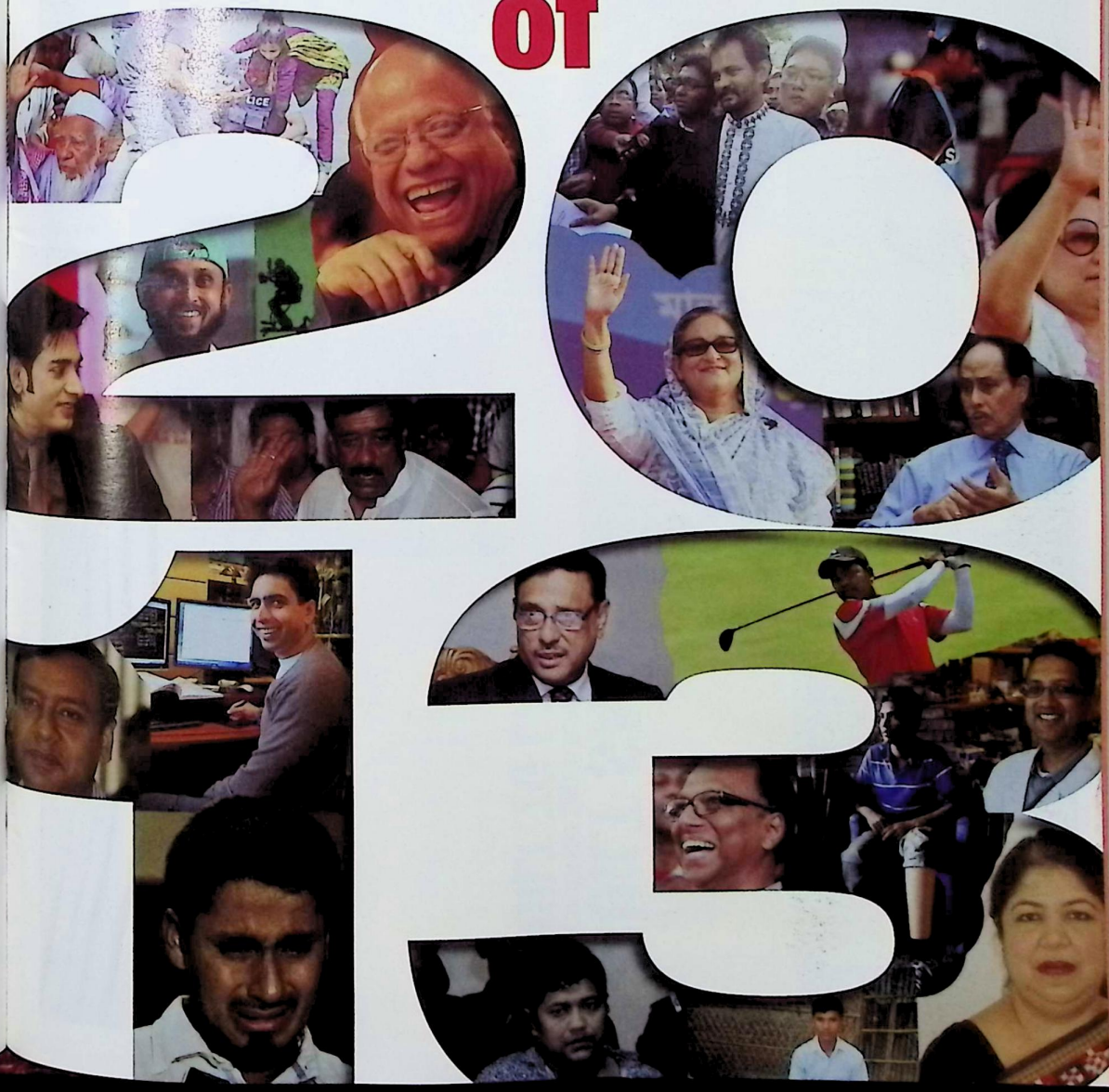
A Weekly Publication of The Daily Star

theSTAR

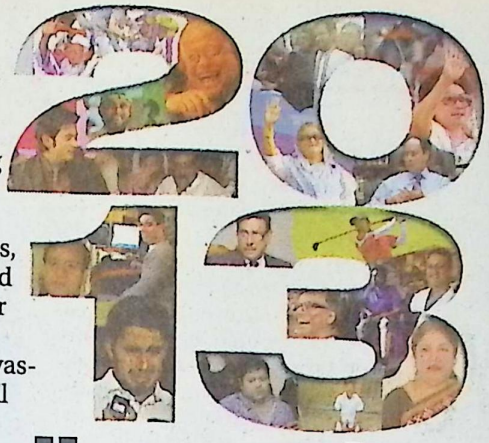
stories behind the news

27 December, 2013

NEWSMAKERS of 2013



Cover Story 12-24



A Rollercoaster Ride

From the very beginning of this year it has been a breathless rollercoaster ride. Corruption scandals, political shenanigans and the worst factory disaster left Bangladesh gasping for air. Politics took a devastating turn when political rivalry took the form of brutal violence against people and public property, its debilitating effects seeping into every crevice of society. In the midst of this bleak, blighted scenario, were a few silver linings - remarkable victories in the sports arena as well as acts of bravery by young men and women. *The Star* magazine team looks back at some of the individuals who made headlines - for the right and wrong reasons.

12) History's Terrible Twins
13) A Game of Shadows
14) Best Minister
15) Feeling Sick? Call the Rab
15) Bangladesh's First Woman Speaker
16) Mad about Muhith
16) Awami League's Enfant Terrible
17) Reinventing Education
17) The Don of Narayanganj
18) A Winner's Stroke
18) A Fallen Hero
19) Top of the World
20) The Man Who Built Television
20) The Bangla Bond
21) The Inventor of Artificial Kidney
21) Mahmud in the Middle
22) Common Woman, Uncommon Valour
23) The Making of a Hero
23) The Solitary Fighter
24) The Face of Inhumanity

inside

2 *Letters*
4 *Voicebox*
5 *Mad Genious*
1 Minute Please
6 *Picture of the Week*
The Wall
8 *Chintito*
Old Wounds Heal Not
10 *Home and Abroad*
26 *Current Affairs*
Mad Parliament!
28 *Village Flute*
Shutkani Torkari à la Kurigram
30 *Musings*
Elections in the Memory
32 *Straight Talk*
Let's Hope Next Year is Better
34 *Art*
Printing Life's Journeys
36 *Youth*
Team Bangladesh
38 *Perspective*
Do As I Say, Not As I Do
40 *International*
Election Will not Resolve Division
42 *Star Diary*
43 *Health*
44 *Science*
46 *Remembrance*
Khaled Khan 1959 to 2013
48 *Postscript*
Have You Made the List?

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MAILBOX

A Growing Presence

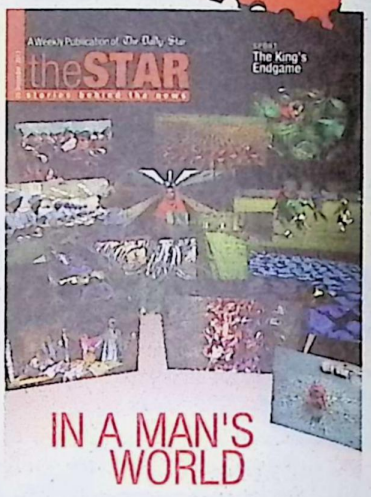
I was a bit disappointed to read the cover story of this week. The writer has tried to establish the fact that the conditions of women in Bangladesh has improved significantly over the years. While it is true, he has failed to present relevant statistics. The harsh reality is the overall status of women in Bangladesh remains considerably inferior to that of men. Women still have limited access to market, productive services, education, health care and government. Wages of women workers are still way lower than those of men. Despite these limitations, more women have joined the workforce than in the eighties. So let us not be complacent. Let us acknowledge the reality and work toward empowering women even further.

Fahmida Khatun Shiuli
Uttara, Dhaka

★★★

Amid all the bad news, I found last week's story about Celebrating Life, 2013 very encouraging. It is indeed a great effort to acknowledge the people who are working relentlessly to portray the advancement of women in this country through photographs. Throughout history women in this country have always fought against social injustices alongside men. But some of us often deny them their rights to live life as equal human beings. Stories like this can have a positive impact in the mind of many readers.

Obaidur Rahman
Savar, Dhaka.



A Show of Strength

When I looked at the human sea at the Surhawardy Udyan on December 16, I felt the strength the writer of this well written article talks about. People wanted to show that they will no longer live in fear and that they are united against anti-liberation forces. They also demanded a free and democratic country as envisioned by the freedom fighters in 1971. The writer asks a very important question: 'We are not at war as we were in '71. Or are we?' I did not have to look elsewhere to find an answer to this question. I found it in the previous paragraph of the article: 'We are also very clear in our demand for a Bangladesh that is free from anti-liberation forces that are conspiring to bring this nation to its knees.' The *Star* and the writer deserve my heartfelt gratitude for such an inspiring article.

Ali Ahmed Babu
Shegun Bagicha, Dhaka



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views held by *the Star*.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINE:

Letters to the Editor, Star Diary and Write to Mita, with the writer's name and address, should be within 200 words. All articles should be within 1,200 words. A cover letter is not necessary, but every write-up should include the writer's name, phone number and email address (if any). While The Star welcomes unsolicited articles and photographs, it cannot accept the responsibility of their loss or damage. The Star does not return unsolicited articles and photos. Response time for unsolicited write-ups ranges from three weeks to two months. All articles submitted are subject to editing for reasons of space and clarity.

All materials should be sent to: The Star magazine, 64-65, Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215, Fax: 880-2-8125155 or emailed to: <thestarmagazine@gmail.com>
It is recommended that those submitting work for the first time to The Star take a look at a sample copy beforehand. Our website is: http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine

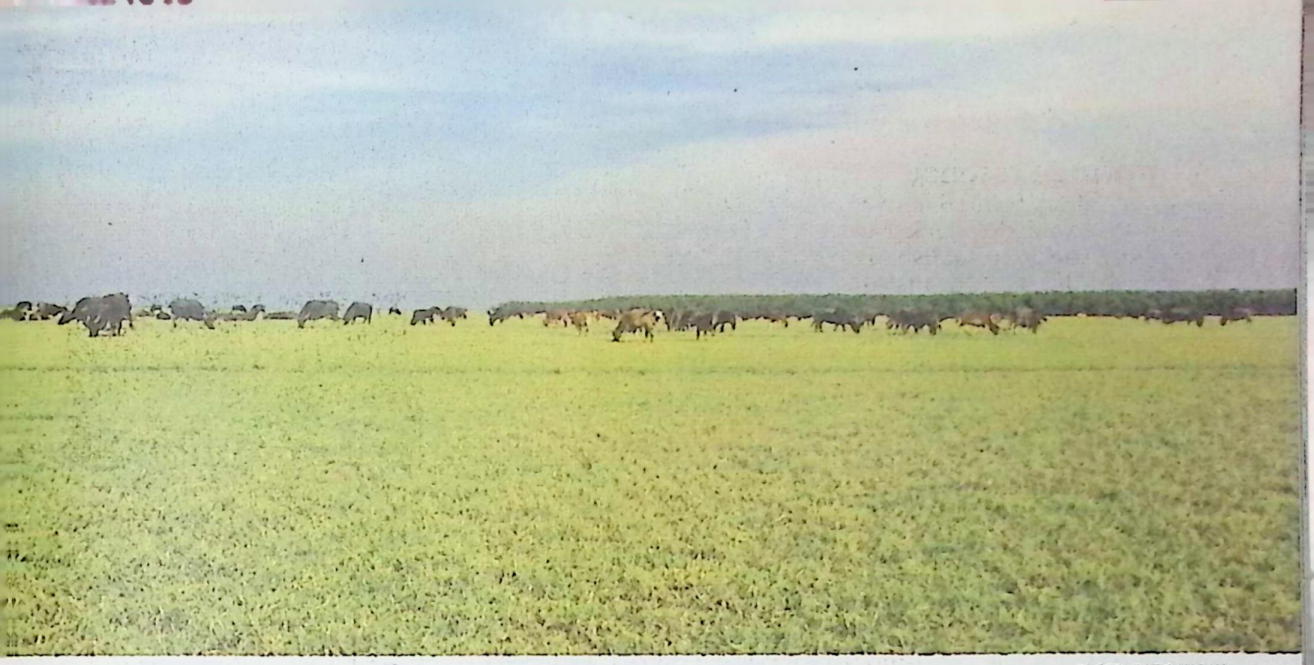


PHOTO: RAFIQ HASAN

Bricklane to Bangladesh

Men like Luke Barton and Tom Smith of UK prove that people still care about others. I wonder what men like them are made of---cycling through rain, snow, heat---on rough terrain, mountains, plain land---and trying to help children make a better future half a world across. A banker, I read this article with the excitement of a schoolboy because of the way it was written---crisp and fluid. I am sure a lot of readers will like this story.

Mohammad Abdul Mannan
Lalbagh, Dhaka

The Power to Reform

We have much to learn from China's move to curb corruption by government officials. We need greater accountability of officials---both public and elected. Every government that comes to power in Bangladesh leaves behind traces of massive corruption and irregularities. The current government has mishandled the Padma Bridge Project and failed to take actions against the perpetrators of the Share Market Scam. The previous government also had their share of misdeeds. It seems that when a party wins election in Bangladesh, it considers the entire country as its business enterprise. It also politicizes and manipulates the civil administration to further its own interests. The civil administration is the body that carries out the development work and maintains law and order in the country. If they are demoralized, the entire country suffers setbacks.

Mizanur Rehman
Gulshan, Dhaka

A new piece of paradise

Looking at the breathtaking pictures of the remote sea beach in Hatya and reading about it, I wondered how proper planning could turn a spot like this into a top tourist destination in the region. I was shocked to learn that local officials are not even aware of its very existence. There are many more hidden treasures like this beach scattered all over the country. The government needs to come up with a well designed plan to maintain and develop tourist spots. Tourism is good for the economy.

Jamila Khan
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

The King's Endgame

I found last week's feature on Magnus Carlsen both entertaining and educational. Chess is a wonderful game and it has many benefits especially when it is played at an early age. According to research, Test scores improve by about 17.3 percent for students regularly engaged in chess games. That is why, in approximately 30 nations across the globe, chess is incorporated into the curriculum of schools. Various studies show that chess helps develop analytical, synthetic and decision-making skills, which students can transfer to real life. When youngsters play chess they must call upon higher-order thinking skills, analyze actions and consequences, and visualize future possibilities. Policymakers would do well to include chess in the curriculum of schools and colleges in this country. All said, if the feature included the moves of at least one game of the championship match between Anand and Carlsen, a lot of chess lovers would have appreciated it even more.

Mohammad Raisuddin
Via Email

Soul of a nation

The Constitution of 1972 is indeed the soul of our nation. We feel ashamed when we compare today's politicians with those during the liberation war and before. Thanks to *the Star* team for reminding us of our glorious past.

Mrinmoy Ahsan
Mirpur, Dhaka

voicebox

"The United States will not deploy observers for these elections. We remain prepared to reengage our observation efforts at a later time in a more conducive environment."

JEN PSAKI
Spokesperson of the US State Department

Confirming that United States will not send observers in the upcoming election in a statement published on December 22

"But she (Khaleda Zia) has to stop killing and blockade, she has to leave the company of Jamaat for any dialogue. If there's any compromise, we'll dissolve parliament, if necessary, for holding the election again."

SHEIKH HASINA
Prime Minister of Bangladesh
Saying that discussion can be continued on 11th general election

"This election is not 'by the people, for the people, of the people', it is, 'by the Election Commission, for the Awami League and of the Awami League."

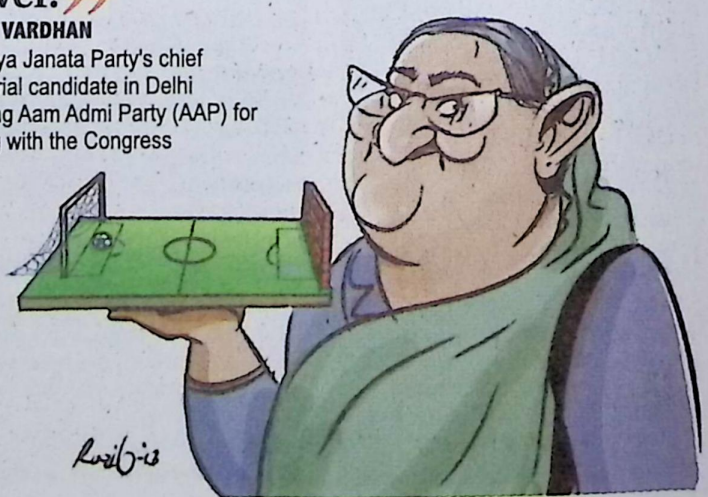
KHALEDA ZIA
Main Opposition leader of Bangladesh
Criticising the upcoming 10th general election in a press conference

"The AAP fought the election on the anti-corruption plank and now they have taken support from a party that has been completely rejected by the people of Delhi. This proves that AAP is hungry for power."

HARSH VARDHAN
Bharatiya Janata Party's chief ministerial candidate in Delhi
Accusing Aam Admi Party (AAP) for aligning with the Congress

"For me, in terms of personal satisfaction, the mission's already accomplished. I already won. As soon as the journalists were able to work, everything that I had been trying to do was validated. Because, remember, I didn't want to change society. I wanted to give society a chance to determine if it should change itself."

EDWARD SNOWDEN
National Security Agency leaker
Told in an interview to the Washington Post





SKETCH: YAFIZ SIDDIQI

LEONARDO DICAPRIO

Leonardo Wilhelm DiCaprio is an American actor and film producer, born in November 11, 1974. He won the Golden Globe Award for Best Actor for his performance in 'The Aviator' (2004). Born and raised in Los Angeles, California, DiCaprio started his career by appearing in television commercials prior to landing recurring roles in TV series such as the soap opera Santa Barbara and the sitcom Growing Pains in the early 1990s.

"School, I never truly got the knack of. I could never focus on things I didn't want to learn.

I get a friend to travel with me... I need somebody to bring me back to who I am. It's hard to be alone.

Drugs? Every one has a choice and I choose not to do drugs.

Portraying emotionally ill characters gives me the chance to really act."

