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## An unsung hero of the Liberation War

December is the month of victory. In the ongoing month we recall with gratitude the sacrifices of our brave freedom fighters and people in general for giving their lives for the independence of Bangladesh.

But there are stories of unsung heroes also. Here is a story of a Christian missionary who emerged as a saviour for many of our war-injured freedom fighters. He is Dr. R.J. Garst (full name Dr. Ronald Joseph Garst). He was born in Tennessee in the United States. After his graduation, he completed the board examination as an orthopaedic surgeon. During our Liberation War in 1971, he was serving the distressed humanity at Ludhiana Christian Medical College in India. He joined there as an associate professor of orthopaedics in 1953 and ultimately became its superintendent. He was deeply moved to see the sufferings of the freedom fighters. He voluntarily visited the war camps and engaged himself in treatment of war-injured freedom fighters, many of them disabled. His noble gesture drew the attention of the then special envoy of Bangladesh government in exile, Justice Abu Syeed Chowdhury.

In the meantime, Bangladesh became an independent state and Justice Chowdhury invited Dr. Garst to visit Bangladesh.

Dr. Garst's affection for war-wounded freedom fighters brought him to Bangladesh on

February 28, 1972. Patronised by the government, he set up makeshift rehabilitation camps for disabled freedom fighters at Mohammadpur College Gate near Shaheed Suhrawardy Hospital at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. He stayed in Bangladesh till 1981 and rendered his selfless services to disabled freedom fighters and developed orthopaedic treatment facilities. The facilities were not available here at that period.

Dr. Garst founded the Rehabilitation Institute and Hospital for the Disabled (RIHD) commonly known as Pangi Hospital. Believe it or not, he worked there on monthly remuneration of *one taka only* as project director of the newly-established institute. At his initiative, MS and Diploma courses in orthopaedics were introduced in Dhaka University. On the eve of the Victory Day, the entire nation remembers the great man's sacrifices with gratitude.

Z A M Khairuzzaman, Dhaka



Dr. Garst (garlanded) at a reception by the Shaheed Family and War Injured Freedom Fighters' Unit Command of Bangladesh Mukti Joddha Sangsad in 1987.

### AL chief and terrorism

In quest of cheap popularity, the AL chief on her return from abroad recently has spoken in favour of the criminals who have been eliminated due to steps taken by the law enforcing agencies to the great relief of the citizens of the country. As a mature leader of the opposition, she should not oppose everything the government does for the sake of opposition. She should have taken her time for making any statement over the issue after assessing the sentiments of the general public. The vast majority of the general public, without any political affiliation, by and large welcomed the recent actions against the terrorists, which has brought a great sigh of relief to them. It is extremely heartening to note that even the ruling party cadres are also not spared. This clearly demonstrates the government's sincerity in eradicating this evil. I would like to mention that the AL came to power last time only on one agenda, and that was to curb terrorism. History will prove nothing was done in this respect. The nation still remembers with horror the remark of the AL chief: "We need more Zainal Hazaris." Such attitude will only accelerate further erosion of the already dwindling popularity of her party. So, may I request her not to politicise the issue and let the curse of terrorism be removed from the face of the nation forever.

Mohammad Ataul Hoque

Dhaka

### Thinking over reform of caretaker system

Being inspired by the invitation of the DS, I am putting my pen to the matter that hovers in the political wind, the demand for amendment of existing caretaker government law. I read SAMS Kibria's article, the rejoinder to this by former Chief Justice Latifur Rahman and the reaction of SM Abdur Rahman published on different days in The Daily Star.

It is true that almost every person is formally or informally thinking about this.

The system of caretaker govt was introduced in our constitution in 1996 by the then BNP government on demand of Awami League and other like-minded parties. By boycotting the February 15 election, the AL cleared the road for BNP to alone provide the law of caretaker government. After implementation of this law, then AL as well as the other parties did not find any flaw in the law and took part in that election. But after losing the election in 2001, AL raised questions about the fairness and neutrality of that election. And the same was done by BNP in 1996 election. Both the parties, AL and BNP were dissatisfied when they lost the election. Given this background and the political culture of the country, does it not appear that caretaker system is not the solution of political confrontation between the parties?

The inception of the caretaker

the flaws and loopholes of the law. If this is right then everyone will ask him, why he or his party did not advise to mend the loopholes? In 1996 it was an easy task to pressure the BNP government for a congenial caretaker provision. Because of mass agitation and support for a provision of neutral and non-party government, AL had considerable leeway to pressure the BNP. Moreover, its party was in power after the 1996 election when he could have raised the matter in parliament.

There may be so much thesis and anti-thesis for and against the caretaker system. Every student of political science will admit that the non-political government for holding electoral activities is a degeneration of democratic norms. The necessity for the system is evidence of our lack of political confrontation between the parties.

