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## Plight of garment workers

Droves of garment workers--emaciated, battered and wraith-like-- coming out of their sweatshops: a common sight of the busy intersections of the city. It seems that every atom of their life-blood has been sucked up by the beast inside whose maw they toil from dawn to dusk. The biggest irony is that they are paid a mere pittance in exchange of their back-breaking labour. The whole scene reminds one of the institution of slavery which was in practice in American South prior to the Civil War.

Unfortunately, the owners often hesitate to pay the wage of the workers --a practice which

leads to demonstrations and eventual conflicts. Again the same people, the owners, maintain a life-style that recalls the lavish lives of the figures of the stories of The Arabian Nights.

Last year, following the protests of the workers, the minimum wage of a worker was fixed as Tk 1,662. I think the venerable economists and the owners -- the worthies who resolved upon the said amount of money-- can explain why that specific amount of wage was fixed as the monthly emolument of a human being!

**Zabed Wali, Pahartali, Chittagong**

## Dispelling cultural imperialism

Education, universally considered the backbone of a nation, can play a quintessentially significant role in dispelling cultural imperialism. Historically narrating, almost all the imperialists intruded into the educational domain of a nation for paralysing the nation both economically and culturally.

According to Edward Said, 'Culture', almost imperceptibly, is those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation that have relative autonomy from the economic, social and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure.

Joseph Conrad in his book 'Heart of Darkness' shows how the people living in Africa, so-called heart of darkness, are barbarian and uncivilized. In the novel the lord-like behaviour of the colonialists reminds us of the behaviour of the present superpower USA in Iraq.

The only solution is to strengthen the education system which will dispel the aggressive intrusion of culture.

**Bazlur Rahman**  
Undergoing MBA in the London School of Business, UK

## CTG's moral authority

I am fully aware of the fact that presently Bangladesh is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Like many Bangladeshis, it is also my desire to see this country as a corruption-free land in the future. But can we achieve that goal through this caretaker government? Do they have the moral authority to perform this task?

In order to earn the moral authority this caretaker government must first prove that its members are a bunch of honest people and they are dedicated to getting rid of corruption in our society. They have to earn people's trust by their actions which must be ethical, impartial and transparent. Let's take litmus tests to find out if they are really trustworthy and have earned the moral authority:

1. Are they transparent in their actions? I am afraid not. Notice their recent activities in sending Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina to

exile. One has to be blind and deaf to believe that they did not put tremendous pressure on Khaleda Zia to leave the country and did not try their best to stop Sheikh Hasina from returning to Bangladesh. I will not argue whether their decision regarding sending the former prime ministers to exile was good or bad. My question is why their action is not transparent.

2. Recently, many people were sent to jail for not being able to submit their correct wealth statements. These people are punished because they did not pay the required amount of income taxes and they have acquired wealth by illegal means. In this regard, I request all members of our caretaker government to submit their wealth statements and prove that they are clean. If they pass the litmus test, only then they will have the moral authority to pursue the goal they have set for the government.

**Acitizen, Dhaka**

## Matin's comments

The International Forum for Trial of War Criminals of Bangladesh, a Sydney based think tank and advocacy group, is greatly surprised by the comment made by Adviser Mr. M.A. Matin that "We should not be talking about anti-liberation elements after 35 years of liberation war (bdnews24.com; 25 March)." While the Chief Adviser Mr. Fakhruddin Ahmed repeatedly talks about the values of the liberation war and its spirit, this unexpected comment from Adviser Matin raises the question whether the Chief Adviser's cabinet members share the same values as he propagates with regard to the liberation war.

There is no doubt that the present government enjoys overwhelming support from the citizens as well as from the expatriate Bangladeshis. This, however, does not give a licence to the Advisers to talk irresponsibly.

We do not want this government to fail and the members to be faced with controversies. We further hope Mr. Matin will clarify his position on the liberation war and the collaborators.

**Dr Chanchal Khan**  
Melbourne, Australia

## Interference

The Law Adviser once said that foreign powers interfere too much in national politics of other countries.

