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Ban Ki-moon's visit

During this maiden visit, he was supposed to take stock of Bangladesh's politics, economy and social affairs to decide the future UN role as our nation is inching towards a general election. Our Foreign Affairs Adviser has already said that the United Nations chief's visit "has a political relevance as the country, which emerged as an important player in the developing world, approaches the election highway".

The UN Secretary General's Bangladesh visit however has other connotations too, where education is a principal area of cooperation with UNESCO, one of the specialised agencies of the United Nations. The country is currently implementing a national plan of action for Education for All, launched in 2003. Now there is a keen urge from the people of Bangladesh that the United Nations draw programmes on popularisation of science, development of libraries, teachers' training and exchange programmes. Those engaged in the task of development of education also feel that the leader of the world body should exert good offices to prevent continuous violation of the provisions of the "The Status of Teachers" as adopted in 1966 and 1997 and approved jointly by UNESCO - ILO, also signed by Bangladesh government.

In the human development sector it is worthwhile to mention the recent UNESCO report which estimates that 18 million more teachers are needed worldwide if universal primary education is to be achieved by 2015. This shortage of qualified teachers is considered one of the biggest obstacles to achieving the EFA goals. Teachers' low wages are at the root of the global shortage. Around the world teachers are crying out for the resources they need to meet the needs of their students, their families and their communities. Millions are living below the poverty line, struggling to feed their own children as they strive to educate others people's children. That's why teachers' unions and associations around the world including Bangladesh, are demanding adequate wages and decent working conditions, including requisite learning resources and reasonable class sizes, in order to recruit the best and the brightest young people into this vitally important profession. Active recruitment and retention strategies are an essential part of the solution, but the task of training millions more new teachers remains a challenge. The world body may extend some important help in this regard.

On global warming and its resultant effect on Bangladesh, environmentalists have already started to raise their voice. Bangladesh being a sub-tropical country is vulnerable to global warming and its effects on crops, oil, insect, weeds and diseases have been alarming.

The appeal for UN's active participation in mitigating the dangers resulting from global warming and resolving the crisis, heard in view of a regional perspective therefore has come from all aware of the seriousness of the problem. They urge upon the world leader to set up a climate research institute in Dhaka under the auspices of the United Nations. People of Bangladesh earnestly believe that the 2-day visit of the UNSG will bring in a positive outcome.

Prof. Quazi Faruque Ahmed
President, Bangladesh College Teachers' Association (BCTA)
Chief Co-ordinator
National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE)

An open letter to Ban Ki-moon

I am pleased to inform you that War Crimes Facts Finding Committee Bangladesh is working relentlessly to mobilise national and international support for the trial of perpetrators of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity in 1971. In this context, the War Crimes Facts Finding Committee has appealed to the government in writing to constitute tribunals under international tribunals acts 19 & article 47 (3) of Bangladesh constitution. UN support to form such a tribunal has also been sought.

Further to that, the demand has been placed to the Election Commission to bar registration of the war criminals and obligate the alleged criminals to declare their status in post liberation time. Pledges have also been sought from political parties in order to refrain from electoral alliance with war criminals and resist nomination of any perpetrator of war crimes in any party.

Under this circumstance, we the War Crimes Facts Finding Committee appeal to the UN to articulate their stand on the above issue and render support to the cause. We expect the international community shall understand that the criminals who sided with Pakistan in the year of 1971 were not their friends.

Over the course of time, it has been proved that the criminals of 1971 have not changed their mindset. It is those people and their allies in Pakistan who are relentlessly venting the message of hatred against western countries. They are nourishing those countless madrassas, which are the real breeding ground of jihadis.

In this context, we have published the list of perpetrators of crimes of 71 and cited the names of genocide spots. There are 369 alleged Pakistani war criminals and 1150 local collaborators who perpetrated the worst war crimes and crimes against humanity in the year 1971.

The war that was initiated by the Pakistani army in the soil of Bangladesh in 1971 was not a civil war, it was a pre-planned act of genocide. There may be debate regarding the definition of genocide. But, there is no doubt that nearly 1.8 million people were eliminated during the war of 1971. Three million was the official figure of death. At that time, nearly 10 million people were displaced due to the pre-planned killing conducted by the Pakistani army and their collaborators. There were many incidents of enforced disappearance and violence on women.

