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War criminals and election

There is a proverb that "Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it". I was not born when this country achieved its independence. But I could not ignore



the history of our liberation war as history never lies. History admits how the brave sons of this soil sacrificed their lives for our independence, how they fought for us, how mothers lost sons, how sisters lost brothers to gave us freedom. History also reveals that a few people, those known as Rajakars (and members of Al-Badr), were against the independence of Bangladesh. These war criminals not only tried to defeat our freedom fighters but also killed so many innocent people. It makes me cry when I read the story of genocide, 1971. Now it makes me frustrated when I see that war criminals are competing in our national parliamentary election and some of us are actively working for them.

The father of this nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, declared a general pardon for the war criminals. But that does not mean that we can forget the genocide committed by them.

Would it not be a shame for us if we see that war criminals are making laws for us and carrying out the responsibility of protecting the flag of Bangladesh? I would like to request the fellow citizens of my country not to forget History. Please do not vote for the war criminals.

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Obama and future of US

'Change has come to America', were the words of the first ever African-American President-elect of USA, Barack Obama on the election night after his victory. When Obama was elected as President many people around the globe, in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, celebrated his victory. The reason-- they were hopeful to see a change in America's policy after an eight year-long rule by the warmonger Bush administration. As time for Obama to take charge of his office draws nearer, some people have become sceptical about seeing real change and have valid reasons to be so. Yet, I will tell more of this later. Before that, let us take a look at some words of Obama before the election.

The then Illinois Senator Barack Obama had been an early opponent of Bush administration's policies on Iraq. He sounded a lot different from George Bush, John McCain or even Hillary Clinton. He had opposed the invasion of Iraq since the very beginning and during his presidential campaign he stood his ground and promised to pull US troops out of Iraq by the end of 2011. Moreover, he sounded much different from George Bush when he said he would try to negotiate with countries like Iran. In a speech given in Berlin in July 2008, he said, "If we could win a battle of ideas against the communists, we can stand with the vast majority of Muslims who reject the extremism that leads to hate

instead of hope." So many people in the world expected him to be a bit less of a warmonger than George Bush. He also said in Berlin, "This is the moment when we must renew the goal of a world without nuclear weapons". It was surprising and encouraging to hear such words from the Presidential candidate of the country which was the first and only one to drop nuclear bombs on a human population (in Hiroshima and Nagasaki). However, despite such nice words from Obama, concerns are rising over the appointment by Obama of his cabinet.

Hillary Clinton has been appointed as the next US Secretary of State. The former first lady, against whom Obama fought long and hard during the battle for Democrat nomination, is going to work in his team and playing a key role in America's foreign policy. Hillary Clinton had been a supporter of the invasion of Iraq although she supports the idea of withdrawing troops out of Iraq. She had differed with Obama on many policies during the presidential campaign. When Obama said he would negotiate with Iran, she called his approach 'naïve'. Later on, though, she had endorsed Obama and campaigned for him. It is yet to be seen how these two former rivals work together on foreign policy issues.

It is not only Hillary-- Obama's team is full of faces that have supported the Iraq War. Joe Biden, the vice-president elect, was a supporter of Bush's invasion of Iraq. Moreover, Barack Obama has chosen to keep

Robert Gates, Bush's Secretary of Defense, in charge of the Pentagon and appointed retired general Jim Jones, who had supported John McCain during the campaign, as his National Security Advisor. Both of these two men, Gates and Jones, have opposed Obama's policy to set a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraqi soil. Then there are many faces from Bill Clinton's era. Amongst them, Rahm Emanuel, Obama's new chief of staff, Susan Rice, who will be acting as UN ambassador, Lawrence Summers, Obama's top economic advisor and Eric Holder, attorney general designate are some of the notable names. Some people have remarked that team Obama will be 'old wine in a new bottle'.

