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# Daughters of toil



In the early morning, Dhaka becomes a city of women; from slums and tenements, a long procession of young women, clad in flame red, bright blue or green, fills the streets, their *chappals* kicking up the dust on the margin of the rough roads. They are garment workers, on their way to the thousands of factories.

If women migrants to Dhaka are absorbed by the garments sector, the men rent a cycle rickshaw to join the others who make a kind of living out of pedalling the painted vehicles which waste the muscles and stretch the sinews of their skinny drivers. In the rush hours, the vehicles sometimes become entangled. They move forward slowly, a single entity, a living sculpture of metal and humanity, bodies and machines inextricable; a metaphor of industrialization.

In the old port (Sadarghat), the traffic on the river is as congested as on land. Most people arriving in the capital travel by boat: the dispossessed arrive daily from different districts, evicted by river erosion, poverty, a destructive cyclone, CIDR, debt - the natural world and human injustice join forces to rob people of their livelihoods. No one knows the population of Dhaka. From the chaotic overflowing centre to the semi-rural villages on the edge of the city; from slums on stilts over polluted ponds, with their spread of pale pink water hyacinths, to the settlements clinging to the stretches of floodwater from the Buriganga, to the crumbling

brick structures in the industrial suburbs - all have one thing in common: insecurity, a daily battle for survival against a degraded environment, the fear of sickness, the reality of malnourishment, the threat of eviction.

They do relentless work. They have to work a 12-hours a day; overtime obligatory, at lower rates of pay. There is no medical leave, no treatment available on the premises. They have no maternity leave, no minimum wage. They do not even get letter of appointment. The women never wonder who will wear the shirts and trousers they make. Only survival matters. 'What if we lose our job?' they mutter. They do not dream, they do not even think of anything beyond the endless unrolling of fabric they must turn into collars, cuffs, trouser-legs.

It becomes ten o'clock at night. The procession of young women begins in the opposite direction; shuffling feet stir the dust once more; bodies used up by excessive hours of work; even the colours of their clothing fade in the dim sodium lights by which they return to slums and tenements for the brief respite before the next day of a labour without end. Will they be able to have a square meal enjoying all human rights? Will there be any change that will make them happy? Only future will answer this question.

**Iqbal Khan**  
Language Specialist  
Teacher of English  
Birshretha Munshi Abdur Rouf Rifles  
College, Dhaka

## A great opportunity

The caretaker government started off their proceedings by entering into the political arena quite ambitiously but consequently failed to live up to their expectations. The more they dug, the more dirt spilled out of the heart of this country. All kinds of obnoxious and filthy corruption was viciously interrelated and no doubt they were unable to curb it. And now the courts are rocking with innumerable bails that have been granted to the people convicted of outlandish crimes. After all these incidents, a question arises in the mind of a common citizen like me, that if our politicians are so innocent and if our leaders are so perfect, then why have we been branded as the most corrupt country in the world probably two or three consecutive times? We human beings are mortal and not intricate robots and therefore mistakes and misapprehensions are

bound to occur in our actions, thoughts and decisions. And it is our obligation to realize our mistakes and rectify ourselves accordingly. Certainly, we cannot complain about lack of virtuous and graceful personalities in our country. But they are dispersed throughout the corners of this vast and endless sea of murky water and it has become so difficult to track them down. This upcoming election will be providing our politicians with a unique and distinctive opportunity to learn from the misdeeds that they have been held guilty of. It will also test their grace, smartness, capability and whether they are honest enough to correct themselves.

**Nabeel Waheedur Rahman**  
One-mail

## US presidents

According to some UK tabloids the Baghdad shoe thrower had no chance of hitting President Bush.

Apparently, all relatively young US presidents are experts at dodging missiles, (mostly) thrown by their wives. One story going round is that soon after Bill Clinton took office he dodged a table lamp thrown at him by Hillary.

However, both denied the incident and Hillary claimed that it is impossible for her to have missed!

**Engineer Shafi Ahmed**

London, UK

People were thrilled by an extraordinary incident in Iraq. Journalist Zeidi threw his shoes towards GW Bush. When Bush announced that American soldiers would remain in Iraq for the next 3 years, the journalist was outraged.

