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# The spirit of Ekushey ...



Amar Ekushey once again stepped into the collective consciousness of the people of Bangladesh. It is on this day during the Language Movement in 1952 against the Pakistani ruling junta that Bengalees had to sacrifice their blood and lives to uphold the dignity of Bangla their mother tongue.

Today, after about 36 years of independence, we've come to that defining moment with a view to making some soul searching.

It is, however, an imperative that we make an overall assessment of our failures and successes as an independent nation, especially in regard to our role in this specific day.

Let us all uphold the spirit of Amar Ekushey.  
**Rafiqul Islam Rime**  
 Agrabad, Chittagong

## Hazardous wastes

I am quite hopeful to read the article "Hospitals Continue to Dispose Hazardous Wastes in Public Bins". (Source: The Daily Star, 20 Feb). While the entire world, including Asia, is engaged in controlling wastes, you have at least raised the voice against medical wastes!

While there is a global concern about minimizing all kind of waste products; no in depth study and action on medical wastes is underway in our country.

I urge the Solid Waste Management Division of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to be active on medical waste management and develop a strategy to follow the ADB suggested 3 Rs: Reducing the amount of waste, Refusing items that are now being discarded, and Recycling materials.

**Dr. Lailun Nahar**  
 PC Culture Housing Society  
 Shamoly, Dhaka

## Beijing Olympics

The Beijing Olympics 2008 are to be held in August. But even before the Olympic Games have started, China is already facing certain obstacles. A few days back, Spielberg (the famous director), who was supposed to be an artistic adviser for the opening and closing ceremonies, has decided to step down from the post. He believes that China needs to do a lot more to stop the ever increasing violence in Darfur (however, he must know that America itself

remaining mum on this issue). A group of Nobel laureates and athletes also ventilated their frustration at China's lucrative business deals with the Sudanese government, through a letter to the British daily The Independent.

They feel that merely asking Sudan to accept a UN peacekeeping mission is not enough. They feel that China, by buying oil from Sudan and by selling them arms, is basically financing as well as ignoring the conflicts and killings. China can expect more pressure to come. Human rights groups will use this opportunity to highlight China's tougher stance towards Tibet and Taiwan and also China's reluctance to deal with Myanmar's Junta. Already, a pro-Tibet independence group, Students for a Free Tibet, have said they will use this event to protest against China. Then the food-price inflation will mean that some of the political opponents of the Chinese government may voice their anger by highlighting the hardship of the poor. Then China's poor pollution record will also come under scrutiny. Environmentalists will particularly try to express their concern over the fact that China may soon be required to pump in water from the Yangzi river to avert water shortfall, which in other words would mean, damaging the river's ecology and making the water undrinkable. And to make matters worse, if the Chinese security forces take a tough stance towards these dissident groups (although

they have been instructed to remain as calm and gentle as possible), then it will severely affect the reputation of China and also that of the MNCs (who will be the sponsors).

China would want to use the Olympics to highlight its growing economic and political clout i.e. it would want to further strengthen its place as a major stakeholder in terms of running of the world affairs. However, this may be the most "politically contentious" Olympics since Moscow 1980 (which were held during the Cold War). China will try to handle the event in the best possible manner. It will face obstacles, but it has to deal with these issues. This is because the West will try its best to undermine China's achievements.

**Wasif Wahed**  
 Old DOHS, Dhaka

**Appeal to AL leaders**  
 What remains to be requested is that please convene urgent meetings of your presidium and ALWC and kindly resolve to pull out from all talks with the EC and the CTG until Sk. Hasina is sent abroad for treatment.

The BNP of Mr. Delwar has not participated in any such talks so far and is not complacent as you are on the question of their leader.

They are drawing more public sympathy than you.  
**Dr. M. Hussain**  
 One-mail

## Newspaper advertisements

It is gathered that newspapers, especially those having less circulation, are facing problems in getting advertisements from different public organisations. Even the newspapers which are getting advertisements are experiencing troubles in collecting bills, particularly from the organisations situated at district level. Now it is felt that the previous system of distribution of govt. advertisements through the Department of Films & Publications (DFP) should be re-introduced!

And I think, the previous DFP system was more rational in respect of the distribution of govt. advertisements as well as in case of payment of bills.

How about opening a separate cell in all the ministries to regulate matters pertaining to advertisement and publicity of all the divisions/departments under the respective ministry?

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

## CTG's options

The newly appointed energy adviser has opened up a new front with Burma and India by going for international tender for offshore oil and gas search. In response to a query of the reporters, he mentioned that Bangladesh would start the work in the area which Bangladesh considers its maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal. If any dispute arises with the neighbouring countries, they would stop the work and go for negotiation to resolve the issue. The spirit of the adviser is definitely patriotic but missing the ground reality of international maritime boundary issues being not finalized yet with India or Burma. I am not sure whether international bidders would respond to our tender before the issue of maritime boundary with India or Burma is clarified. This is a hypothetical question considering our relation with our neighbour.

Perhaps your readers might remember that the former food adviser remarked that Bangladesh would not accept any condition for import of Indian rice even before any condition was given. So it is not clear to us where lies the problem. It is necessary to mention some of the basic problems we are facing now. These are: outbreak of bird flu in almost 30 districts including infection in crows. Since the immediate thrust to contain the bird flu, the matter was left to time to be forgotten by the people. But the reality is that it is now spreading. We do not know who is going to blame whom for the widespread bird flu incidence in W. Bengal and Bangladesh. Secondly, problems of the education sector are increasing and not decreasing. Thirdly, the consumers market is beyond the tolerable limit of the low and middle income groups, but we are busy formulating plans and programmes. Fourthly, the fundamentalists are reported to be regrouping to demonstrate their muscle power and destabilize the situation further. And above all, solution of the political impasse is not in sight.

The best and safest option for the CTG is to hold a general election and hand over power to an elected government as soon as possible.  
**A reader**  
 One-mail

## Public funds and higher education

I would like to draw attention of the taxpayers in Bangladesh (especially the business community) who contribute a huge amount of their hard earned money through taxes and a large portion of which goes to higher education spending.

My first question is: do we really get quality output from the public universities? The answer is definitely "NO". If you ask the employers, those who pay huge taxes for public universities, they would say that they get sick and tired while they interview the job seekers graduating from public universities. I don't say all are bad. Some are excellent, but their number is very small.

The main reason for this is too simple to grasp. These students rely on public funds. They have very little to lose. Compare them to the students from private universities, you will notice a sharp difference in attitude. The difference and the reason are obvious. One is state funded and the other is spending from his/her parents' pockets.

My second question: how many graduates do we need each year from public universities who the nation can accommodate in appropriate vacant positions. The answer is "very few". Then why should we provide subsidy in higher education to all students? Why we are so eager to produce a huge number of junkies who can neither be used for managerial jobs nor are suitable for lower end jobs. In the bargain, we produce a class of people worthless for productive purposes and very suitable for torching public and private vehicles in the streets or destroying properties. So much of fun on public funds!!!

Shouldn't we reconsider providing 'subsidy/full scholarships' to only those (brilliant students) in order of merit, who the government/private sectors can absorb annually through providing jobs. The public funds thus saved can be provided to primary and vocational training to develop skilled manpower to be exported abroad or used at home.

The rest of the lot can empty their parents' pockets to pursue higher studies if they are sincere to themselves.

Criticism is most welcome.  
**AL Khan**  
 UK

## A visionless government

The current caretaker government's (CTG) popularity took a nosedive over the past few months. Unnecessary interference in political matters, negative attitude towards political institutions, and soaring prices of goods and services were the main reasons for this much of depreciation in its popularity.

Failed 'Minus Two' Formula and 'Reforms' -- The CTG failed continuously to carry out its 'Minus Two' formula. After failing to keep the chiefs of the Awami League and the BNP out of the country, the government tried the 'reforms' strategy. There were some tactical errors in the government's ideology of 'Minus Two' and 'Reforms'. The CTG tried to emphasize too much on the 'Minus Two' formula, via the so-called 'reforms'. On the other hand, it wasted its time and efforts protecting these 'reforms'.

The government took a while to understand the sentiments of political activists, in both the camps. Without question, the top two leaders' charismatic identity still puts them well ahead of other leaders in their respective parties. Therefore, 'Anti-Hasina/Anti-Khaleda' group succumbed to the 'Pro-Hasina/Pro-Khaleda' groups. Today, the government not only destroyed the political career of these 'reformists' but also made the two leaders stars for their non-compromising stance.

It is a big shame that despite the overwhelming public support, no genuine reforms took place.

The Election Commission's (EC) role--The role of the EC on the issue of inviting a certain faction of the BNP was a very costly mistake. After all, one wrong decision questions the rightness of others. The EC could well have avoided the problem by not dragging itself into an intra-party feud. Today, this hard-working EC is on the wrong side of people's book.

High Inflation--The CTG tried to control market as they did with political parties. They played too much game in the market and it is the market's turn to play game with them. There is no country in the world where its law enforcing agencies run after the market with batons, to control prices. The government's decision to deploy BDR in the market was a note from cartoons. Lack of successful supply side policies is one of the main reasons for this high rate of inflation. The government should consider long-term solutions like commodity exchange system, income efficient policies and building a highly productive labour market.

Finally, the CTG should lay more emphasis on its main agenda--holding an election.  
**Arafat Islam**  
 Dallas, USA

## Amir Khan's film

Citing the slogan "every child is special", the film "Tare zameen par" underlines importance of child grooming for future, and understanding their world. It was the Bollywood superstar Amir Khan's first endeavour to promote himself as director. The film embodied one of the underlying mental problems of a child which the parents found difficult to

realise, because of having stereotyped ideas about child rearing.

Amir was remarkable. However, the unique representation of the film was about a child, who had been suffering from dyslexia without his parents realising. It's a slight disorder of the brain that causes difficulty in reading and spelling, but does not affect intelligence. Consequently, he was subject to derision by his teachers and parents for getting his spelling wrong

and forgetting homework. As a result, he was about to succumb to competitive modern life in which nobody approached him. At this juncture, the emergence of an unconventional art teacher in his school helped him come out of the predicament.

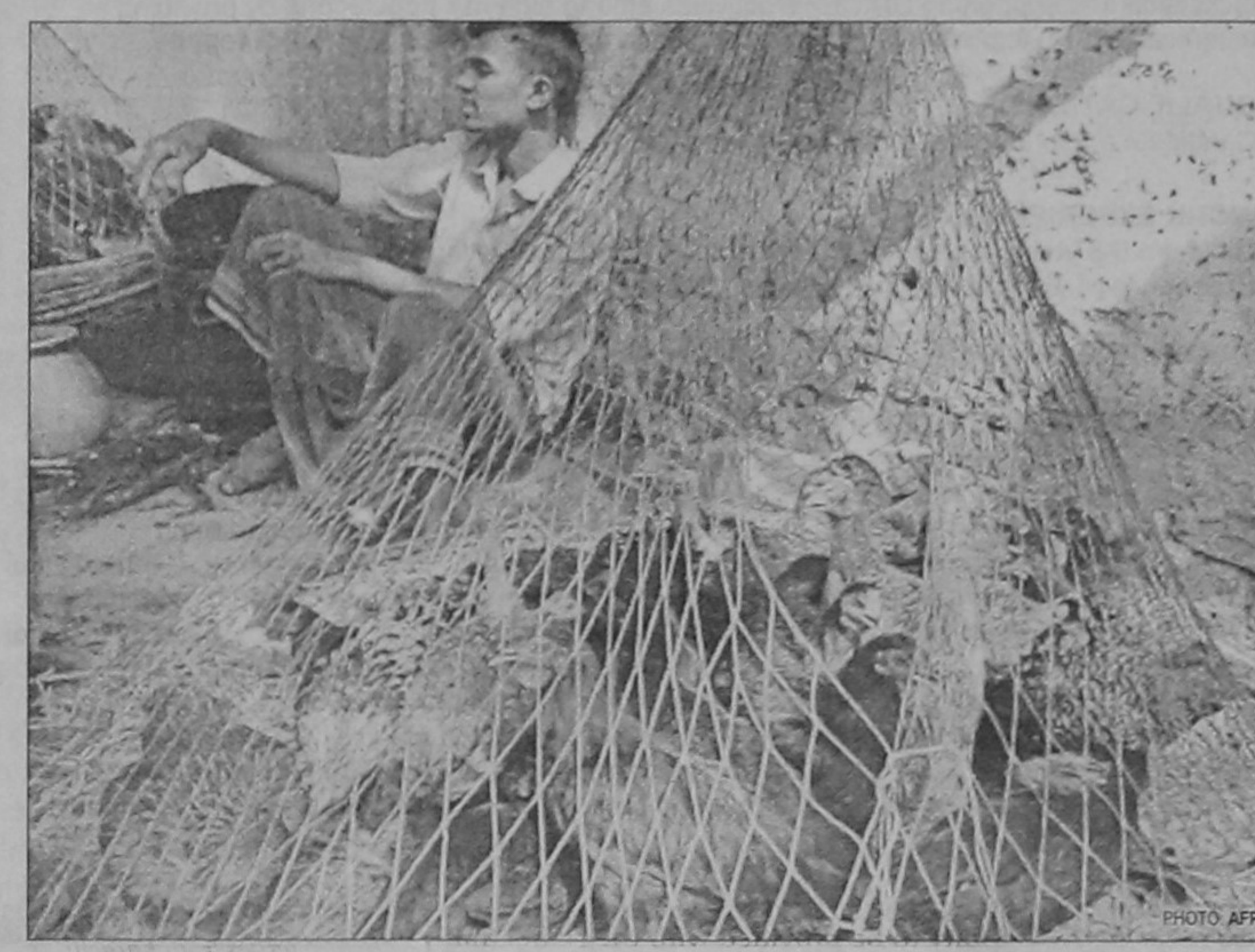
It's really a great film.  
**Md. Nobilul Islam**  
 Department of Anthropology  
 University of Chittagong

