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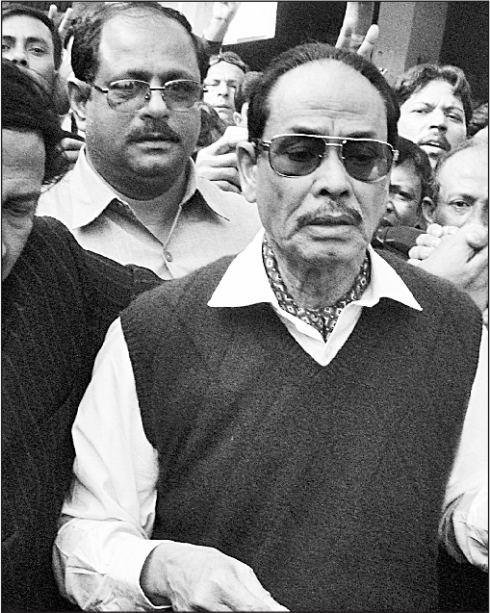
Violence against women

This has reference to the report “6054 women tortured, killed in 2006” (DS, January 12, 2007). I was shocked while reading the report. I wonder whether Bangladesh has any law to protect the vulnerable women.

Md. Badiuzzaman Tamal, JU

Ershad factor

We wonder why many people like to call HM Ershad an autocrat. A person is to be judged by his deeds. Ershad was an established ‘doer’. We ought to evaluate and praise his contributions to the state and people of Bangladesh. The following achievements of Ershad are worth taking note. Ershad took pragmatic measures for construction of the Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge. He transformed the dream of North Bengal people into reality. He introduced the pro-people Upazila system. Only empowerment of the local bodies can generate real development activities in small towns



and rural areas. The historic measure was scrapped at the instigation of power hungry MPs, much to the detriment of the rural people. The Upazila system would have been much more streamlined in the last 15 years and more development would have taken places in the rural areas. There would have been less urban migration of people.

A pro-poor health policy was enacted by HM Ershad, which was sabotaged by vested medical consultants’ group. West Bengal and many other countries have benefited immensely from this kind of health policy. Ershad sent a few battalions of soldiers to aid US troops in the Gulf War, which paved the ways for bigger contribution of the Bangladesh Army in UN peacekeeping missions. This measure has earned millions for the Soldiers and the Armed forces.

A pro-Bangladesh drug policy was introduced. We can see the positive effects of the same now. Our pharmaceutical industries are meeting needs of the country and also exporting to Europe, Africa, Asia and Americas. Tremendous developments in the infrastructure, manufacturing, industries etc. took place during Ershad’s regime. People of Bangladesh got the real taste of money during his period. So, even now majority of the people believe that they were better off during Ershad’s rule and that’s why Ershad remains a factor in our politics.

SN Mamoon
On e-mail

AL politics

The Awami League succeeded in deceiving the middle class for long that it believed in secularism, non-communal politics and sustains the ideals of liberal humanism. Nothing is far from truth. Actually it is a communal party like the BNP-Jamaat alliance. The talk of secularism, non-communalism and opposition to religion in politics were just demagoguery and crafted to draw Hindu votes and earn respectability in the eyes of liberal humanist intellectuals of the country and in the west. It’s really surprising that it managed to appear in such a garb before the liberal humanist intellectuals who in their mistaken belief supported the party. But now the Awami League has the honesty to come out in its true colours. We must thank Hasina for this decision. The liberal humanists, however disappointed, shouldn’t lose heart. They must organise a party of their own and stand on their feet instead of blindly supporting the Awami League.

Those who are protesting such misdemeanour by the Awami League should recall 1996 when it took the Jamaat in its wings. The Awami League never assisted Jahanara Imam and kept distance from Ekatturer GDNC. Neither it sympathised with Taslima Nasreen in 1994 when Mulla Habibur Rahman of Sylhet was demanding her head for blasphemy. Now Hasina has nominated this Bengali Mulla Omar for the Parliament! The BNP was far more judicious than Awami League in treating Taslima. Nor did the BNP agreed to Jamaat’s demand to enact the blasphemy law. The first Awami League government had the opportunity to scrap the Enemy Properties Act, but it did not. In persecuting Hindus the AL is not far behind the BNP-Jamaat.

