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Politics and poverty

Recently, there was a very interesting discussion on Channel-i and GP sponsored "Ajker Sangbad Patra". The experts have said that the poverty has increased in the country during the last 18 months of arbitrary rule of the military backed government. The poverty level is approximately 80%, with more than 60% being steeped in extreme poverty.

The senior journalist guest in the referred programme narrated a gospel truth about Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Now they are directly involved in creating such a miserable situation in our country.

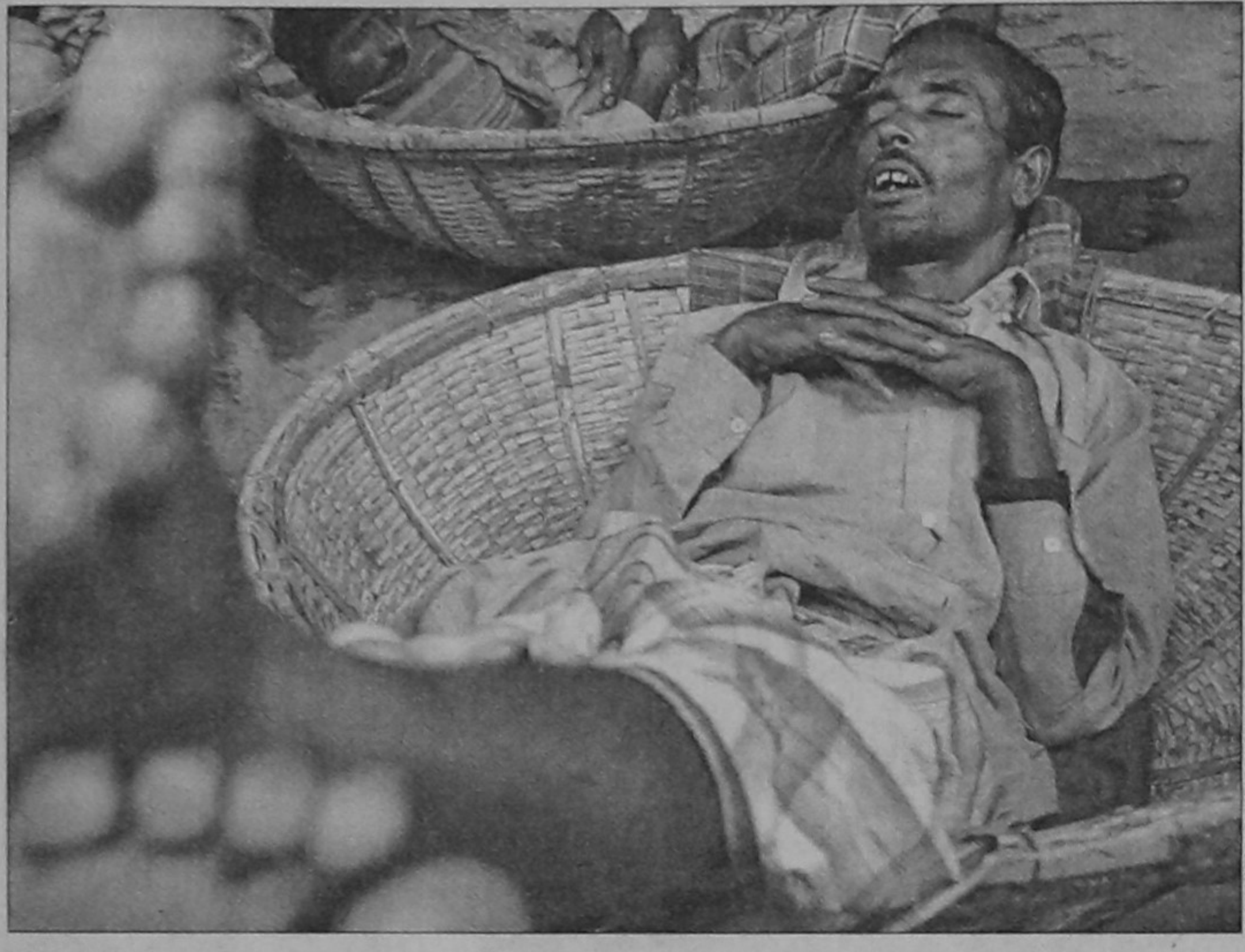
I think it is high time to raise an important question: What they actually do under the cover of poverty alleviation project or study? I will not be surprised if a parallel study is done about their covert study and it is found that in one page they do poverty alleviation exercise and on the other side of the same page they project the political analysis of the country for

their mentors. This is of course an assumption.

