

Where is our RESPONSE?

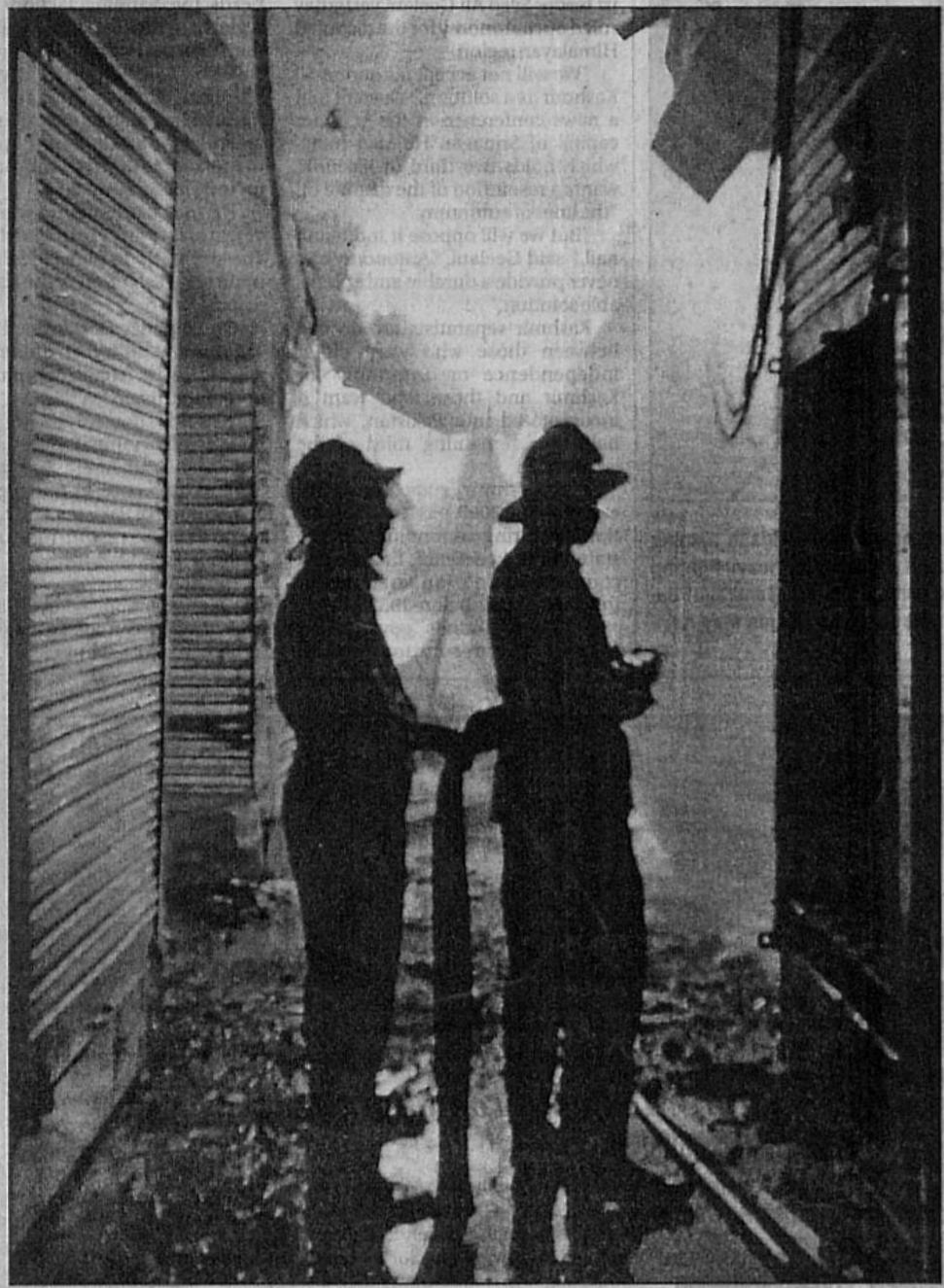


PHOTO: AFP

Another fire and another disaster, yet there is no response from anybody to this hazard.

I wonder how this type of things happen in the very same place again and again. Still we don't see any active move to fight the hazard. I believe many people have seen the actual condition of the Gulistan Hawker's Market. The market is placed in such a narrow and crowded place that it is quite impossible to control fire, once it breaks out. I am also ashamed of myself and

society to notice that while this was a great loss for the poor businessmen, some people tried to exploit the situation and kept themselves busy in looting. This marauding instinct should make us uncomfortable. Thanks to the law enforcement agencies for taking quick action against the looters.

