

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.

Population boom

I refer to the excellent PCP article by Gen Moeen U Ahmed on food security in the country where he touched on the issue of population boom and consequent problems. He has also emphasised that this is really the key issue because if the population cannot be held in check, no attempt to improve the lot of the nation will produce any results, rather the situation will get worse and worse. He mentioned that population of 70 million in 1971 has now increased to 150 million and is likely to reach 210 million in a few years with consequent loss of cultivable land for food.

There are many who think that there is safety in numbers and that a large population is a great asset. This is only so if the population can be sustained easily by the land with enough to spare for cattle and other animals, parks, woodland, forests, towns, cities, roads etc. D.L. Roy in a famous song mentioned about the population of

whole India as 33 crore about a century ago (tetris kotu mora nahi kabhu heen). Tagore castigated the Bengalees a few years later as not being fully mature. Now all over the sub-continent (including Bangladesh) the population has grown more than forty-fold. Certainly such a situation cannot continue. Disease, famine, war, climate change and natural disasters etc are usually Nature's way of achieving balance, but it is too horrible to contemplate even though we all are aware of these dangers.

Of course the nation must put successful family planning of at most two children (with suitable rewards for those who comply and penalty for those who don't) as the primary objective to get the population in a downward trend. We must also not talk as if our numbers were a point of strength. I do not see this number game quoted in European countries much except as a threat to other countries within the EU for jobs, resources etc. If

Turkey had a population of about 30 million instead of 80, I think its membership of EU would have come much quicker.

I would request our writers and intellectuals to spread the message that it is not our numbers, but the quality of our health and personality (maturity, knowledge, wisdom etc) which is the source of strength. **Engineer Shafi Ahmed**
London, UK

Formalin in milk

We came to know that formalin is being used in milk. Milk is supposed to be the purest and safest food for children. How come formalin became so easily available? There should be a strict law guiding sale of such chemicals.

Necessary steps should be taken to stop the adulterators from causing such damage to public health and they should also be brought to justice.

S.M. Shamim-Ur-Rashid
Shahjalal University, Sylhet

Errors in HSC English textbook

There are many questions about the appropriateness of the methodology used in writing the textbook prescribed by the National Curriculum & Textbook Board (NCTB) for class-11. It's not been possible to carry out the objectives of the book due to the lack of an empirical approach to the problem of language teaching and learning in the perspective of our country. The textbook intended for the intermediate first year students contains some inadvertent irregularities, which need to be corrected immediately:

A. In Unit 4, Lesson 2, Section B of the textbook there is a topic on Origami. But in the text it is misspelt as Oregami. Reference: The Little Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English (Seventh Edition, Sixth Impression) and Oxford Talking Dictionary (available on multimedia CD).

B. In Unit 14, Lesson 1, Section C of the textbook there is a sentence... education was one of the most important social phenomenon... But according to grammarians we have to use a plural noun after one of the... For this reason here the noun should have been spelt as phenomena (phenomena, originally derived from Greek, is the plural form of phenomenon). Reference: Michael Swan's Practical English Usage.

C. In Unit 5, Lesson 4, Section B there is a grammatical instruction as 'We use -ing' with a verb when it is used after think, like, love, prefer. But in contrary to this instruction, the second paragraph of Unit 4, Lesson 1, Section C starts as 'The Japanese love to take part in sports in their free time.'

Actually the instruction is partially incorrect. Grammarians say that after like, love, prefer and some other verbs we can use verbs either taking infinitive or gerund (-ing form) without any change of meaning. Reference: A.J. Thomson and A.V. Martinet's A Practical English Grammar, section 266 (4th edition, 10th impression), and John Eastwood's Oxford Practice Grammar, section 68(A), second edition.

There is no clear obligation of using infinitive or gerund after think. But as per the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English we certainly can use infinitive after "think" such as "Who would have thought to see you here?"