PLEASE! 1 MINUTE

He is not only an artist, but an entrepreneur as well. He has explored his artistic venture as a miniature specialist to a large sized painting fabricator. He is the eminent artist and founder of Gallery Kaya Goutam Chakrabarty. Goutam believes in perfection and dedication, so he does not hesitate to spend a great deal of time on a single piece of painting. This celebrated artist shares with the Star some of the facts of his artistic journey.



Kaya Goutam Chakrabarty

Challenge that you faced while opening the gallery

I started Gallery Kaya back in 2003 in Uttara. Ten years back, Uttara was not a very happening place, whereas other areas like Dhanmondi used to work as a cultural hub for the Dhaka people. Therefore the biggest challenge was for me to arrange such interesting fests here that people would readily come this far to enjoy art.

If you were not an artist

I think I would have been a filmmaker or architect.

What keeps you inspired

Poetry and music

Favourite medium

I don't like being static with any particular medium. I love working in watercolour, charcoal, print making, etching or oil paint.

The subjects you have fascination for

I have made a few series on Mother Teresa and on animals like the cat, horse and elephant.

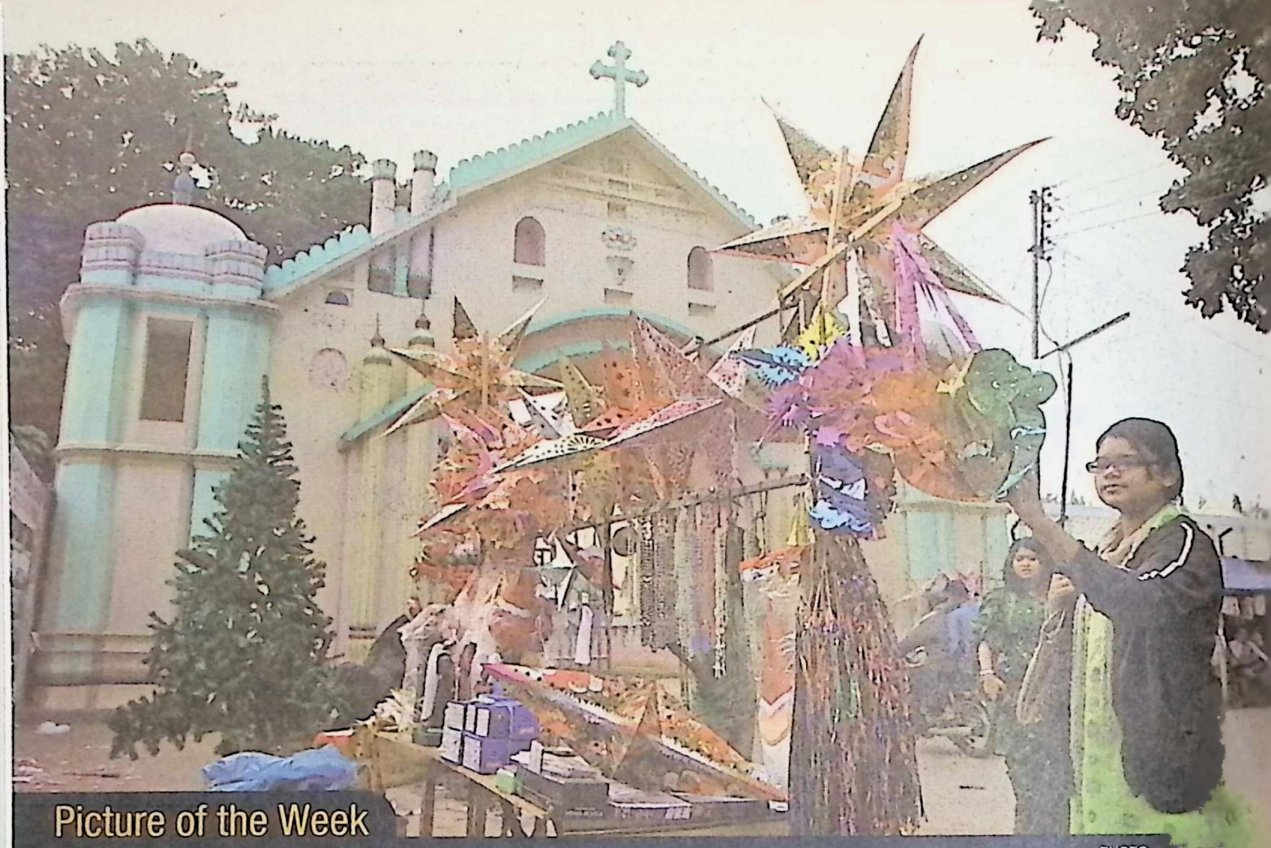
The colour you use over and over again

Blue

Favourite artist in Bangladesh

Rashid Chowdhury, Quamrul Hassan

— FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA



Picture of the Week

We Wish You A Merry Christmas! A girl shops for Christmas decorations, outside the Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Farmgate, a couple of days before the D-Day

PHOTO

What do they say on their social sites? Know it all!

THE WALL



Ahmede Hussain@ahmedehussain
Hell is empty for the devil is now doing politics in #Bangladesh.



Omar Abdullah@abdullah_omar
I'm glad Delhi is finally getting a government but what does this new alliance mean for some of #AAP's high profile 2014 election battles?



Naveed Mahbub@naveedmahbub
Pollibondhu's current idea of a 4-some - playing golf with 3 RAB guards (based on Saif Kamal).



Paulo Coelho@paulocoelho
2013: closing cycles.

৩টি ফ্লেভারে - অরেঞ্জ লেমন স্ট্রবেরী

FRUITY
Chap Stick





সুন্দর ঠোঁটে সুন্দর হাসি...

chintito

Old Wounds Heal Not

CHINTITO

To all those who argue that we Bangladeshis have been demanding an apology from Pakistan for their 1971 crimes only after the AL government of 2001 came into office, the dated extracts below from our column will suffice to evidence otherwise, one.

Secondly, this is but one column; there are numerous other writings where authors and orations when speakers have time and again demanded an apology from the sinners of 1971.

But, after the meaningless and uncalled for outburst in the Pakistan Parliament, whose one astounding December resolution, tantamount to interfering in our internal affairs, shocked even many Pakistanis, as evident from subsequent Pakistani newspaper editorials and news streams, a Pak apology today may not be enough to normalise relationship between the two countries.

The financial debt in crores of dollars that Pakistan owes this nation has to be settled, if need be by international arbitration.

The criminality of Pakistan forces, of their officers and men, who unleashed a genocide on this nation has to be settled, if need be by an international trial.

We demanded an apology from Pakistan, are demanding an apology, and shall continue to demand an apology; but now there are at least two additional matters that were this far eclipsed by our magnanimity. The Pak Parliament resolution was a rude awakening for us.

On 30 May 1995, in **Bangalee's short memory,** Chintito wrote:

Perhaps each trait of the Bangalee has its good and bad sides. But the one peculiarity amongst some of us that is unpardonable is the short-lived memory, particularly with reference to politics. While the emblematic Bangalee will be envious of the Jews hunting down Nazi war criminals and profusely acknowledging their nationalism, the same Bangalee this far has tried to brush under the carpet any suggestions of bringing to book the culprits at home and abroad opposing our liberation. On the contrary, some of us have conveniently forgotten everything that happened before 1971, have taken to speaking Urdu and even supporting the Pakistan cricket team on Bangladesh soil, etc etc. The same Bangalee will find it hard to imagine Israelis cheering a Palestinian Football Team or Mandela twisting his tongue to speak in French with Chirac.

Many of them today lead a cosy life in havens far from the anguish of the dear ones of their victims for whom every new day is to live yet another in pain.

On 26 August 1997, in **An apology for gruesome crime,** Chintito wrote:

In our War of Liberation we had come across many brutes among the Pakistani officers whose actions would have made Dyer tremble in fear. Yes, many of them today lead a cosy life in havens far from the anguish of the dear ones of their victims for whom every new day is to live yet another in pain. Have we not heard of Bangalee children being flung into the air only to test the sharpness of Pakistani bayonets? Have we not been shamed by the rape of our mothers and sisters? Have we not seen the murder of innocent Bangalees, streets and alleyways littered with our soul and body? Yet, have we ever made a concerted effort to seek an apology from Pakistan?...

The Pakistani head of state has visited Bangladesh several times. Let alone at other times, have our graveyards and killing fields ever echoed with the demand for an apology for the most heinous crime in history by the most barbarous of forces to coincide with their visit? Do we then not consider the martyrdom of our shaheeds worthy of an apology?



PHOTO: STAR FILE

It is not that we appreciate war crimes. Far from it. We do not hesitate to speak highly of the Jews who are hunting war criminals even fifty years after the holocaust. Was the systematic annihilation of Bangaless in 1971 any less than Hitler's despotism? Are the sinners of our Muktijudhdho 'more difficult to locate than Nazi criminals? I say sinners because it is a grave sin for a Muslim to kill another of his own faith. And, let it never be said that East Pakistanis were lesser Muslims.

Following the surrender of the defeated Pakistani forces to the joint command of Bangladeshi and Indian forces, subsequent governments in Pakistan have extended the olive branch of friendship to Bangladesh. Every government in Dhaka has responded emphatically but only by treading over our dead.

It is understandable that Pakistan will want to foster friendship with us for deep inside they must be haunted by fearful guilt. It is, however, difficult to comprehend why we should respond unconditionally. No person can kill my brother and then sit across the table pretending that nothing has happened, that we should be friends from that moment onwards. Between two nations, such camaraderie after one has tried to exterminate the other has no precedence.

Let us not await the visit by another Pakistani head of state. Let the demand for an immediate Pakistani apology for all its atrocities resonate across the globe. Let us remind ourselves that we were victims of truly a gruesome crime. We are here only because we triumphed. We are here to demand an apology, now.

On 14 November 2005, in **Apologise they must**, Chintito wrote:

While today visiting Pakistani leaders conveniently salute the martyrs of this land that verily their soldiers killed, it has evaded apologising and financially compensating (for moral compensation is impossible) for one of the most grisly crimes in the history of mankind. In fact, Pakistani leaders should not be allowed to set foot on the Jatiya Smriti Soudha, bathed in sacred blood of countless shaheeds, until they (Pakistan) have asked for forgiveness for their sin.

The mother of the child lost in 1971 still wipes a tear. The widow hopelessly longs for the return of her loved one. The child of a shaheed expects every other living parent to at least feel, if not fight for the cause his father laid down his life.

The cruelty of the Pakistani junta aided by a predisposed civil service of the 1960s and 70s may be gauged to some extent by the treatment it is meting out to its supporters, languishing in subhuman conditions in the so-called Bihari camps in Bangladesh. A country that cannot shoulder its responsibility for its opted citizens for 35 long years has a lot to learn about Islamic values and brotherhood – two of the many blames the mainly West Pakistanis levelled against the Bengali population in pre-1971. Let us pick up the folk tune and sing in chorus, 'Feel like laughing when we hear…' If that does not ring a bell, try "*shunle moder haashi paay…*"

On the night of 25 March 1971, the Pakistanis unleashed a reign of brutality unparallel in human history. Their heavily armed soldiers and militia fired indiscriminately on innocent civilian Bengali, (many in their sleep in slums, dormitories and barracks) in a bid to quell a civil movement led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Futile has always been the exercise of the despot.

Let only those set foot on the holy martyrs' memorial who believe that the then Pakistanis had severely wronged us Bengali.

Let only those salute the martyrs of Bangladesh who understand the grief of the mother.

Let only those lay floral wreaths on 26 March who share the anguish of the bride waiting for someone who shall never return.

Let only those call themselves Bangladeshis who value the distress of the child who tries to grasp the reality why his father never returned from the War of Liberation. ■

ACC's Refusal

Dhaka. There have been newspaper reports on how Awami League contestants of the upcoming polls have amassed huge amount of wealth in the last five years. There's enough proof to carry out an investigation but the Anti-Corruption Commission seems to think that corruption is not really a top priority issue at the moment. The ACC said on December 19 that it won't launch an inquiry into the matter, as according to the organisation, such a move may hamper the election. ACC Comissioner Mohammad Shahabuddin went on to add that the ACC shouldn't take "steps immediately after a report is published in a newspaper", as if they do so the "situation will

Case Finally Filed, Culprits Still Absconding



The country waited with bated breath for the main culprits to be caught and put behind bars. But as the days gave way to months and then a year passed by, people began to forget about the devastating fire that killed 112 garment workers in Savar. After over a year of the gruesome incident, charges have finally been pressed on December 22 against 13 people including Delwar Hossain, the managing director of Tazreen Fashions Ltd, in a case filed for killing 112 garment workers in the factory fire in 2012. The lone arrestee in the case is security-in-charge Anisur Rahman. Of the accused, owner Delwar, chairman Akter, factory manager, quality manager and production manager are on the run while others have sought bail from the High Court.

The Gopibagh Murders

Gopibagh, Dhaka. The gruesome murder of six people on December 21 in the capital's Gopibagh area was added to the list if brutal crimes. In an interesting turn of events, a case was filed against 10 to 12 unnamed persons the day after the horrifying killings took place. Lutfar Rahman Faruque, who claimed to be a 'pir' and described himself as a follower of Imam Mahdi, was one of the six people killed. Faruque's younger son Abdullah Al Faruque had earlier claimed that his father and elder brother came under attack several times at different places of the capital following disputes between religious sects. The killers, however, spared Faruque's wife Salma, four other women, two children and Faruque's relative Golam Mostafa who were inside the house at that time. Seven people have been detained on suspicion of their involvement with the murders so far.

Demand for Compensation Not Charity



Dhaka Medical College Hospital. How can they hope to survive?

Arson victims of the ongoing hartals called by the opposition are asking this question to the government, as they demanded that their families be given immediate monetary compensation for survival. Victims say that only free medicines are not enough for their families to recover from the financial blow, as they are faced with increasing debts, and are forced to face an uncertain future as they spend day after day in the hospital without adding anything to their income. The prime minister paid a visit to the Burn Unit on November 30 and directed the authorities to introduce free medication for the arson victims. Until then, most of the patients' families had to spend a lot for medicines.

53 Number of migrant workers, one of whom was a Bangladeshi, deported from Singapore in the aftermath of the December 8 riot in the city-state.

88 Number of people injured last week when part of the ceiling of Apollo theatre in London collapsed while about 720 people were in the audience watching a popular play.

19 Number of primary school students hospitalised in central China after consuming yogurt that was poisoned by a mentally ill 34-year-old woman.



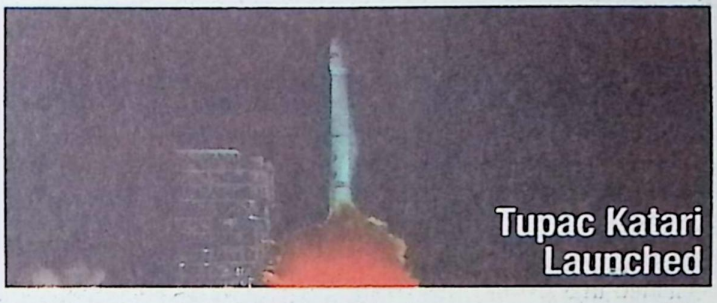
Putin Got Scared?

Moscow, Russia. Pussy Riot punk band member Maria Alyokhina walked free from jail on Monday, immediately dismissing the Kremlin's amnesty that granted her early release as a stunt that would not change her attitude to President Vladimir Putin. Alyokhina, 25, one of two women serving two-year sentences for a profanity-laced protest against Putin in a Russian Orthodox church in 2012, was released under the amnesty the president has said would show the Russian state is humane. The two women were convicted of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred for their "punk prayer" criticising Putin's ties to the Church, and had been due for release in March.

Decriminalising Sex Work



Toronto, Canada. The Canadian Supreme Court in Ottawa on December 20, 2013 struck down a key portion of a law that effectively criminalised prostitution by banning brothels and soliciting on the streets, declaring this disproportionate. However, it stayed its unanimous 9-0 ruling for a year to allow the parliament to consider whether or not to impose other limits on where and how prostitution may be conducted. This case was "not about whether prostitution should be legal or not," Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin said in the landmark decision. "They are about whether the laws Parliament has enacted on how prostitution may be carried out pass constitutional muster. I conclude that they do not."



La Paz, Bolivia. Bolivia launched a telecommunications satellite in China on December 20, an unprecedented event which the government in La Paz had encouraged citizens to follow via live broadcasts. President Evo Morales was in China for the Friday launch of the satellite of the Tupac Katari satellite, named after an indigenous leader who fought against Spanish colonial rule. The satellite, which is expected to be operational in March 2014, has cost $300 million and has been 85 percent financed by a loan from the Chinese Development Bank. According to the space agency, it will deliver telecoms services to 30 percent of the 10 million Bolivians who live in rural areas, though the satellite's cost has been criticized in light of the country's high poverty rate.

Murder and an Apology



Sanaa, Yemen. Al-Qaeda's regional commander for the Arabian Peninsula, Qasim al-Rimi, has offered a rare public apology for an assault on a hospital that killed 52 people. "We rid ourselves of what our brother did," Qassim al-Rimi said in a videotaped message posted to militant websites on Saturday, December 21. He said that the target of the attack was a Defense Ministry compound in Sanaa, Yemen, and that a stray gunman had stormed into an adjacent hospital against his orders. "We accept full responsibility for what happened in the hospital and will pay blood money for the victims' families," al-Rimi said. Public outrage peaked when horrific surveillance videos of the attack aired on state television. However, al-Rimi said despite the group making a mistake, "we are continuing with our jihad."

