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Location of schools

The mushroom growth of English medium schools has reached menacing levels. The residents of Dhanmondi and Gulshan are the worst hit people. The government -- particularly the education ministry -- must come up with short term and long-term plans to cope with the situation. The recent government circular to start the morning shift at 7.30am is a positive move forward and is only a short term arrangement.

A long term arrangement may include shifting the schools from residential areas, picking up the abandoned houses and multi-storied buildings for leasing them to different schools on profit sharing basis, may be 25% for the govt and 75% for the owners of the schools and so on. As there is serious shortage of big plots of at least 3 bighas within the city, the govt should take up projects for residential schools of international standard outside the city areas like in India and Pakistan. Besides plans should also be made to accommodate schools for medium and lower income groups in each community area to stop people from moving into other areas for their children's schooling.

The ministry may engage strategic planners and may also arrange brain-storming sessions on the issue.

Nuruzzaman Khan
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Bus service

Every day people waste their valuable time remaining stuck in the vehicles. As small vehicles occupy more space compared to the number of passengers, we should impose restrictions on private cars, rickshaws, baby taxis etc. And therefore we are in favour of more bus services in this capital city. But our buses are very old and most of them are not big enough. Side by side, there are spacious and more comfortable buses. The government should inspire people to invest in this type of buses which will certainly mitigate the sufferings of the commuters.

Harun-or-Rashid
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

Rationalise "quota system"

Bangladesh, a poor country plagued by myriad problems and numerous constraints, apparently

and indispensably requires an effective, pragmatic and efficient leadership provided by the Bangladesh Civil Service that should have the most brilliant, prudent and talented persons competent enough to address the public affairs, national issues and problems. Hence, the recruitment, selection and appointment of the people to the civil service should unconditionally be on the basis of merit to uphold the national interests. Regrettably, merely 45 percent candidates are recruited on merit and the rest 55 percent on quotas; 30 percent from freedom fighters' children, 10 percent from women, 10 percent from district quotas and 5 percent from tribal people. The quota system was introduced in Bangladesh by an executive order on 5 September, 1972 during a constitutional interregnum in the wake of a destructive war of independence. The constitution that came into effect on 16 December 1972 enshrined the principles of non-discrimination in the Public Service. The Articles 27 and 28 of the constitution stipulate that there shall be no discrimination in the recruitment of the people to the public service irrespective of caste, religion and sex. Though, later, the quota system was constitutionally validated showing the reason of advancement of the backward sections of society. But the provisional measures for proportional representation can not continue for an indefinite period. The long term bad impact of the quota system is being felt now. The quota system has paved the way for rampant corruption. Through the quota system, a large group of relatively poor calibre officials get entry into the civil service and ultimately weaken the entire service.

So, the meritocracy should be the basis of recruitment to the government services to prevent brain-drain and to ensure eligible and competent persons in the administration for effectual and efficient leadership. The quota system should be gradually phased out. A widespread demand from every section of society for rationalisation of the quota system is being repeatedly voiced. The experts, intellectuals and officials believe it is high time to rationalise the existing quota system.

The Public Service Commission, the highest authority for recruitment, selection and appointment of the class-I gov-

ernment officials to the Bangladesh Civil Service, has also recommended to the Ministry of Establishment to rearrange the prevailing quota system. We are optimistic that the government will address the issue in the greater interest of the country.

Alamin Al Azad

Public Administration

Zahurul Haque Hall

University of Dhaka

Same story?

The way things are now going on and the way the things we really want to be are opposed to each other. With the release of most of the accused of graft/corruption cases now under trial and/or punishment, the people are confused. So far so good was our instant reaction to the 1/11 initiations. We then heaved a sigh of a great relief. But looking into what is going on now, we are really afraid to see that we are about to meet the same old fate as we had experienced with our past political governments.

Engr. Shaheedul Islam
Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Set up more universities

This refers to Dr. Sakina Khanam's letter. I support her view of turning Eden College into a university for women, and establishing an Agricultural University by using the facilities of Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) and Veterinary Training Institute (VTI) in Gaibandha. I think it is a very good proposal in the country's context.