The other day, I was listening to the British prime minister on BBC Bengali service. The prime minister was very critical of the outdated role and approach of the World Bank and the IMF. He thought that they needed to be reformed to address more complex social and economic issues in the 21st century. There are few in the West to disagree with him. But unfortunately our bureaucrat-turned-politicians reposed unflinching faith in those financial institutions to tackle the complex problems of the country.

The consequences are quite evident. The government is taking the responsibility of raising the energy prices in the context of international price hike, ignoring the basic problems of the most important sectors of our economy.

Areader
One-mail



MONIR UZ ZAMAN / DORNIENews

"Partisan hoopla"

A very interesting piece of news was published in DS on June 30, 2008. The gradual association of the major political parties in the pilot local council elections is making the EC and the government very nervous. The nation has watched the extensive 'dour jhap' of the EC and the government to obtain the support and participation of the major political parties in the ensuing polls. Now they are gradually engaging in the right direction, and the EC is very nervous about it. Why? Is it because of the hard conditions given by the major political parties which might destroy their caste of cards built during the last 18 months? The government is perhaps also very nervous at the progress of the event politically.

I have no intention of undermining any individual posted at the top three positions in the EC. This is a constitutional institution and has definite operational decorum to maintain its credibility and neutral status. But they have so far failed miserably by any count.

Now the question is: Is the course of events going beyond the stipulated remote control measures of the government and the EC? If so, we expect some major political gamble from the government side. The President is not fully physically fit. The next in the line constitutionally is a directly partisan candidate. Will the government choose him if the President decides to resign on health ground? Here a new turning point will emerge in the political scenario. The political pundits will be active again to draw a new political roadmap, although many believe that the government already has a different roadmap from the declared roadmap of the EC.

The present "partisan hoopla" of the government, not politicians, is now a concern for the ordinary citizens of the country. They are becoming more and more con-

cerned about the fate of the general election. The government has totally misdirected their policy, strategy and wisdom by failing to evaluate the strength of the political parties vis-à-vis people's choice. We hope this might bring change in the duel administration for which things are operating uncoordinated and giving birth to endless dialogue agenda.

A citizen
One-mail

Dhaka College incident

I refer to the DS editorial on 30-06-08 on the Dhaka college incident and the paper's expected sanity of the students. A few days earlier I wrote another letter under the caption "Accident and vandalism" which was published in the DS. In fact, vandalism on the spot of any sort of accident has become a culture in our society. If following an accident, near a garment factory, or near an educational institution or on the highway, the people nearby start rushing in like bees and vandalise other incoming vehicles, how can we live?

All accidents do not happen due to the fault of the driver of the vehicle only, on many occasions, the victim is also responsible for his/her careless road crossing or unmindful walking. So, while I accept the suggestion of the DS that our government erect a lot of speed-breakers in front of the educational institutions, how many will the government erect all over the country's roads? To avoid accidents, I think we should all be careful. Deterrent punishment to the drivers may reduce the incidents but what punishment could be given to the dead victim who might have violated traffic rules?

The government has the responsibility to save everyone. I suggest there should be a rule in the country to deal with this menace. The law enforcers should rush to the spot and stop vandalism first, then

make a preliminary survey as to who was responsible for the incident.

No one should take the law in his hand as the students of Dhaka College did. With the DS we also sympathise for the victim and at the same time request the government to create public awareness about accidents.

