

General Musharraf's regret

It is very confusing to note General Musharraf's regret during his visit to the National Memorial at Savar. So far I've noticed on several occasions that he is a very good orator and his recent comments about fundamentalism has been welcomed everywhere. Moreover, he seems to have a sense of open-mindedness and liberalism, which are hardly noticed in the society ruled by Islamic laws.

He has used the word 'magnanimity'. Being magnanimous he could have used the words 'forgive', 'pardon', 'excuse' instead of simply 'regret'. English is such a language that any word of these three would have made him much more acceptable to the people who suffered the atrocities under the Pakistani forces in 1971. We appreciated his gesture shown during the last SAARC summit when he shook hands with Prime Minister Vajpayee. It was another example of his magnanimity.

Kamaluddin Ahmed
Shamoly, Dhaka

Views on student politics

I strongly support the idea of banning student politics. Student politics only benefit the so-called student leaders. It supports and shields criminal activities in the country's educational institutions. The so-called student leaders never tried to do anything that might benefit the general student. General students become hostages to these leaders' whims and wishes.

Our teachers instead of running behind the corrupt political leaders should focus on research work and teaching. Our universities rank among the worst educational institutions in the world because of these corrupt and politically motivated teachers. I earnestly hope that the government would take necessary measures to ban student politics for good. Let there be light in our educational institutions.

Sherif Saeed
On e-mail

I have gone through the letter "Banning of student politics-- not the solution" by Arafat Islam (August 4). In his letter, Mr. Arafat blamed 'tenderbaazi' for Sony's death in BUET. Yes, it is true. But where is the root of this 'tenderbaazi'? A single student don't have enough courage to do 'tenderbaazi' and I am sure Mr. Arafat will never be able show a single evidence where the 'tenderbaaz' is a common student. In the name of student organisation under political shelter some student leaders are doing such 'tenderbaazi' and collecting toll. What are the identities of Muki and Tagar? Did not the student wings and political leaders support them?

Mr. Arafat also claimed "Because of student politics, the students of DU were able to protest the police atrocity that took place in Shamsunnahar Hall. If there had not been any student politics they should have to keep their mouth shut and wait for more humiliation and oppression in future." I am sorry to find his biased claim. Advocating in favour of student politics he should not give political colour to this honest and dedicated uprising of general students and teachers against police and the authority's atrocity.

It is well-known to all that the recent uprising at Dhaka University against police brutality is not a political uprising - it is the uprising of general students and teachers, which was supported by the common people.

This uprising is also a lesson that campus politics is not needed to protest against atrocity.

M. S. Uddin
Japan

This is in reference to Mr Zakaria Khondoker's letter "Student politics-- assorted thoughts" (July 25) supporting student politics. He did really mix-up student politics with students' right to protest any governmental decision for an unknown reason. It seems he just tried to distract people's concern into a different issue.

First of all as an independent person, everyone has a right to say their own words where students are not an exception and government is not against that. It exists all over the world as we can see violent protest over any governmental decision always occurs (Last time in Indonesia for US bombing). But this can not be termed, as student politics cause students are not involved with any political parties. There can be a student council to look after the students' demand.

He says "You won't be able to show me any single example of gun battle caused by student politics in 90s". Well as a university student, I'd like to inform Mr Khondokar that almost 95 per cent of the gun battles in educational institutions are caused by student politics and patronised by the political leaders.

Every negative incident occurring on the campus is directly or indirectly related with student politics and if it is banned, anti-social activities in DU campus will surely be reduced to about 50 per cent.

Saikot
DU

Roads of Dhaka

Gusty and strong rains, which have been too strong for being seasonal, were too costly for the city dwellers, as majority roads of the city have developed deep potholes as pebbles, stones and bitumen were washed away with the rain. Majority roads are now left with life risking potholes filled with dirt and stagnant rainwater. Scenarios of these roads change completely during night-time, as motorists have to use their sixth sense to challenge the death traps to reach their destinations with the taste of rocky and bizarre journeys.

