

OPINION |

The results from the Nevada caucus are in and it is now turning out to be a historic race for the Presidential nominee for both the Democrats and the Republicans in the United States of America. Seldom a place to throw many surprises, the race to be the nominee is turning out to be something out of a terrible nightmare for some people. Bernie Sanders is now tied at 51 delegates with the party favourite Hillary Clinton, a nightmare for those who were sure of perpetuating the Clinton dynasty at the White House. For a long time before heavy campaigning really got under way, a Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton battle seemed a sure thing for many in the political quarter. However, two mavericks have completely shaken up the landscape—the outspoken and follicle-y challenged Bernie Sanders and the cartoonish and equally follicle-y challenged Donald Trump.



Democratic presidential candidate, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., speaks during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Now, it would be reasonable to question why exactly someone in

SHOULD THE WORLD #FeelTheBern?

AHMAD IBRAHIM

PHOTO: AFP

Bangladesh should be remotely interested in the going-on in the Land of the Free. For one, it's fun. It's a nice time to point and laugh at those who would profess a pro-American philosophy or would venture forth an opinion that places our white benefactors on a higher pedestal. Half of these people are rooting for Donald Trump, who is everyone's worst nightmare and whose policies themselves have the complexity of a teaspoon. With a nuanced rhetoric including sophisticated lines such as 'Total liar', 'We have to build a wall', and 'China China China', Donald Trump represents the racist and imperialistic subconscious of the white underbelly of the United States. The good, white people of America have finally grown tired of pretending to espouse liberal rhetoric and tip-toeing around

polite speech. In some ways, Donald Trump represents the salt of America's earth- forever white and built upon a history of exploitation. That those on the conservative side have elected him to be their spirit animal is appropriate. It should be noted, however, that Hillary Clinton is the face of the pretense that so many have dropped in support of Trump. She is the embodiment of the benevolent mask of American politics bereft of a conscience. Her place in the good books of the establishment and Wall Street are only different from Donald Trump in so far as he is truthful about what he really thinks.

Secondly, entertainment aside, the race holds real world implications for us that will reverberate through our socio-political fabric. The less said about a Trump win, the better. If Hillary wins, our political class will once again be nervously looking over their shoulder because of the favourable Hillary-Yunus ties. Hillary has changed her stance on a Trans-Pacific Trade Partnership and is now

opposed to it. However, if she does change colours yet again, she will stand to not only significantly stunt the Bangladeshi economy, she will also destroy the working class populations of several other countries, including her own.

Is Bernie Sanders, then, the best of the bunch? Definitely, in terms of what the American people really need right now. Not so much, in terms of the rest of the world. An America under Sanders will no doubt be a better place for its inhabitants—inequality might decrease, healthcare might just become affordable and 18 year olds might just not be asked to take on a quarter million dollar debtload just to get a degree. But is this America also going to be one that repents for the number of bodies it has dropped all over the world, for the complete and utter destabilization of the Middle East and for continuing to support the world's most blatant instance of apartheid today (Hint: Israel)? The answer to that is no.

Bernie Sanders has remained tight-lipped on his stance on Israel while the bombs keep dropping in Gaza. He has also remained problematically ambiguous on foreign policy, although he must be commended for denouncing that murderer Henry Kissinger. But will there really be a positive effect for countries like ourselves in the Third World? Our labour will possibly continue to be exploited, and our resources taken away from us as an America that earns more proportionally will demand more clothes and more energy. The jury is out on whether or not Sanders really cares about the global political landscape or if he is just a return to American exclusivism, under the rubric of Democratic Socialism (a far from accurate term to describe his politics). Whatever the outcome of a Sanders presidency, it will be a damn sight better than another Clinton in the office. Unless Trump wins. In which case, we should really look into building nuclear bunkers under our homes. ■

NUMBERS |

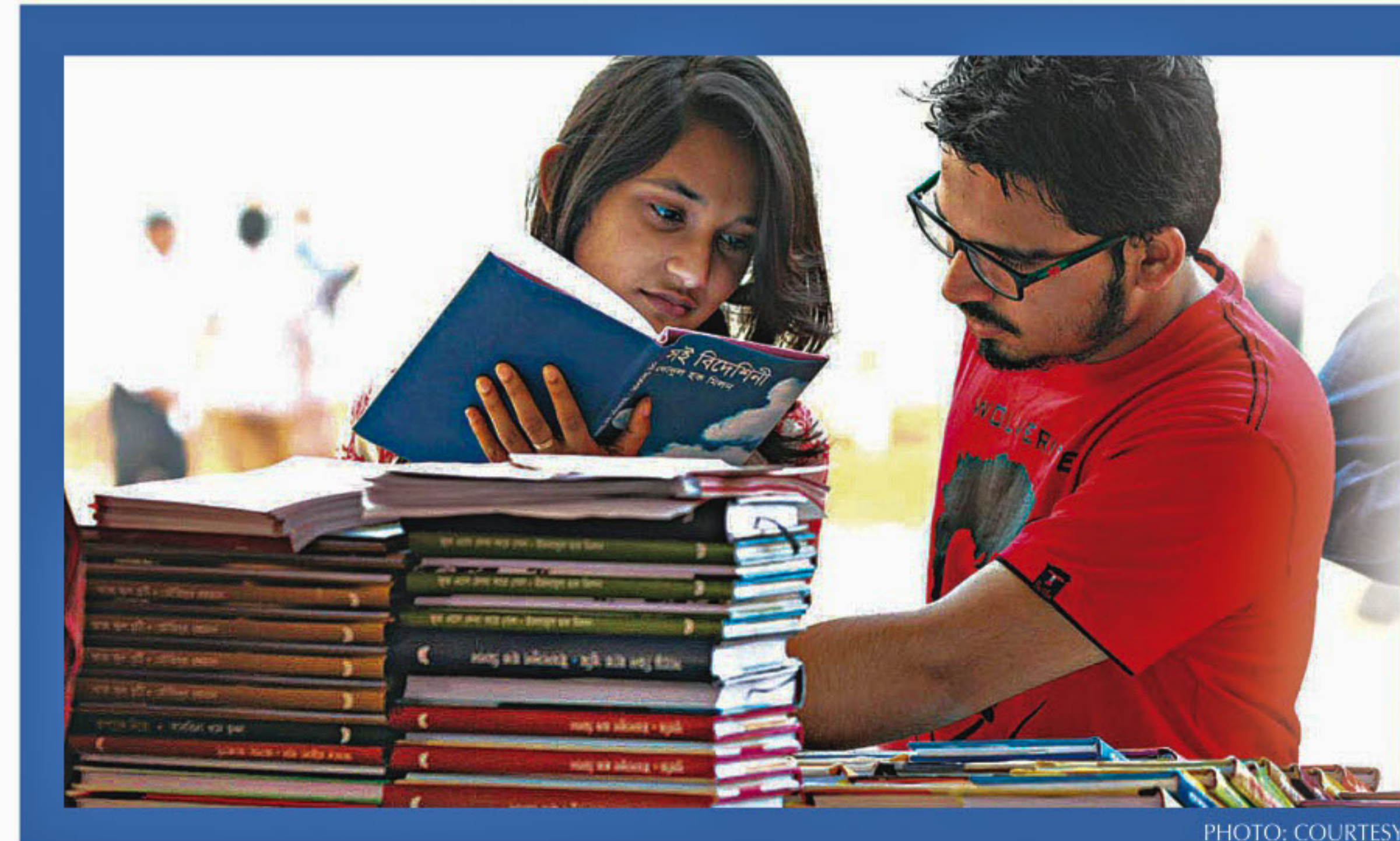


PHOTO: COURTESY

63

3 publishing houses have published books in this year's Ekushe Boi Mela. It is to be the maximum numbers to this date by the Bangla Academy survey. A lot of new publishing houses have emerged in the fair as well.

#RealTalk



OSAMA RAHMAN

PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR PEN IS

come from donors. The question is, why don't the donors ever say anything? And when the donors do express a problem, what can you possibly do?

One of the banes of Bangladesh's development is the sheer disregard with which government officials go about conducting their business. One of the most recent examples of this is the Mouchak-Malibagh flyover, a project of the Local Government Engineering Department. Apparently, using the age old model of copy-pasting other people's ideas without analysis, the LGED made the whole flyover for left-hand driven cars, something that doesn't exist in Bangladesh. While one can claim they did this so as to ensure the least amount of cars use the flyovers and hence they can then pretend that they solved the traffic problem, the reality is the error will cause immeasurable suffering and has resulted in the project cost going up 57.8% from 772 crore BDT to 1219 crore BDT. Of this amount, the government is ready to bear 242 crore BDT while the rest will

