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# EC and war criminals

The EC decides to bar war criminals from polls - this was leading news of The Daily Star of 21 February 2008.

In the first round of electoral reform talks arranged by the Election Commission (EC), a large number of political parties demanded a ban on the war criminals' participation in the elections. This is not the demand of the political parties only, but the people of Bangladesh also support it. If the present caretaker government and EC do this, then it will be a milestone in the history of Bangladesh. The world also will salute this decision.

But the questions are:

- a. How shall we identify war criminals?
- b. If anyone were declared a war criminal,

would he be put on trial?

c. Will there be any special tribunal for their trial?

d. Will the EC invite the known war criminals or their political parties for the second round of electoral reform talks to be scheduled on February 2008?

The answers to the above questions are very important.

The chief adviser of the caretaker government has already said that it will be undesirable to allow the war criminals to take part in the elections.

Now my question is, will the caretaker government really go for such action?

Tapan Saha  
Manikganj



## Khulna Medical College

Recently, I wrote a letter on medical education and now I feel my assumptions were very much right, after reading the news of present deplorable status of the Khulna Medical College. Insufficient teaching staff as well as lack of adequate infrastructure and appropriate educational facilities are creating impediments in imparting proper medical education to the students, which are probably most common to all newly established medical colleges except Dinajpur and Bogra that got favourable treatment from the immediate past government.

It is clear that Khulna was neglected by the last two consecutive governments and even deprived of its legitimate developmental plans and activities. Khulna is a city of over 1.5 million inhabitants, but unfortunately none of past two consecutive governments paid any attention to its proper development. I don't understand why the medical college has not been turned into a 500-bed medical collage till now, which is one of the basis requirements to have proper education of the students.

The specialized 200-bed hospital has been completed half-heartedly with inadequate financial support without executing its original plan, so far I learnt from newspapers.

Proper medical and health care is one of the basic rights of the citizens.

I would like to make an appeal to this non-political government to review the present educational status of all existing public medical colleges and other higher educational institutions and ensure consistent education policies at all levels with proper development of infrastructure and facilities.

Nasir  
One-mail

## War criminals

Some time ago it was Dr. Kamal Hossain and now it is Dr. B. Chowdhury who has apologised for failure to try war criminals (DS, March 28). After 37 years, these two gentlemen, like all other political opportunists, now feel the necessity to put the war criminals on trial.

Criminals of any sort social, economic or war criminal, must be put on trial and punished as per the law of the country and Bangladeshi war criminals who opposed our independence and in the process committed crimes (serious offence), must have been tried and punished long ago. That was not done and the rumour goes that they were "forgiven after taking bribe" by the leadership that took control of the country when Bangladesh was liberated and became an independent state. The war criminals can be put on trial even now but those who cry for it clearly and loudly these days seem to be doing so for some other reason. They are making it a political issue and by doing so they are showing disrespect to the victims of Bangladesh's liberation war.

It is not the trial of the war criminals that they want, they want gaining political points and thereby coming to the limelight, winning election and grabbing leadership of the country.

Tayeb Husain  
Lund, Sweden

## 'Chameri House'

I am surprised to see the statement issued by CIRDP and published in The Daily Star on March 14, '08 in reply to the signature campaign of 91 eminent scholars, professors, poets, journalists, educationists and others. I have witnessed that at least a dozen of national dailies, both English & Bangla, have published their statement to safeguard the heritage building Chameri House-- from the initiative taken to construct a six-story building over there.

CIRDP claims that necessary steps have been taken to preserve the Chameri House as it is being used as their headquarters. How can they issue such a statement? What type of steps they have taken is not mentioned at all. It is only the government which can declare Chameri House as a heritage site and the Department of Archaeology will take necessary steps to preserve it. If it is declared a heritage site then there can be no further construction work there.

The caretaker government should consider this matter very seriously.  
Abdul Kader  
Freedom Fighter  
West Nakhla Para  
Tejgaon, Dhaka

# Farmers



Farmers are the most neglected class in our society, whereas more than seventy percent people are engaged in agriculture. It is hard to believe that most of them are living below poverty line. We have celebrated our thirty-seventh Independence Day but do we ever think seriously about their needs? Every

government finishes the task just giving subsidy in the budget but they never did anything worthwhile that could bring some relief to the farmers.

Mohammad Anisur Rahman  
Abdul Gani Road, West Jharnapara  
Pahartali, Chittagong

## Rehman Sobhan

Thanks to The Daily Star that you have published the address of Prof. Rehman Sobhan delivered on the Independence Day after receiving the Award. It has helped us to understand the philosophy of an outstanding son of the soil. We congratulate the government for recognising the contributions of Professor Rehman Sobhan for the independence and socio-economic development of the nation.

In his deliberations, Professor Rehman Sobhan correctly reiterated the spirit of our independence saying, "Let us not forget that Bangladesh originated in our struggle to build a democratic, just and equitable society where people of all faiths and beliefs could live in harmony with one another."

We are really grateful to Professor Rehman Sobhan for reminding us of the real spirit of our independence. He truly deserved the Award.  
Kumar Prithwiraj Nath  
Toronto, Canada

## Village of 1971 widows

It is better late than never. According to a recent report in several national dailies, on 25th March 2008, the 19th infantry division commander Major General A. K. M. Mujahid Uddin alone with his brigade commander and Sherpur district commissioner (DC) inaugurated a Shaheed (martyrs) memorial plaque and some income generating rehabilitation programmes for the first time for 39 Shaheed families of Shohagpur village in Nalitabari upazila. The barbaric Pakistan army, aided by their local collaborators, on the morning of 25 July 1971 killed 187 innocent men - mostly farmers and day labourers including all the adult males - of that village. Since then Shohagpur village is locally called as 'bidhoba para' or the village of widows. Whoever in the government has initiated this rehabilitation programme, has done a highly commendable job.

Shohagpur 'bidhoba para' is a terrifying symbol of Pakistan army genocide in Bangladesh. In fact, Shohagpur's fate was shared by a number of border villages - a few are locally called 'bidhobader gram' or the village of widows all located in Bangladesh northern border regions. These 'bidhobader gram' suffered most in 1971. Survivors of these massacres - widows and orphans - faced uncertain future and have never recovered fully. Many started begging. Regrettably, like several other matters, 'bidhobader gram' is an almost unknown chapter of Bangladesh Liberation War. I roughly estimated that about 50 - 60 villages in the northern border regions of Bangladesh (old Mymensingh district of Dhaka division and northern districts bordering with Assam-Meghalaya; excluding the Sylhet border areas) could be termed as 'bidhobader gram'. Features of the 'bidhobader gram' are: (1) All or more than 50% adult male population were killed by the Pakistan army without any trial in 1971. (2) These villages were completely burnt to the ground in 1971. (3) Majority of the older women are 1971 widows. (4) Adult males are aged around 40 to 45 years (1971 orphans). (5) Surviving victims widows and orphans (and probably the next generation) are still traumatized and suffering from various mental problems. (6) These families live in abject poverty and illiteracy (even micro finance institutes are reluctant to operate in these villages).

We sincerely wish that the government will include all such villages in a sustainable rehabilitation programme.  
M. Emad  
Oxford, UK

## Where are the criminals?

For quite sometime we were talking about the war criminals but now everyone seems to have forgotten this issue.

The culprits of 1971 should definitely be brought to justice. It is such an issue that whenever someone speaks about it, it really exasperates me. My question is why should we only talk about justice? These criminals should be driven out of our motherland.  
Minhaj Ahmed  
Uttara, Dhaka

## Entrepreneurship versus corruption

A few days back, I was going through the newspaper and was reading a report on some government employees becoming millionaires. They built up their own industrial kingdom. I was wondering whether the reporter has ever given any thought about their business acumen and entrepreneurship. Maybe at the beginning of their career they earned money through corruption or illegal means which as a conscious human being I cannot approve of. But eventually these men have invested in building industries and creating job opportunities for hundreds of unemployed youths and are generating crores of taka to add to the national GDP growth.

