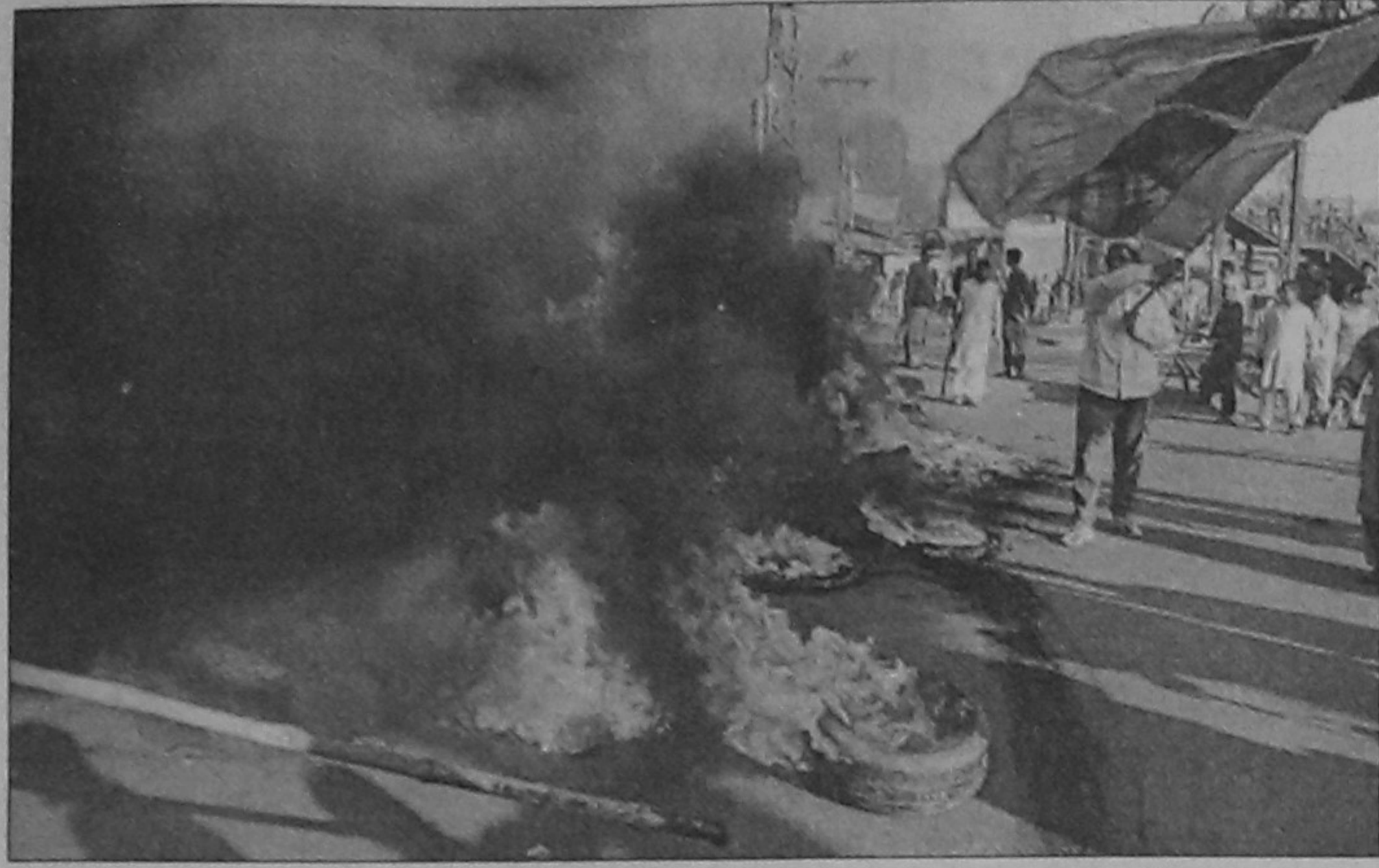


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.



Future of Pakistan

I write with reference to the letter from Mr. Mahmood Elahi titled "Future of Pakistan." While it is true that extremism and sectarianism pose a serious challenge to Pakistan, I disagree with the author's assertion that "Al-Qaeda / Taliban enjoy considerable support amongst the masses" of Pakistan, a deduction reached by the author by pointing to Bin Laden's supposed "popularity" in Pakistan. I believe the results of opinion polls suggesting "support" for Bin Laden need to be investigated thoroughly before reaching any firm conclusion as to their findings.

