



# 4TH OF JULY

## 239th Independence Day of the United States of America



The Daily Star

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

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## Media in the U.S. Politics

**A**MERICANS realized early on that easy access to information would be fundamental to the proper functioning of their new democracy. They would not be able to make sound decisions about candidates and policies without it. To be effective, moreover, this information would have to be readily available and widely distributed.

The answer was newspapers. America's first daily paper appeared in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1783. By 1800, Philadelphia had six dailies; New York City had five; Baltimore, Maryland, had three; and Charleston, South Carolina, had two, with almost 250 other papers, most of them weeklies, scattered around the country. By 1850, there were 2,000 papers, including 200 dailies.

The independent obduracy of journalists has caused conflict with many American politicians from the country's earliest days. George Washington wrote in 1792 that "if the government and the officers of it are to be the constant theme for newspaper abuse, and this too without condescending to investigate the motives or the facts, it will be impossible, I conceive, for any man living to manage the helm or to keep the machine together." On the other hand, politicians have recognized the media's crucial role in keeping the electorate informed. Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1787 that "were it left to

me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

Radio became important to politics in 1924, when the proceedings of the national political party conventions were first broadcast live. In that year, the parties began paying for radio advertisements — the Republicans spent \$120,000; the Democrats, \$40,000. Four years later, expenditures by the two parties had leaped to a million dollars, beginning the upward spiral in campaign spending that has accelerated in recent years.

George Gallup began conducting public opinion polls in 1934, starting with small samples in key districts. He believed that these polls would provide "a swift and efficient method by which legislators, educators, experts and editors, as well as ordinary citizens throughout the length and breadth of the country, can have a more reliable measure of the pulse of democracy." Today, polling has become far more sophisticated as questioning has been refined by experience, and analysis has been aided by the introduction of modern technology. In spite of occasional errors, polling is generally considered to be an effective way to keep track of public opinion.

The first television broadcast of a political

convention came in 1940, with an audience of 100,000 viewers. By the 1950s, television was reaching one-third of America's households. The two parties spent \$3.5 million on television ads during the 1952 campaign, with the Republicans continuing to outspend the Democrats by a large margin. The 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates clinched the crucial role of television in modern campaigning.

Cable television has allowed vastly increased public scrutiny of government itself. Every minute of U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate sessions plus a number of congressional committee meetings are televised by the nongovernmental C-SPAN channels. State and local governments likewise broadcast meetings of legislatures, councils and boards to their constituents.

Citizens have more ways than ever to get news about their governments. While the number of newspapers is shrinking, the survivors continue to report local, national and international news online, providing important scrutiny of government while trying to find ways of remaining profitable in the digital age. People have long taken for granted getting news from radio and television reporters. Now citizen journalists can bring neglected news stories to their community through online blogs.

### Ambassador's Message

**T**WO hundred and thirty-nine years ago, the United States of America was founded on the belief that "all men are created equal that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." These are values that continue to ring true for millions of Americans to this day. Over the years, however, our beliefs evolved to include an ever more diverse American people. We believe that all men – and women – are created equal. We believe that all people – from



MARCI A BERNICAT  
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH

Mayflower descendant to recent immigrant, from deaf to hearing, from Mormon to Muslim, from gay to straight – are entitled to certain unalienable rights, which our democracy continuously strives to recognize and protect. These beliefs, among others, are not unique to America. Bangladesh, too, has strong democratic roots and a constitution that protects individuals' rights. It is because of our shared values that the relationship between America and Bangladesh is so vibrant, multi-faceted, and indispensable. With a Bangladeshi diaspora half a million strong living in every corner of the United States, hundreds of thousands of other Bangladeshis who have studied or lived in the United States, and a growing number of Americans who visit or live in Bangladesh, it is the people of our two countries who are, more than ever, driving our relations forward. We invite our Bangladeshi friends and partners to join us in celebrating the birth of our nation on July 4.

## Religious diversity by design

By Samier Mansur

**T**HE country's founders recognized that the fragile alliance of states that made up the early United States would survive only if it could unify its diverse, competing — and at times, conflicting — religious and ethnic groups into the fold of a new, collective national identity. Without creative and inclusive solutions, the fragile nation could easily crumble in the face of sectarian divisions. The creative solution the founders devised was a Constitution that placed above all else the individual's right to freedom of religious worship and thought. It was only fitting that a land founded upon the promise of freedom would begin first with freedom inside the heart and mind of the individual.

Almost 250 years ago this was a revolutionary concept — a risky endeavor that had no modern precedent. But, in retrospect, it is not surprising that the Constitution's legal guarantee of free-

dom of thought and worship would give rise to a religiously diverse and vibrant society. And while the stories of how disparate peoples became Americans are not always free of conflict and tragedy, the ongoing narrative of America is the continuous unfolding of unity through diversity.

Thanks to its fundamental openness, the United States today is among the most culturally and religiously diverse countries in the world — so much so that, within 30 years, its minority populations will outnumber the majority. Without fear of encountering institutionalized discrimination, American citizens are free to practice their religion, give voice to their views and use their creative energies to pursue their personal aspirations. The result is a dynamic marketplace of ideas where all have the right to express themselves, as long as they are respectful of the rights of others.



The dome of the Library of Congress reading room in Washington depicts important influences on civilization, including Islam.