It appears that the Awami League has frittered away whatever sympathy it had drawn to it in the last five years BNP-Jamaat misrule by this single act of siding with Fatwawallahs. However it cannot expect to win in the election under the existing set-up.

Abu Sufiyan
Lalmatia, Dhaka

School books

I have a one-year old child and am planning ahead to find a suitable school for my kid. Now the fashion is English medium school where books published abroad are used. Can’t we publish books in English with contents of our own?

Can’t you initiate a campaign in this respect?
Shammu
On e-mail

Monumental mistakes

I summarise the mistakes committed by President Iajuddin Ahmed.

a) He, being a member of a certain political party, assumed the position of CA violating the constitution, thus the concept of a non-party impartial caretaker administration was nipped in the bud. b) In violation of the constitution he sought political parties’ nominations for appointment of Advisers, which defeated the purpose of forming an impartial caretaker government. c) He wasted unnecessary time in asking the controversial CEC to go on leave or resign and committed further wilful blunder by appointing two new Commissioners who also belonged to his own political party. d) He held all the important portfolios himself and bypassed the Advisors many times in taking very important decisions, perhaps at the instance of his party e) He deployed the Armed Forces on the streets without any necessity and without consulting his Advisors f) His continuous disregard of the Advisors led to the resignation of four Advisors. g) He miserably failed to address the issues such as, reforming the EC and the administration and to free those institutions from the influence of his party. h) He miserably failed in making arrangement for preparation of a correct voter list, which is a prerequisite for holding a fair and transparent election.

Shapan Biswas
On e-mail

Shaheed Asad

There was no front page news on Shaheed Asad on January 20. I think the great martyr deserves such coverage. Have we forgotten him after only 38 years?

Help us learn our own history and keep up the spirit of liberation.
Abdullah Rakeeb
Dhaka

The caption says it all

The photo caption in the 22 January issue of The Daily Star showing the BNP office left unharmed during demolition of illegal structures at Karwan Bazar speaks how deeply politics has been rooted even into the mind of our law enforcers and mocks the ongoing clean-up program. Can anybody tell me why the BNP office structure was left unharmed (I have nothing to say if it is legal) when all illegal structures on both sides of it were demolished? It was either out of sympathy of the law enforcers involved in demolition due to mere political allegiance to the party or due to a direct order from the top brass.

Whatever might be the case, it is not expected of the law enforcers engaged in the drive against crime and corruption.

Capt. Hasnat
Chittagong



Through 9/11 the US attained an unwritten licence to go on operations sabotaging humanity in the name of war against terrorism with the policy of ‘Give the dog a bad name and then hang it’. At present they are so influential that they can invade any sovereign country any time. The tormented humanity cries or screams or protests in pain. The development and advancement of US particularly is standing on the drops of blood and tears of humanity. After September 11, they, on their maiden invasion on Afghanistan, killed many civilians

including innocent children and women and are doing the same in Iraq where the people of this hapless country feel that Saddam was better for them.

On the other hand, Palestinians who have been fighting to be resettled in their own territory, are being blamed as terrorists.

It is now clear like anything that the US can only destroy peace. Its mission cannot achieve any other goal.

M Ala Uddin Ansary
Zahurul Haque Hall, DU

A hapless country

I wonder if there is no man in this hapless country called Bangladesh to ask the AL leaders how they could hold the entire population hostage to their whims. Isn’t there anyone to ask how can some people rob citizens of

their livelihoods while they themselves while away a life of utter luxury? Isn’t there anyone to ask how can the party play with the lives of people (just to regain power to start plundering once again), destroy vehicles,

uproot railway lines, disrupt ferry services, halt ports activities etc.?