D. In Unit 14, Lesson 6, Section C there is a short passage on the life of the great physicist Stephen Hawking. In the last sentence of the passage it is said "He lives with his wife and three daughters...." But the fact is that he has only one daughter named Lucy Hawking, who is a novelist, and two sons namely Robert Hawking and George Edward Hawking. (Source:

Internet).
E. In Unit 24, Lesson 4, Section C there is a passage on gender discrimination, and the last line of the first paragraph of the passage says "But all their (girls') work domestic or academic - stops as soon they are married off...." But we all know that a girl's academic work may stop as soon as she is married off, but not necessarily her domestic work.

F. In Unit 23, Lesson 2, Section B there is a passage about Bangladesh. The second sentence of the passage says "... it (Bangladesh) experienced British colonial rule until 1947, followed by an oppressive existence as East Pakistan from 1947 to 1971." The word "oppressive" means tyrannical and it indicates that Bangladesh oppressed Pakistan. But the fact is that Bangladesh was oppressed by the Pakistanis, and the word should have been "oppressed" instead of "oppressive".

G. In the third paragraph of the same passage it is said "... the last twenty five years will remain memorable...." But the next sentence says "The 21st of February 1952 immediately comes to mind." The textbook was published first in 2001 and probably it was written in the year 2000. Then what should be the logical range of last 25 years? It may be 1976 to 2000. If it is so, then how can the year 1952 be included in the last 25 years?

I urge the authorities concerned to take the initiative to correct these inadvertent mistakes and incongruities in the next impression/edition of the book. **Md. Munibur Rahman**
Lecturer in English
Jessore Govt. Mohila College
Jessore

Poisoned milk

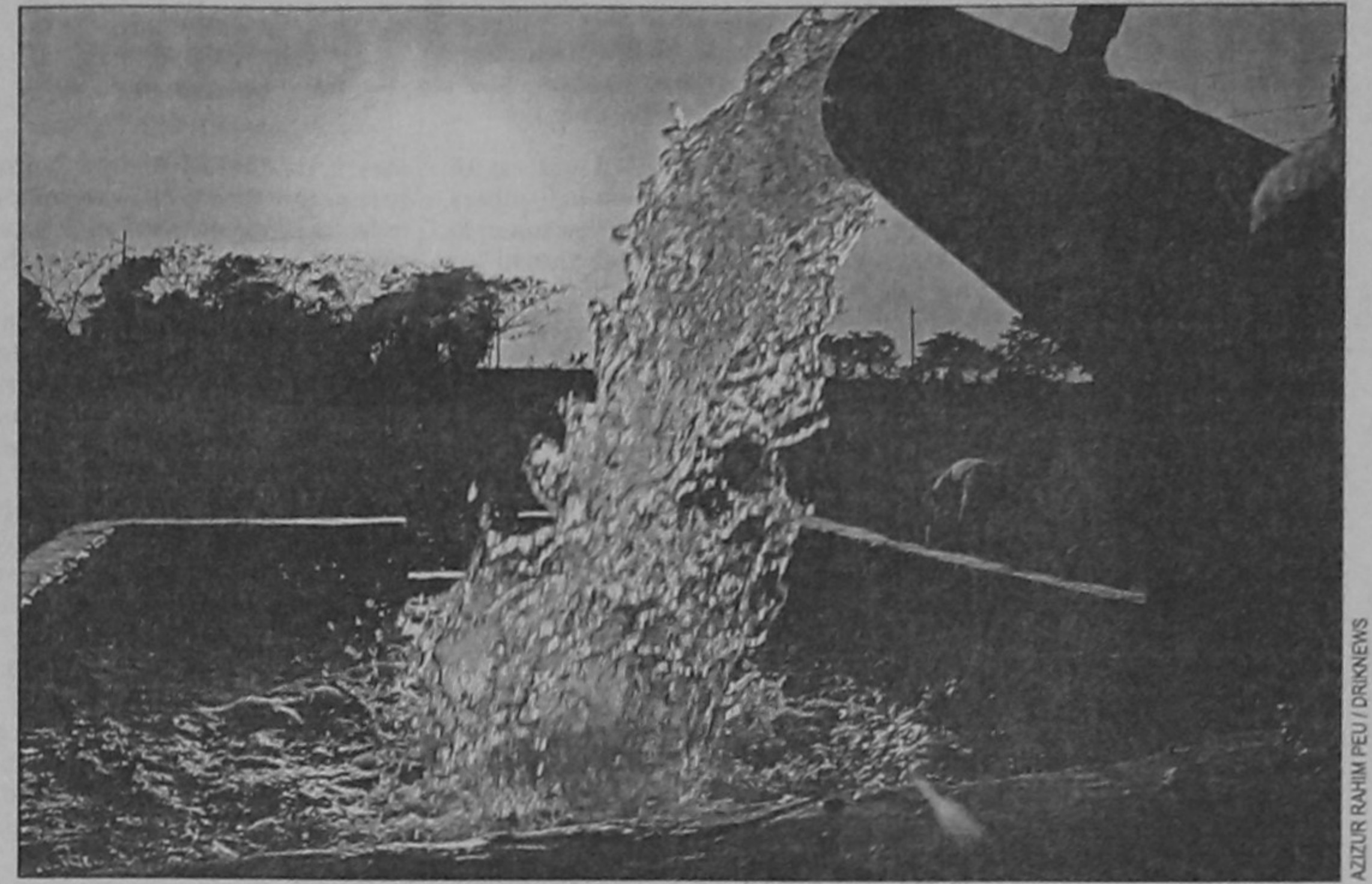
The current milk scandal in China is not only a dangerous problem for that country, as thousands of children are suffering and three of them have already died, this is a problem for us also in Bangladesh. The trouble started when the manufacturers began to use the banned chemical, normally used in plastics, to water down milk to make it appear richer in protein.