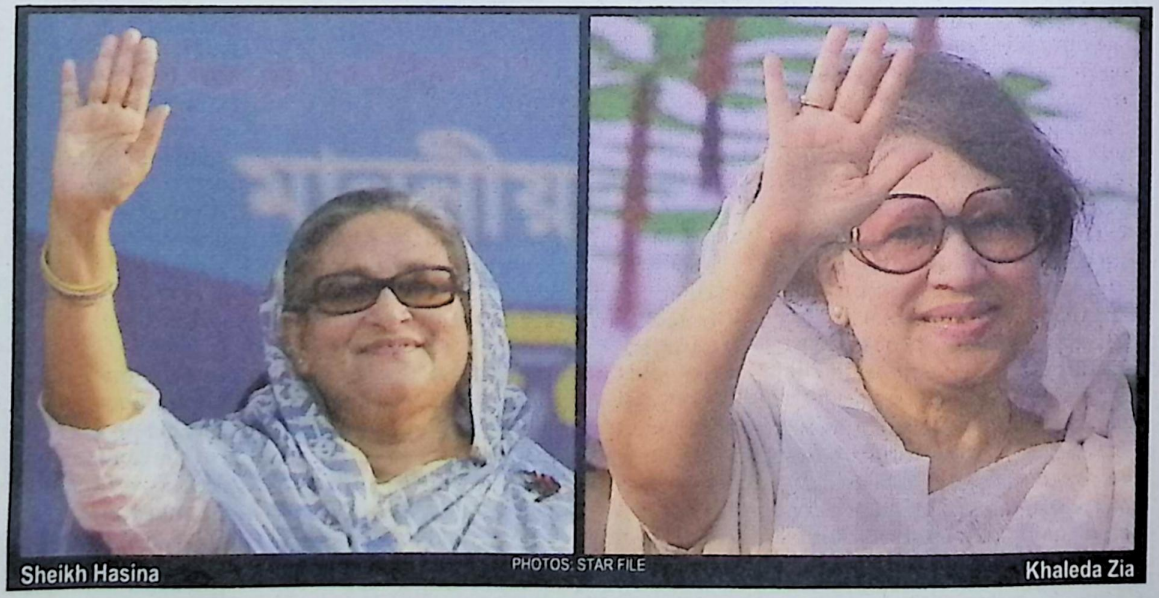
2013
A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE

From the very beginning of this year it has been a breathless rollercoaster ride. Corruption scandals, political shenanigans and the worst factory disaster left Bangladesh gasping for air. Politics took a devastating turn when political rivalry took the form of brutal violence against people and public property, its debilitating effects seeping into every crevice of society. In the midst of this bleak, blighted scenario, were a few silver linings - remarkable victories in the sports arena as well as acts of bravery by young men and women. *The Star* magazine team looks back at some of the individuals who made headlines - for the right and wrong reasons.

History's Terrible Twins

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her archrival Khaleda Zia are the by-products of two ghastly incidents of Bangladesh's history. Hasina was brought into politics after the tragic murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a time when the Awami League (AL) was split into two feuding factions, both facing waning popular support. Since those forlorn days, Hasina, who had little experience in politics, let alone leading the country's largest political party, has steered the AL into many turbulent bends. One of the biggest challenges to her leadership came when the AL had suffered an ignominious defeat in the general election of 1991; the other was in 2007 when a demand for reform was raised within the party, a move that could have ended her political career. She has handled the challenges against her leadership rather well, has consolidated power only to become one of the two most powerful persons in present Bangladesh.

Khaleda, on the other hand, was introduced into local politics after the assassination of her husband Lt Gen Ziaur Rahman. Khaleda faced the first big hurdle in politics when party stalwart KM Obaidur Rahman left Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) during the rule of deposed dictator Gen HM Ershad. Khaleda boycotted two general elections under Ershad, which has earned her the title of 'uncompromising leader'. She led the BNP to victory in 1991, a surprise win for the party.



Sheikh Hasina PHOTOS: STAR FILE Khaleda Zia

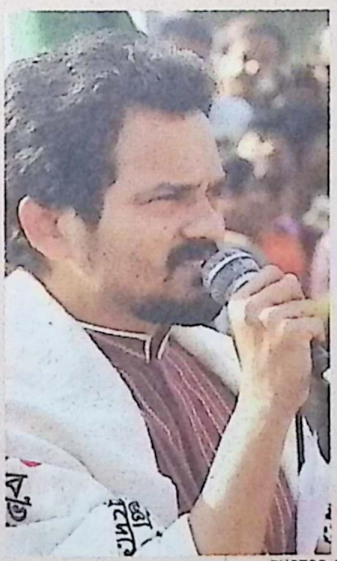
Another debacle that her leadership faced was in 2007 when a military controlled government tried to split the country's two major political parties in the name of brining about reform.

The kind of hatred that the two leading ladies in Bangladesh politics share with each other was exposed this year when a telephonic conversation between them was 'leaked'. The parley ended bitterly with Khaleda accusing her rival of lying. There are reasons to believe that the presence of both the ladies in politics and their acrimonious relationship is one of the many reasons behind the present political impasse. This is especially so if the AL leadership goes ahead with the one-sided election of January 5, which no doubt will make us compare the AL with the likes of the BNP and Jatya Party, which were born in the womb of military dictatorship.

Khaleda whose 'movement' has killed numbers of people in arson attacks might not want to run for a parliamentary seat in the general election her party decides to participate. The same cannot be said about Hasina. Be that as it may, it is, however, certain that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to reform Bangladesh's politics if both the 'begums' remain where they are now. Only time can tell as to when and how a change in Bangladesh politics will take place.

A GAME OF SHADOWS

Gonojagoron Moncho (GM) was formed when Jamaat leader Abdul Kader Molla was handed down life imprisonment for crimes against humanity at the beginning of this year. The Moncho, which consisted of mostly left activists, were successful in drawing the attention of the media and a large number of youths. Thanks to the movement, International Crimes Act was passed, introducing a provision where the prosecution can appeal to the appellate division if they feel aggrieved with a lower court verdict. But the zeal with which the GM was formed soon started to fizzle out. It was mostly due to a debate centering the murder of Rajib Haider, a GM activist who was outspoken about his atheist beliefs. After his murder, allegedly by a little known terrorist cell, the GM started to entertain some Islamic elements into its programmes. In fact, the GM lost much its support base as it centered round only war crimes, more so at a time when the nation is facing some pressing issues such as corruption, misgovernance, the killing of innocent people during hartal and blockades and holding of the general election. Also Awami League could not quite ride on the wave that the GM has created.



Imran H Sarkar

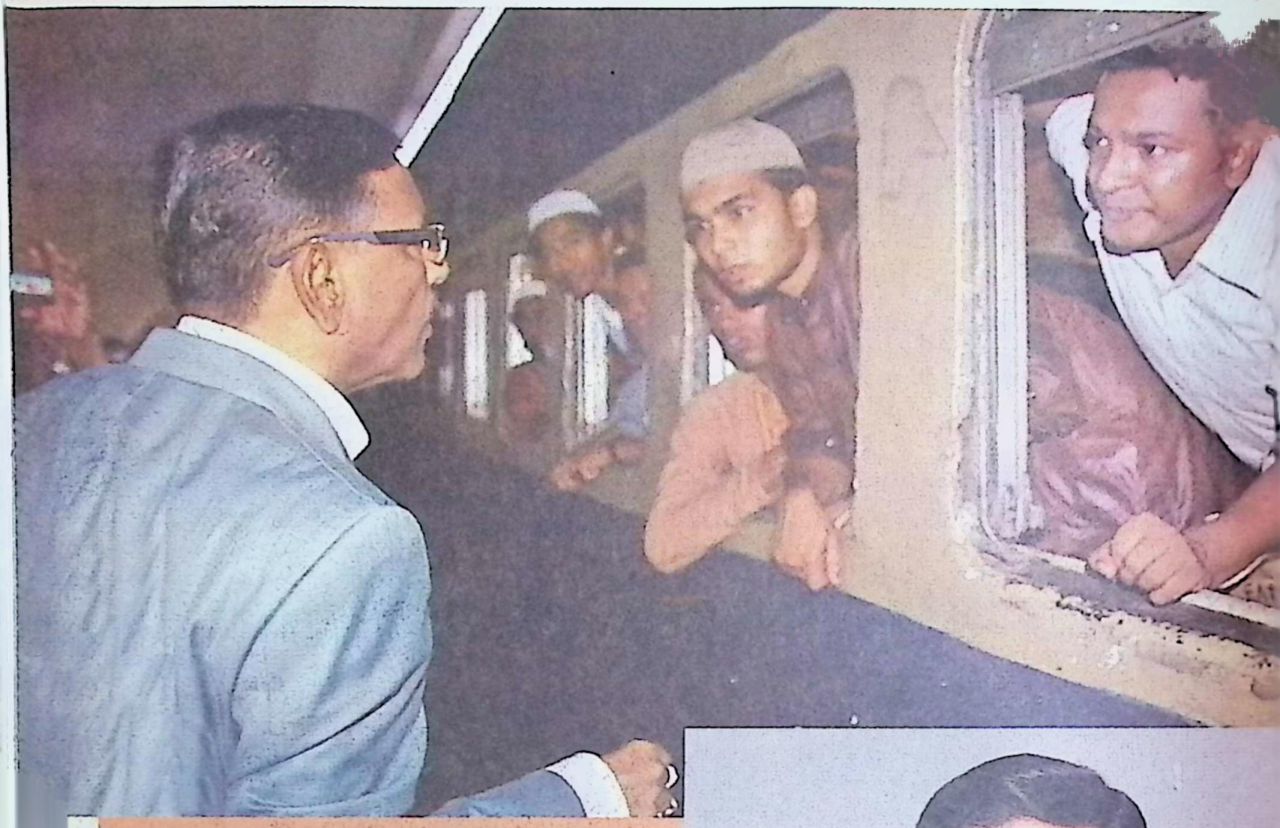
PHOTOS: STAR FILE



Ahmed Safi

The GM's stagnant popular support is inversely proportional with that of Hefazat-e-Islam (HI). Formed by a madrasa rector in a remote village in Chittagong, the HI shot to fame after it had held a huge gathering in the heart of the capital to materialise some demands that the group knows the government cannot meet. The HI's second rally in Dhaka and a GM-style sit in was met with some harsh actions by the law enforcers, resulting in the death of a few. The HI and its paraphernalia have put the death toll to a few thousands. Given the level of trust that the government enjoys in the country, many actually bought the HI's claim and the 'Shapla Massacre' has been one of the reasons why the AL met a humiliating defeat in the recent mayoral polls.

Both the GM and HI are now a skeleton of its previous self. It is highly unlikely that they will be able to remain as strong independent pressure groups. It is unfortunate that the GM, which started its journey as a progressive block, has not been able to keep the momentum and has failed to become an alternative political force.



Best Minister

Obaidul Qader made headlines during his two years as communication minister for his outspoken remarks, even going against his own party to point out the mistakes in the administration. His voice was loud and clear - he spoke against corrupt government officials, against the finance minister blaming his "impractical stance" for the delay in Padma bridge construction, and against the shady members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) for destroying the image of the party. He earned many fans for his much publicised surprise visits to various state enterprises, catching anomalies on the spot, much to the delight of the public.

In the two years of his tenure he became hugely popular for being able to achieve a majority of the targets that he had pledged to fulfill. A Facebook fan has written on his wall that the communications ministry is up there on the chart as a ministry that stands out for its excellent performance in the last two years. According to the communications ministry, the plethora of ambitious projects - elevated expressway, the upgrading of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway and some others - will be completed within a few months. Although major projects like the Padma Bridge are yet to get underway, the scene is changing and communication development projects are up and running all over the country.



PHOTOS: STAR FILE

Obaidul Qader

Feeling Sick? Call the Rab

Jatiya Party chief Gen HM Ershad has been infamous for changing his political stance overnight. But his recent decision of not going to the polls under Sheikh Hasina, it seems, will not change. So caught between Ershad and the deep blue sea (rescheduling the election), the government decided to arrest the former military strongman. But even by AL standards, picking Ershad up just like that must have looked quite a strange thing to do. Hence, it came up with an ingenious story where the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), which was established to deal with serious crimes, took Ershad to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) as, the Rab said, the former President 'was not feeling well'.

It came as a welcome change from the 'crossfire' ridden Rab reports that hit newspaper headlines. But as it sometimes happens in a farce, the tragedy (Ershad's ill health) turned out to be something to be laughed about: a healthy Ershad receiving a bouquet of flowers from an AL adviser was soon published in the newspapers. To make matters even more laughable, Ershad, supposed to be confined to some hospital bed, was seen playing golf. What happened to Ershad is a mystery. Something, however, is unmistakably clear: Ershad thought (perhaps still thinks) that January 5 general election would not take place. It is still not the time though to tell if he was right.



PHOTO: STAR FILE

HM Ershad

Bangladesh's First Woman Speaker

April 30, 2013 won't be celebrated as a national holiday but it still was a momentous day for Bangladeshis all over the world. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury was elected as the first woman of the National Parliament on that day.

Before being elected in this important post, Chaudhury was the State Minister of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. Her nomination as the speaker did trigger controversies as she was not elected as a Member of Parliament through direct popular voting but was chosen by the Awami League – she was the International Affairs Secretary of the party – to occupy one of the parliamentary seats reserved for women.

We are glad to finally see a woman in this pivotal post in the government. Electing a woman as the 13th speaker of Bangladesh might seem like a small step by a government but it is definitely a giant leap for the whole of womankind.



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury

Mad about Muhith

AMA Muhith is one of the few statesmen of our country who have hit the headlines through his comments. He compared Nobel Laureate Dr Yunus with terrorists, called all the expert economists "rubbish" and "nonsense", and addressed the Integrity Department of the World Bank "worthless". Muhith's dealing with the Hallmark issue, share market collapse and Padma bridge corruption was always in the headlines. His role was highly questioned when he commented that Hallmark was not a major scam in the banking sector and the amount of money Hallmark withdrew was "negligible". It may be mentioned that Hallmark withdrew some 4000 crore taka as funded and non-funded loans from the Sonali Bank Limited, one of the major state owned commercial banks. His role in controlling the share market made him a controversial phenomenon in the politico-economical arena of Bangladesh. He fought an uncompromising dual with Dr Yunus, split the Grameen Bank into 19 parts and removed Dr Yunus from his very own organisation.

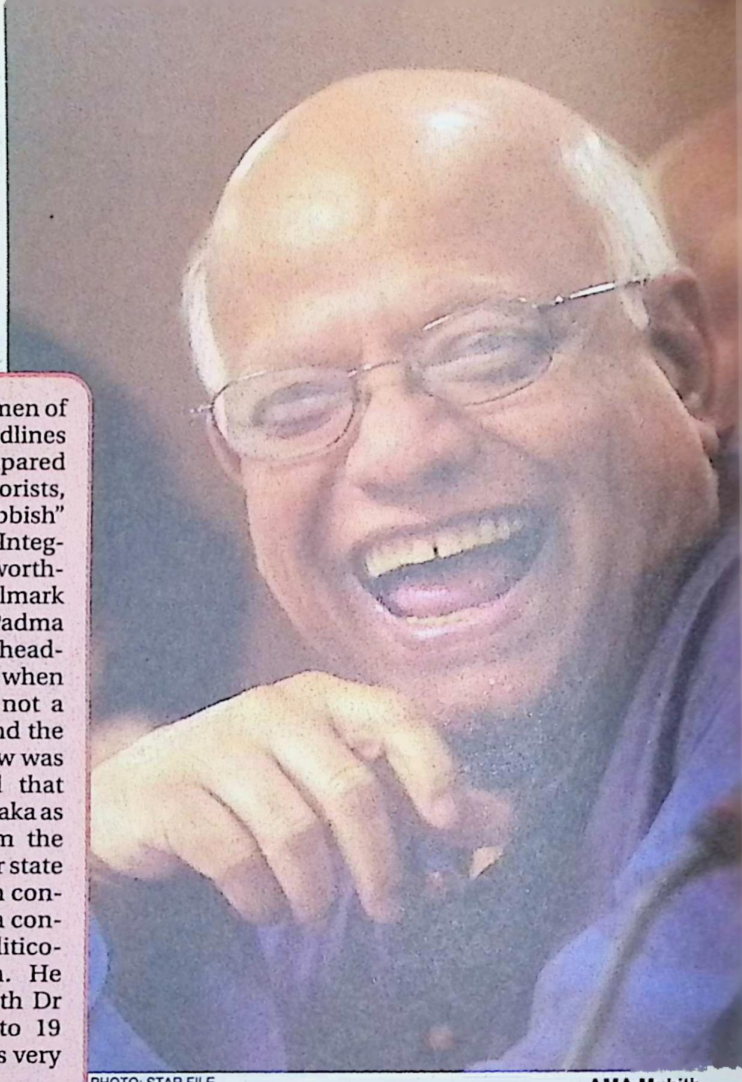


PHOTO: STAR FILE

AMA Muhith

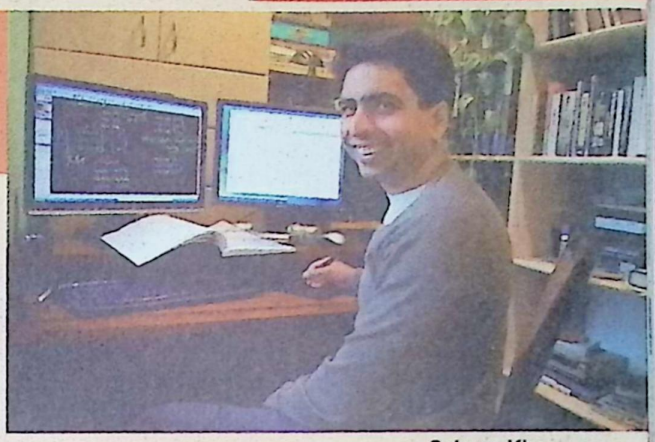
Awami League's Enfant Terrible

Golam Maola Rony is one of the most discussed and televised parliamentarians of the Awami in 2013. From the very beginning of this year this MP attracted people's attention by being outspoken about the failures and corruption of his party. His analysis and commentary on various political aspects especially of his party has made him a popular figure in TV talk shows. Some say that his "too honest" image has made many senior leaders angry. Even an AL policymaker has said, "Rony is the evil star for Awami League." But his TV intellectual image was shattered when he has allegedly beaten some journalists up in his office. After that Rony was sent to jail and he has apologised for his misconduct. He is the first ruling party parliamentarian who has been imprisoned when his party is in power. But such controversy has failed to silence him. He continued to speak and air his thought frankly and fearlessly. Of late he has been in the news by expressing sympathy with the hanged Jamaat Leader Abdul Kader Molla, saying Molla and 'butcher Kader' of Mirpur are not the same person.