Shafiqul Islam
One-mail

Politics as profession

Earning money and politics are, as the dictionary suggests, two different things. One suggests, the money earned for livelihood, and the other the way of ruling a state or the art of governance. But in our country's perspective, they are closely related. In the developed countries, the number of people living on politics is very few. People do politics for the welfare of the country and its people. They don't depend on politics for their livelihood. It is neither their means of living, nor profession. But here many people, directly or indirectly, have adopted politics as the single means of earning. They are running business enterprises and controlling tenders and all such activities in government offices. They are working under the aegis of political leaders. The more these leaders create opportunities for their party's supporters and activists, the greater the number of party men.

According to my personal study, the number of people depending on politics in a village is not less than 30. This will increase in small towns and cities. It is estimated that about 30,000 people in a district are now with politics as their only source of income. This may fluctuate in some cases.

People get jobs with the help of political leaders, and can even influence the legal process. This is something that runs counter to all principles.

We expect Bangladesh will be

free from such nasty politics, corruption and terrorism. We want change, change for the better.

Md. Alamgir Hossain
Lecturer in English
Saribasari Pilot Girls' School
and College, Jamalpur

Science education

Would you disbelieve me if I don't give any reference and statistics but say that in our colleges there are not enough seats to accommodate all the SSC students who pass from the science group? Would you disbelieve me if I say that there are not enough seats in our universities to accommodate all the HSC students who passed from the science group? There are not enough jobs in our research organisations and industries to provide jobs to a large chunk of science graduates who finish their studies in universities, let alone all? These jobs are not attractive enough to attract meritorious science graduates.

I am confident none will disbelieve me. As my statements are generally accepted, we don't need any statistics or reference, then should we really worry seeing the decreasing enrolment in the science group (SSC and HSC)? No. Because if the enrolment in science decreases at the present rate there will be no shortage of science graduates in the next 20 years to fill in the positions in our research organisations and industries.

But should we be relaxed? If not, than what should we worry about? If we are really worried or really want to worry, then we should worry about poor performance of our research organisations, their failure to attract our meritorious science graduates. We should worry why science and technology is not a national issue? We should worry that Bangladesh Academy of Sciences (BAS) is not a well known organisation to our science graduates. Yes, we should really worry as there is no talk of change, let alone reform, in science education and research, even during the reformist caretaker government.

Monir Uddin Ahmed
MS Student
Department of Biotechnology
Swinburne University of
Technology
Melbourne, Australia

Facebook

We thank the author of "I don't care, I'm leaving facebook". He has represented an important issue with some good points. We also felt just like the way he felt about facebook. But he raised some questions about privacy and irritation. He is right, but we have our views from a different perspective. If someone is interested about us, it's not tough to collect personal information, and one is not bound to keep them on facebook. So, it's depending upon the individuals to keep their privacy. And it's true that applications, invitations and requests are irritating. But they are easy to avoid! In spite of these problems, facebook is really a great way of our social network. If I find all my old school and college friends on the same platform, why won't I like it? Really, facebook resembles the 'face' of one in the digital world. If we cannot control ourselves, can we save our times from being wasted only leaving facebook? Actually, we care to be with facebook!

Mahmud & Sath
CSE, KUET

Ridiculous decision!

The government has decided to increase the individual level of the income tax ceiling from 150,000 to 165,000 to help people, considering the present cost of living. But it looks funny and it seems the government is joking with the countless suffering masses of Bangladesh. Because this insignificant increase does not make any meaningful difference, compared to the present state of country's economy and cost of living. That means a person earning Tk 13,750 and cannot afford to maintain his family with this poor amount of

money is bound to pay income tax. What a ridiculous decision! This level of increase is not at all in line with the government increase of prices in other sectors and increase of cost of living. Recently, the government has increased its selling price of CNG from Tk 2.47 to Tk 9.97 per unit, that is more than 4 times higher than the previous price. The price of essential commodities, including rice, has increased nearly 100% during the last one year. But the income of the general people did not increase more than 10%. Under such a dangerous market situation, how far is it justifiable to increase the income tax ceiling by only Tk 15,000?

