

For the wage earners' welfare



Honour to the earner

According to various press reports about three million Bangladesh citizens are living abroad on various work assignment. These people are the major contributor of foreign exchange earning for the country. When the country's economic reserve was at dwindling and alarming stage due to slowdown of world economic activities after the September 11 incident the contributions of wage earners abroad came to the rescue. The recent increase of the foreign exchange reserve of the country and its upward trends proves time and again the contribution of wage earners. Through the wage earners are the major contributors to the country's foreign exchange requirement no government ever paid attention to any welfare activities for them. The government has set up a ministry to look after the affairs of the

wage earners abroad. The wage earners even do not know whom should they contact for any question or suggestion. The ministry should publicise with their mailing and e-mail address with a contact person's name.

In a very recent decision government has decided to give CIP status to a person who would be remitting large amount of money. If only a few people of high-income brackets are recognised as CIP this will be nothing but a mockery. Instead the government should consider such thing that will benefit the wage earners who are regularly remitting foreign exchange.

When providing any plots/flats by the government including RAJUK, wage earners should be given the top most priority (not in paper but in reality). Flats built for NAM Summit Conference could have been sold to the prospective buyers who could have paid it in foreign currency.

At the time of final return to home, wage earners with 20 years or more continuous stay abroad should be allowed to bring free of customs duty and tax for his personal use some household items like furniture, air conditioner, fridge, TV, washing machine etc. and a car. In this respect it may be mentioned that the government has allowed all the MPs to import a car free of duty and taxes.

Introduce electronic banking so that wage earners can remit their income within 24-48 hours in the major cities (at least to the district HQ level) through on-line transfers. This will automatically eliminate the Hundi activities to a great extent.

Availability of wage earners bond in all the banks in district headquarters so that any one interested can purchase it from their taka remittance.

Provide priority in sanctioning loan to the investors who are willing to set up any industry.

Massive counselling and behavioural training for the immigration, customs, security and other officials posted at the airport to treat the wage earners in a civilised way.

Mohammed Ashraf Ali, on e-mail

Nab the killers of Gyanojoti Mohasthorir

A number of days have, the police are yet to make any headway of the murder of respected Buddhist monk Gyanojoti Mohasthorir. The police have so far apprehended four people in connection with the murder. However, local people strongly believe that real killers have gone scot free in connivance with the local administration.

The administration's dilly-dally in nabbing the real killers have outraged Chittagongians. The Buddhist community in Chittagong has been an essential part of Chittagong's demographic diversity. They have been here for ages as a part of Chittagong's unique cultural formation.

The killing of revered Gyanojoti is bound to have far-reaching ramifications for the country. The news of this murder has already been highlighted in a few Japanese newspapers. Reportedly, the Japanese Embassy in Dhaka has reacted sharply against this. Aside from that, a few international websites are also following this murder case very closely. Being the largest aid-giver to Bangladesh, Japanese reaction can never be discounted. In addition, Japan has considerable investment portfolio in this country with a good number of Japanese expatriates living in Chittagong and Dhaka. Thus, the economy of this country would be at stake, if the real criminals are not nabbed immediately.

The murdered monk was an internationally reputed figure. The Buddhist monks in this country have done a great service to the nation, especially in terms of promoting the country in Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Tourists from these countries often throng to the monasteries in Chittagong. They contribute a lot to the local economy. These monasteries also shelter many orphans and homeless people.

The Chittagongians are already outraged at the fact that the reports in FEER, Newsweek branded Chittagong as a potential den of terrorists. Inhuman assault on an Iranian couple a month ago by the local musclemen has further damaged the image of this beautiful city. The murder of Gyanojoti was a last straw in a camel's back.

The deteriorating law and order situation, rampant extortion, widespread abduction in the city and adjacent areas have deeply disillusioned the local people. The government must understand the magnitude of the deplorable law and order situation in Chittagong.

AFM Mohiuddin
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Murder of prominent Hindu priest

Human Right Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM) is deeply shocked at the murder of Hindu priest, Madhan Gopal Goswami of Khagrachari district under Chittagong Hill Tract. This gruesome murder comes close on heels to the murder of the prominent Buddhist monk, Gyanijoti Barua, of Rajai. We express our grave concern about the safety and security of the Hindu, Buddhist and other minority communities in that region and all over the Bangladesh.

According to reports, Mr. Goswami is a member of "International Krishna Consciousness Society" of Mayapur, India. He has established this Ashram in 1992 at Gocchabil Hill tract of Manikchari. Around 12 children are sheltered at the Ashram and receive formal education through the funds of the Ashram.

