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Save the rivers

The government has been taking steps to free the rivers from grabbers. The eviction drive is highly praiseworthy. But we all have suspicion about the future of the drive. What will be the next step? How can the rivers be maintained? I think the govt should take sustainable plans, for example plantation. This is the rainy season, a suitable time for plantation. Government can take up the plantation programme and continue eviction drive simultaneously in the riverbanks. We could get two kinds of benefits from this programme. Firstly, tree can prevent erosion and will keep the riverbanks green. Secondly, it will be tough to grab the rivers by cutting down trees. Furthermore, the authorities can involve all the parliament members and prominent political leaders to plant trees on the banks of rivers and canals. Because we know all the grabbers have political backup directly or indirectly. And I hope that no political leader of the ruling or opposition party will allow anybody to remove the trees, which they have planted. We urge the authorities to take the initiative. Otherwise the rivers will be grabbed again.

Sabina Parvin
One-mail

Commuters' ordeal

Mirpur is one of the most densely populated areas of Dhaka city but commuting to Mirpur by buses has become an ordeal for most of the commuters because of lack of buses and proper transport facility. Although a good number of local buses are plying in and around Mirpur everyday, but their condition is very shabby and due to lack of proper maintenance, these buses are also unfit for travel. Nevertheless, commuters are risking their lives while traveling by these buses. If a person who lives in Mirpur and wishes to go to Dhanmondi, then he has no other option but to board a bus of a particular company, a private enterprise, which is the only operator on Dhanmondi-Mirpur route. This is the only operator who got the route permit from BRTA (Bangladesh Road Transport Authority) to ply in this route and hence the commuters have no other option but to take its service. There is an allegation against the BRTA officials that they provide route permit for busy areas such as Mirpur, Dhanmondi etc to a selective number of bus operators whose owners are very influential people since owning a bus company on a busy route means brisk business. From College Gate to Mohammadpur, the distance is hardly 4 km, but this company is charging Tk. 12 for this small distance which is a

clear violation of BRTA fixed bus fare. BRTA can easily take action against this bus company to stop their monopoly business but they are doing nothing in this regard and we, the commuters, are suffering for this. I would like to urge the authorities concerned to look into the matter.

Sheikh Iraj
Dept. of English
Stamford University
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Withdraw tax on interest and deposit in bank

In the last couple of months Bangladesh Bank has been advocating to reduce interest on lending by commercial banks and financial institutions to stimulate business activities. Most of the private commercial banks and financial institutions have reduced 3(three) per cent interest on term deposits from beginning of May'09. Gradually the lending interest will also be reduced in near future. For better business environment reduction of bank interest is acceptable from macro economic point of view.

If one looks at it from micro economic point of view, one would see that the depositors would get less return from their savings. The retired non-government service holders and older women who meet their family expenditure on interests against deposit in bank would be affected negatively. It is known to all that a few years back government imposed 10% tax on bank interest and has been cutting it on source. Before May'09 the private commercial banks used to pay 13 % to 13.5 % interest for one-year term deposit. A depositor used to get, say (13-13.3) or 11.7 % net interest on one's deposit after one year. As the government has not withdrawn tax on earned bank interest in proposed budget, a depositor will get (9-9.9) or 8.1 % after one year. In addition to that for deposit of Tk.1, 00,000.00 in a bank Tk. 250.00 was cut as government excise duty and for a deposit, which was more than Tk. 1,00,000.00 but up to Tk.10,00,000.00 in a bank, Tk. 500.00 was cut as government excise duty. If this excise duty is not withdrawn the small depositors will be adversely affected.

I would like to urge the Ministry of Finance and Jatiyo Sangsad to withdraw income tax and excise duty on term deposit of up to Tk.10, 00,000.00 in the budget, which is under consideration of Jatiyo Sangsad now. It will give some relief to small depositors who run their families from interest on small fix deposit in banks.

Md. Ashraf Hossain
Central Bashabo, Dhaka

Housing vision 2021!

The subject which was stated in the budget has been mentioned in all dailies on 12th June. The proposal within the timeframe, appears fairly large, and not limited to building flats only for the 26,000 flats. In addition the 22,800 plots having eight flats per plot on an average will have another 1,82,400 flats if I understand correctly. Together the number of flats to be built exceeds 2,10,000 within the next twenty-one years!

