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Bringing down prices

Much is being published in the dailies by the new government about containing the prices; and today (10th. Jan.) the Hon. Commerce Minister gave a time frame of one month as reported. This naturally should remain this government's top priority agenda. This is what will make or mar this government; of which I am sure they are fully aware.

However, have the people involved at our end with the much-talked-about business syndicate been identified? Most of the food grain and items of vital daily food based necessities are imported, and the prices are manipulated overseas. To unravel this unholy business will take time, dogged effort, and investigation; not only locally, but overseas also.

This is a fairly complex task that needs following up many links, some looking like innocent money transfers. They have to evaluate these before the local actors in this drama can be positively unearthed!

We will be fortunate if we can even achieve this by 21st. February, more than a month away; and a very significant day. The idea of Bangladesh was unknowingly conceived on this day, way back in 1952, thanks to Pakistan's stubborn Punjabi mindset that set the ball rolling! We wish the Hon. Commerce Minister good luck and speed in this critical national task ahead.

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

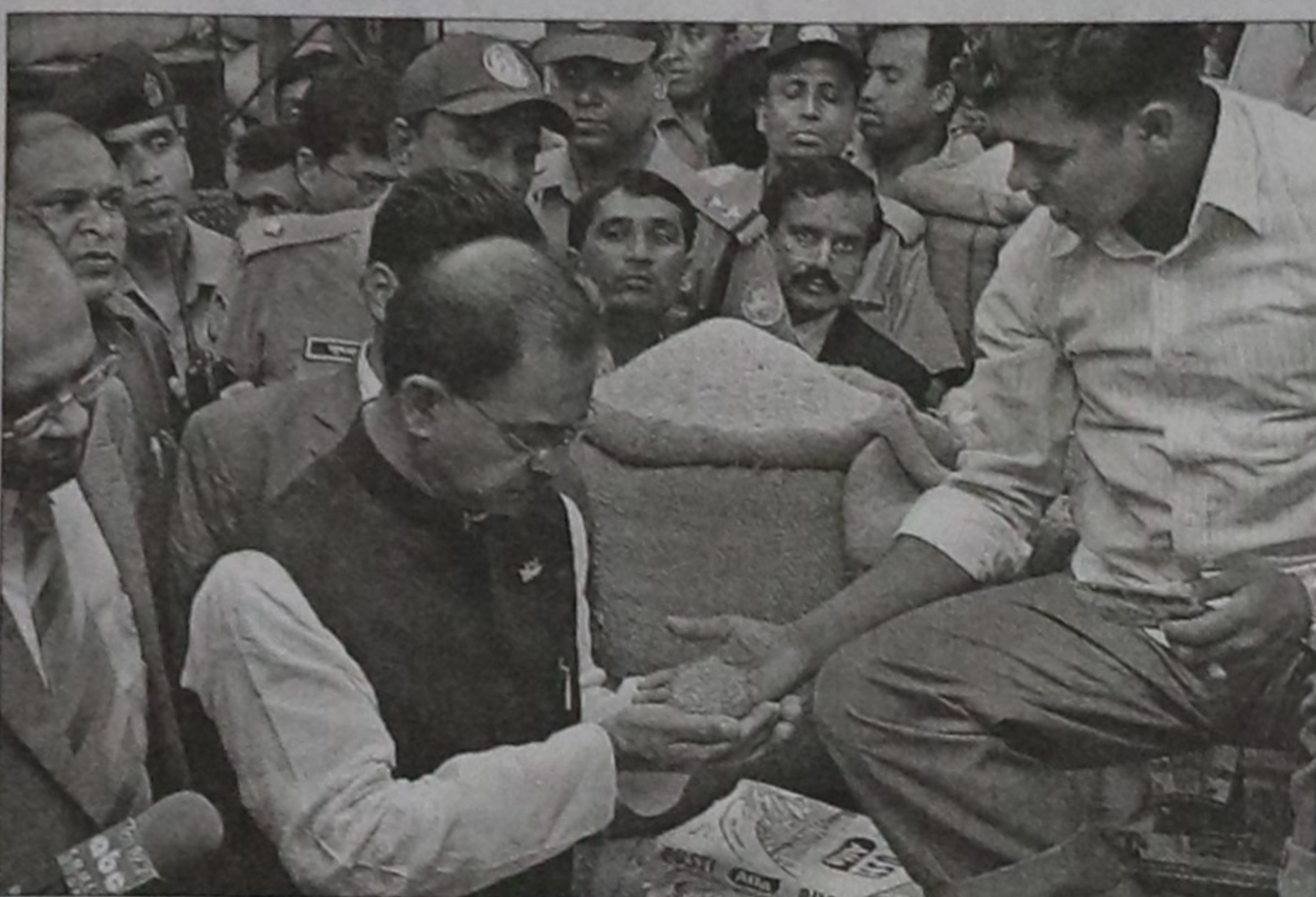


PHOTO: STAR

Virulent student politics

It hasn't even been a week since we got our "democracy" back and already there have been clashes amongst the student fronts of our political parties over establishing their supremacy at some residential halls of DU. This sort of monkey business will not be tolerated.

The time is overdue for our political parties to get rid of their student fronts. This is 2009, not 1971.

Azad Miah
Oldham
UK

Poverty alleviation

Poverty alleviation in this country is really a mammoth task. Nevertheless, Bangladesh has been struggling hard to get over abject poverty. It is, indeed, a big challenge for our country because poverty is still so deep-rooted here.

Some 46% of the total population of Bangladesh live below poverty line. Most of them cannot afford two square meals for survival, clothes to put on, a roof over their heads to shelter themselves.

The main reason of poverty in Bangladesh lies in the bureaucracy responsible for poor administration and exploitation. Nearly 80% people of the country live in villages. Poverty of the rural people is the main problem. So poverty can be alleviated if the poverty of the rural people is removed.

To reduce poverty at least to the minimum level the microcredit system can play a vital role. By providing microcredit it is possible to transform unemployed helpless people into active working people.