Although it is very late for the government to take some steps, but it is still better late than never. I hope the government will take the matter seriously and

consider the problems being faced by the victims of the fire. The victims need immediate financial help from the government, not words of consolation. The unplanned and narrow structure reminds me of another mishap, which is still fresh in our memories. That fire took the lives of many people in Old Dhaka. The authorities concerned should address the issue in right earnest.

Mustah Wali

Department of English,

Jahangirnagar University

Human chains

Different traits of human behaviour and vocabulary denote different meanings, messages, rhyme, rhythm, emphasis and significance. A certain act is now being arranged by various associations that merits discussion and analysis.

There are 365 days in a year and the official holiday list contains at least 69 days. But the number of human chains organised so far has exceeded the total number of the days of this year. Human chains have been and are being staged in protest of misdemeanour of garment workers with employees,

indecent proposal of teachers to their female students, procrastination in disposal of files, police torture, corruption of land officials, autocracy of house owners with their tenants, price-hike, dismantling of Gulistan Cinema, demanding arrest of a VC, trial of Hundi Kajal, write-off of loans of employees, supply of needles and sewing machines, legislation on rights of house-maids, transfer of bureaucrats, trial of eve teasers, killer bus driver, right for singing during ablation, arrest of "Durjan Ubach" for his satiric writing, land grabbers, trial of Bush including granting Bangladeshi free immigration

rights to the US, removal of garbage from Gulshan and Uttara, arrest of conspirators, and so on and so forth!

It is amusing and alarming that these same people tried to draw the attention of authorities by staging a mass-hunger strike (with no casualty/martyrdom since 1972), burial-dress (kafan) procession, submission of memorandum, press release, press conference, calling names, arson and demonstration.

The latest antibiotic is the human-chain to which people are increasingly contributing now. On the same day we are watching 3 to 4 human chains throughout the country. Will the people think over

Freedom of speech

'Freedom of speech' is ascribed as one of the fundamental human rights. To reveal the truth, freedom of speech is a must. But at times the society becomes a barrier to freedom of expression. Each and every society imposes some sort of censorship on free expression for the greater interest of the society. Such censorship existed even during the ancient period. Socrates for example, was the victim of censorship and he had to die for telling the truth to the young people. Censorship was imposed on Galileo for expressing a scientific truth. In India Khana's speech was permanently stopped by severing her tongue as she being a lady tried to express truths like a man. In Bangladesh, the censorship was imposed on writings of Araz Ali Matubbar and Taslima Nasrin and many others as some sections of the society feel that their writings went against Islamic belief. Analysing most of the censorship imposed in different countries on different persons will reveal that the main reasons behind censorship are political and religious.

In the arena of literature freedom of speech is a prime concern. This is true that the real progression of society and censorship do no go hand in hand. But

the question is should there be a threshold point for freedom of speech? Should one express whatever she or he likes in the name of freedom of speech? These questions arise after reading Taslima's book "Ka". It is one of the autobiographies of Taslima. Reading this book one may summarise that Taslima's private life is the main focus of this book. Perhaps, in this book, by exposing her private interactions with some celebrities of the country she has tried to reveal the 'hypocrisies' of these men. But the question is whether Taslima's claims in this book are true or fabricated? She has admitted in her book that nothing happened without her consent. Then why has she bothered to expose these in public? It may be mentioned that sexuality of a person is a completely private affair and exposing it in public is quite indecent.

Those who advocate freedom of speech must understand that the freedom does not give free licence to express whatever we like. Rather we should have a self-imposed censorship so that our writings do not go against social norms and ethics.

Md Anwarul Kabir

Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science, AIUB

this issue, please?
Advocate Monser Fakir
Jamalpur Bar

Religious regimentation?

As a member of a Muslim Bengali family with an Islamic background for more than seven centuries, I (now double retired from government service) feel uncomfortable to note that the current regime is allowing Arabicisation of Muslim greetings and names in common usage for generations.

I was brought up on familiar terms such as khuda hafiz, shabe-e-barat, etc. but the current official format is to use the Arabic versions. Is the use of language in local religious, social practices being subtly controlled? Why? There are hundreds of languages in all communities all over the world, and establishing communication with the beloved (divine or human) is a very intimate and personal process.

Watch the relationship between a new-born baby or child and the mother. No training, orientation, preconditions or formalities, and the natural interaction is independent of human language. It is spontaneous and intuitive. What is wrong with this scenario?

