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# Blair as a peace envoy

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair has now been named as a negotiator to bring peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. After repeated failures of many such envoys, it is unlikely that Blair will be any more successful. His experience in ending the conflict in Northern Ireland may not be of much help unless the parties in the conflict show signs of compromise.

In Northern Ireland, it was the declaration by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) that it was abandoning violence to end British rule in Northern Ireland that paved the way for the resolution of the conflict. The acceptance of Northern Ireland's Protestant majority of the Catholic minority's special links with Ireland was the next step. Once the parties in the conflict accepted some of the positions of the other side, Blair's job was easy.

But in the Middle East, such compromises are difficult to achieve. Although countries



like Egypt and Jordan have recognised Israel and its right to exist, most Arab states have not shown any propensity for compromise. Although Fatah has recognised Israel and signed a deal with it, its military

arm Al Aksa Martyrs' Brigade continues to attack Israel. And Hamas remains resolute in its aim to destroy Israel.

Blair must begin with a call for a resumption of aid to the

Palestinians when the following conditions have been met: (1) The Palestinians have removed all hate and incitement against Jews and Israel from their education system and controlled media. (2) The Fatah/PLO and Hamas charters have been changed to eliminate the call for the destruction of Israel and Jews. (3) Militants have been disarmed and (4) all acts of terrorism against Israel have ended.

With Israel, he must insist that Israel must stop any new Jewish settlement in the West Bank and stop all attacks on the Palestinians. Israel has already vacated Gaza and it must do the same in the West Bank.

Blair will face insurmountable barriers in his search for peace in the Middle East. And he will need cooperation of all parties in this mission.

**Mahmood Elahi**  
Ottawa, Canada

## Nagging question

Who is the "father of the nation" and who is the "announcer of the war of liberation"? This vital issue must be resolved once and for all in the next JS session taking place after holding of free and fair general elections by the incumbent caretaker government led by Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed and his able team comprising of ten advisers.

**Golam Ashraf**  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## Grounded Biman

I have seen Biman passengers abandoned in various airports over the last thirty-five or so years and shuddered. I quit flying Biman about the early 80s, after repeat-

edly suffering their chronic abuse. I never complained. I was not an important person, nor I knew any big shots to pull a favour for me. You must have heard how Biman people would block seats for sale and try to market them as a favour etc, and then the planes even flew out partially empty. They opened routes to places where Bengalees do not usually fly much. They allowed politicians to take percentage, etc. They did not pay their fuel bills, as you know, and still they could not make it financially viable. Who needs a "dushto goru" ? It is not the case of a blind uncle is better than no uncle at all.

The Bangladesh government needs to practise free market behavior and a free market does

not allow for bad apples. If a successor company floats itself with a truly customer friendly and competitive spirit they will do fine on their own.

The brutal survival of the competent and the fittest is the way to go.  
**Mahmood Choudhury**  
On e-mail

## Octogenarian's woes

It was sad to see Manoranjan, an octogenarian, tied with a rope by the police. It was reported that he was unable to pay back Tk 9,000 which he took as loan from a bank.

Is it the country where the law is enforced so sternly? It is an open secret what most of the rich people have done so long. Many banks of

the country got tired of giving loans to the influential and the rich.

However, it was good to see Manoranjan being released after his loan was paid by the army chief.

**Mohammad Shafiqul Islam**  
Lecturer, Department of English  
Metropolitan University, Sylhet

## Children in jail

Although childhood connotes happiness and innocence, many children of our country are deprived of the very basic rights, and they live through an ordeal that is devoid of an iota of bliss, so to say. The fact that many children are living in a state of incarceration highlights the miseries of our poor kids. In most of

the instances, one can find a coexistence of poverty and juvenile delinquency. In other words, it is grinding poverty that impels them to break the law.

In some cases, it is their helplessness in the face of the state machinery that propels them to the dark path. According to the reports, there are about four hundred kids confined in the jails, and this evinces the sheer negligence of the privileged who could help rehabilitate these children.

These so-called delinquents should be freed from the jails and sent to the correction centres or to their guardians.

**Zabed Wali**  
Pahartali, Chittagong

## Dreaming of a better Bangladesh

Since I was born in Bangladesh, all I saw was a gradual decline in every sphere of life. Many people like me left Bangladesh and settled in one of the advanced countries. I personally could not see there was any place for me in Bangladesh where corruption existed across the board and the concept of "who knows whom" works. I never wanted to compromise my integrity. Being the son of a judge, my involvement with any kind of corruption or unethical activity was totally unthinkable and out of question. I am not a politician, nor did I ever want to be. I am a simple ordinary person.

I love the land, but I don't like the mentality of the majority of people in Bangladesh. If people are involved in so much corruption and unjustified power is exercised for their personal benefits, any country is bound to be crippled. It seems to me a certain class or classes of people drained out the resources for their own personal benefits.

I never trusted a politician in Bangladesh. They use the political field to make their own fortune and the news I read today just proves that. If they were honest, the officials could not have been corrupt. Corruption has become a culture for the politicians, their associates, and officials. We have gradually become a very disgraceful nation since independence.

What the caretaker government

is trying to give today is "a wake-up call". This should have been done many years ago. But, instead, we all encouraged the corruption process to go ahead from the top to the bottom.

Personally, I think the army chief and the caretaker government are doing an excellent job and I salute them for this and I just hope that all Bangladeshis can live with dignity.

**Dhruba Chakravarty**  
On e-mail

## Suicide!

The news that nine people committed suicide under a running train in Mymensingh the other day is mind-boggling. They all were from a single family and chose this most

tragic path under the circumstances that are mysterious.

There have been some speculations that these people got converted to another religion from their existing one, and, as such, they had been cut off from society for long.

The law enforcers should try to get at the root of the suicides.

**Rafiqul Islam Rime**  
Chittagong

## Constitutional issues

The report published in DS that the army chief wants more openness in government and also introduction of a law allowing access to information is a welcome development. I hope he would agree to access to information on military

budget, spending, purchases, etc., as well.

In the matter of constitutional amendments, it is imperative that the idea of allowing people to vote for a candidate, rather than a party, is addressed. As I understand, under the existing system, if an elected member of the parliament wishes to leave the party (say, because of policy disagreement) he/she is elected from, he/she loses the seat! A party can ask an elected candidate quitting it to pay the money it may have spent for his election, but the quitter should not lose his seat in parliament. It is fundamentally undemocratic!

**M. Siddique**  
Washington DC, USA

# Fight against corruption

I was reading the article on the anti-corruption campaign and was really very excited/encouraged by the army chief's a broad seven-point proposal for fighting corruption, which suggests simultaneous efforts for dismantling a 'culture of corruption' including a continuous anti-corruption drive, strengthening of law enforcement agencies, and the appointment of a parliamentary ombudsman.

But at the same time I was very shocked to see the participants. How will the army chief fight corruption when most of the participants at the seminar which he attended don't have a clean record?

**Faruk Mir**  
Denver, Colorado, USA

