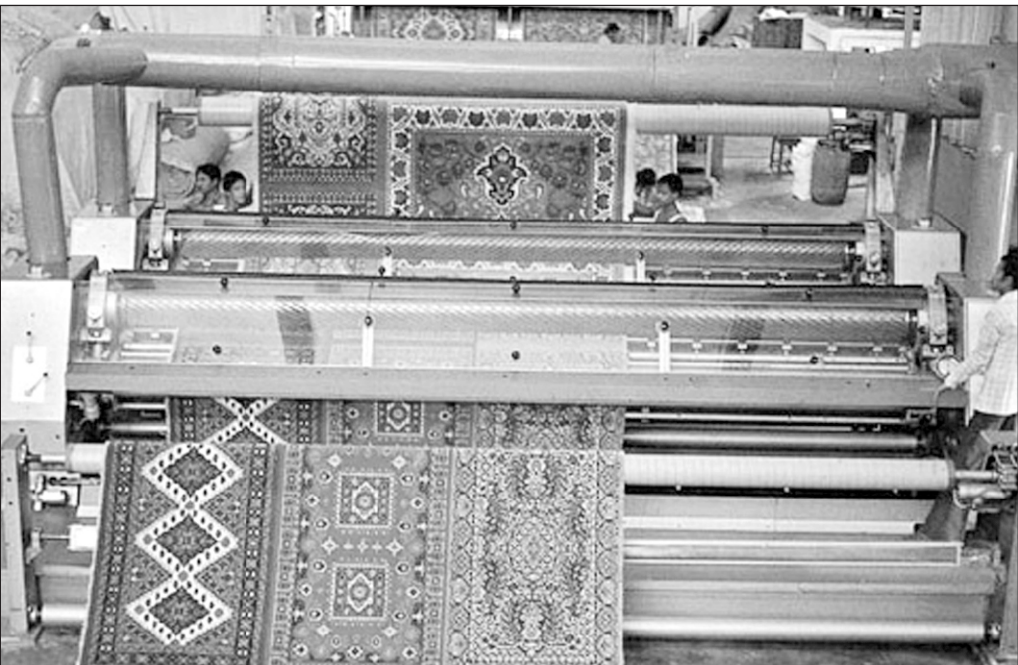


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Plight of workers



Jute , once known as the golden-fibre of Bangladesh, had and still has, many uses. This natural fibre is manufactured into different products --gunny-bags, thread, rope and so on. Once jute--either as raw material or as a finished commodity--contributed significantly to the economy of the country. In fact it was the most important cash crop in this part of the world. Hence the jute mills and the workers were regarded as an invaluable resource of the land.

In the post-71 period, the

situation changed drastically and the jute sector saw a gradual decline. Unfortunately, this downward trend is still there as we watch, much to our dismay, one jute mill after another closing their activities. No more do the workers hear the din of the machines; the sound of the spindles; the shrill cry of the sirens that beckoned them to their daily work. It is the silence of a graveyard that prevails in those abandoned mills. What is more shocking is that these workers are being compelled to join the ranks

of the unemployed masses. In other words they are metamorphosed from self-reliant persons into paupers -- within the span of a short time.

The point that we want to highlight is that the authorities should consider the human factor before taking any drastic decision to close down another jute mill.

Finally, we think that as an environment-friendly material jute still has immense potential.

Zabed Wali
Pahartali, Chittagong

Fight against corruption

The CTG's current programmes aimed at eliminating corruption and cleansing the political parties are welcome and, indeed, necessary. But the real test of credibility of this government still rests with few major issues: containing the price hike before the next Ramadan,

providing inputs (fertilisers etc.) to the farmers on time, and treating one particular coalition partner of the immediate past government like other major political parties.

But so far the CTG has failed to control the spiraling prices of essentials and just like the past BNPaliance government they do not see the role of any syndication or organised middlemen operating

in the system. The government tends to justify the price-escalation due to international trading mechanism. But there is a limit, people are not buying this view now they do not believe that the prices of potato, chili, brinjal, tomato, bean, spices, local rice, fish etc. are controlled by the WTO or any other country! If we are to accept the 'international' logic, then the government should

also raise the salary levels of all professional groups accordingly! The people in the street feel that the BDR operated fair-price shops are only cosmetic measures in urban areas (running kitchen markets cannot be the regular job for any trained defence force!). Please try to realise what the people feel in rural areas where many primary markets (haats) or collecting centres of farm products have been ruthlessly destroyed or dismantled for no earthly reasons whatsoever, thereby, dislocating the chain of supplies of farm products. The government is also telling us of smuggling of fertilisers and fuels across the border. Well, didn't India put barbed wire in most parts of the border and there is BDR surveillance along our side? This logic is not quite acceptable too.

