

## When Corruption rules

Who will clean the stable?

CORRUPTION seems to be the order of the day, as revealed by the TIB National Household Survey 2015, with about 70 percent households falling victim to it while accessing basic services such as passport, law enforcement, education, BRTA, land administration, judiciary, health, etc. It is odious that citizens have to cough up cash to avail services that should come free to them.

It is the common man who has been the worst hit. About 75 percent households had to bribe law enforcement agencies while 60 percent had to grease the educational institutions for registration and admission. Meanwhile, the legal system, which is meant to prevent such malfeasance, is not far behind in the corruption index.

The authorities, as usual, are in denial. The home secretary rejected outright the findings on law enforcement agencies while the passport and immigration boss, reportedly, claimed the survey to be outdated. Such outright rejection of hard data amounts to acquiescence to the crime. The authorities should look at the survey as an opportunity to improve the state of things, instead of rebuffing it. Denial will encourage corruption.

The government should start with ending the pervasive culture of impunity. Shakedown in the form of transfer of top officials -- the typical reaction of the government -- do little to curb corrupt practices. If the institutions intended to fight corruption have lost their teeth those should be restored. Countries that have been successful in reducing this menace have done so by adopting a multi-pronged approach including introducing tougher new laws and enforcing them.

## The games we play with murder

What legal precedence are we setting?

TWO recent cases of murder have caught the public eye. First, the murder of Tonu that still remains shrouded in mystery. The case has caused public outcry and three months on we are witness to the murdered girl's family torments. Not only has the case not gone anywhere, rather the poor family is being hounded by quarters unknown. By the looks of it, we may never know why the girl was killed and who knows when the family will get justice for the death of their murdered daughter. Then we have the case of the broad-daylight murder of a police officer's wife; its mystery has deepened with every passing day. Reportedly, the police super has been offered a deal to either retire from the force or face trial for the alleged murder of his wife.

The contrasting treatment of these two cases could not get starker. In Tonu's case, the investigation seems to have reached a blind alley. Her mother's lamentations, that the poor shall always be deprived of justice may well come true in her case too. On the other hand, a police officer is being offered a deal when he should have been treated as per law if there was prima facie evidence of his complicity in the killing of his wife. In both cases, there is an attempt to circumvent and defeat the legal process with the ulterior motive of shielding the perpetrators.

While it may be expeditious to sweep unpalatable truths under the carpet, what we are quietly admitting is that the law may not serve the course of justice but can be used to serve the interest of vested groups.

## COMMENTS

**"Babul's link has not come up yet"**

(June 29, 2016)

Zasad Ibna Anis

We have to find out the mastermind behind this brutal killing. He deserves the harshest punishment.

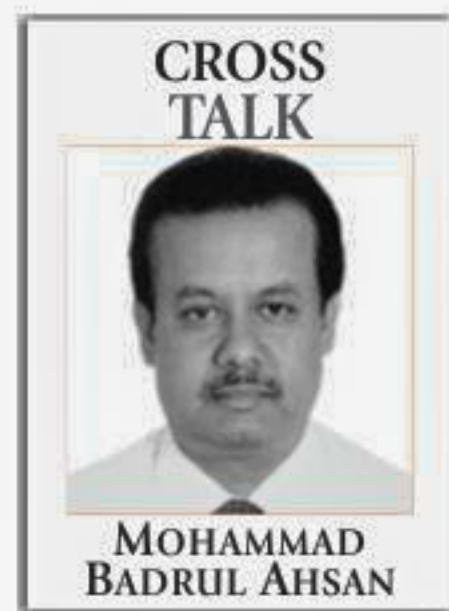
**"Under-construction bridge collapses, 4 workers hurt"**

(June 27, 2016)

Abdul Karim

The contractor and the engineer should be brought to book.

# Fame is fleeting and it's so hollow!



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

FIRST it was the largest Indian state of Rajasthan that ejected Jawaharlal Nehru from its school textbook in the first week of last May, and then the Haryana government scrapped a chapter from a Class V textbook, which profiled political personalities of India. In the last week of last month, Tripura allegedly eliminated Mahatma Gandhi from the Class IX history textbook, although it includes chapters on Adolf Hitler, Karl Marx, the Russian Revolution, the French Revolution, the birth of cricket, and many other subjects. A mood change is sweeping some parts of India, where the erstwhile stalwarts of its history are being dropped like hot potatoes.

And that proves the futility of fame. Last March, the Oxford students marched against the statue of Cecil Rhodes, the 19th century businessman and politician in South Africa, because he symbolised racism and colonialism. Right after the US occupation of Iraq, frenzied crowds fiercely pulled down Saddam Hussein's statues like some house of shame. Granite figures of Muammar Gaddafi rolled on the Libyan streets before and after this one-time Big Daddy was captured and killed.