The inception of the caretaker

help our fledgling democracy stand on its own two feet. The confrontational attitude of both the parties' demagogues did not help get the democratic norms on track, though.

Despite all this, in the context of our present situation, to make a free and fair election, nothing is acceptable other than the caretaker government. And to make it acceptable to all, some sort of amendment is needed also. Mr. Kibria suggested some change in provisions of appointing chief advisor, who is to be selected by free choice among all the retired judges of the appellate division including the retired chief justice. Though some sort of questions about "both sides" have come forth, yet it is not so difficult to understand that these are the party or parties in position and opposition. It would not be irrational to say that a wide choice may create discord again. So choice

for chief advisor should be kept limited to three or four options. Next comes the choice of advisors. As in democracy, both the side in position or opposition are like the two hands of the state. Only they have the right to nominate advisors. They should be appointed in equal share from the choice list presented to the chief advisor by both parties. The personnel in the choice list will have no identity or political banner. If it is done, then the members could serve as the watch dog to guard against partisanship.

NCC

Dhaka

RAB

Bangladesh being a small country, conscious people in general, know the identity of persons killed so far during "crossfire" with the RAB. I think this agency is doing exceptional work as they have managed to do their job without giving favours to the criminals having links with the ruling party. We are observing for the first time a government agency is functioning without the interference from the government and hence RAB activities are having a positive effect on the law and order situation of the country. It is common knowledge that these killers when caught, use their money power to influence police report and then hire costly lawyers who bail them out quickly. These criminals then take their revenge on the sources of their arrest and on the courageous police personnel who earlier arrested them, risking their lives. Lately, a lot of hue and cry is coming from a section of well-known politicians and so-called human rights activists against RAB activities, as they want to punish these criminals after proper trial procedure. These politicians had their share of state power. I ask them politely, how many of these hardened criminals were nabbed during their tenure, how many were punished after "proper trial" and how many of them were freed through the benefitting verdict.

AF Rahaman

Via e-mail

### What did

#### Americans vote for?

Scene 1: Fallujah. A mosque captured by American soldiers. "Hey, this one is feigning dead," one soldier shouts. One GI walks up to the unarmed wounded "militant" and sprays bullet into his body.

Scene 2: Gaza Strip. Israeli soldiers detect a suspected "terrorist" and start shooting at her. The suspected terrorist turned out to be a thirteen year old girl. The soldiers continue their indiscriminate shooting even after recognising her.

There has been a lot of discussion about the US election. The Americans voted for blood and more blood. The Americans just have legitimised the hunt for blood which does not even exist in any jungle. In nature one animal attacks only if it is

These seasoned left leaders, though they lack popular support, seem always to be able to judge the sentiment of people better than the so-called popular political leaders. Is this not ironic?

Murshid

Uttara, Dhaka

### Raam, Shyam, Jodu, Madhu's reaction

When both the stalwarts (Justice Latifur Rahman and SAMS Kibria) have come face to face through the duel of verbal fistcuffs, why should every Tom, Dick, and Harry intervene nakedly with untoward attitude? We all perhaps are aware of a little interpretation of our venerable Constitution and the role and duties of Chief Advisor of a Caretaker Government and the honour of a Chief Justice -- sitting or retired. Let us all learn to give due respect and grace to a person or a system that did tremendous good to this devastated and hapless nation and not sling mud year after year only to decry and express vengeance and that too through an esteemed daily like The Daily Star, for no benefit to the nation. I would, however, say when a person of Mr. Kibria's stature emits venom, the venerable Justice Latifur Rahman perhaps would have done better if he had ignored the biased and unscrupulous expressions and remained silent, for people are in the know what invaluable service was rendered by the former Chief Justice who was rightly rewarded by their befitting verdict.

