

Cheated workers return penniless from Brunei

Punish the culprits, revamp the sector immediately

OVER 104 people who had gone to Brunei as guest workers have returned home penniless, sick and with all their money gone. Many have suffered torture and abuse while working there and some were treated almost as bonded labourers. They were forced to return to Dhaka without their due wages but with wounds and injuries on their bodies as well. A group of recruiting agents had practically sold them down the river as slaves and are now planning a quick exit, something very common in Bangladesh.

Although the Government has fixed the rate of payment at Tk 50,000, they were forced to pay five times more and signed false documents stating otherwise. Given the desperation of their situation, the workers had signed whatever they were asked to but on top of that the tales narrated were so harrowing that one wonders if they were punished for some crime or not. But it seems that in Bangladesh, trying to make an honest living is something close to that.

The treatment they received at the hands of their employers in Brunei were brutal and violate every norm of civilized behaviour. Many have fallen seriously ill as a result of their experience there. It's possible we are not going to be shocked till someone dies but in any other land this would be a serious matter.

Sympathetic noises are being heard from the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agents (BAIRA) but the recruiting agents are already being evasive. One of them when contacted professed ignorance and this seems like a game plan to evade responsibility is already on. Bangladesh mission in Brunei also seems to be unaware the crisis and this is a sign that diplomatic responsibilities need to be redesigned to ensure that the welfare of the expatriate workers is a priority along with export encouraging.

The fact that the foreign employment is still what keeps much of Bangladesh moving is lost on our policy makers. Instead of just tweaking the remittance management system, one has to make sure that there is opportunity to make money working abroad.

The Brunei incident is a reminder of what things have become in the external employment sector. It needs to be rehailed and for that an enquiry commission must be set up at once and actions taken immediately too. And this must happen before it's too late as many things are in this country.

We condemn the entire series of events, commiserate with the victims and demand that the culprits be punished.

Sharon tries to queer the pitch for US peace plans

The superpower turns a blind eye to his tyranny

WITH Arafat's mobility still severely restricted and, his people having their backs to the wall after being thoroughly persecuted by the Israelis, can anyone expect the Palestinians to turn a friendly cheek to Sharon's men? In fact, the worst form of state terrorism has been enacted by Tel Aviv on the occupied territories in the recent months. Violence breeding violence, the Palestinians have carried out two suicide bombing attacks in a week's time, the latest being in Jerusalem on Tuesday killing 19 bus passengers. A Hamas spokesman has claimed responsibility for it. This has been the deadliest attack since the suicide bombing on March 27, which took a toll of 29 lives. Sharon has vowed to retaliate and the cycle of violence is set to continue.

Tel Aviv's strong-arm tactics have taken on monstrous proportions following talks of the United States' new strategic peace plans which seek to create a provisional state for the Palestinians that the latter themselves find far short of their demand. Nevertheless, Tel Aviv seems not only hell-bent upon queering the pitch for the US initiative but also set to alter the territorial configuration of the occupied territories in such a way as to leave next to nothing from the Palestinian homeland. This is ethnic cleansing of the Bosnian variety carried out by Milosevic who is now facing trial for war crimes at the Hague.

Sharon must be stopped from maliciously trying to evoke US sympathy by dubbing the Palestinians as terrorists. There can not be any fight between the stone age armory of the Palestinians and the high-tech war machine of the Israelis, the US has to accept that truth first before things can get better in the Middle East.

HIV/AIDS: House on fire



S H IMAM

THE high-level UN presence at the Regional Editors' Roundtable held late last month in New Delhi under the REACH Beyond Borders Programme made for a useful media -- UNDP interface on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. REACH, an acronym for regional empowerment and action to contain the cross border scourge is the UNDP's nodal agency to interact with the Asian governments and media on the basis of a shared perception of the development implications of HIV/AIDS.

As I took part in the roundtable -- courtesy Editor Mahfuz Anam -- I felt it was something of a throw-back to my participation at the 1981 Editors' Roundtable held at the UN headquarters in New York. This is in terms of the common UN denominator between the two experiences. But all the similarity ended there; for, in the latest instance it has been much more than a tour of the UN system and its activities which I had been given two decades ago along with other editors on that programme. At the Delhi roundtable the mission of the organisers was focused: "prominent editors from the region together with senior UNDP officials" were to explore ways "to enhance media's involvement, commitment and support to contain the HIV/AIDS

epidemic and to mitigate its impact on people" in the larger context of development.

