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Melamine in milk

Mothers are passing their days amid great worry thinking about their babies' food because hardly any brand milk is available without melamine, which is responsible for various diseases like kidney



failure. In a recent analysis by the chemistry department of Dhaka University, they found toxic melamine in many popular brands of milk. It would be tough for mothers to change their babies' food habits, as the babies have become used to powdered milk.

The government should address the issue in the interest of all concerned. Obviously, they cannot overlook such a grave threat to national health.

Siddiqur Rahman Apu
Soil Science Discipline
Khulna University

Adulteration has taken a new turn as melamine has been found in some popular brands of milk powder. What is surprising is that the authorities have taken a rather laid back approach to the whole issue that concerns public health. No doubt it is the children--the future of the nation--whose safety is in question. It has been reported that consumption of contaminated milk poses a serious health hazard. Damaged kidney and liver, stunted growth--all these are the possible consequences of the intake of the spurious stuff.

One wonders what job the BSTI is doing in this regard. It is also a mystery why they have taken such a long time to negotiate the problem. We are shocked at the moral depravity of those importers who have brought that contaminated milk powder.

Now that the matter has come to light, we hope that prompt action will be taken to destroy the adulterated milk powder and punitive action will be taken against the people who put children's health in jeopardy.

Zabed Wali
Pahartali, Chittagong

BRAC's reply

We would like to appreciate the concern expressed by you regarding making all out efforts for the immediate release of two abducted BRAC officials in Afghanistan through your editorial entitled, "Kidnapped BRAC staff in Afghanistan: Make all out efforts for their immediate release," which was published on October 28.

There is, however, a clarification related to our presence in Afghanistan. BRAC did not and does not have any intention to "wind up its programmes in Afghanistan within the next five years." What we intend to do is to engage in capacity building and training of our Afghan staff, so that within that time period all the BRAC programmes can be taken care of and administered by the personnel of BRAC Afghanistan.

M Anwarul Haq
Director, Public Affairs
BRAC

Political scenario

The derailed train is back on "Election Moha Sarak". Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman. What wonderful optimism despite no agreement on two most contentious issues such as a. the state of emergency and b. the timing of the upazila election.

The "Moha Sarak" is linked to our two great neighbours, India and Burma, which one he has in mind?

In Bangladesh not only politics but also the serious public health issues are raised in the court for a decision. What a shame for this failed and broken CTG. Therefore, with regard to these two most important issues we have two options opened, either to go to the court or to appear before the honourable president who is the supreme authority of this CTG. He is the one who has enforced the state of emergency and he is the one who can lift it now in the greater interest of a free and fair election responding to public demand. In the backdrop of the above scenario, as an ordinary citizen of the country I would like to put three(3) questions to our honourable president as below, and would fervently request him to respond not through his caretaker cabinet or else but by himself.

Q1. Do you believe, Sir, that the situation prevailing now requires the state of emergency powers to govern the country?

Q2. I do not know what answer you have in mind, Sir. If your answer is "yes", kindly give a complete and convincing response to the nation as soon as you are ready to do so. The nation is now looking for your response.

Q3. If your answer is "no", kindly inform the nation. Also indicate when you intend to lift the state of emergency.

As a citizen of Bangladesh, I would urge upon our honourable president to kindly fix an immediate date to address the nation at prime time and announce the clear position of his government on this very important issue of state of emergency, which is definitely a big impediment to free and fair election.

Areader, One-mail

Tobacco

Tobacco smoking is a proven cause of cancer and 80 percent of the lung cancer patients are found to be smokers. Even who do not smoke suffer from cancer caused by passive smoking. Now imagine how deadly tobacco is!

In this regard, I must ask everyone if poisoning someone is a terrible crime, and many people have been given death sentence for poisoning, why people who cultivate, sell and spread tobacco are not being treated as criminals?

Dr. Mahboob Hossain
Department of Pharmacy
The University of Asia Pacific
Dhaka

Aid for agriculture

Hon. US Ambassador and US Aid officials have raised serious issues about mismanagement in our agriculture ministry, as reported in a local English daily on October 23rd. The matter needs to be clarified by the government, and the public needs to be informed on these serious issues.

This is essential for improving government's management of the agriculture sector and make it effective. It is ridiculous to ask for further food aid; while earlier funds remain un-utilised!

They stated that our government has not utilised US assistance of over US\$ 30 million, lying idle since the last ten years! This was supposed to have been utilised in eighteen months! They stated that without utilising this fund the US will not consider further food aid! This is a very serious criticism of the government by responsible US officials. Will the government respond to this publicly, and explain the reason behind this ten-year delay? Surely, the people deserve an answer to this question.

US officials also stated that with some minor changes in the wheat procurement tender process, the price of wheat could go down! HE the US

Ambassador is reported to have said and I quote: "Improved trade practices mean more wheat at better prices for the people of Bangladesh."

