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## The legacy of Benazir



It is expected that a win should always be accompanied by magnanimity. What was painful was to see a tribal mentality on the part of the victorious PPP and especially Muslim League (N). No one expected a hit below the belt. It is natural for a political leader to gain and lose popularity. Personal involvements may or may not play a major role in it. It is the public adulation and public enduring interest that matter most. I was a little bit surprised that someone was commenting so harshly on a dead person.

Benazir Bhutto was the prime minister of Pakistan at a most exciting time and we all liked her smiling demeanour. Her and her

government's attitude toward Bangladesh was extremely friendly. She visited Bangladesh with her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, as prime minister during the regime of President H.M. Ershad. She sounded cordial, compromising and almost willing to make atonement for the past mistakes, especially those committed by her father the late Z.A. Bhutto.

The problem of Pakistan is that they could never end their experiment with the kind of govt. that they want. They were trying with the federal system without clearly defining the relationship between the centre and the provinces, especially when East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, was with them. The power sharing arrangement between the president and the prime minister never allowed the president to establish a stable govt. This problem remains still today and would perhaps remain so in future also. What were going to be the Islamic principles in an Islamic republic also remained unclear. Benazir Bhutto, despite, her drawbacks, stood up high as a true leader of the East, trying her best to blend the eastern with the western culture and values. She was far-sighted and was able to lead the nation. She exhibited rare qualities of leadership.

The new phenomenon can be described as a new Asian drama where discredited politicians bounce back with bigger and bigger support. Thaksin in Thailand, Bhutto in Pakistan and who knows there may be many more whom the people would forgive and forget and bring back to limelight.

If people's will is supreme, then a change in their attitude and value system has to be respected.

Moinuddin Chisti  
One-mail

### Contempt of court ordinance

The Daily Star has carried a very brief review of the draft ordinance passed in principle by the cabinet of advisers. This is based on the briefing by the press secretary to the chief adviser. I think the readers would be more benefited if some elaboration is available with regard to the issue of "designed to ensure the people rights", and the rights of the press. There are few significant words like "good faith", "restrained language" and "constructive". These would remain subjective unless well defined by examples and references. The ultimate judgment would remain open and might be arbitrary.

The government would do justice to its citizens at home and abroad if this kind of draft ordinances are put on the website specifically opened for the ordinances like the "human rights commission", "supreme judicial council", "freedom of information ordinance" and the "contempt of court ordinance". This would help us to understand the ordinances from the text, rather than from individual review or opinion.

Areader  
One-mail

### Election financing

During the second round of talks on electoral reforms with the Election Commission, the Awami League (AL) proposed that the parties that obtained 10% of the vote in last election should be allocated Tk 15 lakh for each candidate they would field and Tk 50 crore for central engineering from the state fund. According to this proposal only the AL and the BNP qualify for the funds from public i.e. state exchequer. If accepted, these two parties would receive Tk 190 crore from the government for 300 candidates they normally nominate in the parliamentary election.

Not a bad idea but where the money will come from! When paying taxes we know that many of the members of parliament did not have TIN and didn't even bother to pay telephone and other utility bills for years together. Now their parties are proposing that the state bear the costs to elect them to parliament. Probably the general people did not forget what happened during the last election nomination business of these two parties when transaction of crores of taka took place and money power was the major factor in

choosing the candidates.

But the other proposal that the EC organise projection or publicity meetings for the candidates and paste election posters for them in designated areas deserves to be considered seriously. If this is done impartially then the people will get correct information about all the candidates and be able to cast their votes in favour of the qualified ones. The EC can take assistance of other government organs during the short period of election campaign to do this job which will result in lower expenses on the part of the candidates. Many professional organisations in our country and abroad follow such norms in the election process.

The proposal of the EC about election spending including the maximum limit seems to be realistic and the political parties should accept this so that it does not become a game of moneyed men only!

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque  
Khalishpur, Khulna

### "Sangsker"

Perhaps the most pronounced term is now 'Sangsker'. First of all, it should be clear why Sangsker is necessary. After the Liberation in

1971, we saw both autocratic and democratic governments. In most of the cases, whether it is in the government or in party politics, decisions are taken the autocratic way.

