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The spirit of Bangladesh

Congratulations to all Bangladeshis for successfully holding one of the most fair and peaceful elections in South Asia. People have spoken loud and clear by choosing the Awami League alliance to serve the country. This is as much a victory of the peaceful execution of democracy, as it is of Sheikh Hasina whose alliance party won a landslide. Even though there are no fresh faces at the top, there are new visionary leaders who have won seats in the parliament. There are also many who have worked behind the scenes in the past two years to help their parties re-organise. It was a crushing defeat to all who were counting on violence and disarray. The Bangladesh army and the Election Commission have shown much discipline and far-sightedness by deploying a high-tech voter registration system which was pivotal to the election success in 2008 and beyond. We are grateful to them.

The world has reacted very positively and Bangladeshis living abroad are proud and excited. To a few observers in the international news media, this achievement is a huge deal simply because we are an "impoverished, Muslim country"; the election is important because the rise of fundamentalism in Bangladesh is seen as a threat.

True, but the significance of the 2008 election is greater than that. The men and women of Bangladesh have demanded liberty and dignity again by participating in a democratic election where the new leaders will be held accountable for what they promised. With this election Bangladesh has fully embraced democracy. Now begins the crucial journey to rapid and sustained economic development which is the topmost priority of the new parliamentary government.

Throughout history, Bangladeshis have shown an exemplary spirit of innovation and tolerance to their fellow beings, even in the face of unimaginable hardships. Too long this true spirit has been hidden under war, poverty, or corruption. At this critical time, Bangladesh is well within the reality of eliminating dire poverty within one generation. The new government should keep out of the way of this force of innovation and economic/social growth in Bangladesh. But at the same time the government must do some of the hard, but important things it has been hired to do: remove structural poverty by helping those who cannot afford foods, clothes, shelter or medical care; significantly improve the law and order situation (which is inextricably linked with economic development); continue to build international anti-terrorism alliances so that extremism cannot take root in the country.

Just a few years ago, India and China were described as impoverished nations with anti-democratic societ-

ies filled with human rights abuses. While these countries still are not perfect, they have emerged as the key players in the world economy today. It is incredible how people's spirit can lift a wounded nation. It is a curious combination of a nation's dedication and hard work, as well as the abiding commitment of its leaders. Bangladesh can also rapidly progress in today's world economy if she stays true to her spirit of innovation and tolerance. It will not surprise me if Bangladesh emerges as a world leader in my lifetime.

Dr. Nusrat Rabbee
San Francisco, CA, USA

We congratulate the elected government. We expect the new elected government will do everything for the welfare of people. In addition, this government needs to keep an eye on education. Because education is the backbone of a nation. Only an educated person can perform any task smoothly and properly.

And we would like all political representatives to work together for our country.

Habibur Rashid Ismail
One-mail



SHAHJAL ISLAM KAJOL/DRIKNEWS

Rajuk plots

It is such a disgrace that Rajuk, which has allotted such big spaces in the past, circulates incomplete forms and holograms, bringing in changes even after many have submitted the applications, causing headache to the applicants through poor management.

Rajuk is asking for the TIN numbers of the applicants as compulsory document for eligibility for allotment of Purbachal and Uttara plots. I and many people like me would like to ask Rajuk authorities: does a person cease to be a citizen of Bangladesh if he earns less than needed to pay tax? Should those whose earnings are low and do not have any land and shelter of their own and also cannot buy one piece of land due to high prices be deprived by the government authorities? Don't you think that these are the people who are really needy and eligible for the selection for the lottery process?

Those who have submitted fake TIN numbers should be

punished, but the ones who are not tax payers (due to low income) and have submitted the applications (without TIN numbers) in the hope of having a shelter of their own should be considered at least for the 3 and 5 katha plots, which seems to be within the payable limits of people even with less income.

Isn't this making the rich richer and depriving the needy?

I would like to humbly request the Rajuk authorities and the government to please help the ones who are really needy and consider the above mentioned facts while sorting out the applications for the lottery.

