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Save the farmers



Bangladesh is a country where most of the people live in villages. But farming, the main source of the villagers' income, is in big trouble now. Mismanagement and incompetence of the ministries concerned have affected boro cultivation. During boro cultivation, farmers badly need proper irrigation which depends on diesel or electricity supply. But the present government totally failed to provide diesel and electricity to the boro farmers. Some people were killed at Kanshat in Chapainawabganj in the disturbance that followed demonstrations. According to your report, "At least 25 fertiliser-hungry farmers were injured in police action in Sherpur as they became agitated when some influential people were taking fertiliser by-passing the queue of the poor farmers." And in Shatkhira farmers started a hunger strike to protest non-availability of fertilisers. We, the people, are demanding that the government resolve the crisis as soon as possible.

Shohel Khan Rajib
West Sanarpur, Demra, Dhaka

Opposition leader's stand

We are really surprised by the words of opposition leader Sheikh Hasina concerning the arrest of the most wanted terrorist Shaikh Abdur Rahman. Instead of praising the law enforcing agents for their success, she is saying that "It is a pre-planned drama" to divert people's attention from the proposed reform in caretaker government, Election Commission etc. When people all over the country are jubilant, she could not say a few positive words, what a pity! People will not like it at all, they may even think that Sheikh Hasina is not happy that the leader of JMB has been captured and people are going to feel secure. The opposition leader has disappointed us by failing to appreciate the government move.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Election pledges

By politics, I mean not conspiracies or intrigues but serving the people with dedication. The election pledges of any party should be as follows:

1. Uproot bombers and terrorists.
2. Minimise corruption.
3. Stop hartal by law.
4. Stop long absence of MPs from parliament by law.
5. Declare Saturdays and Sundays as weekly holidays.
6. Supply fertilisers to farmers in time, if necessary on subsidy.
7. Make long-term plans for poverty alleviation.
8. Retain the old system of education at SSC level, instead of the new unitary system.
9. Hold general elections of parliament by the incumbent government like all other democratic countries of the world and repeal the caretaker government system composed mostly of advisers controversial to one party or the other.

Parties contesting in the next general elections may incorporate the above pledges in their election manifestos.

Syed Nesaruddin Hossain
Uttara, Dhaka

Management of ports

Recently, I had the opportunity of passing through the international airport of Dhaka and felt so bad. Let alone providing comfort, the airport doesn't provide the minimum facilities that the passengers need. One will have the impression that there is no management. Dhaka and Chittagong airports are infamous for smuggling, transfer of cash foreign currency, pilferage of home bound passengers' belongings etc. The domestic airports are no exception. There is no alternative to placement of management of airports to private or foreign management companies as the airports serve as mirror of the country. To encourage foreign investors and greater number of tourists in the country, the UPA Government of India has recently reached an agreement with a private sector consortium for management of New Delhi and Mumbai airports and upon observing their performance other imports shall be handed over in phases. The US government had many years ago transferred management of both air and seaports to private management, of which a British Company named Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Co. Ltd (P&O) has been managing six seaports including New York. The P&O has recently been sold to Dubai Ports World, a company owned by the government of UAE. The company has not yet taken over management of those seaports but both Democrat and Republican Senators have already suggested cancellation of the contract as they fear security of their country might be jeopardized owing to management of Vital Ports by a Muslim State.

The reasons for transfer of management are very simple. All the governments are mainly trying to ensure private sector participation to help the country grow rapidly reducing workload of the governments and combat corruption. In the process, revenue earnings of the governments grow which in turn could be utilised for development of infrastructures. The government in order to create an ideal situation for foreign investment as a test case, signed an agreement with Thai Airlines for management of Chittagong airport but could not deliver physical possession due to resistance by a section of officials fearing loss of jobs supported by a powerful political lobby. Recently, the Chittagong Port Authority held a meeting with Port labour leaders and Port Dock Workers and Employees Association for preparation of international tender documents for appointment of a company for management and operation of the new container terminal at Chittagong. Immediately came objection from the Mayor who threatened to shut down activities of the port if management of the container terminal was transferred to a private management group. As an elected representative, the Honourable Mayor should carefully consider the situation and support activities that are development-friendly.

