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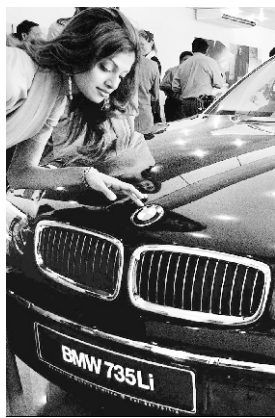


PHOTO: AFP

Ironical!

Bangladeshi Oligarchs

I could not believe my eyes when I read the number of luxurious cars sold at the capital in the last two years since their arrival in Bangladesh. In a country where 35% of the population live below the poverty level and with just \$360 per capita income, I wonder where these new oligarchs come from. Is that a sign of overall prosperity, or rather a sign of growing income disparity between the rich and the poor? Is it possible for any one with a sound mind to believe that Bangladesh made so much progress in some fifteen years (since "liberalisation") that people can now afford to buy luxuries that cost at least 150 times more than the country's per capita income? What is the source of this mountain of wealth? At a time when we are all talking about corruption in the government establishments and those who are linked with them, why should this so called 'businessmen' oligarchy escape from finger pointing?

In fact, there is no doubt that these oligarchs are the by-products of the nation's position as the 'Number One' corrupt country in the world, so we must not leave them alone.

Chowdhury Mohibul Hassan
London School of Economics & Political Science (LSE)

Trial of Saddam

Iraq, a great nation in the history of human civilisation, has now been reduced to ruins. Its president Saddam Hussain failed to earn the trust of Iraqi people because of his undemocratic rule in the country. This has been fully exploited by the opponents of Saddam. Iraq is a sovereign country and its internal problems are to be solved by the Iraqi people without the intervention of external forces like the US and the UN, unless requested to do so.

Whether the US has sold any weapons to Iraq is best known to the US government. The main purpose of destroying Iraq by the US was to protect Israeli interest in the Arab world because Iraq appeared to be strategically important and disloyal to the US. If Americans were really interested, they could have resolved the Israel-Palestine conflict long ago.

In the interest of international peace and justice, Saddam should be tried by the Iraqi people, not even by the International Court. In view of this, if all Arab countries could come forward and put their unified effort to solve the Palestinian issue, this would be a desirable advance toward world peace and stability.

To accomplish this desired goal, the Arab world could follow the Islamic principle of creating peace as followed by Prophet Muhammad (SM) during his lifetime. If the Arab world could sign a peace treaty with Israel, this can guarantee a free state for the Palestinians.

Aunamika Choudhury
Gulshan, Dhaka

Dhanmondi Road 3/A

I am a resident of Dhanmondi Road 3/A. The road was known for its tranquillity and the dignity of the people dwelling there. We could play or walk on the broad street in the evening. But we never knew that destiny would change all that.

The incursion of a political party's office has changed everything. During hartal, the whole road is blocked with at least 100 members of police. The policemen sneer at you when you pass by them.

We have to request them when we want to enter the road to reach our own homes!

That newly set up university is also a big concern for the residents. Makeshift hotels and street vendors now occupy most of the road. You will find couples in very intimate positions in front of your gate. I have an apartment there and I thought I would stay there very comfortably, but it was not to be. Why is a residential area used for such purposes? I don't know.

I would be thankful if the government takes the necessary steps to prevent business organisations from springing up in residential areas.

Badal Hasib, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

'Scholar' civil servants?

I have gone through a news item published in "The Daily Star" on March 4 which said that the government has taken up a plan of Tk.1426 crore to build 'scholar civil servants' by enrolling 3,000 public servants in PhD, MS and various short and long training courses. But to me, and I believe to the eyes of most of the people of the country, it is an indiscreet and inordinately expensive plan. Our government should contemplate how much we could derive from our would be PhD & MS degree holder civil servants, how long would be their tenure of services and, above all, do the civil servants actually need to be PhD and MS to perform their duties? Of course, there is no way to disagree that 'Training' has no alternative and for this a plan could be taken up within a reasonable budget.

We know, our government already has taken up a programme namely 'Education for all' which naturally will be a long drawn process. So far I understand, the 'Education for all' programme is mainly to make every adult of the country literate. But literacy alone cannot contribute to the development of a country. We need education, the backbone of a nation. The target of our plans/programmes should be such that people get proper education so that they can contribute to their respective areas of work. I believe basic education up to class XII would be pragmatic for the country, while it is badly in need of a work force having basic education, rather than PhD/MS degree holder 'scholar civil servants'.

Habibul Muhiit
Chittagong

DU teachers' protest

There is no doubt that the attack on writer Humayun Azad is a shame for the whole nation. In a country like ours, where we constantly fail to identify our priorities, it is absolutely necessary to voice our anger against such an incidence just to force the authorities to stay in focus. But I have great reservations about the form of protest chosen by our teachers at Dhaka University (DU). I think the indefinite closure of classes at DU is a crime. Having been a student at this institution I know how rare these classes are and how frustrating the delay of academic year is. I am absolutely sure that Dr. Humayun Azad himself would never have supported such a protest. The teachers who have stopped taking classes at DU are happily continuing classes at the menagerie of

Story of police

I thank TIB for conducting a survey on trustworthiness of our law enforcers and publishing their findings at a time when the image of police has been lowered beyond measure. Statistical findings have little surprise to offer. There is no doubt that people of all walks of life do not approve of police activities in our country. Reasons behind such a sorry state of affairs are also evident from the report of TIB. When a citizen goes to a police unit or officer after suffering some traumatic experience like being robbed, burgled, raped or otherwise victimised s/he has to pay some money to get the case lodged. Thus s/he is victimised twice for the same incident, once in the hands of wrong doers and again in the hands of law enforcers. When a victim needs some consoling words, s/he is harshly asked to pay expenses (!).

Poor salaries and perks

definitely contribute to corruption. But it is the wholesale politicisation, which ate up the morale of the police force long ago.

It is revealed in the report that OCs and SIs working in metropolitan areas have to work longer hours without any scope for entertainment. I am not sure whether the report could throw any light on the rat race of getting a posting in the metropolitan police stations. Extra departmental influence plays the most vital role in posting of officers at lucrative stations. Surely, such influence is not distributed free of cost. A police reform is most welcome. But one has reasons to be sceptical about the effectiveness of such reform if our political culture pertaining to police activities does not change.

Will TIB take the trouble of making such an in-depth study of our lower judiciary as well?

Sonia, Dhaka

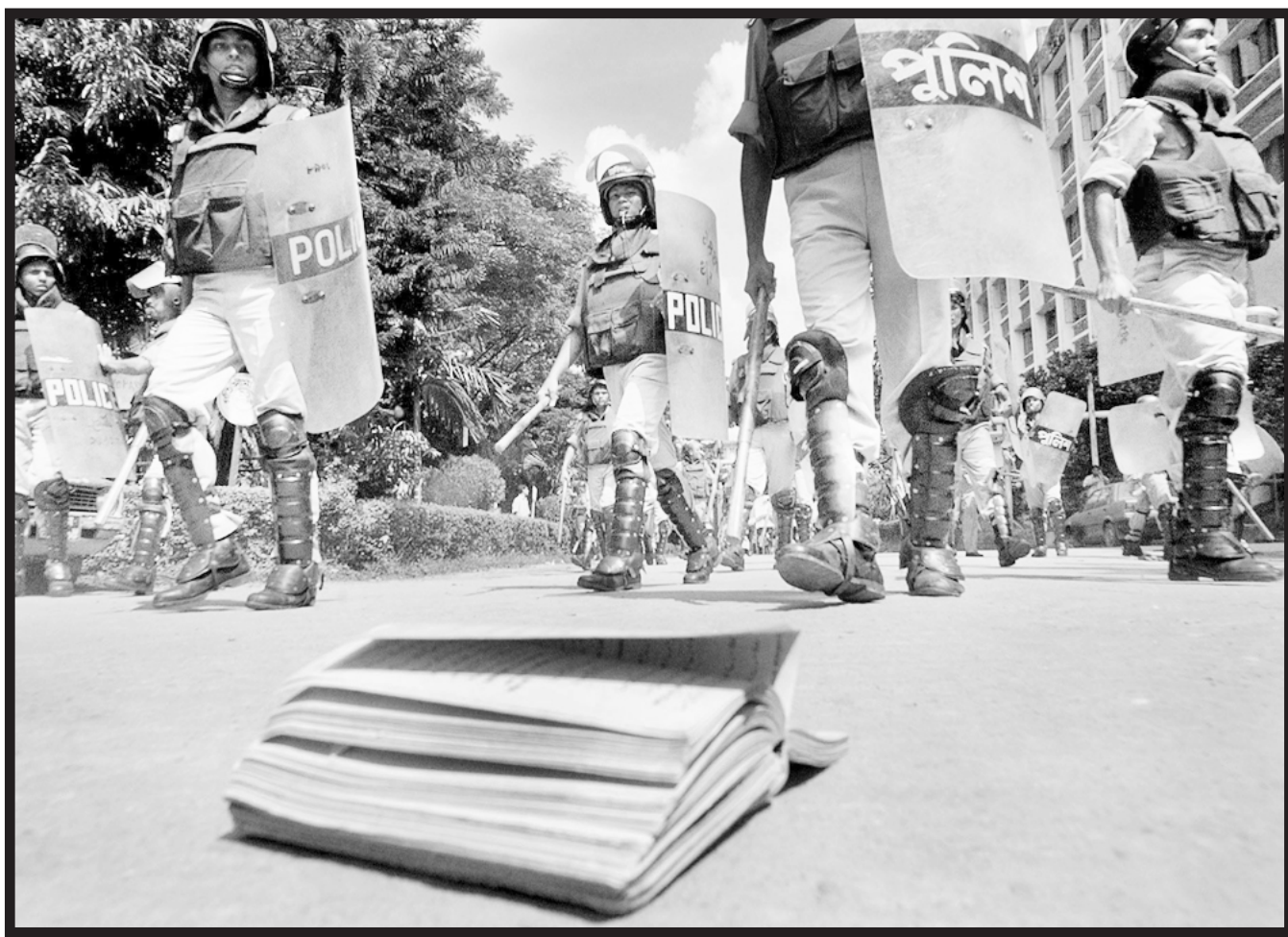


PHOTO: AFP

Sad facts

private universities where they are part time teachers. Is this to say that the DU students are expendable whereas the private university students are not?

In my view, the closure of classes is a mockery of a protest that just makes teaching in private universities easier for the DU teachers. I strongly believe that the teachers should have chosen a different form of protest.

Wahid Choudhury, On e-mail

Is opposition right?

Every time there is a problem, we shout at the government for failing. But who would point out that what the opposition party is doing is not always right? Is it right to burn a

restore law and order, but they don't ask why the opposition party is calling a series of self-destructive hartals. They don't oppose vehemently if the opposition activists burn vehicles but they do if the government wants to stop the violence.

It is their right to call hartal. But to observe it or not is my right. Why should I be bombed for not following hartal if that is my right?

Rimon, On e-mail

Alcohol consumption

I was shocked to read on BBC online last week that alcoholic beverages were being manufactured and sold in Bangladesh as 'malt beverages', exploiting a legal

gion. So I find it rather hypocritical that people indulging in such ways simultaneously claim themselves to be practising Muslims. What I find even more amazing is that many of the Bangladeshis living in the West, who are surrounded by a culture of alcohol consumption, do not feel the need or pressure to drink and often refrain from alcohol consumption. Yet people in Bangladesh feel that it is all right to do so, perhaps feeling that it is a status symbol or sign of modernity. I would argue that it is rather a sign of mimicry of the worst kind, and a lack of self-respect and dignity, that is driving many of the young (and old) towards an alien culture. I would further say that it is a sign of strength and character to avoid drinking alcohol, to be able to say

outfits, we have to conclude that there is little 'student' about them. When their parent parties are in power, like the JCD at the moment, they take charge of educational institutions by virtue of political clout. When their political masters are in the opposition, these 'wings' turn into a phalanx of mobsters trained in the art of destroying public and private property, as the JCD did during the Ershad regime and the BCL is doing right now.

