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## Democracy & corruption

There is no alternative to democracy for good governance and prosperity of the nation. At the moment we are passing through a crucial period of institutionalisation of democracy in our country. The present government is working to give us a genuine voter list, bringing reforms in the political parties, identifying the corrupt people and musclemen, to keep the electoral process away from their unholy influence. We are very much hopeful about the success of the CTG. The foreign powers are also pressing the government to lift emergency and hold an election as soon as possible because our development partners want to see a democratic Bangladesh as their partner.

We the common people understand democracy very little. So, we are afraid of democracy that we have seen during the last few years. The Home Minister reportedly demanded, with the knowledge of the PM,

Tk 100 crore to save a killer from indictment, ministers siphoned off state money to foreign banks, a gas employee amassed Tk 2100 crore, a forest officer kept crores of taka in his pillows and rice containers. But none of them were brought to book for their corruption during those democratic regimes.

Newspapers have revealed how crores of taka were stolen by some people close to our great leaders in the name of repairing Biman engines and parts.

The nation could have never known where our leaders and the government offices and various departments took us!! The nation could have never known how hypocrites became our leaders, had there been no CTG backed by our army. While they were openly speaking about shadinata & image of the country, they themselves were involved in spoiling that image abroad.

Shafiqul Islam  
On e-mail



### Role of banks

Thanks to the Bangladesh Bank for the belated step in directing the commercial banks of the country to find ways to reduce the wide gap between lending and deposit rates. But it is not always the deposit rate which affects the cost of funds in a bank. Although it has a direct link, but free money (about 20% app.) in the banking channel plays a great part in arriving at the funding cost of any bank which means actual effective funding cost of any bank is much less than the real deposit rate. Therefore, it would have been better if the equation could be made between their cost of fund and the lending rates. The spread in such circumstances would be more yawning. A spread of seven percent and above at the sweet will of the banks is too high for the entrepreneurs to do business profitably by taking bank loan, and if allowed to continue this trend will undoubtedly impede industrial development in the country.

The result of previous fiscal year's dismal growth in the industries sector is obviously in view of the above fact. Let us hope that the commercial banks will now come to their senses and realise the harm they were causing to the industry and economy of the country by keeping their lending rates unnecessarily high. Even during the last fiscal period when business activities were reported to be at its lowest ebb, the banking companies made a record profit, the lion's share of which went to a handful of large shareholders in the form of dividend, equity, reserve etc. It is evident that the activities of the banks are centred round the profiteering motives of a few large shareholders and their representative Directors

in the Board. The Board of Directors should realize beside earning a reasonable dividend for the shareholders the commercial banks have a more important and bigger obligation towards economic and industrial development of the country. Unfortunately, our banks have consistently failed in this area. Despite huge liquidity in the money market and large hue and cry from the entrepreneurs to reduce the lending rates, the commercial banks did not lower their interest rates and continued with their money making business only. The contention of the BAB Chairman that it would be difficult for them to reduce the lending rates unless the interest on savings certificates and treasury bonds were slashed is not based on facts.

A few years back when under a directive from the Bangladesh Bank the banks were gradually bringing down the rates to a single digit figure, no one raised this question. Moreover, actually some banks did bring down the rates to single digit level and still they were doing business comfortably and profitably. There is no apparent direct linkage between the lending rate and the rates of government securities. After all, migration of bank depositors to government securities on better rate of return basis is not "violent". Then why such lame excuses?

As a regulator of the economy, such action from the Bangladesh Bank was, therefore, overdue. In my opinion they along with SEC should work together closely in opening more investor friendly avenues for raising capital at a reasonable cost by the entrepreneurs to reduce their dependence on commercial banks. The incen-

tive given by the government on issuance of ZERO coupon bonds could be cited as an example. Income from investment in ZERO coupon bonds has been made totally tax free. This incentive has attracted a number of financial institutions and private companies to raise funds by issuing such bonds at a much lesser cost than the bank loan which will cast a positive impact on the industrialisation and economic development of the country. Moreover, the investors whether private or public have shown keen interest in such bonds in view of the generous tax incentive given by the Government.

