

Human Rights

The question of how to uphold human rights in Bangladesh has exercised public minds for years, but the focus of the debate has always suffered from problems of adjustments.

It now appears that necessary legislation to establish a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is already at an advanced stage.

So far so good. But some concerns still remain. The NHRC's investigations are envisaged to lead only to recommendations, without specifying how justice in such cases could be ensured.

Building Demolitions

At least 250 buildings would be demolished in the next two months in Dhaka City. No, not by real-estate developers. The government would be bringing down about five built up structures every day, to start with, for two months as their construction or situation or both are unauthorised.

On top of the 275 risky buildings there are three thousand built by changing authorised plans and a thousand others that have been built on public or other people's property.

The RAJUK has an easy explanation for this failure. And we have already hinted at it. The barwallahs are mostly influential people and the unauthorised barwallahs generally have had a great pull with the authorities and even with the governments.

The present demolition programme is hardly suspect. For the job has already started at the Khilgaon rail level-crossing. Let us keep our fingers crossed lest the demolition teams should trample on a long long tail of an influential person or any financial big shot committed to keeping him in humour.

Wish you all the luck in the world. A good programme, but late in arrival. Please keep up and complete the job.

Lordly Blocker

The House of Lords in Britain has blocked the passage of a bill from the House of Commons to introduce a new voting procedure for the European Parliament whereby people were to vote by parties rather than by individual candidates.

Prime Minister Tony Blair has dubbed this as an 'affront to democracy', which might find a ready ear with many in Britain who think the one-third hereditary peerage character of the House of Lords should have been long out of the window.

It is being openly said by those who sound hard done by as a result of the House of Lords' latest 'no' to the Labour government's bill that the battle has been lost but the war will be won.

LAST Saturday I was asked by our development partners to share with them the thinking of Bangladeshi researchers, and development thinkers regarding the future as reflected in a document entitled Bangladesh 2020.

The rationale is quite simple the need to think in long-term or as my younger colleague Saleemul Huq put it, 'What will happen to me in 20 years?'

These are in simplistic lumps, i) human development particularly in the areas of population dynamic, public health services, education and technology-access ii) environment and natural resources management with particular reference to harnessing water resources and broad-based agricultural transformation that is ecologically responsible and resource-wise.

An essential element in this endeavour will be for the health services to focus on reproductive health care, communicable disease control, immunisation and simple curative health-care.

Enough is enough Sir, The long stretched sixty-hour hartal has ended. What the political leaders gained from this hartal is a mystery to us, but we, the general people have suffered miserably.

When the people are trying to recover from the effect of the worst flood, which has shattered the country's fragile economic state, this hartal is like pouring water on a drowned mouse.

We all know that our politicians are cruel and heartless (not headless), but do they have to remind us this fact from time to time? We have had enough of this hartal game. The political leaders should realise that they are expected to lead the country in a democratic way and not to dictate it, but hartal is definitely a means to dictate the country in the worst way possible.

Now the time has come to stop this deadly game for good. Both the ruling and opposition parties should immediately come to an agreement to pass a bill to stop using hartal as their political weapon.

Enough is enough.

Rusho Rahmatullah Dhaka

"No-hartal society" Sir, The 'no-hartal' pronouncement of Sheikh Hasina in her capacity of both the Prime Minister and the President of Bangladesh Awami League deserves sincere commendation.

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In democracy, no government is the last government. This quote from the Prime Minister's several speeches during her 1996 election campaign can only testify to her belief that democracy is a dynamic process and that tolerance can only fertilise the preservation of a democratic process.

Looking at the Distant

It is not an attempt to project the future in a rigid modelling framework. The tentative projections which are there make no claim to accuracy. The attempt is rather one of wanting to go somewhere and then working towards that goal.

mented by private capital inflows particularly through foreign direct investment to finance the future in a sustainable manner. Issues like good governance, decentralised decision making and local-resource mobilisation; bureaucratic inertia, crises in public sector management, the rotting disease of corruption and more importantly lack of ethical commitment to collective good have not been squarely confronted.

Turning back to the exercise, if the past bears any relevance to the future, the fact remains that even today, in spite of some recent laudable initiatives, we in Bangladesh remain at the bottom of the Asian ladder in most measures of human development.

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needs to be raised to at least 15 per cent. Similarly, grave new ecological threats of water and air pollution and build-up of solid waste that is accompanying rapid urbanisation must be reversed. Clean energy for industries, appropriate environmental regulations and efficient municipal services are all on the cards.