The government should look in to the fertiliser issue more closely. It was the BNP-alliance government which drastically changed the local distribution system to the advantage of one of their key partners. We now have unrest in those areas where that partner-party has overwhelming followers and they still control the distribution system. Mind that after a season of bad crops for shortage of fertilisers (and also diesel for irrigation after the monsoon season), you will face widespread food shortage in the country! And, yes, you have to be prepared to face it.

Lastly, the CTG is not saying anything about the same particular party that reaped enormous political benefits since 1975 after the killing of Bangabandhu, despite having expressed opposition to the concept of the creation of Bangladesh and having given shelters to the war criminals. While encouraging structural reforms and looking at the sources of funds of major political parties, mainly, the AL and the BNP, the government appears to have given a total clearance to this particular party in matters of financial sources as well as discreet political activities. No wonder that with the arrest of the AL leader sweets were distributed in the name of Jagrata Janata in places where there are large adherents of this party (as in certain parts of Dhaka city, Rajshahi, Pabna etc.). Needless to say that this party is also suspected of having links with the JMB and now the question may arise whether the Jagrata Janata is a veiled appearance of the JMB allegedly patronised by this particular party!

Are we now to believe that this party will continue to be benefited from our neutral CTG at the cost of our national ideology, hard-earned independence and long term political stability?

ME
Dhaka

Lack of confidence!

The present military-backed caretaker government has chosen the confrontational course--arresting Hasina after declaring the roadmap for election.

Lack of confidence is evident in the CTG's activities as they cannot bring down the prices of essential commodities and thousands of jute workers were laid off permanently. Farmers were arrested and tortured for demanding fertilisers. No improvement is evident in minimizing load-shedding.

No cases have been filed against anybody for raping and killing Hindus after the 2001 elections. For doing justice and regaining confidence of voters they should have given exemplary punishment to the perpetrators of heinous crimes (BNPJamaat alliance) against the minority communities.

Asoke Kumar Bose
Toronto, Canada

Titas gas leakage

A few days ago there was a front-page news in your daily on Titas gas leakage.

We are surprised to note that the gas was gushing out through the pipes of all tube-wells in two villages. Alongside, underground hot water mixed with gas and petroleum was streaming out.

We are further amazed to note that instead of taking serious urgent remedial measures the authorities were talking to the villagers how to save them from any disaster which might strike. It was also reported in the news that the authorities were strictly following the Public Procurement Rules 2003 which elaborate formalities to ensure transparency.

My question is, if fire breaks out in any government building, will our Fire Service have to go through the same procurement process to buy materials or float tenders to extinguish that fire?

Gas leakage is a highly sensitive and dangerous issue. The government should have emergency clauses in the PPR to handle such issues.

I think, this is not only PPR formality, it is our gas & oil authorities which were shirking their responsibilities to handle such emergency matters in the name of PPR. They are not bothered about the loss the nation was incurring every minute. If the agencies concerned could not be relied on, there should be an alternative High Powered Body to attend to such emergencies.

Shafiqul Islam

One-mail

Fertiliser for farmers

Our farmers are facing tremendous problems in procuring fertilisers.

May I suggest that the CTG suspend all the existing channels for some time and sell/distribute fertilisers directly to the farmers under the supervision of BDR/Bangladesh Army?

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University Dhaka

Hasina's arrest

I do not know by what process of reason or logic you conclude that the arrest of Sheikh Hasina constitutes an arbitrary use of law to stifle a political figure. If the allegations of embezzlement are true, and the magnitude of the sum involved is also true, then arresting Sheikh Hasina would seem an appropriate application of the law. Your editorial pieces repeatedly use the word "arbitrary" to describe this arrest. What is arbitrary about it? What would seem more arbitrary to me is if Hasina were not arrested despite the evidence against her, when precedence shows that people accused of similar crimes were arrested. Your editorial shows you disagree with the arrest on the grounds that it would harm our democratic process. Is it not in the interest of the people to see that the corruption of their political figures be brought to light, and those guilty be made accountable?

In the 16 years of democracy we had, we never had a choice of honest leadership we could elect above these figures who had dominated our political landscape. By brushing them aside, the caretaker government is doing us, the people, a huge favour. Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina are not pillars on which our democratic system rests upon. The system can function without them. It must function without them, for we are tired of their apathy towards our needs.

