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# Passing of a doyen



The general people thronged in thousands to pay their last respect to Poet Shamsur Rahman, though the country's political leadership ignored one of its best sons.

**Sazzad Hossain**  
One e-mail

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If we look at the sky, some stars are simply bright, some are not clearly visible but you see one of the stars is very bright, unique, extra ordinary and clearly visible. In our literary arena there are a lot of poets, some of them are writing, some have already

written a lot, but I am sure Shamsur Rahman was unique and extra-ordinary. He was the best among the best. But the problem is that we do not know how to respect such people.

He inspired the nation during the liberation war and also inspired us till his death through his writing. Then, why didn't our government show due respect to the poet?  
**Kohinur Akter**  
Dhaka University

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We are greatly shocked at the sad demise of the poet. He was a poet that the nation could be

proud of.  
His death is an irreparable loss to Bengali literature.

**K Hasan**  
Jalalabad, Sylhet

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How can I forget the poems of Shamsur Rahman! Shamsur Rahman, one of the greatest poets of our country, is no more. He has left the world but, of course, he will be in our hearts forever.

Death is inevitable. Still, it is hard to accept that the poet will not write anything for us in future.  
**Emdadul Haque**  
Rajshahi University

## Plan for higher education

Considering the inadequacy that prevails in the domain of higher education the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh, with the help of well known 'experts', prepared a Strategic Plan aiming to upgrade the level of higher education of Bangladesh to "truly international standard" by the year 2026 (p. 1). The Plan was prepared under the guidance of a Strategic Planning Committee formed by the education minister in response to the instructions given by the prime minister. More than 40 experts worked together and gave inputs to frame the Plan. Of the total experts, more than two-thirds are from the public institutions who were directly appointed by the government and the rest are from private institutions. After working for weeks the Strategic Planning Committee prepared the Plan and at the end of the Plan the Committee recommended several strategies to overcome the problems that exist in the higher education sector. The first reading of the Plan might create an impression that it is all right. However, a more careful study will enable any reader to draw a conclusion that it is a futile exercise and it is practically impossible to achieve the goals even if all the recommendations are materialised.

In the Committee's view, higher education in Bangladesh today is not in "proper shape" because of poor funding, weak management, low use of ICT facilities, and government interference in the management of universities, and involvement of teachers and students in state politics (p.1). To bring the higher education of Bangladesh under "proper shape" the committee discussed mainly legislation, funds, availability of technical facilities for the faculties and students, expansion of research facilities, and setting up new universities (p.77). Accordingly, the committee has made recommendations to increase the GDP share from .12% to .30% by 2026, setting up new universities, and making ICT facilities available to both teachers and students.

Hypothetically speaking, if all the recommendations are accepted and executed, would the level of higher education in Bangladesh be in "proper shape" which eventually would lead to the "truly international standard"? The answer is 'no'. Data indicate that since the independence of Bangladesh the numbers of universities, teachers, students, and the amount of government grants have increased. Yet, the quality of higher education in Bangladesh is decreasing and the universities of Bangladesh have

failed to have a position even in the top five hundred universities in the world. In my view, it is not the funds or politics but the quality of the teachers that remains central to the issue of higher education standards. Mysteriously, the committee remains silent on the issue. Keeping the nonqualified teachers in the domain of higher education it would be a utopian idea to expect "truly international standard" of higher education in Bangladesh.

