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# Spiralling food prices



It is a common practice in Bangladesh to censure the authorities for everything and demand that the government quit. Now the most talked about issue is the price hike. The prices of the essentials are rising almost every day. The prices of most of the food products have doubled in less than a year. But to overcome this crisis as a nation, we have to think deeply about this matter and analyse the reasons behind the price hike. If we take a look at the international arena we will see that the food prices have ascended globally in a brief period of time. Japan is looking for alternate flour because of the rising wheat price. India, Vietnam and Egypt have put constraints on exporting rice to meet the local demand. The Philippines has announced a ban on converting farmland to other uses in order to cut import of rice. It has to be realised that the food price predicament is global. Cheap local political solutions do not really exist.

The rising prices of food might naturally indicate a global food shortage. But interestingly enough, the scenario is rather different. In consequence of the price hike, the countries have decided to increase production. That is resulting into a global record food production. World paddy production in 2008 could grow by about 2.3 per cent, reaching a new record level of 666 million tons according to the forecasts of FAO. Still, the prices are not declining. The reasons behind the mounting prices are a bit more convoluted. A mix of economic, social, political and environmental factors have led the prices of staples like wheat, corn, rice and

soybeans to skyrocket in recent months. The value of the US dollar is constantly falling for various reasons, which is affecting the global price range. There is an over-abundance of paper money in the world, and the soaring price of food is a reflection of it. There is no real shortage, but depreciating currencies are triggering prices skywards.

The growing global energy demand is also playing a vital role here. The US government is subsidizing farmers who grow corn for ethanol, a bio fuel that has been touted in some quarters as a panacea for global warming and reliance on foreign oil. The crops that would have normally been destined for dinner plates are instead ending up in gas tanks making things even more difficult for the less developed countries. Droughts in Australia and Europe, cyclones in our part of the world, financial market speculation, and increased demand for food in China and India also have significantly contributed to the price hike. This is a complex situation which has been developing over the period of time and a number of factors are operating in alignment or in conjunction with each other to constrict supply going into the food chain, pushing up demand.

Bangladesh has to lessen the rate of unemployment and increase wages by educating people and creating enough opportunity for work. Because ultimately people's income has to catch up with the global higher price regime.

**Syed Rajaul Akmal Sajid**  
Department of Economics  
Dhaka University

## Islamic University

We are students of Islamic University, Kushtia. It was established on November 22, 1979 at Kushtia for the combination and co-ordination of different branches of education of humanities and modern science with the Islamic education and promote research on modern branches of education and to develop a new curriculum of modern education based on ethical and moral values of Islam. There are twenty departments with an institute and near about ten thousand students (Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists etc) in this University.

We want The Daily Star to cover the university like it does when it comes to other universities in the country.

Md. Shaikh Russell (ICE)  
K M Reza Ali (CSE)  
Bappi (ECE)  
Dishary (BGE)  
Islamic University  
Kushtia

## An appeal

Niketon under Gulshan 1 has emerged with a habitation of 3,500 families approximately. The apartments are pish with the habitation of mostly service holders at the offices located at Gulshan, Baridhara, and DOHS.

Most of the residents have office provided car or have taken a substantial amount of loan from banks to purchase a car of their own which is more than a necessity as main roads are blocked for rickshaws. However, even after two decades of handover of these plots, the roads have not been constructed. The saddest part is that the roads of Niketon are utterly unworthy for cars to ply with cracks and thick slimy muddy soil that regularly affect pedestrians and the cars' durability, after all, not everyone can afford a Pajero, Landrover or Lexus. Alternately, if we prefer to take a ride in a rickshaw to save our own transport, then we are bound to have some injury whether in spinal cord or hip joint or indigestion problems for immense jerk and gallop. Ironically, Niketon, is a housing estate under Gulshan thana.

If we consider the rights of a taxpayer, the question immediately arises what we get in return, we are underprivileged even to have a basic necessity a road, a path to take a walk or even to take a

ride in the cheapest form of transport in the country. With our real estate companies busy counting profit without any long-term strategies and the City Corporation snoozing, who will construct the roads?

This is an appeal to the office bearers of the relevant departments of the government to look into the matter.