But if we still claim that we are following democracy, then that democracy should be called so-called democracy.

Md. Humayun Kabir  
Mirpur, Dhaka

### Our bridge of sighs

These days our very sick Jamuna Bridge is very much in the news; unfortunately for all the wrong reasons! This largest engineering construction work undertaken in Bangladesh seems to be heading towards a national disaster! Kaptai dam, another monumental work, was however completed during Pakistan time. Here too we managed to make a mess of the water turbine generator's maintenance and repairs, possibly for penny pinching approach to it.

Now dangerous cracks seem to be spreading all over the Jamuna Bridge like cancer! It seems we have to spend a fortune for the diagnosis and partial cure of this very fatally sick bridge. It may be patched up, but will it be as good as we wanted? Possibly not.

Already train speed has been curtailed down to a crawl at 20km. per hour. Some experts opine stopping trains moving on the bridge altogether! If this be so; then what was the purpose of this bridge? In contrast; both the Harding Bridge at Paksey and the Bhairab Bridge at Ashuganj were built many decades ago! The Bhairab Bridge was bombed; and one span fell into the river. Yet both these bridges today handle far more traffic than what was imagined seventy years back! Today long mail trains merrily cross these old bridges at speed.

How and why then this fiasco at the Jamuna Bridge? Common sense indicates that concrete structures are poor in tension and bending strength. It lacks flexibility and elasticity compared to steel, the age old bridge building material! Then why we opted for a concrete bridge? May be a steel bridge would have cost more, and it had to be imported in pieces, and then put together at site. However from hindsight, it would not be as much as the final cost of an imperfect concrete bridge that we are saddled with!

The war damaged Bhairab Bridge was repaired with Indian built steel span, and is now as new!

This is a question that needs to be investigated in depth. It will be interesting to get some response from our many structural engineers. Concrete structures are only good in compressive strength. For such a large structure; a steel construction would have been logical. However, the wise men of Bangladesh went for an RCC structure, possibly the cheaper way out. It is a sad reflection and a matter of shame for all engineers, and may be they will have to live with it! Did the Korean Company grease its way into the job, giving a cheap option? This seems to be the same type of misadventures we had with some cheap power plants, and the coal mine venture which are now stories in the press; again during Bangladesh days! Maybe I am wrong, but seeing what has happened, no thanks to our statesmen(?) who are second to none in...!!

S.A. Mansoor  
Engineer, Dhaka

### Pakistani journalist

I was shocked to hear on ATN's 7:00pm news on Feb 21st the comment of Pakistani columnist Ikram Sehgal to the effect that the Language Movement of 1952 was responsible for not only the current political turmoil in Pakistan but also for the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan! The Pakistani journalist very conveniently forgot to mention that it was primarily because the then military government of Pakistan had refused to hand over power to the elected majority party of Sheikh Mujib.

How is the Language Movement of 1952 responsible for the events taking place in Pakistan now, 56 years later? It seems they will never learn to admit the truth.

I don't understand why on earth a reporter of the ATN was sent to interview a journalist like Ikram Sehgal who is a staunch supporter of Gen. Musharraf.

Will any Pakistani TV or for that matter any newspaper ever send a reporter to interview any Bangladeshi columnist? Have they ever done so? Interviewing a politician would have been a different matter.

We don't seem to understand which person or which event to give importance to. Abul Mohsin Siddheswari  
Dhaka

### Our language

I fully realise Mr Sazzad Hossain's concern regarding our highly valued Bangla language and its impact after the recognition of 21<sup>st</sup> February as the International Mother Language Day (Letters, 12/03/08). I would like to add a bit further.

Yes, English is a prominent foreign language and a legacy of the British rule. But does using English mean ignoring Bangla? Doesn't Bangla have foreign words in it which enriches it? Don't we watch English and Hindi films and dramas? Does it mean we hate Bangla?

The success of a language depends on the accessibility and adaptability which explains the success of the English language today. It certainly goes beyond its colonial past. It is about to reach its billionth word with the global usage of Information Technology. English must be used in aircraft and spaceship manuals, air traffic control, naval instructions and communications as an international standard. One of the main reasons our mighty neighbour India is fiercely emerging as a global power is the usage of English, despite having 22 official languages. The word 'Hinglish' (Hindi+English) is now a recognised word in the UK and is soon going to be included in the Oxford Dictionary.

We, as a nation need to focus and reflect beyond our boundary if we want to take our treasured Bangla language forward. Finally, how is Mr Sazzad Hossain going to communicate if he were to visit India apart from West Bengal? MM Rahman  
London

### An eye opener

The Star Weekend Magazine feature story "A Place to Call Home" should serve as an eye opener. We feel deeply for the sufferings, daily humiliation of the Palestinian people by the Israelis, whereas at home we have created the same for the Biharis.

There is no denying the fact that a child who is born on any soil belongs to that soil. A person who lives in a place year after year belongs to that place. That place is his home. His father and mother consider the Biharis who have been living in Bangladesh for more than two generations as outsiders. If someone chooses not to be a citizen of Bangladesh, that is his or her choice. But as a human being we must consider them as ours first, since the majority of those people want to be the citizens of Bangladesh. The government must think about it. We must not and should not be narrow minded. If that is the case why we bother about the Bangladeshis who have been living in the USA illegally and demand that they be given the resident status? This is double standard and hypocrisy.

We should look at ourselves and clean the house first. Mamun Ahmed  
Las Vegas, NV, USA

### Matri bhasha

The need to keep one's own language and culture was a huge motivating factor for the language martyrs and indeed for the creation of Bangladesh. Yet the same nation has often looked the other way as more and more pressure is put on the indigenous people of, for instance, the Chittagong division. The abuse of the most basic rights of these people has been time and again reported both nationally and internationally. While the present government is addressing corruption and thus the effects of some of the past injustices meted out against them, there is work to be done to ensure that all minorities are given the same opportunities as the majority. This does not mean just "treated in the same way", as the term equal opportunities is often translated. There needs to be a change of culture in the national psyche. Are some Bangladeshis less Bangladeshi because they speak English, Urdu or Changma Vajas their first language?

Their numbers may not be large, but their treatment is a matter of prime importance for ensuring communal harmony.

Mir Abdur Rashid Mostafa  
IT consultant  
Blackheath  
NSW Australia

### Urdu

Many human rights groups emphasise the need for preserving the mother tongues of different tribal peoples such as Santal, Chakma, Marmas and so on.

But nobody has ever written about Urdu, a language spoken by a large community (approximately 3 to 4 lakh) throughout the country.

What is the reason? The Urdu speaking people of Bangladesh, at least those born after 1971, are not responsible for the atrocities committed by the Pakistanis against the people of this country.

Azad Hossain  
One-mail

## Quota or merit?

With tangible development in quality of education and immense increase in the number of students at all levels of education leading to an unbelievably huge number of competent candidates in job market, a fierce competition comes as no surprise. Keeping in mind the fast-evolving nature of the current world which requires veritable competence in order to survive as a dignified nation, we can't afford compromise with the quality of public administration, a crucial organ of the state.

Needless to say, our country achieved independence through the nine-month long liberation war and the supreme sacrifice of the sons of the soil, the freedom fighters. Hence our valiant fighters, no doubt, must be duly honoured. With a view to repaying our debt, they along with their offspring have been privileged to enjoy a quota in many sectors. With due respect to them, it's time to say that the quota system in BCS exams warrants a thorough revision.

We are now in a situation to make a fair trade-off. Reducing the current 55% quota boils down to reducing 30% quota for free-

dom fighters to an acceptable extent resulting in a fair overall quota of, say, at most 15%. Many have opposed this in a derogatory manner trying to tag a 'mercy' flavour with the issue. This kind of attitude is utterly reprehensible. Our freedom fighters, who could risk their own lives during the liberation war, were not so narrow-minded as to insist on recruiting their children, if incompetent, into government service through an unfair quota system that has reportedly been exploited by the past ruling parties to place their party men in the administration.

We can't expect good prospect of our country if we further indulge in wholesale rejection of competent candidates in one of the most important state organs at a time when the country is already plagued by innumerable inefficiency problems in various sectors. Now is the time to ensure quality at all levels of administration by giving the deserving candidates a real chance to prove their worth.

Ahmad Ferdous Bin Alam  
Department of CSE, DU



### Whither Bangladesh cricket?

I am writing this with a heavy heart (a feeling shared by 150 million unfortunate people minus 11-14 cricketers and the cricket board, selectors etc). In a good article Mr. Imam writes, "What went wrong with Bangladesh cricket?" I just want to make a small correction- "What went right with Bangladesh cricket?"

Tell me honestly, to score 143 runs or so, do you need million dollar coaches, physios, all the officials and the cricketers who appear to be getting fatter every day, thanks to the tremendous money the system is spinning out. At least can't we make their salaries contingent upon performance? As an ardent follower of the game, I feel that the standard of our cricket hasn't moved forward even an inch and it is exactly where it was in the 70s when the team was scoring and playing like this. I think time has come to take stock of the situation and be more practical. Either stop cricket completely for a few years or send these jokers to a camp for 2/3 years. Then only something worthwhile might come out. The way our batsmen throw away their wickets, even I, at this prime age, feel tempted to try my hand at a game or two for Bangladesh.

Ahmad Kamal  
Abu Dhabi

### CTG's performance

They are chasing the extremely corrupt officials such as those of Titas Gas. They should be com-

mended for that. However, generally the economy has slowed down. The salaries of government officials need to be raised to a more realistic amount, given today's prices, that way the system won't force them into corruption. The government would benefit from external professional management consultants who can put in systems whereby the gas/electric employees cannot breathe without someone knowing about it. They also need to encourage and support business activities and stop the scare tactics which have stunted economic growth. This will lead to more employment and prosperity for the people and more tax for the government to use for projects.

If they put their hands up in defeat, apologise and accept that most of the economy is black and work with this fact rather than fighting it, then the "small" importers can carry out business as before and hopefully bring down the food prices.

S. Choudhury  
UK

### Agony of an expatriate

We (myself and my wife) were on a holiday visit to Bangladesh for 4 weeks recently. Dhaka was the main place of our stay. On 19 January 2008, we intended to go to Barisal by coach at 8:00am from the bus stand opposite Notre Dame College. We took a rickshaw from Segun Bagicha at 7:30am. We turned left to Topkhana Road opposite Press Club. As the rickshaw came near the middle of Toyenbee Circular Road, the heart

of Dhaka commercial zone, a blue taxi came suddenly from behind on the left side of our rickshaw and a criminal from the passengers' seat grabbed the large brown handbag of my wife and pulled hard. My wife cried out for help and the handbag was snatched away by the fast running taxi. I was seated on the right side of the rickshaw witnessing this terrible robbery at broad daylight helplessly. The handbag was pulled so forcibly that we were about to fall from the rickshaw. My wife was shocked to tears by this horrible experience. There was no police or Rab or anyone else to help us. The street was calm and clear. Our holiday mood was shattered by fear and shock. We approached the bus terminal and were told by the passengers that we were lucky that we were not harmed. This kind of incident was said to be common in Dhaka during morning hours or night. If we resisted further, we could be knifed or shot. It is not safe to travel from bus terminals or Sadar Ghat in the morning before office hours or late evening. Streets at that time are quiet and clear without any police or Rab patrols for exploitation by the professional criminals. Within 14 days of this incident, two murders took place in Dhaka.

There is the urgent need for proper police patrol at vulnerable points where the criminals are at liberty to operate so freely. We love our motherland. We come to see our relatives. This is not the experience we should have.

