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Eviction is not enough

Evictions from the banks of rivers surrounding Dhaka city launched almost after every changeover and occasionally in between are an old popular stunt. Appreciated by all but the victims, evictions remain limited to only dismantling the illegal structures, the common contentment indeed evaporates soon after. The question that arises is, why this eviction and what follows it?

The riverbanks are frequently

trespassed and illegally occupied chiefly by the political muscle men. Such eviction usually produce no results. Then why is this expensive futile operation? The argument, in the first place, is that the illegal structures on the riverbanks must be removed. The second logic is to bring the rivers back to hydraulic forms.

The environmental activists have all along been keen to create awareness amongst people, but successive governments have failed in their mission of recovering the rivers from the hands of encroachers. Eviction should not be focused on dismantling illegal structures only; rather its objective should be the reclamation of rivers. Reclamation is not just bringing back its geometric configuration disrupted and knocked out of hydraulic equilibrium but a river's structural and functional return to pre-

disturbance state. So merely recreating the form without the function or functions in an artificial configuration bearing little resemblances shall not constitute river reclamation. Reclamation has wrongly been translated into and limited to eviction. The variables that maintain rivers are its discharge, width, depth, velocity, slope, channel roughness, bed load size, and bed load volume. A living stream is in a continuous state of adjustment for attaining a condition of dynamic equilibrium by balancing these variables within a wide range of natural variability. It is thus impractical to reclaim a river completely to its virgin state with reference to time. Evictions may only be the precedent to saving the rivers culminating in water management.

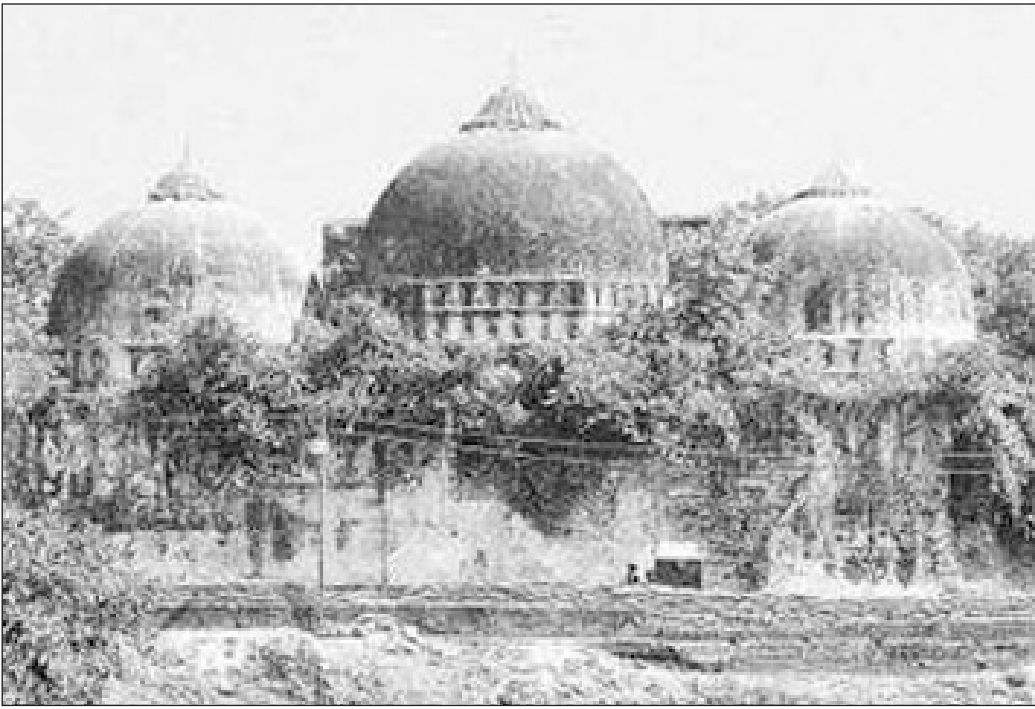
Md. Saeedur Rahman
Former Chief Engineer of BWDB

I like to appreciate one of the articles published today (4 Feb 2007) in the "Star City" captioned "Where is our footpath?" I have a habit of taking a long walk in the evening every day as I do not get time to do so in the morning. I live in Lalmatia and I normally walk along the footpath of Satmasjid Road to

the Rifle Square and back. It was only yesterday I was wondering while walking that Dhaka city is free from vendors on footpaths but all the multi-story markets, hospitals, even fast food outlets, car showrooms and small stores have occupied the footpaths for their parking space. They even put their own personal tiles on footpaths to mark their ownership for that portion of the footpath. I could not walk on the footpath and I had to walk almost through the middle of the road as the parked cars and rickshaws occupied half the road after the footpath car park. There are almost 50 places or more starting from Road # 27 (old) to BDR gate where footpath is being used as parking space on both sides of the road.

