

Great Army

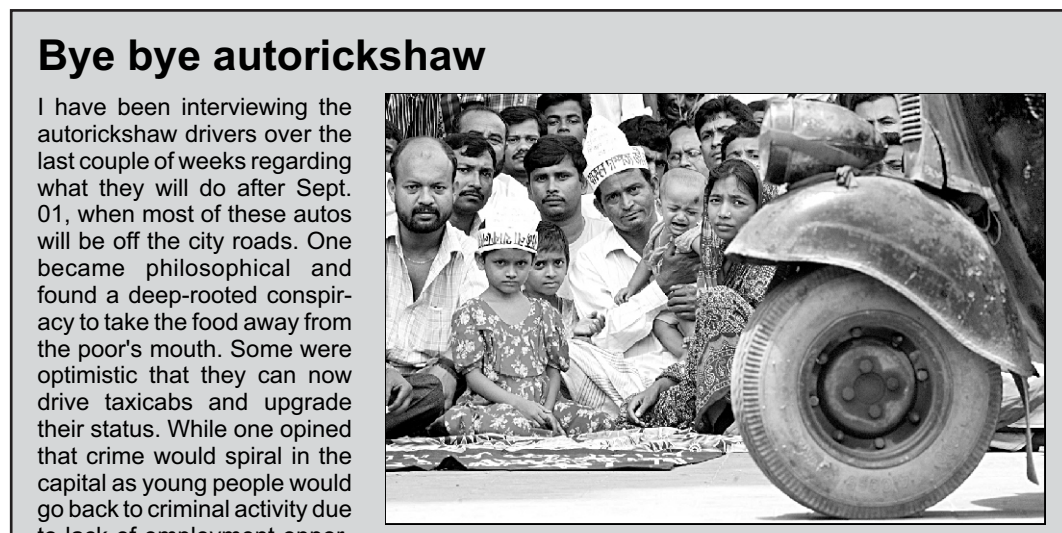
Finally someone from the military has replied with his comments on the ongoing debate and for that I am grateful. I would like to pose some questions and comments for him. 1. The issue of the army asking the identity of civilians entering the cantonment was never disputed. This officer is trying to skew the argument to one of ungrateful civilians demanding access all over the cantonment. That was never the cause of this debate. The issue was twofold. First why are civilian cars not permitted to enter the cantonment

I welcome your arguments. Shabyashachi Dhaka For the last couple of days I am really enjoying the debate on our armed forces. Actually it's a great opportunity to decrease the distance between our civil society and armed forces. And both sides should be caring and neutral before deciding this issue. At first I am going to refer to the letter from 'AMilitary Person' posted on 28 Aug. Here somehow this gentleman tried to tell us that tax

Now about Dhaka Cantonment. We all know that cantonment is a restricted area. That's why you should maintain little bit different restriction standard than that of civil establishment. Well, it's not the problem. The problem is that residing in the middle of the city you are creating obstacle to the civil people. And obviously civil people are the heart of the country as well as the main taxpayers. And the civilians are not trying to acquire your properties, they are not trying to enter your office establishment. The only thing they want to use is the road of the cantonment area. The main thing that motivated me joining the Air Force is the honest and challenging life of the armed forces. In Bangladesh you know, almost 90 per cent of the govt officials are somehow involved in corruption. But think about the army guys who are posted in CHT or other rural areas like Rangpur without their parents, family and friends. Sometimes they don't even get weekly holidays due to their service requirement. So as a human being they must get some additi-onal benefit for their mental satisfaction. Now my request is both the civil

places to play for its young. The consequence of this mentality is a Wild West invasion of residential areas like Dhanmondi. Once a serene and scenic residential area, it has been reduced to ruin by the invasion of English medium schools and their counterparts in "higher education", i.e., "universities" "colleges" and "institutes" that peddle entry into law schools in England and IT firms abroad. To be sure, for every "educational" enterprise out to make a fast buck there is an equally money-hungry homeowner willing barter away the welfare of neighbours. The rents offered by schools and colleges exceed the going market rate three to four-fold. The temptation is understandable. Yet, two troubling questions arise: How does one explain the descent of education and responsibility to neighbours to such lows? What kind of education do parents think they are buying for their children, anyway? After all, the bottom line is that when schools and colleges short-circuit the law, their most significant message to students is: "It's OK to violate laws and your neighbours". I can't read Latin or Greek. I doubt that such a message figures on the logos of the colleges to which entry is so enthusiastically sought. Like, say for example, Oxford, Cambridge, MIT, or Harvard. Sultana Alam, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

