

## Let public property remain public

### Free Dhanmondi playground

THE manner in which the Dhanmondi playground is being appropriated by a private club is abhorrent. It is even worse when that club is using the name of a member of Bangabandhu's family to do that. One cannot but see a motive in renaming the club only in 2009, so many years after it was established.

By all records the Dhanmondi playground is a civic amenity provided for the local residents. And it is regrettable that the ground had of late fallen into disrepair because of DCC negligence. But nevertheless it belongs to the people, in particular to those of the neighbourhood. But the PWD, the owner, and the DCC which was entrusted since 1984 to maintain the ground, have by their action and inaction acquiesced to the illegal grabbing.

In this regard we want to know how the DCC has spent huge sum of public money to fence off the ground and restrict use of the property by the people in gross violation of the High Court order of 2011. We would also want to know how local government money has come to be allocated for building some sports facilities within the playground.

Dhanmondi area badly needs a breathing space which the playground was so far. We strongly denounce any attempt to grab a civic amenity and make it the exclusive preserve of a private club. We also condemn the prosecution of those leading the struggle to free the ground. In fact by doing so the club has tainted the name of Bangabandhu family. Should the family allow this to happen?

## Fake national ID cards

### A gaping hole in security precaution

WE are flabbergasted, outraged and concerned over the seizure of 53,100 forged national ID cards. Even this may be just a tip of the iceberg. It raises a chilling prospect that many more like these may have been already manufactured, retailed and in circulation!

The ease with which the national ID cards can be forged with any 'basic office equipment', as admitted by Director of Operations of the National Identification Card Project is a jolting eye-opener. This is indicative of a complete lack of security marker such high-valued document was supposed to have had as an essential feature. Now it is said that the antidote to such forgery would be ensured with the introduction of smart cards. When that will be is the question.

The fraudulent practice clearly poses a threat to financial institutions as they have no way of verifying whether a client has submitted the photocopy of a real NID card or not. Importantly, the card is a document for identifying voters at polling booths besides its other uses for gaining access to services and facilities.

One would have thought that a central data base has been maintained and any institution can access it to verify whether a card is genuine or fake. But as a senior banker pointed out, 'we don't have a data base of citizens' for examining the genuineness of NID card. Clearly, there are huge gaps to fill in the national identification system for citizens.

## It is not the language of Islam

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

AHMED Shafi has come up with a new sermon on atheists. "Atheists, you have become infidels (*Murtad*) and it is *Wazib* for us to kill (*Qatal*) you," said the theocrat. He has also threatened atheists to leave the 'country of Allah' (In a recent video message, al-Qaeda Chief Zawahiri, sympathising with Shafi-led Hefajat-e-Islam (HI), termed this country a huge prison!). Can anyone in an open congregation call for killing other people for their beliefs or opinions? Is it not a criminal offence? In the name of religion, can such atrocious behaviour be justified? What he has said is not the language of Islam.

Bangladesh was born as a secular state based on linguistic nationalism. In a secular state, citizens are free to follow their beliefs and nobody is allowed to hurt anyone's belief. Emergence of Bangladesh established a unique example of solving the religion-nationalism dilemma, which has long perplexed South Asian countries particularly Pakistan and Nepal and, in recent times, India. In our country the notion of a theocratic state is still being nurtured and frequently stirred up by religious fanatics for their cotier interest. And to keep the religious zeal alive they often target people of other beliefs as well as non-believers.

The situation further worsens when these fanatics get patronisation from the polity who exploit religious sentiments to gain political mileage. In this particular case, we have seen how the major parties have been wooing Hefajat to win their favour. The situation has created an environment where conscientious people often fear to protest this kind of religious bigotry.

The government did not take any action against HI that created massive disturbance in their May 5 programme and caused huge loss of state property and lives.

HI has given a 13-point charter which is a clear contradiction of our state principles. After that the patriarch Shafi Huzur churned out a "turmeric theory" showing utter disrespect for both men and women. He proposed to confine women at home only to serve their husbands and look after family chores.

Successive governments have tried to reform the Qawmi syllabus. Even, the Qawmi madrasas students have several times demanded reform of their syllabus but the 'owners', HI being a prominent one, protested vehemently against such moves.

Qawmi madrasas have got stuck at a point. Their ideas are pulling back the society. Organisations like HI are only thriving on this backwardness. What they are doing is in no way related to Islam. These attitudes are medieval and barbaric.

