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Where is the martyr of 1757 ?



A few days ago the BBC published the names of 20 persons as the greatest Bengalees of all time. And Bangabandhu finished ahead of others in the opinion poll. I thank the BBC for conducting the listeners' poll. But I was surprised not to see the name of Sirajuddowla on the list.

He had tried his best to save the independence of Bengal and at last he lost the battle of Pallasy. He deserves a place in the list of the greatest Bengalees, if that includes all inhabitants of the land of Bengali-speaking people.

Mehubub, Naya Paltan, Dhaka

Sylhet scene

Sylhet is an important city, but it is full of problems nowadays. The main problem is traffic jam. Every day, we face traffic congestion in Sylhet. For this reason, people lose their valuable time. Students cannot reach their school or college. Rickshaw is also a major problem in Sylhet. As the number of rickshaws is not adequate, rickshaw pullers always ask for too much, instead of the real fare. The prices of all essential commodities are also shooting up. The people in the lower income bracket are in serious trouble.

The roads of Sylhet are too narrow. For narrow roads, vehicles cannot move smoothly. As a result, traffic jam becomes unavoidable. Finally, recreational facilities are very inadequate in the city. The authorities concerned should look into the matter.

Partha Majumder
English Department
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The end of politics?

What is wrong with politics--anywhere in the world? The same

question can be applied to the yardsticks of economics (A. Sen). The new millennium has drowned hopes and floated uncertainties. The universal sense of direction, decipherable in the preceding centuries, has disappeared, not quietly, but noisily. The human Brownian Effect (physics) is very active, denying the formation of suitable catalytic agents for purging the harmful effects of modern living.

The concept of "Universal brotherhood" (from time immemorial) is no longer popular, when moral insecurity lurks around, and the big cannons are controlled by mega leaders through materialistic programming. In the third world (potential) nations, party concepts have cornered nationalism. Mostly, the individual (charisma) is greater than the state. Perhaps too much dedicated to idealism. The latter is tinged with imagination, hence reality has to fight hard for a place in the sun (beware of artificial solar engines!)

Today the Bangladeshis have lost faith in politics (as practised), and the search is on for alternatives. Seeking options in public life is the

Help the twister victims

I was shocked to learn that children from both rich and poor families are begging in desperation in the tornado-stricken villages in Netrakona (ref Schoolchildren beg in twister-torn Netrakona, 19.04.2004, The Daily Star). The prime minister and the opposition leader visited the affected area on the same day. It seems that the only outcome of such visits is the same old empty promise and harassment, thanks to the tight security measures. The government seems never tired of detailing the 'huge' amount of relief distributed to the twister affected people while they are

starving. Do our 'leaders' understand the situation in which parents tell their children to go to beg? Can they imagine themselves in a similar situation? Why should they? They know that we will write so much about them, and still elect one of them. The cry of the un-fed children will never move them. The opposition will try to make an issue out of it, the government will be busy countering that, while the minor children will be un-fed, injured and go without treatment. The NGOs and the affluent section of the society should respond to the cry of those children.

Saif, Dhaka

new trend--whether it is pre-emptive strike or secular competition.

In Dhaka, some of those disillusioned at the top tier of the society have been rallying around for some elbow room, outside the existing corrupt political arena. Wazoo (ablation) is all right, but where to tread in these unholy soils?

There are two types of have-nots: those in the right path (plain living and high thinking); and those seeking visible shortcuts. The latter is a sign of virtual efficiency--life is short, and time passes independent of human deterrents. The communication virus has become embedded in all man-made systems; and there is no time to wait for the next virus (as in computer technology).

The masses (billions) are living inside test tubes--waiting helplessly for the verdict. Democracy is suffering from over-kill misused and abused (like child traffic). The latest big arms haul in Chittagong port is not a surprise, morally speaking. It is people vs. guns (as practised in occupied Iraq today). The political terrorism unleashed today is a survival reaction--can't face the big guns, so go after the leaders of the gunners. If Bush is re-elected, that is the end of...

Nearer home, we conferred equality to the fair sex at the very top tier of the society. The verdict is not a secret. Whose turn next? When history repeats itself, there is no development (looking from some specific angles).

A Husnain, On mail

UN system after the coming into force of the pre-emptive strike hypothesis by the superpower.

Why this bakshish (tip, reward)? Bangladesh is floating on natural gas (energy), and the superpower wishes to have a closer look at a neighbouring country, and clean it up of energy and mineral resources, as also render some political laundry service. Besides, the super big market in the subcontinent (South Asia), needs guarding in the West and in the East.

Bangladesh is lucky propped without rhyme or reason. The tamsa (jatra show/journey) is just beginning. Free road shows shackle the conscience what else to say?

AZ, Dhaka

Revolving restaurant

I heavily congratulate the Mayor of Dhaka city for deciding to build the tallest building in the capital.

To add to this landmark building, may I request him to build a revolving floor on the top for setting up a restaurant, as we find in many mega cities of the world.