But what greater evidence does one need to debunk this contention than to look at the hundreds of thousands of people who came to welcome Benazir Bhutto when she returned to Pakistan on October 18, 2007? What about the massive receptions she got all over the country, in every province, including the NWFP? Despite always being opposed by the security establishment with the scales heavily tilted against them, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has consistently managed to win a strong chunk of votes in every election since its establishment in 1967. Even in the deeply flawed and rigged 2002 elections, the PPP got around 29% of votes, the highest in the country. If anyone has the support of the masses in Pakistan, it was Benazir Bhutto and what she stood for. How can there be such broad based support for a liberal woman in a country where terrorist outfits or the Taliban enjoy popular support?

Further, religious parties have hardly polled more than 3-4% of the popular vote in all elections in the country except 2002. The reason why religious parties polled 11% of the 2002 vote was a reaction to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Mr. Musharraf's sidelining of the mainstream political parties, creating a vacuum filled by the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam of

Maulana Fazlur Rehman (JUI-F) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) of Qazi Hussain Ahmed in the NWFP and to some extent in Baluchistan. I believe the 2008 elections, currently being rigged by the current regime, will still result in a considerably diminished presence of the religious political parties in the country. In the NWFP, we are likely to witness the rise of the secular Awami National Party (ANP) of Asfandyar Wali Khan. The people of Pakistan are overwhelmingly conservative and religious, but it would be wrong to assume that the brand of Islam favoured by the Taliban has broad-based support in the country apart from certain specific areas / districts.

As to Mr. Elahi's comment on why many people in Pakistan suspect the involvement of what is known as the "Establishment" in Pakistan, the government's inadequate security arrangements for Ms. Bhutto (despite repeated demands from her), clearing the crime scene within 90 minutes of the attack resulting in loss of evidence, its non-serious & callous attitude after the assassination and preposterous lies such as the so-called "lever theory" are some of the reasons why Mr. Musharraf's unconstitutional regime has no credibility throughout the country.

Pakistan's problems, including extremism in all its manifestations, can only be solved by a genuine civilian government in the presence of an independent judiciary and free media, with every state institution not venturing beyond its constitutional role. The current dispensation, headed by a man who has become a symbol of hatred for most Pakistanis, cannot handle the multi-faceted, complex challenges faced by this country.

Taimur Masud Khan
Lahore, Pakistan

Inspection & QC culture

The ruling regimes since 1972 failed to introduce discipline and transparency in our inspectors and inspection networks. It means R&D and QC (research and development; and quality control) were wasteful expenditures; especially for goods and services not exported (like RMG and manpower exports). The local consumers have been suffering, being offered shoddy goods and services. This type of systems losses are huge over the decades, tarnishing the image of Bangladeshi products and services.

Who are working in the background, compared to the visible field staff (who wear no uniform outdoors for instant identity by the citizens)? These are the support teams comprising the bureaucrats and the technocrats and the concerned official agencies associated with R&D and QC. Why so lax and devoid of dedication? The pen-pushers in the Secretariat, ministries and policy-making bodies.

The role of the technocrats in the civil service has to be reviewed. Now the technical staff are kept under lid, and brought out once in a while, for the convenience of the political masters.

Some examples: unauthorized shops carrying out conversion of vehicles for CNG operation; people buy foreign honey and other products (even foreign RMG/clothes; many with fake labels) unfit vehicles on the roads; fake certificates and documents; adulterated foods; unqualified drivers; illegal medical diagnostic centres; non-use of revenue stamps in money receipts; tax evasion—in fact too many items to prepare a list in one sitting, but well known to the average citizens.

The businessmen and industrialists have an easy time, marketing shoddy products and services. In short, we have encouraged a culture of corrupt practices (note the dimensions of RAB raids and prosecutions).

The rates are fixed for the different zones of the city corp. The taxis form a queue, as in KL Malaysia (where I enjoyed this facility for ten years in the 1980s), the city autorickshaws and taxis have fare meters fitted, but do not turn it on; and haggle with each and every passenger.

