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# Disaster management

This is simply impossible to draw the picture of death and destruction wrought by cyclone Sidr last year. The state machinery was engaged immediately in rehabilitation work along with other national and international agencies. As a result tremendous short-term success has been achieved and the government is actively formulating long term policies and projects now.

We have to remember that Bangladesh is a cyclone prone country. We have been living through death and destruction due to natural calamities almost every year. We must look for permanent solutions to this problem. I would like to draw the attention of the agencies concerned to the following.

Although we cannot eliminate the danger of cyclone but we would be able to reduce the extent of death and destruction if appropriate short and long term measures are taken. Steps should be taken to inform the people in time about cyclone and evacuate the people to safer places. Every household must

have an underground waterproof cellar. Before the people leave for safer places they should keep dry foods and other necessities in these underground cellars so that when the cyclone is over and people return to their home they can easily take foods stored underground until relief comes from government agencies and other organisations. Adequate cyclone shelters for humans as well as for livestock should be built. Deep tube-wells should also be sunk with these shelters so that safe drinking water could be made available during and after the cyclone. Buffer stocks of foods and other essentials should be built up in the cyclone-prone areas so that immediate relief could be provided from those stocks because sometimes relief materials could not be sent to the affected areas due to disruption of the communications system, and, above all, Bangladesh should play a vigorous role in drawing attention of the international community to the effects of climate change and seek international cooperation in this regard.

Md. Shah Jahan, Dhaka



# Commuters' predicament

It has been reported that the government is contemplating introduction of 4000 new CNG taxi cabs/auto rickshaws on Dhaka city roads. I would congratulate the government for its efforts in mitigating the sufferings of commuters.

But at the same time I would also request the authorities to resolve the problems suffered by the public in availing the facility in the past.

The following has to be ensured.

a) The quality of the units to be imported must be ensured and selected by a committee to be headed by a teacher of BUET. This process may obviate any possible underhand dealings in importing sub-standard vehicles as happened in the past when the entire process was left to the bureaucrats and the politicians (ministers). The black MARUTI cabs imported from India did not last even two years. The duration of initial road permit period should be reduced from eight years to six years; which should cover the pay back period comfortably, as the road condition in our cities does not permit vehicles to run in order for such a long period. Moreover, the owners do not maintain their vehicles prop-

authorities should be prepared to apply the same meticulously. The present loose system to display only the telephone numbers of police control room on the vehicles did not bring any remedy for the aggrieved passengers. At least 99% of the drivers now refuse to go for shorter distances and charge fares at their sweet will, disregarding the authorised fare. In fact, most of the vehicles do not have any meter in the first instance and some meters are defective and out of order. Unfortunately, there is no authority now to look into the commuters' problems.

c) The law should be strictly enforced to ensure that the drivers charge the actual fares as approved by the authorities and as displayed by the meter. The law enforcing agencies should entertain no excuses by the drivers. Vehicles without meters or with defective meters must not be allowed to ply and should be liable to be confiscated on the spot of detection.

d) Many of the drivers are found to be involved in criminal activities such as hijacking and mugging. Law enforcers must take effective steps to control this crime. All the drivers must wear prescribed uniform metic-



erly. The yearly fitness certificate should be issued after a strict fitness test which the present BRIA authorities are unable to ensure for the reason known to all. Therefore, an alternative agency, preferably private, should be found out. The vehicles must be properly maintained regularly and kept tidy and fit all the time as per international standards and the violators must be taken to task upon detection.

b) The cab/ auto-rickshaw drivers MUST be willing to carry the passengers to any distance in the city, short or long. The nearest law-enforcing agency, upon report by any passenger, must take immediate action against the driver who refuses to go, which should include confiscation of the vehicle and the driver's license. The law should be amended to enable the police to act accordingly and the

ulously and must carry identity cards with photograph issued by the metropolitan police. They must be in a position to show the same to the passenger on demand. Last but not the least, they must be polite in their behaviour to the passengers and be able to communicate with foreigners, as Dhaka is the capital of the country. The law-enforcing agency has a great and honest role to play in this respect to mitigate the sufferings of the passengers.

e) There should be taxi stands with an office of the drivers/ owners association at various convenient points of the city with telephone/cell phone facility, so that passengers even can call a taxi by phone when needed.

If the above issues are not resolved, the passengers will always be in trouble.

Mohammad Ataul Hoque  
One-mail

## Political scenario

The political cloud is disappearing, slowly but steadily. One can see some rationale behind the CEC's firm attitude to hold the election on time or quit. He is opening up his mind with new hints and gestures. May be I am totally wrong, but I get the feeling that the election will be held as planned in a different scenario. Major political parties or players might opt not to participate in the election because of the circumstances obtaining around two interned political leaders; or, there might be a split in the party with regard to participation in the election, and deflection of prominent members cannot be ruled out.

The overall impact of the above process, if it happens, will reduce the strength of the two major parties to compete in the election. This will help the small and newly emerged parties, especially the Jamaat and other religion based parties to draw more attention for alliance because of their grassroots strength. It becomes clear if we look at the programme of the Jamaat to boycott classes of the DU for 3 days on PSC quota system. The issue is baseless because there is no evidence in the near past that 30% freedom fighters quota was filled up; on the contrary, the percentage is hardly 7 to 8 and the remaining seats are transferred to the merit quota. The issue is not a well thought out ploy for the Jamaat to consolidate their political base among the students and keep their party alive. There is no doubt that they have good and strong external support and local patronage, politically and financially.

My question is where are we going politically?  
Reader  
One-mail

## Random thoughts

Whenever someone in the government is asked about the election, you will automatically hear a standard answer that it is the responsibility of the Election Commission to arrange it. And if you put the same question to the gentlemen of the Election Commission, you are almost sure to hear that they are almost ready and it is the government which has to create the congenial atmosphere and facilitate holding of this grand event. The question is a normative one. And both the answers are correct, politically. But is something missing?

The government that came to power after 28 October 2006 failed to create the enabling environment for holding of the national elections within 90 days as ordained in the constitution. The Election Commission in office at that time also failed to hold an election within the stipulated time. Despite all the tall talks, they didn't even have an accurate voter list in their possession. Individual failures of these institutions have presented the nation with a compounded problem and a constitutional crisis. But how far have we recovered? Has the buck stopped? Yes and No ----- Yes, because the present Election Commission has assumed the responsibility in right earnest and No, because there is a tendency of evading blame, if not an outright blame game. I wish I am dead wrong and I fervently wish to be so. With the fourth set of caretaker team and into the fourteenth month, with about only eight months to go, gnawing doubt still looms large.

The Chief Adviser is often extolling the nation for building a knowledge based society. Being a man of letters, his call perhaps emanates from an innate desire and from an inner calling of patriotism. Starved of material resources per capita, education, knowledge, culture, skills and intellectual property might make up for some of the shortfalls of this overpopulated country.

Knowledge has to be acquired through the process of education, learning, and experience and through careful sifting of gathered information through the application of individual judgment. Experience and judgment complement each other. Someone rightly observed that judgment comes from experience, and good judgment comes from bad experience. Hopefully, there is no need for the feeling of exasperation in the present state of things, for we are still in the process of experimenting and gathering experience. The abstract entity known as knowledge must also be useful for enlightenment of self and society. But the real test of knowledge is the adaptability and ability of its holder in freely moving in and out of that "control volume" of knowledge and the ability to respect and honour a different view and accept whatever is the best.

Going back to my first question: Let the answers be pronounced, simple, complete and comprehensive ones, so that we start seeing the elephant in its whole! Further delay will only fuel uncertainty, frustration and the already erratic and volatile market.

