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## Street children in Bangladesh



Bangladesh is a developing country and most of the people are poor. They can not send their children to schools. The children end up supporting their parents by selling flowers, newspapers, vegetables etc. Some of them work as a helper of tempos and buses. They usually spend their nights at the railway station or on the pavements.

They are deprived of their basic rights. They are deprived of food, education and clothing. They get beaten up by the thugs on the streets, used by political parties, even become victims of bomb throwing.

There are meetings, seminars, symposiums organised to talk about the plight of these children, to establish their rights in the society. But do we see any result? Not really. Whatever they discuss in those meetings or seminars are never in real life.

We should not forget that these children are also a part of our society. We can not ignore them. It is a must for us to take realistic steps to improve their condition. If the rich people of our country extend their hands, it might be possible. At the same time, the government should also do something more tangible for the survival of these children on the streets. And finally, we who live in a civil society, should not just turn a blind eye and distract ourselves from the responsibility.

Fahmida Jolani Leela, Dept. of ELL, IIUC

### Crossfire and a few words

Since RAB has started their operation against terrorists in Bangladesh one particular issue has been highly criticised among a few intellectuals in Bangladesh. That is the almost daily news of death of terrorists due to "crossfire." A few people of Bangladesh are trying to make it an issue -- trying to create chaos situation in the country in the name of democratic rights. They are trying to stop this revolutionary attempt by the government.

Terrorism was present during the past government and it is still present in the society. What we did

not notice in the past was the least attempts to stop terrorism. Instead we saw the direct link with the godfathers to the government. And when this present government has taken this attempt as the last chance to stop terrorism and got the desired result, the opposition party is trying to oppose them.

To them crossfire is a great issue and the life of terrorists seems very valuable. Actually I am really confused what they want. Before the activities of RAB they complained that the four-party government is a failure to stop terrorism. And now when the 4-party alliance achieved huge success to minimise terrorism from

the country, they are complaining.

Muftah Wali  
Department of English  
Jahangirnagar University

### A piece of the pie

Foreign industrialised countries (facing sunset years) are eyeing the rich prospects of investing in Bangladesh, full of unexploited natural resources, without the current local means to harvest the same for the next few generations.

Russia and France are showing renewed interest (after the Tata venture). The US is already here for quite sometime, interested in the energy field. The military footprints

Utopia is beyond the horizon between the Atlantic and the Pacific. But today the choices available abroad for self-improvement are eroding, as the West is facing sunset years after two centuries

are not disclosed diplomatically, but the overtures are there (from far away Diego Garcia far down in south Indian Ocean, to Sri Lanka, to St Martin's creeping up north stage by stage). Thailand and Indonesia are very keen to export unsold goods and outdated services to Bangladesh as cheap lots at bargain prices. Our fertilizer is being smuggled out, and we have to import the shortage; our shipyards fail in a country with 500 rivers and poor IWT infrastructure!

The foothold in South Asia is important, for a piece of the pie in the huge potential market of more than one and a half billion consumers; with India emerging as a competitor to China, to dominate the global scene later in the century and beyond.

Europe is on the decline (hence the birth of the EU and Euro). The former huge USSR is broken up, and unable to form a regional block for negotiations.

Imperialism is not dead. It is being reincarnated in modern forms, starting with grabbing of the energy resources, by hook or by crook. Old habits die hard: the exploitation of man by man, colour bar notwithstanding. The nuclear arms threats are purely political harassment through diplomatic pressure, followed by pre-emptive use of force. Had there been no oil and gas in Iran and Iraq, these countries would have been ignored totally (the way Bangladesh is NOT being ignored).

Alfa Ahmad, Dhaka

### Local assembly of mobile telephones

It is heartening news that at long last the government (through BTTB) has agreed to make available the facilities of the TSS (Telephone Shilpa Sangsta) for the local assembly of mobile cell phones. Why local assembly has been started so late, allowing the local market to be flooded with outdated and smuggled mobile telephone sets, without authorised service facilities? Because BTTB was not in the mobile market for so long BTTB, the telecoms regulatory body is a new set-up, and could not push the initiative against the entrenched interests controlling BTTB. The latter is controlling the interfaces, also the submarine cable project. Why this divide-and-rule policy continues? BTTB should compete openly, on a level playing ground. Big business is also politics-oriented, behind the scenes, but it is a taboo issue in the parliament.

