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# Banish hartal!

I agree with the editor (March 13) that the time is overdue for our greedy politicians to end hartal politics. This is year 2005 and people all over the world laugh at us when they hear this. There is a difference between a hartal in which people participate willingly, and a hartal where people are beaten and intimidated to participate. This is not a democratic practice, this is hostage-taking; plain and simple. If you want to exercise your rights by calling hartals then go ahead, as long as you can find someone who is willing to participate with you. But you can't beat me to death just because you want to exercise your rights. What about my rights? I have the right "not to" participate in any hartal.

I believe the AL can be persuaded to shun hartal politics but I am not sure about the BNP. Leaders of the BNP have been coming out lately to tell us how bad hartal is (as if we didn't know), but they never tell us if they will not use it when they go in opposition. But we know very well why they are not committing themselves. If the BNP loses in the next general election the first thing it will do is denounce the results, accuse the winning party of vote-rigging and then immediately begin a programme of non-stop hartal in the name of serving the people (just like the present opposition, AL). This is all pre-planned by both AL and BNP. How can anyone serve the people by preventing them from going to work and by starving them to death? I would love to know.

This is our country and we demand an immediate end of hartal politics. Full stop.

**Azad Miah**  
Oldham, UK



## Ban on smoking

DS published a news on the passing of the landmark 'Smoking and Tobacco Usage (control) Act, 2005', introduced by the Health and Family Welfare Minister. We must thank the government for taking a firm step toward controlling tobacco products in our country. It is a victory of the people and the anti-tobacco campaigners fighting for a long time. Though we are not yet fully informed of the bill but it is apparent from your comprehensive reporting that there was no clause for a legal age limit for purchasing and selling tobacco products, which otherwise would have a strong impact on controlling it. Probably it also overlooked the situation regarding the cost and ease of purchasing cigarettes (like banning sale of a single stick of cigarette instead of a pack). Furthermore, we must also prohibit showing on-screen smoking by the actors in dramas or cinemas, as they send a very strong positive message for smoking, particularly to the adolescents. We must also allocate resources for educating

on March 10 exposed the impacts of hartals on the economy of Bangladesh. As per the report, hartals cost 3-4% of GDP annually. Frequent hartals have paralysed the economy of our country. Though hartal is a political right, it affects all of us. The financial loss caused by hartal is very damaging for our fragile economy. It frustrates gradual economic growth. It deters the flow of FDI volume into our country. Most of the political parties use hartal as a political weapon. They call hartal whimsically. They do not care about the economic hemorrhage caused by hartal. It is very irksome for the foreign investors. Hartal disrupts normalcy of life. It wreaks havoc in the society. It affects the smooth functioning of the academic institutions. The BGMEA said that it loses US\$18 million a day for the shutdown. So hartal is despised by every conscious and sensible citizen of our country.

About 95% people abhor hartal for its deadly impact. The UNDP report is a timely signal for all the political parties to wake up from their

shown for passport, marriage registration, admission to schools, government and private sector jobs, driving license, enrolment of names in voter lists, and for land registration. The parents or a guardian will have to register a birth within 45 days. For a death, the registration will have to be done within 30 days by the deceased's son or daughter or guardian. If the mandatory registration does not take place in due time, a late registration will still be possible with 'stipulated procedures and extra fees'. Punishment for violation will be a fine of Tk.500/- or a maximum two months of jail or both.

Like many other similar laws for registration of births and deaths, this new law is also likely to be a failure. Following are some of the lapses in the new law that I can foresee:

(a) Local self-government bodies under M/O LGRD are not very efficient or effective organisations, and are particularly known for their lethargy and inefficiency. As under previous laws, there will be a good deal of corruption in issuing 'post-

without a proper Birth Registration Certificate or on the basis of a false certificate. It was necessary to include punishment (even though nominal) for teachers/schools admitting students or agencies employing people without a birth certificate or with a false one.

(d) The Child Marriage Registration Act, 1929 and The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961 should also have been amended under the new law to establish linkage of minimum age of marriage with authentic birth certification. As is practised in some Muslim countries, there could be punishments

provided under those laws for Marriage Registrars registering a marriage without Birth Certificates or with a false one.

I'm afraid the revised system of birth and death registration will soon turn into another failed law.

