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US and Iran

US President Bush and UK Prime Minister Blair sincerely feel that their wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have not failed and that they are going on quite satisfactorily as per their plan, though a bit slow. Accordingly, Bush

and Blair think they have the means, confidence and will to win the wars ultimately.

The war machinery of the Pentagon seems to be quite alert to launch a surprise attack on Iran. That means

that the war agenda is very much on cards and looming large in the Gulf. There can be no doubt that President Bush can take every possible risk now, since his Republican Party might not win the next presidential

polls. On the other hand, the White House strategists think that Iran could serve the US case better. If the US wins the wars in some measure that would benefit the Republicans and improve the image of the US. The US has also reviewed the reaction of Iran to Saudi Arabia's efforts to dissuade Tehran from going nuclear as well as the recent tour programmes of Russia and Japan in the Middle East. Whether or not Iran gives up its nuclear programme, the US attack, therefore, seems imminent. The Democrats can do nothing to stop that from happening in any manner. They too know that the Pentagon-CIA have taken all necessary precautions by studying the failures in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Thus the US-led Nato adventure in Iran would be an improved version, unless the war is averted by Iran. That only means that Iran's time is running out pretty fast.

Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal
JNU, New Delhi



Attention: BTB

I have a problem with BTB PSTN. I have three telephone lines at my home. At the beginning of February 2007, I found out that from my home numbers (8022113 and 8022718) whenever I dialed any Banglalink cellphone number it didn't connect but if I dialed from my other home number (9016851) it instantly connected.

At the end of February 2007, I noticed that my phone numbers (8022113 and 8022718) were having the same problem with Akl but my other phone number (9016851) was fine.

To my surprise, I found out that I was not having any problem connecting from 8022113 and 8022718 numbers to GramenePhone and Teletalk.

As there is Warid, I tried with their cell phone numbers too but still my numbers (8022113 and 8022718) cannot connect to Warid either, it says "This is not a subscriber number....." but my 9016851 is working fine with Warid, as well as Banglalink and Akl.

I would like to bring this problem to BTB's notice.
Hassan
One-mail

CRP issue

A news item in The Daily Star has shocked me to note that the most dedicated woman-Valerie Taylor-who sacrificed the best part of her life in creating a facility for the poor-is now being sidelined in her own organisation.

Aziz Ahmed
Gulshan, Dhaka

Demolition drive

Soon after 1/11, The CTG cleared all the footpaths in the capital and elsewhere by driving away the street hawkers ruthlessly without making alternative accommodation, though it has affected the living of so many ordinary citizens at a time. Good enough, we can now walk freely through the footpaths. The CTG deserves praise. But in contrast to the above the highway as well as the adjacent roads in front and around Scholastica School in Uttara are being used as parking space during termination of classes, blocking major portion of the roads and causing serious traffic jams. This also affects the road safety. After 1/11 we all expected that the CTG will not allow at least the main road to be used as parking lot.

But now it appears that the law is not the same for all!
A. Zakaria
Mirpur, Dhaka

The "no vote"

The online edition of The Daily Star (May 20, 2007), reported EC's draft recommendation for the provision of "no vote" in the ballot paper. Apparently, this is to allow the voters to express their lack of confidence in the candidates. I find this very interesting, but the responses during the briefing were contradictory. In one place, the EC says that the number of the no vote would not affect the results; it is merely academic. But in another place it says that there would be a fresh election if more than 50% of voters cast "no vote". In any case, I don't think there is any need for the provision of "no vote" when voting is not compulsory. (Voting is compulsory in Australia where not casting a vote invites penalty). Any one who does not have confidence in the candidates can choose to abstain from voting under the

present system of non-compulsory voting. So, if the EC wants to gauge the level of no confidence then it can look at the percentage of absentees. If the total vote cast is less than 50% then it can call for a fresh election. This would be much easier to implement and there would be no inconsistency in the legislation.

Anis Chowdhury
Professor of Economics
University of Western Sydney
Australia

Sense and insensibility
My sincerest thanks to The Daily Star and your Senior Assistant Editor Shahnoor Wahid for the fine post-editorial, "Sense and Insensibility" in your May 29 issue.

Mr. Wahid has very accurately depicted the prevailing political situation in Bangladesh. These corrupt politicians and some of their leaders are making noise so that old style politics could be brought back and they can go back to power again with the sole intention of ruling over a hapless, helpless and speechless population and resume their kleptocracy. Democracy is the furthest thing from their mind. These leaders, just because one was the daughter of a national leader and the other the wife of a slain president, have earned the right to be rulers.

I believe the present caretaker government should be given adequate time to clean up the house and free the country from all-pervasive corruption before another election is held.

The present government should not crack under any pressure from inside or outside the country.
Asad Zaman
Encino, California

Muddled Bashar

Bashar does not realise that it is time to go. He has nothing but questionable experience to offer. Barring, bowling, fielding or running between wickets--in all these areas he is now a "no-go". What a negative example setter! In fact, the Bangladesh team plays with ten players in their line up! Recently, he said that he was still a good Test batsman. His total score in two innings together did not reach double figures in the lost Test in Dhaka!

The only thing he is good at is giving excuses! If this is the criteria for becoming captain of our Test and ODI team; then may be even I can fill the void!

S.A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

Photo and fingerprint

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda on May 28, 2007 said the Election Commission (EC) was trying not to be rigid on the issue of having photographs on the voter list as it is impossible to compile the photographs of all voters within the stipulated timeframe.

In this connection, as a general citizen, I humbly maintain that only photograph is not enough for proper and quick identification at the polling centre as the voter ID will be used repeatedly for a long time and a person's appearance may change in course of time.

So, I propose procurement of camera, scanner, lamination machine and laptops. The scanner system (with software) will scan the voter's fingerprint and store it into the database. At the time of voting, the voter will only place his/her fingers on laptop and the database will provide all the infor-

mation to the polling officer.

The lamination machine will ensure long-lasting voter and national ID as these will have various uses for a long time.

Saif Tinku
One-mail

To the Chief Adviser...

I know that it's easy to advise, especially from far away. But I always thought I should give my advice, no matter how you treat it.

1) You can't solve all the problems. Please focus on only one. Clean the police department, it will have the capacity to clean the rest in the long run.

2) Nuclear electricity is the ultimate way to solve the electricity problem. You should build a roadmap to bring the technology home.

3) You should have a policy to utilise the money collected from the criminals.

Dr. Hasan
One-mail

Camellia Mustafa

I am deeply saddened to read an article entitled "Camellia Mustafa in critical state" by noted singer Fahmida Nabi that was published in the 'Culture' page of DS on May 04, 2007.

It is very much painful to know from the above article that Camellia Mustafa who was once popular for her exceptional recitation skills, who dedicated her life to our culture and who never thought about her materialistic gains, is now terribly sick and facing tremendous difficulties in meeting her treatment expenses. At present, the senior artist whom I greatly admire is undergoing treatment at Ayesha Memorial Hospital. She owes over Tk 1,50,000 to the hospital. Though the doctors have been supportive, still her treatment is uncertain due to lack of funds.

Letting an outstanding and committed artiste like Camellia Mustafa fade away would be a national shame. So I would request the Information Adviser of the caretaker government to please arrange better treatment for Camellia Mustafa. At the same time, I would request all to come forward with helping hands to share the pains and sufferings of the noted artiste and cultural activist. Contributions can be made at, SBA/C No. 34026842, Agrani Bank, Gulshan Branch, Code-978/7.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Chairman
Department of Language
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural
University

Immigration

Since 14 May 2007, the Australian Immigration Department has changed its requirements for Bangladeshi students who seek to do higher studies in Australia. This student visa category 573 enables students to enroll in Bachelor Degree, Graduate Diploma, Masters by Coursework etc in Australian universities. Bangladesh has been grouped with only 3 other countries in the world which will face a severe restriction to obtain this visa. As a result, obtaining Australian student visa for a Bangladeshi student will become extremely difficult. The number of Bangladeshi students studying in Australia may drop by 80% or even more.

As per the new rule, only parents, siblings, Australian resident uncle-aunts etc will be able to sponsor a Bangladeshi student,

whereas in the past anyone having the required amount of money could sponsor a student.

I fail to understand the reason behind Australia's decision to stop our students from pursuing higher studies in Australia.

Sohel Hasan
Sydney

Election Commission

The EC is gradually realising the ground reality and has made partial admission that the voter list can be done without affixing the photo of the voter. Sooner they realise the full truth, the better. We found in

ment should consider initiating the necessary process for lifting the embargo on indoor politics, which has a direct bearing on the preparatory work and management of the national election in 2008.

Areader
On-e-mail

Education sector

The reform that we need immediately is the reform in the education sector. The system should be overhauled from the very bottom. There are too many errors in the textbooks of the SSC curriculum and these must be removed, and

ment support. I just wish to add that, an important fact that needs to be addressed here is the refusal of past governments to understand that if the universities are to attract the best talents of the country into teaching, teachers' salaries need to be made competitive with the business sectors. Unless higher level teaching and research are demonstrably rewarded by the government and society at large, teaching will remain the way it has for the last half a century.

Imtiaz Habib
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA

A few words

My first advice for the Tigers would be not to worry about the runs/ scoreboard. They should now have only one simple approach -- occupying the crease for the remainder of the match. Secondly, every ball should be treated as if it is the first ball of the innings for the batsman! Meaning, caution is the order of play!

Thirdly, the ever so clichéd but meaningful advice, "Don't chase the runs, let the runs chase you."

And finally, if we give it a clear thought - the equation is quite simple! 8 hours a day, 3 days to go.

Each partnership is to make it past an hour and a half on an average. Too big an ask? Let's hope not.
MANasir
One-mail

Sheikh Hasina's stand

Our Jononetri keeps on making the same claim that the general public want her to lead the country. But who are these people? I don't think it's the general public. It's just the party workers who want her. First, she had problems with Justice K.M. Hasan. And now the caretaker government is the target of her spiteful attacks. It seems like she will continue to have a problem with one and all until she herself is back to the throne, ruling the land. While on the one hand she is vocal in her support for the caretaker government's fight against corruption, why did she fail to take action when her own party members were involved knee-deep in corruption?

I am a young citizen of this country, and I know how I suffered during the time when she was inciting violence to bring down the previous government.

In particular, I recall her encouraging people to bring 'logi and baitha' to the streets, which is surely not a civilised way of solving a problem. Think about the loss not only to the students, but the businesses, the economy, and the people who lost their lives during the senseless violence. How will she try to justify all that now?

As Bangabandhu's daughter, she surely should have taken measures to assist the families of those brave intellectuals who were slaughtered on December 14. One of my closest relatives was among them. But their families have been cruelly ignored by the governments in the recent years.

It's high time the Awami League and the BNP realise that people were forced to choose them, because of lack of options. If our generation doesn't wake up, we will never recover from this mess. We need to give up the attitude that we shouldn't enter politics because it won't make a difference. Otherwise, we will lose our beloved country to corrupt politicians.

Sohana
One-mail

Public universities

Muhammad Zamir has called for reforms in the public universities in Bangladesh. Citing the many critical resource constraints faced by these universities including the sad state of the libraries he has correctly called for greater govern-



Election funding

In my opinion the caretaker government should take the initiative to fund and hold the election after voter registration and issuance of voter ID.

Our FY08 budget will be presented in a week. It could be in the range of Tk 70,000 crore to 80,000 crore. Currently, the total revenue income target for FY07 is Tk 52,540 crore. There is no reason to believe that we need foreign donations to execute the election pro-

ject. DS has reported, "Recently, as many as 23 donor agencies have agreed to provide funds for the Election Commission's (EC) project for simultaneously preparing the voter list with photographs and national identity cards at an estimated cost of Tk 450 crore."

If we take their money to complete national ID or voter registration unconditionally, still the donors will have

the right to poke their nose into our national affairs.

I don't mind taking donations for poverty alleviation or for roads, bridges, schools etc. However, for conducting a fair election and voter registration, I would like the government to use the taxpayers' money. I want the government to do a customer service to citizens.

Abu Abdullah, One-mail

A suggestion

In this unprecedented time of corruption busting when crores of taka stolen from the country's citizens over the years is being retaken into government funds - every effort should be made for promptly translating the resources into public investment.

Zuba S. Islam
One-mail

English medium schools

One fine evening, my young primary level son gave me a paper from school. It's nothing new. Every year this is a brief explanation to justify the increase of yearly fees and monthly tuition fees of English medium schools. Very few English medium schools are providing quality education to the students. There is no governing body or authority to evaluate teachers' qualification and teaching standards. Most of the schools are increasing yearly caution money, yearly charges and monthly tuition fees as well. They do not even bother to discuss beforehand or consider parents' financial status. Unfortunately, the guardians have to accept it, otherwise their kids may be given TC or will be treated badly. Also, many of the teachers are just giving a lot of homework without explaining the subject properly in the class.

The government should look into this matter seriously and help our kids to be educated properly. Please take a bold decision and formulate a national policy on this.
Anonymous
One-mail

TV channels

I am rather appalled by the fact that recently a large number of TV channels were stopped from being shown. Who has made the decision and why? I am not talking about the local issues here. But why stop channels like axn, zee cafe, ten sports, nimbus sports, dd-bangla, ndtv, akash, tara (music & news), etv (India), vhl, travel, etc?

A few years back, all but 11 channels had been banned on the pretext of "being not in keeping with our cultural values". In fact, we had heard about the ban even before the ban had been imposed.

The present situation is a bit different, however. But how were the decisions made? Who standardized the "fitness"? Is there a committee? Who decides what we should and should not watch? Why were the public not informed? There is no transparency here.

One of our problems is that we are too scared to ask questions!
Dipu
Dhaka

India and UNSC

By all accounts, India deserves a seat as a permanent member of the Security Council. However, the membership should be without any veto power. Already, the UN is paralysed by veto-wielding five permanent members. It would further paralyse the Security Council if India is allowed to join as a permanent member with veto power.

Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

Army and politics

It is very refreshing to learn the army chief clarifying the role of the army in the present context. On the whole, the impression would seem to be that of a sincere man with a

clear vision of how he would like to see the future of Bangladesh. However, while I agree with his comment "army is not the proper institution for governing the country" he did not say who is.

Currently among the leaders, with all due respect, we have a 'Daughter', a 'Wife', a 'Cleric' and a 'General-turned-politician' who once had the title in the west as 'the richest president of the poorest country'. So currently people do not seem to have much of a choice really as each of the four mentioned had not been able to see beyond their respective interests in their 'Father', 'Husband', 'Power' and 'Money'. Going by their activities of the last 20 years, it would also seem that Bangladesh, the dear country, had always taken second place to them after their pursuance of respective interests. But alarmingly if they wish they have immense power of agitating the entire population.

There is a phrase in English that 'You cannot teach old dogs new tricks'. Assuming that has some truth in it, one could question how realistic is the dream of the army chief, without removing these individuals from the political scene of Bangladesh. Surely, there are more than one potential leader, whose time may have come, in each of these individual political organisations. Where are they? Why don't they stand up and be counted? Or are we to face the same old repetition of the same old episode of the same old theatre for another five or ten years or even more?

Hazra Awal
Cambridge, UK

Sports news

I have been reading The Daily Star for over thirteen years now. Being an avid sports fan, the sports section of the paper has always been one of my favourites.

But recently I have been quite disappointed with some of the articles in the sports section.

Nafis
One-mail

Dhaka-Kolkata train service

It is good to know that the government is contemplating introduction of train service between Dhaka and Kolkata from July this year. This initiative was long overdue as the air journey is highly expensive and the road journey exhausting. Thanks to the caretaker government for finalizing it.

The selection of Joydevpur as the starting and terminal point needs review and reconsideration of the authorities. Most of the passengers will originate from Dhaka and if one has to catch the train at 7:30 in the morning he/she has to start from Dhaka one hour and a half before. There is no regular transport service between Dhaka and Joydevpur, particularly at that hour of the day. Taxis/CNG scooters will demand 2-way fare from the passengers as they do for any long distance route. The returnees will also face difficulties to get transport for Dhaka at night from Joydevpur. The authorities may please consider these points and select the Cantonment/Airport Railway Station as the starting and terminal point for the Dhaka-Kolkata-Dhaka train service.

Besides, there should be a centre for buying tickets at a central location in the city for the convenience of the passengers.
H.R. Chowdhury
Maghbar, Dhaka