Mazhar Haq, Gulshan, Dhaka

TIME magazine, our politicians and the facts

While going through the report of Mr. Aravind Adiga on Bangladesh captioned, "State of Disgrace", published in the April 12, 2004 issue of TIME, one would easily realise that it's a design of the vested quarters to defame Bangladesh, as was tried before by Mr. Alex Perry and Mr. Austin Ramzy using the same magazine.

Mr. Adiga's story portrayed a partial picture dealing with only administrative failures without looking into the country's successes and achievements. In the World Bank's latest report titled, "Economic and Social Progress in Bangladesh", it has been stated that "Bangladesh has quietly, but steadily established a track record of progress on many important social and economic indicators".

In the reports of the World Bank and the UNDP, Bangladesh's significant achievements in various sectors such as export growth, population control, female education and employment opportunity, close to self-sufficiency in food, primary school enrolment rates, gender parity in enrolment at primary and lower secondary levels etc. were lauded. The World Bank has assessed Bangladesh's progress in the last 20 years and has highly commended the country's economic and social progress. As per the report, during the '90s, the country's GDP increased by 60 per cent and per capita income grew three times faster than the average for low-income countries. Inflation has not been in double digit since 1985. Not only that, as per the UNDP human development report, human development in Bangladesh is well enough comparing to other south Asian countries and stands after China and Cape Verde.

As per the Bangladesh Bank's latest report, despite political unrest and poor law and order situation, the GDP growth rate in the current fiscal would exceed the targeted 5.5 per cent. Growth is also being observed in industrial and agriculture production, export and import. Remittance inflow by the Bangladeshis living abroad is also stable for the second consecutive year. Foreign exchange reserves are also sound, which presently hovers around US\$ 2.7 billion. It was only, US\$ 700 million when the BNP came to power about 30 months back.

Now my question is, do these facts portray a gloomy enough picture of Bangladesh to term the country a "State of Disgrace"? Despite the above facts, some of the politicians and partisan columnists are raising a hue and cry that this report has been published due to the BNP's misuse (?), but they are not vocal on the dent created into the country's image because of the report, which is the duty of a real patriot.

Fakhrul Alam
Siddeswari, Dhaka

BTTB's mobile phone



From a news item published in DS of April 19, it appears that the BTTB has waken up from a long sleep and has realised that rate cut will eventually add more to its revenue earning, albeit under pressure of competition from the private cell phone operators. For quite some time, the BTTB tried to deny even playing fields to these operators even when these operators were willing to make required investments in infrastructural facilities to have interconnections with the state monopolised landline phones. However, the technological development and innovative entrepreneurial ideas foiled the BTTB's capping efforts to obstruct development in communications. As a result, now the common people of Bangladesh can talk freely from almost any location.

The question is, whether it is necessary to keep this inefficient public organisation at the cost of public money any longer, when private investors can serve the purpose in a more efficient manner and without additional burden to the exchequer. Where will be the accountability? The subscribers

(initially) at the investment cost of a few hundred crore taka! I am sure the investment cost per line would be more than Taka 10,000 and they will provide connection at the cheapest rate, beating their competitors. What a game!

The fortunate subscribers will mostly be selected by BTTB's standard methods. If they (BTTB) can sail through their plan, in the next few years they will be able to drive out all existing and potential private mobile and land phone operators. They will push the country again to the same depressing situation that we faced in the past. I wonder whether anybody in the government has evaluated the consequences of the move.

Muhammad Ali, On e-mail

BBC's greatest Bengalee

We should not get carried away by the BBC's latest "Greatest Bengalees of All Time" survey. One can easily question the validity of this survey. In the age of Satellite TV, it is questionable how many people of Bangladesh really listen to

by some so called popular survey. A lot should go into judging who should be the greatest Bengalee of all time, not just by a questionable survey. Can the greatest Bengalee of all time be really identified by a survey participated only by thousands? I don't think so. Frankly speaking, this type of surveys are meant to last a short term. This doesn't mean, however, that I don't think Sheikh Mujibur Rahman should not be adjudged the greatest Bengalee of all time. Probably he should be, but this is a totally different issue.

Nayeem Mano, Lubbock, TX, USA

Tagore second to Mujib

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has arranged for a programme on the Greatest Bengalees of all ages. First, the BBC asked for naming five greatest Bengalees to the audience. I wished to question the very philosophy of asking for the names of the greatest Bengalees, because greatness cannot have a single factor or a few criteria to decide on. But I did not

the Bangla new year 1411, the BBC declared the first position that Sheikh Mujib occupied. As a Bangladeshi, I would be overwhelmed with joy to get our man in that position. But how is that? How a literary personality of the stature of Tagore can be second to a politician?

The four national leaders who successfully conducted our War of Liberation are nowhere. Neither could any of the Beer Srestho (like the martyrs of the Language Movement occupying the 15th position) occupy any position.

Now it is the duty of the BBC to disclose the method of ranking the great Bengalees after receiving the entries.

