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Contaminated water

We the city dwellers in capital Dhaka and Narayanganj solely depend on Wasa for our water. There is no other source of water in these places. Wasa is a government owned water supply agency, a semi-autonomous body under the administrative control of the LGRD ministry. Wasa is supposed

to supply pure water suitable for human consumption. But it has miserably failed to perform its task of supplying safe water. Recently, the city dwellers have been observing with concern that Wasa is supplying water, which is muddy and smelly. This has been going on for a pretty long

time. In the 21st century it may sound incredible, but it is the reality in Bangladesh.

The Wasa high-ups and the ministry concerned should take immediate and pragmatic measures to supply pure water to its twelve million customers.

Md. Tahamid Ashraf
Bashabo, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

Rice and potatoes

Some people are advocating more consumption of potatoes, instead of rice. I think that's a logical proposition. Price of potatoes is less; nearly half in comparison to price of rice and the food value is the same. Surprisingly, many politicians and intellectuals don't support that. The question is why? Is it illogical?

Definitely, we don't agree with many steps of the present CTG or the people who are supporting them. But everything has to be judged on its real merit, especially if the outcome is good at the end of the day. The BNP or the AL can't guarantee that no food crisis occur if they were in power. So, please don't be sarcastic about the "Add More Potato" campaign.

The political parties should refrain from issuing misleading statements that run counter to our national interests. Rather, they should play a proactive role in mitigating the present crisis.

Dr. Azizul Karim
General Practitioner, Australia

Lessons of history

Reading history is a pleasant pastime of living as a tourist actively in the past, when the book is not treated as a textbook. Reading about fast changes in history in a daily newspaper is a different thing, especially in today's global village.

When the political winds of change occur in the neighbouring countries, it is time to be alert. The ultimate straw is to face changes in the capital of one's own country; not stray changes once in a while, but with negative overlays decade after decade, since the birth of the nation. Bangladeshis can feel what it means.

Watch the global scenes today. The Americans are trying a new experiment in electing a new president (tired of military one-upmanship) - it is in Technicolor; without gender discrimination. EU, in the slow lane, has bestowed independence on Kosovo (a victim of genocide in the 1980s). In Pakistan, the general election took a new turn in snubbing military

dictatorships (for half a century). Bangladesh has yet to learn the elementary codes for self-governance; while in South Asia, the Kashmir issue is a thorn in Indo-Pak relations. Vietnam and Iraq are sad examples of super-power lust. Add the lust for energy resources in every nook and cranny of the globe. Keeping whose standard of living? Blowing hot and cold on democracy and the slave trait!

The phases in world history are intuitive, accumulative, or the karma/kismet effect (that is the third law of Newton, applied morally). We learn, or unlearn more? In Nature, actions/reactions are not retaliatory, revengeful, or ambitious. There is a constant ongoing war between the laws of nature, and man-made concepts Scientific R&D teach us a lot, and make daily life easier; but it is unravelling the scientific secrets of the Supreme Creator. What has happened to plain living and high thinking - the way our chasibhais feed us [now they demonstrate for fertilizers and hybrid seeds]. To decipher history is a difficult task, depending on the audience, and the future roadmaps.

In Dhaka, we need applied history, to push us more deeply into the paradoxes of the 21st century.

A Hussain

One-mail

Appointment of VC

Recently, the government has taken an unprecedented decision to appoint Vice Chancellors of public universities through advertisement.

Bravo! At least this decision will give all those interested professors the satisfaction of having a fair chance to join in the VC appointment race! Everyone will be free from the feeling that his eligibility has not been evaluated by the authorities.

Meanwhile, some questions naturally arise in one's mind:

1. What would be the criterion for selecting an applicant for the post of VC?

2. Who will be the members of the selection committee?

3. Would the govt. mechanism be successful in selecting really deserving candidates as VCs?

The most crucial question is, if the selected/appointed VCs would be able to function neutrally following the rules and regulations when the political govt. will come to power after election?

For instance, in our varsity, i.e. Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, the treasurer is currently holding the charge of the vice chancellor in addition to his duty. He is running the university quite peacefully, neutrally, creditably and efficiently because now the country is being governed by a neutral caretaker government and emergency is also in force. But will this situation prevail when an elected govt. takes over?

In my opinion, the govt. needs to ensure one thing first, that is, all sorts of politics have to be restrained in the universities. To accomplish this goal, the government may initiate a dialogue with academics, national political leaders and others concerned.

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

Sheikh Hasina

This is a reference to the news presented by the media regarding attendance of Sk. Hasina in court last Sunday. We have heard the version of Sk. Hasina and the response from the jail authorities. The IG Prison has refuted the charges brought by Sheikh Hasina, a former PM, of her being forced to attend the court despite illness. Now the question is whom should we believe? The ex PM or the IG Prison?

I hope our readers had the opportunity to read the article written by Mr. Farhad Mazhar in the Manab Jamin and had the opportunity to watch Mr. Mazhar on Channel-i Sangbad Patro Porjalochana. Mr. Mazhar is speak-

ing for the silent majority urging the present government to wake up and redirect their policy for establishing democracy and not to present a new hybrid model of democracy to justify their takeover on January 11, 2008. Public support and the sentiment associated with the change are now gone.

A reader

One-mail

Biman and Boeing

Biman has recently acquired a 32-year old dilapidated Boeing 747-B aircraft with another one of the bit older scrap on the way. These two pieces of decrepit junk have reportedly been procured from Nigeria and Sudan. Over the years it has become clear to all old airplane sham salesmen that anytime Biman is about to buy or lease a used plane, it is time to spruce up their decaying grounded aircraft to unload it on Biman for an ample profit as long as they can grease a few palms.

Biman has also signed a deal to procure up to 8 new wide-bodied Boeing airplanes in the next 5 to 10 years. The competing firm was the Anglo-European Airbus. It may be mentioned that after an intense head to head competition and extensive scrutiny, the US Defence Department (Pentagon) has picked European Airbus over the US Boeing based on meticulous consideration of safety, quality, utility and durability. It is interesting that rather than taking the cue from the Pentagon, Biman seems to have taken the signal from the US representatives in Bangladesh, giving credence to the old adage, "Do what we say rather than what we do." All the airy-fairy aircraft deals seem to take the nation routinely for a ride.

The present government has shown an avid propensity to bite off more than it can chew. This penchant permeates all spheres of this regime, functioning in an Alice in Wonderland world. The buying of new and the leasing of old Boeing aircraft seem no exception to this tendency.

Omar Khasru

One-mail

Old beggar

It was pathetic news. A 97 years old man was jailed for begging on the street. This unfortunate man, Jumman Ali, was jailed for three days. Not only that, we are also told that more than 2,000 suspected beggars have been arrested in the last three months. However, my question to the government is: could you please tell us what will they do when people have to live by having only one meal a day?

MD. Mushfiqul Wadud
Department of English
Stamford University

Dignity?

Honestly speaking, the news of ex-MPs' unity to resist the government move regarding allocation of Nam Bhaban flats made me laugh out loud! How funny! As the report had it, our "honourable" ex-MPs have taken a firm stand to protect the "dignity and property" of parliament. I have nothing to say if the word 'dignity' were omitted.

Dear ex-MPs, do you really know what dignity means? When you used to make parliament ineffective by boycotting or being absent, did you dignify it? When you used to hurl indecent words on each other in parliament, did you dignify it? How long will you continue to pretend before the whole nation?

Ahmad Ferdous Bin Alam
Dhaka

Labour law reform

For the last few days one important piece of news is being served by the media that the government is contemplating allowing only one trade union in the seaports. As a loyal citizen of the country and a researcher on Labour Economics, I would suggest the policy makers not to take the other extreme step of allowing too many trade unions.

Too many unions are really a problem for any industry, establishment and business, not only for the establishment but also for the workers, it only creates chaos and confusion. So the government initiative to change/reform the system is a good step, no doubt. But if you allow only one union, then the trade union leadership of that union will become so much dictatorial and powerful which would be unmanageable and out of reach of the general workers. If they join with the ruling party, things would become worse, even the government officials would become helpless and act according to their dictates. So, please don't introduce this one trade union system.

Rather, you may give emphasis on compliance of the provision of IRO -69 (which is also incorporated in Labour Law 2006) whereby a maximum of three unions could be formed in one establishment and one of them could become CBA through election. So far this is the best introduced system and being followed in some other Saarc countries. In Bangladesh, this system could not function well in some establishments due to political interference, and weakness/bad administration of the labour department, but as a provision still this is the best among available options.

If you still have any doubt, I would request you to organise dialogue(s) with the experts on Labour Laws, experts working independently as well as experts from TUs and employers associations and take their opinions before introducing the one trade union system.

S.T. Zaman
Pallabi, Dhaka

Diseased

jackfruit trees

Maona of Sreepur upazila is well known for jackfruits. People earn more than 50% of their annual cash income from selling jackfruits. Jackfruit trees are planted in and around homesteads, raised marginal land, roadside and in the crop-fields. The trees bear fruit for several years. Some grow pineapple underneath. It gives additional income to the farm families.

However, we observed that most of the jackfruit trees are infested with stem-borer in Maona area. Many of the trees are dying and some trees are already dead. A Union Council Member of Maona showed us all his infested trees and some trees which were dead.

Sometimes, the trees become brittle in the infested zones. With strong wind the trees break from the oozing points. We have seen such dead trees which were either felled by the owner or broken due to wind. We are afraid if such dying continues, it would be like top-dying sundari in Sundarbans or dieback of sissoo in northern Bangladesh. It is not clear whether stem-borers are the primary or secondary source of infection.

Jackfruit trees in Dhaka, Tangail and Mymensingh play a vital role in forest conservation. People living in those area depend on jackfruit trees for both fruits and timber. They usually don't go for illicit felling. With reduction of jackfruit



Globalisation and free market

Nowadays one of the most talked about issues is globalisation and free market economy. This theory is advanced by the developed world. Now they are trying to reach their goals. We have to think about it seriously.

Globalisation means no barrier, it is mainly the barriers of region, culture, community etc that globalisation seeks to eliminate. Free market economy is the economy which faces no barrier

of region and country. People can sell and buy any product anywhere in the world.

If we want to realize the significance of these theories, we have to look back. In the colonial days, the countries which had colonies plundered lots of wealth. Now those days are gone, yet the countries are trying to get some benefit from other countries (especially from the third world). So they have developed these theo-

ries for their own benefit. They want to enter the markets of less developed countries and finally treat them as their colony, albeit under changed circumstances. The sole objective of the developed countries is to economically exploit the less developed ones.

We have to realise what is going on!

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

trees, people dwelling around shal forests would have no alternative except collecting their fuel wood and timber from shal forests. Now, jackfruit growing areas around shal forests are working as the buffer zone of forests. If we fail to control the stem-borer problem, we will have to pay a heavy price.

Fariduddin Ahmed
Executive Director
Arannayk Foundation

Good piece

Hats off to Mohammad Badrul Ahsan! He has written a brilliant piece on Tagore's analysis of the Bengali psyche in Friday's DS under the heading "Take it from Tagore". He has put into perspective what Tagore in his interview said about his observation of the character of Bengalees. We have to honestly admit that our negative traits have kept us divided, despite our many positive qualities and potentialities as a people and a nation. No one could have written a better description of the nature of our fellowmen than Tagore who traversed the world in search of treasures and found it right in the heart of his golden Bengal; "a single dewdrop on a single blade of grass". No one could have analysed Tagore's observation better than the writer who went into the very heart and soul of our national character!

Nilufer Ahmed
Bariadahara
Dhaka

Price hike and election

Prices of daily commodities are increasing day by day. People are just dragging on their lives. They hardly can buy all the necessary things from the market. The government is trying to keep the prices under control, but it has

not succeeded so far. On the other hand, the government is determined to arrange the national election within the scheduled timeframe and almost every day we hear something about it. My question is, if the people do not survive, then who will vote in the national polls?

Tarik, Sylhet

What does it mean?

I was there for seven years and participated in every National Day programmes held on Rajshahi University Central Shaheed Minar premises. I was not an activist of any organisation, not even any cultural organisation. I love independence and I love my university. But it is regrettable that the RU authorities allowed Chattr Shibir backed cultural organisation Bikolpo to hold programmes at RU Central Shaheed Minar on the Independence Day. Central Shaheed Minar is not a place for anti-liberation forces. It is a place for liberal people and Chattr Shibir does not belong to that category.

Nupur
North Chello Para
Bat Tala, Bogra

Yet another committee!

I was surprised to see the latest news regarding formation of yet another committee to review the recently approved National Policy on Women's Development (which was highly appreciated and welcomed internationally and by the majority of the Bangladeshis).

We know that the political scene in Bangladesh remained volatile and democratic institutions fragile after the transition to a parliamentary system in 1990. Since January 2007 the country has been under a military-backed govern-

ment, a situation that has aroused some criticism internationally, but still was appreciated for some good performances among which was the approval of the National Women's Development Policy for achieving the goal of gender equality in Bangladesh. Now the caretaker government, by forming a committee to review the well-formulated National Policy for Women's Development is again dividing the nation which will arouse widespread criticism.

Now, through your newspaper, my submission to the government is: avoid yet another conflict/crisis in the country. You should immediately cancel the committee and refrain from giving any benefit to the reactionary groups.

Nizamuddin Al-Hussainy, PhD
Green Square,
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Is it a joke?

'Cigarette Company Paid for Lung Cancer Study'. This is a report of The New York Times. It reveals that a study on lung cancers is going to be funded by a cigarette company. Is it a joke or a sign of benevolence? We don't discourage the funding on research; it is highly needed. But my point of objection is whether it is fair to conduct a research funded by one responsible for lung cancer.

This is called corporate social responsibility (CSR). They do a lot to create a problem for their own interest and do a little just for showing as remedy. There is an exact analogy the USA destroys the environment and simultaneously does a bit to restore the situation. If we look at Iraq, Afghanistan or Palestine our assumption will be proved right.

Md. Shafiqullah (Rajwan)
BSS (Hons)
Social Welfare
University of Dhaka

Nursery for women entrepreneurs



Small loans could help millions of poor women create jobs, support their families and narrow the gender gap, according to the United Nations and banking experts. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO) data released on 7 March, 2008, there are now 1.2 billion women working around the world, some 200 million more than a decade ago. Susan Maybud of the ILO's bureau for gender equality said that micro-financing - small loans given to the poor, generally at slightly elevated interest rates - could play an important role in empowering women with no other economic lifeline. She also said to Reuters, 'Micro-finance is really their one glimmer of hope, their one way out of poverty'.

In Bangladesh, there is substantial empirical evidence from existing micro-finance institutions like BRAC, Grameen Bank and ASA as well as other NGOs with new programmes and instruments that they can effectively finance and refinance the micro as well as the small enterprise sector. It should be possible to quickly adapt the microcredit model to meet the financing needs of the fast growing SMEs. Most of the large NGOs in Bangladesh have had a similar experience and demonstrated their capacity to grow on a very fast track, but were constrained by availability of funds. We have some evidence of how fast the new enterprises can grow from the experience of ASA, Grameen Bank, BRAC,

some of the other NGOs as well as the emerging new private enterprises themselves. Here is a success story of a women micro-entrepreneur who became rich by running the nursery business within a very short time. Khaleda Begum, wife of Md. Mahub Bahadur at Chittagang Road area in Shiddirganj Thana under Narayanganj District, was once an unemployed poor woman but she turned herself into a model to others when she earned a lot by selling different kinds of plants from her well established nursery project.

This is an example that others can follow.
Md. Mahubur Rahman Bulbul
Dhaka

Hasina's health

I wish to thank you for your forthright comments about the people's right to know the condition of Hasina's health. And you are right to tell the govt. that the nation has the right to know about the health and well-being of the former prime minister of the country. The behaviour of the present caretaker govt. is indicative of their total disregard for accountability. That's what we have been witnessing from the very beginning of their dealing with Hasina and Khaleda.

They seem to be bent on portraying Hasina as the culprit for all the evils plaguing the nation.
S. Choudhury
One-mail

