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Rickshaws and female passengers



PHOTO: AFP

The Dhaka Transport Coordination Board, a watchdog of BRTC, has taken the initiative to withdraw rickshaws from the Mirpur Road (Azimpur to Kalabagan) and Science Laboratory to College Road (Banga Bazar) via Elephant Road and Shahbagh. Certainly it will reduce traffic jam and thereby prevent wastage of valuable time. The DTCB has mentioned in its notice that it will introduce more bus services in these routes to meet the demands of the commuters in the absence of rickshaws. These two routes are important market zones of the city. Because busy markets like New Market, Gauchia, Dhanmondi Hawkers Market, Chandni, Chandrima, Metro Shopping Mall, Markets of Elephant Road etc. are situated in these zones. Most of the customers of these markets are women. Those having private cars will not be affected by this move. But those who use rickshaws, especially women, will be affected a lot. There are a few seats for women in a bus. Most of the time these seats are occupied by male passengers. If a female passenger commute by a local bus without getting a seat, then in many cases she is harassed by some male passengers, even by conductors and helpers of the buses. To avoid these problems a female passenger can hire a taxicab or a CNG scooter. But this will be very costly for them, since most female passengers of rickshaws belong to middle class and lower middle class families. The DTCB should introduce special bus services for women. The number of seats in a bus for female passengers should also be increased.

Md. Foyaz Ahmed
Economics Dpt, University of Dhaka

Rescuing our freedom

It is high time we start thinking about revamping our political attitude and perspective. New ideas and people, who believe in freedom, ethics, participation and transparency, are needed to build a Bangladesh of our dream. According to Watts, Griffith and Abdul-Adil (1999), oppression is seen as unjust use of power by one socially salient group over another in a way that creates and sustains inequity in the distribution of coveted resources. Isn't this statement reflected in Bangladesh's situation? Unfortunately, oppression against citizens is not a new phenomenon but a repetitive scenario that has been occurring with con-

secutive governments in power. Is it amnesia that they are suffering from when they become totally oblivious of the past mistakes? How could they think that they could get away with anything and treat all of us as ignorant zombies? How can they speak about development when most of us tend to be chained and are being denied our social and political freedom? It is a pity that we are still prisoners of a despotic political system where the people who wear the crown tend to capitalise on their position for their individual gains and also get away with it. We just cannot let this situation prevail anymore and should start thinking about a citizens' intervention to save our beloved country from the clutches

of the self-indulgent and immoral people. Until or unless we can free ourselves and realise the political and social freedom, it is certain that we cannot achieve the desired economic freedom. It is high time all Bangladeshis from both home and abroad start mobilising themselves for the greater good through media, community meetings, mosques, schools, universities and other organisations, not to disrupt the nation's progress but to show both the government and the opposition that we are sick of their political game, mud-slinging and what we want now is a real change in the outlook, which will pave the way to real democracy.

If we as a nation once stood up against the oppression by foreign powers, we can surely stand up once again against the evil domestic powers.

Rehnuma Karim
Doctoral candidate,
Pennsylvania
State University

Attack on Humayan Azad

I was really shocked when I read this news.

I do not understand who is safe in this country. And our government seems quite indifferent about the safety of its citizens. I am really surprised that after so many days police could not arrest anybody. We notice that the police often arrest innocent people and harass them. A major portion of our citizens is not happy with the performance of police.

I request all the political parties to come forward to solve this problem, and, obviously, the ruling party has to take the initiative in this respect.

Wadud
Dhaka

Bangladesh Business Award 2003

The joint initiative of DHL and The Daily Star to honour the business community is really a fine example of how to inspire the entrepreneurs. It has been a booster to the business community and the entrepreneurs.

We, the Bangladeshis, have potential to be the leader in any field.

Despite resource constraints, proper utilisation of available resources and good management could make a man a pioneer in any business. It has been reflected through the often-untold success stories of the exceptional business personalities and enterprise-icons of our country.

Recognition to these personalities and enterprises would establish the fact that despite all the problems that we encounter, our business leaders can still achieve laurels if they have the courage, determination and, of course, the vision to do so.

