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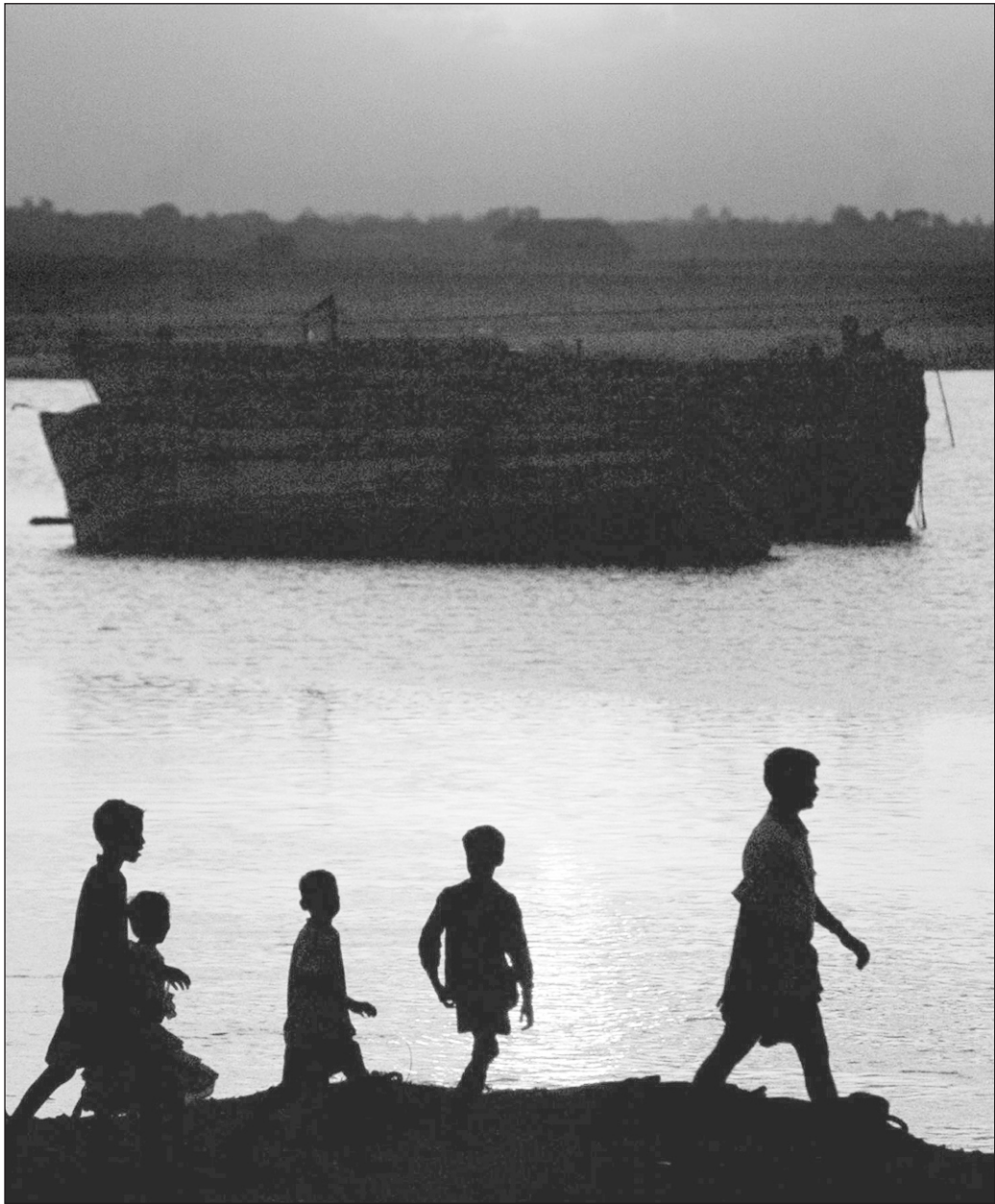