But the recent step by the Bangladesh Bank to refer to NBR before granting permission to the private companies; other than financial institutions and banks, to float ZERO coupon bonds is perhaps a wrong step. The regulators are now regulating a virtually non-existent capital and bond market with so many rules and regulations but no place to apply!

Mohammad Ataul Hoque  
One e-mail

### Pitha Festival-2008

The word "Pitha" gives us the smell of delicious cakes. And to make pithas more popular, pitha festivals are the best occasions. That's why to inspire the young generation not to forget our traditional foodstuff, some people organised a pitha festival in Rajshahi.

This is the first time a pitha festival was organised here. Hats off to the people who were behind it!

Shatabdi Biswas  
RPATC Officer's Quarter  
Rajshahi

### The language issue

This editorial of 6 February is quite timely. The problem has arisen because of the clever attitude of some Bangladeshis (mostly abroad) who have managed to identify the language of Bangla with Matri Bhasha or Mother tongue. Of course a proper language must have its alphabet, its vocabulary and grammar and a standard pronunciation over a large area of population for mutual understanding, and thus Bangla Bhasha has evolved over centuries from many dialects of various mother tongues or brojo-bulee, matri-bulee etc. When a *bulee* becomes a *bhasha* with all necessary elements, it is the *bhasha* which must be given prominence by the educated citizens and matri *bulees* or dialects must only remain in the background of culture or literature, but never occupy the centre stage.

Unfortunately, this situation has been changed by overzealous disservice and the struggle for Bangla Bhasha has been identified as struggle for Matri Bhasha. This is not the situation in West Bengal, so they speak the evolved language as it should be spoken.

It can quite easily be seen when instead of, say, singing, "Moder garab, moder asha, amader ai banglabhasha", they sing "Moder garab, moder asha, amader ai matri bhasha".

This confusion must be resisted and removed from our psyche for the proper development of Bangla as the 4th widely spoken language in the world and the common language of this glorious delta-land.

It does not mean that various matri *bulees* or dialects be demeaned, only that they must have a subsidiary or buttressing role to the main language.

Engineer Shafi Ahmed  
London, UK

### Marrying a foreign national

After reading a few correspondences in the newspapers on the above issue, I felt an urge within myself to clarify it further. Following is the existing law in brief as per the gazette notification vide the ordinance No. LVII of 1976 relating to the Public Servants (Marriage With Foreign Nationals) Ordinance, 1976, issued under the signature of the late President A.M. Sayem dated 7th July 1976.

The Ordinance inter-alia states:-

1) That a public servant in diplomatic service shall not marry or promise to marry a foreign national. 2) A public servant other than a public servant in diplomatic service shall not marry or promise to marry a foreign national except with the permission granted under sub-section (3). 3) The President may on an application made in his behalf grant a public servant other than a public servant in diplomatic service permission to marry or promise to marry a foreign national. C) A public servant who contravenes the provisions of the sub-section 1 or sub-section 2 shall, notwithstanding anything contained in any other law or in the terms and conditions of his service be liable to be removed from service.

Public servant includes any person who is, for the time being, in the service of the Republic or of any local authority or nationalised enterprise.

The law seems to be devoid of natural justice and is not consistent and also harsh in nature. After all in this world, exchange of heart may take place between any unmarried grown up man and woman anywhere any time during the course of life, irrespective of nationality, religious faith and linguistic difference. This is the law of the nature. Now a public servant of non diplomatic cadre if unwittingly or unknowingly commits the blunder, law has made no room for the marriage to be regularised by obtaining a post facto approval

from the President of the country. For the sake of marriage he/she has to lose his/her bread and butter and be jobless. Then again, the definition of a public servant seems to be ridiculous. How can a worker of a nationalised jute mill be classified as a public servant?

However a law is a law and it is effective as well as binding, though it may have deserved amendments in its proper perspective by the successive governments in power. But no one had time to look at it. Sounds funny we have many such irrational laws like in the past during ex President Ershad's tenure there was a law that a govt servant or semi government servant would have to forego his/her due turn of foreign posting if he/she has more than two surviving children.

A law has to be humane. Maybe, time permitting, the CTG would do something about it.

A.B. Mohammed Zakaria  
Whitley Close  
Middlesex, UK

### Violating traffic rules

This morning (19 Feb) sometimes after 9 am, I was coming up the Gulshan Avenue (south to north) towards the first circle intersection, when a police pick-up with horn blaring was leading a Bangladesh flagged car.