Renowned universities like Oxford and Cambridge were also religious teaching institutions. Over time they changed themselves and led social progress and brought renaissance in Europe. National Professor Abdur Razzaq once said that Islam brought a great change in the discourse of the theology coming out of overemphasis on afterlife and focusing on world life as well. He also emphasised on the secularising effect of Islam in the Indian subcontinent, particularly Bangladesh. We should uphold that spirit.

# The insignificant idolatry of the big

RUBANA HUQ

ONLY last week, Raghuram Rajan, the Chief of the Reserve Bank of India blasted US measures on its global dollar supply and complained that the emerging economies like India often go into a "tailspin" when this happens as a country like India has to then resort to rapidly building up its foreign exchange reserves to keep its rupee stable. Ben Bernanke, Chairperson of the Federal Reserve, hit back by saying that the US had always been a part of a global system and that American policy makers had always not turned Nelson's eye to the emerging economies and believed that recovery of US economy would help the emerging markets as well. Well, in reality, the grand does have a tendency to turn a Nelson's eye to the small.

Walmart is big. Starting from multiple products, it has also diversified into providing financial services. A Walmart-2-Walmart cash transfer scheme has already been initiated where Walmart consumers would be able to transfer money to other parts of the country/world with ease. Walmart just doesn't stop growing. So, when it floods a factory with orders, the smaller runs of even a higher value added product do not make economic sense. Will then Bangladesh continue doing only basic products in gigantic quantities or will it also attempt higher value added smaller quantities and take a leap of faith?

How can one even compete with this idolatry of giantism? The same applies when it boils down to production lines. In a country where we have mostly smaller factories, bigger factories do get awarded with big orders from brands, and after accepting large orders often subcontract to smaller ones. The existence of the 'small' therefore continues in shared buildings and, in many cases, in relatively unsafe units. It is also impossible to relocate the small ones overnight and, therefore, the only other option would be for the big to take responsibility of the safety and survival of the small.

The World Bank recently predicted that the bigger garment factories will absorb the smaller ones. That may very well be the case, but perhaps in another format. In order for the bigger ones to absorb the small factories' capacities, they would have to expand their own production capacity, which, at this point of time, is not feasible. This is certainly not the time to invest in garments. This is the time to smartly diversify and walk away. With disasters and turmoil hitting the country, it would be naïve to assume that the brands are not looking for alternative markets. They are. India, Ethiopia, Vietnam and even Myanmar are just the right destinations on their sourcing map. In about five years, they will be ready to shift. How will Bangladesh hold on to the production monopoly? With weaker infrastructure, how would we ever grow big and correct in such a short time? Or do we want to be small and smarter?

For decades, the world has idolised the big. Yet in many cases, large units break up small units. While Germany became big through unification, the German-speaking Swiss and the German-speaking Austrians who did not join did as well economically. While most of us were brought up worshipping the concept of economies of scale and while, till date, most of us believe that big companies are inescapably necessary. We also often forget that Mr. Sloan of General Motors structured the gigantic firm in such a manner that it became a federation of reasonably sized firms. As a result of his decision, the well-coordinated assembly became a federation of lively, semi-autonomous units, complete with individual drive, target and sense of achievement. While most of us need the orderliness of large-scale, we also need to realise that we also need the freedom and the manageability of the small.

This duality of scale will always exist and it is only up to us to pick and choose sides.

With the requirement of compliance guidelines, many factories in small and shared buildings will go out of business. Exporters who want to remain as important players in this business would obviously have to invest in developing capacities. The rest can play a smart game and pack up. Ideally, the big would become bigger and the small would cease. Large capital-intensive projects would turn out to be more preferred than the labour-intensive ones. Many of us will be opting for machines that will reduce dependence on man and will bring our labour costs down. Production by the masses will be replaced by mass production. This will soon become the economic reality of our times. Labour will eventually be put in the weakest bargaining position and we will be bypassing the very people for whom development is needed.

I sound terribly old fashioned today. That is because I just watched a friend withdraw from a small factory where 400 workers worked and produced fifty thousand pieces of garments for him monthly. The factory was in a shared building where the boiler and the generator were on the same floor, and in spite of having two exits the second one had a rusty cast iron staircase, which looked threatening. Could that factory have been saved or remedied? Perhaps another safer staircase could have been built, perhaps the multiple factories in the same building could have shared their resources and perhaps the fire equipment could have been installed, perhaps the workers could have been trained... But these are possibilities that the bigger manufacturers need to consider and approach the brands. While most of the key vendors to the brands are busy facing audits and structural examination, how many of us are willing to think about the smaller factories that are facing closure? If only each leading exporter mentors and monitors at least 5 to 10 tier 3 factories, then the negative image of subcontracting will come to an end. While brands assess their own direct suppliers, the leading suppliers must also take responsibility for indirect sourcing and propose remediation in an absolutely transparent dialogue with the brands.

