



From dust to death

On January 30, the Auto-rickshaw Sramik Union called a day long strike in Dhaka city protesting the government's decision to remove faulty auto-rickshaws and tempos from the city. They also declared that if the government does not change the decision the strike would go on indefinitely. Oh, what a relief it was! We thank the Auto-rickshaw Sramik Union for declaring this strike as it gave us a chance to breathe fresh air for at least a couple of days (as the strike was ultimately withdrawn in a couple of days). We thank the government for the steps they have taken to combat air pollution. They must be relentless in their efforts to create a pollution free country and we hope the government will not hesitate to take necessary steps in this regard and would not compromise with anything or anyone.

Nur Jahan Chittagong

The nation wants to know the correct statistics

There is a big controversy prevailing in Bangladesh between the previous government and the present one. The previous government the Awami League is claiming that before stepping down from power, they have left sufficient foreign currency reserve, enough for running the government smoothly. They are claiming the same as far as food reserve is concerned. On both the issues the present government is providing a complete opposite picture. The present Finance Minister is claiming that, his government started with an alarming low level of foreign exchange. Now I have two questions and I want answers from some authentic sources: How much foreign currency reserve the last government i.e. Bangladesh Awami League left behind when they stepped down? I will prefer the statistics of the last three months. How much food reserve the last Awami League government has left prior to their stepping down and again I will prefer statistics of the last three months. I will appreciate if someone provides the statistics, mentioning the sources.

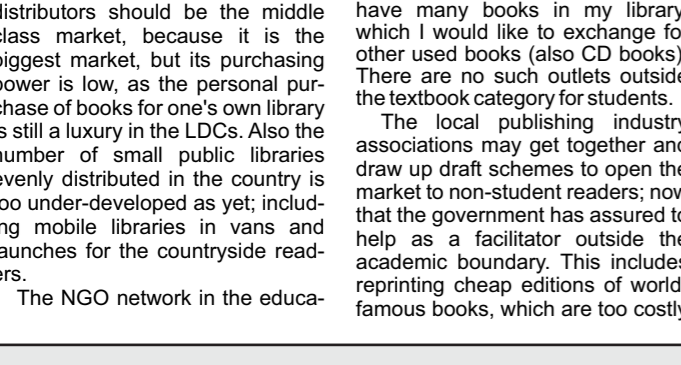
Kh. S. Omar Faruk California, USA

Home-library culture

It was heartening to read the news (February 3) that one local publisher has published in Dhaka Naipaul's 'The Enigma of Arrival'. This is an encouraging trend for the book lovers who like to build up personal library at home. The target of the publishers and distributors should be the middle class market, because it is the biggest market, but its purchasing power is low, as the personal purchase of books for one's own library is still a luxury in the LDCs. Also the number of small public libraries evenly distributed in the country is too under-developed as yet, including mobile libraries in vans and launches for the countryside readers. The NGO network in the educa-

tion sector can help to develop reading habit ('Read, to enjoy and learn'). A quick survey would reveal how many middle class families have home/family libraries. The next stage is to open Book Clubs, later extended into mail-order purchase through books-by-mail catalogues (use the local websites also and pay by e-cash). In

Politicisation and our academic environment



Student politics, Bangladesh style

As a former teacher in Bangladesh and a current Professor of a university in the United States, I am deeply concerned about the excessive politicisation in the seats of higher learning in Bangladesh. Excessive politicisation among the teachers and students at the universities in Bangladesh has exacerbated the level of violence by creating a reign of terror and disrupting the learning atmosphere in academic institutions in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is the only country in the world where a change in government leads to a change in the administrative positions in the universities, and a change in the control of dormitories. It is tragic to see the university professors involved in partisan politics, which is a characteristic of politicians. Excessive

to buy imported in original edition. India has established a foundation for the paperback book industry, which is quite popular. Another venture is missing the publication of annual anthologies by Bangladeshi writers, both in Bangla and English. The government has to develop the Translation service in the country with the guidance of UNESCO. The publishing industry cannot be established quickly in the third world without technical co-operation of international donors. The library book market in Bangladesh can be developed, with a huge base population of 130 million and recent literary rate soaring to the 50 per cent mark. The local publishers have to contract joint-venture terms with foreign suppliers for cheaper reprints in the developing countries. Cheaper books create more readers, if the distribution network is wide in depth and breadth.