**K Sayeed**  
Niketon, Gulshan, Dhaka

## Anwar Chowdhury

One would hardly find a diplomat other than the immediate past British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury receiving so much coverage in both print and electronic media in Bangladesh. Still articles and videos highlighting his social activities are coming out in different media. Mr. Chowdhury recently left Dhaka ending his four-year diplomatic assignment in Bangladesh.

Anwar Chowdhury being a Bangladesh origin British citizen became very popular among the Bangladeshis through his good manners and concern for developing Bangladesh. Immediately after his arrival in Bangladesh as the British High Commissioner, he started taking keen interest in socio-economic and politico-cultural affairs of Bangladesh. Under his dynamic and dedicated leadership all the staff members of the British High Commission took part in various development activities. Personally, I was impressed by Anwar Chowdhury's performance as an extra-ordinary diplomat. On one occasion I wrote a letter to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II informing her about Anwar Chowdhury's positive contributions towards the development of our community. And my letter was officially forwarded to the Office of the Secretary for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs of the UK.

Meanwhile I am of the opinion that Mr. Anwar Chowdhury declared the 'Man of the Year' by our print and electronic media in appreciation of his friendly association with the people of Bangladesh.

**Professor M Zahidul Haque**  
Chairman  
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka

# CU incident

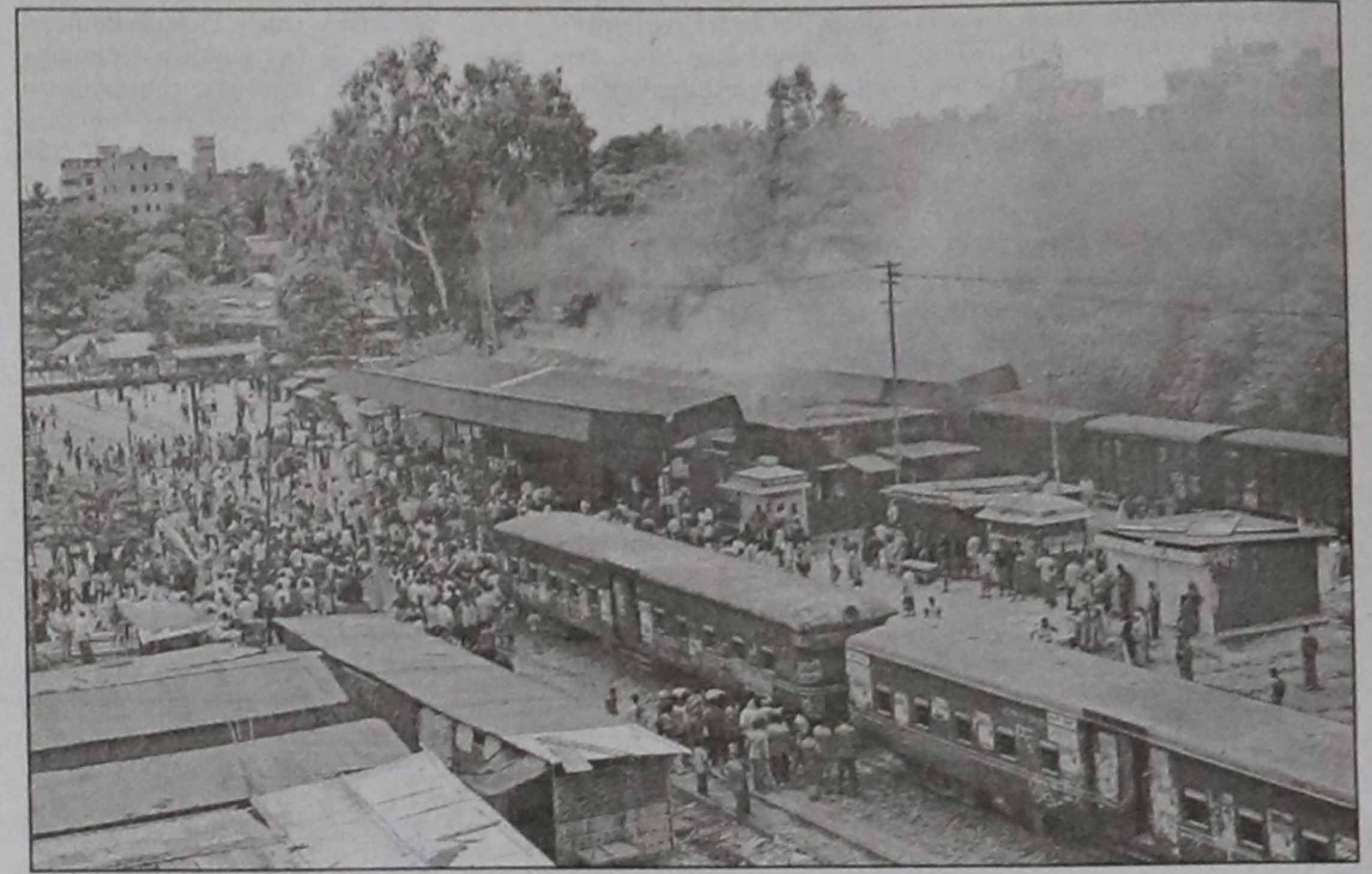
The recent incident at CU is very shocking, where a student jumped from an over-bridge onto a train, fell on the rail lines and eventually died. What the students did in response to this incident is also very shameful. May be, at first they could not know the reason behind his death. Here, in Bangladesh, if anything happens against the rights of the university students or anything they don't seem to like, they vandalise vehicles, harass commuters etc. They never seem to understand that they are destroying our national property.