AF Rahaman

Via e-mail

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## Starry nights in winter

Every year on December 29 and for the first week of January it is a wonderful time to observe the night sky. Mercury is a small planet and it represents communication and the messenger of gods in ancient mythology. The reason I am saying this is because Mercury gives me the spirit to communicate. The night sky is clear and all the beautiful stars are visible. The stars are like shimmering angels that come to visit the Earth with a message of peace. In the night sky I can see the sparkling dance of the stars and the moonbeams. Estelle is like the star and Mahnuma is the moonbeams. Maybe I can paint the sky with stars. Enya can "paint the sky with stars." The painting of Starry Night by Vincent Van Gogh is a creative way of describing a star. What I like most about Van Gogh is that his paintings and images look like they are moving because of the way he used the paintbrush. The stars are fiery, blazing circles. As I stand on a mountain in New Mexico, or Colorado, or New York, I'll raise my hand since the sky is so close to my hand, and I'll reach as high as the highest star. A star is a fiery blaze that lights up the sky. The dark night sky covered with stars is one of the most beautiful sights, especially in the icy cold winter night. While I stand on this planet, I see the stars. Sometimes there is one bright star, sometimes the sky is covered with hundreds of stars. Sometimes a star is a glimmer or a sign of hope that maybe life on Earth will be peaceful and just. Sometimes the star is a guide to the prophet Jesus and sometimes the star is a token from an angel. The Sufis and the saints have referred in many ways to the stars. While Noah sails in the flood, perhaps he will find a guiding star. But people are so greedy in the city, they just never look at the stars. I go up to the roof every evening and observe the stars. Stars are signs of enchantment, magical moments, and fairies. The sparkling jewels of stars are in my notebook and on my shirt. There are stars on my wall. Stars in the winter sky. "This night will not be like any night. This night the stars will all shine bright." I love the stars. I hope that like the Little Prince that Exupery created, we will find a planet of peace. "We all live together in a planet of the sun" but when the night arrives it becomes a planet of moonbeams and stars. If a person sees a shooting star, he or she can make a wish. Starlight, star bright, stardust. My first wish upon a star would be that everyone should wear clothes that are simple and practical (not wasteful). Another wish would be that I would continue travelling to many places. And since the stars are shining in January, perhaps we can hope for a better year.

Estelle Mahnuma, Fraulein M. Chaudhury, Via e-mail



PHOTO: INTERNET

## Feedback on imposing ban on costly dress

This letter is in reference to the "Impose ban on costly dress" (Dec 8). I disagree with the views of Mr. MZH. In a democratic country every citizen has his or her own rights for choice of freedom. So, if any citizen is rich enough to buy a costly dress for herself, that should not be an offence and government should not impose a ban on production, display, and sale of costly dresses.

There are many costly items which are bought by the rich people and the poor can't afford such as the growing number of Mercedes, BMW and Pajero plying on the streets of Dhaka city, and as a consequence the gap between the rich and the poor widens.

Actually, we are becoming a consumer community not a productive one. So, if Mr. MZH has the thought of requesting ban on costly dresses, then he should consider a lot of products which are imported from different countries and are very costly and posses economic backlash to our country. Since the size and weight of the sacrificial animals vary, it will be very much difficult to fix a price on them, even by the government.

Md Mamun Chowdhury

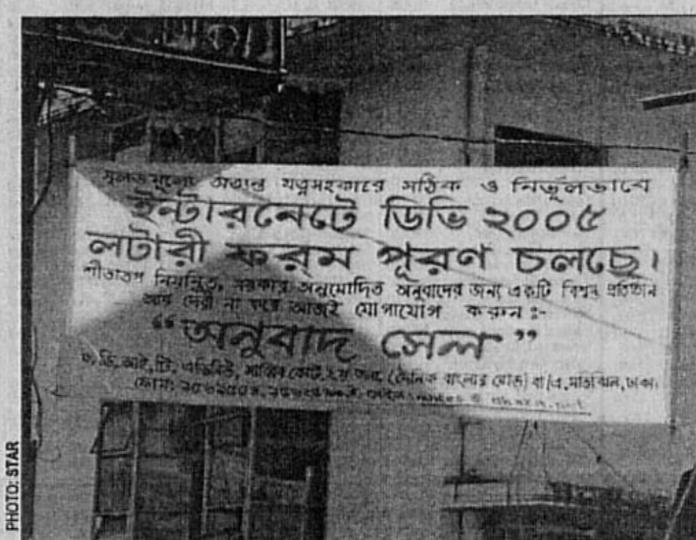
Narinda, Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR

## Beautification drive

Of late, it is being seen that a good number of government and private organisations including Dhaka City Corporation are taking part in beautifying our urban sites like street islands, cross-way pinnacle rounds, pavements, and other important corners that catch our eyes. Attractive plantings as well as archetypal concrete works are being carried out all in a planned way and now it is likely that all these will contribute to generate beautiful urban scenery. Thanks go to those who are involved in accomplishing such tasks to make us feel happy. On the contrary, though, some odd looking activities are being seen



that make us feel unhappy. Advertising banners, placards, festoons, etc. are being put in places that mess up the beautification works.

Unauthorized works like sticking bills here and there are continuing unheeded as if there is no one to look at it and keep premises clean and to stop the wrong-doers. Recently, the longcherished flyover at Mohakhali point has been formally opened for public use. This is indeed a significant task done by our government and can be considered to be a milestone for the road trafficking system of our city. A good deal of beautification works at the ground level have been

accomplished to make the flyover and its outskirts look beautiful. But we feel unhappy seeing that a lot of unusual things like poster, bill sticking, banner hanging, etc. are being done and nobody is coming to stop it. I would like to suggest that such practices could be stopped, taking action against those who are involved in such. Catching the relevant companies/advertisers and fining them can make a difference, and things will come under control within a short time, and our city corporation can get rid of the unnecessary burden of cleaning tasks. Abdur Rauf Baridhara, Dhaka