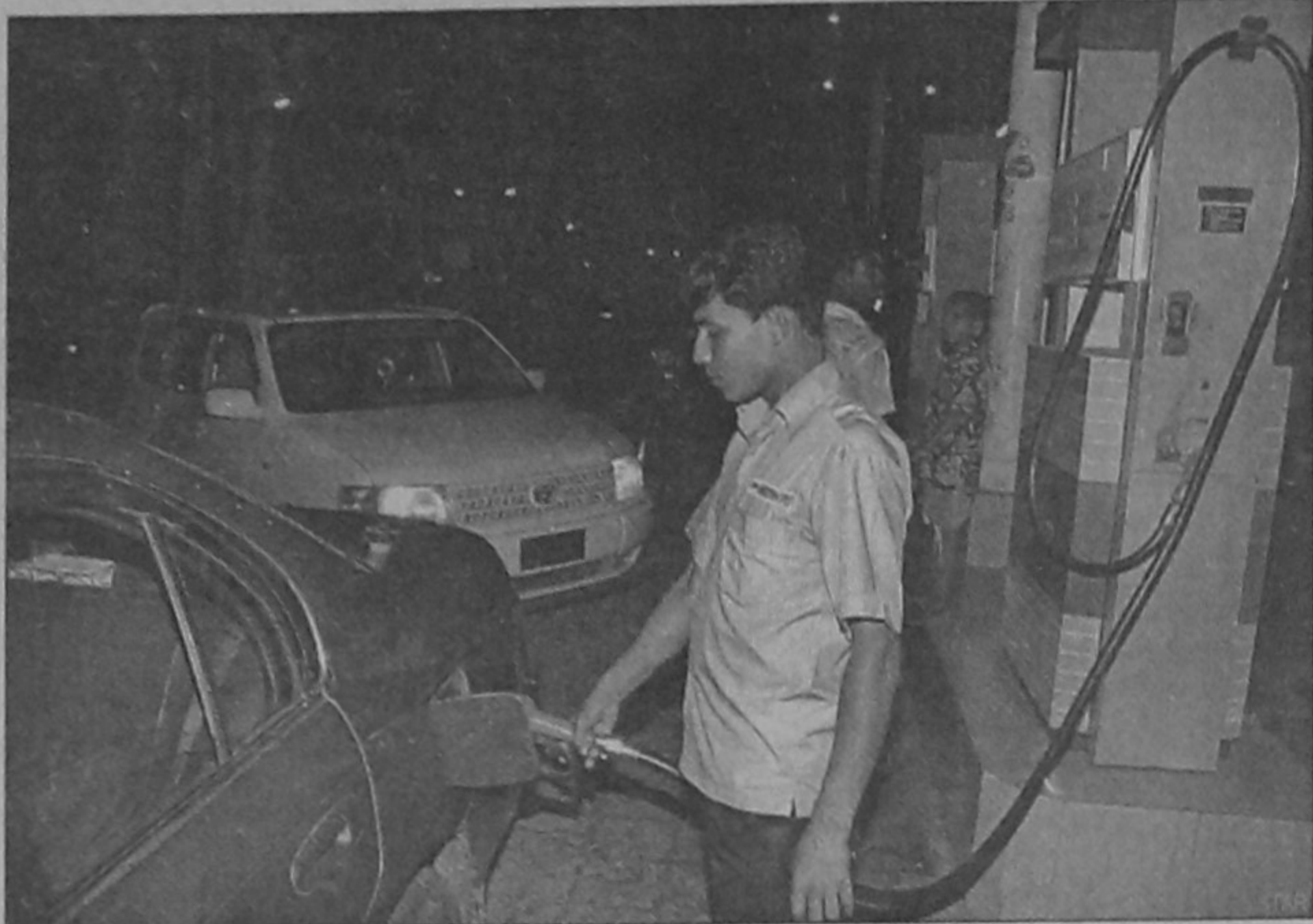


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

## Fuel prices

With the increase of price of fuel in the world market Bangladesh also increased it a few months ago. In the world market, price of petrol increased from 70 US \$ to 140 US \$ and the government of Bangladesh had no other alternative but to increase the price. Petrol price was increased from Tk 65 to 87 and diesel from Tk 40 to 55 per litre (about 38 % increase). With the hike of fuel price, there was an adverse effect on world economy. Bangladesh was not an exception. Although the people of Bangladesh cannot afford the high price, considering the world situation they accepted it without any protest. Cost of fuel is the prime factor of fixation of prices of agricultural and industrial products and transport fares. Prices of all products and transport fares increased with the hike of fuel price in Bangladesh. But wages and income of labourers, farmers and general people did not increase. Poverty has increased tremendously. The aftermath of which can be observed easily.

In the world market the fuel price has been reduced to about 70 US \$. Most of the countries cut the fuel price accordingly. Bangladesh has also reduced the price of fuel up to maximum 12%. It means the price of petrol will come down to about Tk 77 and diesel to Tk 48 per litre. The Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser explained that in order to check smuggling of fuel the cut would not be much. It is really astonishing! Any government, elected or un-elected, use this phrase all



the time.

The general people of Bangladesh are very simple and honest. If we calculate the price of petrol of India and Bangladesh, we can find that as per valuation of currency of both the countries, the price is more or less the same. Present rate of US \$15 in Bangladesh is Tk 69 and in India it is Rs 48. So Bangladesh Tk 100 is equivalent to Indian 70 Rs. When the price of petrol was Tk 87 per litre, it should have been Rs. 60 in India. But in India the price of petrol is Rs. 57 per litre as of today. It is learnt that India is going to

cut the price within a week. How will fuel then be smuggled out to India?

If we agree that fuel will be smuggled out to India if its price is lowered, I would request the government to raise the price to Tk 100 per litre and give back Tk 40 (per litre) to the customers upon production of bills. It is hoped that the consumers will then not be affected and all industrial and agricultural products and transport fares will come down to a reasonable level.

**Tapar Baral**  
Retd. Joint Secretary

## Erratic power supply

Recently, BERC declared the increased rate of electricity-- 16 % for the wholesalers like Dhaka Power Distribution Company (DPDC), DESCO, WZPDCO, Different areas of PDB, Northern Electricity Supply Company & Pali Bidyut Samiti.

To the best of my knowledge, every public service sector has some liabilities & responsibilities and has to satisfy the customers. In our country load shedding is a national problem. But very few efforts are being made to address it.

**Ashish Kumar Sarker**  
East Hazipara  
Rampura, Dhaka



### 'Nasiman'

A report from Faridpur on the subject was published in a local English daily on 23 October. It raises issues which are technically not relevant. First of all, it is not, as stated in the report, "a shallow machine run vehicle." It is the same popular diesel engine that is used for running shallow tube-wells for irrigation, which is fitted to the three-wheeler for transportation.

Regarding "approval from the authorities", it is the question of registration for plying public roads. This is independent of the fuel that the prime-mover uses-- be it petrol, diesel or natural gas. As a matter of fact, we should appreciate and praise the local innovation of our mechanics. They have fitted an engine, spares, maintenance and fuel for which are easily available all over rural Bangladesh! We cannot get gas or petrol in rural areas; so this is a very intelligent way to solve the problem of easy transportation for goods or passengers.

Registration is an administrative matter; which the government authorities should do, without creating unnecessary bottlenecks, that can give rise to corruption. Possibly it is because of this reason, that the vehicle owners avoid registration of 'Nasimans'. It is in reality a wonderful appropriate technological development that deserves praise, not punishment from us!

**S.A. Mansoor**  
Engineer, Dhaka

### Language and religion

You have maintained repeatedly that religion must not be politicised. If language can be politicised, I see no reason why religion can't be.

In fact, what can be politicised is circumscribed only by the limit of human ingenuity. Iftekhar Sayeed  
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

### Madrasa students and DU

The new criteria of having 200 marks in Bengali and English in SSC and HSC level, barring the madrasa students in some departments of DU, has created deep resentment amongst madrasa students. Madrasa students study similar curriculum for Bengali and English in their Dakhil and Alim level as the college students do in their SSC and HSC. But allocation of number has been shrunk to 100 for each to give place to the Islamic subjects.

I fail to understand why some of the departments are trying to bar the madrasa students from their legitimate right to be admitted in the varsity on merit. They are not claiming any quota! By putting technical obstacle on their right of being treated on merit, the DU authorities are pushing them to hard-line which ultimately may force some of them to resort to vandalism and anarchy to establish their right of equal opportunity.

The authorities' attempt to give a police solution is clearly unwarranted and provocative. The arrest of madrasa students while they were trying to form a peaceful human chain to press home their legitimate demand from the National Press Club can no way get nod from any well-meaning citizen, especially those who are advocating right of expression and fair competition.

If the madrasa students can prove their merit in a highly competitive admission test, it is fully irrational to deprive them technically.

Reportedly, the Dean of the arts faculty proposed to increase the pass marks of Bengali and English in admission test. The proposal could be a good alternative. Sharif Ahmad  
Advocate, Dhaka

### Melamine menace

People have been extremely worried and anxious for the last couple of weeks regarding the melamine contamination of eight brands of imported powdered milk in Bangladesh. In spite of the detection of the presence of melamine in Dano, Nido, Diploma, Red Cow, Sweet Baby by a competent authority, Dhaka University, the government was dillydallying in giving any clear directive as to the ban on these products. Even if they were not sure about the purity or contamination of these foreign products, they should have ordered temporary withdrawal of them from the market considering public health.

Now that the prudent lawyers of the Human Rights and Peace of Bangladesh have come forward to save the awed nation by a writ petition to the High Court to ban these reportedly melamine-contaminated imported milk, I heartily thank them for their timely action.

**Mohammad Rukanuddin**  
Assistant Professor of English  
Bangladesh University  
Dhaka

### War criminals

Really, this is a big shame for us that we are still shouting to punish the war criminals. In spite of 37 years of freedom, the sector commanders and the freedom fighters are still arranging conferences for the trial and punishment of war criminals! We feel bad when we read news that sector commanders, freedom fighters are still at war. Have they done a huge mistake by making this country free? Why is the govt still silent?

Now we have to sing with singer Haider Hossain - "Ki dekhbar kotha ki dekhchhi, ki vabar kotha ki vabchhi, Tirish bochor poreo ami shadinota take khujchhi" Md. Zelhas Ahmed Tipu  
Kuril, Badda, Dhaka

### A decisive moment for America

Only two days are left before November 4, the election day of America. We do not know what will happen, will the people come out of the cocoon of racism and vote for Barack Obama or though Barack Obama is ahead in the opinion poll, in the privacy of polling booth the "Bradley effect", will dominate. If that happens, it will be very unfortunate, America will lose the chance to regain its glory because the Democratic nominee Barack Obama seems the person suitable for the endeavour.

Former secretary of State Collin Powell endorsed Barack Obama, it is very significant, after observing Obama for a long time, he came to the conclusion that Obama is the person who could lead the country because he is steady and very intelligent.

People from other countries also like Obama, he seems to be a level headed, capable and kind person. His foreign policy is admirable, he opposed Iraq war and declared that if necessary he would meet other Heads of State without any precondition. It is a sign which reveals that he wants peaceful relationship with other countries, make friends, not enemies. So, the world will wait and hope for the best. Nur Jahan, Chittagong

### Financial crisis

I am writing with regard to the letter dated, 24 October 2008, by 'Engineer' Shafi Ahmed. It's not fair to compare the bonus culture with the endemic corruption in Bangladesh.

I have worked as a consultant for Barclay's, Royal Bank of Scotland, ABN Amro and the Woolwich bank. The bonus is based on performance. It's transparent as we are appraised on our performance that is agreed at the beginning of the working year with the line managers. Each year we have to perform 20% better than what we did the previous year. Thus, if we perform as we did the previous year then that is not good enough - thus no bonuses. Sadly, we have to pay tax on the bonus too. Aren't there bonuses in Bangladesh for Eid?

I have never paid underhand my 'bosses' for postings and promotions. In all my life in the UK, (32 years), I have never paid anyone-- from the gas man, school teachers, telephone engineer to council officers to get anything done, other than the fees that are required, as known by everyone, and usually straight to the company or council's account.

Mr Ahmed's comment about motivating staff to do more by threatening them with demotion and dismissal are rather simplistic. I sincerely hope more positive methods are used in Bangladesh. Fazle Karim Chowdhury  
Barrister at Law

### Outstanding scholar

Your editorial (20 Oct) "A unique achievement" where the illustrious and arduous activities of Professor Jamal Islam and his sister Professor Sultana Zaman are briefly mentioned is indeed an overdue acknowledgement of such talents and their activities in Bangladesh.

I did not have any opportunity to meet Professor Zaman, however the mention of Jamal threw me back about sixty years when in Autumn of 1951, I, along with a handful of other Bengali lads were sent to Lawrence College in Ghoru Gali (about one and a half mile down from the hill-town of Murree in Punjab) for special training and where we met the only other two teen age Bengali brothers Kamal and Jamal Islam. Kamal was couple of years older than me, (a proficient singer of Hindi and Urdu songs at student parties by the way), and moved in senior circles so I did not see much of him. But Jamal and I were about the same age and soon became easy friends and developed a rapport. And although it was far away and long ago, we have been in intermittent touch and memories of our time in Lawrence College are ever-fresh in my mind. In particular even at that tender age I remember we conversed a lot about the mysteries and apparent paradoxes of many mathematical puzzles and phenomena (for instance parallel lines meeting at infinity) and that of the visible and theoretical universe. The rugged and silent mountain peaks, the cedar and pine laden Himalayan foot hills certainly contributed to such lofty meandering of the minds. I remember our shared reading of a book in the college library, where we were admitted at different times. The book was an adventure story about pearl divers in a South Sea Island and was called "Twenty Fathoms Deep".

With the onset of winter and snow Lawrence College was in hibernation for about 3 months. Kamal and Jamal returned home (to Chittagong) for vacation and we, who were under a special training programme to be mariners were moved to Aitchison College, Lahore, and then in summer of 1952 we were sent to UK by the Pakistan Central Government to complete our training in UK taking several years.

Later in late sixties and onwards I met Jamal a few times (once with my family) at his Cambridge home called "Sabzar" and enjoyed the hospitality of him and his wife and discussed many mathematical and cosmological matters as before. I knew that he was in first name terms with many Nobel Laureates including Professor Salam, and was working as a visiting Professor in many US universities. He gave me a recently published copy of his book, "The Ultimate Fate of the Universe" (Cambridge University Press, 1983) which I still cherish. He was working at the time as 'Reader in Mathematics' in City University, London, and was commuting from Cambridge. He expressed his intention to leave for a comparable job in Bangladesh rather than stay abroad, which I thought was extremely noble and unselfish of him.

Of course I have again renewed our contact over the last few years and although I did not know the details of his accomplishments, reading it in your editorial makes me extremely proud of him as my childhood friend. After retirement from my own job as a British Civil

Servant, I became a mature student to gain proper knowledge of my scientific and mathematical interests, and inter alia studied for an MSc degree in Astrophysics at the University of London. Then I came across various textbooks on relativistic cosmology, with tensor analysis etc., written by Jamal (and published by Cambridge UP), which are required reading material in many universities in Britain and the U.S. Also I met many Professors and visiting Professors in informal gatherings, lectures and discussions who all knew Jamal and his writings and who were surprised to hear that I was at school with him. A rare and reflected honour indeed!

The school song of Lawrence College of the time (I understand it was a version of the old Eton Boat song) often rings in my ears: "Forty years on when afar and asunder/ Parted are those who are singing today. When you look back and forgetfully wonder/ What you were like in your work and your play?..."  
**Engineer Shafi Ahmed**  
London, UK

### Jamaat's registration

I am an Anglo-Bangladeshi, now living in New Zealand. I visit Bangladesh every two years as I still have my old mother living in Chittagong. I also follow Bangladesh politics and other activities as my heart still remains where I was born. It was interesting to see how the Jamaat amended its constitution and removed many of the clauses which were anti-constitutional, on the advice of the Election Commission. It is also interesting to note that the Jamaat allows non-Muslims to be "Associate" members of the party, although I am not sure how practical will that be for non-Muslims to live with the Jamaat and its ideology.

Although the Jamaat 'officially' allows non-Muslims to be (associate) members of the party, there remains a gross violation of a constitutional provision. This relates to taking oath by a non-Muslim promising to defend the sovereignty and independence of Bangladesh which does not apply to Muslims seeking membership. This discriminatory clause is in violation of the Articles 26, 27 and 29 (Part III; Fundamental Rights) of the constitution of Bangladesh.

Would the EC revisit this aspect before granting registration to the Jamaat?

**Kerr Mann**  
Manukau City  
Auckland, New Zealand

### All pervasive corruption

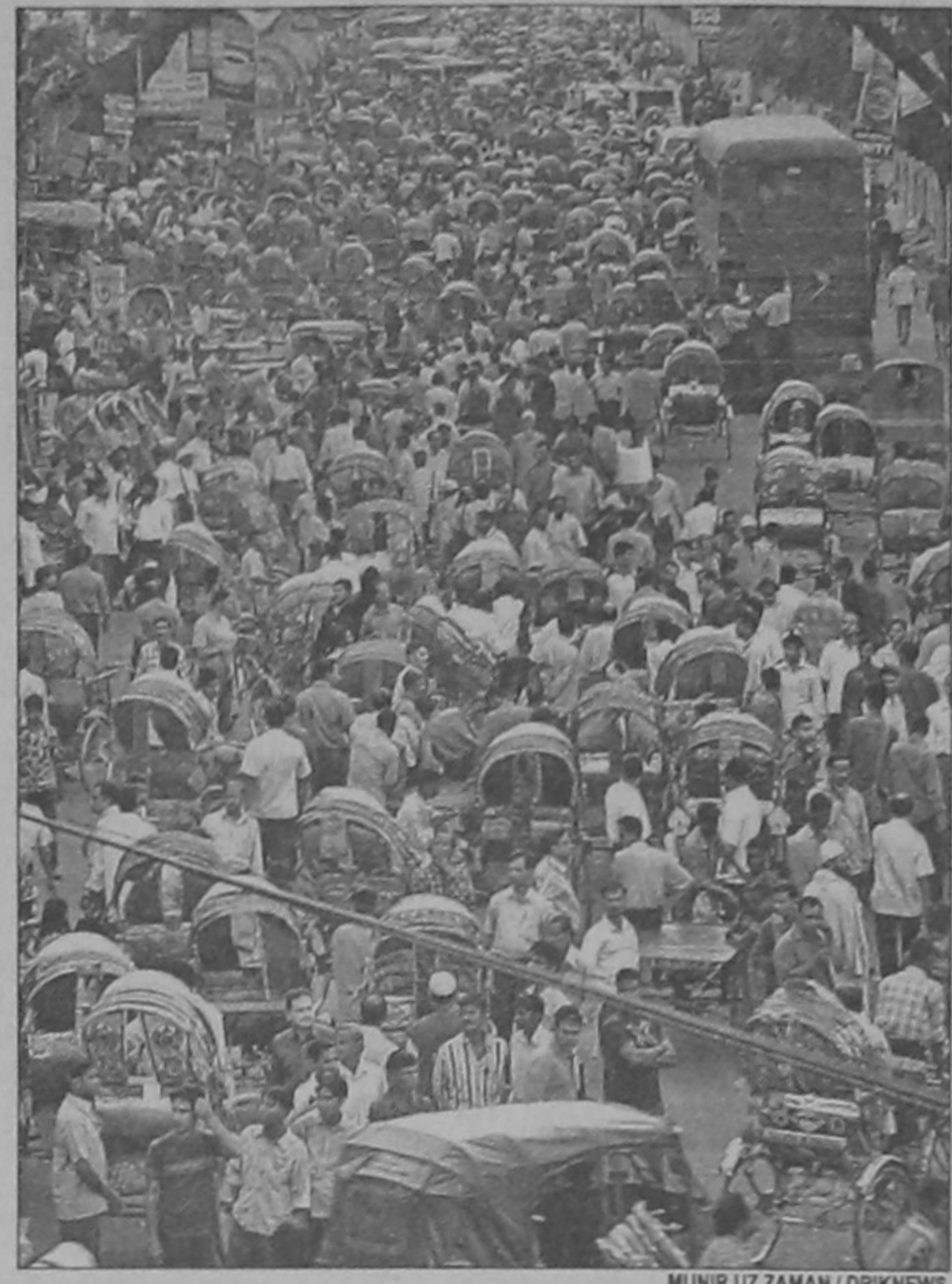
The menace of corruption in public life has eaten into the vitals of society, distorted all values, truth and virtue. The evil has grown to such gigantic proportion that there is hardly any sphere of social, political, economic or even religious activities that is free from corruption of some kind. Like the air we breathe in, it has become all pervasive.

In schools & colleges, meritorious students are denied admission while those capable of giving fat donations get something that they don't deserve.

Corruption generates at the top and then gradually filters down to the lower levels.

**Pradip Gope**  
BBA  
Shahjalal University  
Sylhet

## Life in the city



I don't blame anyone for taking my letter dated 21.09.08 personally, as I know some people will take it on themselves (personally) and some will probably not pay any attention at all as it is just another letter regarding Dhaka's nagging traffic congestion.

However one thing is for sure when some one or a group of people are blamed for the job they have not done, it's a typical Bangladeshi tendency that they will come up with thousands of excuses and it was no exception for me.

In a letter dated DS 10.10.08 with the above caption "Rickshaws and Dhaka", a senior citizen Mr Ahmed came up with a similar excuse and did put the blame on the then political situation and the governments for not building roads and not listening to the so-called elite citizens' advice. However, I would like to remind Mr. Ahmed that during the most controversial regime which was of H.M. Ershad's rule, Dhaka did get to see some roads which are now playing a major role in the city's communication. After that we had 15 years of internationally recognised democracy in the country but failed to find one major road constructed during this time, apart from a few overbridges on the rail tracks (I do not want to call them flyovers). Also I would like to highlight the fact that during the late 80's and early 90's, it was probably necessary for the government to centralize everything which is Dhaka based as the then Dhaka had all the infrastructure required and historically Dhaka has been the heart of this part of Bengal from the days of Shaista Khan.

But the then democratic governments and the intellectuals/civic society failed (or were busy making money) to foresee the future Dhaka and simply had their hands folded and no initiatives were taken for the decentralization of the capital resulting in everything Dhaka based.

Today Dhaka has come to an almost standstill city in each and every aspect. The then children of the mid 80's and early 90's who are now parents go through nightmares every day while sending their children to school or going to work.

Though I am not an anti-rickshaw campaigner but I certainly will not go to Tongi in a rickshaw from Dhanmondi for the sake of eco-friendly nature of the tricycle, no way. Though in my previous letters, I mentioned the slow phase out of rickshaws due to its slow nature but now I feel the faster it's removed the better it will get as people will develop the habit of walking. I just would like to mention here that Dhaka is not all about Niketon, Gulshan and Banani.

No doubt, the motorized vehicles are one of the many reasons for the air pollution but it is not the only reason for the air pollution as we all know that the brickfields surrounding the city are the main reason for the air pollution.

Why there is no write up or seminar on the brickfields and the heavy industries within the city which keep changing the flow of carbon dioxide when the seasonal wind changes.

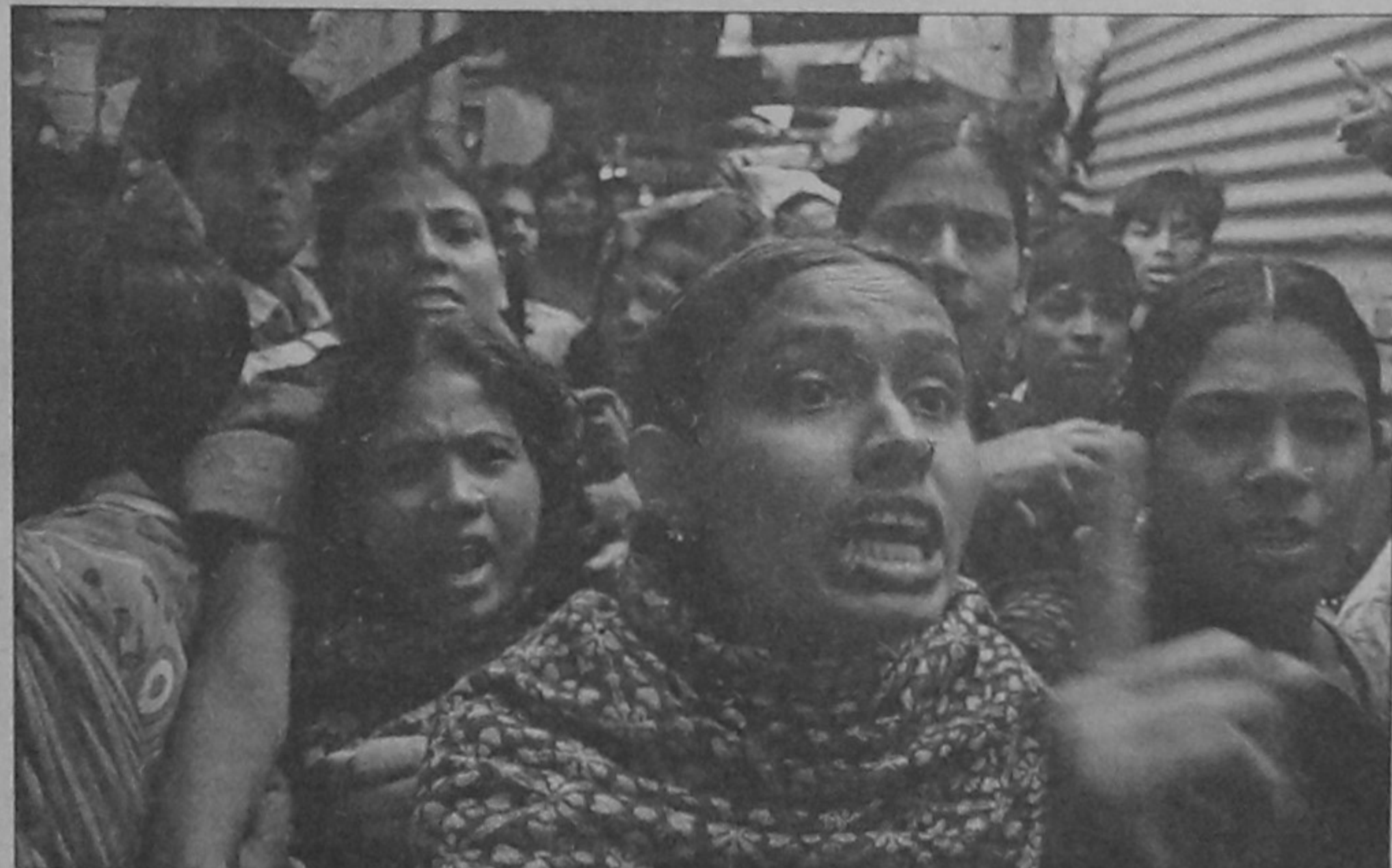
Just would like to mention one more thing here that Mr. Ahmed wrote in his letter regarding Kolkata where he said Kolkata has an efficient subway and taxis that do not refuse fares. I agree with him in today's context but did he not miss out that in the early 80s when Kolkata was constructing the underground rail what a mess the city was for 15 years? I remember when I first visited Kolkata as a small kid, I was scared to see thousands of people standing in the middle of the road to catch a bus and I did not see any traffic discipline at all and saw the taxi drivers refusing to go as they do in Dhaka today. But I still remember during those chaotic days I did not see any rickshaws on the major Kolkata streets.

To me the future of Dhaka seems rather dark as I have noticed that the so called private/government developers selling lands for houses are more or less like Niketon and have no provision for a walkway, so when these projects will be complete, the city will certainly have a population of more than 20 million and the present congestion of traffic will still be there, adding new dimensions to the problems.

There is no alternative other than to make new wide roads and whoever comes to power must put great emphasis on the Mega Transport Project.

**Sohel Ahmed**  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

## Our economy



The world's economy seemed to be standing on a shaky turmoil. Our economy, however, needs to be more self-dependent. As the oil prices go low, the cost of raw materials that we import will fall as well. Our wage determination of labour is already low compared to our competitors.

We may also say when the investors will not feel reluctant enough to pour their capital into the service sectors, they might focus on injecting money in infrastructure, or our primary sector that would make our overall

economy much stronger with the long run approach. Apart from import, our export market demands might also enhance as our economy is mostly not producing durable goods, like automobiles or high tech electronics. Also we produce goods like garments, with which we can argue that when foreign economies get weaker they would search for textile industries that can produce such goods cheaply.

**Tahsin Hyder**  
Dhaka