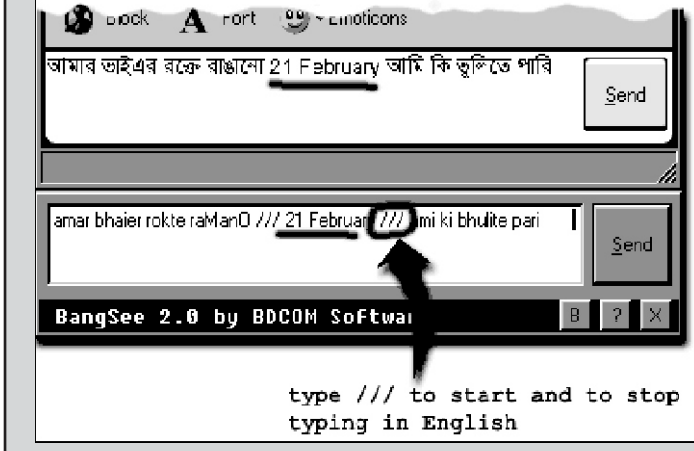
Bye bye autorickshaw I have been interviewing the autorickshaw drivers over the last couple of weeks regarding what they will do after Sept. 01, when most of these autos will be off the city roads. One became philosophical and found a deep-rooted conspiracy to take the food away from the poor's mouth. Some were optimistic that they can now drive taxicabs and upgrade their status. While one opined that crime would spiral in the capital as young people would go back to criminal activity due to lack of employment opportunity. For most commuters, it will be a nightmare as taxicabs simply refuse to go to different areas of the city and especially if they are short-distance. Their fare is already high and simply there isn't adequate number of taxicabs in the city. There are routes in the city like Mirpur to Gulshan which are without bus service. The conditions of the city buses are



Right direction, but a right decision?

very poor and most of them except for the Uttara-Motijheel route are non-A.C. and "non-gatelock". Auto-rickshaws must go no argument against that, but the alternatives to autos need to be in place before going for such drastic change. A three-phase solution taking 5,000 autos off at each stage and putting the replacement buses, CNG-run autos and taxicabs in places would have been a better solution. I would request the decision makers to give up their government cars and try to go to their offices through public transportation on Sept. 01. Only then they would get the real picture. Parvez Murshed Mirpur, Dhaka

"English medium students in trouble"



Much has been written recently about English Medium schools. I do not wish to enter the debate about the strengths, virtues or righteousness of being literate in one's mother tongue. Certainly, being proficient in Bangla is important to a buoyant sense of oneself (if Bangladesh) but, more important, of entry into the world of the creative genius and vision of Bengali thinkers, poets, authors, and composers. However, it is also true that simple mastery over Bangla is not enough. Most of the people involved in giving and taking bribes, exacting "tolls" and lifting the reputation of Bangladesh to the giddy heights of being Numero Uno in the world for corruption can never be accused of having turned their backs on Bangla or negotiating deals in non-Bangla. What I do want to address is the equation made by several writers between English medium education and SUCCESS...GETTING AHEAD. This has led to a massive degradation of education into a raw, money-hungry industry that brooks no obstacles. Such "obstacles" include permits required to run schools and designed to ensure child safety, and a host of zoning laws designed to protect residential areas from crowding and traffic congestion: in evading such laws, the new school industry effectively denies: The rights of people in residential areas to live in peace and quiet in the privacy of their homes. The rights of such people to breathe clean air, and to be from deafening noise pollution. The right of such people to healthy surroundings free the stench of urine and excreta deposited along boundary walls, and piles of garbage heaped up on spaces. The rights of women to use roads in their neighbourhoods without fear of lewd remarks and unwanted ogling. The rights of children to play outdoors. The rights of a community to cohere, provide safety, security and

There has been a lot of debate going on regarding English medium students. As a product of an English medium school, I think I need to address these views. Why is it that people in Dhaka are so quick to judge students from English medium schools as people who "live in the fast lane"? I do not think that children's behaviour outside of school has anything to do with whether the medium of instruction in school is English or Bengali. How they behave outside of school is a reflection of the values that they are brought up with at home. I do not think that my parents would ever let me get away with dressing in a manner that is inappropriate or talking to people in a manner that is not acceptable. I was taught that in order to gain respect from people in other lands I must first respect my own identity and that my own identity included my mother tongue, Bengali. So, please, before attacking English Medium schools for encouraging immoral behaviour, please look at where this immoral behaviour arises from. Mehnaz Mustafa, Canada

It is interesting to follow the current debate regarding English medium schools. I do agree with the readers who expressed concern at the standard of Bangla among English medium students. May be the authority of these school should take note of this. But the fact of matter is that when it comes to English we perform very poorly. Just look at our neighbours-- India, Sri Lanka, and even Pakistan are so ahead of us. We have to be realistic that the English is the language of the time and we can not ignore it. We must know English well and be able to speak fluently in order to be competitive. Let's learn Bangla and English at the same time. Tariq Abd'allah, USA

