

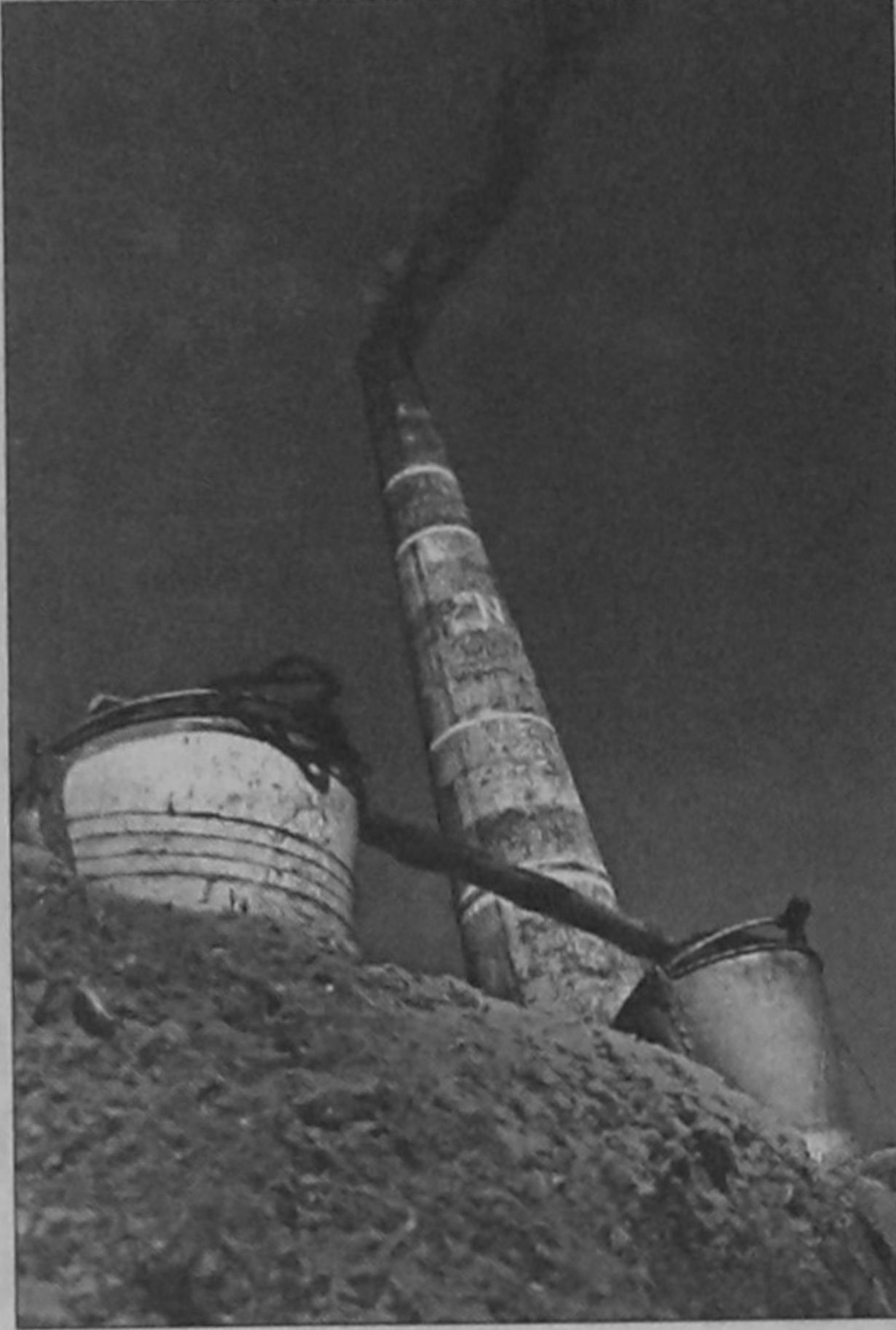
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# Air pollution in Dhaka

Air pollution in capital city Dhaka has gone higher than Mexico City and Mumbai killing thousands prematurely each year. According to the Department of Environment (DoE), the density of airborne particulate matter (PM) reaches 463 micrograms per cubic meter (mcm) in the city during December-March period - the highest level in the world. Mexico City and Mumbai follow Dhaka with 383 and 360mcm respectively. An estimated 15,000 premature deaths, as well as several million cases of pulmonary, respiratory and neurological illness are attributed to poor air quality in Dhaka, according to the Air Quality Management Project (AQMP), funded by the government and the World Bank.