So, considering the future of our generation, can we think about it seriously?

Lutfur Rahman
Seoul National University
Korea

Exporting brain!

Every year, thousands of students get admitted into public and private universities for higher education. They have a dream after finishing their studies they will get a good job. Like them, I had also a dream as a student of Chittagong University. We felt proud when we got a good subject. But now we feel that the reality is different. Getting a good job is not easy!

So, most of the talented students are going abroad. This is a serious problem which has to be addressed in right earnest.

Rejaul Haq
One-mail

Climate change



PHOTO: AFP

Bangladesh has experienced some of the worst climatic changes, bringing sufferings to millions of people. The media continue to report on the aftermath of the cyclone SIDR which razed human settlements and infrastructure to the ground along the coastal districts, leaving a trail of destruction along its path.

Rapid global warming has caused fundamental changes to our climate. No country and people know this better than Bangladesh, where millions of people are already suffering. Sudden, severe and catastrophic floods are taking place more frequently owing to increased rainfall in the monsoon. Over the last ten years, Bangladesh was ravaged by floods of catastrophic proportion in 1998, 2004 and 2007. Heavy downpour in short spells has resulted in landslide. Cold spells claim human lives and damage crops. Droughts often affect even coastal districts. Bad weather makes the coastal waters risky for fishing. Damage and losses due to climatic extremes like floods, cyclones, tornadoes, and droughts are colossal.

These are early signs of global warming effects. Sea level rise, in the coming decades will create over 25 million climate refugees. This is larger than entire populations of many countries.

Bangladesh must move on in its pursuit to develop and thrive as a nation, taking

into account its vulnerability, susceptibility and capacity to manage climate risks and adaptation. In this respect, the government has taken some bold steps to prepare and respond to the challenge. To help the country and its people build necessary capacity and resilience, regional and international cooperation is essential. Major rivers that draw freshwater and sediment from upstream basin to the Bay of Bengal going through Bangladesh originate in neighbouring countries and water flow during both summer and dry periods is critical for agriculture and food and drinking water security. Collective actions are necessary now to understand the risks and take action. International efforts in planning responses to climate change must be on to keep the situation under control. The case of Bangladesh, one of the first and major victims of human induced global warming and climate changes, should be taken seriously and addressed collectively.

Md. Tareq Mahmud
Dept. of environmental Science & Resource Management
Mawlana Bhashani Science & Technology University
Santosh, Tangail

Bangladeshis in Los Angeles

The Bangladesh Association of Los Angeles (BALA) is undergoing a major awakening following a decade-long stalemate in its activities. Thanks to the valiant efforts of Mohammed B. D. Khan, the Chief Election Commissioner and his team of Commissioners, BALA will hold its next election on October 26, 2008.

The Bangladeshis' participation in one of the oldest Bangladeshi organisations in North America is essential for reviving the collective power of our community to solve its problems and reach out to the larger American community that we all live in.

The economic and cultural vitality of Bangladeshis can only be harnessed when we are united in all our diversity.

Ishtiaq A Chisti

Long Beach, US

National Haor Festival

The haors, baors, beels or the wetlands in general, occupy a significant place in the culture, tradition, lifestyle, livelihood and economy of our people and the country.

The initiative by 'Paribesh Bachao Andolon' undoubtedly carries an important message for all of us to revisit our traditional and cultural practices, which we tend to forget amidst the hustle and bustle of the city life.

Wetlands provide many important services to human society, but are at the same time ecologically sensitive systems. This explains why in recent years much attention has been directed towards the formulation and operation of sustainable management strategies for wetlands.

Both natural and social sciences can contribute to an increased understanding of relevant processes and problems associated with such strategies. Observing a Haor festival is one such social strategy.

Wetlands possess significant economic value and that nationally they are under heavy pressure. The immediate causes of wetland loss and degradation include overuse, land conversion and degradation, pollution, species introduction and recently included climate change.

Underlying causes for less valuation of wetlands are, among other things, price distortions, income distribution inequalities, absence of full cost accounting, policy failures, market failures (missing prices), lack of property rights and population/urbanization growth and consequent encroachment.

