

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.

Transparency International

The following is an excerpt from the Transparency International Global Corruption report for 2003, "In Bangladesh, the new BNP-led government spared no effort in exposing the misdeeds of its predecessor. A white paper issued in January 2002 presented a total of 40 major cases of alleged corruption against the Awami League, accusing it of plundering US\$126 million while in office. The paper also alleged that the former premier Sheikh Hasina pocketed US\$123 million from the sale of eight Russian MiG-29s and a further US\$3 million through the employment of foreign consultants in an export promotion scam. The BNP-led government reasserted a norm familiar in Bangladesh politics: no incumbent politician is ever successfully prosecuted for corruption. Cases pending against BNP politicians were abruptly withdrawn. White paper investigations into corruption conspicuously omitted irregularities committed during the party's last tenure in office."

I am constantly amazed at our political leaders' abilities to sling mud at each other while absolving themselves for all their own crimes. The TI report also didn't mention the fact that the businessmen, who facilitate these underhanded deals, usually get away with it as well.

Sabyasachi Dhaka

"Save Dhanmondi"

This is in reference to Mr Mustafizur Rahman's call for realism and a halt to efforts to save Dhanmondi.

Where does Mr. Rahman get the idea that saving Dhanmondi means recreating a purely residential community "100 km away from city centre"? Has he not heard about the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (2000-2015), which changed the status of Dhanmondi from a "residential only" to a "mixed use" residential zone?

Before Mr. Rahman dismisses efforts to save Dhanmondi as pie-in-the-sky, he should at least pick up a copy of the Plan and treat himself to some of the exciting ideas it offers for meeting the problems of urban life. Like countering the threat of crowding and traffic congestion by developing self-contained residential neighbourhoods, furnished with a school or two, perhaps a college, a couple of clinics, pharmacies and a handful of shops that directly cater to the daily and weekly needs of residents.

And, what on earth does Mr Rahman mean when he says that the schools, colleges, hospitals in Dhanmondi are hallowed because they are "nationally reputed". Reputed for what? Excellence of teaching? Surely, he doesn't expect us to swallow that? If the schools really qualified for excellence, they would provide plenty of space for children to romp around, let off steam, and discover the awesome learning power of play. They would provide enough space around school buildings to ensure that, when an earthquake strikes and high rises come tumbling down, children are not buried in debris. If they really cared about excellence, they would abide by city laws that rightly require that a primary school be built on 3 bigas of land (1 acre) and secondary schools, 6. If they truly cared about children's health, and the social consciousness and moral stamina of future generations, they would abide by Dhaka city laws that mandate that schools in a mixed use area, like Dhanmondi, must be located no further than 150 feet away from a commercial intersection. The reason for the requirement? To ensure that schools do not inconvenience the community by creating traffic jams. Yes, to ensure that a resident's human rights to a peaceful home is respected.

If the colleges in Dhanmondi really worried about academic excellence, they would move out of the area, consolidate themselves into one or two large campuses that achieve sufficient scale to acquire and maintain decent libraries, well-equipped laboratories, plenty of grass and green around to help students retain their reverence for something called nature.

As for the imputed reputation of hospitals and clinics. Let the exodus of Bangladeshis to India, Singapore and Thailand serve as commentary.

Sultana Alam Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Indian acquisition of ABM Systems

Besides developing its own medium range surface-to-air missile (SAM), "Akash" into anti ballistic missile (ABM) system which is said to be comparable in capabilities to the US ABM, patriot system, India is also seeking to acquire "SV-300" from Russia and "Arrow" ABM system from Israel.

India's efforts to introduce ABM system in South Asia are potentially highly destabilising and are even in contravention to its "no first use" policy, since the acquisition of such systems enhances the temptation for a disarming first strike. If such a development is not forestalled by the international community especially the US which is already in dialogue with India on its new strategic missile defence shield, it will create a hair trigger security envi-

ronment in South Asia and would compel Pakistan to adopt the highly destabilising and accident prone "launch on warning" or "launch under attack" strategies.

The biggest problem is that even if the two countries, somehow, develop or acquire through foreign suppliers, adequate early warning systems, they may be able to detect a missile launch, but there is no way they can determine the kind of warhead the incoming missiles are carrying. Based on traditional military way of acting on worst scenario, the response could result in catastrophic consequences for both countries.