#### Part of the American Mix

Like most aspects of American life, religious worship in the United States is infused with the spirit of inclusion and mutual respect. During the month of Ramadan, for example, mosques routinely open their doors to neighbors of other faiths to partake in the breaking of the fast at sundown. A couple of years ago, I had the pleasure of attending an iftar dinner at one of the oldest Jewish synagogues in Washington. The dinner was attended by religious leaders and practitioners from all the major faith traditions. Scenes like these have become common across the United States, as communities come together to share and celebrate the diverse and collective experience of what it means to be American.

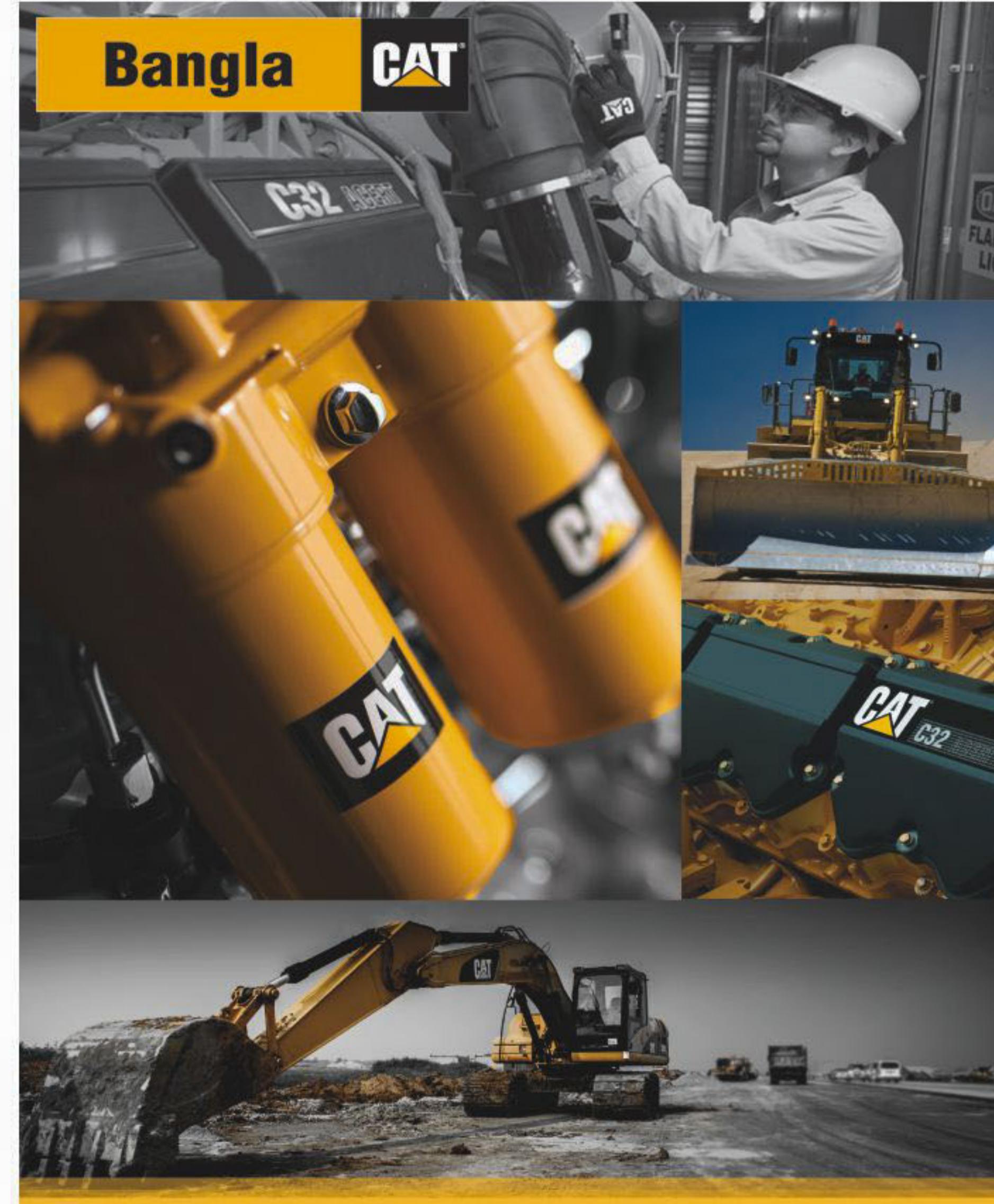
Muslims in the United States contribute to the social and economic fabric of their communities. They are among the most educated and highest-income-earning groups in the country, and they participate at every level of society — from teachers, doctors, lawyers and engineers to elected officials at the highest levels of government. In fact, the very same day that I gazed upon the dome of the Library of Congress, I discovered another treasure housed in the great library. When the first American Muslim congressman, Keith Ellison, took the oath of office in 2007, he used a Quran that had belonged to Thomas Jefferson. This Quran, hand-marked with the initials "TJ," is displayed in the library, next to Jefferson's copy of the Old Testament.

The story of the United States began with the story of religious freedom. From the halls of government to the archives of history, it is a story that has reaffirmed itself time and again. It is a story that continues to shape the nation today.

In a world where many countries must come to terms with increasing diversity brought about by the triple forces of globalization, technology and travel, there is a lesson in the experience of the United States and the forging of American identity. It is a lesson that is embodied in the Latin words inscribed on the seal of the United States, and sums up the central theme of the American identity, "E Pluribus Unum" — Out of Many, One.



Zara Afridi, center right, chats with friends outside the South Asian Youth Action building in Queens, New York.



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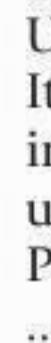
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