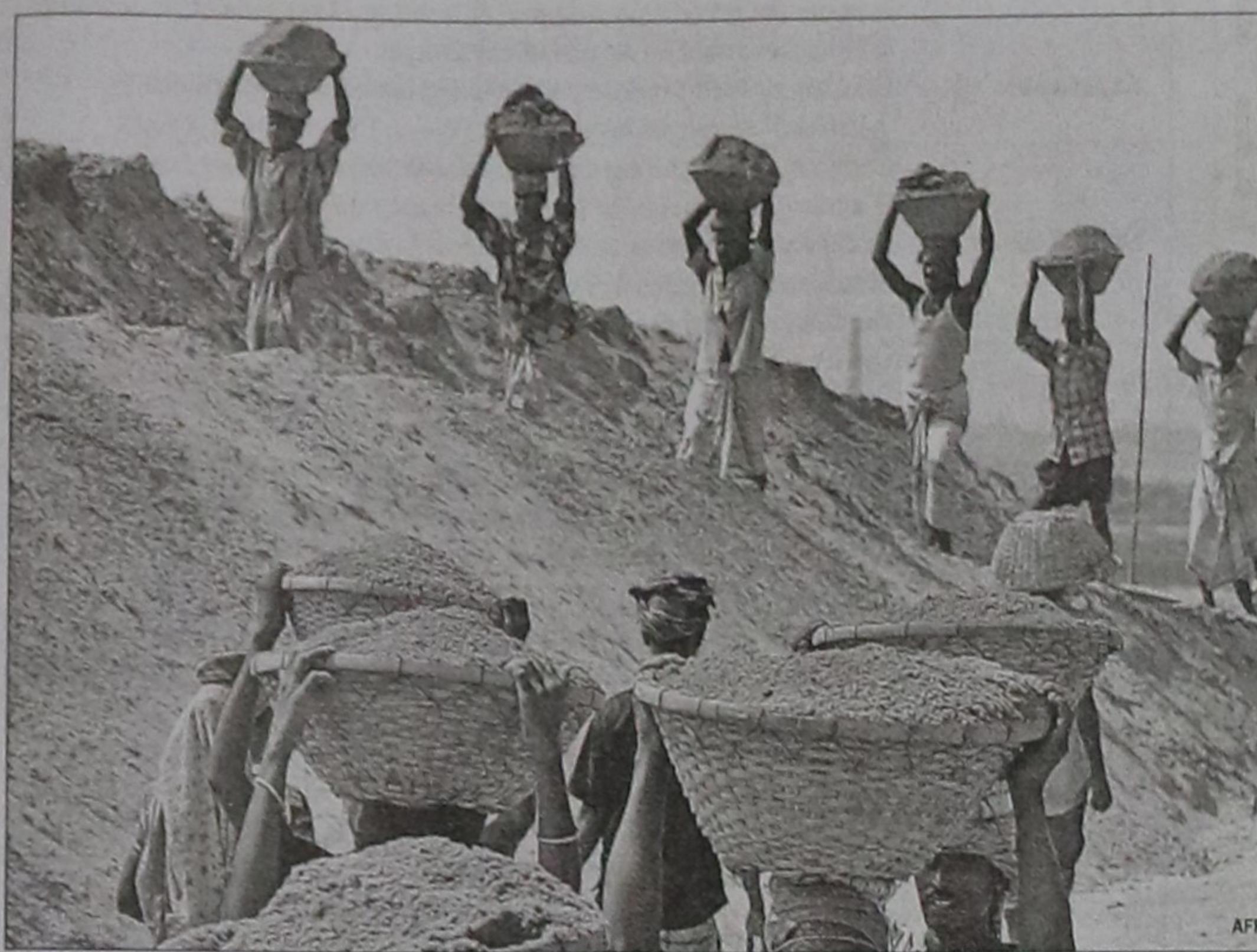


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Development strategy



Budget preparation is a highly technical job and can only be handled by the persons who have the knowledge and experience to do so. As there is no parliament, the budget should be placed well in advance for public debate so that it does not become a burden for the common people. This being a general statement, the budget should also reflect the vision of the nation. Our vision is to become a middle-income nation within, say, 10 years. This time is neither too short nor unrealistic. If we all strive to achieve it, may be this is possible even in a shorter period of time. It is not possible to perform this gigantic task by one man or one group of people. One man is, however, very important-- the progress of Malaysia without Mahathir could not be conceived but he was supported by a diehard team and the nation as a whole.

