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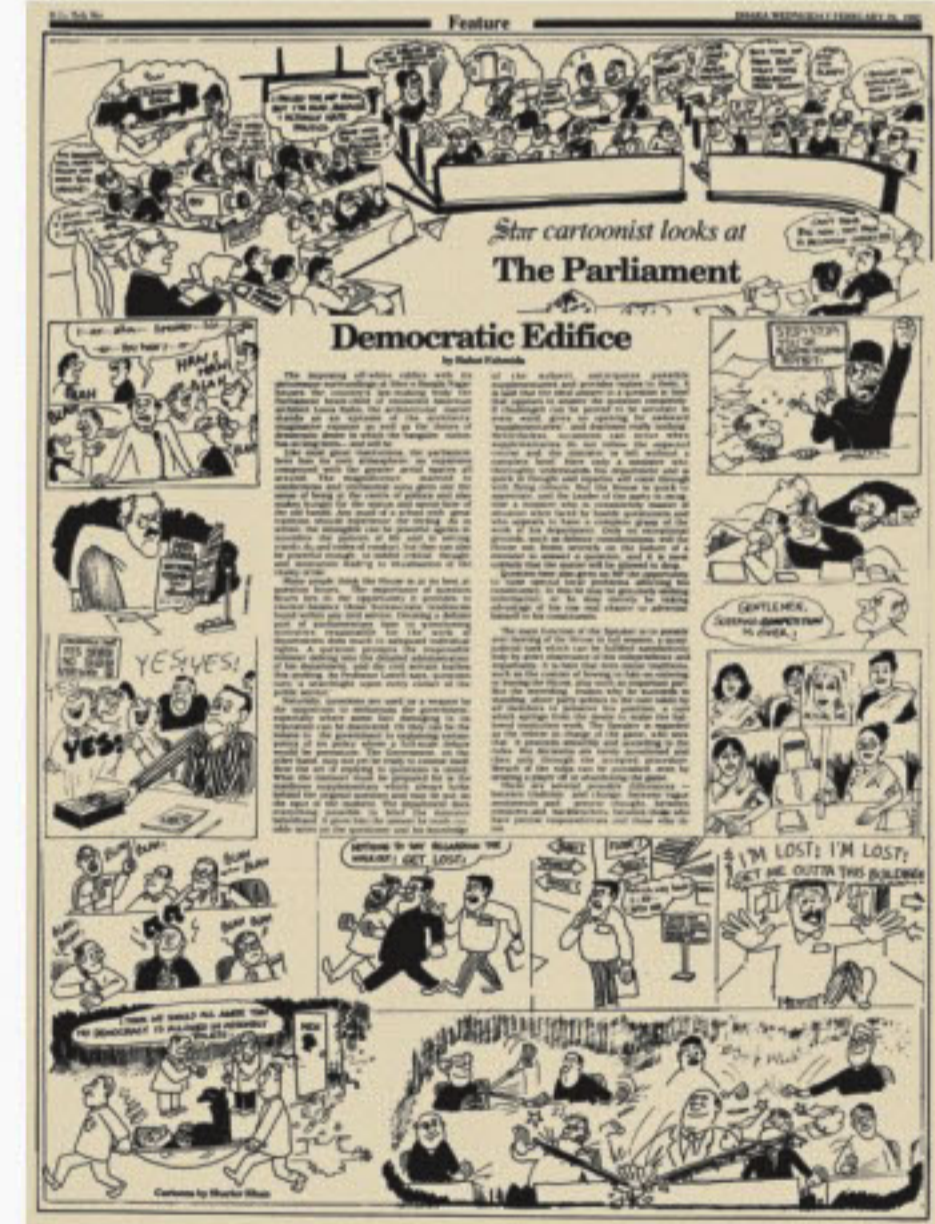
PHOTO: AFTAB UZZAMAN

“Nature always wears the colour of the spirit.”  
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

**SNAPSHOT**

**MAILBOX**

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**Our Backs are up against the Wall**

The well documented write-up on the above title that appeared in the *Star Weekend* on January 29, 2016 of the spotlight page was full of sad realities that told us about our police's sporadic crimes and activities that bear discouraging messages for our progenies; who in turn would take up the steering of this impoverished country. What lessons and messages the predecessors are leaving behind for would be successors? A nation just cannot run like that on individuals' whims.

I believe it is just a few of the dreadful incidents of police crimes that happened to get published in the media. While there might be many more of such crimes and dreadful incidents being carried out by the police that don't see the light of media or remain suppressed. Thanks to the *Star Weekend* Team for revealing these incidents.

