

Murder in BUET

I read about the murder in BUET with horror but I was not surprised at all. Look at the overall law and order situation in our country. It is frightening. But some people, depending who they support, either blaming the Awami League or The BNP for this mediaeval picture in our country and failing to see it as a national problem.

As a nation we are failing to behave like a civilised society and instead of trying finding its cause we are busy to find the scapegoat. To solve the problem we must tell our own MPs in our constituency that in the next election we will not vote for the one who encourage lawlessness.

The problem is not a easy one, but the people have to tell the politicians that people had enough.

Waheed Nabi
Sheffield, England

Too many State Ministers: A liability?

The senior members of the BNP cabinet have refused to take up the job at the Home Ministry because of the alleged interference of the State Minister. One senior member went as far as saying he will only take up the job if the State Minister position is abolished. In the meanwhile we have been served with a rather theatrical show by the current Home Minister regarding terrorists. The cabinet even issued a directive as to the Home Minister not making any public comments. And this is supposed to instil confidence among the public?

The people of Bangladesh have voted the BNP led coalition to power to do something for the country and its people, not to appease all the party members by giving them ministerial jobs at the expense of smooth running of the government. I plead with the Prime Minister please restore confidence among the people by removing unwanted interference even if you have to ruffle some feathers. Otherwise those who have voted you to power can easily turn their backs on you.

Rubaiyat Kibria
The University of Sydney
Sydney, Australia

AL joining Parliament

Your esteemed daily keeps harping on the same old theme that the Awami League should join the Parliament. Is the AL's joining Parliament going to solve all the national problems? I doubt it. When students are being gunned down in BUET in broad daylight, babies being shot at in their parents' laps and the economy going down the drain, your constant urging of the AL to join Parliament is not the panacea that you make it out to be.

Rather I feel that it will only encourage this current ruling-party, that since its "victory" last October seems to have gone off the kilter and is taking the nation down a disastrous path. It will only prolong the country's current phase of agony.

Rather given the present law and order situation, newspapers in Bangladesh should try to encourage a new "third party" to break the current monopoly on power of the BNP and AL. At the same time, given the current situation, it is not unthinkable for conscientious papers like yours to push for early

mid-term elections. The people of Bangladesh are not fools; I bet the results of a free and fair election held tomorrow would yield a vastly different outcome than the one back in October. There is a limit to the anarchy that a people and nation can tolerate, even relatively submissive ones like ours.

SH
USA

"Army businessmen"

This is in response to Asterix's letter, "Army businessmen". Would the writer kindly explain what is wrong with the army's commercial ventures?

India-Pakistan crisis-- a golden opportunity for Bangladesh



Let's take IT initiative

Many Bangladeshi IT companies have been trying to get into US software market, but have faced difficulty due to inexperience, lack of networking and late start. As you might know, the international media and the US and UK governments have taken the India-Pakistan conflict very seriously and placed them in High-Risk category for their business, investment and population. They have also started to evacuate their citizens from those countries.

Many American companies are rethinking their commitment to software companies in India and many have halted investment in that country. Bangladeshi companies should take advantage of this.

If you are a Bangladeshi software company, this is your golden opportunity. Go ahead create professional company catalogues and post them to as many software companies as you can. Follow up with phone calls. Explain to them, that since India is a high-risk country, on the brink of a nuclear confrontation, it would be safer for them to divert their investment to Bangladesh, or do new software projects in Bangladesh. Explain the advantage of 12 hours difference between Bangladesh and USA, which means Bangladeshi engineers, can test or debug whole night for work done in US during the day. This means 24 hours development, shorter turn-around time and shorter time to market. Bangladesh is the ideal country for that.

Arif Joarder
Software Engineer, USA

Reading his/her letter I am tempted to think that he/she doesn't complain about the golf clubs because he/she is an avid golfer who is also perhaps in the garments business. Why else is he/she so apprehensive about an army run garments factory?

Shahpar Selim
One-mail

Air Force

The Air Force continues to disregard the most basic public safety by practising flying their helicopters and transport planes in the old airport.

Does anyone care that an almost 80,000 pound plane with thousands of gallons of highly flammable fuel is flying about taking off and landing right in the middle of the city? Do you care that its take off flight path puts it right next to the Rangs Tower? It then continues to fly at an extremely low altitude right over Farmgate and the high-rise buildings in Panthopath.

Is this routine exercise absolutely necessary right in the middle of the city? Even the best pilots may have

accidents. What then?

Biggles
Dhaka

'Second link to Chittagong'

We are elated to learn that The Minister for Communication is considering various ways to improve links with the port city, Chittagong. Expressways etc are all very well but time and money consuming.

Much lesser investments can bring about visible results within shorter time. Completing the double track for railway and proper maintenance.