**Humayun Hye**  
Baridhara, Dhaka-1212

## South Korea's success

**Shabbir A. Bashar, Ph.D.**  
San Francisco Bay Area, California, US

## BTTB cell phone

Recently, our prime minister inaugurated the BTTB cell phone service. People in the country were really impressed to hear the news. Especially for two reasons: it would be cheaper in all respect and the private cell companies would face competition to reduce their existing charges. As a result the existing cell phone users would be benefited as well.

But after the inauguration we do not see any further development or progress in this project. The previous government had taken the same initiative but it was finally postponed due to some unknown reasons. We think the same may happen to this project. In fact, present cellular phone service providers are making good business and they are dominating the market. It is known to all that the present cell phone charges are much higher compared to our neighbouring countries. The government is somehow reluctant to have control over these companies and we have been paying a lot more for each call and duration since long.

Introduction of BTTB cell phone was a good initiative from the present government to control the private cell companies indirectly and to expand the cell service among general people to a great extent. But the government is going slow on this project.

Whatever may be the reason behind this, we are still optimistic about the implementation of the project. We hope the government will take effective steps to fulfill its commitment.

**Zahir U. Hyder, Dhaka**

## Unearth the mysteries

According to newspaper reports, three persons confessed to their involvement in the killing of SAMS Kibria. The government has given police the freedom to investigate this killing. Earlier police were successful in arresting the people involved in the killing of Ahsan Ullah Master.

In both of the above mentioned cases, BNP activists are reported to be prime suspects. However, the BNP denied these allegations and counter charged that the AL was responsible for the killing of its own leaders. Not only the BNP, the Islamic parties in the alliance also blamed the AL for the killing of SAMS Kibria. At any rate, the real culprits must be brought to justice.

I believe the government can unearth the mystery of August 21 grenade attack if it really wants to.

**Nazmul Hasan**  
Ontario, Canada

## English medium education

I am very pleased that the matter of the regulation of English-medium schools is beginning to be discussed in a truly learned fashion between those who have the interests of true education at heart. We all know that the present situation has elements of both chaos and creativity! It is good to know that at least some involved in the debate want to deal with the worst of the chaos, without destroying the creativity. The timid-minded in education can be an awful nuisance.

As one who has lived through the hurly-burly of the educational scene in the UK over the last 50 years, I must point out that, at one point, there was such a strong move there to close all independent schools, that we had to man the barricades! I was educated privately but taught predominantly in government schools. However, I knew that the best schools in the independent sector were a vital part of the full spectrum of education, not least because they were free to pioneer all sorts of developments that often ended up adopted more widely. They were also homes for some totally unconventional, even

'unqualified' teachers, who were doing a great job. Yes, to allow different sorts of schools to co-exist, despite the grumbles of the timid-minded, needs a strong social consensus and a government, that demand respect and mutual tolerance.

I must also point out, as one who sings your National Anthem daily, at School Assembly, that the accusation that 'English-medium' must necessarily mean being disloyal to Bangladesh is a cheap jibe that should not be given house room.

**Angela MV Robinson (Rev Mrs)**  
Principal of The British School in Dhaka, Lalmitia

## Violation of diplomatic norms

You have reported "Germany offers dialogue to make next JS polls free & fair". Then does it (Germany) mean or indicate that after a lapse of 3-1/2 years (of post-universal recognition of unprecedented free and fair election in the history of

governance and even comment on rise of fundamentalism or so called sighted terrorism! As if we are not aware of our own affairs!

I would give a small piece of advice to such advisors or patrons (who have tried to touch almost all subjects of our state affairs and our local politics, as canvassed by the anti-govt. parties at home or abroad) to keep up their good wishes and advice to a limit, up to the extent of diplomatic norms and pursuit as prescribed under the Geneva Convention.

**A F Rahman**  
On e-mail

## Power ban --ruling and reality

This is a response to the write-up by Sabrina Murshed (DS: March 13) on the subject. The ministry's decision to suspend power supply to shopping malls in the evening does not seem to be a very serious and realistic approach to solving the problem of power shortage.

However, if power consumption needs to be reduced to the malls; public power supply should ensure power for lifts or escalators and central air conditioning in the malls. Power to lifts and escalators is needed for safety and power to air conditioning plant is necessary in view of the hot weather and lack of natural ventilation in shopping malls. This can be arranged through installing some devices.