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

Non citizen businessmen

As a patriotic citizen the growth of a new class of non-citizen businessmen has been bothering me. Many of us can vouch for the presence of hundreds of Indian citizens either directly or affiliated involved in our country's businesses. In some instances they just borrow existing business names or enter into so-called sleeping partnerships. Not that we are free from guilt either. Seeing easy money many of us gobble up opportunities without caring about country's interest. However it is the lack of institutional process that gave rise to such situations. Yet these citizens, almost all Indians move, make money and take it away at will. Yet: (1) Bangladeshis do not enjoy any reciprocal acceptance either at the public or private level in India. (2) Bangladesh is losing enormous amount of revenue to underworld remittances. (3) Unlawful businesses such as these are detrimental to national interest, which the government is supposed to protect against.

Rafiq Ahmed Chicago, USA

Gas is not only gas

I have carefully read the article by Professor Rafiqur Rahman published in your esteemed daily on January 25, 2002. I fully endorse the views of Dr Rahman. He has realistically approached the gas issue and has analysed it from different practical angles. Technical experts analyse things from bare technical angles and tend to overlook the fact that gas is not merely gas, it is linked to various strategic issues. He has rightly pointed out that saying 'NO' to selling gas is the easiest and safest route because that is how the current wind is like. I would like to thank The Daily Star for publishing the article and I look forward to reading such objective articles in the future. It seems selling gas could be Bangladesh' gateway to many other possibilities, so let's give a patient hearing to both the sides and not be carried away by the prevailing wind, specially on such an important national topic. Osman Chowdhury

The same old debate anew



The never ending debate

The debates over the Father of the Nation, Declarer of Independence issues have again started fermenting anew with the change brought by the BNP-alliance government in the school text books. It seems that we, as a nation, are destined to be in the vicious circle of these age-old debates forever. Our garrulous politicians and their coteries will never let the destitute people of this country get out of this circle. Why did we fight our Liberation War? Just to get a Father of the Nation? We have incessantly been whining, for the last 30-years, over the Pakistani atrocities on Bengalis, and still, even in the capital city of ours, we are burning people to death. How sadly are we treating our minorities both religious and ethnic! We had a notion that in independent Bangladesh, the word 'minority' will be no more in our vocabulary. After the last general elections we have cowed our religious minority to shrink into no citizen of this country. The word 'independence' does not work as opium on the hungry millions, as some of the politicians and their pet intellectuals think of. In spite of this reality, what an unquenchable thirst our politicians and intellectuals do have for the debate on Father of the Nation and Declarer of Independence.

Faruque Hasan Dhanmandi, Dhaka

USA and the rest of the world

There is growing hatred and rancour among the people all over the world against the biased and prejudicial, foreign policy of the USA. Power corrupts. It appears that the superiority complex, lack of wisdom and vision of some US leaders and violation of human rights by them is plunging the USA deep into darkness and ruination. I need a friend in deed' but it is an unprincipled and selfish country which seeks its own selfish ends and financial gains by hook or by crook. Are the poor and underdeveloped countries becoming scape-goats to the USA? OH Kabir Wari, Dhaka

Shocked and burnt every single day!

