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Street children

Street children are a worldwide phenomenon. That they are in the streets for many different reasons should not discourage attempts to look at their problems as a global responsibility. If you are an adult and you live on this planet, be aware now that many of our children are going to sleep hungry tonight, in the streets, with no adult protection or care. Millions of children are living in the streets, and the number is rising.

Street children, despite living in the worst circumstances, continue to be neglected. In most countries in the world, this is because resources are limited and the governments logically work on improving the health and education of children who are "in the system" - they have parents who vote and they go to school and will ultimately contribute to the society. Everyone agrees that street children are a tragedy but when it comes to allocation of resources, it seems it is not "cost-effective" to spend money on trying to help them.

Large UN Agencies and other large aid programmes, even when child-focused, allocate a disproportionately large amount of their funds to children who need it less than street children. Their expressions of concern consist of holding expensive conventions to discuss street children, funding expensive research to discover how many street children are there, and supporting a few showcase projects that can be

used for public relations. Large agencies will never mount a global action to genuinely meet the immediate needs of street children because street children have no representation, no constituency - no power and no access to power. We will continue to see big conferences and task forces and the empty rhetoric that has characterised the dialogue about the growing number of street children in most countries in the world during the last ten years. Large agencies will continue to fund research into the numbers and characteristics of street children because it is cheaper and easier than getting out of their offices and doing something concrete about 100 million or more children in desperate misery. There is something seriously wrong with a system where adults get paid \$50,000 or more per year to talk about children's rights while the number of children who are homeless and starving increases.

For this reason you will find that most of the websites here are those of small independent agencies who work directly to assist street children in limited geographical areas. They have small budgets and they raise the money themselves. There are many similarities in their programmes but each has developed its own way of dealing with the problems of the street children in their area. They will welcome your interest and deserve your support and assistance.

Peter Rebeiro, *One e-mail*



Election date

The BNP's backing down indicates that they would not boycott elections at all, even if they were held on the 18th as scheduled. Delaying the polls by 10 days really does not benefit the BNP. The rescheduling of the dates for nominations gives them a little additional time to prepare, but as far as the polls are concerned, 10 days will make absolutely no difference to their preparation or chances. The only logical reason I can see for this demand is that delaying by a week to 10 days puts the elections during Christmas time. Many foreign observers will cancel their trips. I'm sure you are aware that there are still a fair number of BNP sympathizers within the administration, especially the EC, etc.

My concern is that the BNP may still be hoping to make an attempt, however unrealistic, to act as the spoiler. Besides, shifting the elections introduces uncertainty into the whole electoral process again. Right now they are set and everyone excepts that the BNP is prepared for the polls. It is simply not right for the BNP to be playing around like this, especially when we know they were bluffing all along!

Arif
One e-mail

Change for the better

Change, change, and change. Change is everywhere and change is part of life. If we accept good changes, we will grow, if we reject them we will be lost. America shows that you can change yourself to new choices, new relations, new ideas, and finally to a new life. The question is how many of us are ready to embrace this shift in our paradigm.

What type of change are we talking about? We know for sure, electing Obama as President of the USA could be a 360° change for Americans, who used to hate blacks so much and now make one of them their President. In Bangladesh we don't expect 360° change, but at a minimum we may change 90° or 60° or may be even 30°. We don't have to make a religious person the president of Bangladesh. We could just stop the blame game and discard the claim of banning the politics of religious parties. We should let the religious parties exercise their freedom of speech, as any other groups.

Let it be a lesson throughout the world. Let us understand and feel that we all can change ourselves. We can come out of our dogmatic approach of choosing some

corrupt political leaders. It is time to change and change for the better and choose honest people as our leaders. We should change our outlook.

Let us also hope that Turkey will change to see the scarf as not a threat to the country's future. Pakistan will change and will not kill their own people only to please some foreign occupiers. Arabs will change and will not help others to kill their innocent civilian children, women neighbours.

