

Urgency of tackling climate change

It is the poorest who are most vulnerable to these natural disasters. And it is the poorest who are most severely affected by climate change. They must be at the forefront of our minds as we decide what sort of deal we want at Copenhagen. Doubly so, because they have done the least to cause the problem and their voices are rarely heard in the negotiations or the media.

ED MILIBAND and DOUGLAS ALEXANDER

WITH the clock ticking and less than a hundred days to go until ministers from around the world meet at the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, now is the time for the UK and [South Asia/India/Bangladesh] to work together to get a climate deal that is fair to the region's economy and its people.

We are here in South Asia to hear what climate change means for millions of people in India and Bangladesh. For this region, the case for the urgency of tackling climate change is beyond question.

Flooding of the Kosi river over the past two years has driven millions from their homes in Nepal and Bihar. Cyclones Aila and Nargis have killed thousands and displaced millions more in Burma, Bangladesh and West Bengal.

Torrential rains have caused terrible landslides across the Himalayas. And now a weakened monsoon is causing a

drought, which threatens hundreds of millions of farmers all over India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Once again, the number of farmer suicides is increasing.

While none of these natural disasters can be directly attributed to climate change, scientists predict that they will become more frequent and more severe unless we act. Alongside the terrible human toll, these disasters exact an economic cost -- with the loss of economic growth in South Asia from environmental causes equivalent to double that from the global economic crisis, each and every year.

It is the poorest who are most vulnerable to these natural disasters. And it is the poorest who are most severely affected by climate change. They must be at the forefront of our minds as we decide what sort of deal we want at Copenhagen. Doubly so, because they have done the least to cause the problem and their voices are rarely heard in the negotiations or the media.



Bangladesh is suffering the most because of climate change.

It is their voice we have come to South Asia to hear. Yet we have also come to listen to those communities, businesses and Governments around the region who are pioneering responses to climate change. From sustainable forestry in Nepal, to flood-resistant crops in Bangladesh, to renewable energy production in India, there is much to learn.

We can also draw encouragement and optimism that the world is taking the issue more seriously. In July world leaders, including Prime Ministers Manmohan Singh and Gordon Brown, agreed to strive to keep global temperature rise within a 2 degrees threshold, beyond which the risks of dangerous climate change rise significantly.

As well as coming to listen, we have also come to South Asia to explain that we recognise the role that developed countries must play in facing up to our duties to help solve the problem of climate change. And we are here to work with the Indian and Bangladeshi Governments, to help secure an ambitious, fair and effective deal in Copenhagen.

Firstly, the UK recognises developed countries' historic responsibility for climate change. The developed world must lead in the response and must do more. That means ambitious commitments to reduce emissions, including from the United States and Europe. The UK has set out plans to reduce its emissions by one third by 2020 compared to

1990 and our Climate Change Act puts our stringent targets in legislation. We are prepared to go even further as part of a global deal.

Secondly, developed countries must meet our commitment to provide the finance and technology to help developing countries address the challenges of climate change. Prime Minister Gordon Brown recently launched a climate finance initiative which put a global figure of around \$100 billion every year by 2020 to help developing countries address climate change, including adapting to its impacts. Finance needs to flow in the context of an ambitious global deal.

Thirdly, on the basis that action must be lead by developed countries, we recognise that at this stage, developing countries in South Asia will not take on national emission reduction targets. But equally, we know that allied to strong action by developed countries, we need developing countries to pursue a low carbon development path if we are to have a hope of tackling the problem of climate change.

That is why it is welcome that India is taking important steps to increase the use of renewable energy, particularly solar power, to increase the energy efficiency of its economy and to increase forest cover. It is demonstrating the carbon savings that can be achieved through these actions. But it is taking these steps to put its economy onto a low carbon path because it recognises the benefits for its energy security and sustainable develop-

ment.

Bangladesh, a very low-energy consuming country, is pursuing a low-carbon growth path whilst building its resilience to climate change, reducing the risks climate change poses to national development.