When I opened the paper today I was so happy to see the report on this. It was easy to evict the vendors from the footpaths but we want to see that the law is equal for everybody and nobody is above it. I thank The Daily Star for the report and wish to see more comprehensive reports on the issue covering the whole city.

Mohammad Monirul Hassan
Lalmatia, Dhaka



Will Babri Mosque be rebuilt?

Recently, a delegation from Pakistani Archaeological Survey sent by President Musharraf visited India and met Indian leaders including the BJP leader Mr. L.K. Advani. They submitted a detailed plan for renovation work on Hindu temples in Pakistan. Though not very clear, it seems the Indian government might also be considering measures of reciprocation to reconstruct the grand Babri Mosque at Ayodhya, demolished in 1992 by the Hindu fanatic terrorists (non-terrorists?) led by Advani -- and misguided by hollow emotionalism. Of course, later Advani did repent for that barbarous act of arson at Ayodhya. (Before the demolition, the government of India, in order to "justify" the ultimate destruction of Babri Mosque, was clever enough to call Babri Mosque a "structure" that could be destroyed just like that).

It is time to think of positive steps of reconstruction of religious places and enhance across-the-border ties between peoples -- the beginning for that has already been made from both sides. Without looking back, Indo-Pakistan relations should be further straightened. Hopefully, the delegation of Pakistan has impressed the Indian government to pursue reconstruction of Babri Mosque earnestly at the site where it stood before, as promised by the then federal Congress government when the Mosque was demolished. Even if it has not, the government of India should initiate steps to rebuild and "rediscover" Babri Masjid and help people in the country as well as across the borders live harmoniously.

Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal
JNU, New Delhi

VoIP

I am a Bangladeshi living abroad. I think the government of Bangladesh should legalise VoIP like every other country. We cannot communicate with our family through phone cards as the VoIP providers are being chased by the law enforcers. Well, if their business is illegal, do something to legalise it!

Ranak
Canada

We live abroad but our beloved parents and other relatives stay in Bangladesh. We talk with them at night and holidays, but from Jan 15, 2007 we are unable to call anybody in Bangladesh. I talked with all my friends living abroad and they are facing the same problem.

I understand illegal VoIP connections have forced the government to ban such operations. But the government should not forget that telecommunications with other countries must be restored and the only way to do so is to legalise the VoIP.

The matter deserves a closer look as Bangladeshis living abroad cannot communicate with their families and relatives at the moment.

Chowdhury Ziaur Rahman
Malaysia

Miseries of the masses

Under the auspices of the new caretaker government, a drive is going on to clean up the city. This drive which includes the eviction of the shanties, slums and other makeshift structures has earned the appreciation of the citizens to whom those structures were blots in the cityscape. They can now walk freely on the sidewalks, which were cluttered with temporary shops selling cheap clothes, fruits, and other commodities. It is the people of the low-income group that used

to frequent those shops.

But the eviction of slums is a different matter as it involves a human factor. Before demolishing those flimsy abodes the authorities should think about the ill-fated inmates. They are condemned to a life of misery, pain and perpetual suffering. They are literally made to live in the cesspool and they do not get the basic things like clean water, electricity and so on. No doubt the recent eviction drive will further worsen their ordeal.

We expect a pro-people administration. Being a democracy, the state should bother about the miseries of people.

Zabed Wai
Paharitali, Chittagong

A true Bengali

I have received the following email from a friend in Dhaka. I think I should share his thoughts with all others in Bangladesh.

"Amidst the almost all-pervading darkness that I (perhaps many more) have been living since long (counting of years hardly matters now) always striving to search for a ray of light (even at the end of the tunnel) and at times felt so frustrated that I wished what a relief it would be if I were not born in the land where I was, the heart-rending passing away of 'Wahid Bhai' suddenly has awakened me to a new realisation that everything is, after all, not lost. Having attended the farewell of the 'Troubadour' (epithet used by SB Ahsan in DS) -who, in his short physical stature from head-to-toe epitomised everything of excellence in 'Bangaliana' at yet to be fully complete Chhayanaunt Sangskritik Bhavan, I experienced a sort of 'metastasis' at the outpourings of grief through rendering with heavenly tears few of his favourite Tagore songs in 'bedona-bidhur' tenor by the members of his family and participated by student devotees, admirers and peers (few of them, if not all, still mired in search

of truth and beauty). Yes, I felt like a new being as if on a passage to mythical paradise(?) breaking the barrier 'Ekono gelona na aandhar' (Thursday column in Bhorer kagoj).