First of all, we have to find out the thrust sector which will be the driving force to achieve the cherished goal. So in my view education should be our thrust sector and the Ministry of Education should be the "Nerve Centre" for achieving our millennium goal. So, the bulk of budget should go to the education sector. But only allocation of the biggest chunk of budget pie to the education sector will not do the miracle. The Ministry of Education which is the implementing ministry should be well equipped so that they can deliver. The best secretaries, office staff should be posted in that ministry and if required certain extra incentives can be earmarked for

them. The minister in-charge should be a dynamic person with a lot of zeal and enthusiasm.

Once the whole nation is educated, if they can handle their own business, if they are able to solve their own problems, if they know how to keep themselves physically fit, if they know what is good for them and what is not, the task of pulling the nation up will become easier.

Now the main problem remains, that is, sourcing out money. As we have more or less a fixed amount to meet the total requirements of the country we have to look for not-so-urgent type of expenditures. The first thing that comes to my mind is defence expenditure. Being a person from the defence services, I don't underestimate the need for improved defensive capability but we can have an effective foreign policy to enhance the security of the country. We must also reduce our huge "establishment costs". It is revealed through a study that the government does not need such big manpower to run the country. Finally, we must get rid of corruption. Let us face the fact that corruption has penetrated into our society so much so that people have a tacit acceptance of this menace. But we must eliminate it as far as possible.

Given the quality of our people, they are good, intelligent, hardworking, hospitable, and once they are educated the country can aspire to become a truly developed one.

Commodore AMA Alam (Retd.) BN
New DOHS, Dhaka

Tormenting questions

I am tormented these days by the following questions:

- Does the interest of the country come first or the sanctity of the constitution?
- Is the constitution there to serve the people or people to uphold the constitution?
- On the last day of judgement, will Cain escape punishment by arguing with God that the commandments like "Thou shall not kill" were not in place when he murdered his brother Abel?

Hopefully, we will get some guidance from our highest court soon.

A.B.M. Nurul Islam
Chicago, USA

Treatment abroad

Why, when the vast majority of Bangladeshi people cannot afford to go to Singapore for medical treatment, are we sending out the politicians? It should be a national policy that the public servants have to get treatment in the system that they have produced. This is sending a clear message, the healthcare system of Bangladesh is not good enough for our politicians but good enough for the common people of Bangladesh. I think it would be a fine lesson for them to experience the pitfalls of local healthcare and hospitals, they would probably be traumatised at what goes on, even if they were given special treatment and seen right away and spoken to politely. It should also be a policy that the children of the politicians be sent to government schools, that way they will have to invest some money into the healthcare and education systems for their own sake, if not for the people they represent.

Is the caretaker government going to send all the prisoners to Singapore for treatment? Or just the ones that drained the economy of all its prosperity?

Shabbir
UK

Second dirtiest city?

Dhaka gets the dubious distinction of being the second dirtiest city in the world according to the Forbes magazine.

Lead-poisoned air lands Dhaka, Bangladesh, at the No. 2 spot on the list. Traffic congestion in the capital continues to worsen with vehicles emitting fatal amounts of air pollutants daily, including lead. The World Bank-funded Air Quality Management Project aims to help.

The top slot as the dirtiest city in the world is taken by Baku in Azerbaijan for having life-threatening levels of air pollution emitting from oil drilling.

All cities are positioned against New York, the base city with an index score of 100. For the Health and Sanitation Rankings, the index scores range from the worst on the list--Baku, Azerbaijan, with a score of 27.6--to the best on the list--Calgary, Canada, with a score of 131.7.

Dhaka's Mercer Health and Sanitation Index Score is 29.6.

Located in South Asia, between Burma and India, Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh battles with the constant threat of water pollution. Surface water is often thick with pollutants from the use of commercial pesticides. With an estimated 150 million people living in a relatively small area, cleaning up the problem won't be easy.

Addressing air pollution is the easiest way to be able to fix someone's well-being because we're always breathing, and there are all sorts of harmful particulates in the air," says Richard Fuller, founder of the New York-based Blacksmith Institute, a non-profit organisation dedicated to solving the pollution problems of the developing world. "In fact, the biggest pathway for lead poisoning is particulates in the air. So in areas with a lot of air pollution, shutting down the worst forces of these types of pollution really does make a difference.

The World's Cleanest Cities No.10 (Tie) Lexington, KY, Population: 260,512

Metro area: 73 square km.

Lexington is known as the Athens of the West.

Sayedeh Rahman
Founder, BANGLAIT

School and criminality

I would like to draw your kind attention to the danger that school boys are facing every day. In school areas some individuals are very much involved in criminal activities. They are known as 'borobhai'. Innocent schoolboys fear these elements. They disturb the students in many ways and even snatch away mobile phones from them.

My younger brother is a student of Junior Laboratory High School which is situated in Dhanmondi 10/A. He is a victim of criminal activities. The school authorities did nothing about the incident in which my brother was harassed by some hoodlums in front of the school. They show reluctance to do anything against those criminals. As a result, the helpless innocent boys are facing great difficulties everyday.

Individually we cannot solve the traffic police's problems, the cab drivers' problems or passenger's problems. Spare parts prices, automobiles service charges should be controlled and the CNG should be made available.

After giving the drivers the facilities they need, we can expect better services from them.

Mohammed Babur Ali Khan
Crescent RD

Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Astudent of BBA, NSU, Dhaka

EC's reform proposal

I recently read in newspapers that the Election Commission is showing flexibility on many reforms it has proposed. Since then I have been feeling a little disturbed because all the proposals are very important if the country has to be saved from the syndicate of evils. I think it is my social responsibility to bring to your attention the true picture on at least one issue - politics in foreign lands.

A large majority of the Bangladeshi community (at least 95%) have a strong dislike for national politics in foreign countries. They think that it is the only reason for increasing division in the community and the continued decrease in quality of life. It not only prevents them from being assimilated in the mainstream, it has been responsible for patronisation of criminal activities in foreign countries.

Bangladeshis are no longer regarded as law abiding, honest and sincere immigrants in the USA, for example. A large number of so-called leaders (some of whom have criminal records in Bangladesh) are involved in many anti-Bangladesh activities in foreign countries. In the name of politics, they spread fabricated stories of violation of human rights and use this as a tool for speedy immigration. Foreign companies operating in Bangladesh use these cronies as their agents for easy access to the high-ups in Bangladesh. The same agents again use these foreign companies and through them the political leaders in the US to pressurize Bangladesh on trivial issues. These are open secrets among the NRNs. But how long will it take for the policy makers to understand these issues? If there is any confusion, please conduct a comprehensive study on the issue.

India, the biggest democracy, does not allow any political activities in foreign countries. Indian immigrants in foreign countries also do not have any political rights and they are not allowed to purchase agricultural lands for obvious reasons.

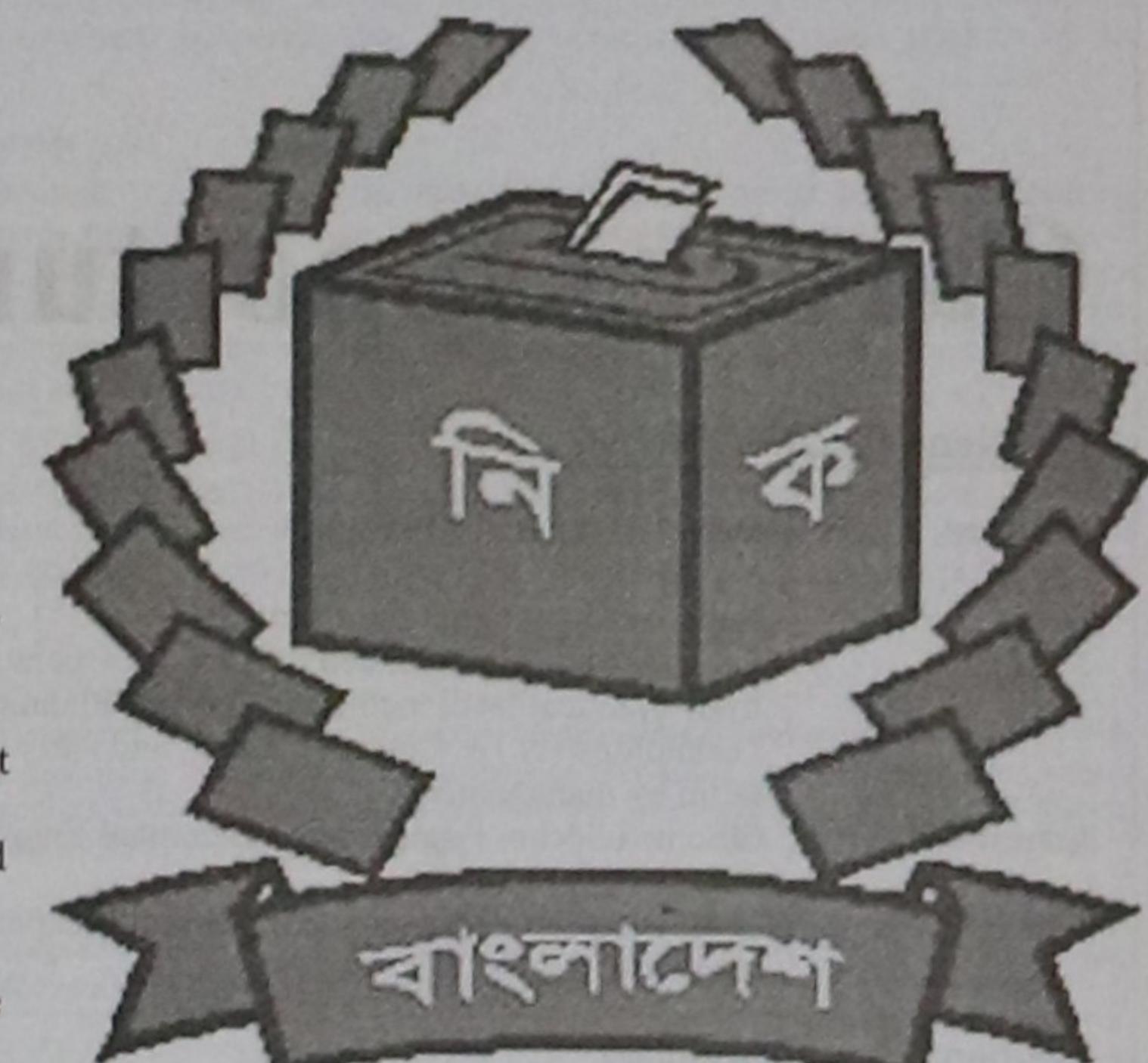
Only Indian nationals living in a foreign country on a temporary basis (and who have not applied for immigration in any foreign country) can vote as absentee voters at their own arrangement. But they must be registered voters in their own constituencies. Non Resident

Indians who have obtained nationality of their host countries or any other country can not be voters. These information can be verified from the Indian Election Commission. The United States also has similar rules.

The two countries do not have any procedures for registration of voters in foreign countries.

During my long stay in the United States, I have never heard of activities of any political parties of expatriates living there.

We the people of



Bangladesh deserve to live a better life. We have relentlessly fought against colonialism and political oppression. We are fighting natural disasters every year. We are fighting for democracy every other year. We sacrificed our lives for language and self determination. We are the most sincere and the most hardworking nation of the world. Why should we be hostage to a handful of opportunists?

Fatema Chowdhury
Dhanmondi
Dhaka

side, needs to be addressed with equal, if not more, emphasis.

High time we gave the matter some thought.

Kazi Mahbubul Huque
Dhanmondi
Dhaka

Ashraful's performance

I would appeal to Ashraful, the captain of our national cricket team, to voluntarily resign from his position, after his dismal performance against the South African cricket team. I am not an avid follower of cricket matches but I do follow our matches.

We all know in management term Performance = Efforts X Capacity X Willingness. Willingness being the motivation which is 3 dimensional: Direction X Persistence X Intensity. So according to those two equations if any of those is zero the end outcome i.e. Performance will be zero. Our captain scores 100 in all areas except willingness, where he scores zero in all three dimensions.

As he is not sure of his direction (goal), he also lacks consistency.

Qamar Shams
Sydney, Australia

Some points

The month of March has come - the month of independence.

Let us address some issues this month:

1. True respect should be given to the people who died in the war to ensure our independence.
2. War criminals (true) should be brought to justice.
3. We should work hard to make a prosperous, corruption free and economically strong Bangladesh.
4. People who are trying to make our country a "failed state" should be identified and punished.

Montasir mamun
Sher-e-Bangla Hall
BUET

Dhaka traffic

Dhaka traffic is probably the most common subject of discussion in any gathering in Dhaka. Everybody has a solution. Talks of billion-dollar projects are in the air. But before we start building more roads, subway systems, LRTs and other such physical infrastructure, we should first ready our minds to imbibe the culture of respecting others' right of way. In more mature societies this is guaranteed. But in this country we don't even have the slightest idea of what this means, let alone respecting it.

Yet, this is the most basic requirement for having safe, chaos-free traffic on the road. Without it we will be addressing only the physical side of the problem. The human side, the cultural

Lessons from US primaries



Currently, we are watching the dramatic primary elections of the US. Two features of this election, I think, are very relevant for our country. One is the opportunity of the electorate to select the best candidate from their favourite party and the other is the issue-based campaign by the candidates.

Long before the real election is held in November, the candidates willing to get nomination of the two major parties are trying to reach out the electorate. The party nomination is not certain for any

influential leader. However, in our country we see a different picture. Here it is possible that we have a preferred party, still we may not like the party leader. But we don't get the chance to express our distrust on that leader. As a result, that leader finds a scope to hold the position almost permanently.

All the presidential hopefuls in the US have their individual agenda. The campaign is focused on different socio-economic issues like foreign policy, tax policy, employment generation policy

etc. on which the candidates express their differences clearly to people. However, in our country it is very hard to find any policy difference between the major two parties. Our parties focus on intensity of tribute to national leaders, nationalism, religion, loyalty to India or Pakistan etc.

Reform is a much talked about subject of our national politics nowadays. Can we take some lessons from the primary elections of the United States?

Mohammad Kazi Mamun
Bank Asia Limited, Corporate Office Treasury