PHOTO: AFP

Floating lives

The river passenger launch which sailed recently on the metropolis river taking a toll of more than 140 lives was constructed in the dock in just one month! (According to press reports): Unbelievable. Rough estimate: 2m (two months) for redesigning (from standard configurations) and official approval processing time: 6m for priority construction in the most modern shipbuilding yard; in for pre-trials and minor changes and finishing by the dockyard team; 1m for official test and trials by the regulating authorities; another 1m for minor modification; and 1m for registration and documentation, before full clearance to ply with passengers. The rough estimate of the total period involved for this project comes to 12 months, minimum. Even with the bakshish culture in full swing for forged documents, the physical

construction and finishing job (before approaching for final approval) cannot be completed in one month. Even the top industrialised countries cannot do it in such a short time. Must be a world record. One member of one of the preliminary probe teams is reported to have sarcastically remarked that if that be true, then big business groups would go into this line and flood the market and the rivers with thousands of launches, to cater to the needs of the inland water transport sector. The incubation period is too short and very much tempting for our innovative industrialists. There is no waiting period, practically. Why launches and other river craft are not on our Export List? It would beat the garment industry hollow. The density on land of urban migration would decrease drastically, but the rivers would be crowded, like Dhaka's

narrow streets. The new style would be to live a floating life, (like our politicians, who have no anchored life). We would be imitating the life style of the snake charmers and other boat people in life. We are accustomed to water and activities on the water surfaces, hence floods do not frighten us, our adaptability is that great and diverse. In private drawing rooms, other questions are being asked. Why the shipping or IWT minister never drowns, and swims ashore safely every time there is a tragedy on the riverfronts. Good floating life, air-conditioned. Marine regulations have become too watery. The point is that changes are not made in the offices higher up when there are public tragedies on the water front. Perhaps this vibrant nation is practising stoicism. **AZ, Dhaka**

Shastri should apologise

I must congratulate your sports reporter for condemning the comments of Ravi Shastri (March 21). I also echo the same sentiments and am asking for an apology from the former cricketer of India. In fact, these days we are getting fed up with the Indian commentators. They do not hesitate to pass any comment about the captain or other players of any team facing India. They behave as if they are also part of the crowd watching the game (forgetting neutrality) and are obsessed with the Indian players only. This is never the case if you listen to most of the commentators who are not Indians. **Khurshed Alam New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka**

Occasional bus riders

My sympathy as well as support is with Mr H Hyder and other victims. Occasional bus riders and commuters strongly feel that something should be done by the communications ministry to change and improve the modus operandi of the Dhaka Bus Owners Association. The association is shy to think about it. A couple of years ago, during a visit to Chittagong I found all local bus conductors issuing a ticket for the fare they charged. If they could do that in Chittagong, why can't they do so in the capital city under the communications ministry's nose? Non-issuance of tickets against bus fares has been creating chaos and confusion. A letter from the ministry to the bus owners could make all the difference. **AR Choudhury Uttara, Dhaka**

World peace

The world has, no doubt, changed after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre. Since then the world has seen two wars and thousands

died. After the war in Iraq the United States is trying to promote freedom and democracy in that country, but are now struggling on the land where they have found more enemies than friends. The Bush administration is thinking more about other countries, when his own country is running out of resources. Recently, the US secretary of state visited both India and Pakistan for peace talks. On the one hand, they are discussing peace and on the other they are offering F-16 fighter jets. The US is passing intimidating comments about Iran's nuclear programmes. It has claimed that Iran has the capability of producing chemical weapons. Peace negotiations are all right, but the rights of other countries must also be recognised. **Tahsin Hyder Maple Leaf International School Dhaka**

National unity: a crying need

Brutal political killings are rocking our country and we seem to have nothing to do. After each and every assassination, investigation committees are formed which ultimately produce no result. It proves that the government is not at all determined to prevent these incidents and therefore they are taking place frequently. The opposition parties also have some drawbacks since they always try to make it a political issue, instead of trying to identify the actual perpetrators. The blame game doesn't bring anything fruitful to the country. Regrettably, we the common people are accustomed to such incidents and forget everything after one or two weeks. The mourning and sufferings of the victim's family fall under the dust in course of time. But we should remember that such incidents are leading Bangladesh towards a critical image crisis in the international arena, for which it may have to pay a lot. Therefore it is high time for

national unity, which will help them raise their voices against the killers. **Sonia Ahmed Dept of Law, DU**