Consequently roads of Dhaka are now in bad shape and pedestrians and motorists have been going through immense sufferings. Truly rains took its heavy tolls on the roads and created mockery of the road repair management of City Corporation. If the situation persists it would be a difficult job for the City Corporation to bring the damaged roads back in the usable form. Dhaka City Corporation already announced its development budget but yet has to decide whom to allocate the job. It took too a long time to study irregularities caused in road management and fund disbursements of the past government. Well, it's a consonance that the City Corporation felt pity for the poor dwellers and hastily took some efforts to do something that we can count on and it was a temporary road repair work. Alas it was a poor and half hazard effort as temporary repair work only let people feel good for a while and then once again things moved in the same direction. What is important for such an important Corporation to protect its corporate image is to develop and chalk out a sensible and timely work plan to resolve rising crises. Critical issues such as waste disposal, pollution, traffic management and fighting mosquito men-



Ruined roads

ace cannot be resolved with a dilly delay process.

As time is passing by things are becoming more challenging and hectic and therefore new dimensions have to be added in plan and work priority list. It's time to think in a new way and draft plans, which mean sense for city dwellers. It should stick to the slogan "Plan for tomorrow and work for today".

M. S. Jamal, Dhaka

Have you ever imagined how callously planned Dhaka's roads

Biman Bangladesh Airlines

I am not sure how to react at the news of financial turmoil of our national flag carrier. As an expatriate, I get to see a lot of Biman/Govt staff living and travelling around on Biman's account. Their lifestyle does not reflect the fact that Biman is up to the nose with debt. Our crew and officials indulge in extravagant comforts. They stay in top of the range hotels around the world. They claim meal allowances but regularly pilfer meals from onboard provisions. Routes are designed to suit crews/govt officials. Otherwise how can they justify New York flight? It's common news that Biman incurs a loss of Tk.40 lakhs each flight. That's Tk.80 lakhs a trip. Scores of people are travelling to New York either free or on discount fare. And it's only applicable for govt big wigs or Biman Staff.

These are only a few examples how resources of the national carrier are being looted. Accountability is almost non-existent in the organisation. And almost every section is involved in the loot.

Why do we have to have a national carrier, which does not serve any useful purpose for national cause? Why can't we follow suit like Air Lanka? It's still a flag carrier but managed and partially owned by a foreign investor airline. And they are doing a lot better.

Biman must adopt life saving measures immediately. Route restructuring should be the first action to be taken. All unprofitable routes should be reviewed. New York Flight should be discontinued. Biman must take measures to enhance its image to attract other airlines for code sharing deals. It's an acceptable and widely practised business solution for most of world airlines. Employees (Specially Crew) must be encouraged to accept Cost Cutting Measures. Above all Biman has to purge the organisation to get rid of those people who regard their service as business.

Abeer Chowdhury
Singapore

Bush, Blair and the Middle East

As an English lady who reads *The Daily Star* via the Internet, I would like to agree with the reader who refers to Blair's place in the White House and the new position for the 'once mighty British Empire'.

I am one of the many thousands of British people who are fed up with Blair saying "yes sir" to George Bush's every whim.

Bush is a warmonger and will not be happy until he sees Saddam Hussein wiped from the face of the earth. He wants to complete the job that his father left undone during the Gulf War. He is using the events of 11th September 2001 to justify his dictatorship of the world and is using Blair as support. I truly believe that if it were put to the vote here in the UK it would be thrown out.

Ramna Park

A large number of people visit Ramna Park everyday. I am pleased to note that after many years the Park authority has cleaned up the entire Park. It now looks really clean and pleasant. We convey our thanks to them.

We only hope this tempo is kept up in the coming months. The flowerbeds and the trees be maintained so that entire Park gives a decent look. We hope our new City Mayor will keep an eye on this for the benefit of the people.

Recently a report was published in the newspapers showing the wretched condition of many city parks. These were mostly taken over by unauthorised people and being used for truck/bus garage, shops, slums etc. We hope the City Mayor will take firm steps to recover these parks and after proper repairs/renovation reopen them for public use.

There was a car parking space near the Kakrail Mosque for people coming to Ramna Park. Recently this space has been walled up by the Mosque authority. They have also built up 'tinshed' in the area. We would like to know whether this space has been allocated by government to the Mosque authority or has been taken over illegally. Surely the Mosque authority can expand the Mosque upwards instead of taking over the car parking lot causing inconvenience to the people. This matter may please be clarified for public interest.

I. Haq, New Eskaton Road, Dhaka

are? Almost no roads have any safe means of crossing by pedestrians. Just take a look at Mohakhali, there is no way to cross it apart from running and weaving between speeding buses and the other transportation on the road. But the worst is probably the Airport road. It has houses and factories on both sides of the road and for the most part there is no way to cross. Every night on the way home I am terrified that my driver will hit one of the garments workers crossing the road. With the trucks coming from the opposite direction with their lights on high beam, it's almost impossible to see anything anyway. You just have to hope there isn't some pedestrians with no road sense standing in the invisible divider waiting to jump.