Impartial inquiry has strongly ascertained that 460,000 women were raped and tortured at that time.

There are nearly 920 mass graves and identified genocide spots. Far more can be identified with the assistance of any international group. This is to be noted that in the year 1971 approximately 53 counts of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity were committed by the Pakistani army and their collaborators. Of them 17 were major war crimes, 13 were grave crimes against humanity. They got involved in four counts genocide, which were never addressed.

In this context, I do strongly appeal to you to establish an International Tribunal to address the above issue.

Dr. MA Hasan
Convener
War Crimes Facts Finding Committee, Bangladesh
Uttara, Dhaka

Discarding Bangla



TANVIR AHMED / DRINKNEWS

This is really very much disappointing that we are not paying proper attention to our language.

I would like to share one of my experiences with you --- a few days ago I went to a stationary shop and found a girl buying something. After a while the salesman asked for money to the

girl and said poitrich taka (35 taka) but the girl couldn't get the meaning. She asked another girl what the amount was in English and then the other girl made her understand. After they went away I came to know that she was a student of a very renowned English medium school.

This is not desirable in a society where people take great pride in their mother tongue.

Sadia Siddiqua
Business Administration
Department
Shahjalal University of Science and Technology

Doctor, not quite!

Last week, my mother took my aunt to get a regular dental check-up in a hospital. She told the doctor about the severe and unbearable pain in her molar tooth. The doctor examined the tooth for a couple of minutes or so and finally gave the prescription. He told that he had to remove that tooth at once which simply scared my aunt horribly. To add more to her fears he said that if it was not removed as soon as possible the other teeth might need to be removed as well. After reaching home, my mother tried her best to console her but all her attempts went futile. She suggested that we consult another doctor before taking any hasty decisions but my aunt was stubborn. Next day she had her operation. All went well for three days. On the fourth day her tooth started paining. When it was unbearable, my mother and me took her to another hospital. After examining for half an hour or so, the doctor asked the reason for removing the tooth. We explained to him. After taking some tests he told us that the tooth for which she was suffering was left untouched. Giving a sigh he told us that THE DOCTOR HAD REMOVED ONE OF HER GOOD TEETH! After hearing that mother and me stared at the doctor for a couple of minutes open-mouthed. She was suffering from pain because a bone got stuck in her tooth. He has removed it and soon she will start smiling. He prescribed some medicines and then he bid us farewell.

Hats off to our doctors who are trying to snatch the smile from our faces by removing the "wrong tooth".

Shifat Azmeem
One-mail

Stray dogs in Uttara

Of late, stray dogs are creating problems for the residents of Uttara area. The morning walkers are facing the problem every day. As the western Uttara is partially under Dhaka City Corporation and the other part under the Haripur UP, no one takes the responsibility of eliminating/controlling the stray dogs which create a lot of problems.

The DCC or the Dhaka district administration may take up the job immediately and make this part of the city a safer place for pedestrians and children.

M. Sanaul Haq
Uttara Model Town, Dhaka

Making Dhaka liveable

It has often been said that to delay a project, let a committee deliberate on it; while to put it into cold storage permanently, pass it onto an expert committee(s). The sketchy reports of the deliberations of the Expert Committee in the above Round Table that appeared in the DS, 12 Oct 08, obviously make little sense, since the major hurdles hindering the management of Dhaka's transport nightmare have hardly been mentioned.

A workable transport system must cater to the masses in two broad and separate spheres. First, MTS (Mass Transit Systems) that runs on, over or under main arterial roads and rapidly transports masses of people to stations near their ultimate destination. This includes subways, freeways, MRT, BRT and any other RT you care to invent. The second one is point-to-point transport that is equally important and carries just as many people over short distances from their homes to school, offices, shops etc and back again. Not surprisingly all attention was focused in the Round Table on the first, as it is more glamorous and involves thousands of crores of taka, huge construction contracts, long gestation periods and more scope for 'you know what'. The second is the more humble poor cousin involving CNGs, taxis, walking and I hate to say the word, dreaded by our planners, designers and implementers alike rickshaws. Private cars belong to both categories but how many in Dhaka can afford multi-million taka gas guzzling monstrosities that cost thousands to maintain and run every month?

