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Columnist

Osama Rahman

Staff Photographers

Prabir Das

Kazi Tahsin Agaz Apurbo

Graphics & Illustrations

Manan Morshed

Make-up

Md Saiful Islam

General Manager, Production

Selim S H Chowdhury

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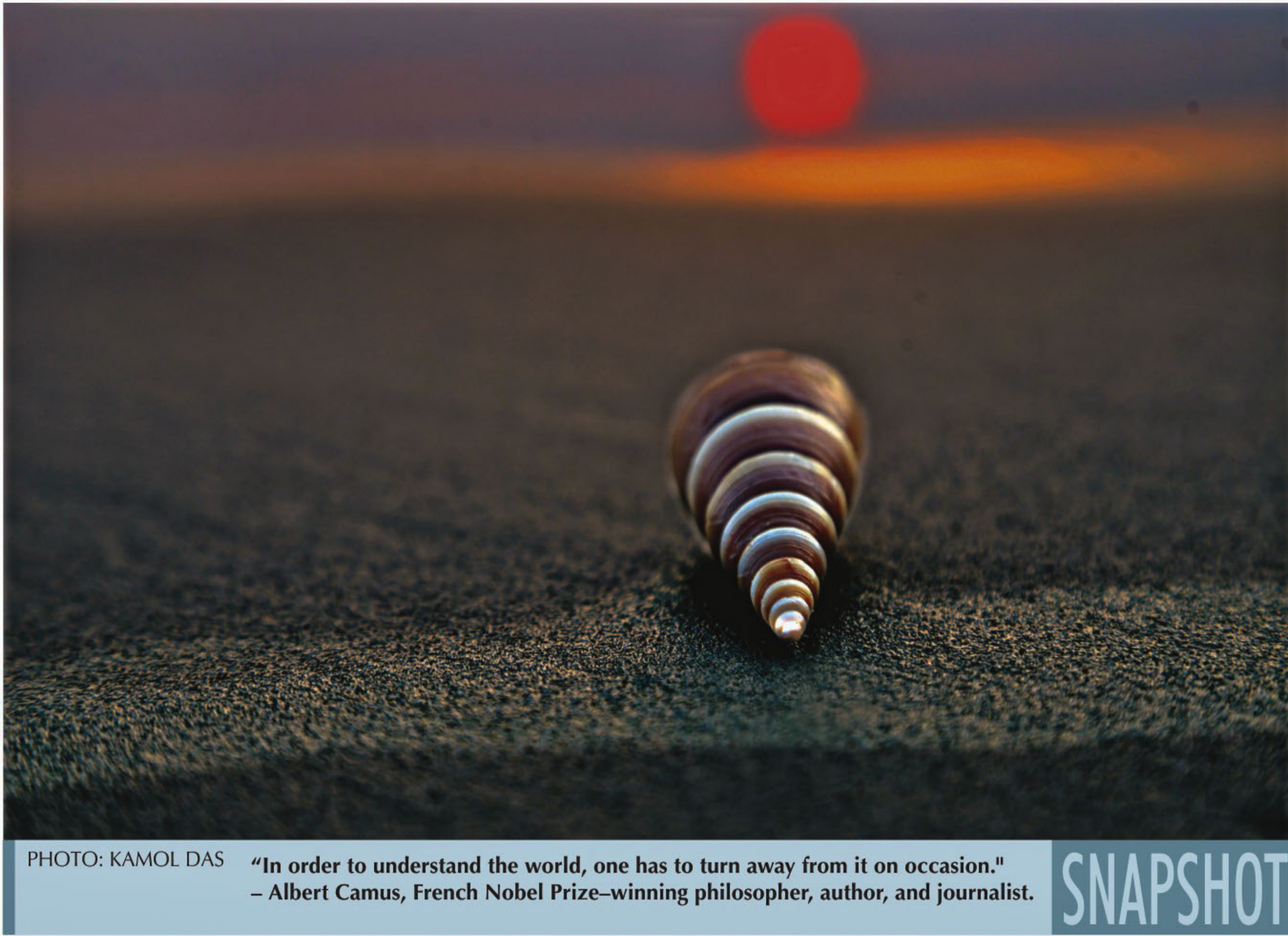


PHOTO: KAMOL DAS

"In order to understand the world, one has to turn away from it on occasion."
– Albert Camus, French Nobel Prize-winning philosopher, author, and journalist.

SNAPSHOT

MAILBOX

thestarmagazine@gmail.com

WISHING
ALL OUR
READERS
A VERY HAPPY
2016!



PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

Colours of Christmas

It is really appreciable how the Star Weekend celebrates every festival by publishing spotlight articles on the unique features of these familiar and age old celebrations. This week's spotlight article (published on December 25, 2015) on Christmas celebrations was also a pleasant read. The writer has brilliantly pictured the lively activities that make this happy occasion a festival for all. However, there are many Christian families in the remote rural areas, for instance, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and in the hills of Netrokona who are extremely poor. I wonder what they think of Santa Clause, Christmas cakes and food galores which are important features of all Christmas celebrations in Dhaka.

