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Railways



This refers to an article published in a local English daily on 14th September about the sorry state of Bangladesh Railways. Elsewhere in the world, railways are being revitalised and developed as a care-free, cheaper and relaxed means of long distance transportation, independent of weather conditions. It is getting popular day by day. However, it seems that it is not so in Bangladesh, where it is being grossly neglected. In most countries, new routes are being introduced, trains are speeding up, tracks are being upgraded and frequency of service is being increased.

In Bangladesh, on the other hand, we are closing down railway routes, reducing service frequency, while private road transport is being supported by infrastructure investment! The reality is that, our railways are deteriorating, while private inter-district bus services are expanding day to day. However BRTC (the public road transport entity) like BR (Bangladesh Railway), is also speedily going downhill.

The way-out is to disband the Ministry of Communications, and eliminate all government inputs in railway management. Government's control will be limited

to the statutory control that we have over private enterprises and nothing further. This risk must be taken. Alternatively we may hand it over to private sector against long term low interest bonds which can be redeemed in ten years or more if necessary by the owners against stage-wise periodic agreed payment terms.

The railway should be a private/public jointly owned, and an independent commercial entity, with government's financial guarantee for an agreed period. Needed capital investment, assets (rolling stock) renovation, upgrading of track and organising reliable door to door cargo service should be provided. Customer service and satisfaction should be the management's aim. The organisation has to be trimmed of excess manpower and corruption if any. Quality of passenger service and cleanliness has to be strictly supervised and maintained and customer's confidence restored.

This could be the way out for our really sick and fast deteriorating railway system. It needs to be revitalised in overall public interest, on a priority basis, by this democratic government.

S.A. Mansoor
One-mail

The mosque controversy

The building of an Islamic Trade Centre and a mosque near the World Trade Centre is getting heated up every day in the United States. They are citing reasons that it will severely hurt the sentiments of the people and relatives of those who lost their near and dear ones when the 'Islamic extremists' blew out the buildings known as Twin Towers in a most shocking way. They say that the mosque will be so close to the spot where the Islamic extremists brought down the World Trade Centre in 2001. It would refresh their memory from time to time. The matter became so emotive that a pastor of a small church in Florida named Terry Jones threatened to burn the Holy Quran if the Muslims did not back out from their plans. The threat caused a major uproar in the States and President Obama had to intervene and request the pastor to refrain from doing so. The plan for building such establishment and the mosque is being initiated

by one Imam called Faisal Abudul Rauf. It is important to mention that according to the Imam the proposed Islamic Trade Centre and the mosque will be two blocks away from the actual Trade Centre. The Imam also said that nearby there exists a betting parlour. I don't find the logic of the Imam to stand tough on his stance and go ahead with building such a sacred place over there!

Humayun Hayder
One-mail

Tri-nation highway
With Myanmar's cutting ice with Bangladesh by nodding to a proposal for construction of a tri-nation highway connecting Chittagong and the Chinese city of Kunming through Myanmar, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's dream to build the highway during her visit to Myanmar in 2003 as part of a 'Look East Policy' comes true which will go a long way in balancing our lopsided deal with India and ushering in consensus politics in our country.

Tinku
Lalpur, Natore

Mine victims of Chile

We learnt little about the 33 gold mine workers who have been trapped inside the mine some 3000 feet below the earth surface. They have been captive of the manmade or natural disaster since August 5, 2010. For the last one and a half month they have been cut off from the world, from their sweet home, from their nearest and dearest ones and have been enduring the fury of nature under the earth. They have been passing their days without food, air, shelter, security and others. The Chilean government has been endeavouring, leaving no stone unturned to rescue the mine victims. They have brought a very powerful excavator from Australia to dig hole to reach the miners in order to rescue them from the trap one by one. But it will take long four months to excavate the 3000 feet deep hole sufficient to bring out the victims. Furthermore, in this process more dangers are still waiting for the victims. When the earth will be dug by the excavator, boulders of different sizes will fall upon the victims. As self-

defence they were advised to work on shifting basis to remove the boulders. By this time the mine victims got food, medicine, cigarette and other necessary items through a very narrow hole. Electricity has been provided there through that hole which will give them hope. Pentagon NASA has been formulating new ideas to implement at the disaster site just to make them lively and happy. In the electronic and print media the victims have been shown in bare bodies and in standing position close to one another. It has been reported that temperature inside 3000 feet deep is very high. How long will they survive like this?