The long-term implications of such fads and orientation have to be explained to the masses to avoid misunderstanding in matters appealing to the heart, rather than to the head (belief and logic). As an educated pensioner, I am confused, and would like to be enlightened.

Acitizen, Dhaka

Buses for women only

Women constitute half of the total population. But they are less privileged in almost all aspects of life. In the local buses only four seats (where three people with average health will feel suffocated) are earmarked for women. Most of the times these seats are occupied by males and when women are standing, these guys sit there without any remorse. Harassment by male passengers is a common phenomenon. Most of the times women prefer to keep silent, if anyone speaks out, she has to hear "if you cannot stand this, you better have a private car". Some people go too far and start analysing the 'character' of the woman even before she has got down from the bus. Fortunately, it's not an all gloomy picture. There are of course people who 'sacrifice' their seats for women passengers. (Most of the time for the young and attractive ones and not the old and weak ones, but hopefully there are exceptions too). Due to the present law and order situation and their house hold duty, women try to go back home as early as possible in the evening. But most of the times they cannot win the wrestling to get into a bus which is already packed with 'sardines'. A few days ago I was waiting for a bus while getting roasted in the scorching sun. I saw one of the rare 'women only' buses. As it passed by, one of the girls in the bus smiled at me. It was a smile of sympathy. Sympathy - something we the male passengers seldom show to our female counterparts.

Saif, Dhaka

Bangladesh and globalisation

During the Industrial Revolution many parts of the world had no factories but Bengal was fortunate to have some foreign, local and government investments. Some examples are the dockyards and factories in Kidderpore, heavy industries in Durgapur and Asansol towns, tea gardens and tea industries in Jalpaiguri and Sylhet, textile mills, dockyards, pucca jute presses and a tannery in Narayanganj, a glass factory in Hatkhola, Dacca, cotton mills in Krishnanagar and a

sugar factory and the lone brewery at Darshana. The railway workshop in Saidpur was one of the major investments of the British rulers.

But industrialisation must be a planned thing. The growth of industries like RMG, knitting, dyeing-finishing, cement etc. in an unplanned manner will eventually cause 'unfair competition' and loss to our scarce Venture Capital. However, more EPZs alongside our major sea and land ports, and balanced agricultural and industrial investments across our country, with the aim of producing quality goods at cheaper prices, could rightly place us in the global foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign trade (FT).

Golam Ashraf
DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka

Anti-graft commission

I read your editorial on the anti-graft commission with interest (DS November 23). The government must be congratulated for the decision to form the commission and for appointing the chairman and its members.

The opposition has expressed its views clearly and negatively on the formation of the commission and in particular about the naming of BNP member Professor Maniruzzaman Mian to the commission. Your editorial has also rightly focused on the age of the chairman of the commission. An octogenarian is old for any society and no matter how good a health he may have, his age should have been considered seriously, for he would just not be chairing this very important body; he would also be responsible for establishing this commission from scratch. It is really incredible that the government chose to burden him with this dual responsibility when age is clearly against him. However, the most important issue here that can answer everybody's question about the commission, namely its neutrality, is how serious the government is in allowing the commission to work independently. Going by the prime minister's dealing with crime where she has cracked down on the criminals irrespective of party considerations, one may be optimistic that with corruption as well she would do the right thing. But then crime and corruption are not the same. Corruption is much more elusive and all-encompassing.

Therefore the commission, despite all the fanfare, will perhaps act like the old Bureau of Anti-Corruption, a case of old wine in new bottle? The appointment of the chairman and the members point to that.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhamondi RA, Dhaka

Thanks to the present government for forming an independent anti-corruption commission. But the most important thing is to make it "corruption free".

That will be the real challenge for the government.

Jalal, One-mail

Thanks for the analysis presented in your newspaper on Nov. 23rd. Already political reactions are coming as expected. The chairman of the newly formed commission gave an interview with the BBC Bangla service on 22nd Nov. This has some indication about the difficult task ahead with 20,000 cases pending which include political cases. The chairman did mention that political cases already withdrawn would not come under their purview. He also mentioned that the commission would see what it can do. I hope I have summed up correctly the said interview with the BBC. If not, I stand for correction.

I have a few queries. In Bangladesh corruption Watch Dog had been the Bureau of Anti-Corruption. Recently, a more powerful Watch Dog has emerged called TIB. For the last four years they are reporting about the status of corruption in Bangladesh.

des. My query is: what kind of relationship we would expect between the Anti-Corruption Commission and the TIB? Will TIB overstep into the activities of the commission and also evaluate its performance including the question of independence and neutral institution, or vice-versa?