But at the same time we should admit that in the public universities the facilities for the gen-

eral students are very poor. In CU, students have to commute only by this shuttle train from the main city to the campus. If one misses the train, there is no other way to go to the campus, as the university is situated in a remote place. The university authorities should think of expanding the transportation system by introducing bus services, which would ease the sufferings of the students. We hope the authorities concerned would do so.

And we hope the students, who are the future of our country, would avoid such violence in the future.

**Areader**  
One-mail



ADNAN / DRINKNEWS

## Prospects of English

I am an undergraduate student at the department of English in a private university. As a student, I have always noticed a kind of inferiority complex among the students of my department and that is, they have a feeling that with a graduation degree in English there is hardly any possibility of getting a good job in the present job market, since all the employers are looking for MBA holders, not English "literature" people. However, to my opinion this is one of the wrong ideas that people have about the students of English language and literature. Why? Let's have a look at the following points:

First, the syllabus of our university is designed to enhance the communicative skills in everyday practical life. It is very different from the traditional literature syllabus that is still in practice to a great extent in most of the public universities and colleges in our country. In those universities, the aim is "to learn about the language/literature" not the actual use of it. As a result, even after graduating there are many students who cannot even speak English properly. And it is needless to say that in business face-to-face communication i.e. speaking is essential.

Secondly, in many courses there are instructions regarding group-study. This practice of group-study is very helpful for developing communication skills, which is mostly speaking and in some cases dealing with and managing the people in a particular situation. This skill is essential for a good business executive.

Thirdly, there is this practice of presentation in every course, which is very helpful in order to grow confidence among the students. In business or corporate jobs, presentations in English are needed. Therefore, if students are not trained beforehand on this aspect of an international language like English, how would they be able to carry out the tasks of presentations done by a corporate officer at executive level?

Fourthly, every course in English has a requirement of writing assignment. Now, these assignments have two-fold objectives regarding the skill-development of the students. Firstly, students are bound to practise writing English in order to write the assignment. As a result, their writing skill grows. Again for the assignment they often have to go on various surveys regarding assignment topics. This skill is essential for the students who want to go for marketing jobs.

To conclude this article, I would like to give a practical example from my own life. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was ordered by my father to convince an Italian buyer into buying some of our garment products. It was not only an opening venture, but also a challenge for me. Nevertheless, despite the devastating nervousness, I could do the job with considerable aplomb.