MAS Molla, BAAS, Dhaka

TIME report

I am surprised at the amount of column spaces devoted to responding to a 'single' negative article about Bangladesh. One wonders if the critics even bothered to read the article in question. If so, nothing what the author wrote would surprise anybody who reads any of the

Artificial ripening of fruits and vegetables

Mr. Mizanur Khan's article (DS: April 18) on the subject states about the government's decision to frame a policy to control use of toxic chemicals in growing and ripening fruits and vegetables. It is indeed a commendable step. However, the real crux of the problem lies in implementing the policy to monitor and control the use of toxic chemicals. Therein lies the real challenge.

Many policies, laws and rules are there, but unfortunately their implementation has become the major problem; for implementation in most cases gives rise to corruption. In this case too, it will create an avenue of enforcement which will usually victimise ordinary people; here the ordinary farmers. Meanwhile, the real culprits will buy their way through which seems to be the norm in Bangladesh, whenever rules are enforced.

This is the real worry, and unless this issue is tackled right from the beginning, the whole problem will boil down to opening another avenue of corruption.

SA Mansoor, Gulshan, Dhaka



COX'S BAZAR (DISTRICT)

CHITAGONGS

Cox's Bazar

Matarikhal

Narail

Ukhia

Myanmar

Bay of Bengal

Unutilised minerals

What is 'Black-gold'? How many people in our country know about 'black-gold'?

It is a mixed component of various minerals Zircon, Ilmenite, Rutile Garnet, Magnetite and Monazite etc, etc, found in huge quantity in Cox's Bazar, Teknaf, Inani, Mohshkhal, Nijhum Dwip, Kuakata and some other coastal areas of Bangladesh.

Only a handful of persons might have seen the 'black-gold.' The President of our country, Prime Minister, Ministers, MPs, Secretaries to the government, teachers, students and scores of people might have read news and reports published in our various national dailies and magazines and watched some TV programmes on sea beach sands, the valuable minerals, of Cox's Bazar. Many meetings and seminars on valuable minerals have also been held in our country during the last three decades, but all in vain.

The authorities concerned do not pay any attention to the valuable minerals of Cox's Bazar. Sometimes the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, Minister of Science and Technology, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission and others say that the minerals found in the coastal areas are not economically viable. Sometimes they claim that exploitation and utilisation of valuable minerals involve crores of taka, which the government cannot afford due to resource constraints.

Thus millions of tons of valuable minerals have been wasted and washed away in the sea and continue to do so till today due to negligence and inefficiency of the authorities concerned.

My contention is if we can produce salt and set up shrimp cultivation projects in the coastal areas and earn crores of taka, why can't we utilise the valuable minerals and why can't our people earn money?

It is true that separation and refining of the valuable minerals is a costly affair. But why can't we move step by step? Slow but steady wins the race.

Why don't we first of all extract and collect the valuable minerals in crude form and export them for the economic benefit of our people? Why doesn't the government allow exploitation, commercial utilisation and export of the valuable minerals by the private sector?

It may be mentioned here that Bangladesh's mineral deposits are quite comparable with world's biggest and richest mineral deposits in Australia, Brazil, Russia, Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

OH Kabir, Dhaka

The land of Black-gold!

Targeted killings



Assassinations are nothing new to Israeli intelligence community.

The policy of targeted killing is like a double-edged sword. What you do to your opponent, they can do to you.

But the psychological assumption that assassination casts fear into the heart of the enemy dissipates the moment the act becomes a routine and when the motive is revenge.

The systematic assassination campaign by Israel has succeeded in intensifying the confrontation, thus increasing the determination among Palestinians to continue the fight. The killing of Fathi Shikaki, leader of Islamic Jihad, in October 1995 was a major mistake. His successor, presumed to be lacking in leadership, proved to be even more capable than Shikaki.

Interestingly, Yassin once accepted an end to the conflict, one that included a Palestinian state next to Israel. His main target was to end the Israeli occupation. It is important to remember that Hamas and all forms of resistance were born out of the Israeli occupation. Last summer, Yassin was instrumental in effecting a unilateral cease-fire.

Yet by killing Yassin and Rantissi, Sharon has succeeded in turning the clock back, destroying the Oslo Agreement and the Palestinian Authority as a partner. For Sharon, peace means giving up the land in the West Bank. There is also an obvious cynical political angle to the Yassin and Rantissi killings. By this act, Sharon has silenced the militant critics of his disengagement plan within the Likud Party and transferred the peace process to an existential conflict. The Israeli government has spent most of its energies trying to negate the possibility of establishing a Palestinian state. By embarking on a new level of violence that will in turn make Hamas more militant, Sharon is in fact waiting for the next Hamas retaliation that will strengthen his hands. He is even ready to sacrifice more Jews in the process. Violation of international law is unimportant with the Bush camp backing him all the way.

The Israeli decision to kill Arafat's deputy Abu Jihad in 1988 was not without reason. His death left Arafat alone without the counsel of a talented and pragmatic strategist.

By killing Yassin and Rantissi, Sharon has tried to put the final nails in the coffin of the Palestinian Authority.

The death camp can rejoice. But this will be short lived, as life always wins in the end. That is the lesson of history.

Syeda Akhtar (RN), On e-mail