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Nepal: a new beginning

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) won the largest number of seats in the Constituent Assembly election held on 10 April 2008, and formed a coalition government with some smaller parties. The Maoists had insisted on the abolition of the monarchy and the removal of Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev as King with Nepal becoming a federal democratic state with an elected head of state. The newly-elected Assembly met in Kathmandu on May 28, 2008 and abolished the monarchy that had reigned for 240 years. Nepal's government has

announced a public holiday for three days, from May 28 to May 30, to celebrate the country becoming a republic.

This is a new beginning for the people of Nepal. Now they must realize one thing: Western Democracy may work in Western developed countries but this does not mean that it will work in Nepal also. So the people of Nepal have to be very much cautious about their future.

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

Population problem

I read the letter on the above subject by Shafiqul Islam Bhuiyan. I was also thinking about this—why in any talk show the so-called intellectuals never address this basic problem of our country. One hundred and seventy million is a horrifying figure!

This year the rice production is very satisfying, but could fifty percent of our people have two meals every day?

In Dhaka, buses and CNG auto-rickshaws are increasing. But they cannot accommodate the commuters. I notice regularly with great fear that in every bus people are "hanging" in a dangerous way, which could cause accident any time.

Go to any market place, you can see people cramming those places from morning till night. Nothing would be sufficient for the people of this country, because every day the demand is increasing.

The media can play a vital role to build awareness among our people. I can recollect, some fifteen or twenty years back, BTV used to air some short dramas addressing the population problem, family planning and birth control. I do not know whether they do it nowadays. Or is it the responsibility of the

national TV channel only? At present there are too many TV channels in the country. How come they avoid the responsibility to address such an issue? They regularly broadcast adds on HIV, TB and so many subjects because they get paid for that. These TV channels must come forward to show their social responsibility.

And what is the government doing about this?

If we do not take pragmatic steps right now, we will soon be one of the poor countries of the world. Though we should have taken proper steps to control our population long ago, it's never too late.

Aysha Khan
Savar, Dhaka

New police stations

It is heartening to note that eight new police stations are going to be set up soon in Dhaka city to deal with the growing violence and other problems.

Kadamtai, now under the over populated Shaympur PS, is known to have been proposed to be a new PS, bifurcating the Shaympur PS. I think the best location for the new police station in this area would be at Meraj Nagar which is centrally located and well connected by roads with all the surrounding

areas. I would, therefore, request the authorities concerned to set up the new police station at Meraj Nagar.

Momtazul Islam
Mohammad Bagh
Shyampur, Dhaka

Election Commission

The EC is gradually emerging as the most controversial institution. One might ask me why I think so. I think so because if you just recollect the latest deliberation of the CEC and two commissioners, you might get the same feeling. The CEC has said that if the dialogue fails, the election would be uncertain. One commissioner has said that they are recommending to the government some fundamental constitutional changes, and another commissioner has said that the EC would not take the responsibility if the elections are not held for any other reason, because they would remain prepared for holding the election. They are generating pessimism in public mind. They are over stepping their constitutional jurisdiction. They have successfully maintained their position above any kind of accountability so far.

Lots of hope and doubts are being generated surrounding the political dialogue. I am constrained to comment about some side issues of the dialogue sessions held so far. I think the bureaucratic culture is prominent in the arrangement of the dialogue.

Coming back to the EC, I would continue to be sceptical about the preparation of the voter listing including printing of 70 lakh pages of the voter list. The national ID card is already behind the schedule. According to an Election Commissioner, about 3.5 crore have been completed. Luckily, this is not a requirement for voting. Transparent ballot boxes would be coming from Canada. I am constrained to point out that election rigging and engineering is said to happen outside polling centres, and after the polling is over!

We hope the government would show statesmanship and ensure that the dialogue produces positive result.

Areader
One-mail

Our problems

The constitutional post of the Ombudsman should have been operative in our country. We could have reaped the benefit of social justice. The corruption in our country spread with the adminis-

tration of the East India Company when they minted the one anna copper coin. The company did not question the ordinary holders but would reduce the huge accumulation with surrender by the possessors in the courtyard on a moonlight midnight in a bamboo basket with a live goose over it.

