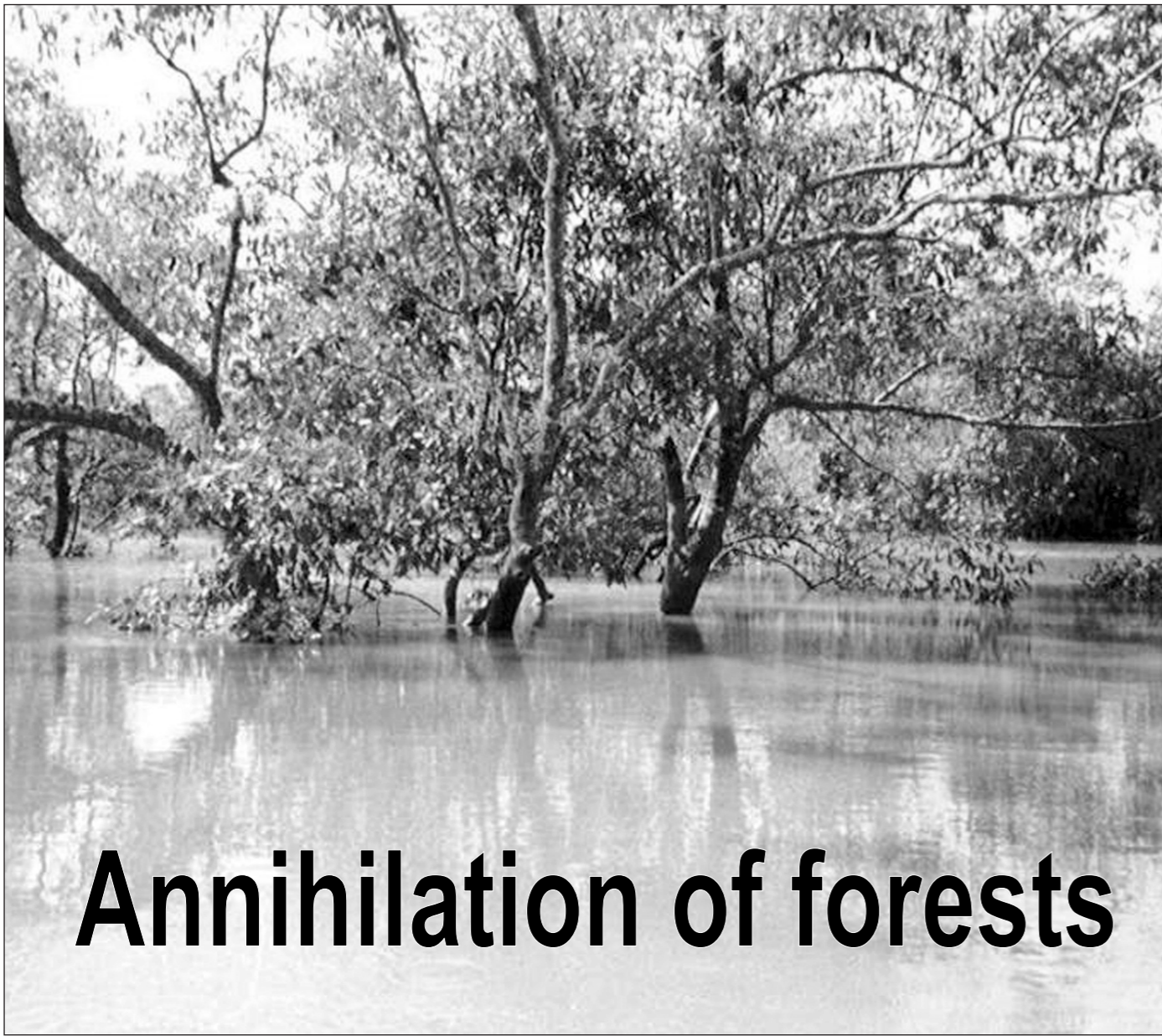


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.



