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Begum Rokeya's DREAM

Women had to fight a lot for restoring their basic human rights so that they could be treated equally with men. Ironically, the ground situation is always giving a bleak picture for women. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 all men and women should be treated equally. But in reality up to the 1970s no significant development took place regarding women's empowerment and gender equality. In the 1980s a series of international and national conferences on women helped the process of women's integration in the mainstream.

The women's movement was initiated in the sub-continent in the late nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century by Begum Rokeya. Her initiation and farsightedness helped the cause of women to a great extent. Begum Rokeya tried to salvage women from the darkest situation. At that time social stigma and inhibiting societal structures defined the lives of women. Begum Rokeya was very much convinced that women had to come out of this confinement for their own sake.

The situation is very different today, but Begum Rokeya's dream is yet to be fulfilled as women are still struggling for their rights in many societies across the globe.

Md. Azmal Hossain
Program Director Advocacy
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

Why blame them?

I'm often amazed by the amount of negativity that people have against English Medium schools. One of the biggest concerns that I've come across was the fact that these schools don't teach students anything about our culture or tradition. Some even go as far as saying these schools don't teach Bangla to their students! I find these statements quite outrageous and insulting to say the least. We, as students and alumni of these institutions, are not only adept in blending with our culture, but also capable of adjusting to Western environments - giving us a fair bit of flexibility. I've studied at English Medium schools all my life and I think I speak/know Bangla very well. I feel these sentiments are unjust. Are we forgetting the influence of cable television on today's youngsters? I'm sure the kids studying in Bangla Medium schools also want to be like Hollywood movie stars. The ability to relate to our culture has very little connection with the type of education we receive at school.

Another favourite issue for English Medium bashers is the fact that most of the students end up going abroad for post-secondary education - thus not contributing anything to this country. Again, let's step back a little. What are the options for a student graduating from high-school in Bangladesh? Engineering aspirants want to go to BUET. Others may think of Medical Colleges. But hang on a minute! The entry exams at BUET and Medical are totally geared towards students following the HSC syllabus. So, in order to get into these institutions, English Medium students not only need to complete the HSC syllabi in a couple of months, but also face unfair competition. It seems way easier for them to get into universities abroad, which readily accept A-Level grades. Isn't this reason enough for these kids to go abroad? Many such students are now coming back to Bangladesh and providing much needed expertise for economic develop-

ment. If they didn't love their country or culture, why would they be returning?

The SSC/HSC results are published in all major newspapers with interviews of top students, their study habits and sleeping patterns. How come we don't even know when the O-Level or A-Level exam results are published? Only The Daily Star has been providing motivation for English Medium students by awarding Excellence Certificates every year.

I might be referring to Dhaka only when I say a significant portion of children are now studying at English Medium schools, but I strongly believe that our higher education system needs to take notice of this often neglected and unjustly prejudiced group of students.

Nayef M Khan
University of Waterloo

Three cheers for government

The present caretaker government's drive to nab the corrupt politicians and government officials has come as a divine blessing to save Bangladesh once more from the hands of some power hungry money mongers and militants. The godfathers of these people have now got the clear message that Bangladesh does not belong to any particular group or party. It belongs to 14 crore people and there are many honest and capable people in this country.

We know this government will not stay for a very long time, even then it should set hands on some other issues which have divided the nation. These are distortion of history, appointments of self-declared killers of the father of the nation as diplomats, growth of militancy etc.

These issues need to be addressed in the greater interest of the country.
Shafiqul Islam
On e-mail

Yesterday I was going to Pallabi when I noticed all the shattered furniture shops. I could get that it was the result of the recent drive by the joint forces to remove all the shops which don't have parking spaces. When

I read about such drives and hawkers being evicted I was a bit relieved that finally we could walk on the footpaths. But when I thought about all those hawkers losing their sources of income I felt bad. The government has arranged holiday markets for them, but the idea is still not working.

