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Population boom

Mr. Mamoon's letter (5 Oct) deals with the most important problem facing the country in the foreseeable future. The government and donor agencies must rectify the shortfall of birth control pills and artefacts with renewed vigour. Mr. Mamoon mentioned other problems and suggested solutions with which I totally agree. However, as a member of Optimum Population Trust (UK) and its various parameters to support a viable healthy population I would say that the optimum population of Bangladesh is in the region of 30 million rather than 100 million. By the same parameters optimum population of England is calculated to be only about 20 million and no more!

Besides aids to birth control and various other inducements like preferential treatment of smaller families, educating the women etc, there must

also be a social policy (and funds and service) to look after poor and needy senior citizens in their old age who do not have children's income or assistance to fall back upon.

The last is the main reason, (although not immediately causative,) why most poor people produce too many children and with assurance for incapacity due to health or age as part of an established social service (as is available in say UK), I am sure the poor would not want, nor need too many children. Donor agencies should help with funds for such social service as well as for actual family planning programmes, as both are necessary to contain and hopefully to decrease the population.

Engineer Shafi Ahmed
London, UK

detriment of public interest. This culture of nepotism and favouritism has to be stopped to regain the public confidence in elected political regimes.

A Husnain, Dhaka

Habit of blaming

Bangladesh is a developing country and it has many problems. In order to manage these, our political parties should come to some kind of consensus. Nowadays they are accustomed to blaming each other, rather than coming to the point.

They should reach a broad understanding on national issues in order to serve the country.

Mohammed Jamal Uddin
Dept. of English
International Islamic
University Ctg.

Secularism

It is surprising that so many eyebrows are raised when one argues in favour of establishing a secular constitution, which was originally the case post independence. If I may humbly take the liberty of defending such initiative within the scope of this letter, then it is important to point out that secularism embodies two important principles. First, it presents a case for neutrality towards every religion. Second, it promotes prohibition of religious associations in state activities. Hence, neither a secular constitution prevents a good Muslim from practicing his religion in harmony, nor it makes our nation any less peaceful for believing in our respective faith.

A particular political force often argues that the Islamic sentiment of the majority must find reflection in the national constitution. Yet, such opinion raises the concern that our nation will entertain democracy's signature defect—the tyranny of the majority. If we go back in history to 1592, it was a Muslim statesman Akbar, the Mughal Emperor of India, who displayed extreme tolerance for all faiths—a fundamental trait of secularism—by abolishing taxes on his Hindu subjects and by facilitating multi-religious dialogues between scholars of various faiths. We must today take inspiration from such statesmanship.

Ashkur Rahman
PhD Candidate
London School of Economics
(LSE)

Coal mining to start!

Your front-page report on the matter published on October 6th has at least opened the door of possible open-pit coal mining in Bangladesh.

Many so-called energy experts and intellectuals (virtual know-alls) with book-

ish knowledge and nothing else; and without an iota of mining experience, will as usual cry foul. They are out to sabotage any mining proposal. At least the government has gone to the Germans, who have knowledge and hands-on experience in both deep shaft and open pit mining. It is the proper source for expert opinion. It is time that the "Buddhi-jibies" put a stop to their endless "Bakwas" and go back to their books; and refrain from talking on matters in which they are practically novices!

In the larger interest of the country, we have to maximise utilisation of our natural resource for producing the desperately needed electricity, and coal the raw material for it is lying underground! It will hopefully contain our fast depleting natural gas and reduce the import of liquid fuel. This will be good for the economic health of the country.

Of course, the people affected by the mining should be provided needed facilities for re-settlement; and compensated for their loss; which in the overall context of foreign exchange needed for energy in Bangladesh is marginal; possibly no more than one or at most two years cost of imported fuel.

If the BNP government had signed any agreement, it was under duress and in any case they cannot sign away the right to explore and exploit natural resources. This will be worse than selling our natural resources for earning foreign exchange. Such illogical agreement against the interest of the country, should be ignored which will be supported by an overwhelming majority of people!

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Our cricketers in 1971

Recently, in a bid to write the biographies of some of our first generation cricketers (for Wikipedia), I was searching through the pages of www.cricketchive.co.uk. I was looking at the scorecards of different 1st Class Matches played in erstwhile East Pakistan during the 60's. With great interest I was reading how our local heroes (Halim Chowdhury, better known as Shahid Jewel, Shamim Kabir, Raqibul Hasan, Daulat-uz-Zaman & others) combined with the Non Bengali players like MA Latif, (Maharashtra born East Pakistan Captain) or Nasim Ul Ghani (Delhi born Pak Test player). Together, they played against the likes of Zaheer Abbas, Mushtaq Mohammad, Majed, Khan & others.

While searching through the pages, I found out an interesting piece of information. During the 1970-71

Nobel for Obama

The committee that awards the Nobel Peace Prize likes springing surprises. When Kenyan environmentalist Wanggari won in 2004, the committee explicitly linked peace with concerns about the state of our planet's ecology, a concept that was familiar in environmental circles but rarely discussed elsewhere. Bangladeshi banker and economist Dr. Yunus won it in 2006 for his efforts to alleviate poverty thus promoting peace through the use of microcredit schemes. Now the prize has gone to a sitting U.S. President just eight months into his first term. Both Maathai and Yunus told TIME magazine that Obama was a great choice.

He, like every new President, has reckoned with both the power and the danger of words, dangers that are especially great for one who wields them as skilfully as he. With his key role we will rid the earth of its most lethal weapons. We will turn green and clean. We can make the world economy stronger, especially the least developed countries which are facing tough situation after the Iraq war.

Maybe the prize will give him more power, new muscle to haul unruly nations in line. But peacemaking is more about ingenuity than inspiration, about reading other nations' selfish interests and cynically, strategically exploiting them for the common good. Will it help if fewer countries come to the table hating us? To a point. But it's a starting point, not an end in itself.

Any way Kenya has every reason to be proud. Kenya has some fantastic talents. We think President Obama continues to be a great pride for Kenya and Africa, also for the whole world, and we hope that, just like when he was elected President, he will continue to inspire the world and continue to challenge the world to manage ourselves better.

Lutfur Rahman
Post doctoral fellow
Seoul National University
Korea



Some say that the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to US President Barack Obama in recognition of his speeches containing his noble intentions but not for action towards establishing peace. Well, in my assessment I think Barack Obama has so far achieved remarkable progress towards establishing peace through his bold initiatives to get the earth free of nuclear threat and religion-based hostility.

I strongly feel that Obama's winning the prize is a triumph of peace over war, hatred, and conflicts. The Nobel Peace Prize has opened a new vista for Obama to march forward boldly towards implementing his noble plans.

I take this opportunity to heartily congratulate President Barack Obama and sincerely wish his total success in his peace mission.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Chairman
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System
SAU, Dhaka



Dhaka's traffic mess

After a lull of 16 days (Sept 18-Oct 03), Dhakabashis are back on square ZERO as far as the traffic mess is concerned. From the Prime Minister down to the humble traffic cop, all are trying to minister to this plague that is strangling life in our so-called metropolis. Your second editorial in today's DS (5-10-09), still speaks of the pipe dreams of STPs, DUTPs, DITS etc, etc ad nauseum, that are years away even if implemented right away.

This morning an over zealous sergeant again stopped my rickshaw on Mohakhali Road while I was on my way to office in Banani. He sternly admonished me for breaking the law as rickshaws were banned (earlier a cop had waved me on, in deference to my white hair). I asked him politely "If the law says 'no rickshaws' on Mohakhali Road, then, why were your cops absent during the last 16 days? And why are there so many cars parked on the road and on the foot-paths? Isn't that also against the law, showing him the cutting of The Daily Star front page headline dated Sept 1, 2009 where the Prime Minister herself ordered 'the law enforcement authorities to seize and tow away illegally parked cars?' He smiled sheepishly and said "That was an exception for the Eid Holidays". He gunned his motorcycle and roared away immediately, when I asked him to kindly inform me on which days "the law would be making an exception, when I could commit murder, robbery, mugging, smuggling, etc with impunity?"

When will our "experts" recognize that the basic problem of traffic is very simple, as enumerated in the 50 letters that I have written on the subject over the last two years. The number of cars in Dhaka (4-5 lakh each occupying 70-90 sft of road space, carrying maximum 2-3 lakh passengers) is too many for the roads (only 7% instead of minimum 25%). The traffic department is gutless to control private motor vehicles, so they ban rickshaws (3-4 lakh that occupy only 30 sft space each but carry 40-50 lakh passengers generating Tk.10-12 crores every day), without even denting the problem. Any resolution of the traffic mess where only a maximum of about 5% of the privileged class benefit, to the detriment, inconvenience and harassment of the vast majority (95%) of Dhaka's people, is unconstitutional,

undemocratic, impractical, unjust, immoral, and in my opinion downright stupid. Do the authorities want an upheaval on their hands, when their hands are already full of other social problems; to name just a few, price rises, polluted water, load-shedding, unemployment, land grabbing, etc etc?

Sikander Ahmed
Gulshan 1, Dhaka

Argentina still alive

The stakes could not be higher! Argentina was in serious danger of missing the next year's World Cup Football, South Africa 2010. On Saturday, October 10, Argentina were facing Peru at the Stadio Monumental, Buenos Aires. This was one of the most important games in Argentina's football history. Their opponent Peru were out of World Cup contention, but that does not mean they took this game lightly.

However, Argentina have managed to keep their hopes alive through winning 2-1.

Bazul Wahab Shaheen
Boston, Massachusetts
USA

Islam under attack!

According to Mr. Mahmudur Rahman, Islam is under attack from both within and outside.

He was participating in a talk show alongside Dr. Akbar Ali Khan on Diganta Television on October 3, 2009. He alleged that the infidels declared war against Islam back in 1995, if I am not mistaken. He definitely appears to be a sympathizer and well-wisher of Islam vehemently accusing the government.

My question is if the infidels declared war on Islam back in 1995, what did you do to protest, when your party was in power from 2001 to 2006. I recall with regret that your party men while campaigning for the upcoming election stated that if the people fail to cast their vote wisely, Bangladesh may have to embrace the same fate as that of Iraq and Afghanistan, in our local mosque during Jumma prayers. Your party while in power was happy with Bangladesh being labelled as a moderate Muslim country for not protesting the aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now that the Awami League is in power, why are you protesting, is it just an eyewash or a strategy to win the popular support of the people. I hope you will be able to prove me wrong when your party comes to power again.

Saleh Mohammad Ayub
Kalabagan, Dhaka

VAT on commercial space

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. SN Mamun for his letter that was published to draw the attention of the Hon'ble Finance Minister in The Daily Star on 14th September 2009 under the heading --VAT on commercial space. My congratulations to a sturdy vocalist like him. I also appreciate Dr. SN Mamun for the way he took a stand against NBR's activities. Definitely, this is an illegal imposition of VAT by NBR and the NBR officials not only being jealous of us, they are also trying to abolish the business minors through this process of VAT collection.

How will the lessor survive? To run a commercial building in a befitting manner, a lessor has to spend a big amount for smooth administration, security, cleanliness, service charge and various utilities. Besides, for their own survival they have to pay ransom to the political intruders or so called mastans and at times have to fulfil the tiny desires of minor govt. officials. It has to be mentioned also that our country was earmarked as the number one corrupt country in the world many a time in past. We are helpless!!

So, please issue a directive to the authorities concerned to withdraw the illegal VAT imposed on commercial space.

Md. Russel Ahmed
Pallabi, Dhaka

Spoilt BGMEA

BGMEA was seeking Tk three billion from the govt to pay Eid bonus to the workers. It is because the BGMEA has been spoilt by the govt. and the society because it lays the golden eggs. So easy to ask from the Treasury; and then create law and order situation, if this appeal is rejected.

Eid bonus is not a new thing, it is applicable in all sectors; hence the employers should take care of this routine situation every year, instead of seeking doles from the public exchequer. I know of some cases wherein the GMs are not allowed to go abroad, and the boss travels abroad several times, sometimes with family.

It must be noted that powerful political godfathers work behind the scenes through the backdoors to put undue pressure on the political regimes. The regime has to be strictly impartial. Today we find situations in the transport sector; and the way the City Corps and RAJUK and other semi autonomous and autonomous bodies work -- to the

Waste management

As I travel through the city early in the morning I have to put my palm on my nostrils in an attempt to guard against the foul odour that wafts its way from a trashcan or a pile of rotting waste lying beside the road. And I am talking about the environment of the port city which still retains its green look. The situation is even worse in the capital. According to the recent news reports, the capital city alone produces 3556 tonnes of solid waste everyday--a staggering amount by any standard.

This waste includes lots of non-biodegradable stuff, toxic

materials and harmful things. For example, medical waste can help spread germs which cause many deadly diseases. Again some neighbourhoods and kitchen markets have no proper place for the disposal of garbage. Some people are in the habit of throwing garbage almost everywhere.

Waste management is an area that is in need of immediate intervention. More funds and manpower should be channelled into the sector.

Zabed Wali
Pahartali, Chittagong



season. The Quaid-e-Azam trophy, the leading 1st Class tournament in Pakistan started on 9th March, 1971. The Group IV included PIA (B), East Pakistan & Dacca University. Dacca stadium was the scheduled venue. Yet, no matches in this group were played as both Dacca University & East Pakistan gave walkover to the PIA side. Following the historical speech of 7th March, the whole of East Pakistan was in a state of alert, preparing for the inevitable confrontation with the Military Junta. By denying to play, our cricketers, in their own way expressed their support for the ongoing movement.

It was a small, but a firm gesture by our cricketers. It was especially brave on the part of Raqibul Hasan, as the young opener was considered to be on the brink of winning a Pakistan cap. He would

eventually play a full ODI, 15 years later, for Bangladesh, ironically, against Pakistan. In Jan 1977, Shamim Kabir became the 1st captain of Bangladesh. But Halim Chowdhury, the ever reliable opening bat, wasn't so lucky. He died during the liberation war, but he is still remembered in our cricketing world as Shahid Jewel.

For the record, the Airlines team (led by Shafiqat Rana) reached SF with full points. They lost their SF match at Karachi, against the eventual champions Karachi Blues.

Rafiqul Ameer
One-mail

Traffic in Dhaka

My friends abroad hear me complaining about the traffic in Dhaka constantly and they don't get it. Actually, unless one lives in Dhaka or its suburbs, you cannot even begin to imagine the monstrosity and hopelessness of the situation. There's absolutely no solution in sight and most of the people are rendered captives to the issue. I live at Green road and from my balcony every day, I witness a severe gridlock that lasts for hours! There are a few hospitals in this neighbourhood and sometimes even the ambulances are sitting with their sirens on in this never-ending flow of traffic. If you are a patient in the ambulance or waiting for one - a prayer and a priest might be your only hope.

The level of noise pollution gives me nightmares and who actually needs an alarm clock when you have the car drivers honking incessantly at all hours of the day.

Our politicians talk about traffic congestion, its problems and downfalls but are yet to come up with any logical solution. Logistically speaking, unfortunately there can be none. Our roads are limited, expansion is almost impossible and the number of automobiles on the street are doubling by the month. What do we do?

We have to look to the west. They met with issues and problems as such! They improvised, re-regulated and reformed their laws to better accommodate their traffic situations. It sounds easy but it's not.

1. Delegate peak hours and

off-peak hours i.e. certain heavy duty vehicles cannot be on the smaller streets during peak hours.

2. Set up HOV time and regulations i.e. when kids are being driven to schools in the same neighbourhood - they should be in High Occupancy Vehicles.

3. All buses with 15-year service should be automatically off the streets during peak hours. Better for the environment also.

4. The government should invest heavily in our transit system so that more people are less reluctant to use it.

5. We definitely should hire and train countless more traffic officers.

Think of the next generation.

Fazle Haque
One-mail

Neglecting animals

I have been utterly flabbergasted by seeing a photo of an emaciated rhinoceros in Dhaka Zoo recently. I have also come to know that this photo was published in a newspaper in Malaysia as well. As I got more irritated (to make it worse) I have learned that two Giraffes were dead and more than forty animals in Dhaka zoo are in dire straits due to mal-nutrition and lack of professional care.

These kinds of reports are not only bad for our country from the perspective of animal rights but at the same time they put a stain on our collective morality as a nation. It is understandable that "maintenance of zoo with adequate resources" is probably not a higher priority in the government budget for a developing country like ours, however, that doesn't give us any excuse to be apathetic toward this kind of default animal cruelty. If government cannot take good care of zoo animals due to lack of resources, it can either scale it down to a manageable size with less number of animals or give the management to a private sector.

I hope the people in the government agency concerned will take this matter seriously and stop this kind violation of animal rights.

Zafar Hadi
California, USA