



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.

Our forests



In 1978, I set up the first project in private agro-forestry in Bangladesh on my own barren hills near Chittagong. In the next 10 years, more than 100,000 trees/plants of over 60 species were planted with my own money and hard work. In 1988, when I wanted to harvest a portion of the mature trees, I came up against the well-entrenched red tape of the Forest Dept. In short I was told that I was free to plant trees but not harvest them without their permission. The permission I soon found out was only forthcoming after payment of 'Nazrana' to all tiers of the forest bureaucracy. I dug in my heels and refused outright. Then followed a series of more than 100 letters from 1988 to

1994 (and thereafter with decreasing frequency) that I wrote in the English newspapers exposing the Forest Dept's corruption with names, locations and amounts demanded. Although the media cooperated wholeheartedly by printing each letter without omitting even a comma, there was no response whatsoever from anyone in the authority. On the contrary, those named as culprits were even promoted. (senior readers, especially Mr. O H Kabir of The Black Gold of Cox's Bazar Beach fame will remember). The letters and articles fully exposed how the colonial Forest Act of 1927 had been efficiently adapted for corrupt practices; corruption was institutionalised and in many respects even legalised. After threats and attacks on my family as a consequence, I was forced to leave Chittagong in 1993 and have been working for my living since then in Dhaka. The trees on the farm were totally decimated within months, involving hundreds of trucks and labourers. Discreet enquiries from Dhaka revealed that no one saw anything or knew anything as to what happened to the thousands of trees worth crores of taka that had to travel a short distance of 18 kms through the forests and other check-posts to reach the markets in Chittagong. In one of my letters I had estimated, as per productivity on my farm, that the Forest Dept's income from forest acreage under their possession should not be less than Tk 1,200 crore yearly. That year they had shown a mere Tk. 43 crore and I had posed the query as to what had happened to the remaining Tk.1,150 crore approximately. Now 74 years old and still working 10/12 hours a day for my living, I feel a sense of relief that perhaps my stubborn convictions, efforts and losses may not have been in vain and that our land will once again become the verdant paradise it was 55 years back when I first saw it. But for that to happen, as I had also half-seriously suggested in a seminar to the World Bank team who formulated the 20 years Master Plan for our forests in the early 90's, at least 75% of the more corrupt staff should be put inside the Ban Bhaban and the whole lot "blown up".
Sikander Ahmed
Dhaka

Poets

If poets are pleasant in one sense, then they're unpleasant in another sense. We have many poets in our country, young and old, firebrand etc. But do we know how they're pleasant or unpleasant? The answer is that we do not know. They're a mystery, one thing I can tell you for certain, and the material and message that would shed light on their life and work is locked more in libraries than in the hearts of our generation. I don't know the young generation's thoughts on them, but I'm sure our elders have respect for their contemporary poets. No doubt, there's been a massive collection, out of which a little has been exposed so far that we can

remember, and love to admire. Our poets wrote a lot. As a commoner, I can remember some of the childhood rhymes, limericks; and some pieces that have some sort of this or that political message. Yes, politics is a part of rhyming but many poets I can remember do not endorse this view. Yes, in expressing outlook on politics, the poets are polarised, unfortunately though. When everything will be out in the open, I believe, our poets will be acquitted of anti-sentiments of all kinds.
Sirajul Islam
*Pisciculture Housing Society
Shyamoli, Dhaka*

Dr. Kamal Hossain
Dr. Kamal Hossain has begged apology to the nation for his trusting some leading politicians of the country out of his own simple mindedness. He has asked those crafty, crooked, anti-people top politicians, as well, to beg apology to the nation just as he himself did. In the same interview he asked the government to put those 'class one' leaders to speedy trial for the crimes they have committed, instead of running after the second and third levelers. Dr. Kamal Hossain is well known not only in the country but also in the outside world as a lawyer of repute. He was drawn into politics

nearly four decades ago by the then Awami League chief Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and for the same line up he happened to be the first law minister of Bangladesh under the Mujib government beginning in January 1972. In the decades past, he also survived in politics not entirely having his lot with the Awami League. Despite being a well-known international personality and a heavyweight by himself, he could do little as far as elective democracy is concerned. Having failed to do enough in power politics all on his own, he joined hands with different political parties during the last decade, the latest one being the Awami League itself. Now it

appears quite clearly from his latest statement of begging apology that he has been let down by his latest associates. One can only wish that he lived the rest of his life with the wisdom he has acquired through many trials and tribulations.
M.T. Hussain
Ibrahimpur, Dhaka