BBC going west

As a lifelong listener (and later, as a viewer) of BBC news for several decades, I am feeling disenchanted with the news presentation (and the biased views); specially after the 9/11 bombing. Now Blair and Bush are trying to act together, and BBC, while not taking side, is trying to be helpful, in a polite way. It is not polite to many other cultures. The "C" in the ICT is distorted. Propaganda very much exists, even outside the BBC, openly, or in disguise. The global IT networks are controlled by the developed nations. Pre-emptive news! That is the current fashion. As an Asian, I feel more isolated about the global coverage offered. Little news is generated on Asia, and in the third world, except those of interest to Western imperialist aims and objectives.

May be BBC is feeling the invisible well. Where are the eastern eyes? A few minutes ago I switched off the BBC radio news after five minutes. The pattern puts me off. We come in only when man bites dog. We cannot be normal! The terrorists are supposed to be mostly Muslims, and there is something wrong with the Muslim-majority nations. Those familiar with the growth of the British Empire can detect that the BBC does not like the current environment, as reporters and interpreters. BBC was recently in the news with top reshuffling. Good. Let us have more of it. The decline of the West (industrialised nations) is not a debatable issue. It is the shifting of the "sine wave of history"; the movement is now from the West to the East. May be the next century belongs to Africa. No more trust with the BBC. Sad. **Abu Abd Dhaka**

Ruler's philosophy

What can you say when infants are accused of ransacking and have to wait in a court room for bail? A great philosopher said 'man is born free but he is in chain'. The chain is the society. Man's instinctive nature is animalistic. Rationality has to develop from within. In all ages it is the philosophy of the ruler that acts like a dog that is friendly to a friend and cruel to the enemy. **Niharendra Nath Chaudhury Palasbari, Gaibandha**

Fighting for credit

At the end of the school year, the six-inch high clay house I moulded with my own two hands won the first prize in the inter-school competition but when asked, I was taught to say that "our class" won the first prize for the clay house.

It was not something difficult to say. On the contrary, it brought my friends and classmates closer to me with huge smiles on their faces. They were all proud of me. My teacher proudly looked at me with a grin. I knew that she was not necessarily proud of the project but was proud of me. I probably learned one of the most important lessons in my life that day at age 9. I learned to overlook my pride and share the fruits of my hard work and labour. Reading about the inauguration of the "Khilgaon Flyover" on the national dailies today I am reminded of my lesson and feel sorry that the national leaders did not get a chance to study under my teacher. Their manner of fighting for credit is something that I wish our editors would not publish for the youngsters to read. It is so sad that political leaders squabble for credit all the time.

I wonder when and how they ever plan to do better? **Rehnuma Gulshan, Dhaka**

Listening to politicians

I have started skipping the public speeches of our politicians. Why? Language was given to man to conceal his thoughts, not to reveal it. Our *netas* excel in this pastime. If you can read a politician's mind, she is not a politician. But strangely enough, we condescend to vote 300 of them into our august parliament to beat about the bush. But none can beat Bush (bideshi jungle). There is hardly anything new to learn most of the time. Stinky opinion is vomited 99.9 percent of the time, meant to be licked by the citizens. There is hardly any information or knowledge in the contents. A huge waste of time (on both sides). Information is projected in a dubious sense, with ill motivation. The society will collapse if all follow this nefarious kind of gossiping and mud slinging. The (local) members of the society are its own enemies. Goodwill does not sell, nor credibility. Exemplary instances are rare. Whatever information is projected, it is mostly in the negative sense—finding fault with others. The philosophy of hatred is encouraged, in contrast to the aphorism "goodwill for all, malice to none". The society is divided. But the

divide-and-rule stratagem is not successful; because time is a subtle deterrent, filter, and purifier. Since the cosmetic effect is transient, the elections follow a pattern. No religion supports violent means of conversion or daily life. Islam might be in danger, but bombing will not change the course (as the US believes and Hitler believed). A simpler and peaceful solution is to issue a universal call for unity, as today the Muslims are dangerously divided and weak, and there are many vertical and horizontal layers, sect wise and economically; causing huge communication gaps in all parts of the world. It appears to many Muslims that the Muslims were being tested at the cosmic level, as human rationality is not working effectively.