We, on behalf of the HRCBM, condemn this pattern of violence. We urge the Government of Bangladesh to immediately arrest the

criminals, give them exemplary punishment, and ensure safety and security of the minority community.

Dhiman Deb Chowdhury
Chanchal Chatterjee
Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM)
Santa Clara, U.S.A

Image of Bangladesh in Iran

I have nothing to say about the cover story of the FEER or the Wall Street Journal because the BNP government is saying that AL facilitated it. I don't want to say anything about The News Week's rating of Bangladesh as filthiest, because as per Khaleda Zia, this could also be an "information terrorism" by Sheikh Hasina and AL.

But, how about the news in Iran's "Iran-e-Varzeshi" newspaper where there is a vivid description of barbarian attack on the Iranian couple and especially kicking of the pregnant lady in Cox's Bazar has been published. There is no AL or Hasina in it. It has been narrated by the victims who are Iranian Muslims. It has also been mentioned in the news that the attackers were ruling party cadres! Now, my question is who is defaming the image of our country abroad?

G. Chy
USA

Bertil Littner and Bangladesh

My friends and me were appalled to read the FEER report "Bangladesh: Cocoon of terrorism" on the Internet. It was malevolent and preposterous. I have lived and studied in Bangladesh for six years and was lucky to witness the rules of both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. During those periods there was no sign or iota of terrorism or fundamentalism in Bangladesh, not to mention Talibanism, which was far-fetched. I believe even now nobody thinks of that way!

How did the so-called "celebrated" journalist of FEER got his facts is the million dollar question. In fact what got into his brain that he should think this way of Bangladesh known to be one of the most moderate and democratic Muslim countries in the world. He is fast turning out to be a stigma on journalism.

"Palestine"



Two flags, one peace

This is in response to MA's letter (May 3). I agree with Mr MA that the Arab countries should be criticised for the way they have treated Palestinians. However, that does not take away from the fact that Israel is able to do what they are doing in the West Bank today because of the billions of dollars of financial and military aid it receives from the US each year.

The US is not and has never been an honest broker in the Middle East. Mr MA points out that the US is a democracy, but does the US Legislature proportionally represent the pluralism in society? How many women are there in the US Congress? Or for that matter African Americans or Muslims? However, there are dozens of Jewish lawmakers, the number of Jews in Congress being far higher in proportion than the population of Jews in the United States! It is the only minority that is over represented.

Mr MA refers to the rally for Palestine on the 20th of April, which I admit was well attended. However, there was a rally for Israel a few days prior to that which was not only larger, but also attended by several US lawmakers and the second man in Pentagon, Deputy Secretary of Defence Wolfowitz.

While I agree with Mr MA that the other Arab nations deserve criticism, I think this is a diversion from the real issue, that of US neutrality or the lack thereof in this crisis.

Shameran Abed
New York, USA

A reader
London, UK

An Indian view on Palestine

This is in response to Ms. Meeta Sanyal's letter. I think I understand why people like her are so vocal in supporting Israel. Look what is happening in her own country India. Despite its secular facade the communal riots in Gujarat is continuing with direct help from the government too. India and Israel are no different in trying to cleanse out minorities.

Sharmin Zaman
Texas, USA

Basics in America

The Americans are fairly myopic when it comes to politics. (I'm a fairly educated American, which doesn't mean much.) It comes down to this basic premise: Americans don't like the Palestinian leader for one reason: he's a bad guy, and a well-known one at that, which reinforces our short-term understanding of good versus bad.

Sharon is also very bad (probably more than Arafat, but in a different way). Give it a little more time, and a lot of the American press will substantiate this statement.

T
USA

MIGS and helicopters

This is in reply to Mr. Biggles last letter where he advocated the raising of a militia force for Bangladesh.

I was not talking about high defence budget for Bangladesh at the expense of social development. My point is that threat perception does not depend on economic prosperity rather it depends on geopolitical issues. Yes, economic prosperity comes into play only when a country decides to deal with the threat. To deal with such a threat a country needs to raise a defence force with necessary equipment. The argument that poor countries do not need defence forces is not acceptable at all.

I do not advocate high defence expenditure like Pakistan or Burma. The examples were given to show that all third world nations have defence forces. The writer was

Maruf
New Orleans, U.S.A

quick to mention that most of the Pakistan's and Burma's problems emanate from high defence expenditures but kept mum about India's high defence expenditures and the problems it cause. Pakistan's defence budget is not 25 per cent of GDP rather it is 25 per cent of national budget and 3.9 per cent of GDP. India is a country of high defence expenditure with a defence budget of 20 per cent of the national budget and 2.5 per cent of GDP. In case of Bangladesh the figure is 10 per cent of national budget and only 1.8 per cent of GDP--the lowest in the region.

Chinese or Indian threat perception has nothing to do with my spending time in Bourbon Street. The border skirmishes that the writer mentioned were initiated by India and it was not in 1965, it was in 1962. Since 1947, China's other neighbours settled their borders satisfactorily through the normal process of diplomatic negotiation with Beijing. The Nehru government decided upon the opposite approach.

The writer should revisit his letter to check that he compared Bombay with first world cities not with city like Bangkok. In any case, I don't see how a few urban rich people in Bombay make the Indian defence planners believe that India needs to spend \$13 bln each year for defence depriving the rest 900 million half fed people of proper food and shelter.

The American govt. knew it very well that they could not rely on disorganised South Vietnamese to beat the North. So, they amassed half a million army with sophisticated weapons, ships and fighter planes. It was the American air force's F-4 phantom that got beaten by the North Vietnamese Mig-17. And about never losing a war against North Vietnamese, in 1968 North Vietnam launched a major counterattack, which began on the Vietnamese New Year. North Vietnamese captured most of Saigon and even the US embassy for a few days.

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Maruf
New Orleans, U.S.A

"MIG's and helicopters"

This is in reply to Mr Ashfaq Chowdhury's letter (May 3) nominating me for the post of Defence Minister. First of all I am flattered, but as I keep writing, I am not asking for no defence forces at all. I do believe we need a strengthened BDR and Coast Guard. I am only asking for the abolition of the Army, Navy and Air Force in their present wasteful parallel state forms.

But I could take up his challenge for defending our borders. It was not too long ago when on a trip to a tea garden in Sylhet I went to the border. There, sitting on a chair drinking the miraculously appeared tea, I watched the BDR and the BSF arguing over some wandering cattle. Once they finished I wandered over to the no man's land and said hello to both parties. The BSF guys then invited me to go with them to their base. But me alone, my attendants and the tea garden caretaker weren't allowed to come. The BDR guys warned me that only the last week they were shooting at each other and that I shouldn't go. So off I went. We walked through the jungle for half an hour until we came to their base. Total Indiana Jones & the Temple of Doom stuff. With rather a lot of armed men watching, they sat me down and offered refreshments. My Hindi is as poor as their English so we couldn't chat except by gestures. I wonder how they were talking to the BDR or maybe that's why they shoot at each

other?

Anyway I was offered biscuits and asked to drink from a black earthen gourd with a straw, apparently some sort of brew. Tasted horrible but I finished it. Then they gave me some clear liquid stuff to drink in little earthen cups. Also tasted awful.

After an hour or so of my diplomacy, we walked back to the border. Back at the border I found that the poor BDR guys had been waiting for me to get back!

Anyway, my caretaker upon hearing what I had been up to decided that I must not leave without seeing what his people had to drink. So we went one of the villages where the workers stayed and I tasted their version of the clear liquid. This one was milky.

I have no further recollection, but if you want me to protect the border, all I need is the universal grunt with raised glasses and something horrible to drink.

Biggles
Dhaka

Portrait issue and our priorities

AL made a great mistake by enacting a law regarding the portrait of Bangabandhu. In fact it does not require laws to draw respect from the countrymen. Moreover, it is undemocratic to impose laws on the countrymen for hanging a portrait.

However, BNP is acting the same way AL did. They have gone to the extent of repealing the law only to bring down a portrait! History is not something that could be bought and sold the every other day. History must take its own course. It is unwise and uncivilised to distort history.

BNP should know it is the people of this country who cast their votes for them to run the government democratically and prosper the country. And they should also realise that it is the people who hold the power to elect someone else if their demands are not met.

M Rabiul Islam
Dhaka

Of friends and enemies

In one of its March issue, The Time magazine has expressed its dismay at Europe's unwillingness to lend its

future generation will take a more pragmatic view of the world in political, economic and military perspective. An atmosphere of dialogue rather than confrontation will take place with emergence of more powerful states like China, India and Russia.

Hegel's philosophy of history also noted that the predominance of any state is a matter of prudence not of pressure. In the annals of history the position of the United States will remain a very strong one but the synthesis is yet to come. Only time will say where the road goes.

Akbar Hussain
Toronto, Canada

the labour unions and politicians are the same!

Its seems that a massive surge of selfishness is sweeping the nation. Any one who has any institutional power is misusing it for their own purposes.

First the opposition has been hijacking the whole country and the economy whenever they feel like it, since democracy was restored more than a decade ago. Is there a more hated word than hartal in our country? And then of course we have our labour unions. Take the Chittagong Port for example. They are ready to stop the port's activity and do not seem to care what massive devastating implications it might have for the economy of the country.

I am beginning to see an uncanny similarity between our politicians and these labour unions. Both seem ready to put the fortunes of 130 million people on the line if it suits their interests.

The old adage "united we stand, divided we fall" was meant as a force for good. In our country it seems, unfortunately, the only time any group of people unite is when they are in a position to inflict damage on the 'opposition' who happen to be their own countrymen!

Zobair E. Anam, on e-mail

Safety and student numbers

Is the number of students enrolled (ranging anywhere from 1500 to 10,000+) at popular schools call for concern? Commentary and reports on student abductions could per-

law and order situation has deteriorated. Murders are being committed over minor matters and authorities are absolutely apathetic about it. All we see is blaming and counter blaming and in most cases nobody gets punished.

Respective of blaming individuals or parties isn't it time for us to think, whether is anything wrong with us as a nation?

Waheed Nabi
Sheffield, England

Deshi telecom sector

I am worried by the spate of letters regarding the local telecom sector especially regarding the future activities of BTTB. There are many who feel that BTTB's introduction of mobile phone and Internet services will have a salutary effect on the telecom sector of this country. I sincerely wish it were so.

BTTB is one of the ugliest examples of monopolies in this country (if not the region) whose business activities are harmful for the potential users and the respective sector. BTTB in all its existence has been seriously inefficient in laying telephone lines for all who have needs for them.

If BTTB enters into the mobile phone network, it will be a case of the judge committing the crime that is being judged. BTTB owns the infrastructure that all mobile phone operators must use to ensure that the public gets the communication service it needs and expects. Advantage: BTTB. It can set incoming T&T calls to its mobile phones to zero, whereas private mobile phone companies have to charge 2 taka/minute after the first minute. Advantage: BTTB. Even if assuming that BTTB cancels incoming T&T call charges for all, it still has the capacity to seriously limit the accessibility of mobile phone operators to its network to shut out its competition. If the mobile phone operators start divesting, then BTTB will once again reign supreme.

Many talk about how BTTB's entry into the mobile phone sector will make the phone more accessible to the masses. My friends BTTB is the very reason why full mobile phone services are not available to the masses at a cheaper price. This is because the government has imposed this fee and that fee for every call and on the monthly use of mobile phones in this country.

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French election and the victory of Le Pen



Liberty's unwanted child

Did presidential candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen's preliminary victory amount to a failure of democracy in the modern crucible of the concept? Au contraire, it heralded a triumph. For a start, there were 16 presidential candidates. A ridiculous characteristic of advanced democracies is that anyone can run for election if he or she wanted to. Britain's relative elec-

toral sanity, for example, is partly because of insane election-night scenes of legitimate candidates sharing stages with contenders wearing dustbins over their heads.

Anyway, the world will now watch perplexed as last weekend's absentee voters throng to next weekend's ballot boxes. And vanquished presidential candidates will scurry to align with Chirac for the run-off. Well, it's not advisable to get smug about democracy, which can and has been dictated by autocrats and fascists. This week's sudden focus of minds and gathering of objectives in French politics is due to the horror of seeing France democratically back itself into fascism.

However, the surprise of Le Pen's success is an indictment against a mass media that refused to pay attention to unpalatable home truths. If the French and international media did not anticipate Le Pen's success in last weekend's elections, it was because Bogeymen generally receive little, if any, press focus. But they emerge in such a way that indicates they not only exist in the flesh but also have warped into political and social fabrics.

Last weekend's phase of France's presidential elections left the French no more scope for such self-deception. If democratic elections are meant to deliver a true and accurate reflection of a society's nature and thinking, France's have succeeded remarkably.

There he is, Le Pen, an extreme right winger. Late French Philosopher Jean Paul Sartre called these very people as 'social parasites'. Le Pen is beaming at the cameras in incoherent joy with nearly 17 per cent of the popular vote. Will it not be fair to say that our country is also beset with many of these entrenched parasites? Think of that.

