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Novote

A true free, fair and impartial election requires that the voters are able to exercise their voting right without any constraints. But unfortunately in our country the voters are not able to do so because the political parties are divided into two groups and field candidates just to win the election. In order to secure victory in election, the jotes (alliances) primarily consider not the merit of the candidates but their matching capacity, that is, if one jote fields a strong candidate in a particular constituency the other jote must field a candidate who would match his rival in terms of money and muscle. In such a situation, the voters become helpless. They have no option but to vote for one of the two. Hence the fundamental objective of an election as well as democracy is frustrated.

If we sincerely desire for a free, fair and impartial election we must empower the voters to exercise their voting right in accordance with their free will. We can guarantee this right by providing them an option for "no vote". This will act as a deterrent on the capricious and whimsical acts and decisions of the political parties in selecting candidates. In that event the political parties would think twice before fielding a candidate.

We would urge the authorities, particularly the Election Commission, to consider this demand sympathetically in order to provide an opportunity to the voters to exercise their voting rights without any constraints. Otherwise, the steps taken by the Election Commission for holding a free, fair and impartial election will mean nothing.

We hope the Election Commission would consider sympathetically the demand for the "no vote" option so that the voters are able to protect their right and the will of the people is truly reflected in an election.
Md Shah Jahan
Dhaka

Medical ethics and business

Many patients are aware of the rapid cutthroat commercialisation and its presence in the medical profession. Now medical ethics has been trampled down by commercialisation and corrup-

tion which has the doctors as its silent beneficiary! It all started rather innocently; with drug houses giving all expenses paid trips to influential doctors for trips overseas (or shopping holidays?) presumably to attend conferences and seminars. The idea behind or the smokescreen was to gather knowledge! The trend has now gone much further!

Now, cuts (or percentages) are being paid in cash or kind to doctors by drug manufacturers on the basis of whose drug is prescribed! Medical representatives of drug companies keep track of all drugs prescribed. And even free samples offered to physicians find their way to the medicine shops! To push sales, the competing drug manufacturers under the head of selling expenses, push their sales by keeping both the doctors and the sales representatives happy in more ways than imagined! Of course the lion's share is for the prescribing physician!

There is no monitoring or surveillance or any investigation on these unethical and corrupt practices which are no different from bribery! Many patients are aware of this, but keep the knowledge to themselves, as they are totally dependent on their physicians for their treatment and health.

It is a quiet but well organised circle of non-ethical cash (also kind) flow, with no remedy in sight! If this practice is stopped, drug prices can be reduced by at least ten percent if not more! Medical ethics today is just words in the text, a minor part of medical education that can be easily ignored!
An aware patient
Dhaka

Utopian vision

The changes have given rise to a lot of visionaries keen to express their love for the country. Many of these visions are of course the result of a genuine desire to see a better Bangladesh making its mark on the world stage. Many of these visionaries are people fed up with their identity of being citizens of an impoverished state and are now seeking to cease the moment to dictate a way out of it. This, of all things, must be accepted with much appreciation, our people have begun to dream the unthinkable!

The problem with the visionaries long exiled from the real politik of our landscape is that they have little knowledge of the society that we have. They are bemused, amused and flashed by the advancement of so many other nations. Their visions are therefore triggered by a strong surge of emotion. A little study or research has resulted in them inventing the solutions that they offer. To sum up, the visions of our new visionaries are nothing but an utopian dream.

Only today I read a number of articles from a wide range of publications, almost each one of them dealt with an issue handled by the current administration. And a common pattern was visible: people with longstanding engagement with the reality of our country tended to be critical of the initiatives by the government of our esteemed economist, while those who had the privilege of enjoying the best that our nation has to offer tended to take a clean swipe against their old masters and bend heavily towards the present government. That, in my view, ought to tell a story.

We talk of democracy, ask for institutional change, demand permanent curbing of huge authority enjoyed by certain leaders. But what we fail to grasp, or perhaps unwilling to show, is a sound understanding of the reality of our country, our politics and our nation.

