

Muhammad Ali is no more

He was simply the "greatest"

THE man who "floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee" is no more. Muhammad Ali achieved what no other boxer had ever done before -- win the world boxing heavyweight title thrice, the last at the age of 36. His style in the ring belied imagination, a combination of the physical prowess coupled with unorthodox boxing style that melded speed and power which knocked opponents off their feet.

Ali was a champion inside and outside the ring. He had combined sports and politics in way that lent greater dignity to both, and he gave the African-American Muslims a cultural identity, attaining which was both a defiant and brave act. His stance on the civil rights movement, refusal to get drafted during the Vietnam War with the famous lines "I ain't got nothing against them Vietcong", which nearly sent him to jail -- all pointed to a man who was much more than a devastating fighter inside the ring.

His showmanship in the ring and his canny humour won him the hearts of millions, and although he was dogged by illness in later years, he did not lose either. He was a man larger than life and appealed to people of different creeds and faiths through his charm and intelligence.

Millions around the globe will remember him both as a boxer par excellence and a humanist, who in the later years of his life preached spirituality, peace and tolerance.

A great human being has departed this world, and we mourn his passing. In life he was the 'greatest' and in death he continues to be the 'greatest'.

Road Kill

How much is too much?

THE reason behind the head-on collision between a bus and a stone-laden truck on the Dhaka-Bogra highway on Friday is reckless and drowsy driving by both the drivers. It turned out to be fatal killing ten people including the truck driver and injuring twenty. How many lives have to be lost before a genuine attempt is made by the authorities and other stakeholders to curb the number of road crashes that, reportedly, take more than twenty thousand lives on the country's roads annually?

There is no indication that our roads are getting less dangerous. Almost every day the media are awash with reports of people killed in road accidents. While there is no short-term solution to problems such as the poor condition of roads and vehicles and carelessness of pedestrians that contribute to such an astronomical number of deaths, careless and groggy driving can and should be addressed immediately. Drivers of buses and trucks are often dozy simply because their income is based on the number of trips they can make everyday instead of fixed salaries, prompting them to enter an unhealthy and deadly habit of driving as long and as fast as they can.

These statistics, numerically shocking they are, fail to reflect the tragedy related to each life lost. Who is going to take responsibility of their families? Do owners and operators of public transports realise that letting sleep-deprived and untrained drivers drive is nothing but a recipe for murder?

Unless and until stringent actions are taken against the errant drivers, and owners and operators held to account, precious lives will continue to be lost on the roads.

COMMENTS

"Obama pays tribute to Hiroshima victims"

(May 30, 2016)

Toufiqur Rahman

It is ironical that they are paying tribute to the dead after dropping the A-bomb on Hiroshima.

Prithvi Biswas

And he didn't even apologise for the bombing. Disgusting!

MUHAMMAD ALI (1942-2016)

The Greatest, one and only

SYED ASHFAQUL HAQUE

WRITERS around the world fiddled with many words over half a century to define the aura that Muhammad Ali exuded. But eventually they all had to settle for The Greatest, the title with which Ali famously introduced himself after knocking out a fearsome Sonny Liston to become the world heavyweight champion some 52 years ago.

With his rival lying literally lifeless in the ring, the 22-year-old went on to proclaim in front of a stunned Miami crowd: "I am the greatest! I am the greatest! I'm the king of the world." True to his words, Ali transformed himself into a larger-than-life character, who made us laugh, awed us, inspired us and motivated us. Till his death yesterday, the king of the world spent a lifetime living up to the billing. But the legacy of the silver-tongued boxer and civil rights champion will never be forgotten.

The three times world heavyweight champion was a fighter from beginning to end. As a boxer he had it all in him -- he was fast, strong and precise. He used to talk and box, a tactic that the world had never experienced before. He goaded his rivals into attacking him, then leaned back into the ropes in a defensive stance and waited for opponents to tire. "I'm going to float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. His hands can't hit what his eyes can't see." The taunting invariably worked in his favour in many of his bouts. His opponents were routinely puzzled as their forays of punches and jabs missed the dancing butterfly in the ring. And finally when the moment came, the defensive boxer quickly went for the kill with a flurry of attack punches. Out of 61 fights, Ali lost only 5; and 37 of the 56 wins came through knockouts. This typical Ali tactic has been copied by many other champions since.

