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# Boosting food production

We welcome as well as thank our army chief for the advice that all arable lands, not under cultivation, be brought under the plough immediately to boost our food production. He also voiced his deep concern that there was no alternative for us, other than increasing our food production and becoming self-reliant. We have to produce our own foods and stop relying on import. Once we achieve this, I strongly feel that the value of our cur-

rency will go up. I suppose mostly the khas lands belonging to the government are outside cultivation. We must ensure that every inch of land becomes productive. At Schiphol Airport, dairy farms are there and one can see cows grazing on the green fields within the airport area. It is sad that our decision makers have been neglecting the agriculture sector as well as the farmers.

The politicians were sleeping on it. The government has to give top priority to the sector and make all out efforts for boosting food production. The farmers must not be exploited by the middlemen and corrupt government and non government officials and agencies. It is the job of the government to protect them and ensure just treatment. They are the backbone of the nation. They are the ones feeding us.

But before anything else, we need to protect our farmlands. There should be no further requisition and acquisition of farmlands. Farmlands must not be utilised for any other purpose like transferring the soil for earth filling to develop the cities. We no longer see those vast tracts of farmlands in the rural areas and day by day the farmlands are shrinking. The mighty rivers devour our lands every year. We could do nothing to protect the lands. We have to take care of our coming generations and must act in that direction. The government should enact laws like in many other countries.

Our politicians in the past remained busy otherwise and had no time to ponder about the plight of the common people. We hope this time around they have learnt their lessons...

A.B. Mohammed Zakaria  
Stanwell, Staines  
Middlesex, UK



MUNIR UZ ZAMAN / DRINKNEWS

## Political philosophy

After 1/11 (Jan 11 2008), the political year 2008 in Dhaka has bogged down. No cooperation from the past political regimes ruling since 1991. The other parties are not in tune with the orchestration of the two major parties -- for obvious reasons. (the haves and the have-nots). The high food and fuel prices have slowed down and distracted the attention from the major theme of holding neutral general elections in Dec '08.

This is a typical Bangalee agenda: too many items on the agenda; and lack of priorities; diluting focus on principles, rather than on the details. This is due to the overcrowding effect we experience in daily life; looking for space for the next footstep. I experience it when I go to the kitchen market--too crowded with shoppers, vehicles, beggars, and garbage without bins.

The bus stops are none too comfortable. Why so many unauthorized bus stops? The answer is easy: the politics is too informal. That also means the governance--the culture is yet to mature into acceptable discipline. Why so? No background; no gestation period; no political sapling allowed to mature. It is all ad hoc, without continuity--and with the opposition seats vacant in a running parliament.

This government would be remembered for an epoch-making achievement: the issue of computerized, digitalized national voter ID cards. The party leaders are worried; where to hid karchupi? Therefore the coming local elections before the general elections is a litmus test for the sustenance of future national political culture. It is embarrassing to read the reports of TIB on corruption data prevailing in Bangladesh. The politicians never show the other side of the coin; hence the voters have to set the tune for the future. Due to economic handicaps, the awareness campaigns are rather cosmetic (note how the farmers have now accepted the importance of fertilisers, and genetic seeds, as a result of sustained daily broadcasting programmes on farming news).

Our IT sector has a role to play. Notice how ICT technology has filtered down into the daily lives of even the semi-literate rural people; the impact of the mobile telephone. Skipping time and space. Another democratic tool is the personal computer, with Internet facility. It shattered bureaucracy, and the grey area in a network system.

Opacity in political governance prevails as a global epidemic. The inertia effect has to be overcome--only national unity could handle this challenge. What are we doing? Lost in election canvassing!  
AliFZabr  
Dhaka

## Drainage problem

In Dhaka city, we are facing many problems every day. I think everybody will agree with me on this point.

The authorities concerned should concentrate on improving the civic amenities in the city.  
Lincoln  
One-mail

## Poor education system

We should realise that the main reason behind the nation being backward is our poor education system. So effective plans should be formulated and implemented successfully. Some points are:

Women's education must be ensured. They constitute half the total population.

Effective planning by the government and NGOs is needed to educate the deprived children.

Social workers should come forward and contribute to this sector.

Montasir Mamun  
Department of civil engineering  
Sher-e-Bangla hall  
BUET

## New ordinance for private universities

It is learnt from a report published in DS on 16th July 2008 that the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh protested the proposed Private University Ordinance -2008, saying some of the rules in the ordinance will change the basic structure of private universities. The private universities are now run according to

the Private University Act-1992 and its amendment 1998. I am neither a decision maker nor a protestor. I am just a victim of the complexities of the ordinance and its amendments. I am interested to know "what type of basic structure exists in the private universities at the moment?" The university is generally known as an academic institution of higher learning. There are several types of universities in the world such as:

Humboldtian University at which academic freedom prevails.  
Napoleonic University on which the state has a strong influence.  
Newman University in which personal development is the central goal.

The American University in which service to the community is the first priority.

What category of universities do we have? Can we call them Oscillating Universities?

