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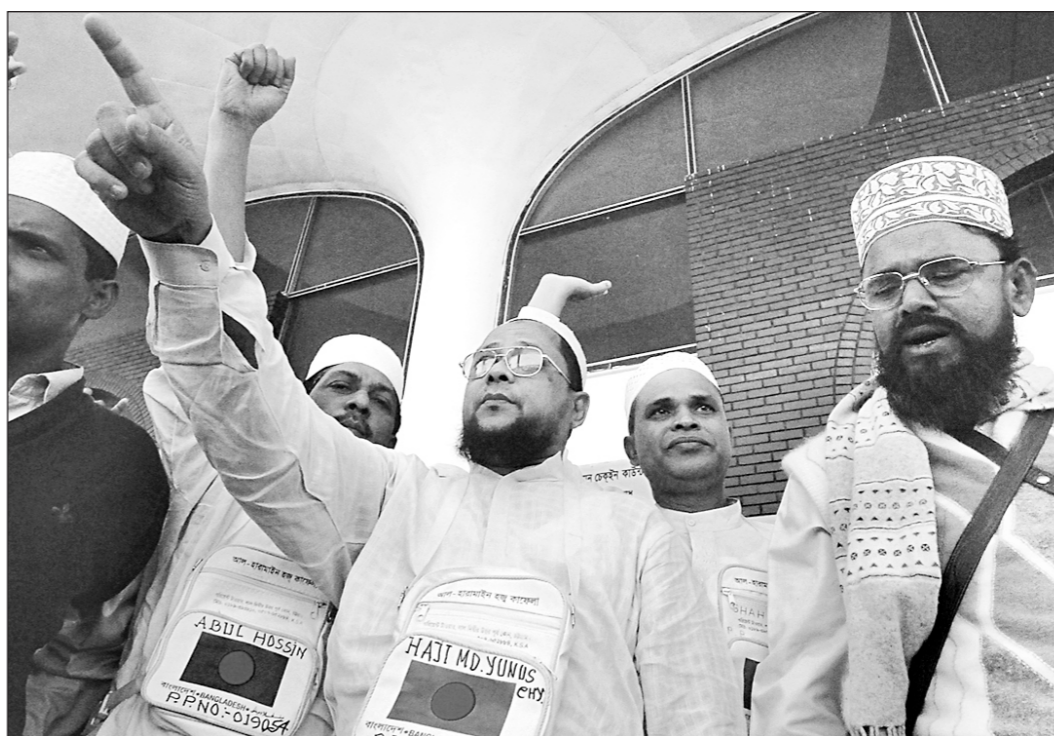
Hajj 2007

As you enter the place, Al Rahman, you will see most of the guests coming from Bangladesh lying in a row so close to each other that one breathes over the other. Stinking toilets, leaking basins and flowing shower place are a common site. Narrow and untidy stairs or small spaces in-between, wet and curry smell certainly would bother you, how on earth my close one is living in such a condition! Mostly it is one to two kilometres from the holy Haraam, they often have to climb up. With much of the discomfort and inconvenience that they go through for the whole period, and despite what is being promised by those agents, they do not complain much. Accepting as it is and pray that his/her Hajj is accepted.

Many lived in such a condition but they feel too shy and embarrassed to reveal it to their loved ones.

I happen to see the accommodations and facilities provided to other Hajjis from India, Pakistan or other nationals, far more organised and managed. Renting the houses for Hajjis is an annual big event for those who remain close to the Hajj management. This is public knowledge, many stories were run in the newspapers back home every year.

However, this year's fiasco is amazing, the private hajj operators, despite the ban, rented the rejected houses, understandably with a low price. But



matching rent seeking, greedy and unethical business practices, these poor helpless Al-Rahman's (God) guests are not spared also. Unaware of the new policies, since a building collapsed last year, run down houses that they rented were in the list of demolition and unable to get clearance from the authorities.

More than forty thousand aspirants, I would think they have already taken the money, are left to complete uncertainty. More than hundreds of flying hours, thousands of seats in the chartered planes have already been cancelled. Those who will

make it no doubt much cost and frustration awaits them. What a loss, what a mess!

Interestingly enough, compatible with the inherent culture, smartly dressed HAB officials are blaming everything on the government.

Prophet Shoeb (Pbuh) descended and preached to a community who happen to be rich business people. But they followed foul practices, like giving less in their measures to make more profit. When they were told to follow the good practice in their business dealings they refused. Consequence of the business

community is well known.