Despite the increasing recognition of the need to conserve wetlands, losses have continued. The main reason is that wetlands have traditionally been considered by many to be of little or no value, or even at times to be of negative value.

This lack of awareness of the value of conserved wetlands and their subsequent low prioritisation by the decision-making process has resulted in the destruction or substantial modification of wetlands at an unrecognised social cost.

The crux of the wetland conservation issue is non-sustainable exploitation or complete conversion fuelled by this under valuation of wetland resource benefits. A strategy based solely on formal conservation designation will not be sufficient to reverse this trend. Sustainable utilization of wetland resources must be reinforced by

an efficient policy, enforcement of legal instruments and braced by adequate knowledge.

I hope that this festival does not turn into an annual 'show-off' but will encourage people from different strata of the society to revisit their childhood memories - glimpses of the past, and to assess the functions performed by wetlands and make a pressure group to illustrate the economic value of the functions performed by the wetlands and help the policymakers to eliminate the word 'wasteland' (used to denote the wetlands) from legal documents, ii) to constitute an institution for research and management of the nation's wetlands (unlike the present shabby Haor Development Board), and iii) to form a National Wetland Policy.

SUST diary, calendar

Producing required stationeries like diary, calendar etc. is the heritage of the public universities of Bangladesh. At present private universities also offer these as the effective tools of promotion. All the universities try to produce these essential products timely. But for unknown reasons SUST authorities have failed to bring these out in time.

The university diary is not a general diary like others. It contains very useful information for its stakeholders. Different latest information regarding Departments, Faculties, and the authorities are found in this publication.

Shah Jalal University of Science and Technology would publish this document from its inception. In the first week of January we would get the diary. But eight months of the year 2008 have already gone. We didn't get it. The question is 'Why the authorities have failed to print and circulate this significant document timely?'

The university would publish its calendars (desk + wall) regularly. It is the most significant directory for the students, teachers and administrative concerns. We know that it contains the lists of different holidays and other information.

Dates of official and academic commencement are known through this source also. For this reason calendars would be published with academic sessions.

In the previous years we would get the calendars within the first week of July. But this year we have not yet received these things.