It is very funny that Bangladesh plunged into the category of the world's most corrupt country at the end of the reign of the last Awami League government when Mr. Shah AMS Kibria was the finance minister of Bangladesh. Such trend continued during the 4-party alliance government while Mr. M. Saifur Rahman was the finance minister. The problems are the anomalies, irregularities persisting in Bangladesh.

Golam Ashraf
Gulshan, Dhaka

Road network

It is needless to mention that the present caretaker govt is taking care of the people, and gained more popularity than any govt did in the past.

Your budget last year was considered to be one of the best budgets in the history of Bangladesh. Your open invitation to the people to comment on the budget was another historical move and an evidence of your confidence on the right budget.

My opinion was added to your website with a request to include a very important project on road communication development of certain areas of the city (around the Cantonment). This project was planned about two decades ago but political governments failed to implement it.

I hope, you will kindly consider this project in your next budget.

Mohd. Shah Jahan Farazi
Surveyor/Loss Adjuster
Social Worker for Expatriate
Community
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Sanglap

The much awaited dialogue (i.e. sanglap) commenced between the government and the political parties on May 22nd. This dialogue could be the turning point for Bangladesh as far as the circumstances through which the country has been going on are concerned. If the dialogue succeeds the country will be able to hold a credible election. If it fails the country might go back to the situation existing prior to 1/11. The future of the country will be surely uncertain.

The political parties are the players upon whom the fate of the dialogue will hinge on. If a consensus could be reached, it will be the biggest gain. The Chief Adviser's speech was quite positive.

However, uncertainty is brought by the main political parties when they are threatening that they will not attend unless their chiefs are present. They have to understand that their chiefs are currently facing trial. The parties should go to the sanglap and demand release of their leaders. They should attend and say everything they have in their mind whether in the form of complaint or wrath. They may walk out of the dialogue if they find the situation not favourable to them. If the political leaders depend on their leaders completely, their competency could be questioned.

For instance in a cricket match if the captain cannot play the vice-captain leads the team. The leaders in charge of the parties are experienced, thus it is time for them to show their class. The politicians have to broaden their mind and show maturity.

Moimul Alam
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Tragic death

We always get shocked when a premature death occurs. CU student Mahmudul Hasan Mamun's death was indeed a tragic one. His sudden death brought tears to the CU students and they showed this through violent activities, which is very regrettable.

Tasfiq
Narayanganj

National holidays

Religious fanaticism might have grown in our country to some extent but we Bangladeshis also can take pride in religious tolerance and harmony among the followers of all faiths.

Europeans take pride in religious freedom, but we do not enjoy any holiday during the Muslim festivals here in Britain.

Mufasssil M Islam
Human Rights Advocate
UK

EC and politicians

One of the Election Commissioners told the press on 25 May that the Election Commission is determined to hold election some time in December and there is no time to tinker with it. He further said that after the completion of voter list in October, the election schedule would be declared. He categorically mentioned the good intentions of the government and also that the political parties would be blamed if election is not held in time.

It cannot be his personal opinion, it is definitely the opinion of the Election Commission. It all now depends on the politicians and the CTG. Now the politicians have the main role to play. The only way open to the politicians is to compel the government to hold elections. If they fail they will invite more trouble.

Shafiqul Islam
One-mail

A positive PSC

The Public Service Commission (PSC) has shown the highest sense of responsibility by issuing a press release in clarifying the status of 27th BCS results. This is a rare case of showing respect to the public sentiment by a statutory body like the PSC. The people have the right to know the status of the results. The PSC, before anybody's pointing of finger, disclosed the truth before the public. The PSC, in other words, performed the job of ensuring people's right to information. Every government department should follow the example of the PSC.

The PSC took about 10 months to conclude the viva voce of 27th BCS, which seems to be too much time as the council of advisers advised the PSC to take the viva within the shortest possible time. Question arises in people's minds whether ten months' time is the shortest possible time. Anyway, congratulations to the PSC for arranging an ideal form of interview by gathering distinguished personalities from different sections of social and administrative strata. Hopefully, this will end the infamous black chapter of the 27th BCS.

Matin bin Zahir
Raergram
Mymensingh

Form a think tank

I strongly feel that in Bangladesh the non-political Shushil Shamaj should form a formal think tank like the Fabian Society in England. Such a body would have enormous persuasive power to influence any ruling party and lawmakers to bring in legislation for the good of the country with a vision of the future. Safe from the hurly burly of politics and policies and machinations to hold on to power from one general election to the next, such a body of learned and involved people would be able to look at the long-term issues for the country.