We can demand a fault proof system, we can dream of a perfect formula, we can seek to mimic the 'tasty recipe' of others, but as long as we fail to understand the needs and issues of the masses, nothing will make any difference.
Talha Ahmad
UK

Forensic voice identification

Once again, Pakistanis are left confused about the authenticity of PML-N's claim. The PML-N produced an audiotape that allegedly contains a conversation between PML-Q leader Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi and an unidentified person about a plan to sabotage the nomination process of Mian Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Pervaiz. As expected, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi counter-alleged the tape to be fake. In this day and age of digital wizardry, there shouldn't

be any ambiguity about the authenticity of such allegations. Voice patterns of any given person are as unique as his/her fingerprints. Cheap and more powerful computers have transformed the art of 'forensic voice identification' into a science. Such technology had been in use for many years by CIA to identify and isolate and track audio signatures of people of interest out of millions of other noises. Some of the American police departments are even employing this technology as lie detectors. If Pakistani agencies are still living in Stone Age, a news outlet should be able to make a small investment in buying a software like 'VoiceVault'. Instead of guessing, such technologies should enable the media to confirm or deny such accusations.
Adnan Gill
Los Angeles, USA

Beggars carrying infants

Begging with infants is increasing in Gulshan area. As a mother of a child, it is so painful to see that female as well as male beggars are begging with infants.

I think something should be done to eliminate begging as a profession. It is so inhuman. Please cover the issue in your reports and awaken people.
Sabera
One-mail

Dialogue between AL and BNP

The dialogue between political parties and the caretaker government sounds more like a job interview. The parties may place their demands but the CTG will ultimately define the terms. Both the Awami League and the BNP have already declared that they would boycott the dialogue. The smaller parties may make themselves look important by their participation in the dialogue but the ground reality is that none of them can get elected without "Nouka" or "Dhanershish" as their election symbol (with a few exceptions). As a result, I doubt whether the dialogue will bear any fruit. Even the dialogue with the AL and the BNP will produce nothing.

True reform can only be achieved via a dialogue between the AL and the BNP. In view of the new political reality, both the parties should realize that without dialogue and consensus on "Civilized Rules of Engagement", the country will end up with a controlled democracy where the "Shohayouk Shokti" will call the final shot.

The Chief Adviser in his speech to the nation proposed a national charter. The BNP and the AL together can and should deliver that charter without the help of the CTG.
Ahmed Mushtahid
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

You will be watched!

This refers to Mr. Shawkat Anwar's article in your May 27 issue regarding DMP's plan to install 176 CCTV in Dhaka city costing Taka 610 million.

Why spend 610 million taka? I am afraid spending even 10 times more won't necessarily bring any change to the prevailing traffic chaos unless the 'old habits' of the traffic police could be changed! One does not need to go far. For example, around Kakoli at Banani & going towards Gulshan-2 via Kemal Ataturk Ave. & then on to Gulshan-1, one can see what goes

Save Bangladeshis in Bahrain



On 23 May 2008, one Bangladeshi worker had a brawl with a Bahraini and unfortunately the Bahraini was killed. In connection with the same, the Bahrain government banned issuing Work Permits for the Bangladeshis and stopped the renewal of Work Permits. If the residence permit expires, it cannot be renewed and the worker concerned will have to leave the country. Nearly 100,000 workers are engaged here in various fields and many of them have been staying for 15-20 years. They are employed in construction, hotels, tailoring, teaching, hospitals, accounting, administration and so on. Many of them are settled here with business, self employment etc. Many people have been staying with families; their children are being born, educated and brought up here. Many children are going to attend the O Level, A Level and even university exams. But as their parents' residence permits are not going to be renewed, they will have to

leave the country. Many people have invested here in the hope of better economic freedom but everything is going to be wasted. Now everybody here in Bahrain is upset and hopeless.

We have attended the emergency meeting in the Embassy and came to know that the situation is going to deteriorate in the days to come. CDA Mr. Saiful Islam is a very courageous man and along with his team he is trying very hard. But their efforts are not producing any immediate results for resolving these issues.

