

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.

"What I saw in Bangladesh"

Re: "What I saw in Bangladesh,"
Nokib-E-Kibria (Aug. 8).

Nokib-E-Kibria wrote: "My last visit was in 2005 and I noticed after three years that there had been a lot of change. First of all, at the airport everything was good, no hassle, quick service, all in order and everything on schedule. No hartal and no violence and I was able to use and enjoy all my valuable time." I also visited Bangladesh in 2006 and I also found everything was good and there were no hartals and protest marches. I thoroughly enjoyed visiting various parts of Bangladesh.

However, there was one big difference between my visit and Nokib-E-Kibria's visit two years later. During my visit, Bangladesh was a democracy and people were looking forward to next election with some apprehensions. Their concerns proved to be accurate and Bangladesh plunged into turmoil as the two main political leaders -- Sheikh Hasina of AL and Khaleda Zia of BNP -- could not find a common ground to hold the election. Their infighting brought the country to a standstill, leading to the declaration of emergency. It is a great pity that the political leaders of Bangladesh caused great harm to the democratic process by their infighting.

Democracy is about public participation in the political process and when political leaders refuse to listen to each other as representatives of the people, they put the whole democratic process in danger. Ancient Athenians, who invented democracy, realised this and they created what was known as Athens Council to put a check on the leaders. The Athens Council, composed of 500 citizens chosen through lottery, had the power to veto any law which they considered too overly partisan and did not respect the wishes of

the minority. Ancient Athenians believed that democracy is not a tyranny of the majority and must take into account of the views of the minority.

Today's parliamentary system depends on the cooperation between various political parties to stem any dictatorial power of the prime minister. This is why the leader of the opposition bears an enormous responsibility to provide the needed check and balance. As such, cooperation between various political leaders is essential to the running of democracy. When political leaders forget to cooperate with each other, they undermine the institution of democracy. Bangladesh should look to Pakistan where after years of military dictatorships and infightings by political leaders, the political parties have learned to cooperate with each other to keep democracy functioning.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

Crimes against women

The news entitled "10 months' nightmare", which was published in the last page of The Daily Star on 6 August 2008, indicates the barbarian attitude towards women in our contemporary society. A woman was allegedly burnt by her (educated!) husband.

This kind of treatment to women must be stopped once and for all. The culprits must be given exemplary punishment.

Md. Kamrul Islam
Mishu Kutubi
Dept. of English
IUC, Chittagong

Barisal election mystery

Barisal, the Venice of Bengal, had some mysterious anecdotes since long. But now the city mayor's election under strict emergency

rule made Barisal even more vulnerable to mysterious happenings. When we were getting bored watching the one sided election results on the night following 4 August, Barisal came with the unusual jerk, so desperately needed to break the boredom. Brushing aside all the predictions, a candidate supported by a newly formed and recently divided King's party came to limelight marginally following the main candidate. Fortunately, I am married to a not-so-mysterious Barisal woman, who has a lot of politically informed relatives. I used my mobile phone to know about the whole drama. The end of the drama became tragic for the surprise candidate. We could see on television the helpless face of the returning officer declaring the number of votes polled by different candidates but he refrained from declaring the highest vote gatherer as winner.

We hope the Election Commission will look into the matter in depth.
M. Sanaul Huq
Uttara, Dhaka

Upgrading ZIA

Yes, I agree that ZIA airport is not up to the standards of any modern airport in our neighbouring areas like Bangkok, Singapore or the Middle Eastern countries. We do need an upgrade to improve the image and make it a more attractive place for all tourists and foreigners who come to Bangladesh for whatever purpose. But, being a less endowed nation than those other countries, Bangladesh is still cash strapped to be able to compete. Perhaps it will happen but may be not when we all want. I do agree that building another airport from scratch may not be a good idea since that will be so much more expensive. I don't see that sort of a quantum leap in people coming in/leaving that necessitates such a radical

plan at this point of time. Again, may be in the future.

However, as a Bangladeshi living abroad longer than having lived in Bangladesh, I cannot help but spill out my emotions every time I arrive at ZIA. When the plane makes the landing approach, I can see the green, small villages in the outskirts of Dhaka, a lone farmer walking his cows, or a rickshaw making its way, the water, paddy fields and little ponds. All this trigger a nostalgia of a feeling so unique.