Recently the Fabian Society has published a booklet under their theme of 'Life Chances and Equality': Fabian ideas 623 and entitled 'How to Defend Inheritance Tax'. This is a booklet full of wisdom for fairness and taxing of transfer of wealth across generations for redistribution of wealth in society. In the past I have written various letters in Bangladesh newspapers for introducing such a hefty tax for gifts or other wealth transfers (above certain value) and for death duties

Control poverty

Poverty is mostly a question of how a country's agricultural land and natural resource systems are managed. If management of resources is based on the principles of equity, productivity and sustainability, then poverty can be beaten back quite successfully. But the way resources are managed in Bangladesh goes against these principles and poverty remains predominant. Most often, we are breaking up the wrong tree, labelling population growth and shortage of resources as principles reasons behind poverty. Bangladesh has one of the most fertile lands in the world and its arable land/population ratio is higher than China, Japan, Holland which are world leaders in agricultural productivity. Reserve forest areas of Bangladesh are about 2.9 millions hectares (although much of it without tree covers). Bangladesh is also well endowed with natural gas and coal. Although not lavishly endowed with natural resources, our endowment cannot be considered meagre. If we can manage our resources very well, poverty alleviation will become an attainable goal.

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AZZUR RAHIM PEU / DRINKNEWS

(above certain valuation of estate at death). In addition to redistribution of wealth in society, for a developing democracy like Bangladesh it will also act as a curb on corruption and dynastic oligarchic ambitions.

Many intellectuals and Nobel Laureates have been involved with the Fabian Society (Bertrand Russell, George Bernard Shaw etc), and although it is affiliated to Labour ideals of fairness, equality and socialism, it is basically a non political think-tank. I implore Professor Yunus and other intellectuals of the country to create a forum and establish such a non political think-tank for Bangladesh.

Engineer Shafiqul Islam
London, UK

A-level practical exams

The British government and its examination watchdog, the QCA (Qualifications and Examinations Authority), recently approved the draft syllabuses for the new A-levels. The 'post-16' reforms, as these have been termed, see the introduction of more stretch and challenge in assessment and learning with the aim of pushing the brightest pupils to 'think outside the box', a new grade 'A*' to record performance above that of the A-grade and a reduction in the number of assessment units in most subjects (except the sciences and mathematics) from 6 to 4.

While these 'new' A-levels seem academically superior to the current crop, the largest UK examining body in Bangladesh, Edexcel International, has changed its mode of assessment in the sciences (Physics and Chemistry), so that instead of practical examinations, candidates from international centres can only appear for written alternatives. While Edexcel standards are a global brand, the removal of direct practical assessment will mean that most English medium students are going to be deprived of direct laboratory experience.

To highlight my case, all O-level science syllabuses emphasise practical experience but hardly any school in Dhaka offers direct practical classes to its students because there is no 'laboratory based exam-

ination' in the assessment of Edexcel O-levels. Furthermore most students are even deprived of demonstrations and must rely on rote learning of the laboratory details from books without actually having a hands-on experience. Another A-level subject, Biology, has a written alternative to the 'Individual Biological Investigation' which UK candidates do. The Edexcel Specification clearly states that candidates must have the relevant fieldwork and laboratory experience in simple ecological and biochemistry experiments but once again probably not a single school in Dhaka, caters for such mandatory practical experience. Rather, most teachers provide just theoretical discussions and students rely on memorizing marking schemes of past years' question papers to fulfil the requirement.

Practical assessment is an essential part of the teaching of science. It's my sincere hope that the relevant authorities will seriously consider the case I have made.

Ahsan Mosharraf Barkatullah
Elephant Road
Dhaka

Drug abuse tragedy

Your staff correspondent's graphical front-page report with photographs (May 26) illustrates real life horror at its worst. The unfortunate mother's statement about her drug addicted son depicts tragedy in real life. The family may have been driven to a corner, with no remedy at hand.

So a crime had to be done, to wash away another crime! With possibly no options the family was figuratively "at the horns of a dilemma", with no way out!

