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SHEHAB UDDIN/DRINKNEWS

## Senior citizens

With the improvement in the healthcare sector, the longevity of people has gone up significantly. This in turn has resulted in the society having a substantial number of senior citizens. The population of elders in Bangladesh has considerably increased. But what has of late stirred up the conscience of society is that majority of the elders are being increasingly deprived of their dues.

In the twilight of their lives a significant number of the senior citizens are being compelled to fend for themselves without any support or care. Worse, many are deprived, neglected, abused by their near and dear ones for whose comfort they had contributed significantly in their prime.

It is very distressing to note that care for the elderly has been found wanting in Bangladesh in spite of the strong cultural and religious ethos which puts the onus of caring for the elderly on the children. The changing values and increasingly insensitive society have contributed to the present plight of the elders. The inability to contribute to the earnings of the family due to advancing age, increased cost of medication contributes to giving rise to the feeling that the elder has become a liability.

Apart from being denied their dues, neglect and the feeling of loneliness, the senior citizens, more so those who belong to weaker sections of society, are not getting the necessary healthcare facilities. The health care sector of the country is still not equipped to tackle the problems of the elderly patients.

A comprehensive healthcare scheme for the elderly needs to be formulated taking into account their special needs. Along with doctors, Bangladesh also needs a dedicated team of paramedics specialized in geriatric care for the elderly patients whose numbers are rising. A geriatric professional will be able to handle an elderly patient's physical, mental and psychosocial health and chalk out programmes according to individual needs.

Society too needs to be responsive to help the elders lead a life with dignity. The elders on their part should never feel despondent and should lead life with a positive outlook and be actively involved with different activities. With old age being a reality, one needs to prepare for it in the prime of life itself.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam  
National tourism worker

## Traffic mismanagement

I was very glad to read Farah Islam's letter as above in the DS of 4 May 2009. It is time that women got up and took notice of this fact, more so as women, children, the elderly and the disabled are the worst sufferers of traffic mismanagement. The 13 points she has elaborated are valid to some extent, but she may not have given due importance to practical factors that are very vital to the stark realities of Dhaka.

These are: 1. Dhaka's roads account for only 7-8% as against minimum 25% of the area. Most of these are narrow, winding and pot-holed, not suitable for the plying of big buses. 2. Passenger traffic can be divided as follows: 1-2% private cars, 15-20% CNGs, 20-25% buses, minibuses, etc, over 50% rickshaws/vans. 3. Rickshaws therefore, carry the bulk of the people including most women, children, elderly, disabled and for small loads over short distances, cheaply, speedily and environmentally cleanly. They generate about Tk. 10 crore every day for about 2-3 lakh rickshaw-related persons and 15-20 lakh members of their families. Therefore any traffic plan cannot dispense with rickshaws until



there is a viable alternative. 4. About 350-400,000 private cars carry only 1-2% of the privileged class, hogging over 75% of the road space while plying empty/half-empty as can be seen if you stand for a time at any intersection. In addition, they park illegally all over, deafen the public, create air pollution and kill and maim thousands every year. I do not find any fault with the other points she has made except "No 6 where she says that rickshaws may be confined to operate in 'residential' areas only". Pray, where are these residential areas? Is she referring to Dhanmondi,

Gulshan, Uttara etc? Her concluding para is particularly poignant for me, "I wish somebody made me responsible for this. I would implement most within a week". Very laudatory, but in 38 previous letters over the last 18 months, I have repeatedly voiced the same sentiments adding that it can be done in months at no cost to government on the basis of existing traffic laws. Will the authorities call our bluff? Actually it isn't! Sikander Ahmed  
Niketon, Gulshan-1  
Dhaka

### HC ruling

The High Court Division has issued a guideline to prevent harassment of women in the educational institutions. This is a very significant judgment, and big news for our media to cover.

We have already heard comments and opinions in the print and electronic media, more to come likely. Hopefully, this will have no negative impact on this significant ruling, as we watched a very high profile talk show guest talking lightly on the matter. He could be more serious and positive. Anyway he had his own style of talking! Qadir  
California, USA

### Crisis in Nepal

Eight months ago Nepal introduced democracy. This democracy came in Nepal after 239 years. But the present situation in Nepal is critical.