Annihilation of forests

Woods are shrinking at an alarming rate. It is estimated that only 5% of the surface of the country is now covered with forests. In near future all the remaining forests may disappear -- a bleak prospect. No doubt, the human activities are responsible for the gradual shrinkage of the pristine nature -- the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans, the forests in the Hill Tracts and other patches on the plain.

Illegal logging, destruction of trees due to agriculture and human encroachment -- all these contributed to the process of deforestation. In this regard, we can highlight the rapid growth of population which is exerting pressure on the carrying capacity of the land. Forests are giving way to human habitations. Trees are being felled and used as building material and firewood. Another factor that did a great harm to our woods is the

practice of monoculture which ignored the issue of bio-diversity. In fine, we have shown a great apathy to our forests as well as the indigenous people who live there.

The Sundarbans has already been declared as a world heritage site by Unesco. More initiatives are required to save our remaining forests.

Zabed Wali
Pahartali, Chittagong

Our captain

It is extremely frustrating to see the facial expression of the captain of the Bangladesh cricket team on TV. When the team needed some aggressiveness, we saw him hanging in there for no good reason.

There is nothing wrong in losing a game but what is disturbing is the lack of positive thinking. A sensible game plan is completely absent. We need some intelligent cricketers who can take control of the situation and do their job.

Mamun Ahmed
Las Vegas, NV, USA

Political issues

The CTG is facing a huge task -- to defuse the huge political black energy boiling within the society (corrupt practices and black money). This multifaceted syndicates have a powerful, wide and vicious network, which cannot be controlled or wiped out in one phase (applied anywhere in the world), before the clean and transparent elections are held in the near future; even with public backing, which is already forthcoming.

Trimming the leaves and branches are not enough -- the very roots have to be uprooted. The resolve of the current emergency regime is laudable, but the proof of the pudding lies in the eating. The Army Chief sounds tough. We have seen similar exercises all over the world; but the evil inertia of bad governance is very tenacious.

The new governance is passing through the incubation period -- it is not an elected government, but enjoys public support. Then there are vested foreign groups who are putting pressure on this government through indirect diplomatic pressures of various kinds. The local psychology and culture have to be analysed carefully for fine-tuning this operation clean-up.

Money cannot buy anything and everything, but it could do a lot of damage and slow down honest endeavours through delaying processes and subtle sabotage exercises. Only honest elected politicians can handle such operations on long-term basis. This is a big hurdle in have-not societies. Also we can learn a few lessons from what is happening in Pakistan today under a military general.

Now the militia are operating kitchen markets; which is not their job. There are shortages of food and the essentials of daily life. Thus a short-term emergency regime is theoretically handicapped in coping with the accumulated garbage of the nation for over three decades.

Nothing new has been pointed out above, and it is not difficult for laymen to fathom out what went wrong with us since liberation. The media is helping with public feedbacks. Some hasty actions have created bottlenecks (physical and

mental).

Slow and steady is not the need of the day. Let us seek divine guidance.

A Mawaz, Dhaka

Secularism

His Excellency Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, High Commissioner of India - the official representative of the largest democracy in the world insinuated that Bangladesh should follow India, as "...real secularism is practised there (India)", as reported by The Daily Star on 19 May, 2007.

Perhaps His Excellency was alluding to the fact that India has a Muslim President, a Sikh Prime Minister, and therefore, qualifies as an epitome of what secularism should be. I wonder whether he remembers Graham Staines - the Australian missionary in India who in 1999, along with his two children aged 7 & 9, were burnt alive while they were sleeping in their car by a group of "Hindutva" zealots. I wonder whether he would like to discuss the Gujarat riots or the plight of the 150 million Dalits (untouchables) in India.

The High Commissioner's remarks should not be taken lightly. Relegating them to a faux pas, or a one-off event, a diplomatic gaffe would be an egregious folly.

Thankfully, the Prime Minister of India is not blind, and in December 2006 he admitted that, "Untouchability (in India) remains a blot on humanity".

Hon'ble High Commissioner, if secularism means having a belligerent and xenophobic attitude towards all of your eight neighbouring countries, then yes, we need to learn from India. If secularism means having a right wing Hindu nationalist political party like the BJP holding 22% of seats in the parliament (as opposed to the Jamaat with less than 04% in our erstwhile parliament), then yes, we need to learn about secularism from India.