One however wonders if the family made any attempts to contact drug prevention agencies, both NGOs and the public institutions, for rehabilitation and found no solution to their son's problems. This is an unknown part of the story about which nothing was reported. However, whatever way one looks at it, drug abuse has this potential of destroying a family! This is one of the many destructive things that drug abuse can lead to!

Drug abuse is the worst destroyer and killer now becoming an epidemic in Bangladesh. Our efforts to counteract and overcome

it are unfortunately feeble and not well organised. It will be a worthwhile public service if our readers can pen their suggestions and ideas in this page, to combat drug abuse. Such ideas are to be reasonable, pragmatic and fool-proof.

Based on these, a national guideline for curing drug related problems can be drawn. This needs the full support of the government and wide publicity across the media in collaboration with the government's publicity agencies. Maybe the information so disseminated can prevent such further tragedies in the making! We must meet this challenge head-on to eliminate this social curse. The CTG should treat drug traders and their distribution chain with the harshest punitive measures. They harm our society far more than corrupt politicians and officials do. The government must stop drug trading forthwith. Death penalty for drug trade needs to be introduced and widely publicised, as a warning to delivery drug traders and their delivery chain mechanism.

Drug abuse, an unfortunate curse of modernity, has infiltrated our youth as a wrong example of high living and thrill seeking. Is it that with rapid growth of education and widespread awareness thanks to the TV, that this dangerous habit has also expanded? Drug abuse has led to increase in violence, crime and even traffic accidents. Has the growth of knowledge and awareness become a two-edged sword for our society? One wonders.