But I suppose, emotions aside, we probably need to develop a level playing field, so that we can attract people from all over the world invitingly at the first point of their entry to Bangladesh.

Khan Kabir
NY, USA

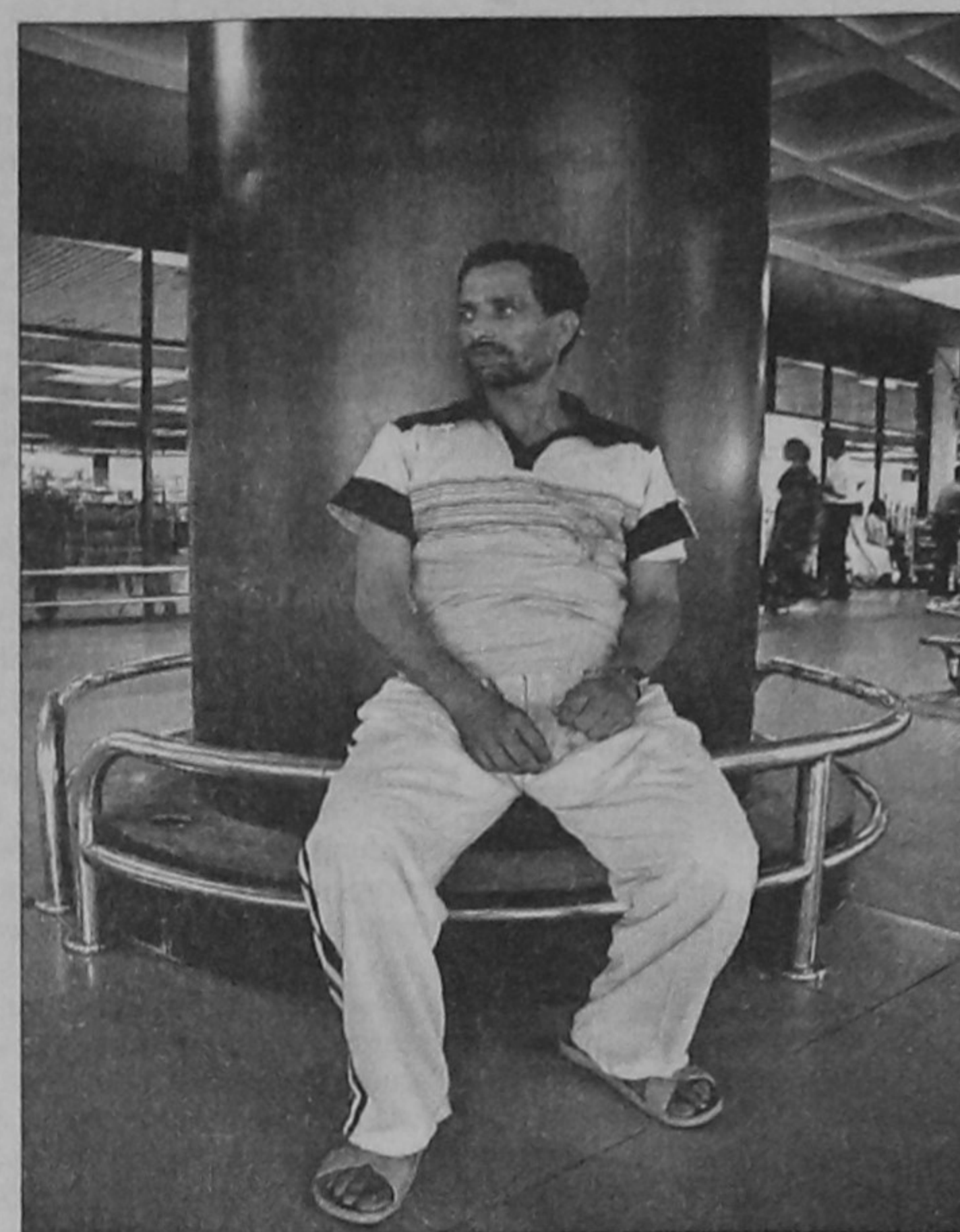
Wonders of Olympics

It was a real wonder to watch the gala opening of the 29th Olympic Games in Beijing. The theme and the performances are so real that one could get lost easily in the rich history of China. The National Geographic Channel has shown a documentary on the fantastic efforts of the people of China and the technological support of the engineering genius of the western world in completing the main Olympic Stadium and other complexes well in time to stage such an unforgettable opening show. This is a perfect mixture of human ingenuity, science and technology and above all the will and effort of the Chinese people and the government to show what they can achieve.