I started reading your esteemed daily some seven years ago. Since then I have been an avid reader of your paper. What I like most among the others are your honest and insightful story, a firm ideological and committed stand against any sorts of irregularities and wrong doings which go against the interest of our vast majority regardless of any party affiliation. Hats off to all your staffs. Recently, a friend of mine, an Australian national, wanted to know about Bangladesh. I passed on her your web address so that she could read the daily and get a chance to know the country. A few days later she got back to me with an expression of horror and utter surprise! We shared few stories like burning the muggers down, misappropriation and robbing of our national money by our elected political leaders. Not to blame her, I myself find the news items shocking, frustrating and disgusting. Nevertheless, I hit the daily every single day in the hope that I shall find something that would encourage me to breathe and live with dignity in the world! Alas! It's the same old story everyday! Md. Mashi Ul Azam Khan Sydney, Australia

Beating about the

Prof Haroon A. Khan, Ph.D. Henderson State University Arkadelphia, Arkansas, USA

How can President George Bush call the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat a terrorist and term South Korea, Iran and Iraq as 'an axis of evil'? If the Americans can struggle for their statehood and wage a war of independence from 1783 against the British colonial rule under George Washington how and why President George Bush define and classify freedom fighters Yasser bush I am sad to comment on a letter by Nasir Siddiqui under the heading 'Arabic speaking CSWS?' (Arabic speaking Commercial Sexual Workers). Firstly, this 'Caption' is not a civil one. Mr. Siddiqui's anger is venomous, which appears surprising and abnormal. So, I read the letter in question of January, 28 under the title 'Make Arabic Compulsory in

The Daily Star letter column: a place to express our views

If spring is the right season for the flowers to bloom then The Daily Star is the right place to express our views. It's a matter of great pride that this newspaper from a very conservative society have the audacity to publish very divergent views from its readers from around the world. This rare quality has lined up a galaxy of readers with different ideas and views. A number of very sensitive ideas on Islam, purdah and the interpretation of Islam as a religion has already been published and aroused deep interest among the thoughtful readers. Looking at the history of the French Revolution of 1789, when thoughts played a very vital role in the making of that great event, The Daily Star is playing that role now. In this difficult times when the very existence of the entire humanity is in question thoughts guided by pragmatism and reality is a must for our survival. This will help us not to be overwhelmed by confusion and orthodoxism. This will help us to overcome and shine. This will show us the right path and guide us to our ultimate destiny. Akbar Hussain Toronto, Canada

I have been reading The Daily Star for years. No doubt that this

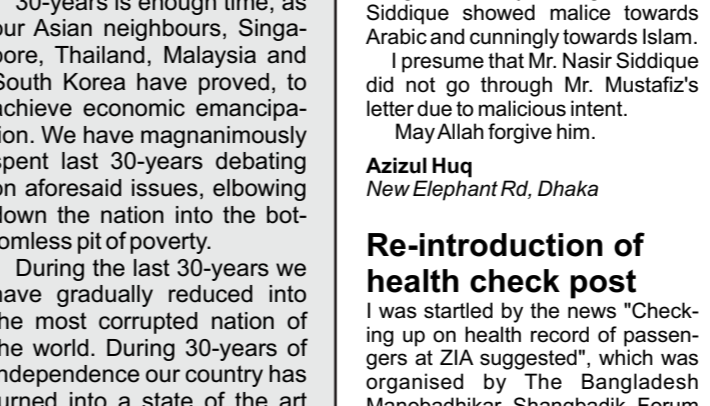
ants/miscreants or intra-party rivalry etc.

In the other report you said that one Awami League leader/supporter or activist was murdered allegedly by BNP supporters. I am wondering how you are so sure that in the case of the murdered AL leader, it was allegedly committed by BNP supporters and in BNP's case, by unknown miscreants and not allegedly by AL supporters? If you are not sure who was the attacker, it must be applicable in both cases but you have only singled out the BNP and not the Awami League. I am sure it goes against the very spirit of responsible and neutral reporting and earnestly hope your esteemed newspaper would avoid this in future. Secondly, it also gives us a very dangerous signal that, after being defeated heavily and resoundingly, how the AL goons dare to murder so many BNP supporters/leaders and activists after the election. Also the fact that BNP is very

Re-introduction of health check post

I was startled by the news 'Checking up on health record of passengers at ZIA suggested', which was organised by The Bangladesh Manobadhikar Shangbadik Forum (BMSF) on 26th January 2002. International health certificates for travelling passengers as well as the check posts had been done away with internationally long time ago. Re-introduction of the same in our country (well reputed for corruption right and left) means one more step of harassment for the passengers passing through the Land, Sea and Airports. Rather, we should wait and observe what the developed countries do in this regard. The suggested means may only apply to a country, which is 100 per cent free from AIDS/HIV. But there is no such country in the world today. Such an enormous global problem has to be tackled in a different manner. But if above is reintroduced in our country alone the health certificates will only be purchased and tailor made in the open market. This will pave the way for the unscrupulous employees of the Health Department and concerned outsiders to earn illegal money by extortion. Their suggestions remind me of a law enacted during the Ershad regime that an employee having more than two surviving children is barred from foreign posting (what one may earn once a while during his service life) as a measure to curb the population growth of the whole country. Bangladesh has many such black laws to suit the individuals of the time. We, as travelling public have our bitter experience of the various agencies functioning at ZIA, though since the last Caretaker Government a lot of improvement has taken place. So, please do not suggest adding one more agency to make our life further miserable. It is also worth noting, though unbelievable, that we do have a health check post at the border out post of Bhomra and some more may be at other locations also. They simply harass the travellers in the name of providing a health certificate or pushing an injection and extract money from the passengers, though no such requirement exists at the other end of the border. They are also helped by the local mastaans in extortion. May I draw the attention of The Health Minister to immediately dispense with all the health check posts from our border, which should not have been there in the very first place? A.B.M. Zakaria Dhaka

Enron case shows that oligarchy rules



The Enron fish

Aristotle, in his The Politics, remarked "A democracy exists whenever those who are free and not well-off, being in the majority, are in sovereign control of government, an oligarchy when the control lies with the rich and better-born, these being few." By this definition, the world's so-called greatest democracy, the United States of America, is an oligarchy. With both Republicans and Democrats beholden to the largess of the big corporations, political power now belongs to the rich and better-born and ordinary people have little access to the decision-making process. The latest scandals surrounding the giant Enron Corporation only confirm this. The New York Times reports that of the 248 members of Congress, no fewer than 212 were on the Enron's handout list. It is, therefore, not surprising that the same lawmakers, who are making noises about Enron's improprieties, were actually enjoying the corporation's favours and did nothing when the big bosses virtually swindled the shareholders and the public. It will be naive to expect that politicians can take corporate money without being bought. Both concentration of wealth (the richest one per cent of Americans have almost 50 per cent of the nation's wealth) and domination of a few huge corporations have made American democracy extremely vulnerable. Plato also warned about such concentration of wealth and power in few hands. It was the controlling influence given to wealth that Plato found particularly disturbing. He had the deepest distrust of what today be called the profit-motive and of the public influence of private wealth. He draws a picture of growing disregard of public welfare by political leaders met by growing bitterness leading to unrest and chaos. Given the power of big money, the Enron bosses may go away scot-free. But the lesson of this must be clear that private corporations are for private profit, especially for profit of small groups of people that controls the corporations and not for those who have any voice in the management. Pope Pius XI once said that totalitarian communism and unregulated capitalism are united in their "satanic optimism." The satanic optimism of the totalitarian communism stems from the belief that the world's problems can be resolved through total control of the forces of production, while the satanic opposition of the unregulated capitalism stems from the belief that everything will be fine if market forces are allowed to dictate. The former was guided by the lust for power, the latter by the lust for profit. When power or greed is the motivating factor, the result can be disastrous. Ask the Enron CEO. Mahmood Elahi Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

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