Golam Maola Rony

Reinventing Education



Salman Khan

In August 2004, Salman Khan began remotely tutoring his cousin, Nadia, who was struggling with "unit conversion". Since Nadia was in New Orleans and 'Sal' was in Boston working at a hedge fund at that time, Sal started tutoring her via telephone and Yahoo Doodle after work. Eventually, word got around and he was tutoring a handful of his cousins and family members. Sal started recording videos and posting them on YouTube in 2006. More and more people kept watching, and Sal, who has three degrees from MIT and an MBA from Harvard has created nearly 3,000 of them since then. Today his website (www.khanaca-demy.org) covers a staggering array of topics–from basic arithmetic and algebra to the Electoral College and the French Revolution. Over the past two years the free videos have been viewed more than 200 million times. Volunteers have translated Khan's videos into 24 different languages, including Urdu, Swahili and Chinese. Khan's meteoric success has attracted the financial support of a bevy of high-profile, socially responsible backers, including billionaire Ann Doerr, Bill Gates, Netflix CEO Reed Hastings and Google, whose chairman, Eric Schmidt, serves on Khan Academy's board. The company's 37 employees are mostly software developers with stints at places like Google and Facebook. Khan grew up in a suburb of New Orleans, where his Bangladeshi mother raised him on her own by cobbling together a series of jobs and businesses. Khan has given commencement speeches at Ivy League schools like Rice and Yale.

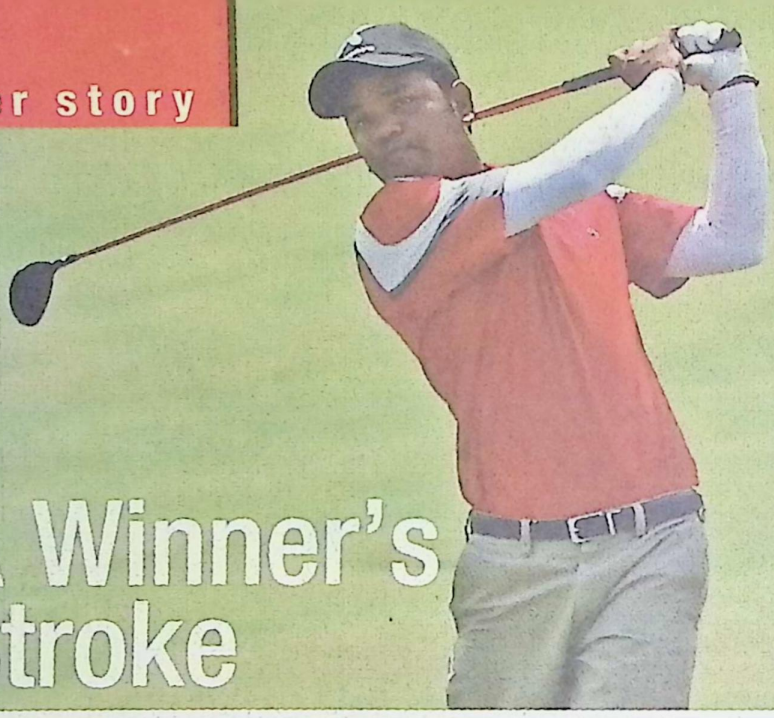
The Don of Narayanganj



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Shamim Osman

In 2013 any news that came from Naryanganj would be incomplete without Shamim Osman in it. Being the most influential member of Awami League backed Osman family, Shamim graced the newspapers with all of his 'talents' to make controversial headlines. He left no stone unturned in making Narayanganj full of hot news, some of which are stained with blood. Extortion from transport owners, terrorising ordinary people and opposition activists, beating up famous footballer Emily, grabbing properties of even a graveyard were some of his regular features. Shamim Osman and his family members' involvement in the murder of Tanvir Muhammad Toki, a brilliant student and son of Ganajagoron Mancho organiser Rafiur Rabbi exceeded all of his previous vicious activities. When the law enforcers discovered Shamim's dungeon with murdered Twaqi's blood stained shirt, it became clear as to how this family has terrorised the inhabitants of Narayanganj. Far from putting him into the trial, the AL has given him nomination for the next general election, perhaps to unleash some more terror.



A Winner's Stroke

Siddikur Rahman
PHOTO: STAR FILE

Siddikur Rahman, known as the 'Tiger Woods of Bangladesh golf' claimed his second Asian Tour Title when he beat SSP Chowrasia and Anirban Lahiri of India by a single stroke in a tense final day of the Hero Indian Open at the Delhi Golf Club in November. The 29-year-old, 5'5" Siddikur, who had become the first Bangladeshi golfer to win on the Asian Tour when he clinched the Brunei Open in 2010, carded three-over-par (75) on the last day for an aggregate of 14-under (274), just enough to give him one shot victory.

He kept $225,000 of the prize money, taking his season's earnings to $449,167. From an impoverished family Siddikur was forced to leave school at an early age and started working as a ball boy at Kurmitola Golf Club before being promoted to a caddie. There he learned the game with a makeshift seven iron head stuck onto a piece of metal rod. He turned pro in 2007 and won four titles in the Professional Golfer's Tour of India in the next three years before landing the biggest prize–the Brunei Open in 2010. The ace golfer has inspired players to excel in a sport that is considered "a rich man's game' by many in the country. ■

A Fallen Hero



Mohammad Ashraful PHOTO: STAR FILE

When Mohammad Ashraful admitted to match-fixing during the 2013 Bangladesh Premier League, Mushfiqur Rahim called it a "loss of pride" for the Bangladesh cricket team. Here is a batsman who scored the fastest fifty in Test among any batsman in the world and scored the fastest fifty in the ODI and T-20 international among any Bangladeshi batsman and till date holds the record of the youngest player to score a hundred in a Test match. He provided the entertainment quotient that turned heads towards Bangladesh, be it the unbeaten 158 against India in 2004, the magnificent 100 against Australia in 2005 triggering a huge upset, or the innovative 87 against South Africa in the 2007 World Cup. When he made a comeback in 2013 after being dropped due to poor form, he made 190 against Sri Lanka. Ashraful, who has been in the eye of the storm ever since his confessional statement to the Anti-Corruption and Security Unit (ACSU) about his involvement not only in this year's BPL but allegedly also in international games for the country, admitted that he was one of seven people who had been charged with match-fixing in the BPL. Fans felt that he let the entire country and the sport down. How history will evaluate Ashraful remains to be seen.



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Shohag Gazi

Top of the World

During the first Test match between Bangladesh and New Zealand (October 9-13), 22-year old Shohag Gazi achieved the cricket equivalent of the moon landing by slamming an unbeaten 101 and bagging 8 wickets including a hat-trick. No human in the 136-year-old history of the sport had done it before. For a man who learned to play cricket with a tennis ball, it was a long journey from his humble home in Patuakhali. He made his first-class debut in the 2009-10 season, starting off with a five-wicket haul against Chittagong Division. The following season he was the highest wicket taker in the National Cricket League, taking 41 wickets. In 2012, against West Indies, he became the first off spinner to bowl the first over of a Test match on debut, ripping through the batting order and claiming 9 wickets. By his third Test against Sri Lanka, Gazi was the lead bowler of the Bangladesh team. Despite all the adulation and fame he has received from the sport, he remains impeccably mild mannered and self-effacing. His success is emblematic of Bangladesh's growing aspirations at the regional and global stage. He embodies what Bangladesh can become: the world's best at something. Gazi has transcended the heritage of a society divided and handicapped by politics and ideology at a time when people of this country desperately needed something to believe in.

The Man Who Built 'Television'

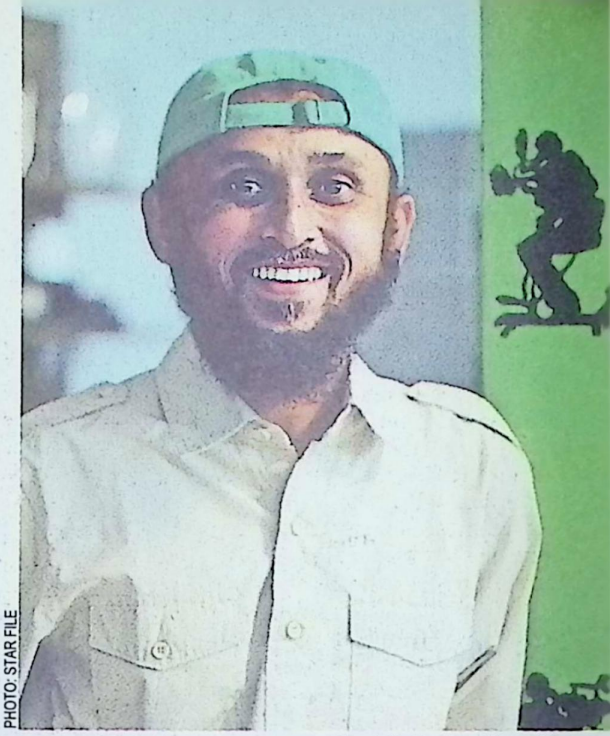
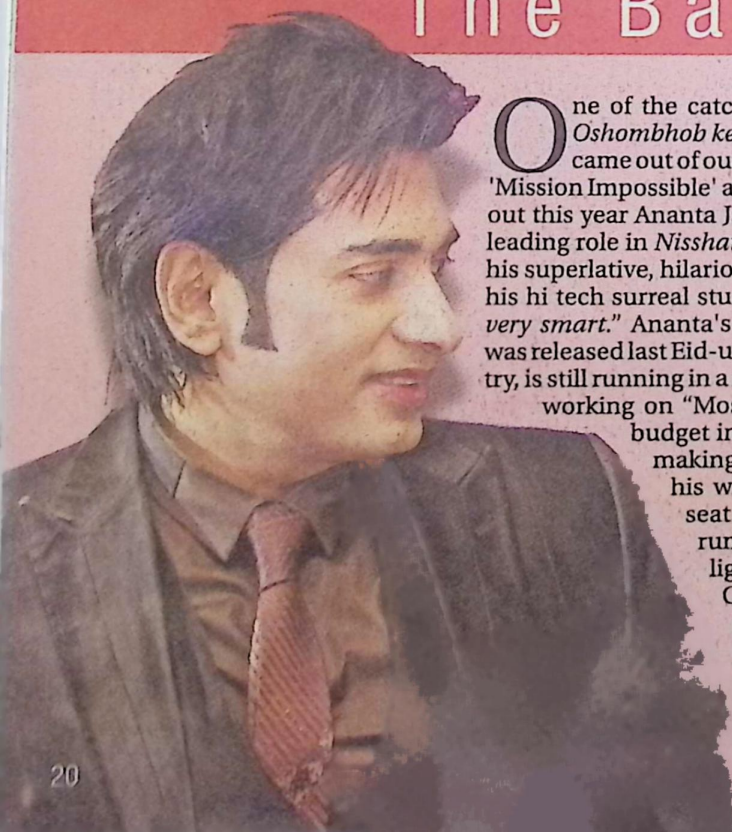


PHOTO: STAR FILE

Mostafa Sarwar Farooki

2013 brings a pack of good news for the film enthusiasts of Bangladesh. One of our Bangladeshi films 'Television' has drifted through quite a few film festivals around the world, bagged a number of noteworthy awards and earned prestige and popularity for our Bangladeshi film industry. For giving us these proud moments throughout the year, director, Mostafa Sarwar Farooki along with his team surely deserves a round of applause. 'Television' was screened in the Perspectives Film Festival in Singapore this October and had been selected in the festival's "Breakthrough in Independent Cinema" category. Also in October, it competed with a number of quality films from all across Asia in Rome's Asiatica Film Mediale's and has won the "City of Rome" prize for best feature film (jury). In addition, it won the best feature (audience) in popular vote in Asiatica. Then again, the film was screened in Kolkata International Film Festival and won the Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema (Netpac) award. 'Television' was also awarded with Jury Grand Prize in Asia Pacific Screen Award, 2013 and was nominated for best film and best screenplay in the same contest. Previously, the acclaimed film was nominated to compete at the Oscars in the "Best Foreign Language Film" category. Not only 'Television', this year Farooki has created a buzz with his film "*Pipra Bidya*", which had its world premiere at the 10th Dubai International Film Festival.

The Bangla Bond



One of the catchphrases of 2013 that we know by heart is *Oshombhob ke shombhob korari Anantar Kaj*! This dialogue came out of our invincible superhero Ananta Jalil's mouth in 'Mission Impossible' a TV commercial of Grameenphone. Throughout this year Ananta Jalil has been the centre of discussion for his leading role in *Nisshartho Bhalobasha* (translated as What is love), his superlative, hilarious dialogues and participation in talk shows, his hi tech surreal stunts or for his peppy song "*Dhakar pola very very smart.*" Ananta's latest film *Nisshartha Bhalobhasha*, which was released last Eid-ul-Fitr in over 200 theatres all around the country, is still running in a number of cinemas. This year, he also started working on "Most Welcome 2", claimed to have the biggest budget in the history of Bangladeshi film. Apart from making onscreen news, AJ's infidelity rumors with his wife Barsha also made his fans jump off the seat. As soon as the Ananta-Barsha breakup rumour was squashed, he again came in the lime light by taking Barsha to watch a Barca match in Camp Nou and by buying her a brand new Bulgari watch worth USD 22,000 from Dubai as an Eid present. All through 2013, our Bangla Bond Ananta Jalil kept people glued to his antics - both on screen and off.

The Inventor of Artificial Kidney

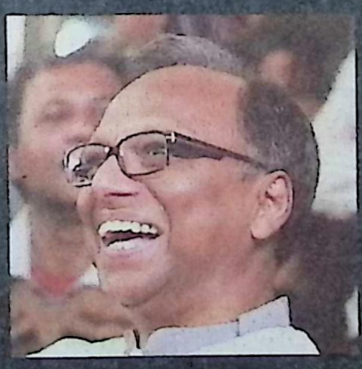
Dr Shuvo Roy, a Bangladeshi American scientist, has made an epoch making invention for the humanity. His invention of implantable artificial kidney for kidney failure patients has brought about a revolutionary change in medical science. Nearly two million people worldwide are affected by the end stage of renal diseases. Dialysis is the only treatment available but it's too expensive and is complex for most of the patients. It also does not replace all the functions of a healthy kidney. Kidney transplant is another option which is very limited due to donor shortage. Roy's invention will be the key to save the lives of millions of people suffering from renal failure. His bio-compatible artificial kidney can be effectively attached to the circulatory system and the device will allow patients to live untethered from dialysis machine and normally eat and drink.



Dr Shuvo Roy

Mahmud in the Middle

Mahmudur Rahman is one of the most discussed and controversial names of 2013. He and his daily *Amar Desh* produced lots of notable events in Bangladesh. Some of the reports of his daily triggered the madrassa based Islamic leaders' demand that blasphemy law to be passed. They took to the streets under the banner of Hefajot-e-Islam. He published the controversial Skype conversation between the two judges of the International Crimes Tribunal, which led to the resignation of one of the judges of the tribunal. Soon Mahmudur's office was shut down by the law enforcers and he was interned in his office. Finally on April 11, 2013 he was arrested on charges of sedition related to the hacked Huq-Ziauddin conversations, for committing cyber crimes and inciting violence. He spent many days in police remand and was hospitalised due to alleged torture. Despite the credibility issue of his newspaper reports, suppression of media and attracted the global outcry on human rights issues in Bangladesh. Journalists, human rights activists at home and abroad have demanded the release of Mahmudur Rahman. But it is true that the issues that Mahmudur Rahman has introduced into Bangladesh politics are yet to be solved and are still threatening the stability of our country.



Mahmudur Rahman

PHOTO: STAR FILE

It is human instinct to flee the scene of a grue same crime. In times of danger, it is only natural for a person to be more concerned about their own safety and protect their lives. Jharna Begum, a 28-year old single mother of two, was an exception to the rule.



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Jharna Begum being honoured for her courage.

Jharna was the only local to brave the wrath of Shibir activists and help the seriously injured Jahangir Alam, in-charge of the Upashahar police camp, who was savagely beaten up by the said activists earlier this year. Without worrying about her safety, Jharna ran to the scene, covering her scarf around the wounded police officer's head to curb the bleeding. Her attempts at saving a fellow human being were not diminished even when she saw that no one was willing to come forward with a helping hand.

Even when others joined her Jharna continued with her efforts, not abandoning her responsibility even when Jahangir was taken to the hospital. She waited at the hospital until the policeman's relatives arrived at the hospital, and left Jahangir's side only when she was sure that he was in the care of loved ones.

She was honoured by the police department with a crest and certificate and was recently rewarded with a permanent job at the attorney general's office. For Jharna, the courage she showed was only natural as she did it for the "sake of humanity." But for the rest of us, Jharna Begum has become an icon; she has become the face of compassion and valour of the common person on the streets.

Common Woman, Uncommon Valour



Jharna Begum rushes to help a severely injured policeman.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

The Making of a Hero

Keshab Roy's story could have been like million other teenagers born and brought up in poverty. He could have continued working at a pawn shop for Tk 300 per month to supplement his family's modest in come.



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Keshab Roy

On July 12 Keshab, an 18-year-old from Nilphamari, was amidst one of the seven recipients of the Youth Courage Award given by the United Nations. Keshab was recognized for his courage in battling against child marriage and promoting education for all children.

Keshab himself was forced to drop out of school when he was in class six after his father was suddenly taken ill, and he then started working for a neighbourhood pawn shop to provide for his family. He was determined to complete his education, however, and he was supported in him ambition by Kanchon Chandra Roy, president of the NGO Surjomukhi, who even persuaded Keshab's father to allow him to rejoin school.

He then joined the local training programmes of Shurjomukhi, promoting children's right to education and raising awareness on other social issues. After becoming the president of Rangdhanu Shishu Forum, Keshab became even more involved in preventing child marriages. He has managed to stop 25 child marriages in Nilphamari till date, and helped in encouraging over 50 drop-out school students to continue their education. ■

The Solitary Fighter

After two years of a long battle with the Ministry of Home Affairs, he has finally begun to find a fresh lease on life. He wants to be a lawyer to fight against the corrupt system and the arbitrary acts of law enforcers. He is not frightened of what the future has in store but confident that one day his dreams will come true.