What we seek is a level playing field to allow US farmers to compete fairly to feed Bangladesh's hungry mouths." This is a very serious allegation from the representative of the US government in Bangladesh.

Will our authorities respond? One can only wonder!
S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Poor decision

I think Bangladesh Bank's recent move to circulate the Tk 1,000 note is not a good decision. How many people will be benefited from this decision is a matter of doubt. Only a few people, I guess.

How many people would have access to this facility when half the population are living below poverty line in our country? Does a Tk 1,000 note matter to these poor people? Rather, it would only increase inflation that is already high. Tk 1,000 note would only facilitate those limited number of people who have unlimited income. Bangladesh Bank should not make such a move that will only serve the interest of a few people.

I wonder why eminent economists of our country still have not said anything against it. I am expecting some criticism from them.

G.M. Rezwana Rasul
BBA
American International
University- Bangladesh

Corruption in BTTB

Refer to the DS editorial on institutional corruption in BTTB. You have expressed surprise on the scale of corruption in public offices and cited example of using 122 labourers to fix a toilet pan and lack of accountability. This is not the only one of such amazing examples. All public utility departments like gas, water, electricity, municipality etc. are dens of open-air corruption and there is no accountability anywhere in those offices. There is a saying that the table, chairs and files of Titas Gas office take bribes. Nothing comes out without greasing of the hands of officials of those offices.

I believe we are genetically a corrupt nation. Our education and motivation by both schools and homes of our children are not flawless. If we want to reduce corruption, we will have to start right from primary schools and respective homes.

Instead of helping our children with copying in exams, we should start telling them to learn good things and the parents should talk honesty before our children. If we can do that, in 20/25 years, when today's kid of 2 years becomes an adult with good education, some change in behaviour will be possible. Also, the parents should desist from glorifying the ill-gotten riches in front of their children.

Let us all try to change our mindset and help our children who are our tomorrow's leaders and bureaucrats with good ideological teachings.

Shafiqul Islam
NY, US



Counter them vigorously

We are astonished by the caretaker government's bowing down to the demand of religious extremist groups and removing the baul sculptures from the airport roundabout.

It is unbelievable, we never expected in our wildest dreams such an action from the government. We vehemently protest this and demand those sculptures to be re-installed immediately and make sure that in the future such incidents will not be repeated. It is the

government's duty to safeguard the artefacts which symbolise our Liberation War and culture, and the show-pieces of our rich heritage, of which we are very proud.

Therefore, to quell the unrest arising out of the removal of the statues, the government must act swiftly.

Nurjahan
Chittagong

Do they know?

Last week, we saw two unusual things, which are rather very disappointing. First, the pulling down of the sculptures of Bauls and the other is the cutting down of trees on Rokeya Sarani. These two incidents are interlinked with one another. The parties that protested the removal of the sculptures seems to have a very rigid understanding of the Holy Quran and Sunnah.

What about the cutting down of the trees? If they are very Islamic, then why didn't they protest when the trees were being cut down. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "If any Muslim plants any plant and a human being or an animal eats of it, he will be rewarded as if he had given that much in charity." (Bukhari)

The sculptures are not being made for worshipping, it is for promoting and keeping our culture alive. Referring to Hana Shams Ahmed's article on October 21, 2008 in The Daily Star, it seems that the government is allowing this to happen and past governments also allowed such parties to grow. Now since the toothpaste cannot go back to the tube after all, the government has to do something which is good for both-- for the culture and the Islamic parties.

Despite seeing and hearing all these, we merely want to tinker around the edges, carry on "normally" and feel good about the normality.

Tauqeer Haider
Shaninagar
Dhaka

Baul statues

It is truly vexing to know that there were so many negative reactions to the protests of the mullahs regarding the Baul statues. Not many days ago, the action of the mullahs sparked protests led by the country's luminaries and literary figures.

Our luminaries blame the so called 'religious fanatics' as a threat to national identity. Last time we checked, the mullahs were not erasing the names of Lalan and others from history books but merely preventing their statues

from being placed.

The idea behind the statue was something close to showing deep respect and as Muslims many find it too close for comfort.

If Lalan is indeed great, let us look to the MOVER behind the man, and not the man itself.

Syed Bayezid
One-mail

"Survival of the fittest"

"Survival of the fittest" is the order of the day.

Those who treat their customers as "the king" are successful. Customer service is a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction/loyalty, which is the basis for the very survival of an organisation (both public and private).

Bangladeshi businesses, after establishing their corporate and/or brand image mostly through "sweet talk", tend to take a "smooth ride" on the mass customer base--hardly caring about customer satisfaction.

Dr. Nasir Uddin Khan
Gausul Azam Avenue
Uttara, Dhaka

Present and future leaders

Bangladesh is a country with immense promise for corruption, and prejudice for patricians.