Masroor Anwar
Uttara, Dhaka

Agriculture Day

Declaration of Pahela Aghahan as the 'National Agriculture Day' by the government has sparked pulsation to the community life of our farming people. Farmers throughout the country have celebrated the Day with great enthusiasm and jubilation. The government deserves appreciation for declaring the National Agriculture Day by recognizing the men behind the plough who are actually the prime driving force of our economy.

Meanwhile, I think, the National Agriculture Day could have more impact on our farming community if the word 'Farmer' could be incorporated in it, that is, 'National Agriculture & Farmers Day', in Bangla, 'Jato Krishi O Krishok Dibosh'.

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

Experience!

I would like to pinpoint the present situation of our job market and the attitude of the employers of multinational companies. There is scarcity of job opportunities and the job seekers have to face the question - "experienced or inexperienced?". My point is, nobody could be experienced while seeking his/her first job!

So, there is no point in asking for experience if the candidate is capable of doing what he or she is asked to do.

Md. Zahidul Islam Zibon
*Dept. of English
International Islamic University, Chittagong*

Rats

Rat killing drive is launched in our country under the patronage of the agriculture department of the government. The drive should be launched on a regular basis and the whole nation must be included in this task for the greater interest of the country.

Ours is a poor and small country with a population of about 15.00 crore. The farmers are trying hard to feed such a big population. Unfortunately floods, cyclones and other disasters often visit our land with a heavy loss of crops. As such, almost every year we have to import crops in exchange of valuable foreign currency.

Many of us do not know how much crops are destroyed by rats every year in our country. They eat 10% of the crops in the field and then 12% from the storing places. The lost crops amount to 31 lakh tons per year which is 40 days' food for the total population of our country! Dangerous statistics!

Harun-or-Rashid
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

Michael Jackson

None of the criminal cases against Michael Jackson could be proved beyond reasonable doubt. None of the civil suits could be proved with balance of probability. He is a clean man as per the definition of law. He even moved to the Middle East. But the witch hunting continues which is paradoxical to the human norms and laws of lands. He is innocent as not proven guilty. Now he has been confirmed to have converted to Islam like many other celebrities in the West against all propaganda and media campaigns against the faith. The Sun is one of the best selling tabloids in the UK where the story has grabbed the headlines of its 22 November issue with a shocking ridicule against Islam which put Jackson in a Burqa, as if Islam and Burqa were synonymous terms. Absolute example of disgusting taste in any form of civilised journalism.

Mufassil Islam
*Human Rights Advocate
UK*

Secondary education

The government and NGOs are working for improving the quality of secondary education across the country. Particularly BRAC and TQI (Teaching Quality Improvement Project) are providing training to head teachers and teachers. Obviously, there are other projects and NGOs also working for the betterment of English teaching-learning situation in secondary schools.

Yes, English should get importance. But it is also important to teach math and science subjects properly in secondary schools.

Mawduda Hasnain
Rajshahi

Education and employment

Bangladesh is fighting against poverty since 1971. Till now a significant chunk of the population is poor. Ensuring two meals a day is a major challenge for this country.

The government is trying to ensure education for all to fight against poverty. But only a small section of our people is getting higher education facilities.

It is a matter of regret that those seeking higher education are also not being educated according to the needs of the age.

We are living in the age of globalisation. Science and technology are progressing at an amazing speed. It is changing our management pattern, organisation structure and mode of doing jobs. But we are lagging behind others.

We have to be a lot more competitive in the present day world.

Md. Joynal Abedin
*MBA Intern, FBCCI
Motijheel C/A, Dhaka*

Limited resources

Our resources are limited. We waste our resources indiscriminately. If it goes on, one day there will be no resources for our general use.

I want to draw the attention of all classes of people to this matter.

Md. Ahmed Kofil
*Business Administration
Shahjalal University
Sylhet*

Rat killing drive is launched in our country under the patronage of the agriculture department of the government. The drive should be launched on a regular basis and the whole nation must be included in this task for the greater interest of the country.