What is the BDR Doing on the border? Thanks to Asif for his critical analysis on the subject that deserve intricate attention, though most of us are not aware of it. I, being an ex-member of Bangladesh Rifles, happy to see his concern on this issue. I served long 37 years in the BDR, during most of those days I remained away from my family and was posted on the border protecting our country. It agonises me if some one questions about the role and performance of BDR on the border. "Protection of borders, persons and property in border areas" is the prime role of Bangladesh Rifles. History stands as the testimony of what BDR Jawans did in our War of Liberation, in 1984 forcing India to

money and gaining power. The student fronts backed by the political parties are not concerned about the need of congenial atmosphere in the educational institutions. They are busy capturing hall and collecting toll. If this continues, it will paralyse the educational as well as national progress. The general students should unite and raise their voice against this violent politics. There is no need of such politics. There is no way to establish proper atmosphere in our educational institutions without imposing a ban on student and teacher politics. Kamal Kishore Das Rampura, Dhaka

Name sign inside the office and towel in the chair It is a practice and common feature in almost all the government, semi-government, autonomous and other governmental organisations in Bangladesh that a towel is placed on the chair of an executive (small-medium to the highest) which is not only ugly looking but an unique practice. Same applies to the wooden sign board with curved design behind the executive (including the Ministers) showing the name of the incumbent and his predecessors with job start and end date. This list even goes up to the birth of the organisation. This is also another weird tradition that Bangladesh bureaucracy loves to rare with honour. Mohammed Ashraf Ali Dhaka

Teacher-student politics under fire I have gone through the article of Professor Abdul Mannan and I can not accept his view regarding the present trend in student politics. He pointed that the participation of our students in the Liberation War is a glorious episode of student politics. But my point is that their participation in the Liberation War was motivated from a different aspect -- as conscious citizens, not as cadres of some political party. They played one of the most important roles in the Liberation War because it was the need of time. But the mode of present student politics' can no way be considered as the way to establish the students' rights as well as people's rights. Because it has become a violent politics of earning

Scholastica I am pleased to see that Scholastica has gotten a syndicated loan of Tk. 16.5 cores. So how much of that are they going to spend in building a parking lot for the thousands of cars that totally block the highway everyday? Kim Dhaka

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Zakaat system This is in response to Mr. Golam Ashraf's letter "zakaat system"(August 27). I would like to thank Mr. Ashraf for his unique observations on the implications of zakaat, one of the five pillars of Islam. Islam has given detailed regulations for our economic life, which is balanced and fair. Muslims are to recognise that wealth, earnings and

With due respect, none of the G8 countries have zakaat system. What they have is a good planning, better taxation and utilisation system and less corruption. I personally do not think any amount of money would make any difference in a country like Bangladesh where system loss is possibly one of the worst in the world. I am currently living in Canada and paying close to 35% of my gross earnings as income taxes and 15% as sales taxes to federal and provincial government. The government is supposed to use all the tax money it receives in a way so that it can provide everybody in the country. What we really need in Bangladesh is a good taxation and utilisation system and a little less corruption in every level of our society, which would undoubtedly free up a lot of resources for the less fortunate. Shuja Shabbeedur Canada

Weapons of mass destruction, whose rights? Everyone is worried about the potential scenario of Saddam using weapons of mass destruction. Let's examine the track record of the US. It has used atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Then it also used chemical weapons in Vietnam and N. Korea. It then dropped weapons like daisy cutter bombs and low grade Uranium based weapons over Iraq, Yugoslavia and elsewhere. Weapons that can be categorised in almost in the same league as weapons of mass destruction. The US is also continuously helping to arm its allies like Israel, with weapons of mass destruction, who continue to terrorise Palestinian children, and occupy lands (in violation of UN resolutions). Is the right to possess and use weapons of mass destruction, solely the prerogative of the Anglo Saxon civilisation? Yamin Zakaria UK, London

through the Staff Road (Heroes Live Forever gate)? All civilian cars are allowed entry through the Banani gate, then why not this one? No one has given an argument against this. No one is disputing that some sites should be secure. All people are asking is that light civilian vehicles be allowed to enter and exit from the three main gates, the Staff Road, the Banani Gate and the Jahangir Gate. That is all. 2.a. Please, when you find the time between defending the country and turning away civilian cars, browse the Internet. There are many sites including www.janes.com that give information on our military purchases and equipment. Funny enough the military's own sites have nothing of interest. Anyway with a bit of persistence you will find that Tejgaon Airport hosts the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 31<sup>st</sup> Helicopter squadrons. The C-130 and the Cessna's can be spotted at any time if you work anywhere near the IDB Bhaban. In case you're curious, the jets flying over residential areas can be spotted anywhere from Baridhara, Gulshan and Banani. b. If you had read some of the letters properly, what the writers were suggesting was to convert the airport into a park but keeping the airfield for our annual parades. Although one writer did point out that the international norm is to hold such parades in public avenues and not destroy valuable tarmac with tank treads, but that's a moot point. Regarding the MIG-21's flying overhead, as the letter writer clearly pointed out, the plane that crashed was an A-5 which is derived from the Q-5 which in turn was derived from the MIG-19. But I think you are correct, the planes flying over Gulshan and Banani, taking off from, Bashar Airbase are probably of the 21<sup>st</sup> Sq.'s FT-6's another vintage aircraft. I am surprised that the writer claims that no trainer flights take off from Bashar AB, as the FT-6 is a trainer jet. Would someone refresh my memory about that crash last year? No one is disparaging the professionalism of BAF pilots but I think most would agree that the probability of crashes are the highest during landing and take off. Think about that. On a final note, if having army or navy bosses did make public corporations honest, not only would DMCH or the Jails be such messes but we frigate and MIG scams wouldn't have happened either.

paying first class citizenship of the country is not enough criteria to enter into the cantonment area. Well, here you should consider one thing, one of the main reasons behind the traffic jam of Dhaka city is the current position of Dhaka Cantonment and Dhaka University Campus as both of them are in the middle of the city. All sorts of light-weight transports are permitted to enter into DU area and only for this reason normally people of that area don't face that much problem regarding traffic jam.

The most funny thing of Dhaka cantonment is here any citizen using public transport (like BRTC bus, Emma, Maxi, Tempo) don't have to face any obstacles from the MPs at the Jahangir Gate but people who come by private car, baby-taxi are often obstructed and turned away. Now about defence budget. This time I fully oppose the people who are in favour of curtailing defence budget. I am an ex-cadet college student and was in 42 GD(P) as a Flight Cadet for about six months.

society and armed forces should be respectful, caring and friendly towards each other. We should realise that as a developing nation we must work together and utilise every single amount of our properties properly to become a self-dependant nation, which will definitely glorify the image of our country in the outside world. Shaheen Reza North South University, Dhaka The monorail I believe that the monorail can be a

Biman: The saga continues

They are at it again! Foreign currencies valued at crores recovered from a Biman flight yet again! Not only they are failing to serve their esteemed customers with any useful purpose, they are smuggling out our hard earned foreign currencies unabated. I thought enough had been written about Biman to wake up the concerned authorities. But we were definitely proved wrong. It's amazing to witness how an organisation with international exposure can promote corruption so openly. No wonder that one has to grease some one's palms to get employment in Biman. Tk.15 lakhs were going rate for recruitment as cadet pilot! And probably it will cost more to get employed as aeroplane cleaners! Some of the cleaners have been caught with millions trying to deposit in non-descript rural branches of banks. And if you have to buy your own employment why bother about serving others! We are being robbed of our hard-earned foreign currencies. We are unable to buy services from Biman even after paying their salaries! Someone up the top should be honest enough to own up the responsibility and sort out the mess. Otherwise shut it down. We will at least save some foreign currency. Abeer Chowdhury, Jalan Tantaram, Ang Mo Kio, Singapore

My husband and I were travelling to North America from Dhaka by a Thai Airways flight on 19<sup>th</sup> of this month. As we were approaching the final waiting lounge after completing all our immigration, customs and security formalities, one gentleman came to us and told that we were not allowed to take our only hand luggage because he thought it was over-size. We tried to make him understand that the bag was bought according to the size provided by the airlines for a cabin bag and we already had couple of journeys across Europe and North America with that bag. The gentleman (his name was Mr. Mizan, as we came to know later) was very stubborn and did not want to listen to any argument. We told him that we were taking a longer route and it would take us about 36 hours to reach our destination with eight hours waiting in Bangkok and nearly six hours in London, and the cabin bag was containing our personal belongings and medicines that we would need on our way. He along with two of his colleagues told us that they would book it up to Bangkok and we would get our bag there. My husband was little sceptical and asked them how would we get the bag while we would be in the transit lounge. They told us that it happened almost in every flight and Thai Airlines people would do it for us once we ask them for assistance. In Bangkok, the Airlines people informed us that it did not work that way and collecting the bag meant our passing through the immigration for which we would need a visa, and checking-in once again mean-

ing paying again for the travel tax. Imagine! However, the Thai Airlines people at Bangkok airport were very kind and, on our request, they located the bag and booked it through to our destination. The attitude of those people at ZIA (I am not sure whether they were airlines people or were from civil aviation department), was not only uncooperative but an interruption just before boarding and was also deliberately providing wrong information to the passengers. The gentlemen, especially Mr. Mizan, were rather rude.



Will Biman ever take off?