Not surprisingly last Thursday night I saw a truly bizarre and horrifying spectacle. I was driving towards the city in my car. The rear of the one in front of me, a white '96 model Corolla suddenly seemed to jump up as if it was running over something. As the car sped on, remember all this happened in half a second, I saw what I thought was a dog or some rags, but actually a body of a bearded man. He was lying length-wise on the road; the car in front of me had driven right over him. I managed to swerve away in time although he looked quite dead. It appeared that he was hit not by the car in front of me but the one in front of that. I imagine it was that one because he sped away as fast as possible.

So Thursday night someone got away with a hit and run. There will be many more like that until our roads have some safe means of crossing and our people learn some road sense.

Satyajit
Dhaka

In my opinion, Bush is more dangerous than Saddam. He ought to be looking at the problem of the Palestinians in Israel and trying to solve that, instead of making trouble where there is none. Of course it does not suit him to find a solution in Israel, as he may have to offend his Jewish friends. I have recently met English people who have visited Israel as tourists and they are shocked at the plight of the Palestinians. They had never realised the situation they were in until they saw it with their own eyes. This of course is because we see only what the Jewish controlled media in the UK want us to see.

I would hope that Tony Blair also looks into his heart and comes to his senses before Bush plunges us all into a war for no reason. We British have enough to answer for in our past when we ruled the 'Empire'. We should be trying to make amends for

are left in a catch 22 situation. On one hand we just can not be happy with the reduced rate that we are having because it is harming governance and on the other we could not accept the \$1.25 that we were paying earlier which was one of the highest rate in the world.

To take care of this disparity what Bangladesh government did was to reduce the TAR rate from 60c/m to I believe 20c/m. This was a bold move indeed but sadly as far as I know the New York spot market rate for Bangladesh still holds at 7c/m. Which means that the disparity between the rates of these phone cards and the major carriers will continue to exist. Major carrier can come down to 60 c/m but it will not be enough for the average consumer to switch.

I feel that Bangladesh government has no option but to impose tax on the use of VoIP. That it recently

Cricket-- game of certainty?

Since getting Test status the measurable performance of our cricket team has continued unabated. There is no mark of improvement. The heavy defeat at the hand of a second string Sri Lankan side in the 2nd Test has proved beyond doubt that we are not a Test material.

Our Cricket Board should suspend all our Test match programs for at least next two years. Let the national team play more and more 1st class matches at home and abroad. If there is any improvement after two years, the board can reconsider resumption of Test matches.

Cricket is said to be a game of uncertainty, but our cricket team has made humiliating defeats certain for each and every Test match. This humiliation must stop.



Are we Test material?

our past mistakes instead of supporting the man who is building his own empire. He will not stop with Iraq. Who will be next?

Kathleen Haq
UK

VoIP in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh VoIP has been on for quite a while now. VoIP is the technology that allows you to talk to someone over the Internet. VoIP is what makes it possible to call Bangladesh from the US for only 15 cents a minute. I remember not too long ago I used to pay \$1.25 for the same. But the sad part is that VoIP operates in a secretive fashion to avoid paying the government any tax. While we get the benefit of the amount of revenue lost is quite significant for country as resource hungry as Bangladesh.

Back in 2000 I remember reading somewhere that revenue dropped 50 per cent from 500 crore taka that Bangladesh earned from long distant services the previous year.

With the country's total revenue receipts at 19000 crore, we are talking about 1.3 per cent decrease in national revenue just from this sector. This is huge and certainly not affordable by Bangladesh. So we

did with the per minute usage fee. I have a mixed feeling about it because it is imposing a huge tax burden on a much larger community for the problem created by a few. In theory what Bangladesh government could have done was to impose direct tax on the exact amount of VoIP traffic. In order to achieve that it could first legitimise the VoIP business and make these companies register with BTB for their VoIP operation. I think it is better to keep things out in the open, especially when it is clear that this technology is here to stay. Then they can impose a huge penalty for unauthorised usage. Once BTB and the ISP (VoIP Hosts) reaches a service agreement then BTB can impose a tax on each minute of usage for the outgoing calls from those telephone lines. With the amount of traffic these days even if BTB gets 2 cents a minute, it can look at way beyond 500 crore from this sector alone.