On a serious note, India has many wonderful things to offer to the world, but for now, secularism is not one of them.

A. Farjad Ahmed
Baramaghbazaar
Rajshahi House Complex, Dhaka

A few days ago, the High Commissioner of India said in a press conference that Bangladesh should follow his country's secularism.

Within one week, we saw in the newspaper that thousands of lower-caste Hindus in India converted to Buddhism.

Now I would like to ask the Honourable High Commissioner: what kind of message does it send? I am requesting them to assess their own standard of secularism.

Adnan Mursalin, On e-mail

Practice of hegemony

Hegemony is the dominance of one group over other groups, with or without the threat of force, to the extent that, for instance, the dominant party can dictate the terms of trade to its advantage; more broadly, cultural perspectives become skewed to favour the dominant group.

When we take a look at the history of mankind we can see that there has never been peace among the nations, and it is becoming increasingly elusive.

Ivan Simic
Belgrade, Serbia

Paul Wolfowitz

No man is above the law and everything has a limit that's hazardous to go beyond.

The very truth was proved again when Paul Wolfowitz, the president of World Bank, bowed to pressure over a scandal.

Ala Uddin Ansary
Zahurul Haque Hall, DU

Unstable prices

It is frequently reported in the media that foreign exchange reserve is increasing day by day and it has come to above 4 billion US dollars. In respect of export business of international trade, a substantial growth is recorded as of February 2007. The country is experiencing an upward trend in wage remittances. In view of such upward movements, Bangladesh economy is being considered to be on a sound footing.

On the other hand, the present spiraling of the prices of essential goods is putting tremendous pressure on the marginal and fixed income groups. This indicates that the value of taka has decreased in respect of its purchasing power. The inflation with regard to food prices was recorded at 8.36 percent in February, 2007. Economists and research organisations suggest adopting different means to overcome the situation. The crisis is basically due to reduction of supply in line with demand. The commodities for which the crisis is being faced are agro and agro-based products. They can easily be produced in Bangladesh. They are imported to meet the demand. It is said the price hike is due to the change of price levels in the international market. As such, the prices of such items are increasing in the local market.

The central bank should come forward with policy guidelines to contain the unbearable price hike.

Mehdi Rahman
On e-mail

Writing letters

Recently, I received a personal letter from a reader who heartily appreciated me particularly for my art of writing on a variety of items.

What I feel is, no literary or journalistic work carries any value until and unless it is published and read by readers. As such, the credit also goes to the newspapers which make my write-ups visible to the readers.

Truly speaking, those among us who voluntarily write for the newspapers, especially for this column do so with a noble intention to serve people and the nation. We do not only try to project problems but also make attempts to put forward possible remedies. Of course, these are the serious faculties of the society but people also need entertainment and amusements. Keeping this in mind I always try to write on light issues as well. I know some readers often dislike it but we should not forget that variety is the soul of life. Variety breaks monotony!

Anyway, to get back to the beginning, during my long stroll on the media platform, I have had the opportunity to come in contact with a number of wonderful persons.

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

Commercial establishments in Dhanmondi

I hail the decision taken by the Honourable Adviser for Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives directing the Dhaka City Corporation not to give licence to the commercial enterprises in the residential areas. A few days ago he also declared that all the educational and other commercial establishments in the Dhanmondi residential area would have to move out. I thank the Honourable Adviser for grasping the sufferings of the residents of Dhanmondi due to the unscrupulous behaviour of the greedy people and their connection with those within the City Corporation, who give licences to the educational and other commercial establishments.

It is surprising that after the announcement of the Honourable Adviser about the removal of the educational and other commercial establishments from Dhanmondi, the traffic department has introduced one way road system in the area for easing traffic congestion by putting a huge number of police on-duty. Obviously, it has eased the congestion to a certain extent. Should the residents of Dhanmondi be happy with this arrangement? Question arises as to how long the traffic department would be able to deploy so many policemen. What cost does the new arrangement entail when it comes to the residents? Can the residents move freely now? How much do they have to make to go to the next road by burning costly fuel? How much

the rickshaw fare has increased? Why the inhabitants of Dhanmondi residential area should undergo the trouble of the one way road that is suitable for the city heart centres, commercial and office areas?

