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Stop acid violence

No other crime is as barbaric as acid throwing. Despite the law being very tough, this crime is still increasing alarmingly.

I don't know whether the administration is serious about stopping it or not. How the people are still buying and selling it so easily?

This is now a big problem for us because it is a threat to the safety of women and children.

I think the government should think about the matter very seriously, rather than just discussing it in the seminars and meetings.

It is necessary to monitor the situation carefully, so that the application of law can be ensured.

Md. Anisur Rahman
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Language issue

According to language experts, every two weeks a language ceases to be spoken.

The gradual demise of languages is but an indictment on the nature of the progress the world has been making to the detriment of indigenous cultures and civilisations which are being swept away by the tide.

Every effort must be made to maintain the world's linguistic diversity.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam
One-mail

Ekushey Book Fair

Being a first time visitor I was surprised to see a huge gathering. I have visited many fairs in my life, but I have never seen such a mass gathering. The campus was full of enthusiastic visitors. There was no empty space. But I was surprised when I came to the Bangla Academy gate. The queue was very long. I was not sure whether I would be able to visit the Book Fair as it would take a long time to enter the place.

However, I could get in at last. It was an exciting experience for me.

Mojibur Rahaman
One-mail

Swindling by NGOs

Recently, an NGO cheated thousands of people with the help of the local administration. Now the victims are helpless. The NGO shattered their lives.

How come these organisations are given registration? Whereas a bank gives only 12% interest, these NGOs are saying they will give 100 to 200% interest. So it is evident that there is something wrong with them.

The government should look into the matter immediately.

Kamol Dey
One-mail

Gulshan Lake bridge

As is normal, we always wish to oppose and criticise everything without sound reasoning. The

work of constructing a bridge across the Gulshan lake is an important project for serving public interest. Excepting the Kamal Ataturk road connection, the only other connection between Banani and Gulshan is the Mahakhali road. Both roads are off limits to rickshaws and rickshaw vans. Extreme difficulty is being faced in transportation between the two parts and it has to be experienced to be believed. Not one but several bridges are required across the Banani-Gulshan lake to facilitate essential movement. The Gulshan Society, BELA, PBA, etc. have no reason to oppose such projects.

The only thing which needs to be done is to remove the earth filling done for the construction, which LGED has assured.

Abul Ahsan
Gulshan, Dhaka

Independence of Kosovo

The small captioned news that caught my eyes and made me happy was the Independence of Kosovo.

I was fortunate to work in Kosovo in the year 1999 and I had seen the extent of destruction and damage of infrastructure, roads and economy as well as social and moral degradation.

Thousands of homesteads and houses on the sides of highways were either damaged or put on fire. I visited Mitrovica, a place of gold mines, and other places and everywhere I saw the magnitude of destruction.

Women were raped. I had seen many mass graves on the sides of highways that evoked in me the memories of those days of our independence in 1971.

Nasar
One-mail

Whither rule of law?

One may argue with the contents of the letter of Dr. Abdul Moyeen, published in The Daily Star of 29-2-08 under the given caption, albeit it is difficult to contradict his noteworthy conclusion that

"Everybody knows how corruption had spread during the five-year rule of the BNP-Jamaat, and how the country was run by the family of the PM and her son's office, Hawa Bhaban. Instead of taking any firm actions against those, the government has given its leaders a fairly royal treatment with almost no cases being filed against them and many of them are still at large, especially the ones who belong to the Jamaat." I believe that the CTG (Caretaker Government) would come forward to address this wide spread perception. Further, the following points also demand immediate remedy by the authorities.

1. Of late the public servants are submitting their wealth statements. This is obviously a very encouraging step taken by the CTG, albeit it is not understood as to why such submission of wealth statements should not be extended to such very important persons as the Advisers, Heads of Constitutional bodies and the like. Pertinently, I must praise the stand of the ACC chief in asking for wealth statements from the former Ministers and the Prime Ministers, and initiating necessary legal steps. I suppose if the ACC has real operational independence and if there is any convincing ground, it should do the same to the existing incumbents of the establishment. Undoubtedly, such steps would go a long way in ensuring transparency and bridging the gap between the government and the governed.

2. The CTG's one milestone achievement has been the initiation of the independence of judiciary. However, this independence of judiciary from the executive would be sheer insignificant in the absence of totally transparent dispensation of justice. Such transparency can well be ensured if the members of the judiciary voluntarily and periodically provide their wealth statements and keep themselves clean before the nation.

3. I think it's time that the ACC delved into not only the past irregularities, but also into the

present ones. Pertinently, I would request the ACC to go deep into the recent media report as to how a huge amount of edible soybean oil was recently exported to India at a nominal price of Tk. 48/ per litre while we are reeling under the sky-high price spiral and buying the same stuff at Tk. 107/ or even more per litre. It is not understood as to how the concerned organs of the CTG kept silent over all these transactions. One wonders as to whether similar "business deal" was also carried out for such commodities as rice, pulse, powder milk, and so on! Needless to say, in order to avert unnecessary speculation, the CTG should immediately come forward with the actual picture and take appropriate steps to free the country from the evil clutches of the so-called "syndicates".

Hafeezul Alam
A former civil servant

University teachers

On 29 January 2008, I was stunned and dismayed to go through the media reports that the DU teachers, soon after their release, issued political statements asking the govt to immediately withdraw the state of emergency and declare specific date of general elections. They directed the CTG to hold immediate dialogue with the political parties. They also demanded release of the two former prime ministers including the detained student leaders. Seems they have not learnt any lesson from their past mistakes. The whole nation sympathised with them for their arrests and subsequent sufferings simply on the consideration that they are the honourable and learned teachers of the highest educational centres and held at the highest esteem by all and sundry.

I suppose as respectable teachers their only job is to enlighten our children with knowledge and education, besides guiding them in building their character by setting examples. These students one day will lead the nation. But if they themselves indulge in politics then what would happen to this nation? Have they ever tried to read the pulse of the common people? Moreover, is it the right time to hold the elections? Whom to elect at this stage - those thugs and looters? What's the hurry? No one wants an election at this stage and go back to those dreadful days prior to 1/11. It's a long way before we can have a credible and meaningful election. I think out of sheer motivation they made those political statements without caring for the desire and expectation of the people in general.

The CTG has a lot to do in this respect and they are preparing for the same step by step. We must cooperate and assist them in presenting the nation with an effective government. The CTG has a duty to ensure that the nation does not go back to those days of muscle power and lawlessness. Each and every institution has been destroyed by these so-called politicians. The CTG has to hand over power to safe hands and prior to the election the following has to be ensured besides many other actions:-

a) Completion of voter list and arrangement of transparent ballot boxes. b) Norms have to be made mandatory with punishment for the violators. c) Either hartal has to be banned by law or no one will be coerced/intimidated by the political goons/vandals to forcibly observe hartal. d) Judiciary has to be 100% independent, rule of law must be established for each and every citizen of the country and no

one including the president of the country must be above the law. e) Introduction of strict and genuine qualification bar for all elected/selected public representatives including the members of union councils. We don't want to be ruled by thugs and illiterates. f) For the sake of social justice, the police has to be made accountable to the people. h) Future elected governments must be answerable to the nation and their power should be redefined. There must be transparency on their exercise of powers. i) Politics should be banned in all educational institutes like that of the neighbouring country.

How could they demand release of the two former PMs when they are already under trial and custody? Don't they want the rule of law to be established in our country?

No one wants their release without trial, except the motivated ones who want to take us back to those horrifying days of logi/baitha.

A.B. Mohammed Zakaria
Middlessex, UK

Spirit of Ekushey

It was good to read, over Ekushey, the number of articles promoting more respect for Bangla and expressing dislike for the various ways in which it is being corrupted. This battle has to continue in all our schools!

I have heard some people talk as though English-medium schools are all part of some 'foreign' conspiracy against all things Bengali, including disloyalty to the language. What nonsense is this? On the contrary, in the ones I have been associated with, Bengali is a 'core' subject and no pupil can get promotion to the next class unless he or she has proved their competence in the syllabus for the past year.

Of course, there are some Bangladeshi children who have returned from years living abroad and who speak Bangla quite well but their reading and writing leaves a lot to be desired. They tend to roll their eyes and plead for mercy but, in most of such schools, surely do not get it! Our School, for instance, offers them Easy Bangla classes for a maximum of 2 years and then they have to join the mainstream. We actively discourage our students from speaking the mixture of English and Bangla that is the current fashion in many circles at the moment, for which the English-medium schools can certainly not be blamed. Learning good Bengali and good English is not an either/or but a both/and in any school worthy of its place in this nation whether Bengali-medium or English-medium.

As for the Bengali culture, Ekushey is just one of many significant anniversaries that is celebrated appropriately each year by many if not most English-medium schools. I have heard teachers from some Bengali-medium schools saying that they wish they did as much for Bengali culture as we do!

No one who saw the stunning performance of 'Chandalika' for the Silver Jubilee celebrations of BIT could possibly question the enormous enthusiasm and devotion of this school to Bengali music and dance.

So what's the problem?
Angela Robinson
Rev Mrs AMV Robinson MA Dip Ed (Oxon)
Head of Girls' Section
Bangladesh International Tutorial

Role of political parties

Many political leaders, members of different political parties, activists and members of various civil society are asking questions with regard to the timing of and/or holding of the general election by the present government.

While the present government can once and for all put an end to all these doubts, perplexing the mind of politicians and dilemmas brewing within the civil society, by unequivocally declaring that the last day of this year i.e., 31st December 2008 will be the election date, it is true that the nation as a whole is anxious and looks forward with great expectation to the major political parties and their leaders for a better future.

Without any shred of doubt in my mind I can say that today the overriding thought reverberating in the heart and mind of each and every single peace loving, law abiding citizen, including all voters and non voters, is that the political parties would make an unequivocal declaration to the nation that they would do what they preach. Only that can see us through the present crisis.