Moreover, the present rate of fixing income tax from 10% to 25% on different income groups is extremely unrealistic in our economic situation. In my opinion, the individual income tax should be imposed on a person earning an annual income of above Tk. 300,000. The income group of Tk. 300,001 to Tk. 500,000 should be imposed a flat rate of Tk 10,000 annually. Because this income group is much higher among the middle class who can afford to pay income tax at this rate. The person who earns above Tk. 500,000 should pay income tax at 10% irrespective of his/her level of income. There should not be any differential rate like 15%, 20% and 25%. If it is so, the government's revenue earning will rise manifold. And I am sure there would not be any necessity for chasing defaulters. We, therefore, request the government to give serious attention to the matter and reconsider fixing the individual income tax in light of the above.

Md. Shahjahan Mia
Development professional
Satmasjid Road
Dhaka

Corruption in NGOs

I strongly appreciate the words of the TIB Trustee Board Chairman. He pointed at the level of corruption in the NGOs in Bangladesh. It is true and can be found easily among the top ranked NGOs of Bangladesh. Some of them are making the poor community poorer in the name of development of their (beneficiaries) livelihoods by administering a high interest rate on loans/the so called micro-credit. The neo literate and illiterate people, especially the rural women, are being targeted and any inability in paying back the loans results in their assets being seized. There have been many signs of such narrow trades in the NGO sector, but it is impossible to stop or treat the top level NGOs with the same effect of anti-corruption law in Bangladesh. Because holding them under a chart of corruption would create a problem within the investment sector of Bangladesh, since NGOs have a huge presence and range in the development sector.

S.M. Shaikat
Director
SERAC-Bangladesh
A law & development organisation

Whynot us?

I noticed the circular for appointment of "Food Inspectors" from Khaddo Odhidoptr in the daily Ittefaq on June 6. Initially, this gave me a great pleasure because I'm a student of Applied Nutrition & Food Tech & obviously this is absolutely Food & Nutrition based service. Unexpectedly, I was surprised by what was written in the qualification category. The required qualification was that students doing graduation with honours in any subject could apply for this post!

What a mess! It seems to me that our govt. didn't know clearly that there is a subject named Applied Nutrition & Food Tech in our local universities (DU, IU, Haji Danesh, Mawlana Bhashani, etc).

The decision makers should consider the point raised by me.

Shammy Akter
Dept. of Applied Nutrition
& Food Tech
Islamic University, Kushtia

Workers' rights

It is a matter of great regret that about 20% of the owners of garment industries still don't pay the minimum salary to the workers. But the workers are the biggest contributors to this sector. Why should they be victimised? It is now quite impossible for them to cope with the present situation as prices of essentials are well out of their reach. It's their legal right to get this salary, as the owners had assured them earlier.

The government should take stern action against the owners not going by the tripartite agreement.

Md. Ariful Islam
Journalism department
Stanford University, Dhaka

An average smile!



PHOTO: STAR

Friday dailies welcomed the readers by displaying the jubilant faces of successful SSC students, the future generation to usher in a luminous future. They are smiling, hugging one another, giving pose for the next day's newspaper and doing everything that suits the occasion. The print media and the electronic media rendered highest attention to holding the moments of unfathomable joy of the glorious victors who passed out successfully the first public exam of their life. The readers and viewers came to know the secrets of the triumphant students how many hours they spent for studying, to whom they are indebted most-in every detail. The story of success of some impetuous students-- who refused to bow down to poverty because of their unquenchable thirst for knowledge--attains the fairy tale flavour.

However, what has escaped the notice of many is the sigh of frustration and helplessness of those who believe that they could distinguish themselves more distinctively had the grading system been different. My point is very clear--the existing system has removed the difference between 'very good' and 'good' since a student can attain 'golden A+' by scoring just 80% marks separately in every subject. Finding no credit for scoring the highest percentage, it has been the prime concern to secure only 80% and this tendency will obviously deteriorate the overall standard.

The SSC results of 2008 are marked by a tremendous leap of 13.82 point from last year's pass percentage and the number of A+ achievers rose by about 20,000. I feel that the satisfaction of having so many 'good' students has

been bought at the expense of the dissatisfaction of 'very good' students. Does it look convincing that there is no difference between the 1st and the 700th student of the same institution? There are institutions where hundreds of students have been endowed with A+ and the stern reality of a flawed grading system has placed all of them on the same vessel while many of them are unable to stand the preliminary sickness of a sea voyage.