These two vehicles overtook the rush hour heavy traffic, and without waiting for the lights to change, drove right through the cross traffic heading towards the second circle!

This was as rash and dangerous driving as one could imagine; and that too by a high official! Imagine what would have happened if a car coming on its right of way would have dashed into the police-up or the flagged car?

Normally with the right of way; the car dashing could not have been faulted; rather the car that could have been dashed was driving recklessly and dangerously, across normal traffic; during busy hours!

This incident naturally upset the traffic stream, and must have caused anxious moments for many drivers. Luckily, the cars stopped timely; and no car was dashed from behind! This sort of dangerous and reckless driving across a busy road crossing at the busiest time of the day cannot be imagined anywhere except in Bangladesh; where rights and rank go hand in hand!

It was a punishable traffic offence; and an example of law breaking through misuse of power and status; by none other than the police; the so-called custodian of the law!

No wonder ordinary people do not trust the police; who have different set of rules for different people! This is one form of corruption that will remain with us; and in a sense the seed of corruption being planted by the high and mighty!

An astonished pedestrian  
Dhaka

### Rights of minorities

In Bangladesh, we (non Muslims) are the minority. The majority people are better placed. It is natural. But it is also natural to have our right to observe religious festivals established fully. Sadly, the reality does not reflect that. On 11 February, we observed our Saraswati Puja. Almost all of the educational institutions remain closed on this day. But the English medium schools are not caring about our religious values. They were running classes. Saraswati is our Goddess of knowledge, art, music and others. But our English medium students are not getting any chance of praying to our Holy Goddess. This is quite unfair. We must learn English but of course not at the cost of our own religious values.

I hope all the schools will remain closed on this day in future.

Pallab Kumar Hazra  
Department of English  
Jagannath Hall  
University of Dhaka



## Local languages

Many communities like Chakma, Marma and Rakhaines are living in different places in Bangladesh. But they are on the verge of losing their linguistic identity.

The matter deserves a closer look.

Nurnobe  
Chattagong University

### The old and the new

Warriors and despots are generally bad economists - Richard Cobden, the 19th century 'apostle of free trade'.

More and more, we see the rise of two opposing political camps in Bangladesh. One is the old that wants to revive politics through immediate parliamentary polls. The other is the new that emerged after January 2007 and who never wishes to return to old political dominance by dynasties, lawlessness, and the inability or reluctance of elected governments to bring reforms.

The 'price of liberty is eternal vigilance' so said one of the great English philosophers and we should never lower our guard even in the present situation when much is expected but little can transpire.

While government's political reform agenda is commendable, its

country.

Individuals possess better economic judgements and skills than governments. Individuals know where and when to take risk. When they sustain loss, they redo their management methods or quit to stop further losses. Unfortunately, Bangladesh's academics or even the media have not found much to highlight the positive sides of the economic individual. In economic matters, Bangladesh's intelligentsia focus on the power of the government. They project private enterprise as weak, unscrupulous, and without access to global resources or markets. This belief and the practice have created a vested business community that constantly seek government favours and protection. To this class, having access to the government is more important and necessary than customer satisfaction in the market.

officers? They should abolish it first, if there is any.

That does not sound good when the meritorious students from all over the country compete for admission.

Monawar  
One e-mail

### Energy policy

The energy policy needs to be publicly accessible and this is a standard practice of any democratic nation. If it is open to general people it will remove the doubts on our leadership. Once the policies are rock solid, sensible and professional interest, it will be very easy for the people as well for the investors on energy or other areas to participate in international bidding. If the policies lack clarity, national interest will be harmed.

Anonymous  
USA

## President Musharraf

There seems to be a huge applause in Pakistan on Musharraf's imminent ouster. We as Bangladeshis welcome the end to a military regime. But we should also not forget that the General is the only Pakistani leader who expressed regrets for the genocide in 1971. During his time, Pakistan enjoyed the best relations with India and had a long economic upturn. It is the same politicians who were ousted for corruption that came back to defeat him. Let it be a reminder for all Bangladeshis that we have to finish the anti-corruption drive and make sure that the rule of law is established.

