

As the JS goes into session ...

Leadership is what the nation expects

AS the Jatiyo Sangsad meets for its budget session today, the nation clearly looks forward to positive guidance and leadership from both the ruling party and the opposition. Had democracy been on a normal course, there would be little reason for worry on the part of citizens. The truth, though, is that over these past four years and a half, the chasm between the governing alliance and the opposition has only widened over such issues as the best way for the next general election to be conducted. Neither side, apart from some fitful gestures, has thought it necessary to make efforts toward a bridging of the gap. While the ruling Awami League insists there will be no return to a caretaker system of government, the opposition is adamant that it will have such a form or nothing.

Democracy, lest we forget, is a matter of give and take, of compromise where matters of grave national import are concerned. And since both the AL and the BNP once waged a long battle against the forces of autocracy in defence of popular rights, it is the considered feeling of the nation that they should begin to minimize their differences, arrive at a consensus on national issues, do everything necessary to promote an effective pluralistic order through debating the issues on the floor of the House and, in the end, convince the nation that the country is on the right course.

We expect the ruling alliance to adopt a conciliatory attitude to its opponents when the JS meets today. Likewise, we hope the opposition will today persuade us into believing that its lawmakers will go back to the JS not to save their membership but to engage the government in purposeful debate. Our democracy is yet a tender plant. Let its growth not be stunted for good.

Prevent food wastage

Multiple benefits to be derived

IT is one of the least talked about issues that needed to be brought into a sharp focus for its potential importance in our lives. Food waste curbed is not merely food added but also provides a means to equitable distribution and sustainable environment. This year's World Environment Day's theme is "Think. Eat. Save," and in line with that message environmental experts met in Dhaka last week with the goal of preventing food wastage for sustainable environment.

This year Dhaka University's Department of Geography and Environment organized a "National Environment Olympiad-2013" where 300 schools will participate. It is an important step towards greener environment, as knowledge sharing and awareness at the school level will create environmentally conscious students, our country's future. Especially with this year's theme, almost all people from everywhere can act and give back by limiting food wastage and utilizing food and food related products wisely.

The urban population should especially pay attention to the "Think.Eat.Save" slogan as restaurants and fast food shops have become a second home for many. The wastage both at home and outside is in abundance. Our garbage bins may sport half eaten meals but we also need to remember that food discarded in landfills mostly generates methane, a greenhouse gas 23 times more potent than carbon dioxide. And we can all play a proactive role by reducing these carbon footprints from our lives.

While there are many burning issues to consider when it comes to our environment and climate change, the impact of food wastage is something all citizens of Bangladesh can

BPL and match fixing

Musfiqur Rasheed

HANSIE Cronje is my biggest cricket hero from the last century. He did what no one did before him. His career ended but his confessions jolted cricket for good and the whole anti-corruption thing started off. Many of his contemporary and earlier cricketers fixed matches but they decided to never speak of it and to speak as they were instructed to speak by the corporate cricket bodies.

I was not a big fan of Ashrafur because of his inconsistency, but like many others I loved watching him when he was on song. But most of the time he went out in a manner you couldn't explain.

In this match fixing saga he defied all his bosses by telling all the truth. He did not think of the consequences to the whole cricket industry in Bangladesh. Just as the matches, many would blame his irresponsibility.

But this time the media should step up and look at the bigger picture. Let's look at him as a whistle-blower not a criminal. Responsible media should go deep down inside "Cricket Incorporated." Media knows the who's who of BPL and all the corporate franchises. Was it fixed how the owners of the franchises were decided?

Let us ask the investors why they chose to be in this business. If these are losing concerns on paper then why did they come in the first place? If they cannot pay the players, why did they bid? They will show LOSS in their statements to avoid Income Tax. But who would audit the black money earned through these franchises?

What was BCB's plan with BPL? Surely they cannot expect to duplicate IPL's success here. They surely knew this would open up ways for fixers to polluting cricketers' minds. Did they do their best to screen the event managers and investors from an anti-corruption perspective?

Responsible media must put forward more question to the corporate structure rather than the players who are more of victims than criminals. Only Media can put the executives to justice, otherwise they will keep harming the game under the cover of the "Legal Entity".