Meeting of the Two

The nation is again in the grip of the two leaders, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia. What they did during their stay in power in the past is known to all and what they will be able to do in future is also not beyond imagination. They have become leaders not by their leadership qualities but by virtue of luck and the failure of other politicians in both major political parties to come out of the shadows of the two ladies. I was in Saudi Arabia for a long time and had to listen to the joke from Saudis that there was no man in Bangladesh having moustache! This is the fate of this nation.

The two leaders who do not talk to or see each other (except for a moment on 21-11-08 during the Armed Forces Day celebrations) for decades have now agreed, reportedly being pursued by foreign diplomats, to sit and talk face to face.

But they could not yet agree on the agenda or subject matter of the meeting. The AL wants a specific agenda but the BNP desires the dialogue to be on the country's overall situation. On the other hand, the government was striving to bring the two leaders to the negotiating table with the hope that the meeting might help to remove uncertainty over the national election.

There is a general belief that neither Sheikh Hasina nor Khaleda Zia will do much for the benefit of the common mass. But the people will be grateful to the two leaders if they just make commitments that their parties would not consider money & muscle power while selecting the candidates for the



parliamentary or any other elections, accept the outcome of the next general election & help the government in running the state affairs seating in the opposition.

The nation will remember them if they can reach a consensus on the above issues that may also stop recurrence of another 1/11 that now many believe has pushed the country to another deep crisis.

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque
Khalishpur, Khulna

The information doesn't create news only! It dawns in the editorials of major dailies as well!

DS carried an editorial on Nov 23 2008. While apportioning blame on the two 'Ladies' only for this folly, it wrote inter alia, "The world has moved on. We as citizens of Bangladesh have moved on in our thought processes. But our two eminent women clearly have not. They have not looked at each other, to say nothing of greeting each

other in civil manner."

All very true except for a small hiccup i.e. the people have remained stuck with the 'two eminent women'! We rejoice at the fake birthday celebrations of one woman, which happens to be the day of a national tragedy, when the other woman's father who is the Father of the Nation as well and her entire family were brutally murdered save, herself and her sister. Correspondingly, we also organise 'Mourning sessions' as 'Sena hotya dibosh' at the behest of one woman, which happens to be the 'Revolution Day' for the other woman. How many of us, the people, have denounced it and told them, 'Sorry, we are not doing it for you, it is bad taste and uncivilized! None.

So it is not the two women' only, who have not moved on in their thought process over the decades, it is most of us who have not.

Walid Haque Khondker
One e-mail

Edible oil price



Edible oil price in local market has gone up again.

The interim govt could easily use our TCB to import refined palm or soyabean oil and can bring stability into the local market. The voyage time from Malaysian or Indonesian ports to Chittagong is less than a week.

Samad Choudhury
One e-mail

Political reforms



I refer to the PCP article by Professor Nazrul Islam entitled "Vital Reforms Ignored" on 21 Nov. His recommendations to reduce the tenure of an elected government from 5 to 4, to induce tolerance by the losers for the winner, is indeed a pragmatic idea and a newly elected parliament must take this on board for consideration. Four years has been the tenure of the elected US President from the inception of its constitution about 2 centuries ago and it has proved its worth over this time for the unity of such a disparate nation, and for the development of a tolerant democracy.

His other observation and recommendation for a 'proportional representation' (PR) system of parliament also has enormous merit, however it needs an educated electorate to function properly. If public are only allowed to vote for parties and parties

are allowed seats in parliament on the basis of percentage of votes, then obviously a complete list of candidates of all parties and their preferential order for allocation of seats needs to be studied by the voters prior to making up their minds. This may not be possible with most Bangladeshi voters who lack literacy.

A PR system will allow all NRBs to vote easily for the party of their choice from abroad as it will not be complicated by constituency etc. Similarly, demarcation of constituency etc would also possibly be unnecessary except for locating of voting stations. Independent candidates may have to start a party of their own. Notwithstanding all these complications, this should certainly be a long time goal for Bangladesh.

Engineer Shafiq Ahmed
London, UK