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Saint Martin's Island

As the only coral island of Bangladesh, I can understand the interest it draws from us Bangladeshis. But do we have to go for the overkill and ruin it in the process?

For six months of the year, for three hours a day, more than four or five steamers laden with tourists descend on the island. Officially the figure is about three thousand, but unofficially it should be a lot more, since many come on private trawlers and boats as well. After they leave, the northern part of the island is littered with garbage of all sorts. These large ferries, they churn the water during their arrival and departure to such an extent that the corals on the northern tip have been choked to death and buried under the sand. More than once, there are documented reports of Green Ridley Turtles, either getting ensnared in the fishing nets, or attacked by stray dogs or scared off by gawking tourists when they come to the shores for laying their eggs. The original 50+ families have expanded to more than 5,000 members, also placing increasing demand on the land.

The other damage that is being done is by the permanent structures that are being built all over the island in the name of tourism by unscrupulous private developers which have no significance whatsoever with the island when they could have been easily modelled after the exclusive resorts of Bali. Perhaps the Maldives example is much more appropriate for St Martin's, whose atolls are just as fragile as that of our island. Over there, the government has leased out each island to just one resort each, collecting US 5.00 per day per guest as tax. Notwithstanding the fact that because of such revenue sharing scheme and the resulting high per capita income of the tiny island-nation, it has also managed to attract well-off eco-tourists who are willing to pay dollars for the pristine-ness of the place,



along with scuba diving and water sports. How much is our government earning in revenue from the island while exhausting the fragile eco-system of that delicate place? With rampant digging of holes for the sake of fresh water, unscrupulous corruption in land trading, it will soon be like roasting the goose that lay the proverbial golden egg.

Another issue of St. Martin's that needs to be addressed is its strategic location and its abundant source of Uranium in its sands. With recent negotiations going on in terms of nuclear power plants and the shortage of this precious commodity world-wide, what should we do to protect it and then harvest it in the long run before they get washed away

by removing of natural rocks for commercial exploitation that acts as a barrier against tidal surges?

Just by declaring the island an ecologically sensitive zone is not enough. The access to there has to be severely restricted and controlled, and should there be any tourism there, let it be controlled in a manner that also benefits the exchequer. Getting off from the ferries after they dock in Teknaf, I can only wonder how long these throngs of people can be supported on such fragile an island like St. Martin's. Does anyone care?

M.K.Aaref
Architect
Gulshan, Dhaka

Nuclear power plant

Lots of talks are going around about building a nuclear power plant. Several countries are interested, as I understand from the news. Our bureaucrats are running fast with this prestigious project and as usual I'm afraid they are going to make a deal which will be a losing one for us. There are experts and professors who are dealing with it, but do they have any professional experience? I don't think so. You can't run a nuclear power plant theoretically (none of other industries either). A simple example is the placing of the power plant. What I know from the news, they are talking about the old proposal of Ruppur. But the basic rule for a nuclear power plant is its safety and that can't be located in a place where surroundings are densely populated. The second thing is the cooling system and availability of water supply. I don't think Ruppur fulfils any of them. These are only a few examples and there are many more.

Narendra Das (M.Sc. Eng.)
Quality Control Engineer
Electrical Equipment (FTEK)
Forsmarks Nuclear Power Plant, Sweden

Arab leaders' empty show

The Doha press report, published in most dailies on March 29, was an empty talk show of Arab leaders without any substance. Most of these leaders are dynastic despots, governing their subjects by might, rather than any right, by and large more autocratic than democratic!

Their main effort will be "one up-manship and to vie with each other; as to who can say and boast the most. Like them, Fatah and Hamas are more after each other than their common tormentor Israel which possibly enjoys these passing shows that provide them pointers on how to effectively tackle them, which they have been doing over the decades!

Small wonder, then, that Israel can do what it likes and get away with it!

These half a dozen or more

Arab states are no match for Israel. They are weak morally, militarily, intellectually; more led by their own personal agenda, than any leadership potential to look after their common interests. Possibly, they have nothing in common except for their language. In their heart of hearts they envy the intellectual superiority of the Palestinians, and are not keen on their having a country of their own, despite all their lip service to the cause of PLO.

Either in war or peace, in politics or diplomacy, these self-centred Arab leaders (?) are no match for the dogged Israelis which has been proved many times. They would prefer the Palestinians to remain refugees under their shadow living as second class citizens among them, dependent on their charity! As days go by, their protests over Israeli atrocities against Palestinians are getting weaker and weaker. In the none too distant future, these Arab countries will indirectly allow Israel to crush the possibility of having an independent Palestine.

I believe that Israel is trying to create a situation, to provide them even half an excuse to destroy one of these self-seeking Arab countries and cower them down to permanent submission!

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Why?

