

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Textbooks

The education minister, Nurul Islam Nahid, has kept his word in fulfilling his government's commitment -- distributing textbooks among most of the madrasa and school students on the opening day of the new academic year.

We think and, strongly, believe that if the government is serious and sincere, it can succeed under difficult and even hostile circumstances.
Habibur Rashid Ismail
Jamea Rahmania Madrasa, Chittagong



WANID ANONAN / DRINKNEWS

Anti-India or pro-Pakistan?

We know that in our country some political groups incessantly engage in blatant anti-Indian propaganda. We must be aware of the fact that "Anti-Indian political sentiment" can easily be translated into "Pro-Pakistan political sentiment". Interestingly, the terms "Anti-Indian" and "Pro-Pakistan" often prove to be synonymous and we must try to investigate whether these political parties are actually "Anti-Indian" or "Pro-Pakistan".

Let me clarify the issue even more specifically with some concrete examples. I think the leading Anti-Indian political party in Bangladesh is the Jamaat. Evidently, it's a "Pro-Pakistan" party, if we consider its apparent role of 1971. The BNP is another party which is popularly known for its consistent Anti-Indian propagandas and its persistent criticisms of its rival because of its rival's India-friendly policies. Interestingly, the BNP is currently a very close ally of a highly "Pro-Pakistan" party like the Jamaat.

The collective socio-political outlooks of these parties generally resemble the socio-political sentiments that characterize a religious fundamentalist nation like Pakistan. For instance, we know that anti-secularism, religious fundamentalism, religion-based politics, repression of ethnic minorities, patronization of religious extremism, are some of the most evident traits of an awfully fundamentalist nation like Pakistan. And it's not surprising that the "Anti-Indian" or "Pro-Pakistan" political parties of our country have often been characterized by these evil traits (both explicitly and implicitly). For example, we know that during the rule of the BNP-Jamaat regime, religious extremists got patronization from the government.

We frequently hear these anti-Indian political factions vehemently criticizing the government's India-friendly policies, as if they are the archrivals of India (like Pakistan). However, these parties seldom criticize Pakistan's shameless patronization of religious extremism and Pakistan's international lobbying against

our initiatives to punish war criminals. We must always be cautious about the fact that many Anti-Indian sects in our country are actually "Pro-Pakistanis" in disguise. Their ultimate political aim is to transform this country into a mini-Pakistan.
Kh. Asef Safa Kabir
Muhammadpur, Dhaka

Mobile phone inside mosques

Breaking the serene atmosphere of mosques with grating ring tones is a common occurrence these days. It is an obvious lack of respect towards fellow devotees who find it very difficult to concentrate. It is very common to hear at least one ring tone during the course of prayers and they are not only loud but also very cacophonous.

It has turned to a bad habit to leave your mobile phones active even when you are saying your prayers inside mosques. Though most of those causing the disturbances are adults, the offenders also include teenagers and young children. I think if people think they are so important and cannot miss a single phone call, they should pray at home. They should think about it - how are they going to answer that call anyway, if they are in the middle of a prayer?

People will answer the call if it rings not paying any attention to the other devotees who find it very irritating.

This problem can be resolved if some people would just make an effort to be civil and the ultimate responsibility lay with the Imam leading the prayer to discourage the violators causing disturbances.

However, just before the prayers start, if the Imam makes an announcement telling people to switch off their mobile phones during prayers, it might increase the chance of people being civil and showing respect to the mosque.
Badal Hasib
SIBT
Sylhet

Primary education

The educational arrangement in Bangladesh is three-tiered as well as very subsidized. Existing government projects in Bangladesh have obligatory primary schooling for all, free of charge education for

girls up to grade 10, stipends for female students, a countrywide incorporated education system along with a food-for-education literacy movement. A big segment of the country's national budget is reserved to facilitate these programmes into act and to encourage education and make it more available. Current years have seen these hard works pay off and the Bangladesh education structure strides in front of what it were only a few years ago.

However, the educational system of Bangladesh comes across many bottlenecks. Formerly, Bangladesh education was principally a British-controlled, upper class affair with all courses set in English and very little being done for the ordinary people.

