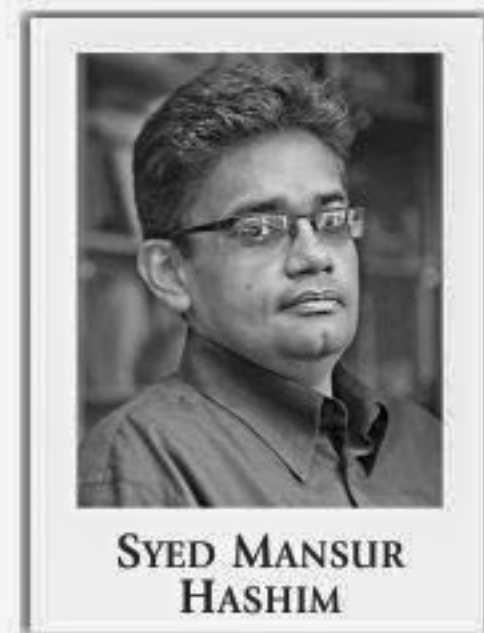


Bangladesh's growing middle class



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

ACCORDING to a new report titled 'The Surging Consumer Market Nobody Saw Coming' published by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG),

the middle class of Bangladesh is emerging as one with purchasing power that values foreign brands and is hopping on to the digital bandwagon in their millions. Obviously this opens up new opportunities for foreign firms hoping to cash in on the spending spree Bangladeshi consumers have embarked upon.

The report and its findings reveal some interesting data. For instance, the average income of targeted families which falls squarely into the 7 percent of the population that constitutes the middle class have an average annual income of US\$5,000. The consumer product revolution that is being witnessed in this class, especially with the proliferation of banking facilities like credit purchases and easy installment / higher-purchase forms of payment and affordable loans have seen the consumer market record stupendous sales in consumer products ranging from foreign cosmetics, air-coolers, refrigerators to passenger vehicles.

Seven percent of the population with purchasing power translates into roughly 11 million people who are "middle and affluent consumers" (MAC) are seen as confident consumers with an expectation of seeing their incomes increase positively in the next fiscal. Yet, there is also another undercurrent that differentiates the Bangladeshi average consumer from their Asian counterparts i.e. the aversion towards accumulating debt which they may or may not be able to repay. Despite reservations on affordability, Bangladeshis are hopping on to the digital bandwagon at a stupendous rate.

It is estimated that more than 50 million people use internet services on their cell phones. There is also a shift in consumer preferences being witnessed when it comes to shopping habits which

had long been dominated by traditional convenience stores and supermarkets. That more and more people are using the internet to buy and sell products from household products to cars and even land, houses and apartments, the latter three being most valued of fixed assets, is another very interesting development. In urban centres, "plastic" (debit / credit cards) is making inroads into the purchase and sales of consumer products.

As stated by Vivek Naubhar, a BCG consultant and another co-author. "Companies should start building robust e-commerce platforms designed for interacting with consumers through

growth rate of around 6 percent for the last decade. Its apparels industry (RMG) has emerged as number 3 in the global market riding high on low wages and an abundant pool of labour. The strong growth of inward remittances by the hundreds of thousands of expatriate Bangladeshi workers amounting to billions of dollars annually are all contributing factors to the rise of the Bangladeshi middle class.

Companies, both local and foreign, need to wake up and take notice of these trends if they wish to be companies of choice to whom Bangladeshi consumers will turn when they go shopping. The

has captured around 50 percent of the internet-enabled smart phone segment. These companies understand what motivates the customer: Good value for money and a relatively decent shelf life while sporting technology that is second to none.

The biggest thing going for the country is its population – a young, vibrant and growing population will help propel the country's growth engine and a rising consumer base for many years to come. It is estimated that the poor segment of the population that currently stands at 84 million will nearly halve to 44 million by 2025 and the emerging middle class will

Headway in the Tavella case

Fair investigation will unravel the truth

AFTER weeks of little visible progress in the investigation of the murder of Cesare Tavella, an Italian national, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police has caught four suspects involved in the killing and recovered a motorcycle that was apparently used by the murderers to escape. According to the police, the suspects are convicted criminals who have confessed that they had been hired to kill any foreigner who was 'white'. They have also admitted that they had been hired by a 'big brother' to carry out the killing.

