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Oil tanker disaster

The explosion and consequent disaster with loss of lives on board an oil tanker at Chittagong outer-anchorage was front page news for the last few days. Routine maintenance including chipping was reported in the newspapers to have been in progress during the incident. Marine casualties of this nature despite all possible care & attention cannot be eliminated, or in other words absolute safety may not be achieved due to the factors such as act of God, human error etc. Ships are always operated & looked after under rules/regulations of international conventions duly adopted/implemented by maritime laws of the countries. We therefore need to be firmly assured by the owners as well as the authorities that there was no exception to these requirements made for this particular vessel, "Banglar Shourav".

The ship was an asset of great value to BSC, a corporation with majority shares held by the state. Loss of valuable lives makes it imperative on the part of the authorities to ascertain the following things.

1. Approved equipments/instruments to determine the gas-free state of the tanks/spaces were used before commencement of the chipping-work.
2. Certificate was issued by the authorised govt. agency (Explosive Dept).
3. The vessel was duly covered by Hull/P&I insurance in all respects.

Surely this tragic incident touches the hearts of all seafarers and the people of this country with no words to console the members of the affected families. May Allah bless us all.

Z. Rahman, Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Teachers and journalists

I couldn't hide my exasperation towards the elite, that is the literate part of our society, especially the teachers and the media people. These groups of people are supposed to be literate and enlightened, progressive in their thought and expressions. Contrary to this, they are, in my opinion failing us miserably. They are failing not because of their inability to understand things, rather their strong bias that limits their wider perception of matters that affect our lives.

MM Haque
Jeddah, K.S.A

a home study session for a group of her top girl students in her own house where they could discuss politics, religion and literature without the intimidation of the Mullahs. In her book, she recounts one such session with her students about why Iranian men insist that women should wear veil. Here is an excerpt of their discussions:

"Can you imagine the kind of man who'd get sexually provoked just looking at a strand of my hair?" said Nassrin.

"Women who cover themselves are aiding and abetting the regime," said Azin with a defiant flourish.

That gives a picture of how Iranian society today.

Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

Resolve the crisis

The safety net for an elected democratic government is the people. We hope our present government enjoys the confidence of the people as this is the one and only safety-net to run the government. We further hope that the government

will be responsive to current political issues faced by the country. In my judgement, the following issues need to be addressed with results:

- a. The controversy surrounding the presidency. Why can't the people listen to the President?
- b. The EC has become a controversial institution due to its failure. We are forced to guess that the end results of this will only eat up the valuable time to update the voter list. Who is going to be benefited?
- c. Teachers' strike. An appeal by the PM is yet to work. A meaningful dialogue has to be initiated by the government.
- d. The most important issue of electoral reform needs a more positive approach by the government and the opposition. We consider it the responsibility of the government to take sincere steps to arrive at a decision on reform.

It is time for thinking differently and openly.

A Reader
On e-mail

Cause of cancer

As you know chemical released by plastic water bottles can cause cancer (It is not the water that affects you but the chemical released from the bottle)

How to avoid: Check the bottom of the bottle there should be a triangle sign and there will be a number on it. If the number is higher than or equal to 5 -- then this bottle is safe to use. Numbers under 5 will release the chemical. For most bottled water, the number is 1. Remember to check and stop reusing those bottles. Please pass on this information to your friends.

Some of you may be in the habit of using and re-using your disposable mineral water bottles, keeping them in your car or at work. Not a good idea.

Mohiuddin Sarker
On e-mail

Student visa

An ever-increasing number of students from Bangladesh, in recent years, are going for higher or further education programmes around the world, especially to the USA, UK, Australia, Canada and Japan. The growing tendency toward overspecialisation, which is also a national demand, is needed for higher positions in business, industry, and government. Many students over the years after successful completion of Undergraduate, Postgraduate or Doctoral degrees are now back to their motherland and serving the nation. But more recently the limited and controlled student visas and the stringent visa processing system make it difficult for students to get entry into some countries and they are often not granted visa, despite having all the requisite qualifications.

Many of them even with excellent academic background and already enrolled in reputed foreign universities have not been granted student visa. This trend is frustrating and discouraging and dissuades good students from higher studies. One of my friends, a graduate from SUST in Computer Science with brilliant academic results, failed to get a student visa to Canada and then went to a university in England. Another one, a chemical engineer, failed to get visa to England and left his ambition for higher studies for good and joined a company!