# Bird flu scare

"Bird flu and mass hysteria" by Mr Saif Ahmed (The Daily Star; Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2008) is really appreciable and carries in brief the real picture of bird flu phobia. Do we (our reporters) or livestock dept. ever think about the effects of publishing the news on chicken culling? According to WHO the total number of deaths from bird flu since 2003 is 225 all over the world as of February 16, 2007. Compare that to these numbers:  
 \* Diarrhoeal diseases kill over 2 million children a year (225+ per hour)

\* Malaria kills over 3 million a year. Yet SARS which killed less than 300 people and AI which killed 225 got more media coverage in their panic years than the two big killers did in the last decade. The reasons for this appear to be the same as the reasons for the lack of media coverage of the Bengal famine, 1943.

We are already the poorest of the poor and don't force us to become poorer and dependent on others.  
**Anonymous**  
 One-mail



# War criminals and election

The Election Commission has again expressed the "wish" not to allow the war criminals to participate in the election, provided the court gives ruling as to who are the war criminals. The "wish" need not be elaborated for public understanding. This provisional "wish" is nothing but another gimmick of the EC.

We sincerely hope and request the EC to kindly bring the "cat" out of their bag and relieve the nation of the physiological pressure and cynicism built up by the EC's behaviour. The sce-

nario of election preparation is not the one the nation expected to see. To put the train back on track, kindly show us clear identifiable evidence that the preparation of the voter list of all the constituencies is progressing as it should be. The average figure of percentage of progress has no bearing on the actual requirement of the draft and final voter list which we have not heard so far.

Kindly tell us the progress constituency by constituency including the progress of work on printing the

voter list.

I still continue to keep my fingers crossed with regard to Photo ID for all eligible voters in the country. We have a comparable benchmark, the last voter list, to compare the success of the present voter list preparation. The separate EC secretariat is yet to be set up.

We hope the EC would wake up and do substantial work to hold general election as soon as possible, but not later than December 2008.  
**A reader**  
 One-mail



# Dhaka traffic

The traffic situation of Dhaka is far from satisfactory--roads have become stagnant and traffic authorities don't know exactly how many vehicles should ply on the roads. Percentage of roads is far below the standard. We have the Ministry of Communications, DTCE, BRTC, BRTA etc. but yet the problem of traffic congestion is not solved.

Some people blame the traffic police, some ask to withdraw rickshaws, some want wide footpaths, others suggest removing old vehicles but these are not the real facts. Some people also think of beautification, regardless of solving the main problems. The number one problem is the lack of roads and the road width (narrow).

The situation in Dhaka will be worse than the present and people will have to walk all the way to any destination after 5-7 years. What we need is an independent metro network that means a mass transit, which has already been approved by the present government. It's good news that private firms will



complete the project.

We need underground mass transit first, and then we can go for expressways with proper design. Most probably, we don't need expressways, because we can make several metro networks one after another beneath the ground. Considering the heavy load of passengers, we can never introduce light metro (monorail, sky train etc).  
**Engr. Rashed**  
 One-mail