**M Salauddin Chowdhury**  
One-mail

Ahmed's reaction, as expressed in the print and electronic media, to the recent filing of a corruption case by the ACC against him. The typical way he has reacted is well known to our people. All charges of corruption against our politicians are always 'false and fabricated'. He also hinted that it was a politically motivated case. His political colleagues spared no time to give him a clean chit and urged upon the government to withdraw the case unconditionally. That's what they all had been doing for the last sixteen years. Politicians in our country fail to arrive at agreements on issues related to the welfare of the people. But they take no time to come out in a body, like the members of a trade union, with full force to save their colleagues whenever anyone of them is charged with a corruption case. Can we ask them a simple question: If all of them are innocent as flowers, as it is commonly uttered in political slogans, then who did the corruption in the last sixteen years? Who were responsible to place Bangladesh on the top of the TI's list of corrupt states for years together? And, finally, why should the ACC, a non-political independent organisation, file 'false and fabricated' corruption cases against Mr. Tofail and other politicians? Will any politician be kind enough to answer these questions?

If we look at our present lot of ministers, MPs, mayors, ward commissioners etc we find that in the last sixteen years the flowers that blossomed in the political garden of Bangladesh were not innocent and attractive like roses. They were either useless like water hyacinth (kachuripana) flowers, or poisonous like thorn-apple (dhutura) flowers. Because they were cultivated, nourished and groomed by the most inefficient gardeners like Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. The way these "political children" of Khaleda and Hasina are now demanding unconditional release of their creators bear testimony to the fact that they were created, not as politicians to serve the country, but as a bunch of sycophants, having no democratic or other values of life, only to blindly and loyally serve their respective political leaders.

Politics has to be managed by politicians only. There should not be any doubt about that. But can we leave such a matter of vital national importance like politics to the political kachuripana and dhutura flowers cultivated at national, district and upazilla levels during the last sixteen years? Certainly not.

Messrs Tofail, Shahjahan Siraj, Mannan Bhuiyan, Saifur Rahman and other senior leaders alike joined politics long before Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina took over the political stage of Bangladesh. It is most unfortunate that these senior political leaders failed to rise above controversy.

**Syed Ashrafuzzaman**  
Mohakhali DOHS, Dhaka

# Congratulations, Barack Obama

We heartily congratulate Barack Obama for clinching the Democratic Presidential nomination. History has been made and we hope that he will reach another milestone by becoming president of the United States. We also congratulate the people of America for choosing Barack Obama, they have shown great wisdom.

America needs a president like Obama who is wise, sincere, intelligent and have got the foresight to do the right things.

His love for America and its people is so genuine that a transformation takes place when he delivers a speech.

Obama, OBAMA', like a mantra, over and over, one Illinois senator rooting for another, occasionally stopping and smiling, reflecting on the achievement of America finally giving a shot to a man of colour to attain the highest office in the land, finally giving a historic chance to a man of the black race, a race that this 16th President emancipated over a hundred and fifty years ago, to become the 44th President of the United States..... Honest Abe is rejoicing!

Further south, in the cotton fields not that far from Savannah, Georgia, you may, on the same night, catch another apparition, hundreds of



PHOTO: AFP

Barack Obama seems to be a very modest and kind person, we hope if he becomes president of United States, he will try to bring peace in the whole world; he will be understanding not aggressive. We also want to echo the slogan, "Change we can believe in".

**Nur Jahan**  
Chittagong

black cotton pickers, men and women, silhouetted in the white of their clothes, bending and rising, picking cotton, murmuring and then in gathering volume in a lilting chorus, shouting in unison 'OBAMA, OBAMA, OBAMA'!

Travel east, over the Atlantic, not that far from the Sargasso sea, yet another apparition... frightened, young, black men, soul brothers of Kunta Kinte, shackled on the deck of a 19th century slave ship, sweating, sinewy arms straining on long oars dipping into a listless sea, ignoring the crack of the whip and curses of the slave foreman, rejoicing in the victory of a man with roots in the continent whose shores they are never to see again, rejoicing in a full-throated crescendo of a cry 'OBAMA, OBAMA, OBAMA'.

Africa's time has come!

**Shawkat Ali**  
Dhanmondi  
Dhaka

## Doctors' attitude

I was quite surprised to learn about the death of Jahid Kamal (UNO of Babugan). He was kept without treatment for two hours when he had suffered a heart attack.

I don't understand when will our doctors' attitude change?

**Lutfur Rahman**  
Seoul National University  
Korea

## Sustainable development

Sustainable development is possible only when the development workers have two attributes.