"The proof of the pudding lies in the eating". In this case (official action), the proof lies in the follow-up actions and legal prosecutions (not "cross-fire"!), to ensure that the declared policy is not a cosmetic show under duress. The regime has to sew up its tattered image. How the regime is planning to get the benefit of the doubt? Political gestures have become unreliable, and the utterances of the political leaders cannot be trusted (it has nothing to do with patriotism, which is a separate issue).

If I go to the mosque regularly, keep a long beard and dress non-neutrally, and talk about Islam and its virtues, that does not mean I am a hidden extremist and terrorist. Religion appeals to the heart, while politics has to appeal to the head. It is dangerous to mix up the two at the wrong time and place (there are stages in mundane and spiritual lives). Who are listening?

A Husnain Dhaka

Rural Health Centres

In an interview on BBC Bangla service at 6-30am on 12 March, 2005 our health minister made a very bold and significant announcement regarding the future plan for management and operation of the subject clinics by NGOs. This is indeed a great decision for which the present administration ought to be hailed like few other pragmatic steps taken so far in the public interest. All the Rural Health Centres established in the past with lot of human efforts and huge public funds/aids are today examples of great failures. Poor service delivery linked to lack of accountability has very recently been cited in the media news as the reason for this great disappointment by the Chief Economist of the World Bank's South Asia region.

The higher rate of doctors' absence has also been blamed as the primary cause for the failure of these government health clinics, meant for the people in the rural areas. It is further alleged that performance of these clinics compared to those run by the NGOs or private sector is not only unacceptable but also examples of gross negligence by all concerned. We surely do not require the expertise/service of an eminent person like that of the Chief Economist of the World Bank to point this out before we wake up to take corrective measures! Anyone visiting our villages will be able to observe the aforesaid position and must wonder as to the justification of keeping these clinics, presently doing absolutely no good in most cases to the cause for which these were created.

The proposed action plan by the health minister as indicated in the aforementioned BBC Bangla programme is the only way out of this mess. Steps as contemplated must therefore be taken to reactivate the Rural Clinics under NGOs or private sector without further loss of time to render the desired essential services for the basic medicare needs of our rural people. **Z. Rahman Gulshan Dhaka**

Bangladesh's image

Before concluding that 'false news'

Ban on petrol import

The government is contemplating a ban on import of petrol as it is being used to adulterate octane. This is nothing but an eyewash as no mention has been made of the steps/measures to be

taken to prevent other modes of adulteration. A cheap chemical by-product (from certain chemical-plants), known as "condense", is the substance being mixed with both petrol

and octane by unscrupulous traders! What is the government going to do about it? **Chowdhury Naim Rahman Khulshi Chittagong**

