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Education commission

It is good to note that the present government has felt the necessity to reform our existing education system which is not only obsolete and ineffective but also corrupt. It has constituted an education commission with some of our illustrious educationists as its members. May be within the next three to six months, the commission will compile a report and submit it to the government for its consideration. The government will probably take another six months to study the report to find out how quickly and efficiently it can implement the recommendations. Finally, in about another six months or so, the government will forget about the report and put it in the deep fridge. One may ask why I should be so pessimistic about the new education commission. The answer is very simple. All the reports submitted by the past education commissions in our country had met the same fate. In the face of agitation on the streets, the parties or persons in power never found it expedient to take any action on these reports. However, in the process the state every time had to spend in vain a huge amount of money to launch and run the activities of such education commissions.

Every existing system has its own group(s) of beneficiaries. Whenever any effort is made by a government, with all its good intentions, to bring about reforms in it in public interest the beneficiaries feel threatened mostly for financial reasons. As in the past, the present corrupt and inefficient education system has also many groups of beneficiaries. Such groups are present at all levels right from the ministry of education down to

the lowest level. These groups include sections of politicians, policy-making bureaucrats, education administrators, teachers, textbook writers and publishers, over aged student leaders etc. From our past experience we know that no education report was, as a whole, questionable or unacceptable. For example, if a report had, say, one hundred major recommendations, may be, only one or two of the recommendations were controversial for technical or political reasons. One or more of the threatened beneficiary groups took advantage of such controversies and opposed tooth and nail the whole report. They never said that except the controversial one or two recommendations they accepted all the remaining recommendations, and they would cooperate with the government in implementing the acceptable recommendations. They hired the services of the over aged student leaders, misguided and incited the young students to bring out processions on the street to repeal the report, as a whole, of an education commission. Every time in the past an education commission released its report members of these vicious circles played this dirty game in their petty self interest. If nothing is done in advance by the present government to defeat these self seekers in the education sector the report which will be produced by the present education commission will, I am sorry to say, meet the same fate as the previous reports did. And again a large sum of the poor taxpayers' money spent for the exercise will go down the drain.

Under the circumstances, may I humbly request our education minister, who is known for his personal honesty, efficiency and patriotism, to kindly ask the present com-

mission, or may form a separate committee of experts, to find out first why the reports of the earlier education commissions did not work.

Brig Gen Syed Ashrafuzzaman (Retd)
Former principal of Jhenidah Cadet College
and Faujdarhat Cadet College

Forgotten 'soldiers'

Armed with a weapon of a new kind, a breed of new age warriors have taken over the streets of Dhaka. "But Bangladesh isn't at war with anyone. Who are these soldiers? What are they fighting for?" asks my friend Nabil.

Long gone are the days when we fought for our freedom with guns and bullets against Pakistan. The bayonet of our enemy has a new name and disguise today, it's called poverty. Disguised as the army of children, our distinguished freedom fighters have formed a trench in the streets of Dhaka, armed with candies and popcorns to help them on the way.

Most of the upper class society in Dhaka tends to think it's better this way that these children work than beg. It's all about survival of the fittest, after all. But are these children supposed to be doing either? We sometimes tend to forget to see these poor children as what they are, simply nothing but children.

"Well, the children have nothing to worry. They have more candies than I ever had" complains my 4 year old niece, Tania, as she throws out her half eaten ice cream. Sheltered from the atrocities of life, little does Tania know that not much older than herself, these children face a life of a different kind. A life where they have to fight to earn their bread!

Mehzabin Ahmed
North South University

The donors

After thirty-eight years of our independence, the donors & multilateral financial agencies are becoming controversial for their roles as development partners of our nation-state Bangladesh.

It is a great tragedy that we lost both our father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman & announcer of the declaration of independence Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman within the first decade of our independence and following their sad demises the country plunged into martial law that existed twice in our country from 1975-1979 & 1982-1986 periods but still this country did not lose its capacity for extending the basic utility services like water, gas, electricity & sewerage.

Since 1991, every administration that is taking the high office blames the previous administration without working constructively to extend utility facilities for all the citizens of Bangladesh.

Golam Ashraf Gulshan, Dhaka

MP's visit to school

Students/examinees numbering about 1500 were instructed to welcome the Member of Parliament and the people accompanying him at Adhar Chandra High School, Savar. Young students did so despite a record high temperature in the country in decades last Monday. In doing so, students/examinees had to suffer for about two hours from the heat wave which could have caused health hazard to them and could be cause for even death from heatstroke. We condemn such undemocratic and cruel acts.

Mosharrar Hossain
Haliahar, Chittagong

Movement for the house!

Remember the immortal lines of Shakespeare? My horse, my horse, the kingdom for my horse! The BNP's stand on Khaleda Zia's residence seems to be similar. There really is no issue. She was allowed to stay on in her husband's temporary residence after he was killed in a military putsch. She is no more helpless. Therefore it is not expected that she stays on in that house and carry on with her political activities.

I remember having written in these columns of your daily before the last elections that creation of a level playing field should start at home. I said that one leader lived in Dhanmondi under public scrutiny for 24 hours. Anyone could monitor her movement or those of the ones who come to her residence, the other was ensconced in her citadel where it was impossible to know what was happening after a certain hour of the night. How can she be allowed to stay on in a temporary home forever and carry on with her political activities from there?

She should come to the people who have elected her and install herself in a house within people's gaze.
Fahmida Intekhab
One-mail

Quality education

We know that some government schools and colleges will be established in Dhaka city under a project, which is now under consideration.

I would like to draw the attention of our education minister and the authorities concerned to establish government schools and colleges in Rajshahi city also to ensure quality education.

Quazi Monoar Sultana
Kadirgonj
Rajshahi

Analysis

I do not expect that all my reactions to the prevailing political situation in Bangladesh would be published in the newspapers. I had the opportunity to watch a few satellite tv footage. I have comments on one or more of them as follows:

a. A foot note on ntv news showed that the Deputy Speaker of parliament is reported to have said, "If the farmers have reservations about the procurement of rice and paddy price, this might be reconsidered". This statement, if true, sounds like the so called election campaign of rice at Tk 10.00 per kg and fertiliser free of cost often referred to by the BNP leaders.

My point of concern is that the DS has raised a controversy on the procurement price issue. The farmers might agitate to increase the price or Begum Zia might get a new point to make that the government is not sure what should be the procurement price of rice and paddy.

b. A responsible party member of the AL has started to point out the criteria for being a member of the AL presidium. Is it his job or the job of the council to decide the criteria of AL presidium membership? He is just opening a new controversy. The same thing is also prevailing in the BNP.

c. The Channel-i arranged a debate on the cantonment house issue. It was quite fascinating to listen to Tania Ameer and the enjoyable "bak juddha" between the three journalists present in the show. I have written several letters expressing my view point. I still believe that the issue is not a case of vengeance or hatred, it is rather a basic issue of how we want to see our democracy move forward. If we mean pure democracy, either the cantonment must be cleared of the political head or the cantonment should be shifted from the home area of the political leader. It is basically a moral issue. The present political action as envisaged by the BNP lawyers and party men is just to encourage the rule of force to keep a very controversial house in control as long as possible. This is nothing but a political strategy for the survival of the BNP and revival of the party.

Areader
One-mail

Reshuffling govt. officials

With the installation of a new government, changes in the bureaucratic administrative

May Day and workers' rights



MUNEM WASIF / DRINKNEWS

Observance of May Day requires establishment of workers rights. Otherwise, it would be a hollow celebration of a day.

The International Congress of Paris [ICP] adopted May 1 as the International Socialist holiday in 1889. Each year since then, in countries across the world, barring a handful, working people have been observing the day for better pay and better standard of living.

Originally, the demands were for an eight-hour day and social legislation for equal labour rights and pay for men and women. In most countries, the May Day is celebrated as a workers' holiday. But many of the rights remain unrealised even today. Women are still demanding equal pay even in the developed countries.

On this day, the class-conscious workingmen and women assert, if only for a day, for ending exploitation. The day symbolises international brotherhood of the working-class, fighting for ending exploitation.

The observance of the day in Bangladesh is important for the work-

ers as millions of them work for longer hours for a meagre pay. The day commemorates the movement by Chicago labourers, who took to the streets at Hay Market for an eight-hour working day exactly 122 years ago. Many of them had to die. But May Day is not observed in the US.

For the Chicago labourers, it was not so easy to establish their rights. They had to come together to protest against the exploitation they had been subjected to.

In Bangladesh, as it is going through industrialisation, the May Day assumes a new meaning.

Under 'greedy' capitalism, international labour law is nothing more than a hollow slogan. But May Day rings around the world the timeless slogan for the universal cause of establishing the toiling people's rights.

It is time for the government to ensure the labour rights to benefit both the workers and the employers and to help promote economic advancement of the country.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam
A tourism worker

Bleak future of old Dhaka

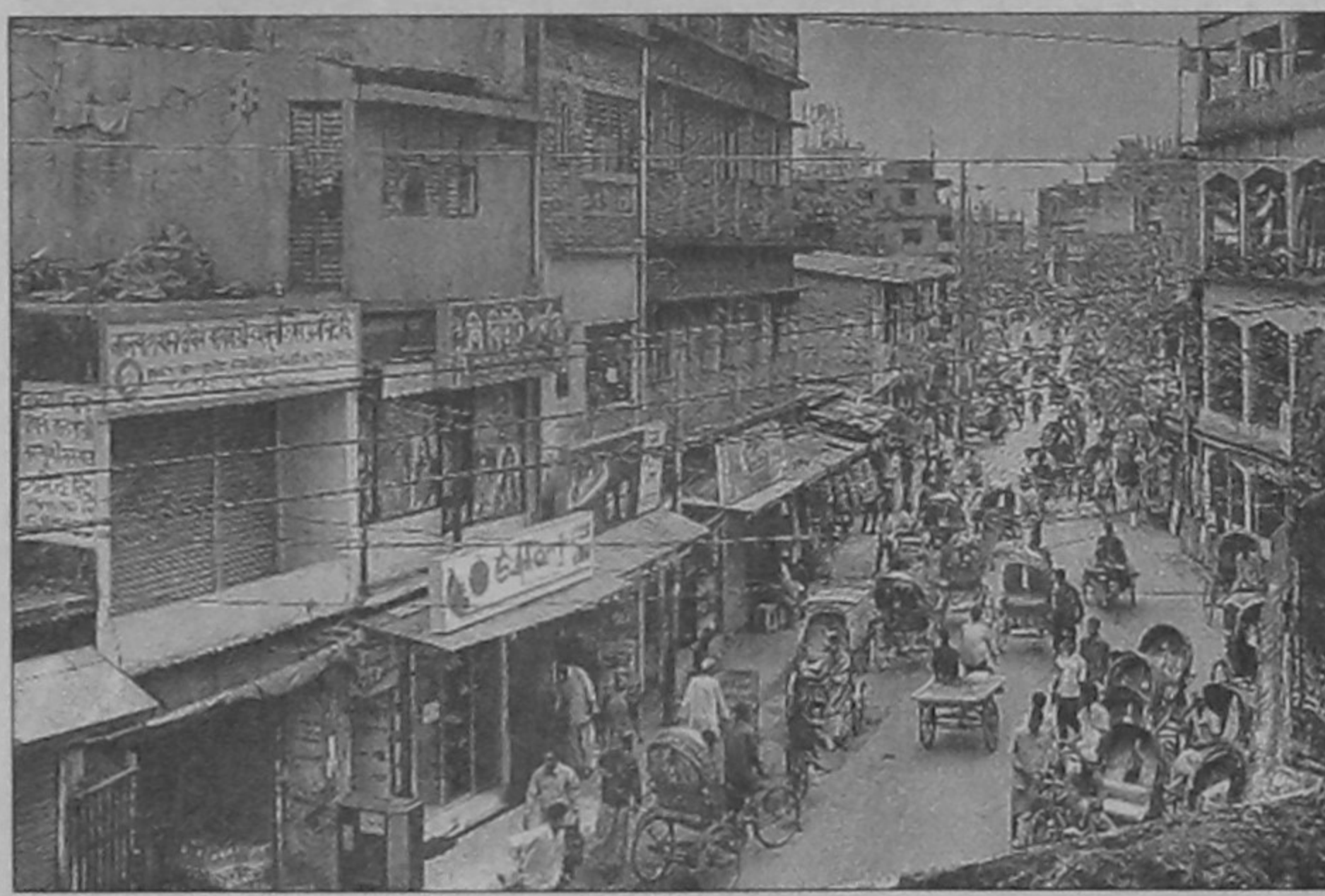
Dhaka city is 400 years old and it is only recognised when one visits the old part of the city. Although it is the city heart but now it's in a very deplorable condition. The slums are increasing and footpaths are occupied by poor people. This part is endowed with architectural masterpieces like Lalbagh Kella and Ahsan Monjil, etc.

The City of Mosques has now changed into the city of rickshaws and

the electric wires form a dense spider net. The roads are so narrow that even one car's movement becomes difficult. The roads contain so many holes that no vehicle can move smoothly, even at the slowest speed.

The situation must change for the better.

Md Mahbubur Rahman
Old Dhaka



Talk shows

Arrangement of talk shows on regular basis in private tv channels has become routine programmes. Whenever someone switches on the television set the viewer will find a talk show or personal interview of people from different fields. Many of the participants are not eminently known to the viewers. By the grace of private channels they get opportunity to express their views on many issues. The idea of the tv channels is good and I believe it is intended to educate their viewers with in-depth knowledge and information on some current issues.

We appreciate the initiatives of the tv channels for such programmes. But very often their selection of participants is not well judged. Many of the participants are not well conversant on the subject they are supposed to talk about, some are very much biased while some are ill-treated and abusive. These participants, instead of imparting knowledge to the viewers, spread discontentment and ill feelings against their opponents.

I hope the private channels have been opened for all categories of people, and not

for any particular group of people to view their programmes.
Shafiqul Islam, NY

Road accidents

I am writing in response to Sayed Zain AlMahmood's letter 'Seize the moment' published in the Star Magazine on 13 March. At the outset, I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks to him for his outstanding, timely & informative article on road accidents. In his writing, he gave a vivid picture and statistics of the causes & casualties of road accidents occurring in Bangladesh and around the world. He terms road accident as a forgotten epidemic & compares it to malaria and tuberculosis which get timely attention from the government, media & donors. He also mentions that road crashes cost us roughly 2% of the GDP every year & is almost equal to the total foreign aid received by Bangladesh in a fiscal year. Bangladesh has one of the worst crash rates in the world - more than 100 deaths per 10,000 vehicles. He further shows that the official figure for road deaths is three to four thousand a year.

Various international departments have observed

that the actual death toll could be three times as high. The number of people seriously injured in road crashes is estimated at more than 100,000 each year. However, this is appalling news for us as the number of death & injury is increasing in a geometric proportion every year. The roads & highways of Bangladesh have really become a death trap. Yet, the writer also mentions that the transportation issue is nowadays regarded as a public health & sustainable development problem. According to statistics, 1.2 million people are killed in automobile crashes annually across the globe, 3,000 lives lost per day. As many as 50 million are injured or suffer disability every year.

However, road accident has become a burning issue in recent years since the death toll due to road crashes is ever increasing in Bangladesh. Unless the govt. takes action to reduce road injuries and deaths through a combination of tougher enforcement of traffic rules as well as public awareness and safe road infrastructure, road crashes will become an epidemic in the coming days.
Md. Yeasin Emon
Department of English
University of Dhaka

Introduce more buses

The busy, clogged up Dhaka city and it dwellers need to have some sort of comfort while commuting throughout the day to their destinations. Cars and rickshaws, according to many people, are the main reason of the city's traffic congestions.

Making roads and flyovers, underpasses etc are time consuming and costly. The traffic department with the help of the city corporation and bus owners' association can actually increase the number of buses per route and all the parties will have to ensure that the buses which will be plying must be always on the left-hand side of the road. Bus certainly carries more passengers than rickshaws and cars and is the cheapest amongst he transports available for the city dwellers. If the left side of the main roads can be designated for the buses, the transportation time will certainly come down and a person can probably save 15-20 minutes during each journey. However, the condition of the bus has to be better internally and externally. All the buses must be painted in the same colour. The so called minibus has to vanish from the streets as these are the daredevils which create most of the congestions, haphazard parkings along with speeding on the streets which ends up in some sort of violence and chaos. The city

corporation must ensure that the edge of the roads and footpaths are well maintained, so that to avoid the broken edge of the road, the bus does not have to deviate which will create problems in the middle of the road or the junctions and the passengers will not have to wait in the middle of the road for boarding a bus.

If a joint team from BRTA, Metropolitan

Police (Traffic) and the City Corporation with the blessings of the government takes up this small but effective project, we will see that the city traffic is moving fast and the time which the passengers waste will also be reduced significantly. Dhaka is still a small city compared to other big cities in Asia.

Sohel Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

