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Is Bangladesh cheap?



PHOTO: STAR

I read with deep interest Dr. Ahmed's write-up, "Bangladesh is cheap!" (Today 13 August 2004). I do hope that Dr. Ahmed said so mockingly after carefully observing the sordid situation of costs and prices in the country.

Surely, Bangladesh is very cheap for casual visitors from West Europe and Northern American countries but certainly not for millions of poor Bangladeshi people. A taxi-ride from Sonargaon Hotel to Dhanmondi costs Tk 27:00 and from Dhaka University to Mohammadpur Tk 60 only. No doubt, it is very cheap. From the economic point of view, it is self-destructive and the poor taxi driver has no choice but to continue with this non-productive business activity. He cannot fix a reasonable price neither for his investment, nor for the toil he undertakes driving the passengers.

Similarly, five dollars per person for a nice meal at a Chinese restaurant is cheap but again a university professor in Dhaka earns less than 10 dollars a day and over 60% of the population can never visit such a restaurant.

Can we still say Bangladesh is cheap? However, I have no objection if Dr. Ahmed's write-up was to encourage foreign tourists to visit Bangladesh because it is cheap there!

Tayeb Husain
Lund, Sweden

Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton, (DS 13 August, 2004) that "Bangladesh is Cheap". As usual, his columns are eminently readable. His discovery that things are cheap in Bangladesh is not uncommon; many others who live in America or Europe are surprised, even mildly amused, when on a short visit here.

Yet, that Bangladesh is cheap is a dubious distinction, one that millions in Bangladesh could do well without. Goods are cheap because labour is even cheaper; workers earn one twentieth or even one fiftieth of what an American doing similar work is paid. And labour will remain this cheap because global trade, commerce and finance is skewed in favour of the rich; the poor are grateful to have work and earn a pittance; the exchange rate is always tilted to the advantage of the rich countries not by accident but by design thanks to global financial institutions foisted by the rich for the rich. High wages are exclusive privilege of the workers in rich countries. Yes, the poor (countries) are allowed to beg and borrow to survive ; their survival is essential to serve the rich. The privilege of Americans and others in advanced countries to have unlimited access to cheap goods and services from abroad is guarded as a right and . Think of oil, raw materials, and ores America buys from the rest of the world. It is even going to war to get unfettered access to such things. So, if the millions of Bangladeshi garment workers, mostly young females, had worked normal hours in decent conditions; earned a decent or near decent wage, they would have had a better life just enough to give them human rights; and things would not have been so cheap for visitors to be amused or surprised. Under the world trade order , threats are regularly issued, access to markets restricted, and sanctions are never far away to preserve unfair unequal trade. Indeed, a heavy price is extracted to keep things cheap for the first world and keep the third world in debt that it cannot repay.

Zakir Husain
One-mail

IRAQ
what lies ahead?

The US-UK war and occupation of Iraq has wrought chaos and claimed countless victims. Despite the over-riding uncertainty of what lies ahead, and the ongoing debate regarding the legality of the occupation, winds continue to change in this prominent and rich Arab country. Iraq is now prey to many forces, some competing to consolidate their control, others merely stirring instability. Still others refuse to take on any role in the political reformation of the country while it is run by outsiders. No elections with occupation, they say. In the midst, new terminology is invented; claims

emerge and die. The Saddam threat is replaced by the more elusive Sunni Triangle. The old guard is scrapped, card by card, only to be replaced by a Governing Council that, despite being handicapped by the US occupying authorities, promises sovereignty and prosperity.

Meanwhile, seemingly old questions linger: Where are the banned Iraqi weapons? Was the intelligence hyped, forged even? Aren't Iraqis better off without the Baath Party, Saddam Hussein and a legacy tainted by internal discord? Murad Hamid
On e-mail

Dr. Humayun Azad no more

I've just heard of the unexpected death of Dr. Humayan Azad.

It's really shocking news. Dr. Humayan Azad was a prominent writer and teacher. We have lost one of our intellectuals.

CantaraWaliRuhi
Dhaka

Very sad to hear the news of Dr. Azad's premature death.