Mohammad Faruk
Nurjahan Road
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

The ground reality

I was mugged outside my residence, House 7, Road 5, Block - A, Section - 10, Mirpur, Dhaka-1216, on the way to work in the morning of December 4. Four men put a gun at my neck and a knife to my side and asked me to hand

over everything. They said they knew that I work for the U.S. Embassy. My idea is that the muggers thought I am well paid because I work for the U.S. Embassy-Dhaka. While mugging, they grabbed my shirt's collar and hurled abusive words at me. They took away Taka 500.00 and my embassy cell phone (# 01713-062076). Then I rushed to the police station and described the incident to them. The most pathetic thing is that the police personnel suggested me not to file a case. Their suggestion was that if I filed a case then I would have to come to the police station several times; and consequently would have to be present before the court also. That means I would be facing great difficulties. After thinking all these, I did file a general diary (GD) with Pallabi Police Station on the same day.

This is the real situation of my country where I am in fear of muggers and disappointed with the role of law and order enforcement agencies.

Shahid Md. Mobasher
U.S. Embassy
Dhaka

Ahmadinejad's Christmas message

According to a transcript containing Iranian President's Christmas message on Britain's Channel 4 television released before the Christmas Day, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad observed that most of the world's problems stemmed from leaders who turned against religion. While offering seasonal greetings to Christians, President Ahmadinejad said "If Christ were on earth today, undoubtedly he would hoist the banner of justice and love for humanity to oppose warmongers, occupiers, terrorists and bullies the world over."

May President Ahmadinejad's observation and deliberation touch everyone's mind and the tension prevailing among the nations get softened!

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Chairman
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System
SAU, Dhaka

Government schools needed

The government is going to establish a public university in Rangpur. The CTG inaugurated Rangpur University recently. Earlier, some other public universities were established across the country which have met the present demands of the people partially but no secondary government schools were established for a long time in the country. More government secondary schools are required in Rajshahi and all divisional towns.

There are only four government secondary schools for boys and two for girls in Rajshahi. The number of inhabitants of Rajshahi is increasing fast. With the increased population, the existing government schools are not sufficient. There are only 317 secondary government schools all over the country. Only 340 children will be admitted into class three in all four government secondary schools through an admission test soon for 2009.

Actually, people are interested to admit their kids into two government schools only and the rest of the four are not up to the mark in the guardians' view. The government should take the initiative to draw the attention of guardians through transferring dynamic head teacher/staff to these schools.

I would like to request the government to take timely and appropriate initiatives for establishing more government secondary schools in all divisional towns.

Mawduda Hasnin
Rajshahi

Decimate militants

Militancy is a perennial menace. The diehard militants are adamant to destabilize the country. So they try to assassinate the progressive political leaders. They are highly dogmatic and misguided. Actually, they are pursuing the mirage to materialize their plans in Bangladesh. They want to jeopardize the future of our dear motherland.

The police, Rab and the intelligence agencies should take drastic actions against them. They should show zero tolerance towards the JMB and their offshoots to ensure the security of the people. The political parties which mollycoddle such type of militant groups should sever their relations with them. Otherwise, they will boomerang on them.

I hope all will come forward to stop militancy in any form in the country.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Shahbagh, Dhaka

Indo-Pak relations

It does not require a political genius to perceive that under consistent public and media pressure in the wake of most audacious November 26, 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, the loud noises emanating from Indian media about the government of India being busy in serious discussions about selective strikes on Pakistan are merely not for public consumption.

This is fraught with serious implications especially given the fact that it will require not even a Mumbai type November 26 terrorist attack against India by elements from Pakistan but merely an earlier bomb blast of Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Jaipur etc variety (though God forbid but may happen any time given the situation in India and Pakistan) will be sufficient to constrain India to go all out for such strikes on Pakistan and which is bound to escalate into full fledged war between India and Pakistan.

Only an imbecile will believe that a full fledged war between India and Pakistan will not lead to 'nuclear war' between India and Pakistan (traditionally the most hated and feared countries, against each other).

War is a sovereign right of any country and martial element is an essential part of any State and which are supposed to kill and in the process even get killed in a war against 'enemy' country. But what makes a war between post 1998 India and Pakistan a grave matter for the entire mankind. In such nuclear war not only the martial forces of India and Pakistan but also the millions of civilians including children and women will get killed, burnt, injured and incapacitated. Therefore it is not only 'no bravery' but also an inhumane affair which the entire mankind should urgently take cognisance of.

