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It happens in Bangladesh only

I was surprised reading (and also seeing the picture) in your newspaper this morning (March 28) that the Bangladesh Ministry of Home Affairs has decided to equip Rab with armoured vehicles. Either the government officials have reached the end of their wit or they can't find any better way to spend tax payers' money. The law enforcement department(s) needs reliable vehicles equipped with sophisticated communication equipment and not fortified vehicles to fight crimes that are common in Bangladesh. Providing Rab with such armoured vehicles will make sense only, and if only, they have information that the criminals are preparing for army-like assaults on citizens or on law enforcement officials with heavy war machines. In that case, the general population has the right to know ahead of such assault so that they can take precautions to avoid harm. Having an air-wing of Rab is a good idea. Air transportation, by giving greater mobility, will definitely help them fight crime.

In my opinion, it is time for our public servants (did I say public servants?) to sort out priorities.

Mohammed Hashmat Ali, Ph. D.
Professor of Chemistry
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US

Rab or ROB?

It's interesting, Mr. S.A. Mansoor (DS 4 March), that you got moved so much that you had to write against Rab for the stray case of an alleged robbery by a solitary Rab member, while you totally forgot that our country has been labelled as the most corrupt in the world! Shouldn't you be relieved to see that not many such cases have surfaced against Rab?

In your mind "Rab's robbery and extortion is the first and foremost image today" whereas, me and million others have expressed in this page and elsewhere that Rab has been doing an excellent job and rendering great service to society. Nowadays people sleep more or less peacefully, mothers take their kids to school and go home unscathed without losing their vanity bag or necklace, female students are enjoying their days without being scared by the eve-teasers and most of the toll takers have taken a hike in view of Rab's presence!

We cannot expect miracles to happen every day and results of good deeds over night, we must give

The recognition story

Before Bangabandhu's return to Dhaka on 10 January 1972, only India and Bhutan had recognised Bangladesh in December 1971. On his return, country after country accorded recognition to Dhaka. Only those countries that suffered strategic defeat along with Pakistan in the Liberation War remained out of the race. Erstwhile foes are now friends of Bangladesh, one even turned to be 'trusted.' It only proves that in interstate relations, there is no permanent friend or foe, the only permanent thing is the national interest. East Pakistan was used as a strategic point by Pakistan and China in their bid to contain India with whom both had a number of issues to settle. China challenged material, political and diplomatic support of India behind Bangladesh Liberation by extending similar support to Pakistan to ensure its national interest. The United States wanted to befriend China against rival Moscow and exploited its strategic alliance with Pakistan to open a window to China. Pakistan became a conduit between Washington and Beijing. Henry Kissinger made his secret journey from Islamabad to Beijing in 1971. National interests of China and the United States converged to keep Pakistan united over the self-determination of the East Pakistanis in 1971. But the claim of Ambassador Rezaul Karim that China's delayed recognition resulted "from complete misunderstanding about the very reason



d'etre of Bangladesh" [Independence Day Special, The Daily Star, 26 March] and "Out of ignorance of China of Bangladesh Liberation War" [Prothom Alo, 24 March] is not credible. Nobody would ever thought that Mao Tse Dong and Zhu En Li were among the ignorant people on earth. Ambassador Karim further wrote that Saudi Arabia delayed recognition because "the Saudi Monarch gave in to Pakistani propaganda that Bangladesh was born

due to the machinations of a Hindu India determined to divide and weaken the largest Muslim state in the world." The fact was Saudis wished Bangladesh to drop 'secularism' from the constitution and King Faisal during the Non-Aligned summit in Algiers in 1973 wanted Bangabandhu to declare Bangladesh an Islamic Republic. Bangabandhu replied that Pakistan was an Islamic Republic yet its soldiers carried out genocide and raped thousands of women in Bangladesh. The meeting ended abruptly.

The Saudi recognition came after the assassination of Bangabandhu in 1975.

M.Shafiqulah
Former ambassador
Sonargaon Janapath
Uttara, Dhaka



FILE PHOTO

very often behind the scene or beyond common folks' knowledge, but are rarely caught.

What are we doing about those people? Have we abandoned the stalwarts or leaders, who not only make big money by fraudulent means but also commit all sorts of crimes for political reasons?