Students applying for entry visas are normally required to present documentary evidence of their status as responsible and law-abiding citizens of their own country. They are to submit to a mental and physical examination and establish their eligibility to receive a student visa. Students are to spend almost a year of hard work and their parents' valuable money for all requirements of student visa. After a long year of hard work with determinism and enthusiasm, if someone possessing all authentic papers and documents is denied a visa his tribulation reaches its climax.

Embassy officials may refuse entry visas to students only on specific grounds set forth in the student visa regulations. This may include conviction for crimes, fraud or wilful misrepresentation in pro-

cessing a visa, membership of certain proscribed organisations, believed to be prejudicial to the public interest or dangerous to the welfare, safety, or security of the nation etc. But these specific grounds should not be on mere 'suspicion' or 'lack of authenticity' for being ineligible for a student visa.

A precise scrutiny is justifiable before denying a visa to a student. All the embassies and High Commissions, I believe, should think about the issue a second time. "A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste." isn't it?

Mehedi Hasan
Uttara Model Town, Dhaka

Bangladeshi UNSG?

I must first of all thank Mr. Abdul Hannan for his article: "Why lag behind the race for the next UNSG?" and Mr. Talukder Maniruzzaman for his article: "A Bangladeshi Secretary General?" published in The Daily Star on June 23 and 27.

Mr. Abdul Hannan has mentioned in his article that the UN has an informally agreed regional rotation system which dictates that this is Asia's 'turn' to have a UN secretary general. While Butros Butros Ghali of Egypt, and Kofi Annan of Ghana were from Africa, Xavier Perez De Cuellar was the lone representative from Latin America. U Thant of Burma (Mayanmar) has been the only UNSG from Asia. India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and South Korea have announced candidates to succeed Kofi Annan whose two terms expire at the end of the year. Pakistan and Malaysia also started thinking for the race. Mentioning Bangladesh's deep commitment to the principles and purpose of the UN and the great role played by Bangladesh, Mr Abdul Hannan has strongly suggested to the Bangladesh government to take part in the competition and there is a fair chance of winning the race.

Mehedy Hasan
Mirpur-12, Pallabi

Tenure of government

Recently, BNP secretary Mr Mannan Bhuyan suggested that the tenure of the govt. be changed to 4 years. I completely agree with him.

Our political parties do not seem to have enough patience to wait for too long. If we analyse the last 15 years of political activities we can see that the opposition parties organised different agitation programmes to topple the government at the end of the term of each government.

In view of this, I would request

our political parties to consider this matter seriously.

Sagar Ahmed
Dhaka University

CEC and his antics

Things are rotten in the state of Bangladesh. It is deeply engulfed in confusion, conspiracy and uncertainty. In this utter hopelessness, is the Chief Election Commissioner out there with his ludicrous utterances and gestures to bring some comic relief to the situation? If so, he is doing this at a huge cost.

After all, the interest of the nation is not a matter of child play.

Lulu Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

ICDDR, B

Congratulations to Morshed Ali Khan for his gutsy article (June 16) on ICDDR, B. This is probably the first time that ICDDR, B has been questioned and rightly so.

To be fair to ICDDR, B their output is far better than any national institute of the country. While ICDDR, B will have surely their "defence" on the issue, let us not forget that the scientific community in Bangladesh is perhaps not qualified enough to either verify or validate the quality of research work of ICDDR, B.

As a Bangladeshi living in the USA and who has a close link with science research institutes, it was painful to find the appalling condition of our research centres where crores of taka is spent every year without any result. One classic example is the BCSIR Laboratory Dhaka, popularly known as "Science Laboratory" where funds are regularly flowed in.

Also, it is high time that the government and donor agencies promote scientific research at the private level.

B. Aziz
Westador Condominium, Austin TX

History repeats itself!

The history has repeated itself. FIFA could not stop this repetition. Same host same opposition but slightly different occurrence. In 1990, a penalty was given illegally in favour of the host team and yesterday a legal penalty was not given in favour of the opposition team.

The result is well known to all. Shame!