We know there are 8 man-made ancient "Wonders", and 7 natural Wonders recognised by the world today. We hope the "BIRD NEST" will occupy the 9th place of man-made "Wonders" when the judges will look for a new "Wonder" of the world.

Areader
One-e-mail

Oppressed workers in Kuwait



In a rare development in the Middle East, thousands of Bangladeshi workers went to strike protesting poor living conditions and human rights violation.

I hope you were not surprised with the aftermath of this. Instead of addressing the human rights abuse issue that has been going on for years, they pounced on the workers. Why should we be surprised? This is Middle East, after all. No one has the right to complain. If you do complain or try to raise the issue to get a long over due attention, all you get is yet more abuse and rampage. Well, for thousands of poor legal employees, you got a forced deportation.

The Asia News reported on August 05 that "Kuwait has expelled a thousand workers from Bangladesh, believed to be responsible for violent demonstrations, but at the same time it has announced a law against 'visa merchants' and the exploitation of foreign workers, the factors that unleashed the workers' protest."

It also reported that "last week, hundreds of employees of

Kuwaiti businesses unleashed a series of demonstrations to ask for better labour conditions and fair pay. The reasons behind the protest include forms of sexual violence suffered by women who act as domestic workers. This phenomenon, together with that of forced labour, was denounced in June in a report from the US state department on the condition of workers in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Qatar".

Wait a minute! Are we talking about "sexual violence" against female workers? Is this happening in an Arab nation? I believe Islam forbid that and abusers are supposed to get stoned-to-death punishment. Apparently, that does not apply for our oil-rich Arab friends there.

My twelve-miles-a-gallon ML350 is literally making these guys rich. Every mile I drive, that money is enabling these "inhuman beings" to bring more women as "domestic workers" from poor nations and sexually abuse them. I feel morally responsible, don't you? We must intervene and take action.

According to a report there are about 2000,000 workers from Bangladesh in the Gulf countries, mostly employed for cleaning services or as security guards.

"The Kuwait authorities have already directed the companies to pay the minimum wages and warned them of tough actions in case of any failure." Funny it sounds! The poor workers have been arrested, but the abusing companies were only "warned".

"But similar promises were made following protests in 2005. Three years later, Nazrul and his fellow workers are still waiting for a change." Raymond Barrett reported from Kuwait City. Make no mistake that it is just a kick in the air this time as well.

"Kuwait has \$39,300 per capita income. Poor workers there get \$75 per month? What type of culture is this?" a friend of mine has asked. Compare that with the USA which has \$45,800 per capita income and \$8.00 per hour (in California). Does any civilized human being live in Kuwait? Or are they all beasts running the show?

This is even worse than slavery. Each of these workers is possibly one of the poorest people in world. Yet they paid as much as \$3,500 to the middleman in Bangladesh and agents from Kuwait to get legal papers and come here. People don't sell their homes and pay that much money to get into slavery. They sold their land or whatever they had to get a job. Now they have lost both the job and the home.

Where are the human right groups? What are they doing? Are we afraid to ask tough questions to our oil rich "friends"?

We have to start looking at the injustice and evil practices if we are looking for real friends in the Muslim world.

GM Solaiman
Silicon Valley
California, USA

Ramadan price hike



No doubt, Ramadan is the month of abstinence and self-purification. But we often fail to uphold its solemnity. I agree with the people who apprehend that the prices of commodities will be increasing during this month. If I go by my previous experiences, I am not that much optimistic that the present caretaker govt. would be able to control the prices during the time of Ramadan.

The government should handle the issue on a priority basis.

Aiman Bin Shaofiqul Hamid
Dept. of English
International Islamic University
Chittagong

Dhaka marathon

"...Bangladesh is a nation of 150m people; the biggest nation never to have won an Olympic medal". (BBC commentary on Beijing Olympics opening ceremony team parade, Fri. 08.08.08). Why? This year we have just six participants. It is good to be represented in Beijing and heartening to see our distinguished flag flying - but we need to win.