Ashrafu Islam
Windsor, Ontario, Canada

Expatriate youth

I currently live in the United States. I am on my way to pursue my high school diploma (which is equivalent to HSC in Bangladesh). In these last three years I have encountered many different types and groups of people. I along with my cousin (who is an entertainment editor) write for our school newspaper. I noticed there always remained a profound communication gap between the Bengalis here and in Bangladesh. We wanted to address this issue and involve ourselves in any Bangladeshi newspaper.

The youngsters here are producing a huge impact and are representing Bangladesh in a broader aspect than their parents. That's why I think if you give us the chance we can let the Bangladeshi people hear our voice. Or else our contribution will always remain unrecognised.

Mustafa Sarker
New York, USA

Fighting corruption

There are lots of professionals from different sectors who are engaged in the money-making ventures using the state apparatus. A drive to root out corruption will not be complete unless these people are brought to book.

Omar Mohamed
Toronto

TV channels

A few days ago I was watching a drama on one of the private satellite television channels. The drama was one of the worst I have ever seen on TV. It had no story, no acting skills & no sense. We do not

know why some directors make movies or dramas without any story. What is the point behind making these dramas?

I will strongly request all the TV channel authorities to stop showing films & dramas that have no meaning.

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

The new caretaker government

We hope our new Chief Adviser to the caretaker government will be able to create a congenial atmosphere to hold the next general election within a short span of time after making the major reforms in the election system. We, the general people, are behind him and we are wishing all the best to him in his unique journey towards making our society free from all ills. Please keep it up, Fakhruddin Sir.

Mahfujul Alam Russel
Zigatola, Dhaka

Democratic culture

At a great cost we achieved freedom and so we can't afford to see our country going to the dogs due to the activities of a few self-seekers.

The people are aware now that it's the solemn duty of theirs to save their hard-earned independence and democracy. In the past, they succeeded in restoring democracy more than once, and they won't let others say that they can't repeat the feat.

In my opinion, our entire administrative machinery requires an overhaul. So, we hope the present CTG will take all the necessary steps in that direction.

Our democratic culture must be guided by good governance.

Engr. Shaheedul Islam
Former member of Bangladesh Water Development Board

Election date

Recently, both AL and BNP have become impatient and are repeatedly asking the CG to announce a specific date of elections as soon as possible in order to reestablish the hard earned democracy in the country. But one important question remains unanswered which is, if we go for the literal meaning of 'caretaker', then we all should know that it obviously will take a good amount of time for the caretaker government to take care of the misdeeds committed by the past government. The caretaker government needs sufficient time to straighten up all those wrong doings. So we have to be patient.

I am sure if a survey is conducted most people will vote for taking time. We the general public have suffered at the hands of the two major parties. Anarchy was widespread. Corruption made the lives of general people hellish. Prices of essentials have gone up to such an extent that it seems that this country had no government, no administration to take care of these things.

Against the backdrop of all these anomalies, I fervently request the caretaker government to take time and eliminate corruption and all such ills from society as far as possible.

Humayun Hyder
Zigatola, Dhaka

Government's job

Your picture titled "Peaceful Coexistence", on Saturday (Feb.2) spoke more than a thousand words! While the CTG is busy dismantling the hutments of poor slum dwellers, and eliminating their humble sources of livelihood, they do not seem to see the ugly eye-dore in a clean area like Eskaton Garden Road!

In all fairness, the eye sore needs rapid eradication; not the poor man's only refuge, and effort to earn a poor livelihood above begging. The CTG needs to sort out its

priorities soon if they really mean to look after the poor who factually represent over ninety percent of our people. Is there any one sparing a thought for them?

A citizen
On e-mail

Welfare state

In recent weeks after the caretaker government has come to power we have seen the eviction of many slum dwellers along with other businesses who have occupied plots of lands illegally.

It pains us that civilians who do not have adequate means to support themselves should also be hurt in this eviction process. But the problem was not created in a day, nor is it the caretaker government's problem alone. Rather, it is a problem that has accumulated over the past 27 years because no government had a social welfare policy in our country. Particularly, since our cities are beacons of opportunity for village dwellers, they have become overcrowded.