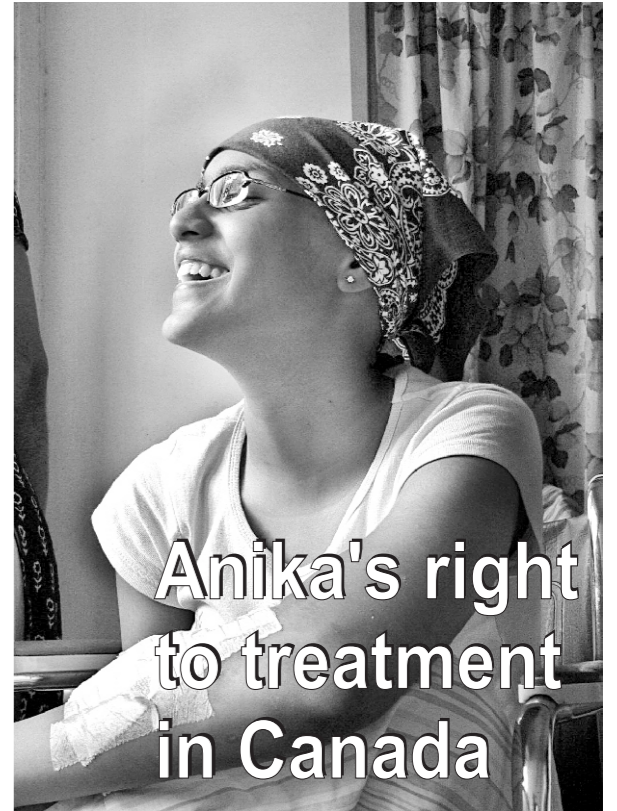
Shoeb
RUET

For balanced growth

Bangladesh is a 'low-income' country, and its main aim, like any other developing country, is to substantially improve the social

and economic performance. Recently, Bangladesh has been enjoying an economic growth of more than 5% per annum. However, it is evident that most of the development is taking place in the cities Dhaka, in particular. One sees flashy malls like Bashundhara City and high-rise buildings springing up in all parts of Dhaka city. But when one travels right outside of Dhaka, he sees a completely different picture. There is no sign of urbanisation, and poverty is widespread. I am not saying that the construction and business boom in Dhaka is bad; it is helping the country increase its GDP by all accounts. However, such Dhaka-centric growth of urbanisation cannot be a good idea for a developing country like Bangladesh where one city is reaping most of the benefits of the economic growth while the rest of the country remains, more or less, the same. This causes people to move to the main city, Dhaka in this case, for economic opportunities, creating a lot of pressure on the existing infrastructure of the city. Such large-scale migration to Dhaka would not occur if other parts of the country could be urbanised and job opportunities created in those areas. The fruits of economic growth of Bangladesh need to be spread-out.

One way to spread out urbanisation to other parts of the country is to move some of the important government and private institutions from Dhaka to other district headquarters. This will increase the importance of other cities of Bangladesh. One such city that may be considered is Chittagong. Chittagong has been declared the 'Commercial Capital' of Bangladesh. It has a number of important facilities that can encourage the establishment of firms and factories: an international airport, a seaport, and a large market for goods and services. However, it is sad to see that the city does not even have the headquarters of a single major commercial bank. The government should encourage some of the public and private commercial banks and other financial institutions to move their headquarters to Chittagong. Staying with Chittagong, we see that the international airport is practically lying idle. Only Biman, GMG and Thai Airways use the facilities of the airport regularly. One way to increase the air-traffic at Chittagong airport is to allow the private airlines to use it as a hub and to fly to any destination in the world. Biman can have Dhaka as its hub. The government should



Anika's right to treatment in Canada

Sixteen-year old Anika Haroon, undergoing chemotherapy for osteosarcoma in Mumbai's Tata Memorial Hospital since April this year, has been advised by her oncologist Dr Agarwal, to seek further treatment in Canada urgently. 'Every day counts, he urged, 'we must not only pray and hope, but also look for a miracle.'

Given the fact that the child was born in Canada and as such, is entitled to the advanced health care available there, particularly in prosthetics, her parents lost no time in applying to the Canadian High Commission for visa. But the genuineness of Anika's case, both its humanitarian and legal aspects, simply failed to sway the immigration office in Dhaka. It was 'not satisfied' that the child needed her parents to accompany her and they were summarily denied visas.

Anika's cancer has spread from her knee to her lungs. She is in a wheelchair and cannot be expected to take care of herself independently. Although she is very brave, she needs the physical and emotional support of her parents, not only on account of her being a minor but also because of her very serious condition.

It is unthinkable that a country, admired for its civilised immigration policies, should allow its officials here to be so harsh. Isn't denying Anika parental succour at this critical time in her life tantamount to gross violation of her rights as a child and as a Canadian-born national?

Anika has written a personal letter to the Prime Minister himself, appealing that her parents be given permission to accompany her to seek advanced treatment in Canada. That would be the politically correct and compassionate thing to do and in keeping with the internationally recognised Rights of the Child.