Limon Hossain, is the young man whose leg was amputated after he was shot by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and left bleeding for a long time before getting any treatment. They had mistakenly shot Limon thinking he was a criminal they were looking for. The law enforcers, to cover up their goof up, falsely accused him for carrying arms and obstructing law enforcers. However, after two years of Limon's immense struggle, the government finally withdrew the case against him in July this year. But Limon Hossain is still waging against the state machinery and he has chosen not to drop his case against the RAB.



Limon Hossain

PHOTO: STAR FILE

The Face of Inhumanity



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Sohel Rana has been in the news after April 24. But for all the wrong reasons.

Rana, possibly the most hated man in the country, was responsible for the death of over a thousand workers who lost their lives in one of the worst industrial disasters in recent history. Workers had seen cracks on Rana Plaza in Savar the day before the building collapsed but authorities did not take their fears into account, farcing them to come to work the next day or face serious cuts in their wages. Rana had also told journalists that the cracks were "nothing serious," ignoring the warnings of engineer Abdur Razzak, who repeatedly asserted that the building was unsafe.

What more can be expected out of a man who bullied adjacent landowners, and took their property by force to build this eight-storeyed structure? Rana was a notorious muscleman, a 'mastan', involved in the trading of illegal drugs and guns, and protected by corrupt local government officials. Rana was the joint convenor of the local unit of Awami League's youth wing Jubo League, and would unashamedly brandish his influence in his locality, threatening people and exploiting his political connections for his own gains. His political allies seemed to have been mesmerized by him, as they didn't think twice before giving him a construction permit to build Rana Plaza, despite allegations against him, and even went on to give him a second permit to add upper floors that is said to have destabilized the building.

Rana might be the face of the terrible disaster but he's not the sole villain. Corrupt government officials who protected him and granted him access to build his unstable complex, other owners of factories in the complex who did not care for the safety of their workers, as they continued to violate every code and regulation, the engineer who should have reported the cracks in the building to a higher authority and demanded that the plaza be closed until further inspection – all of them are to be blamed for the death of 1,129 factory workers.

The Rana Plaza tragedy has had long term effects on the country's garment industry - many buyers cancelled orders, with Bangladesh being internationally criticised for its negligence of basic safety codes for workers.

Rana, though far from being the sole culprit, is the symbol of everything wrong with our wealth obsessed, power hungry, political society. Unfortunately, however, our country is overpopulated with countless Ranas, who are willing to risk lives to satisfy their insatiable appetite for wealth. ■

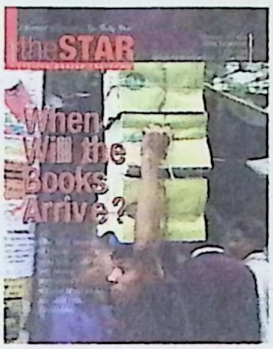
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Politics



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Economy



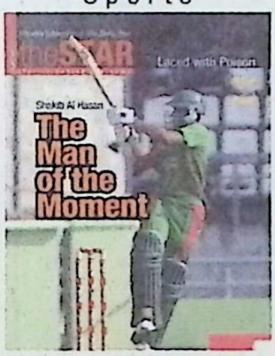
Health



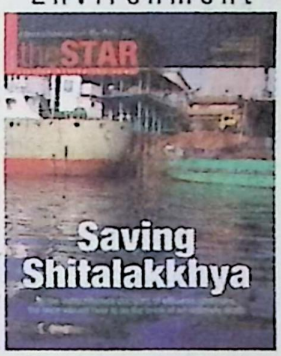
Art



Sports



Environment



Culture



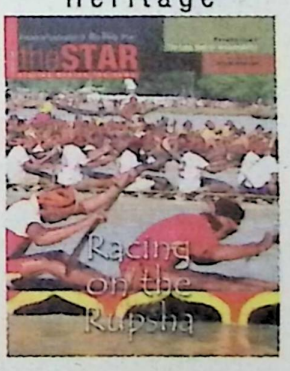
Fashion



Personality



Heritage



stories behind the news

Mad Parliament!

Hasina's new government might face a diplomatic crisis, as the international community has taken a clear stance against the one-sided election of January 5

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Ruling Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina looks all set to be elected the leader of the AL parliamentary party after an easy two-third majority in the January 5 parliamentary polls. MPs elected through the one-sided election will take oath any day after January 24, after the expiry of the tenure of the current parliament. So, upon her election as the leader of the majority party, she will be appointed by President Abdul Hamid as the new Prime Minister. She will swear in as the premier in two consecutive terms and for the third in her political career. She will have a new life as the PM for five more years. She will then advise the President to convene the new parliament within 30 days since the publication of results of the January 5 election in an official gazette.

> Everybody knows that the majority of the people had nothing to say in the January 5 polls as their voting rights have been denied.

The new parliament will have three types of MPs--154 elected unopposed, 146 elected in friendly contest and 50 to women reserved seats to be indirectly elected. So, it is clear that the parliament will be dominated by MPs elected either unopposed or in an indirect election or in a farcical election. Of course, this will be an abnormal parliament. The government and ruling AL may keep claiming that the new parliament is an elected one. But their claim will remain limited to some technical aspect as the January 5 election is being held only in paper.

But everybody knows that the majority of the people had nothing to say in the January 5 polls as their voting rights have been denied. Sheikh Hasina however did not like to be elected unopposed from two constituencies. Two Jatiya Party men, who were unwilling and unprepared to contest the election, are now challenging her in Gopalganj-3 and Rangpur-6. If both the Jatiya Party men could have been able to withdraw their nomination papers, Hasina would have been elected unopposed. Her government has abolished the caretaker government on grounds that the election time non-partisan caretaker government was formed with unelected people. Will Hasina's new government be able to claim that her new government is elected by the people? The caretaker government's functions were very limited. It did some routine work and had extended all out cooperation to the Election Commission to hold a free and fair parliamentary election in 90 days timeframe. But Hasina's new government will be formed for five years and it will have all the powers necessary to run the country. There will be no strong opposition in the parlia-

ment to hold the government accountable. Those elected as MPs from other parties will remain loyal to the AL.

How will the new parliament and Hasina government perform after being elected in such a controversial election? The coming days look all set to be more volatile. The BNP-led opposition and other parties will continue to wage street agitation against her government. Different sections of people may continue to criticise the government for its failure to hold a credible parliamentary election. So, her new government with little legitimacy and public support will have to spend much of its strength to face the opposition. Unruly and controversial activities of many MPs and ruling AL men may give Hasina's new government more pain. Their activities might generate more controversy and taint the image of the new government. Many wealth statements published in different newspapers have already shown how they were desperate in the last five years to make money in lawful and unlawful ways. The new parliament and the new government might make the corrupt even more corrupt.



Sheikh Hasina PHOTO: STAR FILE

Hasina's new government moreover might face a diplomatic crisis as the international community has taken a stance against the one-sided January 5 election. The European Union and the US have refused to send observers for this election. Many other countries are set to follow them. They did what they had done in January 2007 as they were against the January 22 one-sided parliamentary polls which were cancelled following the declaration of the State of Emergency. The international community believes that sending observers for the January 5 elections is tantamount to making this election credible. As they took a stance against the election, they might take position against its outcome too.

A number of officials in the diplomatic arena in Dhaka told this correspondent that diplomats stationed in Dhaka have opened discussions amongst themselves to find their next course of action. They will be sending reports on the prevailing situation to their respective countries. The reports they will be sending of course will not favour Hasina's new government. So, it will be difficult for her government to expect cooperation from the international communities and the donor agencies. If so, what will be the fate of the country's various development projects that are funded by donor countries and some international agencies? Will Hasina's new government lead the country towards a grave danger, making the country alienated from the international community? Is it possible for a country to survive alone in the days of globalisation?

In parliamentary democracy, the parliament forms and ends a government. What will the new parliament do if the government faces a tough time both nationally and internationally? Will the parliament help the government to overcome the crisis? Or will the parliament will behave in an abnormal way?

A Note on Mad Parliament: In the UK, the birth place of parliamentary form of government, there was a parliament over 800 years ago which was called 'Mad Parliament'. Its exact name was 'The Oxford Parliament'. But its functions were against the king's absolute power. The parliament started to make laws and regulations to curtail the power of the king in different ways. In this parliament, a group of barons had forced King Henry to accept a new form of government in which power was placed in the hands of the Privy Council, a council of fifteen members who were to supervise ministerial appointments, local administration and the custody of royal castles. Parliament, meanwhile, which was to meet three times a year, would monitor the performance of this council. Such activities infuriated the King and his men. So, they called in the 'Mad Parliament'. But in the history of the evolution of parliamentary democracy, the importance of this parliament is immense.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

Village Flute

Shutkani Torkari à la Kurigram

ANDREW EAGLE

How to make *shutkani torkari* etc. in 12 easy steps:-

Opening note: the following process would've been much simpler had I'd met my friend's younger brother stationed at Ulipur fire station at first, as described last week. But that was on the second arrival in Ulipur in the space of days, while discovering *shutkani torkari*, a Kurigram District specialty, was a task of the first. I didn't know any Ulipur locals then. Anyway, let's get started...

Ingredients

250 grams fresh puti fish
3 onions
2 cloves of garlic
15–20 small chillies
25 grams jute leaves
2 pinches salt
2 teaspoons turmeric
half a glass of water
cooking oil
2 brothers and 1 sister-in-law
1 village kitchen
a generous serving of Ulipur hospitality

Method

Step 1: For the best result in experiencing *shutkani torkari* you'll first need a *bou*, *amma* or *apa* – a wife, mother or older sister from Kurigram District, preferably from a village, who will be expert in cooking. Local dishes are not served in restaurants and home-made food is best. Political correctness aside, it remains a general truth that the ladies of a household are the culinary master chefs.

However, finding one of these relatives at short notice isn't easy – and in the case of a *bou* the endeavour will be complicated and have lifelong consequences. But don't despair – a suitable substitute is to find a generous *bhabi* or elder sister-in-law. It is well-known that a Bangladeshi bhabi is a close relation akin to a friend and that bhabis by habit take care of their *choto bhais* or little brothers, especially when it comes to food.

The good news is that bhabis are easier to find. Bangladesh is full of bhabis – all you need to do is to first locate a kindly *bhai* or brother.

Step 2: A recommended starting point for locating a bhai in Ulipur is the Al Shad Hotel on College Road. With the hotel managers and patrons it will be easy to quickly establish cordial relations and enquiries regarding a desire to sample the local cuisine will be received with enthusiasm and lively discussion.



PHOTO: ANDREW EAGLE

Brothers Mizanur and Shohidur Rahman in their house yard at the time of the *shutkani torkari* experiment.

If possible, try to raise the subject when Health Assistant Md. Shohidur Rahman has stopped by for a bite to eat. It is likely he will kindly volunteer the cooking skills of his own bhabi in Bisnubhallabhe village of Dhamsreni Union, some ten kilometres from the town.

It might be that he is able to call ahead to ask if it is okay, at which point his bhabi, Umma Habiba Mitu, will likely agree. Any offer to buy the ingredients before setting out on his Honda will be firmly refused – everything is available at the house, you will be told. In such a case, one may be on the way to the beautiful village by Shohidur Bhai's motorcycle within minutes.

Step 3: Shohidur Bhai will likely stop to show the fishing nets in the waterlogged land beside ricefields at the entrance to the village where the pint-sized puti fish are caught. In the meantime,

Bhabi will have started, unasked, to sort the various ingredients onto plates, chopping and washing the onions, garlic and chillies in preparation – so it looks like a TV cooking show set before your arrival. She will have the clay oven fired.

Step 4: There will be introductions with Shohidur's older brother Md. Mizanur Rahman Bipul and of course, with Bhabi. In due course you will be shown to the kitchen.

Step 5: Next, take the dried jute leaves and mix in water, slightly crushing them in the process. While doing this, Shohidur will explain how the jute leaves are harvested when the plants are young, no taller than his nephew. It is the new leaves which are chosen – a process which does not destroy the jute plant. It continues to grow, to provide the golden fibre. The harvested jute leaves are subsequently dried in the sun for 2 – 3 days.

Step 5: Put the washed jute leaves into a pan, adding the fresh puti fish.

Step 6: Add the onions, garlic and chillies followed by salt, turmeric, water and oil. Lightly mix by hand, and please note that one can be actively involved in this process. All the work need not be left up to Bhabi.

Step 7: Place on village stove to cook for fifteen to twenty minutes. While Bhabi lightly turns the torkari as it cooks, Bipul Bhai will bring the conversation to a boil concerning that other Kurigram delicacy, *shidal* – a dish made from *shutki*, which is dried, emaciated and shrivelled fish and *kochu pata*, or aram leaves.

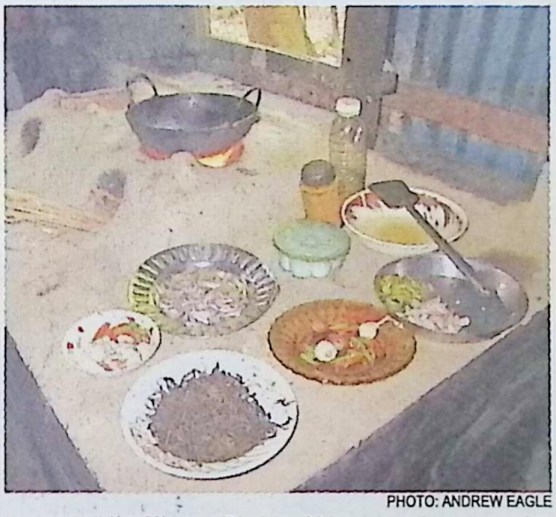


PHOTO: ANDREW EAGLE

Umma Habiba Mitu, or Bhabi, will have neatly arranged all the shutkani torkari ingredients in advance, so the kitchen looks like a TV cooking show set.

The process for making shidal is first to dry the puti fish for seven days in the sun – the usual shutki method. Then the shutki is mixed into balls with kochu and returned to sun-dry for another 15 – 20 days. The brownish, uninviting, disc-shaped and very smelly shidal ball is then ready for use. It's a strange kind of treasure.

Bipul Bhai will explain that when visitors from Ulipur town reach the villages they often desperately seek out shidal; while visitors from Dhaka tend to react with surprise and curiosity, asking "What on Earth are you eating?"

Step 8: While this is going on, Shohidur Bhai will be visiting the neighbours. He has already decided that any experience of Kurigram cuisine cannot be complete without at least seeing a shidal ball – as good as the shutkani torkari promises to be. As they had none in the house, the obliging neighbours will have agreed to provide one – and Bhabi meanwhile will metamorphose this plan into actually cooking the shidal, to make more precisely a shidal *bhorta* – a mashed shidal dish.

Step 9: By this time the steaming shutkani torkari will be served, usually with rice. It has a strong flavour, with a spinach-like consistency but slight bitterness to it – with just a hint of puti fish. Shutkani torkari leaves a lasting taste in the mouth which makes one want more. Even for a novice who's not particularly fond of fish – shutkani torkari à la Bhabi is delicious.

Step 10: Meanwhile the shidal disc will have arrived. Its odour is worse than a three-day old shirt and certainly no non-local would ever consider putting that in their mouths. Yet, the Kurigramers know better – that when cooked it will have a spicy, fulsome flavour.

Somehow before the eating of the shutkani torkari is completed, Bhabi will have miraculously fried the shidal with onions and chilli before it is mashed into a bhorta with mortar and pestle. It's spicier than the torkari, saltier with a stronger, unique flavour that, while tasty at first, must be as coffee – a flavour type which only brings increased enjoyment with accustom. It's not difficult to understand why Ulipur townspeople feverishly seek it out. Next time I will too.

Another dish associated with Kurigram District is *pelka*, a seasonal soup traditionally available at winter's end made from jute leaves and soda, or with *shozna* leaves in other seasons. But word from the Al Shad crowd is that pelka has resigned itself to history and is rarely enjoyed in Ulipur nowadays.

Step 11: Returning to town, Shohidur Bhai will stop beside a four-hundred-year-old village mazar, an Islamic shrine which sits not fifty metres from a likewise old Hindu temple, now within the roots of a huge tree. He wishes to demonstrate something of which he is proud: in Dhamsreni Union as in Ulipur, people of different faiths live in harmony.

Step 12: Upon reaching College Road, you'll find half the street talking about the project: to sample Ulipur cuisine. The experience will need to be discussed at length with the crowd at the Al Shad over a cup or three of tea.

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Elections in the Memory

SYED BADRUL AHSAN



Fatima Jinnah (left) though very popular, lost to Ayub Khan (right) in the 1965 elections.

Now that we are about to have an election, or a non-election — and it all depends on how you look at it — there is this huge temptation in many of us to recall some past elections that we have seen happening in our times. For the present, let it suffice that the Awami League is poised to form a government after 5 January. To what extent that will resolve the ongoing crisis, or defuse it, remains to be seen.

Be that as it may, the history of elections in our part of the world, especially that concerning Pakistan and Bangladesh (remember, we were one country once upon a time), has never been of a comforting kind. At times there have been all the comic situations that left us all greatly amused and our interest in politics a trifle more aroused. For myself, I recall a day in 1964. That was the day when 80,000 Basic Democrats, under Field Marshal Ayub Khan's concept of democracy, were elected in East and West Pakistan. In Quetta, Baluchistan, the candidate my father had voted for lost. But the triumphant nominee had no way of knowing that, did he? So he and his supporters, in a big procession, paraded the streets and at a point stopped before our house. Full-throated slogans of 'Haq sahib zindabad' and 'Mashriqi-Maghribi Pakistan Bhai Bhai' were raised. 'Haq saheb' was, of course, my father. He, in his grand way, acknowledged the greetings of the victorious man's campaigners.

In late 1964, as Pakistan prepared for its presidential election, again under the Basic Democracy system, it was interesting to read of the rousing receptions Fatima Jinnah, sister of Pakistan's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah, was getting in East Pakistan. She was the candidate of the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) against Ayub and it looked as if she would be able to unseat the military ruler. In the end, despite her very strong showing in the east, her defeat in the west ensured that Ayub would win. The presidential election was held on 2 January 1965.

In the course of the election campaign, one important opposition figure, Khwaja Nazimuddin, passed away. Retired lieutenant general Azam Khan, once close to Ayub Khan and one of the men involved in the imposition of martial law in 1958 and subsequently governor of East Pakistan until he fell out with the president, went around the country soliciting support for Miss Jinnah. At one point, Ayub made a crude comment on Azam: 'uss ke demagh me bhusa bhara hua hai (there is chaff in his brain)'. I recall that many Pakistanis thought it was a witty remark, which it was not.

