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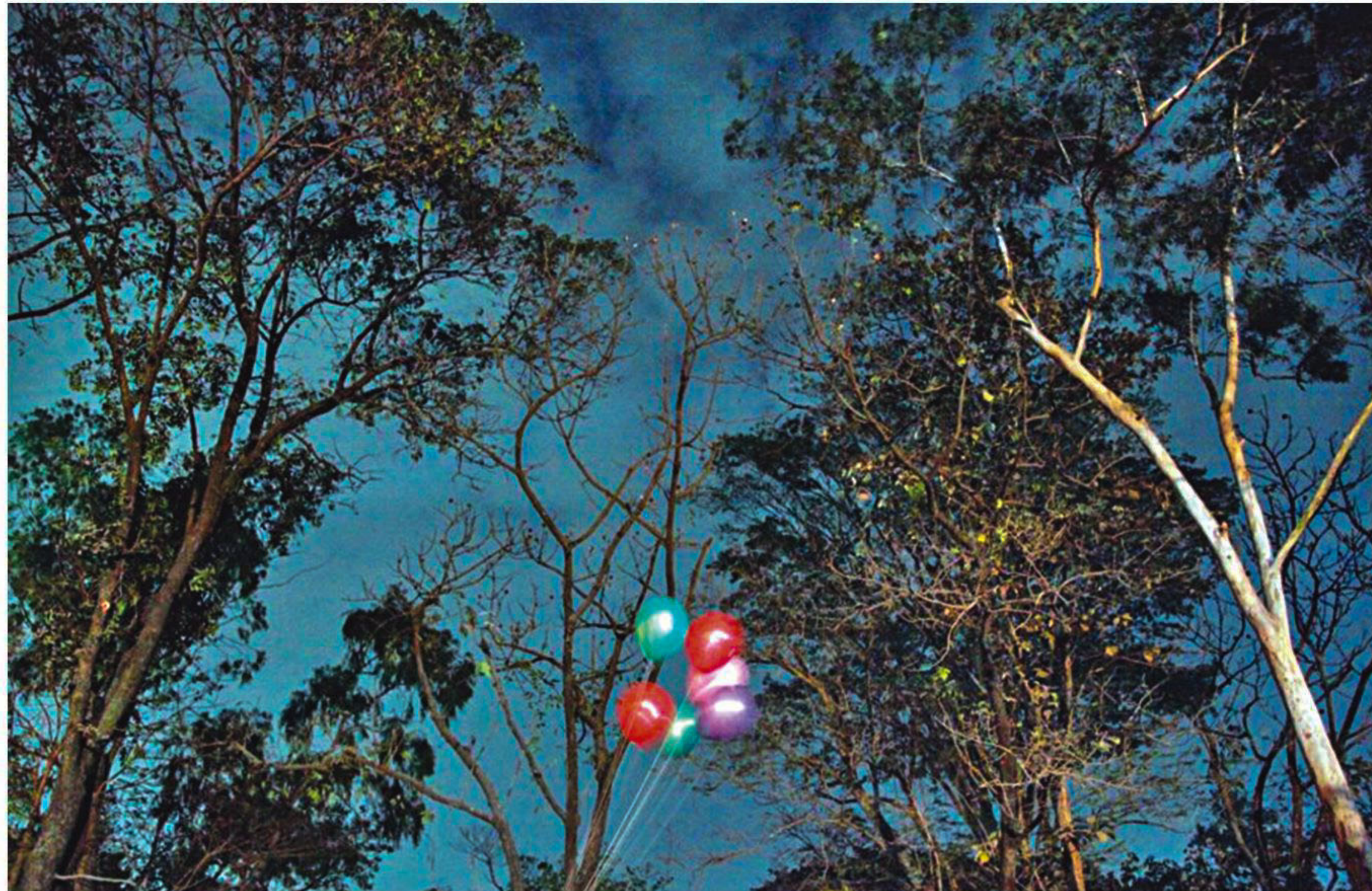


PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

**"Give freedom to colours and then you shall meet the rainbow everywhere!" — Mehmet Murat ildan, Contemporary Turkish playwright and novelist**

**SNAPSHOT**

# THE BIRTH OF A PANOPTICON STATE

AHMAD IBRAHIM

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

**OPINION**

When the Awami League came to power in 2008, it was amidst the backdrop of a real possibility of military rule entrenching once more a democracy that had barely had two decades of shelf-life. They brought with them a futuristic fervour that the nation didn't yet know it wanted. Talks of a 'Digital Bangladesh' superseded what were arguably more pressing matters at the time, such as restoring any semblance of a functioning democracy, stopping the slow but steady tide of land being dispossessed from the poor and the minorities and the centuries unchecked violence perpetrated on women despite the presence of female heads-of-state for the past twenty years.