Passport issue

The present government is trying to eliminate corruption. Lt Gen.(Retd) Hasan Mashud Chowdhury is trying to create public awareness to get rid of the evil but unfortunately corruption is mixed with our blood, and without changing the whole blood the germ cannot be eliminated! Getting a passport is a fundamental right of every citizen. If you go to the western world or even Singapore, you need not be worried about getting it. In Bangladesh, however, it is the toughest thing if you do not bribe the police or passport officials. I submitted all necessary documents for my wife and daughter to get their passports. The passports were supposed to be delivered on 29/04/07 but God knows when these will be given. Like me there are lots of sufferers. My earnest request to the authorities: please do something so that this fundamental right is not ignored.
A sufferer
Dhaka

English class

In Dhaka, some Bangla medium women's university-colleges are really good for studying English literature. The highly efficient teachers speak English with fluency and impeccable diction. But the sad thing is they do not deliver the whole lecture in English and do not converse with the students in English. Our earnest request to them is, "Please do give us lectures in English, for we have come to learn English and study English Literature."
Natasha Nazli Noor
Dhaka

Plant quarantine at ZIA

Our expatriates (wage earners) are mostly the unskilled workers working abroad. While returning /visiting home from M.E. and gulf countries, some of them usually carry a small amount of fresh /dry fruits and spices for their own consumption as well as for their near and dear ones. Of course, those have no commercial value. But only at our airport the plant

quarantine section of the Ministry of Agriculture has been functioning so conspicuously, something one will not see at any other airport of the world. So we have set an example! The uniform they wear is also dodgy. You will take them to be customs inspectors. They intercept the passengers on their way to green/red channel of customs and escort the selected ones to their counter in the name of examining whether the above articles contain any germs etc and are supposed to charge a nominal fee in taka for the

services. One will find a notice board displaying a chart. For fruits up to 5kg no charge but for spices up to one ton Tk 50/. Here lies the catch. So they can check/examine even a few grams of spices. Isn't the exercise uncalled-for and unnecessary? The simple passengers unaware of rules and such an unexpected encounter get nervous and frightened as they are usually intimidated in many ways. After a long overnight journey in a pressurized cabin the passengers remain tired and fatigued. So they normally give in to their demand to get out of

the trap. They have to part with some of their foreign currency to get out of the hassle. The rules have been framed very tactfully! Can we not exempt our wage earners from this uncalled-for harassment by changing the workings of the so called rules? It makes one laugh when we visit our local markets and find all sorts of poisonous and adulterated food items being openly sold. I appeal to the government to address the issue.
A Zakaria
Shewrapara, Mirpur

Climate change and national interests

The USA and China have come under great pressure internationally to take more forceful measures to curb releases of greenhouse gases. China relies on coal to meet two-thirds of its energy needs and is projected to surpass the U.S. as the world's No. 1 emitter of greenhouse gases sometime in the next two years. Consequently, the new emissions programme, announced by China's National Development and Reform Commission, has outlined steps that China will take to meet overall energy efficiency. A 62-page report promises not to tread the traditional path of industrialiation with its high consumption and high emissions. Measures to improve China's environment will include expanded research and deployment of new energy-saving technologies, improvement of agricultural infrastructure, increased tree-planting and water

resource management and greater public awareness of the issue. What intrigues is Beijing's assertion that its carbon emission cuts could not be at the cost of its economic growth. As a responsible member of the UN Security Council, China has an obligation to the world community to at least secure its breathing safe and secure, if not their territories and people's lives. The same is true about all developed nations as well as countries like India contaminating the breathing air and adding to the terrible climate change. Not only the G-8 and other international and regional organisations and institutions, but the UNSC should also concentrate on climate change on a priority basis so as to arrest the fast growing danger to mankind.
Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal
JNU, New Delhi



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