Meagre school attendance and small contact time in school are aspects contributing to low level of learning accomplishment. Moreover, the system lacks sound Human Resource Development and this has dispirited the primary education sector people, including teachers, and contributes to poor performance. As a whole, poverty is a big obstacle to primary education.
Shohag Mostafij
MBA (Strategic & International Management)
University of Dhaka

Our mistakes

Today we are facing a serious threat to ourselves for not being law-abiding. It is a most common and most noticeable matter that we do not follow traffic rules and car parking codes, that is why we are not able to exempt ourselves from unendurable traffic congestion which has now become a big challenge for city dwellers, especially in Dhaka.

The same way we are purchasing a number of out of use and useless vessels and other things which cause loss of lives.
Atikur Rahman
Kabi Jasimuddin Hall
Dhaka University

Threat of movement

Media in Dhaka report that Begum Khaleda Zia has threatened to launch a country-wide agitation programme if this govt signs any anti-state agreement with a neighbouring country. She has hinted at,

among others, transit to India, Tipaimukh barrage, water sharing deals etc. We object to her early warning because she is not participating in any process of drafting of agenda that would be carried by the prime minister during her visit to India. We feel she is also not sincere in her talks and thoughts. Had she been sincere, she should have joined parliament just a few days before the state visit of the prime minister and could have raised clauses that she wanted to include or delete from the agreements expected to be signed during the visit. We have a lot of disputed issues with this big neighbour which need to be resolved through mutual agreements for our bigger interest than the interest of neighbours who are already enjoying more benefits than us.

In the absence of agreements we are suffering. So, signing of agreements on the pending disputed issues are our priorities and not the neighbours'. We will have to bargain with the neighbour and reach an agreement on "give and take" principles. I think, her pre-emptive threat is merely politics of hatred towards others and designed to earn cheap clapping from a few who have strong anti-India feelings.

Creating unnecessary panic among public is also an anti-state move. Not only she, no one in Bangladesh will support any agreement if it is signed compromising our national interest. Sheikh Hasina's government will not dare to sign any agreement having anti-Bangladesh clauses.

We therefore request Begum Zia to please lend her hands to the government to work out the necessary bargaining points which will benefit the nation if embodied in the agreements.
Shafiqul Islam, NY

Arms trade

The arms trade is a major cause of human rights abuses. Some governments spend more on military expenditure than on social development, communications infrastructure and health combined. While every nation has the right and the need to ensure its security, in these changing times, arms requirements and procurement processes should also undergo change.
Abdul Azim
Department of English
International Islamic University Chittagong

Import green cars

The government must start import of green environment friendly cars as soon as possible in order to save our fast deteriorating land from global warming and pollution. The government should also vastly reduce taxes on such cars and make them affordable to everyone.

The government must also stop import of reconditioned cars which are flooding the market and a spoiling the environment.
Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali
Dhaka

Security arrangement at embassy

The report of deployment of Indian special security forces in the High Commission premises has been made an issue by BNP leaders without ascertaining whether this is allowed under the Geneva Conventions. They have two ex-foreign secretaries in the party as advisors. Therefore, they could find out the real position in this regard. But, instead, they raised the bogey

of our sovereignty being threatened and so on!

The Geneva Conventions permit foreign embassies to arrange their own security arrangements, if need be. Their premises are off-limits to the host country's law enforcing agencies. That is why people seeking political asylum, sometimes take refuge in a foreign embassy and the govt. cannot enter it to capture the person without the permission of the chancery. In fact, the embassy premises are the sovereign area of the related country and that is why they can fly their own flag inside the premises. It seems anything concerning India will set BNP howling, no matter what!

Abul Mohsin
Siddheswari Circular Road
Dhaka

News that was covered by most of the dailies and few media channels in the last few days is: "Indian security forces have taken over the security measures of their embassy which is a threat to our sovereignty."

This news has got no value at all. Politics and the ignorance of politicians made it news at national level. Politics is there because it is that age old "INDIA" factor.