In 1968, there were many people in the western part of Pakistan who were quite excited by the idea of a Bhutto presidency. You see, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had left the Ayub cabinet in mid-1966, formed the Pakistan People's Party in late 1967 and in early 1968 informed Pakistanis that he meant to challenge his former mentor at the next presidential election scheduled for 1970. The news even made it into Time magazine. But, of course, there was no Ayub-Bhutto contest since events were soon to overtake Pakistan. But let us remind ourselves that sometime in the early 1960s, when Bhutto was general secretary of the Ayub faction of the Muslim League, known as the Convention Muslim League, he proposed in public that Ayub Khan be declared president of Pakistan for life. That was quintessential Bhutto for you. We know of the rest of the course his life was to take.

The December 1970 elections in Pakistan, its first and one that led to its break-up, were hugely exciting. In East Pakistan, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman crisscrossed the province seeking support for his party's Six Points. While he described the elections as a referendum on the Six Points, many of his West Pakistani opponents, such as Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan, glibly told West Pakistanis that they had visited Dhaka and had found no support for Mujib and his party. Bhutto went around preaching a curious mix of Islam, democracy and socialism. He was neither Islamic nor democratic nor a socialist. In the east, Moulana Bhashani proved rash yet once again when he decided to stay away from the elections. On 4 December, a mere three days before the voting, he 'declared' the 'independence' of East Pakistan from the rest of the country.

Be that as it may, the history of elections in our part of the world, especially that concerning Pakistan and Bangladesh (remember, we were one country once upon a time), has never been of a comforting kind.



The landslide victory of the Awami League led by Bangabandhu was a shocking awakening for the Pakistani regime.

The results of the elections stunned the Yahya Khan regime, which had been advised by military intelligence that the Awami League would not win enough seats to form a government, which in turn meant that all the other parties could together cobble a government into shape in Islamabad. Of course, that did not happen. And of course the regime and men like Bhutto refused to hand over power to the Bengalis. The result was disaster for Pakistan, propitious for the people of Bangladesh.

You could go on talking about elections for a long time. In free Bangladesh, Khondokar Moshtaque lost the 1973 elections, but then the government maneouvred things in a way that the loser eventually became the winner. In 1979, all the old collaborators of the Pakistan army took part in general elections, thanks to the machinations of General Ziaur Rahman. In 1986, the Awami League was left red-faced when it announced its intention of taking part in the elections called by the Ershad regime. It was supposed to compete for 150 parliamentary seats, with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party going for the remaining 150 seats. Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia were to make simultaneous announcements, at the same time and from different places. In the event, the BNP backed out without warning. Later, it castigated the Awami League as a party that had legitimised Ershad's military government.

Ah, so many stories to tell! But let us call it a day.

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.

Let's Hope Next Year is Better

NADIA KABIR BARB

Every year around this time, I find myself sounding more and more like a parrot repeating the same phrase, "where did the time go?" over and over again. Here we are being propelled towards the New Year and I feel as if I have barely had time to experience the year gone by. Maybe it's an age related symptom where the older you get the faster time seems to go. Right now everything feels as if it is taking place at a frenzied pace as everyone gears up for ushering in 2014. It's a time for both reminiscing and a time for looking to the future.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Rana Plaza collapse, April 2013.

For Bangladesh 2013 has not been one of its best years with both political and economic unrest besieging the nation. The Rana Plaza disaster where an eight storied building collapsed leaving over eleven hundred people dead and more than two thousand people injured seemed to have set the tone for the rest of the year. The tragedy was one that caught the world's attention with the haunting and often poignant pictures of the dead and injured flooding our television screens and newspapers.

It was also the response of the government that left people incredulous and outraged. The Prime Minister's initial attempts at denying that the owner of Rana Plaza was a member of the Jubo League and subsequently having to retract her statement did not do much for the credibility of the ruling party. To add to that the utterly callous remark by the Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith was received by the public with derision and disgust where he stated that, "The present difficulties ... well, I don't think it is really serious — it's an accident." I am sure he wishes that he could take back those words considering the Rana Plaza disaster is said to be the most catastrophic garment accident in history. The combination of this debacle, the dissatisfaction of the garments factory workers and global concern for better working conditions and pay for the workers have left the garments industry in turmoil and in a highly vulnerable position. This is disastrous for the country as this sector constitutes almost 80% of our exports and employs almost four million people, most of them women.

If this was not enough the nation has been beleaguered by constant strikes (hartals) over the



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The tragedy was one that caught the world's attention with the haunting and often poignant pictures of the dead and injured flooding our television screens and newspapers.

past few months bringing the country to a standstill and gradually crippling the nation financially. Not to say draining the people of morale and instilling fear at the state of lawlessness. The upcoming elections have turned into a farce and I would say a source of embarrassment as the rest of the world looks on while The Awami League openly manipulate the situation to ensure the elections go their way. The opposition party in the meantime carry on with the pointless 'oborodh's and strikes which are harming the country and have had no real impact on the government's position.

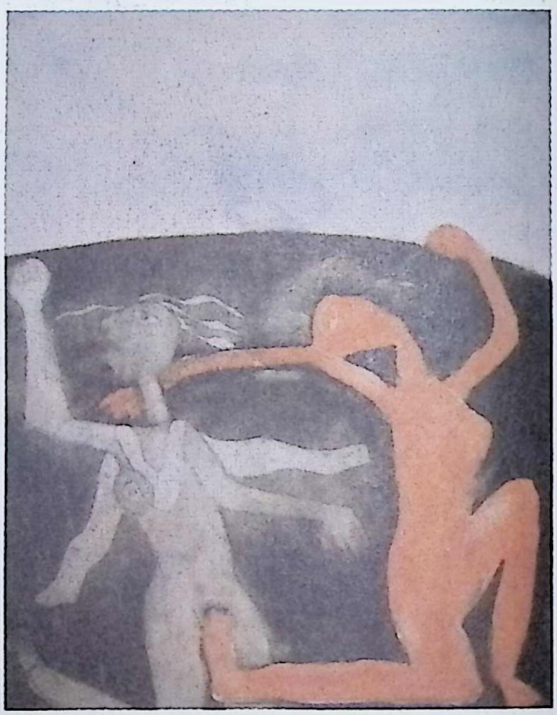
I asked the driver of a family friend whether he supports any of the political parties and he nodded vigorously saying that he was a BNP supporter. I was interested in finding out his reason for supporting the BNP and asked him why and his answer took me aback. He said that he liked the symbol of the sheaf of wheat more than he liked the Awami League's election symbol, the boat. I also asked a cook in someone's household the same question and he claimed to be a staunch Awami Leaguer. When I asked him the same question as to why he was, he smiled and shrugged saying he just was and had been for a long time. In hindsight both their simple answers made perfect sense and put things in perspective for me. Politics in our country has very little to do with party manifestos or what position a particular political party takes on health, education, domestic and foreign policies etc. We live in a time of street politics and armchair politics and are caught in the middle of two feuding parties with personal agendas and grievances that should have no place in the political arena.

If we are hoping for a better year for our country maybe 2014 will bring with it a new independent political party, one that actually has the nation's interests at heart and values its people. Or maybe we can hope that the current political parties will put aside their personal differences and work together for the welfare of the nation. I know its wishful thinking but as I said the New Year is a time for reflection and also a time where we can hope for better things to come. So I hope for a year of political calm, economic growth, happiness and prosperity for my country. With that I wish you all a very happy 2014!

Printing Life's Journeys

A young artist talks about hopes and dreams

FAYZA HAQ



Jafrin Gulshan, an intense print maker, went into print-making because that is what her teachers Abul Barq Alvi and Rafiqun Nabi selected for her. This was 2005 and she had just joined the Faculty of Fine Arts at DU where she learnt block making, by relief process, etching and lithography. These are the three mediums she went into. When one uses stone and grain --- this is just to create a surface, on which the picture will be made, she says. In the wood block print and the intaglio process, she says, you have to cut the wood, and in the metal, which one scratches, she says --- this is called etching; and one scratches on the metal with the needle, and then bites it in acid. The colour comes much later, according to the imagination of the artist, she says.

"Bit by bit one puts on the colours" explains Jafrin. "Using press colours, wiping as one progresses. Next one puts it in the machine and presses it and it comes out as print on paper. In the case of multi-coloured prints one plate is divided, and the colours are put on as the artist plans. Both woodcut and etching can be done in various plates. Lithography has silicon or sand grains to create sensitivity between the stone blocks. This has to be painted with oil-based glass- marker or 'tush', a kind of ink. In 'tush' one can get a water-colour effect, says the young print maker. After this there should be light nitric acid bite. Jafrin says. "During the making of a picture there should be paper on which the print is taken" says Jafrin. "If more than one colour is wanted, one has to prepare the stone that many times. One would say that litho, woodcut and etching are not easy to handle," says Jafrin.

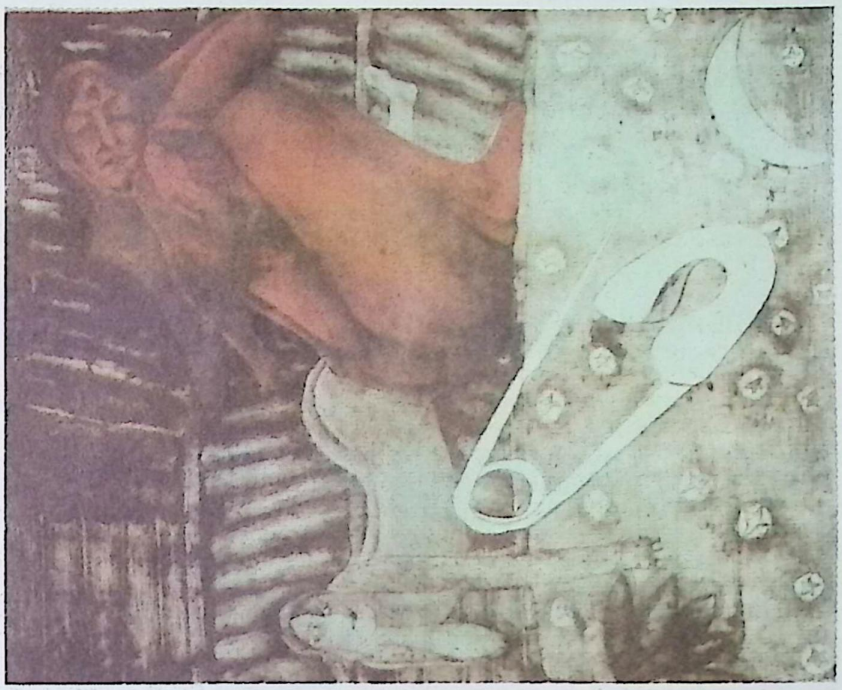


She has worked in all three media, but more often than not she goes in for etching and lithography. To get the stone, one must go to the print making section in the Fine Arts Institute in DU, she says. She began in 2005 and ended in 2013. It took her

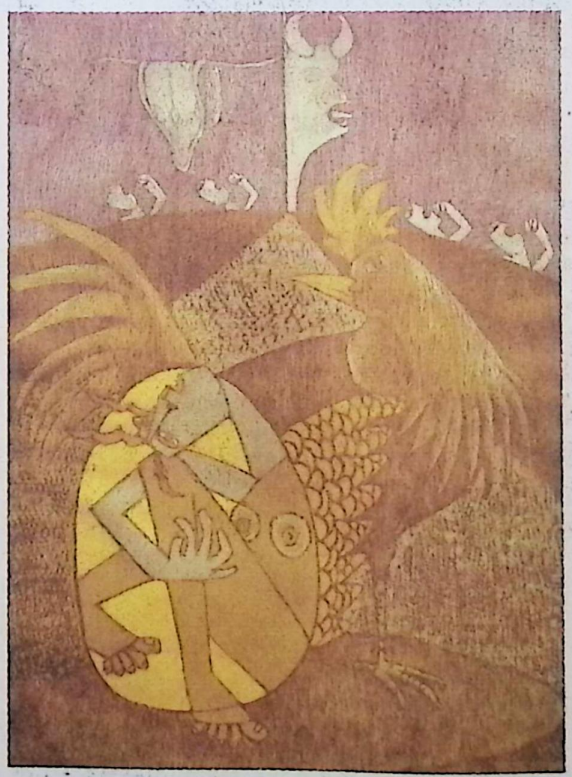
nine years to complete her honours and masters. The usual session jams have to be considered. For her higher studies she wishes to go overseas, specially to Japan.

In her subjects, she gives priority to her own experience. If one has not gone into the depths of the life of a rick-shaw–puller, she says for instance, one cannot paint his life.

She had Abul Barq Alvi, Rokeya Sultana and Mahmudul Haque, and Anisuzzaman Anis as guides.



Jafrin is preoccupied with the female figure, she has presented their pictures. The figure might have a veil in front and be nude at the back. She wanted to create a contradictory situation. She does not believe that clothes can brand a woman. In the quest to maintain the national identity she has worked with the lotus flower. This could be in a vase, rather than a pond. Another symbolic work which she has experiment with, is the safety-pin which she has used to symbolize the insecurity of women. Similarly she has used the book to symbolizes the need for enlightenment of women, for whom obtaining degrees is not all. ■





Team Bangladesh

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world that can boast of its huge and dynamic population of young people. A huge number of young Bangladeshis always keeps the nation alive with their voluntary work that aim to bring about a positive change in the society. Mahmud Hasan a fresh graduate of Dhaka University is one such young Bangladeshi. When he went to Nepal to attend a training session, he met John Christian, a young dreamer from Denmark who wants to establish a society where education will be free for all. These two friends worked out a plan to make that dream come true in Bangladesh. Their mission is to reach students of remote areas with an interesting and joyful method of learning called alternative education. Rene Peterson and Jonas Stampe from Copenhagen University joined and "Team Bangladesh" was formed.

At that time it was in need of a mentor who would support the cause, which Professor Dr Amjad Hossain and his AB foundation duly became. Mahmud Hasan says, "A few things happened in my life which is very significant to me. One of these is my meeting with Professor Dr Amjad." They managed Amena Baki Residential Model School for Team Bangladesh's alternative education project. The school is situated in the border town of Chirir Bandar, Dinajpur which is some 341 km away from Dhaka and one of the northern most areas of Bangladesh.



Team Bangladesh with the school students (In the middle row- John christian, Mahmud Hasan, Rene Peterson and Jonas Stampe. PHOTO COURTESY: MAHMUD HASAN

Despite the remoteness of its location, the school is quite dynamic in its teaching method. To ensure the access of impoverished families, they have resource centres called Child Development Centres (CDC) in remote villages where students and their families are counselled to send their children to the school. Thanks to the cordial support of Dr Amjad and AB foundation the Team Bangladesh not only found a school to run their initiative but the school authorities also provided their food and accommodation in that far flung region of Bangladesh. Dr. Amjad says in this regard, "Bringing students and volunteers from other countries can be a good way of socio-cultural knowledge exchange. Its aim is to ignite the students' minds and connect them globally and we are very happy to accommodate the volunteers at our school". Such a warm welcome highly motivated these young workers to start their work with great enthusiasm.

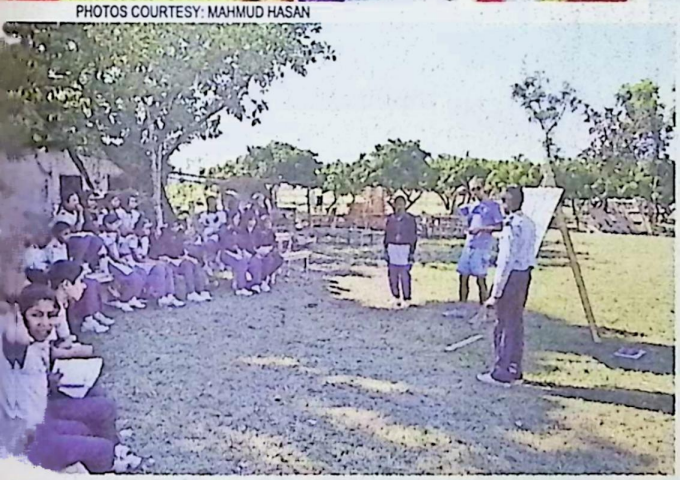
The first day with the school students started with a welcoming introductory session. The students were excited to get some teachers from Dhaka University and some foreign guests from Denmark. They all spontaneously wanted to learn English from these wonderful teachers. But the lessons were not like the usual English classes. These young teachers soon became friends with the young students. At the open air classes in the school playground there was actually no teacher, all of them were friends who were facilitating each other in teaching and learning. According to Rene, "We didn't teach grammar and traditional things to these young friends. We actually had a lot of fun with tongue twisters, pronunciation and storytelling and as well as learning communicative English." Such joyful learning sessions give the students a great opportunity to learn how to communicate fluently in English.

Now the Team Bangladesh has around 150 members from class 6 to 9 of Amena Baki Residential Model School. With these energetic members, the team does not confine itself to only English teaching and learning in the open air classes. Another core objective of the alternative education process is to learn through community activities. Soon these students were engaged in various community awareness activities with their foreign friends, which are coordinated by Hassan. They set up trash



PHOTOS COURTESY: MAHMUD HASAN

Interactive learning sessions during the class.



Open air learning sessions.

cans in and around the school. Together they cleared the pond beside the school which was normally clogged by garbage. Besides participating in cleanup activities, the students also accompanied their teachers to the countryside and even to their homes where the latter got the taste of Bangladeshi hospitality.

Coordinated by Mahmud Hasan, the Team Bangladesh also spent a fruitful time in Child Development Centres. In these centres, Mahmud, Rene, John and Jonas interacted and taught some of the least privileged children of our country. These young activists brought a message to these children: Yes, we the youths are with you and we will help you with our maximum effort to ensure education, your very basic right.

These young activists have formulated a new definition of education to these students. Now the students don't get bored in the class. Rather they are lively and in each and every class they get the joy of discovering new things. Besides interacting with students, Team Bangladesh also holds sessions with the teachers of the school. They interacted with the teachers about the new ways of joyful learning and its effectiveness, and also about the alternative method of education where students are engaged in community activities besides their formal classes. In Amena Baki Residential Model School, teachers are now seen playing badminton with the students in the school playground while students are submitting their home tasks spontaneously and regularly.