I agree that "one bad deed washes away all the good deeds". If it's valid for Rab what will he say about the criminals and other wrong-doers (against whom we, poor citizens, are fighting from day one)? What do they deserve for all their misdeeds carried out under the patronage of their godfathers?

AF Rahman
One e-mail
On a TV serial
I am writing to you to express my

children seeing that 'the youngest sister talking about dating openly with her elder sister'. I find it difficult to understand.

The whole show or all episodes are full of falsehood, cheating, phony love and unethical stuff revolving around all the young characters in the serial. First, I find it very strange that the man who created 'Nal Piran' could write or think in this fashion, it is pure trash if a comparison is made. It may be popular among the youngsters. On a fabulous witchcraft he is giving a joy ride to the youngsters to a fantasy world. Second, unlike his earlier serials this one only talks about silly and sleazy things. Third, he writes in newspapers talking about all the problems that is created by the politicians or governance and is a conscious voice of the nation. But none of these issues find place in his plays, stories or novels.

Politicians have ruined the economy of this nation. That is what we all say and presume but in 34 years the mindset of our people has changed and is carefully molded into an unethical, alien and impractical behavior and attitude that often leads to criminal manifestation. I consider this a result of slow induction through our so called literary materials produced and spread by our so called 'conscious' people. Please think of the following:-

The West Bengal chief minister's wife takes public bus to office. Our wives require two to three maids and with great fun they torture them. All middle class houses are built with three to four bathrooms/toilets for each child, guests and for the servants separately (even in ME only millionaires can think of this kind of luxury and snobbishness).

A businessman instead of reinvestment of his profit goes for a BMW.

How all these have been induced into the psyche of our people?

A nation is ruined deliberately in its upbringing. Positive and prolific thinking is found almost nowhere. A superficial articulation of the spirit of liberation, democracy, secularism, human rights and justice is spread through so loud, that you don't dare question the intention.

Politicians shout at each other during daytime and share the booty at night and writers mint their fortune talking about it.

MM Haque
Jeddah, K.S.A

Slice wise power foolish

This is a sequel to Farid Bakht's article (DS: April 02) and a front page report (DS: April 04) on the vagaries of investment in power proposals. One wonders if these reports at all even prick the thick hide of officialdom? The need for power generation for progress and development is endlessly spelled out by our powers to be. Unfortunately, it is all talk and no action by the government, except cancelling old proposals and going for new ones. In contrast, none but the deprived users talk about loadshedding. Rarely, when the powers to be talk about it, it is to restrain us from using electricity with the threat of disconnection if official orders are not followed!

One may wonder what ails this sector. The first ailment is lack of any coherent plans or actions to back it. We seem to have all the will to go for large mega-power proposals; however the first priority here is the size of the pie for our powers to be! This is acted out year in and year out, blaming the last proposal as inflated and going for a new one on inflation plus basis! Since the slice of the pie is the criteria, naturally the move is towards mega cost based options. Everyone of the stakeholders is busy to carve out as large a slice as possible. No wonder

viable options for small power proposals are ignored or shelved; because there is no sizeable slice on offer.

We have lost sight of various small but viable power sourcing options. Added together, these options could enable us to fairly quickly bridge the gap of demand and supply. Unfortunately, mini investment ideas interests no one, which have in effect been totally ignored and forgotten. It lies buried, unexplored, untried and unheard of among mega-proposals floating around.

S.A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka
Well done, BTTB
On March 31, BTTB commercially launched GSM mobile phone

additional forms, but these were also inadequate for the huge demand. BTTB assured that the form would be available from the next week at all service centres. Some people have sold subscribers' form outside the exchange. People became very angry when they were unable to buy this package. Riot police and armed police tried to control the situation.

Mobile phone has become a fashion but sometimes the demand shoots up. There are four cell phone companies occupying a big market—Grameen Phone, Aktel, Citycell and Banglalink. These companies are trying to give their best service with better facilities to the subscribers. This time BTTB has done a great job through which people will

English Department, DU

What to expect?

The finding by Dr. Abdul Barakat, that 75% of our MPs spent Tk 128 crore to get elected astounded me. The question has to be asked, "What are these people after?" The altruistic purpose of serving the nation? I don't buy it!

