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# Mino and the International Women's Day

How many International Women's Day we should celebrate before the harassment of hapless women at the international airports can be stopped?

We all hear about the harrowing tales of hundreds of poor working women who are pushed into work not by choice but just to provide for the families living on the edge in the age of free trade agreements and free flow of capital. It is something else when it comes to human beings, and more so to women. This time at the Dhaka International Airport it was Mino Begum's turn to take the beating. She had a valid visa, a passport and full fare ticket but that are not enough to pass through the vigilant eyes of ubiquitous "crooks" whose business is to prey on the hapless women and squeeze the max amount they can without an iota of remorse.

Onlookers only turn back and cast an indifferent glance as if to endorse the harassment of women as a norm. This is not restricted to Dhaka airport alone but goes on around the airports of the developing countries. We all are part of this drama that is staged day and night.

This time, I decided to relinquish the safety of silence-- not for the suffering humanity but because I was at the receiving end at the Sana'a International Airport. It is a pity that our sense

of social responsibility is aroused only when we personally face the brunt. When it happened to Mino who has been our home caretaker and almost a part of the family for more than three years of our cherished tenure in Dhaka. I knew I have to put my pen to the paper. Thinking everything is in order and getting an SMS from a friend who facilitated her ticket and basic formalities that "Mino made it". I Went to the Sana'a

International Airport to receive Mino Begum only to find out that she was not allowed to board the flight because she could not dish out Tk 12,000 to those whose job is to extract money from gullible overseas workers before they can fly.

Tears, pleas and all the explanations have no meaning for those who only understand the language of money. Mino's baggage checked in by the counter, the boarding pass in

her hand and a valid visa to travel meant nothing. Her relations had all left after embracing, crying and praying for the safest journey and Mino after having a rough time at the airport was standing with a Manila rope tied box of her life's belongings. She found herself pushed out of the departure lounge. Somehow she managed to get back to her home and next day I started on with my frantic calls to friends to see what could be

done now. I was told by my friends there to "give the money and get the thing done" but I guess some of us are hardwired for doing the right thing and feel reluctant to buttress the corrupt system. She was told to either pay or get the passport stamped by the Labor Department after hours of unsuccessful bargaining and threats. All this can be explained in a simple way by either the airport counter person or the authorities that check if the papers are in order rather than asking poor, illiterate foreign countries bound passengers to step out of the queue and make a deal. My question is how much does it cost to set up a small desk at the airport by the government or some NGO to help those women travelling alone-- if nothing else but just to save them from injury, insult and improper behaviour practices every day under the glare of blinding lights that adore the international airports.

This Year's International Day for Women set me thinking that I am guilty of being "much talk, no action" type. We all have got into the habit of celebrating too quickly, we go for the rhetoric rather than the reality, we opt for banalities rather than the benefits for those who need it most.

**Naseem-ur-Rehman**  
On-email



## An appeal to Sheikh Hasina

Through the letter column of your daily, I wish to request the honorable leader of the opposition, Sheikh Hasina, to consider calling off the hartal scheduled on March 27 for the following reason: March 27 is Easter Sunday, the greatest religious occasion for the Christians. The very foundation of Christianity rests on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On Friday, 25 March, Christians all over the world will commemorate the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus Christ, and on Sunday, they will celebrate His ascension to Heaven. In Bangladesh as elsewhere, near and dear ones in the towns and villages will await the home coming of their relatives. Relatives wait eagerly to attend church service on Sunday morning with their dear ones.

Therefore, I very humbly request the honorable leader of the opposition to call off hartal scheduled for March 27.

**Terence Penheiro**  
Associate Professor  
Gono Bishwabidyalay  
Mirza Nagar, Savar

## ACC and 24<sup>th</sup> BCS

Why I am writing to a daily about an issue over which it has no command needs to be clarified first and it is that in present Bangladesh every institution of a democracy except the press media has already lost credibility and the people do not believe such institutions any more. In my opinion, only the press except certain newspapers is doing an excellent job which is clearly helping the democracy of Bangladesh to

survive. I am really proud of them and probably this is the reason for which the local and field journalists are facing death threats and many have been killed by this time.