The powerful CTG cannot enforce this simple rule, widely practised all over the world. No deterrent prosecutions and publicity. It is not enough to be too busy with the preparations for the next general elections (the ID card is important), and ignore daily hassles. More than 60 per cent of road passengers use the pedal rickshaws in Dhaka city, while only one per cent have private cars, as per newspaper reports; then why this zulum on the majority commuters? The majority of rickshaw drivers and vehicles have fake documents.

There are two basic aspects; control the number of cycle rickshaws; and discourage urban migration to the capital Dhaka (diversify). You can't get any work done without visiting Dhaka for most assignments. It is not good governance!
AMMA'abid
Dhaka

School calendar

The recent hurricane-strength Sidr has made obvious the need for a flexible school calendar in disaster-prone areas; but it is as well necessary in many other regions across the country. Though all our education commissions have recommended decentralization of the education system, the right for scheduling one's own school calendar has been overlooked all along. It is however known that the District Primary Education Officers had certain number of holidays in their hands to give to local schools until it was revoked, maybe, towards the end of the 1980s. Again, on 22 April 1998 in a meeting at then Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) a decision was taken for some flexibility in local school calendar with due permission from the Division.

Basing on this particular government level decision, Sabalamby Unnayan Samity (SUS), a non-government organisation of

Netrokona, made a campaign for the right to make their own school calendar. As a result, in a post-cyclone meeting in Netrokona on 17 September 2007, Mr. Ayub Quadri, then Education Adviser of the present caretaker government, spoke positively of such a calendar. Next, on 21 November in a programme on how to improve quality of education in the upazila of Khaliajuri, jointly organised by SUS and the upazila administration, those present spoke for it in this haor area. Then one by one, the upazila education committees of Khaliajuri, Madon, Mohonganj and Kalmakanda in Netrokona took decision for introducing such a calendar, which now awaits approval at the district level and then finally at the ministry.

If the decision gets the nod from the ministry, it will pave the way for adopting such locally suitable school calendars in other regions of the country like in the hilly and northern districts with indigenous communities, where it is too urgent. School calendar needs to be rescheduled in order to accommodate children who are involved in particular or seasonal works in some areas, for example catching shrimp larvae in the districts of Bhola and Cox's Bazar, picking tea leaves in Sylhet, and engaging in jhum cultivation in the hill districts.

At present our school calendar has 75 days of holidays, besides the usual Fridays, that is nationally set by the ministry. In this, summer vacation imitating the cold European countries is no use here because it rather comes with plenty of delicious fruits. Winter vacation is also fruitless because with new rice it provides more nutrition to children helping them to concentrate on their studies. These vacations can be used for the loss of school hours during the period of floods and other disasters, said Jibon Dey Shyamal of SUS, Netrokona, in a conversation with us.

The ministries concerned should handle the matter in right earnest, keeping in view the ground reality.
Alamgir Khan
Program Officer
Other Vision
Other Vision Communication

Cancel quota system

The caretaker govt has taken myriad steps for reforming and reconstituting various govt organisations including the Public Service Commission (PSC) as the organisations have plunged into corruption and irregularity. The govt successfully reconstituted the PSC, which is the highest recruiting body of govt officials and the steps taken were lauded by all. The caretaker govt has also taken the initiative to bring about changes in the PSC recruitment process, so that the meritorious candidates could get chance. The measures would deter mischievous and fraudulent candidates who enter govt service using loopholes in the recruitment process. Recently, while reading DS, I came to know that the committee, formed to bring changes in the process, is indifferent towards taking any initiative regarding the quota system.

Needless to say, the quota system doesn't favour the really deserving candidates. We appeal to the authorities to introduce a system that will do justice to the meritorious.

Md Zonaeed Emran
University of Dhaka

A timely warning!

This is perhaps for the first time that the Finance Adviser warned scheduled banks not to harass their clients. In fact, we expected such a dictum from the Bangladesh Bank. As the central bank, BB's role, we expect, should be much greater. We observe that banks are earning a lot of money. We request all banks to provide on-line banking services and take care of clients' account accurately, send their balance regularly, include adequate precautions about the safety vault and lockers and honour every customer as valued one.