Solution for Kashmir conflict

As both India and Pakistan remain embroiled in a low-intensity war, while India continues to threaten for a full-scale attack the questions remain: Can India afford to launch such an attack and even if it launches such an attack, will it stop terrorism in Kashmir? Despite sabre-rattling, India is hardly in a position to go for war against Pakistan. Despite having a much larger military force, India is basically an extremely poor nation, which does not have the economic and political means to carry out any military action without hurting itself badly.

As for India's insistence that Pakistan must stop cross-border terrorism in Kashmir, it may be pointed out that Pakistan has failed to stem terrorism within its own borders and many Pakistanis and foreigners inside Pakistan are regular victims of terrorism. The same applies to India, which has failed to protect its own people from mayhem in Gujarat.

Though Pakistan has been instrumental in arming and training various extremist groups in Kashmir, it now finds itself in a difficult situation in which these groups are operating virtually independently. India is demanding that Gen. Pervez Musharraf do what he cannot do - prevent further attacks by the so-called Jihadis (religious warriors) in Kashmir. And with most people in Pakistan remain sympathetic to these extremists groups, it will be impossible for Gen. Musharraf unless some solution to the Kashmir problem is found.

Only through a joint India-Pakistan action, these violent groups can be brought under control. But such action is not feasible as long as both India and Pakistan remain at odds over Kashmir. In this context, it may be interesting to take a look at the Easter Agreement concluded in 1998 to end the conflict in Northern Ireland. The Easter Agreement can provide a practical blueprint for the resolution of the seemingly intractable conflict in Kashmir.

MAH
Dhaka

Baggage handling at ZIA

I call upon the government and particularly the Ministry of Civil Aviation to seriously investigate into the irregularities of luggage handling at ZIA by Bangladesh Biman. Often several flights arrive and land almost simultaneously. Yet, only one conveyer belt is used for luggage handling for a large number of passengers. In case of the wide-bodied aircraft, whose passenger capacity is more than usual, cargo or luggage volume is also more than one conveyer belt can handle.

It is tiring for every incoming passenger to wait for an hour or so for collecting the baggage. The

Biman employees too play havoc on the tired passengers by dispensing baggage at a snail's pace. We are aware that these employees screen potential luggage (for pilferage) and are reluctant to use some of the other conveyer belts which remains idle at times (when only one flight has arrived at a time).

'Priority luggage handling' is unknown to Biman personnel. They have no idea or concept of handling First Class and Business Class passenger baggage. Will the authorities do something about it and put a halt to such mismanagement for once and for all?

Saheen Samad
Dhaka

Solution for Kashmir conflict

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MAH
Dhaka

Thank you Mr. Finance Minister for nothing!

With the presentation of this year's budget we also have an additional gift that our GDP and GNI have gone down from US\$377 to US\$375 (June 9). In real terms, considering the devaluation of taka over the last few years, particularly, last year, the decline of gross national income will be much higher.

However, there, indeed, are differences in annual budget formulation by an economist and an accountant. This is borne out by this week's annual budget of Bangladesh presented in the Parliament. No doubt, the price of essentials for sustenance of daily livelihood will/has gone up substantially (*The Daily Star* news, June 10) and the poor and the middle-class will be most hard-hit. There was no pay-scale revision since nearly last ten years, and thousands of salaried employees are struck at the ceiling of salary level. But the Finance Minister (FM) still deserves thanks for giving an option for these overwhelmingly majority to buy air conditioners, fridge, brand new cars and television sets at lower prices (note that most of these are now available in instalment arrangements and these institutions will also be grateful to our FM).

What is left for the farming class and the rural poor is not mentioned in the budget. Undoubtedly, they will remain happy with paying a load of invisible taxes and VAT, and will be lost in the group of silent majority in course of next few years. Yes, talking about VAT, this tax net could further be widened by incorporating the highway beggars at the Mohakhali, Panthapath, Maghbazar and other crossings and the dollar beggars at the ZIA. According to a survey they number nearly one million in Dhaka metropolitan area alone who earn on an average more than Tk 700 per day (ZIA group earn more). Taking the nation as a whole their number will be not less than 25 million. They should also be brought under the income tax net like the petty traders.

At the same time, the FM, perhaps, forgot to impose tax (and also VAT) on the firearms used by the increasing number of 'Hirer Tukro' children of the present regime all over the country (the BUET incident is the latest one). He should have taken note the experience of the 'Sonar Chheley' during the AL rule!

On the other hand, imposing taxes on computers and private/English schools will be rewarding for many reasons, since most middle and low income groups will now be discouraged to be interested in them and the upper income group normally send their children overseas. Out of job many young unemployed use to get solace in using their computer skills and working in such institutions now may find alternative to become 'Hirer Tukro'. I did not see such taxes for private universities in the FM's long speech or have I missed it? The present popular government has given permission to about six new such universities abandoning nine out of 12 proposed public universities earlier planned by the AL government.