This is the kind of action, which the UK stands ready to assist. We are keen to learn how, as part of a global climate deal, we can help India and Bangladesh to build on these plans, thereby helping to tackle together the climate challenge and lift millions more out of poverty.

We are here together because we recognise that whilst we cannot hope to eliminate poverty in South Asia without facing this global climate challenge; neither can we hope to achieve a global climate deal without facing this region's development challenge.

The decisions made in December at the climate conference will be some of the most important the world will take for decades and are vital for the future security and prosperity of South Asia.

We look forward to all countries playing their part in an outcome at the Copenhagen climate change talks, which is good for development and good for the future sustainability of our planet.

To know more about UK's position at Copenhagen, visit: www.actioncopenhagen.gov.uk.

The Rt Hon Douglas Alexander is UK Secretary of State for International Development, and The Rt Hon Ed Miliband is UK Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

Reviving Zila Parishad

Democracy is one of the fundamental principles of our state policy. Keeping this in view, the constitution has provided for elected local government in every administrative unit of the republic. The Constitution, particularly Articles 11, 59 and 60, should guide the framing of the proposed Zila Parishad law.

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

WHILE talking to the representatives of the upazila chairmen and vice-chairmen at his secretariat office on June 7, LGRD and Cooperatives minister, Syed Ashraful Islam, revealed that the zila parishads would be made functional in the year 2010 as the government had planned to enact a law to this effect by the beginning of that year. This is a welcome statement because of the fact that zila parishads have remained non-functional for the last 18 years or so.

A look into the history of the local governments in the geographical area that now constitutes Bangladesh shows that the district-level local government body was the most important tier of the three-tier local government system introduced following the passage of the Local-Self Government Act 1885. These were: (1) a District Board (DB) at each district, (2) a Local Board (LB) in a subdivision of a district, and (3) a Union Committee (UC) for a group of villages. The DB was made the centre-piece in the local government system and entrusted with extensive powers and responsibilities. The LB acted as an agent of the DB, while the former was a supervising body of the UCs.

The British system of local govern-

ment continued till the imposition of martial law by Ayub Khan in 1958, which suspended all local bodies. The Basic Democracies Order (BDO) of 1959, providing for a four-tier local government system not only changed the name of the DB to District Council (DC) but also destroyed the democratic character of the body by appointing the Deputy Commissioner as its ex-officio chairman in place of the elected chairman, and vesting all executive powers in him.

Immediately after independence, the Awami League (AL) government dissolved all the existing local government bodies and appointed committees to administer these defunct bodies. The deputy commissioner was made the administrator of the district committee.

Articles 59 and 60 of the constitution of 1972, which included specific provisions relating to the basic structure, functions and power of local government bodies, were deleted by the Constitution (Fourth Amendment) Act, 1975.

The Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 1976, promulgated by the government of General Ziaur Rahman, introduced a three-tier local government system. The Zila Parishad (ZP) was one of them, the other two being Thana Parishad (TP) and Union Parishad (UP). The LGO provided for a ZP that was to

consist of elected, official and nominated women-members, including a chairman and vice-chairman to be elected by them from amongst themselves.

General H.M. Ershad, who seized power in March 1982, transformed thanas into upazilas (sub-districts) and sub-divisions into zilas (districts). So, the three tiers of local government stood as Union Parishad (UP), Upazila Parishad (UZP) and Zila Parishad (ZP).

In 1988, the Jatiya Party government of President Ershad enacted the Zila Parishad Act. According to this Act, a ZP comprised (a) public representatives such as MPs, UP chairmen and municipality chairmen of the concerned district, (b) nominated members and (c) certain officials including the deputy commissioner of the district without voting right. The ZP chairmen were to be appointed by the government.

The ZP, as established by the Act, ceased to exist with the fall of Ershad government on December 6, 1990. The BNP government that came to power in 1991 abolished the UZPs. The UZP system reintroduced by the AL-led alliance government this year has come under the supervision of the local MP and thereby lost its independence.

The above narrative is given to show how the local governments, starting their journey in a democratic environment, subsequently suffered from undemocratic actions of the central government.

While the statement of the minister for LGRD and Cooperatives has ushered in hope for revival of the ZPs, it has also raised some questions. Will a ZP be an elected body as envisaged in the Article 59 of the constitution? What will be the

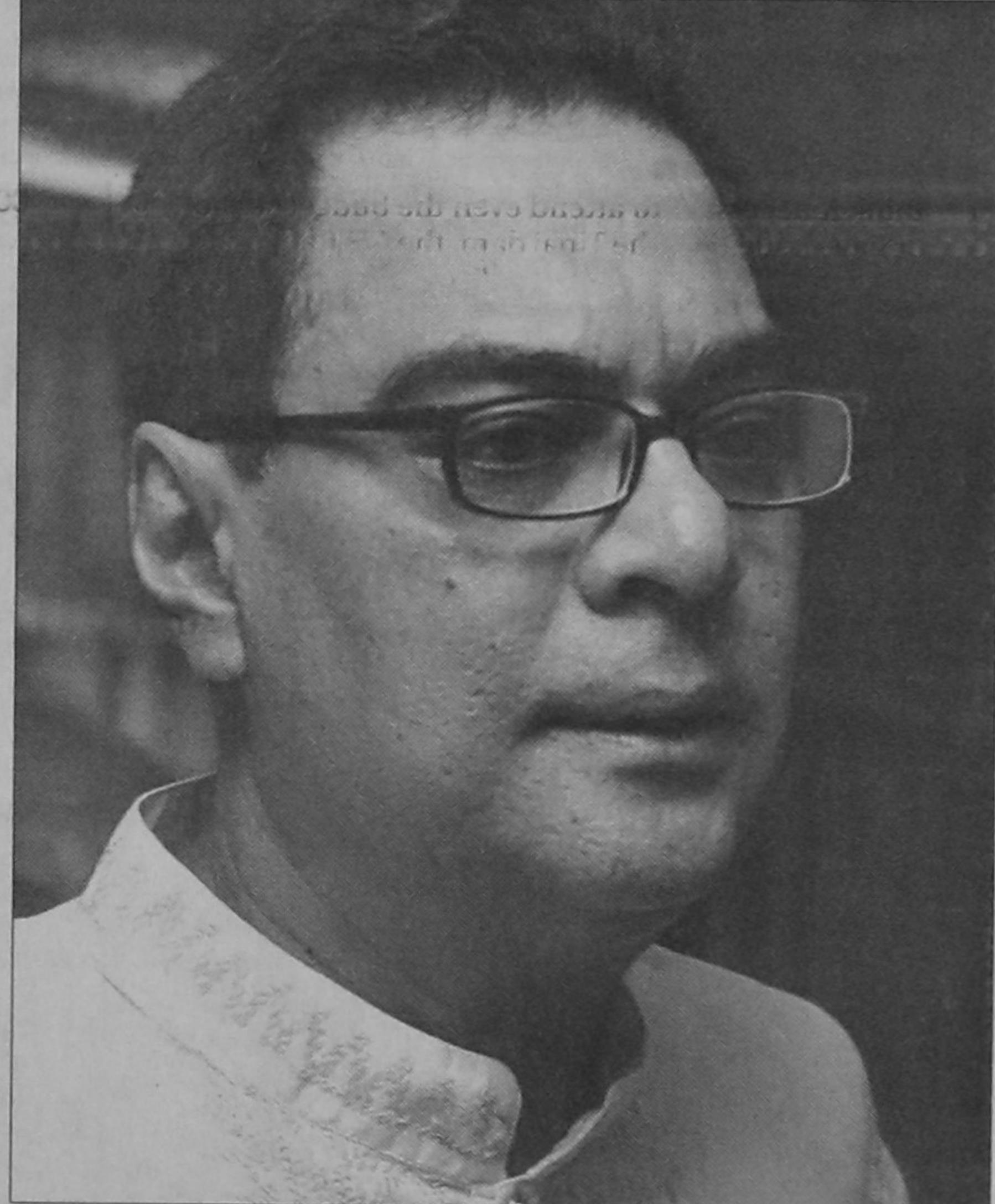
rank and status of the chairman of ZP? Will the central government retain power to supersede a ZP on some excuses? Will it be able to exercise the financial power as envisaged in Article 60 of the constitution? Will the grants and loans from the central government come with heavy strings?

