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Women workers

It is an established truth that without women's participation national development cannot be expedited. Every year we observe May Day in a befitting manner. We hold meetings and seminars, but that don't change the lot of the common people. University teachers, NGO representatives and human rights activists are seen in these seminars. But the ground situation remains unchanged.

We have failed to ensure equal rights of women. Women workers are still discriminated against.

Md. Humayun Kabir
Pallabi, Mirpur
Dhaka

Rickshaw-free capital

After reading Mr. Sikander's letter published in DS on May 9, 2008, I could not help but write once more on this subject.

Before I go on, I must emphasize that I personally think highly of The Daily Star and believe that it is an unbiased newspaper and it deserves the respect of the public for upholding the truth, transparency and integrity in news reporting and responding to the public needs in a fair and impartial manner. Therefore, I absolutely disagree with Mr. Sikander's comment on DS.

Having said that, we need to accept the hard fact that rickshaws and their negative impact on our city streets is massive. It is important to understand that one of the main reasons for traffic jams on main (rickshaw-free) roads is the long delays caused by rickshaws on other roads which create a tail back effect on the main ones. It is another problem that we perhaps have more vehicles on our roads than they can manage; but that does not justify leaving rickshaws free to roam the streets anyway they like. Dhaka is a capital city which is constantly growing and is in dire need to have an upgrade to its transport system. Among other things its roads must be made off limits to rickshaws. As I have mentioned several times before, it is not feasible to have both motorized vehicles and rickshaws share the same roads. Firstly, Dhaka's streets are not wide enough and our infrastructure of roads does not provide sufficient space for rickshaws to share the road with motorized vehicles. Besides, it is nearly impossible to train the large number of rickshaw pullers to stay on the left side of the roads and let the vehicles pass by. There is also the danger of

Potato campaign

This year Bangladesh witnessed a bumper production of potatoes. An extra 3 million metric tones of potato has been produced by the farmers. The World Food Program (WFP) has also declared 2008 as the Potato Year.

Because of the excess production a huge amount of potatoes is rotting and the farmers have no way but to dump the lot! The government, especially the army chief Gen. Moeen, has been emphasising consumption of potatoes.

However, this message has been misinterpreted. The government is urging the people to consume potatoes every day with rice. But some people are misinterpreting it as an attempt to substitute rice with potato. Although there has been a bumper production of boro crop, the prices of rice have not gone down. Thus, consuming more

potatoes would certainly reduce pressure on rice.

Recently, the government arranged a three-day long potato fair. The initiative appeared to be fine to me. As a visitor, I found the fair very interesting. However, if the recipes of the potato made items were available to the visitors the fair would have been even more successful. The way the electronic media is supporting the campaign is really appreciable.

The government should hold such fairs on crops and other agricultural products so that we can have an opportunity to know about our crops. We have to use our own resources for survival.

Moinul Alam
Dhanmondi, Dhaka



provide them with a more respectable form of living.

So let us all pray that specific steps will be undertaken very soon to begin the process of elimination of rickshaws from Dhaka metropolitan city streets!!

Rahat
Malibag, Dhaka

Price hike

The prices of essential commodities are shooting up. I hardly go to kitchen market because I am dependent on others but the reaction from them and the media is really terrible & pathetic. The queue for OMS (BDR market) is lengthening. The middle class people are the worst sufferers, as they can neither buy from the shops, nor stand in the queue.

I know the government is trying to keep things under control, but the business community should also come forward and extend a helping hand.

Wadud
Finance officer
Perfetti Van Melle BD. Ltd.

Top leaders

Two top Bangladeshi political parties and two top leaders are under prosecution since the current caretaker government has taken over. We all know the caretaker government is trying to bring back democracy. I just cannot grasp why our political leaders are mounting pressure on the government for unconditional release of the two top leaders. They should rather understand that by establishing the rule of law they can free their leaders (if they are innocent).

As a general citizen of the country, I would like to see both the leaders to be free, but not by influencing the legal process.

Mohammed Chowdhury
One-mail

No trip to Savar?

I noted with interest the itinerary of Air Chief Marshal Tanvir Mahmood's visit to Bangladesh. Significantly, a visit to Savar is missing from his trip here. Why? All dignitaries, and particularly dignitaries from Pakistan, should be taken to the Smriti Shoudho in Savar to pay respect to the millions killed by the Pakistani army, in one of the worst genocides of the 20th century. At a time when Bangladesh is agitating for the trial of war criminals, why is Mr. Mahmood not being taken to the Smriti Shoudho? Surely, the Pak Air Force chief could spare an hour of his time to pay his respect to the martyrs of 1971.

Tasneem Nasrin
Savar, Dhaka

Political parties

These days the political reforms are the talk of the town. It is people's hope that in the coming days all sorts of election will be freed from the influence of the black money and muscle power.

Bangladesh is a nation-state which turned 37 years on 26 March, 2008. A human being has two hands while a government has three! Over the years there have been few significant changes and

reforms in the executive and judiciary branches of the government but the legislative branch currently remains dormant as the preparation of the National ID cards and the voter list is going on.

The politicians must open their eyes and see how the Armed Forces organised themselves with modern cantonments, bases, training facilities, academies, colleges, UN missions etc.

On the contrary, the political parties and the politicians could not ensure smooth functioning of parliament. The parties are still not organised enough to be run according to set rules.

Golam Ashraf
Gulshan, Dhaka

Important developments

This morning we have heard and watched two important reports on Channel-1. These are regarding a) anti-corruption drive seminar b) Acquisition of 3-crop agriculture lands in Munshiganj for EPZ. I think both the reports deserve close scrutiny.

The speakers in the ACC organised seminar included eminent citizens and the chairman of the ACC. The ACC chairman is seeking the support of the lawyers to sustain the drive against corruption. He is also critical about the effectiveness of the anti-corruption drive without emergency rules. A member of the Shushil Shomaj asked for initiating an effective anti-corruption drive against the investigative branch and the officials who are reputed to be corrupt. And a member of the lawyers community asked for provision of bail to ensure justice to the accused.

The people are already questioning the ultimate purpose of the anti-corruption drive of the government. The activities of the ACC are not above question. We think the ACC should depend on the law of the land to sustain their drive against high powered corruption. They perhaps need more institutional strength, rather than cover of an anti-human rights law - the state of emergency. They are required to be transparent in the trial phase so that nobody can question the modalities of judgment and procedural matters. The ACC should act independent of government pressure and political interference. This is how they can uplift their public image and perform well with the existing laws of the country. Any shortcut system in the judiciary will raise the credibility question about the trial and judgment.

The cover of the state of emergency cannot and should not be a permanent feature for the ACC to obtain their strength to sustain the drive. They need to strengthen the existing laws and timely application by giving legal advice to the government within the purview of the constitution safeguarding the rights and liberty of individual citizens. We are not engaged in a war but engaged in the anti-corruption drive which should be fought and sustained by existing laws of the country. If needed, upgrade the laws to deal with political or high powered corruption. The ACC needs to be updated in fighting corruption of high order, rather only dealing with cases which are 10-15 years old. The operation needs to be dynamic and moving forward with the current cases including the old ones in hand. We have so far not seen the ACC providing any legal framework to the government to smoothly run the anti-corruption drive.

I have a feeling that we need an "oversight institution" to provide a check and balance of at least three important institutions like the judiciary, the Election Commission and the ACC. But I fail to come up with concrete suggestion because I have serious problem in suggesting the human resources who would perform the actual oversight function. So far we have failed to identify a single individual to head the "Ombudsman", a constitutional obligation remaining unfulfilled for 38 years.

The second piece of news is alarming. When the country needs a policy to promote and strengthen agricultural growth, the government is reported to be planning to set up an EPZ on agriculture land. Is the country moving in the right direction under the present management? I am sure the government is aware of the incident of "Nandigram" in W. Bengal where agri-land was being acquired for an industrial project. Are we promoting that crisis in Bangladesh? I am not an economist. Therefore, I cannot claim whether my feeling about EPZ would be correct.

The outsourcing policy is currently raising a big question in the west in view of their growing unemployment. In our case, I can see that we are outsourcing our scare resources like land and energy. Should we do this? What should be our in-sourcing and outsourcing policy?

Azizur
One-mail

More fertiliser factories needed

When one looks back to the agriculture scene of the past in Bangladesh, it would be seen that the government agencies motivated farmers to use fertilisers to increase farm production. Urea and other fertilisers are indispensable to get higher production. The farmers agitate when they do not get fertilisers. The media tries to influence the government to maintain an adequate supply and to keep the prices low. If any problem arises, the government is blamed. The Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) has set up some fertiliser factories and has been operating those for a long time. The demand of fertilisers has been increasing rapidly. The local production can meet only 50 per cent of our requirements. But in



the past fifteen years, the last three elected governments and private entrepreneurs did not come forward to set up any fertiliser factory. About 1.5 million metric tons of fertilisers has to be imported

every year. We have lost opportunities to set up new fertiliser factories in the last 15 years. We have to set up such factories to meet the local demand. This is necessary to boost

agricultural production, which is a crucially important issue.

Md. Ashraf Hossain
Sr. Manager
RM Group of Industries
Panthapath, Dhaka

Burmese military junta

It is a universal fact that any government worth its name is responsible for the welfare of its people. The Burmese military junta has shown themselves as an exception. It is reported by the Indian authorities that they had informed Burmese authorities that the cyclone was moving towards the Burmese coast two days before it struck Burma.

On 1st May when I was watching the weather bulletin on CNN, I saw in their weather map that the cyclone was passing just north of Rangoon. It was forecast by CNN that the landfall of the cyclone was going to take place the next day in the evening, though our own media kept blaring that the cyclone might still hit Bangladesh. Though the military junta knew about the impending cyclone they chose not to warn the population about the impending disaster. Burmese people were caught unawares and that is the reason for such heavy loss of life. It proves that to this military junta human life has no value.

I feel that in the UN charter there must be provision to interfere where the government is so irresponsible and allows it people to die through their criminal silence. This is mass murder. A case should be lodged in the international court against the junta for criminal negligence of its own people.

Salahuddin Ayubi

One-mail

Aquery

Those involved in the real estate sector of Bangladesh are aware that there are arrangements for land development by developers on a 40:60 or 50:50 sharing basis and landowners have to bear no construction costs for their share of apartments. It would be highly appreciated if a clarification is given on how to update the tax-file of a landowner after the land is completely developed and ready apartments are handed over to the landowner, and whether the landowner is required to pay any taxes.

Dr Mahmud Murshed
Auniversity teacher
Melbourne, Australia

Diversifying exports

It is a very good thing that exporters are trying to diversify the product and service base from Bangladesh.

While such efforts are being made, the strategic issues involved also have to be brought onto the planning table. There is already a shortage of edible quality food stuffs like fishes, meats, vegetables and fruits etc in Bangladesh. The whole nation is captive in the hands of either profiteering or ignorance of harmful effects of chemical stuffs that are being put either to give the foods a fresh look or to manipulate their growth or maturity. While the nation is being deprived of high quality foods, international standard items from the same country nourish the growing brains in other parts of the world.

The question remains, if the nation is able to produce export quality food stuffs under domestic supervision, why cannot that effort be replicated for the domestic market? Is there a feeling that domestic consumers are less than humans and they could be fed whatever is left over from export?

Export earning at the cost of the health of a nation has no value.
Al Mahmud
CMA (BD) MBA (UK)
Research & Consulting

Obscurantism

Islam respects women more than any other religion. It has given permission to women to work anywhere using hijab but our fundamentalist Islamic leaders want to keep the women caged even in the 21st century. The government should take necessary steps to contain obscurantism.

Mir Abdur Rahman
Department of English
South East University

A dubious practice

Some men and women earn greatness during their lifetime by making outstanding contribution to their own nation, or to the world civilization. As a mark of respect and gratitude to these great persons and to glorify their contribution, institutions and establishments are generally named after them after they die. This is also done to inspire the members of the younger generation to follow the footsteps of these great souls. But in Bangladesh we just see an opposite trend. Here some people in authority, especially the politicians, who are mostly corrupt, are in a great hurry to immortalize themselves while they are still alive! They don't want to wait till their death when people could evaluate their contribution and, if felt necessary, could decide to name some institution(s) after them. In the last three decades, we saw a mad rush by the corrupt political leaders of our country to name educational institutions, students' halls of residence, hospitals and other welfare institutions after their own names. In almost all such cases these persons did not spend money from their own pockets to establish these institutions. They all did it either by managing the required money out of the public exchequer, or by indulging in extortion from the general public, by exercising their political power. All this is being done in very bad taste, to say the

least.

Many politicians who are now convicted by the court for corruption have a number of institutions and establishments named after them. As a citizen and taxpayer I have serious objection to this practice. Think of a school, college or a hall which has been named after a convicted corrupt person, a criminal confirmed by the court of law. Will the students of this institution, from a moral point of view, bear any respect for this person? If not, why do we then subject the students to this immoral practice?

I, therefore, suggest that the present caretaker government, by issuing necessary order/ordinance, ask all institutions/establishments, public or private, to remove the names of the persons convicted for corruption, or any other criminal offence. These institutions/establishments can be renamed after the non-controversial national heroes. Such an order/ordinance should also name a number of institutions/establishments for public use after the names of persons who are alive. It has to be done now.

Syed Ashrafuzzaman
Mohakhali DOHS, Dhaka

Back to Obama!

I have been reading for long the pieces written by Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed in op-ed pages of The Daily Star. His recent articles, mostly on the ensuing US presidential elections (I remember one exception being an article suggesting that Bangladesh consider giving honorary citizenship to some noted Indians who were born in Bangladesh), have been interesting. But I am constrained to point out one particular streak of opinion in his recent articles on US presidential elections: the betting horse must always win the race, no matter what. The week before last i.e. before the Indiana and South Carolina primaries, he bemoaned Senator Obama's several political mistakes; criticised him for his failure to denounce

his one-time religious leader, Jim Wright; took him to task for his unguarded comments regarding the mental make-up of small-town voters in Pennsylvania; and seemed to have rebuked Senator Obama for remaining elitist in attitude (gulp the coffee being offered even if you need orange juice).

With a convincing win in the South Carolina primaries on May 6, Senator Obama is again receiving all praise from Dr. Fakhruddin and in our view rightfully so. In The Daily Star of May 11, 2008, he has quoted Kenny Rogers' unforgettable 1978 tune where an old man is advising a younger person about mastering the art of knowing "..... when to walk away and when to run". Nothing succeeds like success. Or as my grandmother used to say when you begin winning no defeat touches you and when you are dying there is no medicine.

Be that as it may, who in Bangladesh would not like to see Barack Obama walking into the White House? Dr. Quazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed Gulshan-2, Dhaka

Tolerance needed

Thanks to AMK Chowdhury his concern about "derogatory practice" an issue he raised in an article published in a weekly.

