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# Of child labour



It is nice that people these days are vocal about child labour and abuse of the labourers. Sadly, child labour in the twenty-first century is rampant in societies where, in reality, exists no balance between the rich & the poor. And in Bangladesh, unfortunately though, a staggering number of children are engaged in horrendous jobs, when they are supposed to be in school. The ratio is alarmingly on the rise. Interestingly, we all know that poverty is one of the causes of this inhuman practice, and that they (poor children) are to be put back on track – the school. And given the facts, one might wonder if we have ever thought of eliminating this curse from society

through a proper rehabilitation that needs a good chunk of money! Have we figured out the exact number of these destitute children? Have we, at all, figured out the budget for the rehabilitation project for them? And then, have we made/sorted out a comprehensive plan for them yet? We need to financially back their families first, so that they do not depend upon their wards' earnings; and then we've to ensure education for them. Only through such a concrete action oriented programme can we salvage these unfortunate children.

**Rafiqul Islam Rime**  
Chittagong

# The budget



The annual budget is a very important document for any government.

A sense of time and place is essential in politics. A caretaker government, as envisaged in the constitution is a non-political entity in as much as it is possible to be non-political for a government that has to rule a country for any length of time. This is a special problem for this government because it is going to be in power for a fairly long time which is fraught with many challenges, not least of which is confronting the nagging question of being in power for more than 90 days and maintaining emergency rule for more than 120 days and then have enough goodwill left to get all the political parties to participate in the elections organised by it.

The main task of this government is to hold a free, fair and impartial election and handover power to the party that will form government. To be able to perform this task, it is an absolute must to maintain peace.

One of its main budgetary challenges under present conditions of price instability and raging stories of corruption by previous governments is to maintain stability and to convey a sense of being evenhanded

and fair in dealing with all sections of people. It should ideally be above the usual governmental fixation about maximizing the revenue income and freely distribute the proceeds to favour seekers. More importantly, it must not appear to demolish what concerned sections of people consider to have been earned from previous regimes.

But, unfortunately, the government appears to have done just that. It has imposed duty on computers and related items, mobile sets, savings certificates, industrial raw materials while reducing duty on cars and finished electronic items. All these will appear to be beyond the present government's ambit and anti-people in character which political parties currently under siege will certainly exploit when the time comes.

We hope that the government will be realistic and limit its plan of action considering the time frame up to the elections in 2008, and leave all long-term issues to the next elected government.

**M. Ahmed**  
Uttara, Dhaka

## Singapore visa

I am a Bangladeshi and currently living in Indonesia as my wife works here for one of the UN organisations. Last month we planned to go to Thailand and Singapore. When I approached the embassy of Singapore in Jakarta for a visa, they told me, being a Bangladeshi, to get a visa I needed a sponsorship letter from a Singaporean national who lives in Singapore. I don't know any Singaporean and told them so. In that case, their answer-- a visa could not be issued and they handed me a paper regarding visa issues, mentioning names of some countries including Bangladesh whose nationals need sponsorship in order to get a visa.

Shouldn't the visa issue be reciprocal between two countries? I would like to know what documents a Singaporean needs to produce to get a Bangladeshi visa?

**Masud Fazal Elahi**  
Jakarta, Indonesia

## US-led wars

The US-led wars since the Sept 11 have strained its relations with the European countries, considered by Washington as its backyard, with the exception of the UK, a close English ally willing to play a junior partner. While Germany has significant reservations about a few issues like global warming, France, like Russia, has emerged as the strong critic of the US policy in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq. Former French President Chirac criticised President Bush for his Iraq war in unequivocal terms. Chirac had questioned the legitimacy of the war and that annoyed the US. President Bush tried his diplomatic skills to quell the French protest, but in vain. Both sides have tried for improvement, but failed continuously. The new President of France, Sarkozy, known widely as pro-American has not only maintained a neutral position with regards to the US plans, but also sided with it over the global warming issue.

Badly shaken by terrible outcomes of the war in Islamic nations and unable to stop the drift of Europe from US leadership, the US seems to have revised its strategy for Europe by making strenuous efforts to build friendly diplomatic bridges across the Euro-Atlantic region. The US now moves faster to flatter Europe, nation by nation, by singing good tunes of European music so as to bring them back to its fold for action on different issues, particularly to seek help of France in making diplomatic effort to support Iraq.

The forthcoming diplomatic tour of Rice to Paris needs to be understood from this angle.

**Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal**  
New Delhi

## Caretaker government

I, on behalf of a lot of well-wishers of our country, would like to say that the present caretaker government is a blessing for the nation. But for the government's anti-corruption drive, people would never know that the political leaders were so corrupt.

We hope the corrupt will be brought to justice.

**Md Shahid Ullah**  
Rupgonj, Narayanganj

## Ugly face of communalism

It is a matter of great regret that communal forces are still very active in the country. I was shocked to know that Nomita, an innocent girl, became the victim of barbaric oppression by local goons in Barisal.

This must come to an end. Punish the criminals.