Above all, to alleviate pov-

erty people from all walks of life have to come forward.

Habibur Rashid Ismail
Chittagong

My teacher

My heart broke, sank deeply when I heard the news of Alok Sir committing suicide. He was my beloved teacher of the Journalism Department of Chittagong University (CU). As a student, I feel guilty that we could not help when he was in distress. Some rotten, filthy people poured so much poison that he couldn't bear. He was so innocent, simple and guileless. The nastiness of this vindictive society did not allow him to live. Shame!

Tears rolled down my wife's cheeks, she was speechless.

I am fervently appealing to the new government and the university authorities to run a full-length investigation into the matter.

Ataul Gani Osmani
Ex-student
Journalism Department
CU

"Diplomacy and enlightened self-interest"

Reading Syed Badrul Ahsan's invaluable write-ups is a great pleasure always. His writings based on the ground realities reflect the pros and cons of the issues that he pens through. Take the one titled "Diplomacy and enlightened self-interest", for example. Here he makes a pragmatic analysis of diplomacy and the diplomats and their role given the changing situations in the country and abroad.

Our diplomats overseas over the past years utterly failed to ensure the welfare of our workers. Mr. Ahsan's pointing out of all these facts and other suggestions for a healthy and vibrant diplo-

macy/foreign policy to be delivered by the competent diplomats is a matter of prime importance.

We hope that our newly appointed Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni will be living upto the nation's expectations.

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Our culture

As a Bangladeshi, I like our culture. I feel proud when I see that all Bangladeshi people celebrate 21 February, 16 December and Pahela Baishakh. I also become proud when I listen to Rabindra Sangeet, Palligeeti and Lalongeeti. But at present it is a matter of great regret that our time honoured culture is on the wane. Our own culture and tradition are going to be replaced by alien culture. Our young people are being influenced by such culture.

If it continues one day we will lose our own culture and our own national identity.

Md. Rabiul Alam
Business Administration
Shahjalal University of
Science & Technology

Smoking in public places

Smoking in public places is restricted in our country. Our government has also formulated a law on the issue. But it is a matter of great regret that people are smoking openly violating the law. Even the members of law enforcing agencies violate the law. The government has failed to enforce the law strictly.

