Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

I am surprised by the statement of

our Foreign Secretary on the issue

of "no illegal Bangladeshi residing in

India". Well, I myself know of at least

one Bangladeshi who has been

living in India illegally for the last

three. She went on a student visa to

Delhi and now is working there for a

turn a blind eye to the numerous

reports of people from our minority

community taking refuge to India?

The Foreign Ministry should verify

the Indian press reports before

Deployment of army for UP election

would have served two purposes.

Army would have acted as a deter-

rent to lawbreakers (which are

unfortunately eroding for police),

secondly, legitimacy for the whole

the government exchequer for

movement of army in addition to the

movement of other law enforcing

agencies. Cost of POL, TA and DA of

officers of the armed forces will be in

addition to the usual cost of main-

taining law and order. Army deploy-

ment would have also made prece-

dence for future UP elections and

thereby made the role and effective-

Deployment of army in aid to civil

power is considered as extra and

beyond their job purview. Army

deployment for the last few months,

possibly, affected their normal

training and exercise. Therefore, we

should not make any decisions

based on personal preferences.

Conducting elections divisionwise,

by deploying police, BDR, civil

officers is good enough for holding

out of around 70 to 80 percent.

Some polling centres are too con-

gested to accommodate all the

polling personnel and polling agents

having long cues for awaiting vot-

ers. It is better to finish taking votes

before dusk, as such training and

preparing the voters will be very

useful. Experienced Presiding

Officers should be selected instead

of new ones who have no practical

experience. Another note of caution

is taking care of the supplies for the

election i.e. supply of quality seals,

I do not think deployment of army

is necessary. Instead we should

develop proper strategy to conduct

free and fair election with regular

forces like police, BDR etc. We

should also bar the ministers and

MPs from canvassing for any candi-

"My visit to Bangla-

admit that the American lady said

ink, knives etc.

M M Haque

UP elections have maximum turn

ness of police weaker.

free and fair elections.

But this provides added cost on

coming up with absurd statements.

Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka

Deployment of

election process.

army for UP polls

And how can the Foreign Ministry

fashion house.

"Innocent yet tortured" and some suggestions



When the children cry...

This is in reference to an article "Innocent yet tortured" and a letter "Some suggestions" by Shahnewaz Siddique published (January 8).

Mr. Siddique in his letter mentioned about possible networking among readers of The Daily Star. I think it is a tremendous idea. The Daily Star can set up a forum in their website to discuss the stories they publish. I can offer technical help with that if necessary. Just to give you an idea, how networking makes a difference, I would like to tell a story how two stories published in The Daily Star changed lives of some people by such networking.

After reading an article on journalist Tipu Sultan's torture in *The Daily Star* and Prothom Alo, I set up a website in 2001 to raise some funds for his treatment. This website was subsequently linked from The Daily Star's website and within three weeks I raised about \$15000 for Tipu that came of tremendous help for his full recovery. From that initiative, some people contacted me to create a permanent organisation for such cases of human rights abuses where the expatriates can help. As a result of the networking we formed an activist human rights group called Drishtipat in October 2001 which is based on Internet (http://www.drishtipat.org) . The networks grew larger and on October 2001, after seeing a story in The Daily Star on minority oppression in a village called Annadaprashad in Bhola, we decided to do help them out. After two months of fundraising, we raised about

Since then, the money has been spent to build 20 houses for the affected and create a permanent scholarship for minority students in that village. Now our members are spanned in four continents of the world and it is a great example of how expatriates can come ahead to alleviate the pains of some people in Ban-

Torture of two broth-

The news (January 7) of torture of

two brothers at Khilgaon after their

arrest by the army has sent shiver

down our spine. The police station

received them badly mauled and

nearly dead. This time the army

personnel were cautious enough to

spare them not to die of heart attack!

cerned from the news report was

that their young brother is a local

President of Chatra League. The

army's claim of their involvement in

anti-social activities have been

negated by the neighbours. The

case that was lodged against them

was politically motivated and later

withdrawn, as the members of the

family affirmed. But the two brothers

fell prev to torture. And it gives us the

impression that army has been

deployed to cleanse the society of

none but the Awami Leaguers.

