some old, from diseases or accidents. When one dies in old age, though painful, everyone accepts it as a natural phenomenon. But I have noticed that in our country when a renowned person dies due to old age, in the newspapers it is reported: so and so is "shocked" by the death of that person. I think the word should be saddened. The word, "shocked", should be reserved for the premature, unnatural and unexpected deaths.

I hope the press will consider this point.  
**Nur Jahan, Chittagong**



PHOTO: AFP

We have been discussing the problems of garment industries without taking into consideration the most important issue of this sector. It is the implementation of Labour Laws. Everybody is ignoring the fact that the Labour Laws are totally ignored by the employers and the government. The discontent and the burning of the factories were due to long ignored basic rights of the garment workers as per labour laws.

As per the labour laws there are a number of requirements which must be fulfilled by the employers.

1. Normal working hours shall not be more than 8 hours in a day and 48 hours in a week. Extra working time is limited and payable at double the normal rate. A worker must get one day off within 10 days of work.
2. Every permanent worker is entitled to casual, medical, and annual leave with pay. Maternity leave has to be given to female workers.
3. Every worker automatically becomes permanent after 90 days.
4. Services of a worker can be terminated only with full benefit and pay.
5. The workers are entitled to 2% profit share of the company.

The law contains a lot more provisions to safeguard the rights of the workers. These are totally ignored by the employers and the govt.

The employers do not allow the workers to form their labour union and CBA after bribing the officials concerned or sacking the labour leaders. The employers take all sorts of undertakings from the employees at the time of their employment and terminate their employment just before 90 days to avoid making them permanent workers. The government allow these illegal activities of employers at the cost of employees.

The employees have no choice but to accept these conditions under duress in return for their employment. The laws must be modified and enforced strictly to safeguard the interest of the workers.

This problem must be addressed immediately to avoid further deterioration of the present situation.

**S. Yahya**  
 Shahjahan Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Kansat", "Shonir Akhra" & then what happened in the garment industries in and around Dhaka must be considered most alarming by every conscious citizen of this country.

This is no time to blame and counter blame each other like the two major political parties.

Farmers, garment workers & the manpower employed overseas are presently the back-bone of this nation which once started off as a basket-case, but came a long way to gaining economic strength. The garment sector is our premier export earner & any attempt to disrupt this sector will mean disaster in many respects with highly negative consequences.

**Z. Rahman**  
 Gulshan, Dhaka

I felt fascinated when I read about Muslin, the pride of Bangladesh. I have always thought that those times would come again. When will we show our talent in the garment sector? With an enormous earning of \$6.89 billion from the garment sector in the fiscal year 2005, Bangladesh has earned the confidence of foreign buyers that has drawn huge orders over the rival countries.

Not only this, Bangladesh has been ranked 65 in the ease of doing business index whereas China

and India were ranked 91 and 116. It's the time when every sign seems positive for Bangladesh to raise its head from the decayed position of an underdeveloped third world country.

**Khizir Mahmud**  
 Malaysia

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The violence in the garment sector is highly deplorable. The members of the citizenry witnessed, awestricken, the flare that engulfed the biggest foreign exchange earning sector from Gazipur to Savar to Dhaka. While the marauding workers engaged in the loot, fire and destruction; the owners were on the street blaming the govt. for their failure to contain the convulsion.

Reading through and watching the media reports one would be confused as to who is to blame? The most annoying of all was the irresponsible remarks made by the high echelon of the ruling party. Some stalwarts of the ruling party put the blame on the opposition and even smelled foreign conspiracies. In Bangladeshi style of politics, it was no wonder. However, this time we felt that the ruling party would not try to confuse people by blaming the opposition alone and would tell the simplest truth to the nation.

Irresponsible remarks have always been our primary state-of-the-art of the politicians, ostensibly to divert people's attention and obviously to hide government's failures. Let's revisit a few examples of irresponsible utterances in the past few years that stunned the nation we saw a minister consoling a bereaved family referring to Allah's wishes (As if the law enforcers had nothing to do) after the sad death of a two year child on his father's lap in a terrorist shootout. Oh! what a mockery! On another occasion, we heard a minister commenting on the migratory birds, "We have not invited the migrating birds, why call them our guests." The after-effect was random hunting of these birds that took shelter in the wetlands of Sylhet. The remark is a blatant disregard of the existing law that prohibits hunting birds and animals. Thanks to the press for the immediate reaction, the hunting of these migratory birds stopped. The Kansat outburst is yet another example when the government blamed the opposition for orchestrating the popular movement of the peasants. Another example is the outburst of people at Shanir Akhra who had gathered spontaneously demanding regular supply of water and electricity. These irresponsible remarks and utterances give rise to one question are we failing to see the fizz and fizzle of unhappy people?

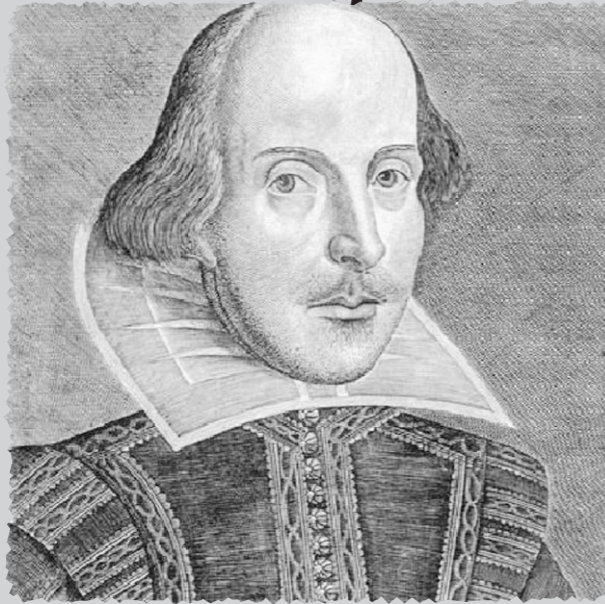
Coming back to the unprecedented scale of violence, arson and looting in the RMG factories. The government failed to take adequate security measures. The government perhaps preferred to hold their guns back keeping the election in view. BGMEA, on the other hand, termed the violence, as an act of 'outsiders' in the guise of workers plotting to destabilise the RMG sector with an ulterior motive. Whatever may be their line of thought, deprivation of workers, absence of a safe working environment and job security, sparked off the violence. Of late, the workers have been voicing their demands, unfortunately no one seems to take it to cognisance. The result has been violence & destruction; above all, it is the image of the country which is at stake.

It is time we refrained from making irresponsible remarks.  
**Ulfat Hussain**  
 Mirpur Road, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

# Celestial Shakespeare



In my house, there is a framework upon which the following lines are engraved: 'World is a stage, Time is a period, Man is actor, God is director.'

This is a saying by William Shakespeare. Whoever comes to my place, he/she can't take eyes off the statement and expresses close intimacy and agreement to the version as it is a universal truth. Though there are many writings about his life and contribution in world literature, I always cherish a dream to be included in the row of those people who wrote and are still writing about him. A little long ago, a question arose about his existence; whether he was a male or a female. My friends who were not students of English department, were curious to know about it. A debate took place among our department's friends. Anyway, I feel the urgency to write about the genius. He was born on April 23, 1564 at Stratford-Upon-Avon. His life was commonplace.

Before his death, he moved to Stratford and took last breath there and died on 23 April, 1616. His contribution to literature is timeless and of universal interest to all.

**Rubab Abdullah, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka**