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# Saving water



Amidst the daily news reports of CTG's continuing crusade against the corrupt, and the unwanted drama revolving around the BNP chief, which is now nothing but a boring event, newspaper reading is an unrewarding experience. Only the sports page provides some interesting variety!

In contrast, the good news in page 3 of your publication (May 16) on the real possibility of reduction in water require-

ment for rice planting is the most exciting and eventful news for us in Bangladesh. Hopefully, the breakthrough will soon be achieved. We will be looking forward to more news and follow up of this revolutionary technological achievement by the IRR. Are our politicians who will run this country at all aware of this important news item?

I am sure our government, elected or otherwise, will give topmost priority and support to

disseminate this important development to the farmers. It will definitely reduce the cost of production of rice.

Even if there is no visible decrease in the price of rice; hopefully it will increase the profit margin of our marginal farmers somewhat. And they really deserve all that they can earn. They are the real backbone of the country.

**S.A. Mansoor**  
*Gulshan, Dhaka*

## Secularism and Bangladesh

Bangladesh as a small country has a lot to learn from India: technologically, in trading and economics, developing infrastructure, developing tourism, even election methods. India has turned itself into a global power in today's world boasting to be one of the largest and fastest growing economies, a challenge which none but China can rival. With such a strong partner beside us, I think Bangladesh can use the Indian model, and use Indian as a strategic partner to develop itself into a stronger country. One of the first steps would be allowing foreign investments (under favourable conditions of course). But these decisions of favourable/unfavourable deals should be made quickly, and efficiently instead of elongating the method and taking years to come up with a decision. Living abroad I understand that the ball is now in Bangladesh's court, the expectation is high for our country economically (just as our cricket team), it is now for Bangladeshi policy makers to either deliver results or crash out of the global competition.

Now coming to the comments made by the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka. Firstly, I will thank him for advising Bangladesh on better implementation of "secularism". It is unfortunate but the comments of the Indian HC warrant some criticism. India is far ahead of Bangladesh in all of the above cases, but lags behind in secularism. I do not mean to have any tone of sarcasm in my letter, and I understand that the condition of Hindus in Bangladesh is not good according to international standards, but my comparison between the two countries is prompted by

the Indian HC's comments. He mentioned, "Democracy in India is very strong as there is no division or discrepancy among people of different faiths and values because of the practice of real secularism". I think the HC was positioned in Bangladesh in 2002 and really did not get a chance to have a look at the Indian news at that time. As much as I respect and admire India's development, I have to be critical of the treatment meted out to Muslims, not because I am a Muslim myself, but because I am a human being. Having secularism in a country may be good for democracy, but it is meaningless if it is not practised.

**M Shadman**  
*Toronto, Ontario*

### National ID

I was surprised to hear that in Bangladesh everyone is talking about the immediate data collection process, which is only a very small fraction of the gigantic task, but no one has any concern about the most important task of data processing, updating and storage.

No one has raised any question about how and where the data will be processed and stored. Who will be the custodian of the huge data and how will they ensure the privacy of such sensitive personal information? What infrastructures are needed to secure the data? How the national database can be linked with the national birth and death database maintained by the local authorities? How will the system be kept alive and online so that it can update instantly and securely?

I hope that all concerned will look into the entire present and future prospects, so that we don't end up

having another white elephant project such as the previous voter list project. Finally, there must be a strong project co-coordinator with high level authority and vision to implement such an important project.

**Mohammad Rahman**  
*London, UK*

## BCS exams and expatriates

We, the Bangladeshi students in the UK, feel the need for a BCS exam centre in the UK. Many Bangladeshi students who are currently studying full time can hardly hope to appear in the BCS exams. It may not be possible for many to manage a leave from their institutes to attend the exams in Bangladesh. In addition, thousands of students cannot afford the cost of traveling to Bangladesh recurrently to complete the whole examination procedure. Remarkably, there is usually a few months' gap between different tests (multiple choice, written, viva etc) within the BCS exam system. Therefore, a student from the UK who is willing to appear in the BCS exams needs to travel several times which is obviously time consuming. A student has to attend his classes regularly in his academic session. He needs to prepare himself for the exams. Hence, it is a problem for a Bangladeshi student to appear in the BCS exams in Bangladesh.

I, therefore, request the authorities concerned to set up a BCS exam centre in the UK.

**Afjal H Khan**  
*Middlesex University, London*

### A suggestion

Firstly, congratulations for the article regarding the election crisis in Bangladesh.

It is impressive to note that how this caretaker government has successfully imitated the same patterns of policy-making as our last governments have for decades.

When the caretaker government took charge in January 2007, there was a feeling among political economists that Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed, with his background of political science, would at the minimal reduce the enormous democratic deficit associated with our governing system. Such a deficit has persisted with us since our time of independence. Our independence, and thereafter domestic reforms to steer back our economy, did not require us to be accountable to any nation of the world, and by virtue of the absence of external forces, our politicians could effectively mould politics to any shape they wanted to.

The price of such a deficit has to be paid by economics and its agents. A stable govern-

ment in place, with appropriate separation of powers and checks and balances, is an important factor for a successful economy. By successful I mean price-stability. Our price stability has continuously suffered from time-inconsistency problems, derived from the short prime ministerial terms, whereby any reform plan taken at a particular time, was suspended after the next elections. However with the current situation, there are two factors which indicate increasing social instability, having a direct spill-over effect on our economy.

Obviously, there is a fine line dividing the academic world and the political arena. The caretaker government must learn party and manipulative politics, not apply textbook politics to a volatile situation.

**Hasanuzzaman**  
*London School of Economics*

### AL chief's stand

Awami League president Sheikh Hasina has long been complaining against the interim government. She has claimed that the nation is now in a 'suffocating situation' (18/05/2007).

We strongly believe that only the corrupt are now facing "suffocation".

My question to her: would you want to push us to another pre-11/1 situation?

**Abdullah-AI Mamun**  
*BAU, Mymensingh*

### AL leadership

It seems that Awami League leaders are desperate to come to power. They cannot wait for the EC reforms to take shape. Ironically though, many of these reforms were proposed by the AL during the four-party alliance rule. Now, the AL wants a truncated version of reform implementation as they claim that full implementation of reform package is unnecessary. From the way AL chief Hasina speaks in interviews and public talks, one gets the impression that the current caretaker government has a de facto obligation to make sure that the AL comes back to power. The present leadership of the AL, as usual, has failed to read the popular sentiments.

This should be clear that this government enjoys support of the masses on the streets and people would like this government to execute the reform package in its entirety before the general election is held. The AL top leadership should realise that.

**AFM Mohiuddin**  
*Lalmatia, Dhaka*

## Election and democracy

Should we not ask ourselves what we want?

In a very simple manner we can interrogate Bangladeshi citizens and ask them questions like this:

- Are we living now in a better condition under the governance of the present CTG?

- Are we in a rush to see the end of the present government?

- Are we in a hurry for election?

- Why American Senators and other foreign dignitaries want to see the end of this government and ask the CTG to hold election as early as possible?

- Do we want to go back to the so-called democratic rule?

- Should we not hold a referendum on the question of continuation of the present government to eradicate corruption, give time to

reorganise the existing political parties by eliminating bad elements, to help creation of new parties with honest people?

It is up to us, not the foreign governments, to decide what we want. We have to choose between a democratically elected chaotic government or a disciplined undemocratic, selected caretaker institution.

**N.G. Chaudhury**  
*Luxembourg*

### Secularism

In principle I agree, with reservation, with the comment of the Indian High Commissioner, Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, that Bangladesh lacks real practice of secularism. When you compare secularism, we need a standard. Referring India as role model and standard for religious secularism is simply unacceptable.

There are several countries with fine track record in religious harmony that would warrant such a comment, but ironically India is not one of them.

**Iriza Ahmad**  
*Boston, USA*

### To the Chief Adviser

First of all, I congratulate the present interim caretaker government for taking right decisions in almost all the sectors of governance. We appreciate the government's steps taken to root out corruption. We have started benefiting from all such steps. Good luck on your endeavours for making a corruption free Bangladesh!

I have the pleasure to take this opportunity to put forward something about education; and it is in fact, higher education, particularly in Chittagong University.

Almost all the national dailies published a front-page news about the arrival of a UGC probe body to investigate the irregularities in Chittagong University.

Under the circumstances, we appeal to you to kindly look into the Department of Mathematics.

**Prof. Dr. Moslehuddin Ahmed**  
*Dep. of Mathematics*  
*Chittagong University*

## Money in bags & pillows!

The bizarre that might surpass Reply's Believe it or Not stories has been unfolding its multifaceted ugliness one after another in this land lately. There had been posh cars, expensive and rare pets of different kinds and many more in the possession of the corrupt politicians that had been chased by this government. And now you notice, with all sense of wonder and angst, how a high forest official went beyond sense/consciousness when the joint forces arrested him the other day. The person lost his sense for the fact that he knew well, when he was spotted with all his money in cash that mounted miraculously to a staggering one crore taka hidden in pillows, vaults and other places at his own home, that he was going to lose his money-mountain! It was a bizarre spectacle on the TV screen, joint forces officials were searching & collecting the cashes from pillows, vaults and other crevices; the owner was fainting --- trust me, I've never seen such a scene in my life; I bet, very few had the luck or bad luck to witness such an awesome event --- truth is indeed stranger than fiction! reckon!

Finally, this unique story of some high forest official does point out, very vividly indeed, the fact that the rot/evil has actually crept deep into the individuals of the society; and it also manifests the fact that the government has to be cruel only to be kind --- there is no other path left if we mean business.

**Rafiqul Islam Rime**  
*Lecturer in English*  
*Premier University*  
*Chittagong*

### Prescriptions for us

It has become a daily practice for Western envoys to write prescriptions for all ailments of Bangladesh. Now it seems the Indian envoy has joined the league. It sounds like big brothers telling his younger brother what is the right thing to do. Indian envoy's remark on practice of secularism in Bangladesh is rather diplomatic. I certainly believe Bangladesh has a long way to go before we can claim ourselves a secular nation. Constitutional provision does not guarantee secularism in practice in India or in Bangladesh. True secularism has to be practised in daily life and exists in the heart of the people and not in the mouth or printed in the constitution. In the 1960's a professor of comparative literature of Jadovpur University after visiting the villages of the then East Pakistan wrote, " True secularism is in better practice in the villages in East Pakistan than anywhere else in the sub-continent".

A true Bengali can never be a non-secularist.

**Munim Chowdhury**  
*Founding Member of Tagore Society of New York*

## Combating corruption

The anti-corruption drive by the caretaker government (CTG) is not

# Palestine scene



Both Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas have been elected by the Palestinian people, then why are they slaughtering each other? Only two months ago, they signed an agreement ending the earlier factional fighting and formed a government of national unity. But instead of bringing unity, Fatah and Hamas have resumed their infighting in which they are killing each other without any restraint.

Latest bloodlettings started when Hamas gunmen raided the house of an important Fatah leader, killing his guards. In the ensuing fighting, both Hamas and Fatah gunmen have been attacking each other in the Gaza Strip while blaming Israel for their own brutality toward each other. Fighting continued even after rival Palestinian factions renewed a pledge on May 14 to stop killing. But gunmen loyal to Hamas and Fatah continue to battle each other. With the casualty toll mounting, Interior Minister Hani Kawasmeh resigned, accusing leaders on both sides of fomenting the violence. People of Gaza found the latest violence more ominous than the previous rounds, saying it signaled to the total animosity between the two Palestinian factions and their desire to destroy each other in the name of the Palestinian people. Both claim that they

are elected by the Palestinian people and must have total power. They fail to realise that Hitler was also elected by the German people before he started to destroy his opponents. "Now they are starting off from where they left," said Jamal Abu Shabaan, a Gaza resident to the Associated Press. "If they get to each other's throat, they won't let go this time."

At the centre of the new Palestinian infighting is a dispute over who controls the security forces. A majority of 80,000 security officers in the West Bank and Gaza are loyal to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the Fatah leader, while Hamas set up its own 6,000-strong militia last year. These two heavily-armed groups are determined to destroy each other. Renewed violence between them will continue to cast a dark shadow if they cannot find a way to live together.

As such, this may be the time for the violent factions to rethink about the methods they are using to fight each other and Israel. Only by eschewing violence, they can make any progress toward peace and stability. They may look to Mahatma Gandhi who gained India's independence non-violently. When Gandhi launched his anti-colonial movement against the British rule in India, he rejected out of hand any violence in the

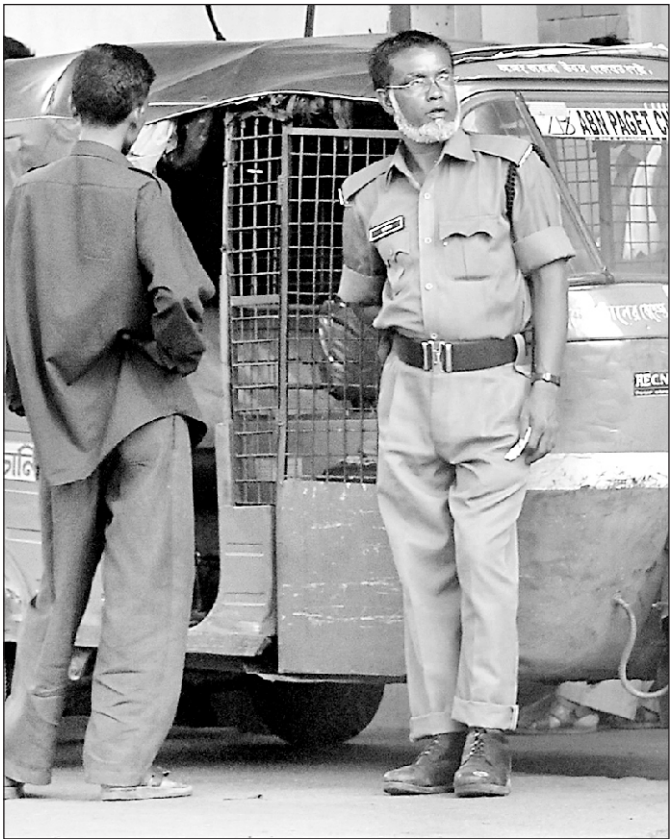
name of anti-colonialism. Here are his own words: "If India makes violence her creed, I will not care to live in India. She will fail to evoke any pride in me." Gandhi rejected the idea that the end justifies the means. For him, the means must be noble if the end is noble.

When some militants in his movement attacked a police station, he called off his non-violent movement. Only after being assured that there would be no recourse to violence, Gandhi resumed his struggle.

Although Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu extremist who thought he was too soft on what he considered as the Muslim enemy, he gained India's independence without taking a single British life. Gandhi had shown the world a way to fight oppression without having to kill. The same applies to violent groups like Hamas and Fatah, which can achieve their goals through non-violent political actions. The only way Hamas and Fatah can stop killing each other is by renouncing violence in the name of politics.

**Mahmood Elahi**  
*Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada*

# CNG issue



The government tried to end passenger harassment by CNG autorickshaw drivers when they set up the new meter reading and fixed daily down-payments for owners. But the scheming and greedy owners saw a loophole and put drivers on two shifts, thereby earning more than what they used to receive as daily payment from the drivers BEFORE the government set the new limits. The govt. now has to resort to stiff action by fixing daily payment to the owners by the drivers, whether the owners put out the vehicles for two shifts or one. That way the common people will be spared the harassment and the drivers, who have now to bring up the daily sum in fewer hours and are as

much harassed as the passengers are, shall start abiding by the new rules and go by the meter.

Also, some CNG autorickshaw owners are having the meters on their vehicles removed on the pretext of having them fixed according to the new calculations. However, they are not installing the meters again. The drivers therefore, cannot drive on the meter readings and passengers have to fix the fare instead. It is just like it used to be before.

We urge the govt. not to ignore these problems as the increased fare has benefited only the unscrupulous owners.

**Sumaiyah Kanij**  
*Kuwait*