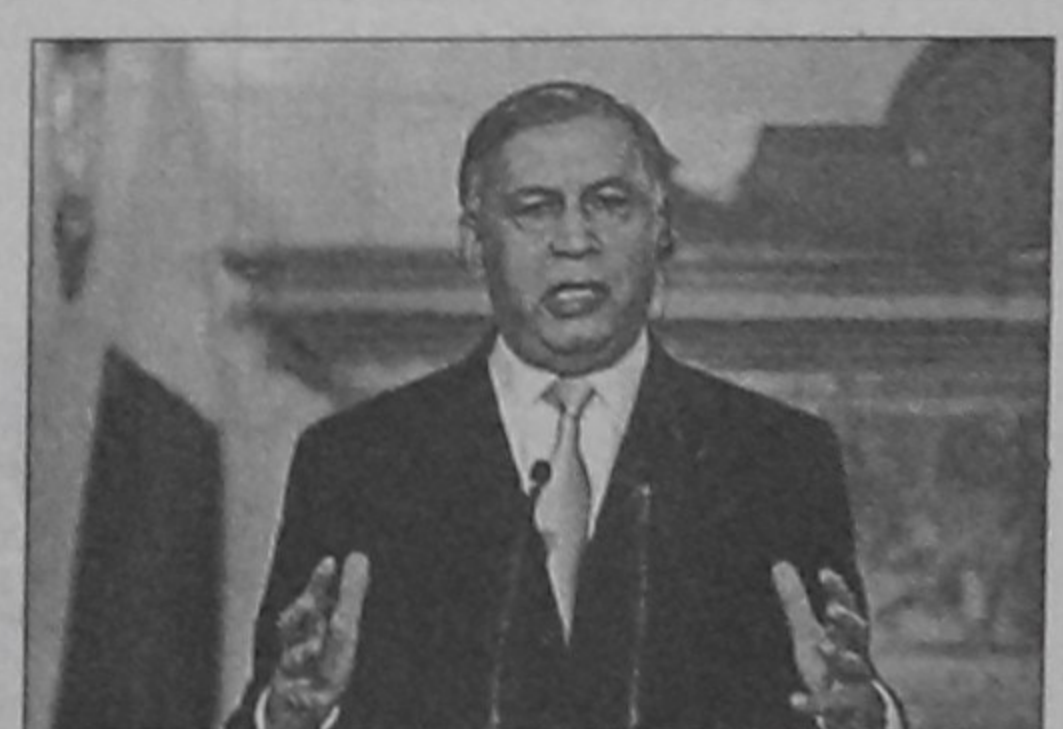
Historians like Nihar Ranjan Roy or RC Majumdar say that Benglaeas and sub-continentals are very emotional. Because of genetics or environment we can't tolerate others' opinions. Unfortunately, that "national psyche" brings quick decision making, which reflected our political institutions and history, fuelled by other variables, in comparison to other cool headed nations. Consequently, consciousness, rationality and pragmatism should be established in society, rather than hypnotisation or witch-hunting. Half truths can be worse than full lies!

Dr Azizul karim
GP, Australia

A good interview

Atiq Odho has conducted an interesting interview with former Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz. The interview was one of the products of Odho Corporation telecast by GEO news channel of Pakistan on the evening of 10 May 2008. The outcome of the interview can be, in many respects, considered as revealing, lesson bearing, advisory, and an antidote or a response (or both) to the present day criticism of the acts and deeds during his (I mean, PM Aziz) premiership. Aziz was appreciative, in relevant ways, when it comes to matters pertaining to effectiveness of overall leadership of President Pervez Musharraf and his personal commitment towards Pakistan and Pakistanis, among other things.

Aziz was found to be polite, articulate, pragmatic and intelligent throughout the interview. The demonstration of a balanced amount of relaxed informality by the interviewer and the interviewee in the session and an excellent handling of questions and answers by both of them during that session added an additional dimension to the programme's (I mean, the interview) overall viewer friendliness and usefulness.



Aziz indicated inter alia he would continue to give advice to governments, leaders, institutions and others in pertinent areas as and when he is requested or required (or both) to do so in the days ahead. He reiterated his commitment to Pakistan and Pakistanis in that respect. It was revealed via the interview that Aziz had advised, in the past, relevant leaders of the PPP, the PML (N) and others on pertinent matters.
Dr. M.S. Haq
One-mail