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Footpaths

Thanks to The Daily Star for carrying the series "Whose footpath is it?" We certainly keep our eyes blindfolded to this issue, whether it's the City Corporation or the general public.

Dhaka city lacks good footpaths for pedestrians. The majority of the footpaths Dhaka has are 3-4 feet in width and some of them really are too high for ordinary people to use them. It is rather unthinkable for a city like Dhaka which is highly dense and has tremendous shortage of safe, decent public transport. The footpaths we have are so nar-

row in width all over the city.

It is up to our city planners and the City Corporation to determine the width of the footpaths based on the density and area but they should consider the growth of the city and its population. I feel that the footpaths should be not less than 20 feet in width on all major streets and should have 2x2 feet spots (Every 10 feet) for planting trees which will help to combat the ever growing pollution of the city.

Sohel Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

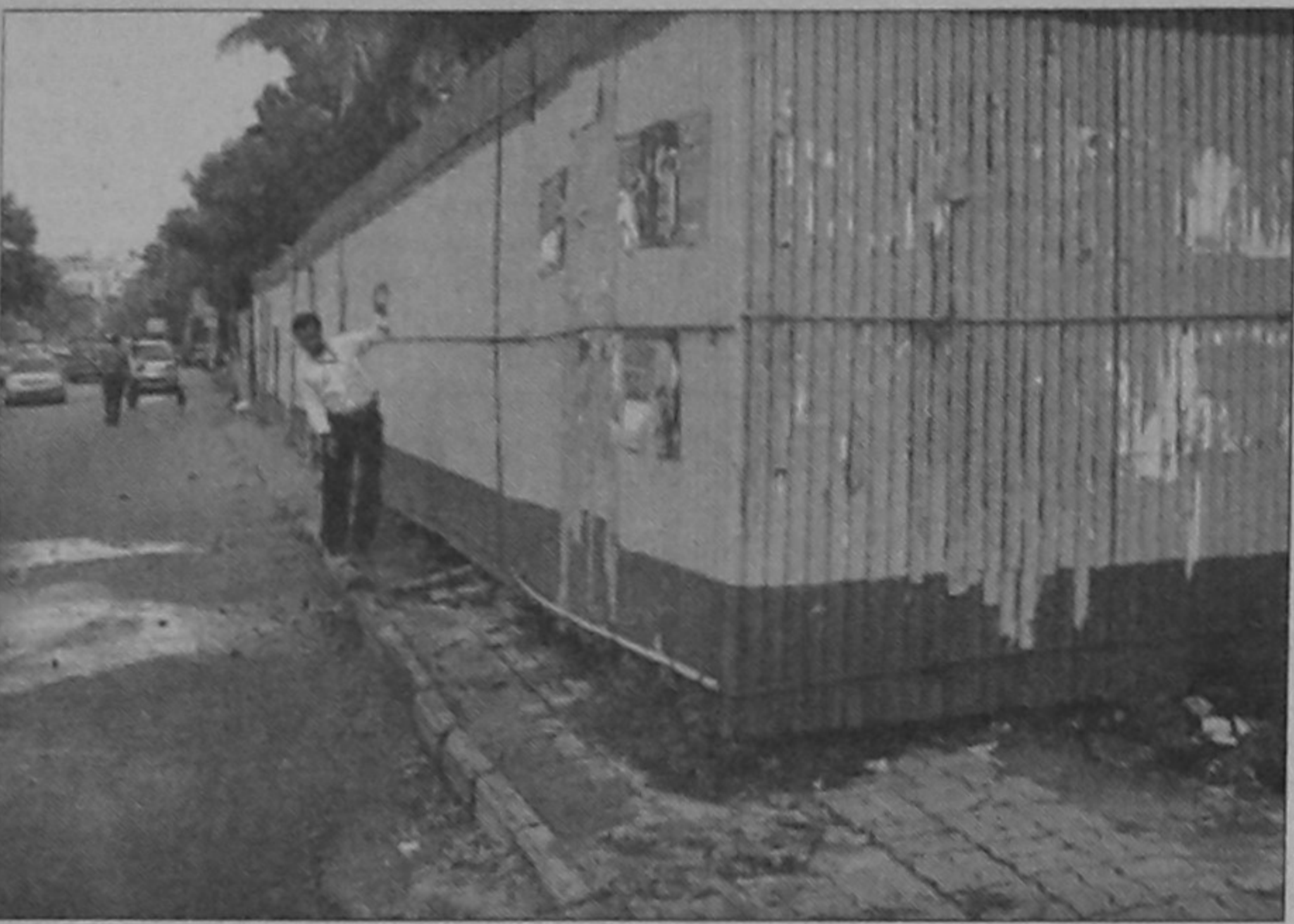


PHOTO: SHAWKAT JAMIL

Student politics

Bangladesh achieved its independence through a nine-month struggle in 1971. The students of Bangladesh made a huge contribution to the Liberation War of 1971.

Let's go back to history. In 1952, 1969 and 1971 students played a vital role to save the motherland and language. At that time student politics was for the welfare of the country. They played a vital role from 1948 to 1990. In this period they achieved special position in our national politics. So, the whole nation always respects them and their principles. They continued their regular studies and were free from corruption and terrorism. For this reason, many student leaders became members of parliament, ministers, national leaders, journalists, poets and others important national personalities in our country. But in the present situation, Bangladesh student politics has deviated away from its tradition and glorious historical roots.

Though every human being is a student from cradle to grave, there is a specific time which is considered student life. It should be spent in study and interaction with all in order to develop the qualities for future leadership.

As students, we can offer some social services to our community. Ours is an undeveloped country. So we have many things to do for the welfare and good of the country. Most of the people of our country are illiterate. We can open night schools to teach the illiterate people to remove illiteracy. Especially, female students can teach the uneducated women how to keep their house neat and clean, how to bring up children and look after their health. We can also teach the general people the basic rules of health and environment, and so on.

Md. Nur-e-Alam Siddique
Faculty of Agriculture
Hajee Mohammad Danesh
Science & Technology
University (HSTU)
Dinajpur

Power generation and pollution

An unrealistic suggestion for power generation for Bangladesh was published in a local English daily on August 29, which was theoretically rational and possible elsewhere. However, given the reality of heavy rain and floods in Bangladesh, the idea is not feasible here. Investigations on computer modelling based on Bangladesh weather data, indicates that in Bangladesh we can harvest at most 25 percent of available annual sunlight for power generation!

Further, why should we unnecessarily bother about carbon emission from power generation. Rich countries like the USA, Germany, many countries in the former USSR and South Africa use coal for majority of their power plants generating close to if not more than fifty percent of their electrical power. One day's electricity output from coal-fired power plants in the USA alone, will be possibly more than the total electricity (in KWH) we have generated in the last four years or so! It is they who should go for reduc-

ing carbon dioxide pollution.

If we go for generating 1500 to 2000MW of electricity, which can take care of our power shortfall, through coal only, our total carbon emission will be like a grain of sand compared to all the sands at Cox's Bazar beach!

The solar and wind combination for power generation can be ideal for dry desert like areas found in the USA, ex-USSR, and the Middle East and even Pakistan, where large areas of open waste land is available.

Pakistan has already installed a 500MW wind power plant in their desert-like coastal area of Sind. They have stated in a technical article that they are going to set up more solar and wind based power plants which can potentially generate 5000MW of power!

In Bangladesh, we do not have enough cloudless and rain free days with bright sunlight, nor enough sustained wind speed and large areas of empty land to go for wind & solar combined power plant! It would be most attractive for Libya and Middle Eastern countries.

Luckily, they have more than enough petrol available at prices cheaper than water! Also having large tranquil seashores, they usually go for combined desalination and power generation projects!

The "solar plus conventional" thermal power combination, proposed by the writer for Bangladesh, will not be economically justified for lack of sufficient sunshine, as well as scarcity of free land for setting up solar reflectors.

Engr. S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Swine flu management

Swine Flu in our country is rapidly reaching the pandemic level. The question is, how much we are prepared, not theoretically but practically to counter the swine flu threat? In my view, the government should ensure the followings to face the swine flu

pandemic:-

* Enough publicity through mass media to make people aware about different aspects of swine flu and its control measures.

* Imams of mosques and priests of other religious institutions should be advised to ventilate information pertaining to swine flu and the precautionary measures.

* Both govt. and private hospitals should make buffer stock of swine flu drugs (e.g. Tamiflu) to administer upon swine flu patients in emergencies.

* Medical experts should make public a comprehensive treatment plan to treat swine flu patients

* NGOs and philanthropic organisations should chalk out their own programmes to create public awareness on swine flu.

* Local pharmaceutical companies may undertake programmes to produce swine flu drugs.

* For greater precaution, schools may be given Ramadan and Eid vacation soon.

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

We mourn

We mourn the death of former finance minister M. Saifur Rahman. We pay our profound tributes to him.

May Allah bless him.
Tarik
Student
LU, Sylhet

Diplomats and traffic

It is not my habit to write blistering missives to editors. However, the appalling attack by Shabbir A. Bashar, (PhD, Vancouver, USA) on the community of diplomats in Dhaka is such that I feel compelled to reply, if only to prevent certain of his assertions from passing into local lore as fact.

Although I am not a diplo-

mat, I have been married to one for 15 years.

Thus, I believe my experience should have at least as much weight as Mr. Bashar's recent 10 days.

First, his assertion that the cost of the cars owned by the international community is borne by the Bangladeshi taxpayer is not true. The cars owned by embassies, and the gas to run them, are paid for by the taxpayers of the home country. The international NGOs pay for their own cars and, so far as I know, they are not subsidised by the government of Bangladesh. If the local taxpayer is paying for any SUVs, it will be the ones owned and operated by their own government. And, I would be willing to bet that these far outnumber the ones owned by the accused foreign diplomats.

Second, the assertion that the diplomats assigned to Bangladesh are less than the cream of the crop is not merely untrue, it is an insult to the many foreign diplomats who chose -- yes, chose -- to come to Bangladesh because they want to make a difference in the lives of others. These are dedicated officers who really believe that the point of their profession is to prevent conflict and to ameliorate the conditions that lead to it.

They could have asked for postings in many other, less difficult, places. But they chose Dhaka. Think about that, Mr. Bashar, when you return to your home in Vancouver, USA.

Third, the number of SUVs on the road would not, I think, be appreciably reduced by the removal of all those used by the foreign community. As I walk, and drive around Dhaka, the largest number of SUVs I see are driven by Bengalis for Bengalis. My understanding, from Bengali friends, is that the SUV is the muscle car of choice for the well-to-do Bangladeshis.

Finally, I would love to dump the gas guzzling SUV, and do whenever I can. However, there is a cost, one that makes me appreciate the hefty wheels prescribed by home governments for their diplomats here. The number of times I have been pushed into the traffic by large groups of importunate beggars, surrounded by staring Bengalis as I wait for the light to turn green, assailed by children looking for taka, faced rickshaw or CNG charges anywhere up to ten times what a Bengali is asked for, and had to dodge complete strangers who seem to think I keep visas in my pocket is quite enough to make me understand why the less determined foreigner gives up and retreats to the company car.

And I dress not like some fancy foreign celebrity, but in shalwar kamiz and shawl.

As for the officer who claimed that diplomats do not obey the local traffic officers, it would be interesting to know whose diplomats he is referring to. I know most of the Caucasian diplomats do their best to obey the law, when they can find out what it is. The biggest complaint I hear from foreigners about Dhaka traffic is that they appear to be the only ones following the rules, with unfortunate consequences for their mileage, their paint jobs and their stress levels.

Adiplomat's wife
On e-mail

Trial of war criminals

The Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister recently announced in unequivocal terms (The Daily Star, 28.08.09) that there was no

Dwindling forests

The accepted standard, according to the experts, is that a country must have at least 25 percent of its total land area covered with forests. According to the forestry related sources, a total of 7,69,000 hectares or only 7.29 percent of Bangladesh's landmass have tree cover.

Indiscriminate felling of trees during last decades in the greater districts of Dhaka, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Dinajpur resulted in an alarming depletion of forest resources. For example, on 21 August Daily Star's report (by Pinaki Roy) said that in Madhupur the forest coverage reduced from 3,826 hectares in 1962 to 594 hectares in 2003.

In Bangladesh, population explosion has left the most adverse impact on the forests, and the increasing demand for agricultural land, shelter and fuel took a heavy toll on the country's forest resources since the early 20th century. The population of this country was 40 million during 1910's but it's jumped to about 150 million now. In the 1980s, the rate of destruction of forests in the country was 8,000 hectares per year. According to a recent survey of various international organizations, this rate has gone up to 37,700 hectares per year. Most experts think that the desertification process in Bangladesh started in central Barind area in the country's north-western part. They fear that if this process continues, a large chunk of Bangladesh's land area will turn into desert.

A massive expansion of commercial shrimp culture recently appeared to be the latest threat to forests in the country's southern coastal areas, especially in Khulna, Satkhira and Cox's Bazar regions. Thus the coastal zone is becoming unprotected.

The forest officials blame illegal encroachment by the local people and over exploitation of forest resources as the immediate reasons for fast depletion of woodlands in Bangladesh. On the other hand, shortage of manpower of the Forest Department is responsible for its failure in properly maintaining the forest resources.

Realizing the alarming situation of low forest coverage, the government has set a goal to increase the forest coverage to 25 percent by 2015, but today the vexing question is how far different agencies have



MOHAMMAD ISLAM / DRINKNEWS

been able to implement the programmes aimed at 25 percent forest coverage by 2015. The quantity and quality of forest resources in Bangladesh are deteriorating with time. Though different plantation programmes increased the vegetation cover of the country but we have to remember that plantation is not equal to forest cover. Forestry requires a systematic, long-term approach and sound policy. Now quick action should be taken by the government to protect the natural forest cover of Bangladesh.

Md. Rana Abbas
Student
Dept. of Geography & Environmental Studies
University of Chittagong

foreign pressure in regard to the issue of the trial of war criminals, which directly contradicts the claim of the Local Govt. Minister who had said that there was pressure from abroad.

Only God knows who is telling the truth. Such contradictory claims make the issue ridiculous!

Monzur Rahman
Rajshahi

Government's plan

We have seen a report in the national dailies that the government will give jobs to about one lakh unemployed people under a national service, a special project. The government manifesto was that at least one unemployed man or woman from each family would get a job. We have heard that the name of the project reflects the overall plan.

Every day we encounter severe traffic jam in Dhaka which cripples our normal life. The government should take a project like this for all the rickshaw-pullers, so that there will be no rickshaws in the main city of Dhaka. They should introduce large buses in the city to serve the commuters.

Md. Tofazzel Hossain
Kushtia

Good work

I must congratulate bdjobs for introducing the best employer award in different categories. This will definitely encourage other organisations to improve the work environment.

But I was always under the impression that when a survey is conducted to understand the position of certain organization(s), sample data is collected from employees of those organisations, otherwise one will not get the correct information. According to

bdjobs, among the participants 85.5% are currently employed (majority of the participants are not employed in any of the organisations finally coming out as winners), 6.5% are currently unemployed and around 8% are fresh graduates or students...

How can a) a participant comment/vote without having worked in any of the organisations? And b) what do 6.5% unemployed participants and 8% fresh graduates know about these employers?

Shumon Sobhan
Jikatola, Dhaka

Lamb and wolf story?

The tug of war between the Mayor of Rajshahi and the Chairman Education Board reminds me of a story the moral of which is "Rogues must have some plea." The story runs like "A lamb was drinking water from a spring. Suddenly a wolf appeared overhead and barged in rudely at the lamb, "Why are you muddying my water." "How it is possible sir, you are at the upstream and I am at the downstream!"

The lamb bleated timidly. "Then you called me names," the wolf nagged still forcefully. "How long ago sir?" "The lamb wondered miserably. "The wolf asserted, "A year ago" "Sir I am only six months old. I was not born a year ago." The lamb tried to correct the wolf. "Then your father did so." With this the wolf allowed no chance for any further defence from the lamb. He jumped on it and made a feast on it. The analogy may not be misplaced!

Nobody in Rajshahi lends credence to the fabrication of the mayor, except for a few cohorts that were spawned by him.

An official
Education Board, Rajshahi

Brutal police action

We condemn the brutal police action on the people who were marching towards the Petrobangla office at Karwan Bazaar to protest the government's decision to award three offshore blocks to international oil companies. The members of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports were present at the protest rally. We learned that more than 50 people were injured by the police assault and both legs of Anu Muhammad, a Professor of Economics of Jahangirnagar University, were badly fractured.

These people love their country and want to protect its natural resources, their actions are laudable and the citizens of Bangladesh should support them.

We are surprised by the words of an Awami League Leader. He said that those policemen acted from the mindset of the past BNP-Jamaat led government. I don't know how anything like this could be uttered!

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Four-day workweek

"The Four-Day Workweek Is Winning Fans" by Bryan Walsh that appeared online (TIME Magazine) is really interesting to share. Bryan wrote: "In an era when most of us seem to be working more hours than ever provided we're still lucky enough to have jobs, 17,000 people in Utah have embarked on an unusual experiment. A year ago, the Beehive State became the first in the US to mandate a four-day workweek for most state employees, closing offices on Fridays in an effort to reduce energy costs. The move is different from a furlough in that salaries were

not cut; nor was the total amount of time employees work. They pack in 40 hours by starting earlier and staying later four days a week. But on that fifth (glorious) day, they don't have to commute, and their offices don't need to be heated, cooled or lit. After 12 months, Utah's experiment has been deemed so successful that a new acronym could catch on: TGIT (thank God it's Thursday). The state found that its compressed workweek resulted in a 13% reduction in energy use and estimated that employees saved as much as \$6 million in gasoline costs. Altogether, the initiative will cut the state's greenhouse-gas emissions by more than 12,000 metric tons a year. And perhaps not surprisingly, 82% of state workers say they want to keep the new schedule."

We're piloting a DST scheme, but mostly unpopular, as many people and newspapers suggest. Can we think of a 4-day-workweek with 10 hours in office?

Sirajul Islam
Pisciculture Housing Society
Shyamoli, Dhaka

Swine flu

Nowadays, swine flu has become a serious threat to the world as well as to our country. It can turn into an epidemic in no time. Still the people of our country seem to be indifferent to the harsh truth. Rather, our health minister asked us not to be worried about it as an adequate quantity of drugs has been stocked up.

The preventive measures to tackle the virus are not so visible. Can we still remain unperturbed? It is time our govt. took necessary preventive measures to tackle this virus and thus save invaluable lives.

Ramij Ahmad
Department of English
University of Chittagong

Organic farming



"While the farmer holds the title to the land, actually, it belongs to all the people because civilization itself rests upon the soil." -- Thomas Jefferson.

As a species with an ever-burgeoning population, man has had to invent clever ways to keep himself fed. The reason why the development of agriculture proved so crucial in the development of civilization was that it allowed huge amounts of food energy to be available to man predictably and regularly. The fundamental change from hunting and gathering is the aggregation of many productive food-bearing plants. By definition this is the process of making plants fruitful beyond their natural tendencies. Agriculture is generically the process of creating a huge monoculture of food-producing plants, but beyond simply growing the right kind of plants, people make the plants themselves produce more food. Throughout recorded history, this process has involved using fertilizer. In old times this was done without knowledge of chemistry, merely by spreading animal waste, compost, or other organic material over the fields. However, since the development of the different

processes, chemically produced fertilizers have come into widespread use. Nitrogen and phosphate fertilizers, be they horse manure or artificially produced ammonium nitrate, have allowed for huge improvements in the fertility of world agriculture. This was a crucial development making possible the explosion in human population that has occurred over the last two centuries, and the continued use of fertilizers as well as other agricultural technologies is equally crucial in sustaining a food supply for our rapidly multiplying species.

The proliferation of fertilizers to expand food supply comes at a large cost to our environment. More stringent measures must be taken to measure the amount of fertilizers needed to increase crop yield while minimizing the amount of nutrients released from the soil.

M.A. Basar
Assistant Manager
Pallikarma - Sahayak Foundation (PKSF)
Agargaon, Dhaka