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Slum dwellers

Famine, flood, river erosion, torture by the upper/richest classes and joblessness force the poor to leave their village homes in the rural areas of Bangladesh. Then they start living in Dhaka city. We see them mostly beside the railway lines in Kamapur etc. At night many of them sleep in the railway station platforms. Most of the slums of Dhaka city lack proper drainage and have no

electricity or gas. Slum dwellers work as day labourers, rickshaw pullers, masons, and vegetable vendors. Despite the crucial role that they play, slum dwellers are one of the most neglected and disempowered sections of society in Bangladesh.

For the last couple of years, the slum dwellers have suffered considerably and are subject to many threats. Part

of a slum was burnt in an arson attack, and most parts of that slum were again severely burnt down a year ago, resulting in casualties and loss of assets.

Children, who live near the railway stations, have to live dangerously. Any time they may face fatal accidents. Extreme poverty forces them to indulge in criminal activities.

We find that the authorities concerned sometimes take the initiative to evict slum dwellers, but they don't take the future of these people into consideration. So the problem persists.

Yasmin Chowdhury, Dhaka



PHOTO:AFP

PHOTO:AFP

Weekly holiday

Is it appropriate for a poor country like Bangladesh to have two-days weekend?

Like several other readers, I also believe that two-days weekly holiday cannot bring any good to our economic life.

The government should reconsider the matter in the greater interest of the country.

Professor M. Zahidul Haque
Dhaka-1207

Eid-ul-Fitr 3 days (holiday starts from the day of Eid), Eid-ul-Adha 3 days (holiday starts from the day of Eid), Islamic New Year 1, Muharram Ashura 2 days, Prophet's Birthday 1 day, National Day 16 & 17 December (1 day was added for winning a verdict in the International Court of Justice a few years ago).

If the above days fall on weekends, holidays are given as compensation. In the light of the above, we have too many holidays. So the holiday

satisfaction, we used to read high class (printing wise) newspapers/national dailies containing four to six pages at a cost of two anna (equivalent to thirteen paise) per copy.

These days a newspaper cost Tk 7.00 to Tk 10.00 and contain 12-20 pages. But unfortunately the printing of most of the newspapers/national dailies is not of good quality. Innumerable alphabets, letters, words, sentences and paragraphs of various news, reports, articles and advertisements of the papers are indistinct and illegible which can hardly be read.

We would request the newspaper publishers to kindly look into the matter, and stop using small/mini size alphabets/letters. They should use better quality dark black ink and improve printing and publication of newspapers.

Through your daily we would also like to draw the attention of the Ministry of Information and the Press Information Department to the matter for taking immediate and pragmatic action in the interest of readers.

OH Kabir
Wari, Dhaka

Cyber cafe

What actually is going on in many cyber cafes under the cover of "Internet

Service"? The chambers of the cyber cafes are generally fenced in such a way that nobody else can peep inside. And, sensing this environment perfect for gratifying carnal desires, a good number of demoralised people, especially the depraved couples, are frequently abusing the cafes, in connivance with the employees.

I have heard quite a few stories about this sort of activities. The governing authorities should clamp down on such activities immediately.

Minhazur Rahman
Department of English, JU

Patriotism

There appeared two writings in The Daily Star, one on Tuesday Group and another on Islamic extremism. The first one deals with the group, representing powerful, rich and dominating countries of the world and the other one poor, weak and foolish people of the world. Both groups are doing the same thing to Bangladesh but adopting a different methodology. One group is helping other knowingly in connivance or unknowingly in exchange of money or perks. Both the writers are Bangladeshis; one appears to be a senior citizen with an international mindset and the other a proud Bangladeshi. Self respect breeds patriotism.

Patriotism is the hallmark of all morality. Educated immoral people are the enemies in the patriotic guise.

Commodore AMA Alam (Retd.)
New DOHS, Dhaka

Ban on tobacco

A few months ago the parliament passed a bill which banned smoking. But how does it work? I think the law was a ban on tobacco advertisement only. The law stopped advertisements on cigarettes but it has no power to ban smoking. The law against smoking is like Norway's ban on tobacco advertising. There has been a law in this respect in Norway since 1975 but even now they have a great percentage of smokers in their country. It shows

advertisement plays a little role in causing someone to start or continue smoking. In our country some tobacco companies played a great role in our media and music. My question is why we banned advertising? If we really want to make a tobacco free zone in our country then we need to stop smoking strictly.