This averages to building a minimum of 10,000 flats regularly every year. However, just building the flats will not help. For providing needed services, to make the flats habitable, electric power, potable water, LPG or piped natural gas for cooking, drainage, sewerage and affluent disposal needs are to be met. Both the quantum of work, and funds needed for all these ancillary works will be quite substantial!

On the basis of providing average 10KW of power and 1000 litre potable water per flat; we will need to provide 100MW of electric power every year to make the residences habitable and 10 million litre of potable water regularly on an annual basis! One wonders if we have the physical and financial capability to sustain such a pace of progress continually for the next 21 years? Mind you; this does not include the infrastructure related to the project, like roads, street lighting, drainage and sewerage links which are essential prerequisites!

The ideas presented, are sound, the objectives lofty, but the big question is can we sustain it.

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Roads of Uttara

Uttara has become one of the fastest growing areas in Dhaka. Day by day the area is getting crowded. But the conditions of the roads of Uttara are extremely bad. People have elected an MP with much hopes so that people of Uttara could at least have good roads to travel. It seems none is in charge here. Every single day there are traffic jams near Jasimuddin Road for hours. Most of the roads are also in real bad shapes. I guess, we will keep on living with false dreams and promises.

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

Mobile sets

The proposed budget for the FY 2009-2010 has many new features. For the first time public-private partnership investment plan is going to be incorporated in the ADP. But some aspects of the budget are mind-boggling. Imposition of flat tax rate on different consumer items is unconvincing. Same thing might be used as necessity as well as luxury item. For example, low priced mobile phone sets are used by common people as necessity. Whereas the costly ones are the luxury of the affluent people. So the government should differentiate between necessity & luxury. Here progressive rate of taxation is relevant. So the mobile sets priced below Tk.10,000 shouldn't see higher tax rate proposed in the budget. Rather sets priced above Tk.10,000 should see progressive rate of taxation. Those who argue that under invoicing might be a problem should learn that the prices of different brands of mobile sets are displayed on the websites of the companies concerned. So the common people hope for the finance minister's prudence in this regard.

Syed Muhammed Azim
Nayabazar, Nasirabad
Chittagong

Farmers

There are some people who have vital contribution in our social and national economic development. But, unexpectedly we are always trying to overlook them. For example, the farmers, who are mainly recognized as the soldiers of agriculture. They always play significant role in tackling food crisis by producing crops despite extreme temperature, rain, flood, storm and various natural calamities. But the facts, they spend their life under the poverty level. We must remember that if the farmers survive, then the whole country will survive. Yet, we do not respect these national heroes. We must change our perception, otherwise we may face endless darkness.

Md. Omar Faruque Shamim
Haji Mohammad Danesh Sci. and Tech. University
Dinajpur

Daylight saving

Bangladesh has started daylight savings! Congratulations, though the benefit to be achieved has become controversial already! However, as many have raised concern regarding the possible chaos in light of the change, I believe, the government should have implemented it on the 18th June, Thursday midnight instead of 19th June midnight.

Generally, in the rest of the world it is done on a Saturday night, so that the impact of change in terms of confusion and chaos is minimal due to the following day being a Sunday, a holiday. People get time to get adjusted and used to the new timing. As such, in Bangladesh, it should have been done on Thursday midnight, so that people would get time on Friday to absorb the change. Friday being public holiday would cause least of confusion except a bit in railway or bus timing but major things like schools, offices and important meetings etc, would not have been affected.

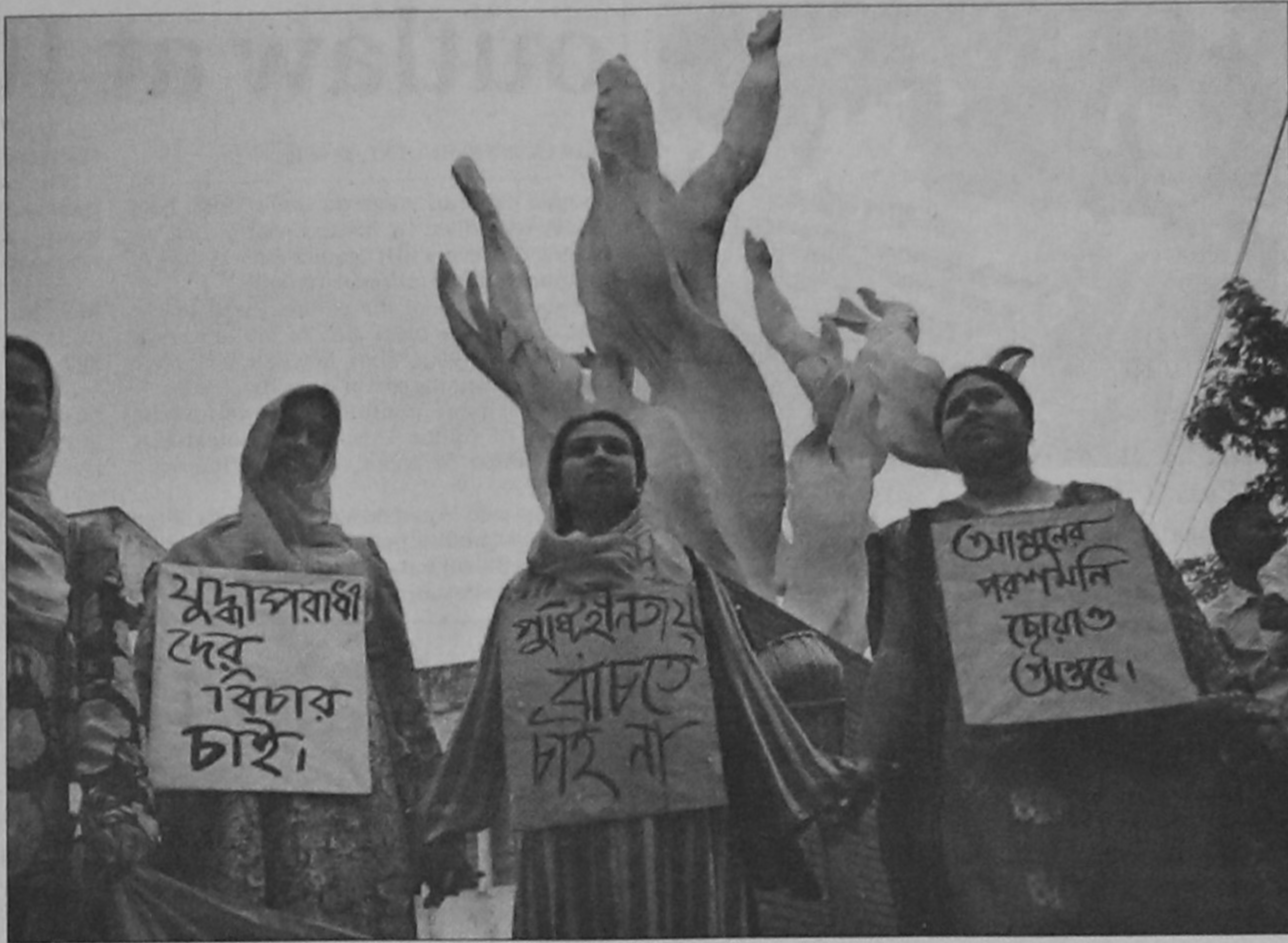
Shariff M Haque
Lecturer
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Ocean water contamination

Continued emissions of carbon dioxide from all directions are raising the oceans' acidity to an irreversible level. In the past couple of hundred years the world's oceans have absorbed about a quarter of the carbon dioxide produced by human activities, and the current rate of acidification is much more rapid than at any time during the past years according to the researchers. Adding chemicals to the oceans to try to counter acidification was likely to be expensive, only partly effective at local shores and could pose unknown risks.

Najeeb Rahman
Operations Analyst
Sydney, Australia

1971 war crimes tribunal



Upon the demand of the Law Ministry, the Bangladesh cabinet approved taka 10 crore for the much awaited trial of the 1971 war criminals (Daily Star, 12-06 -2009). However, it seems that the amount is woefully inadequate compared to such other trials elsewhere.