Disappointment is likely to prevail regarding US foreign policy in many countries even during Obama's presidency. Palestinians in the Middle East may continue to see double-standard US policies for another 4 years and the hope for peace still remains bleak in the region. At the time when the Presidential race between Barack Obama and John McCain was going on, renowned British journalist Robert Fisk said in a TV interview with the Doha-based news channel Al-Jazeera that there was no possibility of seeing a change in US foreign policy in the region of Middle East. He said Obama or McCain would not make a big difference in the conditions that exist now in the region.

The Guantanamo Bay Prison, a symbol of human rights violation by the US military, is to be closed by the Obama administration. A nice initiative, I would say. So despite all my pessimism about change from the Obama administration, at least for this initiative I would say, "Thank You, Obama, and Good Luck!"

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FBCCI

I think it is high time to evaluate the nation building performance of the FBCCI group compared to the daily performance of our rural farmers we watch every day on Channel-i "Krishi Sangbad". The FBCCI is misusing its economic power by interfering in the politics openly and sometimes from behind the scene.

The FBCCI is concerned about the impact of "hartal" on the urban and national economy. Have the professionals ever thought that if our farmers go on strike like the industrial sector what would happen to this country? The industrial workers are forced to go on strike by the management and poor government policy. The FBCCI is asking to curb the democratic right to call hartal. I am not a protagonist of hartal but I am opposed to curbing of democratic rights on any pretext. Why we should call on the army to stop hartals etc. This is not their job. If this idea continues, a number of civil ministries and departments might have to be transferred to the defence folder!

I would urge upon some of

our civil society members and the FBCCI group to rely on the civil administration and help strengthen the system without negative interference from these groups. We are aware that undemocratic rule helps the individual members of the business community. They should guard their own house and let politics grow on its own!

Areader, One-mail

Politics and literature

Politics is the combination of ideas and activities that are concerned with gaining and using power in a country. By using political power and influence politicians sometimes gain personal advantage.

The question "Should our politicians study literature?" arises from the persistent failure of our politicians in discharging their responsibilities. An ominous fact has been evidenced that in Bangladesh politics more or less is looked upon purely as a business venture in which one would invest a large amount of money in the expectation that once elected, one can extract handsome financial reward. Since the country's independence, the rich and the mighty entrenched groups have had the monopoly to hold on to the state power.

Political leaders are often found to be greedy and selfish. Their professional love of the people frequently turns out to be hypocritical. Hence, literature may be considered a powerful tool to create awareness among the politicians.

The habit of reading literature, poetry, fiction, prose etc can really help people to look at life in a positive way, highlighting the value of honesty, welfare and other human qualities. The habit of reading literature benefits the readers in every way, making them worthy citizens. The role of literature in enhancing the quality of politics and politicians is widely acknowledged. Literature generates love, mercy, humanity, sympathy and moral values as well in us.

Writings of William Shakespeare and other great authors can be not only a source of great pleasure but a genuine source of moral teaching and knowledge needed to be an enlightened person.

Literature is an inevitable part of our understanding of human nature. Since corruption has grasped politics in our country, the politicians must get the lessons of literature for acquiring essential human values.

Sophocles' play 'Antigone' can teach us not to cross the limit. Dostoyevsky's 'Crime and Punishment' and Rabindranath Tagore's 'Gora' make us politically conscious and thoughtful. As language plays a vital role in politics, politicians should read literature to strengthen their language.

Great literature endows us with the sense of justice, question of choice and its consequences.

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Wastage in education sector

I read a news report titled "Education privilege abused for politics" in DS dated 20 July, 2008. We know that more than 5,000 institutions are redundant and the government incurs a huge loss of Tk. 600 crore yearly.

Every citizen of Bangladesh was shocked to read the news.

The government saved a huge amount of money from the education sector during the Awami League rule. At that time Education Minister AH Sadeque and the government had formulated the appropriate strategy.

I would like to draw the attention of the education secretary and the authorities concerned to take necessary steps in this respect and save Tk. 600 crore yearly.

Md. Tofazzel Hossain
Kushtia

Nayar's article

This refers to Mr. Kuldip Nayar's article 'Between the Lines, At least war is out of way' (DS, Dec. 20).