We are happy to learn that order has been restored by the new caretaker government.
Ali, Doha, Qatar

Dr. Yunus on politicians

Both the major political parties (AL, BNP) have reacted sharply to the criticism of Dr. Yunus over what he said to the AFP and printed in the media here on “money grabbing” as the main objective of politicians in Bangladesh. While pervasive corruption has been accepted as a way of life it is for the first time that Dr. Yunus identified politicians with the malady that seems to have put the nation at great risk of ruin. Many others have written about how politics has destroyed important national institutions in the field of education, judiciary, police and the bureaucracy. It is known that such a state of affairs cannot go on without patronage by politicians with the intention to stay in power by any means. In this connection it may be worthwhile to mention what Edmond Burke said at the time of writing of the US constitution in 1780 given pervasive corruption in the countries from which people came to the USA. “Among a people generally corrupt, liberty cannot long exist”, he wrote. The current political crisis has exactly brought the country to the condition of some loss of liberty under the emergency rule which naturally the people welcomed with a sigh of relief.

Sharp reactions from the political parties must be followed by full disclosure by those politicians who would like to be excluded from the general comment made by Dr. Yunus on money making as the main political goal. Let’s get it clean once and for all, now that the motive has been brought to the open by the media. That is what chief Justice Brandeis of the US Supreme Court wrote about media exposure: “Sunshine is the best of disinfectants”. The poor people of this land of ours have suffered enormously in the hands of corrupt politicians for a long time. Dr. Yunus, the champion of the poor, has rightly pointed out the curse in the society that is holding back promise of growth as outlined in the MDG by the UN.

Since people are the masters of the country and Dr. Yunus has spoken for the people, politicians must act to come out clean by disclosing their wealth. It is my

belief that not many will give such disclosures.

Prof. Dr. M. Shamsul Haque
Vice Chancellor
Northern University, Bangladesh

I am a Bangladeshi and have been living in Japan for more than two decades. During this long period I encountered many Japanese from different walks of life. The overall image of the ordinary Japanese about our country is that Bangladesh is a country of flood and corruption. Every one of us knows that Bangladesh is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Who are responsible for making this country corrupt? Are we, those living abroad, responsible for it? Or the peasants who live from hand to mouth? It is very clear that the politicians are responsible for the mess. I of course believe that there are some honest politicians. They might be honest in their personal life. They may not take any bribe but they do not complain when some members of their parties take it. Therefore they have to share the blame.

Wherever you go, you have to pay some amount of money in the name of “bokshish”. I had a fixed account in central post office, Dhaka. I went to the post office to withdraw some money from my account in August, 06. The person-in-charge told me that he had no time to handle my account on that day. My brother-in-law was there with me. I authorised my account to him. He went to the post office the following day. But the same officer told him that the account holder must come, or pay some money!

The politicians should learn how to perform their job more efficiently, earning money shouldn’t be their sole objective.

Mokhlesur Rahman, Fukuoka city, Japan

Many of our political leaders seem to have been very deeply offended by Dr. Yunus’ statement that politics is driven by money and not ideology. This is not a new statement; newspaper columnists have said similar things for years. They have hardly bothered our politicians or deterred them

from their usual way of conducting business. Now, for the first time, we see a strong response. This is likely due to the enormous influence and prestige that Dr. Yunus enjoys throughout this country. Perhaps there is an element of fear that this influence can actually impact politicians adversely.

I believe Dr. Yunus spoke for the overwhelming majority in the country. Even die-hard fans of each political party readily admit this and think of their own party as the least worst of all the options. To be fair, there are a few good politicians who are driven by the mission of public service; but they are few and far between and one has to look hard to find more than a handful in important decision-making positions in the past elected governments. Who can deny with a straight face that the vast majority of politicians, including those who had important decision making portfolios in the past governments fit Dr. Yunus’ characterization quite well. Who can deny the takeover of student factions of each party by the few corrupt individuals looking to get a cut?

Turning to the subject of ideology, I would like to ask: what kind of ideological mooring does a party have that is willing to sacrifice its secular credentials to make a deal with bigots just to get to power? What is the ideology that drives the two major parties to court a corrupt former despot, reportedly with large sums of money? There are numerous examples reported in newspapers. Suffering during the liberation war, pointed out by a politician, is not unique to them; many common people in the country

suffered similar fates. In any case, personal sufferings do not entitle anyone to a proprietary attitude towards the country.