I think the law enforcers should be tough on those smoking in public places.

Md. Gias Uddin Jami
Dept. of Business
Administration
SUST

Feedback

I follow the cricket results in The Daily Star ever so often and would appreciate if the latest scores were included at the top of the article as it proves, in my opinion, quite challenging for readers to gauge the actual score after reading the report. And sometimes people would just like to glance at the scores without reading the entire report.

I love the new look of your site, but I feel that the site is not very well organised. I would suggest looking at the BBC site, bbc.co.uk. It is quite easy to navigate to the desired news item on that site.

Thank you for your wonderful work!
Azmeen Rahman
One-mail

Scientists and politicians

Nobel Laureate Professor Dr. Abdus Salam established the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) and the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Italy with the objective of developing the third world countries through utilization of basic sciences. Prof. Abdus Salam was from a developing country, Pakistan. He wanted to establish the research centre in a developing country but he was not given support to establish such an important institute by any country of the third world. The reasons are political, social and financial. But the most important reason was lack of importance given by the politicians to the issue. To tell it more clearly many political leaders of the developing countries did not understand what the famous scientist was going to do at that time. Now many politicians and scientists of those countries understand what mistake they committed by turning down the request of Prof. Abdus Salam.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has given priority to establishing a "Science and Technology based Digital Bangladesh" in her party's election manifesto. The long expected election of Bangladesh is over and it has created an excellent example. The countries like the USA, Japan and India have praised Bangladesh for the successful holding of parliamentary election. According to the reports of international observers, the election was free, fair and peaceful. The International Republican Institute (IRI), a Washington based election monitoring body, has said the results of the ninth parliamentary election held on 29th December 2008 are an accurate reflection of the will of Bangladeshis. Being voters of Bangladesh, we feel proud of their comments.

As a scientist and recipient of TWAS Fellowship, I should say we have a lot to learn from TWAS in Italy if we want a real Digital Bangladesh. This is high time for all to look into the matter. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina may be requested to give high priority to the issue and to create an environment so that the politicians and the scientists come closer and sit together to design a model in the context of the country to develop a real "Science and Technology based Digital Bangladesh".

Prof. Lutfor Rahman
Founder Vice-Chancellor
Science and Technology
University in
Rural Bangladesh

"Inspiration from Bangladesh"

It was different from the usual report on Bangladesh in German dailies.

The sporadic reporting on Bangladesh here is virtually confined to something "dramatic" only, usually a disaster, natural or man made.

The recent overwhelming vote for democracy and rejection of the religious fanatics in Bangladesh are reported in some details in most newspapers.

I am referring here to a different news item in the Sueddeutsche Zeitung (SZ), a major national daily from Munich.

In the January 2, 2009 issue the economic section of SZ bears a title: "Inspiration aus Bangladesh".

It reports that the city of Paris, after a yearlong debate and discussion, has adopted a version of the "microcredit" method, invented by Dr Muhammad Yunus originally to fight poverty in a developing country.

From this month the city of Paris (one of the richest in the world) is covering all its quarters to provide microcredits to the needy through one of the oldest banks of the city, Credit Municipal. The number of poor people needing help in the city has increased by a third during the last one year and is increasing further due to the recent global recession.

A monetary measure of poverty is of course relative. The items to be financed with the microcredit in a developed economy (per capita income over \$32,000) and in a developing economy (per capita income, say, \$1,000), could also be quite different. In Bangladesh for example it is perhaps a loan to buy a goat or a mobile phone for renting, to a lady in a village; in Paris it is a loan to buy a computer for a young son of an unemployed single mother (who has to live on a "social security" income of 685 Euro per month) or for financing a vocational training course, or to cover the fees for a driving license course.

It is interesting to note that the loanee typically is a woman whether in Bangladesh or in Paris. In his early experiments in microcredit, in the seventies, Dr Yunus came to a crucial discovery: women in general were more responsible for the well-being and the economic future of the family members than men in a similar economic situation.