The police have insisted that there are no militant links to this murder, thus rejecting the IS claim posted by US-based SITE Intelligence Group.

We are heartened that the police have made some headway in a murder that has spread fear and confusion among the international community. We hope however, that this case is not in any way politicised, and the investigation is carried out fairly and efficiently. Not only the hired assassins but also the masterminds of this murder and that of Japanese national Kunio Hoshi must be identified and brought to book. This is the only way that the fears of the international community as well as those of all Bangladeshis, will be allayed. We hope in the coming days the police will be able to come up with more information regarding the cases and share it with the public.

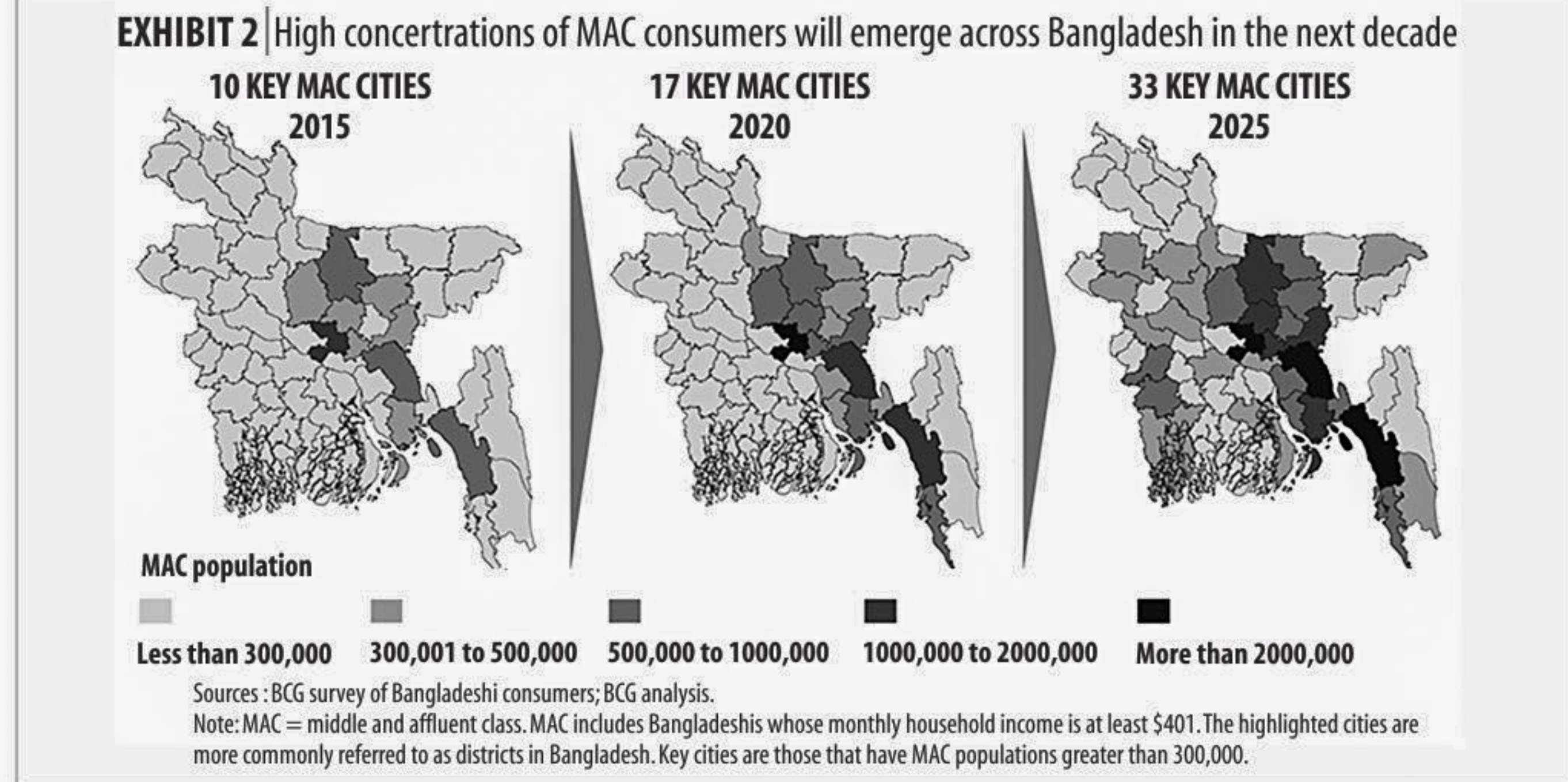
Kidnapping in the hills

Haul up the perpetrators

THE safety situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has deteriorated sharply, a manifestation of which we see in a rise in the incidents of abduction in the region. According to reports published in this paper recently, 26 people have been kidnapped in the last 10 months in Bandarban, Rangamati and Cox's Bazaar, of whom 20 have been released after families paid ransom. Six people are still being held hostage. Not only that, last August a BGB soldier was injured when Arakan Liberation Army (ALA) members fired on a BGB patrol team. And last month, a VDP member was killed in an exchange of fire with a terrorist group in the CHT. The situation points to a serious downturn in the law and order, and, to make matters even more worrisome, no one has been hauled up yet in connection with the abductions.

Myanmarese insurgents groups ALA and Mro National Party are, reportedly, behind these abductions, which the outfits use to finance their clandestine activities. It is now evident that they are using parts of our territory as hideouts. The hostile nature of the terrain and its limited accessibility makes it easy for these groups to carry out cross border activities with impunity.