As an Associate Professor of Physics Department of DU back in 1979/80, I came across this talented colleague of ours from the Bangla Department.

Humayun Azad's death is a loss to the nation. We need to reflect about the kind of country, society and environment we all have collectively created where violence, anarchy and intolerance are snatching away valuable lives.

We need to nourish a society where people with interesting opinions and convictions will listen to each other and take a balanced view to enrich the nation.

Humayun Azad's pre-mature death is our collective failure.

Dr. Abul Hasanat Mohammad Husain
MBE (Member of the Order of British Empire)
Education Adviser to schools, colleges and local education authorities in the UK.

The prominent writer died at Munich. I think there is a conspiracy behind it. It may be a sequel to the February attack on Humayuun Azad . It is very sad that we can't provide security to our intellectuals.

Jahangir
University of Dhaka, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

Overpopulation, a great burden

This relates to a letter published in the DS on 9 August, 2004. I strongly share the opinion expressed in it. Population control should be our first priority. We have no adequate places to expand our dwellings, no playgrounds for our children, no amusement parks for weekend wandering, not enough open spaces for fresh breathing. We fail to expand our roads to lessen traffic jam which leads to loss of valuable time.

Imagine our country with 50 million people. There would be no traffic jam in the roads, enough open spaces for building parks, playgrounds and ultimately no hunger, no unemployment, no deteriorating law and order, no broken health, no such corruption and so on.

Some people argue that overpopulation is not a big issue. Skilled manpower is an asset. Is that applicable to our country? Millions of people are not aware of their as well as the country's future. Overpopulation is the cause behind the problems that we are facing.

ML Rahman, West Kafrul, Dhaka

Be confident!

We see many people around who always suffer from inferiority complex that they are unpopular because they are neither good-looking, nor are they quite brilliant in academic performance. As very few people can endure being addressed ignored , people with inferiority complex prefer to keep themselves away from social interaction and even sometimes think about resorting to conflict and back-biting , doing harm to themselves or others to get rid of their shortcomings. The number of such people is not small in society.

However, they should not forget that every individual has her/his worth.

Rubab Abdullah
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Laws are made to violate

I am a student of class nine reading in an English medium school. I know, as everybody else does, that polythene or any plastic bags were banned a year ago. I frequently watch the Environment and Forest Minister visiting markets and catching shop-keepers selling polybags. But these days as most of the places of Bangladesh are flooded, I saw some ministers helping these flood victims by giving them relief in polybags. I was shocked. I wonder why did they make this kind of law which they cannot follow? What will be the future of this country?

I know that there are many students like me who are going to be ministers of

this country one day. What will they learn from our honourable ministers?

Zahra Ahsan
Int. Turkish Hope School, Uttara

Police and crime

It came to my notice a couple of days ago while reading an article in your newspaper that the government is taking action by transferring some 37 policemen in Sylhet due to their criminal connections. What does this mean? Does it mean that these policemen have been socialising with criminals and as such are being penalised for it, or have they committed something that cannot be treated so lightly? If the latter is true, isn't mere transfer of police personnel a bit of a hogwash? Are these policemen going to turn a green leaf overnight as a result of these transfers? Perhaps not. Is it too naive of me to expect a bit sterner action by the authorities? Are these police personnel not part of the same civil society that we live in and if criminals can be tried for their activities, shouldn't anyone or a group aiding that criminal

the box. That's how an advanced police force works in today's world.

Waseem, One-mail

For a safe world

The world is passing through a violent turmoil for the last many years. The First World War ended in 1918, the Second in 1945. Now the world seems to be very ripe for a 3rd world war, as predicted by a 16th century astrologer. May the Almighty save all of us from such destruction. We all know and realise the circumstances, incidences, events and the mistakes committed by the relevant parties, and the ground situations and realities. Blaming, pointing fingers and scoring points are not going to solve the problem. We demand a safe, happy and peaceful world for our children to grow, thrive, work and prosper. The situation has been created by fundamentalism- be it Islamic or Zionist or Christian or Hindu. The effects on the common people are the same all over the world.

