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Clever, not intelligent

We have ingenuity of the negative kind. We can stall politics and make money out of it. We should be good in the laundry business turning black money into white. Grab land and water bodies. Our lawyers are making money ("my client says"). We lament loudly for our poor and the deprived, and do not share the spoils of victory.

We are experts in trading hatred. Our intolerance is at trigger point. Our patience is minus zero (minus zero [-0] not yet discovered!). We cheat 'honestly'! We denounce the terrorists, but carry guns. The law applies to others.

We cheat ourselves too, but we are not aware of it. Dishonesty is not taught at the university degree courses, but we can get a doctorate on this subject, objective, and goal. We are not scared of examinations we can cheat our way through. We can fool the IT (income tax) department. We cannot be fenced in. Our inspectors do not inspect, and



our teachers work in multi-mode. Our systems losses in government revenue collection runs into thousands of crore of Taka, but still our economic growth rate is around five per cent per annum! We do not know how to protect our main asset 130 million citizens.

We cultivate the culture of *matbar* (godfather). We use *burqa* (veil) for our nefarious activities. We suck out the milk of human kindness not suck it in as the baby does. We have

suberb gift of the gab, and have proved that language was given to man to hide his thoughts, not to reveal it. We argue with facts, because some of our facts and information are phoney.

We teach our young and new generations how to be wily, crafty and slippery. We can shatter moral ethics with impunity, and seem to get away with it. The civil service has apparently collapsed, because the uniformed brigade has taken over. The politicians should wear uniform, but carry no arms. We can tell the truth only through occasional oversight, and when Rab rubs the salt into our wounds.

We shed crocodile tears during anniversaries, and wear glycerine cosmetics. Watch the number of anniversaries covered by the mass media, and compare the same in the developed countries. Out of 365 days, there are over 300 anniversaries.

We love to live in the past, and dribble past the current national problems.

We are good ambassadors abroad. In our humility we keep a low profile closer to mother earth. But on homeland we are a bit ambitious, yearning for Pajero culture, and hi-rise air-conditioned shopping centres, where majority of the items sold are imported.

The *zemindari* hangover is still lingering, noting the fondness for rent-seeking business (telephone and photocopy booths). We prefer 4-wheelers to the baby 3-wheel cycle rickshaw, and do not feel ashamed of banning rickshaws from the metropolis. We prefer off-road vehicles, for obvious reason—we go off the road frequently, being oblivious to boundary conditions. The rivers and water bodies are drying up; and Dhaka might be sinking slowly within the next few decades due to extensive use of deep tubewells.

Our politics has potholes; and, pot bellies. We are familiar with the bottomless basket, and headless bodies; as also with the terms TI an IT. The former (TI) has awarded us a first class first, and in information technology we have enormous HR (human resources. Perhaps we are world leaders in hartal (strike), as it eats away four per cent of our GDP (press report). We have charismatic attachment to our past leaders, hence are extra sensitive to violations of the decency code.

We like grazing, drifting, with or without sail or rudder. It works, as we have swelled to more than 130 million souls without exerting our heart or brain. Rapid economic growth rate might be unstable; hence we go slow and steady.

Alif Zabr
Dhaka

Textile deal

After years of knowing this would happen, are we as a country prepared to deal with a drastic change in one of our most profitable industries? The end of the deal will in turn allow other countries to gain textile deals that Bangladesh due to its size and lack of preparation will be hard pressed to meet. With continuing *hartals* and instability in our country it appears the government has failed to keep an eye out and take steps to maintain an industry that provides us with 85% of our exports. This industry provides jobs to many workers. The fall of this deal would result in reduction of our exports, which in return have an adverse affect on the employment of these individuals. Our

country has already a high poverty line and the spread between the haves and the have-nots is getting wider day by day. In spite of all the warnings reports from the Agence France-Presse (BBC News) reflect that the exports have already fallen by 21.34 percent. With a fall in sales, people will lose their jobs and we will have an even higher unemployment rate. With the fall in unemployment rate and increase in poverty with the inflation of all consumer products our socio-economic condition will go from bad to worse. The instability that exists now will be far worse as corruption and crime will escalate due to the need to find other means of income for the thousands who are currently employed in the textile industry. Not to mention those members of the middle class society who actually managed to climb up, thanks to the opening of positions in multiple textile mills across the country. We do not have the Multi Fibre Agreement to protect this industry. It is time the government and the leaders of this industry took notice and started working towards protecting the livelihood of so many people.