This will help eventually to promote the banking habits among the public at large and build public confidence in the banking system.

Thanks to the Finance Adviser for the warning.
Kumar Prithwiraj Nath
Toronto, Canada

Climate change

It has been said in the UN report that the world's climate is undergoing significant changes. If the world's temperature changes drastically many living beings may face extinction! The sea level is rising day by day. Bangladesh is located at a very dangerous point. We should make all-out efforts to keep the situation under control.
Motdur Rahman Moti
Shamoly, Ring Road, Dhaka

Wasa clearance certificate

Through your daily we would like to draw the kind attention of the authorities concerned that many consumers/customers have not received the yearly clearance certificate of payment of their monthly Desa and Wasa bills for the last two years, as yet.

The possession of the clearance certificate by the consumers/customers protects and saves them from the harassment by some unscrupulous elements of Desa and Wasa who from time to time demand double payment of the bill because we fail to produce before them copies of the paid monthly bills which are incidentally misplaced or lost by us.

We would request Desa and Wasa to expedite issuance of yearly clearance certificate or a statement of outstanding bills, if any, for the last two years in order to maintain and settle up to date account of bills and to keep Desa and Wasa as well as customers/consumers free from any predicament in future in the interest of public service.

We would also request our authorities concerned to give some incentive/award to the consumers/customers who pay their monthly bills regularly for a period of five years at a stretch, without any break.
OH Kabir, Wari, Dhaka

Introducing essential rules

To develop our overall standard in different sectors of the state, we need some rules-regulations and their appropriate execution. But unfortunately the political governments didn't perform those tasks effectively, though they were vocal always in favour of those rules. For example, "Separation of the Judiciary" has been a long standing demand. But in 36 years they have done nothing meaningful. They have deferred it by showing lame excuses like red-tapism, bureaucratic complexity etc. But now we are encouraged. This government has initiated a lot of good things. They have made the EC, ACC, PSC, UGC, HRC and other organisations effective. But the challenge is to make these corrections institutionalised. Otherwise, future political governments will attempt to make the ventures futile.

We feel this government should consider some more important issues where reforms or introducing new laws are much needed for the long-term welfare of the nation.
Astudent, Shahjalal University

An icon of chess

Robert James Bobby Fischer, former world chess champion from the USA, died of kidney failure in Iceland at the age of 64. He was born in 1943, the son of two physicists (divorced when he was two).

Nobody taught him chess at Manhattan Chess Club; he learned and mastered the game himself. As Collins, a veteran chess organiser-cum-coach at Manhattan Chess Club observed: "Geniuses, like Beethoven, Shakespeare and Fischer come out of the head of Zeus. They seem to be genetically programmed, know before instructed."

This chess legend earned the rare distinction of being the youngest grandmaster and the youngest American champion and was an unprecedented phenomenon in the chess arena across the world.

The separation of his parents forced him, as some tend to think, to be more detached from others, and he confined himself in a small room among the chess books that ultimately paved the way for him to rise up to a phenomenal peak of magical intensity with which he outplayed all his opponents on the 64 squared board. He was considered to have IQ higher than Einstein's!

World chess, since the Second World War, had been a continuous affair of success for the super-scientific Russian players; it was Bobby Fischer who made his appearance felt by all and brought about an end to the Russian era by defeating Boris Spassky in the historic Reykjavik world championship match in 1972, the match dubbed as the "Match of the Century" --- the Russian hegemony of chess had severely been hit and cut short, though till 1975 only. Fischer did not play the next title match with the challenger Anatoly Karpov as the FIDE (World Chess Federation) did not accept the demands on different issues made by him. Fischer, all of a sudden, quit chess. The eccentric genius pulled himself off the chess arena and started living in self exile. It was in 1992 that Fischer made yet another appearance in a match with Boris Spassky, again in a controversial match held in Yugoslavia. America put an embargo upon his playing there, but he continued and made himself the eyesore of the American administration.

Fischer's contribution to the chess world is multifarious; he was the sole fighter to stand for the interests of the chess players across the globe in terms of a prestigious field of professionalism.