Let us face it. Most of these organisations are nothing more than crime syndicates, the nonsensical nostalgia of the glory of student politics notwithstanding. By continuing to absolve these groups of their criminal conduct, we have become the only nation in modern history which openly and proudly

ties owned by the family, not to say anything about costly houses. Knowing all these hard facts and uttering what he has publicly said deserves something more than carping criticism. Instead of passing such remarks, he should categorically say how many jobs at what levels he is planning to create in next FY.

Acitizen, Dhaka

What a joke!

It seems there are numerous organisations to protect the journalists from violence and repression but very few to speak for the ordinary people; people who are not in power, who have no intention of being in power and are not

should concentrate on the situation now prevailing in their own countries. And when the US State Department talks of human rights, it is just a joke. No one in the right frame of mind can take that seriously.

Zahid S. Nizam, Dhaka

Karail fire and NGO's

On March 4, a fire broke out in Karail, a slum under Gulshan Police station in Dhaka. Thousands of shanties were gutted and about 10,000 people were affected. As per reports published in the local press, five children and an elderly man was burned to death. Relief from government for the distressed people was insufficient as usual. But it is surprising that none of the NGOs came forward to help those people, although hundreds of NGOs are stationed in Dhaka.

Some NGO offices are located in places very close to Karail. But it is very unfortunate that until now none of the NGOs, large or small, went there with relief for the affected people, although they collect fund from the donors to help the destitutes. Do they have any real sympathy for the poor and distressed people of the country, or it is only a show to collect funds from the donors?

AKM Fakhru Alam
Dhaka

We salute him

The first class magistrate, who has set an example of dedication to public service, deserves a round of applause. When everybody with some sort of power is busy making up his own fortune, he is committed to his work with utmost sincerity and honesty. This "wrongdoing" has invited threats to his life, but he is unmoved and is keeping on doing the good work. We as readers are fad up with comments on hartal, worsening law and order situation, price spiral etc. This was a very welcome change of subject. It is an honour to salute such a man.

The DS has done a good job by revealing the story of the magistrate, which gives us a new hope that some day the wind of change will blow all over Bangladesh. We are waiting for that day.

Saif
Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

Long way to go still

buss? Or to call hartal? Did we have smooth time during Awami League governance? It is only right to say that we didn't. We had as much violence as we see today and even more. Why would not we give five years to the government to stay in power and then have our say in the next election?

It is a pity that our political system gets violent against itself. Could anyone tell that we are better off today than a decade back? I think the opposition leader has a perpetual wrath against the ruling party and vice versa. And in between we are the victims. The newspapers point their finger towards government for failing to

loophole, and that the manufacturers/distributors were also using a foreign trademark to sell their drinks. I commend the authorities for cracking down on such businesses, and hope that they will continue to do so in future and not allow alcoholic beverages to be produced and marketed in the country.

While many urbanites in Dhaka, and elsewhere, may find it fashionable and 'modern' to consume alcohol, I think the opposite is true. Many people in the West are turning away from alcohol, as it only leads to more social ills than good. Moreover, drinking alcohol goes against the teachings of our reli-

'no thanks', rather than to give in to something that has no real value.

I would urge fellow Bangladeshis, especially the young, to look at the social, psychological and health problems that alcohol creates, and learn to say NO. You don't need alcohol to have fun, to be 'cool', or to fit in. Learn to be cool and strong on your own, not because you drink alcohol.