Surely Ashrafur has angered all his bosses; he angered the whole organization. So this might be the end of his career. He is not Azharuddin, he won't become an MP; he might die in poverty unlike his corrupt bosses. But, Media please take the right side; take the side of truth no matter how big or how powerful "Cricket Incorporated" is. Do what perhaps the Indian media has failed to do. Do it to uphold the sacrifice of Ashrafur; unravel the fixing corporations, the black money of cricket.

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The writer is a professional Accountant.

Stop playing lose-lose game



KALEIDOSCOPE

With next general election drawing so close neither party can afford to continue with this the lose-lose confrontational game.

THE former military dictator Ershad has dared the ruling Awami League the opposition BNP together to prove their popularity in a presidential election. Since such an election is against the spirit of constitution, he has even suggested that such an election might take place under an amended constitution.

Where has he got the courage and inspiration?

Obviously from the glaring failure of our democracy and the parties that champion it.

Was Ershad talking through his hat when he issued such a challenge?

Not in the least. Clearly, the prevailing political situation, a handiwork of both the ruling and the opposition parties, have encouraged him to call his bluff.

The incident gives the lie to the fact that the mass people under the leadership of the present ruling Awami League and the opposition BNP did fight a long-drawn-out battle to bring down the nine years' dictatorial rule of this selfsame Ershad. And his downfall is still so enthusiastically celebrated as the victory of democracy!

Things appear to have come full circle.

This is but a very sad commentary on our democracy.

Whatever the merit of Ershad's challenge, the two major political camps should better take it seriously. What Ershad has said has a message for both the leaders.

Unbeknown to them, the war of attrition they have been waging against each other has reached a dead end.

And their failure have been read, and rightly so, as the failure of democracy by quarters inimical to democracy.

As a fallout of this never-ending war between the two dynastic claimants to state power with a democratic façade, the mass people have got totally frustrated about the present situation.

This is certainly not the kind of governance for which the common man struggled hard and spilled blood to overthrow military autocracy. Ask any average person in the street, if they see any difference in their lives during all these two decades plus years under democracy compared to the

times before when they were under military dictatorship.

The same old bloody street skirmishes, the same practice of denying the opposition the space they are constitutionally granted and the reluctance to respect, far less listen, to the other's point of view.

Meanwhile, far from narrowing, gap between ruling party and the opposition is but widening with every passing moment. And with it, the prospect of reaching a common understanding between the two major political camps is getting ever bleaker.

It's not that the two major political actors in the fray are not aware of the consequence of their mindless intransigence. Pointing to each other's follies, either camp, from time to time, has been issuing warnings to its rival about the pitfalls of such an irrational stance with next general election near at hand. The recent encounters and resulting bloody street violence between the government and the opposition are a forewarning for what may come next.

Even so, neither is willing to relent. Oblivious that the danger may come from different other directions, they, like the fabled one-eyed doe, have been keeping watch on one side only.

Worse yet, they cannot realise that however much they may try. It is impossible to annihilate their rival political camp. They have not been able to achieve that impossible mission in the last twenty years! And if one look further back, the past military regimes, despite all their scheming, miserably failed to destroy either of these parties.

The same also holds true at the moment. Sooner they come to terms with the fact the better.

Friends both at home and abroad have been making repeated appeals to the government and the opposition to bury their differences.

The Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Heather Cruden, the other day urged the ruling party and the opposition to engage meaningfully with each other to resolve the ongoing political impasse towards ensuring a free, fair and transparent election.

Such appeals made by foreigners to our politicians have been coming in addition to the occasional pleadings from the businesspeople and members of the local civil society. But they are not only heedless, they also often dismiss such pleas coming from concerned quarters, whether from foreigners or from locals, as something unwanted and meddling. And as such, pseudo-patriotically, they prefer to give a damn about what others may say about their business.

With next general election drawing so close neither party can afford to continue with this the lose-lose confrontational game.

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Bringing the unnoticed to policy attention

SHYKH SERAJ

NATIONAL Budget is at our doorstep, to be announced on June 6, 2013. Ahead of the 2013-2014 national budget, Channel i's agricultural documentary, Hridoye Mati O Manush submitted 58-point recommendations, in favour of farmers, to the Finance Minister Mr. Abul Maal Abdul Muhith. Like every year, field-level crises and demands of farmers were documented this year. The proposals or recommendations were written as per the field-level thoughts. Initiative had been taken to send the recommendations to the government on May 13, 2013.

Since 2005, we visited 35 regions around Bangladesh before the final announcement of the national budget. During these field sessions, we met more than 200 thousand farmers who gave their valuable opinions and kept submitting the proposals to the ministry of finance, prior to budget document preparations.

The honourable finance minister himself wants to read the rural lips which will be very useful in allocating for the farming sector—whether the existing allocations are in use or on how government can fix the problems. At the beginning, it was all about surveys on farmers' crises and demands, held this year in five districts (Rangpur, Natore, Munshiganj, Shariatpur and Tangail), organised by Hridoye Mati O Manush's one of the leading initiatives, 'Krishi Budget Krishoker Budget' (Farmers' Voices in Budget/FVB).

The minister said government tried its level best with the agricultural extension. Those who are involved with this department are well trained and there is no training deficit. "The service depends on the agent himself—in some regions, they are doing wonderful, somewhere somewhat fine, and some places, worse," said the finance minister. Government has already started crop insurance in some regions on pilot basis. Sadharan Bima is piloting one project. Sadharan Bima is now consulting with Life Insurance of India where India has a comprehensive crop insurance system and Sadharan Bima is trying to learn from them.

It's true that success isn't everywhere, but they have been trying. He said that having insurance on fish, salt and poultry won't be that difficult to provide. By this year, TAX Holiday will be ending. The livestock ministry recommended its extension until the year 2020, FBCCI recommended until the year 2025. And the government would extend it until the year 2015. This year, the agricultural subsidy amount will be Tk. 9,000 crore and this year there will be no arrears. Government has to give a Tk. 300 crore backlog. Subsidy is not really subsidy in the farming sector.

It is actually like an investment for the farming sector—that's what I firmly believe.

There are some key concerns which I would like to highlight. Bangladesh should be heading towards a sustainable farming sector and that is why the government needs to adopt a national action plan on food security. To materialise this, we need to have proper infrastructural facility along with frequent investment to boost up the sector and definitely the small farmers.

Private sector is reluctant on helping the sector. They should be keener towards the sector with an international outlook on the promises the sector has. Government has an infrastructure of preserving 1.5 million tons of rice. With a recent WB funding the storage facility is going to increase another 0.4 million tons, and finally the total storage capacity would stand at a total of 1.9 million which is never enough for a country that is handsomely producing 35 million tons of food grain.

We need to be very cautious about this very alarming issue. More alarming is the fact that farmers are gradually stepping out of doing paddies and mainstream crops since they are not getting a fair price for their produce. They don't have a secure place in the market and most of their crops are remaining unsold.

On the other hand, as a solution, they are going for high value crops and producing rice for their own. This is where government has a key role to play. Government should have to subsidise the farmers more so that they stay with growing paddies and also do their own high value production. If farmers keep on moving out of growing rice, Bangladesh will be facing a great food shock in less than a decade and that's what I am really worried about.

Land loss is a major problem with Bangladesh for a long time. Every year, we are losing lands at 1% rate. This is certainly threatening news for Bangladesh. There should be a zoning agriculture system where farmers should be given better technology (seed) so that they can grow fifty maunds from one bigha, otherwise things will become worse.

It's true, however, that throughout all these 42 years of independence, with proper irrigation, varied assistance from BADC and DAE has ensured Bangladesh as an almost food sufficient country. If we cannot hold the diversification process in the production chain along with the value addition, we will lose what we have achieved.

That is why we need phase-wise action so that whoever comes next to power may be able to follow the footsteps of the previous government and may well be able to own the working process. I am talking about a five year plan not an overall developmental process. We need to start gradually to conquer the most.

During the last seven years or so, the charlands (alluvial lands) have awakened. Once the charlands were home to poverty but now most of them have now become agriculturally enriched. The charlands of Padma, Jamuna and Brahmaputra rivers are becoming greener with crops. Located in 230 river basins, the charlands have an area of around 1,722 square kilometres. These depressing lands have now become lands full of prospect. If we can solve some of their problems, Bangladesh would definitely meet a new horizon.

This year's Farmers' Voices in Budget (FVB) sessions chiefly focused on the stories of charlands and the finance minister assured that the budget would have good news for the charland inhabitants along with TAX holiday extended until the year 2015. The subsidy in the sector has to go on and I really believe farmers need more of it as I was referring to the threat that many of them are actually leaving paddy cultivation due to unfair price and poor preservation.

Government is solely responsible for not being able to motivate the industry entrepreneurs, civil society, educated youth and other key players of the nation. Bangladesh is enjoying its optimistic economic growth every year and employment generation has been superb. However, we can't just feel the bundle of energy that is flowing through the nation. We need to build this creative people as strong workforce which would sincerely and effectively move up the ladder towards higher GDP.

We however, in reality, need the government to introduce GNH (Gross National Happiness). The assessment of gross national happiness was designed in an attempt to define an indicator that measures quality of life or social progress in more holistic and psychological terms than only the economic indicator of gross domestic product (GDP). The term "gross national happiness" was coined in 1972 by Bhutan's fourth Dragon King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. If they can look at things differently, why can't we?

Through Hridoye Mati O Manush's initiative, Krishi Budget Krishoker Budget (Farmers' Voices in Budget) farmers' voices were raised. They could bring up the realities in front of the policymakers. And, we were able to send their stories to the government. Farmers of the country and we are as well waiting keenly for the upcoming national budget. What share will the farming sector have in respect of allocation, planning and policy guidelines? We will definitely focus on the results of the budget after it is announced.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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VIPs' burial

An Indian writer's article on VIPs' burials was published in a local English daily on 26th May. It referred to the usual practice in this subcontinent of allotting exclusive and high valued locations for the VIPs' burial. Memorials and monuments are also put up all on state cost. More so, if he or she dies when their political party holds state power!

Frankly, in my opinion, this is a waste of state resources. All such expenses should come from party or private funds. However, this can be done for outstanding non-political persons who have brought worldwide name and fame for the country.

A Bangladeshi citizen
On e-mail

'Let the enemy take over'

The ones that send them to war. You would have thought having gone through the horrors of it themselves in the World War I, they would have never done it again. At least the children who had to go through the war, those men that had to go through the hell would never have wanted to send their children into war again, but they did!

But I think this younger generation is fed up with the war. They've seen the horrors and heard the wars. I think that they're just going to flatly refuse to fight, flatly refuse to go to war.

How can a leader be a Christian and order billions to be spent on such nightmare armaments? If you refuse to fight, then your enemy has nothing to fight about and there wouldn't be any wars, if you just flatly refused to fight. The Quakers teach if the enemy wants to take over, let them take over. Give peace chance.

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Ban killer robots

Killer robots are one kind of autonomous weapons that could attack targets autonomously without a human pulling the trigger. It is heard that many countries are developing these weapons. Experts in warfare technologies warn that the world's leading military powers are moving so rapidly in this direction that a pre-emptive ban is essential.

A recent report of this daily says that drones or unmanned aerial vehicles were intended initially only for surveillance, and their use for offensive purposes was prohibited, yet once strategists realised their perceived advantages as a means of carrying out targeted killings. The report also informs that Christof Heyns, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, will address the forthcoming UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and call for a worldwide moratorium on lethal autonomous robotics weapons systems that, once activated, can lock on and kill targets without further involvement of human handlers.

We express our solidarity with Christof Heyns because machines should not have life and death powers over humans.

Mobarak Ali
Gopibagh, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Pressure piles on US to end Dhaka's GSP," published on June 1, 2013

Triple Ace

Obama administration can implement conditional policy change regarding Bangladesh's special status. Conditional pressure is more effective than total pressure, since conditional pressure still retains an incentive for mutual gain.

Paulette93

If we were to follow the western world's example, our economy would also be in a shambles. History has proven that welfare states do not work. Unions, artificially inflated wages, exuberant benefits etc. have made even the richest of countries cash strapped. Others that let market forces decide worker conditions and wages, like China and Dubai are now posed to dominate the world.

"More tax on car owners" (June 01, 2013)

Ashikh Mahmud

Extra charge won't be a problem to the people who afford to buy cars. And we must think about the road capacity compared to the number of vehicles. Where is free space in this country? Hope government will not misuse the extra money.

Tina

Maybe this will refrain the high-ups from buying cars one after another.

Salam

There are always lapse in laws for these people. Sufferings are waiting for those middle-class people who dream to afford a car and finally buy one with all their savings.

Russel

The rich people will not stop buying cars. They know the loopholes.

The middle-class people will struggle to pay extra charges.