The two brothers' fault as dis-

ers

gladesh rising above petty political belief for the common interest of helping Bangladesh. I would urge Mr. Siddique and other likeminded people to come ahead and contact us to create a positive impact and join the force.

In this light, I would like to thank The Daily Star for giving us such a great opportunity by providing honest and investigative reports in their daily. One such report "Innocent yet tortured" touched a lot of hearts. We would like to help out the victim who is in dire financial need. If others are interested, we can save this poor victim as well. Would The Daily Star be kind enough to set up a fund for him? Asif Saleh

New York, USA

Condemnation is a word that does not come close to what I am feeling after reading the news "Innocent yet tortured".

This is exactly what I had been warning against for the last few months. To every one who had written in this Letter Page in support of Operation Clean Heart (OCH), I ask: are you all happy now? After all, Operation Clean Heart people are merely taking "criminals" off the street and no innocent law abiders have

Many readers have taken exception to my opinions on the grounds of my physical remoteness from the "reality of Bangladesh". Now it has closely hit home. We are all guilty by association, especially those living in Bangladesh. You have all stood by and let this

I have nothing but utter condemnation for our society. My thoughts and prayers are with the boy and his family. To top it all, he will not get justice because of the new indemnity. It is a sad day to be a Bangladeshi. Yahya, USA

desh - An American But the army was deployed to tion of either Australia or Canada, This is in reference to the letter by could infiltrate in to the land guarded by the Border Security Force (BSF) ing mail for many of us. But we must Someone may say that it was not

one day in which these people have

and evidences of his involvement in

nothing but the truth. gone there. But then, what have the Last year one of my American authorities been doing for so long? friends visited Dhaka, Chittagong, Why now? What next? Sylhet etc with her Bangladeshi Ironically India, in its bid to husband and wrote me her experibecome a regional superpower ence after returning to USA. I was appears to be gradually losing embarrassed. This embarrassment common sense and it's leadership is is not for our poverty. I didn't get any adding clamour to an already bewilcomplain about our people. But it is dered nation, who could re-elect a the govt offices and the govt officials person like Mr. Narendra Modi to that are responsible for the negative power despite ample allegations

Often the slogan- 'Clean Your igniting of thousands of Muslims in City' can be found inscribed on the Guiarat, I feel horrified that our roadside wall I or on the billboard. country will one-day be surrounded But no one was ever told how to by a big neighbour led by the policlean the city. In fact there is no cies of people like Messrs. Advani, garbage management system in the Thackerey and Ms. Uma

of image of our country.

Dhaka looks better after banning 2-stroke autorickshaws. But still the traffic system remains chaotic.

Entrance to Dhaka from Chittagong by road is a horrible experience. Footpath should be made available to the public instead of hawkers or other illegal occupation.

ZIA is the first place that gives a negative impression to a foreign visitor about our country. Service, equipment, attitude of airport/customs officials nothing helps in improving the country's image. And if any visitor ever have to use the toilet of ZIA, he wouldn't think twice to say goodbye to Bangla-

Haroon Rashid Agrabad Access Road, Chittagong

was going through some letters from foreigners-expressing their view of Bangladesh...I just had to share my bit.

Although being a Bangladeshi, myself did get the same treatment from the customs officials. If that wasn't enough, my friend from Germany was very unfairly treated at ZIA! She did not even do anything wrong, rather she wanted to explore our 'unknown' land and inquired about getting a visa-in return. But she was swept away! As if she was a refugee or an unwanted alien!

Bangladesh is already suffering from negative image abroad! We could never attract any tourists like our neighbours India or Nepal-and to add more-we are the 'most corrupt' country in the world!