If the UGC of Bangladesh means business then they should come up with the findings why the domain of higher education in Bangladesh is not in "proper shape", and then they should make their position clear as to what exactly they meant by stating "truly international standard". Surely, there are some indicators to demarcate international and non-international standards. In light of the set indicators those who qualify should be allowed to carry out teaching and research at the higher learning centres and those who are not qualified should go on retirement. Without cleaning the mess, that prevails in the domain of higher learning centres, if the recommendations made by the committee are materialised, the results will be highly unsatisfactory.  
**Abul H. Bhuiyan**  
Bangladesh Open University

## Responsibility of the ruling party

I am very dismayed to see now that the ruling party ministers, including the prime minister herself, seem to be devoted 100% to activities of their political party and the next election, rather than running the country. Their mandate from us, the electorate, is to fulfil their term during which time they must take full responsibility of maintaining the government and law & order. Instead, every day they are openly abusing official money and time by canvassing and campaigning. I saw on a private channel one of the prominent ministers declaring there was "100% certainty" that they would win again in his constituency in the next election. Unless the minister, still part of the government, is planning vote rigging by abusing his power, how can he be 100% sure?

We have, in our strange democracy, a provision for a three-month period of caretaker government, and I would urge the ruling party to concentrate on finishing their term of office with decorum and responsibility, then once their term is up, let them do whatever they want in terms of electioneering.  
**Sanjoy Kumar Nath, Chittagong**

## Dismal political scene

Arafat Islam's long discourse on the subject (DS: Aug 31) is a reflection on realities in Bangladesh. Political parties today have no principles to which they are committed. Their only commitment is to winning the election; through any means! Therein lies the tragedy of Bangladesh politics!

Our political environment is a multi-layered sandwich of power, greed and corruption. These tendencies are manifested through a person's character. Without strength of moral character how can one contain material desire and greed? If we look back to recent history the stalwarts of Indian independence came from certain families. They were products of well to do families, hence desire and greed for material things were not a dominant part of their make up. In contrast most of our political people in or out of power are more materialistic than moral.

Not that we have no good human beings around; but unfortunately they are few and far between. They are overshadowed and overwhelmed under the crowd of opportunists and grabbers in the garb of politicians and leaders! May be slowly the ideas that come out in the debates and discussions by the good people in our society will percolate down to the people in the corridors of power. May be in a decade or so it may result in having more good people at the right places. That is the optimistic hope; and man can live, but by hope only. May be today's talks can bear fruits in the generations to come when we will have more people of sound character and ethics.  
**S. A. Mansoor**  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## Ershad

In the political arena the former deposed dictator Ershad is not the only one who was and is corrupt. If I am not wrong almost all the politicians except a few are corrupt. If we can send Ershad to jail for corruption, then as an ordinary non-political person I must say that many other politicians should also be sent to jail. I have come to this conclusion after reading several dailies for the last few years in the Internet.

Why should people of Bangladesh talk about Ershad's corruption only?  
**Mamun Ahmed, Las Vegas, USA**

## Disabled management?

Firstly I congratulate fellow citizen NR Sinha for an insightful write-up on empowering the disabled (DS: Aug 7). I believe that the government, which has a duty towards its citizen and the added moral obligation towards the

disabled, should pioneer the lead. Most developed societies provide various public facilities to assist the disabled. Everywhere they are given preference including financial support in travel, taxes and various utility and medical benefits, apart from separate facilities to help their mobility restrictions, in all public facilities.

Our (popular!) government on the other hand, befitting the large panorama of non-governance and incompetence everywhere, has managed to locate the office of the National Disabled Foundation set up by them on the TOP FLOOR of a three storied building; and that too without a lift! Is it to protect the foundation officials from the disabled, so that the cloistered officials can plan and do wonders in isolation where none of the disabled can have access to distract them! Only papers (able, disabled or otherwise) have access to this hub which is supposed to be the forefront of assistance to the disabled.

Does any one care? Or may be can any one dare to point out this unimaginable isolated location planned and established by the worthwhile government? The term "isolated ivory tower" in this case, realistically comes home to roost! The government can see no wrong and do no wrong. It is keeping it mentally and physically aloof from the disabled for whom this was set up to! There can be no better example of poor planning!  
**Fortunately Able, One e-mail**

## Sex education

While talking to a student of a reputed English medium school in the country, I was struck by the lack of knowledge with which a teacher of the school had been in all sincerity educating her students about safe sexual practices.