We urge the present CTG to bring the country to a level where we can proudly face the world, no matter how much time it takes.

**Zafar Ahmed**  
Shantinagar West Lane  
Dhaka

## Jamuna erosion

The Jamuna, the mighty river, is flowing through Sirajganj district. On its way to the south, it has been eroding the western bank over the years.

A large number of people have been rendered shelter-less and helpless and hundreds of valuable institutions have been lost.

So, the authorities concerned are requested to take proper measures to control erosion by the river.

**Iffatara Asha**  
Department of Zoology  
Sirajganj Govt. College, Sirajganj

## Introduce Saarc award

Very recently the 14th Saarc Summit ended in New Delhi with some pragmatic declarations. The people of South Asia, despite a lot of hidden potentialities, have been suffering from so many problems linked with some social, natural and political vices like terrorism, poverty illiteracy, natural disasters, scientific and technological backwardness, absence of potential woman leadership in socio-political activities and so on. The leaders of the 14th Saarc Summit have confidently, cordially and to some extent self-critically mentioned some barriers like lack of mutual understanding, mistrust, hollow self-centeredness (created mostly by the governments not by the people) which obstruct development.

The voice of the confidence and cordiality of the Saarc leaders has indeed kindled a light in the hearts of the South Asian people. The principal message of the speeches delivered by the Saarc leaders is unity and understanding among the people.

In this context, I humbly propose introduction of Saarc awards for the best performances of the people, institutions and

organisations of the Saarc countries in the fields of literature, education, journalism, disaster-management, economics, especially concerned with poverty alleviation research, women's empowerment etc.

I think, the introduction of the proposed Saarc award will contribute a lot to strengthening unity, friendship and mutual understanding among the people of the Saarc countries.

**Nemai Chandra Mondal**  
Associate Professor  
Dept of English  
Govt Rajendra College, Faridpur

## Reforming police

The Chief adviser's call for police reform is a timely one. Yet, lots of problems will have to be faced in reshaping our police into a truly people-friendly and professional force.

Over the years, the previous governments used police to suppress the opponents merely for political ends. To attain this goal, police from top to bottom have been politicised. As no political government is in power now, the police are proving their worth. In his speech marking the Police Week, 2007, Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed stressed the need for a radical reform to the police force. But with the present manpower, resource, infrastructure and salary scale, it is not possible to improve the service of the police to a satisfactory level. In addition, our police lack a sound mindset. So, change of police mindset is a pressing need. This mindset may change to some extent if recruitment of police personnel is done in a fair and transparent manner.

**Md. Abdus Salam**  
Ashrafpur, Bogra

## Bashar's poor show

Bashar should quit now. He is the captain, but his contribution is zero. He can neither bat nor bowl!

Why should he still retain his position in the team?

**Monju, Dhaka**

## Hasina's role

It is the responsibility of the Awami League to move the nation forward. There should be alternative leaders who might take over

after Hasina retires. Because, after all, at some point of time she has to retire, but this will be determined by the party not by any other forces. We are observing the transition of power in Britain from Blair to Brown. Without Blair it was impossible for the Labour to win the election. Likewise, without Hasina the AL will not survive at this point of time.

But we need to look for future leadership as well. So it's very important that Hasina does not make any mistake.

**Shahnur Chowdhury**  
Oxford

## "The top two" ...

I would like to thank Mr. Shantoo for such a beautiful letter (May 16). Shantoo's short letter manages to say more than what many long editorials and articles fail to say. Simple and straight to the point. At a time when we see some people crying foul about Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia's "rights" to become prime minister of this country, yet again; it is important to remind ourselves how arrogantly these ladies have violated the rights of over 140 million people, again and again. How enthusiastically they have brought this country to its knees.

Shantoo's last point is so good that I have to mention it here again: "All must believe that the party chief is the undeclared queen of this country, blessed with knowledge and divinity!" Stunning letter!

**Azad Miah**  
Oldham, UK

## Voter list and national ID

Voter List and National ID Card (NIC) will not be enough to solve the problems that we are facing. To solve the problem one more thing is required-- compulsory Birth Registration Certificate (BRC) to all new-born babies.

The BRC will automatically enroll everybody as a voter after 18 years.

**Saif Tinku**  
One-mail

## Advance tax on credit card

It has been a while that this caretaker government has come to power. The government has done some good things so far. In the last budget the then finance minister imposed tax @ 3% on every transaction made by credit card. Though the tax deducted by this way is adjustable against the yearly tax payable by an assessee while submitting return, but my question is if a person does not earn yearly an income for which he is not supposed to pay tax then what will happen? At present the tax exemption limit of income is BDT:120,000/= and to get a credit card from a bank, a person must earn monthly Tk.10,000/-. So his yearly income comes to BDT:120,000/= and he/she does not have to pay tax. Now suppose that person has a credit card and she/he pays 3% tax by using that card. As per rule that person need not to pay any tax but against what the 3% tax paid by him will be adjusted? Currently, when a bank sends a credit card statement with due amount, then it charges 3% tax from clients as per government rule. But when a cardholder does not have enough money, then she/he goes for buying goods with credit card and pay for that later. The banks are keeping silent regarding this issue as it is deducted from their clients.

Charging 3% tax on the card has

# Sarkozy's triumph

The change augurs well for France's relation with the USA, but not so well with Russia. The warmth of camaraderie Putin, Chirac and Schroeder enjoyed may no more be the same with Sarkozy's entry into their club.

Russian President Vladimir Putin could have congratulated Nicolas Sarkozy for his victory at least in a lukewarm message instead of remaining completely mum to a great event next door. In diplomacy, 'silence is deemed as the loudest expression of anger'.

Observers were stunned to hear the Socialist Party's presidential candidate Segolene Royal forecasting violence in the event of Sarkozy's victory. Such an ominous forecast seems to have added fuel to the present fire on the streets around Paris's Bastille Square. Royal should now advise her followers to calm down their agitated nerves. Those who are torching cars on the streets should also realize that violence would rather boost support for Sarkozy's party in the next month's parliamentary election.

In another development, incoming French leader Nicolas Sarkozy has been embroiled in a row over his stay on a luxury yacht on Tuesday, two days after winning election with a campaign to lift low wages and help hard-working families.

Is it a crime to take a break when you are fatigued? Sarkozy has the right to ventilate and 'recharge his battery' after his gruelling political campaigns, no matter if he chooses yachting on the ocean; provided the weekly rental of \$ 271,300 for the 200 feet long luxury yacht is paid by his billionaire chum Vincent Bollore, who is hosting Sarkozy's holidaying in the Mediterranean island of Malta.

If Segolene Royal had won the election she would have been the first female president in France's history, a record that could have greatly encouraged American voters to replicate by choosing Hilary Clinton as their first female president as well.

But France is different from the USA, so is Hilary from Royal. Hilary Clinton is running a fundamentally different candidacy. Many French ladies didn't like Royal, who may have paid a price for focusing too much on gender at the expense of her policies. On the other hand, Hilary as a veteran lawyer and the former First Lady knows well how to tailor her words in political campaigns to tune

in to the wavelength of the American electorate. Nevertheless, the biggest lesson Hilary must have learned from the French election is that a woman cannot necessarily take the women's vote for granted.

Indignant Americans who were angry about Chirac's shenanigans and hobnobbing with the allies of Iraq in decrying US policy on the Middle East were allergic to anything French, even french fries.

**Maswood Alam Khan**  
General Manager



Bangladesh  
Krishi  
Bank

offices rub each other's back.

The CTG should not show any leniency in dealing with them.

**SS Nasim A Chowdhury**  
Somersby Gardens  
Ilford

## Voter ID and national ID

I am following with great interest the current discussions on Voter Identity Card, Voter List, and National Identity Card. Do the citizens of Bangladesh require a voter ID card? Well, in developed countries like Canada, we do not have a voter identity card or even a national identity card. A birth certificate or a driving licence is sufficient for voters to cast their votes. I am not a specialist in this area, however, we should use common sense. The voters should have proper identification documents, where name and date of birth are clearly indicated. For the sake of discussion, if the government goes with the proposal of voter ID card, which requires millions of dollars investment, what about the rest of the citizens who are not voters? Do not they require an identification document? My recommendation for the government would be a one-time

investment for a single ID card for the whole nation. This will be the primary document for the citizens to vote, apply for passport, driving licence, admission in school etc. At the same time birth registration should be made mandatory for all new births. And it should be made compulsory to issue a birth certificate and make it a precondition for admission in school etc.

In short, citizens do not require a special ID card to cast vote.

**Masud Karim**  
Brampton, Ontario, Canada

## Our democracy, their concern!

It is interesting to observe how the US and EU react to the political developments in our country. They tried to pursue the two major parties to remain on the democratic path, but failed miserably. And they are witness to what happened in the country.

But they seem to have forgotten everything, and are now ready with their most saleable commodity once more. Yes, it's democracy! They don't even want to give this government any time to restore it!

**Acitizen**  
Dhaka

# Democracy in the political parties

With politics going into a state of suspension as a result of the emergency, there are a good number of questions which have arisen about such issues as general elections. However, one of the important issues that has lately arisen is related to the conditions in which the major political parties find themselves today. The fact that the offices of the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist party are under lock and key is the clearest sign yet of politics being in hibernation, indeed of the many changes that need to be made before things can get back to normal.

The caretaker administration has given out broad hints of the reforms it expects to come into the working of the political parties. There is the questions of registration. Unfortunately, it has been the two major parties which in the past defied all calls for registering themselves and so have given rise to the fear that democracy as the country wishes it to be may not really be promoted by the parties. That conclusion may be a trifle far-fetched, but it does not really seem so, considering the fact that within the parties-- and we can speak here of the AL, the BNP and even the JP-- there is hardly any sign of activity which encourages the country into believing that democracy works in their inner councils. There is the record to fall back on. Abdul Jalil was chosen general secretary of the AL by the party president even though there was a clear expectation that an election for the position might throw up Tofail Ahmed or Abdur Razzak. In the BNP it has always been the prerogative of the chairperson to decide. Khaleda Zia's son was inducted into the party and raised to the position of senior joint secretary general and it reflects the undemocratic nature in which party politics has generally worked in the country. Likewise, in the JP, it has generally been Hussein Muhammad Ershad's writ which has run. In other words, an absence of democratic practice in the political parties has by and large stymied a proper working of these organisations.

The state pf politics at this point ought to be taken advantage of by the parties. That means between now and the elections, even as the caretaker government clear the decks for the polling that will result once more in elected democratic government for the country, the parties could go for restructuring within. There is always the past to fall back on. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the AL as a party was a truly democratic organisation, the result of which was the important role it had for itself in the nation's history. It is return to that practice that is called for today. Similarly, parties like the BNP, given the battering it has received in these past few months, should be rethinking their inner modes of working.

Democratise or perish!  
**Sharmin Rashid, Uttara, Dhaka**

# Iraq conundrum

A number of civilians and US or British soldiers were killed and many others wounded. Yes, this is the regular news from Iraq. At present, the Iraq situation is very delicate. The guerrilla attacks are intensifying day by day. No place is secure for US led coalition forces as well as innocent civilians of Iraq. The 'green zone', which is called the completely secure place, is also becoming a target. On 12 April 2007, a suicide attack was carried out on Iraqi parliament complex and as a result two parliament members died and many others were wounded.

Saddam Hussein and his companions have been hanged, more US soldiers have been deployed and a new policy has been taken. But no initiative is being fruitful to bring back peace. For that reason the people of Iraq are now fully disillusioned with the US forces. And the Bush Administration is now in a quandary.

So the United States is going to face the same fate as they did in Vietnam!  
**Mustafa Iqbal Shahadat**  
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