The silent majority is watching the present government's activities. No wonder, an ardent BNP supporter and voter, a friend of mine, has taken off his paddy-sheaf badge from his pocket day before yesterday.

EM
Dhaka

Budget and our education sector

In the recent budget the government has imposed income tax and VAT on English Medium Schools. Why were these schools allowed to come into being in the first place, which charge exorbitant fees?

In the main two cities of Dhaka and Chittagong when was the last time any large-scale government school was set up? For Chittagong, as far as my knowledge goes, there has been no new government school after the Liberation!

A Distressed Observer
Chittagong

Saifur's folly

In the backdrop of a fast deteriorating economy and a global slowdown this was a very disappointing if not farcical budget. Where there should have been ruthless cutbacks we see a deficit. The public sector will continue to suck the liquidity out of the market, stifling investment and increase our sovereign debts.

I reread your report on the budget and it still appears that the government has banned the import of reconditioned cars. Is he serious? Most of the cars in private ownership in Bangladesh are reconditioned. As a matter of fact before reconditioned cars became popular a great many people couldn't even afford to buy a car. Most of the new cars in Bangladesh belong to the Government and the military anyway as well as the duty free ones bought by the MPs.

On one hand the government claims to be trying to help the IT sector and on the other it has put new taxes on computer hardware and peripherals. By what twisted logic does this work? If the governments IT advancement plans go ahead we'll have a great many people ready to start software development etc. but with the additional burden of the 7.5 per cent tax.

Along with all this nonsense the customs duty on cereal pellets have been increased. But there is already a great shortage of feed for the poultry and fisheries industries, import of cereal pellets was absolutely necessary for the viability of this sector. But no, this government would rather just throw money at a sector while undermining it on the side just as it is doing with IT.

Another thing I found bizarre is the increase in funds for the PMO. In the first place budget should have been cut not increased; secondly with much of the decisions being taken by Hawa Bhaban, I'd have thought that the PMO could do with less money not more. What will the extra money be used for?

The newspaper report claims a cut in defence expenditure. While the BBC report on the budget says "Spending on defence went up too, and will account for 39bn taka, or 8.8% of revenue income. "The present government is committed to modernise

I am referring to the letters "Bad News zap the good one" by A Mostafa and "The other side of helping the helping hands" by Ms Basmiah Jahir.

First of all, I think I don't have to mention the upsetting picture of our education system. More or less we all know the frustrating picture of our education scheme. For that reason where people are even not good in Bangla, I really felt very bad to see Mr. Amer Mostafa, scrutinising a main headline. I thank him for finding out a mistake of an esteemed daily newspaper. That's fine absolutely, but on the other hand I wonder if he had a tendency to find out others' mistakes especially when Bengali speakers speak in English then that is very disappointing I guess.

In my life I have seen many of my friends, relatives, students, even elderly people, even though they have an immense desire to speak in English and therefore have a great interest in learning the language, just can't proceed. Just because if they make mistakes people will laugh at them. Those faultfinders contribute a lot to destroy their love for English and therefore we all become losers. Before opening

their mouth to speak in English, the door has been shut. I tried my best to convince them by the fact that English is not our mother tongue and we just can't expect 100 per cent accuracy from Bengali English speakers and mistakes are learning steps so if we say we hate mistakes then it's becoming, we hate learning steps. From my side I want to make a little request to everybody especially those who know English well, not to laugh if they come across any mistake from the enthusiastic speakers and contribute to encourage the practice of English in our country.

For the second letter "The other side of helping the helping hands" I want to inform Ms. Basmiah Jahir that for the Editing of "to the Editor letters" sometimes I feel what the writer wants to mean is hindered. My letter was basically written for those who are in trouble to keep their maids for their ill treatment at home and as a result not having peace at home. It was not actually meant to establish their rights. In this connection, for her letter I also want to raise a question and that is "Do we have to always seek help from the government to solve any



Budget blue

and improve the efficiency of our defence forces," the minister said.

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/business/newsid_2029000/2029708.stm)

I am inclined to believe the BBC that this government with its twisted priorities has increased defence expenditure especially when I see that the allocation for Public Order and Security is only 5 per cent. I don't think I would be in a minority here if I were to say that the reverse should have been the case. With deteriorating public safety, defence gets a boost. What nonsense.

The government in its wisdom has also made travel and construction more expensive. This will only hurt the middle-class no one else. For the BNP protected millionaire meter reader and their friends in customs and other departments all this requires is a little more extortion but they'll keep on happily buying the flats in Gulshan and taking the shopping trips to Singapore.

This has been a disappointing budget by a disappointing government. At this rate our economy and growth will continue to flounder and the next government will be handed over an economy in worse shape than they had found it.