We prey for the courageous young man.  
**Rtr. Mohammed Abdul Kader Biplob**  
Rotaract Club of Ctg.  
University  
Noapara, Pahartali, Ctg.

## Founder of Awami League?

I would like to draw the attention of the leaders and policy makers of the present AL to the "Election Manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League 2008". In its very second para it has been mentioned that "---- the architect of our independence, the greatest Bengali of all times, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was the founder of our party". Regarding foundation of AL we have come to know from the Banglapedia (Bangla version, page 110-112 of the 1st part) that the party (then it was "East Pakistan Awami Muslim League") was born on 23rd June, 1949 in Dhaka. The leaders on the first committee were President: Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Vice-president: Aatur Rahman Khan, Shakhawat Hossain and Ali Ahmed Khan, General Secretary: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (at that time he was in jail), Kh. Mostaque Ahmed and A.K. Rafiqul Hossain, Treasurer: Yar Mohammad Khan.

Undoubtedly, Bangabandhu was the architect of our independence but he was not the only founder of the AL. We may say that he was one of the founders of this party. He was Junior to some other leaders at that time and his rank was not number one or two.

It may be mentioned here that the word "Muslim" was excluded in 1955 in a council meeting.

**Harun-or-Rashid**  
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

## "Every child is special"

Thanks to Amir Khan for making 'Tare Zameen Par'. It's a movie which has the power to make every parent feel that their child is very special. It makes you feel that Ishaan (darshel) the young actor, could be your son, daughter, friend or He could be you.

In Bangladesh hundreds of children are suffering from SCHOOL PHOBIA due to several reasons and they are underestimated by their parents. Their teachers fail to detect the actual reason. This movie shows us a disease called dyslexia which means a person having difficulties in reading & spelling which Ishaan is suffering from.

Going to school for the first time is a period of great anxiety for a very young child. Many will be separated from their parents for the first time, this sudden change can make them anxious and they may suffer from separation anxiety causing further stress and making them feel very vulnerable.

Suddenly, they are under the scrutiny of their teachers. Children may have felt unwell on the school bus or in school and associate these places with further illness and symptoms of panic, and so want to avoid them. Other children may have experienced stressful events.

This special movie will educate the audience on dyslexia. It's really a must watch movie as the story and its presentation will touch your heart deeply and teach you that EVERY CHILD, rich or poor, IS SPECIAL.  
**Peter C. Rebeiro**  
Indira Road, Farmgate  
Dhaka

## Withdrawal of cases

The dropping of extortion cases against influential bigwigs apparently brings out the harsh political reality of our country. In Bangladesh 'what's ethical' and 'what's acceptable' largely depend upon the prevailing political situation. Today what we regard as 'a dire crime' might turn into 'a mere misunderstanding' tomorrow. As a result, prudent people seldom fail to heed the call of time. As the political scenario is gradually changing, the businessmen who were once courageous enough to file significant extortion cases against Sheikh Hasina and Tareq Zia can obviously imagine the consequences they would face if these 'powerful people' retaliate after being triumphant in the upcoming election. It won't be reasonable to criticize these businessmen because there really seems to be no other option left for them. It appears that our political destiny will always be controlled by a handful of people. And as long as these people can take advantage of the right situation they will always get away with their crimes. Businessmen, who are now dropping cases filed against top politicians, are actually clever enough to sense that the 'blind masses' of Bangladesh won't ultimately stand by their side and the public will eventually vote for the same corrupt culprits, despite being aware of their evident misconducts. These businessmen at least felt the need to alter things when they 'mistakenly' envisaged a new horizon of change.

At the end of the day, every one has the right to survive. And in "the jungle" it's not wise to enrage the lions!  
**Khandoker Asef Safa Kabir**  
Lalmatia, Dhaka

## Dual nationality and US laws

Each country has its own citizenship laws based on its own policy. People may have dual nationality by automatic operation of different laws rather than by choice. For example, a child born in a foreign country to US citizen parents may be both a U.S. citizen and a citizen of the country of birth.