News published on 23.03.09: "Amid mounting pressure from the government, vice-chancellor (VC) of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) and its three senior officials resigned yesterday"

News published on 25.03.09 in the same paper: "The government yesterday appointed a new vice-chancellor (VC) two pro-VCs and treasurer of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU)." There is nothing wrong with it.

But we may recall that the immediate past VC was appointed during the last caretaker govt. when he faced tremendous opposition from the four party alliance followers, but still he could take

office and continue working. He was in a more or less similar situation after the new government took over. Why? Md. Delwar Hossain
East Rampura, Dhaka

Private residence in cantonment

The issue will generate a lot of political tension now. I hope the PM was quite aware of the political reaction from different quarters, especially from the well-wishers of Begum Zia and the BNP. We heard a university professor giving his view point from legal perspective and human emotion attached to it. I think it is also necessary to analyse the statement of the PM in parliament. She has raised a question about the legal process adopted in giving the house to the BNP chairperson by the then government of president Ershad. The PM has made an appeal to the chairperson to handover the house to the cantonment board, not necessarily any counter legal action to force her to leave the place.

The present opposition leader was PM of the country twice. We can not endorse the emotion or feeling of an elected leader to remain in cantonment area where the people can not enter without permission. Is it a normal situation for an elected public leader to alienate herself from the people by whom she is elected?

I think the opposition leader can kindly give a serious thought from political perspective and not from emotional attachment. Simultaneously, I would urge the government to earmark a house for the PM which must be occupied by the elected PM although he or she might have a private house. We must return to politics of discipline and avoid controversy. I am not sure what option the opposition leader and her party will choose.

The concept of an elected leader living in a restricted area like cantonment is perhaps undemocratic and needs to be addressed from that perspective too.
A reader
One-mail

BCL and violence

On the issue of BCL violence, the editorial of 5th April asked: will it ever end? Well, here is a financially viable, easily enforceable and the most accurate answer in the universe: to completely end all this violence, our political parties must dissolve all their student wings. Or, we can beat around the bush and come up with all sorts of condemnations, suggestions, analyses and fancy articles. But that would all be pointless. We would simply be fooling ourselves, yet again.

The choice is ours, ladies and gentlemen. There is absolutely no reason whatsoever for us to have student wings and student politics.

Azad Miah
Oldham
UK

Rein the BCL in

Being allured with the slogan "din bodoler sonod" we the young generation voted for this present government. After coming to power our prime minister announced that terrorism would be wiped out

from our country. Hearing this the nation became very optimistic but the prevailing hazardous situation, especially on the campuses, makes the nation pessimistic. What's going on on our campuses in the name of so-called student politics? On 31 March, we lost Rajib in Dhaka Medical College. The nation has lost a doctor. We have seen clashes between two groups in Shamsunnahar Hall of DU. It is a very awkward situation for the nation to see its female students engaged in political turmoil. If such a situation continues, very soon the nation will be in dire trouble.

It is high time to stop this practice. Prevention is better than cure. So I humbly request the honourable Prime Minister to rein in her student wing.
A.M. Nuruddin Shohag
Dept. of law
University of Chittagong

Traffic jam

Thanks are due to Mr. Mufazzel Hossain who wrote an article of substance describing the ills of Dhaka's traffic in DS of 26 March 2009.

The options he has highlighted are constructive and feasible and should make a difference on Dhaka's road very quickly, if implemented. A few more options that could be considered are:

1. Bank loans for purchase of private cars should be discouraged. Major companies should reduce their expenses by having pick up and drop facilities through micro-bus. Encouraging employees to live within walking distance of offices should be rewarded. If at all, younger staff members may be given cycle, motorcycle loans on easy terms.
2. Plying of empty cars/half-empty private cars on main/trunk roads be subject to fines during certain peak hours.
3. Parking on any public road between 8:am-8:pm on working days should be fined heavily.
4. CNGs should be fined heavily for refusal to take passengers on meter.
5. If parking on the roads is controlled, one lane on the left side of every road can be free for rickshaw traffic to cater to about 50% of Dhaka's population.

tion. Rickshaws should be re-designed to lower their gravity point and powered by battery, solar power or small engines as quickly as possible. Some models are already on the road and working fine.

6. Fitness test, driver's licences, tax tokens and TIN registration must be rigorously checked to stop corruption at BRTA.

I have said it before, and reiterate again that the rapidly inflating egos of our privileged class is the main reason for traffic jams and it is people like my old 'friend' Mr Rahat and Mr Lutfur Rahman (DS 27 and 20 March respectively) who constantly ask for the total banishment of rickshaws from Dhaka's roads. Have they ever seen a single rickshaw in any of the pictures on gridlock that have appeared in dailies so often?

It seems that all the facts and figures that I have given in my previous 36 letters on the subject have fallen on deaf ears. It is opportune that in this time of great economic peril, when even the motor car giants everywhere are going out with begging bowls, that those privileged amongst us set aside their own aims and conveniences and look for common grounds so that all the 15 crore people of our country are given the chance to earn an honest livelihood to maintain themselves and their families.

Sikander Ahmed
Niketon, Gulshan, Dhaka

Muggers operating freely

I'm writing this on behalf of my father who is a service holder at Petrobangla, Dhaka. At around 10:00pm, he was coming from Gabtoli bus stand to Banani road no 2 by a CNG baby taxi. The CNG driver's appearance was harmless, so my father thought he would go home safely. But he was wrong. The CNG driver stopped his baby taxi twice on the way.

When he came near to prime minister's office he stopped again and after that he talked with someone over phone. When his baby taxi reached cantonment (Jahangir gate), three hijackers got on to the CNG and held my dad tightly. They put molom on my dad's eyes and took away everything from him. My dad was quiet all the time. They threw my dad out of the CNG and some how he reached his home.

Now our question is molom party is not new in Dhaka. What is the govt. doing for the safety of general people? He was attacked by hijackers in a place near the PM's office. Security is absent everywhere!

Mohammad Monirul Islam
One-mail

Car parking

The parking of automobiles is clearly a wasteful use of road space, but the alternatives providing all off-street parking is a wasteful use of other resources. A compromise is thus needed to improve the efficiency of road space without inflicting inordinate costs on society in terms of paying for off-street parking.

A few places should absolutely ban car parking, with sufficiently strong penalties to serve as true deterrents. These include busy streets, all footpaths, and all parks and playgrounds. Banning car parking on busy streets could allow for greater provision of space for bicycle lanes, rickshaws, and an efficient bus rapid transit system. Car parking on footpaths is an offensive

deterrent to pedestrians and should never be tolerated, any more than would the stowing of other personal belongings (a bed, a table, a desk) on the footpath.

Minor streets could allow car parking within designated areas, with people around to collect fees based on time and space used. Sensitive areas that require free access and especially where children gather should ban parking altogether within a certain radius. This would include schools, and would have the effect of reducing traffic congestion, increasing safety, and serving as an inducement to travel to school by more efficient modes.

Rahidul Samana Roky
Dhaka University



PHOTO: STAR

Landlords' decree

The fixed income city dwellers comprising both middle and lower middle class households are in real trouble to tackle the rising house rent in the country. Most landlords, in the recent years, have increased their rentals on the plea of increase in prices of the essential commodities, construction materials, holding tax and cost of the utility services.

House rent has increased nearly 285 per cent during the last 18 years, according to a survey conducted by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB). A jump of over 23 per cent in house rent was witnessed in 1991, and the trend continued later on. It was increased by 17.4 per cent in 2001, 13.49 per cent in 2002, 8.4 per cent in 2003, 9.96 per cent in 2004, 7.89 per cent in 2005 and 14.14 per cent in 2006. Further, it has been increased by 21.48 per cent only in 2007.

On an average, nearly 50 per cent of monthly income of a household is spent on house rent. However, ideally it should not exceed 20 per cent of income of any household.

The fixed and low income households are the worst sufferers affected by the frequent increase in house rent. But there is no control of house rent in absence of effective government measures. There is absolutely no authority to monitor the growth of house rent. Also there is no effective law to protect the rights of the tenants. In the website of DCC, monthly house rent rate of 10 different zones are shown, but these are not implemented on ground.

Rent controller system was first introduced in this subcontinent during British rule. The Rent Control Act was enacted for the first time in 1943. It was amended in 1953 in the then East Pakistan. As a continuation to this, the latest amendment was made back in 1991, which is known as Premises Rent Control Act 1991. There are 36 sections in this act.

As per the law, house rent should be assessed at 15 per cent of the total cost of land and construction for a premise, which is in fact ignored in most of the cases.

The law also says that the landlord cannot increase the rent unless the house has been remodelled or renovated. Increase of house rent should not



be based on only cost of land and construction of house, but should also include the depreciation value of the house. It should be determined on the basis of location, space, amenities and present market price; and also separately for commercial and residential areas.

In India, house rent is charged based on standard provision devised by the local authority. In Delhi it is to be maximum 10 per cent of construction cost and market price of land based on historical values, not as per current market value. The rent also decreases according to the life of property. In Pakistan it is practiced as per mutual agreement of both landlords and tenants at the interval of every three years of tenancy.

In the USA, the Neighbourhood Councils settle any dispute related to house rent between landlords and tenants following the process of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). Those Councils act as innovative forums for all community stakeholders as quasi city entities that affect the lives of the citizen.

Here the existing laws related to house rent contain lot of inconsistencies in terms of implementations. Both landlords and tenants are ignorant about the law in general. The law is biased towards the landlords in particular. The tenants are vulnerable to various exploitations by the landlords in absence of an effective rent control mechanism.

We urge the government to take necessary action against the greedy landlords.

Sydney Thomas Robertson
Patherghatta, Chittagong