1. Skill
  2. Honesty
- Our country is developing with highways, multi-storied buildings, mills, factories. But the development will not be sustainable without skill and honesty.
- Md. Shajedur Rahman**  
SM Kamruddin Ropum  
Institute of Education and Research (IER)  
Dhaka University

## Our future

Too often we say, "Past is past" while referring to some unpleasant memory, meaning that it is better to think about the present and the future. If we scale down a little more we can even feel comfortable to keep aside the present and seriously think about the future. As a nation what is there in the future for us? Our motherland is the most densely populated country in the world and one of the poorest too. After the agricultural products, we are surviving on garments and manpower export. The first one is unpredictable as weather & other natural calamities are major factors that determine the output and the second one is already suffering due to destructive activities. The third sector i.e. manpower export is also experiencing setbacks, the most recent one being in Bahrain that halted employment of Bangladeshi workers following a crime, a solitary case that has now affected all Bangladeshis working in that country. The government of Saudi Arabia where about 15 lakh Bangladeshis are currently living, has also stopped issuing residential permits creating deportation fear in thousands of Bangladeshi workers there. Our import dependent economy is facing daily challenges from rising oil prices which may hit 200 dollars a barrel at the year end. Above all, if the present pace of global warming continues unchecked, one fifth of Bangladesh will go under the sea by 2050, making 20 million people landless & homeless.

Of course there will be no dearth of expert recommendations which definitely deserve

consideration. We should also explore the reasons and remedies from the religious viewpoint. Our Creator Almighty Allah says, "By the time, verily Man is in loss except such as have Faith and do righteous deeds, and join together in the mutual enjoining of Truth, and of patience and constancy." In another surah, Allah says, "Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods, lives & fruits, but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere." Let us think why we are losing in all fields and turn our face to the Almighty.

**Engr. Md. Aminul Haque**  
Khalishpur, Khulna

## Leaders

We heartily appreciate the most practical and appropriate speech by Dr. Kamal Hossain that was published in The Daily Star of May 31. We observe that some political leaders are regarded as "Goddess" by some political parties. They think the law of the country cannot be imposed on them, they are above trial and enjoy immunity.

Do they know that their idea goes against the spirit of democracy?

**Hassan Ali**  
Kararia  
Tangail

## Blind followers

It seems our politicians are not interested in any smooth transition to democracy. They have put their carts before the horses. They want their leaders out of jail before anything else, no matter what happens to the nation. They do not like dialogue, they have now patched up their differences with their rival parties, they are becoming united for a "sangram". We are surprised to note that even yesterday's arch enemies are demanding release of their rival leaders. The friends and foes are uniting themselves to take us, probably, to the era of pre-one-eleven.

If they succeed in their efforts to create chaos in the country in the name of so-called "sangram", their first task would be to bring their leaders out of jail and then hold election in their old style where their supporters will not have to go to polling centres.

But we know, those who have been jailed by now, are proven guilty of corruption and against many of them, who are still free, there are strong evidences of corruption. We cannot imagine what they would do, if they are freed.

The leaders of the last alliance government are bright examples. People do not believe that all charge-sheets submitted by the ACC are false. People do not want these leaders to stage a comeback by creating chaos and brand our motherland as the "most corrupt nation" in the world again and again.

We should not allow these people to lead us to an unsafe destination.

**Shafiqul Islam**  
One-mail

## Saint Martin's

I have read with great interest the article on "Saving the coral biodiversity of St. Martin's Island." Congratulations to the author, Dr. Md. M. Maruf Hossain. I should like to make my own contribution to our knowledge of the fauna of the island, collected on a one-week scientific expedition to the island led by the late Professor M.I. Choudhury of Dhaka College in 1957. I made a collection of marine nematodes, two of which were new to science: *Theristus sanctimartini* Timm 1958 and *Monhystrella marina* Timm 1964 (the only marine species of the genus).

Nematodes exist in enormous numbers on the floor of all the oceans of the world. Many of them are bacterivorous and therefore play an important role in the natural elimination of decaying vegetable and sewage waste materials, which has become a problem on St. Martin's Island.

**Father R.W. Timm, CSC**  
Notre Dame College

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