The Roundtable however, did come up with some interesting figures: Dhaka has only 1) 250 kms of roads fit for large-scale bus operations, out of 2,200 kms. 2) 2,000 large and 4,000 mini buses whose condition is well-known. 3) An inflated figure of 400,000 rickshaws and suppressed figure of only 150,000 motorized vehicles plying the roads, with another 1,800 getting registered ever month (BRTA says 100-150 per day). 4) A lot of useful advice, like decentralization, drainage, short term solutions (what?) etc etc.

What was NOT mentioned was 1) The 250-300,000 rickshaws provide livelihood to about 20-25 lakh rickshaw-related people and families; and cheap, fast, easily

available and pollution-free mobility to another 25-30 lakh people of modest means every day i.e. half the city's population. Their contribution to GDP is over Tk.10 crore every day. 2) Motorized transport i.e. cars, buses, CNGs, small human haulers, taxis number over 300,000, including over 250,000 private cars (recent DS reports). Private cars occupy 80% of road space while carrying less than 2% of the privileged class at astronomical cost. They park everywhere in blatant disregard to existing traffic laws and blow their horns and flash their blinding lights in utter disdain. Thousands do not even pay fitness or registration taxes. They contribute nothing to society except air and noise pollution, reduced foreign exchange reserves, congestion at Chittagong Port (also Mongla now, DS 22 Oct) and frayed nerves. 3) The less said about buses, mini-buses (most are museum pieces), taxis (invisible), CNGs (arrogant), the better. 4) Dhaka has only 7% road area instead of the normal 25-30%. 5) STP? Call us after 20 years.

Short-term strategies were mentioned but not elaborated. Where the recommendations of the Round Table can be obtained is a mystery. The Roundtable recommended walking for everyone, but where are the free and even foot-paths, street-lights and protection from mugging? I am in no doubt about the academic and intellectual capacities of the participants, but did they have the basic qualification to seek to arrive at the solution for the mobility of the masses? Did they walk or take a rickshaw or CNG to the roundtable? If no, where did they park their expensive cars?

At least you injected a note of sanity to the proceedings by putting emphasis on concentrating on solutions to the problems rather than discussions and perhaps, I might add, strictly implementing existing traffic laws. But how can a weak (demoralized?) force do that (The IGP said that, not me)?

Sikander Ahmed
Niketon, Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Population boom and no planning!

Population is increasing at an alarming pace. As a result, new problems are arising on a daily basis. A decade ago about four infants would be born in one minute, but now the number won't be less than ten. The issue like population boom has been discussed many times but could not draw the attention of the authorities concerned. The majority people are living below poverty line. It has become very difficult for impoverished people to survive by managing the basic needs as prices of almost every commodity has shot up.

I had read in a daily that in the last year only five million contraceptive sheaths were allocated against the minimum requirement of ten million. Overlooking the issue of family planning will produce very bad results in the long run.

Hassnat, AIUB
Banani, Dhaka

US vice president

Recently, I came across a story, which quoted Republican Vice President candidate Sarah Palin as answering to an 8-year-old third-grader kid's question on the actual job of the US Vice President, that the vice president is not only the president's 'team mate' but also 'runs the Senate' and "can really get in there with the Senators and make a lot of good policy changes. And it's a great job and I look forward to having that job" Palin added.

In reality, as per the constitution of the United States of America, the main duty of the vice president is to replace the president if the president resigns, dies, or is removed from office or unable to carry out his/her normal duties for some other reasons. The vice president has no official role in developing legislation or determining how it is presented to or debated by the Senate.

Good thought! Why should the president alone exercise all the powers, s/he should share a portion with her/his vice president!

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Chairman
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University
Dhaka

Election 2008

Everybody is asking whether election will be held on Dec.18? The answer is "No".

My suspicion is that the general election will be postponed putting the blame on the politicians again, and the upazila election will be held since the schedule is going to be announced simultaneously with the general election. However, there are a few bargaining points left for the government like state of emergency, delimitation of constituency, election by the two leaders etc.