The Cabinet may review how to recast and modernise the operations of BTTB. Similar negative environment exists in the energy and power sectors, making some groups privately rich, exploiting the demand and supply equations (illegal connections, and corrupt practices involving nepotism).

Overall, as the British HC pointed out (DS, Nov 18), we have to modernise our civil service, and get away from the Raj aroma. The political parties spend too much time and energy on one another, and the national priorities go by default, causing high systems losses in the public sector.

AMawaz, Dhaka

### Payment of electricity bill

While we welcome the computerised monthly electricity bill we would like to state as follows for kind information and necessary action of PDB/DESA:

1. The monthly computerised bill prepared by PDB/DESA in the first week of each month are delivered to the consumers only a few days ahead of last date of payment of the bill without any surcharge.

2. Many a times a consumer has to visit electricity office for correction of various mistakes found in the bill. There is always a

rush of consumers in the electricity office for correction of their electricity bills. But most of the times they have to wait for 2-3 hours as the officer-in-charge/staff concerned/meter reader are hardly available in their rooms/seats.

3. The Officer-in-charge refuses to make any time extension for the payment of the corrected bill.

4. When a consumer goes to the prescribed bank for payment of the bill he finds a long queue of consumers standing and waiting their turn for payment of their respective electricity bills. It usually takes 1-3 hours to make payment of one's bill.

5. It is requested that a chart with columns showing meter reading, period, name and signature of the meter reader may be supplied to each and every electric meter of the consumer for accountability and transparency of the electricity bills.

6. It is also suggested that the banks may be supplied with Post Office like Franklin postage stamp machines for prompt and quick payment and receipt of electricity bills.

7. It would also be highly appreciated if the consumers are given choice/option to make payment of their electricity, gas, telephone and WASA bills in a particular bank nearest to their residences instead of several banks in a row.

8. Would PDB, DESA, Titas Gas, T&T, WASA and concerned banks kindly coordinate and cooperate with each other in the interest of public service?

OH Kabir  
Wari, Dhaka-1203

### Abolish moon sighting committee

Do we really need a central moon sighting committee? The astronomy has advanced so much that we can get a second to second position of celestial bodies. So why not ask the position well in advance. So the yearly uncertainty for Ramadan and Shawal moon will be solved and millions of people will be benefited from the predicted dates.

Alternatively, as a Muslim ummah we may follow the dates announced by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. After all we do not disagree for Hajj dates which is accepted by whole world as one particular date announced by KSA.

However, I would personally recommend to adopt the scientific data to be obtained from the astronomical science because we are not religiously bound for "sighting" the moon which may not be seen for days together due to clouds or inclement weather, but we are interested in its "appearance" on the horizon on the first day of the moon month. I would invite more ideas to change the present dubious practices.

Mohammed Alauddin, Dhaka

### Jihad against corruption

The newly formed Anti Corruption Commission has declared "jihad" against corruption. It has assured the nation to show a result in one month, which it would not have done if the newly appointed in it had not been come under criticism. Its Chairman has asked its staff to give declaration of the assets held by them and their near relatives. It is very easy to demand it and get a response, because many of them are passing sleepless nights in fear of loss of their jobs. People will anxiously wait to know about those of them who will be axed for possession of assets disproportionate to their lawful source of earnings.

Since the Chairman has assured to show a result within one month, he will sway his axe right and left.

The Commission can expand its area a little further that it can ask the ministers to make similar declaration. Every body knows that

to become a member of our parliament, one has to spend at least fifty lakhs.

This is a time of test for the Chairman, specially because he never served as a senior executive in an organisation for a considerable period of time.

G.A.Hossain  
Dhaka

### Terrorism and public life in Bangladesh

The public life in Bangladesh has already become very miserable in the face of organised terrorism through the country. From the common people to businessmen, landed gentry to high officials, nobody is safe from terrorist activities. Women can hardly go out wearing jewellery and come back home safely. Each day many school and college girls as well as many rich businessmen are kidnapped by the powerful terrorist groups in the whole country and subsequently they demand high ransom money for the victim's release.

In fact, in each particular area of the country there are some professional terrorist groups who control the area strong-handedly and nobody dares to protest them. Nobody can raise a building or run a business without paying them a handsome amount. They extort toll from the public in many ways

should take steps to solve the problem.