SS Nasim Chowdhury
UK



Seminar on the disabled

Yesterday (25th Feb) I attended a seminar on Disability Rights in the light of UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that Bangladesh has signed and ratified. Many luminaries attended the seminar from government, diplomatic missions, judiciary, law, media, members of local and international disabled peoples organisations as well as a professor of law from Harvard University. The seminar was a brilliant enunciation for promoting the rights of the disabled to rights-based from the existing welfare-based approach. It gained huge support from all, as it should.

As I am one myself, partially, I have kept abreast of disability issues for the last 3 years. However, once again I came away from this seminar with some disappointment. There are two main causes of disability. First genetic/medical, over which we have little or no control yet. The second is man-made, which includes conflicts of all sorts and accidents.

This letter deals with the conflict aspect. Only about 20 countries have well-entrenched armaments industries churning out 'weapons of mass destruction' (pardon, the pun) in huge numbers which are sold to the rest of the world to be used in their petty quarrels, power struggles, acquisition of resources and outright aggression. The sellers are wealthy while the buyers are poor without exception. Poverty in turn also produces more disability. The military-industrial complexes

keep turning out sophisticated weapons to kill thousands and maim many more (proudly shown on Discovery and Nat Geo Channels) that are the largest single cause of disability in the world. Result - Disabled people are being produced through wholesale use and misuse of easily available armaments on almost assembly line basis recent examples, Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Darfur and now Iraq.

Yet except for a passing reference to war, not a word was spoken against this basic abuse of humanity's basic right right to life and sound limbs. No reference is also available in the mountains of paper regularly produced on this subject. I would bet my bottom taka that it is also not mentioned in the UN Convention documents. Moreover, genetic/medical after effects usually cause only one type of disability, while conflicts are all encompassing causing multiple disabilities.

Why is this so? Should not the disability organisations work together to curb this ever-growing menace in all its manifestations and forms? Why do the disability organisations in developed countries not take up 'arms' and say this far and no further to the arms producers, sellers and exporters? In the poor buyers' countries, such organisations can press their governments to spend scarce resources on development, not arms.

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State of economy



Two recent articles by Ahsan Mansur on the current economic conditions of Bangladesh published in DS have received my attention. To start with, I would like to congratulate the author for his interesting thoughts. His second article particularly addresses the concerns of some politicians, TV talk-show hosts and donor agencies who think that Bangladesh is heading towards a recession. Mr. Mansur provides us with some statistics on export growth, domestic credit growth, net foreign asset growth and growth of tax-revenue income for the last year - all indicators show that real economy is in the growth path.

However, these are demand-side indicators. No data concerning consumption and saving were provided. From the provisional estimates of 2007, I find that consumption is 79.5% and domestic saving is 20.5% of GDP. These statistics show almost the same pattern of the last few years.

I do not have disagreement with the overall conclusion that Bangladesh economy is not in recession.

If we look at some provisional estimates of supply side indicators for 2007, that is, sectoral growth of industry (9.5% compared to 9.7% in 2006), service (6.74% compared to 6.4% in 2006, agriculture (3.18% compared to 4.94% in 2006) - we see that all indicators in 2007 are almost the same of the previous year except agricultural production. Considering the value addition method, Bangladesh Bank projected that the current year's GDP growth would be around 6.5% - almost the same as the previous year but lower than what was expected.

Although the provisional estimate of agricultural production growth seems lower than the previous year, it is expected to recover once the seasonal boro rice production starts. Boro production accounts for around 50% of the total rice production in Bangladesh. The hurricane Sidr and floods have caused damage to a part of Aus (10% of total production) and Aman (40% of total production) rice production, but not to boro.

Therefore, Sidr or flood should not have much negative impact on the total rice production as well as on the real GDP growth.

It seems that high inflation or current political transition do not have much negative impact on the economic growth, particularly on the domestic production. This is not surprising in the sense that it is well argued by economists and non-economists alike that economic growth in Bangladesh is mainly driven by individual initiatives with minimum/negligible efforts from the government. Note that many empirical studies show a positive relationship between inflation and growth. For example, moderate inflation is helpful to growth, but faster economic growth feeds back into inflation. If non-tradable sectors like financial intermediaries, telecommunication sectors etc. grow rapidly, they may have impact on the price of tradable sectors. Both sectors enjoy the fruits of inflation. So the cost of

inflation should be subtle on the society - one example may be what Mr. Mansur cited in his previous article that rice price hike would help poor farmers. However, what's worrying is the situation of the fixed-income people, if their wage (real wage) is not increased. On the other hand, there are some uncertainties among the business community about the successful transition to a democratic government or whether the ongoing reforms in various areas such as in the areas of governance, financial sector or politics will sustain in the long run. Sometimes, as history taught us, partial reforms may lead to another crisis. If we assume that there will be a smooth transition to a democratic government by the end of 2008 and rule of law will be established, it is expected that business confidence will be restored and economy will grow at a faster rate.

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