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### Attack on women demonstrators

It is disgusting to watch on television news the incidents of police attacks and brutalities on women demonstrators in Dhaka streets and educational institutes. People should be feeling ashamed to watch these police brutalities on women. Women fought for their rights for centuries and in the later part of twentieth century they have proved excellence in fields where men dominated. Be it flying an aircraft or ruling the country. Why are they being treated so shabbily in a civilised society? Ziauddin Ahmed, On e-mail

## Changing village scene

The shrinkage of population in villages is sending signals, which is alarming. This has happened in the west, the villages are either deserted or inhabited by the people aged above seventy. Thus the concentration of people in the cities.

In Bangladesh the process has started. Fifty years back, though the population was less than a quarter of today's, the villages were humming with people and activities. Lots of football, ha-do-do, and even badminton games could be seen and people enjoyed the games during evenings. These scenes are very rare today. If you observe, you will find the educated people are gradually shifting to smaller towns and from there ultimately to Dhaka. That's how Dhaka is getting overcrowded and the villages are giving a deserted look.

There are many reasons behind this demographic shifting. First of all, the opportunities that Dhaka offers are so attractive that those who can manage to come to Dhaka will think twice before going back. The attractions are availability of better education, healthcare, job opportunity, chances of going abroad, business opportunity, nearness to power centre, better amenities of life and availability of items of enjoyment. The glittering lights of shopping malls, live stage performances glimpses of "Stars" are other attractions.

Whatever be the cause, the fact is Dhaka city is becoming a place unsuitable for healthy, safe and comfortable living. The traffic jam has tremendous impact on the behaviour of man. One can observe the irritant nature of Dhaka people. Less tolerance, drug addiction, crime, family feud, display of vulgarity, little or no concern for others, selfishness and you can go on adding many such negative qualities which are the attributes of a cramped Dhaka city people. If the children do not have a park to move around, no playground, no place for the couple to have a exclusive place to enjoy the nature, then the life is not worth living. The drinking water, electricity, education,

healthcare and many essentials will become so scarce that life will become unbearable. I remember my little old village where I grew up. Alas! the village is now almost dead, you don't find lots of young people, neither the children are playing on the streets, nor are the cowboys playing the flute. You only see lots of aged people's gathering during Friday prayers. The other day I was going through an article about a village in Germany which once was a humming habitat. Today it is totally deserted and the animals are gradually occupying space vacated by human beings. I am apprehensive of similar things happening in Bangladesh. Will it be good for the country? A land-mass having no population can be compared with a dead sea, vast mass of water with no living beings. So, we must take steps to stop the trend and make the villages liveable. Commodore AMA Alam (Retd.) BN New DOHS, Dhaka



### Mobile library

The role that is being played by the Bishwa Shahitya Kendra (World Literature Centre) is great in ways manifold. Their "Mobile Library" that visits places with a good number of books in it for the young readers is simply pleasing. They're, to an extent, carrying & spreading wisdom to the people in society. People, namely the youths, can borrow books, read them and change them. Thus they can keep themselves in good touch with the precious life-blood-books.

It is a time when people at large are stumbling at every step of life, as it seems. And as such they are busy in their daily dives for meeting both ends in a way that reminds us of nothing of the past, as all these are damn new phenomena in society!

Importance of reading books is manifold, as the wise men assert. It is the "Precious life blood" that revives or brings forth the imaginative faculty of an individual. It's the determining force that instills the vitality in the line of thought of a young that culminates in shaping out the mindset. The spirit makes one responsive to the call of the conscience. It is, thus, the essence of a conscious human being.

Regrettably, youths of the present time hardly read books and that others concerned are not making any effort to enhance the urgency in them. A look around the society will help anyone see the dire straits that the future of the present generation is in. And at such a time the service that the Bishwa Shahitya Kendra is rendering to the society is a highly welcome effort that earns them salutes from us. People behind the precious endeavour deserve praise that goes beyond any expression of words. We wish them a great success and march towards the never-ending journey! Congrats & cheers! Rafiqul Islam Rime Agrabad, Chittagong

### BPC and poor quality diesel

I read the news that the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) was to buy some diesel from Kuwait, which is not recommended, safe for consumption.

I feel it's high time that the high officials who risk the state and people's interests unilaterally at a high cost be taken to task.

At a time when there is a hue & cry in the country over dearth of diesel, the latest decision to call open tender can be hailed but question remains what action was being taken on the reported arrangement to receive the 'harmful diesel' from Kuwait which, if received, would have incurred a loss, as reported, to the tune of Tk. 2.5 crore.