AFM Mohiuddin
Lalmatia, Dhaka

full support to the United States in its war against terrorism, especially the possible strike at Iraq. Starting from the World War I the magazine has reminded Europe the amount of sacrifice America have made for Europe in men and material. The soil of Europe is full of graves of the American soldiers and it was American military and financial power, which helped Europe from communism. Now when the question of America's security has come after the 11 September terrorist attack, Europe is balking. Why this ungratefulness?

To find out a logical reply to this question, I read Edward Gibbon's 'The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire'. Gibbon was not a historian only, he was a philosopher as well. While discussing fragile human nature in relation to the rise and fall of the nations, he mentioned that powerful nations at times forgets that their existence depends not only on their military might but also very closely attached to their understanding of their friends and subjects. The Roman's failed in that and history was not very kind to them. His practical philosophy did not subscribe to the idea that all has a beginning and an end as well.

The United States despite these difficult times will not face decline. But the scenario will definitely change and its technology will guide it to a safer conclusion. As we know that nothing is final in love and war the emergence of a more understandable generation in America is in the offing. This is imperative that

happens look at the correlation between such numbers and the issue of safety.

Most schools have the ID cards and maybe a handful of guards to maintain our idea of 'security'. Is this enough? How well does the school management know their own students, parents and teachers to ensure the students' security?

The rest of the world, believe it or not, is debating on how low student numbers should be for ensuring students' safety and quality education, while private and public schools here continue increasing sections and branches and high classroom intake. Why must parents spend so much time, effort and money simply bringing their children back and forth these huge institutions when a small, neighbourhood school can do a more effective job? Parents must learn to distinguish between the genuine schools and brand name commercial schools, which care nothing for either quality schooling or the safety concerns for children.

Its time that compulsory ceilings on enrolment and the concept of zoning were implemented.

A concerned parent and teacher,
one-e-mail

Dulu's murder and some thoughts

I read the news item "Dulu was murdered over minor offence" with heavy heart. I do not think it was just a Awami League vs BNP issue. It is another example of how much the

well.

Driven Crazy
Dhaka

Remember North Vietnam did fight America

I am writing with reference to Op-Ed: "Credibility gap in US' Middle East policy," by Abdul Hanan (April 27).

Mr Abdul Hanan writes: "Asked why they could not win the 1967 war with Israel, the late Egyptian Presi-

Education is most important



Flying for education

I have been reading the letters in reference to what kind of air defence should Bangladesh have. As a Pakistani and a well-wisher of people of Bangladesh I would like to suggest that Bangladesh should have a strong defence against a foreign aggressor.

But if possible please put as much money on education as possible. An educated Bangladesh will be able to create a viable defence of their motherland.

Safdar Mallick
Lahore, Pakistan

dent Anwar Saadat said, "You cannot fight America". What he meant perhaps was that Israel drew its strength from the support of America." But Mr. Hannan may be reminded that North Vietnam did fight America not indirectly, but face to face and beat the super power back. Vietnam faced the might of the U.S. military from land, sea and air, not merely the American support of the South Vietnamese government. Yet, in the end, America had to withdraw leaving North Vietnam to bring southern part under communist rule.

Why a small poor country like North Vietnam could beat a super power and its surrogate regime in South Vietnam, while a much larger Arab world with their oil wealth and bigger manpower could not defeat a small country like Israel backed by the United States? The answer lies in the determination of North Vietnamese forces and the Vietcong guerrillas in South Vietnam to carry on their war of attrition. They did this not by suicide bombing in American-controlled cities, but by hit and run attacks, which the U.S. found ultimately untenable. In contrast, the much larger and richer Arab world compared to poor North Vietnam lacked the determination and fortitude to carry out any real fight against a tiny country like Israel which was fighting for its survival. Thus, North Vietnam could win against the might of America which disorganised Arab forces could not.

By winning the war against a super power, North Vietnam had shown what a resolute nation could do. However, the Arab-Israeli conflict can be resolved through peaceful means, provided both sides give up the hope of winning a military victory. It is obvious neither side can beat the other militarily, and the suffering of both groups will only escalate if this unending cycle of violence continues. To begin with, the Arab countries should stop blaming the United States for their own shortcomings.

How do we solve this problem? Well since we now have alternatives to BTTB, we should allow them to develop. The government should act only as a regulatory body ensuring that prices stay within reach and there is no unfair competition. The first thing that the government should do to ensure this is to restructure BTTB. This must include one very important action: either BTTB must be disbanded as a company or use of the basic telephone infrastructure must be made free for all or for a nominal sum only. Of course the process is going to be very complicated with all its legal and policy implications but I think that if good people with less self interest are put in charge of this process, in the end it will turn out

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By