Qais Ahmed Rawalpindi, Pakistan

"Well done Sheikh Hasina!"

This is my response to Ms Nabila Idris (January 27). I thank her for her reply. Her thoughts as a citizen do deserve respect. But the truth is in the limelight it is better not to hide. In my view that is not patriotism but suffocating the truth. I definitely do not agree with her that any statement our Opposition Leader has made cannot be termed false.

As for the "bindus" our present

administration.

However I must say given our sorry situation, we need the army to ensure fairer UP polls. It's interesting that the CEC sent a copy of his letter to the Armed Forces Division as well. Does he hope to get a more sympathetic hearing from them? Will the army force the PM to call them out?

Masood Rana Dhaka

"Whither image of Bangladesh"

May I draw the readers' attention to the concluding remarks of a Professor of one of our prestigious universities, "It is no use sending our FM to US where he will have an entry putting thumb-impression and being photographed for record -that will be all the more degrading" (January 27). The erudite Professor should have better known that the FM, as a diplomat, is included in the categories exempted from registering at INS (Immigration and Naturalisation Services) offices of the US government.

I am, however, not pointing out the optimism, usual in such cases, to the effect that lobbying may ultimately lead to lessening the

The wolf and the lamb

The other night BBC was screening a joint live press conference of the British Foreign Secretary and the American Secretary of States on Iraq. While watching the programme I was reminded of the most recounted fable 'The Wolf and the Lamb,' particularly the way the duo are dealing with the Iraqi crisis. The press conference of the two foreign secretaries, however convinced us that both the countries are following a double standard in matters of crime and criminal, one for their own (wolves) and the other for the rest of the world (lamb). So long the two, most civilised ones (!), were teaching us the universality of the law that no one is guilty of a crime unless proven guilty. In case of Afghans and the Iraqis the duo are using the opposite law. Both the foreign secretaries without a bit of qualm said that the "onus of proof lies with Saddam" that they do not have arms of mass destruction. The world is proud (?) of having such world leaders (!) who follows law of their own making!

There is another mind-boggling issue in relation to stockpiling of arms of mass destruction. The Iraqis are accused of holding all kinds of arms of mass destruction and that

education, employment- that cries out for urgent attention, the administration commits enormous resources to wage war. A war not to defend against an attack but to fight an imaginary or at best a remote threat which might occur according to those whose interest is tied to military preparations.

Clearly, however loud the rhetoric about the Iraqi threat, it is unconvincing even to the uninitiated that Iraq poses a credible or imminent (if ever) threat to the US. What however is more plausible is that Iraq is the only country in that troubled Middle East that might one day challenge Israel. Reality however is that the US is fully committed to protect Israel, to arm Israel to a level far above that of any other country. Unwavering US commitment to Israel has only produced an obstinate Israel with thinly veiled imperial ambition.

While the world is awaiting in sheer anxiety with foreboding about imminent war, let all people with fair and justice in mind hope that the current crisis will resolve through peaceful means and that the forceful and mighty will garner the courage and prudence to be patient and pragmatic in the interest of world peace and security, will have the tolerance of the brave to spare millions the misery and suffering which inevitably a war will bring.

Hussain Dhaka

TV schedule and Grameen 222

I would like to know why half *The Daily Star's* TV schedule is on Indian time and the rest on local time. It wouldn't take much of an effort to print using Bangladesh time rather than asking your reader to do so. It's even more weird because HBO, AXN and Star Movies are on local time while Star World, National Geographic and Star Sports for instance say 30 minutes plus. Why is that?

Secondly, I am a frequent user of the Grameen-Prothom Alo-Daily Star news service. It's just about the only real time news updates available during the day. But *The Daily Star* news service seems to be less often updated than the Prothom Alo one. Why is that? How many times a day and at what times is the news updated? It would be very helpful if the time of the latest update was included in the recordings.

I had hoped that bangladeshinfo.com would give real time news updates on the Internet but their web site is mostly shoddy writing and news culled from other online sources. *The Daily Star* website may have been the first Bangladeshi paper on the net but it's become outdated. There has been little improvement to the site in years. I think the website should be a source for real time news throughout the day in addition to the access to the print edition, as has happened with the sites of most of the leading papers in the world.