Rezaul Huq
Lalmatia, Dhaka



"Shangkhnad"

Bangladeshi film producers are making good films. The latest 'Shangkhnad' by Abu Sayeed is a good example of the quality films being produced here. The plot of the film is based on a very conventional element of our society. The story developed from the family feud over land and a hair-raising killing for usurpation triggers it. The film ends up encapsulating various themes of the age, which are everlasting, such as selfishness, religious hypocrisy and survival of the fittest. All these are wreathed up in celluloid adroitly, no doubt. Fazlu, an impetuous youth lives by stealing, wanted to be a dacoit, but circumstances made him a thief of burial-cloth. Perhaps,

his witnessing of torturing of the have-nots by the rich at village level might have helped him to shape this bandit career. But his aim fell flat. The sky of his reality is not detached from the hundreds of downtrodden. The existing social system cannot afford to procure two square meals for them— let alone materialising any dream. Surely, the movie has the potential to attract conscious viewers.

Abdullah-al-Mujahid
English, DU

Identity crisis

I read the article 'Overcoming identity crisis' by AK Abedur Rahman. He writes 'As I will make an attempt to focus on the identity crisis of the people of Bangladesh, I will critically

examine the role of religion, language and culture towards the formation of nationhood. What makes me confused here is in culture study and in anthropology, in particular, culture doesn't seem separate from 'religion' and 'language'. Gustav Klemm offered in the mid-19th century an extremely modern definition of culture as 'custom, information, and skills, domestic and public life in peace and war, religion science and art...it is manifest in the transmission of past experience to the new generation. Tylor in 1871 said, "Capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." He also writes, "The creation of Bangladesh on the basis of Bengali nationalism was characterised by

changes in their socio-economic and cultural activities, affecting their day-to-day life. Bangladesh consists of 68 thousand villages inhabited mostly by semi-literate and illiterate people. They constitute 80 per cent of total population. Religious sentiments are strong among these people. Bangladesh whose foundation was also based on secularism is nowadays witnessing the 'consequences' of bringing religion into political arena." We are turning a blind eye to our national values. Unfortunate is the nation whose history is distorted.

Roney
On e-mail

Endangered plant

In Bangladesh presently we are losing a good number species of trees or plants which are endangered due to the deteriorating ecological balance. I was just a couple of weeks ago that I was delighted after seeing the 'Daud Mordan' - (local name), an attractive shrub on the premises of the Dhaka University Botany Department Plants Conservation Centre in Curzon Hall area. Though we locally called it 'Daud Mordan' but it is popularly known as Candle Bush as well as Seven Golden Candlesticks. Its scientific name is Senna alata, Cassia alata and family name Caesalpinioideae / Caesalpiniaceae. The tree usually grows up to 3 metre. Leaves are simple pinnate and fold together at night. The use of the tree in our country as a medicinal plant is common. It is widely used to cure skin diseases. Its boiled leaves are also used to treat high-blood pressure. Its leaves are used to treat fungal infections such as ringworm.

Mirza Shamim Ahasan Habib
On e-mail

Drug addiction

Drug addiction is not a new phenomenon in the history of criminal activities in Bangladesh. Though it was a limited problem in the early nineties, in the recent times the rapidly increasing number of addicted youths proves that it is spreading all over the country. The adolescents are the first victims of this illegal and destructive booming business. A few years back Bangladesh was identified as a transit point for drug traffickers and not as a major user country. Considering the social values and norms, religious mindset and massive poverty of common people the drug traffickers did not think seriously to expand their market in this country. But the cheap prices of phensidyl attract the youngsters and it was a profitable item for drug peddlers. Now all the types of expensive and cheap drugs are available in the luxury flats to dirty slums. Drug market has passed its first stage of establishing networks

and now old customers are motivating freshers to buy and take drugs. Consequently, the parents of young sons and daughters are so much worried about their future. The drug peddlers have already captured the educational institutions as their promising business area. In general, the young people are very enthusiastic about taking anything new. If drug peddlers can convince one young student, it is possible to get a large number of students through him. In this context, the real substance abuse scenario in our higher educational institutions like universities can be mentioned. At night, academic buildings of universities are the safe places for taking drugs. The sentries are helpless to prevent the addicts due to the threat posed by the derailed addicted students. This reality is common to almost all public universities in Bangladesh. The prevailing situation is deteriorating rapidly due to inaction on the part of the government and the civil society. It is reported that in some cases the government employees are engaged in facilitating the drug business. Most of the guardians are not so conscious about their children's movement and with whom they are mixing. This generation is very fast and technical by virtue of modern technology, while their parents are in the dark regarding this matter. Timely steps can check such activities. Otherwise, the lives of a huge number of youths will be totally ruined.