We hope Nepal will be able to overcome the present crisis. Mahfuzur Rahman Manik  
Student, IER  
Dhaka University

### Opinion poll

With interest I read your poll question, "Do you support the government decision of importing 420 vehicles for the newly elected upazila chairmen?"

This question has a built-in answer, "NO" and would very much be reflected in your survey.

However, if you put the question like this: "Do you support the government decision to provide official transportation to the elected upazila chairmen?" You may find a different answer.

The Daily Star is rendering a great service. Shamsuddin Ilias  
One-mail

### A welcome change

Political arch rivals Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia should maintain regular social relations in order to improve the political culture in Bangladesh.

That is the opinion of the members of the civil society including singers, development activists and researchers. An amiable relationship between the two top politicians will be a positive signal to leaders and activists of their parties, which will help prevent conflicts across the country, they said.

Khaleda Zia went to Shudha Sadoon to meet the prime minister, following her husband's death.

It was a sad occasion but people were happy to see Begum Zia embracing her main political rival.

Habibur Rashid Ismail  
Jamea Rahmania Faidil  
Madrasa  
Chittagong

### Electricity first

If we construct underground train in Dhaka city it would cost us millions of dollars of foreign loan.

How would we run the underground train in the midst of load shedding and frequent electricity failure? The million dollars project would fail and the country would incur colossal financial loss.

We wonder what is the need for construction of underground train and Padma bridge now when we are beset with tremendous financial hardships and a great economic crisis and the sufferings of the people know no bounds due to load shedding and frequent electricity failure.

Let us go forward step by step. Slow but steady wins the race.

Let us alleviate the sufferings of the people on account of power shortage first, and then go for construction of Padma bridge and underground train.

O.H. Kabir  
Dhaka

### Khaleda Zia's house

Begum Zia should apply her moral judgement showing respect to the laws of the country, and vacate the house with full respect and honour. The people will rather praise her decision. Otherwise, the issue will hunt her peace and politics in the coming days.

The legal advisers and the special adviser of the party may kindly give a second thought to their political mobilization PLAN in the coming days. A reader  
One-mail

### Cattle trade with India

People of Bangladesh need millions of cows every year for religious sacrifice. Such huge number of cows are not raised in Bangladesh. On the other hand, millions of villagers in neighbouring India rear cows to have milk and to plough their farmlands. It is said that India produces the highest quantity of milk in the world. But they do not need a huge number of bulls born naturally every year.

These ground realities influenced an informal regular trade of bulls between India and Bangladesh. A few groups of traders from India used to sell bulls to Bangladeshi traders. An informal chain was developed to do this huge trade, which is illegal as per the laws of both Bangladesh and India. No government can accept such smuggling.

Indeed, Bangladesh and India should initiate legal trading of cows. Md. Ashraf Hossain  
Ramna, Dhaka

## Save forests, biodiversity

Forests are closely related to socio-economic and ecological aspects of a nation. It is a vital source for maintaining the ecological balance. Forests are necessary for protecting the country from desertification. Besides, forests protect the land from erosion, especially from river erosion. A mentionable portion of people in our country, especially in Sundarbans and CHT areas, largely depend on the forests for their livelihood.

According to international standards, any country needs at least 25% forest cover for ecological balance. In the year 1948, the forest areas in the country were 24%. Now, only 9% remains. A survey conducted by USAID and CIDA revealed that 50% of the forests of the country have been destroyed during the last 20 years.

The present area of forests in Bangladesh is not adequate for



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maintaining ecological balance and ensuring sustainable development of the nation. Loss of forests not only disrupts ecological balance but also hampers the very efforts of economic and social developments. So, it is the right time to be concerned about the

future of our forest resources as well as ecological system and development.

Md. Nur-e-Alam Siddique  
Faculty of Agriculture  
Hajee Mohammad Danesh  
Science & Technology University  
Dinajpur

### Obama deserves A+

US President Barack Obama promised to bring change to America. After years of mismanagement under George W. Bush and his bunch of neo-con acolytes, most Americans were crying for change. In the name of war against terrorism, Bush turned even many friends of the United States into enemies. He seemed to have followed Roman tyrant Caligula's dictum: "Let them hate as long as they fear." Under Bush, the world came to hate America without fearing it. He also left behind a massive budget deficit and an economy in deep recession. In short, President Obama faced a great challenge to bring about a total transformation of the American policy.

