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General's assertion

While responding to reporters' questions at the Bangladesh High Commission in London a few days ago, General Moeen U Ahmed made it clear, as he did previously on many occasions, that he has no desire to become president.

We love to believe that General Moeen's assertion is the answer to all speculations.
Pablu Chakma
West Shewrapara
Mirpur, Dhaka

Reform euphoria

Long time ago, US President Theodore Roosevelt said, "All those blatant sham reformers, in the name of new morality, preach the old, old vice and self-indulgence which rotted out first, the moral fibre, and then even the external greatness of Greece and Rome."

Is Bangladesh next? Are we to be "rotted out by sham reformers?" Are we to be apathetic Bangladeshis who say, "I don't know and I don't care!"?

I don't think so. I believe we are at the banquet and Bangladeshis are feasting on the political consequences of the last thirty-five years. They don't like the taste of the political concoctions they've been fed and are demanding and working for change.
Gopal Sengupta
Montreal, Canada

Reaz Rahman on Shehabuddin book

This is with reference to the recent letters on Mr. K. M. Shehabuddin's book "There and Back Again: A Diplomat's Tale (University Press Ltd., Dhaka, 2005)" by the former state minister/adviser of Khaleda-Nizami's government - Mr. Reaz Rahman (September 24, 2007), Mr. Rezaul Karim (October 01, 2007), Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed (October 05, 2007) and two earlier book reviews by Syed Badrul Ahsan

(September 08, 2007) and Mr. Muhammad Zamir (January 17, 2006).

During the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, the activities of Mr. Reaz Rahman and many like-minded persons betrayed the interests of Bangladesh in general and freedom loving Bengali diplomats in particular. So it is quite natural that the bizarre logic behind not joining the liberation war and continuing serving Pakistan now given by Mr. Reaz Rahman is difficult for many to accept, let alone understand. And one could not agree more with Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed's comment, "By not joining the most momentous event of our history, Reaz Rahman has not lost anything. He has been rather more than amply rewarded. He rose to the highest position in his foreign service career, the post of foreign secretary, and finally minister of state for foreign affairs. That is why he now has the 'courage' to defend his decision not to join the liberation war and maligns the historical role of K M Shehabuddin as the first diplomatic soldier in our liberation war."

Late Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury could not complete his 1971 memoirs and there are only a few books on the 1971 Bangladesh diplomatic front. I strongly request all living diplomatic soldiers (including the non-diplomats like typists, drivers etc. in Pakistan foreign missions) to pen down their 1971 experiences in detail and let "all the cats out of the bag" to correct the already distorted liberation war history.
M. Enad
Oxford, UK

Australian polls

Australia, heading for a Presidential poll next month, has been a trusted ally of US-led terror wars in Middle East that saw the fall of Afghanistan and Iraq. John Howard, the Australian prime

minister and Liberal Party leader, has called a federal election for November 24. Howard, 68, has been in power for 11 years, but is lagging behind Kevin Rudd, his younger Labour opponent, in opinion polls. Among the issues the election will determine are the future of Australia's military contribution in Iraq and its stance on climate change. Labour has promised to withdraw troops from Iraq and sign the Kyoto climate pact, but, generally speaking, the election will also be fought and won on domestic issues. Rudd, 50, has promised sweeping reforms to health and education as well as an overhaul of controversial labour laws introduced by Howard.

Howard, the country's second-longest serving leader, who is seeking a fifth term, has stressed his economic stewardship and tough security credentials to win back voters. Howard has promised a national vote on recognition for Aborigines in the country's constitution if he wins, a move dismissed by opponents as a last ditch effort to present a "vision" to lure back jaded former conservative supporters.

The PM is even behind in opinion polls in his own Sydney constituency of Bennelong, which he has represented since 1974. Mr. Howard's unflinching support for US President George W Bush has proven unpopular with many Australian voters. The PM now hopes to persuade the electorate that voting for Labor would be a gamble with prosperity. The Australian stock market is hitting record highs, while unemployment last week hit 33-year lows amid the ongoing global resources boom deals in the continent.

However, it is definitely not going to be a cake-walk for Howard this time. A change of government seems to be on Australian cards now.

Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal
Freelancer, Delhi

Eid & starvation!



