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New political front



I was very happy to see the news on Prof B. Chowdhury, President of Bicolpodhara, and Dr. Kamal Hossain, President of Gano Forum, finally launching a new front to contest the next elections. This will certainly offer people an alternative platform other than the two major political parties, the BNP and the AL, engaged in confrontational politics. The citizens have voted them on the basis of their manifestos. Instead of participating in the parliament sessions and making good laws and ensuring the accountability of the government and its officials, they were seen more in the street. The BNP and the AL have spent most of their time fighting each other and both have placed the country at the top of the list of corrupt nations in the world. Prof. Chowdhury and Dr. Kamal Hossain are honest politicians and certainly they can bring together some of the most brilliant and intelligent people with expertise whose contribution will help make this country a really developed one. I wish them good luck.

Muntasir Chowdhury
On e-Mail



Fair election & democracy

Bangladesh is getting ready for another parliamentary election which is scheduled to be held in 2007. The credibility of this election will have an enormous impact on the future of the country. The election will also answer the questions like; will Bangladesh make a great leap forward in its democratic path? Or, will it slide to the abyss of destruction? The existing relation between the main political parties can be called anything but constructive and conducive to a democratic political process. The discordant political parties hold diametrically opposite views on each other and every

national issue whether it is politics, economics or history. Taking the advantage of this dismal situation the organised vested groups in Bangladesh play their roles often invisibly to manipulate election results in their favour. This manipulation is carried out very discreetly using powerful state institutions and also capitalising on people's religious sentiments. The proviso of Caretaker Government sounded great at the outset but its formation retaining due objectivities has become ostensibly a very complex issue in the present context. Transient nature of the government

with limited empowerment has, in the past, proven itself inept and helpless to decimate the influence of these power monger groups in election. Foreign contingent of election monitors, because of their own limitations of resources, are not capable of conducting extensive micro-level monitoring of election. In this critical time, a fair election is the only tool which can repair the fragmented fabric of Bangladesh and her democratic institutions. Based on the opinion of cross section of citizens and Bangladeshi expatriates we have

identified following imperatives to be addressed to guarantee fairness of the coming election acceptable to all parties. 1) To install a Caretaker Government with consensus of all main political parties. 2) To empower the Caretaker Government to ensure that public organisations do not meddle directly or indirectly into election affairs. 3) To overhaul the Election Commission in every level to ensure a non-partisan format. 4) To ban religious parties from

politics. 5) To bar individuals as candidates of next election who are indicted on corruption or any other criminal charges. We firmly believe that a mechanism should be in place to validate the fairness of the upcoming elections in Bangladesh. Mani Islam
CCHRDB Activist
Toronto, Canada



Buet in silence!

It has been a long time since Buet was closed indefinitely. The authorities are saying that they will announce no fresh date of exams before investigation into the vandalism on the campus is complete. If they want to call it investigation, then why not do it instantly! How can we expect the spot-evidence assisting the investigation to be proper after such a long time. No student from Buet can pass a four-year BSc course before five and a half years or even more! And when we submit our certificates to foreign universities for MS or doctorate courses, they (foreign university authorities) wonder whether we have passed all the courses without any retake or failure! How can we explain to them the trifling yet heartbreaking incidents that snatch away invaluable years from our student life? The number of students who are involved in student politics is small compared to the students who want to sit for exams according to the schedules. And yet this minority group of students is holding back all of us in the once-revered institution. I wonder whether I can really sit for a term final with Ramadan knocking at the door and the political situation in the country getting tense. I console myself wondering, "When the whole society gets infected with the disease named 'Disorder', how can Buet go uninfected?"

Aggrieved and helpless
On e-mail

HM Ershad

I have the intuition that General Ershad is a formidable factor in national politics. His resilience has put him at par with good leaders. I am not in the corridors of power but I presume running a country for

ten long years after a stint as the Chief of Staff of the army for a few years is no mean achievement by any standard. Rabeya Rahman Mira
Washington D.C.

BNP's political blunder

The BNP took a suicidal decision when they formed alliance with the Jamaat five years ago. Now, they are making another blunder by trying to bring Ershad and his party to their alliance. The BNP leadership is unable to see and understand the self-inflicted damage they have caused to their party. People are not necessarily unhappy with the BNP but they are unhappy with the way the BNP government has been handling the issues most affecting the people and the country, especially by the reckless speeches and comments being made by their ministers and advisors. I think the young and most promising leader of the BNP, Mr. Tareq Zia, made a mistake by meeting Ershad publicly. A short-term political benefit can be a long-term political liability for his party. I urge the BNP leadership to take a step back and re-evaluate their current party standing. The party cannot afford to lose trusted, dedicated and tested leaders to accommodate untested, may be opportunistic young politicians. Even if there is a risk to lose an election, the BNP should make an effort to stand on its own feet. I urge the BNP leaders to be farsighted and visionary.

Sikandar Chowdhury
Dallas, Texas

Who will stop them?

