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## Holding tax self-assessment



The DCC has engaged a 4,500 strong force of NCC boys for door-to-door delivery of holding tax self-assessment forms and collection of the same after completion by the house owners. It is quite difficult and a real harassment to complete the complicated form with all the supporting papers within the given time.

The Mayor says the purpose of this crackdown sort of move is not to increase holding taxes but to bring under tax net the new houses that have been built over the past 14 years, about the number of which the DCC has no accurate statistics. But how could that happen since attaining a holding number from the DCC is obligatory for every new construction? In the very first place, utility connections will not be provided by the authorities concerned without the holding number and address. And if only the newly built houses are the targets then why the forms are being given to those who are already in the tax register!

To eliminate corruption in collecting holding taxes, rates have to be reduced to reasonable and bearable levels, specially for the fixed income group in the lower ladder. Consider the case of a retired official who has built a modest 4-storey house with a 3-bed-room flat in each floor, taking HBFC loan of Tk. 15,00,000/- If the house fetches a rent of 4X6,000/- = Tk. 24,000/- per month, its annual holding tax would be around Tk. 17,000/- allowing deduction for the payment of interest on the loan. It is not understood why the principal component of the loan installment is not deducted in assessing holding tax or income tax at least on human consideration. The hard fact in this case is that the loanee's total monthly loan re-payment installment would be about Tk. 16,000/- (interest + principal). So he is actually left with only Tk. 8,000/- which is hardly enough for even a frugal living. And there is no certainty of this amount also, because quite often flats remain vacant for months, or tenants do not pay rents duly. In this situation, how can he bear the heavy load of taxation?

Lastly, it should be observed that in order to solve the perennial problem of fund shortage, the honorable Mayor must eliminate embezzlement, misuse and wastage of funds first.

MA Hashem,  
Mirpur Road, Dhaka

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A neighbour of ours has erected a semi-pucca structure on the sweeper passage adjacent to his and my residential buildings, leaving no space for the sweeper to be able to clean the drain. As a result, the drain that passes through our neighbourhood remains clogged with soil, dirt and overgrowth of weeds, and bushes making it a superb breeding ground of

mosquitoes of all types. The gentleman was requested to remove the obstacle several times verbally and through written communication. But he would not listen. The less said about the haughty attitude of the gentleman, the better. Later, the matter was duly brought to the notice of the regional office of the City Corporation on 25th October 2003 in writing with copies to all concerned, but to no avail. The matter was also brought to the notice of the chief health officer of the DCC. Failing to get redress for our trouble, we called up the Chief of the Health on telephone. He assured us that he would take necessary action. Still nothing happened. Then we went over to see the Chief himself. His attendants would not let us in on one pretext or the other. One day a sanitary inspector and our neighbour visited us in our home. I took them to my roof to see for themselves the situation on the ground. He had no answer to the problem at hand excepting a little advice that we patch up our disagreement between us, though he did not offer any remedy in making the smelly-clogged drain free of mosquito and dirt.

We wonder if the Conservancy Department has any role to play in the maintenance of the drain. If it takes nine months to get this small piece of information, then we wonder how long will it take to get the job done, if at all the Conservancy Department is the right agency for the job, or we may be shunted again to somebody else.

Is there anybody from the Local Government who could shed some useful light on this confusing state of the DCC?

Syed Waliullah, Mohammadpur Housing & Pisciculture Society Ltd., Dhaka - 1207

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This refers to Mr. Karim's interview with the city Mayor (DS: 25 July). I feel that if particulars of new holdings were the objective as explained by the Mayor, there was possibly an easier and less troublesome way to do it.

I believe almost all trading establishments have a trade license, including all apartment builders. If they would have been asked all the particulars about their premises the same information could have been made available in a more normal manner without raising an undue hue and cry.

This would have covered more than eighty percent of the new holdings. The balance holdings could then have been enumerated through any professional organisation under DCC's direction. This cost could have easily come from the extra returns from more than eighty percent of the new holdings identified.

S.A. Mansoor, Gulshan, Dhaka.

### Death of a domestic help

I read the compelling editorial "Death of Domestic Help" and I must admit I was emotionally moved and felt very angry and deeply frustrated.