Is the City Corporation so poor that it needs to make money by any means? One understands that removal of commercial establishments cannot be a one-day affair. But effort should be made to start the process. The commercial establishments can easily move out to the nearby commercial establishments already developed at the Mirpur Road, Road 27, Satmasjid Road and Road 2.

A. Hadi
Dhanmondi

Public library needed

The harmonious development of body, mind, soul, morality and intelligence in a balanced way is regarded as education. Education is a life-long process and it is not confirmed only to the institutionalised level. Generally, in different educational institutions some subject-related books are prescribed and the learners are compelled to collect and read them. But the fullest development of knowledge and profound wisdom is quite impossible by reading prescribed books only. Needless to say, because of financial limitation and some other practical problems nobody can buy all the books he intends to read. So a public library can play a vital role in this regard. With a view to spreading the light of education and enlightening the mind and soul of the book-loving people, some libraries have been established in different parts of the country. But public libraries can hardly be seen in rural areas. Moreover, because of the inadequate number of libraries and lack of necessary facilities, a lot of people are deprived of the services of public libraries.

To educate the nation in the truest sense, the establishment of public libraries is a must. In order to remove the curse of illiteracy from our beloved motherland, public libraries can play a very important role. If the authorities concerned provide essential infrastructural facilities and recruit trained and experienced manpower, public libraries can be used as mass education centres, especially in rural areas. Poor students of the rural areas (and even urban areas) can be benefited by borrowing books from public libraries.

By this time, the present caretaker govt. has taken many pragmatic steps for the welfare of the society. We have observed several revolutionary changes in different sectors of the country. So to achieve the above mentioned goals, I would like to request the present govt. to take a vigorous initiative for establishing public libraries in all the villages of the country. But it is very difficult only for the govt. to implement such an expensive and comprehensive programme. That is why, the affluent and the educated people may come forward to assist the govt. for the implementation of this philanthropic programme.

Md. Khairul Anam

Asstt. Teacher (English)
Comilla Zilla School, Comilla

The CTG

Bangladesh was steeped in profound obscurity and needed a concrete guide who might salvage the country from such murkiness. It is not so easy to get someone like that, but optimism has started to grow in our country, thanks to the present caretaker government.

That is why the present administration of our country is not only a government, but also a source of pride for us.

Rahat Ahmed Chowdhury
Department of English
Metropolitan University, Sylhet

School tuition fees

Some English medium schools are providing quality education to students. But most of the schools are increasing yearly caution money, yearly charges and monthly tuition fees as well. They don't even bother to discuss the matter beforehand, nor do they consider parents' financial position. Unfortunately, many of the guardians have to accept it; otherwise their kids may be given TC or treated badly.

The government should look into the matter.

Anonymous
On e-mail

A good decision

This is a good decision (holding the 27th BCS viva again). It also implies that there were major irregularities in the last viva voce.

The irregularities must be removed at any cost.

Saif Tinku, On e-mail

BCS exams

We heard the news of question paper leakage before the preliminary test of the 27th BCS. But nobody protested or wrote any letter to a newspaper till the viva results were published. Instead, they nurtured the hope of becoming a civil servant but when they failed they started crying foul! How unethical! We also sat for the exams but were not successful. However, we have congratulated a few friends for their success.

Now, we hope that the government will soon hold the 28th BCS.

Mamun, Mizan and Roton

Dhaka

Gruesome murders

The report published in different newspapers on May 23, 2007, police discovering decomposed bodies of six of a family, was so gruesome and macabre that I had to gasp with horror and anguish. How could people become so cruel? Are they human beings, how could they become so ruthless and sadistic?

We are feeling so uneasy because criminals like them are roaming everywhere. This sort of incidents could happen anywhere, anytime. They are demons in the guise of humans!

