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TOMZO MOLICKI/DRINKNEWS

## Aila-hit people

A brief news article and a photograph published in a daily has rightly depicted the miseries of the people of the southern part of the country (The Daily Star: 6th September, 2009). It is not the picture of only Shyamnagar Upazila of Satkhira district.

The same dismal picture is pervasive in almost all Unions of Koira Upazila of Khulna district. The people are still living in makeshift thatched houses on the embankment. Monsoon weather and saline water inundation have made their lives more miserable. There is no drinking water in the neighbourhoods. People have to move a long distance for saline-free water for their day to day wash. People are living in a miserable

state without employment. Thousands of inhabitants of these localities have already left their homestead in quest of their sustenance.

But it is not understandable yet why these hapless people cannot draw proper attention of the government and the local representatives.

Local political parties are equally reluctant in coming forward to their rescue. May be the next election is very far! In this circumstance, may I humbly request the government and the representatives thereof to try to feel the predicament of the hapless people and take side with them right now.

Monzur Rahman  
Khulna

and hard earned foreign exchange would have been saved. The government's wrong decision only caused loss to the state with no gain.

In fact, this is our mindset. We love other's products more than our own. We don't mind harming our state interest for pleasure of a few. I request my fellow countrymen, please show patriotism, grow your own products and avoid imported ones as do the Japanese. If Japanese people want, the Japan government can flood the country with imported fresh meat from Australia.

Europe, America, India and many other countries but they do not want that. That's the difference between the Japanese and us.  
Shafiqul Islam, NY

## Diplomats and traffic

Re: "Diplomats and traffic," by A Diplomat's wife (Sept. 8).

The diplomat's wife is absolutely right when she says: "The cars owned by embassies, and the gas to run them, are paid for by the taxpayers of the home country. The international NGOs pay for their own cars and, so far as I know, they are not subsidised by the government of Bangladesh. If the local taxpayer is paying for any SUVs, it will be the ones owned and operated by their own government. And, I would be willing to bet that these far outnumber the ones owned by the accused foreign diplomats."

All the expenditures incurred by diplomatic missions in Bangladesh are paid by their respective Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates. The same is true about foreign NGOs. If they are indulging in high living, only taxpayers in their countries can complain about them. As a Canadian (I presume that Mr. Shabbir A. Bashar, like myself, has taken Canadian citizenship) can complain about any high living by Canadian diplomats stationed in Dhaka in Canadian newspapers or as a Bangladeshi, he can complain about high living by any Bangladeshi diplomats stationed in Ottawa in Bangladeshi newspapers.

The diplomat's wife is also right about the quality of diplomats posted to Dhaka. Dhaka for most American, Canadian and European diplomats is a hardship posting and many countries reward their diplomats with nice postings like Geneva, Paris, Rome, Washington etc after serving in Dhaka. I know a Canadian lady who was posted to Geneva after serving in Dhaka. As such, the quality of diplomats stationed in Dhaka is not different from those stationed in other countries. In fact, many diplomats and their wives are inspired by the possibility of having an interesting experience by serving in a country trying to come out of poverty and underdevelopment. People like Nobel Prize winning economist Prof. Muhammad Yunus may serve as a beacon to see Bangladesh at close quarters.

She is also right that most SUVs in Dhaka are driven by Bangladeshis. While visiting Dhaka in 2006, I was astonished to see the number of SUVs driven by the nouveaux riches in Dhaka. They are the ones who should be blamed for causing pollution and traffic jam in the city.

Mahmood Elahi  
Ottawa, Canada

## Baul Samrat

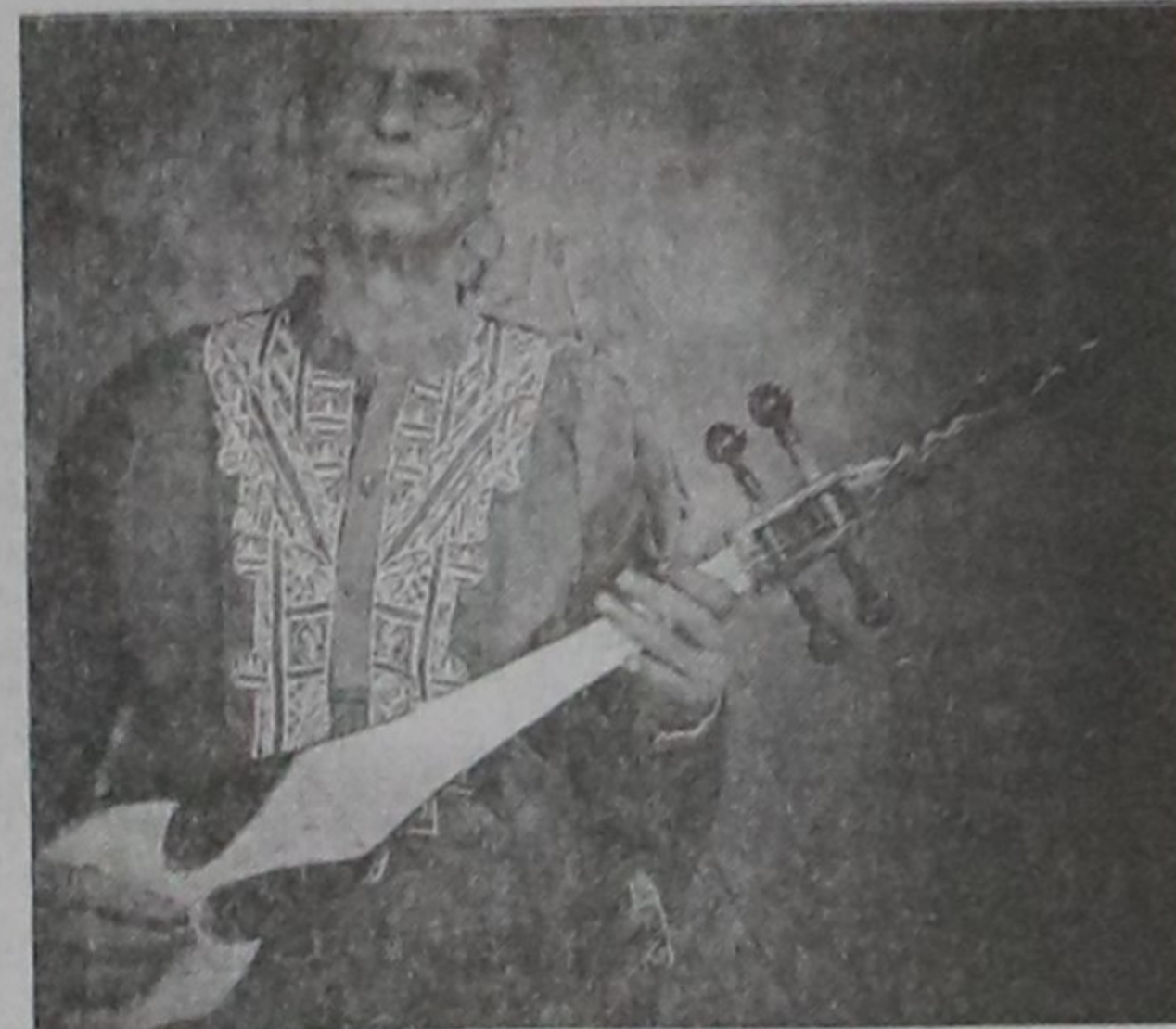
Shah Abdul Karim, after his heart throbbed for long 93 years, found his worldly presence too fragile and left us on 12 September for eternal rest in the other world after years of his probing into the mysteries of 'expression of body' (Deho Sadhona) and 'expression of mind' (Mono Sadhona).

Bauls are basically very restless; they cannot confine themselves to a specific area. Nature beckons them to come out from the incarceration of worldly living. They like to roam around the countryside all alone or in a group wearing distinctive clothes with an 'ektara', the quintessential one-stringed musical instrument a baul must carry.

Shah Abdul Karim was one of those Bauls. About one hundred years ago he was born in a low lying area in Sunamganj called 'Ujandhol' that he found remaining submerged almost eight months a year. Abdul Karim could feel the earth beneath his feet only for four months---too small a time for a child to take roots and make a bond with the soil.

Abdul Karim never had a chance to enrol himself in a school. So, he had to garner knowledge from what nature could present him in cryptic language only a saint or a Sufi could decipher---the knowledge that turned him into a legendary poet-cum-singer. Nature wanted to see in him a songster who would captivate his countrymen. His soul-searching baul songs have hugely captivated his countrymen in Bangladesh and many of his fans living abroad. His countrymen have not deprived him of his dues. Abdul Karim earned many awards including "Ekushey Padak", the highest national award in Bangladesh.

Through a myriad baul songs woven with colourful threads of allegories, Shah Abdul Karim tried to take our souls away from this busy world at least for a while to unite us with God and to open our eyes to the mystic world. He took us as his companions to show us the state of separation existing between the souls of men and the spiritual ground. He made us understand



many other mysteries, which are not touchable, viewable or audible in this world full of noises made out of greed, envies, and sins.

He used to pull us to a tranquil world far above this earth. He let us rediscover the meaning of life lived, passion of love translated into marriage and also the glory of love unrequited---all through his baul songs.

May God grant this mystic minstrel eternal peace he craved for!

Maswood Alam Khan  
Banker

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We are shocked at the news that Baul Samrat Abdul Karim is no more. He was a pastoral bard and his songs enthrall us all. The philosophical content of his songs arouses our thoughts. We pay due homage to him.

Abdur Rahman  
One-mail

## Better leaders needed

Leadership is of two types. The transformational leader and the transactional leader. The transformational leader is one who is content with running things as they are. While the transformational leader is concerned with change. The transformational leader is not content to see things as they are but always endeavours to transform society through new and innovative ideas. In Bangladesh at this moment we need transformational leaders. But unfortunately most of our political and civil bureaucrats who are at the helm of power are transactional. That's why change is very slow and things are not moving.

Farah Khan  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## Death, dignity and ethics

I have been thinking for quite some time that I should write at least a brief note on the issue. And finally I have decided to write after watching the TV news coverage of the tragic road accident and the death of former finance minister Mr. M. Saifur Rahman and that of another dreadful accident in which five members of a family were killed. Obviously, the news of Mr. Rahman's death came first in the electronic media and the way the accident scene and particularly the dead body of the late Rahman were shown in the exposures was not the way one would expect to watch them. His uncovered body, the doctor examining his pupil all appeared very undignified and highly improper. People should have minimum respect for a dead man whoever it may be. It was more painful to watch when a very popular TV channel gave coverage on the illustrious past of Mr. Rahman. The coverage again started with his

uncovered body and swollen face. Similarly, both the electronic and the print media showed bodies of the victims of the other accident in the similar manner, lying on the ground uncovered. This is a very familiar scene when our media cover this type of sad stories. I am not very well aware of the journalistic ethics but still, as a member of the public, I think the ethics should dictate our conscience as how to show respect to a dead body or victims of any other disaster or mishap when the related news events are covered by the media. I firmly believe that the media, in its own way, always dictates our conscience towards ethical norms whenever we need it at our personal, social or national level, but what would happen if the media itself deviates from its own principled responsibility?

Dr. Syed Kamaluddin Ahmed  
Dhanmondi Residential Area  
Dhaka

## Railway reforms

A detailed and interesting front-page report on the proposal for Bangladesh Railway reforms, put forward by outside railway consultants, was published in a local daily on September 5. It represents the bureaucratic stand for stone walling the proposal suggesting to hand over powers to the CEO of Bangladesh Railways. As reported, and I quote: "They (Secretary of the communications ministry and his officials) are against creation of a separate division as in the proposed organogram which will empower the BR chief to be responsible to the communications minister directly."

Now the BR Chief has to reach the minister via the communications secretary.

Will the red signal ever turn green?  
S.A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

## Eggs and green chillies

Japan, is the second biggest economy in the world. The Japanese are one of the highest per capita income group people. If some one believes that the Japanese government cannot import most tasty and protein rich beef and supply to the Japanese, no one will believe it. I have never been to Japan but I hear that a kilogram of fresh beef in Japan in the present market costs \$500.00. Japanese cattle farmers reportedly raise cattle with lot of expenses and care because they get handsome return. Even though price is very high the Japanese do not mind and do not create pressure on their government to bring them cheap beef from abroad. This proves their patriotism.

