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# Inequalities in health services



While reading Prothom Alo of 1st September 2012, a news drew my attention. It was a health report by WHO which showed the discrimination in health services between the rural and the urban areas. Pregnant mothers and children are the worst victims of inequalities simply because they are poor and live in villages where healthcare services are not available. Statistics shows that only 13% mothers get the services of skilled birth attendants during delivery period in the villages whereas the percentage is 37 in urban areas. Before delivery, 37% women living in the urban areas receive ANC (Antenatal Care) for four times, while only 14% village women can access it. Bidhan Krishna Sarker, Research Investigator of Reproductive Health Unit, ICDDR,B talked to Prothom Alo and said that it has not been possible on the part of the government to build comprehensive emergency obstetric care facilities equally across the country. At the same time, poor people cannot afford to buy the private healthcare services. He also talked about the lack of information for which people sometimes do not get health services. Correct information and awareness may create the demand for health service utilisation among poor and rural people, which can contribute to reducing the existing discrimination. So, there is a need for a massive health education campaign to aware people who are poor and living in rural areas. I would like to request the government, NGOs and donors to give sincere efforts to minimise the gap and ensure equal and better health services for all.

**Md. Musfikur Rahman Jony**  
Assistant Director: Monitoring and Evaluation  
Light House, Bogra

## Prevent early marriage

It is sad that people still think girls should get married at an early age. What is even more unfortunate is that many parents are unaware of the negative impacts of early marriage on mothers' health. Lack of awareness and health education are at the root of this evil. Thus, the need for government and non-government authorities to launch awareness programmes in rural areas. Early marriage is a national problem and there has to be a comprehensive strategy to uproot it.

**Miton Kumar Gupto**  
Phulbari, Dinajpur

## Antibiotic a health hazard

Latest researches have found that antibiotic destroys essential gut flora or microbiota which plays an important role in keeping us healthy and well. In fact, 90% of our genetic materials are from the bacteria, fungi, viruses and other microorganisms, i.e. microflora which influences our genetic expression, immune system, weight, mental health, memory, and also the risk of numerous chronic and acute diseases, from diabetes to cancer. These microbes influence the activities of genes in our brain and are believed to manipulate our behaviour plus memory system. Antibiotics and other elements like agrochemicals, chlorinated water, antibacterial soaps, and environment pollution are constantly damaging our gut microflora.

In addition to the normal and excessive uses of antibiotic, we are consuming a lot more antibiotic through livestock products like milk, meat, etc. It may be surprising to note that nearly 80% of all the antibiotics produced are used in agriculture not only to control infection, but to promote unhealthy weight gain in the animals for profit. Nowadays it is much difficult to have organic meat or milk because most animals are raised in a confined animal feeding operation (CAFO).

Antibiotic also influences weight gain in humans. One of the major factors for child obesity is antibiotic. Perhaps time is still there to decrease the use of antibiotics for saving our health and ensuring our well-being.

**Professor M Zahidul Haque**  
Dean  
Faculty of Agriculture  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University

# Hard floor of allegiance!

King Agamemnon crossed the Aegean sea to get Helen back. But our lords and leaders can't even cross the floor to salvage national interests. The constitutional provision that disallows floor-crossing in our parliament is a tool for hegemony by the ruling majority. This approach is like fixing results to back-calculate to the test, instead of administering the test to arrive at results. It undermines the merit of issues and that of individual representatives. It stifles dissenting voices. Members of Parliament must be allowed the scope of individual thinking, analysis and decision-making.

**Adnan**  
Gulshan, Dhaka



## A cruel joke!

When we the people of Bangladesh dream of a load-shedding free country, our prime minister wants us to suffer from load-shedding at least for two hours every day, just to ensure that we do not forget the word 'load shedding,' even if we have enough electricity.

What a cruel joke it is! She also said that it is okay to accept load-shedding to have a reduced electricity bill. I don't think anyone considers load-shedding an option to cut their power bill. Rather she should have encouraged the people to become smart users of electricity. How could she say that two hours of load shedding every day is too little to hurt the country's productivity?

When this kind of irresponsible comment comes from a prime minister, it becomes very difficult for us to swallow.

**G.M. Rezwan Rasul**  
Kalyanpur, Dhaka

## Will govt clarify?

Your two front page news reports of 1st. September, from MAK Azad and the Star Report, on either side of the lead photograph of the stalled road extension work, provide an abyss of contradiction. Here we have no funds for "extending 8-lane road extension project", while our Prime Minister reiterates Bangladesh's proposal for joint venture 'Hydro Power Project with Nepal'!

When we are cash-strapped and many development projects have been curtailed and deferred, as reported in the dailies a few days back, where will the fund come from for the joint venture project with Nepal?

Given our present bitter relations with the World Bank, our priority project, Padma bridge, is now in a quandary.

Will the authorities concerned kindly clarify the matter for the confused citizens?  
**Engr. S.A. Mansoor**  
Dhaka

## Dhaka College teacher sets example

In the national university (NU) many students are reluctant to attend classes regularly. As per the rules of NU, students must have 75 percent attendance. But both students as well as teachers are neglecting the rule. Besides, each academic year consists of 15-16 months, though classes are held only for first 6 months. What would happen to the students if they do not attend classes?

But an opposite scene is to be found at the English Department of Dhaka College. Here students ought to have 75 percent attendance to sit for the year final exams. If a student has less than 60 per cent attendance, s/he has to bring her/his guardians before a board of teachers. They have to explain the cause of their ward's absence to the board. The teachers inform the parents about the performance of the student and the parents have to sign a bond assuring that his/her offspring will attend classes regularly from the next session.

What is more, 15 out of 25 tutorial marks are given for 75 percent attendance and the marking is done fairly. It is an established rule in the department. Some students and teachers did not welcome it first. But an assistant professor of English dept. was determined to stop the malpractice.

Ultimately, he has become successful in his mission to bring the students back to the classes. Later, other departments -- Economics, Management and Accounting-- of the college have followed the rule. Other colleges under National University should also follow the method.

**Rasel Osman**  
Honours 3rd year  
English Department

# Good luck, Barack Obama



Four years ago Barack Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States, an African-American to go to the highest office. It was possible because of the people of America who gave real meaning to the slogans, 'Yes we can' and 'Change we need'.

And now Americans are going to elect their next president within a short time. The convention of the Republicans was held and Mitt Romney got the presidential nomination.

But we hope and wish that Barack Obama will be re-elected and history will be made again. As Barack Obama seems to be a very wise person, we hope he will use his wisdom for the welfare of the human beings all over the world.

Our best wishes are for Barack Obama; may he again become the president of the United States.

**Nur Jahan**  
Chittagong

## "Right hand of God"?

At age 33, Ralph Reed was the Christian Right's wonder boy. He was anointed in a 1995 Time Magazine cover story as the "right hand of God" for spinning the trust of conservative Christians into political gold. It was Reed who built the Christian Coalition of televangelist Pat Robertson into a powerful arm of the Republican Party.

But Reed fell from grace in 2006 after he was implicated in the biggest Washington scandal since Watergate. His pal and colleague, the lobbyist Jack Abramoff, pleaded guilty to defrauding clients of millions of dollars, some of which had landed in Reed's pockets as well. The money spigot was now wide open. Abramoff was being paid millions as a lobbyist. Reed was being paid millions to dupe his fellow Christians.

He says he intends to build the 21st century version of the Christian Coalition, with an annual budget of \$ 100 million, five million members, full-time lobbyists in all 50 state capitols, and an enormous database.

The pharisaical ultra-conservative, hard-Right support he receives comes largely from a hard-core of misled, fanatically anti-communist, fundamentalist, evangelical, bigoted, self-righteous religious minority, as well as from the vast silent majority, of the indifferent, couldn't-care-less, self-indulgent, self-satisfied. The fact is these fanatical religionists also consider themselves above the law and the courts and are willing to commit any crime in the name of national, religious or so-called family security!

**Ted Rudow III, MA**  
Encina Ave  
Palo Alto, CA

## READERS respond

Here are some comments that came in response to Tuesday's The Daily Star news report headlined "Sonali to sue culprits"

### Khalid, UK

We wonder what is going on in our country. If banks get depleted in this way like share market, what will happen to our economy? It is so easy to make money and loot public fund from the banks if one has political nexus. People are worried and frustrated about the future of this country.

### Reaz Hassan

Cases should have been filed long ago without wasting time. Arrest the suspects before they flee the country. Remand them in custody so to recover the stolen money.

### Concerned expat

All Hall-Mark bank accounts, including all its office bearers' accounts, should be closed immediately. All bank accounts of Sonali Bank board members should also be closed and their assets confiscated without delay.

### M Rashid

Privatise the state-owned banks. Remand the culprits in custody and give them exemplary punishment.

### Salah Ahmed

I am sure all this talk by the government is mere eyewash.

### Barkat

Yes, nothing will happen to these criminals. They have the backing and blessings of political leaders. I am sure these leaders and the criminals will never get punished in their life time.

### Harun Rashid

Why is it taking so long to sue or nab the culprits? Actually the government did not take any lesson from the share market debacle. It could be an eyewash of the political government to save the corrupt people.

### Anonymous

Hall-Mark scam has started since the tenure of its previous managing director. But his name has been deleted from the BB's investigation report.

### Tausif

I do not understand why business leaders of our country are demanding arrest of only Hall-Mark group officials? What about the other culprits of other companies?

### Shahinur Rahman

The demand of FBCCI is correct. All suspected officials of both Sonali Bank and Hall-Mark group should be arrested immediately.

### AKM Ziaul Huda

I believe many innocent officials will be victimised and the real culprits will escape.

### Shahen Alam

Filing case against the criminals is a formality in our country. If the accused are of the ruling party, they will be proved innocent and the whole thing will be described as a set-up of the opposition. Nothing fruitful will happen. Banking sector is such a convenient sector for the politicians that they can save their black money in the banks. Who will stop these politicians?

### M. K. Alam

Senior veteran MPs of the ruling party strongly recommended immediate arrest of the culprits, but the authorities concerned did not pay heed to them. Investigation is a long process in Bangladesh. The delay in taking action may jeopardise the spirit of the case, not to speak of realising money.

### Translucent

What are they waiting for? Why aren't the criminals already arrested?

I disagree with the FBCCI president that the board of Sonali Bank is not party to this embezzlement. The entire board should make way for a new team so that investigations are not biased, misguided or jeopardised. The real culprits may get temporary