Fischer, as many used to think, used to notch out the opponents' psychology, had several times made it clear that "I don't believe in psychology" rather "I believe in good moves." Indeed he used to make great moves that constantly took his opponents by the nerves. It was Fischer-Fever that had been a strange but strong phenomenon for the chess stalwarts of his time, rather on his way! Russian Grandmaster Mark Taimanov felt it most with his 0-6 loss to Fischer in the candidates before the 1972 final; the same thing happened to Danish Grandmaster Bent Larsen - same feverish 0-6 performance with



Fischer sitting opposite as the opponent

Furthermore, Fischer's knight move to h5 square against Spassky with the black pieces in a Benoni defence in the third game of the world championship match would ever remain a great innovation for the chess players. In the endgame part, Fischer brought about a revolutionary change. His overall contributions to the cause of the game will ever remain fresh to the players of our times and the ones to come in future.

Ironically, Fischer, the Cold War Hero, made out to be the reverse to the American administration after his anti-American and anti-Semitic outburst on many occasions. He was denied the American citizenship, and stripped of the glory, fame and the world acclaim that he brought for his own country in the bitter treatment that he received. This world icon of chess, with his millions of fans across the world, had to remain unfathomable even by his people --- the extra-sensitive soul had to wander around till his last breath in Iceland.

Bobby Fischer will be living through his unique games, through his equally unique sensitivity, and his overall majestic spell upon the chess lovers across the world that he once cast through his extraordinary moves on the 64 squares --- he died at 64 too! May God bless this great soul.

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Surma-Kushiyara Project

I felt very sad after reading the report about the above-mentioned project which was published in your paper on 30 December 2007. The information that the project is not being implemented properly due to the apathy of the officials concerned is very unfortunate. The frequent downward revision of the budget is proof that it has not been formulated properly. Most of the croplands of the projects area are haors (flat low land) suitable for growing only one crop in winter (mostly boro rice) but rice crop is damaged by floods, partly or wholly, almost every year. This has been happening from the time immemorial.

The poverty caused by frequent crop failures forced many families of the area to migrate from their birthplaces. I vividly remember the heart-rending scenes that I saw in my childhood when the members of the migrating families bade good-bye to their ancestral homes with tearful faces. The governments in the past did not do anything to address this problem. Elites of the area also did not take any interest in this matter. When I was in govt. service several people approached me to know if I could do anything to solve the problem. I could do nothing.

The project taken up at long last envisages control of floods, drainage and irrigation not only to save crops but also to enhance productivity. It raised expectation of the farmers that their sufferings will

probably come to an end. If 49 thousand hectares are brought under the HYV rice crops per year, the total annual production of clean rice will be at least four lakh tons having a value of Tk. 50 crore. So the funds spent for the project will be realised within five years. Moreover, the project should be taken up throughout the country, particularly in the flood-prone areas. It may not be out of place to mention that the expatriates of the five project upazilas have already earned for the country an amount of foreign exchange which is thousand times more than the costs of the project.

I hereby request the hon'ble adviser in charge of the ministry of water resources to kindly give attention to the issue in order that the project is implemented prop-

erly and fully. If funding is an immediate problem, the implementation period may be extended. Frequent downward revision of budget and stopping release of funds obviously raise suspicion about the good intention of the government. I also request the implementing authorities to get the local people involved. This will bring down the number of mistakes that may occur in such projects. It will be useful if personnel having exposure to haor ecology are employed in the project. Finally, I urge upon the political and other elites of the project upazilas to please show interest in it.