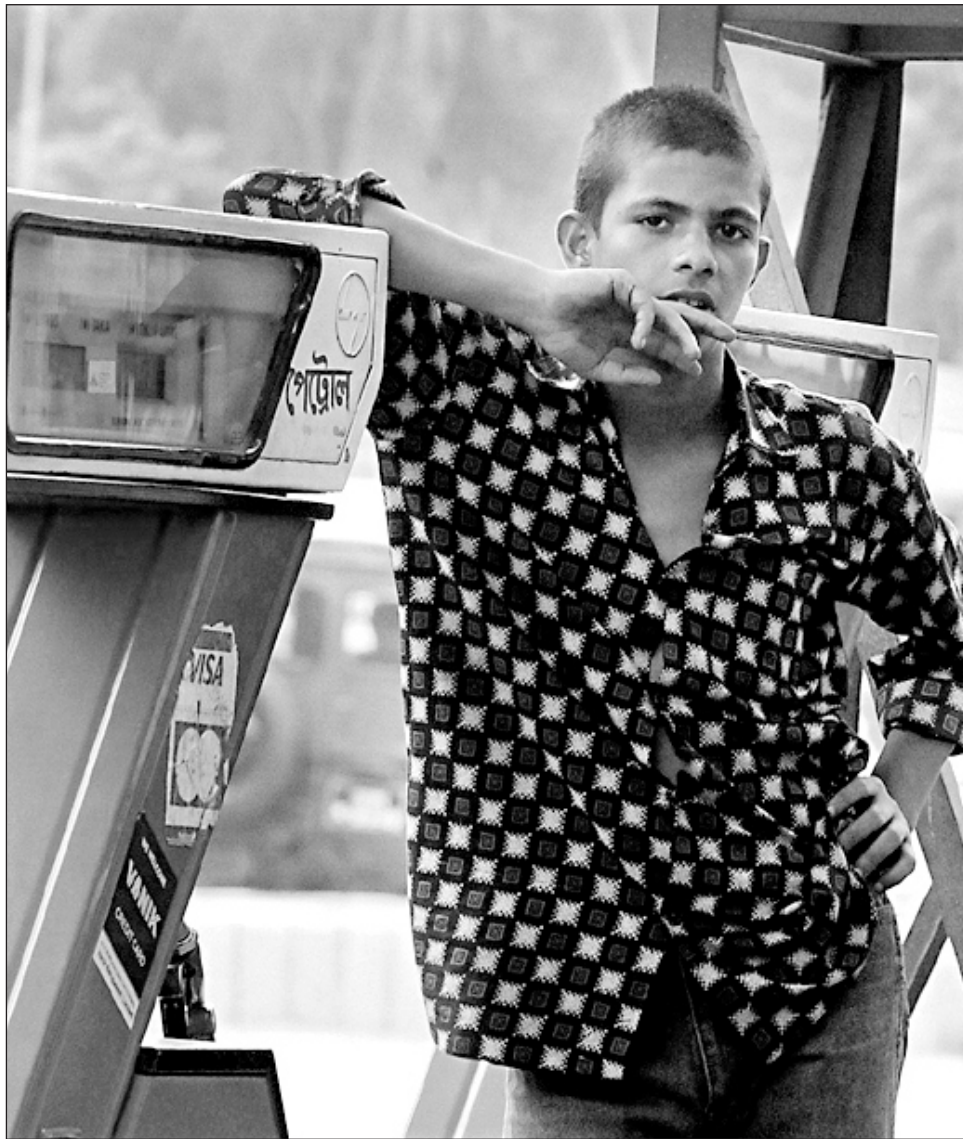


PHOTO: AFP

and the 'over exercise of press freedom' are damaging Bangladesh's image abroad (Saifur's Salvo, 13 March), the finance minister and the industries minister might usefully have taken a look at the front pages of the newspapers in those foreign countries which they are so keen to impress. A few minutes on the internet will persuade these gentlemen that the press in the rest of the world does not only print good news. For example, a brief survey of today's headlines from the UK yields the following alarming selection: "Terrorism threat in UK!" "Illegal drugs trade reaches new high!" "Alarm as postnatal depression soars!" "Police cannot cope!"

ment, for which better sources than the daily paper exist. The ministers are however not alone in their misapprehension. As readers with connections with that country will know, the UK prime minister is not above shooting the messenger either. **Matt Bannerman Banani, Dhaka**

Needed: unity and understanding

I express my profound shock at the death of the former finance minister SAMS Kibria. His death is not just the demise of a person but is the loss of one of the brightest man in our political arena. Mr. Kibria was grenade-charged to death in Habiganj. We don't know

safe in any kind of turbulent situation in the country. They should know that those days are gone. Now each and every person is a potential victim of terrorism. For political leaders it is time not to do politics to reap benefit out of a dead body, rather it is time to make decisions to protect their own as well as people's existence. **Mohammad Abdul Hannan IBA, DU**

Two arrested for poppy cultivation

Two Arakanese tribal men were arrested on 2 March by the Burmese army for poppy cultivation in a remote area of Northern Arakan, said a local headman from Buthi Daung township.