Syed Hussain
Atlanta, USA

Spycams

Recently, I've read in your that the government is considering installing close circuit TVs in various spots to

monitor criminal activities.

Is this either necessary or desirable?

It is commonly perceived, correctly I think, that the police are well aware of most of the habitual criminals in Dhaka. Newspapers often report how the police themselves give prior warnings of raids etc. How will installing such an expensive system help stop that?

It is also questionable if we even want the government to have the ability or right to video tape us. The use of CCTVs is a very controversial one, even in Britain where it is now quite common, but as yet of unproven effectiveness.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, an organisation dedicated to defending the Bill of Rights, CCTVs have the following drawbacks:

Surveillance Camera Systems Are Not Effective Crime-Fighters
Surveillance Cameras Displace More Effective Public Safety Measures

Surveillance Cameras Undermine Individual Privacy
Surveillance Cameras are Subject to Great Abuse

(From the statement of the ACLU to the House of Representatives)

Do we really want to give our police the right and ability to take pictures of us going about our lives? The lack of accountability in our law enforcement agencies is already bad enough as it is. Giving them the right to video innocent people is not something that we should add to their growing list of abuses.

MA
Dhaka

On US stock market loss

It is terribly painful to see my 18-years of retirement savings go down so miserably due to corporate greed, corporate cheating and lying. I used to think USA; the technologically most advanced nation on earth is the best place where work ethics in business was the best. I used to think Bangladesh is the worst country when it comes to work ethics and corporate morality.

Unlike the real Bangladeshi

Mig-29s and new fighter planes



Exit Migs, enter...

The purchase of Mig-29 was indeed a bad deal by the past government. Therefore the decision to sell those if buyers can be found was welcomed. On the heels of that news, the PM announced her decision to procure new fighter planes of the latest technology.

May we remind her that her election pledge was transparency and eradication of terrorism in the domestic front -- and as the year closes, we have to say the progress has not been good. This cannot be covered up with clever speeches and startling declarations.

Where will the money to buy this defence equipment come from? The banks, newspapers etc have recently reported that there are enough hard currency thanks to the backbreaking work of the Bangladeshi immigrants. But is the investment in defence the best use of this hard-earned foreign currency? The country's best defence is an educated, healthy population that is fully employed.

Nasreen, Dhaka

in politics. Who is to blame if university students get involved in those wings of political parties and commit the same crimes?

When law is bent to fulfil one's own purpose to patronise the criminals, then banning student politics could not wipe out the diseases. A student involved in unlawful activities can be brought to justice if we can establish the rule of law in the society. What is our problem is that we do not let the law act in its own way. We bend it in every possible way to protect our own interest. This is the reason why the nation is stumbling into deep-rooted crisis in its every sector. Why will we blame student politics when our intentions are not definite and honest? Why will we blame student politics for our own failure to punish the criminals of the campuses? On one hand we talk about uprooting terrorism and on the other hand we patronise the criminals. This double standard should be stopped first to solve the present crisis of the nation.

Islam
Tangail

I applaud the students of DU for exercising their peaceful and powerful protest, removing the VC and demonstrating the power of an honest student movement. This is why I agree with the point that healthy student politics is essential to academy. All students have a right to peaceful environment for pursuing education, and the nation must

operation of the schools or the City-- are subject to disciplinary action by the school and prosecution under the national law. Punishment will be up to 15 years in jail and US\$ 250,000 fine."

The punishment must not be limited to student/teacher *mastani* and *tenderbazi*, but must also include teacher-absence, embezzlement, misconduct and violence, etc. Once criminal acts become visibly punishable then acts of crime will disappear, even with the practice of partisan politics.

Finally, I disagree with the argument that laws exist but we cannot enforce them because - if we can enforce a "ban on student politics" as we are doing in BUET, then surely we are capable of enforcing a law to ban serious and petty crime committed in the campuses.

K. Gazi

"Great Army"

A Z M Abdul Ali's letter reminded me of a strange fact. All of us have been to weddings and receptions at Senakunjo. When you have an invitation card the MPs at the gates let you in without any questioning.

But if they see a white person then they demand to see their pass or clearance. I've seen the application forms for clearance to attend functions at Senakunjo. You have to furnish all the details of your foreign guest in advance.