Muhammad Zakul Islam  
Air Commodore (Retd)  
DOHS Baridhara  
Dhaka

## Dhaka and architects

After going through the article of architect Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed (The Daily Star 1/2/08), I was rather surprised to find that he knows all the problems and the probable solutions about our current repulsive architectural culture prevailing in society. But the influence on our architects in Dhaka is negligible. It is the motivation factor, which is distorted (by market conditions).

A question arises: the preservation and practice of enforcing moral ethics in professionalism. In our society it is observed that our medical practitioners and teachers are also loose and lax in following what the textbooks say.

One basic cause is the domination of black wealth in the market. The professionals give in to what the unprincipled owners want. It takes moral guts to say NO. There should be a limit to compromises. The basic culprits are the ruling politicians. The established institutions have cracked and many broken down (also note the way some of our industries have shrivelled and are dying; the neglect of preventive maintenance).

I was thinking of settling in Dhaka city after retirement (I am in Dhaka since a school student during the Raj period); but this fascination is fading away-don't like the concrete jungle, and vertical-living. Out of touch with mother Nature-dehumanised! Too crowded, thanks to political centralisation. It is time we thought seriously of turning the divisions into provinces-our density of population per sq km is the highest in the world.

The new and fast changing urban society needs stabilisation at the base/foundation (the vertical rise is too rapid, economically and philosophically); but our so-called civic society leaders have failed to persuade the ruling politicians to take a more humanised view of political trappings. The outcome? Overcrowded jails with VVIPs!!

Look at the modern flats in the capital. The verandas are miniaturised; and that too in a hot tropical country. All cannot afford laundry machine and air conditioners. Most of the flats offered belong to luxury class (in an LDC).

Today we cannot depend on the architects, bureaucrats, lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers and the business community. No light at the end of the tunnel?  
AMawaz  
Dhaka

## Bangladesh today

Two letters to editor by readers in a local daily on 20th February made interesting and contrasting reading; with fairly reasonable viewpoints! One was by Juliet Kausar from Iran giving the writer's views on the issue of "custodial torture", and the trampling down of "human dignity" and the "arrogance of power" with a real life example! The fact remains that this is the reality of Bangladesh today!

On the other hand, Azad Miah from the UK talks of wholesale corruption and nepotism of the dynastic political governance that we experienced through decades of democracy (?) or call it "democratic" governments that we saw in Bangladesh only yesterday, in historical terms. He is very right to state that "dynestocracy" supported with full scale obnoxious practices of pliable public officials was the order of the day. Here "chamchas" were the centres of power, and "yes-persons" the props! Will the proposed elections next year eliminate this somewhat entrenched norms of our style of democracy, that we saw for so long?

Who are responsible for this? Not the poor rural people; who are the vast majority of hard working rather quiet people, who only silently desire something better in their lives, but never get it--democracy or otherwise.

The culprits of all these misdeeds are the vast majority of educated persons whose greed knows no bounds! This is what is Bangladesh today! Noble, honest and simple educated persons are few--"a few, too few for drums and bells" as the poet said.

We the unfortunate "literate" are the curse of Bangladesh today! Maybe only Allah can help us mend our ways.

A hopeful citizen  
One-mail

## CTG

The present caretaker government should stay for the next five years to protect democracy.

The CTG has come as a saviour of the people.  
Mohammad Julfikar Alam Mukul  
Mukul Pharmacy  
Khagrachhari Bazar  
Khagrachhari



# DU admission rules

I remember the elation I felt at the moment when I learned that I had passed the D-unit admission test of Dhaka University and stood within the top ninety in the merit list. It was no small feat for a student with English medium background and one with no coaching. I was quiet sure I would get English, as I got more than twenty-four and twenty in compulsory and advanced English respectively; which were above the required minimum. But the interview burst my bubble in the worst possible way. Not only was I frowned upon for being from English medium but I was also denied the subject on the sole ground that I did not have English in my A-Levels, the fact that I had an A grade in English in O-Levels didn't seem to prove my competence either. Seriously, not even five percent of A-Levels students take English, but that does not mean they don't want to study it. Since it is not compulsory to have those particular subjects in A-Levels that

we want to take in undergraduate level then why this is different for English, which has been the medium of our studies? But while I was denied English, others who had it as a third or fourth choice were taking it up as their more favoured subjects were unavailable. So, they would rather take in reluctant people than eager and capable just because of rules that show little logic. This has happened not only with me but with quiet a few others.