Few American presidents have reached as high as President Barack Obama in their first 100 days in office. He has completely changed the direction of both domestic and foreign policies. He ordered the prison at Guantanamo Bay closed. He lobbied for new relationship with China and Russia. He opened up the possibility of a dialogue with Iran. He made United States a key player in combating global warming. On the eve of his 100 days in power, The New York Times found President Obama has a 68 per cent approval rate among the public.

Faced with the enormous task -- two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a crumbling economy, continuing threat of terrorism, environmental degradation -- President Obama has shown courage and fortitude. He has quickly moved to stop the collapse of the banking system, kick-start the slumping economy by his massive injection of public funds and moved to address America's lost image in the world. It has been refreshing to see how President Obama was greeted enthusiastically by Europeans in stark contrast with how George W. Bush was treated with contempt whenever he went abroad. Obama has made people outside love Americans again.

In foreign policy, sheer scope of what Henry Kissinger calls "Obama's vast diplomatic agenda" has restored America's leadership in the world. He has brought in a new relationship with China and Russia; raised hopes for a more balanced Middle East policy; pushed arms control higher in the agenda and made the US a key player in combating global warming. Beyond doubt, Obama has the potential to be a great president -- most creative and inspirational since Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

And yet, most commentators reacted circumspectly to President Obama's first 100 days in office. Mostly, they have given him either a B or B+ for his performance. They tend to ignore that he's transformed America's face. He's given Americans a new sense of direction, a common purpose and goal. And he regained America's trust. For all this, he deserves an A+... Mahmood Elahi  
Ottawa, Canada

### Renaming BDR

A letter was published in your daily of 13 May 09 with the above caption.

One gentleman has expressed his 'strong protest' to suggested change of name and uniform of BDR. He felt this will not bring discipline. He has also mentioned that, "We cannot justify some retired officers' advice to change the name of BDR."

Anyone who has suggested the name and uniform change has not done it due to hatred for BDR. It is to save the present and future BDR personnel from carrying the stigma of 'Butchers of Palkhana'. All ranks of BDR who were not involved in the mutiny (they are the large majority) are deeply ashamed of the carnage their fellow men carried out on 25th and 26th February, 2009. Now the name BDR is synonymous with cold blooded murder and rape. Whenever in future the name BDR will be mentioned or their present uniform will be seen by general public, they will hate the force. This will very adversely affect the morale of the force. A force with low morale will be inefficient.

Some other people like this gentleman have also objected to change of name and uniform of BDR. They have stated that in the past mutiny has taken place in our Army and Air force, their name has not been changed. Bangladesh Rifles is not a generic name but Army and Air Force are generic names. The name of the country is prefixed to Army, Navy and Air Force. Like Indian Army, US Navy, French Air Force. So, name of the defence forces cannot be changed. Name of police cannot also be changed. The name of a para military outfit can be changed.

To save the present and future personnel of our paramilitary force from carrying the stigma of 'Butchers of Palkhana', it must have a new name and new uniform. Lt Col Quazi Salimuddin (retd)  
Baitul Aman Housing Society  
Adabor, Dhaka

### Our education

What is the meaning of education? We are simply studying for getting a good job in order to lead a comfortable life in future, nothing else. Sometimes our parents would say, "The more you learn, the more you earn." So the purpose of education is to obtain a lucrative job!

A few days back one of my cousins came from the UK. He was very much interested to know about our education system. He went to my school accompanied by me. He was appalled to see our education system, curriculum and the wrong way of teaching. He figured out some drawbacks of our education.

Our secondary education is not in proper shape. In case of higher studies, the picture is a bit different. These days it is not necessary to go abroad in order to obtain a good degree. May be things are improving a bit! Mohiuddin Momen  
SSC examinee  
Halishahar, Chittagong

### Musings on architecture

Human beings live in houses designed by the architects. Not escaping them! As a non-architect, ordinary citizen living in urban homes (at home and abroad), I wonder how much the human mind replicates the easy friendliness of Mother Nature.

Look at our buildings: the vast majority use too many angles and right angles. Why this rigidity? Now look at the natural environment, and note how few are the sharp angles and right angles in the scenes we see around us. The trees and flowers do not look geometrical, but there is an elegant pattern in the background -- aesthetic and artistic elegance peeping out.

Curve and angles: note the flow of water, the rivers and the sea. The bodies of living things (including the human body) have mostly no sharp angles. How to be in tune with Nature?

Our high-rise buildings are rigidly geometrical, with straight and sharp angles everywhere. The movements of the eyes of the viewers seek relaxing contours. Why curves are avoided? Realise the impact of a winding path and a straight highway. Has life become mechanical (in the urban, materialist society). The rigidity and inter-facing effects have to be examined more carefully. Find angles in the body of a baby.

Zen paintings are interactive, therefore attracting and appealing, allowing the viewer to complete the picture and enjoy it subjectively. Note the economy of style: minimum ink, paint, time, and details -- the difference between additive and subtractive art. Leave something in the background -- why crave for the front stage at the time (the mother is always in the background like the way we breathe, intuitively). The human models parading the stage look so artificial. Distract or attract?

There are many other aspects which parade the minds of the readers. We miss harmony, tuning and empathy in the modern materialistic world. It is difficult to be natural. There is a difference between pose and poise. A Mahasen, One-mail

### We want security

Mugging is increasing in the cities. Nobody feels safe while they go out of home with money or other valuables. The situation has turned critical in Mirpur area.

The muggers snatch away money, ornaments or other valuables from passers-by at gunpoint. It has now become very risky for unarmed men to move around. If the snatchers do not find something valuable with the person they target, s/he is attacked. The nearby people or the police do not come forward to help the victim, even if he or she cries for help.

We want to see Rab becoming active again, as they were in the past. We want security.

We earnestly request the prime minister to order Rab to tackle the latest wave of crime. We are helpless. Md Jamal Hossain  
Senpara Parbata, Mirpur-10  
Dhaka

### Dead workers

Foreign remittance plays a very important role in our economy. The lion's share of the country's income comes from the Bangladeshis working in different countries. Virtually, our government does not have any production cost behind this huge income. Our workers' hard work brings this huge amount of money to our economy. But recently we have seen that hundreds of Bangladeshi workers are being brought back home dead. Some days ago, the dead bodies of 64 Bangladeshi workers were brought back home. The causes behind these deaths are said to be cardiac failures, accidents, brain strokes and other, largely unspecified, causes. A worker goes abroad safe and sound and suddenly the family members get the news of unnatural death. Is that acceptable? Nothing can compensate for the loss of those family members. Your dear one is staying away from you for earning and suddenly one day you hear that he is no more. How does it feel like?

I also have some dear ones working in the Middle East and I am really anxious about them. Our government should seriously look into the matter and ask for a logical explanation of these tragic happenings. The recruiting agencies and employer companies are responsible to a great extent for such deaths. It is a crying need to probe the matter. When a healthy man goes abroad to earn a living, we never want him to come back home dead within months.

S.M. Shamim-Ur-Rashid  
Tushar  
Dept. of Business  
Administration  
Shahjalal University, Sylhet

### Child labour

Disappointing though it might seem but it's true. Last Thursday, while going to my class I stopped by to buy a bottle of coke. Just then, a middle-aged man and a small girl stopped at the same shop. The man purchased certain things. The shopkeeper after packing them up handed over the bag.

The girl (who happened to be a servant) took it all though it was extremely difficult for her to take the load. When the man was about to pay for his purchase, he found that he did not have enough money. He expected to get a credit from the shop, but the shopkeeper refused to give so. Surprisingly, the man demanded the chain in the girl's neck.

The girl begged of him saying that it was the only thing left by her mother before she died. The man paying no heed to what she was saying snatched the chain, in the midst scratching her neck. She was bleeding. The man disposed the chain in the nearby shop and then paid for his purchase.

They left leaving me surprised. Shifat Nazmee  
Maple-Leaf International  
School