Putul's death is a case of murder and this family should be caught, tried and given the maximum punishment under the law; hanged if need be. But what has happened to Putul should be a case for our conscience. We all employ domestic help in Bangladesh and behave more or less the same way

responsible for what this family did in Khulna. Our treatment of the domestic help sustains and encourages some amongst us who have less self-control to cross the limit and commit murder. We should begin by thinking that the domestic help are not slaves but humans and give them the dignity and the respect that God has given them by making them the same *ashrafat maqluqat* (God's greatest creation) as who employ them. We can for a start give those we employ at least a day off a week for themselves and ask our children not to call domestic help

the foundation is the same, and the super-structures are changing? There are changes in approach and styles in anything 'modern', hence it is necessary to ponder whether the basic, wholesome joys of life are also subject to human amendment. The preliminary test is to have a quick survey of the small pleasures of life, which are independent of economic indicators. The bigger pleasures in one's lifetime come at rare and long intervals. Hence these remain as landmarks in the footprints of life (mixed metaphors are one of life's

mind. Rockefeller was sick till he became a philanthropist. There is natural happiness, and man-made happiness. The joy of motherhood is priceless, while few can afford a BMW, claimed to be the perfect interface between man, machine and the road. A good cup of tea at the right time is more satisfying than... you name it.

Alif Zabr  
Dhaka

### Friday issue

If the quality of all English dailies is examined, I believe The Daily Star will get star marks for covering all sorts of news in excellent English of international standard. The purpose of my writing and praising your paper is that the Friday magazine that you include should be free for readers as a bonus!

Sultan Talukder  
Gazipur

### Stepmothers and godfathers

The Dhaka metropolis planners are bogged down with the inflated (self-created) problems of the city, mainly in the day to day management and administration, and in the implementation of the approved schemes. The situation is aggravated with the so-called back-door unauthorised services performed for self benefit.

The government is active on other fronts, but rather evasive in initiating reforms of Rajuk (modernising and restructuring, to start with), which are long overdue. Two of the greatest weak points in running the metropolis are Rajuk and the DCC (city corp).

Dhaka will continue to be flooded with lakhs of daily visitors unless decentralization is introduced through parliamentary enactments. There is no visible move to discourage the growth of slum areas in the city. Visit any other divisional HQs, and note the difference in official activities. Why the districts are deprived of their due share in running local official business?

Dhaka city has many stepmothers and godfathers, who are sucking the public resources. Have the concerned ministers have something NEW to say? We are bored listening to the cliches.

Abu Abd

Dhaka

### Flood victims

Almost every year our country is hit by floods. Disastrous floods occurred in 1988 and 1998. Many people had died and lost their property during those floods. Now, again Bangladesh is facing floods of stupendous proportions. About two crore people have been hit, and over 400 people have died so far. Forty-three districts have been affected. Many people have become homeless and their normal life has come to a standstill. Prices of necessary commodities are going up alarmingly. People have contracted waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea and are suffering without medicine and pure drinking water and with little or no food. They are leading measurable life. On the other hand, schools, colleges and other institutions have been closed down due to floods. However, this is high time to take preventive

measures and to extend our helping hand towards the hapless people in the affected areas.

And at the same time I would like to request the government to take the necessary steps for future, so that we remain prepared to face natural disasters.

Zahid Mollik  
Karatia, Tangail

### Woes of a student

Today our main problem is flood. Bangladesh is sinking under water. According to weather forecasts, the floods will further worsen. Most of the districts in North Bengal are under water. I believe that the floods have surpassed the deluges of 1988 and '98 in severity.

Dhaka city is one the flood-affected areas. The eastern side of the city is the worst affected. If we look at the areas beside Bishwasha Road like Badda (East West and Middle), Natun Bazar, Kuril, Khilgaon, Bashundhara, Rampura, Kalachandpur, Kamalapur etc, we get a grim picture of floods. Millions of people are suffering.

I am a student of BRAC University and sometimes it is difficult for me to attend the classes. I am now living with my parents in a four-storyed building, because our own home is under water. The sad news is that the ground floor of that building has gone under water. I am now using boat for travelling. Sometimes our lecturers fail to realise our predicament.

We would be much obliged if the university authorities kindly close it, considering the flood situation. It can be reopened as soon as the flood water recedes.

Tanmoy Bhattacharjee  
English Department  
BRAC University.