Zybex® SR

As reported in the press, Beximco Pharma has launched "Zybex SR" tablet which is claimed to be a highly effective therapy for smokers who want to quit the habit. I appreciate the initiative to help people quit a bad habit. It is sincerely expected that smokers in our country will be benefited and rid themselves of smoking. **Prof. M. Zahidul Haque Chairman, Department of Language Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka-1207**

"UK to run out of gas!"

But has this daily catalogue of woes presented to the readers of these newspapers tarnished Britain's image here in Bangladesh? My Bangladeshi friends don't seem to think so: they continue with their educational, leisure and business links with UK unperturbed. They have the common sense to distinguish between a newspaper's duty to bring bad news to public attention and an analysis of longer-term trends in a country's develop-

the reason, and probably we never will. Like the previous gruesome bomb attacks this case will also be looked into and will end up with no solution. Besides the local investigation teams international experts will come in, perspire out their valuable sweat beads and finally fly out, leaving no trace of their expertise. With that our heat will get cool until another such incident occurs to add to this brutality and we will find a chance to blame one another once again.

We, the conscious people of the country, demand a proper investigation into the 27 January incident to bring the culprits to book and also to put an end to this kind of barbarity here in Bangladesh. We want a safe life. We want a guarantee of natural death. And for all these, we believe, all that is needed is the consensus and commitment of political leaders, especially the two major parties. At this crucial moment the ruling party and the one in opposition should forget about the inherited divisions among them and sit together to find a way out of this perilous situation. The country is so filth coated with dirty politics that one Kibria's blood is not enough to sanctify it. The dirty politicians don't want the country to be a purified one, for they fear that it will end their good days. But if they continue their traditional politics of intolerance their happy days will automatically vanish. The situation is such that no single person is safe now, nor even the political leaders who used to consider themselves

They were identified as Gangaw and U Maung Kyaw Aung, who were living in the village of Shit Chaung, Buthi Daung township. A column of light infantry from Battalion 55 arrested them in a poppy cultivation field, but four other people escaped from the spot. According to local sources, a few remote villages, including Shit Chaung, Tharaw Gai, War Netron and Arin Guas Chay in Buthi Daung township near the Bangladesh-Burma border, are engaged in poppy cultivation at present. The poppy field is only 0.5 acres wide. The cultivators also plant mustard plants among the poppy plants to help conceal them. The area of upper Shit Chaung stream is very close to the upper reaches of the Sangu River of Bangladesh, where, for many years, local tribal people have been reported to cultivate poppy. This is the first instance of poppy cultivators being arrested on the Burmese side, but it is still unclear how many tribal people are involved in poppy cultivation in the area. The two arrested are from a tribal group of Chaung Pyae Khami, an ethnic group of the Arakanese community. Closer cooperation between the two countries can help contain the menace. **Narinjara Buthi Daung, Burma**

Sky train or metro

The photo in the front page of The Daily Star of 11 March of an anguished father and daughter suffering a near nervous breakdown after arriving at the examination hall late due to traffic jam speaks volumes for the problem. We know about the magnitude of the problem, talk about its impact on the economy, physical and mental health of the people. Yet, nothing tangible has been done so far to mitigate it. The huge traffic of Dhaka has to be managed the way it

is in other megacities like Bangkok, Tokyo, Manila, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Tehran, Paris, London etc. The solutions are on the board. We are lucky in the sense that we do not need to perform much research or homework. Others have done the groundwork. We will just follow the traffic management plan. So, build a metro or sky train in Dhaka. Nothing else is going to solve the problem. **SN Mamoon Dhaka**