I thank the caretaker government for exposing the corruption in our political parties.

Omar Siddiquee
One-mail

I agree with your editorial. The present govt is misusing its mandate. Hasina's arrest will in no way help to restore democracy.

Liton Hasan
Oklahoma city community college US

Situation mishandled

I do believe the Two Ex-PMs are beyond reformation and their departure from politics is a necessary step for a healthy growth of responsible politics. Despite a paradigm shift of tectonic proportion, still they have not got rid of their autocratic style. And I believe they never will.

However, it is pretty clear that the CTG bungled the post-1/11 handling of the Two ex-PMs and some heads definitely should roll.

Mohammad Aktaruzzaman, MD
Wake Allergy Asthma & Sinus Center, PA
Wake Forest, North Carolina

CTG overstepping

It is sad and ironic that after 36 years since liberation, those now in charge of the country have adopted the same old Pakistani Army mentality in turning Bangladesh under similar facets of a dictatorial regime, suspending all civic rights, detaining politicians without fair trial. We have seen in the past that dictatorial regimes do not last long as in Chile, Pakistan, Uganda and the Philippines.

The decision of the caretaker government to arrest Sheikh Hasina on charges of extortion is based on the Pakistani model to exclude certain politicians from holding public office. The CTG has overstepped its constitutional obligations to hold free and fair elections to hand back power to a civilian government through a popular mandate.

We call upon the UK government to put pressure on the caretaker administration to release her and other political prisoners from detention immediately, and get on with the job it was mandated to carry out - hold free and free elections within six months.

T. Karim
United (The Union) -Amicus Branch Acting Secretary, London Westminster Branch London

Bangladesh politics

After the independence of Bangladesh, the Awami league, the BNP and the Jatiya Party ruled our country for over 36 years and helped to produce thieves only. The financial backbone of the nation has been broken by the ministers, MPs and other politicians and politically-backed businesses.

We never realized how we were allowing them to destroy our economy. We would like to see this caretaker government being fair and different from other political parties.

Duranta Prakash
Toronto, ON

Khaleda and Hasina

How do they want to cling to power when no one wants them? Unfortunately, our nation's memory is not sharp enough. We have

forgotten what mayhem prevailed during the regimes of the 'Two'! They have lost their credibility as leaders.

Let the 'Two' retire while some respect is still there for them. They have ruined the nation!

Anonymous
Banani, Dhaka

Stop experimenting!

Like all great religions, the basics of all great constitutions are alike. When our constitution was written it was not drafted from scratch, rather it was drafted in line with other great constitutions. Now, if all other great constitutions are followed by their respective citizens even in trying times, why in Bangladesh, we try to change the constitution every now and then to achieve some so called "Bangladesh specific" goals. This is especially alarming and disgraceful when the call for constitutional change comes from non-elected people.

Time to time public sentiment may swing towards the extreme and a change of constitution may be contemplated, but such urge must be restrained. Life comes back to normal again, and those changes start to create problems and the revered constitution requires another amendment to purge the change, leaving it a notch down in terms of dignity.

S. Khan
New York, USA

Weak leadership

A nation can never progress under weak leadership. During their 15 years of rule they have proved beyond any doubt that they are weak. It's not due to their gender, it's rather lack of strong personality, wisdom and other qualities required for state leadership.

Do we want to remain under such weak leaders and keep on becoming champion in the corruption race? Then why so much worry about Hasina's arrest!

After many years, the country is being run by a bunch of highly educated-successful people! Why not give them sufficient time? They have not done any bad thing so far. They are sincerely trying to give their best. Why are we so impatient?

We tolerated the misrule of Hasina/ Khaleda for 15 years. Can't we tolerate good rule of good people for some years? We forget everything very quickly, probably, due to our high and low tide characteristics. Wake up Bangladeshis! It's not important who was who. It's to be seen who has done what.

Mohammed Didarul Alam
Dhanmondi, Dhaka



Pratibha Patil

India elected Pratibha Patil as their first woman president recently in a vote that saw her victory to be the one for the millions of Indian women.

Patil, the 72-year old candidate of the Congress Party, defeated incumbent Vice President Shekhawat, the candidate of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party. Patil being the first woman president of India does manifest the fact that people of this part of the world have a strong urge for a discrimination free society backed up by peace, tolerance and a harmonious living.

I, at this point, believe that this historical event will certainly augur well to usher in a new and modern era in this subcontinent.

