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ADMAN/DRINKERS

Environment

Our environment is the place where we have to live.

For our own well-being, we should protect our environment from being polluted.

Montasir Mamun
Sher-e-Bangla Hall
Department of Civil Engineering, BUET

Substandard foods

Needless to say, hygienic food is required for sound health.

Let's come to the main point. There are thousands of restaurants and hotels all over Bangladesh. And this is also known to us that most of them are not up to the standard. It has been our tradition to remain silent and silence encourages those carrying on their dishonest way of making money. No voice is raised against them at the right time. Nowadays many fast food shops are using 'sausage' (made with non-food grade colours) and adulterated oil to make their foods. Not only are they careless about the food quality, they don't ensure cleanliness. The condition of most of the restaurants is sordid, and their kitchen is pretty untidy and frowzy. An effective campaign against them was launched by the CTG, but not much has been achieved.

So, intermittent supervision will not work at the end of the day, rather only constant supervision on a long-term basis can be effective.

Razib
-Khilket, Dhaka

USAID programmes

According to a recent USAID 'Press Release', more than 150 tons of sweet onions are giving some Bolivian farmers a \$340,000 harvest! The recent bountiful shipment to Los Angeles marked a three-year USAID effort to make Bolivian onion growers international competitors. It may be mentioned here that the sweet onions, along with a dozen of other crops including chilli, peppers, garlic, grapes, etc. are a USAID training programme to improve Bolivian agriculture.

For the information of the readers, I would like to add here a few lines about sweet onions. This is a variety which is not pungent like

other types. Its water content is rather high but sulphur is very low, which makes it sweeter than other onions.

Meanwhile, as I was going through the above press release, the picture of our farmers flashed across my mind. Ours is an agricultural country and we have natural resources to grow a variety of crops. Our farmers are very hardworking too. We have also a very sophisticated govt. department of agricultural extension. But question arises, if our farmers are really organised to switch over to commercial agriculture? Are they getting appropriate extension support?

It is true that the USAID is providing assistance for our agricultural development, but we are not getting Bolivian types of returns. Would the USAID consider undertaking crop-specific development programme for our farmers? **Professor M Zahidul Haque**
Chairman
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University
Dhaka

Looking at Bangladesh

What are the basic assets and liabilities of Bangladesh -- without getting lost in details in specific sectors? Two basic foundations: elbow room and footprint. Fighting for survival decently. The top leadership does not believe in the philosophy of plain living and high thinking. Society is not homogeneous in the LDCs and the cracks and barbed wire fences could be easily detected using common sense. Our leaders are floating in spaceships, ignoring the *matri bhum*.

Suppose the population density was one half of the current 1,000

persons per sq km; it would have lessened the burden of the government; and we could have concentrated on long-term development projects without bias and favouritism (we should have done our huge coal resource ten years earlier).

Have-not behaviour depends on supply, demand, need; and peer-value ratings; (note the percentage of imported goods on the shelves of super markets and dept. stores, catering to black wealth. The middle class shoppers are ignored contemptuously).

Due to misuse of power and position, a section of the society are getting filthy rich in short spans, creating resentment in the left-out groups. The communication gap between the urban and rural residents is huge. This is accentuated by break in continuity of development projects once a political regime is replaced -- party survival and prosperity takes over (second reason, kick-backs, secret deals).

Above is a general pattern replicated in the poor and newly emerging nations. The UN is a bloated cipher, thanks to Western gagging techniques. The winner takes all. The CTG govt. in Dhaka is fighting against entrenched mindsets. Premature elections (return of the hoodlums) would bring back political arsenic poisoning. In Pakistan, the voters revolted -- let us watch if the referendum effect would be practical.

Let us ignore the barking of the human hyenas, not in the Sunderbans, but from the air-conditioned towers in Dhaka. The higher the rise, the greater the fall. **AMawaz**
Dhaka

Dying trees

Aged rain trees, located on the road-dividers, beside the sidewalks and other places are dying -- a matter of great concern. These trees -- I am talking about those of Chittagong -- provided balmy shade in the hot summer days. Again these trees took decades to grow -- a fact that should be remembered while talking about the diseased trees.

These trees are the remaining patches of green that dot the urban landscape. Whether it is because of fungal disease or any other type of malady -- the fact remains that trees are dying in scores. One can see barks of these ill-fated trees being peeled off. In addition to the barks the trees are also losing leaves. Denuded of foliage, they can hardly survive.

Thanks to our apathy to the environment, we have already lost much of our woods. Now we are losing the remaining patches of greenery of the urban areas. A concerted effort on the part of all concerned may arrest this process.

Zabed Wali
Pahartali, Chittagong

Hospitals and clinics

I would like to bring the following

issues to your notice. I was taken to the 'Emergency' of a sophisticated & well equipped hospital in the city following an injury/cut in my forehead in the early morning (7.30am) of 03rd March '08. I was highly frustrated and shocked to see their service and commercial attitude.

Instead of taking care of my injury, they were more concerned about collecting my blood for various tests. After collection of blood, they took me to the OT and gave 4 stitches in my forehead and brought me back to the emergency and billed me Tk. 3,896.65. Meanwhile my blood report came in their hand and they called my wife & brother (who accompanied me) away from me separately to inform about my physical condition. They asked my family to take care of me. They informed that I was suffering from severe 'Dengue' fever, in fact I was in the danger zone as the 'Platelet' count of my blood report was found to be only 54000, but the minimum for a human is 150,000-350,000. Now you can understand the mental stress and pressure my family underwent after hearing such a report. However, on our approach they released me advising some medication and suggested the same blood test the next day and also asked me to consult a medicine specialist.

I gave my blood for platelet count in a diagnostic centre on 4 March '08 and got the report it was 170,000, which is quite normal. Then I again went to that hospital emergency with the report and talked to the doctor about their fault. But the duty doctor became furious to see the report!!

I would therefore request you to publish detailed reports on the hospitals and clinics in the city so that people get a clearer picture of what is going on in the name of treatment. After all, we are not supposed to suffer because hospitals are run by unscrupulous elements whose only objective is to make money!

M. Monirul Islam Chy
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Corruption

Corruption has engulfed the whole world. From clerk to prime minister, from Asia to America, many people are involved in corruption. Recently, the UN took an initiative against corruption and they initiated UNCAC (United Nations Convention against Corruption). The government of Bangladesh also joined the programme.

It is clear that the government of Bangladesh is trying to eradicate corruption from the land. But is this possible only by signing conventions and giving lectures? I don't think so.

Human beings are programmed from childhood. They learn what they see, what they hear and what they are taught. If he/she lives among criminals and thugs, he will be acquainted with that and will

start to believe that crime is normal. If they grow up among good people, they will learn good things from them. That's only natural.

This is my request to the education authorities that they insert the teaching of morality from the very first class. Only then, this land will be free from corruption.

Astudent
LLB Hon's
ASA University

'Parjatan' or tourism

The development of the tourism industry depends on many inter-related issues and policies of the government. Lack of tourism awareness among the common people may also be acting as one of the hurdles to tourism development in Bangladesh.

However, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), the government-run tourism promotion authority, is itself confusing the situation, obstructing, in the process, the popularisation of meaningful tourism as the first concept among many common and illiterate people of Bangladesh. They cannot really identify 'Parjatan' and tourism together. They believe that these two are two separate identities!!

Besides, 'Parjatan', the Bengali word, does not represent the English word, 'tourism'. It has multi-faceted meanings, especially from culture and heritage, hospitality, aviation and environment points of view. Moreover, the BPC, the name given for giving 'Parjatan' its national identity, gives the idea of ambiguity for the purpose of foreign affiliation and correspondence. This is why the words -- National Tourism Organisation -- do require to be written for such affiliations and correspondence.

We would like to make a solemn request to the authorities concerned to popularise tourism instead of 'Parjatan' and rename Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation as Bangladesh Tourism Corporation.