MUNIR UZ ZAMAN / DRINKNEWS

A local English daily's staff correspondent's vivid front page report (Oct:17) with accompanying statistics on the desperate food scarcity in Northern Bangladesh should shame us all beyond words. It highlights the contrasts in Eid Day scene; of white and black; pomp and poverty; hunger and Hummer that are sadly around us! We are bored seeing smiling handshakes of the top personnel governing this unfortunate land; exchanging Eid greetings with well fed, well dressed and well-to-do grand ladies and gentlemen around them. We sometimes hear, but rarely

see (except few newspaper photos) of fellow citizens, starving; lucky even to have a scrap of boiled stem of banana trees, shrubs and other wild plants; to stave off the painful pangs of hunger; and that too not daily! Is this the manifestation of patriotism, fellow-feeling and morality? It's idle to think; but surely; the worthies at the helm of our country could easily have helicoptered down among the hungry, sparing a few morsels of food for them. It could be done with the funds saved by cutting off all useless wasteful decorations; and empty display of gaiety. Maybe

from these savings the state could have provided a reasonable meal of simple "Dhal-Bhat" for the many, many, hungry and starving children and grown ups. Cutting down on all pomp and glory and feeding the needy and hungry: would have been a shining example of humility, service and honour in the eyes of Allah whom we praise and remember at the Salat-ul-Fitr to start the holy day of Eid-ul-Fitr.
S.A.Mansoor
An ashamed person

Partition of India



The main problems of population migration that arose from the independence of the Indian sub-continent from the British Rule was not the creation of India and Pakistan as such. Jinnah wanted partition of the country into Pakistan and India, mainly on religious grounds, but he also argued fiercely with Mountbatten and his advisers (I read in one

of Mountbatten's biographies that the argument at the final stages of independence went through a whole night), against partition of the provinces of Bengal and Punjab and demanded that these two Muslim majority provinces which had existed for many years with their democratic provincial legislatures and governments must remain in tact and be allocated to Pakistan. Mountbatten was adamant that if religion was the basis to divide the country as a whole then the same principle must be applied to these provinces as well.

If these provinces were not partitioned but in their wholeness of existence as before became part of Pakistan, then India would have remained a Hindu country with large Muslim minority, and Pakistan a Muslim country with large Hindu (or Sikh and other) minorities. Both countries therefore would have been forced to pursue only secular democratic policies acceptable to all factions of populations within them, (like the erstwhile British), whether it was largely a Hindu or a Muslim country.

In such an event independence and partition would have provided a much better opportunity for peaceful coexistence between the two countries with political thinking very much like the British, with much higher potential for development and progress for both India and Pakistan. But of course Mountbatten was no Solomon!
Engineer Shafi Ahmed
London, UK

Medical admission test

It is known that the scapegoat never listen to moral lectures. If proper justice is ensured and all possible loopholes are sealed, the members of society would not have thought of it. But unfortunately so far as it is known, nobody dared to take proper actions against the unscrupulous vicious circles existing in the safe zone except little eyewitness.

We all know what happened to the Medical Admission Test last year 2006. Both the failed and the winning candidates (I refrain from saying successful as there was a game of money) had to go to the Supreme Court of the country with pleas to reject the examination and, on the other hand, to reject the appeal of the failed candidates.

Subsequent to the race, the winners got themselves admitted into different medical colleges. The unsuccessful candidates with their mental agony, tried elsewhere or waited for another chance killing valuable one-year time with a hope to find a place in the race of test examination of their choice. Obviously, it is the Public Medical Colleges in the country. We do not know if their aspiration will be fulfilled, because the men behind the curtains remain at the same place. Therefore, we are appre-

hending if those unscrupulous people in the Directorate of Health under the Ministry of Health & Public Welfare, responsible for last years' malpractice depriving thousands of meritorious, genuine students of their legitimate right are still active.

May I fervently appeal to the Adviser in-charge and the honest, dignified and dedicated high officials of the ministry and the department as well, to look into the matter very seriously.
Dharani M Barman
Tejgunipara
Tejgaon, Dhaka

Enforcement of law

It has been noticed that due to the failure of the authorities to enforce any law, public respect for its compliance is eroding fast. People do not seem to show any respect for any law as they can get away with the violation easily. For example, an anti-smoking law was promulgated long ago prohibiting public smoking. But has it been implemented? The answer is a big NO. Because there is no authority to implement this law. Recently, horn free zones were declared for some particular streets and places in the city. But the drivers of the vehicles are not showing any respect for the law and there is no

one to enforce it. As a result, hooting is rampant in those restricted areas. The traffic authorities now have come up with another directive prohibiting use of mobile phone or ear phone while driving. But as usual this directive is also totally ignored in the absence of any attempt to enforce its implementation.

If the authorities are not in a position to enforce the law, then why enact those laws? Such practice greatly diminishes public respect for any law. There is no point in enacting any law only to be disregarded by the public, unless effective steps are taken for its instant implementation.
Mohammad Ataul Hoque
One-mail

DU incident

The government promptly set up a one-man judicial inquiry commission to look into the DU incident. Since the commission has started its function, we have seen sporadic comments from the witnesses in print and electronic media reports.

