

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.

US presidential polls

Senator Obama is leading by more than 8 points. The battleground states like Pennsylvania, Ohio and Florida are still in favour of Obama. Nevertheless, the margin in Pennsylvania is more comfortable than Ohio and Florida, where there is close to a tie, considering the independent and undecided voters. If the election were held today, Senator Obama would win the Presidency, one can predict safely.

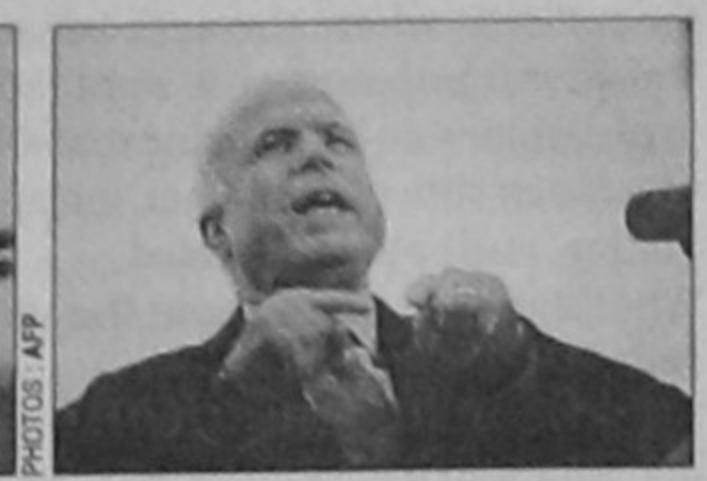
In the backdrop of this



scenario, the campaign of Senator McCain and Governor Palin is continuously launching personal attack on Obama and very intelligently playing the race and religion card. It might appear that Governor Palin has been picked up for this purpose to boost the conservative base of the GOP (Grand Old Party) i.e. Republican Party. The mud slinging is very common in the election campaign. However, Obama is

maintaining a very cool temperament except that his campaign is responding in extreme cases to dispel lies.

It appears that Senator McCain has realised that negative and personal attack on the opposition is hurting, rather than helping him. Governor Palin is speaking on American current issues in a balanced way, although she is hitting her opponent hard on social issues like pro-life and pro-choice and asking for a more clear answer. This is a



move to regenerate the conservative base of the GOP. The strategy of the GOP is to create doubt and confusion regarding Obama's leadership at the time of crisis. The target group is independent voters. This would continue till the election day. Perhaps, they would not miss the opportunity to refer to race and religion issues which, at least, have appeal to some voters. At this point the McCain campaign is desperate, but sena-

tor McCain and Gov. Palin are shifting the tone and message which have more acceptability to the American people. They do not like negative campaign.

Senator Obama has just finished consulting his top aides to present a concrete and clear plan for recovery from the current critical economic crisis.

It is also very important to keep in mind that Senator Joe Biden, running mate of Obama, is very articulate and experienced. He is a big asset for Senator Obama. When he speaks, he speaks with clarity and facts and figures. Frankly speaking, Governor Palin is yet to come to his stature.

The final result looks favourable for Obama, but unforeseen events like race and wrong notion of religion might create some hesitation in the minds of some voters.

I must admit that I am a novice with regard to American political culture and choice. My viewpoint is based on my common sense about a political necessity, and from the perspective of peace and prosperity everywhere in the world.

Reader
One-mail

Pakistan, a fair weather friend

"Pakistan betrayed?" by Shamol Saha (Oct 14)

Shamol Saha is absolutely right when he says: "Bluntly put, Pakistan hardly needs to be betrayed! The country Pakistan has tried to play a double game with the US and has made Americans very frustrated. The real elephant in the room is Osama and his surrogates in the mountains of Waziristan."

In fact, Pakistan has been a fair weather friend which has tried to extract as much economic and military aid from America pretending to fight the Taliban while harbouring them in the tribal areas. The Taliban/al-Qaeda and their acolytes are attacking the American and Afghan troops using Pakistan's tribal areas as their staging posts. As long as the Taliban continue to attack the American and Afghan troops from their bases in Pakistan, they will remain legitimate targets. However, Pakistan has come to realise that the Taliban are also trying to destabilise Pakistan by carrying out suicide bombings as the latest bombing of Marriott hotel in Islamabad has shown. Instead of criticising, Pakistan should co-operate with the Americans to wipe out the Taliban and their violent surrogates.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