The present system is an injustice in two ways firstly, it has lowered the status of the 'excellent' students down and secondly, it has upgraded the status of the average students. The first group is getting demoralized and the second misguided, being unable to estimate their real worth.

I don't suggest that the grading system be done away with, since it is the latest yardstick to measure the performance of the students. However, we may opt for some reformative measures to remove the prevalent incongruity by forming another grade between 80-100% or selecting percentage of different grades for different subjects every year (like O' level exams). In this context, I would like to allude to Tagore's 'Shesher Kabita' where Amit Roy (protagonist of the novel through whom Tagore speaks) says--"Good things are good because they are few in number, otherwise they would be average being overcrowded by their own variety". The smiling faces that pervaded the front pages of the last Friday's dailies are faces of the 'good' students, not of the 'very good', let alone 'excellent'.

Samyathath
Sagarpara, Ghoramara, Rajshahi

Medical treatment of politicians

Every day thousands of people are receiving proper and excellent medical treatment in Dhaka. Cardiac interventions and surgeries, knee replacement surgeries, vertebral column surgeries etc are being performed regularly in a very professional manner by expert hands in Dhaka. Unfortunately, some of our expert medical professionals suggest treatment abroad for politicians. Is it not shameful for them? The cases may be considered.

Sheikh Hasina. Went to the USA

for treatment as her hearing aid is neither available nor repairable in Dhaka. Treatment expenses may be paid by son or daughter.

Koko: Suffering from multiple respiratory, cardiac, musculo-skeletal, neurological diseases. These can be treated in Dhaka.

Md. Nasim: Recently suffered a cerebral stroke. As per medical science cerebral stroke follows its own natural course. Once started there is no way to prevent it. It will stop by itself at a certain stage. There may be internal bleeding or embolus. Treatment is possible in Dhaka.

Transfer by air ambulance to

Singapore will cost Tk.32 lakh. How the family will justify the transfer and subsequent treatment expenses? Will the relevant authorities check the income tax returns of Mr. Nasim, his wife and his sons?

The same logic of transfer and expenses is valid for Koko, Tarique Zia and Khaleda Zia. They do not possess such legal funds or wealth to bear expenses of treatment abroad. At the same time, treatments are available in Dhaka.

We would request the authorities to examine the legal, financial aspects of their treatment abroad.

SN Mamon
One-mail

Spanish inquisition



PHOTO: AFP

The Euro 2008 trophy has gone to the right hands. This particular Spanish team deserved it. They played super football throughout the entire tournament. This feat broke the jinx that they carried for 44 years. The under-achiever team of the football's higher echelon has now got something to cheer about.

This is a collective effort. They played the final without the tournament's top scorer David Villa. Torres stole the limelight in the final but it's my notion that their midfield players played the pivotal role throughout the championship. Fabregas, Iniesta, Xavi Hernandez, Marcos Senna-- all of them

played their best football. Emergence of the virtually unknown striker of Real Mallorca, Daniel Guiza, added the additional strength. And under the crossbar there's the invincible Iker Casillas.

The football triumph put the ethnic differences aside. Now all the inhabitants of Spain cheer for Spain, now the Catalonians & Basques or others dissolved under a single Spanish flag.

Yes, it's the football which has done this! That is the beauty of the game.

Solaiman Palash
East Jurain, Dhaka

Free and fair election



MONIR UZ ZAMAN / DORNIENews

At the 'National Dialogue on Democratic Transition' held at Kashem Mahub High School Auditorium recently, the Chief Adviser said his government would extend all cooperation to the Election Commission to ensure that the elections are free from the influence of black money and muscle power. It is a good step by the caretaker government.

There are ward commissioners who have got criminal records. The government has to make sure that these culprits are captured and brought to justice, so that they cannot run for election.

We honestly do not want to go back to the pre-1/11 days. We do not want ward commissioners or mayors or politicians who have got criminal records. If this government cannot ensure this, then it cannot possibly justify having been in power for 18 months.

Minhaj Ahmed
Utara, Dhaka