Can anybody define a university in the context of Bangladesh?

What is the difference between a public and a private university in the country?

Can anybody show me the model of a public or a private university in Bangladesh?

Who are serving in the top positions like VCs, Pro-VC, Deans, chairmen of departments in private universities? Who are involved in good or bad activities of the private universities?

Do we really need so many private universities in the country, particularly in Dhaka city?

Answers to those questions have become very important when the issue of selling certificates by private universities has come to the notice of the international bodies. We need to understand that the prestige of the nation is involved in such activities.

I was appointed as Vice-Chancellor of a private university in January 2003 for a tenure of 04 (four) years. It was the first ICT based university in rural atmosphere. The university was shut down in 2006 along with seven other universities on a report submitted by an inspection team. Unfortunately, none of the team members was scientifically or technologically qualified. Here is the gap between the reality and the responsibility. If the activities of the existing universities are now judged by the same formula, the doors of all the private universities

are bound to shut down.

The lesson learnt from the activities of the high powered inspection team is that closure of some universities cannot solve the problems of all the private universities created by university authorities, politicians, academics etc.  
Professor Lutfor Rahman  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

## Big questions!

Some recent developments in our present context have raised some big questions in people's minds. We've come to see Jamaat leader Matiur Rahman Nizami being released on bail. And the sudden resignation of the Attorney General -- all these incidents are, to a great extent, obscure to the citizens of the country.

There has been a very shameful incident of a freedom fighter being attacked by the Jamaat activists as well.

Lest we forget: "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty".  
Rafiqul Islam Rime  
Agrabad, Chittagong

## Criminal infested Bashabo

Some criminals are very active in Bashabo area. They steal electric or cable wires around the area and burn them in secluded spots, filling the densely populated area with toxic fumes. The people around are forced to close their windows and cover their faces on streets. After burning the upper plastic cover, they extract the inner metal wires and sell them.

Who endorsed those people to fill the air we breathe with carbon monoxide, lead and what not? They are destroying property, disrupting life and destroying nature. Since the perpetrators are the local goons, people fear to stand up to them while they continue causing damage. A couple of "break and sell" shops are responsible as they recruit such thieves and buy these stolen items from them.

The authorities should take stern steps to ensure that the illegal practices are stopped.  
Ananya Das  
Cephalon International  
Rajarbagh, Bashabo, Dhaka

## "Nirbachani Sanglap"

Recently, the Election Commission, BBC Bangla, BTB and Bangladesh Betar jointly arranged a series of dialogues on upcoming city corporation elections. I was present in the inaugural session as a participant in Sylhet. It is undoubtedly a consequential venture on the way to democracy. Actually, I was displeased with the performance of the mayoral candidates but I think it has helped both sides to know each other. The candidates have known the matters that create great panic for the city dwellers. On the other hand, the voters have acquired an overall supposition about the qualifications (academic and relevant) of the candidates within a short time. Public consciousness about the candidates is indispensable to exercise voting right. It has created an opportunity to make the candidates answerable to the mass people. They have promised 'a lot of things' to the nation. If they fail to meet up those effectively, in future they will remain accountable to their voters.

The presence of the CEC and other commissioners at the inaugural session has inspired us. It should be continued in case of parliamentary election also. Thanks to the organisers for a well organised programme.  
Md. Abdul Hamid  
Assistant Professor  
Dept. of Business Administration  
Shah Jalal University, Sylhet

## "Neglected Khilgaon"

This refers to Mr. Akbar Hossain's letter published in your newspaper dated: July 13, 2007 with the headline "Neglected Khilgaon". I appreciate his concern for Khilgaon because I have also been living in Khilgaon for the last 30 years and have hardly seen any development. The construction of buildings was done haphazardly. No one knows whether there was any master plan for the area or not.

During the rainy season, the streets are flooded with water. Mr. Akbar rightly said that none of the previous two elected members of parliament did anything to develop this area. As a result, the ordinary citizens like us had to suffer a lot.

We have learnt to live with harsh realities, as we had no choice but we want our future generation to live a healthy and better life. We saw what our previous politicians did.

So, I would request all the citizens of Khilgaon to vote for someone who will surely fulfil his promises.  
Akram Ali  
Khilgaon, Dhaka

## Introduce death penalty for adulteration

At present, the actual type of adulteration, as well as the number of adulterated items (used in a wider sense) in Bangladesh are unknown to ordinary people. Further, the quantity and the quality (in terms of say, degrees of adulteration) of adulterated items imported by the country - whether consciously or otherwise - are currently beyond the knowledge of the people. Factors such as: the role of the country's law enforcers and others in unearthing and dealing with relevant cases of adulteration and adulterated items in recent times; and the media projection (print, electronic) of those cases as applicable have been instrumental in opening up the eyes of public when it comes to behind the scene faces of adulterated fruits, adulterated medicines, adulterated fishes, spurious engineering materials and so on.

The production or the marketing or the consumption or the use (or any combination of them) of adulterated items has known outcomes, as well as ramifications of various types, magnitudes and durations - among other things.