This is one reason for the overwhelming preponderance of women members of microcredit institutions in Bangladesh (and now in many other countries of the world), as well as their success. Analysing the first institutional building phase of Grameen Bank, two Norwegian social scientists, in their early study of the phenomenon, noted (among many other interesting things) the silent pride and determination of Grameen Bank -- its leader and its members -- to succeed in the struggle to free the country from the grip of poverty. The two writers surmised that it could lead to an unexpected present from Bangladesh, a silently proud nation, to the world: an institution to fight poverty anywhere.

Farhad Faisal
One-mail

RR neglected

During the BNP-Jamaat rule, the development of Rajshahi and Rangpur was neglected. Most of the ministers were from certain areas and so-called development took place in those areas only. Bogra and even Ishwardi (very near to Rajshahi) got pipeline gas some years ago, but still now Rajshahi is far behind it. There are lots of issues I can mention in this regard.

So, priority should be given to the development of Rajshahi-Rangpur region as well as all the underdeveloped areas across the country.

Mawduida Hasnin
Rajshahi

University at Barisal

Barisal Public University, the name of a unique higher study hub, has been demanded by people of the southern region of Bangladesh. This grand educational pyramid had been coated by golden hopes of millions of common people of Barisal. In 1979 President Ziaur Rahman had pledged to establish this varsity but this dream project was dead along with this visionary. But his political party, the BNP, ruled the country for two five year terms in the last 15 years. In those terms of governance, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia pledged more than 7 times to establish this university but in reality nothing has been done.

The last CTG approved funds for Barisal University. We hope the university will soon be established.

Onto Mian
New York, USA

Arabs and religion

There is a widespread belief among the general Muslims in our country that native Arabs living in Middle East will be faithful adherents to Islam as they are the inhabitants of the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). This assumption, however, is not a valid or logical one: just because people live in the birthplace of the Prophet (Pbuh) does not necessarily mean that they will be truly religious in essence. Christianity, for instance, originated in the present day Middle East, nonetheless we will find the majority of faith-

ful Christians living in other places such as the USA, Canada and so on. Similarly, Buddhism originated in present day Nepal, but the vast majority of Nepalese are not Buddhists, rather we see a significant number of practising Buddhists living mainly in the South-East Asia or other regions.

In the similar fashion, we will see many devout Muslims living in the Indian sub-continent and they apparently outnumber the practising Muslims living in the Middle East. Therefore, one must not take it for granted that the Arabs will be naturally faithful to religion.

A true believer can live anywhere in the world!
Ryan M. Haque
West Rampura
Wapda Road, Dhaka

Government colleges galore

At present there are over two hundred and fifty govt. colleges in Bangladesh. The number of govt. colleges was about ten in 1970 and their performances were enviable. But during Ershad regime private colleges were nationalized right & left for the sake of cheap popularity. On the one hand, this has resulted in huge recurring expenditures from public funds and on the other hand performance of many of these colleges has gone down dismally. Instead of improvement in teaching standard & performance in exams, the result has been just the opposite because teachers are more interested in private tuition rather than classroom teaching. This is because they feel that their jobs are secure. Performances of many private colleges are much better than a large number of nationalized colleges.

Hence I feel that the govt. should make a survey to identify poor performing govt colleges & denationalise them. This will result in two-fold benefits. Due to accountability of teachers to local managing committees they will try to perform better. The govt will also be benefited by saving huge expenditures on account of these colleges. Existing teachers of the govt. colleges need not lose their jobs because they can be transferred to other govt.

colleges & may even be retained in those colleges temporarily on deputation until they are adjusted in other govt colleges.

Will the Ministry of Education look into it?
Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury
Fulbari, Sylhet

Jamaat's ghost...

After independence when people's dream was not being fulfilled, Freedom Fighter Ziaur Rahman emerged in the political arena of Bangladesh and people started gathering in masse behind him. In 1971, people had heard his voice from Kalurhat Betar Kendra and were inspired to a great extent to fight against the Pakistani invaders. If Zia were not a Freedom Fighter, people would not have supported him. Actually Zia appeared in our political sky like a comet. His personal honesty was a great plus point amongst dishonest politicians.

Zia wanted to build Bangladesh putting together all hands of people, irrespective of their past political beliefs. So, we saw extreme lefts and extreme rights working hand in hand.

But what do we see now in the BNP? For competing with the AL, the BNP is working as per the prescription of the Jamaat. The Jamaat's ghost has got its permanent place on the BNP's shoulder! The BNP's pro-liberation groups and supporters are annoyed. The Jamaat is setting traps, one after another, and Khaleda Zia is entering into those without calculating the future influence and results of it. The BNP sacrificed a leader like Kamal Ibne Yusuf for Mujahedd of the Jamaat the latter narrowly saved his deposit money in the election. Satter Ukil of B.Barua could not participate for Ameeni in 2001 and 2008, although the former had won many times before.

The Jamaat was, and still is, an anti-liberation party and they directly collaborated with the Pakistani army. They killed, raped, looted and what not! They have not yet admitted their past misdeeds. Why do the genuine supporters of Zia have to have friendship with such criminals? Could not the BNP win alone in 1991?

Harun-or-Rashid
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

Agenda for change



QUDDUS ALAM / DRINKNEWS

The people of Bangladesh have once again asserted that they are serious about their rights and responsibilities; they cannot be sidelined and ignored; and moreover, they are not apolitical. They have delivered their verdict for change and the change is for peace and progress for the entire population across the country. They have clearly ordained that the people's wish is the supreme.

The people have struck a deal with the Awami League led Grand Alliance to serve them and not to rule them. The winning Grand Alliance must always remember that they have been overwhelmingly voted not to be rulers or elected tyrants.

The people of Bangladesh, especially the new young voters and the women at large, have spoken their minds through ballots. They have spoken in favour of change, economic progress, opportunities for honest and decent livelihood, social entitlement, people's empowerment and peace. They have shown their maturity with a sense of direction and purpose by dumping the despots, corrupt self-seekers, looters and plunderers. They deserve a big "Thank You" for giving the country a sense of direction in line with the perception and inspiration of the war of liberation.

The Election Commission headed by Dr. A.T.M. Shamsul Huda has set an example that it is always possible to hold a free, fair and credible election. The armed forces have successfully completed the great task by preparing a credible voter list and national identity card. The caretaker government has finally stood beside the Election

Commission steadfast for holding a credible election. In spite of some lapses the Election Commission, the armed forces and the caretaker government deserve a round of loud applause from all of us for their service to this nation.

The people's verdict in favour of change speaks for:

1. Good governance and transparency.
2. Strict enforcement of law and order.
3. Eradication of corruption and nepotism.
4. Establishment of rule of law without fear and favour.
5. Trial of war criminals.

These are doable and the new government with Sheikh Hasina at the helm of affairs shall deliver them all in earnest. The people do not beg to the government to feed them, rather they desire their government to be proactive to assist them in earning their livelihood with dignity. If the people are able to go on with their normal day-to-day activities, the country will move forward.

It will be a long arduous walk before we finally reach the road to peace and progress. Other nations have done it and we shall also do it. If we could win the best wonder of life, the free Bangladesh, we can once more make sacrifices to transform it into Sonar Bangla. We can do it; we shall do it in style. Bless and guide us Almighty!

Dr. A.K.M. Abdul Quader
Department of Chemical Engineering
Bangladesh University of Engineering and
Technology
Dhaka

Plastic products



Plastic product is a threat to health & environment. It destroys the environment in a many ways. Throwing plastic products on land destroys the soil fertility and makes the soil barren and infertile.

Plastic products were unfamiliar to Bangladeshi people a few decades ago. But recently a huge amount of plastic products is being used in large cities. Considering the detrimental impact of plastic products, the govt. imposed a ban on polybags on 1st March 2002. But unfortunately business people are again using polybags in their daily activities, instead of using environment-friendly natural fibre products.

I would like to request the govt. to handle the issue in light of our environmental needs.

Himel Aziz
Dept. of Business Administration
Shahjalal University, Sylhet