The home minister should have dealt with it properly and she should know everything before replying to the journalists and BNP spokesman Mr Nazrul Islam should have known the facts before spitting venom, because he himself was an ambassador when the BNP was at the helm of the country. And media channels should have known the facts and should not have given importance to such unimportant news to confuse the people. The practice of deploying security force of their own in any embassy is a recognized norm under the pact of Geneva Convention on diplomatic relations 1961, Clause 22, where it has been granted that any embassy can deploy their own security forces to protect their territory as per their desire and requirement.

Dr Md Shameem Hassan
New DOHS, Mohakhali
Dhaka

Militants coming back!

A few years back, the people of Bangladesh sighed a relief watching the trial of Bangla bhai like militants. They committed atrocities across the country for a long time, and at long last their death sentence brought a message of peace to all.

But the scenario is changing. Though the leaders were executed, their followers are becoming active once again. The law enforcers should take note of what is going on.

Bipra Kanungo
Momin Road
Chittagong

The eagle

Like the old eagle that had been chained so long to a stake in the ground that he'd worn a rut in the ground from walking round and round. When his master finally decided to liberate and set him free, he took the metal ring off and tossed the eagle up into the air. But it just flipped right back down to the ground, walked back over to the old rut and started walking around the rut again! -- No chain. No bird band. Just the old habit!

Help us to change the things that need to be changed, and not to change the things that don't need to be changed, and especially, help us to know the difference!
Ted Rudow
Menlo Park, CA

Copenhagen Summit

The 193-nation Climate Summit only pledged to limit emission level by less than 2°C but failed to reach consensus to forge a legally binding treaty to achieve that goal. The biggest five polluters namely, the United States, China, India, Brazil & South Africa apart, the rest of the world vented total frustration on the outcome. President Obama, himself on the sideline, gestured his ire, yet he appraised the outcome as a good beginning. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been able to successfully project and showcase the catastrophic effect of climate change on non-player countries with no fault of theirs.

The situation having been so, we have to address this menace on emergency footing to save our ecology, habitat, flora, fauna, landscape etc. even without any foreign aid or assistance.

Therefore, we need to explore and adopt indigenous and a country-specific strategy to achieve the goal.

The strategy and action programme may include inter alia the following:
(a) Solar, wind and localized small hydro plants may well be a substitute to conventional fossil energy.

(b) Extensive afforestation campaigns have to be launched at every segment of society. Felling trees, cutting hills, filling water bodies - like river, pond, canal, marsh, sea line, multi-crop

land must be considered as non-bailable offence.

(c) All polluter industries must install ETP at their plants or else close down.

(d) All old vehicles must go off the road and petrol vehicles have to be converted to hybrid electric or CNG power gradually by a target time. Smoking in open places and honking of hydraulic horns must be strictly prohibited.

(e) Use of harmful insecticide/pesticide on land and crops has to be totally banned.

(f) Recycling plants under govt-private partnership are to be set up to treat solid wastes in all metropolitan cities.

(g) Rain, flood and surface water, instead of underground water, shall be the only source of irrigation, drinking and other uses. It is no exotic idea; we saw it in our childhood days.

(h) Coal and wood fuelled brick kiln must be closed.

(i) Medical waste and diagnostic laboratory level must be monitored by the regulators.

I believe that the present democratic govt. with a huge public mandate will not delay or deviate from responding to this serious challenge.

SA Samad
General Manager (Retd.)
Janata Bank
Dhaka



AFP

Great recognition

Fazle Hasan Abed is to be knighted for alleviating poverty at home and abroad. He is to be knighted as the second Bangladeshi. We have a negative image all over the globe and that's why we can't brand our country. Nevertheless, our achievements are remarkable. These achievements will assist us to make Bangladesh a brand which would be a blessing to our country. Our government needs to take a lesson from those people to enhance our goodwill all over the world.

Through branding we can transform our country into a developed one.
Raju Kumar Das
Dept. of Business Administration
SUST, Sylhet

Buying power from India!

This news item was published in almost all daily newspapers on the last day of the last year. But the reality which we will see is that it will remain only news, and not a reality! After all there are "many a slips between the cup and the lips". In this case, India holding the cup, there will be many slips with nothing to be sipped by us! From MoU to MoT (moment of truth), there is a long way. It is more like travelling from here to eternity!

Take the example of Nepal, closer to India than us in more ways than one. They have been asking for 125MW of power from India for at least six months or more. Yet till date not a kilowatt have they got! The news is that within the week, Kathmandu will have probably eight hours of load shedding! Given this reality, we are second in the queue for Indian power, at the least. Meanwhile, West Bengal is saturated, with load shedding round the corner! Power from India is many dreams away, and let us not bank on it.

We must rather make our own way, giving all encouragement and support to private sector power plants and harnessing all possible sources of alternative energy. Top priority should be for solar and biomass power sources. We should go for these in a big way; with government providing all support for these ventures. Solar heating of water, directly, without electrical

power; should also be encouraged positively. This measure will save both electricity and natural gas, particularly in urban high-rise buildings for homes and offices; particularly in winter months! Methane from biomass should be vigorously pursued for cooking and air-conditioning loads, now totally dependent on electrical power and natural gas, directly or indirectly! These are the directions we must move, if necessary on a war footing emergency basis!

The German proposal for financing solar panels must be vigorously followed up. Another very important matter on which nothing has been done in 2009 is to go all out for open pit coal mining and simultaneously setting up coal fired power plants. Some intellectuals' unnecessary environmental concerns, and the affected people (who are to be provided suitable resources and relocated), have to be tackled and solved on priority basis.

The possibility of nuclear power plants using safe U238 as fuel, which is being done in South Africa and China, also are examples before us. I wonder what is preventing us from going ahead?
Engr. S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Women's contribution

Women are a major part of our total population. They are working in various sectors and contributing a lot to the development of the country. Nearly 90% of garment workers are women who are doing the jobs of spinning, knitting etc with skill and devotion. In educational institutions, women have been contributing a lot.

As social workers, they are helping the poor and the illiterate people by giving them health tips, advice on the importance of education, family planning and so on and so forth. Besides these, they are now working in banks, hospitals and medical colleges, administration and business firms.

They are performing their duties efficiently. In short, women's contribution to development of our country is increasing day by day.
Areader, One-mail

Begum Zia's stand

My sincere thanks to The Daily Star and its editorial board for publishing an editorial on January 3, 2010 entitled "Begum Zia must not prejudice Delhi outcome. She ought to raise such issues in parliament." It appears our political leaders will never behave responsibly.

When they are in opposition, their stand is different. It is sad that they are not prepared to understand the hard realities of the prevailing situation that the opinion is sharply divided with no mandate to back up the demand for the sake of the working class and the poor. Parliament has lost many days of productivity and has caused much disruption in the parliamentary activities. Naturally, the common people don't want war. That is understood.

But after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a family based dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All we have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country.

The true test of the Bangladeshi ideal is whether we're able to recognise our failings and then rise together to meet the challenges of our time. Whether we allow ourselves to be shaped by events and history, or whether we act to shape them. President Barack Obama said, "I always believe that ultimately, if people are paying attention, then we get good government and good leadership. And when we get lazy, as a democracy and civically start taking shortcuts, then it results in bad government and politics." As Mahatma Gandhi said, "I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people."

So long as a person is not capable of self-renewal, she/he is not alive being.
Gopal Sengupta
McGill University
Montreal, Canada

Tourism

Bangladesh is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. There are five hundred tourist spots in this small country, most of which are natural. But it is a matter of great regret that we still lag behind in the field of tourism. We are still indifferent and careless in preserving those beautiful places. Another surprising matter is that hundreds of spots are still unknown to the people of Bangladesh. Hence, how can we attract the tourists from abroad to these unknown spots? However, the topmost tourist spots of Bangladesh, which the whole world knows, are the Sundarbans and the sea-beach of Cox's Bazar. Besides, another prospective spot is Saint Martin's, the coral island. But only for lack of care the biodiversity of this island is being ruined. In the meantime, approximately 200 species of birds, many marine creatures, fishes and different types of snails and oysters have been lost. Due to the polythene and human waste, the coral stones, which are the amulet of this island, are dying gradually. Inani, Kuakata, Parki, Patenga, Sonaichari of Sitakunda are being neglected year after year.

We need to be a tourist-friendly nation.

Mohammad Zia-ul-haque
Dept. of English
International Islamic University Ctg



RAJ ANIKAT / DRINKNEWS