Do I Dare! A Z M Obaidullah Khan

fronted head-on. Twenty per cent of total budgetary expenditure should go towards the education sector and one half of it for basic education with affirmative action for women.

The single largest contributor to urban employment are jobs located on the periphery of the urban areas linked to poultry, livestock, agro-processing and other forms of agricultural, livestock, fisheries and forestry-based activities.

the urban areas linked to poultry, livestock, agro-processing and other forms of agricultural, livestock, fisheries and forestry-based activities. Their expansion in absolute terms is likely to generate a new pattern of urbanisation with small towns growing faster than the statistical metropolitan areas.

The fourth area, and I shall deal with it rather sketchily is infrastructure and energy. With the transport infrastructure, besides the Dhaka by-pass, a road network linking divisional, district and thana centres; restructuring the railway into a predominantly freight moving profile with the private sector taking over inter-city passenger services; placing water-ports in private hands; ports rendered efficient and air transport professionalised in partnership with outsiders are all necessary building blocks of a communication network that can sustain a rapidly growing economy.

The rural infrastructure study of the World Bank (1996) has identified 2100 rural growth centres and market towns evenly distributed all over the country.

Another psychological barrier is the regular crossing of the floor by opportunists posing as politicians. Politics as a profession has yet to mature, but there are no godfathers to maintain credible standards. Can poor countries afford opportunist politics?

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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts.

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The masquerade

Sir, The smokescreen of hartal created by the opposition could not keep their ulterior motive hidden. Why behave in a circuitous way when things are too obvious and foolproof? Better they would have spoken loudly and boldly that they are against a cause.

Nazma Yeasmeen Haque Dhaka

Alas! Sir, To quote from the DS editorial of 17th instant - 'Begum Zia is expected now to make a similar statement abjuring the use of hartal'.

Alas, we cannot break free from this vicious cycle of insanity! What's more, we are afraid, the recent declaration by the PM, that her party would not go

for hartal again, seems impulsive at best, that's telling from the nature of politics in our country. We will, in all probability, still be at risk of hartals, same as we are now, and when the AL is in the opposition when they may again justify by saying they are 'compelled' or that they have to call hartal to 'save' the country, etc.

An Anxious Observer Chittagong. Suggestion 'D' Sir, The editorial 'Let's Build on D' dated 12.11.98, suggesting for avoiding hartal is most laudable.

May I add one thing with this suggestion 'D' (A B and C have already been done), which is as soon as they will reach to an MoU on the basis of these three suggestions, both the government party and the opposition party will apologise to the people for all their past hartals and admit that past hartals were of no good to the people.

Nur Hossain 151, Bangshal Road Dhaka-1100. Hail hartal! Sir, We are very much accustomed to hartal which has become a part of our life. We all know the demerits of hartal, but have we ever tried to figure out its merits? Well, here are some:

- 1) Less road accidents; and no traffic jam. 2) No black smoke, carbon monoxide; and less pollution.

utterances, there would perhaps not be such deterioration of law and order situation and a few valuable lives could have been spared.

A F Rahman Dhaka

It's time, BTV Sir, It is true that the number of programmes telecast on BTV which should capture a large number of viewers are very limited. So those who have means, turn to satellite television to meet their entertainment.

As such, it seems that BTV is scaring away more of its viewers, forcing them to turn to cable TVs. It didn't make any sense when BTV aired programmes on Bangladesh for at least three consecutive days when most people want to watch refreshing programmes.

The respect that we have for Bangladesh, seems to be fading away day by day, due to the intolerable pestering of our television. It is really high time the AL government realises the fact.

A Viewer Uttara, Dhaka

BTB or ALTB? Sir, In its election manifesto the Awami League had pleaded that if elected to the government it would make the make the BTB programme people-oriented, grant autonomy to BTB and the electronic media would telecast objective, free, neutral and fair news, reports and views of all concerned. But unfortunately nothing has been done so far.

Over two years have passed since the Awami League has come to power. To our great surprise and shock we find BTB programme getting one-sided day by day, more and more pro-Awami League wherein there is hardly any trace of news, reports and views of the opposition parties.

We wonder if the BTB (Bangladesh Television) has now been turned into ALTB (Awami League Television).

O. H. Kabir 6, Hare Street Wari, Dhaka-1203

Disgusting BTB Sir, Recently the BTB has turned into a disgusting propaganda box of the ruling party.

We can't trust a single news item of this showpiece. We certainly expected a better, decent and neutral role when the new DG was appointed. But he has disappointed us (those who had respect for him for his intellect) miserably.

No wonder 'Je jai Lanka, she ho Rabon'.

A Citizen Uttara Model Town Dhaka-1230