Unfortunately, my uncle had a shop on that Mirpur-Shewrapara road and along with all the other shops his shop was also broken. Parking problem has always been there in the past few years when there was a sudden mushroom

growth of shopping centres. And a new law has also been passed that the shopping malls' plans should include a parking lot. My question is what about all those shops which were opened before this law was passed? Will they close them all?

In my uncles' case the person who owns the land is not ready to give any explanation or doesn't feel liable for any of these things. The landlord has rented this shop without a parking space but all the losses are now incurred by my uncle which is serious pressure for a middle class family. When I asked him about the time limit which was given to remove the shops he said that there was announcement at 4:00pm in the afternoon and they bulldozed the shops at 9:00am the next morning. That might seem

to be a lot of time but when you are actually removing things which you have collected over the years even a month is not enough. Surprisingly, he added that most of the shops there don't even have customers who come in a car.

Now like many other shop-owners in that area and other areas he has got only 1/3 of the shop and to rebuild it will take a huge amount of money when he doesn't have any income for the time being.

The government should look into the matter and make sure that no excesses are committed in the name of enforcing the law.

A citizen
Dhanmondi, Dhaka



PHOTO STAR

No tears for politicians!

This is in reference to the editorial published in your daily on March 1, 2007. The implication of the editorial is that early election is a popular demand, and by your own calculations it can be held as early as middle of next year. I think the editorial is wrong in its assumption about the public mentality. People from all walks of life have welcomed the intervention by the armed forces and the steps that the caretaker government (CG) has taken in fighting corruption. It is extremely laudable the way this government has brought the corrupt bigwigs to justice. So if it takes longer than the middle of next year, then I think there would be very few to shed tears about the misery of our politicians.

As is universally acknowledged, very few of our politicians are truly corruption-free. It runs from the very top. Interesting to see how the yesterday's hunters (read unabated corruption facilitators) have now become the hunted, evading police and army dragnet. So if the drive against corruption, as has been claimed by the newly formed Anti-corruption Commission, and supported by the CTG continues unabated, then these political parties will hardly have any leaders left to run the show! Wouldn't that be "lovely"!

A citizen
On e-mail

Dr. Yunus

Your vision on poverty alleviation through micro credit facilities for the poor people has become a tool in micro economics. The whole world acknowledged this, and many nations used this tool to reduce poverty.

I also thank you for giving us the chance to express our opinions on a new chapter in our country's politics. I read your letter with great interest and would like to express my views on it.

Today, our country witnesses a ray of hope in the political horizon thanks to some bold steps taken by the caretaker administration. The mainstream politicians were not at all patriotic, while in the treasury bench or in the opposition. Their selfish approach and poor governance did not allow us to progress smoothly as a nation, despite having an annual GDP growth of 6% (on average). Corruption is the number one reason behind this, and this infected our administration-top to bottom. We always talk about our struggle for democracy, but sadly the politicians who fought for it became the most autocratic and selfish. The mainstream political parties got themselves engaged in unnecessary feuds, which literally crippled our nation.

Hartals, parliament boycotts, strikes etc. were common phenomena over the past 15 years. Our economy lost millions of dollars due to their political enmity. But, the party in power (both AL and BNP) never thought about our economy. The only concern was how to get corrupt and become rich overnight. We, the common people, became pawns in their unethical and immoral politics. All of us were somehow relieved when the current CTG came and the state of emergency was declared. Corrupt politicians are now being brought to justice. The common people applauded the steps taken by this CTG and we hope that they remain in power until and unless the whole system becomes sound. There is no benefit in fair election, as long as these negative elements remain in politics.