A. Haq  
Barrister-at-Law (London)

## Contaminated water



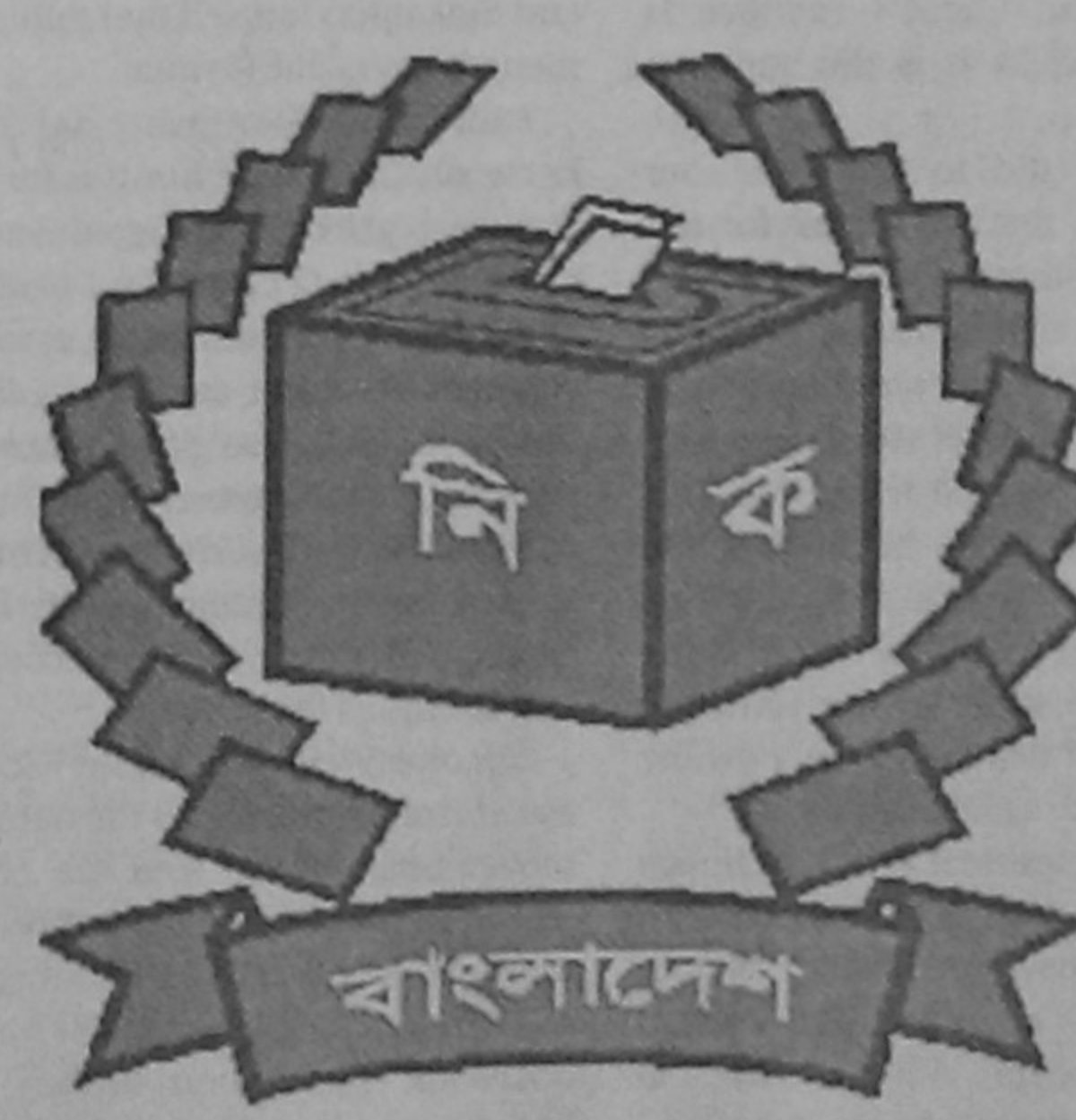
Dhaka metropolitan city and Narayanganj dwellers are consumers of water supplied by Dhaka Wasa, a 100% government owned organisation. It is monopoly business for Wasa. No one can lift water from underground in Dhaka and Narayanganj city areas without obtaining

permission from Wasa. We have learnt from the media that the government is enacting Consumer Protection Law to protect the rights of the consumers, while we observe supply of contaminated water by Wasa. Is it not self-contradictory? Twelve mil-

lion city dwellers in Dhaka and Narayanganj have been consuming contaminated water supplied by Wasa every day.

We urge the government to look into the matter and find a solution. Suman Khan  
Panthapath, Dhaka

## EC, here and there



I feel cynical about my confidence in the typical style of our governance. However, thanks to the government for taking a step further to make the EC independent and free from govt. intervention.

We are looking for improvement in relations with our neighbour India. There the Election Commission is performing with authority, public confidence and above controversies. The scope of cooperation between the ECs of the two countries to strengthen our institution could be explored.

Areader  
One-mail