

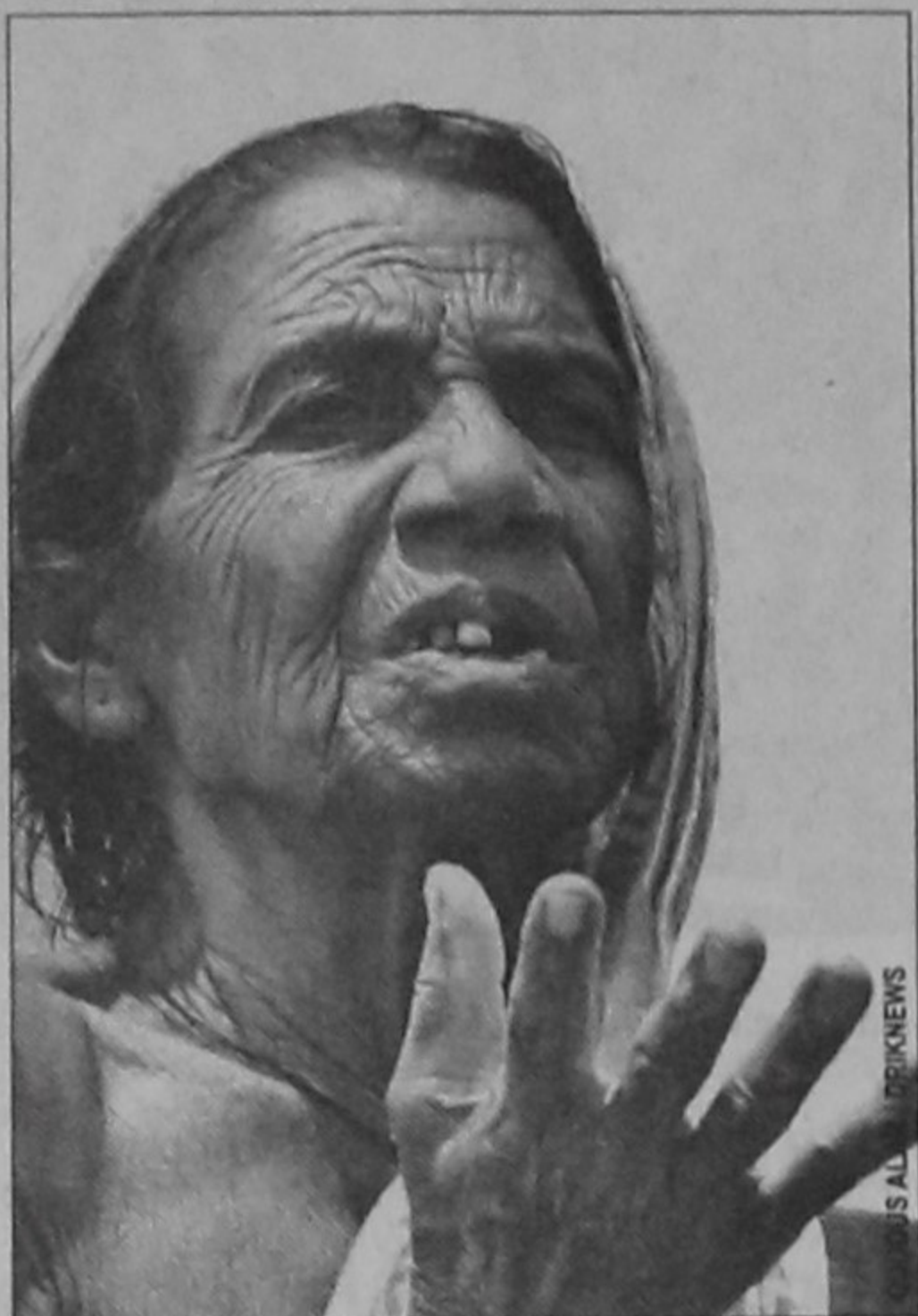
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Democracy and poverty alleviation?

Most dailies, on 18 October headlined on the front page the report which correlated democracy as the means to ease poverty. The other part was on curtailing and eliminating graft to contain poverty. However, this reader could not correlate the relationship between democracy and poverty alleviation! The correlation seemed to be theoretically weak, and rather elusive!