If the authorities have no problem to allow smoking here and there, then what is the problem with advertising? It's true that smoking is not a good thing for the environment and health. If the government wants to stop smoking then I want to urge it to stop smoking everywhere. Stop both advertisement and smoking. Don't ban advertisement only.

Mostafa Saikh Chowdhury
Dhaka

Meena Bazar and car parking

I'm writing about the news item published in your paper quoting the Meena Bazaar authorities as paying fine to the traffic police department for illegal parking of cars by customers on the footpath in front of the Meena Bazaar. The news item appears to have supported the arrangement.

My question: is it an act that could be supported? If tomorrow hawkers occupy any footpath to start any makeshift shop and are willing to pay the fine, would the DMP allow this?

Then how could the DMP allow the Meena Bazaar to use the road as parking lot? I was surprised to see that some customers asked for this type of privilege from superstores for car parking on footpath. What an unreasonable idea!

Dr. Nazrul Haque
One-mail

Departure

In "A Mother in Manville" Jerry went off by himself to evade the departure of the writer.

When loving ones insist on departing, turning a blind eye to us, we are shocked.

Roney
One-mail

Crackdown on restaurants

Recently, the authorities have started cracking down on restaurants for preparing food in an unhealthy/unhygienic environment. This is well appreciated and I applaud the authorities for doing so, but many people are overlooking one major issue. The people leading these crackdowns (the magistrate, the police and many journalists who write about these crackdowns) are not above question, and there have been reports of these people harassing honest restaurant owners.

The law enforcers cannot ignore this aspect of the story.

Saad Hussain
One-mail

A superlative Eid bonus!

A few days ago I went to the GPO at Ramna to mail an air-parcel containing a small puja gift to my brother who lives abroad. I discovered an unusually long queue, as many Muslims were also doing the same on account of the forthcoming Eid. What made me feel very angry was that the man at the counter, who was weighing, giving the stamp and also

giving the final acceptance receipt, was never returning any change to anybody, and it was remarkable that most of the charges were about Tk 20 short of a round number, and most people having no changes, or not knowing the exact stamp dues, handed over hundred taka notes, which the man put in his drawer without even mentioning the words -- "Sorry, I don't have any change". One young man tried to protest and the man became so rude that the young man, fearing that his parcel might be left behind or "lost" did not push his point. We calculated that at the rate parcels were being accepted and the changes being pocketed, this man was making about at least Tk 5,000 per day!

Sudhir Mitra
Khilgaon, Dhaka

Technical education

Recently, here in a local daily a wake up call was made with the dismay that the UK is going to be a third world country. The reason such concern was raised is that the authorities think that UK schools are not producing enough math and engineering skills as much as Chinese or Indian schools are producing to attain economic objectives. In fact here in the UK, math and science teachers get additional incentive pay.

The objective of this writing is to let people in Bangladesh know and feel the importance of technical education in Bangladesh to meet our strategic demands.

Abdullah Al Mahmud, UK

Secularism

Secularism becomes a debatable issue in Bangladeshi politics if we go by former mayor Hanif's comment. It is not clear to all that secularism has many facets like philosophical, social, political and of ethical. When a politician talks of secularism in the political sense, we understand that it's a socio-political practice, apart from any religious belief. Here, a politician must give a sugarcoated lecture to impress mass people, not harming

their religious dogma. Mr. Hanif did it well. Secularism, the brand of which we are propagating, is not acceptable to the masses as it tends to "de-religionise" everything. Mass people apprehend that secularism means going against the religion, specially Islam. So it is not acceptable in Bangladeshi socio-economic perspective.

If we want to tell about secularism in the political field, it's nothing but abstaining from religious practice in political decision making. It should be understandable to all.

Sarwar Kamal
Dept. of Philosophy, CU

Biman grounded

Biman cannot operate efficiently under government control (politics has no backbone); as has been proved time and again. The weaknesses are known to the authorities, but political nepotism and greed stand in the way. The collapse of the jute sector and other public corps also reveal the trend. Simple solution: smash political bakshish and toll collection by the godfathers. The top leadership indirectly condones the questionable ways of getting support from the bottom layers.

Corruption is so entrenched that any shopper can go to Baitul Mukarram market (footpath stalls) and buy many items available in the Biman stores. The sudden strike by BB staff without adequate notice needs deterrent action in the way union regulations are formulated and implemented (the political parties depend too much on labour union support).

