

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.

Workers returning from Kuwait

Kuwait has started deporting Bangladeshi workers who are doing menial jobs there after it faced strong demonstration by Asians demanding better wages, humane working environment and regular payment. One can easily realise their deplorable condition by seeing the faces of the returning workers, with tearful eyes, dressed in one cloth, empty hands and signs of physical abuse. These people are mostly employed by companies engaged in cleaning & other nominal maintenance jobs of municipalities & hospitals, offices & markets, schools & mosques etc. They are poorly & irregularly paid and live in houses resembling prison cells. The money they earn from legal employment for the first contract period of about 2-3 years is spent just to realise what they paid to the recruiting agency.

The comments and opinions expressed in the

editorial of The Daily Star of 1st August 08 are highly commendable. I worked in Saudi Arabia for about sixteen years and got the opportunity of seeing the condition of these persons employed in mostly cleaning and agricultural works. Virtually all of them need to work illegally outside their normal employment contracts in order to survive and realise the huge amount of money they spent to get the overseas jobs. They do all types of jobs, from car washing to carpet cleaning, hawkers' business, loading & unloading of heavy goods & materials etc. These people leave the country under some illusion and only understand the real situation when they are already in trouble. It is very unfortunate that our government is only counting the foreign currency they are earning but least care about their condition. As pointed out in the editorial of The Daily Star, the

government must come forward and adopt some firm and bold steps to stop ill treatment and discrimination to Bangladeshi workers by Kuwaiti employers and authorities. Our people are giving their hard labour and definitely have the right to get reasonable & justifiable remunerations and humane behaviour. Kuwait is a Muslim country and we expect our brotherly people there to abide by the guidelines of Islam in employing people.

If not today, they will have to pay dearly tomorrow for every drop of tears of these deprived workers.

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque
Khalishpur, Khulna

I have heard of many accounts of Bangladeshi workers' harrowing plight in the Middle East over the years. Friends living there have often mentioned that of all the working class population represented within the ME, many felt that the Bangladeshis were at the bottom of the social rung and repeatedly subjected to harassment. I'm sure that this situation is not exclusive to the Bangladeshi labourers. There are other nationalities that may have similar tales of low wages, long working hours, job insecurity, little or no access to health care facility and subjected to physical & sexual exploitation.

The cover picture of Bangladeshi worker Anwar Hossain arriving at ZIA from Kuwait (31st July, 2008) should make anyone stand up & protest the treatment Bangladeshi workers are often subjected to. I think what is more bewildering is that the workers themselves feel that they are unable to approach the Bangladesh consulates for help.

While wearing a blood soaked T-shirt and bandaging plasters may seem as a photo opportunity to illustrate the treatment of the law enforcing authorities, it also reflects an underlying inability & incompetence on the Bangladesh Embassy's part to assist people like Anwar Hossain. Since Bangladesh is recipient of their hard earned foreign exchange, surely it would be in the country's self interest to at least take some action to assist them. Unless our government does something to point out the difficulties faced by Bangladeshi workers, they will continue being humiliated & wronged.

Nahid Rahman
Oxford, UK



Election and euphoria

This is the usual mechanism by which modern democracy fills offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive and judiciary, and for regional and local government.

During election campaigns, everybody talks about politicians or rather, candidates, however there are also some very important participants in elections which are not so much talked about; they are called qualified voters.

Candidates become changed people during elections; they will promise everything to get elected. They will lie, deceive, and guarantee the impossible, sing and dance, cry and laugh, and all that in order to win!

It is evident that while campaigning, candidates will tell us things we like to hear and agree, just to make us think they are good, smart, dedicated, and considerate, among other things. However, almost everything they say was written and prepared in advance for that occasion by the campaign staff in order to attract more voters. In most cases, especially in democratic systems, candidates heavily rely on finance from private donors, selected individuals, groups or industries. If elected, they have an obligation to reimburse supporters for their contributions by protecting and supporting their businesses, no matter what that businesses might be.

We all know what candidates do, but what about voters?