With much applause and chants from all the parties at the beginning, gleeful grins from mediocre parties for minus two in the middle and finally their saint-like sayings seemed to be the things we all wanted. The pattern of thinking of the politicians must be changed; they should act for the sake of the country.

Ahmed Istehad
Tilpa Para, Khilgaon, Dhaka

Ershad factor

General (Retd) H.M. Ershad was a dictator, no doubt. His nine-year autocratic rule and corrupt politics are still in the memories of people. But the reality is he is now a factor in Bangladesh politics. His is the third force after the two major parties and the polarization of

politics in Bangladesh increases his demand particularly to the two major parties. And I think the Awami League is doing the right thing to accommodate General Ershad into their alliance.

Let me clarify why the Awami League needs Ershad. Everyone knows how this major party has been struggling to survive since the assassination of its leader and the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The conspirators killed the elite leaders of the AL according to their blueprint they had made after their defeat in the liberation war. Also they attempted several times to kill Sheikh Hasina. However, coming into power 21 years after the assassination of Bangabandhu, they tried to find ground under their feet, but could not stand with enough strength because of lack of far-sightedness and some leaders' involvement in corruption. The party again experienced a serious setback in the following election in 2001.

So for the sake of its existence, the AL must accept Ershad together with all others including Bikalpa Dhara and LDP, even if necessary the Islamic parties as well. The leftists may strongly object to it, even they can think of leaving the alliance. But before they leave, I would urge them not to make such mistakes again. They committed lots of mistakes in the past boycotting the AL. If they really like to work for the benefit of people and their own existence, they have no other choice but to cooperate with the Awami League. The Awami League should also have lots of things to do. They should look for young talented leaders and bring them in the front line.

General Ershad should also be committed to his words and should not play a dubious role any more. Still he can become a true leader of the people of this country. He also should not put so much pressure on the AL for which they have to face difficulties in distributing seats among the parties to be working together.

Md. Sirajul Islam Molla
Kanthal Bagan, Dhanmondi
Dhaka

Use foot overbridges



In Dhaka city, there many foot overbridges and underpasses for the passers-by to easily cross busy roads. But few people use these foot overbridges and underpasses.

To reduce traffic jam and road accidents people should be conscious and use foot overbridges. The government, NGOs and other organisations should come forward to raise awareness among the people. A little alertness can save us from accidents.

Rawnak Arefin
Department of Business
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Science and Technology
Sylhet

US presidential election



I am writing from Boston, Massachusetts. There are six days left before the presidential election. All polls show Senator Barack Obama leading against Senator John McCain. Mr. Obama has a comfortable lead in Electoral Votes that determine the winner. Winning 270 Electoral Votes is enough, as there are a total of 538 Electoral Votes. If Senator Obama and McCain win in all the states that were won by Senator Kerry and President Bush respectively in 2004 presidential election, Senator Obama will win 252 Electoral Votes and Senator McCain will win 286 Electoral Votes. In that scenario, Senator McCain will win. But this time, Senator Obama is running very strong in some states that were won by President Bush 4 years ago. For example, considering a very conservative estimate, Senator Obama is leading by a comfortable margin over Senator McCain in Iowa (7 Electoral Votes), New Mexico (5 Electoral Votes), Colorado (9 electoral Votes), Virginia (13 Electoral Votes) and if Obama wins in these 4 states, he will have 286 Electoral Votes compared with John McCain's 252 Electoral Votes.

It means Obama can lose in Ohio and Florida and still win the election. In 2004,

Senator Kerry lost both Ohio (20 Electoral Votes) and Florida (27 Electoral Votes), but won Pennsylvania (21 Electoral Votes). But if John McCain wins Pennsylvania (21 Electoral Votes), he will have 273 Electoral Votes and Barack Obama will have 265 Electoral Votes. The McCain campaign is trying hard to pull off an upset win in Pennsylvania and hoping that Barack Obama will lose in both Ohio and Florida. Polls suggest that Obama is leading in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Florida. Especially in Pennsylvania, Obama's lead is wider than in Ohio and Florida. In addition to that, Obama is doing well in some states (that President George Bush won) like Missouri (11 Electoral Votes), North Carolina (15 Electoral Votes), Nevada (5 Electoral Votes), Indiana (11 Electoral Votes), North Dakota (3 Electoral Votes), Georgia (15 Electoral Votes), etc.

All developments suggest a Barack Obama win in which case he would bag between 273-380 Electoral Votes. But John McCain is a fighter and his campaign is trying hard to pull off an upset win. McCain would bag between 271-286 Electoral Votes, should he win. This is my overall analysis of the upcoming election.

I am a Bangladeshi American and a registered Democrat, but I have done my best to give you a fair analysis.

Bazlul Wahab Shaheen
Boston, Massachusetts
USA