**Md. Manower Hossain**  
Dept. of Accounting (BBA)  
Jagannath University

## Doctors exempted

The law is not equally applicable to all in Bangladesh! And a classic example can be seen in medical services. All government officials ranging from Assistant Secretary to Secretary, Assistant Engineer to Superintending Engineer, and Assistant Judge to District Judge--none of them is lawfully allowed to be involved in any commercial activities. It is only the medical practitioners to whom the law is inapplicable.

If doctors are allowed to engage in private practice, why leave others out?

**Kh. Tahmed**  
Khilgaon, Dhaka

## Political leaders' claim

We were surprised to see the comment of a political leader that appeared in your daily -- "The nation is in a suffocating situation". As a matter of fact, the political leaders are in a suffocating situation as they cannot go out in the streets with processions and deliver speeches!

The leaders always say they were fighting for democracy, peoples' rights and for providing food and shelter to the downtrodden. But they could never live up to their promises! What do they have to say about their miserable

failures?

**Abbar Hamid**  
Dhaka

## Diplomatic interference

From time to time we observe that some foreign diplomats, leaders and visitors poke their nose into the internal matters of our country. They make statements, hold press conferences, meet our President, Prime Minister, Chief Adviser and Advisers to the CTG, political leaders, leader of the opposition, top govt. officials and any one they like and discuss our domestic, political, economic and foreign affairs. Even a low profile foreign official can meet those at the helm as and when they wish.

How many of our leaders, ministers, ambassadors, high commissioners and high govt. officials have access to the US President George Bush, British Prime Minister Browne and other American and British leaders and high govt. officials in Washington and London?

Do our political leaders and govt. officials have the guts and courage to tell the leaders/government officials of foreign countries about their (foreign countries') excesses, violation of human rights, illegal occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, indiscriminate killing of hundreds of Iraqis and Afghans, blind support to Israel etc?

Is interference by a country in the internal affairs of another country right or wrong?

What does the UN charter say?

**O H Kabir**  
Dhaka

## Rethinking needed

I think time has come to rethink about everything and hope that people will reconsider their responsibilities and try to fulfill those with sincerity.

We have no time to lose in bargaining!

Hope everyone will realise the point.

**Rabiul**

**China**

## Commuters' plight

The word 'people' has some synonyms based on their activities or situation. Of course the common and well-known terms are citizens, customers, consumers and commuters. There are more, but let's just concentrate on how the "people" in our country start their day.

We wake up and get fresh and think to have a wonderful breakfast. Obviously, all of us are burdened with a vital question nowadays: What are we eating? Here the citizens are suffering as consumers. The price hike of goods is causing wrinkles on the foreheads of all consumers.

Let's just come out from home and start the struggle on the way to office. We don't have good (spacious, longer) bus-stands with sheds to protect us from sunlight and rain. Most of the time the commuters wait on the roads, some maintain a line and some just in an anomalous way. This creates a problem when passengers get into and get down from the bus. No bus follows an appropriate way of taking passengers. Besides, most of the time passengers need to get down from a running bus! This is very risky.

The seats are very uncomfortable in some buses. Some small buses carry standing passengers where they have to bend themselves. Even no handle to hold and stand properly! Too narrow space between two seats and that causes muscle pain and back pain later. Sometimes a smell comes out from the engine, may be because of impure fuel burning which causes

serious coughing among the passengers in the bus.

Every day we have to waste two hours or more just because of traffic jam and it seems we are getting used to this kind of a situation. Do we ever think that two hours of our daily life could be used for some creative work or even for relaxation? Nevertheless, the unwanted horns prove how careless we are. No wonder, whoever holds the driving wheel likes to press the horn-button.

We really need proper and transparent planning and budget to solve all these problems. We need large, spacious buses, more double-deckers. Every location must have a bus-stand and all types of buses must maintain a passenger queue.

There is a saying that morning shows the day. After running behind the bus to reach the office on time and watching all those unpleasant scenes, we may lose the patience to greet our friends and colleagues!

I hope the government will concentrate on the transport sector to lessen the miseries of commuters.

**Ireen Sultana**  
Dhaka

## New PSC members

I must congratulate the CTG for taking the initiative to clear the PSC of questionable characters. The current CTG has appointed two new members. To restart the normal activities of the PSC, they are on the verge of appointing the rest of the members.

My question is, how is the PSC going to be different from the previous one? With no aspersion on the members, may I ask what has been the policy in recruiting the new members? Maybe they are good, but are we sure that better candidates are not being left out?

The CTG should think in terms of evolving a system of recruitment that will make it possible to attract the very best to run organisations like the PSC.

**Prof Mamunar Rashid**  
PhD (Cambridge, UK)  
MS (Columbia, NY)  
Ibrahim Medical College

## DCC's role?

In regard to Sultana Alam's letter on DCC's role in Dhanmondi, I am amused somewhat by the expectation we have of our City Corporation.