HIV/AIDS is too serious a business to afford any verbal sleight to blame each other for its rapid spread during the last two decades. But isn't it a statement of fact that at the time of policy formulation and strategic decision-making media are seldom involved? They usually come as an afterthought when the concern for advocacy intensifies. One wishes very much that both global organisations and national

Programme commends itself for having brought together the print and electronic media specialists for an interactive session with such high UN officials as Mark Brown, UNDP Administrator; Hafiz Pasha, UN Assistant Secretary General; Brenda Gael McSweeney, UNDP Resident Representative and UN Resident Coordinator, UNDP, India; Ms. Kerstin Leitner, UNDP Resident Representative and UN Resident Coordinator, UNDP, China; David Miller, UNAIDS Country Programme Advisor, and Sonam Rana, UNDP's

priorities, too many wake-up calls to the HIV/AIDS menace have been ignored over time. To give a sense of the scale of the incipient danger facing us, there were 14,000 new HIV infections a day in 2001, more than 95% of which was in developing countries. Number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the same year totalled 40 million, with 37.2 million adults, of which 17.6 million were women and 2.7 million children up to 15 years of age. In 2001 alone five million were afflicted anew.

reverse economic growth. UN studies indicate that after two decades many economies could be 20-40 per cent smaller than they would have been without HIV/AIDS.

The stigma and discrimination suffered by the victims Brown, the UN administrator, termed HIV/AIDS as the 'leprosy of the 21st century' and the social equivalent of 'slave trade in South Asia' will be attacked as a human rights -and gender-based issue. Rights to live and work and the right to confidentiality are giving rise to constitutional cases in

tionalism and stigmatization. Besides, it makes a taboo of any discussion on the subject, some people even discerning a certain 'titillation' in the suggestion of it. That's why, apart from the emphasis on safe sex, the fact that HIV spreads through other means like transfusions of unscrubbed blood, contaminated needles, most frequently for injecting drugs into users and from a woman to her child during pregnancy or breast feeding, needs to be driven home to the public at large.

Antiretroviral drugs are crucial to the treatment of the HIV-infected people. The time between contracting HIV and development of the serious AIDS illness is around eight years. But many succumb to serious opportunistic infections like tuberculosis or pneumonia caused by the weakening of the immune system. Antiretroviral drug therapy can slow the progression of HIV infection, but this involves highly expensive medications costing around US\$ 10,000-15,000 per annum per patient. Well beyond the reach of most people in the developing world.

Brazil has shown a way out of the mire by openly defying patents and manufacturing its own generic versions of antiretroviral drugs for a fraction of the cost in the west. India's Sipla is coming under WTO rules on intellectual property rights as she has signed up to them. China may also be feeling inhibited by the WTO regulations in its pursuit of research in the field. It is time the World Trade Organisation considered bending its rules to allow developing countries to produce antiretroviral medicines based on western formulary.

(Next installment on regional perspective and Bangladesh)

SH Imam is Associate Editor of The Daily Star.

JUST ANOTHER VIEW

Brazil has shown a way out of the mire by openly defying patents and manufacturing its own generic versions of antiretroviral drugs for a fraction of the cost in the west. India's Sipla is coming under WTO rules on intellectual property rights as she has signed up to them. China may also be feeling inhibited by the WTO regulations in its pursuit of research in the field. It is time the World Trade Organisation considered bending its rules to allow developing countries to produce antiretroviral medicines based on western formulary.

governments were more sensitive to the need for taking the media onboard as stake-holders at the planning stages. They could then have a feel of ownership of the policies thus produced and be enthused to play their due part in taking the implementation process forward.

The beneficiaries have been such an apple of the eye to the policy makers, mostly for reasons of publicity that important stakeholders who can play a pivotal role in the success of a project feel left out in the cold.

This had to be said because of the criticism often heard of the media's none-too-adequate response to the challenge of HIV/AIDS. In this context, the REACH Beyond Borders

REACH Beyond Borders Regional Programme Coordinator based in New Delhi.