Vehicular air pollution is a major cause of respiratory distress in urban Bangladesh. If pregnant mothers come across excessive pollution, it may cause premature death of their children. According to the National Institute of Diseases of Chest and Hospital (NIDCH), nearly seven million people in Bangladesh suffer from asthma; more than half of them are children. Cases of children suffering from bronchitis and chronic cough have also shot up in recent years. Children breathe more air relative to their lung size than adults. They spend more time outdoors, often during midday and afternoons when pollution levels are generally highest. WHO air quality guidelines (2005) recommend a maximum acceptable PM level of 20mcm; cities with 70mcm are considered highly polluted. Airborne lead is the worst of the harmful PMs.

By penetrating the lungs and entering the blood stream, lead may cause irreversible neurological damage as well as renal disease, cardiovascular effects, and reproductive toxicity. The phasing out of petrol-driven two-stroke auto-rickshaws in 2003 and their replacement with four-stroke versions, which use a much cleaner burning fuel (compressed natural gas), significantly decreased the volume of air contaminants. But, according to DoE sources, a sharp increase in the number of vehicles and construction sites in 2004-2008 led



AZIZUR RAHIM PEU/DRINKNEWS

to a deterioration of Dhaka's air quality.

Old, poorly serviced vehicles, 1,000 brick kilns, dust from roads and construction sites, and toxic fumes from industrial sites are major sources of air pollution. So, the authorities should take the initiative to reduce air pollution in Dhaka city.

**Md. Shohag & Tapas**  
Dept. of Geography & Environmental Studies  
University of Chittagong

## Ensure justice

The article entitled "The Mystery Remains Unsolved" by Elita Karim in DS on October 30, 2009 was a unique piece, which appealed for justice for the victim of a barbarian from the educated community. For sure, there are many similar cases and the perpetrators are going unpunished.

Indeed, dowry is a curse in our society because it is one of the prime reasons for the incompatible conjugal life of a couple.

Let us say 'NO' to dowry to protect our future mothers and newly married couples from endless misery.  
**Hasnat, AIUB**  
An intern at DBBL

## Two beautiful spots

Last week I visited Cox's Bazar and Saint Martin's. As we are busy with our city life, after making some effort we got the chance to visit the longest beach of the world. We planned to go there to have some refreshing experience but after reaching the place I was really disappointed. The beach was full of hawkers.

The situation must improve in the interest of both local and foreign tourists.  
**Sabina Parvin**  
Dhaka

## Smoking banned in open space?

I would like to draw the attention of the ministry concerned or any person who has read the anti-smoking law. I have read in the newspaper and personally seen that people are being fined or harassed for smoking in the street or open space. Is this the correct interpretation of the law?

I had read the anti-smoking law, that was promulgated several years back. It said that smoking is banned in some listed 'public places'. The law listed what are those 'public places' - govt offices, educational institutions, movie halls, public transport (bus/railway/launch/steamer), marketplaces and specific places. The law does not say that smoking is banned in the street or open space. Interestingly, it says smoking is allowed in restaurants.

Nowadays, most people are interpreting 'public place' as open space, or 'prokashshey' in Bengali which is wrong as per law. Please note that in most countries you can only smoke in open space or in streets where there is no gathering of people.

Can someone please check the law carefully and inform us if smoking in the street or open space is banned. You

must prove the point quoting the exact clause of the law.