I quite agree with most of the comments that Mr. Nayar has made in his article but it contains some wrong notions and unfortunately the respected journalist did not hint at the root cause of terrorism. Result of an evil act we all see immediately and very vividly but to arrest it we need to know first why one takes arms and does such malevolent deeds.

The terrorists who attacked Indian Parliament or Mumbai city did not do so to harm India's democracy and pluralism as Mr. Nayar's said. The truth of the matter is that the Kashmir issue cannot be separated from the question of terrorism. If there was no Kashmir problem India and Pakistan could be good friends. India needs to solve Kashmir problem to live in peace with Pakistan and the Kashmiri people.

Tayeb Husain
Lund, Sweden

Christmas

While they were there, the time came for Mary to give birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped Him in a blanket and laid Him in a Manger, because there was no room for them in the hostel.

There were shepherds camping in the neighbourhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody worldwide: A Saviour has just been born in David's town, a Saviour who is A Messiah. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherds returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told! - Luke 2:1-20

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. His birth changed the whole world -- and He can change your life today. Jesus was born in the little town of Bethlehem in Israel over 2,000 years ago; His mother was the Virgin Mary. When He was born, an angel proclaimed to shepherds in the field "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

When Jesus was born, some people welcomed Him; some ignored Him; and some rejected Him. There was no room for Him at the inn in Bethlehem, so the Son of God was laid in a manger where animals stayed. Even today, some people welcome Christ and some ignore or reject Him. Jesus came to earth to be our Saviour and to die to pay the penalty for our sins.

Peter Rebeiro
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Madrasa education

Madrasa education needs to be reformed.

To keep pace with modern times, the steps needed are as follows:

- Computer-based teaching must be included in it.
- Competent and skilled female teachers alongside male ones must be appointed.
- The vigilance team has to discharge its duties on a regular basis.
- Above all, all kinds of measures necessary for better madrasa education must be taken. The sooner, the better.

Habibur Rashid Ismail
One-mail

Attention: DCC

Sometimes I wonder if our city fathers lack common sense.

The large billboards erected as panels and installed on both sides of some of the foot overbridges, blocking the public view from all around, become a safe haven for the muggers and malam party to easily prey on innocent passers-by and commit any crime.

We all know the crime rate inside the public buses have gone down after enforcement of mandatory lightings inside during night movement. But none of the overhead bridges is illuminated after darkness, rendering it more vulnerable. One at times feels very unsafe and becomes fearful while crossing the corridor. With the departure of emergency it has become more unsafe. Shouldn't the DCC revise their decisions and make the pedestrians' movements through the overhead tunnel transparent, so that it remains visible all around? They should also initiate illumination of all such bridges considering public safety.

In the interest of public safety we also urged the DCC in the past to arrange illumination of all the public bus counters, located on the footpaths, where huge monetary transactions take place everyday. These counters are manned for a very limited hours during the night. But we failed to draw their attention. Simply by installing a single powerful flood light on top of the ticket counters in each such location, the problem can be resolved to the relief of all. Thus the DCC may also earn the good will of the people in general.

A.B. Mohammed Zakaria
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Global warming

Melting down of ice in the Arctic zone is a confirmed sign of global warming. Scientists all over the world are very much concerned about the adverse effects of greenhouse gases on climate and overall environment. The degree of damage so far caused by the emission of greenhouse gases has yet to be calculated and confirmed. Meanwhile it has

become indispensably essential to take global action to contain release of greenhouse gases into earth's atmosphere. For this, we are to move to green life-style, that is, increasing greening activities by planting more trees, using green energy sources like bio-fuels, solar power, etcetera.

It is now confirmed beyond doubt that we have to control/reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, such as, CO₂, NF₃, etc. for keeping the earth habitable for flora and fauna.

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Rajuk plots

Rajuk recently announced the lottery for allotment of 1,000 plots at 'Uttara' and 6,000 plots at 'Purbachal'.

Through their website www.rajukdhaka.gov.bd they asked for applications from the interested buyers from home and abroad. Initially the last date of submission was December 18, 2008.