Farhana Sultana, USA

Student wings

Often newspapers refer to 'student wings' of political parties. Having observed the behaviour of these

endorses the existence and operation of organised crime.

Esam Sohail
Kansas, USA

Finance minister's observation

Our finance minister's sermon "You build costly houses but demand cheap food, that's not reasonable" drew my attention. As finance minister, he should be well aware of the percentage of people building costly houses and the number of people living below poverty line. He should also know how many of Bangladeshi people have houses with minimum facili-

involved in politics. Given the number of violent crimes committed in Bangladesh, which must be one of the highest in the world, relatively few journalists seem to be affected.

People of Bangladesh enjoyed a short-lived peaceful atmosphere during the Operation Clean Heart. The operation was abandoned either due to foreign pressure or internal pressure but ordinary people like us would want such an operation back again. It is much better if a few criminals suffer in the process rather than innocent people in their thousands, including innocent journalists. Foreign Human Rights organisations

Blair, Blix, Bush and Iraq

Now that Weapons of Mass Destruction has turned into Words of Massive Delusion its fall out with the uncalled for destruction of Iraq and the unnecessary deaths of thousands of Iraqis has become sour grapes for Blair and Bush; the grapes of wrath for the perpetrators of an unnecessary War of Massive Destruction.

Having brushed aside the UN and summarily dismissed Blix as incompetent in discovering WMDs in Iraq, the Bush and Blair combination with bombastic verbosity and aggressive eloquence rushed into an unnecessary war when other saner UN members of Security Council desired restraint.

Now the whole charade has come unstuck. Blair is between the devil and the deep blue sea.

He is trying desperately to orate his way through with the audacity of asking that international laws be changed so that a couple of nations with their servile and sycophant partners can attack whosoever they desire and whenever they desire! Does Blair believe that the comity of nations and the peoples of the world are so gullible as to swallow his words; hook, line and sinker? It is but a crude attempt for a post facto approval to try to whitewash the blackest event of modern history ushering the twenty first century.

Bush's attitude is: "couldn't care less". For him the dogma "might is right" underlines his core belief. The foundation of his support base comes from the crony conservatives who want the US armament indus-

try to thrive and prosper. What better way than to go to war at the drop of a hat to consume and update the US arsenal? It is a small cost in men's death and materials lost, compared to the vast profits in money and potential prospects of wealth in the defence and oil related industries. Furthermore, the US presidential style of government allows him a greater degree of latitude in his words and deeds. To placate some barking Democrats after his own WMD search fiasco, he has called for an enquiry or two to find out and hang some poor scapegoats; who may even be provided wealth and perpetual material happiness away from the limelight to become the official culprit responsible for all the deception and doomsday scenario painted prior to the Mother of all Wars of Mass

Destruction.

Blair across the seas unfortunately has to face the Mother of all Parliaments! He is desperately trying to bamboozle his way through appealing to sentiments of high moral ground, and "cross my heart" integrity! May be he thinks he can manage to post facto change international law to justify his indulgence in following Bush.

Blix the gentleman; now that all the smoke has cleared and the ignominy of incompetence as harpooned by the Bush and Blair combination gone with the wind; has come out with his words of wisdom and righteousness. He believes that the UN should rightly be the custodian of international action of any sort involving any country. In his magnanimity he

is satisfied with the political punishment of Bush and Blair's misdeeds; rather than go for a multi-billion dollar defamation suit for hurting his capability and competence as a weapon inspector so imperiously declared to be incompetent by the past and present imperialists.

Spare a thought for Iraq. It has lost its oil, its infrastructure, and possibly its future. The victors are trying to cobble together a redefined democracy to suit their own ends; the signing of which came unstuck despite US persuasion, power and pressure. That at least ushers in a ray of hope for Iraq. May be it will at long last become a Wealthy Muslim Democracy the last but fitting words for the WMD acronym.

SA Mansoor, Gulshan



PHOTO: AFP

War, lies & more lies!