An egg is an important protein rich food item.

In Bangladesh how many can afford an egg every day even if it is cheap? I believe not more than 10% or so. Recently, the price of eggs has gone up and the Bangladesh government immediately, without giving any second thought, imported few crores of eggs from neighbouring India worth some crores of taka. Our poor poultry owners were getting a few bucks which could compensate for their losses due to the recent bird flu, the government has struck them from recovering from that effect.

Why was the government in such hurry, while many other important requirements are not being met so promptly.

Instead of importing few eggs in exchange of the people's hard earned foreign exchange, it could have provided the local growers this amount as interest free loans, the farmers would have been encouraged and within a few months' time, the crisis of eggs would have been eased

## Promotions

Most recently, the government promoted a huge number of civil servants to different posts in the civil bureaucracy hierarchy. While the mass promotion has been criticized by the media as promotion spree or the like, there is no denying the fact that promotion is definitely one of the most effective tools for generating employees' motivation. This is all the more true in a situation where government employees' incentive packages are not at all commensurate with the market prices, let alone being comparable with those of their counterparts in the private sector. So, granting promotion to the deserving employees (if it has been really done so) is surely a good gesture by the government. But what strikes me is the information that a large number of officers promoted will remain posted as officers on special duty (OSD) (read, officers on no duty). The euphemism "the officer on special duty" is in fact a stigma which is arbitrarily used for dumped officers as well as for officers newly promoted and waiting for placement. The overcrowded lobby of OSDs will be eased to some extent by posting most of the promoted officers belonging to the administration cadre on in situ basis (in positions they were holding before their promotion). But officers who got promoted to the post of deputy secretary from other cadres perhaps will have to sit idle for a long time. Some of them will get posting by dint of strong tadbir (lobbying) or just by virtue of luck. While the secretariat is overcrowded with OSDs, some important cadres like Audit and Accounts, Customs, Income Tax suffer from acute shortage of manpower. By losing more senior level officers who opted to become deputy

secretaries, the HRM situation of these department will worsen further. So, as in administration cadre, it will be an effective and efficient decision for government to post officers coming to the senior service pool from other cadres on in situ basis in their respective cadres until they are posted in the secretariat job. Otherwise, the government's indulgence in the luxury of having a huge number of OSDs by paying them and not getting any service from them in return will simply be damaging in the long run. Moreover, psychological trauma of the OSDs who are otherwise not meant for being traumatized by remaining workless and hence worthless is sure to adversely affect the collective efficacy and efficiency of the bureaucracy.

Sohan Rahman  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

## Creaking law and order

This is response to the editorial entitled "Arrest Surging Crime" published in your daily on the 8th September, 2009. The account of robbery, extortion, hijacking, murder, rape and all other kinds criminal activities which have been very correctly presented by the learned author, Mr. Asadullah Khan, is really alarming. It may have surpassed all the records of any of the previous governments, not to mention that of the previous caretaker govt. So, it is high time to find out the reasons for such an alarming surge. It may not be due to any flaw in the democratic system which we are exercising in this country.

It has already been found that some godfathers of the ruling Awami League are directly involved and are also using different terrorist groups for achieving their goal of profiteering and extortion. So it is not democracy; but it is the so-called democratically elected government and its inefficient and inexperienced ministers and legislators who are responsible for this surge.

The PM should reconsider her decision to be involved in every affair in the administration and utilize the efficient and experienced legislators of the country.  
Dr. S.A. Miah  
Lasalle, Quebec  
Canada

## Grabbed canal

A couple of days back a piece of news published in DS caught my attention which read "PM orders the concerned department to free all canals of the country from the illegal grabbers. It is a very worthwhile decision and got me interested in writing this letter. On the 3rd July (if my

memory doesn't betray) there was a report on Channel 1 news on freeing a 100-year-old canal from illegal grabbers at Karatia, Tangail. This canal flows through just behind Saadat University College, one of the first five university colleges of the country. Just after the report was telecast on Channel 1, a number of policemen along with a magistrate reached the canal side and started breaking the encroachment. But the local Union Parishad chairman showed up there and requested the magistrate to give him 7 days' time to get the land free from grabbers. But alas, two months are gone! Nothing has happened! The grabbers are still encroaching govt lands.