Voters are a group of people gathered around to make some decision or express their opinion often in discussions, debates and election campaigns. Voters support their favourite candidates, they go to rallies and listen to what their favourite candidates have to say, they analyse them, agree or disagree with them, and in the end, they make the final decision on

Election Day. However, on Election Day, not all of the supporters vote for their desired candidate, which they supported throughout the year, not all voters are faithful to their candidate.

To make things more clear, let's use the 2008 United States Presidential Election as an example: candidates Barack Obama and John McCain, and qualified voters/electorate.

It appears that Americans are fascinated with Democratic candidate Barack Obama, possibly more so than with any other Presidential candidate in US history; many talk about him, adore him, and cheer for him.

On the other side, Republican candidate John McCain was selected in the US primaries, along time before Obama, it was clear that he was the chosen one on this side, but it looks like people are not so enthusiastic about him as they are about Obama.

According to these indicators, we may feel that Barack Obama will become the next President of the United States, but will he?

The chances of Barack Obama becoming the next President may not be as good as they look. For Obama it would be better if he had less attention, his chances to win would be better.

On Election Day many people change their minds and do the opposite of what they were saying, promising, cheering and longing for throughout the election campaign.

In the end, democracy is not like a communist regime; in democracy it may not really be as important which politician or candidate comes to power. As long as democracy continues to be the ruling mechanism, as long as they do not take extra power, the system will continue to work. Plans and ideas will continue to be executed, no matter who is in charge.

Ivan Simic
Belgrade, Serbia

Noisy car mufflers

Through your newspaper I would like to draw attention of the city's traffic authorities to the loud noise making car mufflers. During last several years it has become a fashion, especially for young people, to remove the original silencer and replace them with extremely loud noise producing mufflers. These mufflers are as bad or even worse than hydraulic horns, the use of which was stopped successfully by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

I reside in Dhanmondi and it has become a menace to the locality. I have seen numerous times teenagers (apparently under 18 years) driving around Dhanmondi with these mufflers. In majority of the cases the cars have dark glasses which is also a violation of traffic law.

I request the traffic authorities to take this matter into notice and, if need be, enact the necessary law to stop use of loud mufflers.

Fahad Saleh
ADD Pearl
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Why photos only?

Seemingly every issue of The Daily Star features a photograph of environmental degradation in Bangladesh; often on the paper's very front page, in full colour. However, rarely, if ever, does any kind of investigative report accompany such photographs.

Take yesterday's (Monday, July 28, 2008) edition of The Daily Star for example. The front page of the paper's main section spotlights a photo of a polluted section of Chittagong-city "where untreated industrial waste is dumped into canals". The last page of the main section (page 16) similarly exhibits a photo of a polluted Gulshan Lake, where "street urchins scavenge through the garbage for something usable". No report or story is tied to these pictures. No indication as

to who, specifically, the wrongdoers are or what the authorities might or might not be doing in response to these flagrant violations of national law. These photographs just take their regular seats on these pages, chronically alone, as if they are not really 'news' but merely part of Bangladesh's everyday scenery not unlike a hawk peddling wrist-watches on the street or people enjoying an evening sunset around the parliament building. The caption below the page 16 photograph does claim that "the trash dumped [in Gulshan Lake] continues to pollute the lake", but nothing more. This type of journalism is so typical that I, as a reader, have stopped even looking for the accompanying news article -- because it almost never exists.

I wonder what your aim is with these pictures? Are they intended to raise the eyebrows of the paper's readership? Are the supposed to elevate the consciousness of the public with respect to the dire environmental situation faced by the country? Or, on the other hand, does The Daily Star simply intend to conciliate the nation's obvious environmental apathy? If in fact The Daily Star is trying to make some kind of point, what is it? Would it be too much to ask of DS to actually pursue the details surrounding these environmental violations?