Tangina Akther  
IIUC, Dept. of ELL

### Want a change

The masses have no faith in politics now. The party in power is suppressing opposition parties and opposition parties are trying to get back in power to do the same. This power game is not for the welfare of people or the state. Leaders are doing these just for welfare of their own. Each side blames the others. With the help of the so-called leader, the country has already reached the number one position among corrupt countries, law and order is going from bad to worse, politics is circling in the same structure. People want a change in this process where people's welfare will be valued.

Javed Hossain  
Eskaton Garden Road

Dhaka

metallic bin. The whole area is stinking and has become a public nuisance. One can also see crows and dogs vying for eatables and garbage hunters scrambling for PET bottles, saline bags, tubes etc. The whole thing has posed a health hazard to the community and to the pedestrians. This is not expected of the custodian of health that is the authority of Holy Family Hospital. Every modern hospital, which goes by its name and fame, must have arrangements for safe disposal and incinerators. Let us not convert Eskaton Garden Road into Eskaton Garbage Road. I would request the concerned authority to seriously consider the issue and take urgent remedial measures.

Javed Hossain  
Eskaton Garden Road

Dhaka

### Prothom Alo

We, the students of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University (SAU) are really upset that the university authority has banned Bangla daily Prothom Alo in our campus after

a report titled "Party fight and irregularities at Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University" published on 25 October, 2004. Although the authority has banned the newspaper in the campus officially, some students keep Prothom Alo in their room and read them in secret. But

## The decline of the industrialised countries

Singapore is suffering from a shortage of babies! Every year at least 50,000 babies have to be born to offset the small population of 3.4 million, but only 35,000 babies were born last year. The fertility rate has gone down below the critical level of 2.1 per cent to 1.8. The coming generation would be short of human resources.

According to a survey carried out in Singapore, as reported in the press (December 6), family life is no longer an attraction, but it is social status and affluence, and personal freedom. Also there is a reported shortage of eligible grooms. Both men and women go out to work, a typical pattern noted in the developed countries. The home is no longer the centre or core of the society. What happens to a dynamic system without the nucleus?

On the other hand, in the third world, the birth rate follows the free flow of natural cause and effect. In Bangladesh, due to fertility of the soil (plenty of water and arable land), nature can support a huge population of 130 million in a mere 144,000 sq. km, with a density of over 900 persons per sq km, probably the highest in the world for the size of a nation.

Like politics, the life styles in the industrialised countries is also artificial and unscientific to some extent. Now jobs and services are being outsourced to developing countries at an increasing rate, as human resources decline, and wages go up. Confucius, the traditional wise man advocated that the strength of a society came basically from a strong family life. In fact, a couple of decades earlier, Singapore tried to popularise the Confucian philosophy, but it seems that it did not sell in the materialistic environment. UK and Japan, two other powerful island nations, are also in trouble, as the prosperity enters sunset years.

Now the super-power is trying pre-emptive strikes using military forces. It never worked in the history of human civilisation, but the misadventure continues. This philosophy is a mirage. Subjugate or convert?

It is time philosophy replaced some of the large overblown footprints of politics and economics.

