

Rejuvenation of jute



Jute: Making a comeback.

Biochemistry and Molecular Biology of Dhaka University, decoded the genome jute plant.

"Many may ask the question about the application of the genome sequencing. It will improve the quality of jute fibre and help saplings survive in adverse weather caused by climate change," the prime minister told the parliament.

"This will help farmers increase yield, meaning a better future awaits for them," she said, adding it would also help the farming community to better manage pests.

Jute was once the country's top foreign currency earner, but the fall in demand in the world market forced Bangladesh to scale back cultivation and close down loss-incurring jute mills, including the Adamjee Jute Mill, Asia's largest mill.

Farmers increasingly switched over to rice production as it promised better output and prices. The genome sequencing is expected to result in both quantitative and qualitative improvement in jute production.

This scientific discovery emerges at a time when, after a short-lived fancy over synthetic fibre, the world has once again turned back to natural fibre as people become increasingly conscious about the environment. Such consciousness has resulted in significant demand for natural fibres like jute. UN declared 2009 the International Natural Fibre Year, but Bangladesh missed that golden opportunity to tap into the full industrial potential of jute, widely known as a versatile and ecologically-safe natural fibre.

The discovery also offers a ray of hope to traditional jute-growing countries presently facing the adverse impacts of global climate change in the form of frequent and prolonged natural calamities like droughts and floods. Bangladesh has now joined a handful of countries that conducted such milestone research of mapping out plant genomics.

Experts believe genome sequencing will help to improve jute's length and quality and develop high-yielding and pest-tolerant varieties. This research is significant for the economic and environmental benefits it will bring to the country and the world.

Hopefully, its benefits will reach the farmers within the next five years. "The genome decoding of cotton has made a revolution in textiles. We can also do something similar with jute. We want to use jute fibre in the textile industry," said the agriculture minister at a press briefing on June 17. Therefore, the government should play a pivotal role in further research on jute genomics so that the discovery may translate into tangible gains for the farmers.

The jute sector, which made up the backbone of Bangladesh's economy many decades ago, is

now fighting a losing battle for survival. There exists a strong perception that the World Bank put pressure on the government to shut down Adamjee Jute Mills and is now promoting India's jute industries, thus downsizing our jute sector. India set up several new jute mills after Adamjee's closure, raising the total number of jute mills to 92.

It is encouraging that the government, on June 17, approved a draft bill seeking mandatory use of jute in packing of various commodities. The bill will be placed in parliament soon for passage. India's Jute Compulsory Use Act facilitated jute bag sales in their local market by imposing restrictions on the use of all other packaging materials for grains.

Bangladesh dominated the global jute trade for many years with its 85% share in raw jute export and 65% share in jute goods export. The total quantity of hessian, sacking and CBC produced in 1972-73 was over 450,000 tonnes, which grew to about 563,000 tons in 1982-83. But the production of these jute goods dwindled to nearly 242,000 tons in 2005-06 due to lack of proactive policy support, sheer negligence and indiscriminate closure of jute mills.

Bangladesh is now losing its foreign jute markets to India really fast. The hasty decision to shut down four Khulna mills just on the ground of incurring losses was detrimental to the overall jute sector. Bangladesh lost a large volume of business in Ghana, Syria, Iran and Sudan, as buyers from these countries were apprehensive of the closure and lost trust in the timely delivery of goods. They have now moved to India.

A comparison of our jute export with India's reveals that Bangladesh exported 14 lakh tons of jute goods in 1990, while India's share was only six tons against 30 lakh tons of global demand. But the situation is reversed now. Global demand for jute and jute goods has risen to 50 lakh tons and India has seized the major markets. Bangladesh has failed to cope with the world market's growing demand for jute goods with only 22 jute mills, since out of 82 jute mills 60 have already been closed.

Ironically, the jute sector in India has flourished tremendously the past few years while declining alarmingly in Bangladesh. Really, our jute sector is in its last gasp because of wrong policies, mismanagement and rampant corruption.

Possibilities of bringing back its lost glory have emerged with this brilliant scientific feat. This scientific achievement coupled with the renewed interest in natural fibres worldwide, has opened up a new vista for jute. All we need to do now to rejuvenate the jute sector is formulate proper policies and enforce them.