Areader
One-mail

Media and modern life

To make anything famous or familiar to the world, media contributes a lot. With the changing world, the activists and receivers are also being changed. As a civilized nation, we are now very close to all the scientific inventions.

I often observe that large number of people are spending a huge part of their time enjoying products of the media, such as radio, television programmes, browsing Internet and so on.

I think at times the habit is being carried a bit too far!

Md. Kamrul Islam Mishu Kutubi
Dept. of English
International Islamic University
Chittagong

British Council

The British Council is a centre of learning. Its library, cyber zone & listening zone are really helpful to learners.

When I became a member their cyber zone was operating faster. But day by day it is slowing down.

I hope the authorities concerned will look into the matter.

Md. Mahfuzur Rahman Manik
IER, DU

What are we eating?

With the population boom and increasing demand, adulterated edible oils, foods stuffs have flooded the market. The traders are making money at the cost of the customers.

The consumers are purchasing things that might actually threaten their lives. Caring mothers are struggling to get melamine free milk.

The government should address the issue in right earnest.

W. Islam
Uttara

Appointment of VCs

The present caretaker government has claimed that it would depoliticise the academic administration and formed a so-called "search committee" for appointing world renowned highly accomplished intellectuals and capable academics as vice-chancellors of the public universities.

But the resolve is not being reflected in the appointments of VCs!

A concerned Bangladeshi
One-mail

Political circus!

It appears that with a common goal to sweep the board, both the Awami League and the BNP have joined in a rough music that they will boycott the upcoming JS election, unless the government expresses its inability to face the music and declares that the holding of the JS election and participation of their 'Netries' in it are inextricably linked to each other. Well, the government seems pretending that this simple declaration in plain words they are holding as a king's worthy ransom to achieve something very precious from them for the country's benefit, though one of the advisers is harping on one string that "It will become clear through the legal process".

It should not be unintelligible to a tomfool even that "The legal process" is yet steered by the "Administrative Wheel".

Ipsa facto, both the sides should call a spade a spade, stop the "Tom and Jerry" show and make up the leeway for opening the dreadful Pandora's Box for the people again, with one of the 'Netries' holding it.

Molla A. Latif
Kapasia, Gazipur

Natural gas

Once upon a time we heard that Bangladesh was a country with huge gas reserves. But the recent data analysis gives a different picture. We have natural gas which would serve us till 2011. After 2011 we will face a shortage of natural gas.

We should prepare ourselves for the future.

Md. Mehedi Hasan
Economics Discipline
Khan Jahan Ali Hall
Khulna University

We are the citizens of a third world country and most of the people of our country are illiterate and live under poverty line. Our main resource is natural gas. It is not a manufactured product which can be produced overnight.

So, it is essential for us to care about proper use of natural gas.

Robin
Dhaka



A. HAFIZ / DRINKNEWS



Biotechnology

Food and Agriculture Biotechnology shows potential to improve the quality, nutritional value, taste and above all safety for the animal and agricultural food products. A range of research tools is used to understand and manipulate the genotype and thus the phenotype of organisms. Recombinant DNA techniques, also known as genetic engineering, is the modification of an organism's genotype using transgenesis method. Biotechnology is much broader a term to include genetic engineering, but applies to any technology that uses living organisms to manufacture or extract commercially viable products from them mostly aimed to enhance human living standards. Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are recombinant organisms, in which a gene fragment is incorporated into the host genome or a gene manipulation is performed to change expression level.

The applications of food and agriculture

biotechnology include crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries. There have been no animal, fish or human GM products approved for use in GM food anywhere in the world. In some countries like the USA, Canada, many processed foods, such as biscuits, cooking sauces etc. includes GM ingredients (soybean and maize) at a very low level.

Transgenic crops were first commercialised in the 90's and the global area of transgenic crops has since grown about forty-fold from the year 1996 to 2003.

The agronomic benefits such as pest and weed control, higher productivity, controlled growth etc. have driven its adoption by the farmers. Also the growing world population and concerns within developing countries will boost the adoption of this technology in the coming years.

Jewel Rana
MS student, Dept of Biotechnology
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