On Feb. 11, you expressed your desire to form a new political party and wanted to know what we think about it. I think there are many determinants which need to be addressed before taking such a step. Nobody denies your ability and eligibility to do this. But, to form a political party and that too with a different mindset is not an easy task to accomplish. How will democracy be practiced under such circumstances? Now, if you decide to recruit new members for your party, where will you get so many people? Civil society is there to support you, but they will never join any political party. On the other hand, to create a new atmosphere in politics, your party definitely needs the infrastructural support all across the country. How will you organise people throughout the country, with this much of political experience? You tried to express your desire involving citizens' participation. But, common people from all walks of life cannot join politics.

So you have to answer a number of questions.

Arafat Islam
On e-mail

Fight against corruption

To rescue the country from pervasive corruption the lone organisation named TIB has been fighting in various ways to reach its message to the entire populace that the beloved nation has been pestilence-stricken since long rendering its growth prospect elusive. The media campaign, pop music concert initiated by them to inform the people of the ill effects of corruption and inspire them to fight against malpractice were manifestation of good feeling they have for the country. Our political leaders, instead of supporting them, rejected their reports on unlawful activities of different ministries including port management. The political lead-

ers should have pledged before the nation in unequivocal terms to combat the menace and extended co-operation to bring out more reports detailing illegal financial gains. The bureaucracy, pioneer of endemic corruption, has been silently working against TIB, as government officials are also beneficiaries of the corrupt system.

As a nation we feel disgraced only for a handful of people belonging to political parties, the bureaucracy and business. The present caretaker government is possibly our only hope which can

lated malpractices. People want this government to set the ball rolling for building a just society based upon the aspirations shared by everyone. The people also want this government to free the country from the godfathers and national wealth plunderers. Hasina would be ill-advised if she failed to understand the common expectation and mood of the people in general. Walking around the streets, markets, shopping malls, villages and tea-stalls, one will find the newly infused sense of hope and optimism among the people emanat-

History of Liberation War



Bangladesh recently and learned from common people on the street about their happiness with government actions against corruption.

These actions are responsibilities of the present government but they also should feel a moral responsibility to create awareness amongst the people about correct history of our war of liberation and independence. The immediate past government distorted the history to such an extent that young people do not have a clear idea about the liberation war.

There is no doubt that it was Bangabandhu who motivated the Bengalees to jump into the struggle for freedom from the Pakistanis but the actual freedom was achieved by the fighters on the ground. Great leaders like Tajuddin and his colleagues (minus conspirators like Khondokar Mushtaq) did an excellent job to steer the nation when an international conspiracy was on against our liberation.

Khalid G. Rabbany, UAE

raise the sunken ship from further destruction and show us the way to work out our own salvation.

Rezaul Huq
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Sheikh Hasina's comments

It is observed that Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina has been quite brash about a few things. Her pejorative comments about Prof. Yunus and micro credit are insensitive and lack civility. Now, she has been demanding early election in the name of people. This is sheer preposterous considering the fact that the common masses want the country to be cleared of all kinds of accumu-

ling from this government and its activities.

Madam Hasina, please do not be impatient as we are very patient. Maybe, you should do more soul-searching about the state of politics in this country than make brash and derogatory comments about everyone and everything.

AFM Mohiuddin
Lalmatia
Dhaka

Awami League's demand

A group of Awami League (AL) leaders visited the Election Commission office to demand election in June. The leader of the party, Sheikh Hasina, has made

statements in support of an early election. I find these demands to be inconsistent with the recent public statements of the AL leader in support of the current initiatives of the caretaker government. It sounds to me as if the AL leadership is talking with a forked tongue.

As part of the anti-corruption initiatives of the caretaker government, a list of 50 individuals has been made public and some have already been apprehended by the law enforcement agencies. In-depth investigations are being carried out against the individuals and charges are being framed against them. It has also been reported in the media that similar allegations against even a larger number of individuals will be made public in time. Sheikh Hasina has said it herself that some of the more ill-reputed individuals and their leaders are yet to be apprehended and charged.

The caretaker government is taking initiatives to fulfill some of the demands originally put forward by Sheikh Hasina herself, which include updating the voter list with photographs, making voter ID card and providing transparent ballot box.