Not only the basic structure of Bangladesh Biman has to be restructured, but the moral rearmament of the civil service has to be re-anchored. It is too late one year before the general elections.

The regime has other problems: violent religious politics. It reveals lack of political vision and foresight. Reap your own harvest! Jute, airlines and sugar industries are in sunset years. More will follow, as it is too late to stem the negative trend. The cost of doing business has gone up, and the cost of public services has also risen. Unless politics becomes open-ended, there is no end to our troubles. A grey garland is like a cordon (no entry or exit for outsiders). Delivering speeches on physical development projects is not going to get us out of the woods.

A Mawaz, Dhaka

Far from gratitude

A few years ago we, the viewers of Bangladesh Television, were familiar with the song 'Ek Sagore Rakter Binimoye Banglar Shadinata Anlo Jara Amra Tomader Bhulbona...' (which was sung for the heroes of our liberation war) at the time of the news bulletin of 8.00pm every night. This is one of the most famous songs recalling our beloved sons who sacrificed their lives in the war of liberation. But the song is no longer heard. This is how we, especially the coalition govt, are commemorating our national heroes!

The present coalition government appears to be very friendly to the betrayers and the collaborators of Pakistani forces.

Some of them still firmly believe that Pakistan is the destination of our nation. They support Pakistan when Bangladesh and Pakistan play cricket with each other! They are dreaming of capturing state power in Bangladesh within a few years! These are issues that the nation should be aware of in our greater interest.

Sultan Mohammed Zakaria
One-mail

"Hindu extremism"



PHOTO:AFP

Ramadan price hike

Prices of necessary commodities shoot up during this holy month. From oil to onion everything goes beyond the general customer's ability to purchase. Our political parties, which pretend to be well wishers of the general people, are silent on these issues. The main opposition is not concerned about this, rather it is busy with its election campaign. Their political activities centre upon the upcoming elections. The Awami League called a hartal after the third oil price hike not for the well being of the general people, but for political gain. On the other hand, the BNP

does not agree that the prices are increasing. Other allies of the government are not at all vocal on this issue. The government maintained that the price of oil in the world market was high and it had to be increased in the local market.

It seems the government does not know that the income level of our people is much lower than what it is in the developed countries. Otherwise, it would have thought in terms of some other measures, instead of going for the easy solution raising the prices of oil.

Taslim Hasan
University of Dhaka

This is in reply to Mr. Shadabul Mujib's message (Hindu Extremism, The Daily Star, October 11) and his uninformed generalisations regarding Bangladeshi Hindus and several incorrect assertions.

Mr. Mujib claims that "not a single Bangladeshi Hindu" condemned the demolition of Babri Masjid. I would like to go on record, as former General Secretary of Dakkhin Chattogram Puja Ujjan Samity back in the early 1990s, that I sent on behalf of our organisation a press declaration (signed by over 100 local members, all Bangladeshi Hindus like myself) to the local and national newspapers protesting this heinous act in India, demanding the mosque be rebuilt and that Indian Muslims be protected by the Indian government after the riots that broke out. I can remember that there were many similar statements and petitions (e.g. from Kendriya Puja Ujjan Parishad, Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad etc). In front of Dhakeswari National Temple in Dhaka, led by the late Sukanta Saha, a human chain was formed demanding justice for minorities in India. Bangladeshi Hindu politicians including Mr Suranjit Sengupta of the Awami League and Mr Goyeshwar Chandra Roy of BNP had also strongly condemned the action. These are not secrets; the national newspapers all covered this. The prime minister, then also Begum Zia, went on television to say that not a single Bangladeshi Hindu was involved in the events in India, and appreciated that Bangladeshi Hindus had played a commendable role in condemning the events in India. Did Mr. Mujib not see any of this?

I do not have enough information about the BSF killings that Mr Mujib also brings up. But I can say that I personally know of at least one Hindu family who lost a son in border firing by the BSF. His name was Subrata Kundu, and he died in October 2003 after being shot on his way to his shop near the Akhaura border. Ten per cent Bangladeshis are Hindu; it is quite likely that around 10% of those killed

by BSF are also Hindu. In fact the number may be higher, as in Khulna, Sylhet, Chittagong and Comilla border areas, the number of Hindus is often higher than the national average. Why is it necessary to communalise such a situation?