Hem Raj Jain
Mahaviridham, Shri Mahavirji
Rajasthan, India

'Remembering a fallen hero'

I am writing regarding The Daily Star's Victory Day supplement of 16 December 2008. One of the unique features of this year's supplement is that it contains articles by three female writers. All of them have written about their personal experiences during the War of Liberation.

Of the three write-ups, the most evocative is the one by Ms Naseem Ahmed (Remembering a Fallen Hero). This heart rending account of Ms Ahmed's anfractuuous love for Lt Samad almost moved me to tears. While reading some parts of her narrative (as to how short lived their love was, how she found no consolation from her own family in her hour of bereavement, how her lonely heart has striven to come to terms with her grief as she grew up, how she prayed for the safe return of her young love, etc) I definitely felt a lump in my throat. I take my hats off to this writer who has written about her personal tragedy in such a controlled manner and such crisp English.

As far as the 'hierarchy of grief' is concerned, there is no reason to think that the loss of Ms Naseem, and others like her, is in any way less painful or less worthy of respect than the loss suffered by the mothers, wives and sisters of the Martyrs of 1971. Ms Naseem, and other members of her sisterhood, deserve to be placed on the same pedestal as any other war heroine. There is no need for self-deprecation.

By coming out with the story of her love for Lt Samad, Ms Ahmed has very forcefully drawn our attention to a new class of war heroines: "young women who loved young men who went to war but never returned." Society needs to recognise their pain and sacrifice for the cause of freedom, whatever may be their number. As is evident from Ms Ahmed's writing this group of young women may have moved on with their lives, but the wounds in their hearts are still fresh and unhealed. We need to help them overcome their grief. We can do that only if we recognise their suffering for our independence. In this connection, I would like to suggest that The Daily Star undertake a project to find out as many of such young women as they can, collect their stories and publish them in their next Victory Day supplement (16 December 2009). May be Ms Ahmed could help DS do the job. It is understood that many of these young women would be in their mid- or late-fifties and may be reticent to come out as they have been living with their husbands, children and even grand children. In those cases aliases could be used to mask the identity of the real sufferers.

Yes, many of the dreams of our Martyrs of 1971 remain unfulfilled. But they have not been abandoned. We still dream of and strive for a secular, democratic, egalitarian and prosperous Bangladesh.

As for Ms Ahmed's question regarding the bead necklace Lt Samad gave her all those years ago, I understand that it's a rhetorical one (not calling for an answer), I would, nevertheless, like to suggest that she could donate it to the Liberation War Museum authorities who could make arrangements for exhibiting it alongside the pen she had presented to Lt Samad.

Finally, I find that the story told by Ms Naseem Ahmed could be developed into a literary work (short story or a novella) of immense appeal. In the hands of a competent filmmaker the story of Naseem Ahmed's grief could become a powerful film a la 'The Cranes are Flying' or 'The Ballad of a Soldier'.

I have a few more comments to make on Ms Naseem Ahmed's write-up. But I think it would not be proper to make those comments through the columns of a newspaper. Would she kindly contact me at the email address given below. coolcapricorn100@hotmail.com

Fahim Ferdous
One-mail

Price spiral

Today price spiral is becoming an unbearable burden on the common people in our country. What will be the fate of the people who live on fixed income, how will the poor people survive? Of course, the condition of the students who survive simply by providing private tuition is extremely miserable. So, I wish the government notice this and try to find a solution.

Subrata Ray
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TANVIR AHMED / DRIKNEWS

Migrants' welfare

A new desk has been opened at the arrival lounge of Zia International Airport in Dhaka recently. Thanks to the initiative of the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) of the Government of Bangladesh and International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

However, merely the infrastructure and ceremonial opening will not bring any difference to the mostly illiterate migrant workers unless the people posted there are sympathetic and cooperative enough. Others in the government and working for them also need to change their way of understanding to face the reality.

The migrant workers have been sacrificing their blood and sweat (alongside personal and family lives among others) to boost the foreign exchange earnings of the country, however, the government and policy makers are apparently indifferent to their plight, which includes abuses and exploitations in the migration process at home and abroad.

Even, the major political parties have failed to show their due attention to the migration sector in their election manifestos. The role of the civil society with regard to promotion and protection of the rights of the migrant workers is not up to expectation. Although, there are certain organisations active in the area, their credibility and purpose is not beyond question.