Adulteration is inter alia a crime against humanity and a crime against other living-beings because it, if unchecked, has the capacity and capability to cause colossal damage to not only the present generation of humans and other living beings but the future generation or generations of humans and other living beings - in qualitative, quantitative and other terms - relative to time, space and other variables.

Adulteration must be eliminated from affected societies to at least an acceptable extent as soon as possible. It is, among other things, a great threat to human survival or continuity or both. Member states of UN, WTO, INTERPOL, civil society, and others should explore the possibility of introducing appropriate legal instruments including a legal framework - if such things do exist, then they should undergo a BMR (balancing, modernization and rehabilitation) exercise - for dealing with the crime, the accused, the victims and others related with the crime at local, global and other levels - in a tough and effective manner.

The time is ripe now for Bangladesh and other countries to examine the feasibility of introducing death penalty as the maximum punishment for adulteration in not too distant a future. Further, efforts towards enhancement and strengthening of for example, product (used in a wider sense) testing and certification regimes at local and other levels should be geared up.

Let us work towards that with a strong commitment and determination.  
Dr. M. S. Haq  
One-mail

## EC's role

If we remember correctly, a government high-up made an unpleasant remark about three commissioners of the ACC serving prior to this reorganised ACC. This at least invited a protest from one respected commissioner. The commissioner asked for an apology from him and also asked him to withdraw his comments. The adviser made the comment because of the inactive role of the three commissioners of the then ACC.

We have a completely opposite situation in our newly organised Election Commission. The commissioners are overactive. We do not know what kind of comments on their over-active performance would be most appropriate.

In the USA, the famous comedians play a very important role in projecting the controversial aspects of high profile personalities in politics or entertainment. The people in the USA enjoy lighter moments in life which bring longevity and happiness. I think our media can also do the same on a regular basis to get across the message in a different and attractive format acceptable in our culture.

Reader  
One-mail

## Death at DMCH

We are shocked to learn that a 48-year old farmer, Kazi Abul Hashem, whose family came to Dhaka from Brahmanbaria for his better treatment at the DMCH, lost his life after he remained unattended at the emergency for long six hours.

Is that how the poor patients are dealt with at the DMCH? How could the doctors be so irresponsible? And who will pay for the loss suffered by the family?  
Farida Ahmed (Poppy)  
One-mail

# Deforestation



MOHAMMAD ISLAM / DRINKNEWS

The demand for food is increasing every day as the population is increasing at a dangerous pace. This will bring unprecedented and unsustainable demand on the country's remaining lands, forests and swamps. A massive leap in deforestation is clearly visible and it would add to global warming as the sea level continues to rise and will put pressure on our forests. The southern cost of Bangladesh will go under water in a period of 25-30 years, which will lead to further conflict and political unrest in the country.

Under the above circumstances what are we doing as Bangladeshis? We are already experiencing similar problems much before the sea water submerges our lands. Every day we are losing trees around us in the name of development and the demand for agricultural land is increasing. In the name of food & development, we are heading towards more natural disasters than it has already been projected.

We have already passed over a month of the monsoon and it is not yet too late for planting trees all over Bangladesh. I have seen many barren hills in Mymensingh, Comilla, Chittagong, Sylhet and Rangamati but never saw any government agency or the NGOs take up the programme of planting trees on the hills. The ministry of forests has a great role to play in this regard. Once trees are planted on these barren lands/hills, the forests will automatically grow.

At present we are on the verge of losing the forests. Steps must be taken immediately to preserve the forests and the lands nearby (for the future growth of the forests).

Sohel Ahmed  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

## Runaway population growth



It is a hard fact that Bangladesh is one of the most populous countries and in spite of different measures to control the population growth, we are far behind the target. Our poverty is primarily attributed to the number of mouths to feed in comparison to the land area and the available resources. The government is now strongly advocating the one child policy. The demerits of over population are well known & visible but we should also think of the potential benefits of a populous nation, some of which are:

1. Our population has already become a valuable resource and the number one foreign currency earner.
2. Because of a stringent population control policy, many countries in the world are now short of people. If all the countries follow the same policy, then there will be overall decline in population that may result in downturn in economic growth.
3. There is already a social imbalance because of the wide gap between literate & well off people who are practising family planning and the illiterate & poor section of the people who are far behind.
4. In our country where the government cannot even guarantee the very basic needs of the citizens, who will take care of the old parents if one child policy is implemented?

Actually, the important thing is the quality of the people and not its number. In 1971 our population was 7.5 crore and now the number is about 15 crore. We have the same land area, so where from the food is coming for the people whose number has doubled in the last 33 years! The Creator Almighty Allah has said, "Enjoin prayer on thy people & be constant therein. We ask thee not to provide sustenance: We provide it for thee. -- And when the prayer is finished then may ye disperse through the land and seek of the Bounty of Allah: and celebrate the Praises of Allah often: that ye may prosper." Let us have firm belief in these statements and act accordingly. Only controlling population may not be enough.

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque  
Khalishpur, Khulna