This month, the so-called military commander of the ALA Renin Su was arrested from Rangamati. Following the information extracted from him, a coordinated operation against the ALA and other such group should be in the offing. The law enforcing agencies need to work more on human intelligence to arrests the kidnapers and prevent abduction. The government should also seek the cooperation of the neighbouring countries to flush out these criminal outfits.



small digital screens to meet growing mobile-enabled demand." Companies' marketing strategies need to be reoriented to factor in consumer traits that revolve around fear of accumulating debt – which means offering affordable financing in terms of loans and lower interest rates.

So how is a country that is ranked by the World Bank of having a sub-Saharan category per capita income of approximately US\$1,100 per annum manage to find itself as an emerging market for consumer products? The country has experienced an average GDP

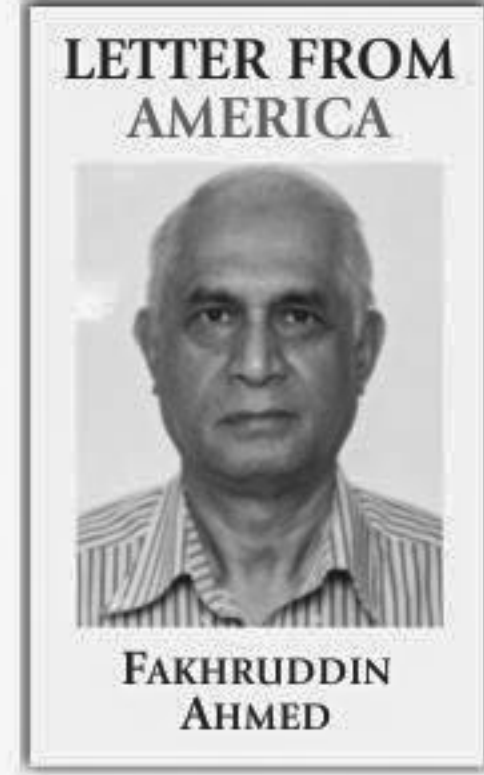
average consumer in Bangladesh is very value-conscious. Whilst, more money may be available for expending on a new product (which is viewed as a step-up from the current "model") consumers can truly be bought over to adopt a product which gives the notion of "good value for money".

This explains why the middle class of major urban centres like Dhaka and Chittagong have opted for brands like Walton, which makes everything from motorcycles to smart phones, is making a killing; or why a Chinese-packaged Bangladeshi company named Symphony

have risen from the current 17 million to 27 million in the coming decade. The rise in purchasing power will not be limited to major cities like Dhaka and Chittagong, but spill over to witness even greater impact in cities like Khulna (an emerging industrial hub), Gazipur (already a major RMG centre), to other cities that will see similar growth of urban populations and consumer bases. It is estimated that in Bangladesh, by 2025, there will be "63 cities will have MAC populations of at least 100,000 compared with 36 now."