While the month-long Shiite Hezbollah and Israel war in Lebanon caused 1000 Lebanese

and 100 Israeli deaths, more than 3,000 Shiites were killed by the Sunni extremists in Iraq during the same period. These Sunni extremists have bombed Shiite mosques filled with devotees during Friday prayers. They have attacked schools, hospitals and markets in mostly Shiite areas. The slaughter of the Shiite majority by the Sunni minority in Iraq had been going on long before the US-led invasion. During Saddam Hussein's Sunni-minority rule, Shiites were systematically brutalised. It may be recalled that when after the First Gulf War in 1991, the Shiite majority rose in revolt against Saddam's brutal rule, his largely Sunni Republican Guards massacred them without mercy. Although the Sunni minority have lost their grip on power after the American invasion of 2003, the Sunni insurgents are systematically killing the Shiites in the name of fighting the coalition forces. For the Sunni extremists, the Shiites are heretics and must be destroyed. The Shiites are now retaliating by killing, albeit in much smaller numbers, Sunnis.

Who will stop the Sunni extremists from butchering their fellow Shiite Muslims in Iraq and Pakistan? Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

Civil Society and its adversaries

This refers to the recent deplorable events in which we have seen how people who think they are powerful went on to use that power only to expose themselves as paper tigers. What are the consequences of such actions and the lessons to be drawn? Well, firstly, now that the gentleman at the helm of the organisation

that is entrusted to attract investment to Bangladesh has gone on with such utterances and actions to suppress those who dare to be critically engaged with his sacrosanct views, and thereby has uplifted the image of the country so significantly, one can only hope that now at last all those foreign investors, who were fence-sitting and second-guessing till now, will start to invade Bangladesh with their investment proposals being inspired by such good image. Or is it? Secondly, anyone attending any seminar/briefing/discussion in Bangladesh --from now on please better beware. If you are sitting there and any critical view has been expressed, you may end up being the target of some people simply because you have been there and have not immediately disassociated yourself from what has been said, and also not said. Keep it up CPD. You have friends everywhere. Sanjan Arman, On e-Mail

Campus

The Daily Star has started publishing a new magazine, Campus. Campus is a magazine through which we get to know about university students, their activities, information about foreign universities, and so on. The magazine is mainly based on several articles, which are written about cultural activities, festivals, club fairs etc. at difference universities in the country. In addition, the magazine is designed very well. The magazine, Campus, has already become very popular with university students. The magazine is very popular with faculties as well. I thank The Daily Star for giving us such a gift. M Salauddin Chowdhury

North South University Good article

I would like to thank M Asadullah Khan for writing such a timely and down to earth piece on the calamitous situation of the capital. Today I can't recognise the city I came to 48 years ago. The important thing is what he has described is the exact scene and immediate remedial action is required. But then who cares in this country? Those who matter are busy talking of election reforms as if that is going to solve all these problems. One can only laugh at the naiveté of our politicians. But are we doomed forever to endure this? I think it is time all of us (especially the news media) constantly bring this issue up rather than printing an odd article in the inside page once in a blue moon. Otherwise, our Rip Van Winkle's slumber will never end and then we don't know what we are leaving behind for our children. So I request the entire media to stop wasting time and effort discussing the voter list and the so called reforms ad infinitum and come down harsh on those making Dhaka city (nay Bangladesh) a hell to live in. A crusade should start right now if we have to survive. Ahmad Kamal
Abu Dhabi, UAE

Private and public universities

We cannot deny the great role of private universities in giving access to higher education to many deserving students who cannot be accommodated in the public universities due to seat shortage. What seems to me more important is that when we address some anomalies existing in most of the private universities in the country we should not forget about the responsibility of some of the senior teachers of public universities who are serving in the private universities neglecting their duties entailed in their main job. Nowadays what has become most common in the public universities is the much delayed announcement of students' exam results (which is taking sometimes 6 to 7 months to finalise) whereas a private university hardly takes more than a month to do the same job done by the same teachers. Another grave objection is that public universities are rewarding too high grade points to their students presumably to allure students to get enrolled. Moreover, teachers in the public universities

David Beckham

Did he deserve to be in the English team or not? Steve McLaren did not keep him in the team. His view is to build the team for the next World Cup. He is the manager and has to take decisions. Time will tell if he is right or wrong. But this leaves a big question about the credibility of David Beckham. No doubt he still has the abilities which no other English player has. He still played better than many English

players in the World Cup. Did anybody notice the game of Frank Lampard. He was unseen in the whole of the tournament. Beckham has spirit, he has passion, he has his trade mark "curly free kicks". Moreover, he is one of the very few English players playing outside England. He also has the pride of scoring the best goal of the "Millennium". Such chances do not come by "fluke". You need some techniques. He will come back to the English team after his impressive performance in the Real Madrid. Nasir Mahmood Gill
Baridhara DOHS, Dhaka

seem to enjoy unofficial holidays caused by campus violence rather than doing anything to stop these incidents sincerely. To add to our sufferings, some (political) teachers engage in politics not to solve any problems directly related to the interest of the students but to please their political bosses shamelessly. Unfortunately, some student organisations seem not to care about general students' long standing problems which they can talk about only among themselves. Actually students' hearts are bleeding with rage against some so called intellectuals who says too much but do too little to regain the lost status of public universities (for example, the University of Dhaka, once known as the Oxford of the East). This is the general feeling of the students who have come to get higher degrees from renowned public universities but have been trying to survive the harsh reality and unhealthy educational environment in the campuses. So, it has become now crucial to look into the long standing problems of public universities as well as the private universities to regain their accountability and sense of responsibility. It would be a great service to this nation as well. Md Arif Sadeq, DU

