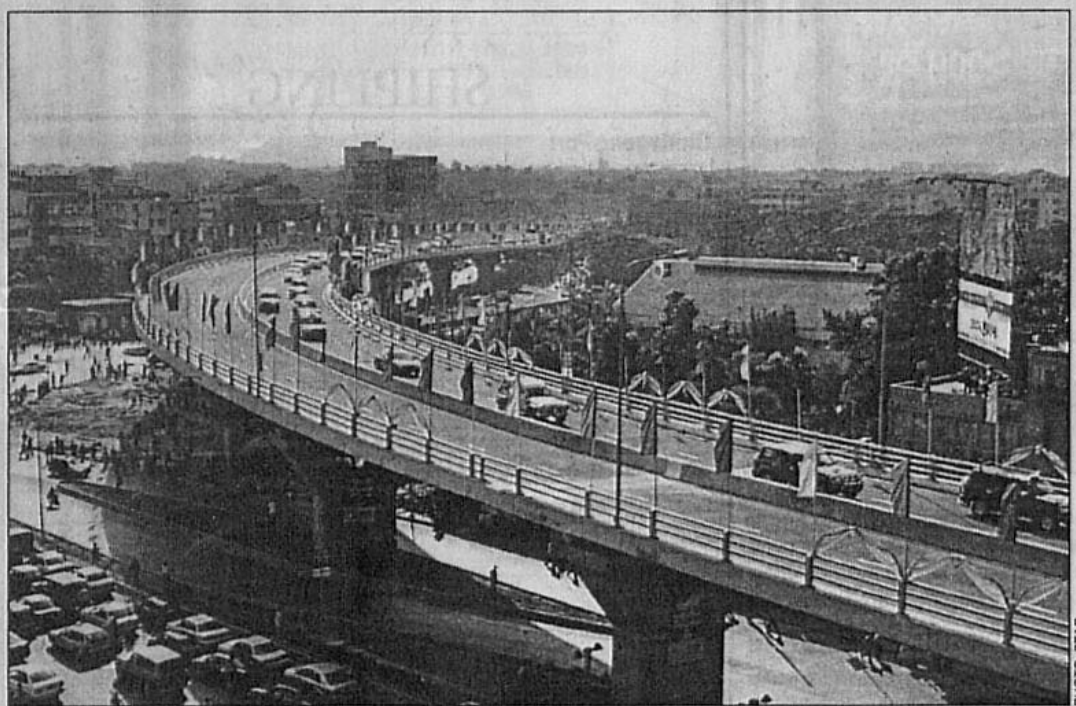


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.



## Mohakhali Flyover

I was surprised to see the traffic jam right outside my house in Banani after the Mohakhali flyover was opened. I asked a fellow to explain it and he told me that it was due to the inauguration of the flyover by the PM. I was disappointed.

If it had to be inaugurated by the PM at the busiest hours of the day, then they should have ensured that no traffic jam would occur. What was the point of making people suffer?

Monem Khan  
Banani

## Save us

On 12 July, 2004 (Monday) at around 12:30pm, a group of robbers (15 to 20 people) raided four Christian minority houses in the village Paschim Padrisibpur and on 14 July, 2004 (Wednesday) the same robbers raided some houses in Durgapur under Bakerganj Police Station of Barisal district.

The robbers looted all the valuable household accessories, ornaments, cash money and assaulted the house owners. They also harassed the young women and housewives.

There is no police camp in the villages or in any place around them. The members of the Christian community are passing their days amid great uncertainty. The authorities concerned should immediately look into the matter.

Emmanuel David Rosario  
Bakerganj, Barisal

## Declare November 13 a holiday

The Holy Eid-ul-Fitr may be observed on November 14 if the Shawl Moon is sighted on the previous evening, otherwise Eid will be on the 15th.

Now the declared Eid holidays are on November 14-16 (Sunday-Tuesday). But if the moon is sighted on the 13th evening and the Eid is celebrated on the 14th, travelling would be highly inconvenient for the service holders.

Besides, due to Shab-e-Qadr holiday on the 11th (Thursday) and the weekly holiday on the 12th, very few employees would attend office on the 13th! Thus it is better to declare November 13 a holiday. This would be very logical and convenient.