I have heard of customs officers giving huge bribes to their superiors to get plum postings. They intend to recover the bribe money and make a profit in a short time. We all know what to expect from our customs officers.

Now, what can we expect from our elected representatives?
Navil Mansur Chowdhury
One e-mail

organograms simply do not work (in Dhaka). But the go-slow process (in all regimes) is so transparent and decipherable! No approval without political colouring!

While the reporters presented one side of the picture (political pressures on approving new projects, eating up huge chunks of time); the minister cited other familiar reasons for the administrative delays. No transparency.

It is more than a question of efficiency (before starting work!). The go-ahead signals on new development projects are being delayed due to high-level human losses (interference at high levels, plus nepotism). The other (dark) side of politics is, however, running at high speed with great efficiency which is

past three decades.

The minister however, had some good news the government has started planning to allow the private sector to invest in the power and energy sectors (entry to a restricted club). Who are calling the shots?

It is high time the government stopped doing business, but there is one weakness, the official monitoring and regulatory actions would be poor, as we see from the non-action in some familiar agencies like Rajuk, BTTB, water and power agencies, police, education, IWT, real estate dev, and other areas.

Even rural marketing networks are in poor state, as the cooperatives in the rural areas cannot be run honestly. The gap has been partly filled in by numerous NGOs, some of whom are doing good work. The human resources are there, but management is shady. How to weed out the bad roots? This scavenging assignment has been allocated by the electorate to the elected parliamentarians. Why the JS is so unpopular? We need fresh air, and we get it through outdoor demo!

Look at the pitiable condition of the state-run factories. Jute and paper are gone, and we are importing sugar. Our shipyards do not work, and the majority of Bangladesh's imports and exports over the high seas are through foreign ships.

The greedy industrialists always present one side of the picture: all the time pressurize the government for more and more concessions and facilities, without informing the public how they keep their own systems running at tolerable efficiency.

Only the power sector is not ill, but the majority of the Controllers (state of governance) are mentally sick all the time, and depend on others for survival. It is the distorted philosophy of politics and governance. One chief of the Power Cell has been thrown out unceremoniously (DS report March 29). Where is the official explanation?

The voters have the right to call for public explanations, and this right is being denied time and again. It is the job of the press (mass media) to point out the other side of the coin. The freedom of the press has become a debatable issue these days. No grace mark for the authorities.

Power is there, but it is not available democratically.
A Husnain, Dhaka

Timeless (!) fairness cream

She was a girl with not-so-fair complexion. Her whole life was miserable. No guy had the urge to scan her twice, even the officer at viva board did not care to look at her, let alone give her the appointment letter.

Then suddenly she found a cream that would make her fair and would help her to face all the difficulties and ensure a fairy tale life. So she goes to a department store to get the cream. She uses it and instead of getting a 'break', gets a nervous breakdown as the dermatologist she consulted says that there is no production date or date of expiry on the product and she is the unfortunate one to use a date expired one.

The fairness cream and other cosmetics (with the exception of some renowned brands) do not have any information about production date or expiry. Sometimes the information is set in a complicated way just to show that some information is there. Girls better watch before they try one, and the authorities concerned should bring the swindlers to book.

Saif, Dhaka



every law or force to take its normal course of time for a successful end. And we just should not overestimate Rab or for that matter be too ambitious to see "Phereshtas" in the garb of Rab. Let's not forget that the members of Rab are also sons of this society and soil. We all cannot boast or claim to be hundred percent honest. And we must not forget the background and the state of affairs in the country.

When we become enthusiastic to cite one or two defaults or crimes of these men, we do not consider that our people (whether in service, in business or in politics) are committing such crimes

grave concern over the serial '69'. I wept watching 'Nal Piran' by Mr. Anisul Haque and watched the film many times, started admiring him and got boosted by his play 'Ekannyabarti'.

But I was surprised to see how he has changed and what is very much reflected in his current serial -- '69'. The name itself sounds silly.