It is true that corruption is by no means limited to politicians only. It has affected all sections of the society. However, if we are to move to a better future, it is imperative that focus should be on those who control policies. Political leaders of the major parties need to look themselves in the mirror, instead of trying to deflect criticism elsewhere.

Their criticism of Grameen interest rates holds no water since it is well known that this institution is self-reliant and owned by the borrowers themselves. The best thing that can come out of this episode, I hope, is that the major political parties are so offended by Dr. Yunus’ characterization that they will stop giving nominations to the most corrupt politicians and thugs



in the coming elections.
Saleh Ahmed Tanveer
Professor of Mathematics
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

I fully support Prof. Yunus’ statement on the Bangladeshi politicians’ greed for power to make money. People of Bangladesh also have the same view. I find the BNP and the AL have at last agreed to join hands to give statements against Prof. Yunus.

Prof. Yunus has done the impossible! I heartily congratulate him. He should continue hitting them with more and more truths to bring them closer.

Why are the politicians angry at Prof. Yunus’ statement? After all if someone says, “People of Bangladesh are poor”, no

one says a word against it though there are many rich people in Bangladesh. Nobody raises a finger if someone states, “People of Bangladesh are malnourished”, though there are many overfed and bloated people in this country.

When it is an accepted fact that the overwhelming majority of politicians work only for money, I find absolutely nothing wrong in Prof. Yunus’ very well thought out remarks. It will only help the few honest ones in politics gather moral courage to fight against the corrupt.

Shahjahan Hafiz, Gulshan, Dhaka

Nobel laureate and banker to the poor Professor Yunus made some pointed comments about our politicians to an international news agency recently. He basically said our politicians are there only for making money. This basically reflects what majority of the people thinks about them and obviously they appreciated the professor for being so outright. Unfortunately, it hurt the sentiments of the politicians and both the major party general secretaries found it unacceptable, regrettable and his negative attitude towards politics as a whole worries them.

But ask the people on the street, they will agree with the professor. After reading all the inside stories of how the nomination for the cancelled election were sold and bought by political parties, you can’t blame the people for thinking that way.

There may be very few honest politicians but they are totally devoured by the dirt we call power politics. They are so insignificant that they make no difference in the bigger picture of decision making, otherwise we won’t be having a system called ‘caretaker government’ every 5 years, nor such a mess as we recently had with the past chief adviser and his advisers. Anyway, if the morning shows the day then the present group of advisers seems to be on the right track and forging ahead towards ensuring a stable system for the election process to be free, fair and credible so that whoever wants can participate in it and doesn’t need to have black money or hordes of mastans to be the campaigners.

The nation can’t afford to waste time every 5 years and in between to come up with a system so that the transfer of power takes place transparently, peacefully and democratically. Now there is an opportunity to get the system corrected. I think the people are ready to allow the present chief adviser and his colleagues the time and space to come up with 1.) An independent Election Commission (just like the caretaker advisers are formed with neutral people). 2.) A national identity card system and an accurate voter list. 3.) Thus ensuring a system for a free, fair and credible election to be held every 5 years to elect a new government.

Professor Yunus, keep on sailing!
Akku Chowdhury, Banani, Dhaka

As reported in your daily on 20 Jan. 07, for the honest and upright comment by Noble laureate Prof. Yunus, Mr. Bhuiyan and Mr. Jalil poured in all sorts of derogatory remarks.

Almost all the politicians in Bangladesh, who have amassed wealth by corrupt means, entered politics to acquire power and money and there are many criminals and murderers amongst them. Our political leaders should think twice before criticising people who are known to be honest and efficient.

MA Gafur Howlader, London

Prof. Yunus’ comment on the money-making propensity of Bangladeshi politicians has evoked a sharp reaction from the major political parties. Prof. Yunus’ remark “Bangladesh’s politicians are in politics only for money” was no doubt a sweeping one. But can anyone deny that most of the politicians are propelled by the intention of making money alone? Did the so called honest politicians ever raise their voice against the corrupt majority?

We are happy that the politicians have been removed from the dictating position, but we are worried about the future of our country.

Sharif Ahmad, Advocate, Dhaka