We appeal to our Chief Adviser to take immediate steps to resolve these problems and save the lives of thousands of people. We are going to be jobless, we are going to be empty handed. We believe that nothing is impossible and if the government comes forward, definitely with the blessings of Allah, we will find a solution.
Mohd Moiz, Kingdom of Bahrain

on in broad daylight under the patronage of the traffic wardens. I don't need to elaborate - but would request the chief of police to take an unannounced drive around these places in an unmarked car in his civies to see for himself & decide what the priority should be.

Alternatively, The Daily Star in collaboration with one of the private TV channels can send a team of its own video taping the activities giving particular attention to Kakoli intersection, Kemal Ataturk Ave. & DIT-2 circle where 2-3 passenger buses can be seen at any given time parked in line taking half the busy lane under the careful watch of the traffic police. It should be a thrilling episode on the TV for public viewing!
Ashley Cooper
Gulshan Ave
Dhaka

CTG's priorities

The way it looked initially this government came to the power with a specific commitment to fighting corruption and reforming the political culture of Bangladesh. After all these efforts it seems now they are still hesitant to do the right things for the sake of the country. They have handled disasters successfully, they could put all nasty corrupts in jail.

It is a reality that people of Bangladesh are emotional and forgetful, they forgave the anti-liberation forces and they were rehabilitated in politics.

If the government fails to do the right thing, the country will go back to the same corrupt culture, anarchy and political dynasty.

We feel the government should try all the corrupt people and take the country forward.
Mohd. Haider
Michigan, USA

Free online map of Dhaka

Until recently Bangladesh has been lagging behind in the technological craze of digital and online mapping. Unlike in other parts of the world, on-line maps, that are printable, are not available here to orientate people. Luxury cars equipped with GPS do not have proper routing maps and Internet users have access only to Google's satellite image of Bangladesh.

Today a small group of GPS and Internet users have started creating a free online map of Dhaka and Bangladesh using Open Street Map (OSM): www.openstreetmap.org/. OSM, which was created in the UK in 2004, aims to create and offer free on-line geodata and maps. The idea behind the project is to democratise and gain control of the mapping process, as well as to provide an opportunity for people to regain contact with their communities.

Currently, OSM has a community of more than 32,000 mappers around the world.

The widespread use of OSM could be advantageous in a country like Bangladesh. First of all maps created with OSM are free and printable. Secondly, OSM maps are copyright-free. Using the same model as other 'wiki' websites, users are encouraged to edit and add data to the map, and also copy and distribute it to others. As a result, one can view a beautifully rendered map that is draggable and zoomable.

No others maps found in Bangladesh offer these things. Although one can retrieve maps from the Banglapedia website,

profits. Since they hold the patents and the managerial sector they will earn more. Moreover, the consumers of the developed countries will have more buying power as they get products at a cheaper price. Conversely for the developing countries, the consequence will not be good in the long run even though they firmly welcome this system. Since they earn very low wages and there is no income from the patents they will fall behind economically.

Besides the economy, the "out-sourcing" policy will create important changes in the education system also. Higher level education and research will not be appreciated in the developing countries. Consequently, they will focus on building more technical schools. On the other hand, the developed countries will have more universities, and more research and development will be appreciated.

The most important impact of manual labour "out-sourcing" will be on people's health. The people of the developing countries will have no options other than working in factories. These jobs are very hard and sometimes dangerous. As a result, those people will lose their ability to work. They will face serious health problems.

The two worlds

Manual labour work shifted to the developing countries in the last five to ten years. The main idea behind this is to exploit the availability of the cheap labour force of the developing countries to produce at lower costs and keep the knowledge based work for the developed countries in order to facilitate better management services. This situation will have a big impact on the economy, education and health.

Manual labour "out-sourcing" will have significant impact on the economic sector. First of all, the entrepreneurs of the developed countries will clearly make more

sourcing" and "in-sourcing" of manual labour and knowledge-based work force.