If any of the victims dies what will happen to others? What will they do then?

I must say this is the longest existing disaster in the world which surpassed the records and magnitude of all other disasters happened in many other countries of the world. The victims will have to endure the stress of the disaster for months together. Some or all may have to embrace death if rescue operation is delayed.

In this circumstance, I would urge the entire world to declare the incident as number one disaster in the world and cooperate with the Chilean government by providing technical assistance to save the 33 human beings who have been trapped.

Md. Lutfar Rahman
Faculty of Business Administration
IUBAT, Dhaka

Recruitment of teachers

It appeared in the newspapers that some of the lawmakers are not happy with the recently published results of the primary teachers' recruitment exams. What are the reasons for their dissatisfaction? Is it because their recommended men were not selected for the posts? The nation would not pay any more for serving the lawmakers' interests.

I wholeheartedly thank the Honourable Prime Minister for her strong stand against this type of corruption. If the teachers are recruited on the basis of political background instead of merit, the future of this nation will be ruined. Honourable Prime Minister, please do not bow to the undue demand of the so-called representatives of the public.

Ahmed Munir
Purana Paltan
Dhaka

Some rule, some law!

This refers to an article published in your daily of September 16 under the above caption. I wish to congratulate writer Shahedul Anam Khan for an article well written. Issues he has dealt with in the article, to say the least, are matters of grave concern for the people and the nation at large. It is indeed sad to see the erosion of the moral and ethical content of two of the most important functionaries of the government and the state, namely the police and the judiciary. People all over the country are shocked and dismayed by the events. We have systematically made the sacred office of the highest authority of the country, namely the office of the president, controversial too. The situation of the police is so bad that it is pointless to even talk about it.

A nation that indulges in such acts by design or by default simply does not have the moral authority to call it a civilised nation. It has always been my standing that we may be poor but we need not conduct ourselves poorly. What legacy are we going to leave behind for our future generation?

Thanks to Mr. Khan for being forthright in his observation.

Shamsher Chowdhury
One-mail

Freedom of religion

The world leaders were adding their voices to the global outcry against a Florida preacher who planned to burn copies of the Holy Quran in a bonfire to mark the ninth anniversary of the Sept 11 attacks. We all enjoy freedom of religion and that freedom of religion comes from a tolerant spirit. We are unable to understand why innocent people are being made targets of vicious attacks in the name of religion. The latest attempt by an American Pastor against humanity is unpardonable. Neither the Quran nor the Bible nor the Bhagavad Gita created James Bonds and gave them the licence to kill or hurt.

Food sovereignty

Whether consciously or unconsciously, there is a concept has been evolved in the western world named "Food sovereignty" which is far safer than security. Sovereignty means that the food is produced within the border of the state. It is limited to the basic staple, in our case rice, and not all of foods. If we look to the west, we see the long lasting conflict between European Union (EU) and USA regarding subsidy to the farmers in order to ensure the food sovereignty as well as food security (Availability and Affordability) for their own people. It was also proven that, there is a relation between ecology & anthropology i.e. the staple food like rice produced in the particular ecology in more appropriate than produced in other ecology (Country) for the people (anthropology) as natural law.

In 2004, the former President of World Bank Mr. James Wolfensohn accused that the rich countries are spending \$ 900 billion on defense, \$ 300 billion on subsidy for farmers and just \$50 billion to \$60 billion on aid, of which just 50% in

cash rather than loans. On the other hand, the rich countries do not come up with adequate money for improving the social and economic condition of poor people who are deprived of the basic necessities particularly staple food. In recent years, the leader of the rich countries realized that hunger and poverty breed unrest and conflict and they started to thinking this issue in the new paradigm.

Professor Amartya Sen has revealed how and why lot of people had suffered through famine in 1943 (Known as Ponchash-er Monnontor) and 1947 in the greater Bengal & East Bengal (Bangladesh since 1971) respectively. Society and the government could have done a lot to avoid those famines.

Last but not the least, as per our constitution, it is the state's responsibility to ensure the Food Sovereignty for the people directly or indirectly.

Alamgir Sujaet
Regional Sales Manager
Mutual Food Products Ltd.
Segunbagicha, Dhaka



This is our simple religion. There is no need for temples, no need for complicated philosophy.

We are punished by our sins, not for them. We must respect the other fellow's religion. What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought upon the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?

Gopal Sengupta
Avik Sengupta
Canada

Future of Pakistan

In a hard hitting article, "Break up Pakistan," in Toronto's Financial Post on September 11, Lawrence Solomon, executive director of Urban Renaissance Institute in Canada, calls for breaking up Pakistan into various states to stop Pakistanis from slaughtering each other. He writes: "The end of Pakistan -- its dismemberment into constituent parts -- could be all for good. Pakistan -- a creation of colonial Britain that's barely a half-century old -- is less a country than an acronym whose passing would soon be forgotten.

There is no Pakistani nation. ... Pakistan is a dysfunctional assortment of disparate, often warring peoples, ethnicities, and cultures whose sum is much less than the potential of its parts, despite much vaunted attempts at nation building."

Mr. Solomon's model is Bangladesh. He finds an analogy in Bangladesh's successful break up from Pakistan after a devastating cyclone in 1970. He writes: "The current threat of secession has a parallel, in 1970, in the province of East Pakistan, when the country suffered its first massive natural disaster. A cyclone that ripped through an enormous swath of land left as many as 500,000 dead. The central government's ineptness and callousness cemented the sentiment for separation. East Pakistan became the sovereign country of Bangladesh the following year."

He also thinks that the success of Bangladesh augers well for the constituent parts of Pakistan if they break up. He writes: "If Pakistan does break up, another parallel provides hope. A few years after the civil war, the dirt-poor country of Bangladesh began to find its feet. Its economy has more

than doubled since 1975 and is now increasing at an impressive 5%-6% per year. Goldman Sachs lists it among its Next-11, one of the countries with high potential to become one of the world's largest economies. ... Bangladesh's secession, in hindsight, was all to the good. Completing the dismemberment of Pakistan may well be too."

Although much of what Lawrence Solomon says is correct, it must be pointed out that Bangladesh is a self-sufficient geographic unit with its own coastlines and ports while Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan, and the Frontier province are landlocked and will remain dependent on Sind for international trade and the biggest province Balochistan is so sparsely populated that it does not have enough manpower to run an independent country. As such, Pakistan's dismemberment will not resolve the problem. What Pakistan needs is a decentralised country with proper rules. And the military should not be allowed to interfere with the running of the country.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

Corporal punishment



I had been a schoolteacher for almost 30 years. I'm now retired and with an almost clear conscience. I can count on one hand the number of times I hit children and I deeply regret those.

I wholeheartedly agree with the honourable Sir Frank Peters when he says corporal punishment teaches hate, resentment, vengeance, disrespect, and is the mother of terrorism and a violent society. Teachers teach, children learn. Subliminally, they also learn more from the good or bad behaviour of the teacher.

My parents (who were most loving, totally non-violent and abhorred corporal punishment) had taught my sisters, brothers, and me this.

Most of my fellow teachers, however, saw corporal punishment as a "quick fix" that often became their most used 'tool' daily in their teaching armoury and was often used wilfully to excess without any form of recourse for the pupils. I engaged in many arguments over the

years with my colleagues about this in support of the pupils, commonsense, and known psychological issues inflicted by corporal punishment.

Despite the abolition of corporal punishment by law, I cannot see an immediate end. There is a saying that 'you cannot teach an old dog new tricks'.

We must also be aware that many of the 'teachers' (especially in villages) are school dropouts, academic failures and without any formal teaching training. Awareness campaign and retraining are must, but without severe penalties or even the jailing of some teachers as a warning to all, there will be no instant change.

I appeal to all teachers to abolish the classroom culture of tyranny and terrorism and to promote an atmosphere of positive learning from which students benefit and let's move forward.

Shakul Ali
Ottawa, Canada

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Allowance for attending Sangsad

Boycotters pocket it, see no wrong (September 19, 2010)

Without attending parliament, the lawmakers should not draw the allowances. It is definitely immoral, unethical and even they are not unaware that it is so. But unfortunately, when a political party is in power, only then they are critical of their opponents. They forget what they did when they were in opposition.

Dr. Asaduzzaman Ripon

If you do not work, you do not get paid. This is the general principle all over the world. This should be applied in this case also.

Anonymous in USA

Is drawing allowance tagged to the attendance of the parliament sessions? If not then this is a minor issue. Let's look at the whole moral fabric of the nation from a bigger perspective. The MPs, irrespective of party affiliation, passed several resolutions for their own benefit including

highly immoral tax-free income and the benefit of importing duty free vehicles. The executive branch of the nation simply does not care.

Jumana Sarwar

It should not surprise anyone. Those things actually reflect the lack of honesty and integrity. We are in the process of amending our constitution, and the government is making this a big issue. I just hope that they also change the law and make it compulsory for members of parliament to attend its sessions in order to receive any allowance or any kind of privileges.

Nawaz

Our MPs pocket the taxpayers' money. They never thought that in any case they are liable to anyone. It will take years to make the JS workable as long as this kind of mentality exists in our

politics.
Gias

The BNP did no wrong as the AL also didn't when they boycotted parliament. They only want our votes and our money in the form of various taxes. And we as a nation never think why, how and what we should be ashamed of.

S.Ali

Your question to Mr Suranjit should have been 'Forget the party, would you yourself do the same when you are in opposition?' the answer would be interesting. We, the Bangladeshis, are unlucky to have such MPs.

JAhmed

This is our money paid through taxes. Our lawmakers don't have to pay income tax. We earn the money with our hard labour & pay income tax from this hard earned money. And now we are watching that our MPs are also taking our tax money without attending parliament, doing no work for us & just playing with us & our money. This culture should be stopped.

Faruk

The practice is going on for the last 20 years. But nobody detected the reason behind it is. I think the reason is their unlimited power. So the power of lawmakers should be reduced, then the practice will change.

A Citizen

The MPs were elected to serve

peoples' cause. Attending parliament is one of those. Not to attend parliament on flimsy grounds is a serious violation of ethics. Parliament should initiate proceedings against the violators.

S. Rahman

This boycott culture was started by the Bangladesh Awami League during 1991-1996 parliament.

Eddo Brandis

Such a culture needs to be avoided. It is corruption.

S.R. Bhuiyan

Politics is pursued for self-glorification and as a source of personal income and not for redressing people's woes - that's the general perception among the ordinary people. The culture of abstaining from JS proceedings and yet drawing monetary and non-monetary benefits has indeed become a norm. By their action, we the voters remain unrepresented in parliament, and our voice remains unregistered and unheard of for prolonged periods. The rules relating to conduct of parliamentary business ought to be reviewed as such. We certainly want to see a vibrant parliament participated by all

Reaz Hassan

The MPs should refrain from taking undue advantage.
Nasirullah Mridha