

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.

# Help the flood victims



PHOTO: AMIRUL RAJIV

This year 36 districts, 159 upazilas and 1 crore people, out of around 15 crore, have been affected by floods. Now the situation is almost under control. But this is the critical time. Various waterborne diseases are spreading in the

flood-hit areas. We must extend our wholehearted support to the flood victims **Rajeshwari Koikay Siddique** School of Development Alternative (SODA) Dhanmondi, Dhaka

## Reforms in land administration

This news of great relief for the nation was published in some Bangla dailies on 28 July'07. The news said that the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), after a case study in Narsinghdi, is setting its hands on yet another most burning issue that is causing unimaginable sufferings to our people for generations. I believe there is no such individual rich or poor, illiterate or illiterate, in cities or in villages, powerful or weak, who did not suffer in the hands of tahsildars, sub-registrars, district registrars and other land record officials. This is an age old problem. Statistics will fail to estimate how many have suffered and how many are suffering since the British days. Due to corruption many have become landless and destitute. In this short letter it is not possible to

highlight the magnitude of corruption in the land administration. I wholeheartedly pray that the present CTG will ameliorate the sufferings of our people by setting the land records right. **Shafiqul Islam** On e-mail

## Hasina's arrest

I am a 26 years old non-resident Bangladeshi living in a western country. I grew up in the Middle-East from the time I was three. I came to a western country when I was 17 and during my formative college years, I developed a keen interest in reconnecting with my Bangladeshi roots. I found the Internet an amazing tool to do so and have almost religiously read the daily newspapers that are published online to understand the lives of people in Bangladesh. It goes without saying that one cannot read about life in Bangladesh with-

out following the politics surrounding it. I have to say that with each change in government, I have been hopeful that the people of Bangladesh will finally be afforded the same opportunities that I enjoy here, or at the very least be given the opportunity to self-determine their own destiny. Alas! With each change of government I have been disappointed with the ultimate outcome. But hope is a funny thing - no matter how probabilistically certain the outcome will be, hope is one thing that one can rely on to beat the odds. The actions of the caretaker government have aroused a glimmer of hope in me but I am utterly confused as to the reaction of the people, so much so that it has prompted me to write this letter. I find it hard to rationalize why the people on the streets are so outraged by the arrest of Sheikh

# REFORM

It is of course time for the political parties to go for reform as their acceptability to mass people has dramatically diminished over the past few years due to the politicians' involvement in corruption and embezzlement. Some so called parties are contemplating reform and curbing the party chief's absolute power, as they think it is the major hurdle that hindered democratisation of the political parties. Recently, BNP Secretary General Mannan Bhuiyan placed a set of reform proposal before the media. The proposals stipulate that the chairperson of the party shall not be the prime minister and leader of the party at the same time. The chairperson who was prime minister twice cannot be the party leader. Some other points incorporated in their agenda are interesting and baffling too.

It seems that the main objective of the reform proposals is to get rid of the existing party chief and nothing else! If this is the main goal, then the reforms might not produce the desired results. **Md Zonaid Emran** Dept. of Political Science Dhaka University



Hasina. I wonder if Hasina would express the same outrage if the average person on the street were arrested on charges of extortion. After all, Bangladesh first acquired the dubious distinction of being the most corrupt country in the world during her tenure and retained such the distinction for a few years thereafter. Are the people finally expressing their heartfelt gratitude for her administration's hard work in making the country the most corrupt in the world? It just blows my mind to see university professors wear black arm bands and refuse to attend classes to protest the arrest of Sheikh Hasina. What I find even more confusing is how the people can entertain the idea of voting to power political figures that have already failed miserably, once in the case of Sheikh Hasina, and twice in the case of Khaleda Zia. Why not channel some of the outrage towards the political parties so that they may offer the people new leadership? **Ockey Uddin** One-mail

**Strategic issues** Although the caretaker government has its hands full, it must also resolve some outstanding issues with our neighbours-- India and Myanmar-- like the dispute over South Talpatti Island, delimitation and demarcation of maritime borders, and the remaining demarcation of land borders with India. The CTG should make the sovereignty and strategic issues of Bangladesh a priority. **Abrarur Rahman** Lake Circus, Kalabagan, Dhaka

**Rental power plants** The basic principle of installing rental power plants as reported in a local English daily on 28 July appears lopsided, short sighted and does not make financial sense, as costs per kwh for rental plants will be higher. Additionally, conditions on minimum off take at these higher prices have to be guaranteed. A much cheaper option is to buy available surplus power from many stand-by and regular power plant installed in industries, public buildings, shopping centres and offices etc. This available capacity can be tapped much more quickly, and power made available to the grid in a much shorter time. The government should set a realistic power tariff, based upon fuel used and the gen-set rating, with a reasonable mark up on actual variable cost of generation. It should also be indexed to the changes in prices of fuel and lubeoil to be realistic. The current flat rate of Tk.2.2 per kwh, will fall flat, except for a few older higher capacity gas fired gen-sets; as it is not realistic with current operating cost base. Unfortunately, most of the desk bound officials fixing the tariff are not aware of these realities, having no real life experience on cost management and control which are the fundamentals of private ventures. Further, to meet our perennial power shortage and regular increase of power demand, it will be best to go for a nuclear power plant. The wisest option would be the South African designed and built "Pebble-Bed" type nuclear reactor based power plant. This design is inherently and "fool-proof safe". A number of such plants have been running in South Africa for some years. Its safety and reliability, along with no hazard in disposal of its waste, presents a very attractive and assuredly safe option. No massive concrete containment domes are needed. This power plant without the usual associated steam boiler/turbine combination and its needed auxiliaries are smaller in size and less expensive compared to other types of nuclear power plants now operating. Also the land required is much smaller. It is unfortunate that very few technical personnel concerned in Bangladesh are aware of this! We should go for this option without further delay, and the time is now! **S. A. Mansoor** Gulshan, Dhaka

**Chief Justice's comments** I find the comments of the Chief Justice of Bangladesh most appropriate. To prevent corruption it is absolutely essential that the citizens are made more conscious about the evil of corruption. General public must be educated to resist bravely against bribery and corruption. **Munim Chowdhury** New York, US

**Civil society** I am surprised to see that everybody, whether a political activist or a cultural activist or a poet, is in general mentioned as member of civil society (The Daily Star, Aug 2). In my opinion, these people are ordinary citizens like others. **Faiz** Shantinagar, Dhaka

**Telephone bill** My residential telephone 8919817 has not been billed in the last two months of June and July 2007. In spite of my reminder last month, the telephone revenue department did not send any bill, though they had promised to send the June 2007 bill by July 25, 2007. The previous experience that I had was a disconnection of the line for non-receipt of three months' bills which were for February, March and April 2007. A computerised bill was received for May 2007 and promptly paid. In spite of payment for May 2007, the line suffered discontinuity for non-payment of earlier three months for which no bills were issued. A good deal of effort had to be undertaken by the undersigned to obtain the pending bills from the Sector 9 office of the divisional engineer of the telephone revenue. When the bill was issued for the arrear months, payment was instantly made by me, and connection was restored after a good deal of effort. Non receipt of bills during the last two months is also likely to lead to the same situation, as in the past in spite of reminders and follow ups. Regularity in issuance of computerised bills as with other areas of TNT should be a routine affair. The authorities concerned are requested to look into the matter on an urgent basis. An early response from the board in this respect will greatly relieve future difficulties of the subscribers. **Ahmad Kamal** Uttara Model Town, Dhaka

**New BCB chief** The government has appointed a new BCB president as part of the crusade against deeply rooted and wide-spread corruption in the country's sports world. I believe that people of Bangladesh and cricket fans world-wide are eagerly waiting to see how he overcomes or at least makes a sincere effort to address the challenges lying ahead of him, after the disastrous tour of Sri Lanka. I think the new chief would have to tackle not only the daunting tasks faced by the cricket world but also the task of eradicating the root of corruption from BCB's landscape. As for the game itself, all the upcoming challenges have already been laid out and the list is growing like a grocery list: competitive first class cricket, introducing 2/3 days game at school level, mental ability, professional approach, bouncy pitch etc. So he does not have to lose his sleep to figure out the areas he needs to focus on in terms of long-term planning. I think the most interesting aspects of his appointment would be to see what he does to address the corruption issue. Would he constitute an audit committee consisting of an independent board member? Since the dawn of human civilisation any institution like BCB generally evolves, grows, develops through exchange of ideas, constructive criticism (by voters or stakeholders), transparency, credibility and accountability. I hope the new president will succeed in lifting Bangladesh cricket from the near death experience. **Sohel** One-mail

**Compromise in politics** The nation suffered as the preceding BNP alliance compromised and indirectly overlooked the activities of JMB (Bangla Bhai and others). A recent court verdict has found 24 people guilty (DS editorial July 28). This constant tug of war between the BNP and the AL has polarised our politics since the birth of the nation. There is no objectivity in our national political culture the party comes before the national interest. This is non-stop, indirect sabotage and the top leaders are responsible for this subjective policy. The former prime minister should be answerable. What are the correct definitions of patriotism and national spirit? Not sticking to power by hook or by crook. Now political flushing is going on, and it should be encouraged; and the time factor is very limited. Officially, there should be some deterrent punishment for the sycophants. Public awareness is tricky, and the field units cannot enjoy the benefits of a network involving the multimedia. Political regimes ignore such projects. **A Husnain** Dhaka

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**Rangs Bhaban** Was it not necessary to give the tenants of the upper sixteen floors more time to move smoothly to a new location? I am astonished that the companies were only given a day to comply with the law that was handed down a day earlier! I don't know about the tenant laws in Bangladesh but in most countries tenants are given 30 days, if not more, to relocate if a property needs to be vacated. It seems that in their eagerness to enforce laws that have not been enforced for so long, the law enforcers are overlooking the basic rights of citizens. One of the main aims of a government in a functioning democracy should be to foster an environment that facilitate entrepreneurs in

building new businesses and ensure efficient functioning of private enterprises. More business activities will in turn generate higher tax revenue, which then can be allocated for infrastructure, education, law enforcement, etc. **Arbab Hassan**, New York City