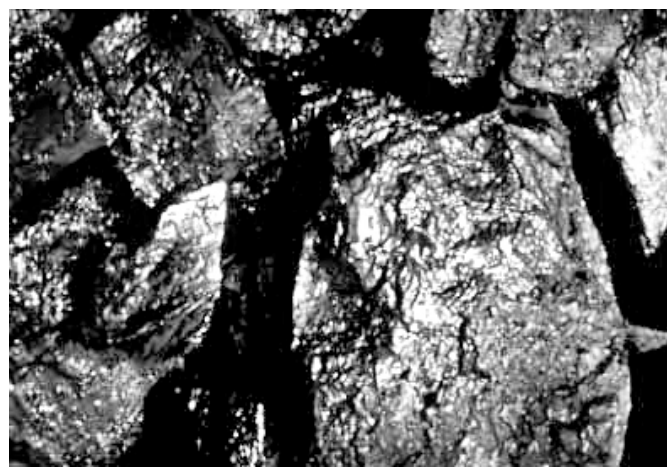
Yesterday, Sunday (3.04.2005), I asked my children to say their Magrib prayers but they insisted that they would, but after the serial as they do always. Since I lost my interest unlike 'Ekannyabarti', seldom I sit for the show. My annoyance and irritation exacerbated in front of my

USE COAL

Bangladesh has abundant coal reserves for a long time for use as energy for many decades. But we are going slow. One reason is the entrenched idea that coal pollutes the environment. But the situation is different in the electricity-from-coal sector, as the following data indicate (mostly IEA estimates 2000, collected from an international journal).

Coal-fired electric power stations meet 38 percent of the global demand for energy; and this No 1 position will be retained at least till 2030; as coal is cheap, and the technology is well proven, and vastly improved now.

Outside electric production, the use of coal accounts for 26 percent; and by 2030 the



situation is not going to change much. Coal fume is now controllable up to more than 90 percent against unhealthy emission and air pollution, and to keep within the 5.2 per cent

figure (Kyoto Protocol). The thermal efficiency at the power station has now come up from a mere five percent to 34 percent. China is aiming at an efficiency of 42 per cent, using

super-critical boilers and other technical controlling devices.

Today we are suffering from choked energy production, depending mostly on supply of natural gas. It needs costly pipelines for miles around, starving the northern districts. It reminds me of a quote 'irrational exuberance' coming out of Alan Greenapan, the US expert on financial matters. Atomic energy is also expensive and difficult to maintain. Coal may be allotted higher priority, remembering the Greenhouse Effect. More information is available on the use of coal from credible sources. We have wasted too much time depending exclusively on gas.

Md Aabab
Dhaka

through a private company, Teletalk. It has launched pre-paid sim card with a very cheap rate. People are very much crazy for this package because of some extra facilities which are better than those offered by other mobile companies. From morning, many people lined up to buy this package. Most of the people failed to buy this package because of an inadequate number of form. Though Teletalk management sent

get the opportunity to talk at a very cheap rate.

I wanted to take this package but couldn't because of the great demand and less service. When I saw the crowd of the crazy people in front of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Exchange, I quickly changed my decision.

Nevertheless, I want to thank BTTB for introducing this service.
Tanmoy Bhattacharjee

Powerless in the power sector!

The Daily Star of March 29 is full of news on use, misuse, non-use, and waste of power, time, energy, money and patience. The power sector has been reorganised, reshaped, modified, modernised, and checked and rechecked so many times by local and foreign experts. The revised

not in public interest. Our politics is subjective and tribal at the base, and it is not a new tool or method.

It is not unusual, as similar patterns can be observed in other sectors, lowering political transparency in governance, regardless of the parties in power (temptation has boundary conditions!). We are number one in the TI list of corrupt nations! That explains it all, of what is not happening in this nation for the

VAT on restaurants

Recently, owners of exclusive restaurants (Chinese, Indian etc) are having hard time due to economic recession. Restaurants are playing a big role in giving jobs to the unemployed youths. A restaurant is not only a centre of learning and it also produces every year many Bangladeshis are going abroad (Middle East and UK) after getting their initial training in cooking here. In England, there is huge demand for Bangladeshi cooks. But I think the government is neglecting this area. Restaurant owners are not getting facilities

from the government like other profitable sectors, rather they are facing some problems.

Now a restaurant has to pay 15% VAT which I think is unreasonable. If the government reduces VAT, then I am sure they will get more revenue from this sector and restaurant owners will get rid of unscrupulous tax officials.

I believe if proper steps are taken restaurant business can give a boost to our poor economy and help to create a lot of jobs, both at home and abroad.

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PHOTO: AFP