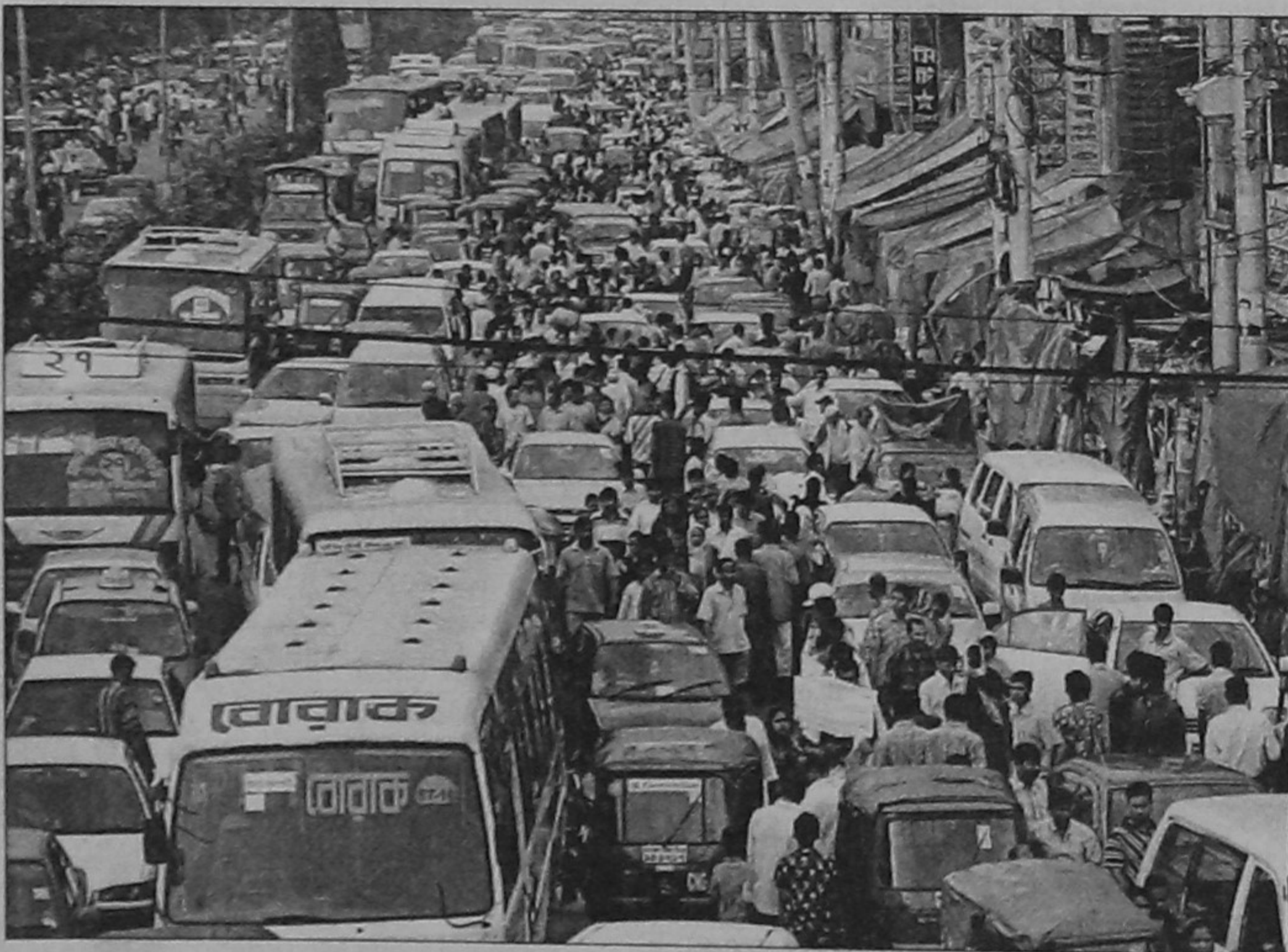
While contacting with any personnel who have involvement with the university, the diary plays a vital role. On the other hand, to fix up examination dates, class schedules, programmes of the departments, cultural organisations etc, the calendar guides us. These are considered as the real 'directory' of a university.

We don't know when the vacation for upcoming Eid or Puja will be start. Official closing or opening days are also unknown to us.

Without having these documents we are suffering a lot. Can we get these soon? Who will answer on behalf of the authorities?

Md. Abdul Hamid
Assistant professor
Dept. of Business Administration
Shah Jalal University, Sylhet

Dhaka's traffic system



The good news is that the government has decided to introduce a modern traffic control room in the capital. To reduce traffic jams, the timetables of schools' morning classes will be adjusted to accommodate the extra pressure on the roads. The education ministry would fix a schedule and send letters to the schools. The ministry will also monitor whether the decisions are being followed. This certainly looks like a good decision and shows that the government is trying its best to bring the Dhaka traffic to a tolerable level.

However, this will probably ease the life in Dhaka for a very short time. It is about time that the government should think and construct new roads. From different seminars and experts' comments, we understand that a modern city needs 27% of roads, as against the 7% we have in Dhaka. Even if 3 layers of flyovers are made, the required 27% will not be achieved to ease the traffic. These are all long term plans which the government has to implement to control the growing traffic of the city. What we need immediately is to modernise the BRTA. The traffic police, the officers, car owners and the drivers need better training so that they also understand the traffic rules. To train all these, the BRTA,

the most corrupt amongst the traffic related offices, has to be modern, free of corruption and full of competent people who can guide the vehicle owners and drivers to manage their vehicles on the roads.

Once BRTA starts operating the way it is supposed to, the next task will be constructing new roads, link roads etc. The government has to take steps to stop all new construction works of the city at the eastern and western ends. Without a proper road plan, no residential or commercial building should be erected. The City Corporation and Rajuk are the main institutions from where these ideas should generate. Haphazard parking, garbage bins and slanted pavements (for car parking) must vanish overnight for smooth flow of traffic. During pick hours roads can be converted to one way traffic. The main roads with "T" type crossings (example Bijoy Nagar and Kakrail Intersection) need to convert to "X" type (Gulshan 1 or 2 Intersections) crossings, otherwise the congestions will remain.