We are inspired, we are encouraged, we feel proud, we are honoured and now we look forward to observance of the global corporate standards in the business arena of Bangladesh.

Rabiul Hoque Choudhury
BUET, Dhaka

Mob justice is blind

Just yesterday, I read how a group

of robbers was lynched by the people of Bagerhat. The criminals were trying to sell off the shrimp that they had looted from a trawler. They would have got away if it were not for the vigilance of the locals. In the end, the thieves were assaulted and their eyes gouged out. It is a rather gruesome thought, but ironically it shows how blind mob justice is.

Criminals such as robbers, muggers, looters, etc. have had a free hand for a long time. Due to the police's inability and reluctance to take any action, the innocent have suffered greatly. The police may succeed (once in a while) in sending some notorious somebody to jail, but can they keep such persons off the streets? Not at all. These criminals spend a single night in jail, and before you know it they are back to their old ways again.

People have decided to take the matter in their own hands in order to deal out justice themselves. Superheroes don't exist in our society, so it's up to the common Joe to get things done. As a result, if criminals are caught nowadays, they are bloodied up, usually to a critical condition, then handed over to the police. Most of these people don't end up in jail... they usually end up in a hospital or morgue. People are sick and tired of being oppressed and now they are shouting out their dissent. Each lynched robber carries out the same message from the people: "You can run from the law, but you can't run from us." It is indeed a sadistic way of meting out justice, but it is the result of police failures.

Al Islam
Sunbeams Senior School

Alcohol consumption

This is in reference to the letter of Ahsan Ali, published in the DS on 10 March, 2004. In his letter, Mr. Ali stated that consumption of alcohol was supposedly common in major civilisations of earlier years and that in the modern times all providers of science, knowledge and philosophy are alcohol consumers. That is completely incorrect! Going through his letter, anyone would presume that alcohol is supposedly the main reason behind all these major achievements, which is absurd!

Alcohol destroys the heart of a person and subjects him to severe cardiac problems, which later even lead to death. It also leads to an immoral way of life, making most people do things they never wanted to before, like fighting and stealing. Consumption of alcohol has no positive effect whatsoever.

Tahsin Noor
Amirbag R/A, Chittagong

Boy's hot toys!

"We plan to have four submarines plus other vessels for our Navy spending Tk 1,200 crore within the next eight years" say newspaper headlines! The question that pops up immediately is where do we envisage the possible use of an offensive weapon system like submarine? What is the probability of such a large scale naval threat?

Buying, servicing and operating submarines is a big time job needing sophisticated technological support, backed by mega dollars. Can we afford it?

Coastal vessels to upgrade the

Coast Guard and beef up coastal and riverine preventive capabilities to deter smuggling is all right. But submarines, basically a deadly offensive weapon platform against capital naval ships, is a different ball game! Do we really need these?

The fact of life is that we badly need pure drinking water, good road rail and river communication infrastructure, better healthcare and not sophisticated offensive naval capabilities! The logic of the decision beggars imagination. But then, who are we to question the great decision makers of the realm?

An armchair thinker
One e-mail

I read in your newspaper yesterday (23 Mar) that the Bangladesh government has decided to buy almost Tk 2,000 crore worth of military hardware including four submarines, navy fighters etc. over a period of 12 years or so to give the Bangladesh Navy a "three dimensional capability". Whatever it means, adding an Einsteinian fourth dimension i.e. "time" would have been more appropriate, because time can only tell the truth.

I simply wonder what it is all about, and why, being a poor nation, we need this kind of military luxury.
Fayaz Khan
One e-mail

Congratulations!