So there is another side of the story!  
N.Z. Khan  
One-mail

## Bird flu

Bird flu has stopped the wheel of our economy. Our economy is now passing through a crucial moment. How can we handle the situation? It is a million dollar question. The government failed to understand this problem at a very early stage. Now it has spread all over the country.

I live in Bhairab under Kishoregonj district. It's a port city. It's a place for business. There are many poultry farms here. And many people are earning their bread with this. But bird flu has caused incalculable misfortune to farm owners.

The local administration & livestock authorities have not done enough to keep the situation under control. The government should come up with an effective action plan to tackle the problem.  
Numan Chowdhury  
North Hall  
Dhaka College

## South Asian scene

The mass media in South Asia is taking keen interest in the upsets and trends witnessed at the recent general elections in Pakistan. Democracy was not allowed to take roots in Pakistan in the past.

The germ hibernated in Pindi, when Sik Mujib was not allowed to become prime minister after winning the general election. Such raping of so-called western democratic practices continues. New books are needed on democratic practices in the third world nations.

Both Pakistan and Bangladesh are passing through teething stages--unusual after so many decades. It shows the lack of political depth, acumen, foresight, dedication, honesty and moral principles.

There is no middle class in Pakistan (the thinking class); and the country is dominated by one big province, which also dominates the army. The country is full of deserts and non-arable lands. Enough water is available only in the Punjab--thanks to the British canal network. The density of population is low, around 150 per sqkm (compared to 1,000/psqkm in BD). The landed class dominates the society, hence the low-income voters are helpless. When politics fails, religious bigotry fills the vacuum. This is what is happening today at the global level, with the focus on Taliban and al-Qaeda groups.

The rich Western powers are now beholden to Asia, due to rising dominance of giant China in the global market. Just south is another nation with a population of one billion (India). Western affluence is diminishing (as it should, according to the theories of economics).

Since South Asia today is in the melting pot, Bangladesh has to keep fit to meet the challenges of the coming decades. But our leadership cannot stand on its feet and deliver.

Both Pakistan and Bangladesh have to see the light at the end of the tunnel; with big brother India as a witness. The future of one and a half billion people is at stake. The market is big; and the price/investment is enormous.

A new type of leadership is required in South Asia in this century of changes. We have the potential; we need the opening and the opportunity.  
AMawaz  
Dhaka

## Air link with Rajshahi

Rajshahi Division of Bangladesh comprises 16 districts with an area of 34,495 square kilometres. According to 2001 population census, 3,02,02,000 people live in these 16 districts. It is assumed that the present population is about 4 crore. There were two active airports until January 2007 at Rajshahi and Saidpur. Bangladesh Biman used to operate flights from Dhaka to these airports which facilitated movements of high officials, prospective investors and the patients. Suddenly, Biman stopped their operation on the plea that these routes were non profitable from their business viewpoint.

After all, NRBs send close to seven billion US dollars a year to Bangladesh and this can easily be tripled.  
Ehsan Imdad, PhD  
Baridhara  
Dhaka

## Support for Sidr victims

It is gratifying to learn that the UK gov. will provide five million pound (approximately Tk.70 crore) support for post-cyclone rebuilding work in addition to its 10 million pounds already spent in emergency relief efforts. This additional five million will support a US \$42 million "Early Recovery Action Program" which is being implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the government of Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, it has been reported that some 200,000 families in the 'Sidr' devastated areas still need assistance to rebuild their own livelihood. With the financial and technical assistances from our international friends, the people in the Sidr affected areas are slowly getting back to their normal life and livelihood. Perhaps it is the time when our gov. can publish a document covering the actual accomplishments towards rehabilitating the Sidr victims and rebuilding the overall infrastructure of that area. Such documents should also depict the existing agricultural situation and needs of the farmers. This, I am sure, will help strengthen both national and international efforts for bringing about pragmatic development in the Sidr affected area.

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

## A bank for NRBs

Should it be an existing bank or a new bank that is now the question. Why? Because a) Vast numbers of NRBs are investing overseas through many different vehicles - from banking to real estate, from mutual funds to individual stock portfolios, from pension plans to retirement homes and much more. Yet, due to the lack of an established and secure infrastructure in Bangladesh this money is going to fill the monetary reserves of other countries. Therefore, Bangladesh is losing large amounts of foreign investments (foreign currencies); b) NRBs are no different from resident Bangladeshis and they are not PBOs (people of Bangladeshi origin) who may think differently. How? Consider that most NRBs left Bangladesh when they were adults; therefore, their views regarding money management are similar to local Bangladeshis'. Confidence levels for small community banks (such as Williamsburg Savings Bank) far exceed those for giant investment companies (like Prudential Bache Securities). In fact, they also feel more comfortable investing with Chase Manhattan Bank's Investment Banker over its parent company JP Morgan Chase, (a leading global financial services firm with assets of \$1.6 trillion). This is probably one of the main reasons why local investment firms have had very limited success in bringing NRB investments to Bangladesh. A bank in Bangladesh established for the NRBs, of the NRBs and by the NRBs would go a long way in attracting many non-resident Bangladeshis to invest in their homeland.

The following are a few features, advantages and benefits ("FAB") of having an NRB Bank in Bangladesh:

- Features:
  - Investment banking opportunity.
  - NRB Bank will streamline money transfers.
  - NRB Bank will be a bank "of the NRBs, for the NRBs and by the NRBs".
- Advantages for the government:
  - Proof that the government cares about the NRBs.
  - Foreign currencies could be utilized for development.
  - Total investments will increase tremendously enhancing reserve of foreign currencies.
  - Better control over illegal money laundering.
- Benefit for the NRBs:
  - There is a bank in Bangladesh to cater to their needs, through this bank (each branch will have an investment banker) they can purchase/invest in mutual funds, stocks, bonds and other investment vehicles.
  - NRBs will no longer build those empty mansions in rural Bangladesh which generate no income.

## Discovering Suchitra Sen

Once Suchitra Sen lived in Pabna! The legendary 'first lady of Bangla cinema' was living in Pabna, Bangladesh, before the partition. I came to know this from Mr. Shahnoor Wahid's write-up in the Art & Entertainment page entitled 'Discovering Roma Das Gupta'. I became astonished and excited at the same time. Then Suchitra Sen was Roma Das Gupta. Her father Karunamoy Das Gupta was the sanitary inspector of Pabna at that time.

What a golden memory! Whatever, during partition Karunamoy Das Gupta migrated to West Bengal (Kolkata). Years later, this Roma Das Gupta turned into Suchitra Sen of Bangla cinema. There is a saying--'old is gold'. Mr. Shahnoor Wahid's write-up was really interesting. I would request him to write more about it.  
Rahad Abir  
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People of Rajshahi Division also need to travel by air to save their journey time. If there are flights in the morning and in the evening people will definitely travel by air. When Biman closed its operation to the airports of Rajshahi Division the flights were at such odd times that they did not match the needs of the passengers.

Now we see that all the private airlines are operating morning flights to Chittagong and Sylhet airports. Therefore, on behalf of the people of Rajshahi Division we request Bangladesh Biman to operate flights to those airports at lunch time, and immediately start at least one flight every morning on the Dhaka-Rajshahi-Saidpur-Dhaka route. We understand that this will also facilitate the movements of high officials from Dhaka to the most neglected part of the country. We also request the Civil Aviation authorities to look into the matter.  
Anwarul Hasan Sufi, Ph.D  
Professor  
Department of Psychology  
University of Rajshahi  
Rajshahi

We are anxious to know whether the authorities studied the matter properly. In 1970, the fare of Dhaka-Ishwardi flight was Tk 40 when the price of gold was Tk 144 and there were two flights each day. During 1988-2000 there was one flight every morning on Dhaka-Rajshahi-Dhaka route and passengers used to fight for a ticket. Such a situation continued until Biman changed its flight schedules for Rajshahi and Saidpur routes at lunch hours followed by delayed flights and sudden cancellation of flights.

During this period GMG tried its best to continue flights to Rajshahi facing huge loss as GMG was given permission to operate Rajshahi flights more or less at the same time with Biman. GMG is a private airline and Biman is a national airline. Biman's losses are paid from the taxpayers' accounts including the people of Rajshahi Division. The people concerned know the background and stories of the losses projected by Biman.

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