So, the world leaders and all the associated countries need to sit down

power. But that is not what we expect from them.

I appeal to our leaders to stop playing the new kid on the block, 33 years after liberation. There are other countries who won their freedom much later, but their development puts us in shame.

Jinaan Khadeejah, Uttara, Dhaka

Cultural dilemma?

Can any one tell me how many best friends turn into bitter enemies after something goes wrong between them? Can any one be surprised when he reads a piece of news about patricide or fratricide in the newspapers in our country, which still boasts to have a tradition of hospitality and relation harmony? At least I don't find anything surprising in this decaying society. I don't know but probably there was a golden age of the East, when relationship really meant something as sacred as religion.

But gone are those days of the East. The West may not care for bondage but definitely they don't betray their

when I pass through the area I see a gradual extension of the occupation on and on, and thus there is not a single inch left to walk on. I do not know exactly what is happening there on the footpath and who has allowed it, the City authorities or the University authorities?

Whoever might have done it, things should be set right in the interest of all concerned.

Dr. GM Bhuiyan
Professor, Dhaka University

Bomb menace

At present Bangladesh is in a pandemonium due to rampant bombings. The populace of this country are walking a tight rope. Sylhet city is the worst affected place. This city is in a shambles due to frequent bomb attacks. Subversive bombing is not new in Bangladesh. The macabre bomb attacks on Udichi gala in Jessore, Ramna in Dhaka, two cinema halls in Mymensingh and Hazrat Shahjalal's shrine in Sylhet have been horrifying experiences. We are really jittery about

We need new people !



PHOTO: STAR

We need new people in the government of Bangladesh! I know this statement sounds naive, however, the people in our government are of no use. Our beautiful Bangladesh is going nowhere, especially when it could surpass countries like Malaysia and Thailand.

Writers who contribute to the DS have wonderful ideas. SN Arbab wrote about population control being our first priority and Sirajul Islam wrote that "developing transparency to create accountability at the national and local levels of government to engage citizens in community based governing actions is the key to development".

Our decision-makers should listen to what is being said.

Shailla
One-mail

efforts be tried and punished in the same manner? Certainly, there cannot be two standards on that.

I am sure there exists in Bangladesh no one or group(s) who/which are above the law, no matter how mighty they might be. I think it is time for the nation to wake up as a whole and stand up to such wishy-washy penalties meted out to convicts (be it a policeman or criminal). Otherwise, we may be creating more versions of Frankenstein than we are capable of realising at this point in time.

Today the policemen are not just there to solve crime but to find out and stop a crime before it happens. There is a subtle difference and it requires the authorities to start thinking outside of

and devise a plan to root out the evils, and execute the same in right earnest. The leaders will be remembered and respected for their timely acts.

SN Mamoon, Dhaka

Our leaders

After the devastating floods, half the country is now recuperating from the trauma and the devastation it has caused. More than fifty percent of the capital city was inundated.

And the recent string of bomb blasts and other terrorist activities are an indication of the political scenario of the country. Our honourable prime minister and the leader of the opposition are locked in an apparent battle for

friends, nor they kill their dear ones only for some material gains.

Rifat Mahbub
Department of English,
Dhaka university

Blocked footpath

A few days back I was going on foot from the Curzon Hall to the SM Hall through the TSC. When I reached near the TSC I could not believe my eyes. I found that what was a nice footpath yesterday became a place of occupation next day. The footpath has been divided into different portions by constructing boundary walls made of bricks and cement. What a great change taking place in one day? After that day

this nefarious trend. The recent bomb attack on HE Mr Anwar Choudhury, the British envoy, has confirmed that some fanatics are behind these activities. They want to terrorise the country in order to Talibanise Bangladesh.

We are appalled at the cavalier attitude of our government. They can not politicise this issue. By reshuffling the police and nabbing the opponents, they cannot halt the frequency of bomb attacks. To forestall such kind of cancerous growth, the real felons must be brought to book.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Dept of English, DU



PHOTO: AFP