Having all but given up on the recent gymnastics of the Bangladesh government, my dampened spirits were truly uplifted to read that we are at last on the brink of signing up the international optical fibre consortium SEA-ME-WE4! Like the Bashar-Whammore Tigers team, this news has given us reason to smile in this gloomy times. The benefits derived from the technological advantages of a faster and cheaper optical-fibre based national telecommunication backbone integrated with all the major international centres of finance, trade, business, education, science, engineering, technology and healthcare, to name but a few, are simply enormous in the context of Bangladesh's unique geographical, social and economic needs. I am hopeful that the powers that be will also examine the cost savings derived from hanging optical fibres from power lines for deploying inter-city networks. A better ICT infrastructure constructed around a robust state-of-the-art fibre based telecom network has the potential to make our country (a) work smarter, (b) enjoy efficient less costly - government, (c) be guided by a well informed population, (d) produce high quality jobs and educate citizens to fill them, (e) pave the road away from poverty and (f) promote life-long learning. Needless to say, this is not a magic pill, nor an alternative to other development investments, but if applied in conjunction with those initiatives, ICTs are a crucial enabling factor for development in Bangladesh. Moving from red-tape to results will require sweeping changes which would take time and need partnerships between local and central government, this industry and other development agencies. (Interested readers can browse an online article located at <http://www.betelco.com.bd/bdsetel/index.html> for a detailed discussion).

I dream of a day when the gigantic but cheap labour-force in Bangladesh will be intimately connected through this 'tunnel of light' to their high-salaried product designing counterparts located elsewhere; we can then play a productive and lucrative role in the ever expanding massive manufacturing market and emulate the success of the ASEAN nations. Today I feel that dream is a step closer thank you and congratulations to all those who made it happen. In the years to come, people will be indebted to their resolve and hardwork.
Shabbir A. Bashar
Stanford University, California, USA

Finance minister's comments

I am not surprised to read the comments of the honourable finance minister, "If people can afford building expensive houses, why can't they afford expensive foods."

With due respect, I humbly ask the honourable minister if he has really seen and felt how hard it is to make ends meet for a family which earns a fixed income only (with no scope or desire to loot public money or take bribes).

There is no denying that under 'category one' - a number of officials and employees (in the government and government held organisations) do accumulate wealth (un-earned) much above their legal entitlements. This unearned wealth is, of course, not for free. It has a cost attached to it and the society at large pays for it.

The population (termed 'category two') who simply do not qualify to accumulate wealth (for lack of scope, absence of political favour or being simply averse to unethical practices) in the above manner take the direct hit resulting from spiralling prices of essential commodities like foods and vegetables.

None will disagree that the population under category two grossly outweighs the population under category one. I do not believe that our honourable minister is not aware of this hard fact and the relevant statistics.

The emergence and gradual development of a 'third category' of population, who find no difference between investment in politics and investment in business (both way an attractive return is desired) is yet alarming. The rate of growth of the para-political force (a derivative of the third category) is exponential and alarming. This class of population are virtually immune to any phenomenon like persistent price hike.

I conclude that the growth in the category one and three (including the derivative of the category three) population has blurred the vision of too many a people. How can we expect the finance minister to be thinking differently?

Nabirur Rahman Khan
Mashreqbank, Dubai

Bachelor

'Bachelor' stands out as an original creation. The actors and actresses play their roles in an easy-going manner. But the main focus of the film creates a little disturbance because the characters are shown to be licentious in love. Girls and boys are in the hunt for a relationship but are not serious.

The film surprisingly avoids the good which I think has a long lasting impact upon mind.

Mahfuzul Haque
Dhaka

Preserve textbooks



PHOTO: AFP

Text-books: Not for sale

When the academic session of any class in a school is over, we find many students selling textbooks to hawkers along with other articles. This happens mostly in case of Bengali medium textbooks. These hawkers tear the pages of these valuable books to shreds in order to use them for multiple purposes.

If you go to a grocery shop you might get things to be wrapped in pages torn from useful school text books. We have noticed that torn pages of national textbooks are quite popular to street hawkers like *Jhalmuridalas*. This is really shameful.

I do not know how could people deal with their textbooks so carelessly. We often see that in the beginning of an academic year, important textbooks are not available. Parents suffer a lot because the existing

stock of books for the classes remains too inadequate.

Keeping this in mind, people should not sell the books unless the books are in tatters due to over use or mishandling. They should donate these text books, if not needed, to the village schools where the poor students cannot afford to pay for books and other educational facilities. The text books can also be donated to any institution that are related to promotion of learning which can lend important books to insolvent parents who are unable to buy books for their children.

Thus the misuse of textbooks can be prevented.