Two and a half months of energetic and innovative initiative of Team Bangladesh has redefined education for the students to whom learning is now a matter of joy. The initiative is really exemplary and it defines volunteerism to its fullest sense. Mahmud's dream, Rene, John and Jonas' participation, Dr Amjad's guidance and AB foundation's support have made the programme a success and have been a catalyst in bringing about a positive change in our society. Following Mahmud's footsteps, if our youths can come forward with their fresh ideas and energy to bring about a positive change, who can stop us from having a bright future?

The writer can be contacted at shahnawaz.khan@thedailystar.net

Do As I Say, Not As I Do

One wonders if the officers responsible for preparing media statements for the Australian High Commission in Dhaka are familiar with their own website. Highlighted in red on the home page is a warning concerning the larger-than-life titled "Operation Sovereign Borders," by which people arriving in Australia by boat to claim asylum are transferred by the Australian government to "processing centres" in either Nauru or on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea.

Presumably the warning is so English-reading Bangladeshis who might think to travel to Australia by boat but not before they checked the High Commission website might know to expect a frosty reception. More on that in a moment...

On 18 December, 8 death and 13 life sentences were awarded to those involved in the well-publicised killing of Biswajit Das last year. It was strange to see those sentenced to death being led away by the police, for as horrific as the Das killing was and as necessary as this justice is, not only for Biswajit's family but nationally, one cannot but wonder if those involved aren't also victims – of Bangladeshi student politics.



Biswajit Das, victim of political wrath.

It does not excuse Biswajit's killing – and overwhelmingly there was a sense of relief his killers have thus far been held accountable. Yet it remains tragic that eight young people have been sentenced to die. It is also true that nine families have been broken, not to mention the families of those receiving life sentences.

Given that the party the killers purported to represent is currently in power – a fact taken to show the independence of Bangladeshi courts, it is unlikely after a government change they would be released due to political pressure.

As such, the Das case is ripe for those advocating against the use of the death penalty. It is curious that the Australian High Commission remained silent, because they did think to issue a media statement on 11 December 2013 in relation to the then-pending execution of war criminal Abdul Quader Mollah.

The brief statement called on Bangladesh to address the United Nations' special rapporteur's concerns before proceeding with the judicial process. The Australian High Commission also took that opportunity to call on Bangladesh to establish a moratorium on the death penalty.

In a high-minded, wide-eyed westerner with no experience of Bangladesh a blanket opposition to the death penalty is easy to comprehend. Arguments that death penalties cannot be undone where injustice has occurred, that studies have shown the death penalty is not an effective added deterrent to crime and that the state should not institutionalise acts of violence sound reasonable. Indeed, rightly they may be viewed as the ideal.

Yet from the Australian government which claims a close relation with Bangladesh it is equally reasonable to expect a high degree of understanding. It would be reasonable to anticipate a more nuanced view at the least, to the nationally significant execution of Mollah, if a view is to be expressed at all.

Why Mollah's death penalty was singled out for public comment is worth considering – particularly as it is inconsistent with the response of silence concerning the death penalties in the Das and other cases. With the geopolitical ramifications of Mollah's execution, it is of concern that the Australian government might simply be trotting out a high human rights standard now and then, to pursue various realpolitik outcomes – in Mollah's case it might be as simple as not provoking an Islamist reaction.

It is simply odd they would stand up for a convicted war criminal but not for ostensibly ignorant young people who did a terrible thing – and the Das case involved a single murder.

Abroad, just how vocal has the Australian government been in publicly stating its opposition to the death penalty in say, the American media, or in China? Likewise, where is the public condemnation of drone killings in Pakistan which involve no judicial process and through which hundreds of civilians including children have been killed?

How committed is the Australian government, in reality, to its stance against the death penalty and in broader terms, to human rights?

Let's return to the High Commission's home page. The statement concerning Mollah's execution came in the same week that Amnesty International issued a report describing some conditions at the Manus Island immigration detention centre in Papua New Guinea as violating prohibitions on torture.

Among other things the report found detainees could avail themselves of just 500 ml of water per day, that there was no shade outside despite regular hot conditions and that detainees needed to spend hours each day queuing for food and to use toilets which often had no soap, leading to unhygienic living conditions. Asylum seekers have committed no crime – they have a right to seek asylum.

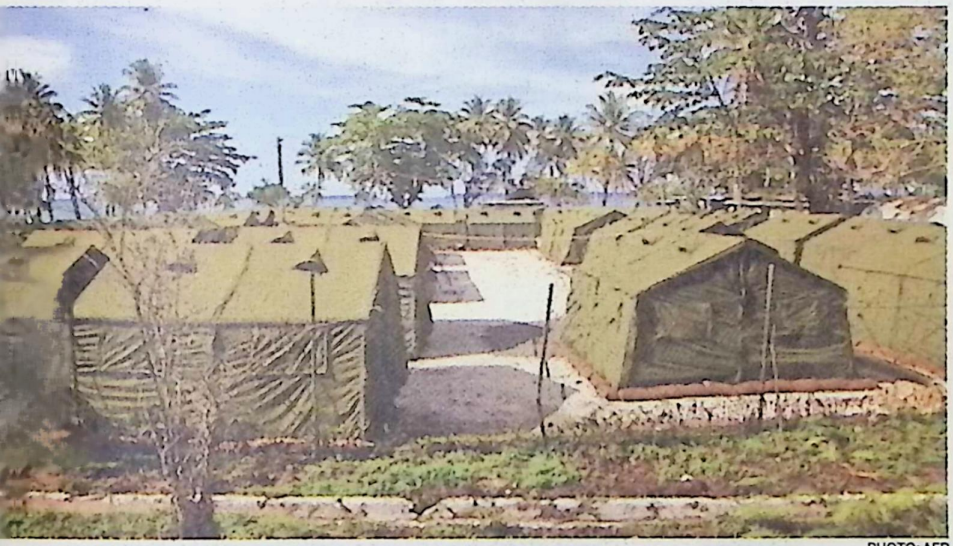


PHOTO: AFP

Part of the Manus Island Regional Processing Facility.

Neither are Australian immigration detention centres stranger to past instances of self harm, attempted and successful suicides, such is the desperate nature of the conditions in which those who seek Australia's help and protection can find themselves – including children.

The Australian government so recently requesting Bangladesh to consider the concerns of the UN special rapporteur will almost certainly ignore the Amnesty International report.

The statement came in the week too where the Australian High Court delivered judgement in the case of the Sri Lankan refugee known as Ranjini concerning the Australian government's use of indefinite detention without trial.

Individuals determined to be refugees cannot be sent back to their country of origin – they are normally granted visas. But if the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation decides a refugee is a risk to national security they are detained pending resettlement in a third country, which in practice never happens.

Such indefinite detention results from a secret assessment in which the refugee has no opportunity to present counter arguments or traditionally, even to know the nature of the security concerns involved – in other words, there is no judicial process. But then, there is also no crime.

Curiously, the majority of those currently held in indefinite detention are Tamil Sri Lankans. Meanwhile the Australian government has instituted cooperation with the Sri Lankan government to stop Tamils from boarding boats headed ultimately for Australia. There is an incentive to maintain cosy relations.

Ranjini is the widow of a senior Tamil Tiger but was originally granted refugee status, allowing her to live freely in the community – where she remarried and established a new life for herself and her two children. However, a subsequent adverse security assessment resulted in her detention a year later. Her third child was born in captivity last January and is still there.

The High Court ruled that in Ranjini's case the Department of Immigration erred, but did not directly rule on the appropriateness of indefinite detention.

Yet surely a government concerned enough to raise its voice in defence of Mollah's rights, one with a sometimes-expressed stance against the death penalty, does not need a court to tell it that indefinite detention of non-criminals is wrong. It is arguably crueller than the death penalty, since in the latter case there has been a trial and serious crime.

Given the relative advantages in natural wealth, stability and development Australia enjoys, it is a country with the potential to be a world leader in justice and human rights issues. This potential remains unfulfilled.

At the very least until it cleans its own house, perhaps on justice matters that are of significance to the people of Bangladesh, the Australian High Commission in Dhaka would simply do better to stay silent. Perhaps they could note the implications of their website's home page.

— ANDREW EAGLE

Election Will not Resolve Division

Thailand's February 2 election will be more fraught than previous ones, analysts say, and will do little if anything to resolve deep and increasingly bitter political divisions in Thailand.

When the Democrat Party last boycotted elections in 2006, it did not obstruct the registration of candidates or voting at polling stations. This time, however, the self-styled People's Democratic Reform Council, in effect the street politics wing of the Democrats, has tried to obstruct the registration and said it will not allow the election to take place.

Attempts to prevent officials from holding elections or to block people from voting could be met by violence from supporters of the ruling Puea Thai party.

"This election campaign will be violent," predicted political science professor Pitch Pongsawat from Chulalongkorn University. "The question is, can the Election Commission function properly? It is very difficult to control violence at the local level."

If the election goes ahead, the Puea Thai will likely win again - like it did in 2011, when it grabbed 265 of the 500 seats in Parliament.

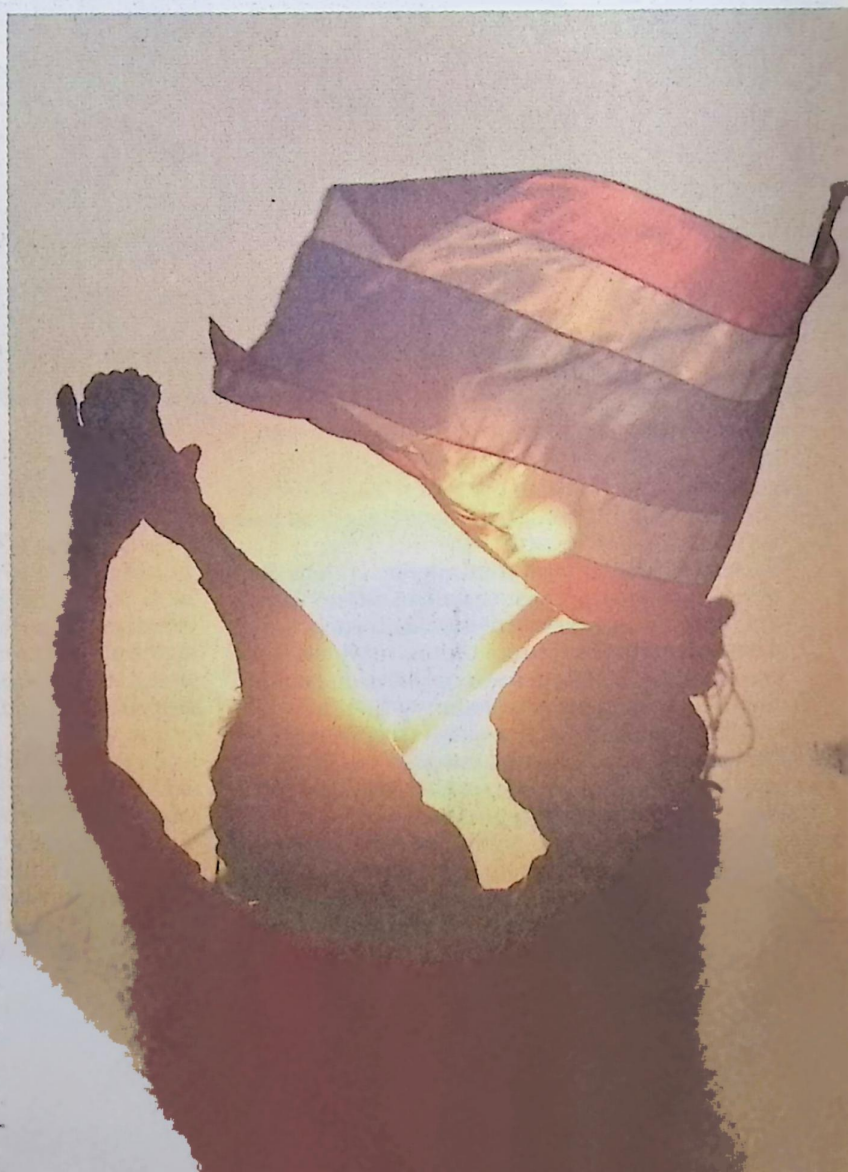
In terms of votes, it outstripped the opposition Democrat Party by around four million.

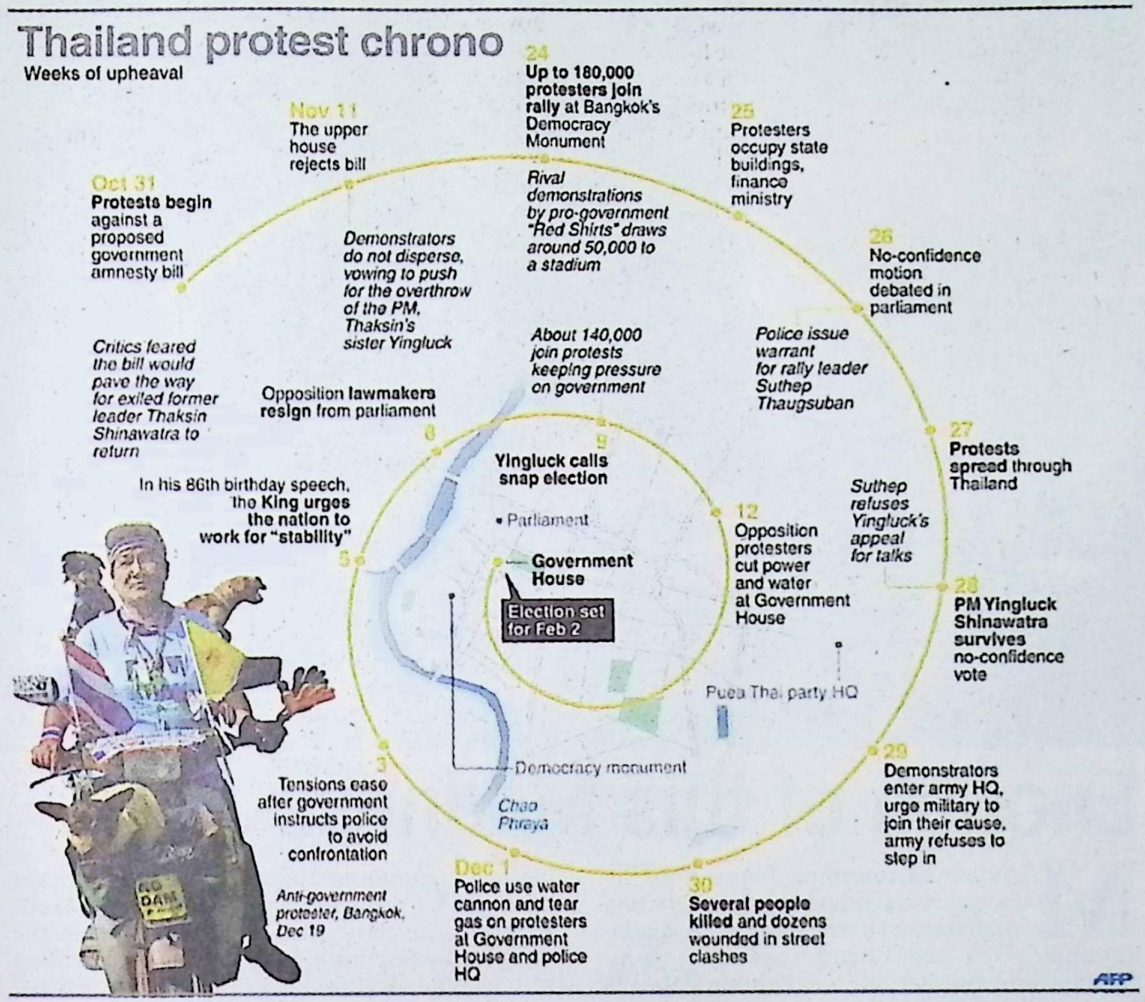
Enduring regional differences paint a picture of dangerous geographic polarisation.

The ruling Puea Thai party is very strong in Thailand's northeast and across the upper north, while the Democrats dominate the south.

In the lower north and Bangkok, the two are split roughly half and half, although the capital usually favours the Democrats. But winning in Bangkok, the south and part of central Thailand alone cannot deliver Parliament.

The northeast has the biggest footprint in Parliament, accounting for 126 seats. Since





2007, the area has recorded higher growth than any other region, which is likely to cement loyalty to Puea Thai.

Yet, the ruling party stands on shaky ground elsewhere. Given the Democrat Party's boycott, candidates who win in pro-Democrat areas may still end up with fewer votes than the "no vote" tally, leaving them as lame ducks.

According to Thai election laws, a candidate who wins unopposed must get a minimum number of votes to be declared a winner. If the candidate cannot hit the minimum, by-elections will be held.

A successful election will go down well with the international community, and a win for Puea Thai will give the party the renewed mandate it seeks.

But millions of mostly Bangkok-based Thais have shown that they reject the electoral system in recent weeks.

Protesters who have been marching in Bangkok see Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra as a front for her older brother Thaksin Shinawatra, whom they regard as corrupt and bent on eroding the influence of the monarchy.

Army chief Prayuth Chanocha had warned last week: "We must not look at the situation in Bangkok alone, but see what is happening in the provinces as well."

The political division runs through all tambons, or sub-districts, and "the situation could trigger a civil war", he added.

A Bangkok Post editorial on Monday said General Prayuth's remarks were "distressing... but it is unfortunately true that even when it seems things can't get worse, they can". Pitch sees the February 2 election as only a tap on the brakes as Thailand continues to slide deeper into uncharted waters.

"Everybody is pushing the situation towards extremes."

— NIRMAL GHOSH
ANN/The Straits Times



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Enough of this Madness

Masuda was returning home from her workplace the other day, happily oblivious of the fact that she would be charred in minutes by a petrol bomb thrown by miscreants. She breathed her last after fighting for her life for a couple of days. I did not know Masuda personally but I later came to know that she was a friend of a colleague. I also learnt that she had gotten married only three months back. She must have had so many expectations from her new life, she must have woven so many dreams with her life partner. But unfortunately the dreams were never meant to be realised. What was Masuda's fault? Why was she along with other innocent people targeted by politically backed miscreants? Who will take the responsibility of her death? It's sad that we, the people of Bangladesh, are held hostage in the hands of a handful of people who are solely concerned about power.