Abedin Faruq
Shyamoli, Dhaka

CSR Practice in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is going to be a middle income country by 2021. There are many private and public universities in Bangladesh in which lots of students enroll every year to pursue higher education degrees and many of them face immense financial crisis to continue their study. Bangladesh Bank has initiated a mandatory rule for all the banks, which is to spend five percent profit for the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Fund which has to be spent in welfare activities. In fact the government should initiate this rule for all profit making industries or companies and if this money can be spent to finance the education of these students, it will be an epoch-making step to reduce discrimination in higher education. At present, many impoverished students cannot continue due to excessive semester fees and other costs and many of them drop out in the middle of their study.

Md. Imran Sarker
Department of Marketing, Begum Rokeya University

Flashback 2015

I would like to thank the Star Weekend for taking us on a flashback to the important events of 2015 through the article titled "Flashback 2015" (published on December 25, 2015). However, I would also like to mention that a lot of important events have been missed. For example, the year 2015 began with nationwide blockades and horrific petrol bomb attacks which took hundreds of lives all over the country. Thousands of Bangladeshi migrants became victims of human trafficking and lost their lives in foreign lands. The year 2015 also witnessed an unprecedented rise in assassinations and targeted killings which have shocked the whole nation. The mentioned five incidents are obviously significant but there are also other important events which happened this year and changed the nation's fate decisively.

Sabrina Khan, Banani, Dhaka



PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Star Weekend.

INITIATIVE

Breastfeeding is still somehow considered to be a very private task for women, not only in Bangladesh, but all around the world. Somehow, making sure a child gets enough nutrition and immunity through their specified lunch or dinner is seen as something that should be done in utmost privacy and isolation.

In workplaces, it is a rare sight to see a working mother be able to breastfeed their baby in the premises. It is uncommon for childcare centers and places allocated for breastfeeding to exist in office spaces here in Bangladesh.

To tackle that very dilemma, for a more deprived group of citizens, UNICEF and DBL group signed a Memorandum of Understanding to promote and improve breastfeeding practices in the workplace through the Breast Feeding in the Workplace Initiative (BFWI), on December 6, 2015. The project has been implemented in selected garment factory sites of DBL group, as a pilot. The collaboration with DBL Group will reach around 4,767 female workers, 340 pregnant and lactating women, and at least 340 infants and young children over a three year timeframe. The initiative has been funded through the generous support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

"We have a target of creating an enabling environment for at least 7000 working females who are caregivers, lactating or pregnant. Initially we're beginning the project with DBL. We are expecting results in the next 2-3 years," says Zahidul Hassan, Fundraising and Partnerships Officer, Communications Advocacy and Partnership, UNICEF Bangladesh.

UNICEF and its partners will provide technical assistance, including improving awareness of all actors; capacity strengthening of female welfare officers and health service providers (doctors and nurses) on breastfeeding and breastfeeding support as well as counselling on infant and young child feeding for workers. While BRAC is partnering with this project for various activities like practical demonstration, counselling and working directly with the female workers, ICDDR, B is in charge of the research work behind the project.

According to the Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey 2014, only one in two infants aged 0-6 months in Bangladesh is exclusively breastfed, while The World Health Organisation recommends that all infants less than six months should be exclusively breastfed. Evidently, the situation here in Bangladesh is quite dire and needs immediate attention.



AIMING FOR PROSPERITY

NAZIBA BASHER

PHOTO: HABIBUL HAQUE



"By providing a practical example of how the private sector can take a rights-based, child-focused approach for their workers this project will demonstrate that children's and workers' rights and well-being of all children can be effectively integrated and applied across business operations and create a win-win situation for all," says M A Quader, Deputy Managing Director, DBL.

The win-win situation for all means having every party of the project satisfied. And they will do so by creating an enabling environment for the workers, which in turn will give the employer happy and productive employees, while the project coordinators, in turn, are making sure that healthy, and well-fed children are growing in the society, which in turn will help the over all well-being of the country. "The vision is bigger than you think. We are not only focused on the here and now of the situation. We're focusing on the future, and this initiative will definitely help with that," elaborates Zahidul Hassan.

"Children are central to society and development. They are the future consumers, employees and business leaders. Gains achieved by investments in children far exceed those in other areas," said Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF representative. "Providing this support is the right thing to do for both babies and mothers. Not only does breastfeeding prevent infant death, childhood illness and non-communicable diseases, it also supports brain development and protects maternal health. It makes good economic sense. Women who have adequate maternity benefits value their employers, leading to increased productivity, job satisfaction and loyalty."

The initiation of this project proves the desperate need of reformation in the system of offices and workplaces with women employees. Zahidul Hassan stresses on how this initiative should reach far and wide. "The private sector should now start moving forward too. They think creating this enabling environment for women will be a financial burden for the company. But it's high time they see the positive effects and use as many resources as they can to create this environment. It will not only help them sustain their business through satisfied employees, but will also contribute to a brighter future for Bangladesh."

By increasing the practice of breastfeeding through promoting it in workplaces, we can all come together to decrease infant deaths and malnutrition and help make Bangladesh the prosperous country it was meant to be.

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