The solution lies in creating low cost housing for people of lesser means. This should have been done over the past 15 years under 'democratic' governments, but since our politicians are crooks, they did nothing. Since our economy is supposedly booming with a 7% growth rate, I hope it will not be particularly difficult to redistribute wealth towards social welfare spending. This is in the long-term interests of our business community also, who seem to be single handedly earning money, without concern for whether money is spent on their fellow citizens. A welfare state will not only improve the environment of the country but also create a happy society. I do not think this is impossible.

Khurruddin Siddique
On e-mail

Give them time

Only a few days have passed

after the caretaker government found all the Advisers; we read the impatience in the tone of our political parties. The parties want the caretaker govt. to take the shortest possible time to hold the election. We appreciate the urgency that the non-representative caretaker govt. should expedite the process of electing a democratic government.

Now, the vital requirements for fair & free election are weeding out questionable characters out from the political arena, arresting the godfathers of criminals, reforming the Election Commission, preparing the voter list and providing ID cards to voters. These were the demands of some major parties but the fact remains that these are also the demand of general people of the country, who become very important only once in every five years. But the advisers are not magicians who can attain all these goals overnight.

The whole country is happy to see the separation of the judiciary from the executive body. The plan to create the most fundamental & basic foundation of democracy went through smoothly because of the non-political caretaker govt.

While political parties are clamouring for the shortest time to hold the election, will the leaders of the parties tell us about the methods and factors which would fulfill all the essential conditions for free & fair election of good and honest people?

Lastly, following points are stressed:

1) In the last 35 years we have seen a member of elected governments, which failed to provide a correct voter list & ID card. Much the same way, separation of judiciary was hanging in the air on lame excuses for over a decade.

2) The people of the country wish that corrupt & questionable characters be eliminated prior to the holding of election and it is expected that the caretaker govt. shall be able to justify prolonging its stay in order to achieve that goal.

3) Our well wishers had been

very active and vocal about the flawed voter list & other factors, and offered their help. They are cordially welcome to help the caretaker govt. to show the shortest way to overcome the hurdles.

A Citizen, Chittagong

Freedom of press in Bangladesh

I am a regular reader of The Daily Star from the first day of its publication.

I am concerned to see the US ambassador getting worried about press freedom in Bangladesh! I would like to convey the message to her that I am deeply concerned about safety of innocent children in Iraq!

Will Ms. Butenits respond to the issue raised by me?

M Sharful Alam
Rtd. government officer

Do it like Mahathir!



After purchasing the votes from the voters the politicians think that this country has been leased out to them and they have the absolute right to rule it. They always try to preserve their own interests and do not hesitate to claim that they are fighting for 14 crore people. If the claim were true then we would not have been champion in corruption for three consecutive times! The politicians always betrayed the people in the name of fighting for them. As we all know Dr. Mahathir was enough to change the face of Malaysia.

So we will request the government and our leaders to follow his example in the greater interest of the country.

Abdul Kaium Khan
Southeast University

Campus and politics

Education, regarded as the prime force of civilisation, has been tormented by so called students' and teachers' politics in Bangladesh. The heritage and contribution of student politics in nation building, in course of time, has also been defiled because of changing pattern and practice of leadership. If a hijacker takes over the control of a plane, the safety of passengers will be in jeopardy.

I would appeal to the government and all the political parties to keep the educational arena free from party politics.

Alauddin Ansary
DU



Weekly holiday

In a newspaper on 2 February 07 a press release of the Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami was published which has drawn my attention. He asked the chief of the caretaker govt. to make it a one-day weekly holiday on Friday. I partially endorse his view that there should be only one holiday per week. If we consider the broader perspective of our society, country and its economic interests, then one-day holiday would be a better choice. But I differ with his other view that the weekly holiday should be on Friday. He said that in the interest of the Muslims of our country the weekly holiday should remain on Friday. But I don't understand why Friday should be mingled with religious sentiments. In the eye of Allah, the Almighty, all days are equal.

In my opinion, for the convenience of the people Sunday should be a better choice. Sunday should be better because Friday is

the only holiday to do all household chores. But on the same day we have to go to the mosques to offer prayers, which requires a couple of hours. So, all other works cannot be done on that day.

But if we get two hours' recess for the prayer on Friday, then it would be enough. On the other hand, Sunday remains free for doing all other things -- shopping, socializing, washings etc. Corresponding with the rest of the world, keeping pace with them and for better economic reasons like most of the other nations we should make Sunday the only off day in a week.

This decision cannot be taken by any political govt. So, I would like to request the caretaker government to introduce Sunday as the weekly holiday once again.

Monzur Rahman
Rajshahi