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# Obama's speech

US President Barack Obama's recent speech in Cairo University was, on the whole, received positively by Muslims across the world. In his speech, he has said that he seeks a "new beginning" with Muslims around the world, based on "mutual interest and mutual respect." He further said, "America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings." All this clearly indicates that Obama wants to remove the sense of hatred and mistrust that Muslims across the world had developed for the US administration, during George Bush's eight years, and find common ground between the US and Muslims. He has also said that the suffering of the Palestinians, over the years, is "intolerable."



While all these things can be fully condoned, there were other aspects of Obama's speech which had some contradictions. For instance, while Obama, in his speech, said that Iran should not have nuclear armament initiatives for the sake of peace in Middle East, he said nothing about Israel's nuclear warheads. In a reference to Hamas, Obama told that "Resistance through violence and killing is wrong and does not succeed," but it was Israel that broke the negotiated ceasefire on November 4 last year, by attacking Gaza. Then only did the Palestinians retaliate and eventually had to face the gruesome massacre of Israel's Operation Cast Lead.

that America's ties with Israel are "unbreakable," it would be hard to expect Obama to promptly bring a positive solution to the "Israeli-Palestinian" conflict and also given the fact that there are strong Jewish lobby groups, it would also make Obama's task more difficult. In the final analysis, Obama's intention of adopting a more reconciliatory approach toward the Muslims and his aim of trying to break away from the belligerent and unilateral approach of the Bush administration is welcome.

Let us now see whether he can go by his words.

**Wasif Wahed**  
One-mail

Barack Obama delivered a speech on June 4 to the Muslim world at Cairo University in Egypt.

He started his speech with .SALAM. When he started with salam the audience welcomed him by clapping.

To open a new era with the Muslim world, he said that human civilization is in debt to Islam very much.

He observed that the real followers of Islam are friends of America but the blinds are not. Obama wants to establish peace in the Middle East, especially between Israel and Palestine.

In this long speech, Obama didn't utter the word TERRORIST.

We think Obama will be able to solve his country's problems with the Muslim world.

**Mahfuzur Rahman Manik**  
IER, Dhaka University

## Saving our rivers

I would like to thank you for your outstanding contribution towards the above.

By publishing hundreds of lively photos of our dead rivers, you could let our people know very much comprehensively how the death of our rivers will lead to death of our cities and eventually our civilization.

Your appeal on the subject certainly touched the hearts of our people and I am sure you were quite able to unite them.

**AHM Mustafa Kamal (Lotus Kamal), FCA, MP**  
Chairman  
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Finance

## Climate change

The impacts of Sidr are till visible in the coastal belt, particularly in the districts of Patuakhali, Bagerhat, Pirojpur, Barguna, and part of Shatkhira. A number of national and international NGOs and other organisations have been still working with the local administration to mitigate the sufferings of victims through implementation of income generation projects, health and nutrition schemes, rehabilitation of roads and infrastructure etc.

I had seen men and women in the rehabilitation programmes sponsored by UNWFP and supported by NGOs.

However, within two years, while these people of the coastal belts have been struggling to settle down gradually, the Cyclone Aila has made the situation critical for them, especially in the low-lying parts of Noakhali dist and Barisal and Khulna division.

The government has been trying its best by allocating cash and foods for the victims, but people of the remote areas are the most vulnerable and are being deprived due to inadequate supplies, and lack of coordinated distribution plans.

What we need at this juncture is a common understanding and coordinated efforts by all those agencies working in the affected areas.

**Nasarullah**  
(One-mail)

## Dying rivers

Thanks to Channel i and The Daily Star for the programmes on the rivers around the city. We will be eagerly waiting to watch next episodes, although I was quite sceptical about the objective of the programme. Nevertheless, this has been able to generate public awareness. It is well anticipated that these episodes would point fingers at the government to initiate measures to mitigate the sufferings of people made public through these programmes.

I hope the sponsors are well aware about the important role of the opposition parties to help create a common platform to address the issues to be raised under these programmes. Few special episodes would be needed to turn around the negative role of the opposition to positive participation.

