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PHOTO: AFP



## Slum *blaze*

Alas! Another slum was burnt in Rayerbazaar on 2 February. It ruined the lives of the inmates. In this winter season hundreds of people have to sleep under the open sky. No bed, no clothing, no food, no money. What will they do now? Where will they go for help? For all these hapless slum dwellers life is now just a burden. But they have the right to live, to get housing and to get assurance of food.

At least five hundred houses were affected and 20

people were injured in the blaze. Will these people be rehabilitated? Can we expect so?

This is not for the first time that such a mishap has occurred. Still there is no improvement in the situation. In Bangladesh people's lives are not valued, particularly if they are poor.

Day by day the number of urban poor is increasing. They start living in various slums where the number of residents is much higher than the accommodation capacity. There is no

healthy environment. The failure of governments to provide affordable housing has forced the bulk of the urban population into inner city slums, peripheral shanty towns and for the most desperate the sidewalks, traffic roundabouts and every conceivable form of shelter. Slum life consists of insecure employment, state persecution and extreme poverty.

**Sheguffa**  
Dhaka

### Far from Bangladesh

I have been living in Toronto for the past five years as an immigrant investor. Being away from Bangladesh, initially posed a number of concerns for someone like me who is rooted in the rich cultural heritage of our race as Bengali. I was worried that I would miss my regular trips to Boi mela, Bangla Academy, Rabindra and Nazrul Jayanti. While I really do

don't think so. It is the teachers involved in politics who have to concentrate on their job, if we want to see any change for the better in our universities.

**Md. Foyzul Hoque**  
Jahangirnagar University

### Ideological direction

Nowadays our youths have no ideological direction to lead our country to the platform that we

America, Africa and Asia. Poverty forces these children to leave their homes and come to the city searching for jobs. Here in Bangladesh, child labour has grown to its highest level. Wherever we look we see children (most of them below the age of 15) working. We see them in peoples' homes working as domestic help, road-side mechanic shops, factories, etc.

democracy as long as they do not hurt other people and disrupt social harmony. I don't think people who initially published the cartoons and reprinted later on, did not realise its repercussion; however I think they did it with a calculated agenda whatever that might be. Most of the news media reports call this an act of blasphemy (according to Islamic belief), however what they missed to mention is, this kind of acts spread hate and negativity against a particular group of people which in a way might create more hate and eventually more violence. I think people of all faiths, colour and nationality should renounce this kind of heinous acts. Because this kind of act, instead of bringing harmony, creates divisions and disrespect (among different groups). In this age of global village, where people of different faiths and colours live side by side and interact almost on a daily basis in a border sphere of humanity, world harmony is very much needed.

**Zafar Hadi**  
California, USA

### Recalling mother

I was unmanageable, restless and obstinate as a schoolboy in the mid-seventies. My mother always forbade me not to play with boys for avoiding unwanted incidents due to my bed-tempered habit. Subsequently I was supposed to be playmates of my sisters but that was not so pleasant. There was a regular quarrel with my sisters and I was the first to hurt them. My father always scolded me and warned my mother, "Your son will go astray and earn bad name for me only" considering my dauntless behaviour. My helpless mother had nothing to do except praying to Almighty Allah for her

son. As I was her only son, I got a special favour from her. My sister always feels jealous for this. My mother usually persuaded me to study seriously. My father's sudden demise made my mother very helpless. At this critical juncture of her life, her main cause of anxiety was her only son. One day she was sobbing standing besides my reading table. After noticing her I promptly asked her cause of such grievances and she readily replied, "You are the cause". I was impressed by her words and vowed to her that I would be a good boy from then on in all respects. From then onward I became a gentle boy and concentrated on my studies. One afternoon when some of my friends and I were having fried rice with tea, my mother suddenly appeared and expressed her deep anguish about my companions. I was very upset by her behaviour. After a long time now I can realise as to what my mother meant on that day. Many of my ill-fated mates could not cross the high school level.

My mother was not a highly educated woman, yet education was her top agenda. She always said, "Son, I am ready to overlook almost everything provided you are a good student". Actually, her dedication and firm commitment helped to have a university degree. Her simple and minimum demand for worldly life may be cited as an instance. On a personal level she was the epitome of courtesy and grace. She tried her best to build her son as a good human being. My mother was the centre of my life. She always guided me. I have never been allowed to go outside without her permission. I had to report to her every time going out and entering the house. Her strict disciplining of my life helped me to attain suc-

## New hope for Dhaliwood



It's good news for us that the Censorship of Films (Amendment) Bill 2006 was passed in the parliament recently. Filmmakers, actors and exhibitors in Bangladesh can be jailed for up to three years under a new law if their films are found to contain obscene, vulgar scenes.

Under the existing law, enacted in 1963, the maximum punishment for being involved in the production of an obscene or pornographic film is three months in jail. Objectionable films have been adversely affecting the youths and destroying social values.

The new law was essential to "cleanse obscenity" from the film industry.

By enforcing this law, the Film Censor Board can now take action against those -- including filmmakers, actors, producers and theatres -- involved in obscene, nude and vulgar filmmaking.

We hope that now we, the general middle class people, can also enjoy Bangla film in hall if good films are screened. We see that whenever any renowned filmmaker's film is screened, people spontaneously respond.

Presently, because most of the films are vulgar, quality filmmakers don't get a level playing field for their films.

Hopefully, the law will bring sanity back to the film industry.

**Zishan**  
Dhaka

According to a hypothesis, today there exists virtually (?) two different Bangladesh: the visible evil society and the real Bangladesh in the background. In many ways, it is good that this division of hers, surfaced today, for all to ponder. It cannot last. It is a part of change. The base of evil never lasts (otherwise it will be the end of civilisation).

This explains the rise of religious terrorists. Today we are still slaves of powerful godfathers.

More actions and reactions are ahead. It is a load-shedding period. Power has to be transferred; perhaps in more than one phase.

**A Husnain**  
Dhaka

### Undo the lies

I read the article published in The Daily Star on 30 January titled, "Why do politicians lie?" The Daily Star and Daily Prothom Alo can publish a regular front-page column to disclose the lies and misinformation given by our political demagogues. The DS and the PA can do us a great service by placing the lies before the people in general.

We have great hopes from these two dailies as they have always

taken a stand on all kinds of social injustice.

**Solaiman Tipu**  
Muslimabad Road  
Patenga, Chittagong

### Cartoon controversy

The row over Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) cartoon is really sad and unwarranted. Basically, it stems from utter ignorance and lack of knowledge of history on the part of Danish and other European papers.

Muhammad (pbuh) was adjudged the world's most influential person among a list of 100 (who impacted human society the most) that included Jesus, Moses (both of whom are highly revered by the Muslims). The list was compiled by the leading print media of the west not so long ago. He achieved this rare distinction for his success in both religious and state affairs while professing peace and tranquility for the human kind.

To portray this great prophet as a symbol of terrorism smacks of sheer ignorance.

**AZM Shamsul Alam**  
Abu Dhabi, UAE

## Green Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

Dhaka is losing its beauty gradually. Great pressure of urbanisation is responsible for Dhaka's losing its beauty. Green patches have disappeared from many localities in the city. Earlier people made one or two storied buildings with enough space for greenery. But now people are more interested in apartments as their capacity is squeezed and availability of free space is a

matter of dream.

Anyhow, we have to keep in touch with green for a healthy environment. People nowadays prefer small plants for their tiny verandas in apartments. It's better than nothing. City dwellers should be appreciated for their efforts to make green their own small world.

**SYZ**  
Lalmatia, Dhaka

miss these programmes, thanks to the recent marketing efforts by a number of private recording companies, I have been lucky enough to be in touch with the cultural hub of Bangladesh as a good quantity of CDs is being sold world-wide, specially where the expatriate Bangladeshis like me reside. The most recent one that I have bought comprises a collection of classic Bangladesh film songs sung by the duo of Khairul Anam Shakil and his wife Kalpana.

The album provides a fine opportunity to compare the current poor state of Bangla music with the golden 60s and 70s. Shakil is a fairly accomplished Nazrul Sangeet artiste and his renditions of old hit of Mahmudunnabi and Satya Saha will surely please the connoisseur. Lata Mangeshkar once said that good recording quality and smooth orchestration could make even the most ordinary vocal sound rich. This is very much evident in Kalpana's effort in rendering the classics of Runa Laila, Sabina Yasmin and even Protima. Also, both Shakil and Kalpana's pronunciation of some words leaves a lot to be desired - a common phenomenon among the young artistes these days.

Overall, I think it was an honest effort and the duo should be commended for trying to revive the Bangla music despite the obvious shortcomings.

**Dr. Niamul Quader**  
Toronto, Canada

### University education

Is this called a public university? After completing the same session, some departments get convocation, some don't. Who is responsible for this? Students? I

have dreamed of for 30 years. But they are the backbone of the nation. Today they are simply used by our corrupt politicians. Youths who are involved in politics have no ideological bond with their parties. The main reason behind their getting involved in politics is economic hardship. Most of them have no educational background to understand the problems that they are facing. They are greatly confused.

**Riasat Hasan**  
Khilgaon, Dhaka

### New channels

I can see new TV channels like Rtv, Bangla Vision coming up. It is good to see more television cameras will be there around our honourable ministers and VIPs in future.

However, we as general citizens hope better and more interesting programmes from the new channels. We hope they will keep themselves free from political influence. The news programmes need to be impartial. It will be better if the channels show more youth/student-oriented programmes. People nowadays like watching reality shows like American Idol, where the general people participate more, not the so-called "made up" stars.

We hope the producers and makers will coordinate their programmes keeping our priorities in mind.

**Cantara Wali Ruhi**  
Dhaka University

### Child labour

Child labour remains a serious problem in many parts of the world. Many of these children live in underdeveloped countries in

Their living conditions are crude and chances for education minimal. The meagre income they bring in is however necessary for the survival of their families. Mostly the working hours of these children are from morning till night! Sometimes they are even beaten up by their employers. Also they are not paid regularly by their employers. Still these child labourers have no choice but to go on working. What would eventually happen to them? Would they have to work all their life? Will they never get a chance to have basic education?

I think the government should give a thought to this problem and try to improve the situation which is worsening day by day.

**Labiba Rahman**  
Dilu Road, Maghbazar

### Freedom of expression

We have seen the recent outburst of anger in the Muslim world over the cartoons demeaning our holy Prophet (pbuh). In many European countries those cartoons have been reprinted in the name of "freedom of expression". However, freedom of expression does not mean giving unchecked freedom to anyone at the cost of hurting other peoples' personal feelings and beliefs. In many western countries hate crimes or sexual harassment cases are sometimes even based on mere expressions or words towards the victim. That means freedom of expression does not give license to anyone to hurt other peoples' feelings by mere acts or words. Constructive criticism and difference of opinions are part of

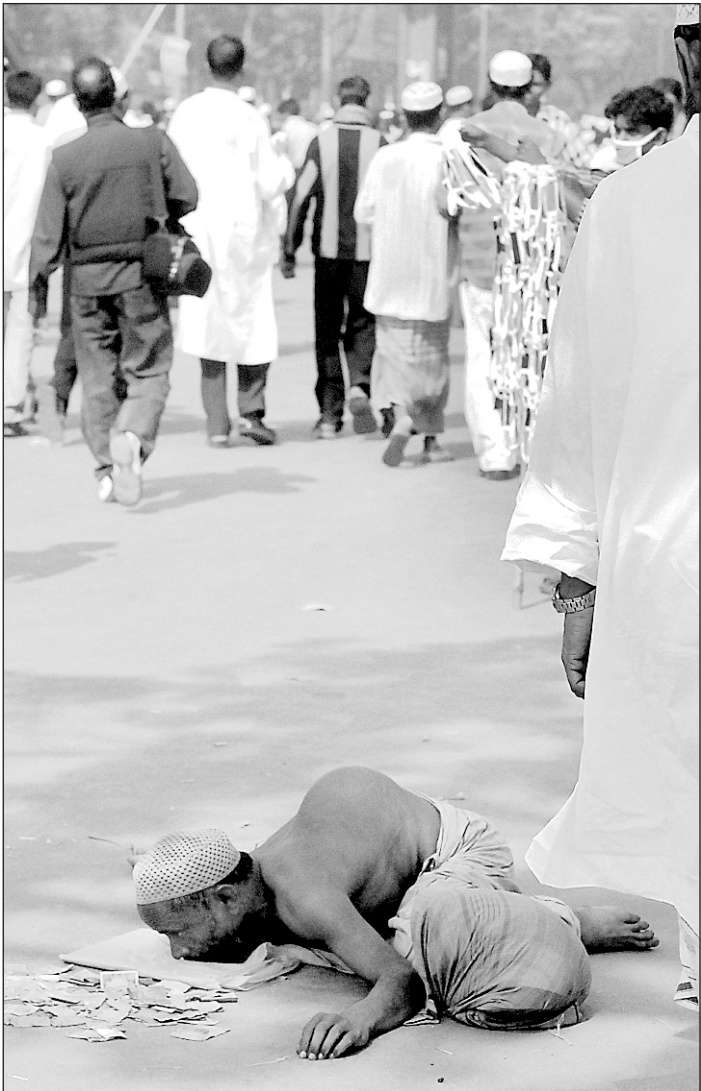


PHOTO: AFP

## Beggars' lives...



The number of beggars is increasing day by day. They are migrating from village to urban areas. In Bangladeshi culture, there is a tradition of giving alms to the beggars by the well-offs. Many poor people tend to capitalise on this by taking begging as a profession. Almost 3% of the workforce is engaged in this profession officially. But many farmers become beggars in their lean cultivation period. It is a dishonorable profession which breaks one's morale and self

respect.

Now the question is what is the future of these beggars? Will they do this throughout their lives? What will happen to their children? Will they also come to this profession or will they be able to come out of the vicious circle of poverty?

Almost 40% of the population of Bangladesh lives below poverty line. The power struggle of the major political parties has hindered the industrialisation of the country for many years by

obstructing the flow of foreign investment.

Where will it end? Will we see a revolution when these have-nots will rise and ask for their fair share of our scanty resources? Will we see them rise and ask the leaders to have accountability for their actions and corruption? You can fool some people some time but you cannot deceive many people for a long time.

**Z Yasmin**  
Dhaka