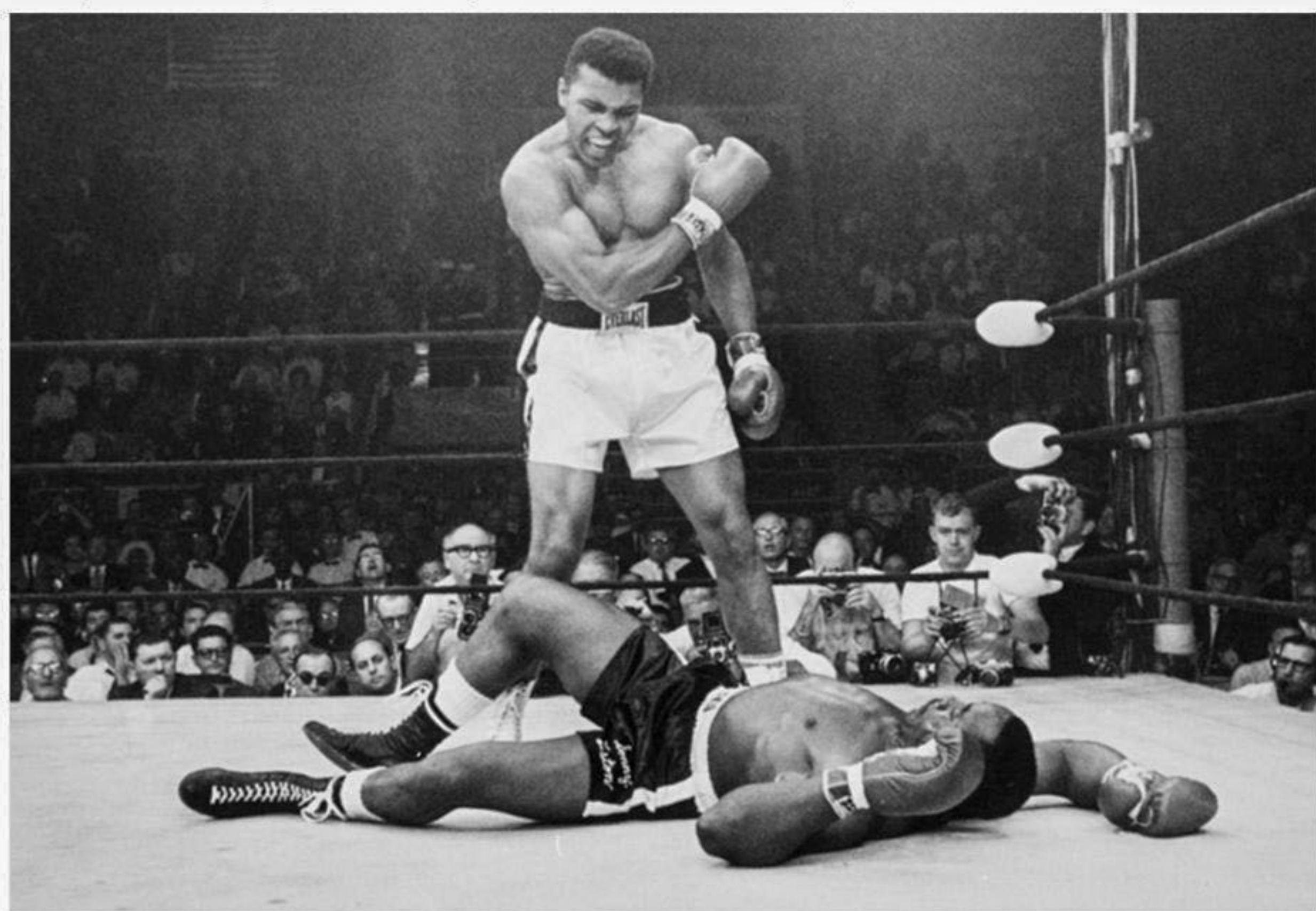
His fights against other men became sights to behold, but he embodied much greater battles that made him the greatest sports personality of the 20th century. Ali was a pariah and an anti-establishment showman who stood for racial and religious equality and for social causes even more than a fight in the ring. He never hesitated to give up virtually everything -- his career, his title, most of his income -- to stand up for what he believed in. He rooted firmly against any injustice he encountered to become the face, the voice, the very heart of the oppressed. And that extraordinary human quality made him The Greatest.

Born Cassius Marcellus Clay in 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky, to middle-class parents, Ali began boxing when he was only 12. Ali became a light heavyweight champion in the 1960 Olympics in Rome, but he, reportedly, threw the gold medal into a river when he was refused services at a soda fountain counter because of his race.

A year before he won the heavyweight title in 1964, Ali converted to Islam and got rid of his slave name Cassius Clay. The next year, the young heavyweight champion refused to serve in the Vietnam War after

being drafted to the American army. At an army recruiting station, he stood stone-faced and refused to step forward when his name was called. The consequence was fast and furious. He was stripped of his boxing title, convicted of draft evasion and sentenced to five years in prison. But he remained unmoved. Out on bail, he started to wage another fight, speaking against war.

"My conscience won't let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, some poor, hungry people in the mud, for big powerful America, and shoot them for what?" Ali said then. "They never called me nigger. They never lynched me. They didn't put no dogs on me."



THE GREATEST BORN: Muhammad Ali stands over fallen heavyweight champion Sonny Liston to proclaim "I'm the greatest" after knocking out his challenger in 1965.

PHOTO: NEIL LEIFER/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED/AP

"My enemy is the white people, not Vietcons or Chinese or Japanese," Ali told one white student who challenged his draft avoidance. "You my opposer when I want freedom. You my opposer when I want justice. You my opposer when I want equality. You won't even stand up for me in America for my religious beliefs and you want me to go somewhere and fight but you won't even stand up for me here at home."

His relentless speeches shaped America's public perception of war. Still, it took four years for Ali to get acquitted by the American Supreme Court in 1971. He was allowed to get back into the ring, where he won

some epic battles in the history of boxing that included Ali-Joe Frazier trilogy.

Ali bade farewell to boxing in 1980 but continued to fight for the rights of people across the globe. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease 34 years ago. His health gradually declined but his commitment to what he believed in remained undaunted. He devoted himself to humanitarian causes, travelling to Lebanon in 1985 and Iraq in 1990 to seek the release of American hostages. His arm was shaking when he lit the Olympic flame in Atlanta in 1996, but that too did not stop him from upholding the spirit of the Games.

Even a few months ago, when he was in a very critical state, Ali could not help but express his concern over the pledge of America's highly controversial presidential hopeful Donald Trump to ban Muslims from entering the United States.

"We as Muslims have to stand up to those who use Islam to advance their own personal agenda," he said.

That's precisely why Muhammad Ali is more than great. The Greatest he was.

The writer is Deputy Executive Editor, The Daily Star.

DEFIANCE OF LAW AND THE STATE of impunity in Bangladesh

STRANGER THAN FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

KARL Marx, among other critics of imperialism, had some kind words for British colonial rule in India, especially in regards to the prevalent rule of law in the colony. The civil and criminal laws, as evolved in Bangladesh -- as in all the former British colonies, worldwide -- are based on the British Common Law. However, barring a handful of former British colonies, there have been endemic violations of the law in Africa and Asia, including extra-judicial killings, and impunity from arrests and prosecutions of certain privileged individuals.

Bangladesh provides unheard of impunity to "well-connected" people, mostly politicians, businessmen, civil and military officers, and their henchmen. As arbitrary power leads to undue privileges, so members of the ruling elite, bureaucracy and law-enforcers frequently break the law by taking advantage of the ordinary people's compliance to feudal, colonial and pre-modern traditions. The British -- who introduced the Common Law and nurtured the rule of law in the subcontinent -- conceded certain (unwritten) privileges and extra-judicial power to high civil and military officers, and members of the landed gentry. However, the British did not allow extortions, torture, and public humiliation of people, at least not in the last two decades of the Raj.

In the backdrop of frequent violations of law -- including the grant of impunity to the privileged few -- in Bangladesh, one may be too naive to impute this disorder to British colonial rule. And it's absurd; the law-breakers are not ignorant of the law, colonial or postcolonial, which don't allow vigilantism, extra-judicial killings, and any impunity from arrest and prosecution to the guilty, irrespective of one's power, position, and status in the social hierarchy. It's no exaggeration that British rule -- at least during the last decade of the Raj, 1937-1947 -- ensured much better law and order situation, democracy, freedom of the press, and human rights to the people in this country than what prevail here since independence.

As the Common Law and its derivatives are quite adequate and comprehensive, so are the well-structured criminal and civil law in Bangladesh. There's hardly any inadequacy in the law. The problem lies elsewhere, especially in the highhandedness of the executive and legislature, which stifle the judiciary, and influence the bureaucracy. There's an ongoing tug of war between the legislature and the judiciary. While the former refuses to part with its power of impeaching judges, the latter apprehends the power could be arbitrary, and even worse, politically motivated.

Since the "right credentials and connections" matter most in Bangladesh, certain people enjoy undue benefits from corrupt regimes; they may kill and humiliate people, swindle billions from public and private sectors, with total immunity from arrests and prosecutions. For those who know the art of remaining "well-connected" forever, immunity goes hand in hand with impunity. Loyalty to one particular party or ideology is out of place in Bangladesh. Beneficiaries of ruling parties often change sides with the change of regimes, and join another ruling party, which might have totally different ideologies and programmes.

The predominance of the ruling party, or the Present Government Party (PGP) -- I coined the acronym in the 1970s, which got a wide currency among my colleagues at Dhaka University -- and the proliferation of the PGP Men and PGP Culture are at the roots of the prevalent culture of impunity. Then again, impunity isn't a sign of strength, but of corruption, nepo-

tism, weakness and incompetence of the government. Throughout history, incompetent autocracies failed to ensure the rule of law for the common people. And the rest is history -- they didn't last long. They either imploded due to civil wars and revolutions, or exploded due to foreign invasions.

Of late, we frequently hear from certain members of the ruling elite that development is more important than democracy. As if the so-called development is unimpeded, and not subject to any retardation; and as if nothing can hold back Bangladesh's growth and development despite corruption and violations of human rights! Hence the advocacy for the Mahathir Mohamad model of development! Nothing could be more condescending, complacent, and foolish than preferring development to democracy. Actually, today unimpeded democracy is the epitome of development.

Mahathir Mohamad, Lee Kuan Yew, Park Chung Hee and other authoritarian rulers didn't ensure any immunity and impunity to members of the ruling elite, let alone police and bureaucracy. Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea -- among other autocracies in the recent past -- developed only by ensuring the rule of law or total accountability of the politicians, bureaucracy, police, military, judiciary, businessmen, and professionals. No government in Bangladesh has so far been able to ensure the rule of law, which is a *sine qua non* of growth, progress, and development. In sum, the rule of law is the mother of development.

Shockingly, influential people who were involved in mega scandals, corruption, or violation of human rights in the recent past, never had to face any law enforcer or the court of justice. The share market scam, the capture of Tk. 7 million from a minister's PS's car in the middle of the night, the shooting of a 12-year-old boy by an MP, a MP's alleged role as a drug lord, a former MP's nephew's drunk

driving and killing of a pedestrian in broad daylight, and last but not least, MP Salim Osman's recent public violation of the human rights of a school headmaster at Narayanganj may be mentioned in this regard.

Although the police, journalists, and sections of the population know who the criminals and their associates are, the "well-connected" criminals somehow remain unscathed. Thanks to the hush-hush culture, and the culture of fear of intimidation from above, people tend to feign indifference to the grossest violations of human rights, scandals in the share market, and fraudulent banking and financial transactions. What many people don't realise is that financial corruption leads to political corruption, and political corruption to impunity, and impunity to chaos, and disorder. In short, impunity is corruption, which breeds tribalism and fractured states. And corruption begins at the top. Mao Zedong has aptly said: "A fish rots from the head down".

It would be sheer recklessness to assume that since Bangladeshis have tolerated all the excesses by members of the ruling elites during the last four decades, they would remain compliant and complacent for an indefinite period. Corruption, impunity, and unaccountability never saved any regime in the past. As social media indicates, people want justice, not impunity for a select few. It's time the superordinates read the writings on the wall. It's a sacred obligation to the nation, not a favour to anybody. What Abraham Lincoln has said in this regard is very relevant to Bangladesh today: "You can't fool all the people all the time".

The writer teaches security studies at Austin Peay State University in the US. He is the author of several books, including his latest, *Global Jihad and America: The Hundred-Year War Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan* (Sage, 2014). Email: tajhashmi@gmail.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Place the waste bins properly

Recently the DSCC has installed waste bins in many areas of Dhaka to make the city cleaner. It is indeed a very commendable initiative on the part of the authority and we highly appreciate it. But there is a problem here. Although there are hoods on top of the waste bins, some bins have got

tilted. During the rainy season, there is every chance that rain water could get stored in these bins and become a breeding place for mosquitoes. We request the authority to place the bins properly. **Hasan Mohammad Al-Amin** *Khilgaon, Dhaka*

Severe waterlogging problem

The waterlogging at Thai Plastic Goli in Rampura is causing untold sufferings to the residents of this area. Unplanned development, rapid population growth, encroachment of rivers and ponds and blockage in drainage system are responsible for this waterlogging problem. The

stagnant water is now acting as a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Urgent actions by the city corporation are needed to solve the problem. **Md. Asimuzzaman Joy Ulon**, *Thai Plastic Goli Rampura, Dhaka*

Graves in advance!

It is shocking that some people have been preparing their graves in advance in Pakistan in the face of the ongoing heat wave. Instead of spending money on building graves they should spend money on building water coolers near homes, schools, universities and planting trees. **Maha Shahab** *Bachelors in Economics University of Karachi*