We demand that the criminals be arrested and given exemplary punishment.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

City transport

Every time one approaches a driver of a CNG autorickshaw or a black or yellow cab, the driver will invariably ask for more than the meter fare. Of course, the distance has to be acceptable to him. His reasons: the owner will not give him any respite on the deposit money, long lines at the CNG station and not to mention the skyrocketing prices of daily essentials. A few months ago they were also burdened with five to ten taka parking charges at different locations in the city.

They fear these goons will soon appear. Their cry for higher fares from the customers is very genuine. When we all first heard about the CNG scheme we were so excited that we thought finally we would have an affordable and environ-

ment-friendly transport system.

As for buses some positive changes have occurred, but not enough. The crux of the problem actually lies not with the CNG drivers or their owners but with the government policy. When the government first allowed CNG to be imported it was through one certified company only. And also the government had fixed a certain number of vehicles that could be imported.

The demand was high and many business people opted to invest in the area. As there was no price control on the reselling, the price of each CNG scooter shot up almost ten times its original price. Many rightfully blamed the minister and his ministry. Considering the low cost of

running gas-operated vehicles, soon there was a rush to convert other small and yellow cabs to gas. But the commuters did not benefit much. Here are some proposals which, if implemented, will definitely change the situation for the better.

A new policy for the CNG and taxicabs should be formulated with the following directives.

- 1) All drivers of CNG autorickshaws, small and yellow taxis should be allowed to become their owners.
- 2) A cooperative body has to be formulated in this regard.
- 3) A bank or banks have to be designated for loans to the cooperative.
- 4) They can become the owners of their vehicle by paying in installments to the cooperative which will buy the vehicle for them.
- 5) Only one driver per vehicle.
- 6) Exclusive parking and refilling stations should be designated for them.
- 7) The government should buy the existing CNG vehicles from their present owners and hand them over to the would be driver owners through the cooperative. The government will incur a loss initially but will be benefited immensely in the long run. Government money is public money and it is the public who stand to be benefited by this.
- 8) Phase wise they should do the same with the small and yellow taxis.

Following this scheme we will get rid of the unnecessary middle man and the monopoly in this vital sector.

Shantoo
Mahakhali, Dhaka

Give us some space



We belong to 50 indigenous communities living in different districts. Garo, Tripura, Chakma, Marma, Mro, Bom, Santal, Khasia, Lusai, Orang, Khumi, Pankhow etc. are some of the communities. But most people don't know about us.

So, if you give a bit of space once a week/ twice a month for us in your paper, it will be highly appreciated.

John Bahadur
On e-mail

Top two leaders

I don't think you can force Khaleda Zia & Sheikh Hasina out of politics.

It was a tactical error by the people concerned to force them out. But I feel, and this feeling is shared by many, that they should quit politics. If we go back to the pre-1/11 situation we would see a political turmoil and many feared if the situation didn't improve, there might have been a civil war in the country. We have come back from that situation, thanks to the Armed Forces. But the sufferings we have endured in those days were unbearable and someone should take the responsibility and I think it is the two major political parties. It is because of their lust for power that we were in that situation.

So, it is my firm belief that being the absolute leaders of the AL and the BNP Sheikh Hasina & Khaleda Zia should quit politics.

They have served us for two decades with not much grace. Corruption, bad governance, nepotism, and undemocratic attitude were the main features of their brand of democracy.

Safayet Jamil

Student, National university

Bashabo residents' plight

Being a resident of Bashabo I have been experiencing all kinds of problems in the last few days. There are a few lakh residents in this locality. Apart from the load-shedding in this terrible heat, we have been subjected to further misery by the construction work that is going on for the sewage system. A large area from the main road at Buddhamandir to Kadamtala bridge has been dug up by the agency concerned. Every day we have to walk quite a distance to avail any kind of transport. Our plight increases when it rains. I thank you for covering the issue but it seems that the authorities are still handling the project in a relaxed manner.

This has been the trait for the last seventeen years and it seems to continue. Only God knows when our ordeal will come to an end.

Mahmudul Hasan
Kadamtala, Bashabo