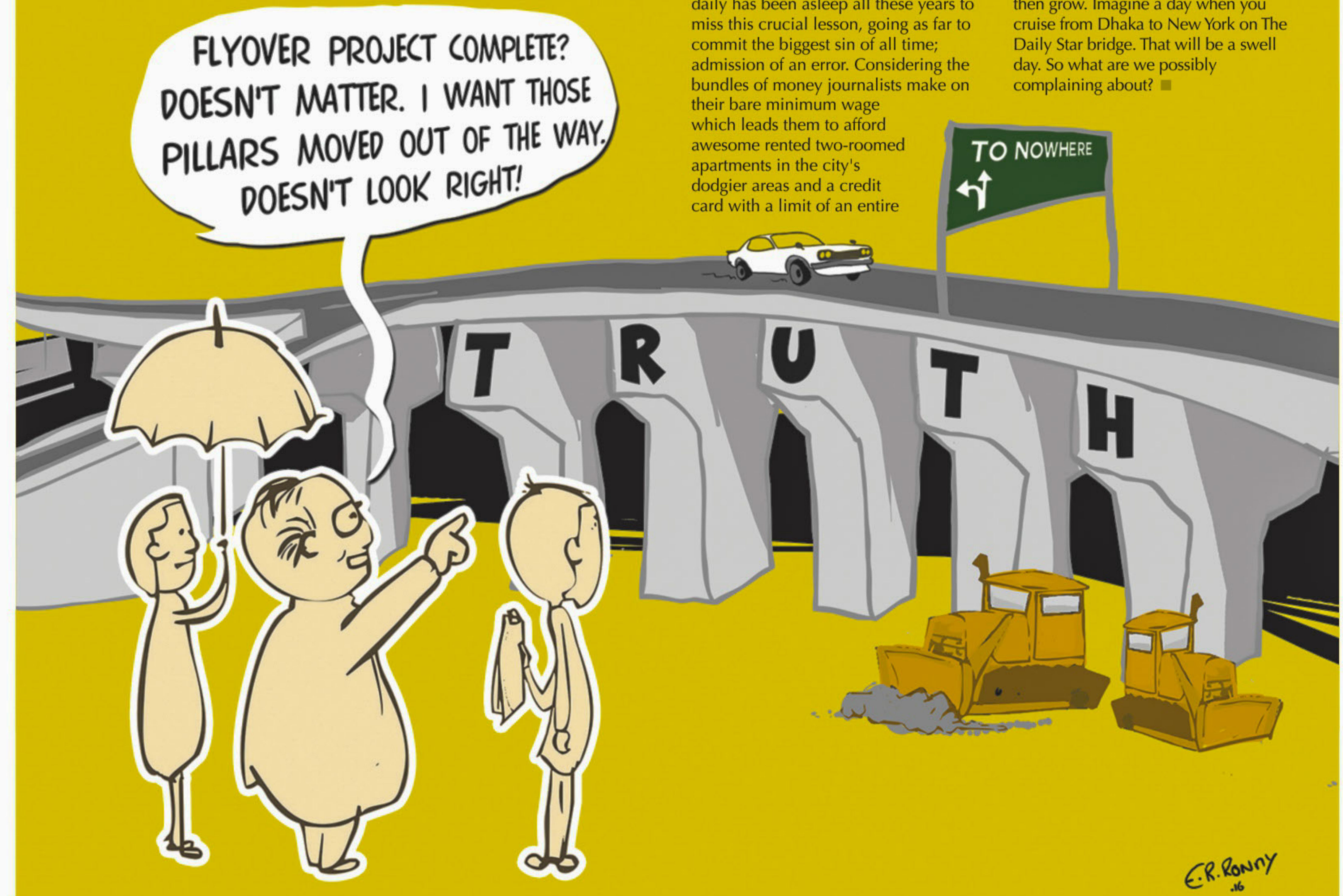
Usually, school-going children, after having stood in the sun for 6 hours to greet some low-ranking, high-browed minister, can be further bullied to stop using their tiffin money for food and instead give it to building some bridge or some road. This is of course a slow process as the stupid kids hardly get enough tiffin money to afford a sandwich at the place our public officials dine let alone build a damn bridge. The next best option is of course to extract money from the people. You may say "duh, taxes", but let's be honest; everyone knows that only 1% of the Bangladeshi population pay taxes. This statement, so often thrown around, though fails to take into consideration the amount of indirect taxes that Bangladeshis pay as consumers or the bank deposits they make, which too are taxed by the government. It can be further highlighted that Pakistan too has figures of 1% of the population paying tax and India is relatively better with

3%. The budget every year also does not take into account the inevitable delays which increase costs in line with inflation. When donors back out due to so many hassles, it is time to recoup some of the money. And when bullying kids don't work, it is time to turn to adults or more aptly an adult who refuses to paper over the dubious cracks the government is hell-bent on littering around. Enter the editor of a newspaper.

A renowned editor has currently come under flak for telling the truth. Everyone and their grandmothers know that editors and journalists as a whole should not be telling the truth. The nature of truth is that they generally tend to go against the party propaganda and hence need not be told. Apart from telling the truth, another vile action is of course admission of guilt. It is almost like this editor has not been paying attention to how the country is being run. Scandal at TSC? Deny it. Shot a kid out of boredom? Go to jail for it but deny it. Building collapses of its own accord? Blame others and completely deny any fault of your own. One then miss this crucial lesson, going as far to commit the biggest sin of all time; admission of an error. Considering the bundles of money journalists make on their bare minimum wage which leads them to afford awesome rented two-roomed apartments in the city's dodgier areas and a credit card with a limit of an entire

garment worker's wage, the obvious way this editor can be brought to book is by paying a hefty fine and by hefty, we mean, enough to pay for all the projects our dedicated officials have left to go over budget. And by that, we mean all of them.

The editor in question has currently been sued for a total of BDT 132,000 crore for his Gandhi-like antics of truth telling. This money can easily be used to cover all of the rising costs associated with both the Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway expansions. Both these projects have seen an increase in costs due to, you guessed it, inexplicable delays. The Dhaka-Chittagong Highway, for example, initially came at a cost of 1655 crore BDT but now stands at 3,800 crore BDT due to a 3 year delay and the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway, after a two year delay, will now cost 1,815 crore from 904 crore BDT. The editor, who we obviously imagine to have more wealth than the entire country, should then be more than happy to pay for not just these highways, but 700 more like them. Imagine how much Bangladesh would then grow. Imagine a day when you cruise from Dhaka to New York on The Daily Star bridge. That will be a swell day. So what are we possibly complaining about? ■



E.R. RONNY