All the while, many in the civil society and political circles have emphasized the need for conducting the local elections prior to the parliamentary election.

However, it will take certain time to complete these tasks. To start, the caretaker government must continue to recruit qualified and suitable personnel to carry out the tasks in hand. In some instances the existing laws will have to be modified. The allegations against the apprehended individuals must be proven in court, which will require thorough investigations. After all, we are talking about hundreds of corruption trials. No doubt these well placed defendants will put up tough fights. It is expected that any rich person fighting for his wealth and reputation would hire a reputed lawyer. Consequently, the trials and appeals of these hundreds of individuals will drag on for many months.

So, while supporting the actions what would be the justification for demanding an early election? I see one explanation which weighs more toward the political interest of the party rather than what is in the best interest of the Bangladeshi people. It appears that the Awami League leadership is finding the present condition in the country as the most suitable time for winning the election. After many of their top leaders held behind bars and many more are being chased by the security forces, the BNP is very much in a tail spinning mode. It does not take a political genius to see that the AL leadership

wants to take advantage of that. Moreover, the talk of Dr. Yunus forming a new political party or the buzz about the emergence of another political party to be formed by the breakaway sections of AL, BNP and JP are perceived as serious threats by the AL leaders.

The reality in Bangladesh today is such that an early election might make AL the winner, but in doing so the Bangladeshi people will actually lose without those needed reform.

No reasonable person would believe that an elected government would be able to complete the unfinished tasks of prosecuting the corrupt individuals even if the AL were to return to power. On the other hand the BNP has even less chances of carrying out the tasks since the majority of those being charged are their own party members.

If the accused persons are not prosecuted properly or allowed to go unpunished one can safely assume that they would return to politics with more vigour. No Bangladeshi ever wants to see a repeat of the political climate that existed in the past years. Bangladeshi people are tired of being labeled as the citizens of the most corrupt nation. People want things to change for the better. It may be so that the future of Bangladeshi democracy would depend greatly on the successes of various initiatives taken by the caretaker government.

No individual or political party should make any attempt to impede this historic and unprecedented opportunity.

However, I have a suggestion for the AL leaders. If they truly believe that people want a June election then why don't they prove their claim? Let the AL leaders take their own initiative to conduct a random poll of say 1,000 individuals to be picked from the last published voter list. Ask these individuals in the presence of the media whether they want an early election or are they in favour of giving adequate time to this caretaker government to complete their tasks. Without making unqualified claims in the name of the people, it's time for the AL leadership either to put up or shut-up.

Kamrul Choudhury
On e-mail

DS award giving ceremony

I heartily congratulate you for giving these O & A level students some media exposure. There were some meaningful speeches made on this occasion which I would like to share with all.

The speech by you was inspiring. You mentioned that we as a nation hesitate to show our potential to the world and concentrate too much on our failures. At the end, and most importantly, you asked the students to develop character, courage and ethics which will help them to progress forward as human beings. The speech given by the executive from the Brac Bank

had a valuable lesson in which he shared his experience with the audience about the meaning of knowledge. He mentioned that 'knowledge is power' is an incorrect statement. He pointed out that knowledge has the potential to give power. It is the person who knows how to use the knowledge properly and effectively that can derive power from that knowledge.

Also the speech delivered by the chief guest Ms. Valorie Taylor was worth listening to.

It would have been better if the whole programme schedule were mentioned at the beginning rather than being

not mentioned at all.

The surprise find of the event was a boy who appeared in his O-level from Scholastica and got the highest marks in 7 subjects. Everyone gave him a standing ovation. Never had I dreamt that such a feat was practically possible. Hats off to the young lad and I genuinely pray that he becomes an asset to the country rather than going abroad without leaving behind any trace at all.

It was a day well spent.
Maruf Buksh
Zigatola, Dhaka



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