I have a dream: I am planning to organise a permanent annual marathon in Dhaka, which will take place every year into perpetuity. It will be the first mass participation sporting event in Dhaka and in Bangladesh. It will be a charity, totally non-profit, with all sponsorship revenue minus expenses going to charity, just like the London Marathon. The aim will be to get people running, fit, encourage healthy eating, become more charitable and generally encourage running in Bangladesh; both in the cities and in the countryside. I want to see a Bangladeshi boy, or a girl, running the marathon in a future Olympics and being on the podium in twelve years time!

The Dhaka Marathon charity will look for ways to empower people in Bangladesh. The charity will be the means to tackle inequality; the charity will challenge gender inequality and the charity will not impose western and/or capitalist values on the people of Bangladesh. It will be purely for the people of Bangladesh with Bangladeshis running the charity and the event. It will be universal; there will be no restrictions on who can participate except minimum age. All that would be required is that

the entrant pays an entry fee, gets fit.

If any reader is seriously interested in supporting me in setting up the Dhaka Marathon, please get in touch. I am keen to hear from you. To set up a charity in Bangladesh I need at least seven people to sign the registration documents to set up the charity legally. Then we need an office address in Dhaka, constitute a board of directors and appoint a CEO. That candidate should be a local graduate ideally with a charity background in Bangladesh or an MBA with knowledge of charity or social entrepreneurship with strong communication skills in both Bengali and English.

The Dhaka marathon will be an event of national interest in Bangladesh and in sporting diary of the country. It will put Dhaka on the global map of marathon running; encourage tourism, fun running and sportsmanship. Together we can make a big difference for Bangladeshis long distance runners and raise a lot of money for Bangladeshi charities. It will also create employment.

Abdul Salam
Camden, London, UK

Election and quality of candidates...

In the recent local election the caretaker govt. tried their best to attract as many educated candidates as they could but admitted their inability to do more than what they did since at the end of the day it is the educated person's decision whether he would run the election or not. We saw so many candidates who didn't even finish high school but ran

for Mayoral Election. Now the question arises whether the govt. has failed to attract the educated class into politics or the educated class failed the country to lead? My answer to this query is somewhat in the middle.

The present situation in Bangladesh can't be considered very conducive for people to associate themselves with politics. The main reason is the state of emergency itself and continuous changing events in the political field. The second reason is lack of co-operation from the family members and also the social perception of an educated person who is thinking of joining politics. Given no co-operation and the great chance of ending up in a prison don't seem to be a pretty exciting offer to join in a battle that so many have termed as a lost one already, and gave up their hope and inspired those who can manage to leave the country.

Around half the people in Bangladesh could be categorized as uneducated and I am not sure they should be considered ignorant, given that when it comes to politics they do possess a decent amount of knowledge about the players (somewhat reluctant to address them as leaders) who have dominated the Bangladesh politics. Now the question is who is knowledgeable and who is ignorant?

A person who has closed the door to grow mentally, intellectually, socially and above all morally could be considered ignorant. On the other hand, the way we perceive education is on the basis of that person's intellectuality and some certificates are considered as the proof of it. Now that shallow perception led us to a point

where moral values and ethics are less important, we endorse the idea of not discovering the inner imperatives of that person's real character. It is very easy to distinguish an uneducated person since he or she has no proof of education like no pieces of certificates but it is not that easy to recognize an ignorant from a pool of population. We all are ignorant to certain extent and that's why we always admire the thing we don't understand. For example, I am quite ignorant about computer and so if someone eliminates a virus problem from my laptop I always give them the credit for being so knowledgeable, thus hiding my own ignorance.

Now the question arises about the educated class of Bangladesh. It is not true Bangladesh was not run by educated people, rather those so called educated could be blamed for the state of the country at this point of time. The common people reposed their faith in those educated people for a long time and still they do command a great amount of respect in our society but the problem is some of them are educated on a piece of paper or on the base of intellectuality but lack moral and ethical values. They did everything to safeguard their own interest and for the vested quarters they had worked for. Before 1/11, the common people looked at them with utmost confidence that they would come up with some sort of peaceful solution and won't put the country into the path of self-destruction but what was happening in the last week of October 2006? That was a situation where

no player offered anything that will pose a threat to their tiny self interest or to their affiliated political party's interest.

The educated citizens who not only have certificates but also possess some moral values should come forward not to repeat the history since education is the progressive discovery of our own ignorance and the sooner we rise to the task of establishing an educated knowledge based society, the sooner we can forget our inglorious past.
Mohammad Kamrul Hasan
London, UK

River pollution

The rivers around Dhaka are getting dangerously polluted day by day. Pollution creates pungent odour and turbidity increase.

The main source of pollution is wastewater from households and industries. Dumping of used engine oil also pollutes water.

The solution could be installation of municipal water treatment plants around the city and ETP plants in industrial units. The dumping of used oil must be prohibited. The authorities concerned should take the necessary initiative to prevent river pollution.

Md. Arifur Rahman
Student of Environment Sciences
Jahangirnagar University

27th BCS

The viva voce of the 27th BCS exams has recently been completed and the result will be published soon. A few days back a report carrying the news of vacant posts of the cadre service was published in DS. There has not been any recruitment in the cadre service, though almost three (03) years have passed after the circular of the 27th BCS was issued. On the other hand, there is shortage of manpower in the administration that creates problems in many sectors of the administration. Many can argue that if large scale recruitment is completed the quality will go down, but I don't believe that. All the candidates are from different universities. I'd like to give an example. In the 27th BCS a total 16,000 candidates participated and if 750 of them are declared qualified in the general cadre the quality will not go down. Recently, the Judicial Service Commission appointed 394 Assistant Judges.

I'd like to draw the attention of the authorities concerned to take the necessary steps to increase the number of posts for the 27th BCS, so that the previously suc-

cessful & new candidates can be recruited.
Mohammad Masum Miah
Counsellor
Zone Services Complex
Chittagong EPZ
Chittagong

Tata's withdrawal & FBCCI

Tata recently withdrew its \$3b investment proposal after the Bangladesh government failed to give any commitment on gas supply. The FBCCI and some economists commented that it would have a negative impact on foreign investment in the country in future.

Interestingly, a press statement of the FBCCI last Friday said that production in the gas-run industrial units was being hampered to a great extent. For this reason they will talk about the gas supply issue with the government.

Now, if the government committed the huge gas supply to Tata, it is easily understood that the gas supply situation to the local gas-run industrial units would worsen. In this connection, I would like to say without hesita-

tion that business and policy organisations and experts are not concerned about scarcity of gas or the interest of Bangladesh.

The \$2-3b investment proposal was years old. Why didn't the experts explain the issue to the GoB in a systematic manner?

Saif Tinku
Baridhara
Dhaka

Clean up Gulshan Lake

The Gulshan Lake has a nice walkway on its western bank, and every morning a lot of residents including many women from Gulshan, Badda and nearby areas take their morning walk. Unfortunately, the bank of the lake is sullied by refuse and garbage being dumped there; mostly by the residents of the flats and houses bordering the western lakeside. Possibly the same thing happens in the eastern side of the lake too, but there is no walkway. I have seen garbage being brought from Badda and dumped on the north-west corner of the walkway into the lake. I have pointed it to the police in

their camp right opposite this corner; but they couldn't care less. Possibly they too dump the refuse from their camp, into the lake! Despite many complaints to the Gulshan municipality, they do nothing about it. Is it not a part of their conservancy function?

The CTG should (rather must, if I may say so) carry out clean up of the lake banks to restore the lake to its natural state. They may post law enforcers round the clock, or from 7:00am to 10:00pm at the places where roads end at the west bank of the lake, and also at the north and south end of the walkway and catch the people who come to throw garbage. Tracing back from them, they can find out the residents responsible for this pollution and fine them to finance the clean-up expenses. May be this will inculcate some civic sense in these otherwise well-to-do residents! This step to clean up the lake, will be deeply appreciated by the many, usually elderly residents who walk every morning along the highly polluted bank of the lake.

S.A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

Education in rural areas



Bangladesh is a small, over-populated country in this global village. Only to survive as a nation, we have to fight a lot. There are many challenges before us. Such as, new economic and cultural colonialism, natural calamities, environmental changes and so on. We have to turn our huge population

into an asset to survive.

And the goal can be achieved only by spreading education all over the country, particularly the rural areas.

Md. Abdul Malak (Mamun)
Pallabi
Mirpur, Dhaka