A maximum number of people applied for plots this time hoping that if the lottery takes place during the regime of the caretaker government, then there would not be any unfair means in the process and the genuine applicants would win the lottery. But that is not going to happen since Rajuk just announced an extension of the submission date till the 14th of January. Which means the lottery will now take place when there will be a new government and we all know what is going to happen with this billion dollar project.

Already several people inside Rajuk are active and they are asking for a bribe to confirm somebody's name in the lottery. Bangladeshi citizens like us who are staying abroad and sent our hard-earned money with the application as deposit can't even expect any fairness in this whole process. As per the Rajuk's prospectus published in their website, along with

the local residents, only Bangladeshi citizens staying abroad can apply. It doesn't say if the foreign nationals can apply.

But we have seen a large number of foreign nationals (ex-Bangladeshis) are applying. They are mostly applying for trading purpose. During the bad economic times, they found it more lucrative to invest the idle money in this and as soon as they win the lottery, they will sell it at a higher price.

They asked for deposit money (i.e. \$2000 for 5 katha plot) from the foreign residents along with the application but nowhere in the prospectus it is clear when and how they are going to return the deposit money to the people who will not win the lottery. Only thing they mentioned is, they are not going to give the applicants any kind of profit or interest on the deposit money. This itself is a violation of the country's law. The government is bound to give interest on any deposit held for a certain period. Anyway, knowing the past performance of the government officials and their ignorance, most of the applicants are not surprised.

So the questions remain, - As the submission time is extended, what is the guarantee that there will be a fair lottery under the newly elected government?

- As per Rajuk's prospectus they are not supposed to accept applications from the foreign nationals. If they have to include the foreign nationals, then it has to be through a separate quota.

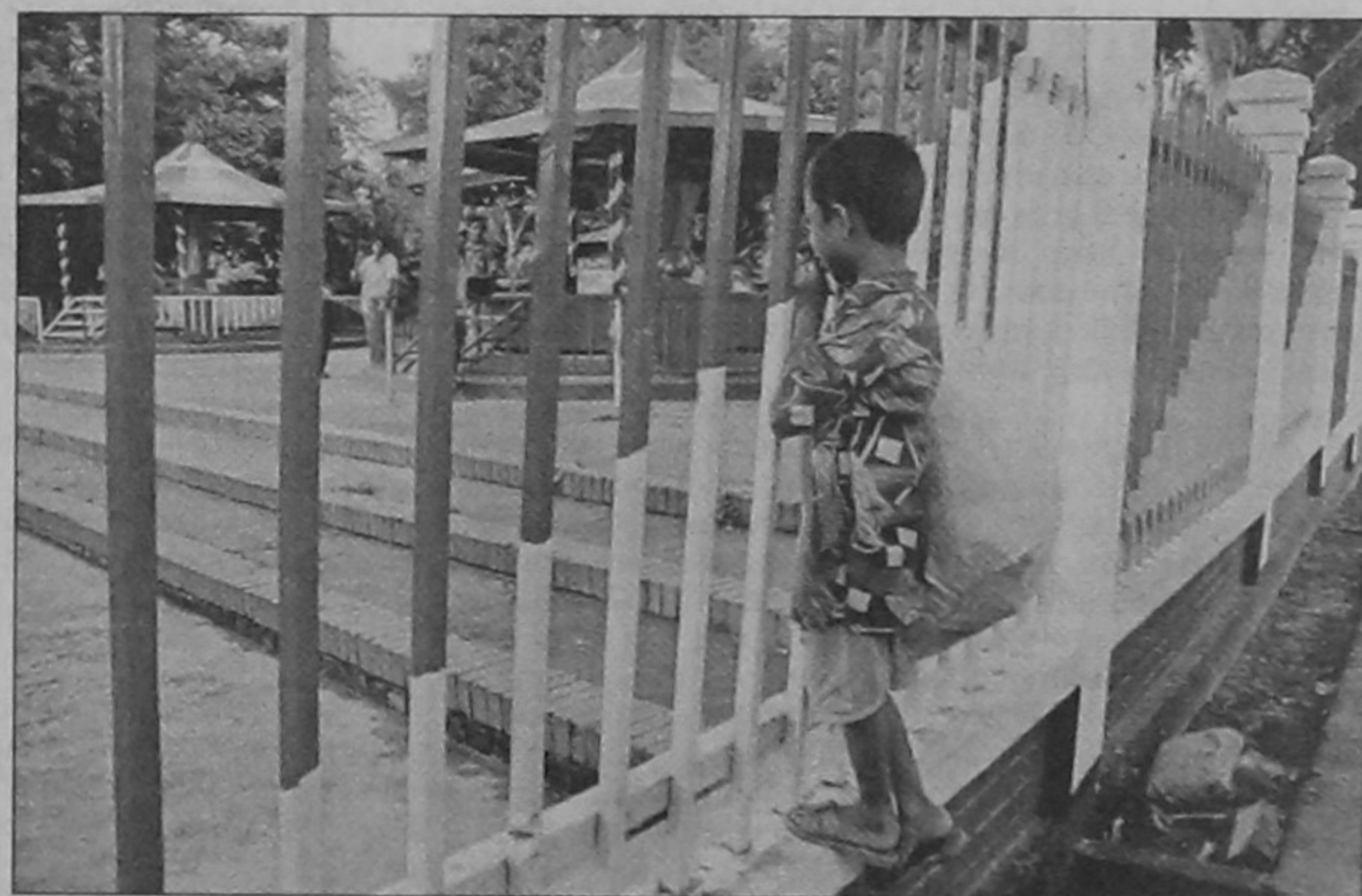
- Rajuk's age and nationality verification process is absolutely ineffective. Anybody can make up a copy of passport with the false date of birth using computer.