My second suggestion is to help the lawmakers draft a bill to be presented in parliament. We can see a lot of cases being filed in public interest in the court of law by individuals or collectively.

I think the opposition members in parliament should be requested to present the bill in parliament which they know will serve the public interest. There is no use saying that we cannot talk in parliament!

**ABangladeshi**  
California  
USA

## Rajuk's plots

I am an expatriate who applied for the Rajuk lottery for plots. Little did I know what I was getting myself into. Of course, the deadline for submitting the applications was December 2008, and ended up to be postponed quite a bit, finally settling in end of April 2009. As an applicant, and as a person who has made quite a significant payment of US \$3500, I do believe that it is my right to know when the lottery will be held. Is it going to be any time soon? Or have the bigwigs still not decided on which of them (and of course, their friends and families) will actually get the plots, and how to pretend that the lottery is actually going to be fair? I guess that is why they needed the deadline to be extended: somebody's shala (brother-in-law) hadn't turned in the application yet. The lottery just can't take place, now, can it?

Does Rajuk not understand that if it accepts payment from people, then the people will have rights with regards to their money? I find it hard to understand how there can be absolutely NO sense of accountability and integrity within this institution.

I would urge The Daily Star to please provide an update for the thousands of innocent people who are totally in the dark about the lottery and whose money is stuck with Rajuk for the time being. Recently, Rajuk put up some applicant and expired FDD lists on its website for the Purbachal lottery, and there's no explanation of what these lists mean. What is someone supposed to do if their FDD has expired? Also, in the applicant list, there's a section for "Credited Applicants" and another one for "Applicants yet to be credited". If a name is in the "Credited Applicants" list, does that mean that Rajuk has already cashed their money orders/bank drafts? It is very frustrating for us, who live outside of the country, to figure out what is happening and when to expect results.

**Frustrated**  
One-mail

## Learning English

Almost all students of our country have apathy towards English language as they do not venture to learn it from an early age. This foreign language creates a phobia among the students because they are not encouraged by their elders and surroundings to learn it from their infancy. So, students of our country are lagging behind and their elementary knowledge is poor. Besides, our prevailing educational system is not satisfactorily updated. The system can still produce clerks, nothing else.

Nowadays several steps are being taken to improve upon the existing situation. Communicative English course has been designed for students to make an innovation in learning English. The course includes four skills (Reading, Writing, Listening & Speaking) for the second language learners. But students are not taught those skills properly in their schools or colleges.

The issue needs better handling.

**Sayef Shahriar**  
Dept. of English  
University of Dhaka

# Your planet needs you!

The World Environment Day (WED), observed on 5 June each year, is one of the major modes through which the United Nations creates worldwide awareness of the environment.

The World Environment Day catchphrase for 2009 is 'Your Planet Needs You - Unite to Combat Climate Change' followed by "Kick the Habit! Towards a Low Carbon Economy" 2008.

This year's host is Mexico which reflects the growing role of the Latin American country in the fight against climate change.

Mexico is also a leading partner in UNEP's Billion Tree Campaign. The country, with the support of its president and people, has spearheaded the pledging and planting of some 25 per cent of the trees under the campaign. Accounting for around 1.5 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, the country is demonstrating its commitment to countering climate change on several fronts.

The day's agenda is to:

1. Give a human face to environmental issues;
2. Empower people to become active agents of sustainable and equitable development;
3. Promote an understanding that communities are pivotal to changing attitudes towards environmental issues;
4. Advocate partnership which will ensure that all nations and peoples enjoy a safer and more prosperous future.

Climate change represents a serious threat to every part of the globe, and it would be ridiculous to believe that this is just another issue being pushed by the developed countries down the throats of the developing world.

Until a decade ago, there was very



little understanding of the financial, social and health effects of environmental degradation and the subsequent costs they impose on the economy. As environmental concerns and assessment of impacts of environmental degradation gained prominence globally, awareness regarding these issues has increased in Bangladesh as well, prompting the government as well as civil society institutions to focus on understanding and dealing with these issues.

We need to change such cold-hearted attitude for a clean future. Rather, we need to examine critically the state of our environment and to consider carefully the actions which each of us must take.

