

## Access of journals to polling stations Essential for ensuring transparency

**W**E commend the Election Commission for rejecting the proposal of the police to limit journalists' access to polling stations on December 30, as any such restriction placed on the media on the day would have raised serious questions about the free and fair nature of the elections.

According to a report by *The Daily Star*, some top and mid-level officials suggested restricting full access of journalists, as the latter apparently "hamper voting activities" and "highlight negative news." They also argued that there should be a code of conduct for journalists, with one official even proposing that journalists cover the elections from outside the polling stations! While we concur that journalists should not obstruct polling activities, we would like to point out that, in the past, the media, rather than hinder, has actually pointed out and protested anomalies taking place in the polling stations, thereby ensuring transparency in the electoral process. A lot of these irregularities, we might add, took place in the very presence of law enforcement agents. Had the media not been allowed, would the citizens of this country have been duly informed of the violations of electoral codes, irregularities in the electoral process and misconduct by officials and political activists during the past elections? We think not.

The idea of prohibiting access to journalists on Election Day is an affront to democratic practices and principles. Sadly, in the past, journalists have been harassed while on duty, and attempts have even been made to throw them out of polling stations. We urge the EC to ensure that no such incident takes place this time and that journalists are granted unrestricted access.

## Make corporal punishment socially unacceptable

*Respect the dignity of all children*

**A**roundtable on Corporal Punishment at The Daily Star Center yesterday has brought to light the need for all members of society to work together to put an end to this terrible practice that debilitates the intellectual, physical and psychological wellbeing of children. Despite the directive from the Ministry of Education prohibiting corporal punishment in all educational institutions, including madrasahs, the practice of beating up students continues. This is because corporal punishment is an acceptable form of discipline in our culture with both parents and teachers considering it to be 'normal'. Even in households, it is quite common for parents to beat their children for disobedience.

These primitive, barbaric notions have to be changed. The participants of the discussion, jointly held by BLAST, CAMPE and Save the Children, Bangladesh, that included the Minister of Primary and Mass Education, eminent education activists, human rights lawyers and representatives of child rights organisations, agreed that it was crucial to make corporal punishment socially unacceptable. This seems to be the most important lesson to be internalised by the adults of our society.

It is therefore necessary to spread the message that corporal punishment is a shameful, harmful practice that must be shunned. The government, with the help of the media, especially the electronic media, can initiate awareness campaigns targeting teachers, principals and parents. As a country that is signatory to UN conventions that guarantee and protect the rights of the child, we are morally obligated to put an end to a practice that can scar a child for life. We must always remind ourselves that it is our duty to uphold a child's dignity and physical and mental wellbeing.

## COMMENTS

### "Migrants get little help" (December 19, 2015)

Lamia Akhter

Although Bangladeshi migrant workers send home around \$14 billion of remittance a year, they don't get expected services from the labour wings of the country's foreign missions. How unfortunate!

Khokon

The government has been spending crores of taka from migrant welfare funds to meet the expenses of the officials and staffs of the country's foreign missions, many of whom don't perform their duties properly.

Jannat Ara

In most cases, officials and staff at the labour wings are unresponsive to the needs of the workers.

Pritom

The government has sent those officials to serve the migrants, and not to exploit them.

Habibur Rahman

Migrant workers face difficulties in getting wages regularly. They also don't get proper medical services. But when they inform the officials at the labour wings about their plight, they don't seem to take the issues seriously.

### "Violence, violation of polls code rising" (December 19, 2015)

Farid

It's the duty of the Election Commission to keep violence and violation of election code under check. What are they doing?

# WTO's Nairobi Package for LDCs



FAHMIDA KHATUN

**T**HE outcome of the Nairobi Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation has received mixed reactions. From very depressing expectations, the

WTO members finally made some progress on the Doha Round negotiations, though not exactly the way it should have. Initially set to discuss and reach agreements during December 15-18, 2015, the conference was extended by another day in a bid to show the world that the multilateral trading system is not yet defunct in an advancing global economy. Still, the draft declaration of the tenth WTO Ministerial Conference indicates that there are sharp differences among member countries on a number of critical issues.