Since December 2008 (even before the Bangladesh national election) Pakistan has intensified

1971 genocide denial old propaganda worldwide through diplomatic and paid intellectual lobby. No counter-measure is seen yet.

Some other areas which should be taken into account are: honest recruitment of efficient judges and staff, arrest of all top central and (old) district-level Al-Badr/ Razakar commanders and 'Peace' committee members, launching of 1971

war crime trial website, establishment of '1971 Bangladesh Genocide Memorial Museum and Education Centre' in London and New York and increased security of Bangladesh missions abroad.

We hope all the 1971 war criminals - Pakistani and Bangladeshi - will eventually be prosecuted.

M. Emad
Oxford, UK

Human trafficking

In Bangladesh, estimates on number of women and children trafficked range from 10,000 to 20,000 per year. Trafficking occurs across Bangladeshi borders to India, Pakistan, and Middle Eastern countries and most are trafficked for prostitution, domestic work, and labour, particularly in textile factories. Boys are often trafficked to Arab states to become beggars or camel jockeys. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in trafficking. Trafficking occurs through kidnapping, promises of better jobs, procuring through marriage, illegal migration, sexually abusing women and girls etc.

Break-up of joint family, dowry, unequal power management and gender discrimination, negligible decision-making status of women, negative attitude toward women and children, social stigma against single, unwed or widowed women, religious fundamentalism, child marriage, polygamy, divorce, incest, physical and mental illness, frustration in love and failure in life, enticements for better life, globalisation and urbanization, increased dependency on children income, natural disasters, family rejection, lack of shelter for women in distress, inadequate rural development projects and government policies, lack of security and safety, inefficiency and corruption of the law-enforcing agencies and women released from jail are contributing to child trafficking in Bangladesh.

Trafficking is a human rights issue with important ramifications in the area of health, law enforcing, and socio-economic development in general. Poverty, attitude toward women and deeply-entrenched gender discrimination, unemployment, cultural norms about marriage, well-organized networks of traffickers, and weak law enforcement are the critical factors relating to trafficking in Bangladesh.

This criminal activity cannot be addressed through tougher laws alone. Several legislations, including the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, already have provision for penalties for violence against women and children, including trafficking and kidnapping. Social awareness, register marriage, rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration, educational program, media work, right uses of law and community programs are needed for trafficking prevention. The large networks of NGOs in Bangladesh and in

the region that are active and have gained experience on trafficking can contribute significantly to the initiative for conducting research and suggest new activities to combat trafficking, rehabilitate victims, and provide appropriate shelter to people fleeing from traffickers. NGOs like BNWL are more effective for rehabilitation. Finally it is high time to protest against trafficking by the government and other organizations to protect our young generation.

Md. Shahidul Islam
Department of Criminology and Police Science
MBSTU, Santosh, Tangail

Digital Bangladesh

AL is committed to make our dearest motherland 'digital'. Being inspired by that commitment the young generation who are students of various institutions all over Bangladesh voted to get the advantages of modern technology as a citizen of digital Bangladesh. But it is a matter of regret that the price of mobile phone has increased due to imposing 25 percent import tax in recently declared budget. Mobile phones which are especially designed to facilitate Internet and email using wireless network (e.g. wi-fi) are the inevitable part of digital lifestyle and fashion statement in 21st century.

I think the imposed tax will interrupt the implementation process of digital Bangladesh. And we the students of Dhaka University will be deprived of facilities of using high speed Internet thorough wi-fi which was established two months ago at TSC which needs WLAN (Wireless Local Area Network) enabled mobile or laptop. It is known to all that most of the students are not from affluent

families who can buy a laptop. Rather, they can buy a cell phone which is worth of at least Tk. 17000. Now, if the cell phone goes beyond the reach of us, then what is the need of Internet all over the campus.

So, the humble request to the finance minister to remove the imposed tax on mobile phone and smoothen the path of vision 2021.

Vidya Binod
University of Dhaka

Torturous timing!

The very idea is to complete the working hours of govt. and other offices within the daylight so that electricity is not consumed. Normal office hours finish at 5 pm. long before dusk and it makes no difference if the offices are closed at 4 pm.

This thoughtless executive order has become unnecessarily inconvenient for many people and school/ college children. Our day's activities relate to the rising and setting of the sun! Now, under this present changed time, we have morning an hour before the sun rises. People going to offices are forced to swallow breakfast at unearthly hours as well as lunch!

It is also not understood why the school children are compelled to rise early by an hour to rush to school though most of the schools normally break up at 2 pm. Over enthusiastic head of institutes should apply common sense on the simple question of daylight and should not impose punitive timing for school children!

The ingenuity of this advancement of time is absolutely a bogus suggestion when thousands and thousands of domestic apartments need using lights, fans and AC. Besides, innumerable sectors

like railway, transport, garment factories, and river transport stations work round the clock with no respite to the consumption of electricity.

Withdraw this torturous timing, for it is untrue to say this Advanced Timing Saves Electricity by even 1 megawatt!

Rumi Ahmed
Banani, Dhaka

Driving license

I had been to Australia recently. It was necessary to hire a transport for my travelling. One can hire transports from the renting company. The matter of concern is that if the person hiring the transport having age less than 25 years has to pay more rent. My son's age being less than 25 years I wanted to hire the transport in my name. But problem started with my driving license that I took with me. My driving license is written in Bengali, which could not be understood by the renting company people and was not accepted. I had no choice but to take the transport hired in my son's name who is below 25 years. As a consequence I had to pay Australian \$200/- more as hire charge. Had my driving license been written in English along with Bengali I could have saved the money paid in excess.

Driving license is also used as identity card that is accepted in many transactions required abroad. Driving license can come to help in so many situations while travelling abroad. As such I feel it necessary to request BRTA to write in English along with Bengali in all driving licenses so that it can be used abroad.

Md. Delwar Hossain
East Rampura
Dhaka

Rights of women and children



PHOTO: AMIRUL RAJIV

Recently a meeting was organized by Disadvantaged Adolescents Working NGOs (DAWN) Forum marking the World Child Labour Resistance Day, 2009 at Dhaka Mahanagar Natya Mancha, in this meeting Meher Afroz Chumki MP and Shirin Sharmin MP stressed on the need for establishing the rights of women and children. But how can this be accomplished in a poverty-stricken country like Bangladesh where women particularly are subjected to domestic violence and social injustice? It's not that easy to establish women's and children's rights at par with our religious and social norms and values. And a lot of money is also required to undertake women empowerment and children support projects.

Meanwhile, as I gathered, the USAID has recently announced its first grant of more than \$500,000 for the "One Woman Initiative (OWI)", a public-private initiative to empower women in countries with significant Muslim popu-

lation. The grants will be utilised by five grassroots organizations in Azerbaijan, Egypt, India, Pakistan and the Philippines. The OWI grants are being made to locally focused organisations with result-oriented programmes allowing women access to legal rights, political participation and economic development.

I think, such types of public-private initiatives can work effectively towards empowering women plus rationalising child labour. Of course such programmes need a huge amount of money to start operation. Perhaps the USAID and other donor agencies may come forward in aid.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Chairman
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System
Sher-e- Bangla Agricultural University
Dhaka

Polythene bags

This is in reference to a letter appearing in your daily on June 13, 2009. I agree with Mr Rashid that polythene bags in Bangladesh need to be taken out of circulation due to its detrimental environmental effects. They are indestructible, and easily clog the drainage system - whatever little of it exists. The substitutes that he mentions are easily available and are bio-degradable.

Polythene bags are used very extensively in North America. Every bag has the phrase "Please re-cycle" printed on it which means their use and re-use is encouraged. The primary route through which they exit circulation is through their use as garbage disposal bags. Since the garbage collection and disposal system in North America is streamlined, not a single polythene bag is seen float-



ing on the streets or clogging the drains. Until a system of proper and environmentally-friendly disposal of polythene bags is put in place, I agree with Mr. Rashid that production, distribution and use be banned in Bangladesh by law. The price to be paid otherwise is going to be higher than we can imagine.

Dr. C. Zaman
Ottawa, Canada