### Relief operations and helicopters

Most parts of the country are under water. People are struggling to survive. They are dying due to snake bites and

diarrhoea. It is very difficult to find a dry land to bury the dead bodies. At this critical moment, none should ask for a thing that is not affordable. NGOs have asked for helicopters to conduct relief works. The finance minister has given a suitable reply - we cannot spend Tk 30,000/- for transporting 10kg rice. This is an idea to fly and observe the situation from the top. This is not an idea to care about and share the sufferings of the people.

NGOs should be advised to procure by themselves country boats and come to the rescue of flood victims. We do not want them to do business through selling their cheap ideas, which we have so long been purchasing at a very high price.

Tapader Md Khalilur Rahman  
Kazipara, Mirpur, Dhaka

### Unjust

It is hypocritical of the chief of the AL to leave for India when millions are suffering due to floods in Bangladesh. She left a trite advice to the GoB, to increase the number of flood relief centres.

There is practically no news in the media about the activities of the Awami League in flood field operations. On the other hand, the party called for a hartal, and withdrew it under public pressure. What sort of politics is this, in this POOR country? Who are ruining the image of the party? Not the outsiders!

AZ  
Dhaka

### History of independence

Independence is such an entity of a nation that must not be shaken in any way, under no circumstances. Those who opposed our independence war are always trying to prove that the decision of parting from 1947's integrity (so called) was controversial. And now they are happy watching distortion of the declaration of independence. If we look back to the

history of other countries, the freedom of a nation is often an aftermath of a long struggle led by a great leader. Before declaration of independence by the very great leader, he must have acceptability to the people. This acceptability of that great leader should be unambiguous. The credentials of our existence as an independent nation are being distorted.

Niharendra Nath Choudhury  
PO Palashbari,  
Dist-Gaibandha

### AIDS-- a danger to human race

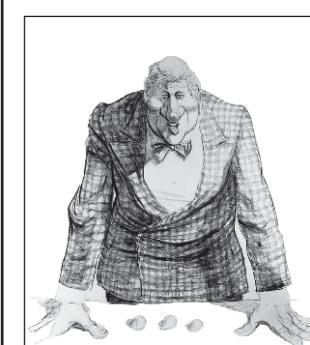
AIDS totally destroys the human body's protective mechanism. Still now there is no effective treatment for AIDS but there are some drugs (Zedovudin, Lavudin etc) that are somewhat effective at a very early stage. AIDS virus can stay in blood for two to ten years without any symptoms. So it may remain unknown to the victim. The common symptoms of AIDS are headache, reduced body weight, throat pain, continued fever, pneumonia, skin infection, fatigue, cancer etc.

Statistics show that there was a single AIDS patient in Bangladesh in 1989 but in 2004 the number is about 250. And the number of AIDS carriers is about 21,000.

AIDS is disseminated through unsafe sexual contamination, injection syringe, blood transmission etc. In our country, normally blood is donated by professional blood donors, but it is risky. In rural areas disposable syringes are not widely used; they use conventional syringes that may be a potential source for AIDS transmission.

AIDS is not only harmful to a single AIDS patient, but it also endangers the whole community.

Md Abu Zafar Sadek Sohel  
Khulna University, Khulna



## Bill Clinton's book

While passing along the road near Hotel Sheraton, I found a boy shouting Bill Clinton for Tk 300. In fact, he was selling the book "My Life" written by the former president of the US. The price seemed to be unusually low. The reality is that this has been scanned in such an excellent manner that it looks so much like the original book.

I think it is an offence to make a copy of the book without the permission of the publisher or the author and in total disregard to the copyright law of the nation. This, in fact, encourages pirates to continue such activities *ad infinitum*. Publishers and authors are really threatened with this kind of activities and total inaction of the authorities to counter such moves.

