

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.

"Free Saleem Samad"

Once again Afsan Chowdhury has written a passionate and hard hitting-article (January 12).

He's absolutely right when he says that when the main accused the two Channel 4 reporters have been released and so also the interpreter Pricilla Raj, then what's the logic behind detaining Saleem Samad? And why is our civil society who raises hue and cry over petty issues like attack in Afghanistan etc are so silent about such a grave matter? I have no words to condemn the inactive attitude of our intellectual body.

Borhanuddin Ahmed, Dhaka

Thank you Afsan Chowdhury for such an emotional and timely article. Like the writer I'm also curious whether it is mandatory for every one to be pro-AL or pro-BNP. If anyone is a general citizen with no bias towards any political party then is he to suffer indefinitely?

Is Saleem Samad's crime so grave that he has to be detained for such a long time? Then why did the authorities release the two foreign journalists? And what is *Reporters Sans Frontiers* doing in this regard? All I have seen is a letter in *The Daily Star* Letters Page from them. Is this the way the foreign news agencies support its co-workers in times of need?

Anjan Chowdhury
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Released at last!

Saber Hossain Chowdhury has at last been released! But God knows for how long he would remain free.

What has the Government gained from the arrests of Saber Hossain, Shahriar Kabir, Muntasir Mamoon and others? These personalities were arrested immediately after the bomb blast in Mymensingh. So we can assume that they were arrested in connection with the incident. Would the authorities make public whether they were able to gather from the arrested any information relating to the incident? If they haven't then why this harassment to these people? And why did the authorities defy HC order in releasing them? Who would make up the lost time from their life?

Anuradha Alam
Baridhara, Dhaka

"ICS have no place on DU campus"

I have been a passionate reader of *The Daily Star* almost since its inception. I, like many readers, switched from other popular English dailies of the time towards this emerging dynamic print media, as it echoed the objective minds, reflected social consciousness and brought news to the public in an invigorating artistry and style.

At times, however, some of your reporters loose objectivity, and often tend to unjustly vilify a particular student body-ICS- as being communal in the arena of Bangladesh student politics. I am not sure what motivated your reporter to sing-along with our so-called politicians with the same rhyme: "ICS have no place on DU campus". My plain understanding about any politics is that every one deserves an opinion in a democracy unless one would like to call it "demonocracy".

What constitutional right the so-called progressive student bodies at DU have when its members are found in regular extortion, hijacking and inhumane torture of general students on campus? I simply don't understand what legitimacy these groups have to ban ICS on DU campus? Who has given the stamping authority to ban ICS or any other student body for that matter? How the DU authorities agree to that either?

If ICS has no agenda that goes contrary to the constitution and/or the sovereignty of the country, then it has every right to assemble and invite others to its ideals free from pressure or any contrived convenience. In case you are unaware, ICS perhaps has the highest number of academically bright students among all student bodies engaged in campus politics nowadays, not to mention the fact they have never been found in hijacking or destruction of public properties in the name of politics. I would urge your reporters to put some research before concocting such stories for the sake of credibility.

Dr. Abu Ishmam
Columbus, GA, USA

After reading the staff report, "Shibir wants to spread wings over DU" (January 13) I feel the reporter attempted in a very ignorant and silly way to undermine the activities of Islami Chhatro Shibir and glorify other student organisations in our national universities and colleges. I do not support communal politics at all, but if we consider ICS minus communal or ideological issues, anyone having the slightest involvement with student politics in Bangladesh can undoubtedly say that the criminal activities being committed by any of the major student organisations in our country are not in anyway less than those being or had been done by ICS.

I think the newspapers that have intellectual resources should come forward and take every step necessary to stop student politics of all sorts - communal or non-communal,



"Death relieves Mimi"

We are deeply shocked and pained to learn that Mimi, the 3rd year student of Architecture of Ahsanullah University, could not sustain the serious burn injuries inflicted on her by her friend (!). She had to fight for long nine painful days.

The incidence must not be seen as an isolated incidence of madness of a person but should be viewed as a symptom of erosion of human values from our society. This is particularly evident among our youngsters - where have we gone wrong in their upbringing?

Series of recent child murders by their relatives and the cases of acid burns caused by the acquaintances that we have learnt from the news reports should be an eye opener for our society. These incidences indicate to a rot in our values.

Exemplary punishment to those who are guilty is needed but it is not the solution to the problem. Root causes must be identified and eliminated. Social scientists and civil society should come forward to find out a corrective measure to this malice.

We sympathise with the bereaved family at their loss and at the loss of social values from our society. May Mimi's soul rest in peace.

Dr. Azizul Mawla
Professor, Dept. of Architecture, BUET

left or right, pro-Khaleda or pro-Hasina - from all of our universities and colleges for the sake of improving the academic atmosphere and improving the poor quality of the students up to the international standard. We repent for what we lost by doing stupid student politics, I hope the next generations would not.

Khairul Hasan, Surrey, U.K

Visiting Bangladesh

We've been guests of your beautiful country for nearly one month now, and our impressions are mostly between positive and very positive. The people are very friendly and helpful, the transportation system works as you would never imagine. In one word: the hospitality of the people of this country is great though one would imagine, that people have other problems than caring about foreigners.

However, I would like to mention one incident that happened to us in Chittagong. After an exhausting day on the train, we arrived quite late in the evening, and so all we wanted was a room to put our luggage and have a shower. In the guidebook, there was the name of one hotel that had very good reputation, namely Hotel Golden Inn. When we arrived at the reception, a friendly man asked us, if we wanted two singles. I said: "No, one double!" For better understanding: My wife is Bengali-born, but living in Switzerland and since then Swiss citizen. There was evidently no problem until there

son, will read this letter and will ask him for consequences! People like him are very bad for the reputation of the Bengali tourism industry.

Klaus Baumann
Zürich, Switzerland

"My visit to Bangladesh--an American view"

I read the letter from the American lady, married to a Bangladeshi, who had visited Bangladesh recently for the first time.

I must say, that as an English lady who has visited Bangladesh four times in recent years, I cannot agree with her experiences. I have travelled alone to Bangladesh and have always received prompt and courteous attention in the Airport.

I remember my first trip from the airport into central Dhaka as a wonderful experience and on subsequent visits I have looked forward to the hustle and bustle that is Bangladesh.

I have made many friends in Bangladesh and I must say that I have never experienced such love as I felt from the people of your beautiful country. I remember writing in my diary on my third day in Bangladesh that "if smiles were to be turned to gold, then surely Bangladesh would be the richest country in the world". For me Bangladesh is like a second home. It's the place I go to when the life in England becomes too stressful and selfish. For me it is a place where I can relax amongst my dear friends.

enter into negotiation and provide large economic assistance. But it actually threatens China's own security.

If North Korea continues to develop its nuclear capability, it will invariably add to Japan's security concerns. North Korea has already demonstrated its capability of hitting Japan by its relatively long-range Tapedong missile and Pyongyang's decision to restart its nuclear program will inevitably magnify Japan's security concerns and Japan may decide to go nuclear to counter North Korea. Any Japanese decision to go nuclear will send the alarm bells ringing all over China and rest of East Asia, which have been victims of the Japanese, militarism during the World War II.

Japan is the most advanced nation in the Asia-Pacific region and it has already a conventional self defence force unmatched in technological prowess and if Japan decided to go nuclear, it can develop its nuclear capability in months. In fact, many analysts believe Japan is capable of deploying hundreds of thermonuclear weapons in a very short time. East Asia might end up in a nuclear confrontation between China, North and South Korea on one side and Japan and the United States on the other. A nuclear-armed Japan will drastically change the balance of power in the region, especially if Japan decides to extend its strategic partnership with Taiwan.

As such, it will be in China's own interest to put pressure on North Korea which is dependent on China for survival. The United States must tell the Chinese that they will suffer in the long run if they cannot stem North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

Telecommunication and consumer's rights

In order to meet the growing demand of telephone connection, both landline and mobile, the government and private sector is putting up lucrative projects. However, the hard fact is, ownership of a telephone connection will still remain far too high for the majority of the people. One should remember that telephone service is not a luxury; it is almost a basic necessity.

A well-planned independent payphone network in the capital would definitely serve the need of common people, who does not own a phone. In the private sector an independent network with seamless interconnection with all the other operators can help people with less amount of investment. If the payphone operates independently, other operators would be happy to provide interconnection. Without any further investments the present operators would be getting calls at their exchange.

The new payphone system should use smart cards, which could be used for other digital transactions. To protect the un-attended street phones from vandalism

Miah's letter (January 7) with typical baseless arrogant remarks and values. He writes that "any country that do not practice the basics of democracy, do not provide its inhabitants with basic needs and freedom of speech cannot be considered as an acceptable nation".