There's no point in having been the pioneer if no improvements follow.

Kim Dhaka

Bangladesh on INS list

Last Bangladesh is included on the INS list. Originally it was in the 35th position out of 36 countries short-listed by the US Justice Department. But suddenly it jumped to the 21st position and is among the first 25 countries blacklisted as a "terror-risk" country by the US government. Why did the US Justice Department take such a decision in a hurry? What prompted it to do so? Was it because Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country or due to the continuous anti-Bangladeshi campaign by some leaders of Bangladesh and our neighbouring country? It is like awarding a severe punishment to a person without waiting for the judgement whether he is guilty or not guilty.

So instead of blaming each other for the sake of our beloved mother-

land, it is high time for both the Prime Minister Khaleda Zai and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina to sit and work together to get rid of this situation.

Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka

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Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka

Bangladesh Cricket

I don't agree with Mahboob ul Malik (January 27) and Kishore Pasha (January 28) when they ask our cricket team to rescind our Test status.

A baby cannot learn to walk in one or two days. Our cricket team is like an infant, going through its learning period. We cannot and should not hope to win the World Cup or beat Australia, at least not yet.

I also don't agree with them regarding wastage of money. We should encourage our players and suggest them how to improve their performance. We should feel proud of them because we have at least been qualified to participate in World Cup Tournament.

Awal Hossain Oly A/UB

Bank charge on foreign remittance

Now and then, we hear our Finance Minister urging Bangladeshi expatriates to send their money through proper banking channel so that our national exchequer is benefited. Unfortunately, however, a significant number of Bangladeshi expatriates still prefer non-banking channel for this purpose. The reason is plain and simple. First of all, they are charged twice- once by the remitting banks in foreign countries and for the second time, by our banks in Bangladesh while crediting the intended beneficiaries' accounts. The so-called 'service fee' often charged by the banks in case of foreign remittances is like salt on wounds as it further reduces the amount being sent. There are also complaints of delayed payments even when remittances are received through wire transfers, let alone the remitters receive lower than open market rates for their hard earned money.

Recently, I had sent 500 US Dollars for my family to a foreign currency account with Sonali Bank Corporate Branch, Dhaka. Later, I came to know that Sonali Bank deducted 25 dollars as service fee. It might have been justified had the Sonali bank transferred the money to another Bank through a demand draft or any other banking instrument. I see absolutely no reason for such an unjust service charge. I hope, the authorities at the helm of Sonali Bank take note of this matter for the sake of encouraging foreign remittance to our country.

Abu Ishman, Ph.D USA

Price control

I am amazed to read the report on the government's efforts to control the prices of essentials. How can Minister Khosru even suggest what would be a profitable margin for wholesalers? On what basis does the government say that the prices for essentials are too high and unreasonable? It is embarrassing to see such ignorance of even the most basic rules of demand and supply.

The government must prove that the prices for essentials are too high. The simplest way to do that would be to look at their cost in the international market. The next step in ensuring that there is no profiteering is to remove the barriers to entry in the market. The more perfect the market, the more prices will converge at a level that is the best for both consumers and suppliers.

Rather than ramble on about price hikes the government should look into correcting the imperfections in the trade of essentials.