**M. Ahmed**  
Nayapaltan, Dhaka

## Some observations

During the last couple of weeks a few incidents have drawn my attention which might have political ramifications in my judgment. These are:

a. A talk show guest was the first person as per my observation, to toy with the idea of reducing the death sentence awarded to the killers of Sheikh Mujib. Now this is being argued by the lawyer of one accused on the same ground mentioned by the talk show guest. It might be a pure coincidence.

b. Incidentally, the same talk show guest had informed his viewers on another episode that while abroad he was asked by many that in the media we had seen and heard so many allegations of corruption against an influential family member of the former PM, where are the proofs, and nothing is substantiated yet in the court of law. A significant observation if we can somehow foresee the dramatic turn in our political game play.

c. The ministry of home affairs is so tentative about taking action against the wrong doing of the elite force

Rab against the reporter of the New Age. They should be firm and not hesitant. Why do they look afraid of the elite force? Do we have any plan to reorganize this elite force and make them accountable to the rule of law? The foreign countries who are so vocal against the extrajudicial killings committed by this elite force has a definite responsibility to propose the reform and be proactive to help execute the same.

d. The SG of the BNP is behaving in such a way every day as if the people are his or his party's "proja" and are obliged to listen to him and obey. If the BNP has no faith or confidence in any constitutional body of the republic, their December council (?) agenda should include the future course of action by the party and stop issuing sermons every day because they have left behind the same old governance record.

e. What about the electronic media coverage of the arrest scene of the daughter of one alleged killer of Sheikh Mujib. Why was it necessary to exhibit the 3-6 months old child in such a way? I am curious to know the role of the police. Why could not they execute the warrant of arrest with required civility?

f. The long absence of the PM might have been felt by the people who require her presence at home when politics is taking a critical and unexpected turn.

**A reader**  
One-mail

## A resolute man

If anybody with common sense listens to the suggestions of the former Chairman of Regulatory Reforms Commission Dr. Akbar Ali Khan, he will surely agree with me that he is not only a great patriot but also a very efficient government servant with a strong commitment to the nation.

If the government responded positively to his suggestions it would have a great impact on the economic emancipation of the country. I am sure the government created the situation for his resignation under the direction of some vested quarters who do not have any commitment to the nation, rather are always guided by self interest.

This is an irony that all of our governments gave importance to the sycophants and not the honest and patriotic forces. The present government should not commit the same mistake.

**Dr. M. Mahboob Hossain**  
Associate Professor  
Department of Pharmacy  
The University of Asia Pacific  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

## Defying logic

Daylight Saving Time in the western hemisphere countries has a definite purpose and period which extends from April till end of October. Setting the clock right in tune with sunrise and sunset in winter time is the most logical thing to do. If this is not done, we will be wasting power in lighting up our houses in the morning. Moreover, as the days get shorter, it will become even more difficult to get up when it will remain pitch dark even at 6.30 am, since our biological clocks are naturally tuned to sunlight.

Under the circumstances, why the government should defy logic is inexplicable.

**Zeba, Seraj (Ph.D.)**  
Professor  
Department of Biochemistry  
and Molecular Biology  
University of Dhaka

## Power vehicles

Motor vehicles are wasteful in terms of energy and fuel used to transport only two or three persons at most! Every time the car engine runs, four fifths of the energy supplied goes to overcome the frictional resistance of the car engine, transmission and the bodyworks and their weights which accounts for the high fuel consumption! The electric car however goes a long way toward reducing wasted energy by replacing the internal-combustion engine with batteries. Even so, electric cars lose about 60 percent of the energy because heavy mechanical parts are still used to deliver energy from the batteries to the car wheels through air box and mechanical transmission system. Lately, though, engineers have come up with a far more efficient way to accomplish the same task: by using magnets in the wheels; in place of traction motor and mechanical power transmission gears.

Wheel motors ensures better energy efficiency than the electric car, bringing the truly energy-efficient car another step closer to reality! The mechanism is surprisingly simple. Each wheel hub has a ring of electro-magnets inside. Another ring of magnets lines the rim of the wheel, which fits over the hub. A rapidly alternating pulse of electricity through the electromagnets in the hub changes the polarity of magnets many times each second, causing the wheel to turn through magnetic repulsion. The only moving parts, aside from the wheel itself, are the wheel ball bearings.

About two hundred test cars, buses, and trucks have been built with wheel motors, till date in USA. Around twenty companies are developing to have these including BMW, Ford, General Motors, Honda, Mitsubishi, Renault-Nissan, Siemens, and Volvo, as well as wheel and tire makers Bridgestone and Michelin.