Bangladesh is arguably the most polluted country in the free world. Many claims have been made at least for Dhaka being the world's most polluted city. Mr. Zunaed of Banani, Dhaka, extolled the virtues of nuclear energy in a letter to you at the expense of any kind of insight as to why in fact the building of a nuclear power plant in Bangladesh could very well be the worst potential response to the country's energy/environment problem. I believe that if we all just started

doing what we can to raise a generation of socially and environmentally conscious citizens, a lot of these problems would take care of themselves without a need for a myopic and possibly catastrophic 'quick-fix'.

I also believe that The Daily Star could play an invaluable role in this regard by telling the public what the implications are of the environmental damage they exhibit.

Ryan Higgitt
Dhaka

CTG and politics

The non-political CTG, couldn't care less if Nizami, a tainted criminal related to killing, rape and torturing Bengalis during the 1971 holocaust, is bailed out, or may be even set free! They only want to account for illegal wealth.

The EC chief publicly expressed his frustration on the lack of "quality candidates" in the line up for the corporation and municipal elections. Since when has the EC been authorised to publicly air their views on the "quality" of candidates seeking election? They can only qualify or disqualify the candidates based on clear rules and guidelines; nothing more and nothing less. Going a logical step further, was the EC trying to directly or indirectly lobby for candidates who in their subjective opinion have the proper "quality"?

This in turn reflects on the CTG's inner motives. Are they extending their mandate from a "free, fair and impartial" election, to election of candidates of "quality"; solely based on their subjective opinion? This is a very subtle manner of discrimination among prospective candidates. Is it really "fair or free", or does the CTG have a different interpretation of what is "free and fair". If so, in all fairness, let every one openly know this.

Prospective voter
Dhaka

Thoughts on elections

Sitting thousands of miles away, watching 2 satellite television channels and reading the daily internet edition of more than 10 Bangladesh newspapers, my conclusion about the "over promised" election being organised by the military backed government is that it might not bring any positive change. Just to inform our readers, I am also educating myself on democratic values watching the full coverage of the US Presidential election process and campaign on major television networks, although I know that one would be more frustrated if one ever tries to compare the two situations. Nevertheless, it is raising our expectation to see more civil-democratic order in our country. Unfortunately, the impact of our deliberately mismanaged state affairs is just opposite. That is why I see all efforts of the EC and the government have made the general election look very "ugly". The reasons why I say ugly are:

a. The EC is just operating like a puppet institution in the hands of the government.

b. Taking advantage of the broken political house with fears of arrest and prosecution, the EC has wittingly included the idea of local council election in the roadmap, knowing full well that the political parties have very little strength to raise any serious questions due to uncertain future of the party leaders. The EC did their homework well. Now the nation is paying the price -- the general election is becoming uncertain.

c. Only 13 local council elections are being held today. We have noticed quite a lot of activities on the part of the EC and the government to guide the election as they wanted to achieve their objective but failed.

d. Great news -- 5500 local and foreign observers will observe the 13 elections. Again our donor friends are physically present by proxy to demonstrate their accountability to taxpayers at home and report back.

The readers might draw their own conclusion and say what picture they see -- good, bad, worse or ugly.

Reader, One e-mail

Poorly paid teachers

On July 27, 2008, Mr. Suranjit Debnath wrote a very good article on the poor salary of community school teachers in Bangladesh. Sometimes I wonder if I write any article whether that would have any impact. Though I am not optimistic about it, I still write and try to convey the message. I am surprised to see that the teachers are getting salary of Tk 1,200 per month, after months of agitation and hunger strike. This monthly salary can only buy 30Kg rice at the current market price. If this is the case, how could these teachers and their families survive? What are the top level government officials doing? Does anyone understand the impact in the long run? Does anyone care about this situation? It seems to me that government decision makers do not care about educating our children in the rural areas of Bangladesh, because most of the top decision makers live in the capital city or district headquarters. They work in air conditioned rooms, live in government houses, use government cars, get good retirement benefits and educate their children in good urban schools. It is very unfortunate that these government officials are completely out of touch of common villagers and perceive themselves as the Masters. I think our government officials must be retrained to change their attitude to become servants, not masters of the people. Like Dr. Barakat, I strongly feel that the salary of the primary school teachers in rural areas should be increased for the sake of ensuring standard education.

Dr. Jamir Chowdhury
Director
Institutional Research and Data
Warehouse
Qatar University

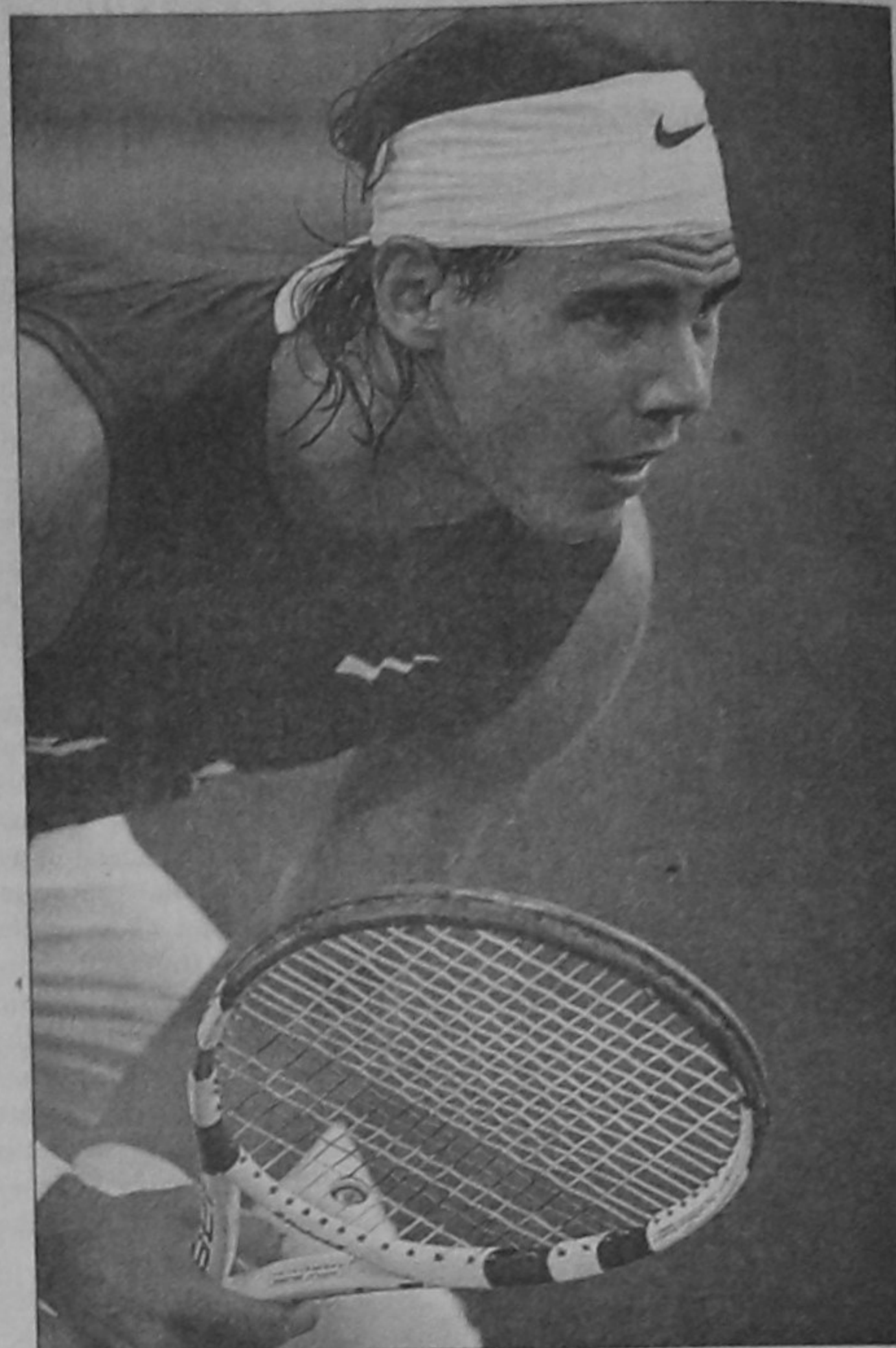


PHOTO: AFP

Irresistible Nadal!

Rafael Nadal, world number two. The tennis maestro has recently rocked the court with his fiery performances at the Wimbledon championship and the Toronto Masters. The epic final of the Wimbledon this year between Nadal and the world number one Roger Federer was one of the most sensational grand slam finals of tennis history. From the very beginning to the end, in that final, Nadal was clearly ahead of Federer. It was in the third game that Federer made a come-back shot, which ultimately though, did turn towards Nadal.

This record making Spaniard is the second player in history after the legendary Bjorn Borg to win the French Open and the Wimbledon in the same year. And Nadal is the second Spaniard to win the Wimbledon, and he has done it after 42 years! In clay court he is phenomenal!

A few days back, Nadal outplayed his opponent in the Toronto Masters tourney in the same way only to whisper at Roger Federer's shoulders for the much coveted number one ranking! Nadal, however, deserves the position now, many experts think. As Federer, some tend to think, has lost his reflex for the time being -- bad patch!

Now that Nadal, the record maker at the French Open (four consecutive wins 2005-2008), is at his peak, he will surely be ruling the tennis court for many years to come! Three cheers for Rafael Nadal!

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Neglected DU students



It's a story. Once, there was a building in Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University. It was almost broken. Students found their lives at risk. But, as students are not human beings, so, they didn't have any choice and got themselves used to living in such a building. Some students, out of fear, made a mistake: they demanded security of their lives, and wanted the DU administration to repair the worn out building. But, the DU administration didn't pay heed to the misguided students; they didn't repair it.

One day, on a rainy night, that building broke down causing death of a large number of students. Now, there stands a memorial building named 'October Smriti Bhavan'.

Now, there are three more buildings, all of which are waiting to crash down. Nearly one year ago, after a fearful night (just like the recent one of earthquake), students started movement against the whimsical administration of the university, and then some experts were hired to assess the situation, and they were made to lie before the students - 'there is no risk and everything is just okay'.

We live here without our parents, our guardians. And, you - teachers of Dhaka University - were supposed to be our parents, our guardians here, but, you failed, Sir! ... Parents or guardians willingly take care of children, they even risk their own lives for children. But you, forgive me for telling the bitter truth - never take any care of us in any sense: we have to pay money for 'strange' and unjust reasons - you never care; we have to waste important years of our youth, our lives for so-called session-jam, we have to live in a terribly unhealthy environment, we have to eat foods not suitable for even dogs, we have to live in buildings that can collapse any time, you never care.

If another earthquake strikes (and the possibility is very high), and if the same thing happens that happened years ago, some new memorial buildings will be built again; but, what'll happen to the lost lives? Who will answer my question?

Sajeeb Sarker
Jagannath Hall
Dhaka University

"Lifetime" of Bangladesh



"There was a tiny country named Bangladesh (1971-2071) beside giant India." As per some so-called environmental experts or bodies, people after 2071 are likely to read the above sentence about us. They may also read, "The country was born in blood and died just after 100 years submerged in seawater." We cannot believe it.

For various reasons, the temperature of the earth is on the increase gradually. The huge amount of snow at the two poles has started melting and the sea level is going up and up. Thus Bangladesh, Maldives etc are going to face extinction.

Who are the culprits behind the rising temperature of the earth? Not Bangladesh or Maldives, but they will be the victims. Maldives is a country of numerous isles and surrounded

by sea but Bangladesh is not like that. Our great rivers are bearing tonnes of silt every moment. If we can manage to deposit this silt the surface of Bangladesh will be higher. Furthermore, it is a matter of joy that Bangladesh is expanding. Some new isles are going to emerge in our water territory.

Our enemies are always trying to launch propaganda against us so that foreign investors become hesitant to invest their money in our country. They are very much interested in depicting negative subjects regarding us on their canvas. But we will emerge as an economic tiger in near future. God willing, in spite of facing numerous odds. Bangladesh will not go under seawater!

Harun-or-Rashid
Sobhanbag, Dhaka