The understanding among the relevant officials to protect the rights of migrants is likely to mean only providing welfare allowance to the family of a deceased migrant (if he is lucky enough to go through the 'official channel'). However, protection has a bigger connotation.

According to government statistics, during 2007-08 fiscal year, the migrant workers have sent US\$ 7.91 billion. During 2007, it was US\$ 6.5 billion. During the same year, 832,000 individuals had jobs abroad. During January-November of this year (2008), 839,677 had overseas jobs.

An estimated 61% of them arranged jobs through their personal contacts, while 21% had jobs through the recruiting agencies. The contribution of the public enterprise, BOESL in this regard is around 1%.

The wrongdoings of the unscrupulous recruiting agencies and individuals are going on unabated, which is alarming indeed. The government is likely to pay its attention to increasing the number of the individual migrants. Unfortunately, it is not paying due attention to other important issues like raising the skills of the potential migrants, increasing salaries through bargaining and negotiations, upgrading the living and working conditions for the workers in the receiving end, extending adequate consular services, and curbing exploitation of the individual migrants during the migration process and afterwards among others.

According to press reports, a large number of migrants have been lured into paying huge amounts to the unscrupulous middlemen and so-called recruiting agencies.

As citizens, the migrant workers are entitled to have due protection from the State. For this, the civil society and all others have a role to play.

As the Adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Welfare and Overseas Employment Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury has been quoted as saying: "To sustain and enhance benefits of migration, it is imperative that we create an environment that supports and protects migrant workers." Those words need to be translated into action.

Udatta Bikash
Legal and Human Rights Practitioner
Dhaka

Unsafe roads



To say that the roads are unsafe in Bangladesh would just be stating the obvious. Of course, despite all precautions accident will occur. The authorities can only try their best to minimize them. The answer to the question whether they are doing so is unfortunately in the negative. Rash driving is common here. More dangerously it is alleged that it is the helpers who often drive the public vehicles, instead of the actual drivers.

However, to blame the drivers and traffic police for all accidents would not be wise. Unfortunately, many pedestrians lose their lives every year because of callous way of crossing the roads and lack of knowledge about traffic rules. The pedestrians must also be educated about traffic rules. The roads must be made safer and, ideally, the pedestrians should get the highest priority.

Md. Gias Uddin Jami
Dept. of Business Administration
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Education

We are creating storm in a teacup every now and then on different issues. Like we are familiar with Abject Poverty, Ill health, No housing, Very Poor Infrastructure, Low Level of Education and now Terrorism!

In connection with alleviating the above malaise, we have taken so many measures and plans, nationally and with international help. Apparently we do not get the desired or promised results. But every time the oppressed and the marginalised get EMPTY PROMISES from all quarters.

I strongly believe that the RIGHT measure is not being taken somewhat intentionally! Now this expression is sure to raise brows and fears and mistrust, even drop many jaws. Indeed it is supposed to. Because we are always getting carried away and missing the whole point.

The truth is that all this is happening because of lack of quality education. If there is adversity in my life and I intend to turn around, then only education can get me thinking out of the box and only then I can look into other alternatives and work on improving my destiny, work on plan B.

So, strange it might seem, only quality education can get us and all LDCs come out of this POVERTY.

For example, the tea, cocoa, sugarcane and coffee growers and the miners do not get their actual wages and cannot therefore improve their lives, and remain just that, enough to only sustain, and get back for the back-breaking work tomorrow to produce more for the consumers in the affluent societies. Those societies know well that if those growers and producers get educated they will demand more wages and bargain, and understand their value and so their product will not be cheaper anymore. They can no longer be exploited!

Hence some cries and crocodile tears of the consumers are simply a pat on the back to get back to work



PHOTO REZA / DRIKNEWS

for them to produce more. They never invest in the education of the LDCs! They want the LDCs to remain what they are.

Again, no one is going to give us the panacea; we are to look for it with introspection.

If there is education, we can elect the best candidate by good decision making. The elected candidate can help formulate better laws for good governance and the results are expected to be desired and improved.

We can safely conclude that, do not enter into blame game, take charge of our own destiny and long it might take though, the truth remains in getting quality education.

I request the next government to allocate more on education and MANAGE better through sincere reforms, please. We are bound to see the difference in the next ten years.

Terrorism will die its deserving death.

Syed Imtiaz Ali
Banani, Dhaka