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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Interesting commentary

I enjoyed reading your commentary "Welcome back, Mr. President" with great interest. I did not realise that there may have been an attempt to change the President; although this was being talked about and I thought it was just a gossip or rumour. Though it is said "There is no smoke without fire." You are so right that the media has been playing a very positive role to safeguard democracy. You have also very strongly advocated accountability of the government, but this can be ensured only when there is an Independent Judiciary and the office of the Ombudsman well in place. We have had successive political or elected governments for the last fifteen years but no signs of the governments taking definite steps to make the Judiciary truly Independent are visible, although they had promised to do so before elections. For a smooth functioning of a democratic government, it is very necessary to strengthen the local government bodies, but our elected governments have not

made any positive move to strengthen this system, as they want to control all the upazila and districts etc through the UNOs and DCs. By having elected bodies, of course the ruling party people will occupy not all positions, but healthier will be the functioning of democracy if the opposition can also have some role in the development of their local areas. People expect the MPs to make roads, bridges etc in their areas, but with the existing arrangements, MPs have very little to do unless they are from the ruling party. Prof. Yunus had a good suggestion: An MP should also be chairman of his upazila. Of course, this will slightly increase the number of seats in the parliament, which can be done by a necessary amendment. That way MPs will be spending more time in their constituencies and will have more contact with people. They will need to perform well to be re-elected. Unfortunately, I feel that our political governments will make none of these reforms or changes. The Election Commission should be Strong and Independent. I hope the media will

continue to play an assertive role in this respect. **Wajid Ali Khan Panni** Dhaka *** I have read your commentary but unfortunately cannot agree with you fully. The PM has made a U-turn all right, but she has done it because she could no longer sustain her party's plan because of the pressure from all corners, and she, therefore, doesn't deserve any thanks for this deed of hers. **ASelim** North Dhanmondi, Dhaka **Housing estates, for immortals?** There are many housing estates being developed by private builders in and around Dhaka city but what surprises me most is that none of these estates have marked out an area for a graveyard for residents who will live in these estates. There are residential estates in private sector, with most modern hospitals, schools, shopping malls, convention and community centres, clubs, children's parks, a large central mosque and even madrassah, but no area marked

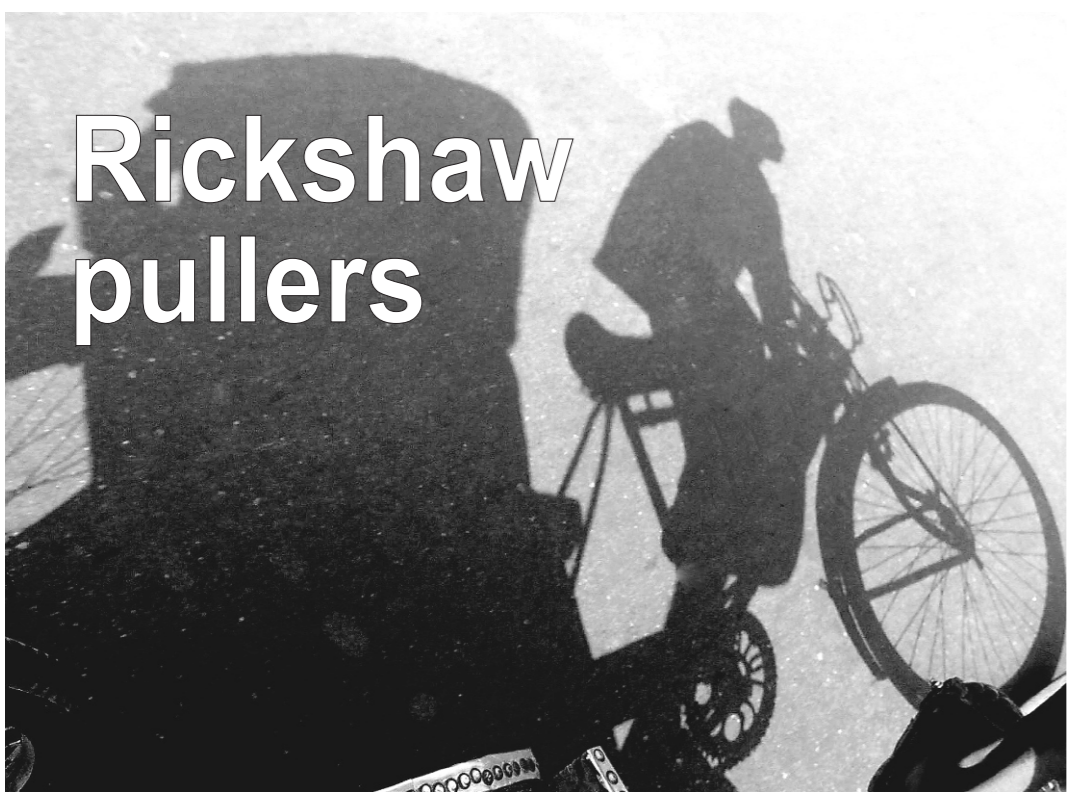
out for a graveyard. Perhaps this is true about all the housing estates coming up. I wonder is it due to builders' greed for wealth, or is it that people who will reside in these estates will be immortals? **Ziauddin Ahmed, On e-mail** **Interpretation of beard** In the past, a young man suddenly growing beard was subjected to close scrutiny. But reasons were different. Friends used to think that their friend had been defeated in the war of love. Parents used to feel relieved, thinking that their son had come back to the way of piety. The strangers avoided him thinking that he had been released from some not-so-dignified place. But today friends tend to think that he has become addicted. Parents get worried to think that their son has become a member of a special brand of political party. But we forget that growing beard is part of Islamic practice. We should change our attitude towards a bearded young man. **Asif, West Mir Bari, Chittagong**

Israeli killing machine



PHOTO: AFP

To rescue a teenage soldier, the Israelis are inflicting havoc on the lives of the ordinary Palestinians. They have already killed 44 civilians and wounded more than 160. And still the killing machine of Tel Aviv does not care a bit about the outcry of the international community. Do the rights of Palestinians mean nothing to the world conscience? **Arifur Rahman Banani, Dhaka**



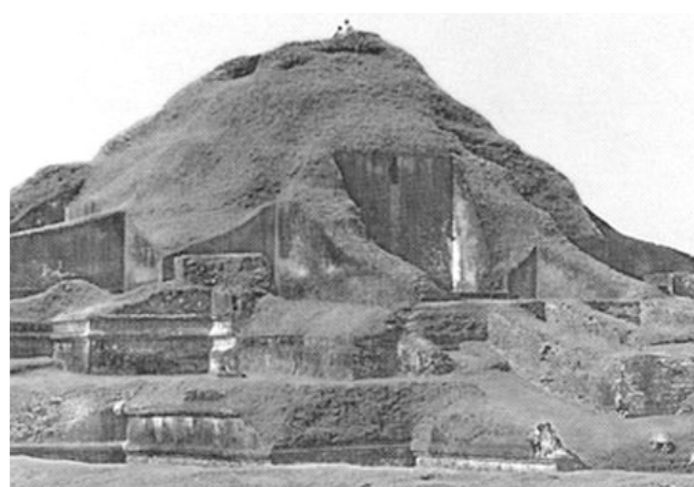
Rickshaw pullers

The rickshaw is the main transport of our country and a considerable proportion of the total population depend on rickshaw for a living. In that way, it is helping to combat our unemployment problem. It is environment friendly as well. But how is a rickshaw puller's life going? Recently, it was shown in a research that most of the rickshaw pullers become disabled at their old age because they work so hard and cannot afford nutritious foods that they need to consume. Moreover, they live in unhealthy shanties and they do not get proper treatment when they are ill. I think our government should do something for them and here are some suggestions, which can be considered: - Carry out a research to change the shape of the rickshaw so that it consumes fewer calories. -Work out the maximum hours a day a rickshaw puller should work and make them aware of it. -Create awareness among them about nutritious foods and provide the same to them at subsidised rates. -Provide them with proper housing and treatment facilities. - Provide them interest free loans so that they can buy their own rickshaw. I hope the authorities will consider these suggestions. **Mainul Quadery** West Bakalia, Chittagong

Paharpur relics

Paharpur is a small village 5km west of Jamalganj in Naogaon district where the remains of the most important and the largest known monastery south of the Himalayas have been excavated. This 7th century archaeological find covers approximately an area of 27 acres of land. The entire establishment, occupying a quadrangular court; measuring more than 900 ft. externally on each side, has high enclosure-walls about 16 ft. in thickness and from 12 ft. to 15 ft. in height. With an elaborate gateway complex on the north, there are 45 cells on the north and 44 in each of the other three sides with a total number of 177 rooms. The architecture of the pyramidal cruciform tem-

ple is profoundly influenced by those of South-East Asia, especially Myanmar and Java. UNESCO declared it an International Heritage Site which enhanced its importance. The place, however, needs better maintenance and security as anti-social elements are active there. **MAH Nazim** University of Dhaka



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