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Plight of rice growers



TANVIR AHMED/DRINKNEWS

The harvest of Boro paddy is under way in the country with expectations of bumper production of about 2 crore tons. In estimations by different agencies, it has been shown that the cost of production of per kg rice would be Tk 12-13. But the price of rice in the local market is about Tk 400 per 40 kg. So, the govt. has fixed the price at Tk 14 per kg of un-husked rice and Tk 22 per kg of husked rice to give the farmers a better price. The govt. has also set the target to buy 12 lakh tons of rice from the local

market during this season. Now the question is what impact it will have, while the farmers will have to sell a major portion of rice in the market.

It is an issue that has to be addressed keeping in view the interest of farmers, the driving force behind our agriculture.

Md. Faruk Hossain
Agriculture Extension Officer
Coastal and Wetland Biodiversity Management Project
Department of Environment
Teknaf, Cox's Bazar

Politics and public interest

I would like to draw the attention of the government and the media to two very urgent and important issues of public interest. One is related to primary farmers and the second one to swine flu. During the last two days we watched some disturbing protests of the farmers, though non violent but very far reaching impact bearing. Farmers were seen with placards for full price of procurement of rice and paddy and asking for farm gate procurement from the growers, eliminating the middlemen. They also protested against the import policy of the government on powder milk, which has eventually affected the prices of home grown milk by the processing companies.

There is nothing wrong if the protest remains non-violent and symbolic to draw the attention of the government, the importers and local milk processing industry. Mr Shykh Seraj has rightly picked up the issues for ventilating the problems of the primary farmers. He deserves thanks. The sector is the life blood of our nation. Any wrong signal might lead to a catastrophe, especially if politicians are putting their hands in it for political gain which is most likely and should not be overruled.

I have a humble request to Mr Shykh Seraj to kindly show us positive ways and means to address the issues.

The swine flu is definitely an issue which will not be downplayed by the government, media and the NGOs working in the health sector. Please do not hide the truth. That will be a suicidal move.

Quadir
California, USA

Population boom

In our country, about 1,100 people live in each square kilometre. The population is at present more than one hundred and fifty million. It is growing rapidly. This alarming growth of population is leading Bangladesh to endless miseries and sufferings. To face this dreadful situation, different measures have already been adopted. But practically no tangible result has been achieved. In order to get rid of this situation:

- The government should give positive consideration to this problem.
- The academic system should be changed and reorganised.
- It should aim to give necessary training in different skills for self-employment.
- The people should be shown the advantages of having a small family, as well as motivated to adopt measures to have a planned family.
- The media can play an important role in motivating the people to adopt birth-control methods.
- Above all, to bring the population boom under control, early marriage and polygamy need to be stopped.

Habibur Rashid Ismail
Chittagong

English medium schools

On May 1 BBC aired a programme focusing on the English medium schools. The programme shows that there is no particular curriculum for the existing English medium schools in our country. The principal in every school is all in all. The principal selects the syllabus for the students of his/her school. So, the students in different schools learn different things. There is another concern that in some schools the authorities teach Geography of Europe, instead of Bangladesh.

It is not desirable. So an academic policy for these schools should be framed as early as possible.

Arif
One-mail

Tagore's birth anniversary

Rabindranath Tagore's 148th birth anniversary is being celebrated with full fervour in Bangladesh, West Bengal and other places abroad where the Bengali Diaspora now extends. There will be a lot of justifiable encomia and tributes for this great poet and personage of Bengal. I would like to say a few words about why I think that after Gitanjali and the Nobel Prize (1913), by the 1920s there was a distinct cooling off regarding Tagore in English literary circles.

There were basically two reasons. First it was his knighthood (conferred in June 1915)

which he renounced after the Amritsar massacre (1919). The British government to my knowledge did not officially cancel the knighthood, and many still referred to him as 'Sir Rabindranath'. This put his erstwhile friends when he visited England later in a quandary as to how to address him. With close friends, or non British, (like WB Yeats, or GB Shaw etc. who were Irish) it did not matter much, but even William Rothenstein was not as enthusiastic. The situation was further complicated when a debate in parliament was raging on the Amritsar massacre, and the House was divided mostly in favour of General O'Dwyer who was in charge and perpetrated the massacre. Robert Bridges (the English poet laureate) declined to meet Tagore, offering one excuse or another, although in 1912 he invited Tagore to his home near Oxford for tea and invited also an Oxford student from Bengal to meet Tagore, whose name was Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy.

Perhaps the second reason was more important which is that suddenly books (Prose, poems, plays and essays etc) in English were being published by Macmillan apparently written by Rabindranath Tagore without any acknowledgement or statement that these were translations from his Bengali work. I have such a copy of his full length novel Gora published by Macmillan (1924). Although India was the Jewel in the Crown of the British Empire, and Calcutta its second largest city it must have touched a raw nerve, especially as the only other writer in English who won the Nobel Prize was Rudyard Kipling (1907, and he also wrote mainly about India). There appeared to be an encroachment on the hallowed ground of English poetry with the likes of Milton, Shakespeare and the Romantic poets. WB Yeats (who himself won the Nobel Prize in 1923) wrote a letter to Rothenstein in 1935 which expresses the sentiment quite clearly:

"We got out three good books and then, because he thought it more important to see and know English than to be a great poet, he brought out sentimental rubbish and wrecked his reputation. Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English. Nobody can write with music and style in a language not learned in childhood and ever since the language of his thought. I shall return to the question of Tagore but not yet I shall return to it because he has published in recent years, and in English prose books of great beauty, and these books have been ignored because of the eclipse of his reputation as a poet."

Of course the situation (of who writes poetry in English) is quite different now, about hundred years after Tagore's winning Nobel Prize.
Engineer Shafi Ahmed
London, UK

Commonwealth

Once the sun did not set in the vast British Empire. Not only our sub-continent, the present superpower mighty America was also under British rule. They directly conquered many countries, they would enter in the guise of traders or preachers but at last they became the emperors of those countries. But as nobody can hold power forever, the British lost their supreme power and thus many independent countries were born.

Then the British have started playing another trick. They formed the "Commonwealth" with the members who were once under their yoke. They also organise "Commonwealth Games" with those member countries. They call the "Ambassadors" of Commonwealth countries "High Commissioners". The British Queen is still the head of Commonwealth. With these efforts, the British feel proud that they were the lords of these countries and try to remind us that we were their subjects. On our part, being a member of Commonwealth is nothing but a symbol of past slavery. Why are we bearing this spot? Is it a mark of glory?
Harun-or-Rashid
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

Traffic jams

Nowadays, there is nobody in Dhaka city who isn't a victim of traffic jam. We, the common people of Dhaka, are frustrated with this evil thing. It is difficult to avoid traffic jams. But we don't know why the law enforcers cannot enforce the traffic rules in the street. As a resident of Dhanmondi area, we are unfortunately familiar with illegal parking beside the roads & footpaths. Though Dhanmondi has wide lanes, parked cars make the lanes narrow. Even we don't have any space in the footpaths as these are used as the parking space. Continuous blaring of automobile horns is putting pressure on our nerves.

Dhanmondi residential area was not designed for the English schools, shopping malls & private universities but these make this zone a hell during working days. It is a matter of great regret that the on-duty traffic policemen don't do anything to prevent traffic jams.
Ahmad Iqram Anam
Institute of Education & Research
University of Dhaka

Fire fighters' safety

I watched with horror as I saw fire fighters fighting to douse the fire at Mohakhali petrol pump on May 04. I was equally shocked a few days ago to see the fire fighters fighting to put off the blazes at Bashundhara Shopping Mall.

Thank you, television channels, for carrying the reports! I was also saddened by the death of a fire fighter at Bashundhara Mall but was not

surprised at all. Why? The answer is simple. The protective clothing was not there for the fighters at all. I wonder how many people have to die and how many houses have to burn and how many families have to be wrecked to put on some protective clothing for these brave fire-fighters whose families are being pushed to living hells when they die putting off fire.

I draw the attention of the relevant government authorities to take immediate actions to ensure their safety and I also draw the attention of my human rights lawyer colleagues to initiate a writ, if the government fails to do what is needed within a reasonable period of time.
Mufassil M M Islam
Human Rights Advocate
UK
President and CEO
Law Offices of Islam and Associates International

Real victims

Although the blazing sun and the scorching heat are the recent hot topic as they have broken the records of 14 years. Simultaneously, the lack of adequate water and the frequent power supply cuts have aggravated the whole situation, bringing more turmoil to the life of people. But still we forget about the real victims, rickshaw-pullers as they suffer in every season. Many have no house and so live on footpaths and a large number of people are found in the slums. Not only in the hot season, they are affected in rainy season also as they bathe in rainwater and the wind of winter freezes them, as they have no warm clothes to face the situation. Still they fight many storms and other natural disasters and the very next day they get to work as they live hand to mouth. They rickshaw-pullers lead a simple life. Of course festivals like Eid, Pehela Baishakh etc are nothing special for them as they have to ferry people to different amusement parks and other places.

Alas! Nothing is being done for these poor people.
Md Mahbubur Rahman
Student
European Standard School

Test of strength?

Some Bengali newspapers have carried out a news item under the headline "Aaj Awami League O BNP er Shakti Parikkha", meaning "Today there will be a test of strength between the Awami League and the BNP".

The story under the headline reads, on May Day, the prime minister will address her labour front's meeting at Paltan and Begum Khaleda Zia will address her front the next day, i.e. on 2nd May at the same venue. There is nothing wrong in it and I believe the parties have not declared war against each other and there will be no battle or fight on the same ground.

I feel such headlines by

newspapers, are in fact, instigations to two groups of supporters to deploy more forces, as many as each side can muster, to counter the opposing forces. In Bangladesh, the number of attendances is not the real indicator of strength because the political parties hire people to attend their public meetings. Let me remind the newspapers of the public attendance in the campaign meetings of Begum Khaleda Zia just before the December 29 election.

She was overwhelmed to see the attendances in her meetings and suddenly her body language changed which had been much diminished by revelation of her government's corruption by the ACC. I hope we all remember what happened when a free and fair election was held on 29 December.

The newspapers play a vital role in educating people by providing information to all levels of people. I believe, the newspapers should be as neutral as possible, and their news should be as factual as possible for creating mutual respect among our people. Giving unnecessary headlines or printing big headlines, or headlines which evoke anger or disrespect are not a good service to the nation.
Shafiqul Islam, NY

A suggestion

Hundred days of honeymoon is over. The government of Sheikh Hasina has passed the acid test of BDR carnage. Due to better management and worldwide price fall essentials have become cheaper, a bumper Boro production will ease the situation even more. Load management of power proved beneficial to irrigation. With welcome rain life has also returned to some normalcy. These are all good signs of better governance. But there are definitely some sore points which need to be addressed in no time. Law and order is one such sector where the police and other law enforcing agencies seem to be moving without a sense of direction. The administration is infested with the past government's people who are out to foil the good endeavours of the government. Political, youth and student activists of the ruling party are in total disarray, searching for proper direction.

In these circumstances, the government should revamp its cabinet and the party to take leadership of the nation. This time people voted the Grand Alliance for a qualitative change in society. This was not a routine change.
M. Sanaul Huq
Uttara, Dhaka

Swine flu

The health ministry has made a timely move to prevent the deadly swine flu now sweeping across the US and Mexico from entering Bangladesh. Similar measures were taken earlier too when epidemic such as bird flu was threatening this part of the world. However, that threat passed over with no cases reported in Bangladesh.

Already, orders have gone out to monitor passengers arriving from the US and Mexico. According to reliable sources, over 100 people died from swine flu in Mexico last week and WHO has warned of the possibility of swine flu becoming a global threat.

The ministry should also take steps to upgrade our quarantine services since there have been instances of those carrying the virus escaping undetected.

The health ministry should also place more emphasis on preventive health in its bid to reduce instances of epidemics from spreading in the country. Measures should be taken to educate people on the nature of the disease, so that they would know what precautions to take.

This would also prevent overcrowding of hospitals and lessen strain on the medical staff.
Mohammad Shahidul Islam
A tourism worker



Govt and power generation

To express his keenness on his schemes for electrification, Lenin, the Russian leader used to say that "electricity plus soviet equal socialism" and to materialize his thinking, he soon started a huge scheme for electrification of the rural areas, and works for setting up mighty electric plants were initiated soon after his taking over the authority of his country. Coming back to our own country, it was only because of the promise made by the Awami League to make revolutionary programmes for electrification of the country that the younger generation went en-masse to vote for them. Unfortunately, the Awami League has not yet been able to show that its promises will be translated into reality. The leaders of the Awami League should not forget the fact that the younger generation of this country have no sentimental attachment for the Awami League and their voting for the party is nothing but the manifestation of their frustration with the BNP.

The Awami League knows well that electricity is just another name for development. It is now four months that the party has come to power. But we do not notice any significant change in the

attitude of the govt towards power. There is no denying that the most important task for the present govt was to ensure optimum cultivation and production of Boro paddy because of the fact that for the last three to four years people have suffered due to the highly inflated prices of rice. Thus the urban people endured the terrible load shedding when the electricity generated was transferred to the fields to ensure adequate production of Boro. Now with the change in the harvesting schedule, electricity is being transferred to the urban areas to mitigate the sufferings of the town dwellers. This kind of stop-gap management of electricity is essential and has its merits too.

Electricity is not something that can be generated overnight and it takes at least eighteen months to set up a new plant and start production. But what is most painful is the real, not apparent, callousness of the party in power towards generation of electricity.

However, if the Awami League remains faithful to what it mentioned in its election manifesto, they should not waste a single more day and go all out for setting up new power plants.
Rezaul Karim
Banani DOHS
Dhaka

Volleying back....

Readers' instant comments on The Daily Star Online reports. Log on to thedailystar.net to leave your comments.

Perform well or risk losing job

PM renews warning to ministers; 6-month evaluation to decide their fate (5. 5. 09)

We appreciate the PM's warning to the ministers. Every minister should submit a progress report to the PM every six months stating their activities.
Let us start accountability from the top.
Dr M Islam

We all hope the directives of the premier will create synergies in all the ministries and that not only the ministers but the powerful bureaucrats will work relentlessly for the cause of the people. This is the time and please show respect to the people by performing jobs for them.
Shah Asad Ahmed

Our prime minister's directives to her cabinet members are, of course, the right way to run the country smoothly.
Dr M M Kamal Bokul

Sounds like a good initiative, would like to see it executed.

The ministers need to be held accountable for their actions.
Farhan Rahman

I think our PM has to prove that she & her colleagues are really working for a change. In some cases, we can see, nothing has changed.
Taha

The whole nation wants to see such accountability in place. The evaluation has to be made unbiased, and on key performance indicators. However, a minister not performing at the desired level in the first six months should be given another six months for his improvement. And the evaluations should be conducted periodically every six months. It's a great and bold initiative of our prime minister. Congratulations!
Engr. S. M. Noor Uddin

The PM appointed some min-

isters with questionable competence. Some of them are still struggling to cope with the enormous task. Six months are enough to cause damage to governance! The sooner she takes action, the better.
Masum

It is a good initiative. The PM should set a target to be achieved within a certain date. Ministers must talk less and make their work talk for them. Sheikh Hasina must set examples through her own performance in the ministries under her control. So far, only the agriculture and food ministries have performed well. The home and foreign ministries can be given the 'benefit of doubt' on some very sensitive issues. The commerce and communications ministers talked more than they worked.
Before the situation goes out of control, senior party leaders

must be included in the ministry.
Saleque Sufi

Six months do not appear to be enough. It should be one year, at least.
Fazila

I am proud of our PM. Undoubtedly, this is a brilliant step taken but the crucial point is missing here. We have to work out how accountability should be maintained. If I were in the PM's office then I would open a monitoring cell where each and every ministry's pending projects could be listed ministry-wise. After that, every month the ministers would give a presentation to the PM's office as to what is the latest about the projects.
Moin Chowdhury

Warnings/motivational speeches/requests nothing will work because of the very structure of the administra-

tion. The best thing to expedite the implementation and execution of the decisions of government is to work through a system of Better Business Forum, the prime minister herself being in the chair. The sooner you do that, the better results you can expect.
Sarwar

It's very prudent to have intermediate readings of performance. However, to have a meaningful performance evaluation, it's important to set goals against which performance will be judged. It's also important to determine aspects of goal achievement over which the ministers have some degree of control and aspects over which the ministers' control is low. Now the question is whether such goals have been set for the ministers and whether some assessment of the degree of controlling has been made.
Humayun Kabir