**Mohammad Shahidul Islam**  
National tourism worker

## Prohibitive prices

If you are a routine bazaar goer, you will feel the real pinch while buying either fish or vegetables. None of the very ordinary fish like puti, tengra, telapia etc could you buy for less than Tk 200 per kg, and to mention the frail 'batashi', it sells above Tk 300 per kg! Whereas these are the fish that the middle and lower middle class people could live on with the fringe of their limited income. We have no headache about other variety of fish usually bought by the rich from mega shops. Who is there to look into this kind of rip-off by fish sellers? The old saying, 'mache bhate Bangalee' that had some semblance until the recent past is now totally a stale and sour word to swallow.

As for vegetables, how come each of the main items like patal, bhendi, jhinga, dhundol etc sells at Tk 25 or above and karola at Tk 30-36 or more per kg? The potato, a daily item of need, is selling at Tk 25 per kg and the green chillies sell at the chilling price of Tk 60 per kg.

The country is not under floodwater that growing of vegetables has been affected to make them so pricey.

The government cannot put the blame on its predecessor or the immediate past CTG. It must see its flaws and take appropriate measures to rein in the prices, or the dealers and extortionists.

**Asadullah Ashad**  
Tajmahal Road  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

## Digital Bangladesh

The first priority is a long-term phased project to install renewable packages in 50 per cent of the villages (the other 50 per cent villages would replace tested packages).

The solar energy electricity kits for the village homes are

not cheap, because the developed countries have tower priority in R&D budgets for products usable in the third world missing four billion consumers!

The latest news is that the thousands of trained computer operators who worked for the Election Commission for the Voter/National ID cards have to be absorbed in other posts. The IT sector is flourishing, but better official monitoring could throw light on future development priorities (note how Bangalore in India has become a global centre).

Energy from biogas would have tremendous impact on rural lifestyle. The government and the NGOs are aware of the possibilities, but the sense of urgency seems to be missing ('Digital Bangladesh' slogan could have been more mass-oriented).

There is one small application, running into millions of users: how to help the paddle rickshaws with some renewable energy application (human pedalling), to provide light, and lessen the use of muscle power. Getting energy from disposed garbage is another project lacking concentration. In this deltaic region, the mass awareness of use of tidal power (inland waterways) is lacking (hardly any application).

We need more industrial zones than EPZs; to shift the small factories from the city municipal zones. With decentralisation of power (provinces?) Dhaka metropolis would not be so overcrowded.

**Engr Md Abad**  
Dhaka

## Unwanted state

After World War II, the division of original Palestine into two states, Palestine and Israel, is the greatest and unforgettable

mistake committed by the United States of America.

Out of the two states, Israel believes in 'Might is right', having a strong army backed by the US.

On the other hand, the state of Palestine is non-existent for the last six decades. Millions of Palestinians have been killed and made homeless in their own homeland by the Israelis. From time to time, the Palestinians who are unarmed are attacked with machineguns, tanks, helicopter gunships, fighter planes by the Israelis. Thousands of Palestinian innocent men, women and children are dying of hunger, disease and for want of shelter every year. But who cares?

The lives of the Palestinians and the Israelis offer a sad contrast.

Washington's two-state policy has become obsolete.

It is true that Israeli-Palestinian enmity and conflicts have led to 9/11 in the US, US invasion of Afghanistan, creation of al-Qaeda, Taliban, US occupation of Iraq and worldwide terrorism etc.

Solution of Palestine-Israel problem, comprehensive peace in the Middle East and restoration of law and order all over the world is possible if 194 members of the UNO sit together and declare Israel an unwanted state and revive the original state of Palestine.

The Palestinians and the Israelis may live in one single country of Palestine like the black and white do in South Africa, the peoples of East and West Germany have been united and people of different races, colours and geographical nationalities are living peacefully and democratically in the United States of America.

**OH Kabir**  
Dhaka

## Good initiative

Without any hesitation, I would like to express my feelings about the initiative you have taken jointly with Channel i to improve the conditions of the rivers surrounding the Dhaka city. The pictures are unique to let common people know the real situation of the capital city. I believe this initiative will be supported by 99% people of the city. Everybody wants to tell the same thing, but they don't have the voice to let the decision makers know the situation. The conditions of the rivers are precarious.