A US citizen may acquire foreign citizenship by marriage, or a person naturalized as a US citizen may not lose the citizenship of the country of birth. US law does not mention dual nationality or require a person to choose one citizenship or another. Also, a person who is automatically granted another citizenship does not risk losing US citizenship. However, a person who acquires a foreign citizenship by applying for it may lose US citizenship. In order to lose US citizenship, the law requires that the person must apply for the foreign citizenship voluntarily, by free choice, and with the intention to give up US citizenship.

Use of the foreign passport does not endanger US citizenship. Most countries permit a person to renounce or otherwise lose citizenship. Information on losing foreign citizenship can be obtained from the foreign country's embassy and consulates in the United States. Americans can renounce US citizenship in the proper form at US embassies and consulates abroad.  
**Sayed Rahman**  
Founder, BANGLAIT

## Bush in Iraq

Ethically, I do not endorse the way the Iraqi journalist Muntadar al-Zeidi expressed his disgust against the US President George W. Bush because by this action Zeidi being a journalist has shown gross disregard to journalistic ethics. Under the conventional rule, it is unlawful even to point a finger at the car carrying a foreign dignitary. After all, Mr. Bush is the president of a country which has been bestowed with abundant knowledge, resources, and power. Of course, it is true that President George W. Bush being the head of a country which is considered the lone superpower has abused his capacity by invading Iraq on a false pretext that Iraq had harboured weapons of mass destruction. But in reality, Bush's hypothesis could not be proved as no such weapon was found. But the war commissioned by President Bush had claimed lives of hundreds of thousands innocent Iraqi people plus 4,209 US soldiers. The United States spent nearly \$567 billion since the war in Iraq began in 2003.

To speak the truth, President Bush has contributed to the destabilization of world peace and understanding plus tarnishing and jeopardizing his country's image and goodwill among the international community. Iraqi journalist Zeidi's throwing of shoes at President Bush has not only humiliated Mr. Bush but all the people of the United States of America.

Anyway, I am of the opinion that journalist Zeidi

should be exempted from any charge whatsoever considering his action as an outcome of his personal frustration.

Meanwhile, I think Zeidi should quit his job in journalism, instead he should join active Iraqi politics to work for restoring self-rule and democracy in Iraq.  
**Professor M Zahidul Haque**  
Chairman  
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University  
Dhaka

The person who has got least respect for human life, freedom and dignity, President GW Bush, has ultimately been 'rewarded' quite profusely while attending a press conference in Iraq. He and his likes occupied an independent sovereign state on the basis of false allegations in an attempt to destroy its people, culture and history and loot its wealth and to fulfil political ambition in the Middle East. Zeidi, an Iraqi journalist, has thrown shoes at him, a gesture of extreme humiliation and disrespect in Arab culture, it is a sign of disrespect in other cultures of the world too. Mr. Zeidi's attitude towards Mr. Bush represents the grievances of the entire humanity that has suffered indignation under occupation and repression of the US forces. It is very interesting to note that in a press conference Mr. Bush said that he did not feel any shame for shoes being thrown at him. Well, this

has always been the face of an obstinate and incorrigible occupier and colonialist like GW Bush, as shameful as ever.

**Abbas Masud**  
M.C. Roy Lane  
Nawabganj, Dhaka

## No choice?

The whole country has gone mad about the forthcoming election. But I still don't understand why and how they decided that we have to choose between Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. Why do we have to choose between the two ladies who have been consistently failing, lying and harassing us over the last 15 years? Are we to believe that out of 144 million people in our country, there is no more qualified and more capable person to be trusted with our lives and the future of our children?

You know that they have destroyed our economy; you know their party men have killed our people; you know they have arrogantly refused to listen to our pleas and requests in the past. How can you even think that they have changed and that they would do things differently this time? To fall victim to a crime is unfortunate, but to voluntarily make yourself a victim by voting for criminals is inexcusable.

Do NOT vote for those who have brought this country to its knees and don't ever forgive them!  
**Azad Miah**  
Oldham  
UK

# Jute industry

Our jute industry is facing a number of problems in the backdrop of recent global meltdown. The recession has triggered a decrease in the demand of jute-made products. Prices of jute products have also decreased by nearly 15%. Our local companies are incurring losses by selling their products at prices that do not even cover costs. Moreover, production costs are very high.