On behalf of this beautiful young girl and her distraught and despairing parents we appeal to the Canadian immigration office to reconsider Anika's case and exercise its better judgement on the humanitarian side, rather than the prejudicial. May the Almighty be with Anika and her near and dear ones.

Begum Quamrun Nayar
Devpahar Lane, College Road, Chittagong

actively encourage other airlines, especially the ones of the Middle-east, to fly into Chittagong. The increased use of Chittagong airport for international travel can reduce pressure on Dhaka's Zia International Airport. Also, a number of hotels can be set up next to Chittagong's airport by private entrepreneurs to provide accommodation to travellers and businessmen. It will also increase the utilisation of Chittagong airport, and can spur the growth of a high-quality hospitality sector in the port city.

The above two steps will move some of the business from Dhaka to Chittagong, and this will make Chittagong commercially important. This way, Bangladesh can have two cities with commercial importance.

These steps will not urbanise the whole country, but they will reduce the sole importance of Dhaka and will spread out the commercial activities across two cities.

The government has been contemplating allowing a Malaysian firm to build the four-lane highway between Dhaka and Chittagong. The move is a commendable one. Our government does not have sufficient resources to provide all the necessary infrastructure facilities to the citizens. Private initiatives are, therefore, important to fill in this function of the government. The government should also allow private entrepreneurs to construct four or six-lane highways connecting Dhaka with all the major cities, like Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet, Bogra and Mymensingh on a Build-Own-Operate or a Build-Own-Operate-Transfer basis. This way, the government does not have to worry about building and maintaining the highways of the country. Also, proper and efficient road communication between Dhaka and the rest of the country will encourage investors to invest in building factories in other parts of the country, because transportation of goods to markets can be done quickly. Such highways can help to spread urbanisation all across Bangladesh.

Such steps will prevent Dhaka to be the sole engine of economic growth for Bangladesh.

T. M. Tonmoy Islam
On email

Israel issue



This is a response to Mr. Oneil Osman's letter urging Bangladesh to recognise Israel. For the last few years Jews in North America are reported to have been working on Bangladesh to recognise Israel.

However, Mr. Oneil, I'm sorry to say that you don't have a case for the Bangladeshi people. The main reason why Bangladesh does not recognise Israel is because Israel is considered an illegitimate state created by occupying other people's land, expelling them from their homes and making them refugees. The issue of religion is not as important here as the fact that if a rich and powerful nation takes over our country Bangladesh and expels us from our homes to make us refugees, we will be as helpless as the Palestinians.

In your last two emails you mentioned the fact that Israel has a lot of technology. It's true, but most of its technology has been supplied and financed by America and the European countries. These countries have also provided Israel with nuclear weapons technology, which they are now trying to stop Iran from acquiring.

In your last message, you have mentioned Pakistan taking steps for recognising Israel, despite opposition from the people. This is also true about the other few Muslims countries who have recognised Israel. But, Bangladesh is a democratic country and here peoples' opinion matters. The reason why President General Musharraf has been thinking of recognising Israel is the tactics adopted by lawmakers in Washington, who because of strong lobbying and partnership between Israeli and Indian lobbies have been blocking weapons sales to Pakistan.

In my opinion, for most Bangladeshis to accept Israel, Israel has to solve their problem with the Palestinians first. This doesn't mean Jews have to leave the land altogether. There must be a fair and amicable settlement between Israel and Palestinians. Palestinians who have been kicked out of their homes must be allowed to return.

Arif, On e-mail

Don't cry foul

Every time Argentina was ousted from the World Cup, they or their fans found a conspiracy behind it. They blamed referees for every whistle going against them. But the fact is that they didn't play well.

Solaiman Palash
East Jurain, Dhaka

Everybody wants to see the World Cup, not Referee Cup. Mistakes of the referees have already spoiled the joy of the grand meet.

No more Referee Cup!

Sumon Dutta, On e-mail

World Cup '06 was supposed to be a "technological World Cup". But technology is only limited to the maintenance system. So the standard of refereeing has not improved. We have had many spoilt games.

Shoeb, Rajshahi



PHOTO: AFP

Frustrating situation

I think I speak on behalf all the expat when I say "I am truly frustrated and disgusted by the political situation in Bangladesh". My frustration is echoed by those of us that are watching from the sidelines.

The blame lies on both parties but for an opposition party to say that "We hope to debilitate the country through a general strike" is probably one of the most counter-productive things one can do at this time.

On the same token, the inaction by the ruling party on the CEC and the lack of dialogue with the opposition are equally blame worthy.

Rashad Haque
New York, USA