At the same time, it is not unreasonable to think that a 'digital' country (whatever that may mean) may be able to succinctly channel its technology in order to solve those very problems. But as it turned out, the futuristic rhetoric manifested itself

mostly through the availability of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter or, in the darker corners, Tumblr. But here, as in most cases, the true potential of the Bangladeshi citizen came to the forefront. Where the state may have come up short in its promises, the average Bangladeshi more than made up for it with their penchant to learn and navigate around the technological terrain for their self-interest. We now have a thriving online community that is no longer Dhaka-centric; we have thousands of small and large businesses operating on social media sites and we are even not averse to the odd revolution, as characterised by the role social media played in mobilising students to protest the implementation of tax on private universities.

So we've come to a point where a 'Digital Bangladesh' is on the horizon, but only because of the endeavours of the citizenry. Is this the kind of effervescent culture that the ruling party was hinting at when they came to power? It's prudent to catalogue, at this point, a few salient incidents that might sway one's opinion, whatever that may be. First on the list must be the very commendable job that Sajeeb Wazed has done in order to uphold net neutrality, which is vital in a growing economy such as ours. Second, would be the equally commendable job that Tarana Halim is doing in introducing faster internet and improved service. Now, let's look at some of the less than pleasant incidents that have taken place—surveillance over social media has grown to the point that a Jahangir Nagar University teacher was jailed for three years for a status update and a very public Facebook page owner remanded; the month long ban over the more popular forms of social media such as Facebook, for which the official reason was to prevent attacks in the aftermath of the war crimes verdicts.

Government control over the internet in developing countries is nothing new. Brazil blocked Whatsapp for two days in the past month and before that there was a long-standing ban on Facebook in Thailand under the military-backed regime. Facebook remains banned in China. The narrative takes on a different outlook once we address all the facts together—yes, the state is very much interested in encouraging the growth of a digital Bangladesh, but it is a certain kind of digitisation that is being pursued; one that aims to allow a particular discourse over others through the very real consequences of surveillance. Whether this strategy remains feasible in the long-term is for another day; but for right now, someone, somewhere, is probably watching.

*Note: The Panopticon refers to an institutional building designed by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century. The concept of the design allows inmates of an institution to be observed by a watchman without the inmates being able to tell whether they are being watched or not.*