In our world neither we can preach nor we can say anything against and we all know that Prophet Shoeb will not appear again.

MM Haque
Jeddah, K.S.A

Every year thousands of Bangladeshis perform Hajj from home and abroad and this year is not an exception either. Unfortunately, this year the Saudi government has barred non-ballotee Hajjis from Bangladesh to perform Hajj on the ground of fitness certificates of houses to be used for

Hajjis' temporary residence in Mecca. This is heart-breaking news for many people who have decided to perform Hajj from Bangladesh in the independent category as their ultimate journey to Mecca has become uncertain. There are many people from abroad especially North America who are coming to Bangladesh to reunite with their family members to perform Hajj together. These people fall in the second category i.e. non-ballotee pilgrims and similarly their Hajj has become uncertain too. It will not only be a financial punishment for these people as their entire trip to Bangladesh will be futile but also their valuable leave which is arranged months ahead of departure will be wasted.

May I urge the present caretaker government of Bangladesh to take steps immediately to resolve this critical issue through diplomatic channel requesting the Saudi King to relax the fitness hurdle and reissue fitness certificates. We also urge the Saudi Hajj authorities to reconsider this matter and review conditions of all the houses rented for the Hajjis of Bangladesh and reissue fitness certificates for those which are safe and acceptable.

We warmly acknowledge the friendly relationship existing between the two countries.

Mohammad Jamal
Canada

Democracy of two parties?



25/3
Ad

Like the other days I got up early in the morning and it's my habit to look at a glance at the headlines of 'The Daily Star' and select some special topics for reading thoroughly. I don't enjoy reading our political news, may be hearing this, readers will be angry with me but the fact is that it's really tedious to read the same news

that you get-- one alliance is telling that caretaker government should do this and other is demanding CG should implement their demands. It's very interesting when I hear the leaders of both alliance telling that these are the demands of the people of Bangladesh and in the last two days (18 and 19 December) the leaders of both

alliances told they would save the holy constitution of Bangladesh and people's rights and I am totally confused about the 'constitution' and 'rights of people' since as far as I know the constitution exists to protect the people's rights. If this is the issue they are fighting each other for the same objectives, I will suggest

them to go away from the political arena of Bangladesh. It's better not to have leaders like them. (dusto gorur chaite sunno goal valo).

A few days ago I attended a seminar where one of the speakers who is a teacher of Dhaka University of IR department specified some basic criteria of a successful leader and one of the criteria is to understand human nature. In this part our leaders are experts as they know the people of Bangladesh are mostly illiterate, so let's keep them in darkness for as many days as possible. I don't wish to go any further regarding this area.

And I was reading the heading and one of the titles caught my attention and while going on rickshaw I read the whole report, thanks to the traffic jam of Dhaka city and felt a little pain in my heart really. When we have nothing to do, our very pious leaders are fighting each other to save people's rights or constitution, simultaneously they are trying to hide their personal key information. It's crystal clear that both the big parties are taciturn about the verity because they know people will throw out their candidates if they are able to know that many of the candidates have a hazy background. In my view politicians of Bangladesh are still fortunate to get votes and the day is not so far away when people will abstain from casting their ballot and it will be ridiculous when enrolment of voters to the centres will be so much stumpy that to the western countries, which are more ardent about our democracy

than ourselves, it would be not accepted. If there were an option to cast ballot in a 'NO' symbol, I think people would have chosen that. By the way, I don't know whether I should comment on the stay order of the Supreme Court on the High Court verdict ordering the Election Commission to collect and make public some vital information. But I can't tame myself to tell that it's a hold up to our democracy. As a voter of a democratic country it's my right to know about the candidate whom I will choose as my representative to the parliament. There is a common slogan for a candidate that "omuk bhai-r charitro fuler moto pobitro" (the character of that brother is as sacred as flower) and if they are so much pure then why they are afraid of disclosing their personal information. It's our ill fortune that most people are still illiterate and they can be easily cajoled to cast their votes for this kind of corrupt politicians who are not only harmful for mass people since these very politicians can sell the country if possible.

My rickshaw-puller is above sixty years old and a freedom fighter who dreamt in his youth that one-day oppressors would go but now in his dream country he observes that new oppressors have come and that's why he is still a rickshaw-puller after 35 years of liberation war; to him democracy is nothing but an occasion of vote.

Md. Asaduzzaman, DU