Indian jute prices are lower and more competitive than ours as they have devalued their currency by 21%. Our government should take advice from the experts to deal with the situation.

**S.M. Shamim-Ur-Rashid Tushar**  
Department of Business Administration  
Shahjalal University  
Sylhet



FAZLEY ELAHI SHWOPON / DRINKNEWS

## Politics and religion

I am most interested in the motivation, history and present practices of religious people who get involved in politics, especially those who get involved in ways that alarm the fellow-citizens of their democracy! Maybe my experience in the UK might throw some light on this issue and encourage those of all religious persuasions in Bangladesh who are sincere about bringing into their national life the goodness, honesty and desire to help the needy that the theory and practice of any good religion should teach us. It cannot be a bad thing for keenly religious people to want to participate in the political processes but it is how they do it that brings either good or bad consequences.

For me, in the UK, it began during the 1970s. Many keen Christians began to emerge from the Pietistic burrow they had been down for many decades. (Although at the time of my Reverend grandfather, whose diaries I have for his first year in the Christian ministry in the slums of Merseyside, 1884-5, there was no such timidity!) In the USA, unfortunately, the majority of Christians of my generation and below ended up in the

Republican Party, with some disastrous results.

In some countries, there were usually a few keen Christians who wanted to form their own political party called 'The Christian....' something-or-other - indeed, there is a very small group who has formed such a party recently in the UK - but most of us are grateful that such efforts are usually short-lived. In Europe, there are a few political parties with the word 'Christian' attached but these have a mixed history.

Thank God, in the UK, most Christians followed the guidance of some excellent Christian organisations that were wise in matters of the faith and academically skilled in sociology, economics etc - I think of the Jubilee Centre, Cambridge. Such groups were researching various moral issues by drawing on the wisdom of Christians from a wide spectrum of church denominations and political affiliations and some non-Christians also. They strongly recommended that keen Christians join the political party of their choice and be active in it and this is what has generally happened. It was very wise advice as there was an active minority of Christians (and, indeed, those of other faiths) in every political party. Thus we have

avoided the twin dangers of Pietism (i.e. refusing to get involved in the 'wicked world' of politics and just sitting passively on the sidelines) or, on the other hand, forming a 'religious' political party and becoming a narrow band of people who begin to define what religion-influenced politics actually is and may intimidate the remaining religious people into joining them or remaining in silence and inactivity (or even worse shame and apology).

Interestingly enough, the poor may take to such participation more easily than the rich. A friend of mine returned to Bangladesh and decided to look up a previous project he had been involved in, about 15 years before - putting a pump into a slum in Tongi, where the homes used to be flooded after every rainstorm. Oxfam paid for it. He wondered whether it would still be working. It was - but a local official standing nearby shook his head when asked how the pump was. "It's awful," he said, "AWFUL! We have to raise so much money to keep it repaired! The local people say that, if we don't, they won't vote for us!" Hurray! True democracy can work, here in Bangladesh!  
**Angela Robinson**  
Gulshan,  
Dhaka

# Election fever



SHAFIQUL ISLAM KAJOL / DRINKNEWS

I remember the early eighties when I accompanied my mother to a polling station. I remember the blue smudge on my mother's nail - the proof that she had cast her vote, those posters, the crowd of people around the polling station. The whole episode left the impres-

sion on the child's brain - that the election is a time of festivity, something akin to a fair.

Then as I grew up I saw people, in the mid-eighties, clamouring for democracy. An election was held in the mid-eighties - the so-called yes-no vote. I remember those proces-



R HASAN / DRINKNEWS

sions, hot slogans, the grim-faced news-casters on the eight o'clock news on BTV. At last democracy came to this land through the mass upsurge of 1990 and election of 1991.

This time round another election is going to be held under the auspices of the mili-

tary-backed caretaker government. We are waiting with baited breath to see the outcome of the election.

Let peace prevail in this part of the world.

**Zabed Wali**  
Pahartali  
Chittagong