Rubab Abdullah
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

The Palestine calling

Assassination of Hamas leader

The assassination of Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin by missile attacks from helicopter gunship which was ordered by Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister, was a shocking, most cowardly and heinous act. This sort of crimes could only be perpetrated by a person like Sharon.

Who has got absolute power in the world? The answer should be: Ariel Sharon, not GW Bush, the president of the United States, because Sharon has got Bush under his thumb; he's acting like a puppet in Sharon's hands.

The immoral and unjust invasion of Iraq was done solely to please Ariel Sharon because Israel was afraid of Saddam Hussein and wanted the country's oil. How could Bush say that the invasion was to liberate the people of Iraq from Saddam Hussein? They were much better off under his regime. If President Bush is so kind, then why isn't he doing anything for the Palestinians, who are suffering terribly. Deprived of their home land, they are passing their days in misery and dying in scores in Israeli attacks. Unless Israel stops this hostility, peace in the Middle East will ever remain an elusive goal. President Bush must take the leading role in peace making.

Nurjahan, Ctg

The postal system

The other day I went to the GPO to post a letter. It was very crowded and noisy also, just like a fish market. Though the outlook of the GPO is good but the interior is very poor as well as dirty. I joined the long queue to register my letter as I heard that without registration very few letters reach their destinations! I was waiting only to see that the queue was getting longer and longer. However, after about forty-five minutes I succeeded in registering the letter. The employee gave me a receipt of registration where the gaps are hardly filled with unrecognisable font. I turned over the receipt and came to know that the registration process would be dealt with by the law made as long back as in 1898.

Dhaka is a city of more than ten million people. Many people live here without their families. They

have to communicate only through letters as no other media is so simple and common like that. So this important media should be managed in a better way as citizens deserve better service. Our postal department should realise that without using modern technology and a trained workforce, it cannot improve the quality of service.

Mithun
Kabi Jasim Uddin Road,
Kamalapur, Dhaka

Views of an expatriate

We, post-graduate students overseas, who were raised and educated in Bangladesh, have been put to shame to our foreign friends by the recent events in our country. We can't believe what is happening in the political scene. Respected political leaders were subjected to vicious attacks because they proposed to form a "third force" in politics.

We are not unmindful of the fact that lack of accountability and respect for political leaders was also there when the Awami League was in power. But the alliance government has surpassed all previous records.

Criminalisation of politics is at the root of such violence. Each local area in Dhaka and around, including the slums, is being controlled by political hoodlums. They simply change their hands. Once they were in the AL and now they are in the BNP.

The political situation has come to such a deplorable stage that senior political leaders cannot constitute or form a "third political force" to get away from the existing bipolarity in politics. Once they get elected, they forget their pledges to the people and they do things as they please, disregarding the necessity and relevance of public morality and accountability.

Major print news media, such as the English-language dailies, have come out openly against the attacks on eminent and respectable political leaders, while the PM was lecturing on democracy and development. It seems that young BNP cadres have been attacking political dissenters to give a clear message that no one should dare to speak against the activities of the party.

It seems to me that Bangladesh has been going around the way Lebanon did in the mid-70s. Each sectarian party had formed its armed cadres of private army. The armed cadres fought with each other at the instructions of "war lords" for their agendas and domination.

It is time a change of attitude came from the alliance government.

Mita Kamal
One e-mail

Waiting for a change...

The Bush administration has failed to present any evidence to back the fact that al-Qaeda carried out the dastardly attack on the twin towers. The stock-piles of WMD (!) scattered all over Iraq are as illusive as ever. Mr. Bush opted for his pre-emptive action and change in rouge regime doctrine. He toppled the radical Taliban in Afghanistan and the heavy-handed dictator Saddam Hossain in Iraq. It is very much true that the Taliban preached the misinterpreted radical version of Islam and ruled accordingly and Saddam used all kinds of barbaric measures against his own people to suppress any dissent. They were no doubt examples of rouge regime and have been changed by military might.

There was another rouge regime that supported the misadventure of the US administration in Iraq and has been replaced by voters. Yes, the former Spanish government. Now the onus is on American people to get rid of their own rouge regime, the ultimate rouge regime in the globe. Will the Americans be as smart as the Spaniards?

Joy, Dhaka