Md Zonaed Emran
Janata Bank Ltd.

A Disgrace, Indeed!

Awhile back, my cousins and I went to Star Cineplex in Bashundhara City mall to watch a movie. As is the norm, the national anthem was played before the movie commenced. Naturally most of the spectators stood up from their seats out of respect for the anthem until it finished playing. However, there were a handful of people who did not bother to pay their respects by standing up while the anthem played. Several of them were talking among themselves and making comments about random people around them. Some of them were having loud, ridiculous conversations on their cell-phones. A few of them who had empty seats in front of them, propped up their feet on those, eating and taking pictures noisily. I was baffled at how disrespectful those people were. We are always complaining about how Bangladesh has failed to move forward as a nation. If we cannot respect the 'little', important things of our motherland and improve ourselves, how can we expect a positive, substantial change overall?

Fariha Hasan
Via Email

Staying away from a Peptic Ulcer

Do you often feel a burning, stabbing or aching pain somewhere between your breastbone and your belly button especially when your stomach empties? Do not ignore this pain, because this pain can be triggered by peptic ulcers. The most common symptom of a peptic ulcer is burning and abdominal pain.

Peptic ulcers are open sores that develop on the inside lining of your esophagus, stomach and the upper portion of your small intestine. Your pain can differ in severity and duration; it could last anywhere from a couple of minutes to several hours. Eating food as soon as the pain arises or taking an over-the counter antacid medication can be a temporary solution, but ignoring this pain for a longer period can increase the severity and frequency of this pain. In fact if peptic ulcer is left untreated, it can result in internal bleeding, infection or scar tissue.

Peptic ulcers include:

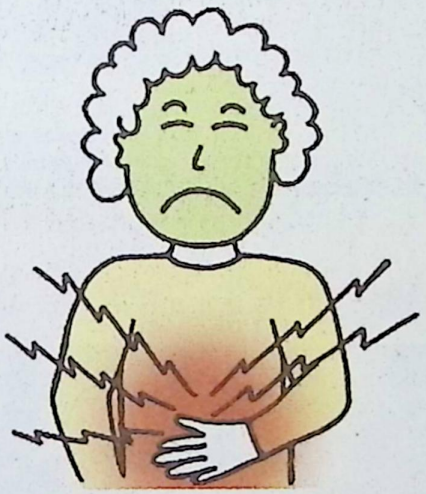
- Gastric ulcers that occur on the inside of the stomach
- Esophageal ulcers that occur inside the hollow tube (esophagus) that carries food from your throat to your stomach
- Duodenal ulcers that occur on the inside of the upper portion of your small intestine (duodenum)

Symptoms

- **Burning pain** is the most common peptic ulcer symptom. The pain is caused by the ulcer and is aggravated by stomach acid coming in contact with the ulcerated area. The pain typically may be felt anywhere from your navel up to your breastbone and it could be worse especially when you have an empty stomach. It could even flare at night and keep disappearing and returning for a few days or weeks.
- **Other severe signs:** In some cases ulcers may cause severe signs or symptoms such as vomiting of blood — which may appear red or black, dark blood in stools or stools that are black or tarry, nausea or vomiting, unexplained weight loss

Causes

Our digestive tract is coated with a mucous layer that normally protects against acid. Peptic ulcers occur when acid in the digestive tract eats away at the inner surface of the esophagus, stomach or small intestine. When the amount of acid is increased or the amount of mucus is decreased, you could develop an ulcer. The acid can create a aching open sore that may bleed.



A bacterium called Helicobacter pylori living in the mucous layer can cause inflammation of the stomach's inner layer, producing an ulcer. Also regular intake of some over-the country and pain relievers can irritate or inflame the lining of your stomach and small intestine

Few changes in your life style could save you from getting hurt!

If you feel your pain is getting severe, it is always wise to see a doctor and abide by the prescription and diet that he recommends. However you could also follow a healthy lifestyle to control this disease.

Eating good food. Having a healthy diet full with fruits, vegetables and whole grains and drinking plenty of water can help you heal your ulcer. Foods that are high in acid, such as citrus fruits, tomatoes, and coffee, may exacerbate ulcer pain. Hence be careful while taking them. Most importantly if you are accustomed with skipping your meal, leave that habit at once. Don't let your stomach empty for a longer period.

Reducing the intake of pain relievers. Stop taking incessant amount of over-the-counter medicines and pain relievers. Consult your doctor to find the lowest dose possible that still gives you pain relief. Don't forget to take your medication with meals.

Controlling stress. There are some stresses in our life which are unavoidable. Yet try to find out the sources of your stresses and try to cope with them by doing some stress relieving activities. Remember stress may worsen the signs and symptoms of a peptic ulcer.

Quitting smoking. Smoking is injurious in many ways! And one of them is it increasease stomach acid. Smoking may interfere with the protective lining of the stomach, making your stomach more susceptible to the development of an ulcer.

Limiting or avoiding alcohol. Excessive use of alcohol can irritate and erode the mucous lining in your stomach and intestines, causing inflammation and bleeding.

Protecting yourself from infections. You can take steps to protect yourself from infections, such as H. pylori, by frequently washing your hands with soap and water and by eating foods that have been cooked completely.

Source-Mayo clinic

Cat Domestication Traced to Chinese Farmers 5,300 Years Ago

Five-thousand years before it was immortalized in a British nursery rhyme, the cat that caught the rat that ate the malt was doing just fine living alongside farmers in the ancient Chinese village of Quanhucun, a forthcoming study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* has confirmed.

Results of the study show that the village of Quanhucun was a source of food for the cats 5,300 years ago, and the relationship between humans and cats was commensal, or advantageous for the cats. The evidence for this study is derived from research in China led by Yaowu Hu. Using radiocarbon dating and isotopic analyses of carbon and nitrogen traces in the bones of cats, dogs, deer and other wildlife unearthed near Quanhucan, the research team demonstrated how a breed of once-wild cats carved a niche for themselves in a society that thrived on the widespread cultivation of the grain millet.



Recent DNA studies suggest that most of the estimated 600 million domestic cats now living around the globe are descendants most directly of the Near Eastern Wildcat, one of the five Felis sylvestris lybica wildcat subspecies still found around the Old World.

Music Brings Memories Back to the Injured Brain

In the first study of its kind, two researchers have used popular music to help severely brain-injured patients recall personal memories. Amee Baird and Séverine Samson outline the results and conclusions of their pioneering research in the recent issue of the journal *Neuropsychological Rehabilitation.*



Although their study covered a small number of cases, it's the very first to examine 'music-evoked autobiographical memories' (MEAMs) in patients with acquired brain injuries (ABIs), rather than those who are healthy or suffer from Alzheimer's disease.

In their study, Baird and Samson played extracts from 'Billboard Hot 100' number-one songs in random order to five patients. The songs, taken from the whole of the patient's lifespan from age five, were also played to five control subjects with no brain injury. All were asked to record how familiar they were with a given song, whether they liked it, and what memories it invoked.

Doctors Baird and Samson found that the frequency of recorded MEAMs was similar for patients (38%-71%) and controls (48%-71%). Only one of the four ABI patients recorded no MEAMs. In fact, the highest number of MEAMs in the whole group was recorded by one of the ABI patients. In all those studied, the majority of MEAMs were of a person, people or a life period and were typically positive. Songs that evoked a memory were noted as more familiar and more liked than those that did not.

The authors hope that further studies of both healthy people and those with other neurological conditions to learn more about the clear relationship between memory, music and emotion; they hope that one day we might truly "understand the mechanisms underlying the unique memory enhancing effect of music."

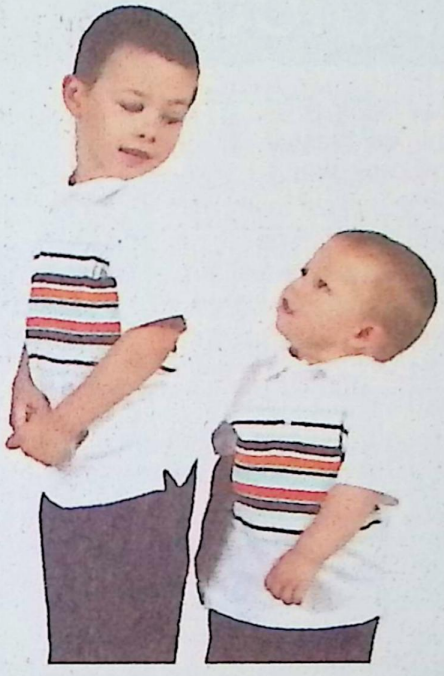
Mothers See Their Youngest as Shorter Than They Are

Many parents say when their second child is born that their first child suddenly appears to have grown overnight. Now, researchers reporting in the Cell Press journal *Current Biology* on December 16 have an explanation: until the birth of the new child, those parents were subject to a "baby illusion," routinely misperceiving their youngest child as smaller (and younger) than he or she really was.

Researchers at Swinburne University of Technology in Australia made the discovery first by asking 747 mothers if they remembered experiencing a sudden shift in their first child's size after the birth of a new infant. The researchers found that 70% of the mothers did.

To further explore that perceptual shift, the researchers asked mothers to estimate the height of one of their young children (aged 2 to 6) by marking a blank wall. When the researchers compared those height estimations to the child's real height, they found something very interesting: mothers significantly underestimated the height of their youngest child by 7.5 cm on average. In contrast, height estimates for the eldest child were almost accurate.

The findings are a useful reminder of just how



filtered our own perceptions of the world around us can be. Researchers concluded that in many cases, we cannot rust the accuracy of our perceptions.

Inkblots Improve Security of Online Passwords

Carnegie Mellon University computer scientists have developed a new password system that incorporates inkblots to provide an extra measure of protection when, as so often occurs, lists of passwords get stolen from websites.

This new type of password, dubbed a GOTCHA (Generating panOptic Turing Tests to Tell Computers and Humans Apart), would be suitable for protecting high-value accounts, such as bank accounts, medical records and other sensitive information.



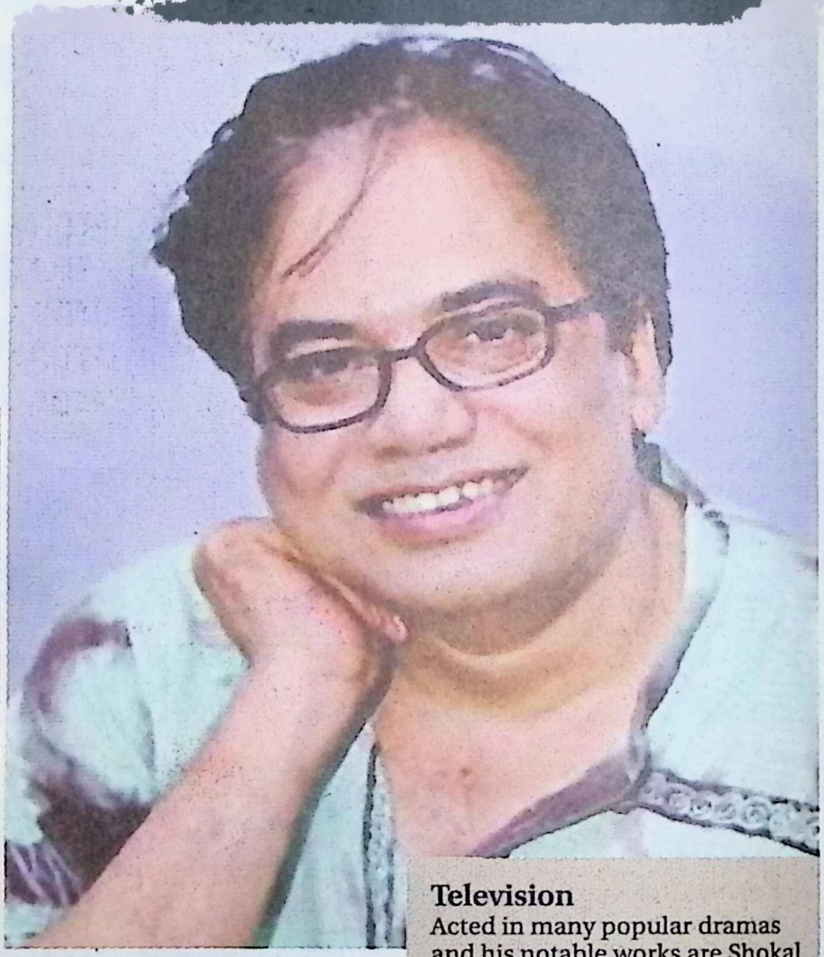
The GOTCHA password system developed at Carnegie Mellon University incorporates randomly generated inkblots (Courtesy: Carnegie Mellon University)

To create a GOTCHA, a user chooses a password and a computer then generates several random, multi-colored inkblots. The user describes each inkblot with a text phrase. These phrases are then stored in a random order along with the password. When the user returns to the site and signs in with the password, the inkblots are displayed again along with the list of descriptive phrases; the user then matches each phrase with the appropriate inkblot.

These puzzles would prove significant when security breaches of websites result in the loss of millions of user passwords -- a common occurrence that has plagued such companies as LinkedIn, Sony and Gawker. These passwords are stored as cryptographic hash functions, in which passwords of any length are converted into strings of bits of uniform length. A thief can't readily decipher these hashes, but can mount what's called an automated offline dictionary attack. Computers today can evaluate as many as 250 million possible hash values every second.

1959 to 20

Khaled Khan, a prominent theater activist, actor and director passed away at Birdem Hospital on December 20. He will be remembered as a gifted artiste and an inspiration to artistes of the theatre arena.



1975
Started his career in the theatre as a member of Nagarik Natya Sampradaya

1981
Started his television career with "Shirighor" on Bangladesh Television

30 plays
He appeared in more than 30 plays. His notable plays are "Dewan Gazi'r Kissa", "Irsha", "Ocholayotan","Nuroldin er Sarajibon","Darpan", "Galileo", "Roktokorobi" among others.

10 plays
He directed more than 10 plays in theatre. Some of his noteworthy plays are- "Muktodhara" written by Tagore, "Putul Khela" written by Ibsen, "Master Builder" written by Ibsen and "Khudhito Pashan" based on short story of Tagore.

28 years
Associated with stage and TV drama for 28 years

20 years
Extensive experience in Finance, Management and media sector





Television
Acted in many popular dramas and his notable works are Shokal Shondha, Eishob Din Ratri, Roopnagar, Lohar Churi etc.

"Chi chi, tumi eto kharap?"
"Rupnagar" a drama aired in 1993, is still remembered by people for his famous dialogue, "Chi chi, tumi eto kharap?"

Awards
- Awarded Mohd. Zakaria Padak for contribution in Stage Theatre
- Nuronnahar Smirity Padak for best acting
- CJFB award for best direction
- Impres-Onnodin award for best TV acting
- IT Theatre Award 2013

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Have You Made the List?

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

People need to make lists. It's what gives them the delusion of order in a life filled with chaos. As the year ends on an uncertain note, the best way to deal with the coming of yet another 365 days that have goodness-knows-what in store for us, is to make lists of various kinds.

At any given moment there is somebody making a list. A wedding planner will have a list of practically everything – the *byriani* caterer, the decorator, florist, videoman, photographer, faintly familiar adolescents ready to do the dances at the holud, Beautician 1, 2 and 3, wedding shop 1,2,3, master tailor 1, 2, 3, 4...

Many a couple have gone their separate ways because a partner forgot to bring a vital item on the grocery list.

Then there are a whole list of people who just like making lists for the sake of listing - List of things to find while cleaning out your couch, of things to do while getting your teeth cleaned, of curse words in a foreign language, of reasons to start a cult, of reasons to eat the last *chom chom*, of ways to stalk your crush and so on.

On the other extreme side of the spectrum are those who constantly challenge themselves and will have lists of near impossible things to do.



Procrastinators and disorganised folk have lists that tend to get longer than shorter. It's because they have to add on the today's 'to do' list with that of yesterday's, the day before yesterday's and so on. They make lists because it gives them a sense that they are actually *doing* something as opposed to nothing. A list demonstrates an intention, a genuine desire to clean the cake of dust behind the bed and buy the wedding gift of the couple about to celebrate their second anniversary. It means that we are sincere about getting things done, changing our ways. How many things we can cross out at the end of each day, however, is a million dollar question. Sometimes people have lists they have already done, just so they can cross them out and get that feeling of self-satisfaction.

There are lists people are dying to get on - the guest list of the New Year's party given by some dubious character who officially sells grains but moonlights in arms smuggling, the nominees for the year's Oscars, Bookers, Tonys etc; the list of invitees to a party leaders' pre-election or pre-oborodh party, list of nominees of candidates for an unopposed election and list of semi finalists of the Bangladeshi Idol contest.

Others are dying to get out of the list. This includes: hitlists (of assassins and vindictive gang leaders, politicians or serial killers); Bangladesh Bank's list of defaulters, list of criminals to be 'caught in the crossfire' or individuals to be 'goomed', person non grata list at the foreign office, list of OSD (Officials on Special Duty) candidates and list of those in the 'danger zone' in dance competitions.

Thus the urge to make lists seems universal whether it is written on a frayed notebook, a used envelope or in the latest app of the hippest mobile phone. As we know even the sharpest minds can have memory lapses and hence the need for lists.

These are not just those cliff hangers who have a list of summits to climb within the year. It includes politicians too. A highly ambitious politician (is there any other kind?) may have a list like this : 1. Increase wealth by fifty fold within the next 3 years. 2. Get multiple visas for EU, US and Canada for self, family and in-laws for quick exit strategy. 3. Buy a spotted deer for mother-in-law's birthday. 4. Send basket of fruits and cash to forest department. 5. Get prime plot near lake to add to the twenty four other pieces of land acquired during tenure. 6. Take over a school and turn it into a shopping mall. 7. Memorise the official lines of denial before press conference. 8. Make overtures to ruling party, then make a U-turn towards the opposition, basically, keep everyone guessing. 9. Give foreign well wishers and the general public the impression that a dialogue will happen despite obvious indications to the contrary. 10. Make people believe that a one-sided election with no foreign observers is good, beneficial and democratic.