Global financial crisis

It all started with the oil prices going through the roof having a massive impact on economies around the world. Countries found themselves grappling with it. Then came the inevitable global warming, affecting every aspect of life and becoming more and more menacing. Erratic and fierce storms and hurricanes wrecking towns and cities struck with unbelievable ferocity, never seen before. Forest fires ravaged and destroyed wide swathe of forests and natural habitats. As we were taking stock of the situation came the breaking news of global food crisis, the price hike, food shortage world over, not even the USA was spared, empty godowns, food riots, famine, starvation and malnutrition. We also learned about crops cultivated for bio-fuel as an alternative to oil and used to run cars and machines aggravating the food crisis. Global warming caused unprecedented floods, storms and natural disasters. The frightening situation was absorbed slowly as we came across more earth shaking news.

Then came the disastrous news of global financial meltdown. The USA came first with the news of banks and financial institutions going bankrupt. There was news before the crisis but this was the ultimate apocalypse and the domino effect like waves went through rich and powerful countries of the world. They came down one after the other. From the United States to Europe came the news of bankruptcies, stocks tumbling, companies losing billions even Asia was severely hit by the financial crisis. Trading closed down to avoid panic selling. Today we live in constant anxiety and uncertainty as news keep trickling in of the new countries affected by the global financial crisis.

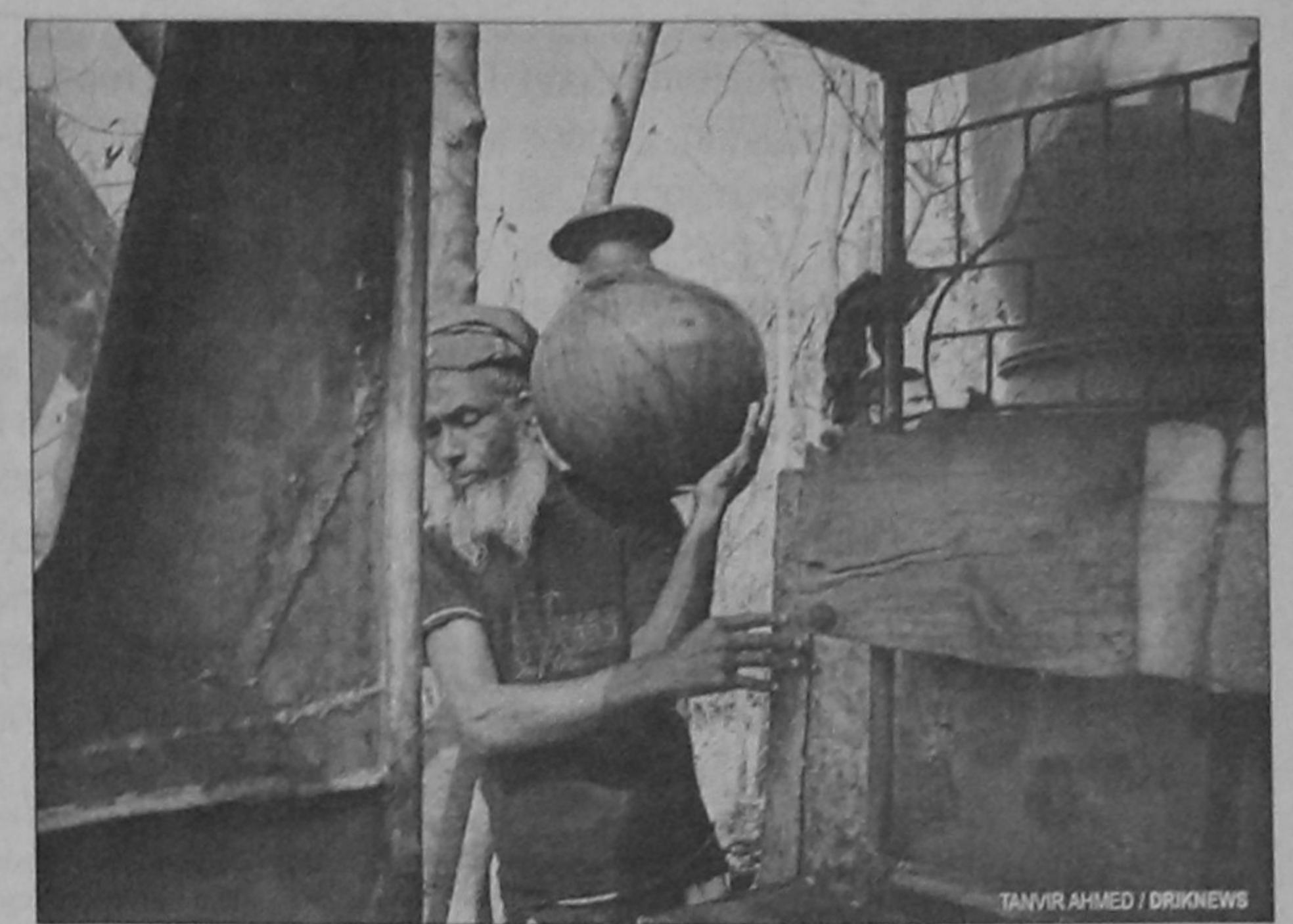
Unemployment is growing in most industrialised countries. Job losses are taking on phenomenal magnitude. Nobody knows when it is going to end; some experts are even talking of recession worse than the 30s. We thought it wouldn't get so bad with experts and think tanks around, who seem-