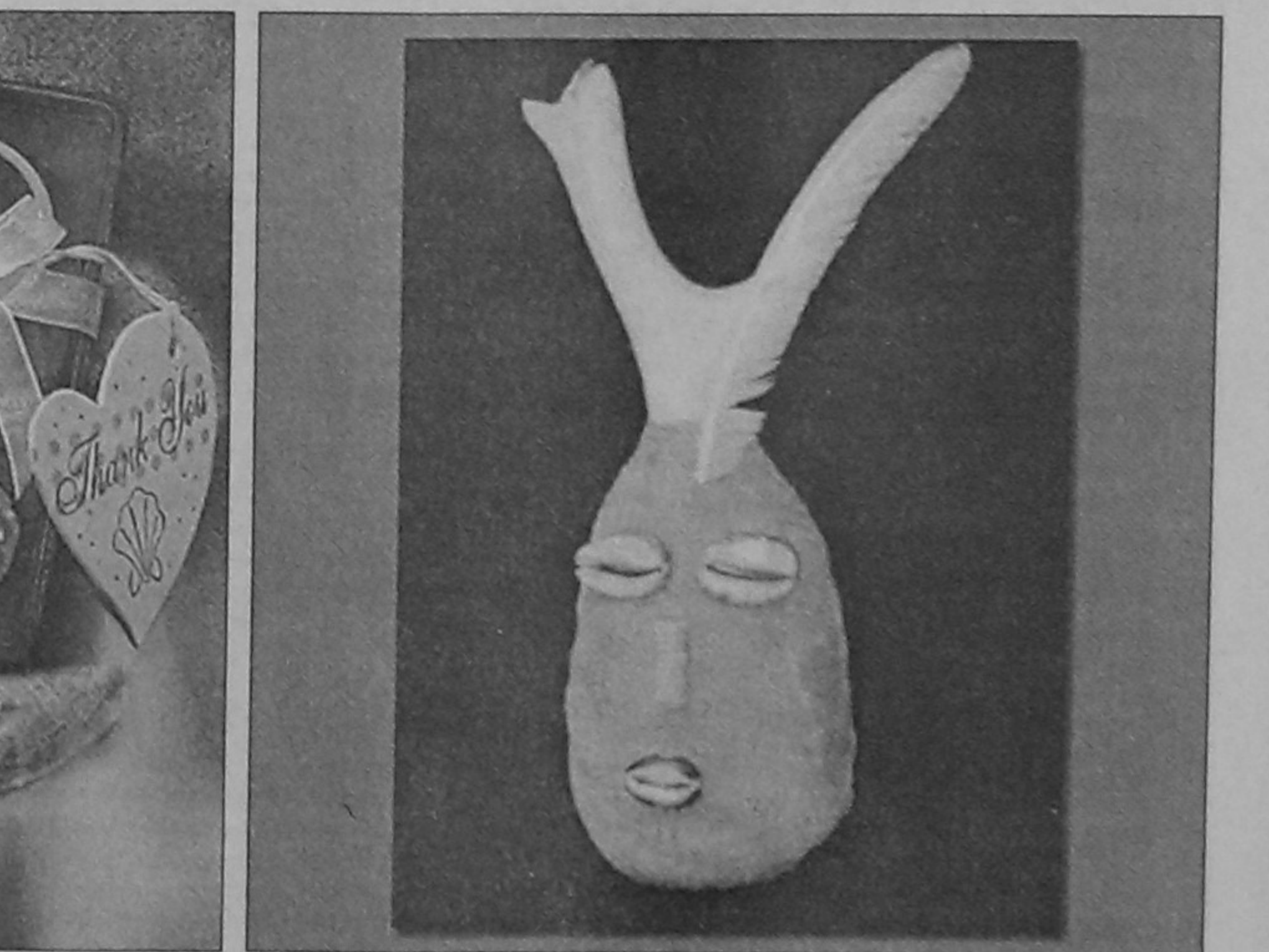
Dr. Mamunur Rashid
Former Director General
Bangladesh Rice Research Institute

Unsavory souvenirs



The government needs to make fresh guidelines to create awareness among tourists, both local and foreign, against purchasing and exchanging wildlife souvenirs made from the endangered species.

The department of tourism and environment should inform the tourists that by buying these wildlife souvenirs, they would be encouraging the illegal trade of our most beautiful and unusual wildlife.



Fresh guidelines should be immediately prepared by the ministries with a view to creating awareness among tourists against buying wildlife souvenirs like wreaths, ornaments and keyring of oyster, deer horn, elephant ivory carvings and turtle shell accessories etc. Countries such as Vietnam, Australia and the US have been warning tourists against buying items made from animal parts.

The ever-increasing tourist flow

round the globe is also putting extra pressure on the endangered species such as tigers, star tortoise, exotic birds, corals and medicinal plants.

We must understand that conserving wildlife doesn't mean legal action against the holidaymakers. Rather, its aim is get support of the tourists in this noble mission.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam
One-mail