My fervent request to the Honourable Prime Minister, PLEASE save this 100-year old canal from the hands of unscrupulous grabbers.  
Abdur Rashid  
A senior citizen, Karatia

## To the mayor...

A huge number of passers-by have to cross the road in front of Banani Chairmanbari, which links Mohakhali and Kokoli. In Banani there are a number of offices and garment factories the employees of which mostly live in Kafrul, Kachukhet, Mirpur, Pallabi, Kalyanpur and the Cantonment area. After office hours they have to cross the extremely busy road of Banani Chairmanbari. In the recent past a number of accidents took place. Crossing this road is very risky.

The simple solution to this problem is to build an overbridge like the one at Kakoli. The overbridge will reduce the risk of any fatal accident.

Would you be kind enough to construct an overbridge in front of Banani Chairmanbari immediately?  
Shazzad Khan  
Banani, Dhaka

## Good example

In the unforgettable year of 2009 (financially speaking!), the Democratic Party of Japan won a landslide in the general election, ending 50-long years of rule by the Liberal Democratic Party. The leader of the defeated Liberal Democratic Party, Taro Aso, said he took responsibility for his party's defeat and he would step down as the leader of the party so that someone else can get a chance to lead the party.

In the same year in Bangladesh, another political party, the BNP, suffered the worst defeat in its history. Soon after the election results were announced, its leader, Khaleda Zia, took full responsibility for her party's defeat

and courageously resigned as the party chief. She said she enjoyed every second of the 25 years as the party chief (as well as enjoying all the benefits and perks as the prime minister of the country for two great terms), but she now wanted to give someone else a chance to lead the party (and possibly become the prime minister of the country and enjoy all the benefits and perks) to resign.

So there you have it, ladies and gentlemen. Two great examples of good leadership for our future politicians to learn from. Of course, do let me know if there are any errors with my facts in this letter!

Azad Miah

Oldham

UK

## AIDS vaccine!

It is encouraging to learn from an USAID release dt. 4/9/2009 that USAID partner, International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), has made a groundbreaking HIV/AIDS discovery that may bring the scientific community a bit closer to an HIV vaccine. The USAID and the IAVI have been in a cooperative agreement since 2006 to accelerate the discovery of an AIDS vaccine. The IAVI with the support of USAID has successfully tested over 1800 HIV positive individuals in several developing countries leading to the discovery of some highly effective antibodies that create immunity against many strains of HIV. Published recently in the journal Sciences, the finding will provide critical information that is, sure to shape vaccine research in the coming days.

We congratulate USAID and IAVI for their untiring efforts and subsequent accomplishment towards discovering a HIV/AIDS vaccine and sincerely wish their ultimate success.

Professor M Zahidul Haque  
Chairman  
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System  
SAU, Dhaka

## Law and order

Deterioration of law and order is now a common phenomenon in our country. Every day we can find its trace in the dailies. Now it is a burning question. The outlaws are active. The whole country is witnessing snatching, dacoity, killing, plundering, encroachment, extortion by intimidation. These problems are increasing at an alarming rate.

People cannot lead their lives comfortably and they feel insecure.

Md. Jubair Uddin  
Department of English  
University of Chittagong

## Dangerous Piranha!

I wrote in a letter to a Bangla daily, back in 2007, that the carnivorous Piranha was being sold openly in the market as Thai Rupchanda, which is totally illegal and should be stopped.

Piranha is not a normal fish. This exotic fish comes from South American rivers including Amazon and also from Africa. With its sharp teeth and voracious appetite for meat, the small freshwater fish is a dangerous predator when attacking any animal in a group.

Although there is a ban on sale, import and farming of Piranha but no one cares about it. It's still available in the country.

The authorities concerned should look into the matter.

Mahmud Ali Kabir  
Social worker, Gopalganj



PHOTO: MAHMUD ALI KABIR