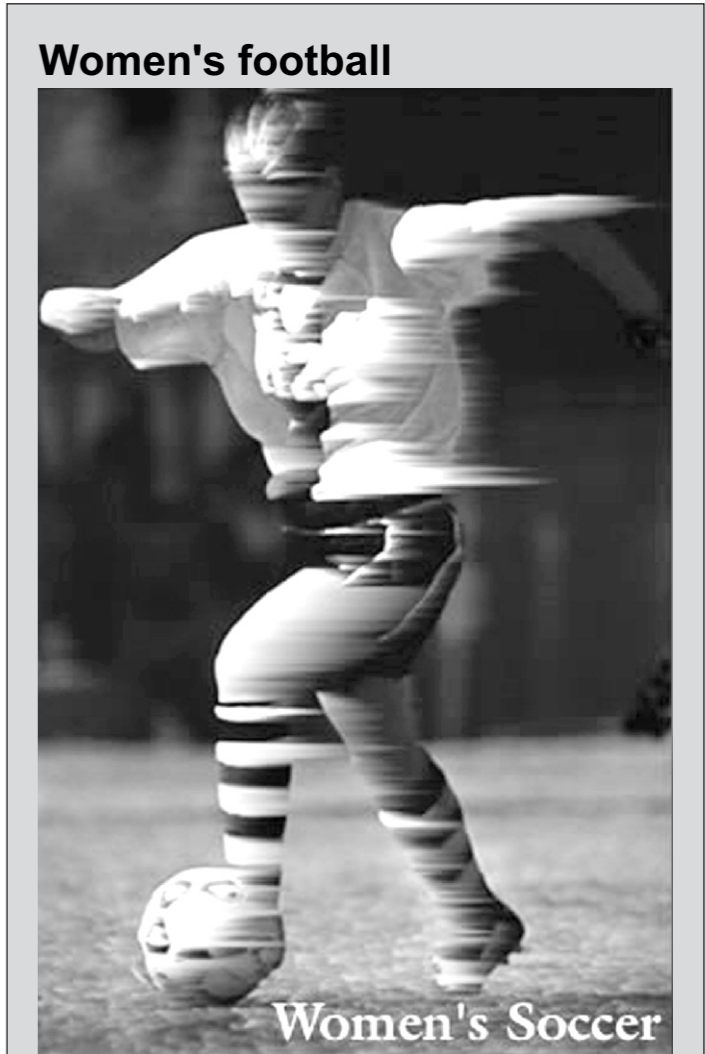
Azad, Dhaka

Write off on bank loans

Most recently, a decision has been taken on write off on Bank loans, beyond five years. To begin with why restrict to five years, it could have been longer than that. It is imperative that this decision is not taken at the spur of the moment rather a careful systematic analysis have been made regarding the effectiveness and impact resulting implementation of this policy. The default is generous amount of around Tk 25.5 thousand crores.

The question now arise is, this fund are neither the defaulters' nor the governments' but funds of the citizens'. The policy gives the impression of guesswork that the defaulter loans could be exempted under special circumstances. This course of action will open the door to another premeditated access to anomaly. As far as I can oversee, private banks will ultimately deal out sizeable loans to the customers and eventually land up with poor or no recovery at all, thus the inherent policy would then serve as the gratuitous savior. For some this will ultimately be supplementary source of wealth by transfer of a large amount through money laundering and deposited to some foreign bank abroad.

When Bangladesh Bank decides to write off such an enormous amount, this gap has to be somehow fulfilled through other sources. I am simply curious to know what the



Football: A guy's game?

It has been interesting to follow the opinions of different people regarding the football match that was disgracefully stopped by a religious group. I must say that my own opinion sides with Mr. Yahya, and not Mr. Sakhawat Hossain.

Mr. Sakhawat appears to be a very closed-minded individual who sticks to traditional practices that suppress women. I think more women's sports events should be organised in different parts of the country with a view to modernising the way of thinking of the people. This should be done, of course, considering the safety of the sports venues, you never know where a bomb is going to blast these days!

I am so tired of the way people hold on to backward customs. Many 'well-wishers' constantly express their sorrow that I don't have a brother, my parents don't have a son. They mournfully question who is going to look after my parents in their old age. There was a time when there was scanty provision for female education. Daughters themselves were economically powerless, and the question of their caring for parents did not arise. But things are different now. I will be economically self-sufficient after completing my studies. There is no reason why anyone should feel sorry for me or my parents. I wish the conservative people of the society would wake up and realise that we are living in a modern world, where the gender disparity should not be made.

Munasir Kamal Dhaka

I am writing this in response to Angela Robinson's (Rev Mrs) comments on Women's football which could not be held at Netrokona recently (January 27).

Anybody would appreciate that women/girls would require exercises in order to maintain their health. This can be achieved by hundred of different ways. Have all other means of exercise been exhausted? Playing football is not necessarily the answer. Living in the society and abiding by its norms is a culture which any sensible man or woman must appreciate.