As an optimist, I still hope there will be someone who will notice this flaw and take necessary steps to fix it. The recent rules have finally allowed students from English medium to apply for a seat in the university which has been a step much appreciated; but, this particular rule should also be modernised like the international universities where at least seven years in English medium is treated as proof of competency in English.

Labiba Mahmud, One-mail

# Dwindling tiger population

According to information available, tigers are being killed. During research by anaesthesia and radio-collaring, two tigers are reported to have been killed, which is extremely regrettable. The unfortunate situation needs a permanent solution prior to the extinction of these majestic animals from our country, which only timely action would prevent.

To prevent the above from happening, a constructive and effective permanent solution should be found immediately.

If the above is not possible, is it not better for us to give away these animals to

those who are interested in having them, instead of allowing them to be eliminated in the above manner?

Let us respect their right to live, and save these majestic tigers which are now at the mercy of poachers and researchers!  
Mohammad Shahidul Islam  
On e-mail



## Amar or Omor Ekushey?

A report by BSS-Dhaka about celebration of Ekushey in our missions abroad, published in a local daily on 22nd February, began as follows: "Amar Lkushhey the International Mother Language Day.....etc." I was somewhat confused, as I believe it should have been "Omor Ekushey" and not "Amar Ekushey"; as phonetically the meaning of the two words differ markedly. While "Amar" in Bangla means "Ours", "Omor" means "Immortal". I believe we mean "immortal" and not "ours"; more so as the day is now recognised internationally.

I believe if the publication of the report is correct, and there has been no spelling mistake while printing the report, BSS needs to issue a correction; and possibly an apology for this major misrepresentation of an important event's underlying meaning.

I shall be obliged to have readers' views on this issue. As a university student in 1952, I feel strongly about it.  
S.A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

## Pervez Musharraf

Through your newspaper, I would like to appeal to Pervez Musharraf to step down as president. The people of Pakistan have already given the verdict against him in election 2008. All of his allies and his army of ministers have been badly defeated in the elections. It is the best time for him to resign with honour; otherwise there will be a time when he will be forced to leave the office disgracefully.  
Syed Habib Orakzai  
London, England

## Restore democracy

Pakistanis are inherently undemocratic and they bow to authoritarianism, but ironically, Pakistan has just completed a free, fair and credible election.

Democratically elected provincial assemblies and the national assembly are about to be summoned, to elect their prime minister and chief ministers. Their constitutional rights are about to be enforced. At this juncture, we are lingering under emergency, we feel ashamed, our ego is hurt. It must end now! A sovereign parliament elected by the good people of

Bangladesh must be in place as soon as possible.

We want the civic and basic rights restored now!  
A freedom fighter of 1971  
One-mail

## Derogatory observation

I was shocked to read the observation of one of your writers Mr. S I Zaman (March 11, 2008) while he was taking a swipe at the two main political parties. "And you brag of being the main party, which has the support of 99% of the electorate! But, whose 90% (a conservative estimate) consists mostly of rural based uneducated farmers who have no notion of democracy." To, probably, Mr. Zaman's sheer disappointment, these are "farmers and chashis" whose children joined our great war of liberation and created our nation.

Acitizen, One-mail

## Enemies of liberation

The dogs were in their worst form during the Liberation War. They did not want to get liberated, they wanted to lick their West Pakistani masters' feet all the time.  
Syed Nayeem, One-mail