Some of the most difficult areas of the Doha Round negotiations, which were initiated in 2001, have been agricultural and non-agricultural market access, reform of domestic support policies in agriculture and market access of services. Demands of least developed countries include duty-free and quota-free market access, preferential rules of origins, operationalisation of the services waiver, and monitoring mechanism on Special and Differential Treatment. Bangladesh, an LDC and the coordinator of the LDC group, has been active in raising its demands during the run-up to the Nairobi conference.

While the decision of the Nairobi Ministerial is yet to be scrutinised in detail, one may have a quick look at what is there for LDCs. In particular, the Nairobi text on rules of origin and services trade carries significance for LDCs and Bangladesh.

The use of simple and transparent rules of origin in trade preferential schemes has been reiterated by LDCs. Even if LDCs are given various preferences, such as generalised system of preferences (GSP), they cannot fully realise preferential market access due to stringent rules of origin. It has been

urged that the threshold level of value addition for LDCs should be kept as low as possible so that they can comply with it.

The Nairobi Ministerial's decision on rules of origin sets a timeframe for preference, granting members the opportunity to undertake the commitments contained in the decision by December 31, 2016. On the value addition threshold, the rules of origin text mentions that the use of materials not originating from an LDC can make

content. Therefore, LDCs may not be able to reap full benefit of the rules of origin agreement.

In case of services, the existing services waiver has been extended until December 31, 2030. This is due to the extended period between the adoption of the waiver in December 2011, and the notification of preferences in 2015. One would recall that on December 17, 2011, during the 8th Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Geneva, LDCs were given services waiver, under

members are also requested to provide capacity building and technical support to LDCs so that they can take advantage of the services waiver.

At the previous WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali in 2013, members decided that the Committee on Trade in Services at the WTO would initiate a process for operationalisation of LDCs' service waiver and review the progress periodically. Developed and developing country members in a position to do so, would indicate "sectors and modes of supply" for providing preferential treatment to LDC services and service providers.

But the operationalisation of the services waiver has been challenging. Therefore, the Nairobi declaration points out that preferences to LDCs should have "commercial value" and "promote economic benefits." LDCs face market access and national treatment restrictions in case of cross-border movement of professionals. Therefore, flexibilities are required. These include removal of entry barriers, creation of a special temporary entry visa quota for LDCs, removal of restrictions on the category of contractual service suppliers and independent professionals, residency permits, Economic Needs Test and labour market tests and conditions on local. In addition, removal of various non-tariff barriers related to visa, work permits, residency permits and recognition of professional qualifications and accreditations are necessary for operationalisation of the services waiver.

A lot of issues are left to be dealt with in the coming months in Geneva. Therefore, the post-Nairobi landscape will be as difficult as before. This may also have implications for the implementation of other global commitments, such as the Istanbul Plan of Action for LDCs adopted in 2011 and the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations in September 2015. How the trade negotiators look at these issues and perform in the WTO discussions will shape the achievements of these global announcements to a large extent.

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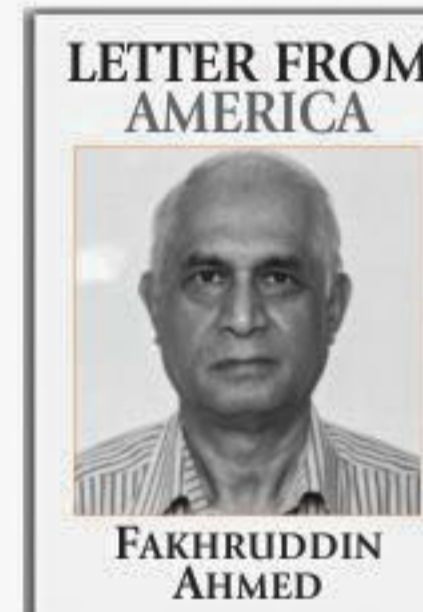
Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta addresses delegates at the official opening of the Tenth World Trade Organisation ministerial conference. PHOTO: AFP

up to 75 percent of the final value of a product for it to qualify for preferential treatment. The Nairobi text also calls for the deduction of any costs associated with the transportation and insurance of inputs from other countries to LDCs. Developing countries declaring themselves in a position to do so are also asked to undertake similar commitments.

The decision of allowing 75 percent of non-originating material is also considered to be prohibitive in view of the fact that increasingly global value chains in modern manufacturing sometimes require very little domestic

which these countries would receive some preferences in case of exports of services. LDCs can gain market access in different sectors and modes of services which are of interest to them. The waiver was to be granted immediately to all LDCs, with preferential treatment being conditional to complying with non-trade issues. The waiver also has the provision of rules of origin which would not allow any other country to be a free rider, i.e. it prohibits other countries to take benefit of preferential access by establishing companies in LDCs. Given LDCs' weak capacity,

# The Nobel Prize that got away



FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

**O**N Saturday, December 19, the Bangladesh Society of New Jersey (BSNJ) celebrated Bangladesh's Victory Day at Rutgers University's Douglass Campus Center in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The President of BSNJ, Lazima Mahmud, and the General Secretary, Omar Haider, invited me to introduce to the audience two

distinguished Bangladeshi Americans they were honouring.

It was my privilege to introduce Princeton University's world-renowned physicist, Professor Zahid Hasan, and the first Bangladeshi-American Rhodes Scholar, my younger cousin Dr. Kazi Sabeel Rahman.

I had written about the outstanding achievements of Professor Zahid Hasan in an Op-Ed in *The Daily Star* on August 19, 2015. His Weyl fermion discovery was named among the top ten breakthroughs of 2015 by *Physics World*. Suffice to say, Professor Hasan is at the pinnacle of his profession. I have never met someone so brilliant, yet so spiritual and humble as Professor Hasan. He is an inspiration to Bangladeshis of all ages. His wife, Sarah, whose father hails from Feni, is equally brilliant. Both Professor Zahid Hasan and Sarah's families are brimming with extraordinarily talented intellectuals. Zahid's father is from Dhaka.

After Kazi Sabeel Rahman was named the first Bangladeshi-American Rhodes Scholar in his senior year at Harvard (2004-05), I had written an Op-Ed about him in *The Daily Star*. The Rhodes Scholarship is the most prestigious graduate scholarship in the world. Rhodes Scholars study at Oxford University, England. Sabeel graduated from Harvard *summa cum laude* (highest degree of praise). He then earned a law degree (JD) from Harvard Law School, and a PhD in Political Science also from Harvard. Sabeel's wife, Noorain, is also a Rhodes Scholar. Currently, Sabeel is an Assistant Professor, Brooklyn Law School, and a Fellow at Roosevelt Institute and New America Foundation.

As I was mingling among geniuses, I was reminded of another Bangladeshi genius who certainly would have won this year's Nobel Prize in Medicine had he lived - Dr. Mohammad Abdul Aziz. In an Op-Ed in *The Daily Star* on November 30, entitled, "A Trailblazer in Medicine," the late Dr. Aziz's daughter, Dr. Leedy Hoque, wrote movingly about the extraordinary contributions her father made in the field of medicine.

Dr. Mohammad Abdul Aziz was born, raised and went to medical school in Bangladesh. Quoting Dr. Leedy Hoque: "Few people in Bangladesh will have heard of onchocerciasis or river blindness, a devastating parasitic infection that claims the sight of millions of people worldwide. The parasite *Onchocerca volvulus* is transmitted by the blackfly which breeds in rivers. Larvae of the parasite mature into adult worms, which in turn release microfilariae that eventually infiltrate the eye, causing blindness. It was a zealous Bangladeshi doctor based in the US who spearheaded the clinical trials back in the 1980s that eventually led to the discovery of a treatment for this illness, namely ivermectin, which is still considered the drug of choice for onchocerciasis. That doctor happened to be my father Dr. M A Aziz. Sadly, his life was cut short by terminal illness just as he reached the peak of his career. However, his work was taken over by another scientist by the name of William C. Campbell who, jointly with two other scientists, won this year's Nobel Prize in Medicine. I feel confident that this honour would have also been bestowed upon my father had he survived."

"The Nobel Committee in their citation accompanying the announcement of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Medicine describes the scientific background of the discovery of ivermectin. "In 1981-1982, Dr. Mohammed Aziz at MDRL, an expert in River Blindness, conducted the first successful human trial (Aziz et al 1982). The results were clear. Patients given a single dose of ivermectin showed either complete elimination or near elimination of microfilariae load, while the adult parasites were untouched." The results of this study carried out in Senegal were published in the *Lancet* in 1982. An extensive study was also carried out with patients in Senegal, Ghana, Mali and Liberia. This time, it was a

double-blind study comparing the efficacy and safety of ivermectin, DEC (diethyl carbamazine, the drug previously used) and placebo, involving elaborate clinical, laboratory, parasitological and ophthalmological (fundus photography and retinal angiography) examinations. One single dose of ivermectin was effective in reducing the microfilariae even after 12 months and the side effects were considerably milder compared to DEC."

Nobel Prizes are not awarded posthumously. If they were, Bangladesh would be celebrating its second Nobel Prize this year. The age of the Nobel Prize winners range roughly from 60 to 90. Dr. Aziz would have been 85 this year.

I had met him briefly at a mutual friend's house in Oxford in the late 1970s. To my lasting regret, I did not realise until after his death in 1987 that our residences were only a mile and a half apart.

His children are equally gifted. Dr. Leedy Hoque studied medicine at Oxford University's Somerville College, where Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher also studied. Dr. Hoque is a world authority on autism. Her brother, Professor Tipu Zahed Aziz is a professor of neurosurgery at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford University.

Two of Dr. Aziz's sons - Dr. Abid Aziz and Dr. Shahid Aziz - live in the US. Dr. Abid Aziz is a graduate of McGill University Medical School in Montreal, Canada. Abid looks remarkably like his father. A renowned surgeon, Dr. Shahid Aziz is a graduate of Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Aziz's legacy of altruism lives through his children. Dr. Shahid Aziz has founded the organisation Smile Bangladesh, and dedicated it to the memory of his father. Several times a year, Dr. Shahid Aziz and his colleagues make the trip to Bangladesh and surgically repair cleft lips and palates of Bangladeshi children.

Their website says: "Help a Child Smile: There are approximately 300,000 children in Bangladesh with unrepaired cleft lips and cleft palates. With a one-hour surgery, we can change their lives."

Bangladesh is not only proud of but also grateful to Dr. Mohammad Abdul Aziz and his children.

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Stop sending Bangladeshi women to Middle East

The other day I was listening to an audio interview of an eminent Bangladeshi on VOA. He was highlighting the cost-benefit aspects of sending Bangladeshi women in the KSA as domestic workers. The poor, uneducated and vulnerable women hailing mostly from rural areas are under the illusion that a rosy future in the Middle East is waiting for them. In the KSA, our

domestic workers have to work in harsh conditions. They remain confined to their employers' house and suffer silently. While other Asian countries have reportedly stopped sending domestic workers to the KSA and other Middle Eastern countries, Bangladesh is still sending its workers to those countries. I believe our government is capable of engaging these poor women in other more dignified work. S. A. Samad Ohio, USA

### Sacrifices of our people should not go in vain

After nearly half a century of our independence, we still have to fear for our lives. False logic is being used to justify the acts of cruelty, vengeance and violation of human rights. Opposition politics that people bank on for release of grievances is being systematically decimated. The sacrifices of millions of people in our Liberation War should not go in vain. We should take a fresh vow to restore democracy and freedom of speech in the country. Yusuf Azad Rajshahi