Rahid Mahmood Khan
Mathematics and Economics
Concordia University
Montreal, Canada

A fresh start

We all must admit that our political leaders and their parties utterly failed to offer a true, meaningful democratic system. Non-cooperation, mutual hatred and corruption at all levels, caused misery to the country and its people. One Eleven created the opportunities for a fresh start. But, as we see, even now, our political leaders cannot come out of their traditional limitations to serve the greater interest of the country. For them, their top symbolic leaders are more important than working to build a prosperous and peaceful nation for our next generation.

We really need a fresh start with fresh and young blood! Let us find entirely new political leaders who were never nominated by the parties before.

Let our leaders come from the bottom, from the union level and upazila level. Let the candidates be nominated by the people at the grassroots based on their capability, creativity, honesty and sincerity. We must not accept candidates nominated by the top party leaders sitting in Dhaka where the candidates are selected on the basis of their muscle power or money.

If we fail to find new dynamic, creative and honest leaders, then the spirit of "One Eleven" will be buried, and with that the hopes and dreams of millions of Bangladeshis!
Dr Mannan Mridha
Stockholm

End of monarchy in Nepal



This is undoubtedly a historic event which all of us should recognize and support wholeheartedly. In the TV news we have heard that the democratic government of Nepal is receiving recognition and appreciation from abroad. Unfortunately, I have not heard anything about Bangladesh's position. Is our government waiting for green signal since "Maobad" doesn't quite appeal to them?

Nevertheless, today Channel i telecast a programme. One of the guests, a former diplomat, made some very important observations about the future issues that need to be tackled by the new Democratic Republic of Nepal. The respected diplomat also briefly outlined the role Bangladesh should play in strengthening the demo-

cratic process in Nepal, which is an important member of Saarc and its secretariat is located in Nepal. We hope that our government has heard his comments including the comment about our image crisis in Middle Eastern countries.

The episode participated by a former VC of the DU and the diplomat should be very thought provoking for the current CTG. We hope they get the feedback from their organised sources of information on this kind of constructive discussion. I feel sorry for the moderator and think that he has found how difficult it is to put words or questions to seasoned guests and get the anticipated reply. Never mind. Go ahead...
A reader
On e-mail

School attendance

We must all be concerned about the recently published figures showing that Bangladesh has one of the poorest levels of school attendance of any country. Among the suggestions was to extend the school day, week and year and change the school year to one that goes from August-July.

As those of us who already have such a school year swelter over the end-of-year exams, I do believe, however, that this change would be a good idea. I experienced the January-December school year for 2 1/2 years in Haluaghat and, as I looked out on the very few pupils who ever turned up in January, I realized that the beautiful Bangladeshi winter had a lot to answer for! Some of the pupils we did not see until the end of February! The combination of the glorious weather plus the end-of-school-year mood is a killer when it comes to getting the pupils back to work on time! The only problem with exams in May and June is that a generator might have to be considered more than an optional extra in some areas.

I do not think that a massive extension of the school day, week or year will work for the simple reason that rather a lot of pupils are not turning up as it is! (In some government schools, teacher attendance isn't so good either....) Instead, it would surely be

better for the education authorities to fix the times around those who ARE disciplined and work out the incentives that will put the others under pressure to be disciplined also minimum attendance demanded for the taking of tests and exams for pupils? Salary loss for teachers properly enforced? Many pupils in government schools are surely required to share in the work of the home, farm etc and having a longer working week or day would be too much. If pupils and teachers are working hard, they need reasonable holidays. Why not focus on getting most of them there on the days schools are open?

Moreover, to extend the school day would only work if all pupils, rich and poor, came to school with a good breakfast inside them and with a nourishing tiffin! I regret to report, this is not always the case. Oh - and a decent night's sleep!

All government schools should provide a 'proper' midday meal. If that happens, in any country, what inevitably happens is not only a startling impact on child nutrition but good educational results partly because the attendance rockets! Mission accomplished!

Angela Robinson (Rev Mrs)
Headmistress, Girls' Section, BIT