Areader
One-mail

Purchase of new aircraft

A report on the subject was published in a local English daily on 25 February stating that Biman may go for Boeing's offer for aircraft, which may help the ailing airlines to come out of miseries.

However, the induction of these new and better aircraft from Boeing may solve only a part of the problem. It may help to avoid the sudden unexpected delays and random schedule upsets that have given Biman the bad name. However, this is not the only problem of our really sick airlines! Another issue which has often been reported in the press, and is known to many disappointed passengers, is the usual report from Biman that the flight is full, while the flight leaves practically empty!

One reason for this could be that travel agents block a good number of seats, and very often cancel it at the last minute as allowed without incurring penalty. Biman authorities can list out such defaulting agents, say for the last two or three years, and de-list them and inform all other airlines and travel agents, and publish their names and addresses. This will hopefully stop this unholy practice.

Next in importance is to trim down the large numbers of practically free travellers, who milk the Biman no end! These are various Biman employees, their families; also officials of DG, Civil Aviation, and the ministry concerned. This facility needs to be drastically restricted. Only Biman officials availing at least two weeks (15 days) continuous earned leave may be permitted to travel at concession rates with only two minor children below twelve years old. They will be allowed concession rates of at least twenty percent of the published fare plus all taxes on fixed dated return tickets purchased at least fifteen dates prior to departure. These tickets should be non-refundable and non transferable for both up and down legs of the journey, and no open-dated ticket coupon for any sector should be issued. These tickets if cancelled or flight dates changed must pay the full normal fare difference; or the amounts involved can be deducted from the employee's salary. The frequency of such travel should be limited to on-line routes only, allowable once a year for overseas destination and maybe twice a year for domestic destinations.

The aircraft selection committee should have one or two technically qualified persons, not necessarily from the air force. Military aircrafts are special types, attuned to manoeuvrability and speed, and is generally poor on overall thermal efficiency, as explained to us by Rolls Royce trainers when their Dart Turboprop Engine was intro-

Fighting inflation

I have been observing Bangladesh from away, which gives some advantage of seeing the big picture. I am an economist. I think in this inflationary condition, the policy should be geared towards changing people's expectations.

People in Bangladesh have formed inflationary expectations, which needs to be changed. At the moment, people are expecting prices to rise, which is feeding into the price level itself, making inflation a self-fulfilling prophecy. To change such inflationary expectations, the following two steps may be primary:

Step 1: Trade has to be encouraged to enhance domestic competition, especially in the food sector. Once the daily necessities such as rice and others are imported on a larger scale, it would drive down price of daily

necessities due to competition. This is the benefit of trade. How? Watch for the foreign exchange market, encourage people, give positive signals to foreigners and domestic entrepreneurs.

Step 2: There is evidence that market players are colluding to raise prices, as often seen after budget announcements, Ramadan etc. Credible market watch groups should oversee if there is monopolistic behaviour observed in a market (such as agriculture) which is supposed to work in line with perfect competition.

Competition in the market can drive down the prices and generate overall efficiency. Let's work for that.

Usman Ali Hannan
University of Waterloo, Canada



MUNIR ZAMAN/DRINKERS

duced in PIA way back in the early 60s. The undersigned attended it at the PIA Engine Overhaul Shop in Karachi. Such members with hands on electro-mechanical equipment experience, can appreciate the technical, economic and cost-benefit breakeven load factors for comparable aircraft and engines.

S.A. Mansoor

Dhaka

It is indeed commendable that the government has decided to free the Biman management from the clutches of bureaucrats, who have little or no knowledge of managing a commercial enterprise, nor can they devote the required time to it.

To my view, just making it a PLC and having a few members of the board from the private sector is not enough. Without being prejudiced and with due respect, it's not even enough to replace some civilian bureaucrats in the board of directors. It needs a total shake-up and restructuring and even the chairman & most members of the board should be picked up from the entrepreneurs, experts in the industry and those who really have successful track records of management.

British Airways may be taken as an example. It faced a similar

situation back in the late seventies. It was Margaret Thatcher's bold and drastic measures that made many British industries, including British Airways, successful. Cosmetic surgery cannot cure an almost terminal cancer.

Public funds must not be wasted any more. There is enough private capital available in and outside the country to finance big projects. So please be bold, devoted and engage dedicated people with total commitment. They will certainly bring positive and desired results.

Biman has tremendous potential. Tell me how many airlines in the world have so many captive customers who would only prefer to travel by Biman. It can be made a real national pride and of course profitable, but it needs proper action and direction. There must be short, medium and long term solid plans and their proper execution. Just buying 8 or 12 aircrafts would not do. It must be part of a total plan and strategy.

M. Alam
Dhaka

BTTB

While going through The Daily Star of 4 March '08 having a write up on BTTB's plans to cut call charges,

which are still high even after the recent reductions, it struck me as strange and also frustrating that while it is essential to cut the call charges, to be competitive, to retain the present subscribers and also to attract new ones to increase BTTB's earnings, why is it that the BTTB has so far overlooked/ignored the idea of including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka & Myanmar in the list of countries where one can make Economic ISD calls? This would definitely increase BTTB's earning and as this facility is not provided by the mobile operators, this can attract new subscribers as well.

I will request the management of the BTTB and the government to give it a serious thought.

Shuja Alim
Agrabad
Chittagong

Local government

It is obviously good news that an amendment to the Upazila Parishad Act, 1998 will be made. Once the Section 25 of this Act is repealed, I think it will be easier for the local government bodies like Upazila Parishad to decide its matters itself and run on its own.

S.M. Shaikat
University of London, UK

Rickshaws in the city

To let them roam free as wild gazelles in Sundarbans or to control/eliminate their movement inside the very rapidly growing capital city of Bangladesh: That is the question.

Ever since I returned to my homeland after staying in America for eleven years in 2001, the dilemma of rickshaws and their unparalleled contribution to the world famous traffic chaos in our capital city have been haunting me. I am sure most of us face this very question each and every day as we move to work, to bring kids to and from school, to shop, or just to take a breather from our busy lives.

I understand the sentiment of the vast middle class of the city which I am a part of, who feel the necessity of rickshaws in our streets as seemingly there is no other better alternative form of transportation for short distances. But are we sincerely thinking about where we are heading? As millions (in my view countless) rickshaws are poured into (God only knows by whom) the Dhaka city streets without any sense of control, planning, or management; each and every street in this city is increasingly becoming a parking lot for uncontrollable rickshaw-pullers who just ignore any sort of traffic rule or

simple common civic sense (Mainly because of their background and lack of education). It is very obvious that they are behaving this way as most of these people were living in villages where no form of engine driven vehicles were around and they usually only

had to manage boats with their own hands and they moved very slowly. None of these people have ever received any training from anyone on the safety guidelines of riding on streets with fast moving engine-run vehicles. I always wondered why

this very important question was never answered by our city fathers.

Surely, it is simply unrealistic to expect that we can move to educate all the present rickshaw-pullers plying the busy Dhaka streets, although that undertaking would be highly commendable. My suggestion is that we cannot help but begin to think about how to eliminate rickshaws from our streets as the condition is getting worse by the hour and soon it will be so much out of our control (If it already isn't) that we will look back and say to ourselves: how did this happen and how did we not think of this before, and what will we do now?

So, please think about this. We cannot just wait casually and let the rickshaw eat up every open space on our streets, sidewalks, parking lots, fields, stations and any other place the ever intelligent rickshaw-pullers can find. Rickshaws must be eliminated from Dhaka metropolitan city streets starting now in quick phases, though we know some Bangladeshi great patriotic politicians may just want to utilize yet another group for the sake of the 'country' and its 'people' with riots, strikes, and yeah 'OBORODH' **Mohammed Rahat**
DIT Road, Malibagh, Dhaka