How about taking a few steps in developing our image, instead of making it worse than it already is?

With a lot of interest I read the letter "My Visit to Bangladesh" by MAU from Cleveland, OH. This reply is limited to what she said about rudeness in Bangladesh.

I'm a Bangladeshi currently living abroad, and I think what she has said about rudeness is hardly wrong. Rudeness is everywhere in Dhaka. Bureaucracy will always get on your nerves, and just about everyone behind a desk seems to think of himself as God (or something close). This behaviour hits the ceiling when a Bangladeshi goes to a foreign organisation for service. Try getting something done at these foreign organisations, just about everyone there is almost unbelievable rude. And do I dare talk about the rudeness characterised by the red fortress that they call the US Embassy in Dhaka?

I could go on forever on this topic But let's stop here.

I have read both Mr. Azad Miah's (Oldham, UK) and Mr. Babak Sayer's (Chicago, USA) letters (January 12).

I had to stop and think about the contents of both the letters. I have had the good fortune (I call it good fortune because these journeys abroad help me to compare Bangladesh with other developed countries) of travelling to most countries in the world. Let me assure both these gentlemen that Bangladesh immigration and customs are no different (better or worse) than the immigration and customs in any other country either in their reception or their treatment of "foreigners", including and particularly

Bangladeshis.

I have watched wheelchair bound patients and their attendants either totally ignored for 90 minutes or harassed to tears (they had all the right paper work and requisite visas). Genuine students being held up for hours while their visas and papers are examined and reexamined. Newly married wives arriving in a "foreign" country to be shocked by the types of questions she is subjected to. I can't even begin to count the number of times I have seen Bangladeshis spreading out their belongings on the customs counter. Have these gentlemen thought about how humiliating it is for a lady to spread out her private

things on the counter for everyone to gawk at?

Admittedly, this is no excuse for us to treat them in a like manner (two wrongs do not make a right) but have the two gentlemen complained to the British Government and/or the Government of the USA about their treatment of foreigners? am all for improvement (and believe me Bangladesh needs improving!) but bashing one's own country all in praise of 'foreign' countries is certainly not the way to

Advocate Afsana Wahab, Ph.D Bashundhara Residential Area,

"Autorickshaw and the affluent"

Mr. Aran thinks that just because he did not beat up a defaulter driver, he will be spared of criticism. Well, that

had many such experiences while being a resident of Gulshan before coming to UK for treatment. Mr. Khan has again proved his immaturity by saving that he doesn't beat up the faulted drivers! Does he think that NOT beating up those poor people is a sign of generosity! And of course, rickshawpullers plying their three wheelers and earning money to feed a family is much more important than people like Mr. Khan having a smooth drive to relax at their friend's place.

Those poor people will respect the rich for their generosity, and because they are well educated, not because they have money or they pay more tax. Money cannot buy everything, it couldn't buy health for me. I hope Mr. Khan will consider those poor people as human beings. They have the right for moral income. And I guess, the government has banned rickshaws many roads and autorickshaws to cities, only bikes and non-motorised vehicles are allowed in city centres. Sure, the ricks-hawpullers may not be as organised and law-abiding. but is anybody else? Khan Kabir

"Is Khaleda, Hasina talks at

all possible?" The Opinion "Is Khaleda, Hasina talks at all possible?" (January 5) by the former Finance Minister SAMS Kibria suggests that Khaleda-Hasina meet will not be meaningful unless the fundamental conditions-restoration of rule of law, adherence to the constitutionan and end to harassment and violence against the opposition are not

During the rule of past governments including the Awami League,

Hartal on January 16!

Awami League has called a hartal on the 16th of January in protest of the government's decision on increase in oil price and other diminutive matters. What they failed to realise was the distress that this stereotypical dawn-todusk hartal has inflicted on both O and A levels students. Almost every important leader from both the opposition and the government knows the time period of these exams but they have this knack to disrupt the schedule.