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

Justin Trudeau - an antidote for rightist propaganda



FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

LETTER FROM AMERICA

ON Monday, October 19, Canada elected 43-year-old Justin Trudeau its new Prime Minister when his Liberal Party trounced the ruling Conservatives. Strikingly handsome, the 6-feet 2-inches

Justin Trudeau is the son of one of the most charismatic and consequential prime ministers in Canada's history - Pierre Trudeau, who was the premier for 15 years (1968-79, 1980-84). Pierre Trudeau is considered by many as the father of modern Canada.

Pierre Trudeau first came into prominence in 1967. Visiting Expo67 in Montreal, on July 24, 1967, French President Charles de Gaulle addressed the crowd from the balcony of Montreal City Hall and, uttered the phrase, "Vive le Québec libre!" ("Long live free Quebec!") to thunderous applause. That was the slogan of the Quebecer separatists. Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson condemned de Gaulle's comment and said, "Canadians do not need to be liberated."

De Gaulle became a persona non grata in Canada, cut short his visit and left. An obscure Canadian Minister of Justice, Pierre Trudeau, himself a Francophone and a Montrealer, wondered how the French would react if a Canadian Prime Minister went to France and declared: "Brittany to the Bretons," earning de Gaulle's lifelong enmity. Riding a wave of "Trudeaumania" within nine months, Pierre Trudeau became Canada's 15th prime minister.

French Canadian Pierre Trudeau repeatedly thwarted attempts by Quebecers to secede from Canada. Pierre Trudeau brought the 1976 Olympics to Montreal. When Trudeau, at age 52,

married the 30-years younger Anglo Canadian Margaret Joan Sinclair in 1971, it was dubbed a political marriage. That was unfair. Pierre Trudeau's father, Charles Trudeau, had also married an Anglo Canadian, Grace Elliot. Pierre and Margaret's first child, Justin Pierre James Trudeau, was born on December 25, 1971.

Although Justin's parents "loved each other incredibly, passionately, completely," the 30 year age difference took its toll. They separated in 1977 and divorced in 1984. After retiring from politics in 1984, Pierre Trudeau raised his children in relative privacy in Montreal. Justin Trudeau was an excellent amateur boxer. Justin earned his B.A. in Literature (1994) from the prestigious McGill University in Montreal, his father's hometown, and Bachelor of Education degree (1998) from the prestigious University of British Columbia, Vancouver, his mother's hometown.

Justin taught French and Math in a high school in Vancouver for four years (1998-2002). He studied engineering at the University of Montreal (2002-2004) and enrolled in a Master's program in Environmental Geography at McGill before leaving academia for politics.

Canadians first caught a glimpse of their future prime minister when Justin delivered a passionate eulogy at his father's state funeral in October 2000. He exhorted Canada to imbibe Pierre Trudeau's idealism. He concluded the eulogy by altering the last line from Robert Frost's famous poem: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep/He has kept his promise and earned his sleep." The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) received numerous requests for the rebroadcast of Justin's eulogy. In 2003, CBC listed the eulogy among the "significant events from the past 50 years."

On October 14, 2008, Justin Trudeau won a seat in the Canadian parliament from Papineau, a poor section of Montreal. He was reelected in 2011 and 2015. Justin Trudeau won the Liberal Party leadership contest in 2013 with 80

percent votes. On October 19, 2015, Trudeau led the Liberals to a landslide victory in the federal election, winning 184 of the 338 seats, with 39.5 percent of the popular vote.

Conservative Party's "Just Not Ready" portrayal of Justin Trudeau backfired. In televised debates, the fluently bilingual Trudeau impressed Canadians with his passionate and articulate advocacy of liberal causes. He stuck to his controversial positions, calling for the legalisation of marijuana and refusing to apologise for smoking it. After the Boston Marathon bombing, he called for studying the "root cause" of terrorism. He advocated women's right to wear niqabs at citizenship ceremonies, and for

Justin Trudeau believes in deficit spending for fixing creaking infrastructure, and favours tackling climate change head-on. He will pull out Canadian planes bombing ISIS. He will bring Canada back to being an honest broker that the world admired.

convicted terrorists' right to retain their Canadian citizenship.