The matter is under inquiry. We do not want to make any comment on the substance or on any other aspect of the inquiry. But on the procedural issue, one might raise a question: is it an open inquiry or a closed door inquiry? The type of

information made public through media reflects the views of the witnesses or even his/her testimony to the inquiry commission. The question arising in our mind is whether these would affect the fair judgment of the commission; secondly, and more importantly, the defendants are not getting an equal opportunity to defend themselves to the public while accusations are made public through media reports. We only hope that the commission would kindly consider the Dhaka University incident in its right perspective.
A reader
One-mail

'Headless horseman'?

I just finished reading the article 'Headless horseman' by Shahnoor Wahid on the DS issue of 18th October, 2007. I must first congratulate the writer for brilliantly portraying the prevailing truth in politics of Bangladesh. His last comments on questioning the three leaders to speak on behalf of Bangladesh are worth noting. In spite of 1/11, the politicians are simply playing the blame game and honestly trying to show their innocence for the fear of being booked by the ACC or some governmental agency. Truly, it is nonsensical to line up behind these people who had marauded and defrauded the nation for so long and in such unceremonious way that I am revisited by a spine chilling specter of pre 1/11 days and my blood pressure shoots up.

I am a pragmatist and I am sorry to say that these half-witted sideliners in politics cannot and will not ignite the fire to regroup and move ahead as a nation with a vision. It is nothing but vanity and utopian thinking that these discredited politicians can provide a bright future for Bangladesh. We shall always remain in the dusts of civilisation as these villains will wield their swords over justice, equity and progress of human kind. While I believe in creating a new class of dignified politicians or letting politics of wisdom and reason to emerge, I do not condone the treacherous acts of government servants and unethical business people who had participated in the rape of the nation.

I would strongly request the ACC (Anti-Corruption Commission) to deliver justice on these people and let Bangladesh become ambulatory once again.
Ziaur Rahman
CEO, IITM

Smuggling into jail!

An illuminating front page report on the matter was published in a local English daily after Eid. The report is a proof of bad habits leading towards criminality, even in so-called high society! It is astonishing to even think of "Phensidyl mixed

Semai"; an unholy concoction, even on a holy day like Eid.

More surprising was smuggling of Vodka disguised as drinking water; and in sealed bottles too! This was definitely done to pamper the filthy habit or rather addiction of the well-to-do people who can afford Vodka; an expensive alcoholic drink! One wonders if all these were destined to the so-called "VIP" category of prisoners.

Such prisoners and their "so-called near and dear ones" should be identified; their names and addresses widely publicized; so that all can know and be aware of them. They should also be summarily tried, and in open public venues to ensure that criminal persons are known to all. Prevent them from polluting the society in future. Such persons cannot be allowed to go scot free. Their punishment should be maximum possible imprisonment, and not any fine.
Society Watcher
Dhaka

CTG

There was no government that came to power with such popularity as the current caretaker government did. But their popularity is now at the lowest ebb. Because they have deviated from their prime assignments.

We hope that they will concentrate on the issues that will serve the people.

Rossy
A student of Independent University

Bangabandhu and Bangladesh

It was a delightful morning for me to see the coverage and the picture of three Chiefs of Armed Forces, the President and the Chief Adviser paying tribute to our father of the nation on the 32nd anniversary of the assassination of Bangabandhu. Bangabandhu and Bangladesh are synonymous. General Moeen and his colleagues have displayed maturity and good sense. Let us not disgrace the father of the nation anymore. During the time when Awami League was in power Bangabandhu's image was restored to some extent.

I was then in Nairobi. A distinguished career diplomat and a highly intellectual High Commissioner of Bangladesh (unfortunately was underemployed) organised a function in his office for the Bangladeshi community to place Bangabandhu's picture officially on the wall of the Embassy reception area and I was asked to say a few words on behalf of the community. On the auspicious occasion I told the audience, "I hope Bangabandhu's picture will not be disgraced and removed once again with the change of government".

Let us pray, my countrymen,

once more that we may not be cruel, unkind and disgraceful to the architect of Bangladesh, or for that matter any other national leaders including the late Ziaur Rahman. Oh Lord, may it not be repeated again.
Munim Chowdhury
New York, USA

NBR chairman

Change of NBR chairman is a routine function. But it is news since people feel that the immediate past chairman was talking too much, which was beyond the normal discipline of a bureaucrat.
Kumar Pritwiraaj Nath
Toronto, Canada

Caretaker government

Since January 2007, this caretaker government has only been doing one single thing: cracking down on the politicians. They are only focused on arresting the corrupt politicians and business people. It is a good thing but after they came to power it is their only mission. They are not at all concerned about other major issues concerning the

development of the country. The RAB and police are doing nothing to stop crimes. Prices of essential commodities are increasing day by day at an alarming rate. The entire nation is suffering from power failure. If electricity is not available 3-4 hours a day, then how will it be possible for business people to compete with the rest of the world?
Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

Police administration

Mr. Nurul Huda's incisive observations on police management (Oct:20) present the pragmatic realities of facts as practiced in Bangladesh. The prime goal is "non-accounting cash flow". This prime goal covers everyone in the hierarchy; except a few, too few; honourable people; who therefore become misfits in the highly efficiently managed and well developed "cash flow" system.