Have the authorities identified the involved persons who played ducks & drakes with the fate and life of the people and attempted to plunder the state coffers? AF Rahman, On e-mail

### HR violations against Khasi community

A number of recent human rights violations and illegal incidents against Khasi community in Sylhet region emphasise the importance for the government to ensure justice to the victims by taking appropriate action and following the rule of law.

On 07/02/2006, (source: Prothom Alo 13/02/2006) terrorists attacked a Khasi village in Modonmohanpur tea estate in Madhabpur Union under Kamalganj Upazilla. The attack followed a land dispute court case in which the tea estate authorities were prohibited from removing Khasi people from the disputed land. However, the police have failed to take appropriate action against the attackers. Similarly on 13/02/2006, Vitorgul Punjee, Jaintapur, Sylhet was attacked by criminals who destroyed large amounts of batel nut, batel leaf, jackfruit and lemon trees. The punjee which spans 50 acres, was given to Khasi community for cultivating batel nut etc by the government in 1992. The Khasi community informed local police about those responsible for the incident, however the police are yet to take any action.

The most recent incident (source: Prothom Alo 05/03/2006) occurred when a BNP leader attacked Kalenjee Khasi punjee, under Adampur union, Kamalganj after grabbing 50 acres of land from Khasi community.

The area is home to 850 Khasi people who have been living on the 250-acre land since 1962.

The Ethnic Community Development Organisation (ECDO), Sylhet urged the government to preserve the justice of Bangladesh by recognising the rights of indigenous peoples and giving them appropriate protection against human rights violation by local terrorists. The fundamental rule of law must be applied to ensure that the indigenous communities are free from discrimination and that Bangladesh can stand up as a nation, which rests on the principles of its Constitution. Louise Sanderson Communication and Sponsorship Officer, ECDO

# Gender issue



I was astonished to read Mr. Saad Quasem's article entitled "Women in a Man's World", appearing in your paper so close to the International Women's Year. While he claims to have changed his previously male chauvinist views on women, it appears from the article that he bases his changed attitudes upon a foundation of stereotypical, reactionary and outdated, if not outrageous, perceptions of women, whom he describes as the "weaker sex".

I believe Mr. Quasem is actually clinging to his beliefs that women really can't play the same roles as men because of some physical constraints, and has hidden these views in the guise of an article purportedly demonstrating a new enlightenment on his part.

Mr. Quasem's retreat into Biblical territory and the concept of Original Sin to define the character of women is almost laughable. He considers women as "THE source of pleasure for man". He wants to thank women for their role in society because without them no sons would be born. THIS is an enlightened attitude about women?

In suggesting a prescription for the future in this country he wants the Bangladesh government "to take severe actions to change the mindset" of the people. How does a government do this? Appoint Mind Police? Syed Hamde Ali The Nawab Palace, Bogra

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"The idea of gender equality is not a novelty" is how Mr. Quasem began his write-up titled "Women in a man's world" in the March 8 edition of this paper. Alas! If only that were so. The truth is, for a large number of people (including, I'm afraid, Mr. Quasem) it IS a novelty. Catch phrases like "gender equality" and "women's empowerment" are political-action buttons they wear on their lapels announcing their ideological affiliations and their heightened state of awareness. Any day when a self-proclaimed, but now reformed, sexist writes an article championing causes for women in Bangladesh is a day for celebration. And, there is indeed something here for us to celebrate- Mr. Quasem's newfound enlightenment. Life in the US has been an eye-opening experience for him, and for that I am glad. He has discovered that prejudice is universal. Even in a supposedly progressive country such as the United States and one that gave rise to the Women's Liberation movement, women are abused regularly. He has come to believe that this is not right, that women should not be kept in chains, that they too have value. This is indeed a happy moment. So, why am I not happy? Maybe, it's because I fear that Mr. Quasem, as so many other passionate and well-meaning men (and women), has transformed himself into another ineffectual advocate for women's rights. He sees the terrible injustice that is being perpetrated on women everywhere around the world, and is flabbergasted. He joins a group to fight violence against women (an admirable cause), but he still believes that women are the "weaker sex." (Never mind for the moment that in popular western culture that term is generally reserved for men.) He points to a

woman's menstrual cycle as evidence for this. "There is no valid reason," as he puts it, "to why women fall sick once a month." No valid reason, of course, than an underlying and pervasive weakness in the other sex. And here is his take on the Original Sin, and what it reveals about the female character: "It is due to Eve's greed, Adam was brainwashed to eat the apple. It is not a surprise that women tend to be more materialistic than men."

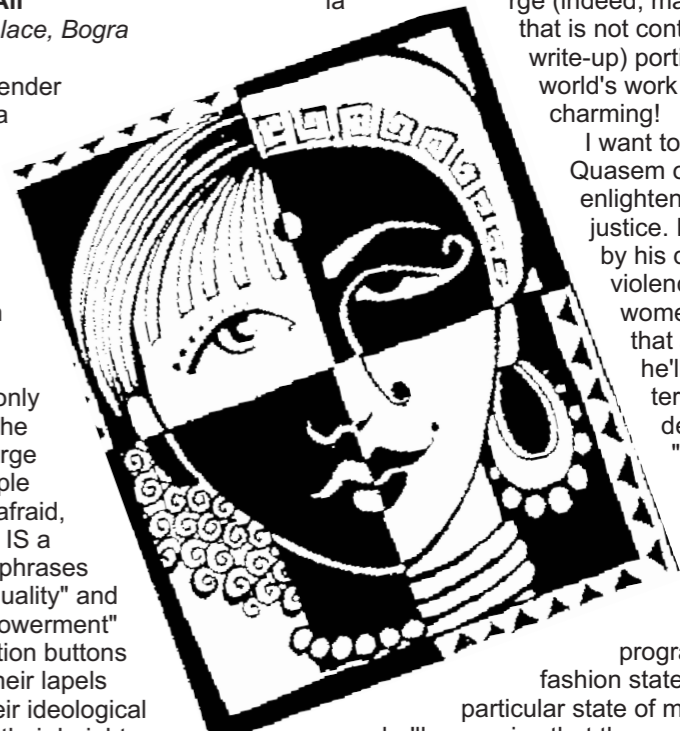
Gee, it's no wonder that women all over the world get slapped around. Indeed, all of this makes Mr. Quasem's coruscating gallantry seem all the more dazzling.

Who cares that women are deceitful and weak and prone to squandering our hard-earned dough. Who cares that so many thousands of years ago, the matriarch of all women (and, incidentally, men too), but let's ignore that messy little detail for now) really stuck it to Adam. We are men in God's image. So, we'll forgive these weak and generally pathetic creatures. We'll take the high road and become their self-appointed guardians- their knights in shining armour. We'll charge bravely into the windmills of sexism all over the globe and vanquish them. But, let no one be fooled. It's not simply because we're benevolent and high-minded that we'll fight for women around the globe, but because we understand their collective value to society. And what are these values? According to the write-up, women are "The source of pleasure for man", they bear him "sons", and they represent a rge (indeed, majority, though that is not contended in the write-up) portion of the world's work force. How charming!

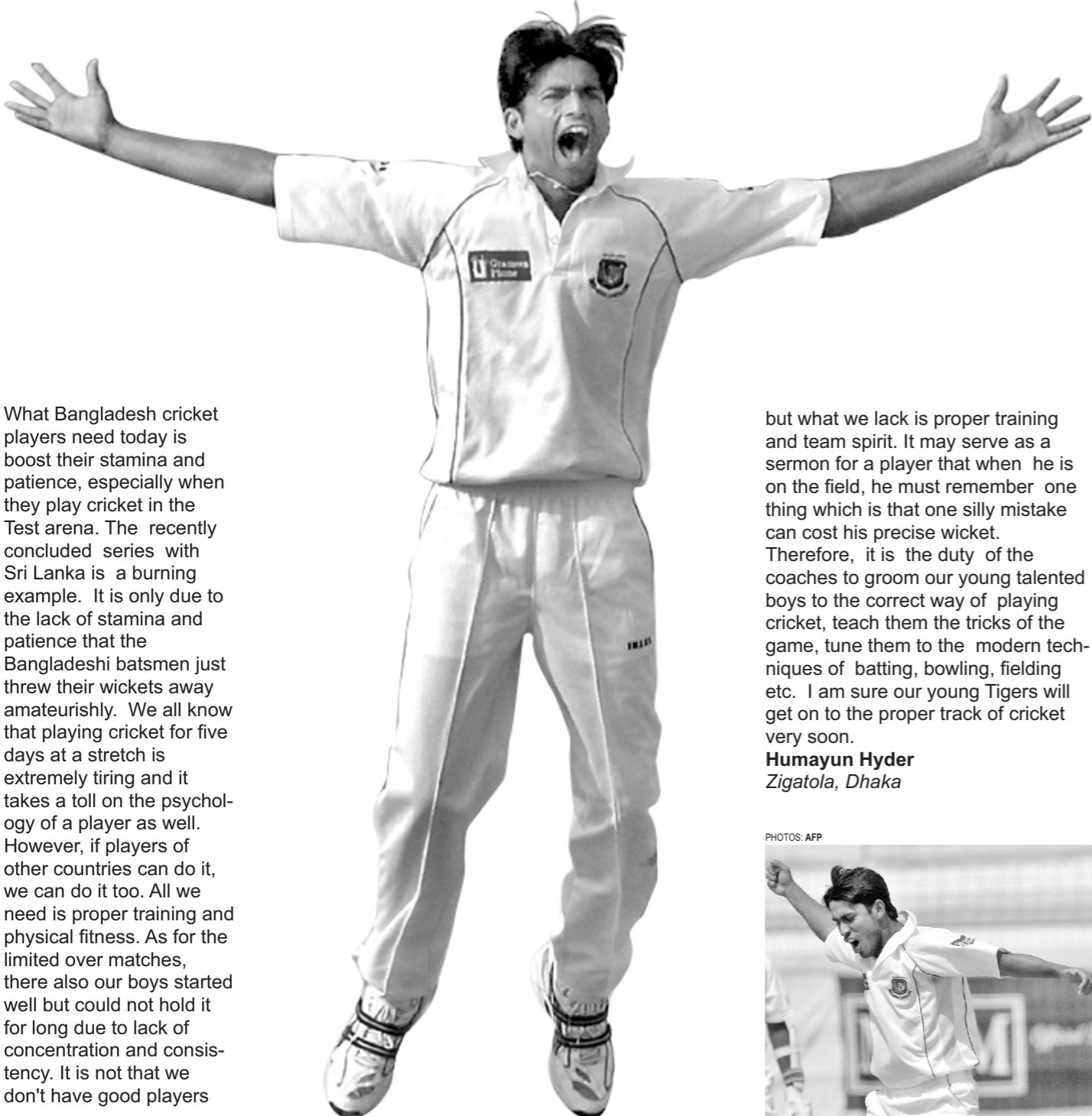
I want to encourage Mr. Quasem on his quest for enlightenment and justice. I am heartened by his desire to stop violence against women. I only hope that along the way, he'll discover that terms like "gender equality" and "women's rights" are not political slogans, or well-planned NGO programmes, or a fashion statement. But a particular state of mind, I hope he'll recognise that the enemy he seeks to vanquish is the one lurking within his own soul.

On a smaller note, when quoting statistics let's all try to be as accurate as we can be. In this information age, with the Internet at our fingertips, it is embarrassingly easy. A quick Google search in preparation for this article yielded the following information: According to the US Department of Justice, in 2004, the last year for which complete statistics are available, there were 209,880 victims (men and women, but mostly women) of rape, attempted rape or sexual assaults in the United States. Of those, about 65,510 were victims of completed rape- a rate of roughly 8 per hour, not minute, as Mr. Qasem suggested. If we consider all sexual assaults, roughly 0.08% of Americans are sexually assaulted every year. According to a 2001 study by ICDDR,B, 37% of women in Dhaka were sexually assaulted by their husbands alone.

My intent here is not to give a favourable comparison for the United States- even one rape is one too many- but to suggest that we have a long way to go. Jonathan Munshi On e-mail



## Our cricketers



What Bangladesh cricket players need today is boost their stamina and patience, especially when they play cricket in the Test arena. The recently concluded series with Sri Lanka is a burning example. It is only due to the lack of stamina and patience that the Bangladeshi batsmen just threw their wickets away amateurishly. We all know that playing cricket for five days at a stretch is extremely tiring and it takes a toll on the psychology of a player as well. However, if players of other countries can do it, we can do it too. All we need is proper training and physical fitness. As for the limited over matches, there also our boys started well but could not hold it for long due to lack of concentration and consistency. It is not that we don't have good players

but what we lack is proper training and team spirit. It may serve as a sermon for a player that when he is on the field, he must remember one thing which is that one silly mistake can cost his precise wicket. Therefore, it is the duty of the coaches to groom our young talented boys to the correct way of playing cricket, teach them the tricks of the game, tune them to the modern techniques of batting, bowling, fielding etc. I am sure our young Tigers will get on to the proper track of cricket very soon.

Humayun Hyder Zigatola, Dhaka