Around a thousand students will have to sit for their exams at the dead of the night in different exam centres from the British Council to the NSU. The inconvenience that hartal can cause is not taken into account by these politicians. If hartals can be avoided during HSC and SSC exams, then why not the O and A Levels exams?

I was even more shocked to see the lack of concern on The Daily Star when the hartal was announced. At least the media should be responsible on raising such issues. The distinction that most in our society put forth in the case of English medium students is well talked about but now this has simply gone Haji Mohammad Isam Dhanmondi, Dhaka

It is our belief that the opposition political parties are well aware that O and A-Level examinations are being held these days. They must also be aware that the schedule of the examinations are decided by the British Board of Exami-



Exams 'yes', hartal 'no'

nations and remain absolutely unchanged, only in exceptional circumstances the timings are changed and that again within that date.

In view of the opposition's call of hartal on 16 January 2003, the British Council Dhaka has rescheduled the afternoon examinations of 16 January 2003 at 2230 hours, and these exams are scheduled to continue until 0100 hours of 17 January 2003. But then on 17 January 2003, the exams are again scheduled in the morning hours.

The above timings would put the students in a very difficult situation, particularly in terms of timings, exam preparations, and the unbearable cold which has swept the country. These will have an adverse affect on their grades as well.

We, the parents of the examinees appeal to our esteemed opposition I parties to take the plight of the young students into account. It must be remembered that their future is at stake.

We would like to put the following suggestions to this

1. Shift the date of the hartal and declare it after 22 January 2003; or

2. Declare a half-day hartal. Or 3. Convince the British Council to shift the 17 January 2003 exams to early evening. It is our earnest belief that the political parties who are supposed to be representatives of the people will take the issue seriously and change their decision accordingly. Concerned Parents of O

and A-Level Examinees On e-mail

I strongly object to the whole substance of his January 8 letter. He states, "These poor people can work as day labourer, why do they have to ply public transport when they have no sense of how to handle public transport?" If these people do not know how to handle these transports, shouldn't someone show them?

I do not think that Mr. Aran will take up the task, and neither will the rich elite. Before making such heartless comments, people like Mr. Aran should take a look in the mirror themselves, and if they have even a bit of common sense, refrain from making such statements in the Rahat Bari

Hatirpool, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

agree with Siddique and Kania Mahmood (January 10) in their response to Aran Khan Anjan about his criticism of rickshaws and autorickshaws describing them as 'pesky' and 'peculiar'!

For your knowledge, Mr. Khan, sometimes these rickshawpullers are much generous than those 'newly' rich people in Dhaka. I've avoid traffic jams and pollution, not to decrease the number of scratches and dents in Mr. Khan's Nahreen Chowdhury

London, UK

Every time I visit Dhaka, my most favourite mode of transport is rickshaw. I ride it to almost anywhere I want to go. The rickshaw gives me an unparalleled vantagepoint to see all that I want to see while on the ride. It's the best way I use my camcorder to record sights and scenes in Dhaka.

It is quiet, pollution-free and open. I love to ride it. I avoid baby taxis. My only complaint is the rickshaws used to be more comfortable and wider in my old days in Dhaka. I'm disappointed that rickshaws are being banned from many roads in Dhaka. In many European constitution was thin, repression on opposition party was usual and law and order was as such that even the PM herself ordered her people to kill I doubt if there was any govern-

we have seen that adherence to

ment in the past who could even realise the above conditions needed for the welfare of the people as well as for the country. And if those conditions could be met by the government itself then what is the need for the present government to invite the opposition leader for discussion? **Nur Hossain**

Bangshal Road, Dhaka

NOTICE

We are planning to bring out a full-page readers' reaction on the newly promulgated Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance 2003. The readers are requested to send their opinion on the subject by January 16. Editor

Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance 2003 and some points to ponder

Modi.

Bharti.