Who decides that every country has to have democracy, has there been a worldwide referendum to find out that this is the only way? NO. Who has defined what the basic needs are? Who has defined what free speech is and has humankind decided it as mandatory? The answer is again a big NO.

Once again we find capitalist blind followers wanting to impose their views and values on others. By definition of democracy there should be a worldwide referendum to decide if everyone has to implement it.

Shuja carries on by saying that mistakes were made by the US in the past which seemed right at the time. Mistakes like annihilating the natives of America is a mistake that anyone could have told them it was wrong. Exploitation of blacks, another mistake which they were told was wrong. Taking of Philippines as a colony was a mistake which they were told of. Funding of IRA in Northern Ireland which they were told not to do. The list could go on. Their recent actions which they think are correct are being criticised just like in the past, yet the voices of others are not being heeded to. So how long can we allow US to go on making mistakes which we can see are WRONG.

Abu Nasher
UK

Thanks to Shuja for the reply (12th Jan) to my earlier letter. The universal excuse "they just hate America" is being used far too much nowadays. In fact, there are quite a number of magic-phrases such as "we are only defending ourselves", "collateral damage", "they just want to kill us", etc. which are being over-used everyday to defend all sorts of wrongdoing (check the book "Why do people hate America" by Ziauddin Sardar & Merrill Wyn Davies)! And whenever someone points (rightly) to those wrongdoing, they are being accused for "finger-pointing" and being branded as anti-American. Apparently, some world renowned journalists like Robert Fisk, John Pilger, Noam Chomsky and many are not free from these "branding" either. Are they also in a "mission" to confuse the world?

I agree with Shuja's point "any country that do not practice the basics of democracy, do not provide its inhabitants with basic needs and freedom of speech can not be considered as an acceptable nation". And that is why I believe America shouldn't go around the world, calling other countries "undemocratic" and "axis of evil", before America itself learns to practice these first. Some facts:

Hundreds of people are being held in Guantanamo Bay without charge or proof. Remember, innocent until proven guilty! These people are being punished before

readers? Well, one will get confused if one is childish enough to ignore well published facts (unless of course, these facts are never published in certain "no-entry" places in which case, there is a report about Canadian media by Robert Fisk "Journalists are under fire for telling the truth", 18th Dec 02 on <http://www.independent.co.uk/story.jsp?story=362545>). But it is laughable to suggest that everyone else is just as childish!

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

"From a concerned Dhakaite"

This is in reference to the letter

British Prime Minister has spoken. His monthly press conference on 13th January 2003 is astounding. It is for obfuscation, double speak, and barely concealed arrogance. On his assertion that Iraq is a direct threat to British security the writer doubts that the British public buys that argument. But more to the point there is a sinister threat to the Security Council itself. By saying that if any member "blocks" action (read a war on Iraq), Britain will not be obliged to defer action. Is Mr. Blair trying to be proxy "super power"? When the Prime Minister of a leading democracy speaks so undemocratically on matters of world security and international law, what can be more astounding?

before applying for foreign patents.

Personally, I do not have the financial means, either to make the working model or to apply for foreign patents. Our Science Ministry (Bangladesh) has promised to patronise the invention, subject to a positive examination report from a local science body, nominated by the government on 30 Nov., 2002. For want of timely steps, one of my previous inventions was alleged to be pirated by a British Company.

The new invention appears to be contrary to prevalent physical laws, and is a revolution in itself, to mankind and as such understandably quite an urgent and serious matter.

Nazmul Huda

Cold wave



The chill factor

The cold wave which is prevalent in the country for the last one-week has made our life unbearable. With the dense fog and unbearably low temperature the suffering of the poor school going children is indescribable. In the previous years we used to have schools closed during winter or early January but the recent timing change in the English medium schools (some) is causing serious problem.

I would be thankful if the children are given a respite for a week and let the cold wave be over. Being a teacher myself, I do not think a weeklong holiday will cause any serious problem to their education. It really hurts me to see my child waking up in the early morning and leaving for school trembling.

Munna, Mohammadpur, Dhaka

This year, the weather is absolutely freezing. It is densely foggy and chilling all through the day. And the sun is also out of sight. The weather is almost identical to that of England. Only that the temperature of England is much lower than that of Bangladesh. But the way it is getting colder day by day, is there any chance of snowing in Bangladesh in near future? What does the weather specialists say?

Aquib Reza,
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

The weather is really cold this winter, isn't it? When was the last time, winter appeared so unbearable in our country? And it's really heartbreaking to see the plight of the poor. When we cannot avoid the chilling bite of winter even after wearing a number of warm clothes, how does the street children who doesn't have anything to wear fight this weather?