AMahseen, Dhaka

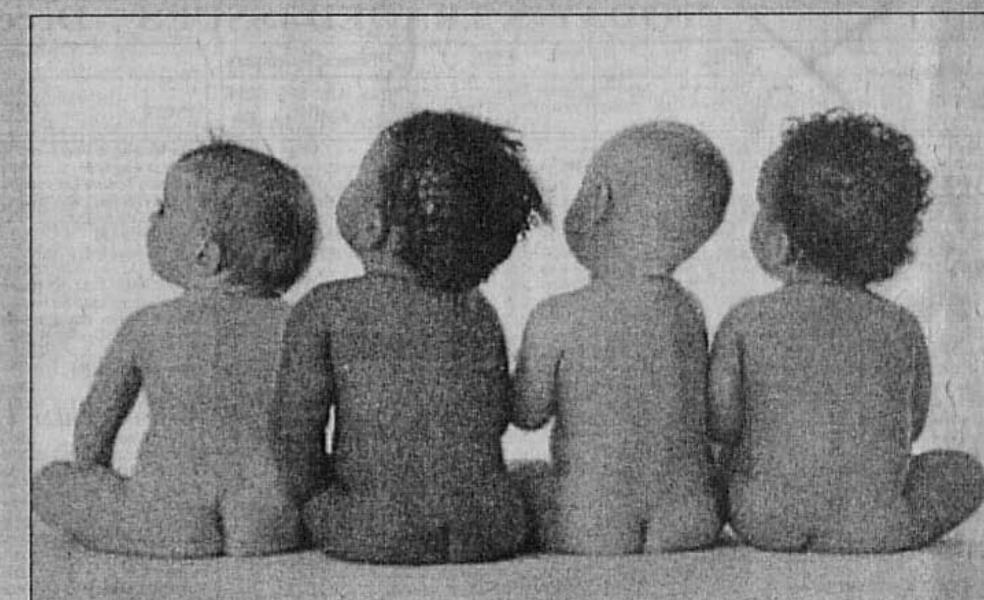


PHOTO: INTERNET

enjoy their thriving business in terrorism unchallenged. Incidents of killing, mugging, and extortion are very common occurrences of our daily life.

Our law-enforcing agencies seem to fail totally in combating the terrorist activities in the country. Perhaps they maintain some liaison with the terrorist groups or they fear to disturb the terrorists because of their affiliation with some powerful political parties. Unless the Home Ministry of the government takes any effective measure against the very strongly organised terrorist groups the lives of the people of this country will continue to lie open to the onslaughts of terrorism.

Liza Akhtar

Department of ELL  
International Islamic University  
Chittagong

### Traffic Jam

#### Chawk bazar

Traffic jam has become a common scenario in Chawk bazar. All types of people teachers, students, businessmen- suffer greatly due to the jam. They can't reach in their destination on time. We usually find the jam from Kapasgola Road to College Road. We have to face this problem for many reasons. Buildings have been constructed in an unplanned manner and very close to the road that's why the roads have become very narrow. Untrained drivers who don't obey the traffic rules cause sometimes traffic jam. I think that it is possible to solve the problem by the awareness of house builders, shop owners and the drivers. Not only the Government but also everyone else

caller ID in the existing system is extremely necessary for nabbing extortions, teasers and criminals in general quickly.

According to the feature, the BTTB needs to invest around Tk. 30 crore to upgrade and expand networks for interconnecting fixed phone operators and Calling Line Identification Presentation (CLIP).

Whatever cost may be involved, the Government should provide special grant to BTTB for introducing caller ID system in public interest.

Zahidul Haque, Dhaka

### Eskaton Garden Road or Eskaton Garbage Road?

You are aware that Eskaton Garden area is basically a residential area with government officers' quarters on one side and private city dwellers on the other side. There are also the Ladies' Club, the official residence of the Chief of the Naval Staff, the head office of "Mohila Bishoyok Odhikar" and the Holy Family Red Crescent Hospital & Medical College. The Eskaton Garden Road passes through these establishments. Usually there is little traffic and is rather peaceful. I am not sure who proposed such a beautiful name for this road, but I am quite sure that none can walk on the footpath on either side of it because of the huge municipal dust bin boxes. All the waste materials of Holy Family Hospital, including rotten rice and sanitary pads are flushed out of a hole in the wall on the footpath and then into the huge

the students who are too scared to do anything as such are the worst sufferers.

I would like to request the university authority to reconsider their decision and allow Prothom Alo in our campus. If they find anything objectionable in any reports, they can always protest in other ways instead of depriving us from the reading the newspaper in the campus.

Md. Rezaul Karim (Reza)  
Sher-e-Bangla Hall  
Dhaka-1207

### RAB action

The mission of the most powerful RAB is though unlike RB (Rakkhi Bahini) of the seventies, the difference between these two is becoming very thin and confusing. Nation's all but (?) corrupt and ineffective Police Forces are almost overshadowed by our favourite RAB.

To many of us, the word "crossfire" is very confusing! This special and fancy word, "crossfire" kills only the criminals and the RAB members interestingly almost always in "near miss" and escape of the criminal's bullets (in crossfire!). Amazingly and very interesting indeed!!

Violent criminals surely have the right to live, but not among the free society but behind the bar for rest of their lives. RAB cannot take anyone's life including the criminals. Only the judges can punish them for their misdeeds. But then again, jails are probably safer for them.

But the question is how uniformly and fairly the RAB members are getting their jobs done? Is RAB the only solution?

Mohammad Gani, USA

## The American dream

The shattering of the American dream was well spotlighted by Fareed Zakaria in his column (Nov 27). It is a two-way dream: one by the future immigrants with hopes of improving the quality of their lives (at different levels); and the other -- the latest fad -- of preemptive strikes by Uncle Sam on foreign soils, cultures, and sovereig