So, Mr. Mujib has presented gross misrepresentations that can lead to misunderstandings between the amicable Hindu and Muslim people of our country. Either he has not conducted any research, or he is intentionally trying to create divisions at a critical time in our country. Living in America, he may not be aware of how delicate a balance those of us actually living in Bangladesh are all trying to maintain in our day to day lives. Those who are sincere about building prosperity and progress for our motherland will not indulge in such intellectual crimes. Particularly during the sacred time of Ramadan and Durga Puja when the spirit of fraternity and joyousness is at its highest, this kind of misinformation must be protested.

Sanjoy Kumar Nath
Chittagong

Traffic jam and Scholastica

This is in reference to the letter by Mr. Anis Rahman of the University of Dhaka published on 5 October '05. Mr. Rahman complains about the traffic jam outside the Scholastica School in Uttara. Has he toured the city to check on the horrendous traffic jam outside Viqarunnessa School, Holy Cross, Sunnydale, Sunbeams and for that matter any school in the city with a large number of students?

Again he complains that the school does not have a parking lot. Which school in town does? Mr. Rahman is living in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and talking in terms of America & England!

Ms. Itrat M. Rahman
Management, Scholastica
Uttara, Dhaka



Street children

PHOTO:AFP

Whenever we have to stop at a signal point of the streets in Dhaka city, we always find little girls and boys ready with their goods to sell. Most of them come to us to sell flowers. We also see them selling books, newspapers, chocolates, food items, towels, toys, essential commodities etc. For the last few years, a new way of earning some money has been invented, that is, cleaning dust from the cars! Most of the

children are below 10 years. It's very pathetic.

These children have to earn their bread by themselves at such an early age, when it is their time to play and live with their parents.

What should we do for them? How long our government will remain silent or blind towards them?

Tuhin Rahman
Malibagh, Dhaka

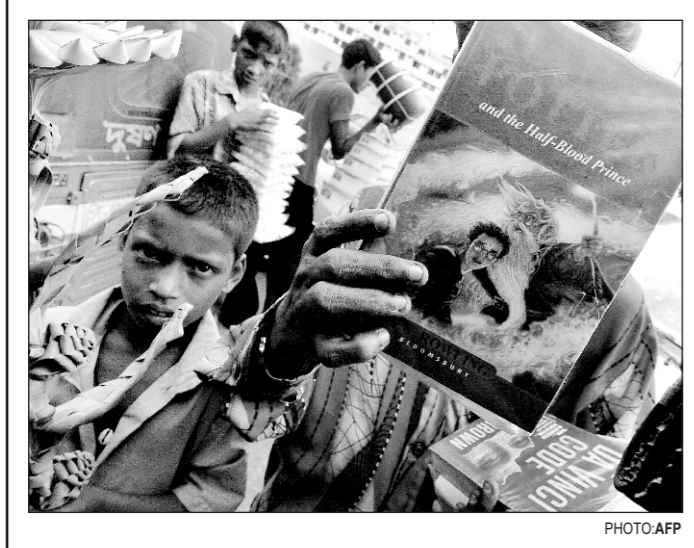


PHOTO:AFP

Based on my experience during my stay in Bahrain on employment for over 17 years, I discovered that government offices work five days a week and bank & business observe six week days. I believe the same is true about most of the Gulf countries. Banking is a vital sector of the economy of Bahrain, considering its geographical location. I simply cannot imagine that our banks will remain closed for two days.

Can't we follow the economic principles of the said countries that are employers of our foreign-currency earner expatriate workers? Public holidays in Bahrain are as follows:

business by any definition remains controversial all the time.

In this context, I also discover that newspapers are available every day in the Gulf countries, regardless of holidays, unlike in our country where we have enough time to read newspapers and are without newspapers. I am afraid too many holidays and hartals (unique in the world) will cripple our national economy, whatever ideology we follow.

Thomas Gomes Bhura
Monipuripara, Dhaka

Improve quality of printing

In the 1950's, with great pleasure and

Plight of people

It is a very common scene every evening during the month of Ramadan that people returning home have to struggle a lot to get into buses. Is there any solution to this problem? At more or less the same time all the offices close, all the people come out and they have to fight hard to get into buses or other transports. Ramadan is a month of purity, restraint, self-control etc. But every day all these people have to end their daylong fasting with a struggle, only because a sufficient number of vehicles are not available.

The authorities concerned should look into the matter.

Zishan Rahman
Dhaka



PHOTO:AFP