Ahmed Mohiuddin

Banani, Dhaka

I would like to express my grave concern over the promulgation of the ordinance, indemnifying the action of the joint force under Indemnity Ordinance of 2003.

curb on crimes and criminals. Peo-

ole welcomed them and their effort

to root out the criminal elements

from the society. But should the

public at large be panicky and weary

of their fate because of their belong-

ing to other platform? We do not

want army to be the cat's paw of the

people at the helm of state affairs.

we want them win the heart of the

general people by being committed

to fairness and equality, and preju-

Illegal Bangladeshis

I am overwhelmed by the alarming

decision of India to deport 20 million

"illegal Bangladeshi immigrants". I

don't know how as many as 20

million people, the figure that amaz-

ingly is less than the entire popula-

diced to none.

Ahmed Nazir

in India

Retrospective effect to indemnify the action of the joint force shall go against the Bangladesh Constitution as well as International Convention against Torture.

Armed forces have their own code of conduct and disciplinary roles. Because of misconduct and negligence of duty they have to face trial under Court-Martial. The newly promulgated indemnity ordinance would seriously affect military discipline. The government should have placed the Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance, 2003 before

the Jatiya Sangsad for a full debate, as the Article 46 of the Constitution would not cover justification for indemnifying the action of the joint forces. This Article of the Bangladesh Constitution puts specific circumstances and a limitation, under which indemnity can be applied. Recognition of inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Universal

Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 3: Every one has right to life, liberty and security of a person. Article 5: No one shall be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment. Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this declaration and against any incitement of such discrimination. And Article 8: Every one has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Torture is prohibited under the UDHR, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Prohibition of torture is also part of international customary law.

No national constitution or international laws would agree or support legitimising the killing (as alleged to have taken place during Operation Clean Heart) of members of the public under the coverage of a black law. The Ordinance would tarnish the image of the

government in the country and abroad. Delwar Jahid, Canada

The Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance 2003 which absolves all army personnel associated with torture and custodial deaths is tantamount to legally allowing the government to launch an occasional campaign of terror, torture and deaths on its citizens and getting



Army above law?

This Ordinance, as it has been pointed out, is contrary to the spirit of the rule of law, which allows equal rights to everyone before the eye of law and prohibits the government's arbitrary use of power against its citizens. The rule of law is very much enshrined in the Bangladesh constitution in article 27 and a number of other related articles. The Bangladesh Constitution, however, also allows indemnity in its article 46, but for very special circumstances which should not cover the present circumstances. By applying

indemnity to the present set of circumstances, the government will do at least the follow-

· Pervert the spirit of democracy

· Contribute to the violation of fundamental rights (prohibited in article 26)

Make the army unnecessarily unpopular and controversial in the eyes of the general

· Tarnish the image of Bangladesh in the world community

It is hoped that good senses would prevail on the part of the government and they would decide not to further pursue the bill in the Parliament. Panini Ahmed, Boston, USA

It is painful to see one more black Indemnity bill being put forward to the people to accept. There could be provision to deploy army in case of national crisis like the tremendous

deterioration of law and order that we had seen before the drive began. However, army should not be above law specially when our politicians want to uphold democracy. Army should never have any role in civil administration, in fact, they are not trained for that During Operation Clean Heart we saw many unlisted (defined as having no case with

the police) people dying in custody. When army came to know that a top terror was not listed by the local police it could first apply its law to the police for being so negligent to the duty. Why so many people had to face such terrible fate for the negligence of our lawenforcing agency?

Army could have been more cautious in implementing its agenda. It could catch the criminals of its list, however, could give the victims a chance to speak for themselves. This is simply undemocratic.

I don't want to complain to any human rights group, but my plea to our government is let not compel our people to accept another black indemnity ordinance. We should always keep our armed forces above politics and debate, then we should remember that it should never be used for causes that could make its action debatable. The whole responsibility lies with the incumbent government.

Dr. Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal Silicon Valley, California, USA