We already have a budget deficit. We cannot continue or afford to move further down the negative scale.

Zeenat Z. Syed
UPS Deployment

Corrupt Rab men

I am not surprised with your front page news under the heading "Rab Man Held For Bribery" on 09 March. Rumours were adrift for quite some-time that "Rab is getting corrupt". I

country like Bangladesh, no improvement can be possible without drastic decisions and implementation. In order to prevent this kind of hassles, what the government can do is at least widen the road, mainly in front of the PM's office, because there is much space to create another lane inside the old airport area. This is the solution which needs to be done by the government, because the other option: to remove the cantonment from the city is not feasible. And making another flyover or tunnel is both time and money consuming.

N.I.Rizvi
Teacher, Scholastica, Dhaka

History repeats itself?

During AL rule, there were reports about the activities of the son of the then chief whip. Similar reports have been published recently also.

The JS is the centre for framing laws for the nation and the post of chief whip is a very distinguished one. So it is expected to remain above all controversies.

M. S. Uddin, Kyoto, Japan

New pay scale

I would like to draw the attention of the government specially the finance ministry as regards implementation of the new pay scale. It is already eight months (i.e. July 2004 to February 2005) the matter is being played around like "musical chairs."

It won't be wrong to mention here that this government did not take so much time when the pay allowances of ministers, MPs etc were enhanced beyond imagination within the shortest possible time -

for the next HSC exams which are just a couple of months away. My roommate tried to convince them but in vain.

Maruf Ahmed, Dhaka College

PSC's failure

The leakage of BCS questions has shattered our hopes. A general diary was filed with Ramna Police Station at 9.30am on the exam day, but no action was taken against the culprits.

The government should act in the interest of fair play.

Khalid Mahmood
308-Zia Hall
University of Dhaka

University education and reality

A university, the highest seat of learning, is taken for granted as the breeding ground where a galaxy of talents is produced.

A university with an excellent academic record reflects the true picture of the standard of education of a country, just as a mirror reflects the image of an object put before it.

One thing must not be left unmentioned here that an outstanding university gives a towering dimension to the image of a country. With the fast advancement of the world, admission in the universities has become very much complicated.

In the selection of university students, dog fights take place. Students are to take part in a battle of merit to demonstrate the excellence of their ingenuity. So any student getting chance in a university can undoubtedly regard him/herself as luckier than those

the cup and lip.

Now would the government along with the authorities concerned turn their attention to the matter to ensure bright future for so many glittering stars of the country who are expected/ supposed to lead the country in future?

forms government, BNP becomes the main opposition and vice versa. Thus, when BNP forms government, AL rejects the election outcome complaining 'cute' conspiracy, boycotts parliament and executes hartals demanding the resignation of government. In their turn, BNP

objective of their actions is targeted to improving public welfare. This was indeed the perception when the term was originally conceived. However, politicians around the world have played the game so badly that this denotation has virtually vanished and has been replaced by an acrimoni-

pretending to protect and promote. They do not care if their actions humiliate the nation before the world, make it a laughing-stock and give the impression that people living here must be uncivilised since they do not know the simple rules of civilised society.

University students are supposed to take up independent life after completing their degrees. They are expected to support themselves, and if required their families, get married and plan for starting their own families etc. Since hartals delay this process, this loss in young life is painfully permanent.

But, there is something very serious about the effects of hartal on private and public universities that deserves our sincere attention. Students of private universities are getting degrees on time, but those of public universities do not. Thus, in addition to creating monetary and non-monetary hardships discussed above, hartal originates a process of life-long inequality between students of two types of institutions for higher learning. Are the victims aware of this kind of life-long loss caused by hartal?

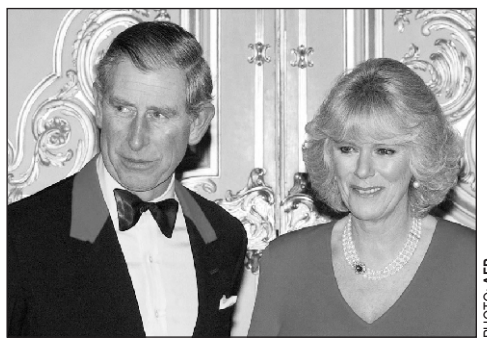
We can sum up the whole situation relating to hartal with one overwhelming proposition: This so-called political culture in our society is a sinister source of social injustice. It is a virulent violation of the fundamental principles of democracy and unacceptable infringement on citizens' rights and authority.