Secularism and this 'Muslim State'

I have carefully read the well-written article on the above subject. But I humbly submit that this discourse on Bengali versus Bangladeshi nationalism is just wastage of time and resources. Just a few fanatics from both sides are keeping this debate alive, which most of the people of Bangladesh do not care about. Dancing to the tune of Nazrul Geeti or listening to Tagore songs are hardly the priorities of

Bangladeshi people. Similarly, the majority of people do care very little about whether we say Joy Bangla or Bangladesh Zindabad. They have much bigger concerns which none of the political parties or the intellectual elite are capable of addressing. We need people and leaders with some moral sense of direction. We need people with hearts not just brains who can deliver good to the people. Let's talk about how we can produce that type of citizens. Why can't a country with such a huge population produce a few leaders with integrity? Poverty is no longer an excuse. It is the rich and well off who are behaving in the most despicable manner. That is what should be our national concern. Somebody defined fanaticism as "redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim". Let's us clearly identify our national aim so that the fanatics from both sides of this useless debate could disappear in oblivion. Whatever the Bengali or Bangladeshi nationalism means, definitely it is not fulfilling the needs of the people of Bangladesh. Let's focus on real issues. A. Islam, USA

Road accidents

I fully endorse the views expressed by you in your editorial on road accidents. You have rightly pointed out that mini buses have become a menace in the city. But who is going to contain this menace? We need the services of conscious people in this respect. Rallies and meetings should be organised to highlight the problem, as law enforcers have failed miserably to stop these killers. You know what I mean. Please keep up the pressure. Raja, Dhaka



National Women's Development Policy'97

National Women Development Policy'97 was a landmark event in our history for women's advancement. National Women's Development Policy (NWDP) was achieved through a long struggle launched by women. In the absence of proper policy and the needed social structure, women were lagging behind in playing their respective roles. NWDP 1997 was a major threshold to

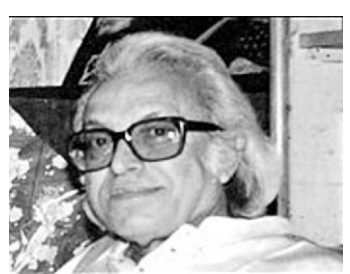
bridge the gap between men and women. Patriarchal attitudes towards women always worked as a hindrance to women's empowerment, equal rights and equal share of power. But in the last two decades four world conferences on women were held and their decisions and aftermath implications give us a new way of thinking. We believe that the National Women's Development Policy should be strictly followed to ensure women's integration in the national development process. Md. Azmal Hossain
Program Director Advocacy
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad



Eminent modern poet

Poet Shamsur Rahman earned a permanent place in the hearts of Bengalees and will be remembered for his contribution to Bengali literature. Shamsur Rahman started composing poetry at a time when most people, particularly the Bengalee Muslims, were not even aware of the development of modern poetry. He popularised modern Bengali poetry among people in general. He wrote a number of novels, short stories and so on. We are deeply shocked at his death. Md. Johirul Islam
University of Dhaka

Rahman so great was his capacity to give poetic expression to the emotions and aspirations of the people of Bangladesh as a whole. This latter faculty arose from his deep commitment to the people and the society at large. It is this capacity that made Shamsur Rahman the undisputed people's poet. To follow through his social commitment, Shamsur Rahman displayed enormous courage. He was even subjected to a heinous, almost fatal attempt on his life by the dark forces of fundamentalism. But nothing could waver Shamsur Rahman from his love of the people and from his intense desire to see a secular progressive Bangladesh. Shamsur Rahman had deep commitment to the environment of Bangladesh. He was an urban poet, a poet who was born in Dhaka and lived his entire life in this city. However, he was no less sensitive to nature and environment, and towards the end of his life he even became an active envi-



ronmental. We had the opportunity of joining poet Shamsur Rahman in several pro-environmental efforts. Shamsur Rahman leaves behind a great task to his fellow countrymen and women. It is the task of ensuring that the dream that he cherished all through his life, the dream for which he was not afraid even to risk his life, gets materialised. He wanted a progressive Bangladesh, a Bangladesh free of bigotry and injustice, a Bangladesh of materially and spiritually healthy people and environment. Shamsur Rahman has passed away. But along with his memorable poetry, he has also bequeathed us this big task. We now have to think how to carry it out. Nazrul Islam
Coordinator, Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN)