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Bangladesh and ICT



PHOTO: STAR

ICT plays a vital role in economic and social development of a country. It not only develops the communication technology but also increases the productivity of a country. But it is a matter of regret that Bangladesh is lagging behind in the ICT sector. The World Economic Forum has issued 'The Global Information Technology Report' 2007-08 on the basis of the following things: quick internet facilities, poverty alleviation, ensuring national activities through maximum utilisation of ICT, inventions and e-skills, business network, transmission for IT generation etc. In that report Bangladesh has been given the 124th position out of 127 countries, our IT ranking and the score is 2.65 which is very shameful for us. In South Asia, com-

puter came first in Bangladesh. Yet we are lagging behind other nations in the region. The position of other countries are Nepal 119th (2.88), Pakistan 89th (3.37), Sri Lanka 79th (3.58), India 50th (4.06). On the other hand, some poverty, hunger, war affected countries have done very well. But it is a very interesting development that the present government is issuing licence for Call Centre. It is a positive sign of improvement in the IT sector. Bangladesh needs a definite plan. It has a lot of potential in this sector and also a bright future.

Mahmudul Hasan
One-mail

Fare hike

The news of government fixing fares of CNG-run autorickshaws and AC/non-AC taxicabs published in The Daily Star on 04/2008 has not had any impact on the situation.

The law enforcers should look into the matter immediately and protect the commuters.

W. Islam
One-mail

Food crisis

Bangladesh's poor people are bearing the brunt of the food price rise as part of the global food crisis. According to a large number of critics the cause of the present food problem in Bangladesh is the inefficiency of the caretaker government. If we do not try to understand the problem in the global context, then the government or the public will not be able to solve or alleviate the food problem to reduce the sufferings of the poor.

There have been food riots in Egypt, Indonesia, the Philippines, Ivory Coast and Ethiopia. Countries like India, China, Vietnam and Indonesia are already restricting their rice export in order to protect their own stocks.

The cause of this global problem is complex. Increasing world population over the years created more and more demand on the world food supply. In recent times emergence of a prosperous middle class in India and China is changing the eating patterns in these countries with vast population. It is a fact of life that rich people eat more than the poor people.

Another factor contributing to the world food shortage is conversion of food crop to bio-fuel - 30% of US corn crop will be converted to bio-fuel by 2010. By 2010, in the UK 5% of petrol will come from food crops.

This trend is followed by farmers of major food producing countries in the west, as there is a greater financial reward for doing so.

Over the last year global food prices have shown an increase of 130% for wheat and 74% for rice.

The solution of this complex problem will also be complex. Increased food production, family planning and change of food habits are some examples. Also genetically modified crops may have some part to play.

In the context of Bangladesh, one should not forget the role of

potatoes. They mature in as little as 50 days and can yield between two and four times more food per hectare than wheat or rice.

The World Bank advised targeted subsidies to the poor to help buy food. In the longer term, more money is needed to support food production in developing countries like Bangladesh.

Awami League leaders are threatening the caretaker government with country wide hunger strike (not on the food crisis issue). On a lighter note, if all the rich and well fed politicians of all political parties of Bangladesh join this hunger strike or reduce their food consumption, there may be a slight impact (however small it may be) on the food crisis in Bangladesh.

Mushtaq Ahmad
Shropshire, UK

Eight-year old accused!

It was a news report in The Daily Star that an 8-year old girl was arrested for drug peddling. I cannot understand why the law enforcers did not apply their common sense and work out that an eight-year old could not commit such a crime. They should have understood that even if an eight-year old girl is found with drugs, she is to be treated as a victim of the circumstances. However, she was freed eventually. I would like to thank the reporter and the DS team.

Mushfique Wadud
Department of English
Stamford University Bangladesh

National Women Policy

After reading The Daily Star report on the Ulema Council's review comments on the National Women Policy, I feel it necessary as a citizen of Bangladesh to put in my "two cents" on several of the issues debated by the Ulema Council as presented in the DS report.

Before anyone debates the National Women Development Policy, we need to debate the merits of the members of the Ulema Committee and their qualification to be representative of the country's conscience. Islam has very strict guidelines on who can be an Islamic scholar. Knowing the Holy Quran and Hadith by heart is not the only qualification. One has to be able to interpret the holy book

and the Hadith in the correct context and apply it in the correct context. An Islamic scholar therefore must have the knowledge or "hikmah".