Khandakar Qudrat-Elahi
Dhaka

BETROTHAL OF CAMILA

The betrothal of Camila to Prince Charles took place on February 11, confirming the speculations of all that they had an extramarital relationship. This gained ground after the divorce of the late Princess Diana, when both Camila and Charles were sometimes seen having some convivial moments. It is believed that this relationship began even before the first marriage of Charles with Diana.

According to the set-up of the royally, the would-be princess must undergo virginity test which Diana had to. The prince does not have to undergo anything like that and he has to marry a virgin. So the signs of male domination are very much present in the system. The affair that Charles had must have ruined the life of Diana. Yet she is the one blamed for



what happened between the Royal couple.

ABM Shafiqul Islam
Dept. of English
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Hartal

Since the first government, elected under the caretaker system, took office in 1991, hartal has become a controversial political issue in the country. Although the subject has received critical scrutiny in our public media, the problem has remained unresolved. In different words, instead of uprooting the problem, the debate has made it more complex and controversial. And naturally, ordinary people have become fatigued and frustrated.

One reason for this disappointing outcome of the public debate is that the hartal analysis has hardly examined the issue from the perspective of citizens' rights and authority in democracy. I want to addresses the issue anew by raising two questions: First, who are imposing hartals on Bangladesh? Second, what is the purpose of these hartals? Why are the ordinary people being asked to suffer harsh personal and socio-economic hardships that often accompany this political power game?

These questions must appear stupid. For, their answers are known to virtually anyone interested in Bangladesh's current affairs: First, the opposition parties execute hartal. Second, the main purpose for executing hartals is to protect and promote welfare of the people or nation.

The above answers, although appearing quite intuitive, are oversimplified. They are, therefore, elaborated below to divert the query to a different direction, i.e., to inspire a different tone in the hartal analysis.

Bangladesh's political battleground is soldiered by several dozens of political parties. All of them, however, do not call hartal. This is not because they consider this partisan protest as a wrong political move. Such kind of political wisdom is fabulously foreign in this land of democracy. The main reason is, these parties are too small to benefit from this effective, and particularly popular, political weapon.

Over the past fifteen years- the so-called golden period of democracy in Bangladesh- two political parties, Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), are alternately ruling the country. This means that when AL

follows AL's footprints when people return them to the opposition.

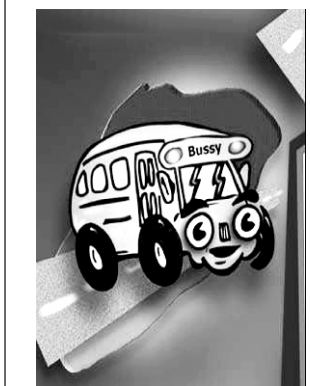
Both AL and BNP argue that hartal is a political right that is guaranteed in our constitution! And we, the citizens of Bangladesh, seem to have tacitly accepted this explanation.

Politics is a public affair, which means that anyone involved with this activity must claim that the sole

ous and satirical connotation.

Thus, no matter what AL-BNP politicians say, people know that they are after one target and one target only- capturing the state power. And they pursue all political tricks to achieve this objective, no matter how mean they are. They do not give a dam about what happen to people, whose welfare they are