Has the Government taken any steps to save these impoverished people from this extreme weather?

Kajali Khan Komol, Baily Road, Dhaka

I have just returned from Canada and though the weather is way colder over there, it appears really unbearable in Bangladesh. It is because we do not have any preparation to fight this type of weather. There is no heating system in our residents and other buildings. The government has no preparation and probably no intention, to save the poor and helpless from the freezing winter.

But why so? This year it might seem colder. But winter comes in our country every year. And every year, the poor people suffer and also a number of them die. And still the Government remains nonchalant about the matter!

Anoop Ali, Gulshan, Dhaka

"Driving wearing lungi"



Blame it on comfort...

This is in response to the letter (January 13) about driving wearing a lungi. According to the writer lungi is an unsmart dress as opposed to pants and that drivers driving luxury cars should not wear lungi because people perceive it as symbol of lower social status.

Fashion is subjective and everyone has a right to label dresses "unsmart" and "smart" as he/she sees fit. I cannot therefore criticise the writer's point of view but I would like to however express my disappointment at how traditional dresses are perceived as "inferior" to western clothes by the writer and I am sure by many others in the society.

I think that such perceptions have roots in our colonial past, when the opinions of the British rulers were in many ways imposed upon us. The rulers then gave greater acknowledgement to people who dressed and behaved in manners similar to

theirs. Long after the British rule had ended in the subcontinent, people have continued to show preference for Western clothes which I see as confirming to the fashion sense of economically superior people. It would speak greater of our self-esteem as a nation if we didn't appear condescending towards what is inherently ours in favour of that which is foreign.

Saad Quayyum
Dartmouth College, USA

This is in response to the letter by RC (January 10) expressing surprise at his driver being penalised by a traffic sergeant for wearing a lungi while driving.

The traffic sergeant is absolutely right and has performed his duty well in this case. I remember, in pre-Liberation days vehicle drivers were not allowed to wear lungi while driving and it was a part of driving rules. A driver must wear a trouser or a half pant. It was probably a rule set by the British in early years but now ignored.

It is a safety reason why lungi is not allowed. A lungi might get entangled on clutch pedal while changing gears or while applying break and thereby causing an accident. Even now when I board an auto rickshaw and find the driver wearing lungi, I politely advise him that he should wear a trouser as his lungi might get entangled on break pedal and cause an accident. Saree is equally dangerous if a lady is wearing one while driving. Lungi and saree is banned in many factories as it might get sucked into a machine while operating and cause serious accident. Lungi and saree may appear very elegant if properly worn but it has its disadvantages in practicality. In case of emergency can a person wearing lungi or saree run fast? Don't tell me drivers don't earn enough to buy couple of pairs of trousers!

Ziauddin Ahmed
Gulshan, Dhaka

came a man from behind. He declared that there were no rooms available. He said, if I had a reservation, he could give us a room, which was ridiculous, because there was only two reservations in total! I wanted to talk to the manager, but he refused. So we had to take a room in a not very nice hotel in the area.

The next day the same thing happened, when I wanted to take a reservation for our return day from the hill tracts. I don't know, what this man thought about us or what his reasons were for refusing to give us a room, but I think a matter like this would be an honour to any regimen country, and is a shame for a country like Bangladesh.

So maybe somebody, who has got a higher position than this per-

Yes Dhaka is polluted, so is every big city in the world but go as I do to the villages in the Rangpur area and see the life there. Live with the people, as a local, as I do and enjoy those simple things in life. Enjoy the love, the family life and especially the children shouting to the *Bideshi*. I'm sorry to say this but perhaps this American lady was looking at Bangladesh and comparing it to America but that would be the biggest insult.

Kathleen Haq, UK

North Korea's nuclear program

Decision by the North Korean regime to develop its nuclear capability is apparently aimed at putting pressure on the United States to

partner-programme could be introduced. A network like this would serve huge number of travellers travelling to Dhaka for various reasons everyday. The network can use VOIP for ISD calls and reduce the international call charge to a fraction for the common people.

The amount of money the government would earn from only VAT would be substantial and the present operators including BTB would be benefited. 5,000-10,000 payphones in Dhaka city would not event put a scratch in the market share of the present operators.

Mushatq
Dhaka

"War is not the answer"

Shuja from Canada replied to Azad

being proven guilty. Recently (29 Oct. BBC report) some prisoners been released because according to US officials "they were not involved in al-Qaeda!" Now tell me, what kind of a democracy is that, where you are arrested, punished and then released because you were not guilty in the first place?