With more development going on, the initial problems, though minor, will soon be overcome and it is expected that wheel magnet driven public transport vehicles will soon become the preferred vehicle on the road.

**S.A. Mansoor**  
Technical Adviser, Spectra Group

## New office timing

I am working in an NGO. Showing respect to the government's new timing for office, our new office time is now 10:00 am 6:00pm. The government decided the timing of private offices, as if there are no women working in private offices, they don't have children!

We are really hard pressed now.

**Areefa**  
One-mail

## Plane crash

I was shocked to see the news item that a BAF training plane crashed in Bogra, while on a training flight. The type and condition of the plane does not seem to suit training for the two trainees of the rank of Squadron Leader! The enquiry must show whether it was training and who among the two was the trainee.

Anyway, thank God who saved the two precious lives.  
**Mohammed Alauddin**  
Green Road, Dhaka

## Why DST?

The words of Energy Adviser Dr. Tawfiq E Elahi Chowdhury on not reverting back to the old timing in an interview with BBC Bangla Service on October 25, 2009, have baffled us, because the adviser himself admitted that the length of day and night are quite different in countries where DST is being used for a long time but in tropical countries like Bangladesh the difference is not much.

So, our question is why it has been changed in the first place. People were hoping that realizing the fruitlessness of this move the government would return to the old timing but to our consternation the government has remained unruffled and adamant on its decision which is useless, not helping us in anyway.

The timing we were used to throughout our life was suddenly changed-- thanks to the whims of the Awami League government. It is not right and acceptable, the government must pay heed to people's demand. We hope the government will act wisely.

**Nur Jahan**  
Chittagong

## Technical education

Bangladesh has been expanding its industrial base in the last two decades. Mentionable development has been achieved in industries like garment, cement, textile, steel, sugar, paper, pharmaceutical, shipbreaking, shrimp culture etc. Manpower export has already been proved a significant financial positive factor for Bangladesh economy. In addition to the garments industry, information technology and shipbuilding have tremendous potential.

To operate the existing industrial ventures, to expand the industrial sector and to export technical manpower abroad, Bangladesh needs a huge technically educated manpower. Without proper manpower, no industry can be developed. But if we evaluate the scenario of Bangladesh for expanding and for modernizing technical education a poor picture is observed.

In different seminars and informal discussions we agree that expansion of technical education is very much needed. But practically, no mentionable achievement was seen in the last four decades of independence.

One poly-technique in each upazila is very much needed to provide technical education facility to all geographic locations of the country. As Dhaka has developed into a mega city, more than 10 million people live here. So, at least 10 poly-technique institutions are required in Dhaka.

**Tahshina Ashraf**  
Kadamtala Purba Bashabo  
High School and Collage  
Bashabo, Sabujbag, Dhaka

## Funding political parties

A difficult question of funding political parties from the state coffers has been launched by TIB, backed by its research, and perhaps seconded by our Election Commission, for discussion. Actually, it's a dilemma that goes beyond Bangladesh. In the absence of mass membership contribution, many political parties, or politicians, rely on private donations to support their activities. But private donations, mostly corporate, are often determined by influence-peddling. So, making a case for public funding of political parties to keep them honest is an option, but isn't easy. It could be a double-edged sword, while public money goes to the parties, they can't be made accountable.

Actually, the question displeases people throughout the entire world, developed or underdeveloped, how to fund politics. In a country where we have high levels of poverty, it's very difficult to say that we are going to clean up politics by arranging legal payments to political parties from the state coffers.

It is a fact that election, or political financing, is shadowy in Bangladesh as well as elsewhere, in fact everywhere. In most of the functioning democracies, while political parties oversee national campaigns, individual candidates are expected to raise their own campaign funds from private sources. Once elected to parliament, lawmakers start looking for new sources of funding. Many say those sources include bribes from persons, groups or companies seeking favours to get their business contracts approved.

Politicians use their position to raise money because that is what the parties ask them to do, or maybe that is the standard practice everywhere in the free economies. Some of the money goes into

their pockets, the rest goes to the parties. State funding for making the lawmakers probably wouldn't stop graft. If we gather experiences from other democracies, we can see that politics, and democracy as well, is getting more and more expensive all over the world.

Some advocate greater transparency in party financing. I think what we can possibly do is publish the sources of our political parties' money and the names of the donors. They should have tax identification numbers, so anybody can trace those persons, or companies.

Apart from the accountability risks, in a multiparty system, public funding of parties must be based on their strength in previous parliaments. Funds for all parties from the national exchequer could also go wrong. We may make it tricky for new parties, our past experience tells us that people from other parties would form new parties just to get money from the state coffers. So, we need to think many times before settling the issue of graft-free funding of political parties.

**Sirajul Islam**  
Pisciculture Housing Society  
Shyamoli, Dhaka

## Role of Rab

The continuing saga of extra judicial killing and torture by law enforcing agencies such as Rab is extremely disturbing, to say the least. The recent killing of an actor and torture of a New Age journalist by Rab prompted the constitution of departmental enquiries, the outcome of which is anybody's guess. While condemning such illegal acts committed by the very organ of the government which is supposed to protect the innocent and punish the culprit within legal boundaries, I think everyone also needs to ponder who is the beneficiary of such extra judicial killings and why this saga is going on unabated for such a long time.

The summary disposal of alleged criminals before giving them an opportunity to speak out and expose the masterminds and godfathers is advantageous to those very people who create and nurture top criminals.

These godfathers have infiltrated into the organs of the government so deep, that they can manipulate and use various departments with impunity and at will.

**Nuruddin Azam**  
Australia

# Poverty and digital Bangladesh

According to FAO, currently about 45% population in Bangladesh are below the poverty level while around 20% are hardcore poor. The population is predominantly rural, with about 85 percent of its 135 million people living in rural areas. For their livelihoods rural people depend mainly on land, which is both fertile and extremely vulnerable. Most of the country is made up of flood plain, and while the alluvial soil provides good arable land, large areas are at risk because of frequent floods and cyclones, which take lives and destroy crops, livestock and property.

Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries with 150 million people, 49 percent of whom live below the national poverty line. In addition, child malnutrition rate of 48 percent is the second highest in the world, a condition that is tied to the low social status of women in Bangladeshi society. About 20 percent of rural households live in extreme poverty. Chronically poor people suffer persistent food insecurity, own no cultivable land or assets, are often illiterate and may also suffer from serious illnesses or disabilities. Another 29 percent of the rural population is considered moderately poor. They may own a small plot of land and some livestock, but while they generally have enough to eat, their diets lack protein and other nutritional elements. This segment of the rural population is at risk of sliding deeper into poverty as a result of health problems or natural disasters. Injury or crop failure caused by unexpected and severe weather conditions frequently ruins the livelihoods and the hopes of many Bangladeshis.

Small-scale farmers may subsist at either of these levels of poverty. Their livelihoods are precarious, because of the seasonal nature of farm income and



natural disasters such as floods and drought may periodically destroy their crops and livestock.

Women are among the poorest of the rural poor, especially when they are the sole heads of their households, such as widows or wives of men who have migrated in search of employment. They suffer discrimination because of their gender, they have scarce income and their nutritional intake is often inadequate.

Poverty reduction is the central challenge for Bangladesh. The integrated activities of the government, NGOs and people can alleviate poverty and then we may achieve our desirable digital Bangladesh.

**Md. Nur-e-Alam Siddique**  
Faculty of Agriculture  
Hajee Danesh Science & Technology  
University  
Dinajpur

# Development



SAFIQ USMAN/DRINKNEWS

As Bangladesh is an agricultural country, village people are actually keeping us alive. They work from dawn to dusk in the fields for growing different crops and we buy and eat those very easily without thinking about their hard toil. Again, they face natural disasters almost every year.

As most farmers are poor, our banks and other financial institutions are not showing much interest to help them in the form of loan. The main duty of our Krishi Bank is to

disburse loans to the farmers but the procedures keep the farmers away from the threshold of the banks.

Some NGOs are working in the villages mainly allocating loans to the village women. Recently, our finance minister claimed that small loans of NGOs do not bring about any significant change. Our private sector must work alongside the government to develop our economy.  
**Harun-or-Rashid**  
Sobhanbag, Dhaka