Larger-than-life statues of Vladimir Lenin were knocked down in former Soviet Union and allied countries after the fall of communism. A giant 62-foot tall statue of Lenin that stood over East Berlin was cut up into more than 100 pieces and buried in a sandpit by a city that wanted to forget its communist past. History is rife with examples when today's heroes became tomorrow's zeroes, consigned to oblivion.

Those who are overly enthusiastic to find a place in history often forget that history isn't enthusiastic to keep them there. Nothing lasts forever, and history, if anything, is a register of that fluidity keeping record of the fluctuating fortunes of rulers, revolutionaries, and reformers. The irony of history is that it eventually

changes those who change it.

If we remember Socrates, Plato and Aristotle today, or if we still draw inspiration from Leo Tolstoy or William Shakespeare, some of the everlasting names that have survived the wash of time, it's because they, like flood-proof houses, stand above rising tides. Fame has its pecking order in terms of who is remembered how long. Some last for days, others for years. Fewer people last for decades, even fewer for centuries. But ultimately, everyone is destined to

be erased. Those who are forgotten already tell others that they should be ready to be all but forgotten. Prophets are remembered longer than reformers, who are remembered longer than politicians. Inventors have more shelf life than businessmen, who these days share the limelight with movie stars and sports icons.

American artist Andy Warhol was a leading figure in the visual art movement known as pop art. He included the words: "In the future, everyone will be world-

famous for 15 minutes," in the programme for a 1968 exhibition of his work at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden. An older version of the same concept in English is the expression "nine days' wonder", which dates at least as far back as the Elizabethan era.

Thus, the lust for fame goes back in time. But how far back does it go? There was a time when warriors were idolised, the conquest of land being the primal desire of mankind after hunting and gathering. Explorers came next, the heroes who discovered uncharted courses and unknown landmasses. Philosophers, reformers, and litterateurs, who influenced minds and imagination, rose to their glories during the Reformation and the Renaissance.

The stage in the late 19th and much of the 20th century was shared between nationalist leaders and inventors. From the second half of the 20th century until now, the scene has been dominated by businessmen and entertainers. Meanwhile, hunger for titillation of senses and instant gratification has replaced thirst for knowledge and depth of wisdom.

Fame is now as instantaneous as the famous. It seems unlikely that in the future it will last as long as it did in the past. And instead of being abiding, the state of being widely recognised is going to become a seasonal phenomenon. Recognised one year, one will be forgotten in the next.

It's said that the world, except for family members, forget a person within the first twelve hours of his or her death. Fame defies that power of instant erasure because the more accomplished ones live longer in the hearts of their followers and admirers. In that sense, fame is like deodorant: Those who sweat more get to wear it longer.

Sun makes wind and wind makes wave. Ordinary lives are ripples that die as quickly as they form, turning into waves only if the wind blows long enough. All waves break when out of depth, so do famous lives. They eventually go out of context, out of mind, and finally, out of sight.

The writer is the Editor of weekly *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com.