Mrs. Amala Debnath, Comilla

## Parks and gardens

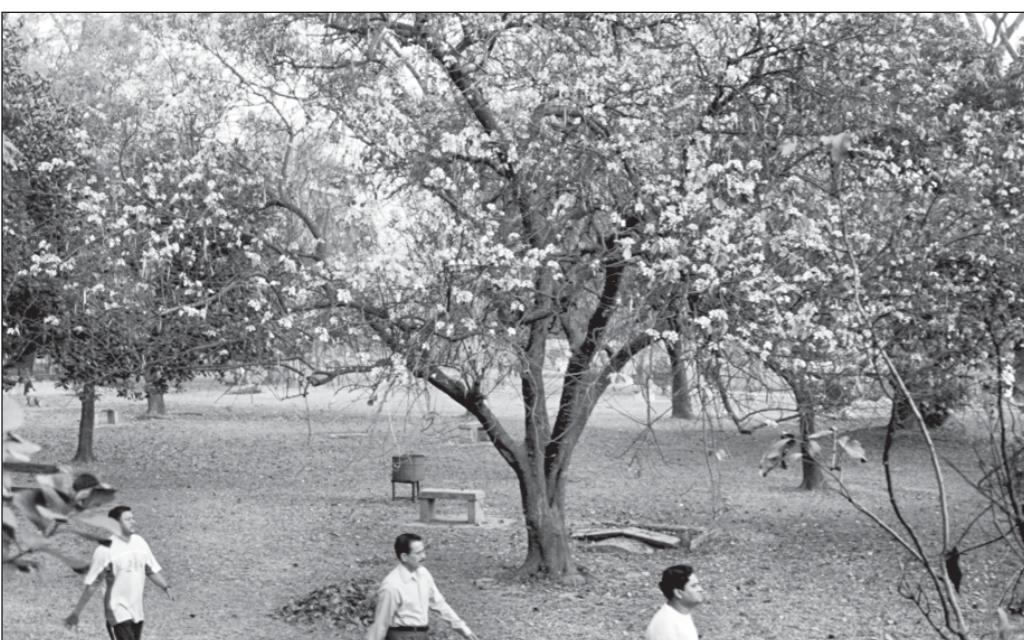


PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Dhaka is short of adequate parks and gardens. It is an irony that the military ruler Ershad built a few of the beautiful parks in the city. But successive elected governments failed to build any new park. Rather, existing parks have been squeezed. Every new government should build one new park or garden. The entire area vacated by the central jail should be converted into a park. On the bank of Buriganga, there could be a garden. There has been a proposal to make a park in the

area adjacent to the Airport Road. Baldi Garden should be extended further by shifting the sweeper colony to some other place. Parade Square should be an open place for holding public functions like concerts, fairs etc.

The authorities, it seems, are more keen to make money by commercial use of open space, so the environmentalists and civil society members should press hard for more green patches in our city.

Swapan Ahmed

Dhanmondi

by their names and without courtesy.

Shahjahan Ahmed

Dhanmondi RA

### Progress of happiness

In this age of fast and vast changes, the global focus is on development; in the broadcast meaning of this saleable term: regardless of its polarity, and the means employed to achieve the goals, sometimes objectively, but mostly subjectively. In the ersatz process, one of the universal and products escapes attention. How is happiness developing? Is it a fixed, permanent quality of life? Then how to categorize bliss, ecstasy, empathy, harmony, fana, dhyani, and all the permutations and combinations? Is modern man trying to get beyond the boundary conditions fixed eternally?

The point at issue is different from the pursuit of happiness. In the latter case the definition of happiness is presumed to be confined within the traditional parameters. Is the definition of happiness changing?

We who read an editorial such as the one under review are collectively

pleasant surprises). At the mundane level, pleasures are tagged to desires. "The more you have, the more you want. No desire, no want". Those who retire from the drawing room to the hujra (as one of my dear friends did, soon after retirement from service) have also the right to seek happiness and contentment, whether through tuition or intuition.

But nowadays, the market forces, and the virtual world of alluring advertisements on the screen in the silly box unmake more lives than make it. Cyber adventures could be exciting but be prepared for the crash of the hard disc inside you.

Materialism in this information age has taxed the mind with varied options available for 'buying' instant happiness'. But there is one restriction: money is round and made to roll, while the secret urge is represented by the epigram 'money is flat and made to pile up.' But, alas, happiness is not for sale, and money cannot buy contentment and peace of

Trafficking is a global problem. No country is free from its claws. According to US officials' estimate, about 600,000 to 800,000 people are being trafficked in the whole world every year. Bangladesh is one of the worst victims of it. It is a common phenomenon in our country. Most of the victims are children and women. Being transferred through the board to India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and so on, they are forced into household works, prostitution, and so on. A large number of Bangladeshi victims are leading a miserable life in India and Pakistan.

If the law enforcers become more conscious about their duty, it should not be impossible to eradicate human trafficking.

Md Shafique  
Karatia, Tangail

PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

## Human trafficking