Until we have planned roads and proper traffic monitoring system in place, the Dhaka traffic situation will never improve.

Sohel Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

A holiday?

It is a sad occurrence that we as a developing nation fail to acknowledge the core values of our people even at the best of our educational institutions. The 24th of August 2008 was nationally declared as a public holiday for "Janmashtami", a religious event of the Hindu community in our country. But in certain institutions I have noticed that they do not acknowledge this day as a national holiday and therefore remain open for business as usual. Students are expected to attend classes, regardless of their obligations and expectations.

I sincerely hope someone does a proper report on this issue. Students should be taught to respect cultural and religious values and such institutions should uphold the values of the people, irrespective of class and community.

S. Rahman
Employee of GrameenPhone Ltd.

Attention: CTG

Considering the recent events in educational institutions, labour unrest and local governmental matters, one can easily predict that the nation is going to watch more and more recurrence of trouble and instability in these areas. The ministry of education and the ministry of commerce are definitely not compatible.

These portfolios are better being separated and manned by more experienced policy makers and administrators. Similarly, the portfolio of the ministry of LGRDC needs change, because in this case we need attitudinal change and full knowledge of the local government system. The labour issue is more complicated and needs a high degree of negotiating skill to balance between the workers and the owners. The perception of labour rights and democratic approach is required.

We consider that the issues are important. Therefore, we would request the CTG to consider reshuffling the cabinet and bring positive changes in policy and strategic decision making with experienced people in charge.

A reader
One-mail

Learning English

Your news feature yesterday had an article on learning English. Indeed, ability to read, write and express oneself in English is indispensable. It is estimated that over 80% of the internet and scientific literatures are expressed in English. This means that one deprives oneself of 80% of the knowledge of the modern world by not having English skills. Fortunately, one does not need to preach Bangladeshi population about the importance of English, by now almost everyone is convinced of its importance. The question is how to acquire this essential skill. In Bangladesh, there is an acute shortage of teachers with English skills; as a result, most of institutions including some of the prestigious ones are not able to deliver this skill to the students. It is encouraging to see that many private centres have come forward to fill in the gap although; the standards of most of these institutions are being questioned.

There are many different ways to learn a language, especially English language. In the globalisation and technological age, "Modern technique" means many different ways. But one low tech method which is virtually free is often ignored and not mentioned at all. It is the short wave transistor radio. An eager learner can easily tune in a short wave radio to Voice of America (VOA) or British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and listen to their English broadcasts free day in and day out. They even have programmes of learning English and "Special English" programme. In the special English programme, the broadcaster pays special attention to the non-English speaking listener and reads the programme very slowly. This is very easy for the listener to understand and repeat after them. In addition to being free, the source of the education is directly from the English-speaking countries' authentic source, which enables one to acquire the best accent and tone of English. Depending upon interest, you can concentrate either in American English or British

English. In my experience, once you have learned your English from either the VOA or BBC, you got it made.

Given you know your field and your great English language skill, there is no job interviewer in this world who will turn you down for a good job. I invite all Bangladeshis to take advantage of this free resource.

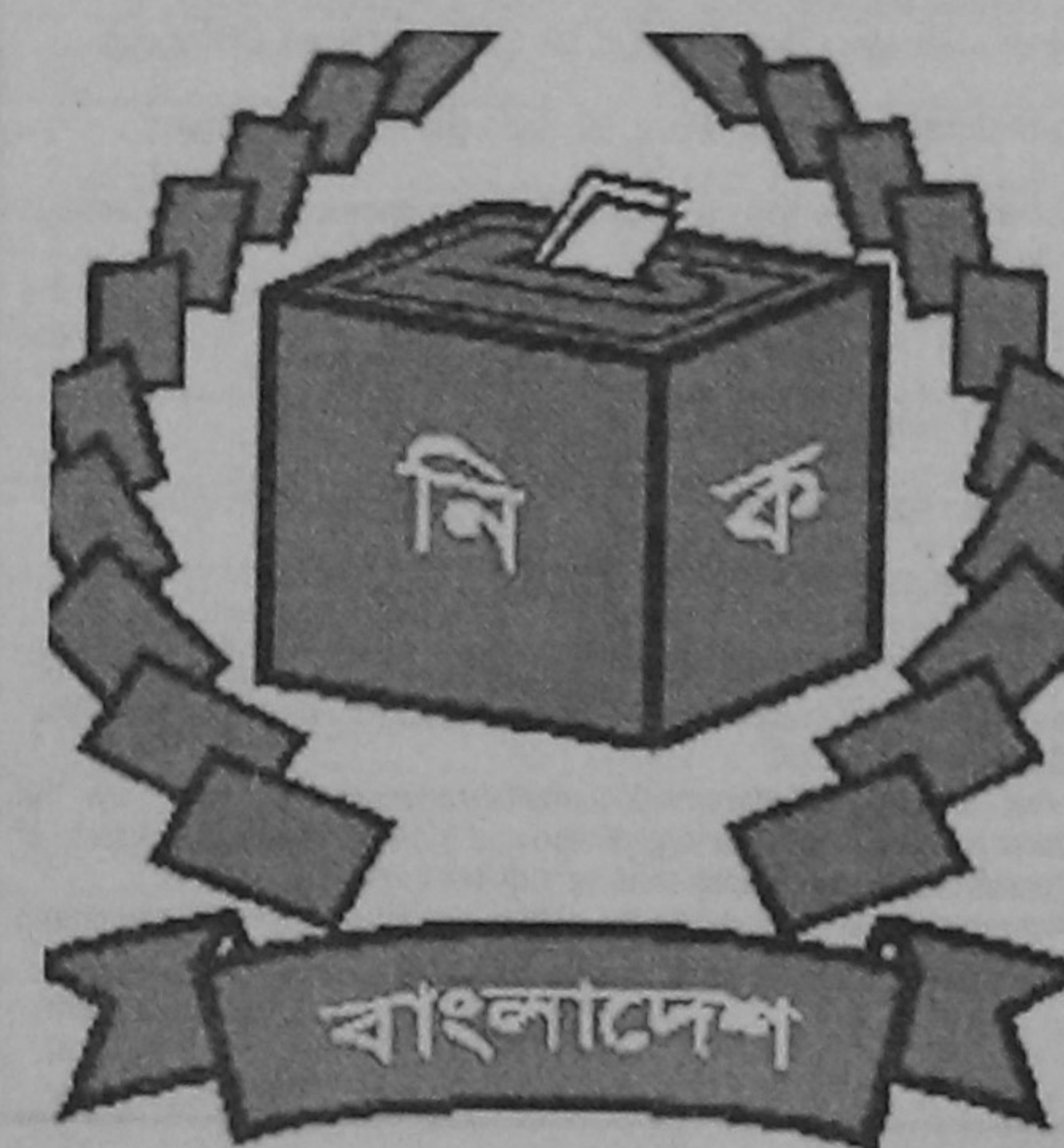
Nizam M Meah
President, Your GI Center
Lake Jackson, TX 77566, USA

Prices of rice

We take a lot of interest in your articles. However, it is not right to say that the prices of rice are still high. You are aware that road communications have improved. People are using mobile phones to know the price of rice all over the world. They also know the prices of fertilisers in the world market. The prices of fertilisers are now 10 to 5 times more than what they were in 2007.

Engr A.K.M. Khairul Anam
Banani, Dhaka

Do we have a choice?



Why does everybody including the CA urge people to choose an honest and efficient candidate in the forthcoming national election? Do the people really have a choice wide enough? Aren't they more or less confined with an 'yes' or 'no' option like various surveys made by the media? Nobody seems to be prepared to urge or request the political parties to nominate honest and efficient candidates for the people!

I would request the two leaders of the Awami League and the BNP to prove that if an Italian can do it, so can a Bangladeshi by giving the CEO post of the country to an efficient (efficient in real sense) leader of their respective party, if either of them comes to power.

Sarwar, On e-mail