The list of journalist representatives included: N. Ram, Editor, Frontline, India; Lakshman Gunasekhar, Editor, Sunday Observer, Sri Lanka; Wang Nan, Editor-in-Chief, International Affairs, People's Daily, China; Kunda Dixit, Editor, Nepali Times, Nepal; Saneeva Husain, Director, Panos South Asia, Nepal; Kinley Dorji, Editor in Chief, Kuensel, Bhutan; Peter Gill, Executive Producer, BBC World Service Trust, India; Sathya Saran, Editor, Femina, India; Representatives from Positive Networks.

Swept under the carpet as a stigma, buried in the numbers game that obscures its human side and caught in the welter of competing

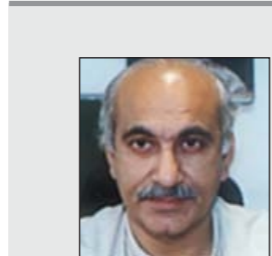
The latest approach to the problem adds on to the merely epidemiological and health related concerns with it in the past. This is happening on four levels: first, HIV/AIDS has transformed into one of the most serious development challenges facing the globe today. Its impact on the entire spectrum of human development has been devastating. Poverty is on the increase both as the cause and consequence of HIV/AIDS; human development achievements have been put on the reverse gear; gender inequalities have worsened; governments' abilities to maintain essential services are eroding; millions of people in the productive age groups are dying; children are being orphaned; and labour productivity and supplies are on a tailspin threatening to

India as expressions of public-interest litigation. The gender angle seems based on the fact that since monogamous wives have fallen prey to HIV infections, women ought to have a decision-making role in matters of sex and reproductive health. They have been the worst sufferers along with their children who remain vulnerable to contracting HIV from their afflicted lactating mothers.

Even in Ethiopia with an orthodox catholic church where the word 'sex' may not have crossed the lips of many so far, there is open talk about what to do with HIV. Even BBC radio took a long time to use the word condom. So, we need not have any complex about that ourselves.

An entirely sexist view of HIV stereo-typically encourages sensa-

A Turkey diary



M.J. AKBAR

WAS Noah a Turk? The question has to be asked. When God's chosen creation, Man, succumbed to Original Sin, Paradise was lost. When Man indulged in not so original sin he was punished by the great flood. When the Holy Lord decided to give mankind, and womankind, a second chance He sent them to Turkey. Noah may have set sail from somewhere near Sodom and Gomorrah (probably near Beirut if you ask me) but his landfall was on the top of Mount Ararat. That is where God showed him a dove and that is where the animals came out two by two (unless of course they had become two by three inside the ark). Mount Ararat is in Turkey. By any logic this makes Noah a naturalised Turkish citizen. The world may have been born in Paradise but it was reborn in Turkey. The Turks are good with rebirth. They can pick up a dying empire and breathe a second life that lasts a thousand years. That is how they served Islam in the second millennium.

You may raise an eyebrow or even two over Noah's citizenship but there can be no doubt whatsoever about the man who infused a new dynamism into Christianity. Paul was only a saint, not a Prophet but he possibly did as much for the new faith as Noah did for the old one. Paul has been made synonymous with Antioch but he was not a Syrian. Since he wrote in Greek the Greeks have tended to co-opt him into their lineage. But Paul was Turk. He came from Adana in southern Turkey (Austrian Airlines now has a direct flight from Vienna to Adana). Most of Paul's missionary work was done in western Anatolia and Konya, and those he converted created the base, the foundations at the people's level, for the greatest Christian empire in history, the Byzantine Empire which started with Constantine, founder of Constantinople and lasted till the Ottomans conquered the greatest city of the past thousand years in 1453. Those who have read Paul's letter to the Galatians may know this. Or not.

A Turk was responsible for both the first and the second world war. The first world war took place around 1250 BC when Paris, son of Priam, king of Troy (or Troye) abducted a Greek princess who proved to be worth a thousand ships, ten years of war, two generations of warriors and an epic poem. Paris was a Turk. Helen of Troy was really Helen of Greece. At least the Turk had an excellent reason for starting a world war. The love of a woman is always worth a war. It was a love war not a hate war.

delivered a mortifying if not a mortal blow to the Byzantines by defeating the Christians at Manzikert. The Byzantines who had till then snuffed at western Europe as a barbaric illiteracy (which was true, as any Asterix comics book will prove) now appealed to the Pope in Rome for help against Muslim infidels who were battering at the doors of the eastern Church and a bastion of Christendom. It took Rome a couple of decades to respond but it was a slow age one assumes. However when the response came it was a

The difference between Europe and Asia is both in the air and visible from it. As the plane lifts from Vienna airport and tops the low hills, you see modern villages ensconced in delicious green and patches of dark forest. The fields are divided by clear, straight lines, neat and ordered and final. But as the view shifts into European Turkey these lines that demarcate ownership change. They become symmetrical, just into patchwork formations or bend into curves the evidence of family squabbles over property.

cafes snuggling beside cigars and cigarettes. Of old men ready to shine shoes in the park outside the wondrous Sultanahmed mosque, ready to work at your feet without losing a sublime dignity on their grizzled faces and a fierce equality in their eyes. It is a city of God and man, of faith and commerce, of the muezzin reciting the azaan through the minarets that steeply up into the sky like sentinels of Allah, or the robed and hatted Sheikh delivering the sermon before Friday prayers and the sonorous and mellifluous

BYLINE

The knights of the fourth Crusade stopped at Venice en route to Jerusalem in 1202 but they were persuaded by the crafty merchants of Venice to change their mind and their direction. They were asked whether they wanted Jerusalem or booty, and there are no prizes for giving the correct answer. And so the fourth Crusade, instead of heading towards post-Saladin Palestine ended up in the Christian capital of Constantinople where it placed a prostitute on the throne of Justinian and ravaged the economy for half a century. Europe destroyed Constantinople. Asia revived it, but in the name of another faith.

The relationship between Turkey and Greece, the India and Pakistan of history before India and Pakistan were born, has followed a sort of Iliad pattern since the wars described by the blind poet Homer. More or less each time the Greeks got the poetry and the Turks got the woman. Given a choice which would you prefer? Poetry or love? As victories go, poetry is pyrrhic while love is, I suppose, priapic. Both words are of Greek origin, deriving from Pyrrhus and Priapus, but an English dictionary would do for further details. Incidentally while Homer went on a bit about what everyone else and his uncle had to say about that war of heroes, we do not know too much about Helen's views on the subject. Maybe as a beautiful woman who had abandoned a boring and possibly foul-mouthed hero-warrior-husband for a charming and invigorated lover, she may have wondered what all the fuss was about. You only lead one life.

The second world war was also the handiwork of Turks. The eleventh century saw the establishment of the first great Turkish-Islamic empire, that of the Seljuks, who picked up, piece by piece, the remains of the extraordinary Arab-Persian sultanate that had ruled the Islamic world since the inception of Islam. It was the Seljuks who nurtured the great Omar Khayyam, scientist and humanist extraordinary and poet incidental. By 1055 Baghdad had bowed to these central Asian Turks. In 1071 the Seljuks

torrent. The Byzantines had been expecting perhaps detachments of mercenaries to help out on the impregnable walls of Constantinople, or indeed take the battle into the enemy camps in Syria and Palestine. No one expected or even wanted great hordes of Crusaders, inspired by the zeal of liberating the Holy City of Jerusalem but pillaging every unholy city along the way as well. The Byzantines were horrified by the Crusaders and urged them off as quickly as they could. Besides there was no knowing what the great unwashed would do to the balance of power in the region. We all now know what they did. But for the Seljuk victory at Manzikert there might never have been the seven great Crusades that dominate the memory of the everlasting conflict between Islam and Christianity.

Well, I suppose great is a flexible word. The knights of the fourth Crusade stopped at Venice en route to Jerusalem in 1202 but they were persuaded by the crafty merchants of Venice to change their mind and their direction. They were asked whether they wanted Jerusalem or booty, and there are no prizes for giving the correct answer. And so the fourth Crusade, instead of heading towards post-Saladin Palestine ended up in the Christian capital of Constantinople where it placed a prostitute on the throne of Justinian and ravaged the economy for half a century. Europe destroyed Constantinople. Asia revived it, but in the name of another faith.

Industrialised Europe has sorted out the problems of family inheritance by dispersing the family and shifting the focus of prosperity from land to manufacture.

Europe also, very clearly and emphatically, has a strict visa policy for flies. You don't see flies in Vienna, no matter how many tortes might flood a cakeshop. But come Istanbul and the flies are waiting for you below the central chandelier of the hotel dining room. All right, chandelier is too grand a word for the cluster of bulbs at one spot but I was trying to give these very friendly people in our hotel a plug. Back to our theme. What happens to flies in the airspace between Europe and Asia? Do the flies live in Asia out of preference, as a statement of free choice or a homage to our ancient civilisation and culture? It can't be the weather. The Bosphorus freezes over as much as the Danube. It can't be some border checkpoint in the sky that tells flies that they do not have a valid Shengen visa. Then what?

However, do not please get the impression that Istanbul is some fly-sodden village out of an Indian art movie made with government funds to be seen by a special select few of Mumbai's cine intellectuals and columnists. Istanbul is, as has often and rightly been said, the city of the world's desire. Of bazaars that can count thousands of years on their registers and people who merge confidence with fun. Of kebabs and corn on cartwheels and hookahs in

Imam leading the prayers, ayaats of the Holy Quran wafting through the halls of mosques in marble, stained glass and blue tiles. Faith lives easily with millions of citizens and tourists who sing and dance through the evenings and nights at crowded restaurants to the music of the violin and a local instrument that seems a combination of the Indian sarod, the Spanish guitar and the Greek lyre. The women, sparkling and beautiful, dance far more readily and far more beautifully than the men who are content to know their place (clearly second) and applaud.

Istanbul is a marriage between European style and the Asian smile. At what point can a kingdom begin to call itself an empire? The armies of Islam, as Istanbul was also called by the Sultans until the word was eased out from usage during the secular dispensation of Kemal Ataturk, reached the gates of Vienna and in 1683 surrounded the city before being defeated by a coalition of the Holy Roman Empire, the Pope, Venice and Poland. That was yet another hinge battle on which the fate of continents and religions swung. Kara Mustapha Pasha, the defeated Ottoman commander, was beheaded in Belgrade for the sin of defeat. Much before that Ottoman armies under Selim the Resolute had swept through the Balkans and overwhelmed the Mamelukes in Egypt, linking the edge of Austria with the borders of Morocco. They were masters of the Muslim world and

servants of Mecca and Medina, the holy cities. Christian Europe saved itself at the gates of Vienna.

The flight from Vienna to Istanbul is two and a half hours, or roughly the distance between Mumbai and Calcutta or Delhi and the Deccan. You have to conquer nations in the west to become an empire. In India all you have to do is to conquer yourself to be an emperor.

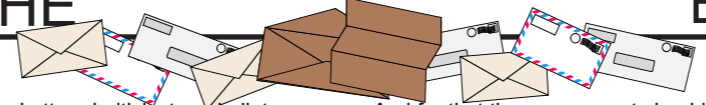
When was the last time you paid a million lire to take a leak? That is what it cost me to use the facilities at the entrance of the great cathedral of Aya Sofia, converted into a mosque by the conqueror of Constantinople, Mehmet Fatih, in 1453, and converted into a museum in 1935 by Ataturk. (When his troops began to destroy the cathedral after their victory Mehmet stopped them with a command. Take your booty, he told the soldiers, but leave the buildings to me. The mosque he created was the only one with an image preserved, a wonderful mosaic of Jesus and Mary.) The zeros have gone haywire in the Turkish economy. A cup of tea (chay) at a roadside stall on the Bosphorus costs a million lire. The sea of Marmara glistens to your right, ships sway through the straits in front of you, and the dying sun has set every building on fire on the island-hills to the south. A million lire for tea with this view? Actually yes, when you find out that a US dollar fetches you a million and a half lire. Why don't the Turks drop dozens of zeroes from their currency notes and make a dollar equivalent to one and a half lire?

Heaven knows. The confusion can be confusing. As a tourist I had to get gyped once. While sipping my tea I found a young man with a weighing machine thrusting the damn thing at me. Which tourist can resist finding out how much weight he has put on? Then this man asked for two hundred and fifty thousand lire for this bit of self-discovery. I was damned if I was going to pay that. If he had asked for two rupees I might have given it. I walked away. The young lout caught up with where it was more lonely and demanded the money again. I was obstinate. He shoved me, shouted "PHAAAK OPPPPHHH" and glared. I phaaaked opppphhh quickly.

A bit of advice to future tourists. Pay the damn twenty five cents and get on with life.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



"PM must rid her party of all criminals"

Congratulation for writing such a bold commentary (June 11). You have rightly pointed out that BNP has so far been failed to control the criminal elements within the party. You have mentioned particularly about Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal (JCD), but in my opinion almost in every department criminal elements have been penetrated including the PM's office.

We know PM is still enjoying public support and trust but before it is too late and trust is shattered she must do something to save the nation from these criminal elements. **Md Shoeb**
BB Avenue, Dhaka
Letters are important

The letters published in the local dailies are no less important than the reports and other write-ups. In this column we may give concrete suggestions to the policy makers, we can criticise the lawmakers of the country in a positive manner. It appears from the letter of one Mr. Kamal written from NY that, he has criticised the BNP budget for proposing tax on the NGOs. But does he know that the so-called NGOs are doing all kinds of profitable business under the shade of NGO umbrella depriving the business community of our country?

Hence, taxing the NGOs is the prime need of the hour. I must congratulate the Finance Minister Saifur Rahman for his timely action and for the nice budget for 2002-2003. **SRH**

Gulshan, Dhaka

Want an explanation

In your Sports Page the report 'Bangladesh United' (June 17) says Justice Shahabuddin is the President of the country.

The AFP correspondent at Dhaka and your sub-editor should explain. **Daiyaan Murshed**
Ispahani Colony, Dhaka

Ensure natural death

We are shocked at BUET student Sony's death. For the last couple of days we have been talking about this unnatural and untimely death. Sony was the only daughter of a middle-class family. Her parents made the utmost effort for a better upbringing of the child and spent their hard-earned money for her education. But their dreams were

shattered with just one bullet. The nation has witnessed similar kind of incidents before. And we understand that we are helpless. Isn't there anything we can do that may ensure our children a 'natural death'? **Rawshan Jahan**
Dhaka

Goodbye to computers?

In this year's budget, 7.5 per cent customs duty on the import of computer hardware, software and other accessories has been imposed. And 3 per cent income tax regarding this sector has been withdrawn. We live in an era of information and communication technology. We can earn billions of dollars from country's IT sector if we have adequate and proficient IT specialists.

And for that the government should have a policy. Instead of help flourish this sector the government impose additional duty on computers. This certainly have a negative impact on the IT sector. If this decision is not reviewed Bangladesh making a place in the worldwide IT arena would always remain a dream. **Rafiq Bin Hai**
Mymensingh

Customs duty on paper

The education sector got the highest allocation in the budget for fiscal 2002-03. But at the same time the imposed customs duty on writing and printing paper (not exceeding 150 GSM) has gone up to B2.5 per cent from 25 per cent. What a contradiction!

A Salam bin Mannan Meherpur

Speaker loses to Deputy

Frankly I am amazed at the antics of the Speaker and his Deputy. Imagine what fighting goes on which never sees the light of day? So the Deputy Speaker was upset about his lack of coverage on TV? Well I think *The Daily Star* owes it to us to do some muckraking and tell us more about the man who is the Deputy Speaker. From what I've read he sounds typical of his party. But I do want to know more about the issues that make our Deputy Speaker tick.

I am also curious as to which one, the Speaker or the Deputy is the Hawa Bhaban nominee. **Biggles, Dhaka**
Want a fully demo-

cratic Bangladesh!

What is democracy? It is where people have to right to choose. Can we call Bangladesh a fully democratic nation? number Where is the promise by BNP made before election that they want to establish full democracy in Bangladesh!

Banning Matir Monia (Which is internationally acclaimed by now) and trying to ban a number of satellite channels shows which way the government is leading. They have raised religious issues and issues concerning healthy cultural developments of our youths as for defending their arguments. As far as Islam is concerned, it has given people the right to choose at their own will. Islam has never said the government should control the mind of the citizens of a country and use religion

for political purpose. The world is developing faster than it ever did before. The only way Bangladesh can keep up with the pace is when the people of Bangladesh have complete intellectual freedom. The only way to bring this about is when the Bangladeshis have complete right to choose their way of life and choose what they want to read or see in the television.

I want to see a beautiful Bangladesh where people has complete freedom in their lifestyles, only then full democracy will be established and the country can move towards economic emancipation. **Kamal Chowdhury, New York, USA**