She authoritatively informed her class that they could not contract HIV Aids if they took a bath after sexual intercourse, implying that the virus would be 'washed away'. She went on to further support her statement by explaining that HIV is more prevalent in poor African countries than in Bangladesh, precisely because tribal communities have improper sanitation and bathing facilities, whereas in Islam (Muslim communities) it is required that you take a bath after intercourse.

This incident profoundly shocked me; not only is the argument and evidence completely incorrect and misleading, but it made me realise that schools need to implement safe sex education programmes for students in English and Bengali mediums, who are sexually active as early as class 7. Instructors should be experts in the field of

medicine or public health, who will deliver correct and up-to-date information. They must conduct frequent workshops elaborating on contraceptive use, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and the legal implications of underage sexual activity. Teachers and parents must increase their own awareness and co-operate with authorities to establish these programmes in a society where all sexual issues are taboo.

Preaching abstinence and not acknowledging the existence of adolescent physical relationships risks the well being of today's youth. It will also pave the way for the HIV pandemic to cripple Bangladesh.  
**R Rahman, Lalmatia, Dhaka**

## Press ethics

The media has no initiative to nurture or appreciate the positive sides of our nation, whatever we have. The TV channels do not present anything beyond entertainment. But who are serving our basic needs? Nobody sings their song.  
**Engr. G.M. Sarker**  
Lalmatia, Dhaka

## News of an accident

I would like to inform you that when I was travelling to my residence at Khulshi, Chittagong, there was a road accident on 14 August at around 3.30pm at GEC intersection. If my eyesight was all right most probably a beggar was lying in the middle of the road and two policemen were diverting the vehicles to other roads. It was a terrible scene, the victim's head had been crushed beyond recognition.

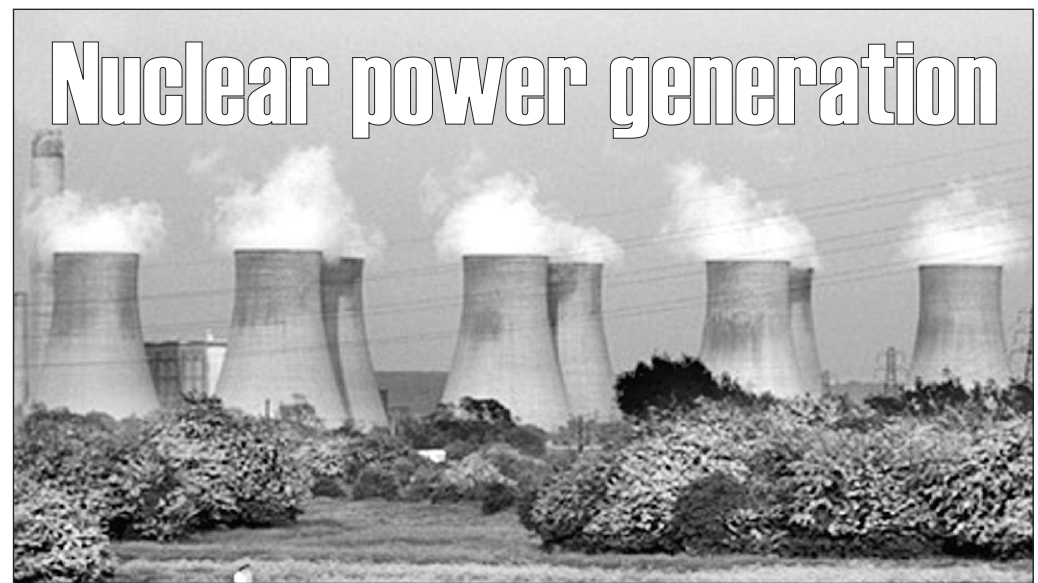
Next day morning while I was reading The Daily Star I found a piece of news on the second page, column 4:

"One old man was killed in a road accident in the port city."