With this declaration a notice can be served that if Eid is observed on the 14th, then offices will open on the 16th and if the Eid falls on the 15th, the offices will start after Eid on the 17th.

MAS Molla

BAAS, Dhaka

## Nepotism in politics

The DS of Oct 28 carried a classical story of nepotism in politics, misuse of power, position and influence in the lobbying for appointment of junior staff in government office.

During the period of the autocratic regimes a couple of decades ago, we senior officers (I am now retired) could recruit lower-level staff as per rules and regulations without any interference from the higher authorities (the higher posts had PSC and other institutional frameworks).

The propaganda experts of the government have to dig deeper into public psychology, and present both sides of the coin for public consumption; simply glorifying the achievements of the preceding years won't cut any more.

Reveal what is behind the purdah

(veil). Formally this is known as transparency, and TI is very much at odds with the government proclamations and denial--Bangladesh is achieving notoriety for governance of khatir (nepotism).

What is surprising is that even some of our ministers and MPs are reported to be ordering subordinates to indulge in irregularities, and then firing them for not supporting illegal activities!

Abul M Ahmad  
Dhaka

## Phasing out rickshaws

The cycle rickshaws have to stay in Dhaka metro, till the following conditions change for the better. It would be impractical to follow the standards and trends of the rich, industrialised countries where the

match the fertility rates in other natural sectors (waters, floods, corruption, terrorism, etc).

The measures to control road traffic cannot be solved in one step or phase, but has to be phased out into several periods within a decade or 15 years. The international donor agencies have to be more realistic than lure investments with proposals which cannot be tested in the developed countries, because such woeful infrastructures do exist; and later generation donor officials have no first hand experience of poverty and living under poor conditions.

Increasing the number of buses won't solve the problems; as there is no road capacity for running buses every five minutes on 150 routes daily within the DCC. Even now large buses with huge footprints

incentive during several earlier phases of development (that is the reason our RMG is so popular export-wise).

Our culture is different: the women passengers cannot jostle with the males to handle the nerve-shattering traffic conditions. Can the middle class afford to buy a small car on HP? The taxi services (three and four wheels) have not yet been standardised for courteous service even after two years, due to lack of discipline, monitoring, regulatory control, and underhand payments and tolls (by the owners!), and other social, cultural, economic and political factors which have been analysed by the professionals for studies. We are aware that the majority of the drivers and public vehicles and trucks operate with fake documents. About 70-80 per cent would

war started on 25th(2+5=7); victory came on 16th(1+6=7); the Mujibnagar Government was composed of seven members (Sheikh Mujib, Syed Nazrul, Tajuddin, Mansur Ali, Qamruzzaman, Mustaque and Gen. Osmani). Savar Memorial has seven facets; SAARC, conceived, formed and launched in Dhaka has seven members; the family of Bangabandhu had seven members (Father, mother, two sisters, three brothers).

The number 19 seems to have special significance for Muslims: there are 114 surahs in the Holy Koran; prayers have been urged therein 209 times; "Allah" is mentioned 2696 times; "Rahman" 57 times and "Islam" 19 times. All these numbers are multiples of 19. The number of mandarins in the higher echelon of hell is also 19. So is the number of letters (in Arabic) in the incantation "Bismillahir Rahmaner Rahim".

Is there some magic in numbers? I wonder!!

Bilou Gaharpur  
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

## American psyche

This was the first time I voted in the presidential election of the United States as a Bangladeshi-American citizen. Although not too extensively, I tried to get somewhat involved in the Democratic campaign and followed the race very carefully for the past year or so. There is one thing that I noticed in this year's election and its eventual outcome, which might change the misconception about America that many people in Bangladesh possess. In Bangladesh, people commonly view America as a modern, western country who are not very religious or do not care too much about religion. Many also think the re-election of George W. Bush is just a mandate on the Iraq war by the American people. However, there are many other things to consider. Even though a lot of people thought either economy

ently helped the Republicans more, proving all speculations wrong. I think this clearly contradicts the view of many, if not most, Bangladeshis who assume that America is just a non-religious western country. In fact, a majority of Americans are just as religious as we are, maybe even more in some cases.