**Bangladesh & its administration** Whether a politically appointed party or a caretaker government like

the existing one is appropriate for Bangladesh is an issue of pivotal importance. On the substance over form, I would like to comment on the current administration. Many years have gone by, since I settled overseas but one issue always bothered & confused me: what should be the correct form of administrative mechanism that is suitable for our country and who will formulate codes of best practices. Since I was born I have never experienced or seen a code of best practices applied to our country. In my view, there is not a single political party in Bangladesh which can claim honesty and integrity. They all are directly or indirectly corrupt. How on earth the political leaders can accumulate so much wealth in kind or cash. If the political parties are corrupt, which ran the country until the caretaker government took over, what can we expect from them? I strongly feel there are only two classes of people who live in Bangladesh: poor & rich. Is this a



# ACID VIOLENCE

The issue of acid violence in Bangladesh is a recurring one, which needs to be dealt with strictly by the government. The caretaker government ought to enact stringent laws on acid sale and distribution. Consumers should be fingerprinted and photo-

graphed and to meet the cost of this expensive procedure, VAT, taxes, levies on acid should be imposed. In fact, a sky-high price of acid might prevent laymen and potential culprits from getting access to acid. Consumers who really need acids may be granted a

small quantity at reduced price, but only after having registered themselves. Instead of raising VAT on foods and fuels, the government should raise the duties on acids. **Sam Afrin**, UODA, Dhaka

discussions, are the best ways to promote a healthy business environment. **Thomas Rumbaugh** Advisor Asia and Pacific Department, IMF

**Building new businesses** More business activities will in turn generate higher tax revenue, which then can be allocated for infrastructure, education, law enforcement, etc. **Arbab Hassan**, New York City

**Wholeheartedly congratulate** the caretaker government for their grim determination in pursuing the case of Rangs Bhaban and getting it demolished within the shortest possible time. The CTG should also pursue the cases of high profile corruption in the fields of politics, business and government services etc. **Zoha** On e-mail

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**geo-scientific issue** like open-pit mining for its implementation in Bangladesh without going into more critical explanations. The justification for open-pit mining in Bangladesh dragging example from Germany as put forward by Mr. Sharier might be challenged citing a news article published in Natural Resources on March 21, 2007 by Steffen Winter where it was written, "Germany has little oil or natural gas, but it does have large reserves of another resource: lignite. However its extraction through open cast mining is highly controversial -- and can lead to the disappearance of entire villages". It further states that "the excavators used at the mining facilities have devastated an area equal to 182,000 soccer fields, wiping at least 244 villages and neighborhoods off the map". More interestingly it states that "Central German Brown Coal Mining Company (Mibrag) has been owned by US investors -- Washington Group International and NRG Energy -- since 1994. There's no shortage of money, and the firm is used to dealing with public resistance: The company has been trying to access the coal beneath the town of Heuersdorf in Saxony since 1994. The citizens protested, but then the so-called "Heuersdorf Law" was passed by Saxony's state

parliament, stating that the village -- which is 709 years old -- has to be vacated by 2008. The dead buried in the cemetery will be moved to new graves and the church will be rebuilt elsewhere". In my opinion, the German example will not simply work in Bangladesh because the two countries exist in totally different socio-economic, political, geographical, hydro-geological, and overall geographical conditions. I also very humbly propose that you organise a public debate on this very vital national issue that would help us to understand the problem in a more transparent way. **Dr. Aftab Alam Khan** Professor, Department of Geology Dhaka University

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# Junk foods



Nowadays it's very common to see street vendors selling lemon juice, guava, black berry, hog-plum, etc. covered with hot chilly spice in busy areas, especially outside schools and colleges. They utter mouth-watering words about these things, that they are very good on a hot sultry day and provide us with lots of essential vitamins and minerals. They can easily convince the school-going kids who are very delighted to have a taste of such foods. But nobody even wonders how they prepare their foods. Sometimes there are flies squirming in the foods and sometimes we can find dust particles in those popular junk foods. We, the students, have read a lot about balanced diet but this food-list does not mean eating contaminated things. All in all, we should be cautious about our health. **Shatabdi Biswas** Regional Public Administration Training Centre (RPATC) Rajshahi

sign of a democratic country? A country should be able to meet the basic needs of its people. Bangladeshi political parties are polluted and their administration has always been flawed. What the caretaker government is doing for Bangladesh and Bangladeshi people is a process of making our society free of corruption. Of course, it is not an easy task to clean a society which is used to malpractice for many years. The people who are being brought to justice so far quite rightly should be thoroughly investigated and if they are found guilty must be given due punishment. The simple equation is that a country can't prosper if it is run by corrupt people. It is not yet too late to regain our position as a respectable nation among the world community. **Dhruba Chakravarty** On e-mail

**Coal mining, German example** The news articles "Mining with a vision..." and "Germany shows the way" by Sharier Khan published respectively on August 4, and August 5, 2007 are well written to convince the general reader in accepting a highly controversial

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