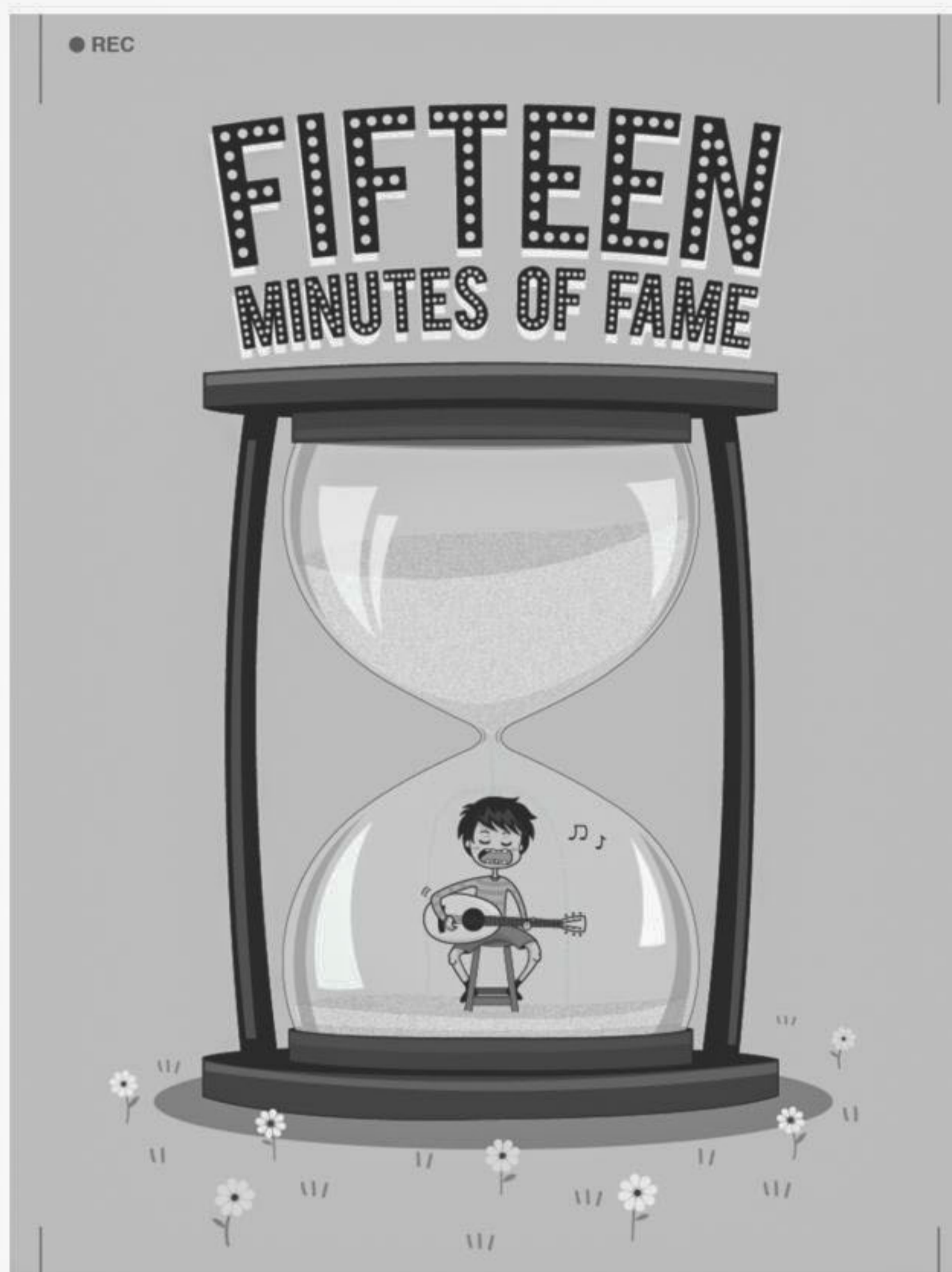
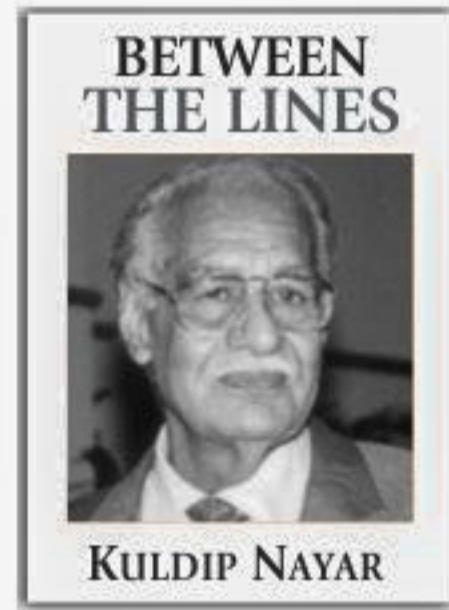


PHOTO: LISA NOONIN/THELOO

## Quality of journalism



BETWEEN THE LINES

KULDEEP NAYYAR

WHEN I was studying in a journalism school abroad, I was told by my professor that a news story should be like a skirt: long enough to cover the subject and short enough to be attractive. Over the years, the story

has assumed the shape of pontification and inevitably padded.

When senior journalists are kicking the bucket, the question that stares at us is what kind of journalism will be there in future. Of course, this is not confined only to India. All countries, whether in the West or the East -- barring the totalitarian regimes -- are asking the same question: which is the *lakshman rekha* (boundary) that journalists should not cross? Or should there be any *lakshman rekha* at all?

Individuals are increasingly posing the question about why journalists pry into their private affairs. Journalists in turn defend themselves on the grounds that if they didn't probe, the skeletons would not come out of the closet. The government has a standard reply: some things cannot be disclosed in public interest. In this way, even big scandals are covered up.

I recall that when I wrote against the supersession of three Supreme Court judges, K.S. Hegde, A.N. Grover and J.M. Shelat, I was criticised by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who argued that journalism did not mean preaching about the "commitment" of judges. She did not elaborate what that "commitment" was. I can understand the judges' commitment to the Constitution, but not to a person, however high their position might be.

What Mrs. Indira Gandhi was demanding from the judges was a commitment to follow her way of thinking. That is the reason she appointed Justice Ray, a junior judge in the Supreme Court, as the Chief Justice, ignoring the seniority of three others. She did not even inform them regarding this development beforehand. They heard the news on All India Radio.