Mashudul Haque  
Central Road, Dhaka

**The Never-ending Ordeal**

Mogbazar-malibagh flyover construction work has been running at snail's pace resulting mountains of woes for city commuters. The earlier deadlines have elapsed but no progress has so far been observed. However, in the meantime cost and time of the projects has been increased several times without any considerable progress. Massive piles of constructions materials and this half built gigantic structure in the middle of the road cause incessant traffic jam in the adjacent areas. The most sufferers are the office bound people and students who have to spend a large part of the day sitting idly in the gridlock. There may be some real grounds for the construction delay but why it happened and after so many irregularities why our government further extended the project is not quite clear. Government should explain and clarify these things to people. It is our appeal to the concerned authority to take initiative to speed up the flyover construction and give us relief from excruciating traffic gridlock.

Md Zonaed Emran  
Banasree, Dhaka



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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

**Once Upon a Time in Dhaka**

The article titled 'Once upon a time in Dacca' (published on January 22, 2016) was an exquisite piece depicting the custom of arranged marriage of Muslims in the old Dhaka. While reading the article, I felt like I went back to my young age at the village where I enjoyed such marriage ceremony several times. The writer craftily depicted the whole marriage procedures and customs. These customs are still being followed in the rural areas of Bangladesh and in some areas of old Dhaka city. In fact, wedding in our country takes several days and is quite elaborate. It takes typically three days from engagement to post wedding rituals. Thanks to the writer as well as editor of the *Star Weekend* for providing us with such a good article which reflected the heritage of our marriage systems and culture in such a charming way.

Md Sayedur Rahman  
Banani, Dhaka

**YOUTH**

Where in Dhaka do you ever see girls from English medium schools casually socialise with boys from Madrassas as equals? I was suddenly struck by the question as I walked into the first day of leadership training at the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC). In the classroom, a group of girls from Viqarunnisa were laughing together, some boys in skullcaps had grouped in one part of the class, and I automatically sat with some girls who looked familiar to me. This unusual mixture of English medium, Bangla medium, and Madrassa students were all taking part in BYLC's eleventh Building Bridges through Leadership Training (BBLT) program. Students from different backgrounds had been brought together with the intention of inspiring leadership, and creating an inclusive society.



**BREAKING STEREOTYPES**

**NOSHIN NOORJAHAN**

PHOTO: COURTESY

In my 14 years of studying at an English medium school, I rarely interacted with students from Bangla medium schools or Madrassas, and never thought about what we might have in common. In that absence, I made assumptions based on existing stereotypes. That's how it works here right? Students are not identified by their age group, or particular interests, but are classified according to the language and curriculum followed by their institution. Everything about this is disturbing. The nation's youth is separated into distinct clusters and kept from breaking out of those bubbles to discover their common interests and shared purposes. For all those 14 years, I am embarrassed to confess, I never bothered to challenge this socially constructed division in our country.

My preconceived notions about people from different backgrounds were challenged when I was put in a classroom with them. I was able to connect with individuals who I always presumed to be fundamentally different from me. Being in the same classroom together and experiencing training on problem solving and effective communication, corrected my prejudices, and enabled me to think about differences in a completely new way.



I had previously assumed that the Bangla medium students were know-it-alls who think English medium students don't care about our country and traditions. I took it for granted that our worlds wouldn't mix and I wouldn't get along with any of them. But I was very wrong. Conversations with Shamanta Apu from Dhaka University that initially started with awkward small talk, eased into common complaints about traffic, or a shared interest in celebrity gossip. There was Sadman, a Taekwondo champ, who taught us tricks and stressed on the need for self-defense and fitness, especially for girls. I made a sister in Oishee apu, who consoled me when I got stressed, and I cheered her up when she felt disheartened.

As for the Madrassa students, I believed quite firmly that their opinions and worldviews were only based on their religious education. Once again, I was proven wrong. Khaled Saifullah, our instructor, who studied in a

Madrassa, and is now studying International Human Rights Law at Oxford, conducted the class with an expert balance of Bangla and English, and impressed us with his wit and knowledge. Imran bhaiya, another Madrassa graduate, has gone on to participate at prestigious international conferences and exchange programs. From Tamim bhaiya, who sported a stylish haircut and trendy clothes, I learned a lot about cricket. Contrary to popular belief, Madrassa students are mischievous and funny, with a range of interests, just like any other young person.

It wasn't always easy though. There were several tense moments as we encountered each other's inherent differences. There was one particularly heated debate in my group during the 'Leadership in Action' component, where we had to design and implement community service initiatives. My idea to include English lessons in our education project was disregarded because it was presumed that I didn't understand the dynamics in a slum. Even if it was uncomfortable, confronting these conflicts allowed us to gain a newfound respect for each other's diverse strengths and expertise. Eventually, all 42 students enjoyed exchanging new ideas, and stopped being defensive about receiving constructive criticism.

I am a whole new person after BBLT because my understanding of the world has been enriched through interacting with exceptional individuals from different sections of society. I have made lifelong friends and am less anxious about stepping outside my comfort zone. By breaking stereotypes and building bridges, I have discovered the immense potential of the youth of Bangladesh, and am inspired to take on the challenges of leadership because I have an army of changemakers by my side.

The writer is a graduate of the eleventh Building Bridges through Leadership Training program at BYLC, and is currently studying Pharmacy at North South University.

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