The little boy in the picture holding the small ball in his hand has a big dream to achieve the heights of his sports hero some day. Size has not compromised his dreams. He is also a child of one of the workers working at one of the smaller, yet safer factories in Khilkhet. While audits and assessments continue, maybe an alternative platform needs to be launched from the manufacturers' side to help these smaller ones survive, so that this little one still has a school to go to...next year.

Gandhi disparagingly spoke about "dreaming of systems so perfect that no-one will need to be good." Let's join our hands together and pledge to achieve that space of transparency and virtue that will make us grieve for our workers on April 24 of this year, and which will also show the way for us to be the very best that we can be.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.



# Great hosting of World T20

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

FOR three weeks, Bangladesh was the epicenter of the cricket world as it hosted the men's and women's ICC World T20 cricket Championships. Twenty six teams descended on Bangladesh to contend for the championship of the abbreviated variant of cricket.

Men's and women's teams from eight test cricket playing nations -- England, Australia, West Indies, South Africa, New Zealand, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka -- came. The men's team from test playing Zimbabwe also competed but was eliminated in the preliminary rounds by the Netherlands. Other ICC Associates from Ireland, United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Nepal and Hong Kong participated in the men's competition but were eliminated in the preliminary rounds. Associate Ireland's women team qualified for the women's Championship.

It must have been a logistical nightmare to shuttle so many foreign men's and women's teams between Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet. By all accounts Bangladesh acquitted itself admirably. Bangladesh cricket organisers and the fans deserve kudos for showing the world that they can host major international sporting events.

Predictably, there were power outages -- thrice in Chittagong, and once in Sylhet. The wonder is that there were so few. Load-shedding power outages are facts of life in Bangladesh. They are as common as *rosogollas* for dessert. But on this occasion, when Bangladesh commanded the global stage, such glitches were mercifully minimal.

Infrastructure-wise, the real revelation was the new stadium in Sylhet, Bangladesh's 8<sup>th</sup> international cricket venue. The stadium itself and the surroundings are pretty. It is just as well that Sylhet hosted 24 out of the 27 women's matches. Over-all, Sylhet hosted 30 men's and women's matches, Mirpur 17, and Chittagong 15. Sylhet fans came out in droves to support women's cricket, whereas Dhaka fans saved their enthusiasm for the men's matches.

Chittagong has become synonymous with the "dew problem" for night matches. As a student of Faujderhat Cadet College the writer remembers that after a clear and hot day around Chittagong, as the earth surface cools at night moisture condenses and forms dew on the grass. The South Africans played all four first round matches in Chittagong, and Dale Steyn had no problem defending 7 runs in the last over against New Zealand on a dew-laden ground.

England, too, played all four first round matches in Chittagong, losing three, including one against an Associate, the Netherlands. They complained about the dew, Stuart Broad likening it to bowling with a "bar of soap." When England lost to Bangladesh in their 2011 World Cup match in Chittagong, they also complained about the dew. I thought England would be the most adept in playing in dew. From my graduate student days there, I remember that it drizzles in England most of the time!

Bangladesh may have been great hosts, but its men's cricket team performed poorly. They were the only team not to win a match; even an Associate, the Netherlands, won one. Shakib al Hasan thinks that fans' high expecta-

tions are part of the problem; and not playing in front of the home fans for two years is the solution. Really? Aren't "Tigers" supposed to be brave? The fans were only exhorting team members to perform up to their potential. They did not. Shakib may have performed well with the bat, but no one excelled with the ball. Good bowling is a prerequisite for winning cricket matches.

Granted, T20 is a bit of a crapshoot and not Bangladesh's forte. T20 certainly is not the favourite of the mighty Australians, who had to beat Bangladesh to escape being tagged the worst team in the tournament. The sad truth is Bangladesh's men's cricket team is regressing.

Bangladesh knocked India out of 2007 World Cup. It defeated a formidable English team in the 2011 World Cup. It should have won the Asia Cup in 2012, losing to Pakistan by 2 runs in the final. It defeated New Zealand in seven consecutive ODIs.

Now Bangladesh cannot win a match in any format. It even lost to Afghanistan and Hong Kong in T20. To sharpen their skills, Bangladeshi players need to lock horns with better opposition, and play many more matches in all three formats. Improve Bangladesh must, because the footsteps behind from Associates like the Netherlands and Ireland are getting louder!

Bangladesh needs to learn from winning teams. For batting, they need look no further than India's Virat Kohli, the MVP of the 2014 ICC World T20. Kohli was in absolute command, and never looked like he was going to get out. One could argue that India could have won the final had Kohli got more of the strike.

For bowling, Bangladesh should emulate Sri Lanka, the champions. Their fast bowlers, medium pacers and spinners all bowled superbly to limit the prolific Indian batsmen to a paltry 130 runs in the final. Bangladeshi bowlers should learn from Sri Lankan captain Lasith Malinga how to bowl the death overs. Firing accurate yorkers outside off stump, Malinga hamstrung all Indian batsmen.

Bangladeshi captain should learn from Indian captain Dhoni, who has been deservedly named the captain of the Tournament XI. Captaincy is critical. A good captain knows how to minimise the team's weaknesses and maximise its strengths. South African captain Faf du Plessis probably cost his team victory in the semifinal by opening the bowling with a part timer, Duminy, who conceded 14 runs to the Indian openers in the first over. In the final, Sri Lanka limited India to only 4 runs in the first over!

While Bangladesh's men under-performed, its women excelled. They won two matches and finished ninth in the competition. While they have a long way to go before contending against the likes of three-peating Aussie women's cricket team, they demonstrated that in the future they would be a force to be reckoned with.

It was befitting that Bangladesh women team's captain, Salma Khatun, was named to the 2014 ICC Women's T20 Tournament XI. Congratulations, Salma! With other budding stars like Rumana Ahmed, Lata Mondal and Panna Ghosh, Bangladesh women cricket team's future looks bright.

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Why spend so much money on making records?

On December 16, 2013 Bangladesh made world's largest human flag in which 27117 people took part. Then on March 26, 2014 Bangladesh made another world record: 2.5 lakh people sang the national anthem together. We spent a large amount of money for organising these two events. We heard, more than 50 crore taka has been spent for singing the national anthem.

But do we really need to make records of this sort? National anthem is in the hearts of 16 crore people. The sons of this soil sacrificed their lives for their mother tongue, and February 21 is observed throughout the world as 'The International Mother Language Day'. Then comes our Liberation War; only in nine months our freedom fighters were able to free the country from the occupation of Pakistan and gave us a sovereign country.

Other records are insignificant to the above mentioned feats. So why spend so much money which could have been used for other purposes?

Nur Jahan  
Chittagong

### Gender-biased question in BCS exam

I have had a chance to browse the English first paper question of the 34<sup>th</sup> BCS exam. Regrettably, the language of the question paper was found to be gender-biased. The first question that requires the examinees to translate a Bangla passage into English begins as: "Man is liable to troubles from which society cannot save him..." The passage is exclusionary in nature as it is full of masculine pronouns such as 'he', 'him' and 'his'. The other questions have also the same condition. It therefore, directly or indirectly, negates the existence of women as human beings. Ideally in an examination questions should be framed in such a way that examinees' knowledge can be truly assessed and they can learn from the inputs presented therein. Gender-biased language puts learners/ examinees into confusion and also affects the image of the highest recruiting agency of the government itself.

Hamida Banu  
Gandaria, Dhaka

### Comments on news report, "Waging war against Bangabandhu," published on April 16, 2014

#### A freedom fighter

Neutrality does not mean deviation from the truth. There is no nation on our planet whose citizens question the legacy of its founding father. When we were fighting in '71, only one person's name glowed ceaselessly in our hearts. What a shame that we question the greatest person ever born on our soil!

#### Touchstone

Zia, though a freedom fighter, deliberately tried to wipe out Bangabandhu from our history. His wife and son are now trying to establish a new history of Bangladesh. If they ever come to power, they will declare Zia as the father of the nation. Be forewarned.

#### Molla A. Latif

The situation is such that there may be a day when people will say, Bangladesh emerged from the Bay of Bengal and there was no Pakistan, no Yahya Khan, no Mujib and no War of Liberation.

#### S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Although a well-written article, I got the feeling that Mr. Ahsan could have been a bit more neutral in his approach.

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### "Do 'study' as Tarique did" (April 16, 2014)

#### Chabagan3

Yes please, you too study!! Then you too can rewrite history! Sounds like the records of the land office.

#### Hardreality

The nation would be very grateful if you provide the name of the history book which you are referring to, or is there any other way (maybe Tarique Rahman has invented a unique way) to study history? Otherwise, how did everyone get it so wrong?

#### Touchstone

May God save us from these lunatics!

#### SM

Just to give a piece of information: when his college principal wanted to qualify him in the exam, President Zia did not agree. Try to give TC to any leader's son now whose party is in power and see what happens.

#### Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Tarique's controversial comments on Bangabandhu are now endorsed by Fakhrul.