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

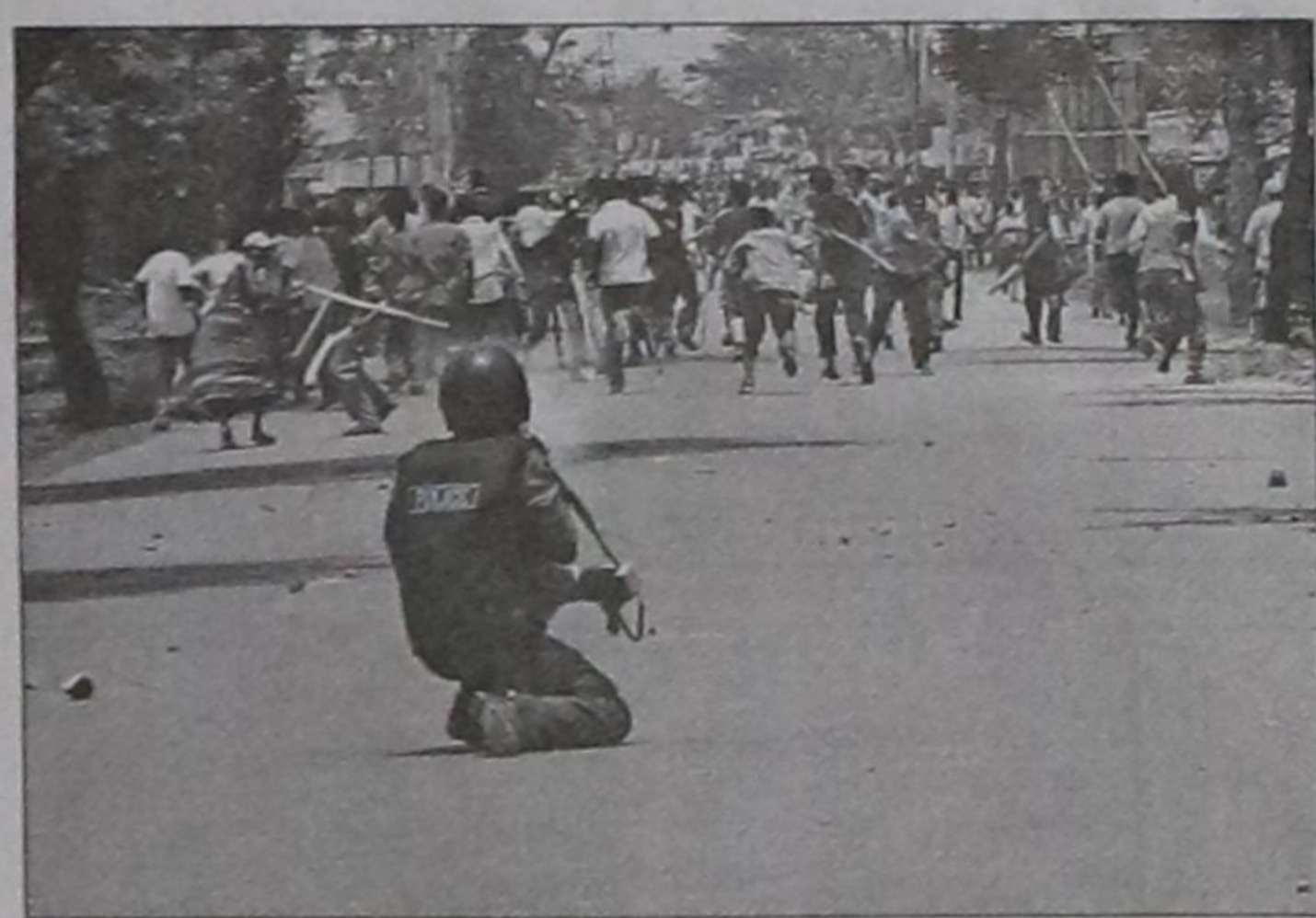
National charter

The CTG has taken bold and long awaited steps to ensure transparency in govt. activities and is working hard to attain certain goals. Now, we see a strengthened ACC, independent Judiciary and Election Commission, improved law order situation, efficient ports facilitating import and export, improving overall economic infrastructure, in spite of natural calamities, etc. All these laudable achievements are the foundation of a prosperous and democratic nation. None of these was the responsibility of the CTG, but it had no other alternative but to take all these initiatives proactively in the backdrop of the anarchy created by the political parties before 1/11, demand of the civil society and peace-loving people. The govt. had not come to power with a pre-planned agenda, rather they had to develop an agenda to achieve all these common goals after assumption of state power.

The purpose of the proposed national charter primarily should be to control the unruly activities of the political activists posing as the greatest impediment in the way of national development. The charter should produce concurrence of all political parties on the issue of banning activities like hartal, private govt. property destruction, political enmity, teacher/student party politics, etc. I believe the proposed national charter will help to consolidate the achievements of the CTG as of today and pave the way for greater national strides in the future. I urge the govt. to form a national commission to delineate the national charter.

Muklesur Rahman, MBA
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

STRESS



SHARH MOHUR UDOUNI / DRINKNEWS

A disturbed state of mind or body which is caused by over-work, tension or unfriendly situation is called stress. Today, law enforcement is widely considered to be among the most stressful occupations, associated with high rates of divorce, suicide and other emotional and health problems such as heart attacks and strokes. Public criticism can be a source of stress as well.

Muhammad Kamruzzaman
Research Coordinator, CRIB
Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University

UNHCR's double standards

The UN Refugee agency, UNHCR has been playing a discriminatory role against the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh.

The agency has been supporting around 30,000 Rohingya refugees staying in the camps. On the other hand, it is not receiving applications for refugee status from the newly arrived Rohingyas. This amounts to compromising of its mandate.

As Bangladesh is not a state party to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951 and its Protocol of 1967, it has no domestic legislation on asylum and refugees. Therefore, there is no state-run system in

place for Refugee Status Determination (RSD). Against this backdrop, UNHCR has been receiving and processing applications for RSD from asylum seekers from various countries. Nevertheless, UNHCR has not been receiving applications from the Rohingya asylum seekers from Myanmar. (If received not processed).

The recognized refugees under UNHCR Bangladesh are from Myanmar (i.e. non-Rohingya like the Rakhine, Chin etc), Sri Lanka, Iraq, and as far away as Somalia and Sudan.

UNHCR has been running RSD procedure (without any formal

approval from the government!) for the last 15 years or so. However, the list of the recognised refugees is submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Nevertheless, the government does not have access to the profile of the individuals (who are they and what really they are in Bangladesh for).

It is learnt that UNHCR has not been receiving applications from the Rohingyas referring to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh, which reportedly stated that no Rohingya would be recognised as a refugee in Bangladesh after May

1994. This so-called MoU has been depriving the persecuted Rohingyas from seeking international protection, which they are entitled to as per international human rights law. The so-called MoU is clearly against the spirit of the Refugee Convention and other relevant human rights instruments.

UNHCR is not critical of the so-called MoU signed back in 1994. It needs to be reviewed from the perspective of human rights.

Udatta Bikash
Human Rights Practitioner
Dhaka



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