Poverty and global water crisis

Throughout history water has confronted humanity with some of its greatest challenges. Water is a source of life and a natural resource that sustains our environment and supports livelihoods but it is also a source of risk and vulnerability. In the early 21st century, prospects of human development are threatened by a deepening global water crisis. Debunking the myth that the crisis is the result of scarcity, this report argues that poverty, power and inequality are at the heart of the problem.

In a world of unprecedented wealth, almost 2 million children die each year for want of a glass of clean water and adequate sanitation. Millions of women and young girls are forced to spend hours collecting and carrying water, restricting their opportunities and their choices. And water-borne infectious diseases are holding back poverty reduction and economic growth in some of the world's poorest countries.

Beyond the household, competition for water as a productive resource is intensifying. Symptoms of that competition include the collapse of water-based ecological systems, declining river flows and large-scale groundwater depletion. Conflicts over water are intensifying within the countries, with the rural poor losing out. The potential for tension between countries is also growing, though there are large potential human development gains from



increased cooperation.

The Human Development Report continues to frame debates on some of the most pressing challenges facing humanity. Human Development Report 2006 investigates the underlying causes and consequences of a crisis that leaves 1.2 billion people without access to safe water and 2.6 billion without access to sanitation. It argues for a concerted drive to achieve water and sanitation for all through national strategies and a global plan of action and examines the social and economic forces that are

driving water shortages and marginalising the poor in agriculture.

It includes special contributions from Gordon Brown and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, President Lula, President Carter, and the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan.

Manir Hossain
President
Society for Environment and Nature Study (SENS)
Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University

Attention: NBR

I am a law-abiding citizen and I want to pay tax (with 7% additional penalty) on my undisclosed LEGAL INCOME during the last three years.

While in service as a govt servant, I used to submit tax returns regularly. As no tax was imposed for five consecutive years, I stopped submitting tax returns on the advice of my Tax Adviser who informed me that a tax-payer might not submit returns if no tax was imposed for 3 consecutive years. The tax authorities also did not urge me to submit returns.

In 2001 (after retirement) I was re-engaged on contract by the govt. in an autonomous organisation for two years. During those two years I again submitted my returns and the tax imposed on my salary (as a govt. servant) was duly paid by that organisation. After the expiry of my contract, I did not submit any return.

Of late, I have been participating regularly in a private television channel. They regularly deduct income tax on the honorarium paid to me.

I also earn a paltry amount though my contributions to an English daily and my participation in a very small number of BTB programmes. I mainly depend on my pension and the profits accrued (after 10% tax deduction) on my Sanchay Patras bought with pension money (I surrendered half of my pension).

Although more than 95% of my income (after the said tax deductions) is non-taxable, even then I made an attempt to avail the AMNESTY declared by the govt which enables a tax-payer to pay tax on his undisclosed LEGAL INCOME together with a 7% penalty (The Daily Star, 27 July). But I was shocked and surprised when I contacted the tax people to pay tax

on my undisclosed Legal Income during the last 3 years. Believe it or not, I was told to pay penalty @Tk.250 per day (TK. 91,250 per year) since the day I stopped submitting my tax returns. It was a bolt from the blue.

The yearly tax on my small income (if any) will most probably be not more than Tk. 5, 000 per year, i.e. Tk. 15,000 during the last 3 years.

Why should I then be asked to pay more than a million taka as penalty? How can this be an AMNESTY? Why is the promised 7% penalty ignored?

Would the Chairman, NBR, who has been taking pains to motivate people to pay taxes, kindly let me know through this column how I can avail the declared AMNESTY and pay tax on my income during the last three years with only 7% penalty. PLEASE HELP ME PAY MY TAX.

Abdullah Syed
Lake Circus
Dhaka

Sexual harassment by teacher

On September 25, I wrote in these columns about a friend who was lured into an affair by a male teacher, who persisted on her to continue the relationship, in secret, when she got out of it and married elsewhere. I wrote the letter at the time when JN University students were holding daily public protest against systematic sexual harassment by a male teacher, and were featuring in news headlines.

M Anam, in his letter (8/10) saw the affairs as 'flirting' and wrote that it should not be equated with sexual harassment. Her ending the affairs and getting married, to him, was 'the teacher backing out' as he put: 'the guy who was flirting with her friend happened to be a

teacher by profession'.

Teacher-student links, just as much as lawyer-client, doctor-patient, employer-employee contacts is fraught with power structure imbalances within the engagements. Presumption of exploitation and abuse of position cannot be ruled out and the engagements should be governed by a code of conduct, as is the norm in advanced societies. Social mores that once governed teachers-student relationships here are faltering, the JN incident is an example.

Teachers' professional duty is to see to their students' educational interest. Any self-respecting teacher should terminate his/her position before entering into a sexually-oriented relationship with a student. Or else, it would be tantamount to exploitation or abuse of position, insisting on to continue it illicit is damn right harassment.

The letter writer missed the point.

Nasrin Pervin
Nottingham Trent University
Burton Street
Nottingham, UK

World Chess Championship

It is difficult to understand why you don't publish anything on the World Chess Championship which is going on in Bonn, Germany, between Anand and Kramnik. All the best newspapers in the world are actually dedicating full columns and supplementary pages to this occasion.

Please make an effort to cover this event. It would be lovely to see the chess notations in your sports section for each game. Quality information is readily available at: www.chessbase.com
Md. Alimuzzaman
One-mail

ing have all the answers with solutions and smart ideas to check the situation from going out of control. Everyone thought they would rein in the cart-wheeling economies.

What a mess this has become. One of the economists has summed up in the scariest term by saying that we haven't seen anything yet. I really hope he is wrong and we will overcome.

How do we explain the meltdown, the food crisis and the weather behaving in this erratic manner? Mankind has become very greedy, materialistic and violent.

There is frenzied rush for wealth and good life. People are being deprived of their lands, livelihoods, and security. Free market economy seems to be the bane of the problem. Markets have to be monitored and controlled or it can become a Frankenstein like the one we see today. Massive corruption has brought down the economies of rich countries to this point. We have reached economic, food and environmental dead-end. Corruption, incompetence and greed have been the nemesis of today's developed societies. Despite all these, I hope we will be able to stop the rot, realise our mistakes and set things back on the track.

Ali Hamid Khan
Gausul Azam Av.
Uttara, Dhaka

Surprising!

Ali Ahsan Mojahid is an arrest-warrant-issued person. But he recently joined a dialogue with the government when police was looking for him. Our Chief Adviser was also present there.

To our utter surprise, police said that they could not find out Mojahid!

A student
Department of Business Administration
Shahjalal University, Sylhet

Vaccination ordeal

I am blessed with a six-year old child. She was born in a hospital in Uttara. After her birth, we started vaccination as the doctors suggested and made a vaccination card. I am giving different vaccinations to my kid. HBS Vaccine is one of them. After completion of HBS Vaccination, the duty doctor inscribed a date for booster dose in her card. After one year on the scheduled date my wife went to the hospital for the booster dose. That day the duty doctor suggested my wife that the booster dose was not mandatory as she had already taken HBS Vaccine three times. Without checking her, the doctor did it.

I was surprised and went to a diagnostic centre to confirm whether the antibody had grown or not. After checking my daughter's blood, they said there was no antibody.

I was surprised and very much disheartened. Finding no other alternative, I discussed the matter with some of my doctor friends. All of them told me that the given vaccine might have been a sample vaccine, water or something else and also suggested revaccination after checking whether she was already attacked by HBS or not. I acted accordingly.

Are our children guinea pigs? The Vaccination Card is still in my hand!
Mirza Mohammad Abul
One disheartened father
Agrani Bank Limited

VC search committee

The caretaker government has set up a search committee for appointing vice chancellors in public universities with the ultimate aim of choosing the very best for the top administration in the universities in a clear and transparent manner. Applications were sought to fill in the vacancies. Recently, a few appointments and selections were made which raised questions in the public mind. For a newly established general public university, two candidates were nominated with the background of purely technical education like agriculture. Why such experts should be appointed as VC of a general university while there were qualified candidates with general education background?
Acitizen, One-mail

Save our natural gas

Once upon a time it was heard that Bangladesh was floating on natural gas. If we didn't sell our gas to other countries, our country might have exploded! But it is a matter of great regret that our natural gas will be finished by 2011. I think there are many reasons behind this. The most important reason is the pipeline gas. Because of pipeline system people keep wasting the valuable natural gas.

In our neighbouring country India they are using gas cylinders. I think it is effective for saving natural gas. My request to the authorities: please look into the matter.
Noor Jahan Shimu
Dept. of Business Administration
Shahjalal University of Science & Technology
Sylhet

Telephone and visa

Telephone: We can talk to 35 or more countries at a reasonably economical rate i.e. @ Tk 7.50 per minute--- to the USA, Canada and so on. But we can't talk to our neighbouring country India, which is also a member of Saarc. We have more friends, relatives and business partners in India than New Zealand, Canada or Finland. Even we have thousands of Bangladeshis in Middle Eastern countries who are the largest foreign exchange remitting people but they do not fall in the category of EISD. Nearly 10% of the population of Bangladesh has somebody in India whom they need to talk to very often for various purposes. But the economy rate of telephone conversation is not applicable for India. Will the respected special adviser to the CA kindly look into the matter?

Visa: One can travel all over Europe almost without visa. As mentioned above, we have to wait and sleep on the roads of Gulshan

Traffic issue

Recently, the govt. instructed all Dhaka based schools to start at 7:30am for better traffic management. In fact, our experience on the first day says it was a complete mess (it seemed like going from bad to worse) from the early morning till late evening. In this situation, I am curious to know why the authorities took this decision. They had to revert to the original timing.

The other day I was reading an interesting letter on office timing. The writer suggested making several broad categories and the timing may be different to ease the traffic management system. For example, English medium schools may start at 7:30-7:45, Bengali medium schools may start from 8:00-8:30 (same area different timing - so spreading the traffic), govt/autonomous offices at 9:00am and bank/insurance companies may start at 10:00-10:30am. Accordingly, the closing timing would also be different. It needs to be spread - so all groups of people will not move (or go to street) at a

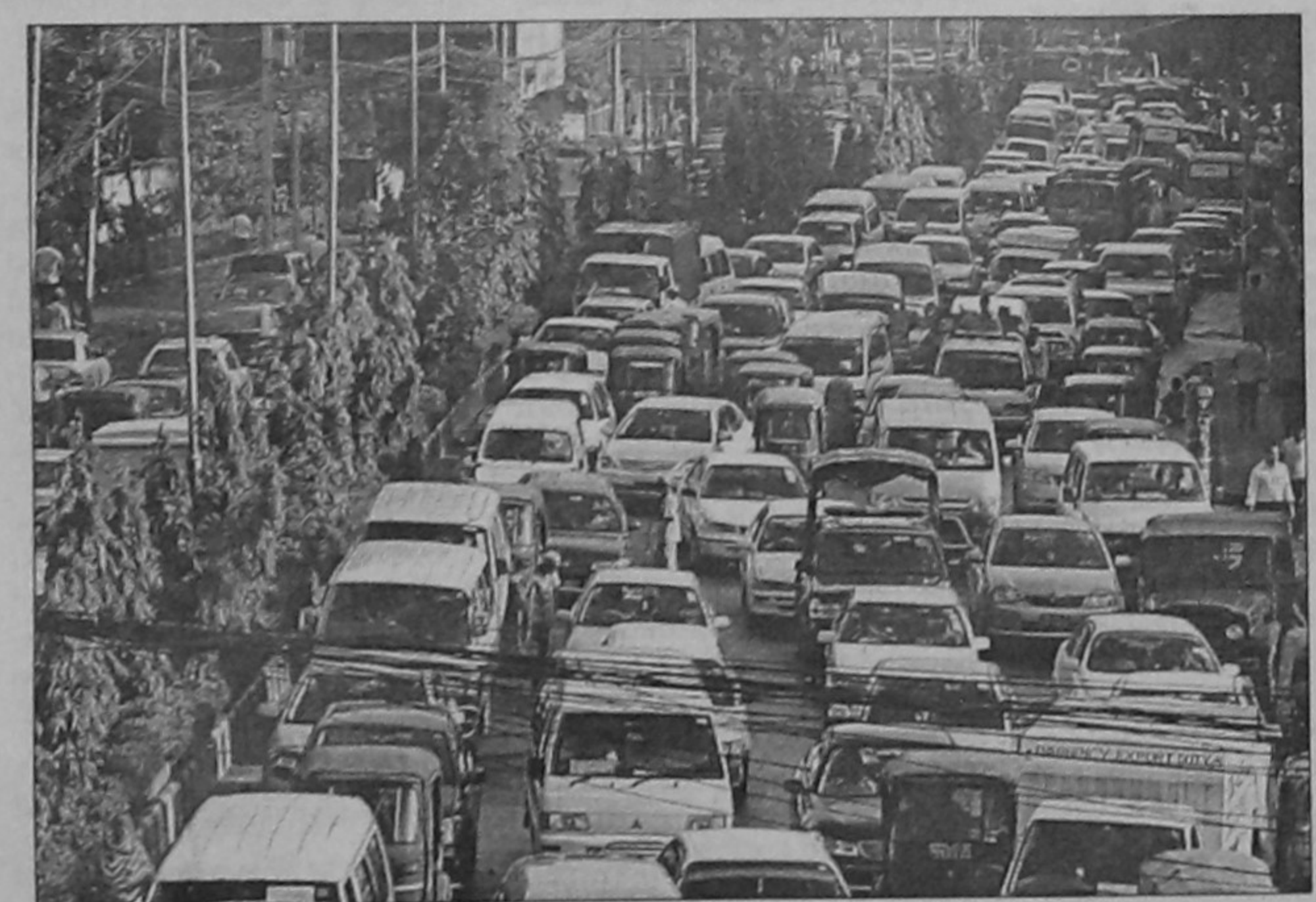
A good comeback!

National skipper Mohammad Ashraful was under tremendous pressure in recent times. A lot of criticisms were coming from even those people who don't know anything of cricket. Lack of form, rumours of joining in ICL, ineffective captaincy and many other things made his life complicated. But he has done the right thing in the nick of time. He scored a well-deserved half century in the first ODI against New Zealand.

His captaincy was excellent in that match. He needs to be consistent from now on. We all know he can do it.
S. M. Shamim-Ur-Rashid Tushar
Department of Business Administration
Shahjalal University, Sylhet



Cars, the real culprits!



Cars pollute as soon as they are turned on, whether they are moving or sitting still in traffic. To blame air pollution on rickshaws because they slow down cars is outrageous. Even when moving smoothly and well-maintained, cars pollute. Cars are the major polluters of our air and the major contributors to climate change. Worldwide, the most serious air pollution is caused by the United States, not because their cars are slowed by rickshaws, or because their cars are poorly maintained, but because Americans drive so much.

Cars pollute; lots of cars pollute a lot. CNG is cleaner than other fuels, but as it is a carbon-based fuel, it still releases carbon dioxide into the air as well as the cancer-

causing chemical benzene, for which no safe level of exposure is known. People travelling by foot, bicycle, or rickshaw arrive at their destination without contributing to air pollution; people travelling by a motorized vehicle, even a bus, contribute to air pollution. While the rich are the main sources of air pollution, everyone breathes the air.

Meanwhile, if the rich believe they are somehow immune to air pollution because they live with air conditioning, they might wish to remember that they too must breathe the same air that they are polluting; the more cars, the more they will suffer.
Rahidul Samanna Roky
Dhaka University

time. Probably, it will ease traffic management a little bit. However, more traffic constables and sergeants need to be recruited and posted at every junction and important intersections / points/signals to ensure good traffic control.

This attempt will save millions of person hours daily and if we do the cost-benefit analysis, it will surely be a good investment. Now it's a total wastage/national loss - I am not sure in terms of money how much it is!

The authorities should give a fresh thought to the city traffic issue. Save us from the gridlock of traffic congestion!
Nikhil Datta
Dhanmondi, Dhaka