I raise this issue in reference to the observation made by a member of the council reproduced in The Daily Star: "A woman cannot enjoy rights equal to a man's because a woman is not equal to a man by birth. Can there be two prime ministers--one male and one female--in a country at the same time?" This statement should raise eyebrows of all Muslims.

There is no doubt that males and females are not equal biologically. By the same token, one cannot deny differences among members of the same gender either--no two males or two females are the same. Therefore if we are to deprive access of one gender to rights and opportunities based on biological difference alone--then why not impose similar restrictions on members of the same gender based on inter-gender differences, in other words why not then implement a caste system? The prime minister is and can be only one person whether that person is a male or a female. The position of prime minister should go to the one suited for the task. Islam requires that Muslims select a person for a task based on the candidates' qualifications.

On the issue of child marriage--the Ulema Council is clearly aligning itself with the culture of this subcontinent and not Islam. Child marriage has been and continues to be practised in this subcontinent. Islam does not dictate child marriage. Furthermore, Islam prohibits forced marriages. Therefore a marriage against the objection of the female is invalid.

I do however agree that a gender group cannot enjoy access to equal rights and opportunities and quota based access to the same rights and opportunities at the same time. It has to be one or the other, since enactment of one automatically negates the other.

I must also ask the question--why just a National Women Policy. What about the men? Are they somehow faring any better in a corruption ridden nepotism oriented society? Why not have a National Code of Ethics that all citizens are expected to live by? Doing so we will have a code of ethics on paper that will ensure

that if someone is wronged in any way, the victim can have his/her day in the court and seek redress.

Shomit Chowdhury
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Commuter's life

This objective oriented diagnosis is for finding a solution--so I studied my daily commuting experience in Dhaka Metropolitan City (DC) roads. We need a turnaround or I call it "branding" to make the road management effective. This does not require 'rocket science software', as Deming's plan-do-check-act PDCA cycle - a world class execution recipe, can do it effectively.

In an effective traffic system--Passengers wait for buses, in DC, buses wait for passengers; symbols are for compliance; in DC, symbol is for defiance; symbol defiance costs penalty, in DC, non-compliance brings reward; displays text message for observance, in DC, voice requests performance; compliance is monitored, in DC, compliance is nobody's business; job aid is modern megaphone, in DC, job aid is primitive "stick and whistle"; intersections are widened, in DC, crossing is for display of showpiece; intersections are smooth and speedy, in DC, crossing is bumpy and breaks speed; cross-roads are free from parking, in DC, bus stand is right on the crossing; electronic signals replaced roundabouts, in DC, roundabouts are refurbished; time-zone rules pick and off-pick hours, in DC, liberty of time is granted to all; zebra crossings are for pedestrians, in DC, vehicles pause on zebra crossing; footpaths are for pedestrians, in DC, both footpaths and roads are for pedestrians. Footpaths are for walking, in DC, footpaths are for economic activities!

Syed Azim
Dhaka Cantonment
Dhaka

Love for animals

Our treatment of animals should be full of sympathy. But not all of us show sympathy. Animals are often mistreated or killed unnecessarily. They are subdued for man's pleasure.

Tajul Islam
Gulshan
Dhaka

Working women

In our country, a high percentage of non-working women have husbands with a high level of income. Another important finding is that less educated women have more children than more educated women, regardless of their working status. The level of education and work status of women would determine the variation in their performance in different areas at home. As expected, non-working women are found to spend more time in child care, personal care and other activities at home than working women. On the other hand, working women are found to be more efficient in raising mentally developed and well-adjusted children. Working women take greater control in decision making at home than non-working women. Husbands seem to be more satisfied with the non-working wives than the working wives. A greater percentage of unhappy wives are also working women. Job satisfaction of working women can only make up partially for their discontent regarding child care and house care.

In our society, I see that a non-working woman is considered as good a wife as a working woman. I feel this is a fallacy because it is only natural that working women will be required to perform more than one task at a time for the simple reason that they do not have the time to perform each task separately and with the same care.

A different method for judging their performance should be evolved.
Arpi Howlader
Student
Faculty of Agricultural Economics
And Rural Sociology
BAU, Mymensingh

People in trouble

Due to the whimsical actions of the present government and especially due to the abnormally high prices of essential commodities like rice, oil, pulses etc, the common people find themselves in a very difficult situation.

Even the middle and the higher middle class people do not find any means to overcome the present price spiral.

What is really going on?
Peerzada S.R. Hussain
Habigonj

Hillary Clinton

Following the win in the Pennsylvania primary, Sen. Hillary Clinton's race for Democratic presidential nomination got a momentum. Congrats, Hillary!

Well, I like Hillary Clinton's sincere affirmation of the fact that she hails from a coal mine worker's family of Pennsylvania which she frankly made on a TV campaign recently.

Meanwhile, I would once again like to put emphasis on the fact that at the moment the United States needs a dynamic and prudent woman President like Hillary Clinton. I am hopeful about Hillary Clinton's overall win!

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Chairman
Department of Agricultural
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Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural
University
Dhaka

Hydraulic horns

A few days ago I had to go to Chittagong from Dhaka by an AC bus. The journey was comfortable. But I was surprised to see that almost all the buses and trucks on the trunk road were using "hydraulic horns" causing loud noise. This is causing much discomfort to the passengers as well as the people residing on both sides of the National Highway.

I recollect some years ago the govt banned the use of "hydraulic horns" by trucks and buses. Some "check-posts" were set up at the main entry points of Dhaka City where the police and Rab checked the trucks and buses entering the city. This proved to be very effective and use of these loud horns almost stopped. However, this menace has reappeared.

I would therefore request the law enforcing agencies to look into this matter and take corrective measures to save the public from "sound pollution."

Observer
Dhaka

"Babu" English

The interview piece on Babu English by Ahmed Hussain on Bangladeshi writer in English Tabish Khair (DS Star Weekend Magazine, 14-3-08) was interesting, but ticklish for the lay readers. The questions were of intellectual level; but it is encouraging to note that Bangladeshi writers are appearing in the world of global English (latest T Aman).

As a school and university product of the Raj era, it is disappointing to note that our Bangladeshi generations are weak in practical English, to feet at ease as global citizens; unlike the post-Raj Indians who have English as practically a second language for daily use, it also explains (partly) the rising popularity of English-medium schools in Bangladesh. Another point to note is that our huge unskilled labour personnel are sent abroad for jobs without proper basic background orientation (latest news-- the government is looking into this issue). It is sad to watch that many signboards in Dhaka city display basic mistakes in English grammar and composition. The tutorial centres are doing booming business; but the authorities feel rather shy of looking at English as a global language. You must be at least bilingual (excluding the classical languages) in this global village; and cannot ignore the importance of English as an

Research and wildlife

Years have lapsed since we spoke against the Aerial Seismic Survey in the Sundarbans that was envisioned by Shell Company in September 2003. Now it's Chevron's turn to take steps to conduct Aerial Seismic survey (ASS) in Lawachhara forest and in addition we hear there will be small charges of seismic explosives (biodegradable they claim). Lawachhara is a forest very rich in flora and fauna. Our concern is why are we heading for this survey in the first place? If a better prospect of gas is found in the area, will the next step be to start digging up the forest to claim the gas fields? In the past during the BNP government, the pipeline was laid through the Lawachhara forests and announced when it was nearing completion. Can our forest department or for that matter MoEF take deci-

is a very difficult yet a unique terrain. The Royal Bengal Tigers have adapted themselves to this unnatural habitat not out of choice, rather a geological contraption. Treading through the pneumatophores and crossing creeks and canals are already a hard task, wearing a collar (however small) and getting used to the foreign body is even more difficult.

Getting permission for above foreign researches is an easy task in Bangladesh. We wonder if they tried their luck in the Indian Sundarbans. For that matter it would be interesting to know if Mr. Karanth has tried collaring tigers in the Indian part of the Sundarbans.

It was once known that every forest in Bangladesh was a habitat of the tigers but now it exists only in the Sundarbans. Bangladesh



AKZUR RAHIM PEU / ORION NEWS

sions without public opinion? The first lesson in democracy tells us to seek public opinion for state owned property.

To quote a director of Chevron "The source..... will leave extremely low impact on environment". Can we define low? Can one ensure that the animals of the area will not leave their habitats, with the charges from the seismic explosives? Will not the most sensitive animals and insects in the area get exterminated?

Bangladesh has suddenly become a centre of attraction for researchers, but behold the researchers who are mostly PhD students either doing their thesis or have just completed it and are trying out Bangladesh as a guinea pig. The collaring of the tigers in the Sundarbans is an example. The Sundarbans

cannot afford to risk the only habitat of the tigers to unabated research even if it means 2%. We may lose more tigers while we continue to debate over the side effects of Telazol. The tiger has been declared by IUCN as a critically endangered animal. If we are to save the tigers of Sundarbans, the forest department needs judicious science it will also be protecting the largest ecosystem and mangrove site of the world.