This kind of political manipulation runs

contrary to the transparency that a democratic system cherishes. Indeed the structure of democracy stands on the pillars of both the division and limitation of power. For example, the army does not interfere in the affairs of the government because it is a force under the civil administration. Some countries like Pakistan have gone under because the military, although it has recently gone back to the barracks, is still very active in the political proceedings.

Democracy expects all its wings to function independently, but in a way that allows sovereignty to stay with the people. It is another matter that rulers themselves become authoritarian and behave like the worst of the Mughal emperors. Those who ensure that democracy functions in the interest of the people are the judges who have the power to go into the pronouncements of the legislature. The debate about whether the judiciary or the executive is supreme is an ongoing discussion.

If there is criticism of what judges do, or even the manner in which the legislature functions, that comes from journalists. It is the duty of journalists to do so. If they are afraid of carrying out what is expected from them, it is unfortunate for the system. I have experienced how during the Emergency -- June 26 this year will be its 41st anniversary -- the entire press industry caved in. Initially, there were protests and a large number of journalists -- including editors -- assembled at the Press Club in Delhi to pass a resolution that Press censorship, an integral part of the Emergency, was not acceptable to them. Yet, as days went by, fear gripped them and they became part of the system, even accepting the orders of Mrs. Gandhi's son, Sanjay Gandhi, an extra constitutional authority.

I recall that as a member of the Press Council of India, I went to its then chairman, Justice Iyer, to urge him to summon a meeting of the Press Council, an apex body. I did not know by then that fear had also made him subservient. He told me there was no use of summoning a meeting of the Press Council because there would be no publicity about its proceedings. My argument was that if there were no protests then many years later, when the archives would be opened of this shameful

chapter, there wouldn't be any record about any protest by the Press Council, the journalists. He then reluctantly convened a meeting of the local Press Council members. To my horror, I saw in the white paper issued after the lifting of the Emergency that he had written to then Information Minister, V.C. Shukla, explaining how he (Justice Iyer) was able to stall the efforts by Kuldeep Nayyar to convene a meeting of the Press Council!

The same question about the independence of journalists comes before us again and again in different situations. And I find that increasingly, we, the journalists, are failing in the standards required from us. None of this has been helped by the new digital technology that promotes very short stories or sound bites. In fact, things have deteriorated to such an extent today that news columns can be bought. It is an open secret that several stories are nothing more than paid news. Some leading newspapers feel no shame in selling the space to whoever wants to buy it. For them, it is purely a question of revenue.

How low have we sunk from the heights that we once enjoyed? There was a time when we were able to bring before the public scandals, such as the Mundhra insurance scam during the time of Finance Minister T.T. Krishnachari. Jawaharlal Nehru, then the prime minister, forced him to resign from the cabinet. But even when I subsequently met TTK, he did not seem to realise the harm he had done to the polity.

India is oblivious to the privations of individuals. In contrast, the UK media has in the past been prepared to take up the cudgels on behalf of innocent victims from different walks of life. For example, the Sunday Times, for which I was a stringer, is still remembered with affection and gratitude for the work it did on behalf of those parents whose children were born handicapped because of the Thalidomide drug prescribed to the patient. Public pressure eventually forced the drug manufacturing company to pay out the needed compensation. Can we emulate those examples today when our very integrity as journalists is being questioned, not to speak of the high standards we once followed?

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## Non-payment of DPL players

It is so embarrassing that the players of the recently concluded Dhaka Premier League (DPL) are yet to be paid their dues. Many players have been reported to express their disappointment over this issue. Such callousness by the team owners before Eid is no way acceptable and clearly indicates a lack of professionalism. They must pay the players their dues as soon as possible. Nafis Nihal Ferdous Anandaniketan School, Sylhet

## Brexit

The votes have been counted and the decision is in: The United Kingdom will leave the European Union. Professional economists have spoken with an unprecedented unanimity that this will make the UK substantially poorer. The campaign also grossly inflated the extent of the UK's financial contributions to the EU.

The Brexit vote may well be the death knell for Great Britain as we know it. Scotland's First Minister,

Nicola Sturgeon, has announced that it is 'democratically unacceptable' that Scotland, which voted overwhelmingly to 'remain', will be taken out of the EU. She describes the prospect of another referendum on Scottish independence as 'highly likely'. The pound has fallen to its lowest level since 1985. Forty five percent of the UK's trade was with the EU, and the terms of trade will now have to be re-negotiated. Ted Rudow III, MA CA, USA

## Messi's retirement from international football

Argentine football star Lionel Messi has decided to retire from the international football. One must read an excerpt of his statement after the Argentina-Chile match that says "I have done all I can." This statement really demonstrates his devotion to the game.

No doubt Messi's professional life in football has made a lot of news, mostly positive. He is a great inspiration to all. P. Senthil Saravana Durai Maharashtra, India



PHOTO: AFP

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net