*The writer is a student of Knox University, Chicago, USA.*



## MAILBOX

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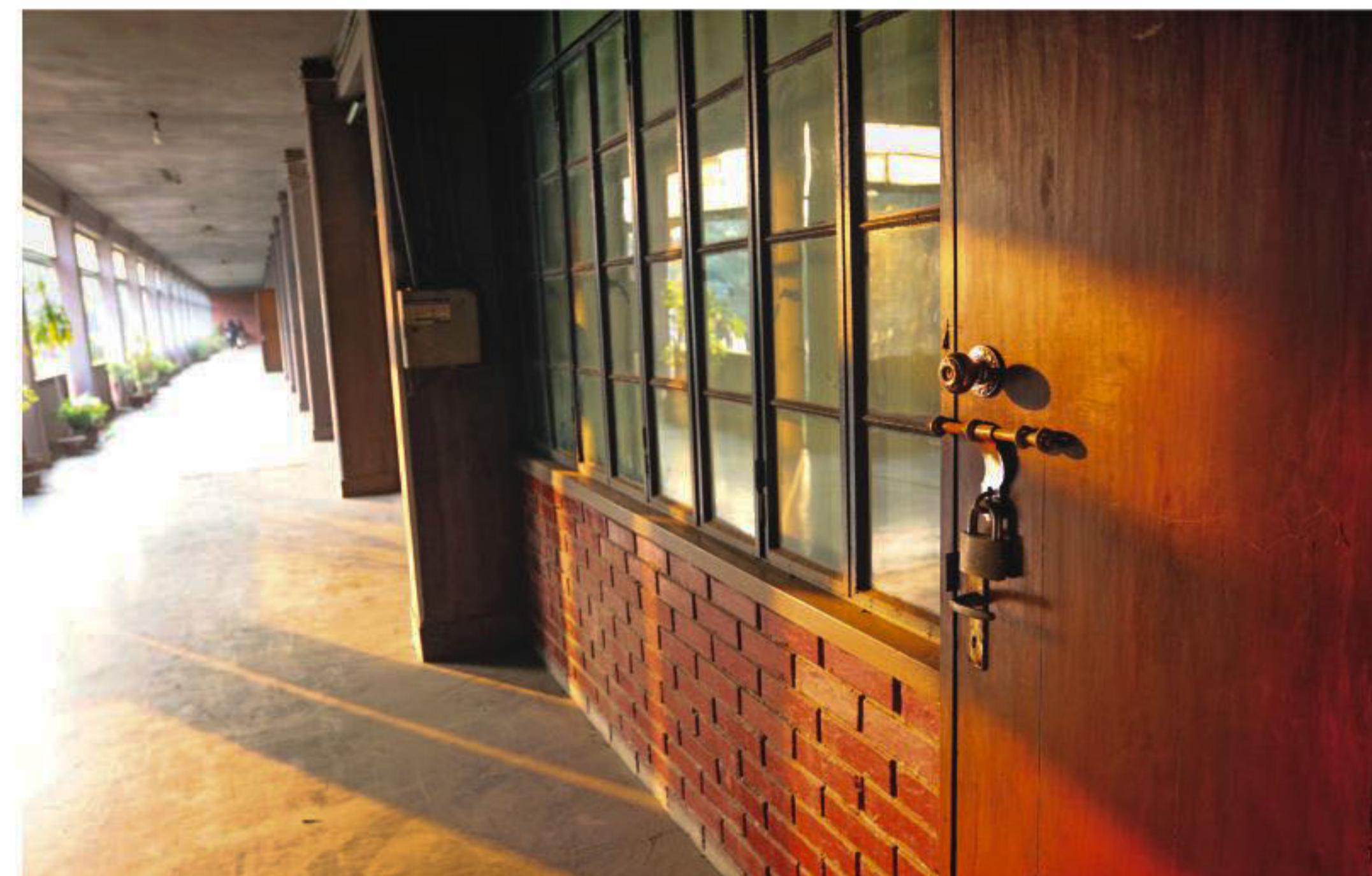


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

### A Change-maker's Journey

As I was reading the write-up on the Police officer that appeared in the *Star Weekend* of December 18, 2015, word by word, sentence by sentence; I couldn't believe the facts stated as I thought it was some pampering by someone known to him. I say this because as a whole our police force, in all respect, has earned a very bad name because of its rough dealing with the public and no sense of human respect and responsibility; although the force is being maintained by the citizens' taxes. They have been well known for their mischief, corruption and partisan actions. A sudden star shines with glimmer of hope for the people of Gazipur belt, a worth hearing about and of course praising. May this officer continue his noble mission further in helping the general mass for which he opted for the job of policing.

Mashudul Haque  
Dhaka

### The Sad Life of a Turtle

The work that the young volunteer, Arzu and his organisation Save Our Sea have been doing is really inspirational. We, the people of Bangladesh, unintentionally and even knowingly endanger our biodiversity. But this is not the only responsibility of the Government or other organisations to save the world's significant but fragile ecosystem. It is a responsibility shared by all of us. We and our future generation will have to live in this world. They deserve a better living place from us. Each of our destructive activity has been acting as a threat for the world's fragile ecosystem but at the same time our conscious initiative no matter how small it is can protect it. Like Arzu and his teammates, we should realise the importance of protecting the endangered species around for our own survival. I would like to thank the *Star Weekend*, for publishing an article (published on January 8, 2016) about this great initiative. I am really inspired.

Jayed Sheikh  
Department of Management  
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PHOTO: COURTESY

### She Aims, She Shoots, She Scores

Bangladesh under-14 football team deserves a great accolade as they won the AFC U-14 Girls' Regional Championship. With the victory, the 18 members' squad proved their ability and brought the nation a colossal gift in the month of victory. Moreover, they broke the conventional idea that girls are not as good as boys in the sports front. Special credit goes out to the coach and other people concerned as they made the team prepared accordingly to win against the strong opponent Nepal. As I read the quotes of the players (published in the *Star Weekend* on January 1, 2016), I found their sharp patriotism for the country and strong determination to do something prestigious for themselves. To encourage these least privileged young pioneers, the profit making companies can provide these players with necessary facilities as a part of their corporate social responsibility. We hope that these tenacious and promising girls will bring another glory for the nation in the upcoming south Asian Women's football league.

Samiul Raijul  
North South University, Dhaka

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

# 4

WINNING IN A ROW.

AMAZED, BUT NOT SURPRISED!

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