Lawachhara and the Sundarbans littoral forests are heritage sites in Bangladesh and nothing should stop the environment activists and conservationists to voice their concern over and commitment to the matter.

A conservationist
Dhaka

international language-- it adversely affects the potentialities of our HR. The national language and patriotism are different and separate issues.
Andaz
One-mail

Dialogue

It appears that the Election Commission (EC) is engaged or at least trying to get engaged in a fruitless "dialogue" and spending months trying to talk to politicians and so-called "dozen men" political parties and wasting its time. It's just waste of time. They are all the same bunch of people who are responsible for bringing the country to this messy situation. I am sure if the EC goes on like this forever, no fruitful result will come out of it.

My opinion is that EC should abandon this fruitless exercise and go directly to "people". They

should formulate their own rules (including reforms of political parties) taking examples from the UK (mother of parliamentary democracy) and India (the largest democratic country in the world), and formulate the rules for both parliamentary and local government elections. There must be democratic and elected institutions in every tier. It does not matter if they contest under the banner of a "registered" political party. They should then publish it (call it "white paper" if you like, in at least 20 popular newspapers and booklets, which should be distributed to every union for comments and national debate). The time frame for comments should be fixed. The response time should not be more than one month. All responses from the people should be compiled and the major and significant ones should be published again in the newspapers and book form for public knowledge.

The EC then will finalize the rules, get them approved by the cabinet and complete other formalities to make it a permanent law.

M Alam
Dhaka

CNG drivers

My means of transport is CNG. However, when we want to go to any place like Dhanmondi, Rajarbagh or Gulshan, the CNG drivers just reject us rudely. When they do agree they charge double the amount of money, instead of going by the meter as they are supposed to. Add to that, they are always complaining about how they cannot afford the money that they need to give to the owners. But I can always see one or two CNG's sitting idle near every roadside teashop.

Ryan Masud, VII, Sunnydale
Dhaka

National ID

I was awfully shocked when I received my national ID card. I could not recognise my photograph in the card. Those who came to collect their respective National ID card were flabbergasted to see their photographs. They could not, like me, recognise their own pictures. Not a single person was satisfied with the distorted photograph in the identity card. Crores of taka have been spent by the government for the National ID card. The photograph in the identity card is neither colour nor black and white. It is simply an irritating and confusing picture.

Mind that this is a national ID card. But

they have simply produced a garbage image. I am afraid that the officials in the polling centres will find it difficult to identify the faces. I am forced to say that the authorities have failed to realise the immense value of National ID card. This shows their lack of foresight and sense of responsibility.

Now who will take charge of the situation and ensure that clear and identifiable photographs are used in the ID card?

Md Shahidul Islam
Reazbag
Khilgaon, Dhaka

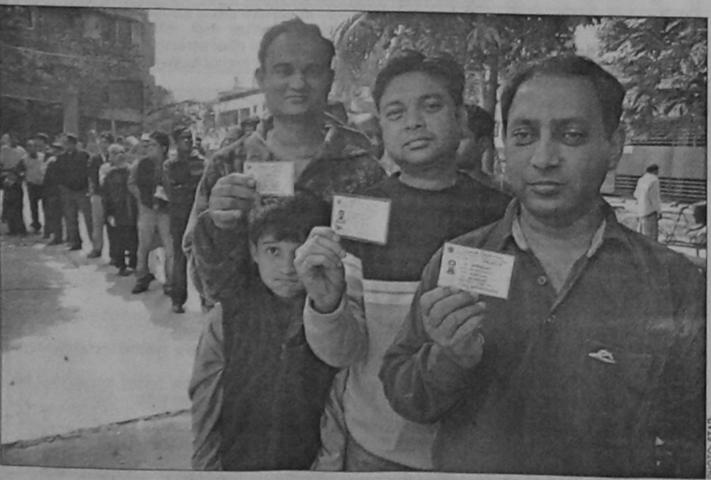


PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

Water crisis

We read very frequently about the drinking water crisis in Dhaka City. How can the consumers expect safe drinking water when Dhaka Wasa does not use sufficient doses of

chemicals to kill the bacteria, but they pay the bills to the suppliers of chemicals!!

We don't understand why the task force does not visit Dhaka Wasa like they did in

Titas. The water supply situation calls for a thorough investigation into the whole thing.
S. Alam
Sweden