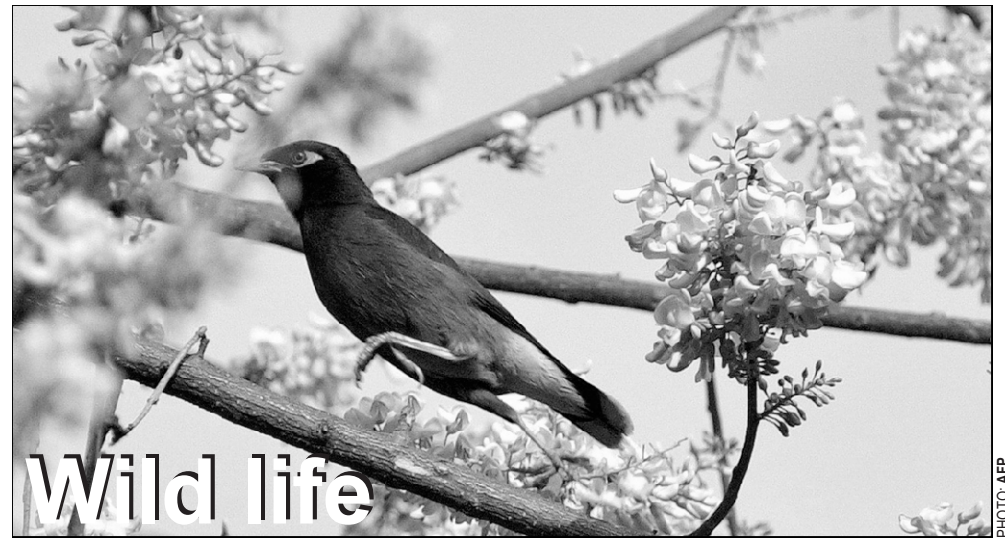
Bus ride



I could never have imagined that bus ride could be so nightmarish if I didn't board a bus the other day. It was a bright sunny morning and the weather was beautiful too. The trees were looking afresh as there was some rain the previous day. I took a bus from Farmgate to go to Uttara to visit a friend of mine. As I boarded the bus the environment seemed totally different. It was full of commuters, the helper as usually shouting for more passengers, the conductor asking the passengers to move forward to make more room for other travellers etc. Very soon the bus got crowded and it started moving. I paid the fare for Uttara and moved a bit forward to ease myself. The conductor collecting fares from others came to me and asked for the fare. I told him that I have already paid the fare. He looked at me and said no you haven't paid the fare. The situation got heated-up with my insistence and his refusal over paying the fare. In no time I became the centre of attraction of the passengers. However, let me cut my mishap short. I finally told the conductor that all these commotion could have been avoided if you had given me a ticket. He gave me a nasty look and moved forward.

Now I would like to request the authorities concerned to look into matter and save passengers from undue hassles.

Humayun Hyder
Zigatola, Dhaka



Wild life

Man is destroying forests in order to meet daily needs. This way we misappropriate foods of different kinds of wildlife and we also snatch away their shelters. So, sometimes animals such as elephants, tigers come out to the localities in search of foods. Then we beat or even kill them by torturing.

It seems we have no way to prevent such cruelty to animals. Have a look at what others are doing. Many countries have made cruelty to animals a punishable offence. But we are lagging far behind them.

Senjuti Shuvo Ahmed
Dhaka College, Dhaka

must praise the home minister for admitting the fact while speaking in parliament and further stating that 107 Rab men have been prosecuted for corruption and lack of discipline.

We must remember absolute power with no accountability breeds corruption.

Ziauddin Ahmed, On e-mail

Traffic jam in front of PM's office

The traffic jam every day almost round the clock in front of the PM's office is very frustrating. It becomes worst every day at around 2:00pm and again at round 5:00pm. This problem is maybe due to the closure of the admittance to the cantonment area and because of the newly built flyover. In a poor

depriving the public servants who are still suffering. How can the government explain this?

Shafiqul Amin
Dhaka-1206

Insensitive

We are rebuked often by the western people for our lack of social consciousness. We seem to be unable to distinguish between what is right and what is not. I reside in a hostel of Dhaka College where we have a hostel for minority students called West hostel.

The boys were celebrating "puja" through using loudspeakers. The sound was so loud that it was almost impossible for us to stay in the room, which is very close to the "puza mandap, let alone concentrate on studies. I am candidate

getting no access to such a prominent place for which they will be hankering for forever.

From the very outset of getting entry into a university, students unconsciously begin to see through the coloured spectacles and stay in the dreamland without knowing the frightening fate awaiting them.

Their guardians also stay over the moon and begin to plough the sand thinking that one day their sons or daughters would be the bright gems in their dark caves.

However, smiles flash across the faces of the students and they do not have much concern about these as they stay in the university to achieve a degree. But they begin to feel the reality as soon as they come out of university.

Blue are the hills that are far from us. Or there is many a slip between



PHOTO: AFP