Do democracies alleviate or for that matter contain poverty to any extent? There are hardly any examples in the world that we can show today. The US has come on hard times; extending and increasing the impact of poverty in society. All because of the free for all, unending greed for wealth of the financial tycoons; speculating on junk shares and property debentures! In contrast, the former USSR, China and Cuba, known as authoritative regimes, without any democracy have been real examples in alleviating mass poverty of their citizens! In these countries, poverty has been really contained and marginalized. This is no small achievement of these countries!

One wonders, how democracy can be the "prime weapon" to rid our nation of pov-



erty. Rather, fighting graft, particularly under the government's capital expenditure programme, which is sometimes illog-

ical, can have a significant impact in helping to divert more funds, that can be used under welfare programmes that directly help to reduce poverty. Take the case of our capital investment in military hardware, particularly in procuring heavy arms, naval vessels and fighter aircraft. Do we really need the hardware for war, given our commitment to peace? One wonders!

Mino Masani, the late Indian economist of the mid twentieth century, described India's poor people as "poverty in the land of plenty". That was true as India then a British colony had its national earnings siphoned off to the UK to finance their war in Europe, with nothing left to feed the hungry Indians!

I believe that fighting graft and curtailing unwise state capital expenditure on war materials is the only logical way to contain poverty, irrespective of the type of government-- democratic, autocratic or otherwise! As a matter of record, democratic free capitalism based governments are most graft-prone, if we only look around the world today!

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Good suggestions

Here are my comments on Professor Zeba Seraj's article on the recent Education Policy published in the Op-Ed page of your daily on Saturday, the 17th October. Some of the ideas enumerated there are excellent. If our past experience serves as a guide, the implementing machinery falls far short of our expectations. For instance, we know that textbooks published by the Text Book Board are below standard containing unattractive pictures and sometimes disproportionate ones which create wrong impressions among young minds. For instance, a Nature's Study book prescribed for 5th grade shows a tiny moss larger in size than a large fern plant. I brought this discrepancy to the attention of the Chairman Text Book Board but without any effect. He promised to look into the matter but could not do anything because of the environment that prevails in such an organisation. UNESCO, ISESCO can help in the printing of quality books with nice illustrations but such a noble move will be resisted tooth and nail by the interested parties who control the textbooks market.

Then a good practice such as to earn an SSC certificate, a student must impart adequate knowledge about alphabets and numbers was discontinued with regime change. I do not know who is at fault, but everyone will agree it was a wrong decision.

What I would humbly suggest is that divide the programme into at least three stages and tackle each

programme at a time. Such a step in my humble opinion will take the country a step forward, instead of allowing it to wait for years, as it happened in the case of Quadrat-e-Khuda Education Commission report. Professor AS Islam Retired from DU

Rawalpindi attack - what next?

We thank Mr. M.Emad for this thoughtful and thought provoking letter with the above heading on 19th October. I would like to add to that subject as to the nature, interference of Pakistan army of the past and present.

We are ashamed of the fact that we were part of a peculiar country named Pakistan. Pakistan was born out of intrigue, myopia of many Hindu leaders of the then Congress (they conspired to oust 'Netaji'- why a Bengali babu! and later on overruled Gandhi), and brilliance, fatigue and impending death of an extremely secular (more of a Parsee than a Muslim) Barrister named MA Jinnah.

The first blow on Pakistan came on 11th September 1948 on the death of MA Jinnah and the second and semi-final one in October 1951 with the assassination of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. His assassin was killed on the spot by another group of killers. It was reportedly widely believed that he was killed by the feudal land lord coterie as Liaquat Ali Khan wanted massive land reforms. Pakistan Army agents were believed to be involved in his assassina-

tion. Pakistan Army started meddling in the state affairs since 1951! Gen Ayub Khan became the first native chief of Pakistan Army. He hailed from Hazara district in the border of Punjab and NWFP. He was a Punjabi-Pathan whose mother tongue was Hindko, not Pashtoo. He played the Punjabi card as well as the Pathan card as the situation warranted.

We were made to believe in the sixties and seventies (even later on) by massive propaganda campaign that Pakistan army is unbeatable, invincible and 'one Muslim Pakistani army man is equal to ten Hindu Indian soldiers'. The Indian army has many Muslim units like JK Rifles etc. while pre-liberation Pakistan army had only four Hindu officers- three AMC and one combat.

Most of the officer corps of Pakistan army was and still is drawn from the Punjabi feudal, semi-feudal gentry etc. An East Punjab born, butcher of the 'Jordanian Palestinians', Gen. Ziaul Huq inflicted the final blow to Pakistan by aligning with the oil rich 'Wahabi' Arab states. He along with the US created the monster called 'Taliban' to fight the Soviet and Afghan infidels. Now, the monster is threatening the very existence of Pakistan and also rendering the whole world an unsafe place to live in, to do business, prosper and thrive.

Ironically, now it has become imperative on Pakistan army and the US to destroy the 'thousand headed hydra' named Taliban and its off-shoots. In short,

Waziristan has to be completely cleansed. This is a tough job and may require many years.

We wish the Pakistan Army-USA forces good luck and demand that they render 'the area' and hence the whole world safe, peaceful, happy and prosperous. And also never repeat such misadventures.

Dr. SN Mamoon
One-mail

Regional development

The media has taken a few remarkable steps to popularise some national demand like a. Nadi Bachao, Desh Bachao b. Swine flu public awareness and c. the Prothom Alo introduced a self correction slogan "Badle Jao, Badle Dao" (of course this could not make any headway because the 'heads' did not pay any heed to it).

Last Monday the BBC Sanglap was held in Rajshahi. One young woman, perhaps a student, raised a very important question. She said that we are already facing the trouble due to unplanned expansion of Dhaka politically, economically and administratively. She addressed the guests, which included the present and previous mayors of Rajshahi, and asked them what kind of master plan we have for Rajshahi to develop as divisional city or a regional development zone which could avoid the serious mistakes committed with regard to overloading Dhaka in all respects.

I do not like to repeat what the mayors said except that it was sketchy and did not meet the overview of a regional development plan avoiding the gross mistakes committed in Dhaka.

The whole purpose of repeating the story here is just to request our media to jointly sponsor a sustained campaign to decentralize politics, economics and administration at the local levels, which should include a new elected tier "Regional Council".

Simultaneously, they should launch a vigorous public awareness campaign, and the slogan could be "Dhaka Chharo, Desh Bachao" or anything else they like to choose having the same theme and message.

I must admit that the BBC Sanglap outside of Dhaka is becoming more educative. My regards to this young student for her visionary question. Keep on thinking and pressurize your representatives to deliver instead of performing as a "talking doll."

Faqurul Quadir
California, USA

Retirement age

The government has recently extended the retirement age of the freedom fighters in government service by two years--a move through which a section of the employees has been given a preferential treatment over others.

Such discrimination will not enhance the overall performance of the government employees.

Asraf Ali
One-mail

Rickshaws, again

My old friend, Mr Rahat of Malibagh has once again vented his spleen against rickshaws in Dhaka and against the suggestion of Prof Rabbani of DU for a trial period of a few weeks, to garage one's cars and travel around Dhaka in rickshaws. Heavens forbid, (according to him) how could any sensible person make such a horrid suggestion in these modern times when one's ego cannot do without one's luxury cars even for the shortest of errands?

Mr Rahat is again utterly shocked to see the horrid traffic jams caused by thousands of (invisible?) rickshaws on Airport, Mirpur, Mohakhali, Gulshan and other roads that have been rickshaw-free now for years!!!! With his 'sensible mind', while stuck in the gridlock of motorized vehicles, he is unsure whether we should move forward (with even more cars) or backwards (with rickshaws). Right now, I do not think he could move even sideways (walking)!!!

He advises everyone to think, to be practical, realistic and sensible. OK, Mr Rahat, please do that. Also please exult in today's headlines Tk 15,000 crore Metro, Elevated Expressways, Four-lane Highways, Circular railways and other lollipops that have been dangled before the gullible public. Will these be available in our lifetimes, because no time-limit for completion is given?

To better understand Dhaka's traffic imbroglio (7% road space, fully pot-holed, capacity 150-200,000 motorized vehicles but with 400,000-500,000 private cars already 'running' (gridlocked) on them and a further 100-150 added every day), I would advise Mr Rahat, in the serene environment of his home, to take a 50 kg cement bag and fill it with 100 kgs of cement. If he can do that, I will raise my hat to him in admiration.

Sikander Ahmed
Niketon, Gulshan-1, Dhaka

A beautiful country

Bangladesh changes its appearance every season and having six seasons is a rare thing. These are all gifts from the Almighty to Bangladesh. Although its size is small and the population is huge still these problems can be solved.

Our tourism potential is great and we should try to develop the sector on the basis of a well thought out plan.

Md Mahbubur Rahman
Old town resident

MPs

You use the word 'lawmaker' for an MP (Member of Parliament), and most of the Bangla print and electronic media use the Bangla word 'Saangsad' for an MP. The use of the word 'lawmaker' for an MP is not correct because it seems many MPs do not know what it means to be a parliamentarian. This is true not only in case of Bangladesh but also about many other parliaments across the world.

Dr MA Obaydullah
Postdoctoral Fellow
Australia

Zero carbon emission house!

A new building has come up among the Florida State University's usual brick built campus buildings. It is an eco-friendly revolutionary building which runs on solar and hydrogen power only, and with zero carbon emission! This futuristic building has no electric connection from the local electric supply grid. It is a breakthrough solution to the climate change problems; combining traditional technology with unique solar-hydrogen experimental, heat and power source.

The solar panels on the roof are the visible difference from outside, for this two bedroom pioneer building. It has electric energy stored from the solar panel which also is partly used to turn water to hydrogen for power when the sun is not shining! Hydrogen is a cheaper option compared to banks of expensive storage batteries.

The hydrogen gas can be safely stored in a simple storage facility. The key is a newly developed cheap electrode material, that enables hydrogen production by electrolysis water cheaply. The large solar panels on the roof produce nearly 7KW of power, compared to 1 or 2 KW for a normal roof panel. The panels for the experiment house measures 99 square meter in area!

Apart from hydrogen gas being used in the fuel cell to produce electric power, it is also burned in the kitchen for cooking and other similar uses! This burning of hydrogen produces no CO2 or any other gases; only water vapour! Because the hydrogen flame configuration is like a vertical column, it is not effective in radiant-heat ovens. For this convection heating fans circulating the heat is needed. Although the kitchen has an electric refrigerator, it can easily use gas-burning refrigerators that have gone out of production since early twentieth century, but was common earlier!

Although the building uses an electric and geothermal system which is very efficient in the milder climate of Florida. However in colder regions, hydrogen gas can be burnt to provide heating. Despite the photo voltaic panel that produces electricity for the house, the roof has and old model efficient oversized hot water coil also. This can heat sufficient quantity of water to fill a 1000 litre hot water tank with water at around 60°C!

To boost natural internal lighting from the sun, simple light shelves under the upper windows are fitted to reflect the incoming sunshine evenly, without creating any hot areas. The other energy saving set-up includes a reflecting roof. All materials of construction in this building are made from recycled products and natural wood. Partitions walls are made of boards sandwiched around foam insulation! The outside walls are locked to the main building frame by wooden keys.

No nails used in the constructions anywhere! Hinges and internal frame panels in the building are made of harden board and wood combination that function quite satisfactorily!

To sum up it is a model eco-friendly with no atmospheric pollution coming from the house with zero carbon emission.

Technical Adviser
Spectra Group

Foreign tours

The Honourable Prime Minister has recently directed all concerned to limit the tour of bureaucrats to foreign countries which, in my view, is a timely move. But the question arises when we see the bulging list of entourage of our ministers, including the prime minister, while they go abroad. I personally witnessed on several occasions the foreigners being surprised seeing luxurious foreign tours by our political leaders.

For the sake of austerity, the number of such tours should be reduced.

Monzur Rahman
Dhaka

Leaders' language

We expect our leaders to speak in Bangla. Problem is many of them cannot speak proper Bangla; so they try to mix English to hide their shortcomings. This complicates the situation further as their English is not good either. A few days ago I heard one of them using the word "motibeshito", the self-bangladeshification of the word "motivation". God help Bangla, English and Bangladesh!

Iqbal Mahmood, Ph.D., P.E.
Los Angeles, California

DST

I am not going into details. Through you, I request the AL govt to conduct a survey amongst school going children who make most honest remarks without any favour or fear about the government decision to go ahead with DST in this month of October. Please also include in the survey the guardians. Actually you do not need to conduct a survey. A pro-people government goes by the people's opinion. In this era, everybody knows when the sun rises and sets with the accuracy of seconds but probably not our ministers and bureaucrats. I am not elaborating. Have they got their own children to take to school and that too by bus or rickshaw just after Fajr prayers?

Dr. M M Mortayez Amin
Rahmatganj, Dhaka

Imitating others

We are a developing nation, Bangladesh. We are developing very slowly but inevitably, undoubtedly. In our sluggish journey as we are following and copying developed countries like all backward countries do, sometimes adopt awkward activities which were proved wrong later but couldn't be retrieved because there was no other way left. Ah, we are

such an imitator, copying straightway what the leaders have done, no matter whether those are appropriate for us or not.

Like natural views, landscapes are being restricted in the name of preservation and business. They are being given to the private sector for constructing eco-parks and afterwards these vicinities are restricted with expensive tickets. A developing country like Bangladesh whose hunger index is 22.7%, can't afford doing that because if it is done, the kid born in a Rickshawala's home will never be able to see those lakes or hills which belong to his country.

For instance, I would like to talk about our Foy's Lake in Chittagong, which is in some private company's custody now. They have encircled it with impenetrable fences and are selling tickets which the poor cannot afford to buy. Why should people be deprived of seeing the lake?

Arafath Shahriar Moon
Department of Marketing
Studies and International
Marketing
University of Chittagong

What about the pledges?

In any election the Awami League itself is enough to win and it is also enough for its defeat. The AL thinks they win alone but when they are defeated, all the progressive people are also defeated. When the caretaker government was in power, AL leaders were divided into reformists and non-reformists. Some illegal money earners took shelter in the reformist camp to save their name and fame.

The AL should now go by its election pledges and fulfil people's expectations.

Abbas Uddin
College Avenue
Barisal

Introduce shuttle trains



The Dhaka traffic problem continues to be menacing and is going to be worse with time. Here is something that the government may consider as a cheap alternative until an effective solution like metro, monorail, circular train is developed.

1. Shift the Kamalapur railway station to Joydevpur.
2. Introduce shuttle trains on the existing tracks between Kamalapur and Joydevpur.
3. These shuttle trains will operate within its own Zone which by definition would be two points of the existing railway tracks until separated by a major road. For example from Kamalapur to Mouchak area could be Zone A. Zone B could start from the other side of the Mouchak Road to Mohakhali. Cutting across the Mohakhali junction will be Zone C which can stretch up to the Cantonment. Zone D could begin from the present Cantonment station to the southern side of Bishwa Road. And Zone E could start from the northern side of Bishwa Road to Joydevpur.
4. All the Zones will be connected by pedestrian overbridges to ease the pedestrian jam that may result due to the need for changing trains.
5. In between these zones would be several stations at convenient points for people to hop on and hop off.
6. Since there are already two tracks, parallel commuting trains with front and rear engines could shuttle to increase the frequency of trains.
7. There will be a one hour, two hour, three hour ticket system as well as daily and monthly tickets valid for all zones.

This system would allow the present traffic to have a continuous run in the city and reduce the jam at least in one part of the city. Rickshaws will be eased out as most people between Kamalapur to Joydevpur will be within 20 minutes from their place of stay or office and therefore can walk.

A similar system could be introduced using the waterway with launches covering the area from Narayanganj to Ashulia to take care of the other side of Dhaka.

On the same principle electric trains can be introduced on the VIP Road !!!

Aldit Rahman
Houston
USA

Women and health



We should recognise that there has been work done to promote health education throughout the community based on the saying 'prevention is better than cure'. This relates to education and more facilities being available in communities for women to discuss their health issues and take steps to safeguard their health. However, much more needs to be done to reach the whole community.

There has been a good campaign on educating women on living a productive life much longer. The incidence of Osteoporosis is escalat-

ing, yet little is being done to prevent the health crisis this will create. The government's attitude of waiting for a fracture to occur before helping with the costs of medication is wrong. Surely there is a lower cost in helping everyone to minimise the number of fractures that occur. This in turn aids people to have a more productive life and lower the medical and hospital costs for the community.

Mohammad Rajja
Member, Nepal Student Society
Dhaka