A sensible solution has been proposed by Masud Hossain on the subject. I believe shutting shopping malls by 7 or 7.30pm could be the best way to solve it, and allow them to remain open on Fridays up to 6:00pm.

However, the root of the problem lies with the government. The energy ministry should on top priority basis increase gas and power generation capacity to reduce and ultimately eliminate power shortage. This should also be taken along with upgrading and extension of transmission and distribution system which also contributes to power shortage.

What about alternative power sources? The government seems to be oblivious of this issue. Can't the government nudge the City Corporation whose Head is totally unaware of bottlenecks in setting up a refuse based power plant in Dhaka?

The possibilities of putting diesel based stand-by units to ease the city

With so many realistic and viable options available it is indeed short sighted policy of the power ministry to go for the "ban on evening consumption" as a solution for chronic power shortage.

**S.A. Mansoor**  
Gulshan, Dhaka.

## IP Engineers

In DS of March 9, the letter from Mr. Iftekhar Ahmed titled "Good RMG Manager" has drawn my attention. In his letter he identified some real life problems which a fresh engineer has to face as soon as he gets into the job. He is right to some extent, I suppose, but Industrial and Production Engineering (IPE) is somewhat different from traditional engineering (Mechanical, electrical and so on). As an IP student I would like to write something about Industrial and Production Engineering.

The department started its undergraduate programme in 1997 in BUET. The programme blends courses in Manufacturing, Computer Aided Design/Manufacturing, Advanced Material Processing, Management Information Technology and Business communication along with basic engineering courses. So IP engineers are capable of working as production manager and finding optimal production policy, inventory manager for maintaining the optimum inventory level in warehouses or stores, safety engineer in making a work place safe and hazard free, quality engineer in developing and implementing quality assurance programme with the help of statistical quality techniques and so on. The basic idea of the department is to minimise the gap between technology and management. On the contrary, the major problem in the RMG industry, as identified by Mr. Anisul Haque, is lack of mid-level management system.

So it is true that proper utilisation and proper treatment of IP engineers can develop the mid-level management system in the RMG sector.

**Shah Md. Rajur Rahman**  
Sher-e-Bangla Hall, BUET

## "Reining in BNP MPs"

I have read with surprise your lead news "Reining in BNP MPs" published in The Daily Star of 13 March, 2005.

The debate that has been mentioned between the law minister and me was based on the tradition of parliamentary norms and



# Women and fisheries

The actual and potential contributions of women in fisheries require a holistic approach that encompasses the role played by women in this sector in rural societies.

Lower educational qualifications and socio-cultural constraints hamper full participation of women in development activities in the sector. In South Asia, for instance, female literacy rates are only around 50% compared to their male counterparts. With better opportunities in secondary and tertiary education, more women have enrolled in training and research institutions. This signals a better potential for the participation of women in fisheries development and planning.

There is need for a research programme that systematically tackles gender issues and women's participation and integration in fisheries development. There must be a greater understanding of gender roles and relations within the family or household, and the institutional framework within which these roles have

evolved through time.

The major drawback is the lack of access to institutional sources of credit. Fisheries in general have not been serviced by the institutional credit sources. Most credit institutions have not been able to recognise them well enough to cater to their specific needs. Under such circumstances, the credit needs of women for fish marketing often get ignored.

The non-institutional sources of credit (i.e. large traders, boat owners, moneylenders and wholesalers) account for more than 60% of the credit with the cost of credit varying from 120-800%. Therefore in a situation where the fisheries sector suffers from poor access to institutional credit sources, women are further marginalised.

**Roksana Jahan**  
M.Sc. in Fisheries Management  
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# Rights of women

I am a male member of the society. I have observed some "frantic" activities to promote women's rights. The Beijing Conference was the focal point.

Now we are observing its 10th anniversary. The venue, South Plaza of parliament, is very significant if you look at it from the perspective of women's rights. Women are fighting for equal rights and justice, the organisers of the 10th anniversary are also echoing the same sentiment, yet women are not getting their rightful place in political institutions like parliament.

Things must change.  
**A Bangladeshi Abroad**  
on e-mail