So our health ministry must take quick action to find out whether Chinese milk is already available in Bangladesh market. If it is so, the govt. must take necessary action to withdraw the same from the market and ask people not to consume such milk. **Zabedini Dhanmondi**
Dhaka

Army chief's article

It is interesting to read the article on comprehensive plan for food security by a man who is defi-

Food and water



Irrigation, which consumes far more water than any other activity, has generated enormous benefits. By helping to raise farmers' yields and stabilising food production and prices, irrigation has been key to achieving food security in many parts of the world. About 250 million hectares are irrigated worldwide today. Yet, inappropriate water and agricultural policies and poor irrigation management have lowered groundwater tables, damaged soils, and reduced water quality. Moreover, growing populations with rising incomes will further increase the demand for irrigation water to meet food needs. Although the domestic and

industrial sectors use far less water than agriculture, water consumption in these sectors is also growing rapidly. And the importance of reserving water for environmental purposes has only recently been recognised: during the 20th century, more than half the world's wetlands were lost. Even as demand for water by all users grows, groundwater is being depleted, other water ecosystems are becoming polluted and degraded, and developing new sources of water is getting more costly. Many people are concerned that water will be the main obstacle to growing enough food in the coming decades. The strategies for national

governments, international donors, and water users for the ensuring food production through proper use of water are-

Increasing the supply of water for farmers, households, and industries by investing in infrastructure.

Conserving water and making existing systems more efficient by reforming water management policy and investing in improved technology in these systems.

Manir Hossain
President
Society for Environment and Nature Study (SENS)
MBSTU, Tangail

Chaotic traffic



Who would want to sit inside a vehicle stuck in the middle of the road for 2-3 hours in the burning hot sun with the noise and pollution everywhere?

Unfortunately, almost everyone in Dhaka is undergoing the ordeal during the month of Ramadan and it's just too hectic for the people. It's either a traffic jam or an accident which just wastes half the day. Everyday we see in the news or in the newspaper something which has to do with traffic control or environmental problems. But I just have one question, will

these problems EVER be solved? It's been a few months now with the roads under construction but there's still no sign of finishing it. Just last week there were two accidents in the airport road, I saw a car upside down and another accident which had to do with 5 vehicles smashed from the front and the back, I am sure that there is not even a single car in Dhaka without a scratch. Five years ago it took me only 15-20 minutes to go from Uttara to Baridhara and now it takes me half an hour or one hour to go there. The policeman who controls

traffic doesn't actually do his job properly. Either I see them solving out a big fight in the middle of the traffic or just standing there talking with the other policemen. Or I see people jumping from those dividers out of nowhere and crossing the road. And the buses start racing on the main roads! This is very dangerous. Everyone should be aware of what's happening right now. We have to start reading between the lines. Bangladesh has changed...

Sahani Randula
The Aga Khan School
Dhaka

Vote for Bangladesh!

One of my letters was published in The Daily Star on January 16, 2008 regarding voting for Cox's Bazaar and the Sundarbans as these two beautiful tourist spots are at the top of the list of Seven Wonders of Nature.

We need more votes from all Bangladeshis living in Bangladesh and abroad. I would request all our embassies abroad to step forward to highlight Cox's Bazaar and the Sundarbans to the foreigners. Through The Daily Star, I once again request all of you to visit www.new7wonders.com/nature, and vote for these two places.

We need more campaigning to maintain their positions at the top. **Minhaj Ahmed**
Uttara, Dhaka

General election

A national election would lead our country back to the dark era for three major reasons:

One, our political culture opposes honest candidates' entry in politics. So, voters do not have many choices.

Two, a large number of voters are uneducated, they vote for money.

Three, most of the voters consider only the two major parties, for their long standing psychological attachment to the parties.

Therefore, election does not provide much information about the condition of democracy in our country. So, we never really had elected government in the democratic sense! We need change in our social and political culture.

stand the fact.

A leader from the new generation is the only solution for continuing the democratic process in Bangladesh. **Salahuddin Moon**
On e-mail

Rights of women

Over a single incident at Baufal, reported in The Daily Star of 13th August, 2008, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad has demanded of the government to introduce another new law to punish the husbands, though such laws have already been enacted for our justice dispensation system. Even then we welcome their proposals, but should it be again another one-sided law like that of the law for prevention of repression against women and children? A law has to be just, equitable and must be applicable to both sexes in equal terms. Are all the women angels and do they not commit crimes against men, other women and in particular their husbands?

Mostly innocent men are bearing the brunt of the above law. The law itself is brutal and it's been made so easy for women to apply to harass and punish their men at their sweet will as and when they like. Laws are meant for the welfare of the human society and are supposed to bring about a balance between the sexes.

I have witnessed a few cases in my local PS, where some women were getting their husbands bashed up mercilessly by the police.

Troubles in family life usually start with betrayal by either of the partners. Do we have any such law to punish a woman for betraying her husband? How can there be a

compromise in this most sensitive area of conjugal life? Just to create a wholesome society and clean family life, Islam has put certain conditions for both men and women to abide by.

But unfortunately our women's rights bodies never preach and counsel women to be loyal and sympathetic to their husbands, who have the sole responsibility of winning the bread for the family. Women have no financial responsibility.

So let there be another hundred laws to protect and empower women but at the same time introduce new laws to ensure a cleaner society and punish women for their wrong doings. Only the sufferers know how far a woman can go to destroy a family and a man's aspirations! How cruel and heartless she can be to satisfy her ego! The Mahila Parishad was never heard to be advising women to be good and ideal mothers, reminding them of their responsibilities and marital commitments; rather they only provoke them against men. They want to have all the laws on their side to challenge men and empower them against men only. Mahila Parishad never advises the government to bar women from doing menial and manual jobs meant for men only. They also do not protest when women protesters on the road are physically harassed and molested by the male police. We don't want our mothers and sisters to be dishonoured in public. This is totally non-Islamic and considered asin.

Let us not achieve modernity at the cost of family life and destabilise society. **A.B. Mohammed Zakaria**
Whitley Close
Staines, Stanwel

The ICL controversy



On September 14, 2008, the report showing the controversy regarding some of the players from the Bangladesh cricket team and the ICL caught my attention. "Selfish, and ungrateful..." - these were the only words that came to my mind when I first heard the news of the so-called talented and promising Bangladeshi cricketers joining the ICL.