MA
Dhaka

Decision that lacked thinking

The government's decision on banning import of recondition vehicles from Japan was not at all wise.

It was rightly said by The Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicle Importers and Distributors Association (BARVIDA), now that there are no imports of such vehicles, the market will be filled with cheap and inferior quality Indian vehicles, which is not at all a good sign.

I have been staying in India for the last five years, and know a lot about their automobile sector. Even a 2002 model Indian car is technologically inferior compared to a 1998 model recondition car available in the market. According to me, what the government should do is allow such imports, but with strict quality criteria.

It is also rightly said by Mr.Abdul Haque, that even United Kingdom and New Zealand import reconditioned cars from Japan, termed as 'Signature Class Vehicles'. The government should see to it that cars not more than three years old are imported, that it has not run more than 35000 km and has a good service history. In this way the middle class people would be able to buy quality vehicles and not suffer by buying vehicles which are not worth the money invested upon.

At the same time, what the recondition car importers should try is not to import too much of Toyotas, but also import recondition Nissans and Hondas (which is being imported in a minute scale at present and are equally good) at the same time, which will give us, middle-class citizens a wider variety of choice.

Ali Masrur
Dhaka

Surprising budget!

The budget for this year is exactly what I feared about-- the sufferings of the middle income group increases.

1. Let's start with making black money white. As far as I could recall, there was similar sort of proposal in the budget of the last AL government. Can anyone give the statistics of the amount of black money turned white since then?

2. After the budget proposal in the parliament people from different fractions welcomed the budget. Did we ever notice who are those people? One fraction is certainly the party members. They will welcome whatever decision the govt may take. Besides if you have the chance to look at the processions I certainly can say that most of them do not know what budget is. And another fraction welcoming the budget is the wealthy people. And they are not worried about the price levels that will affect the living standards of the middle-class people.

3. The transport fair is certainly going to increase. Again the sufferers are the middle-class people.

4. I don't find any reason behind increasing tax of computer and its accessories. The government fails to control smuggling and the general people have to suffer!

5. I'm glad to see that the private universities have to pay tax from now on. Besides the offspring of the wealthy people, the children from middle-class group also get admitted to these universities. The government should consider this point and chalk out some substitute method so that these students don't get affected.

MA Tareq
Mohakhali, Dhaka

Reconditioned cars



I knew that the used car dealers of Bangladesh known somewhat euphemistically as Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicles Importers and Exporters (what export?) Association (BARVIDA) would be up in arms about the decision to ban used car imports in Bangladesh.

But I am surprised that they played their two major cards so early in the game. It smacks of desperation and fear, which I am sure the government can smell.

Of course several prominent men including some in the government would benefit from this new rule. But among the beneficiaries would also be Dr. Iqbal of AL with his dealerships for Land Rover, Daihatsu, Volkswagen, Audi and others and you can't get further from BNP than Dr. Iqbal.

But these were the most obvious of the ploys the used car dealers would deploy. What really struck me as funny was the use of the perennial

bogeyman of Bangladeshi discourse that is India. Again the evil spectre of Indian domination has been brought into play to try and scare us.

The arguments given by these salesmen are false and misleading on several counts. First of all if Indian cars are really so inferior then why would anyone buy them? Do you really think that used car dealers are looking out for us poor gullible buyers? Actually Indian cars these days in fixtures and fittings are equal to the cheap Japanese cars.

In regards to the emissions, new cars sold in India have to comply to the Euro II emissions standards, probably the strictest in the world so much so that American cars have trouble meeting them. I don't know if Indian vehicles imported into Bangladesh also comply but it is a simple step to make that a requirement as well.

The salesmen casually give the example of Japanese cars that they sell for 3-4 lakhs.

That's a joke. What this used car industry has bred is a vast underground network starting from the corrupt customs inspectors who assess the duties in exchange of bribes to the workshops that service these dealers. As soon as a car arrives from the port the first two weeks are spent in turning back the mileage, cleaning up the damages and covering up the defects with temporary patches. The 3-4 lakh taka cars these break down after six months. The most a buyer can do is test the cars performance before buying but you have no way of knowing that all the other parts are near the ends of their lives. The only reconditioning that actually happens is in the back streets of Bijoy Nagar.

The only reason people bought these second hand cars was because the duties on new ones were so exorbitant. Now that they have come down to more realistic levels in addition to the new jeeps and Mercedes' you will see in Dhaka will also be a multitude of cheaper new compact cars bought by the same people who had to until now buy from these dealers. We can hope to see Ford, Peugeot, Fiat and others bringing their economy models to our market.

However in spite of their shifty ways of passing off five-year-old cars as new I agree that the ban should be lifted. With new car prices falling these fellows might even be forced to make an honest living for once.

Bastiat, Dhaka

Never laugh at someone's wrong English

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada