

## Our new head of state

Zillur Rahman must be president of all citizens

WE take this opportunity to extend our heartiest congratulations to President Zillur Rahman on his assumption of the high office of head of state. The new president brings to the office a dignity and a stature that he has built over the years through his dedicated service to democracy and everything that has had to do with the promotion of public welfare. Zillur Rahman has been a fervent believer in the ideals that his party, the Awami League, has always espoused; and he has in his long and distinguished career never flinched from the challenges involved in bringing those ideals to fruition. He has been a respected confidante of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; and in the years since 1975 has consistently underscored his faith in the ability of democracy to bring about social and political change in the country.

Perhaps no tribute could be bigger to the acumen of the new president than that he has always been regarded with unalloyed respect by people across party lines. He has deserved it all, particularly through the determined, level-headed manner in which he not only kept his party on track in the just-ended two years of emergency rule but also convinced others that a return to democracy necessitated an objective understanding of political realities. It was an attitude that earned him kudos. As we welcome the new president to Bangabhaban, we also note that life has not been all smooth sailing for him. His resilience was demonstrated when he emerged from the shock of seeing his wife, the equally committed politician Ivy Rahman, assassinated in the grenade attacks on an Awami League rally in Dhaka in August 2004. Zillur Rahman's sacrifice, and that of his family, to the cause of democracy has therefore been intense and unique. The nation has shared his grief as it has respected his political sagacity.

In the days ahead, President Zillur Rahman will be expected to demonstrate the change he can bring about in the way Bangabhaban conducts business, especially in light of the controversies that have dogged it in recent times. He has vowed to uphold the law and the constitution. The opposition has welcomed his ascension to the presidency. He will now need to build on his reputation through convincing the country that he means to be president of all citizens of Bangladesh, that he will uphold the constitution and that he will abhor and eschew anything that is partisan in his dealings as head of state. That will only reinforce our faith in and hold on democracy.

## PM's welcome stance on extra-judicial killing

It must not be allowed to happen again

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina's categorical denunciation of extra-judicial killings that grew into a culture during the BNP-led alliance government strikes a responsive cord instantly with people who believe in the due process of law and supremacy of the rule of law. Not only that, she has made it abundantly clear, and very appropriately at that, on the floor of the House, that her government will stop custodial killings and bring to justice those who were involved in such crimes.

Public memory is still rife with nightmarish incidents being regularly passed off as deaths in crossfire while to the shell-shocked audience these were nothing but custodial killings. When the media and legal and human rights activist groups highlighted the perverse acts different spins would be given to the stories to justify the patently unjustifiable. It was even claimed that desperate measures were called for in a desperate situation, that hardened criminals being no respecters of others' rights deserved none themselves, and that fear needed to be struck in the hearts of offenders waiting in the wings to commit crimes. If such attitudes constitute the stuff of which law enforcement is made, then where is place of law in it? In other words, how could a law enforcement agency be allowed to work with such complete lack of accountability to any higher authority?

There is no doubt that the perpetrators brought bad name to our country's image abroad and the people's confidence in the rule of law took another drubbing through the custodial killings. So, therefore, it devolves upon the Awami League which has come to power on a massive mandate for change to make sure that extra-judicial killing is stopped once and for all.

## Friendship train

ZAFAR SOBHAN

WHAT event last week was the most important sign of where Bangladesh-India relations are heading and what this means for the future? Significant as it was, it wasn't the much-heralded visit of the Indian foreign minister: it was the signing of Bangladeshi paceman Mashrafe Mortaza to a \$600,000 contract by the Kolkata Knight Riders. Let me explain.

Even with the new government in office for less than a month, it is already becoming apparent what form the coming legislative and rhetorical showdown between it and the opposition will take.

There will continue to be minor ruckuses over seats in parliament and this policy or that policy, but it is now clear that the principle ground upon which the BNP will choose to launch its major offensive of the year against the government will be the tried and tested issue of India.

This was foreshadowed in the election campaign when, running out of ammunition and behind in the polls in the final few weeks of the campaign, the BNP once again played the India card. This has been an effective electoral and rhetorical strategy since the 1970s and has been a corner-stone of the BNP's electoral success over the past 30 years.

Conventional wisdom has it that this time around the voters were not impressed with the alarmist rhetoric, and the fact that the BNP was offering the same scare tactics of old rather than forward looking solutions was part of the reason the party was so thoroughly rejected at the polls.

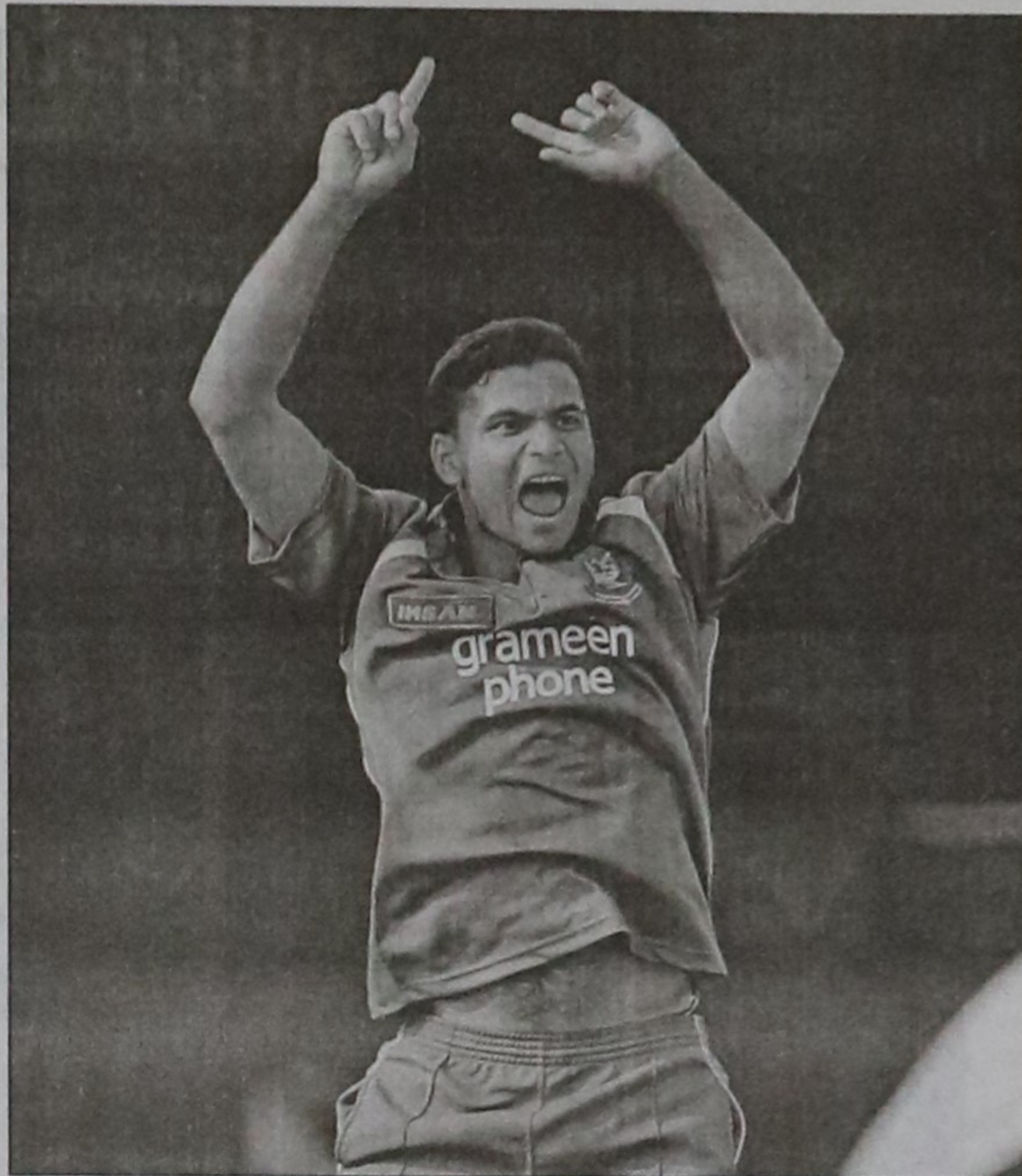
However, the truth is that it isn't clear at all whether the India card has lost its potency as an issue, and, if the histrionics surrounding the visit of the Indian foreign minister are any indication, the BNP appears to fancy its chances banging this drum one last time.

But the difference is that this time, instead of running from the fight, the AL is preparing to stand its ground and defend its India policy. It could, of course, lose its nerve at the last minute, as has happened in the past, but early indications are that the government believes that the nation is ready for a mature debate on the merits and that BNP demagoguery on the issue won't work this time.

Our problematic relationship with India remains one of the biggest challenges any Bangladesh government must deal with, an obstacle to everything from our signing on to the Trans-Asian Highway to regional energy co-operation to our receptivity towards foreign investment.

In its own right, agreements on issues

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Sign of the times.

such as transit or use of Bangladeshi port facilities for goods from India's north-east to expanding trade opportunities with that region, that could be accomplished through better relations with India, would more than pay for themselves.

Not only that, but the continuing irritants in the relationship from our perspective, from border issues to market access to water sharing are all issues that could be resolved far more satisfactorily through co-operation rather than confrontation.

The tide may be turning internationally, as well. Until recently, the BNP always enjoyed the advantage that, except for India, it was better thought of overseas than the AL, particularly in

Washington. Today, this palpably seems not to be the case.

Part of this is to do with comparing the fortunes of India and Pakistan. With Pakistan all but imploding and India well on the way to becoming a major player on the world stage, closeness to Pakistan and hostility to India is no longer a reassuring proposition.

Most important is the change in the US position. Deny it though they might, there was no mistaking the pro-BNP tilt of successive US ambassadors and administrations. But today the calculus appears to be quite different.

How will the BNP react to the shifting sands? One solution is to reinvent itself as the party of hyper-nationalism, economic protectionism, making its stand

on issues such as coal and gas export and opposition to the World Bank and IMF. Certainly there is a constituency inside the country for such a party.

But such a shift towards the nationalist wing of the party will cause fissures in the pro-business and pro-western wing of the party, and, moreover, in these days of globalisation, one wonders how effective the BNP can be as a party if it chooses to pursue the path of insularity and isolationism.

It would almost certainly be better, both for the party as well as the country, if the BNP decided against taking such a tack. There are many more fruitful approaches it could take to oppose the current government and draw a distinction, but all indications are that it thinks that this particular line of attack is a winner.

It is worth noting that there have been two major stories in the past week in the international media, one in Time magazine and one in the International Herald Tribune, focusing on Bangladesh's relationship with India. Indeed, in his IHT column, Philip Bowring points out:

"For Bangladesh, there are pressing economic reasons to escape from old notions that cooperation will lead to Indian dominance ... [W]ith garment exports and worker remittances now vulnerable to the global crisis, realism needs to supplant the politicking which has frustrated economic relations with fast-growing India."

The rules of the game are changing, and the AL is betting that good relations with India will both reap economic benefits and be popular with the voters, and that, in today's globalised world, that a more co-operative relationship will stand us in good stead on the world stage.

This is where Mashrafe's signing with the Knight Riders comes in. Today, Bangladeshis are looking for a more open, friendly, and mutually respectful relationship with India, and the surest sign of this new relationship is Mashrafe's recognition in India.

Already Bangladeshis are looking at India a little differently and vice versa. When we look back in a few years we may well see Mashrafe's signing as the moment when things began to change for the better, and the bilateral relationship began moving to a more equal and mutually beneficial footing.

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Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

## Be mine, Valentine

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE feeling of love is a lovely feeling. If you have loved, you would know what it means. If you haven't, it only tells what you miss. French mathematician Blaise Pascal says the heart has its reasons that reason doesn't know. In love it's the other way around. It has its feelings that only feeling knows. Love is when every heartbeat turns into music.

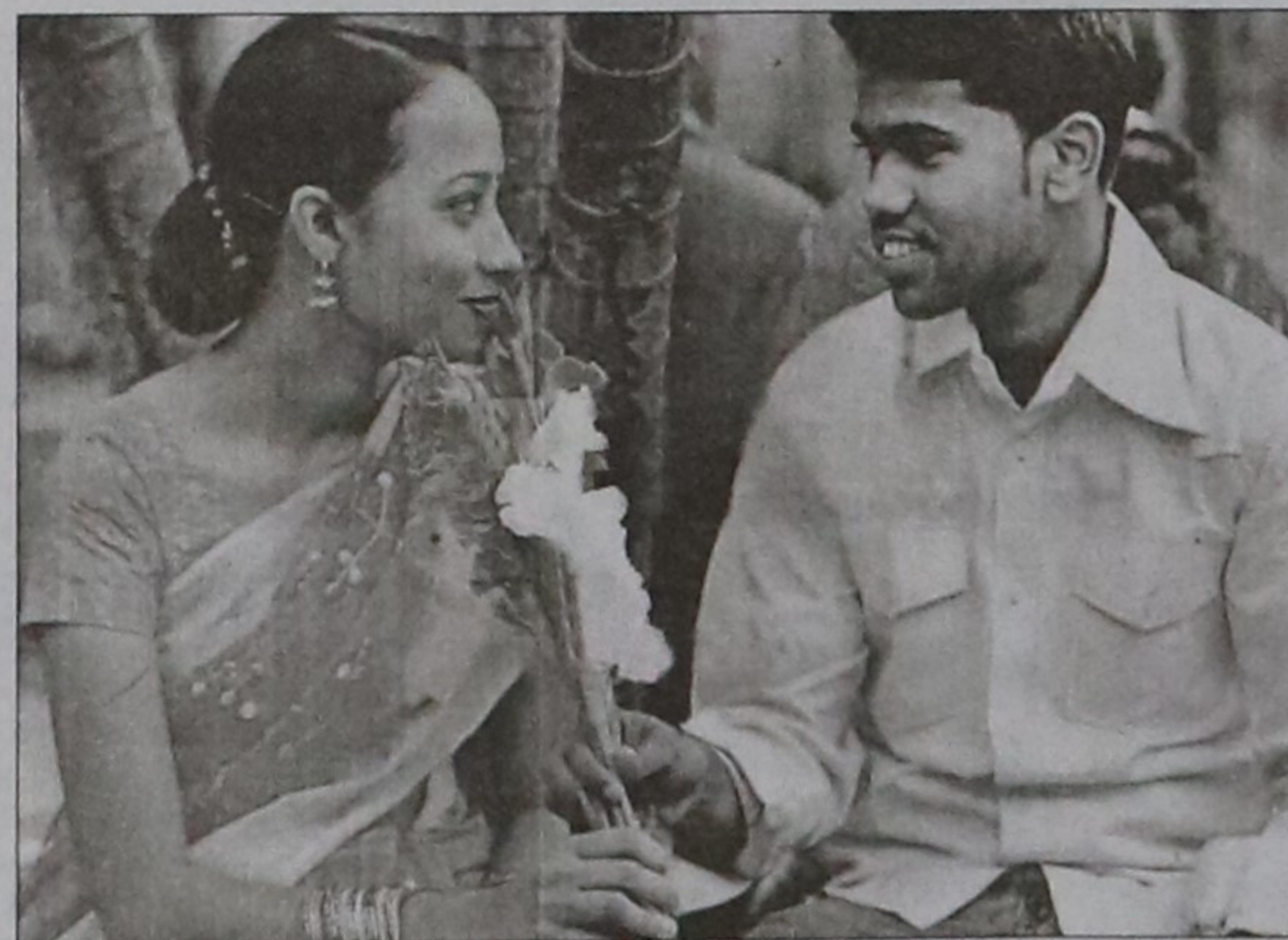
Love isn't without its moments of dissonance. It gets distracted, often distorted, even discontinued. Like lovers, love also has its allocated time. At some point the music stops. But in spite of it, Lord Alfred Tennyson tells us that it's better to have loved and lost, than to have never loved at all. It's worth falling in love and having heartbreaks than never to have taken your chance.

German poet Goethe says what is important in life is life itself, not a result of life. Likewise, what is important in love is love itself, not a result of love. So, why bother if you succeed or fail in love? Why must you look before you leap into its blissful arm? Thoughts too long make life short. Love always lifts your soul, though it might often let you down afterwards.

In 11th century France, the uncle of Heloise castrated her lover Peter Abelard. Abelard became a monk and dedicated his life to learning. The heartbroken Heloise became a nun. Despite their sufferings and separations, Abelard and Heloise remained in love. What does it tell? Love has the power to bind two hearts even when their bodies are pulled asunder. Lust is storm in flesh. Love is gentle breeze blowing in blood.

Queen Victoria of England was so devastated by the death of Prince Albert that she didn't appear in public for three years. She wore black until the

On this Valentine's Day, pick your roses and make up your mind. One red rose, if you love someone. A lilac rose for love at first sight. In some traditions one red rose could mean she is your only love. Eleven roses mean she is your favourite one, ninety-nine roses mean you are forever in love with her, and hundred roses mean you want to marry her.



Each other eternally.

last day of her life and mourned the death of her husband for 40 years after he died. But love doesn't always lead to grieving. Often it also inspires great work. When Pierre Curie passed away, his wife Marie Curie pledged to carry on his work. She became the first person to win a second Nobel Prize.

So, love is lovely although it can hurt sometimes. It can enervate; it can devastate. It can alleviate; it can aggravate. It can bridge the gap; it can widen the chasm. Love is blind; it can also open your eyes. It's the blindness that shows

the shimmering lights on the hill. It can also wind into a blind alley that takes you down to an ocean of grief.

But that is one risk worth taking. If you will never love in life, you will never be loved in return. A moment of love exhilarates a thousand births. Thousand deaths are mourned in one loveless life. If you love to live, I say, why not live to love?

If you are looking for someone to live with, you need to find one you can't live without. Only love can reconcile this

contradiction. It defeats mathematics; its alchemy fuses two into one. It might sound mushy, but lovers embrace this absurd rule. Love is the yearning of two halves. It brings them together into a blissful union and makes one complete whole.

Shakespeare's Romeo says that love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs. He says that being purged, love is a fire in the lover's eye, but being vexed it's a sea nourished with loving tears. Then he asks what else is love. The answer he gives is that it's madness most discreet, choking gall and a preserving sweet. Romeo, however, cautions that love isn't a tender thing. It's too rough, too rude, too boisterous, and it pricks like thorn.

Thus, the experience of love isn't a bed of roses, but a bed of roses is an experience of love. There is an interesting story in Greek mythology about how roses became a symbol of love. Chloris, the Goddess of flowers, created rose by giving life to the lifeless body of a nymph. Aphrodite, the Goddess of love, gave her beauty and Dionysus, the God of wine, gave her fragrance. Rose has been popular amongst lovers for centuries because it stands for brightness, joy and charm.

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One life to live, but live it with the magic of love. You will live many lives in one and wish this one life weren't so short!

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a columnist for The Daily Star. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com