- Rajuk has to clarify how and when they are going to return the deposit money to the applicants who won't make it.

We are strongly urging that the independent Anti Corruption Commission get involved with the process and ensure a fair lottery.

Ashraf Hossain
Washington DC
US

Those hapless children



RAJ/ANIKAT/DRINKNEWS

It has been observed many times in many ways that every nation, whether it is civilized or not, treats its children as the most precious and gifted wealth bestowed on it, not because of the fact that they cause the population to rise but because the new faces with vitality and integrity will not only lead the nation but also show us the infinite possibility in them.

Regrettably, in Bangladesh we divide them and expect these things only from a particular section of children who are born fortunate and avail themselves of different basic rights. But what about the rootless children or orphans who are born ill-fated? Don't they have the creativity as that of the fortunate children?

With a silent famine being experienced now in the country, the number of poor children is on the rise in a geometric progression. More often than not, they are homeless, orphans living in different places like railway stations, slums, makeshift hut or streets. They are left on the streets to fend for themselves. What a miserable life they lead with little food and at times without any food! In ragged half-torn shorts, they are often seen begging mainly for money and food and collecting garbage from city streets, dustbins or from different risky places only for a mouthful of rice. Their pale faces indicate their

untold sufferings. But they, no doubt, could have excelled in every sphere of life.

Yes, we are living in a third world country and most often our dreams remain dreams due to the never-ending poverty. Our policy makers give preference to national issues and are often reluctant to think deeply about these rootless children. But their participation in building the nation is a must as they are our gifted wealth. To be precise, development in any country will never gain momentum until and unless its children, irrespective of the place they are born and brought up, are patronized equally.

There is no denying the fact that we can never expect a better Bangladesh depriving this huge number of children of their fundamental rights. They must be rehabilitated on an emergency basis. Besides, our mindset needs to be changed. What they actually lack is a congenial atmosphere for their proper physical and psychological growth. The government and NGOs cannot handle the problem alone. We all should come forward with a vow to give them a serving hand and give them the opportunities they need to have for participating in building the nation. Let's help them!

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Role of media



PHOTO: SHAHADAT HOSSAIN

We know it's an era of information technology. Unquestionably, it is a great thing that in an under-developed country like Bangladesh, we are enjoying the free flow of information.

It has been possible for the growth of the print and electronic media within a short time.

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