Taufique A Mazumder  
Germantown, MD, USA

## An odd picture

One day I was going to my office. My friend was also with me. We were stranded in an unbearable traffic jam. Suddenly my eyes were fixed upon a picture of a rickshaw standing before us. The picture was of an almost naked heroine and a hero with a horrible look. The picture was so odd that I couldn't look at it anymore. I asked my rickshaw puller whether anyone uses this picture as an advertisement. He said that owners used these pictures to make the rickshaws more attractive!

Today we can't find any space even a matchbox where an advertisement is not used. The advertisers can use the space, the backside of a rickshaw, with decent things.

Bipasha  
Mass Communication and Journalism Department, DU

## DCC and DTCB

The Daily Star rendered a public service by printing (Oct 27) the Star City interview of the former DTCB boss on the hijacking of the DTCB office to DCC Nagarbhawan. To non-technical citizens, it provides an inside view of the internal tussles between bureaucracy and the over-confident politicians (there is a difference between self-confidence and overconfidence).

The scene is familiar: too much interference by the politicians in official matters, ignoring normal operating rules and ethics. The



PHOTO AFP

## Our cricketers

Readers might think just looking at the heading that our cricketers had enough suggestion, motivation, inspiration, coaching, training, and, above all, handsome money. What else could be there which could lift their performance? I think, we are missing one important thing here, that is, we are not allowing our boys to enjoy the game. I still strongly believe that once the Tiger brushes off all their worries, pressure, and start enjoying the game itself, they will do a lot better. Cheer up boys, look forward and see who all are your opponents! Isn't it thrilling to fight with those big guns? You have nothing to lose, but always have a chance to make yourself and your country proud by doing some miracle! So enjoy your game.

Iqbal Ahmed, Mohammadpur, Dhaka

difficult to change.

Such tensions are there in other departments, and these indiscretions are open secrets. Megawati (in Indonesia) lost on the same count (arresting corruption), according to press reports.

The GoB has mounted a publicity campaign on three years' achievement. But the grey areas are not touched.

Alif Zabr

Dhaka

## United States and Israel

The United States is the lone superpower and we think it would be appropriate to give Israel a similar name, because it is controlling everything in America; it's wish is the command. To please Israel, the US administration will go to any length. Israel was afraid of Saddam Hussein so he had to go, an immoral and unjust war was waged on Iraq which created a very tragic situation, people all over the world are deeply upset and condemning this action.

Palestine is bleeding, not only are they deprived of their homeland, they are dying in scores due to the ruthless actions of Ariel Sharon, a devil in the disguise of human being. The atrocities are committed and not a word of disapproval from the United States!

But the United States and Israel should remember that there is a third party, the Almighty Creator, who is watching everything and wrong-doers will be punished in due time. Many mighty nations perished in the past, they should take lessons from history.

Nurjahan

Chittagong

## RAB activities and the intellectuals

The activities of RAB have surely been welcomed by the common people of Bangladesh. By common people I mean the kind of people who do not have any big business, do not pay subscription to all political leaders and do not hire muscle-men to ensure the steady growth of their fortune.

I hailed the 'Operation Clean Heart' (although I admit it had some minor problems) and I do support

the RAB activities. It is good to see the common people are speaking out and not the minority 'intellectuals' taking up the most of the readers' opinion column. I was lambasted by the would-be-intellectuals and human rights sympathisers in this column for supporting the Operation Clean Heart.

But at the same time I want to stress that power corrupts and so the RAB should be accountable to some authority.

Saif  
Dhaka

## Congratulations, President Bush

George W. Bush has been re-elected in a historic presidential election---and in style! He won both the popular votes, as well as electoral college votes by a decent margin (greater margin than President Clinton and Reagan). There is no doubt that this mandate proves that Americans wholeheartedly support his policies on the War on Terror, conservative ideas, family values and economy (especially the tax cuts).

The majority of Americans stand where he does on abortion, gay marriage and stem-cell research (this election proves that majority Americans cannot be labelled as New Yorker or Californian liberals). The huge voter turnout (the biggest in American election history for over 3 decades) proves how people wanted their voice to be heard, and their willingness to keep the Republican in office. The result of this election, as well as the elections in Australia (where John Howard was re-elected) and Afghanistan (where Hamid Karzai won by a landslide), proves what Americans, Australians and Afghans prefer and why they do so.

The Republicans are also going to control the Congress -- another indication of the trust that people have on the centre-right political party in the US.

This is indeed a great news for democracy and for those, including me, who have stood by President Bush all the way during his last four years in the White House.

Aranya Syed  
London, Britain

## Freedom, ethics, and stereotypes

We are going to discuss the questions about Mr. Sharifuzzaman Sohel's letter: (a) What is freedom? and (b) Prostitution and Pornography are not freedom; polygamy and promiscuity are two sides of the same coin. Friendship, freedom, and love are important for positive communication. Audrey Hepburn was divorced twice, and in the end she developed a friendship for many years. Marriage is a controversial and confusing concept! Studies and statistics have shown that there are thousands of children both in Bangladesh, as well as in other countries, who suffer because of unhealthy and toxic relationship between parents. A few months ago, Prof. Rabbani wrote that he thinks that marriage and the family is still an existing institution, however, if we look at the high rate of dysfunctional families and the sufferings of children that we have studied, we can agree that marriage is a dead institution. Marriage is a confusing institution (The Death of Marriage, Single Women and Children in Europe, January 20, 1997, Newsweek). Extravagance of marriage ceremonies, divorce, stress, harassment by in-laws, cheating, the woman becomes a housewife, and she also has a building named after her. Division of labour (divided spheres, and woman's place in the home) does not allow a woman to seek proper education and to develop a balanced personality. A woman is not "Oshohai Obola Nari" (Damsel in distress). Mr. Sharifuzzaman Sohel (letter, Oct. 20, 2004) should join discussions about freedom, and try to understand what the word freedom means.

Money can't buy freedom. "Freedom is that what you've got, when you've got nothing more to lose." This means that we have to overcome greed and search for the important qualities of life. A saint, a Sufi, or a Buddhist monk is not in search of a BMW, lots of money, and a housewife as a slave. In today's world, there are some people who study BBA or MBA and their aim in life is to buy, to sell, and to hoard money and to conduct "business", even if he or she has to sell the soul to the devil in order to make money. We would also like to ask, what is prostitution and pornography? Mr. Sohel mentions that it happens in Bangladesh, and it happens more in the west. We just want to say that prostitution and pornography happens everywhere in the world. In front of GQ Magazine, for men, it says "A Magazine with Sports, Sex, and Booze". Firstly, these magazines and prostitute institutes are funded by pimps and the customers are male. These industries are inhuman and unhealthy.

Fraulein M Chaudhury, Estelle Mahnuma, Suchitra A. Sufia, M Shahi  
Gulshan 2, Dhaka

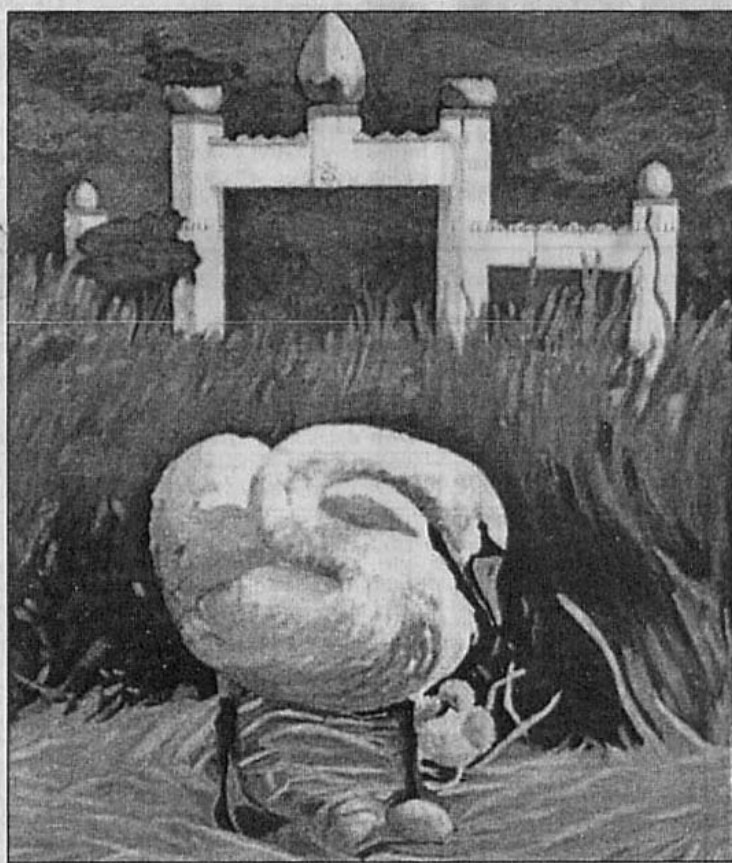


PHOTO INTERNET

standard of living is 10-30 times higher and the basic salaries, GDP and GNP are vastly different.

The middle class and the lower middle classes have to be provided with cheap transport options, mechanised or non-mechanised, for two main reasons: the huge rate of urban migration, which successive regimes have failed to control; and Bangladesh has the highest density of population in the world (around 1,000 persons per sq km). Our economic fertility cannot

have been introduced, instead of small buses at more frequent intervals. How this bright idea was approved, living on mini-streets?

Suburban living depends on fast and cheap rail and launch services every few minutes, which our standard and earning cannot sustain. Even today Dhaka has no circular train or fast and frequent local trains, and the elevated highways have not yet started working. What is the hurry to kill the enemy rickshaw? We forget we have to be labour-

disappear if the police were honest: Then how to run the transport sector?

Alfa Ahmad  
Dhaka

## Number game

Numerology intrigues me to no ends. Take the case of Bangladesh which has a preponderance for the figure of seven. The language movement, precursor of liberty was launched in '52(5+2=7); liberation

or terrorism will be one of the top issues that people vote on in this election, it just didn't happen. Surprisingly, cultural values topped the voters' list of concerns and that include topics like gay marriage, abortion rights and many such things. A high number of evangelical Christians went out and voted in this year's election just because they feel very passionately about these issues from their religious point of view. That is why the maximum turnout in American political history appar-

routine procedures are disrupted, causing systems losses in the long run. Here the motive is clear enough (unofficially).

The reaction from the donors might be unpleasant, with negative future implications, specially after the TI announcement of its annual findings on the corruption index, where Bangladesh's name is very prominent. Temptation makes a person or group insensitive to public interest and moralities of ethical stands. A habit, good or bad, is

## Bush's triumph

Zafar Sobhan's write-up was completely uninformed about why Americans voted for Bush. His self-serving statements, unsupported by facts, are bound to raise some serious questions about his objectivity. Simply reaching a conclusion without more does not qualify as reasoned persuasion.

You assert that the majority of the American electorate is "base" and that Republicans count on this essential baseness to win office. Yet that conclusion, like all others, goes without critical examination or factual support. Perhaps that is why Americans and the rest of the world still view Bangladesh as a third world phenomenon (you see, we can make sweeping and unfounded generalisations just as easily as you; irritating, isn't it?).

You state: "If more Americans trust the economy to Bush than to Kerry despite the evidence of the past four years, if more Americans believe that the war in Iraq has made them safer, if more

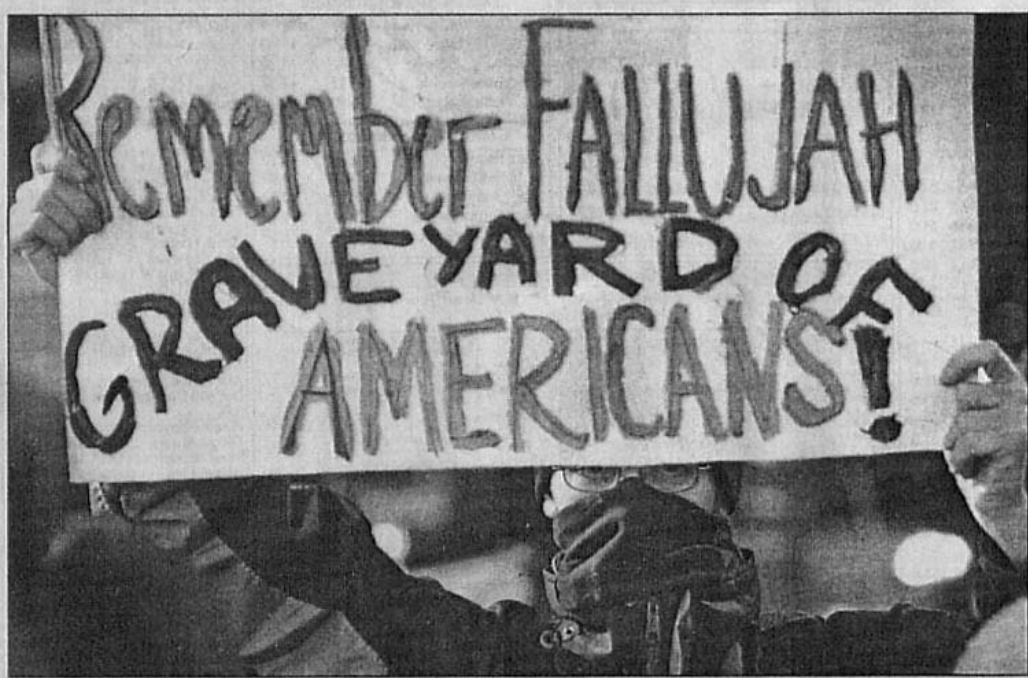


PHOTO AFP

Americans believe that Bush is a steadfast and rock-ribbed leader in the war on terror, if more Americans believe that the

most important thing is to deny civil rights to homosexuals, if more Americans believe that the president served more honour-

ably than Kerry in Vietnam -- then the Democrats can't win." In fact, the economy is rarely, if ever, materially impacted by the

incumbent's policies. The business cycle, the Federal Reserve, and any other number of other factors play a much larger determining role in the health of the economy. Presidents get far too much credit, and far too much blame, for economic conditions. What's more, Sept. 11 impacted the US economy in a fundamental way, terrified investors and businesses, and injected more than a bit of uncertainty into the picture that no one is responsible for except Bin Laden. The electorate realises that, to their credit, and decided not to penalise Bush for events that were beyond his control. Apparently you believe all of these complex issues are capable of being summed up with simple declaratory sentences which offer no critical reasoning, yet notice how I refrain from calling you "base."

Next, regarding Iraq, most people realise the precarious nature of the situation. But what is worse - turning a blind eye to the

worst dictator in the world, or confronting him after giving him innumerable chances to allow the inspectors to continue their inspections unfettered? Do not insult our intelligence by positioning the issue as a choice between a benevolent ruler who did nothing wrong and a war. Hussein, whatever the truth about WMD, was a murderer who, on humanitarian grounds alone, deserved to be overthrown. If you prefer him, why don't you import him to Bangladesh and elect him to govern you?

Regarding gay marriage, certainly it galvanised the conservative base of the party. But by itself, given Kerry's position against gay marriage himself, it would have had little impact had Kerry given them any reason to vote for him other than that he was not George Bush.

Lastly, you place far too much importance on the Vietnam issue - very few people cared either about Bush's National

Guard service or Kerry's service in Vietnam. Both served, and appear to have done their duty.

Greg Smith

One-mail

Zafar Sobhan seems to be confused about the purpose of voting (What's the matter with America? Nov 05 2004). Free elections are held to find out which candidate voters believe will do the best job for them, not to ratify the views of a particular candidate, party, or point of view. Those who voted on the merits of presidential candidates, Bush and Kerry, rejected the views espoused by Mr. Kerry, the Democrats, and Mr. Sobhan. Claiming that there is something "wrong" with people who voted for Mr. Bush is pointless. There is no scale on which voters' freely-made choices can be labelled "better" or "worse" in the way that 10 pounds of rice are better than 9 pounds.

If the Democrats want to attract some voters who rejected

its candidates, it must speak more clearly to them. If nothing else, it (and Mr. Sobhan) must stop lecturing, a condescending behaviour that puts off

people who might otherwise be persuaded. Their success will be determined by the next election.

Voters may regret their choices after the fact, but neither Mr. Sobhan nor anyone else can claim to be more consistently right in advance.

George Brower  
Bethlehem, PA USA

Great editorial on 'what's the matter with America', and I agree.

Have you seen this study from the University of Maryland? See below. Unfortunately, we are only strong as a nation as our weakest parts. I don't know why these people have their priorities mixed up. But please don't forget about the other 49% that did NOT vote for Bush! Bill, A reader from Florida, USA