The Liberals countered the Conservatives' negative ads by showing Trudeau in a classroom exuding pride as a teacher, and "conceding" that he was not ready – to see Canada languish economically!

Canada will be a different country under Justin Trudeau. Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper moved Canada further to the right than its people are. Low taxes, more austerity and balancing the budget at all cost were the mainstay of Harper's platform. He

denied climate change. Too hawkish on foreign policy, Harper was an interventionist, more pro-Israel and anti-Palestinian than even the US.

Justin Trudeau believes in deficit spending for fixing creaking infrastructure, and favours tackling climate change head-on. He will pull out Canadian planes bombing ISIS. He will bring Canada back to being an honest broker that the world admired.

With polls showing him losing, Harper resorted to Islamophobia. He opposed a woman's right to wear the niqab during citizenship ceremonies: "When we join the Canadian family, we should not hide our identity. Never will I say to my daughter that a woman has to cover her face because she's a woman."

Trudeau addressed Harper's xenophobia directly: "The same rhetoric that led to a 'none is too many' immigration policy toward Jews in the 30s and 40s is being used to raise fears against Muslims today." "One of the fears I have is that we have a government that is stoking fears and fomenting anxiety around Muslim Canadians by conflating fears about terrorism with fears about people who look different or sound different. That's the one thing I'm really against."

In his victory speech, Trudeau recounted the story of a Muslim mother he met on the campaign trail who handed him her baby daughter: "She said she's voting for us because she wants to make sure that her little girl has the right to make her own choices in life and that her government will protect those rights. To her I say this: You and your fellow citizens have chosen a new government - a government that believes deeply in the diversity of this country. ... My friends, we beat fear with hope, we beat cynicism with hard work. We beat negative, divisive politics with a positive vision that brings Canadians together."

Pierre Trudeau would have been proud!

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

COMMENTS

"Blasts kill one at Huseni Dalan"
 (October 24, 2015)
 Samiya Tasmeen
 The government needs to take stern action against the extremists as soon as possible before their activities spread further.

"Truck kills man in Dhaka"
 (October 23, 2015)
 Obuj
 We tend to always blame truck and bus drivers whenever a pedestrian gets killed in a road accident. But sometimes pedestrians are also to be blamed. They often cross streets at undesignated spots.

"Undeterred, they will keep working for the street kids"
 (October 22, 2015)
 Farah Nusrat
 We are proud of you. Keep up your great work.

"RMG can create 54 lakh new jobs"
 (October 22, 2015)
 Anis Rahman
 We have to increase our capabilities to make the most out of this opportunity.

Mustafa Mohammad
 Improvements are possible in Bangladesh. The problem is corruption, outdated laws and policies.

Mitira Manzur
 Greater opportunities should translate into better working conditions.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

UN at 70
 The United Nations celebrated its 70th anniversary on October 24, 2015. In spite of various limitations, the UN has made remarkable progress in the areas of peace and development.
 The UN's work towards world peace and security through its critical approach to solving international problems and its implementation of appropriate, effective actions is greatly appreciated.
Professor M Zahidul Haque
 Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System
 SAU, Dhaka

"Aman's Ordeal"
 I was reading the heart-rending story (published on TDS on October 24, 2015) of the untimely death of Aman, the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Moudud. We all sympathise with the bereaved family. The article clearly indicates that Aman underwent wrongful treatment in one of the so-called best hospitals in Bangladesh.
 A few questions are lurking in my mind. The father of this gentleman was the vice president of Bangladesh for nearly two years and the law minister for five years. While he was keen to raise the age of the judges in the Supreme Court, he did not pay an iota of attention to frame a law to establish medical tribunals in Bangladesh to deal with wrongful treatment serviced to patients both in private and public hospitals of Bangladesh. Had he enacted such a law, perhaps, Aman wouldn't have gone through what he did.
Bazlur Rahman
 On e-mail