Shamsul Alam Monir
Eskaton Garden, Dhaka

DS sports news

I am a regular reader of DS sports pages. Normally, the sports section consists of two pages and one of them contains only European Football League news like Spanish, English, French, Italian and German League. On the other hand, the other page contains sports events from both home and abroad like international cricket, national cricket, tennis, national football etc. It seems unusual that being a newspaper of a cricket crazy country, DS has only one page for cricket and still it has to split its space with other sports events. European League, about which even many educated people of our country hardly show any interest is receiving great coverage with every ins and outs and hefty sized pictures. Sometimes the news of European League gets more space than Bangladesh national cricket/football team performances. By going through this section we come to know what Pele said about Ronaldo or which player uttered his desire to fix which club, but it's very hard to find out news about many national events like National chess championship. Chess is one of the few games that is bringing international fame for our nation on a regular basis. But as the leading daily newspaper, DS allows very modest space for different national and international chess events, which in fact disheartens many chess fans of the country. I hope you will pay due attention to the readers' demands.

Shamsul Arefin
Nikunja-2, Dhaka

Looking forward

We want to see the same victory in our financial field, boosting the telecom industry, stepping forward to clear the blockage in adopting fiber optic backbone. Hail the Rapid Action Battalion for apprehending Bangla Bhai and his cohorts. That was an example of overlooking problems hiding in our society for a long period of time. Bangla Bhai is a social menace that went unnoticed for a long time because of our ignorance. Same sort of ignorance still prevails in other socio-economic sectors of Bangladesh. We IT fellows and expatriates working abroad, sucking the marrow out of our bones to collect money and to remit back to homeland, sometimes just look back to see the future of our motherland. What is really happening there back home? What is really happening to the policy aiming at building an ICT-driven nation? What happened to the pledge of building a country-wide ICT-infrastructure to ensure the access to information of every citizen to facilitate empowerment of people and to safeguard democratic values and norms for sustainable economic development? BTB has taken up the project to

Jatka

TRADE

It was an excellent report on the subject by your reporter Mr. Julfikar Ali Manik on 19 March 2006, for the hilsa is the king of all fish, an icon of Bangla cuisine, bet it the choice of the generally poor rural folks or the elite urbanites. Our children begin to learn about this wonderful fish from their text books in class II or III or even earlier, specially the unusual breeding pattern. So mass awareness is there on this unique fish and the criminality of trading in Jatka. We then need to examine if an ordinance is in place which allows for full protection of this riverine resource. As has already been pointed out in your report, hilsa landing rate at Barisal has fallen drastically by nearly 11,000 tons in just over 4 years. Nearly 1.5 tons of Jatka arrive in Shoarighat market of Dhaka city every day. Converted in terms of decrease in earning due to fall in the fish landing rate and selling size, the amount is of considerable magnitude in the fisheries sector. Jatka is available between January through May, and it is in abundance during March-April. With this condition is it not possible to prohibit fishing (Jatka and other fish fry) during these months? Heavy fine may be imposed on the violators. This may require review and re-examination of the fishing rights of the very poor who definitely must be protected under a rehabilitation scheme, particularly during these months. During the annual fisheries promotion week in the country the following slogan may be adopted: "Sell no Jatka, buy no Jatka, eat no Jatka".

Farida S., On e-mail



Bangladesh and its future

You can positively think that Bangladesh has the potential and can achieve 10 percent GDP growth. The trickle down effect will be enormous. It may not move the teeming millions, but certainly a bigger portion will graduate to middle class. You can also think that it is not going to happen within the next few years. Certainly, it is not only hartal that is impairing the prospects, but many other factors like corruption, imprudence, inefficiency, and poor education are playing their due roles. Recently, we saw the media also joining the band wagon, but it is my profound belief that since the upper middle class control our media, who have a greater stake in the economy, they are trying to safeguard their business hours or assets, not much beyond that. For their competitiveness and progress, as they grow, they have to take a hard stance against malpractice in business, but only after the gestation period is over. Big and settled businesses are crying for transparency and rule of law. Had the media taken a proper stance, our politics would have been much cleaner. Should we suffer and perish? No. Write to your editors and let them know what you feel about their writings and help mobilise opinion in your favour and against all unproductive issues and social malaise. Try it consistently and you will succeed.

M M Haque, Jeddah, K.S.A