We should not have the same fate as Pakistan. It seems the Pakistani voters have a very short memory.

Zia Islam  
Los Angeles, USA



weakness lies in its economic belligerency. It continues to mismanage the economy and no political reform is sustainable without a satisfactory economy.

The government assigns economic experts, task forces, and holds discussions with the stakeholders but no results have been achieved. They tried the blame game. Blaming the 'syndicate' was once everyone's favourite. Neither the experts nor the government have found any wilful manipulators of prices. They blame the international oil price hike and global shortages of food due to bio fuels, cyclones, hoarding, profiteering, and the like.

The government cannot clearly explain our economic problems. However, as a solution to our economic ills, the government can leave the economy to the large informal market to respond to the crisis. The official word for this would be liberalisation. The simplest way to liberalise is to legalise the informal economy and all related activities.

Liberalisation specifies that no armed agencies would hinder informal economic activity or 'monitor' markets. It implies that market prices are not controlled. It means eliminating the policy of seizing goods in the border regions or within the country. The liberalisation of the economy would let loose mass entrepreneurship which in turn would fulfil the demands of the economy.

"Entrepreneurs are blessed with a special courage to risk their own resources," said Rockwell of Mises Institute in USA. Entrepreneurial freedom, the sovereignty of the producer and the consumer, if backed by sound money, can generate astonishing levels of productivity to meet the demands of a

Protection, as they get, results in economic distortions and in the exploitation of labour. Protected exporters earn billions on workers living in city slums. Each year they forecast higher export figures, receive awards and attention, but labour standards remain unchanged. The government's poor wage structure robs the lowly paid employees in SOEs of proper incentives to work. The wages they receive are too little to meet their requirements. The government's irrational policies are responsible for nationwide corruption, but we blame only the poorly paid who are compelled to be corrupt.

Western nations have prospered as their intelligentsia campaigned for economic freedom of the individual, not for economically powerful governments. While our media, academics, and some politicians seem to understand the need for political freedom of the citizen, they remain adamant to restrict his/her personal economic liberty. They favour governments and scorn markets. They misinterpret liberalisation.

Bangladesh's new political camp, the reformers, should realise that due to continued economic disappointments the politics of the old may stage a comeback. The old are politically experienced and can outwit the new, unless the government takes a non-intervening economic role to revive the economy.

Nizam Ahmad  
Liberal Bangla, UK

### Quota system

The students of DU should think first whether there is any quota system in their university for 'dependents of DU staffs'. And it is for the fourth class poor employees or for all including teachers and

### Hillary Clinton

The recent setback experienced by Sen. Hillary Clinton, a deserving presidential candidate for nomination from the Democratic Party, proves the fact that the Americans perhaps need some more time to fully attain the goal of their propaganda in support of women's empowerment!

If this were not true, how a highly accomplished candidate like Hillary Clinton could face shortage of votes as well as funds to keep her campaign alive!

In my opinion, Hillary Clinton should be a great choice for the Democrats. And for the current politico-economic scenario of the United States, a woman leader of HC's standings should be elected as president to make the USA more secure and stronger.

Professor M Zahidul Haque  
Chairman  
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University  
Dhaka

### Padma bridge

We welcome the announcement of construction of the Padma bridge next year by the respected Chief Adviser. We hope all preliminary work would be completed to implement this "Mega" project to further facilitate our communication link with the southern districts.

We think some electronic media carried a different signboard in their evening news broadcast. I had the opportunity to watch it and noticed the error in footage broadcast. Anyway, this created some confusion about the name of the "Mega" project.

Areader, One e-mail

## Future of United States



We are watching with keen interest the election campaign of the United States. We are excited and engrossed by the unfolding drama and holding our breath to see the outcome of the election.

It is almost like an election being held in our country because America has got the power to shape the destiny of the world and so much depends on the decision of its President.

We do not know who will win but we are praying that the next president elect will be a person of great integrity. People all over the world will benefit from the right actions taken by the President who will be an advocate for 'Peace, not War'-- someone who will find a solution to the conflict between Palestine and Israel. Someone who will earnestly try to rectify problems such as global warming which is a looming threat to the world. And if nothing is done immediately, this planet will be doomed.

We hope the next US President will bring changes for the better.

Nur Jahan  
Chittagong