Now let me come to my point. We know that the newly formed Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is committed to making Bangladesh corruption free from every stage of the administration. The ACC has started its operation. I think if the ACC wants to make Bangladesh corruption free in real sense, then it's better to take up some long term programmes. The PSC (Public Service Commission) is the place from where the noble job can be started. Just check the irregularities and corruption taking place over the requirement of BCS cadres. I am sure corruption will go down by 75% by 2010. I earnestly request the chair of the ACC for taking a step to review the recruitment process of the 24<sup>th</sup> BCS. Please listen to my appeal and do something which is urgently needed for the betterment of the country's meritorious students.

Lastly, how could recruitment to the 25<sup>th</sup> BCS cadres be fair when questions are reported to have been leaked?

**ABCS candidate**  
Dhaka

## Overbridge at Airport Road

The Airport Road is becoming busier day by day. Vehicles ply this road at a very high speed from the Banani rail-crossing up to the airport. There is only one overbridge at Nikunza. All the way the pedestrians cross the road at a high risk, particularly at Kuril rail-crossing. Many a

time fatal accidents occur while poor pedestrians venture to run through the road amidst speedy and recklessly driven vehicles.

So in order to save life and help both the pedestrians and smooth vehicular movement, the authorities concerned should build at least two overbridges at the Airport Road on a priority basis.

**Mohammed Lakiotullah**  
Uttara  
Dhaka

## Frequent hartals

We, the citizens of Bangladesh, are very much shocked to see frequent hartals. Hartals paralyse the normal life of people. Opposition parties call hartal when something goes wrong. During hartals all types of shops, educational institutions and offices are kept closed. Students of college and university cannot attend their classes, examinations are postponed and that creates session jams. During hartal vehicles are damaged and set on fire.

We must find a way out of this.

**Md. Rezaul Karim**  
Dhaka-1207

## Poor technical maintenance

The DS report (Mar 5) on poor maintenance in BR (Bangladesh Railway) is an old story, retold many times.

Regular routine maintenance is an invisible, essential service, needing trained and experienced teams, with proper logistic support (tools, equipment, and budget). Senior controlling officers need

some extra awareness on the importance of regular maintenance service in any organisation.

The management and administration have to be technically-oriented, for reducing the systems losses. There is hardly any scope for debate. The capital cost of a huge project loses its face value if the maintenance is neglected (the difference between the healthy and the sick).

The launch disasters we are facing is also due to poor maintenance, plus loss of control over transparent regulatory practices (unscientific designs approved through faked documents).

Many passengers are switching over from launches to trains as IWT has become an unreliable sector as far as safety is concerned.

A railway system can run well if well maintained, as the maintenance cost is not comparatively higher as in the case of hi-tech projects where updating is required at frequent intervals (plus refresher training at regular intervals). The BR officials have admitted that while the main lines are being maintained, there is not enough budget for the branch lines. Our density of population is very high, hence alternative travel routes are a must. Here travelling is not a pleasure, and we are harping on tourist promotion!

The point to note in this corruption-ridden age is that extra money is spent on purchasing expensive new capital goods, compared to the 10-15 percent relative budget required for maintenance. First maintain, then buy in phases.

Both BR and IWT need top priority to overcome the crisis in travel and transportation; whereas the emphasis is on "roads, bridges and culverts" as heard frequently on the radio and TV. The Dhaka metro circular river service drew huge publicity when the PM opened the service the other day, and many went to the terminal ghat for a joy ride, but were disappointed (DS report Mar 5). Premature openings create problems; viz BTB mobile telephone service (DS Mar 5). Political publicity and PR have to be carefully planned. It is bad news to read (DS Mar 5) that not a single electric power project got going during the last three years of this regime! Trying to be transparent? The intention is good, but what about hidden motivation the backdoor syndrome?

Pay for maintenance, and spend less in the long run. There is scope for corrupt practices, but the percentage is lower than in capital budgets. Before going for new projects, first examine what could be done about the existing projects.

**Md Abad**  
Retd Chief Engineer (BCS)  
Dhaka

## Is our education system appropriate?

I have no experience of writing for a newspaper. But I feel like writing. As a university student it is my responsibility to be aware of different important things of the world. Today I am going to write something about our problematic education system. The knowledge acquired in student life comes in handy at our work places. It is expected that a student gathers the kind of knowledge which offers him/her better opportunity in future. The highest seat of education is university and we believe it will provide us with basic elements of education. But we do not gather practical knowledge

at all. While a student in Japan invents different important things, we do not. Why? That's a big question. I think our education system is responsible for that. If our education system is changed, I mean if it is made practical education, then we will be successful in contributing to different sectors.

After studying for 4-5 years we look for jobs and it is our tradition. Our educationists should come forward with new ideas for changing the existing system of education.

The existing education system results in unemployment which is the biggest problem of our country today.

**Hasan**  
Dhaka University  
Dhaka-1000

## It's our headache

An intelligent family head does not generally disclose his family or home secrets to outsiders, as it may harm the family or home this or that way. There might originate some sort of disturbing or disorderly matters in a family or a home, compelling everybody to be worried, and each member of that family or home then no doubt seeks resolution of the undesirable matters without the notice or help of any outsiders. Of course, it is true that if the matter goes beyond the family/home control and if it becomes impossible for the family/home head himself to handle the situation, it may be necessary for him to seek others' interference to resolve it. Only then non-members may be called for temporary help.

Ours is a small country with a large population and the bulk of our people are illiterate and poor. We cannot deny the facts, but it does not mean that we should allow others to poke their noses into every important matter. Yes, non-members may extend their helping hand to some extent which we need. Past records say that outsiders had entered into a country in the name of friendship and started playing tricky games like data collection with a view to fulfilling their evil desire of making the country dependant on them. More clearly, they make the politicians their pets and force them to walk along the path prescribed by them. This way the entire country goes into their hands and it then loses its status of sovereignty and freedom and becomes completely crippled.

Considering all these facts and circumstances, our head of family and head of home, along with other members, should think very carefully before treading the path shown by the so-called friends. We should not overlook what has happened to some countries which are now totally dominated by foreigners.

**FM Abdul Matin**  
Mirpur, Dhaka

## Hate crime...

I'm writing against the views expressed in the letter titled 'Don't Cry For the Criminals' published in your February 26 issue. In the letter the writer (Cantara Ruhi) argues that it's wrong to sympathise with the criminals. It also appears as if she supports the incidents of crossfire killing. I think she should realise that no human being is born as a criminal. Every person, regardless of class, is equally innocent upon his birth. But lack of proper education and awareness, eco-



PHOTO: STAR

# BNP's problems

The BNP's forward planning leading to the next general elections is strewn with increasing problems, as the party leaders grapple desperately with the changing situations in the politics of the times. To them, the AL is a 'nuisance', not a threat. Today traditional approaches do not get a front seat, and old strategies won't work. The public is very much conscious, politically and religiously. The immoral black holes in the political sky do not need telescopes to confirm. The oppressed citizens cannot any longer be taken for a ride. (An astute politician like Vajpayee faded into nowhere after the last general election in India). Message: Learn from your neighbours!

The religious shadows (globally) are ominous. Pucca die hard political leaders can no longer be entrusted with the nation's well being, as they move in grooves, and cannot adjust to the changing requirements of the decade. Are they aware of the political greenhouse effect?

The BNP will face serious competition in the coming elections, if held in time, before time, or postponed for an uncertain period. The Islamic political parties would get more votes due to recent publicity obtained indirectly. An alliance with the BNP might not be feasible. The BNP could have run this regime alone.

The temptation was too much? There is an indirect price for all concessions.

Hence the worst scenario is the gloomy picture that the BNP might face the same fate as the withered Awami League, which got only one fifth of the seats after reigning for five years. The BNP should learn its lessons from the AL debacle. Both the parties are in the same boat, waving the Charisma flags. The new gen are not impressed.

History cannot come of the pages and lead. Leadership is a real time job.

The BNP is obviously going for dynasty rule. How far this hunch would be fulfilled? There's many a slip between the cup and the lip. Sk. Hasina has complained (report in the press) that she now faces psychological barrier visiting the United States, after the campaign against the AL

on its foreign propaganda technique. The going will not be smooth for the BNP leading to the elections, as the party's feedback system is not scientific, based on reality. In fact, a large section of the informed voters have lost the appeal for going to the booths for casting the votes, as the voters have been sidelined by the businessmen-politicians. The politics we see in Dhaka is not genuine politics, but pure business opportunism. Haram wealth has higher priority than genuine political agendas.

Look at the failure of the overhead pedestrian bridges (DS report Mar 6), and the underground passes near Gulistan and elsewhere. The useless Saarc beautification scheme. Hidden agendas: make money on the side through new projects. The launches sink due to poor regulation checks. The bomb probes leading nowhere. The JS living a widowed life. The misuse of the project motor vehicles by the seniors. The lucrative contracts after retirement from service. Non-transparent nepotism is not good politics.

What is the difference between the Secretariat and the PMO? Why the political secretary is shown in each and every TV news clip? The PMO is a new idea in political centralisation. Reduce the population in Dhaka metropolis, and get more votes.

Concentration or dilution of power does not work, so long the will is not there to operate public services in a transparent way. The political masters are not interested in daily routines in public administration, which are left to the bureaucracy (under threat of transfer to a third class station if...).

When there is no politics, the names BNP, AL do not matter. The way is clear for religious bigotry, encouraged by the spineless political leaders without vision or motivation, who depend more on the loudspeaker than on public opinion. Noise makers carry no messages.

The cynics won't be surprised if the elections were delayed due to unavoidable reasons?!

**AZ, Dhaka**

conomic deprivation, lack of conscience, and absence of basic moral values, which exist alongside the constructive aspects of the society, transform an innocent man into a violent criminal. We all are born in the same society, but unfortunately each of us doesn't receive the same treatment. It's undeniable that no human society is completely perfect. Some people simply become the victims of the imperfection of the society. I'm not saying that every poor and uneducated man turns into a criminal. People who have done better in adversity obviously got something motivational in their lives.

But most of the people who live in adversities and fail to receive any good inspiration in their lives are unable to be completely civilised. We should accept the fact that our environment, heredity, experiences, and education shape our minds and we all act accordingly. For instance, men like Ershad Shikder are not born, they are created. Several politicians backed him up for their own profits. He got encouragement not resentment for his dirty deeds. If he had been born in a better society, he might well have been a different man. Criminals who were killed in crossfire also deserved a fair trial. However, it's true that the media

should not represent a criminal as a hero. Nevertheless, we should realise that criminals are human beings as well and they deserve a chance to rectify themselves.

Cantara should remember the phrase: "Hate Crime, Not Criminals"

**Kh. Asef Safa Kabir Upal**  
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PHOTO: AFP

# Only for a month?

We have observed the day with due respect and our heart-felt gratitude. The month is over and soon we will forget the teachings of this month. The most embarrassing fact is that the place will be captured by the beggars, vagabonds

and street urchins. The overall environment will remain the same until the month "February" returns. I am talking about our central "Shaheed Minar" and its post-Ekushy management. Showing due honour to this glorious month of

"February" and the dedication of our language martyrs, I want to convey that as a nation, it is our hypocrisy that we maintain the sanctity of the "Shaheed Minar" only during the month of February.

**Rizwan-ul Huq, K.U**