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Return to 1972 constitution

The whole issue is sensitive, and it should be faced with confidence, courage and carefulness. It was necessary for the past, is urgent for the present, and will be essential for the future. The nation is looking forward to the resurrection of the constitution of 1972. People must welcome it.

RASHID ASKARI

WHY returning to the constitution of 1972 is bothering some people is not clear to me. They argue that it is not worth heading back now after we have walked a long way ahead. They are unwilling to fall back upon their basic constitution, the constitution of 1972. Not only that, they have recently mounted a challenge to the government to go for that. And the government seems to have taken it up.

Such a quarrel over our constitution is not at all desirable. The opposition should have no justifiable reason for being so allergic to the core constitution. Nor does the party in power need to jump the gun. In fact, this is a serious concern on which depends the future of our parliamentary democracy, and thereby the political fate of the nation. So, it has become absolutely imperative to deal with the constitutional reform bid in right earnest.

The constitution of Bangladesh in 1972 is recognised as the world's best constitutions for its strict adherence to global fundamental rights and secular values. Most importantly, it was an expression of the collective feelings and emotions of a people who made a supreme sacrifice on the altar of their long-awaited freedom from the petty-colonial Pakistan regime. So, quite reasonably their constitution must have been light-years away from that of the rulers, whom they have split up with. A godly state turns into a people's republic.

Secularism was one of the most striking fundamentals of the new constitution. If you see the contemporary events, you will realise the relevance of the introduction of secularism into the constitution. As a matter of fact, secularism inevitably emerged from the total collapse of the two-nation theory. Language and cultural passion proved much stronger than religious affinity. Indian Bengali brothers became more friendly and accommodating than Pakistani brethren, and so on and so forth.

Against this background, it became a matter of great urgency to bring secularism to the constitution in lieu of any particular religion. This was in the light of "live and let live" doctrine. The country may have many religious communities but the state must not have any chosen religion of its own.

Let the religions be for the respective communities, but let the country be everybody's. What can be a better slogan than this? And this is the truest spirit of all religions too. Then why determine the state's religion? Why should the constitution of a multi-religious country prefer a particular religion? Predominance of a particular religious community may vitiate the real spirit of democracy.

To go back to the constitution of 1972 will not be a backward move. It would rather be the rebirth of some liberation war ideals, which have been held back since long. It would be a renaissance if we can get back to secularism, which bears a tremendous relevance to the present context when hatred rules the roost and humanity is suffering at the hands of intolerance, sectarianism, dogmatism, fundamentalism, orthodoxy, and fanaticism.

Above all, allegiance to secularism in state life may save our country from being one like Pakistan and Afghanistan where humans are dropping like flies because of religious extremism.

But it does not necessarily mean that we should go whole hog and retain the whole constitution. There could be some changes in some articles in keeping with the necessity of the time. For example, the number of women's seats in the parliament should be increased. The provisions for the selection of judges of the higher courts need to be reconsidered.

Most of the changes brought about in our constitution were more or less done by powerful vested interests, so it's better to start afresh. There is no viable alternative but to go back to the main spirit of our basic constitution if we really mean to strengthen parliamentary democracy, rebuild a secular democratic society, ensure basic human rights and social justice and, above all, uphold the spirit of the Liberation War.

The highest legal authority of the country, the Supreme Court paved the way for the implementation of the '72 constitution by its historic verdict. But this is more a matter of public involvement than the decision of the jury. It is not a thing to be done at the stroke of a pen. The government should go about it in deadly earnest.

First of all, a review commission should be formed to scrutinise the whole constitution along with the changes and amendments, and winnow the good ones out of the bad ones. They should do it directly via parliament. Although they have more than the required majority to do that, they should try to involve the opposition in this major national issue.

The whole issue is sensitive, and it should be faced with confidence, courage and carefulness. It was necessary for the past, is urgent for the present, and will be essential for the future. The nation is looking forward to the resurrection of the constitution of 1972. People must welcome it.

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"This is a glorious event for Bangladesh. With this discovery jute is expected to regain its lost glory of being the golden fibre," said Hasina congratulating the discoverers. The scientists, led by Maqsood Alam, a Bangladeshi professor in the Microbiology Department at the University of Hawaii, in active collaboration with Prof. Haseena Khan and Prof. Zeba Seraj of the department of

IT is a matter of national pride that Bangladeshi scientists have successfully decoded the crucial genome sequence of the jute plant, opening up a new vista in its development. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made the announcement in the parliament on June 16 amid cheers and desk thumping by lawmakers.

Let us put a full stop to eve teasing



Still unsafe on the streets.

It requires extensive public education aimed at every level of society at large. Plays, public speeches, articles and even door-to-door propaganda can be a good vaccine against eve teasing, and will help in spreading public awareness.

SHAMRIN AFIA ADIBA

BEING A girl in the early twenties, I feel that no girl has been spared from being a victim of eve teasing. Eve teasing is an unforgivable act that injects shame, fear, disgust and helplessness in the victim. Being subjected to many instances of eve teasing is an inseparable part of every girl's life, causing much avoidable mental agony to her. This in turn adversely affects her family and her friends.

Eve teasing is a common incident, be it in buses, shopping arcades, cinema halls, shopping malls, pubs, restaurants, taxi/busterminals, railway booking counters and every other conceivable place; but the one

place where it happens with alarming frequency is on the road. Girls are never spared in the streets or footpaths.

A vulgar stare, a sly whistle, a wink, a well-timed clap, an unwarranted bump, a seemingly casual touch, a lingering look at a vulnerable time, the humming of a suggestive song, passing downright uncouth comments, cheap gestures, the display of an indecent snap or video, bikes flying close with hands stretched to feel around you, passing by in slow moving cars blasting loud music with many eyes inside measuring you up ... all these are typical examples of such sexual harassment.

The ways they can harass a woman is surely endless! School children, well-dressed execu-

tives, college kids, taxi-drivers, bus-conductors, pedestrians, officials, cng-drivers and aged people too have been enslaved by this horrific habit.

I don't know how many women can truly say that they have never been molested in their lives. If they've been out in a public space, it doesn't matter what they are wearing, whether they are in great shape, whether they're lovely to look at or just plain, they will have been grabbed.

A few questions to the right thinking people of the country:

What is it that makes some men violate a woman's personal space and touch her?

Who gives them the right to do that and think it's ok?

Do they also look at the women in their homes (mother or sister) with the same rubbish in their eyes?

Are women responsible for these men having absolutely no fear to touch, grope, or expose themselves to women?

What do girls really mean to them? What makes two men look at a woman and

react in two different ways: Bad upbringing? A disregard for women? Lack of decency?

If I have male readers, can you please come out on this and tell me what treatment -- extreme or otherwise -- would prevent or frighten a man from molesting a woman?

Families can play the most important role in eradicating girls teasing from society.

Parents should talk to their sons openly and make them aware about the sufferings of girls caused by eve teasing. Parents have to make their sons understand that what is fun to boys may be a cause of suicide to girls. It is the responsibility of the parents to teach their sons to respect girls and their rights.

It is really painful that in movies eve teasing is unashamedly glorified as a means of winning over the heart of a girl.

Many girls in our society suffer from mental agonies caused by eve teasing, which they cannot share with anybody. Parents of teenage girls should deal with them in a friendly manner and conduct themselves in such a way that their offspring repose absolute faith in them and convey their sorrows and agonies. Most girls are extroverts but there are introvert girls too. The parents of those girls should be more alert.

Girls, let's face it: Be bold! Let your family know first; no matter how much your family scolds you they will obviously stand behind you. Generate public opinion; never show your weakness to the culprit. Reveal the culprit to the neighbours. Show the culprit to your friends and family so that he can't even think of doing something harmful.

Get him counselling if doing so seniors. Have a one-to-one with him, but in an open place and after informing your family; be polite in this case. Inform law enforcement people. Contact e-media, print media. Don't threaten the culprit at the outset.

A behavioural change is the only lasting solution to this problem. Changing of behaviour is easier said than done. We have to increase public awareness and raise our (women) voice against such dreadful acts. It requires extensive public education aimed at every section of society at large. Plays, public speeches, articles and even door-to-door propaganda can be a good vaccine against eve teasing, and will help in spreading public awareness.

Lastly, it is the duty and responsibility of the government to enact legislation and put a full stop to such heart-breaking deaths, immediately!

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