Given this management system; information flow within the police hierarchy; except for ornamental gala occasions; when ideal

Sugar crisis

Recently BTV started showing a feature on the bad effects of consuming Indian sugar which is available in our local market. Indian sugar contains ingredients like hydrogen peroxide H2O2 which can cause severe damage to health.

Concentrated hydrogen peroxide (50%) is corrosive, and even domestic-strength solutions can cause irritation to the eyes, mucous membranes and skin. Swallowing hydrogen peroxide solutions is particularly dangerous, as decomposition in the stomach releases large quantities of gas (10 times the volume of a 3% solution) leading to internal bleeding. Inhaling over 10% can cause severe pulmonary irritation.

The general people don't know much about this. I think there should be a wider publicity of the bad effect of the Indian white sugar. Another thing is that the local sugar is not available everywhere. There are only a few market places where the Bangladeshi sugar is found.
Cantara Wali Ruhi, DU

Europe and India

Regarding the 'independence' of India and Pakistan, I have to mention that 'undivided' India or Bharat was always independent and had outstanding economic, academic and cultural excellence until the 'British traders' arrived. After the British finished 'trading and ruling' the foundation was laid not for 2 but 3 countries: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Unfortunately, B'desh became the youngest child abandoned at birth by a large family although once Bengal was one of the richest regions on earth. Today the European colonialists, once racing to grab the Indian resources, are united under 'EU'. But there is also a mighty shine fiercely emerging from the united South Asian platform under 'Saarc'.
MM Rahman
London, UK

Unsafe foods

Thanks to Zarina Rahman of Dhaka for drawing attention of everybody concerned to the consequences of using toxic chemicals in fruits through her letter of October 19, 2007. Toxic chemicals are not only being used in local fruits but also in other foods. Once, I met Magistrate Rokonuddollah and he informed us that dyes made for textile industries are being used to prepare foods. Moreover, there is no report and restriction on the use of artificial sweeteners to make food items sweet. It deserves mention that the toxicity of artificial sweeteners to

humans may include carcinogenicity, reproductive and developmental toxicity, neuro-toxicity, and acute toxicity.

I would therefore request my respected teacher who is now our Health Adviser to kindly look into this matter and take necessary steps to formulate a food policy which will ensure safe food for all.

Dr. Mahboob Hossain
Associate Professor
Department of Pharmacy
The University of Asia Pacific
Dhaka

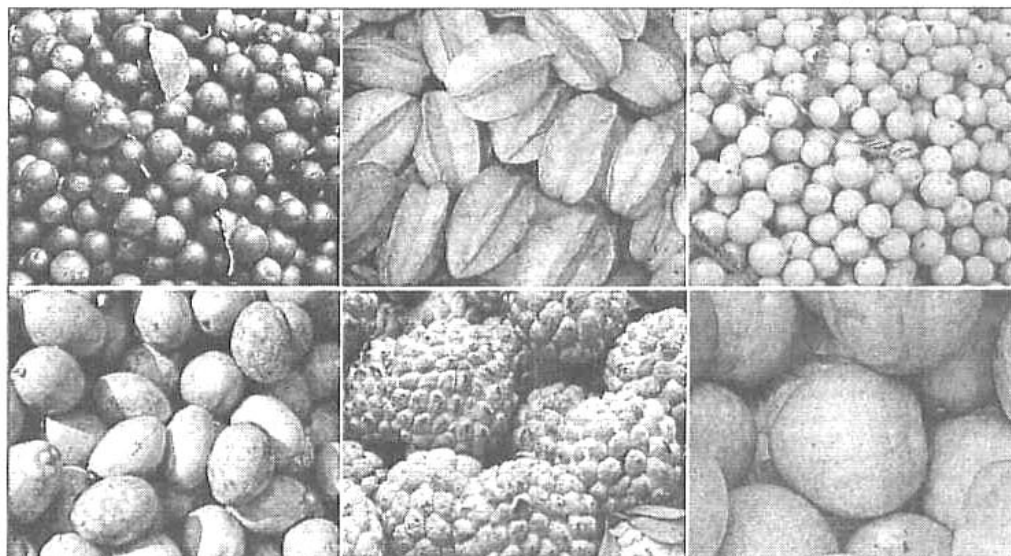


PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA