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Women and children

Parliament is the highest law making body in the country, but subject to the provisions of the constitution. The continued primacy of personal laws in matters of marriage, divorce, maintenance and child custody and adoption discriminates against women in respect of rights within the family. Citizenship laws also discriminate on their face against women. De facto discrimination in opportunities for education and employment as well as access to resources and to services, in particular healthcare, further imposes various barriers on women in exercising their rights. Women face discrimination both in public and private spheres. Violence continues to be a significant feature of the everyday experience of many Bangladeshi women. The actual figures for sexual assault, rape and domestic violence are undoubtedly high, not least

because a widespread culture of intimidation inhibits reporting. Moreover, in cases involving the transgression of 'sexual honour,' the fear of social stigmatisation discourages making such incidents public.

Numerous challenges remain in ensuring the rights of children. One of the most serious is the pervasiveness of child labour. Under applicable laws the age bar for prohibition of child labour varies from 14 to 18 years and is not effectively enforced. In practice, one in every eight children in the country is a working child. Nearly one-fifth of children from slum and tribal areas are engaged as child labour to earn a livelihood for themselves and their families.

Mohammad Rajja
Gono Bishwabidyalay
Savar, Dhaka



PHOTO: AMIRUL RAJIV

Jalil's observations

Recently, two senior leaders from the two major political parties came to the limelight for their sensitive and thought evoking comments about their own parties and top leaders. Of them, the comment/observation of Mr. Abdul Jalil, the former general secretary of the ruling AL, has stirred the whole political environment. The DS even wrote an editorial on the matter in its September 27, 2009 issue.

Since the last general election that gave the AL and its grand alliance an overwhelming majority, the opposition BNP all along is telling that the AL came to power through some sort of secret arrangement. Mr. Jalil's recent disclosure that his party reached some sort of understanding before the last general election will further substantiate the claim of the opposition. In fact, the pre-election activities of the diplomats of a few countries and their relentless efforts to bring some changes in governance of our country was a very common subject of discussion of the people who cared about the matter.

Why Mr. Jalil came out with this disclosure is difficult to understand. It may be the spontaneous grievance ventilation of a neglected party veteran or it may be his conscience that drove him to speak out on this very important matter. However, it is true that he will not be allowed to board the AL boat as a honourable member and he has already been branded "mentally imbalanced." But he can do some favour to the nation by disclosing details of the understanding. There is a rumour that our neighbour played a vital role in the matter. The recent foreign minister level talks in India indicate a new way of understanding between the two unequal neighbours but the question remains whether it will be a win-win game!

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque
Khalishpur R/A, Khulna

Banking system

I would like to thank The Daily Star and its journalist Mr. Imran Hossain for his news report that was published to draw the attention of the policymakers and citizens in The Daily Star on 12 October 2009 under the heading -- Anti-graft probes stumble on banks.

Bangladesh's banking system, already influenced

by the global financial crisis, is facing fresh turmoil. Fighting terrorism, economic offences and poverty reduction will be the three top priorities of the present government in the years to come. The government will have top three core functions: fighting terrorism, economic and poverty reduction in the next ten years with emphasis on dealing with economic crimes, mainly banking and security-related frauds. The economy is progressing and globalisation is increasing, economic crimes are on the rise across the country and Bangladesh Bank being a central agency needs a specialised unit to tackle them. We must have a special Banking and Securities unit to check crimes related to share market and banking sector.

In Bangladesh, however, the dividing line between politics and economics is not always easy to identify, and many observers believe that political motivations may be playing a part in the bank bailouts. The election of a new government in Bangladesh in 2008 provided fresh impetus to the development of the offshore services sector. A spate of seven offshore industry measures should be added to the statute book. These include--

The International Financial Services Commission Act which seeks to promote, protect and enhance Bangladesh as an international financial services centre and to regulate the provision of international financial services. The International Insurance Act which provides for the regulation of persons establishing and carrying on international insurance business.

The Protected Cell Companies Act which allows for the incorporation of protected cell companies or the conversion of an existing company to a protected cell company.

The Mutual Funds Act which provides for the regulation, authorisation and control of mutual funds and their managers and administrators. The Limited Liability Partnerships Act which permits the creation of limited liability partnerships. The Retired Persons (Incentives) Act which offers certain tax exemptions and incentives to qualified retired persons. The International Business Companies (Amendment) Act which provides for the establishment of limited life

companies.

While developing its offshore sector, Bangladesh has not overlooked the fact that the offshore vehicles may be used by unscrupulous elements to launder the proceeds of human or drug trafficking or other illicit activities. Simultaneously with the enactment of the Offshore Banking Act, Bangladesh also passed the Money Laundering (Prevention) Act which established mechanisms and procedures to ensure that the country's financial institutions are not used to disguise the source of illicit funds. This Act is central to the country's strategy to develop a reputable and viable offshore services sector. The definition of 'money laundering' is extremely wide and covers 'engaging, directly or indirectly, in a transaction that involves wealth that is the proceeds of crime, disguising, disposing of or bringing into Bangladesh anything that is the proceeds of crime, knowing or having reasonable evidence for believing the same to be the proceeds of crime.'

Balaram Sengupta
Banker

Meeting a govt official

Whenever a person, particularly a person from a private company, or, from a private organisation or, even an individual who may at one time have held high position in the govt. now retired, wants to talk to any responsible govt. officer, the first thing the PA of that particular govt. officer asks for (not request, to humbly put it) is your identity. If the PA finds that you are nobody who can cause harm to him, or to his superior, without hesitation the reply will be, "Sir is attending a meeting".

We suggest--
(1) Let the govt. decide what should be the time for the public to contact the govt. officials either over phone, or for an interview, and place his/her case.

(2) There should be no excuse like an officer being busy in a meeting to avoid public call, or audience. To ease the matter the govt. must also mention a time for the highly placed officers when they will arrange all the meetings etc, and no public call will be entertained then.

T Huq
Abdullahpur
Uttara, Dhaka

DST riddle

The cabinet has fixed the new office/school timing without fixing the date of implementation. According to media reports, electronic and print, no decision has been announced on the DST or when the clock would be put back to original time which is applicable to the whole country, irrespective of one living in Dhaka or elsewhere.

I need not explain or question this any more, the media will take care as soon as the new problem arises with the new timing. It appears that the government is more interested to have separate time for business activities in Dhaka and elsewhere thinking about energy saving without having any definite data on this.

I think the government is putting itself into the BNP trap on the 'clock' adjustment issue. The worst part of it is that no formal information is available from the experts in the government who have advised the prime minister to implement the DST. The BNP will change the clock to original time.

We have been befooled in the process and we can say that the cabinet ministers have also been befooled by the so called expert adviser of the prime minister for taking the cabinet decision without dealing in the total perspective. Another example of patchwork!

The simple equation is, if the clock is put back to old and normal time, the office and school time will come back to the original position.

Anyway, I am totally perplexed and cannot work out anything out of this complex math produced by the government. I am open to help and assistance to understand the complex math.
Faqurul Quadir
California, USA

Rape and acid victims

The article 'Rape is inevitable if not punished' by Ripan Kumar Biswas of Canada in your daily is something in Bangladesh we know and have been enduring for a long time. It is not unusual for rapists here to get away scot-free, or with minor punishments. Recently some rapists got away by simply paying a fine of only Tk.10, 000 each and managed to escape the locals with the help of some ruling party leaders.

A rape victim, like an acid burnt girl, becomes unwarranted in our society without the society being aware of it. They lose their acceptance in a society full of erroneous beliefs. Many victims commit suicide out of shame after being raped. The worst of all is that there are some people who even blame the victim, not the rapist, for the offence!

Everyone agrees that the punishment for such ghastly crimes must be harsh and concern about the sufferings of the victims is global. But most of us falter to take action harsh enough to stop this horrific crime. This is simply because our close ones have not been a victim of either of these two dreadful crimes. Ask the ones who have gone through this nightmare.

Mahmoodul Haque
Gulshan, Dhaka

New exam

The primary & secondary education board has recently introduced a public examination 'somaponi' exam. The objective of this exam is to uniformly evaluate the students just as the SSC exams. However, some aspects of this exam should be reconsidered:

Students are to complete eight exams in four days (two exams daily). For students of class V, this is a tall order, especially considering the fact that even in SSC & HSC there is a single exam each day.

The gap between each exam day is to be considered as well.

Instead of 50 marks for Social Science & 50 marks for Science, the board has introduced 100 marks for each subject. That too with a very short lead time.

If your daily takes up this issue, we believe the board authorities will rethink and will come up with a more realistic plan.

M. Iftikhar Uddin
One-mail

Zoo animals

Ever heard of the news "Giraffe dies because of the sins of humans". Nope. I haven't heard anything like it before. Sad but true, this bizarre phenomenon is taking place in your vicinity. Yes, you got it-- I'm talking of our country Bangladesh. It's all happening here these days. No doubt we've got a country mired in widespread corruption in every bit of the body. But we are completely oblivious of the fact that we're passing on our miseries to naive creatures of the 'non-human' category. Yes, of course I'm referring to Dhaka Zoo. How appalling!

Waheedur Rahman
Manarat Dhaka International College
Dhaka

Easing traffic jam

An attempt to introduce new office timings to ease traffic congestion is a praiseworthy move by the authorities. However, we can only look at it as a minor measure since we would still have the same number of cars on the road, perhaps at different times.

Has anyone thought of the idea of 'car pooling' (sharing a single car by at least 3 people going on a similar route) to really reduce the number of vehicles on the roads? In some countries, car pooling is promoted by employers and those taking part in this scheme are actually financially rewarded. Sometimes on motorways, there is a parallel fast lane, besides regular lanes which are earmarked only for cars carrying three passengers or more. Needles to say, those who use the fast lane reach their destination much quicker than those using the normal lanes.

In Dhaka city, the major offenders to traffic jams during mornings and afternoons are the English medium schools and we see that their timings have not really been affected much by the recent cabinet decision. Their start time has been set at between 7 and 8:30am and finish time from 1 to 2:30pm. This means that most schools will not have to change their current timings as almost all of them already operate within these hours, creating horrendous jams in areas like Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Banani, Uttara, Airport Road and other places.

What could have made more of an impact would have been if schools were asked to introduce a car pool system. It is often seen that several children live near each other, sometimes in the same apartment block. Car pooling is not a very savoury idea in our culture; indeed some parents might be too status conscious to allow their children to ride in others' cars, especially if they have three cars of their own! But if this is done by a mandatory order from the school authorities, there would be about one-third or at best half of the total number of cars we see now, during school drop-off and pick-up hours.

A few years ago, I had approached a very big English-medium school with this car-pooling idea to be launched as a school project during the International Environment week. It could be seen as the students' own contribution to a) reducing resource depletion, b) cutting down on pollution, and c) reducing traffic jams on roads, particularly near their school. I had also suggested that if this was sensitively handled, it could come as an environment-friendly initiative from the students themselves. In this way they could proudly take ownership of the idea and be encouraged to become aware of such vital issues that threaten our environment. And simultaneously with school support, they could get around the inhibitions of parents who might oppose the idea - for whatever reasons. Of course the actual implementation would have to be carefully planned and implemented with all the stakeholders - school, guardians, senior students, even the police. They could have been an example for other schools to follow. But all this was in vain. The authorities thought it was a wonderful idea but failed to do anything.

The idea of car pooling may be taken up by other people too, including government, non-government offices, organisations, and all kinds of work and study places.

Finally, let us move on to the issue of the public transport system. An efficient and reliable public transport system is an absolute necessity for any mega city. A large fleet of clean, modern and well-maintained buses is essential, especially those without a conductor who insists on standing on the footboard in the doorway so that he can brush against women passengers when they are getting on and off. We need buses that keep time, halt at marked stops and go through their routes at quick, regular intervals without taking excess passengers or having gladiator fights with other buses on the same route. If that should happen and it would certainly need much less investment or time than building flyovers and sky trains, I would be the first to leave my car behind at home!

Dr Arifa Rahman
Professor, Dhaka University

Grade issue

Recently we have been watching several incidents related to grade discrimination. Students who passed SSC & HSC in 2001 & 2003 are now blocking roads and vandalizing vehicles. Why do the general students have to take this kind of steps? Why are they victimised? As a general student, I want this problem to be solved immediately. I would like to draw the authorities' attention in this regard and expect them to be more concerned about this matter.

We want grading equality both at intermediate & university level.
Md. Shahadat Hossain Rajib
MBA, Dhaka University

Maradona



AFP

There is a large picture published in today's (Oct 12) newspapers showing how a coach is celebrating the victory of his team.

Superficially, it looks silly: a responsible coach is sliding on the ground to celebrate!!

I don't think anybody has seen such a picture in his/her lifetime.

This is Maradona. That picture simply touched my heart.

It is not because Argentina won the match to keep alive its hope of qualifying for the World Cup, but due to the message the picture conveys.

It is the sincerity, dedication and emotional attachment of the coach with his team.

He is not simply performing the job of a coach. It shows how passionate he is for his country. Team Argentina is deep inside his heart!!

A country can buy the services of a coach but not the heart.

Maradona gives everything from his heart to his country.

Dr Abu Sayeed FRCS
United Hospital
Dhaka

DVM degree

It is very sad to see that those who deal with the rules of the education sector do not know the elaboration of an international degree like DVM (Doctor of Veterinary Medicine) and the value of this degree. If we want to make the rules of national education sector, we should know the exact meaning and the value of the degree. I have seen that the rule makers of national education sector elaborate the DVM degree as Diploma in Veterinary Medicine. My point is that at first we should know the exact meaning of diploma and the difference between diploma and bachelor's degree.

Bhasker Chandra Talukder
Medicine department
BAU, Mymensingh

Saifur Rahman's death

Former finance minister and BNP leader Saifur Rahman died in a road accident on September 5, when he was returning to Dhaka from his home district. He was wel-

comed or criticized for introducing the Value Added Tax (VAT) system in our economy. When he was dead our prime minister was abroad on an official tour. The prime minister didn't officially issue a condolence message to the media or his bereaved family.

It really hurt me.

Abbas Uddin
Hasina Monjil
College Avenue, Barisal

Irresponsible

How could the present govt decide to give new school timing without withdrawing the Day Time Saving (DST)? Has anyone thought about it at all? The Fajar Namaz starts at 6.25am and finishes at around 6.45am. How a guardian of an English medium school will accompany his/her offspring to be on time at 7:00am? Think of the poor schoolteacher. He or she has to start probably before Azan when it is dark.

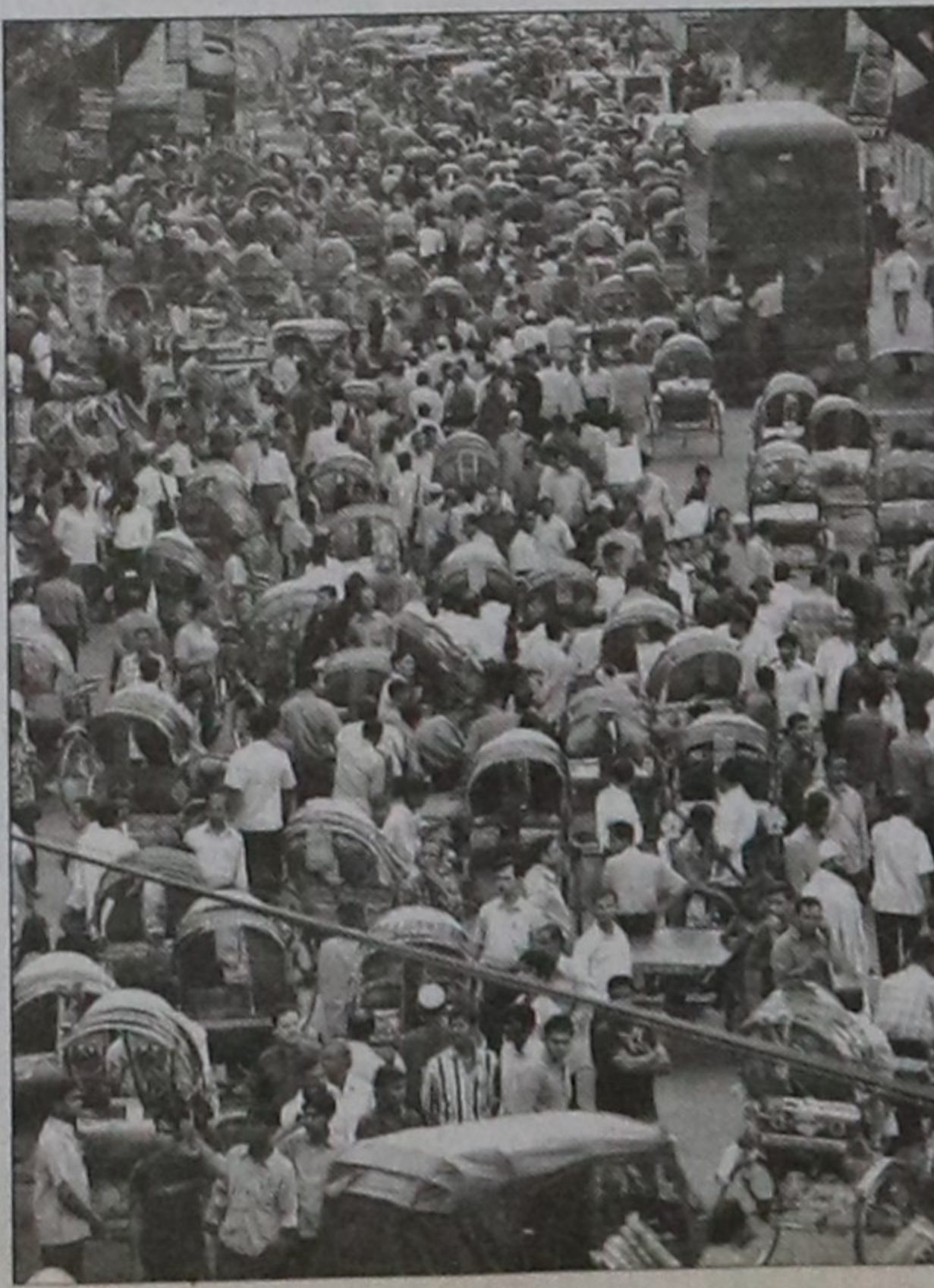
One wonders whether there is a single sensible person in the cabinet.

A conscious citizen
One-mail

Withdraw rickshaws

Do we want to move forward or backward? No more rickshaw- please!!

I was utterly shocked to see the article printed in The Daily Star on October 12, 09 by K. Siddique-e-Rabbani who suggested taking cars off the Dhaka city roads and replacing them with rickshaws!!!! For obvi-



MINIR IZ ZAMAN DRIK NEWS

ous reasons, the question would come to any sensible mind whether we should move forward or backward. When the whole world is moving fast ahead and with newer and better technological advances and with well coordinated traffic control system, he is suggesting that we get rid of cars and ride rickshaws. Surely, if we were to think just in terms of the space needed for a car and compare that with the smaller space needed for a rickshaw, then why even stop there? Why not just get rid of all vehicles including rickshaws and just start walking. Positively, the roads will be able to handle more people than the total number of rickshaws.

The point here is simple. We must take rickshaws off the main road as soon as possible. The fact is that rickshaws are the ones that create horrible gridlocks as they roam free with no control and that traffic keeps pushing towards all main roads even to the ones that are not officially allowed to have rickshaws. Let us be practical and sensible and not try to find an easy, unrealistic way out. The problem now is so big due to our failure to take stern steps previously against rickshaws. Time is running out fast and like everything else in our country we are heading towards a point of no return. So please let us start getting used to living without rickshaws. It is not good for anyone, especially for the poor, helpless rickshaw-puller who is being treated inhumanly. We the 'educated' should be finding ways to get them out of their misery and find them a better profession. Let us 'think'.

Rahat
Malibag, Dhaka