"..... he was getting down from a special city service bus at GEC intersection at around 1.30pm." The name and age of the victim were mentioned in the report.

I think the report was not based on what really happened.

**A Reader**  
One e-mail



Dr. Anwar Hossain's (Chairman, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission) article in The Daily Star on the need for nuclear power technology to meet Bangladesh's growing power demand was very enlightening and timely. A visit to Bangladesh provides sufficient justification as to why the country needs more power grids. The current supply of electricity is simply inadequate to meet demand in all major cities. The situation is worse in smaller towns. Many people are, therefore, forced to suffer during the hot summer seasons, let alone the loss of productivity that such chronic shortage of power contributes in the manufacturing sector.

Sadly, as Dr. Hossain has pointed out, money is the most serious barrier to doing something big, say, nuclear power plants, for a poor country like Bangladesh. In the 'New world' agenda of Bush-Blair, the primary motif is hostility to Muslims, and to deprive Muslim countries of cutting-edge technologies like nuclear and laser technology. The current activities in the UNSC and IAEA to stop Iran from the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purpose are sad reminders that our best intentions may not be sufficient. Even when deals are signed and hundreds of

millions of dollars spent, there is no guarantee that the intended facility would produce electricity. That is where some extra effort in the international relations is necessary.

For Bangladesh, its problem is multifaceted. Its economy is weak with low cash flow. Those who can afford to be shareholders from inside in big projects are filthy rich from their ill-gotten money. They are comfortable with making deals under the table, not above. So, this leaves out major potential contributors from inside. The loans from IMF and WB may involve high interest rates with too much red tape that may be over killing for a nation that has not learned to manage its wealth right! Then there is the perception issue. Thanks to media barrage from other countries, Bangladesh is increasingly viewed abroad as a nation that sponsors terrorism. It is difficult to see how Bangladesh would be able to get into the nuclear field, unless there is a change in the government outlook that generates or promotes mutual trust.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh is energy starved and requires immense energy to make the necessary transition to a developing nation. Nuclear energy is

cheap and its technology much safer today than it was back in the early 1980s when I worked on hypothetical LOCA problems (similar to the Three Miles Island disaster in Pennsylvania). Now, we have also alternative means of energy generation, e.g., windmills and solar energy. They are quite suitable for tropical coastal terrains of Bangladesh. A thorough review of all these potential candidates for energy is needed before opting for the nuclear option. If and when nuclear energy is the best option to choose, an international tender may be called for bidding. I am sure many big name companies like AREVA, NuStart Energy, GE, Toshiba, Hitachi, AECL, General Atomic, Framatome and Westinghouse with the know-how in construction and commissioning of nuclear power plants will be interested in bidding and doing the project, under close scrutiny from various agencies.

Lastly, Bangladesh needs to develop internal competencies in these areas.  
**Dr. Habib Siddiqui**  
Philadelphia, USA

## Spreading hatred



I am writing with reference to letter: "Spreading hatred," by Sajid Chowdhury (August 21).

Sajid Chowdhury has rightly pointed out the outpouring of blind hatred against Israel and the United States in the letters page of DS. He is absolutely right when he says: "Over the past month, conflicts in the Middle East have revealed a lot of Bangladeshi hatred for Israel and the United States. Just look at the letters page each day. Much of the hatred is obviously blind and appears to have its origin in religious intolerance."

In the current Israel-Hezbollah conflict, both sides must share the blame. Yet, most letters in DS put blame squarely on only Israel. Hezbollah provoked the conflict by kidnapping and killing Israeli soldiers even though Israel vacated Lebanese territories in 2000.

The same hatred propagated against Israel is hampering the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict. With Hamas spreading hatred against the Jews, it is only natural that Israel will refuse to negotiate with them.  
**Mahmood Elahi, Ottawa, Canada**

## CPD-Bol encounter

I know Mr. Monzur Elahi for quite a long time and have no business relationship with him. As a matter of fact, he is a good friend of mine.