My second question is: How much flexibility has been built in for adjustments in the new institution to eliminate some degree of controversy that will arise from time to time. I think the present controversy about personality of members might be reduced if open discussion is allowed about their background which should include strengths and weaknesses of the candidate to be a member of the newly formed commission.

My third query is: Where lies the accountability of the commission, to the government or to the judiciary or both?

I have a humble suggestion to the honourable law minister. He should listen to others, instead of just putting counter arguments from a purely political perspective. I am confident that good professional suggestions will be coming from our

influential people? Yes, it is an independent commission but in our country everything is possible.

Everybody knows the level of corruption going on and there is nothing hidden. But we want proper action against the people responsible for branding of our country as the most corruption nation in the world.

Still, we expect this commission to work neutrally. They should be bold enough to name anybody in their reports. Nobody should have the power to influence this commission's work.

Only time will speak!

Arafat Islam, Texas, USA

One-mail

declare some awards for the good-doers.

The other day I read about slitting of several luggage at the ZIA and loss of valuables from the containers. I also heard of hoodlums & swindlers at the exits who at times rob innocent passengers of almost everything including their passports. Why should such things happen, why the authorities cannot make the airport hassle and crime free so that any passenger entering our country can move freely and feel homely and return with a great idea of our beloved country and friendly people. Let us all help build a reputation for our country right from the gateway i.e. ZIA.

AF Rahaman

One-mail

Letter from a mother

I am writing this letter in response to the letter of a daughter published on 22.11.04. Her mother wrote a letter with her left hand due to paralysis in her right hand. This created a lot of pain in the daughter's mind. I am 62 and I feel much pain to write with my right hand; but before leaving for a foreign country my daughter

Congratulations on the first Emmy

I congratulate the ATN Bangla team on winning this year's Emmy Awards for their documentary 'Amrao Pari'. This is indeed a great day for the budding film and documentary makers of our country. Last year, Tareque Mashud's 'Matir Moyna' received the Cannes Film Festival prize. I am sure there will be more such prestigious awards in the future and I wish our talented filmmakers all the best.

Finally, I wish the brave and courageous boy from Haziganj, Abul Khair, gets his share of the acknowledgement too.

Shafqat, Seattle, USA

STAR FILE PHOTO



How old you are in that period?
May be 9 or 10 years

people to make the commission an effective and acceptable institution.

ABangladeshhi

One-mail

Time will speak

I congratulate the government for setting up the anti-corruption commission. But the question remains, will they be able to stay neutral? Already, we have seen how the government appointed the members. The chairman of the commission is reported to be a member of an organisation founded by a minister. Now the question is will he be able to take action against

which is endless. The writer didn't mention that our customs officials perhaps doubt every incoming passenger as a suspect-importer of contrabands and they do not like to let people pass happily by the 'Green Channel' without asking! Do you know the funniest part of the experience while you await your luggage to come in the conveyor belt? You have to stand in a queue and hassle to get hold of a trolley just to carry your luggage outside! The esteemed writer has asked our authorities to "project a good image of a country" but my question is, does anybody care for the same? If they really do, I would sacrifice anything and at least

taught me how to use computer and send emails. Only by using my left hand, I now write long letters to my daughter and to other relatives as well. I have done a few academic works also by using her PC. I no longer feel neglected. Dear Ms, you can buy a laptop for your mother so that she can write many things without difficulty with her left hand even while lying on the bed. You can liberate your mom to some extent in this way.

There is no need to unnecessarily sympathise with old persons for their inability; one should rather try to make them self-sufficient so that they do not feel neglected.

Ayesha Sultana, Dhaka

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Quest is the most unique inborn tendency of mankind. No doubt, this is what has brought us to this age. So, in the same way we will achieve our ultimate goal in the space. Because the human knows how to turn a dream into reality.

Aliens? There are possibilities about their existence. Scientists say we are not alone. So we must not stop our explorations in the space.

Biddut Khoshnabish
Purba Adalat Para,
Tangail

Once I had been chatting with one of my friends on the net. The topic was most interesting and vibrating -- outer space expedition. Unfortunately, he mentioned it as a 'fake dream' of mankind. He is a Canadian. Not only he, many consider the space expeditions nothing but waste of time and money.

Scientific explorations do not always bring money, but it is that drive that has made us what we are now. Modern science focuses on the process of discovering facts and bring them to light for their betterment of mankind. Today's modern world is being easy and comfortable with the touch of space based technologies. Needless to say, dream of flying and touching the moon surface gave birth of rocket and satellite technologies.

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