Because of the criminal activities of some people, the rest suffer but they cannot unite. This has been going on from generation to generation.

I am with you.

**Prof. Lutfor Rahman**  
Former VC  
Sc. & Tech Varsity

## Frustrated people

The MP of Mirpur area has lodged a GD with the police station as he has received threats from extortionists demanding a big amount of money. This is the case of a ruling party MP! So, how general people are spending their days need not be explained. During the caretaker government's period, people were happy as the extortionists were on the run. But with the coming of the political government, the number of cases is going up and up and in the meantime a good number of people have lost their lives.

At the initial stage, Rab's activities were praised by all but now we apprehend that any innocent man can be killed by them.

Every day many accidents occur in different parts of this country and many people die. But nothing is being done to prevent such accidents. In big buildings people become helpless when a fire occurs.

Yes, things are in bad shape. People want the guarantee of normal death!

**Harun-or-Rashid**  
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

## Ground reality

Unless we follow the instructions which we deliver to the voters, they will not care to follow those. This is perhaps the reason why incidents of vandalism, snatching, robbery, land grabbing, hijacking, car-jacking etc are not declining.

Some high-ups might be patronising such crimes. Some of them are acting as hosts to miscreants as their godfathers. Unfortunately, they cannot be punished!

**S.A. Miah**  
Rousseau  
Lasalle, Quebec  
Canada

## Road grabbing

I congratulate The Daily Star for their endeavour to create public awareness about the adverse affects of encroachment on rivers surrounding Dhaka. However, I want to raise the issue of encroaching on the roads. Garage owners and rickshaw owners are occupying the roads, creating traffic jam in Dhaka city and, on the other hand, car owners also park their cars on the roads, creating the same problem.

I fervently request our government and the authorities concerned to take stern action against the so-called land developers/ grabbers/garage owners to save the environment and roads.

**N.S. Chowdhury**  
Gopibagh, Dhaka

## Not the right course

We have seen a report published in the national dailies some days ago that the prime minister called a meeting with the ambassadors of the developed countries to seek financial help to make the dead river Garai navigable by excavating.

We do not get enough water due to the Farakka Barrage. Nevertheless, India is going to construct another barrage at the Tipaimukh and if it does, our rivers in the eastern part will be dead. So, will we seek foreign help to revive those rivers once again? The government should take up the matter with its Indian counterpart and seek a just solution.

**Sheuly Haque**  
Tarash  
Sirajganj

## Waste management

As the amount of waste is growing rapidly and polluting the environment, the time has come to think about it very seriously. We cannot altogether get rid of waste, but proper management can certainly reduce it.

If we think of burning, burying, recycling and thus reducing waste, we can save our atmosphere to a large extent. We can use some waste as fuel as well. In addition, we can use vegetable waste to make composts to improve our soil. In many countries it is now quite normal to collect old bottles and cans and recycle them. More and more companies should come forward to promote greater recycling and changes in consumption patterns to reduce the amount of rubbish and help people to save the environment. We know prevention is better than cure.

It is high time to take proper steps and necessary measures to raise awareness about the problem of waste management.

**Habibur Rashid Ismail**  
Jamea Rahmania Fadi  
Madrassa  
Chittagong

# Women and agriculture



In overall farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labour with percentages much higher in certain region. In the Indian Himalayas a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on a one-hectare farm, a figure which illustrates women's significant contributions to agricultural production.

Their contribution to agriculture is no doubt because of their greater contribution to household income. They constitute a large part of the total work force in agriculture. Although the pattern of division of labour between men and women varies greatly from region to region, women are involved in most of the

operations in agriculture, including subsidiary enterprises like dairy, poultry, beekeeping, mushroom, cultivation sericulture, pisciculture, social forestry, etc. So far as crop husbandry is concerned, women participate in almost all activities, right from preparatory tillage to harvest, and even in post harvest tasks like processing, storage, and marketing.

So, women must be provided opportunities to have control over production resources that would lead to better life for their families.

**Md. Nur-e-Alam Siddique**  
Faculty of agriculture  
Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science & Technology  
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