But when I saw the report in your newspaper I was dumbfounded.

A person like Mr. Monzur Elahi, who is always very polite, keeps his word with life. So, anybody who wants to malign him is either naive or does not know about him. I feel nothing should be said about a person who you do not know well.  
**RH Chowdhury**  
One e-mail

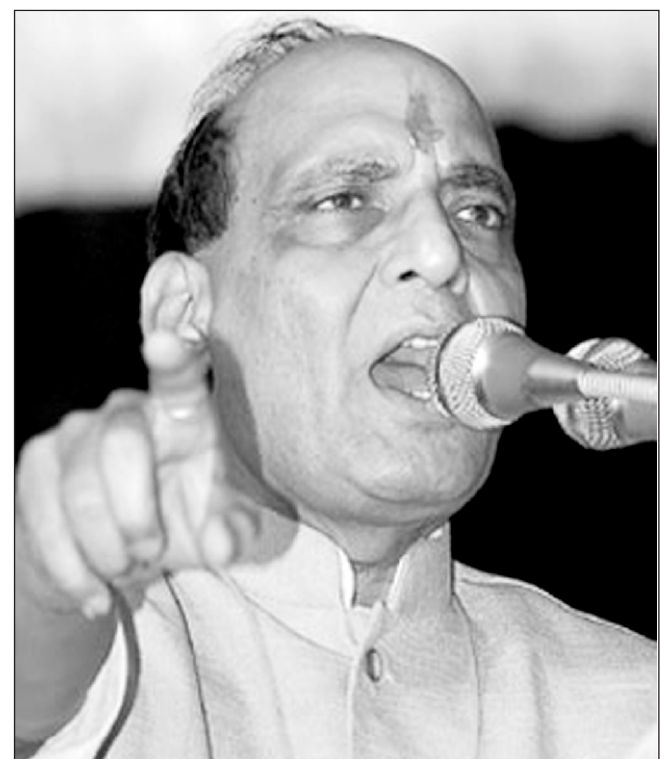
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I am writing in disgust that the Bol chief would embark on a path that is so patently detrimental to investments in Bangladesh. As an investment professional who has directed several hundred million dollars in investments, all I can say is that so long as Bangladesh remains a country where an influential government official can cause arrest warrants to be issued based on highly subjective charges (such as defamation) that are yet unproven, few self-respecting investors would think of investing in Bangladesh. The last thing that someone would want is to be open to such harassment as a result of a

business dispute. The mere possibility would keep legitimate investors away. Bol ought to be endorsing transparency and the rule of law and due process instead of bending the power of the state to personal and/or political ends. Until that happens, the interest and expertise of expatriates such as myself as well as the funds that we control are likely to stay away.  
**Muhit Rahman**  
Managing Director  
Washington & Congress Capital Advisors

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We, the Buet batch mates of the Bol chief, living abroad are deeply shocked and utterly dismayed at the impudent actions of our once good friend. He cannot be the arbiter to judge the citizenship worthiness of anyone. In fact, it is Mahmudur Rahman who triggered the current controversy terming CPD trustees shameless liars. It could be rather the trustees who could have gone to court.

As a friend and well-wisher I still wish him well. But his latest episode has brought lot of shame for all of us and brought the nation to disrepute.  
**Khondkar A Saleque**  
Australia

## BJP leader's statement



We are stunned with shock and disbelief by the statement of Rajnath Singh, president of BJP, who demanded India attack Bangladesh and Pakistan, "to dismantle the terrorist camps". Words fail me to counter this irresponsible remark.

After independence, Bangladesh has become the victim of injustice in many fields. BSF is regularly killing people at the border. Bangla speaking Indians are being pushed into Bangladesh. The plea for water-sharing is going unheeded. And miscreants wanted by the Bangladesh government reportedly find a safe sanctuary in India.

All the political parties should shun their differences and jointly condemn this provocative statement.  
**Nur Jahan**  
Chittagong