Dhanmondi has disintegrated from one of the earliest planned urban oasis to a hotbed of commercial activism right in front of our eyes. We do have to accept the fact that due to rising population pressure, construction of new apartments and the resultant congestions are inevitable. Additionally, it is acceptable that there will be some facilities such as neighbourhood schools and health centres to cater to the residents' needs. However, it is NOT acceptable that Dhanmondi be treated as Dhaka's hub for private health care, private English medium schools, and commercial universities and coaching centres. Go to the DCC, and they will say that the lands are on a 99-year lease under the Ministry of Land or Ministry of Works or what not. Regulating their use is therefore a bureaucratic exercise at best. The enclave of Sobhanbagh right behind Road 32 is full of apartments that are 10 or 15-story high, with narrow roads and blatant building code violations. The DCC must have been in hibernation when all these were happening in the past decade and a half.

If you look up in the web in terms of the Mega cities of the world, Dhaka is one of the top 20 cities. Dhanmondi is the microcosm of the mega city that has a prophetic message for DCC i.e. lack of



# To Stadium managers...

I have been going to Dhaka stadium from 1978. You have made several changes inside the field, but you have hardly given any thought about the common people.

I went to watch the Mohammedan-Abahani match. You had kept only one gate open. The gate on the western side is your new VIP-stand entrance. But why on earth can't you

keep the other gates open? The stadium has 23 gates! You must think about the sports lovers and their safety and security.

You must think about our welfare. Please do something about the problems that we are facing.

**Enam Murshed**  
On e-mail

enforcement of land use, the laissez faire attitude of commercial exploitation of the area, the overwhelming congestion of traffic through the area, and the utterly chaotic providing of utilities in an upper middle class suburb. Now visualize the city 10 to 15 years down. It is not a pretty sight. The DCC's charter probably does not have the provision for citizens' services or long term planning.

Why blame the Mayor? He does not have a clue....

**M. K. Aaref**  
On e-mail

## Extortion and fund raising

Sheikh Hasina keeps saying that she never asked for money from anyone and everyone gave her money out of loyalty to the AL. I would like to remind her that people are not gullible. She compared the extortion charge against her with raising relief funds for the landslide victims in Chittagong! Please give us a break, for God's sake!

Hasina made the remark that there should not be any restrictions in Bangladesh for children of politicians becoming politicians as there are no similar restrictions on the children of doctors becoming doctors, those of lawyers becoming lawyers and those of journalists becoming journalists. Such comparisons are grossly misleading!

**Shadhin Ahmed**  
On e-mail

## "Reform or retreat"

I really enjoyed Shahnoor Wahid's article with the above title (June 27). We read so many articles on the current political situation, but so many good writers miserably fail to say what Mr. Wahid has said in his last paragraph: "These leaders possess the mindset of the landlords, and the zeminders of the bygone era, and act accordingly. Therefore, reforms are only plays to stay away from the jail, where many of the leaders actually belong." I thank Mr. Wahid for this courageous

paragraph.

When criminals are caught after committing heinous crimes, you do not let them go simply because they promise to reform themselves. You and I know very well that they are just lying to save their neck and those much-profitable political positions they hold. In a normal, civilised society, the most appropriate thing to do now, would be to put those criminals on trial and punish them for their crimes.

They didn't commit those crimes once or twice; they were in it for years (decades, in some cases) and they committed their crimes without fear and with absolute arrogance. Of course, they should be given the chance to reform themselves and serve the country (please don't laugh, anyone!), but only after they have paid for their crimes.

**Azad Miah**  
Oldham  
UK

# Palestine

Prof. Salim Mansur, professor of political science at the University of Western Ontario and an expert on the Middle East, in an oped: "Civil war should disabuse West," published in The Ottawa Sun on June 16, wrote: "Efforts in appeasing Palestinians and funding them with expectations that reason will prevail over bigotry have had contrary effects as they murder each other, and wage their mindless war against Israel."

One solution will be to urge the Palestinians to renounce violence and follow in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi who achieved India's independence nonviolently. 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."

**Mahmood Elahi**  
Iris Street, Ottawa  
Canada



# National ID



Like many other developed countries, having a national ID card for every valid citizen of our country has become a top priority. Starting from the children to the oldest citizen of our country, everyone should have a social security number (SSN).

A national ID card should contain the name of a citizen, names of parents, profession, fingerprint, picture, blood-group and other vital information along with the unique 'SSN'. This 'SSN' can be found useful for a citizen in case of availing benefits provided by the society/state.

A central database can be used to hold information about every citizen of our country. A citizen can use this 'SSN', to claim his/her fundamental rights in many sectors like education, medical, housing etc. Passports and many other cases, where it is mandatory to show proof of citizenship, this 'SSN' can be utilised to avoid unnecessary hassle.

This national ID card can help to reduce crime, because it will be comparatively easier to identify criminals & put them to justice.

This will save a huge amount of money of the state, because we will no longer need to create or update voter lists for national elections. We may need huge technical support to implement this project, but our IT professionals are sufficient to provide the required support.

**Md Akhter Hazi**  
Dhaka