In Afghanistan, suspects arrested by American forces for interrogation, are being watched 24 hours a day (nothing wrong). But, they have to sleep, urinate and even defecate in front of the prison guards (check on www.independent.co.uk, 6th Dec 02, Robert Fisk: "With runners and whippers, al-Qaeda outfoxes US forces"). What happened to privacy and basic rights?

Finally, my mission to confuse

"From a concerned Dhakaite" (Jan. 14, 2003)

My first advice to the concerned Dhakaite is the look upon the other driver or drivers as an idiot behind the wheel. You need to proceed with a defensive driving attitude.

The transportation and traffic control division or equivalent of the government of Bangladesh need to formulate strict rules and regulation for the highways. They need to educate each driver via periodic and mandatory training or classes, with pass/fail exams, at a cost to the driver or owner of the vehicle. This will also include the rickshaw-pullers. No matter what the driver's license will not be issued or re-issued till the periodic and mandatory education is completed. The police need to establish as a group with a strong backbone, i.e. they need to be honest, strict in executing the traffic rules and laws, not be biased, not give into bribery, be esteemed, with plenty of patience, and hold individual driver accountable for their actions on the road. Separate "police" courts need to be established in selected police stations across the city (where the traffic congestion is low) to process the defaulters. The police should have the authority to rightfully impound a vehicle due to public safety and hazard issue and fine the owner. The impounded vehicle should be towed under police supervision, into a police impound lot at owner's expense and released after the fine(s) have been paid at the "police" court. Within a month or two, the cost will be borne from the traffic fines, etc.

Many of our states-person have travelled to other countries and have witnessed the systematic acceptance of traffic rules on the road and highways. A quick example would be Singapore. Why can't we do the same in Bangladesh?

Quazi Hasan
San Diego, Ca, USA

Astounding

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.
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Editor

To remind Mr. Blair, the US has on numerous occasions blocked unanimous resolutions by the Security Council. Yet Mr. Blair on behalf of Britain lacked assertion to condemn or act unilaterally. As to weapons of mass destruction, even with his faltering eloquence he does not make a good case by saying that WMD were used in 9/11 attack. Had it been so, every day thousands of WMDs are flying around the skies of the world.

Finally, astounding also is the attempt to delink North Korea and Iraq when it comes to waging war by the West (read US). Yes, there is a disconnect which we understand very well. It is that the North Korea has nuclear weapons and its defiance is to be treated with a soft glove, while Iraq which has no evidence of WMD must be urgently dealt with premeditated brutal force. Why? What is the message then by the custodians of international law and order? Again an astounding piece of argument and a very naive defence by Mr. Blair which convinces no one except perhaps himself. Even that is doubtful.

Hussain
Dhaka

Invention of pollution-free, free electricity generation

By the grace of the Almighty Allah, I have invented a process of pollution-free, free electricity generation. Gravitational potential energy has been used for the process. The complete title of the invention is "Perpetual motion through virtual and sequential transfer of mass by much reduced net force and application of new concepts in science".

I have already applied for a local patent, the priority date is 21 August, 2002. I wish to have worldwide protection of my invention. I also wish to have the process published in international journals, but the (international) patent experts have already cautioned me not to do that

Siddheswari Road, Dhaka

Ad on National Nutrition Project

Advertisement for the post of "National Nutrition Project of the Ministry of Health" was recently published in two Bengali newspapers.

But most of the eligible candidates for such a position are readers of English dailies (very rarely Bengali). So most of the deserving candidates could not apply for the post.

It is requested that the post should be re-advertised in at least one English daily in the interest of wide publicity, fair play and meaningful completion among the deserving candidates.

Prof. Karim Bux
Kalabagan, Dhaka

"Friendly ties with all not at cost of neighbours"

This is in reference to the comment "Friendly ties with all not at cost of neighbours" made by Syed Abul Hossain, International Affairs secretary of AL. From his comment it becomes apparent that AL vows to maintain a friendly tie with India at any cost.

Our relationship with India has always been topsy-turvy. India has always treated us as a weak neighbour and has tried to impose their demands on us. There exists a huge trade deficit between India and Bangladesh, border unrest, dispute on Ganges water and many more problems that proves the relation between the two countries is anything but friendly.

With all these problems prevailing between India and Bangladesh, how can AL claims to maintain a good relationship with India?

Md. Mynul Mamun
East Goran, Dhaka