Congratulations, Pratibha Patil.

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Chittagong

Problem with visa extension

My son born to his Indian mother needs visa extension for his long stay in Bangladesh.

He is a 10-year-old boy staying with me since his birth on 01 December 1997 (with occasional visits to India with his mother) at a Dhaka hospital and the Indian Passport (No Z 1508814 dated 07.04.2003) was issued to him by the Indian High Commission, Dhaka. Since the passport has been issued to him, he has been awarded visa extension for 4 (four) times by the Bangladesh authorities vide visa no V4256/03/T dated 22.04.03, visa no 4136/04/T dated 10.08.04 visa no 4786/05 dated 20.06.05 and visa no 10327/05 dated 27.12.05.

But last time when the last visa expired on 19.10.2006, I refused to offer any quick money to the SB official keeping in view that the drive against corruption was going on. The end result is a 'negative report'

that says due to non-submission of required papers and documents they could not produce a report.

When I contacted the immigration authorities they expressed their inability to grant extension of the visa without a clean and positive police report. However, they sent the file to police for reinvestigation. But no headway has since been made.

This way hundreds of foreign travellers are being subjected to harassment regularly, which is tarnishing the image of the country.

I, therefore, would like to seek an independent enquiry into the matter.

Kazi Nasim Ahmed
Zigatola Notun Rasta, Dhaka

IRAQ WAR



In a strange way, Bush's conduct of the war in Iraq has a historical parallel with Hitler's war in the Soviet Union. It may be recalled that when Hitler launched his invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, he and his generals promised a quick victory. The invasion was launched with three million men and more than 30,000 tanks. It was the biggest invasion the world had ever seen. Hitler's idea was to encircle the Soviet forces on three sides and wipe them out. He declared the Soviet Union was a corrupt and weak state and "give it a hard kick and it will fall apart."

The Soviet forces were overwhelmed by the German blitz. But after initial setbacks, the Russians regrouped and put up a fierce resistance. In the territories occupied by the Germans, they put up a stubborn resistance, attacking German lines from behind and finally at Stalingrad, the Germans were forced to stop. The German forces, cut off from all reinforcements, asked for Hitler's permission to make a strategic withdrawal. But Hitler's response was that nothing short of victory was acceptable. The German forces continued to fight on, but ultimately, were simply overpowered by the Soviet offensive and lack of reinforcement. The German defeat at Stalingrad was a turning point in the World War II and instead of total victory, Hitler faced eventual total defeat.

Although Bush doesn't face such a formidable foe in Iraq, his insistence on "victory" has uncanny resemblance with Hitler's insis-

tence on victory at Stalingrad. In Iraq, the American forces face a hostile local population. Once-dominant Sunni minority hate the Americans for ousting them from power, now-dominant Shiite majority, especially the followers of radical Shiite cleric Muktada Al Sadr, are hostile because they suspect the Americans are trying to install a Shiite puppet government and neighbouring Iran is using the anti-American insurgency to bleed the Americans. The Americans are caught in a three-pronged war against the Sunni insurgents, the Shiite militias and al-Qaeda followers who have joined the war against the Americans.

In this way, the American forces in Iraq may be facing an intractable situation similar to the one the Germans faced at Stalingrad. Moreover, given the opposition to the war in the US (as a dictator, albeit an elected one, Hitler didn't have to worry about public support), Bush's hands are tied. After the failure of the "surge," he cannot hope to increase the number of troops in Iraq and without draft, his capacity to augment troops numbers is limited at best.

The Americans will eventually withdraw from Iraq. The only question remains whether they can withdraw without facing further catastrophe. Despite his bravado, Bush is a deeply worried man. He is just whistling past the graveyard in a dark night.

Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada



Our team's batting is woefully brittle. The batsmen seem to suffer from osteoporosis in batting; similar to brittle bones in the elderly! You don't know when it will fall apart! Something radical needs to be done; unless setting negative records is our aim in the international cricket arena.

Changes in batting order possibly are of no use, but

may be there is nothing further to lose. Why not try out the batsmen number 11,10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3; after the regular openers, who at least put up a few runs. It could not be worse than what we do now. Who knows; may be this disorder in our batting line-up may change the poor lamb's (ex-tiger)luck!

Batting, to an extent bowl-

ing, and fielding, where dropping a dolly catch in the deep in the first one-dayer was a classical example, shows us up as nothing more than rank amateurs!

May be the brave attempt of an upside down batting order could be a lucky move. After all fortune favours the brave!

S.A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka