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Police reform

I read with interest Nurul Huda's 14th March editorial: Pilloried police and pompous platitudes in responding positively to an earlier piece on the subject by Badrul Ahsan in your daily. Huda concludes the piece appropriately that Police has to be organisationally accountable, operationally autonomous and free and functionally responsive. This conclusion has almost universal

acceptance in society and was supported by all leading studies including the first systematic work on police in an UNDP research on Human Security in Bangladesh in 1997 in which Huda participated under my guidance. Recently, a Police Reform proposal based on last few years of intensive UNDP research work and other public opinion surveys has been finalized and was expected to

be implemented.

I read in the news that the proposal has been sent to field police officials for vetting, which is interpreted by some quarters as delaying tactics by senior bureaucracy not friendly to the reforms. If this interpretation is correct, this will be unfortunate for the country and society. Any significant reform requires bold actions and it is highly unusual to seek the opinions of district officials to bring about changes in a highly centralized organisation. The field officials have already been extensively involved in the research and survey process as well as in the development of reform proposal during the last one year.

Anyway, we strongly recommend that the current reform-minded government will take immediate action in implementing the police reform proposal at the earliest opportunity. It is high time that talks must stop to open the door for action to follow. Otherwise, we the Bangladeshis like many other people will continue to be condemned with the unenviable characterization of being too long on talk and too short on action.

Professor A.T. Rafiqur Rahman
Retired Deputy Director, UN Secretariat



Is a flu pandemic imminent?

Despite massive culling by authorities to control the outbreak, the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of bird flu continues spreading among the poultry in Bangladesh. A total of 47 districts out of 64 have been affected by this avian flu virus, and more than 50 percent of the poultry farms has been closed. This virus strain is regarded to be the most likely cause of the next human flu pandemic.

Influenza pandemics are natural, recurring events. They are somewhat rare but, like other natural phenomena, happen from time to time. A pandemic occurs on a much greater scale, spreading around the world and affecting people across many countries. Three flu pandemics have occurred in the last century: 1918 to 1919 (Spanish flu); 1957 to 1958 (Asian flu) and 1968 to 1969 (Hong Kong flu). Each of these pandemics affected large numbers of the population, causing millions of deaths and huge economic and social disruption. On the basis that the last flu pandemic was almost 40 years ago and that they occur every three to four decades, it would appear that we are overdue for such a global disaster. Therefore, we can only assume, the next flu pandemic is approaching. But is a pandemic, which has the potential to kill tens of millions of people worldwide, really imminent? And will H5N1 be the cause?

Experts fear that the H5N1 strain of avian influenza A could trigger the next pandemic for a number of reasons. H5N1 is a severe highly pathogenic form of bird flu, which has been affecting poultry flocks and other birds across the world since 2003. But the virus is not simply confined to birds. It has already demonstrated an ability to infect people and cause severe disease, one of the key characteristics of a pandemic strain. Since it first emerged, there have been 366 cases of infection in people who have had close and direct contact with infected birds. But the consequences of an H5N1 pandemic could be much worse because it is so lethal, if that strain did cause a pandemic, it could be something as bad as 1918 or even worse. In the 1918 pandemic 50 million people died worldwide from a population on the planet of just over one billion people. The virus also has the ability to mutate and acquire genes from viruses infecting other spe-

cies. Experts are worried that the virus could either adapt, giving it greater affinity for humans, or exchange genes with a human flu virus, thereby producing a completely new virus strain capable of spreading easily among people, and causing a pandemic.

The World Health Organization has developed a global alert system, based on six pre-defined phases, as a way of signalling the seriousness of the risk of an influenza pandemic. The world is currently at phase III, meaning that a new influenza virus subtype is causing disease in humans, but is not yet spreading efficiently among humans. We don't know when the next pandemic will begin, how long it will last, how severe it will be, or which flu virus will cause it. We just know it's coming.

International Women's Day

Every year International Women's Day is observed nationally and internationally. This day is significant for women's empowerment and emancipation from all discrimination. But Bangladesh is different from other countries. Women become victims of rape, murder, acid violence, dowry and many types of crimes. We can see this discrimination in all spheres and sectors of life. Every year many women commit suicide because of violence and insecurity. Though in recent years, women are getting involved in all sectors, there is no proper working environment for them.

The government should ensure women's participation and security in all sectors.

Nurnobe
Dept of Bengali literature, CU

Leasing of Myanmar land

Both people and the government of Bangladesh are in great difficulties because of galloping prices of essentials, particularly rice. It is out of the reach of the middle and lower income people, let alone the poor ones.

Our land is limited but the population density is the highest in the world. Moreover, every year the agricultural land is decreasing owing to housing and other development activities.

Last year we heard the news regarding leasing of Myanmar's

land to us. High officials of the two countries exchanged views on this. Myanmar is our neighbouring country and it has vast unused land. Undoubtedly, Bangladesh will be benefited if this proposal is materialised soon.

So we should rethink the matter and put up the proposal again to the Myanmar authorities on an urgent basis for the greater welfare of our country. I believe Myanmar will agree to this mutually beneficial proposal.

Habur-or-Rashid
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

A practical solution

The Election Commission is going to conduct its 2nd round of meetings with the political parties. They should invite all the political parties. But EC's stand on inviting the BNP, one of the most popular political parties in Bangladesh, which formed the last political government, is not understood by us. The EC is unnecessarily wasting time on the issue of court verdict. As both the factions of this divided party consist of senior leaders including former ministers, MPs and BNP standing committee members, so what is wrong about holding two separate meetings with the two factions? The meetings are arranged for holding talks between the EC and the political parties, so that they can exchange their views about the upcoming polls. The EC and the political parties will only express their opinions and will give suggestions to make the polls more credible. So, nothing will go wrong if the two factions of the BNP headed by pro-Khaleda leader Khandakar Delwar and reformist leader Saifur Rahman are invited separately.

I think this will be the most convenient and practical solution.

Molla Ibrahim Zaman
East Boyra, Khulna

Ancient treasures

Bangladesh lost a very rare opportunity to display its national art treasures in the cultural capital of the western world. The fiasco involving the exhibition of its cultural artefacts in the Musee Guimet in Paris must be treated as a well conceived plan to foil the presentation of the true historical image of Bangladesh as a very old nation of Bengalis before the international community. The eminent persons, celebrities, academics

and civil society luminaries including the print media that opposed the exhibition and launched a vigorous campaign to abort the show had played unknowingly into the hands of the forces who want to depict us as a nation without any heritage. It was really very painful to watch the short-sightedness of these standard bearers of Bengali culture who argued that the artefacts would be impounded by the Musee Guimet once they get hold of them!!! It was a laughable assumption. Without being disrespectful to them, I must say that they had no idea how such exchange programmes take place these days among the civilized nations to promote the image of the country as a modern, progressive, developed and tolerant multicultural society.

Ibne Azad
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Influence of MPs

The influence of the MPs on upazila administration should be eliminated for good. People's representatives in parliament should concentrate on the parliamentary procedures and on framing appropriate laws for the nation. The tendency to become MP for the purpose of exercising power on local officials should not be allowed to continue in the years to come. Help the bureaucracy act and decide independently.

The decision of the government authorising the Election Commission to go ahead with upazila election deserves appreciation and applause.

Kumar Prithwiraj Nath
Canada

Election!

News - March 6, 2008 (DS) -- Assaults gunned down a thana unit BNP leader last night at Jigatala under Dhanmondi in the capital.

Earlier, on Tuesday, the assailants shot dead vice-president of Motijheel thana unit Swechchhasebak League Kawsar Ali at Shahjahanpur in the city.

Of course, the two news reports forecast that election is indeed not far away. Surely, a gap of a year or two cannot wipe out the stretch of 35 years of rot. Obviously, the pattern of news is very familiar. Good old days are coming back.

Now, all we need is an election! Thank you.
Sazzad Hossain
Gulshan-2, Dhaka

People and leaders

In response to one of your valued readers, may I please apprise him of the fact that farmers, masons, blacksmiths, butchers, teachers, writers, engineers, singers, military personnel, bureaucrats, doctors ... all participated in our war for freedom. Not only 'farmers and chashis'. Each has a respective place in society and there they look good. A mason should not lead a nation, nor a 'farmer or chashi'.

Political leaders should only be from a background where he/she is capable of understanding economics, foreign trade and international affairs. He/She should be able to interpret the above mentioned knowledge base into better living for the people... This is called democracy.

Putting on lungi and gamcha and buying votes from illiterate poor farmers in exchange for a single meal does not work. This is not democracy.

ABangladeshi
UK

Food taboos

As a result of wrong & unscientific belief, a number of foods are excluded from the list of food items by people. Most of these affect pregnant women & lactating mothers & convalescent people greatly. This is a common belief, for instance, that the pregnant mother should eat less to keep the size of the baby minimum for easy delivery. This is totally misleading & dangerous. A pregnant mother should eat one-fourth amount of food more than her normal requirement. Since she needs to eat for her baby as well. Another food taboo prohibits intake of water at the time of delivery of a baby. But the truth is that during delivery a mother loses huge amount of water as sweat, along with blood & delivery fluid. To compensate for this loss, & to save the mother from dehydration, sufficient amount of liquid should be given.

During pregnancy, mothers are often refused fruits like PAPAAYA, BANANA, BLACK BERRY, & many other nutritious fruits due to belief that these may affect the child. Often a pregnant mother is not allowed to take eggs because of the belief that the eggs may interfere with the pregnancy. In Bangladesh a notable taboo is that the newborn babies are not given COLOSTRUM because of the belief that the thick material may upset the stomach. But the truth is that it is a very nutritious food & contains a great number of antibodies which protect the babies from diseases. Mother's milk is the best medicine for the baby.

Also people believe that PRAWN or SHRIMP causes reduction of milk secretion among lactating mothers. But this belief has no scientific basis. Some people believe that banana causes convulsions or tetanus in children. Another wrong practice is giving castor oil to children suffering from indigestion. Also, in rural areas it is a common belief that citrus fruits will delay healing process but in contrast it hastens the healing process.

However, the radio, television & especially newspapers have to play a role to eradicate this dangerous food taboos or misconceptions. Also, various clubs and organisations can contribute positively to stamp out these problems.

More importantly, the health department should address the issue.

Our combined efforts can remove these taboos from society to improve the health status of the affected people.

Shammy Akter
Department of Applied Nutrition & Food Tech
Islamic University, Kushtia



Rupali Bank

A few days back there were headlines on Rupali Bank news of cancellation of an expected sale deal with a Saudi Prince. The officials of this bank expressed a big sigh of relief and profusely thanked the media for their contribution reportedly in compelling the government to take that decision. Some of the employees of this bank were telling in front of the media cameras how their promotions were held up for many years due to indecision about the fate of this bank.

Banking business is a booming business in Bangladesh. Many private banks having only a few branches in the metropolitan cities are making crores of taka every year. Many are trying to open new banks, some applications for

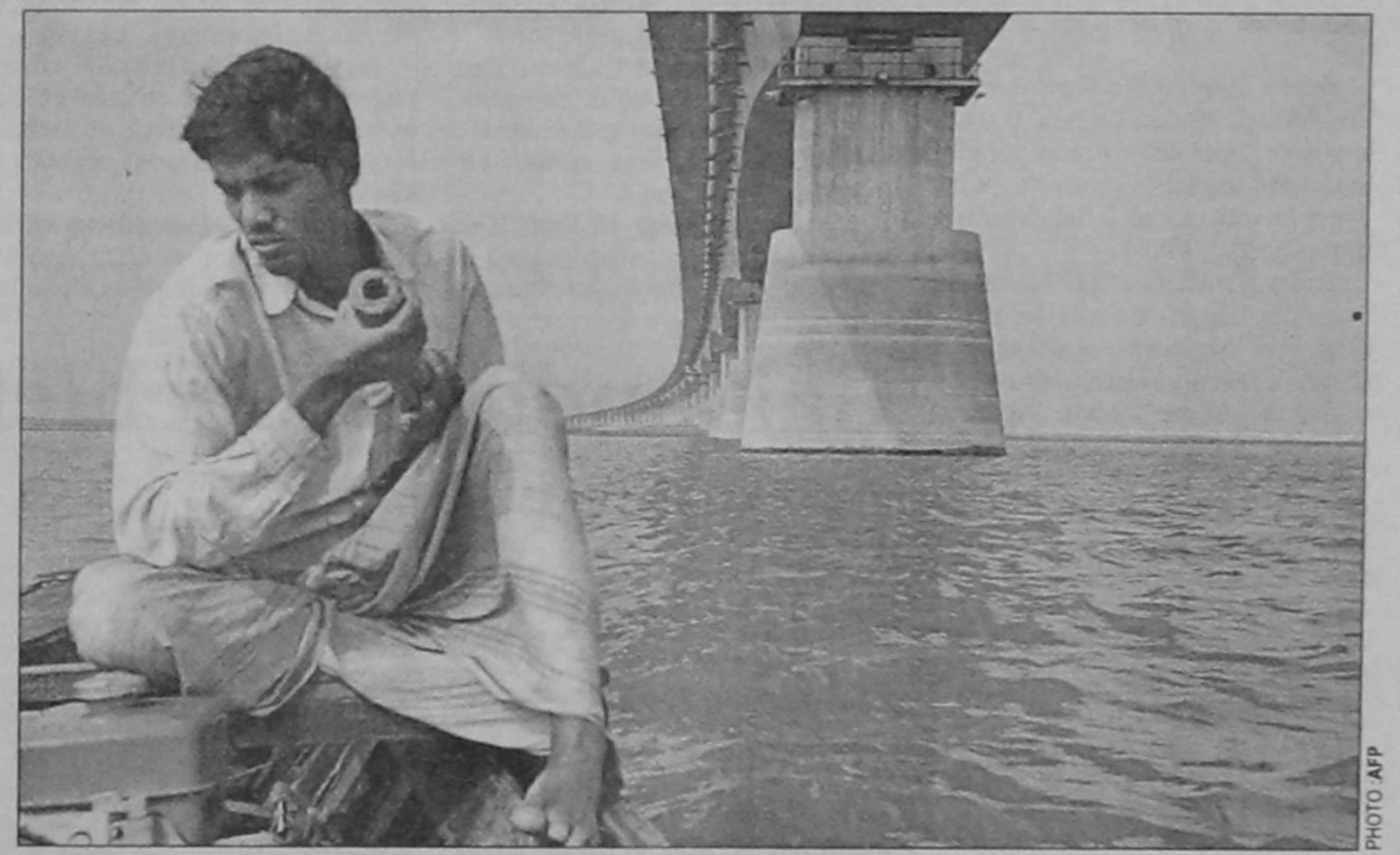
permission are pending with the Bangladesh Bank. On the other hand, the Rupali Bank having branches almost all over the country failed and the government was trying to sell it out to get rid of further losses. Why the Saudi Prince was willing to buy this bank knowing well that it is a losing concern?

Many looked sympathetic to the officials of this bank, but I am not sympathetic at all because the managers and employees of this bank were wholly and fully responsible for the debacle. Their gross negligence to duty, corruption and incompetence were the reasons behind the fall. If you enter any branch of this bank at 9.30am you would find most of the desks empty, their tables and chairs have not yet

been dusted. Even an intending account opener will be directed from desk to desk to reach the right place and finally on reaching the place you will notice that the person is very busy and instead of entertaining you, he will advise you to come on some other day with required papers. Not only Rupali, the picture of all the nationalized banks is the same. The employees of these banks are friendlier to defaulters than the good clients.

The government has cancelled the sale deal, I hope it is a temporary decision. The government should sell out all nationalized institutions which are losing concerns.
Shafiqul Islam
One-mail

Jamuna Bridge



My attention has been drawn to the piece on Jamuna Bridge published in your daily on March 5 by Engr. Saikh Wazir. Apparently, his technical analysis of bridge construction contains valuable suggestions. It is presumed that he has visited the site and made visual inspection before making such detailed technical advice on the physical aspects of this mammoth construction.

The design and structural detail of such construction is always based on load factor and tolerance level. Jamuna Bridge was originally planned as road link between two parts of the country i.e. East and West. The bridge has provided enormous possibilities and has revived the hopes and aspirations of the neglected monga people as well as the most deprived part of the country. When the design and structural details of the road bridge were at the final stage, the then govt decided to include provision for railway.

The inclusion of railway on a road bridge changed the technical criteria and design parameter of the road bridge, that is, railway to run both broad gauge and meter gauge on a single section & four-lane road. This means load bearing capacity of the bridge had to be increased substantially as it would include thousands of concrete sleepers plus three heavy rails for broad gauge and meter gauge besides the rolling stock which includes passenger train, cargo rake and fully loaded tank wagon. It is hoped that Bangladesh Railway, Roads & Highways and communica-

tions ministry have provided correct data for maximum load bearing capacity of the bridge to accommodate the railway traffic.

It is evident that the Korean construction company under the guidance of the engineering consultants and the government agencies involved possibly did not change the basic design required to accommodate extra load for the railway, rather they modified the design.

At present the railway track rolls over the cantilever from the shoulder of the main construction, that is, the road bridge. One would like to know what is the load bearing capacity of the cantilever and what is the actual load that has rolled over the cantilever from time to time.

There are mainly two weight factors i.e. weight of the thousand concrete sleepers plus the weight of three heavy rails and the total load when a passenger or goods train or fully loaded tank wagon rolls over the cantilever of the bridge. Thus what is the design load and the actual load, that is, rolling over the cantilever at present? Further, the vibration tolerance limit at critical point and whether this limit has been ignored and crossed.

Clippings in TV showed that the bridge has tilted towards railway side. Thus the bridge has been destabilized which resulted in tearing off from the holding anchors which has also caused the cracks both horizontally and widened the gap between sections which will

ultimately give in.

During the period of the last government when oil tanker could not reach Bagabari (North Bengal) oil terminal due to navigability problems, the government decided to use the Jamuna Bridge to transport oil to North Bengal, though railway ferry could have been used between Bahadurabad and Tistamukh ghat and also Jagannathgongj and Serajongj ghat to ferry tank wagons. Thus the than government violated/ignored the permissible load code parameters of the bridge and allowed fully laden tank wagons with petroleum products each weighing around 50 to 60 ton, that is, weight of tank wagon + petroleum product. If the rake contains 20 such tank wagon plus 60 ton locomotive total weight comes to more than 1200 tons.

It can be summarised that actual load beyond the permissible load on the cantilever railway track has destabilised, tilted the structure and caused gap in the sections vertically as well as slicing of the horizontal sections by tearing apart all the holding structural mechanism. It may be noted here that the high-tension inter-connector pylon stands on the edge of the shoulder of the main structure on this side of the bridge. On the other side of the bridge, only the East-West gas pipe line has passed below the similar cantilever.

The bridge has not been damaged as expressed by Engr. Saikh Wazir, rather it has been damaged beyond repair.
Shamim Saber
New DOHS, Dhaka

Tigers' performance



It wasn't the biggest surprise to watch the recent performances of our so called "(little) TIGERS" sitting from the gallery as we are used to experiencing similar dramas over and over again. Unfortunately, enhancement of performance by the Bengal TIGERS has stopped after their impressive World Cup campaign. Under the new captain and coach, their recent performances against Sri Lanka, New Zealand and South Africa seemed very depressing to the cricket lovers of Bangladesh. All we witnessed is how our TIGERS were surrendering. This would be hard to accept if it continues this way.

Keeping all the technical issues apart, could we see any zeal, consistency or ambition among the players to challenge their opponents bravely? Was there any unity observed amongst the players? But we saw the same mistakes being committed over and over again. Especially, we saw suicidal strokes from our batters, rather than any extra-ordinary bowling from their opponents.

They can't blame their luck!
Shoppil Mahamud
Old DOHS (Banani), Dhaka