These questions come to the forefront for some valid reasons. Article 59 of the constitution says that local government in every administrative unit of the republic will be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law. The Upazila Parishad Act 2009 has given a lawmaker elected from a constituency the authority to control the decisions of the UZP. According to some legal experts, since a lawmaker is not elected for a UZP, empowering him to control the decisions of the UZP violates the constitution. It is believed that the proposed law on ZP will not authorise any external authority to control the decisions of the ZPs.

The 1988 Act provided for a government-appointed chairman in each ZP, who could be removed by the government without showing any reason. We hope that this will not be repeated in the proposed law on ZP. The chairman and the vice-chairman, if any, of a ZP should be directly elected and may be given the rank and status of state minister and deputy minister respectively.

A ZP should have sufficient power to raise funds by imposing taxes, fees, etc. The political identity of the chairman of a ZP should not influence sanction of grants and loans by the government for implementing development programs of a ZP.

Democracy is one of the fundamental principles of our state policy. Keeping



A bold step

in this view, the constitution has provided for elected local government in every administrative unit of the republic. The Constitution, particularly Articles

11, 59 and 60, should guide the framing of the proposed Zila Parishad law.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the Government.

The 10 worst types of Facebook friends



A multi-million-dollar movie about Facebook is to be launched worldwide by Columbia Pictures next year. That sounds exciting. I can't wait to sit in a cinema for two thrilling hours watching Kevin Spacey editing his friends list.

Facebook, the social networking website, is wildly successful but also incredibly annoying, since anything anyone on your network says, pops up on your page.

But friends are friends, and they are all listed there by name, so you cannot point out that their contributions are utterly worthless garbage, unless of

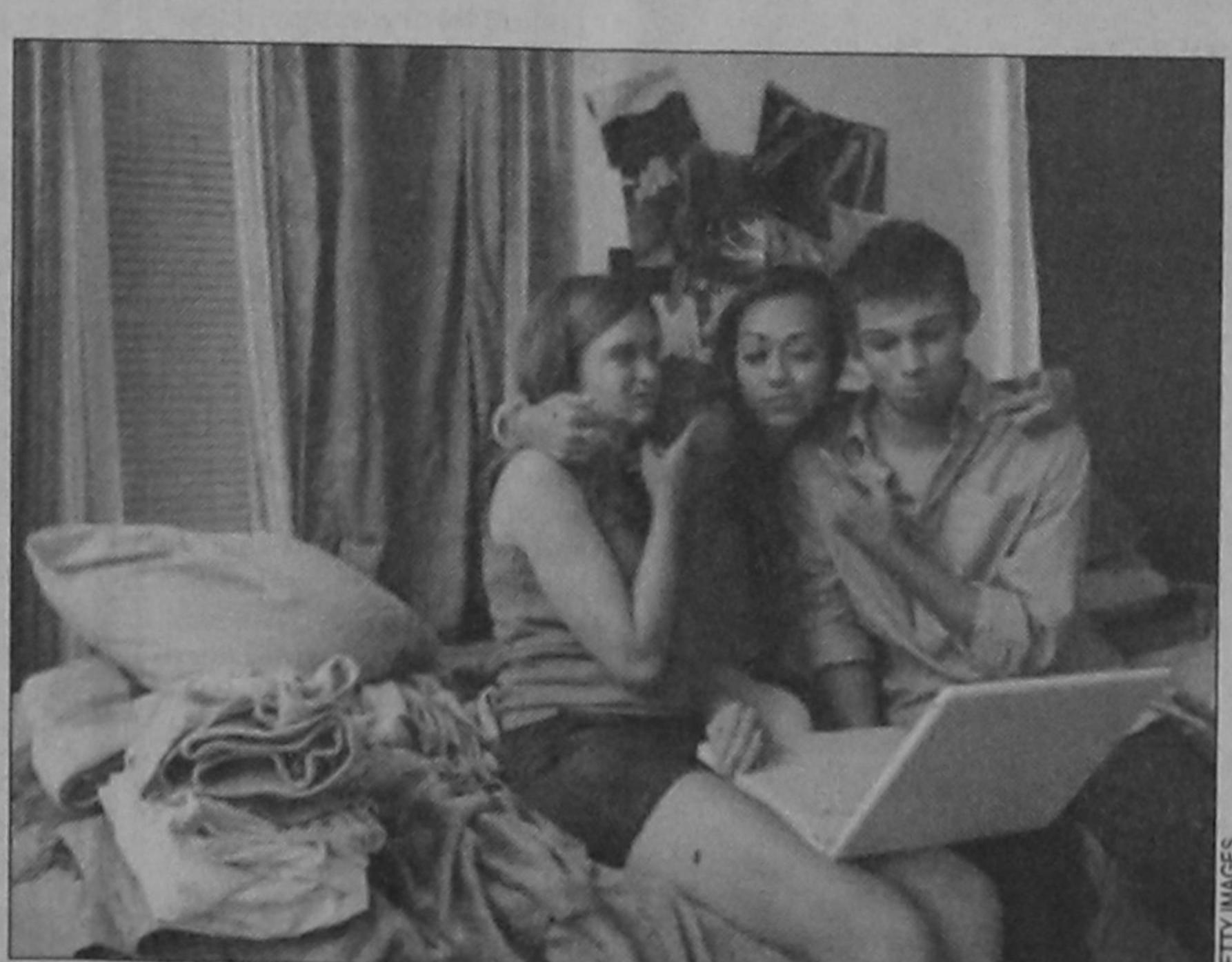
course, you're a tactless, completely insensitive oaf. So here goes. To my Facebook friends: many of you are sending contributions, which are utterly worthless garbage.

Thinking it through, I reckon there are ten types of major timewasters that foul up our Facebook news pages.

1. The linguistically blind: You regularly send me letters and invitations in Bahasa Indonesian, Tagalog, Mandarin and other languages that you know I cannot read. Why? Do you think I am going to learn the language just so I can read your worthless opinion on the latest Ashley Tisdale music video?

2. The hopelessly juvenile: You invite me to join groups that are clearly designed for very, very small, brain-damaged children, such as clubs for owners of virtual pets.

3. The everything sharers: You give me too much information, constantly sending me messages saying: "John just played Typing Maniac and



Which kind are you?

reached level six with a score of 64,558. He wants to share his success

with you!" Well, thank you. In return, I would love to give you this bullet from my AK47.

4. The mass mailers: In my opinion, mass mailers and mass murderers are equally evil. You guys send me invitations to events on different continents. No, I am not going to cross the world for a drink with an inane, thoughtless idiot.

5. The disguised promoters: You pretend to be my friend but you are really just selling me a product. No I don't want to join a new sub-group set up to praise your latest self-published book since I know that all the other fans are you under various pseudonyms.

6. The link forwarders: You forward unfunny jokes to our message walls, neatly reminding us how retarded you are.

7. The hopeless amateur: You don't really understand how Facebook works, but you click everything so each of us gets five identical invita-

tions. You are on everyone's "auto-ignore" list.

8. The bad conversationalist: You don't realise that your dull responses go to everyone on the network so we all get to hear your dazzling gems of wisdom such as "Anyone their?" (sic)

9. The spreader of awfulness: You don't realise you have extremely poor taste but you remind the rest of us of that fact every day. "Here's the fab new Aqua music video, I love it almost as much as I love I'm a Barbie Girl, woohoo!"

10. The missing person: You signed up for Facebook but are too busy to use it so you miss almost every single posting and comment and invitation.

Actually, come to think of it, number ten may be smarter than I give her credit for.

Send ideas and comments via www.facebook.com/nuryvittachi.