With the hard earned money being invested in the hope of transforming these raw players into world class players one

day and make them play for their own country, it was quite natural for the common people to expect something good from them that would not only lift Bangladesh to a new height in the game of cricket but would also give the cricketers themselves a rare chance to give this country something worth mentioning. Alas! These cricketers showed their back to us and resorted to earning money through joining this lucrative cricket league. In the mean time, they forgot the discern-

ible fact that they would not have become what they are today without the support of this country.

It is needless to mention that the retirement of these players from the Bangladesh cricket team will definitely create a vacuum in this country's cricket. These players have cheated us. **Fahim Wasef**
North South University
Kemal Ataturk Avenue
Dhaka

nitely busy with many other preoccupations. In the recent past we have seen him participating in some agri-related programmes where with the assistance of army units farmers have done commendable jobs. This shows his interest in this sector. Gen. Moin U Ahmed's article dealt in detail with the problems and prospects of food security in the country.

In the past, these aspects were ignored deliberately. We hope Gen Ahmed's article will awake our policy makers and functionaries in the field to work in right earnest. We can not remain dependent for long on imports/grants of others for our

most vital needs. We thank General Moin for his timely article. **M. Sanaul Haq**
Uttara, Dhaka

BNP's structure

The decision by BNP standing committee to make Khaleda President for life was a blow to democracy. It also undermined the efforts of the current government to end the dictatorial culture within the political parties in Bangladesh.

In fact, Khaleda has directly challenged the current government's advocated policy for political reforms within the parties. It also displayed her anger and stubbornness toward the government and the Election Commission. The BNP was formed in a dictatorial way and led by a military junta leader. Though the party had a very good chance to reform it, it did not do so, because Khaleda fears that if mass workers have the power base and the right to challenge her leadership, she would not be able to put her brother, son and sisters and other family members at the helm of the party. The new move by the BNP was to place Tarique in the party leadership before Khaleda retires.

I think international donors must not cry for democracy in the country. Rather, they must put pressure on the parties to change the party constitution and rules of engagement (power structure in the party) and to introduce democratic practices within the party.

I hope that conscious and educated people will create awareness among the mass people to vote against the party which is controlled and guided by autocracy and dictatorship of one individual. **Dr. Jamir Chowdhury**
Director, Qatar University

Parochial politics

I had been following the political developments in Bangladesh in the last couple of months. I am extremely frustrated seeing the quiet stand of the intellectual community and particularly the media (third eye for democracy). How is it possible for political leaders of the parties like the Awami League and the BNP and other so called leftist intellectuals to say that they don't like to follow the rules set by the Election Commission for taking part in the political process? How can the Election Commission as an institution ever function in Bangladesh? How can you remain quiet when

the entire world is looking at the corruption of your favourite politicians who seemed to be above the judicial process? How can you have a university where terrorism is the primary lesson, when rest of the universities are involved in research and study? The intellectual community in the civilised world is the think tank of the nation and is involved in developing strategy papers and policy papers to serve the national interest when your intellectuals in the universities are busy achieving their parochial and individual goals.

These are issues that have to be addressed immediately. **Andrew Jameson**
Barns Road
London, UK

Distributing zakat

The purpose behind introducing this system was to diminish the economic inequality of society. Regrettably, we notice that it's not being practised accurately in our country.

The idea has been established among the zakat distributors that 'giving cheap clothes' is the most significant means of performing this religious duty. So, they purchase very cheap clothes (zakaater kapor) from a special market (!) and everyone joins the competition to demonstrate that he has been able to distribute zakat among the maximum number of people. But that is not the teaching of Islam.

The idea behind zakat is to remove the rich-poor gap as far as possible. So those giving it should realise the point and refrain from making a show of helping the poor.

Md. Abdul Hamid
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Business Administration
Shahjalal University, Sylhet

School vacation in Ramadan

In the Holy month of Ramadan Dhaka city traffic comes to a complete standstill, especially when the city dwellers are in a festive mood. All the streets are clogged with cars, buses, CNG scooters, rickshaws etc.

No doubt, it's a welcome decision by the authorities to keep all city schools and colleges closed from 16 September up to Eid holidays. This will ease or reduce traffic, especially during the office time. **W. Islam**
Uttara, Dhaka