May I urge you to consider the following points of your letter:

- a. That Netrokona is no place for a foreign team to play an exhibition match. The authorities concerned must take the responsibility for such an ill-judged selection of the venue.
- b. Arrange as many facilities required for maintenance of women's health i.e. gyms, covered courts, indoor stadium exclusively for the women. Who is stopping us?
- c. Usually in our country a committee is formed when one does not want to do anything on that matter. So, the proposal may not come with anything solid.

At the end may I add that I take my 13-year-old daughter for a walk everyday.

Ahrar Masud Tejgon, Dhaka

sources might be to seal this vacuum. Perhaps there are prodigious views of the economists, financial experts according to who this policy may appear to bring ultimate benefit justified for our economy, our citizens and defaulters in particular.

With this guiding principle in place, we shall be able to demonstrate globally fewer Banks defaults or in other words prove our financial stability.

According a layperson like myself, I see no other resource but to mint more notes as a source of recovery and thereby generate more cash flow and inflation. As the cost of living is marching towards an upward trend, the consequences will affect mostly to the middle class citizens.

Daisy Rasul Dhaka

The war on Iraq that never stopped

While the world speculates the belligerent response of both the US and UK to Blix's report, most have already forgotten that these nations have been waging war against Iraq for the past 12 years. Since 1991, Britain and America have carried out relentless aggression against the Muslims of Iraq, which includes regular bombing raids, imposition of brutal UN sanctions and the division of Iraq's territory into three segments as well as numerous military confrontations such as the malicious attacks in 1993 and 1998. Indeed, the present military manoeuvres are part of an Anglo-American initiative to prepare for the 'final battle', which is intended to facilitate the physical occupation of

Masud Karim Siddeshari Lane, Dhaka

Push-in and HR violation

It is very strange that we don't hear anything now from human rights activists at home and abroad, especially European Parliament, member of British parliaments regarding the repeated inhuman attempts made by Indian BSF during the last few days to push-in Bengali speaking Indian nationals through several points of Indo-Bangladesh borders!

"If our doctors were a little more caring!"

An interesting piece on the above caption (24th January) by Nazma Kabir caught my attention. I entirely agree with Ms. Kabir's observation and views on the present status prevailing in our society on doctor-patient relationship and sympathise with her for her



Cure with a smile

sad experience she had to pass through recently with her double vision problem.

From my ten years of experience as an eye surgeon in the country, I feel, somehow, I am in a position to comment on this important subject of doctor-patient relationship on which a lot has been talked about recently. I feel this subject is extremely important as because of this single complaint thousands of our patients go abroad for medical treatment draining millions of our hard earned foreign currency. It really hurts specially when one hears from most of these patients that they didn't gain anything more than what they received from our doctors except good behaviour. So, if only the doctors' behaviour costs us so much then the subject must be taken into account.

During our training period in the '60s we learnt the art of patient-doctor communication from our seniors. One wonders why it is not the same today. Most probably nowadays our senior doctors do not get enough time to teach their students with emphasis on this important issue of doctor patient relationship. Would it be a good idea to include a chapter on this important subject in the medical curriculum emphasising its importance?

Dr. Rashid Hyder Baridhara, Dhaka

government added the larger drop. I will ask why a religious group had to stop a football match. Don't you think that indicates religious bigotry? And what do you think about "Jamaat" as a part of our present government? Even now if she says that Sheikh Hasina is the person who put a fire to a cracker she should think again. There is an American Embassy in Dhaka and they are aware of the situation, which prevails in our country.

However, it is now futile to debate on this fact. We should look forward to preserve our reputation not as an individual or a single entity but as Bangladeshis. We should now unite and again show to the world that we are still the same patriots which we were 32 years back.

Khalid Rahman Dhaka

UP Elections

This tussle with the CEC over the deployment of army must be quite embarrassing for the government. I for one am no fan of our army. I think it is a failure of our civil administration and our country that necessitates bringing in the army to do everything from controlling traffic to guarding WASA pumps.

I also believe that this situation will continue, because we coddle the army while denigrating the civil

problems associated with special registration of Bangladeshis. It is known to all that many far more moderate US Muslim allies have also been included in the US list. So the qualification of being "a moderate Muslim nation" (and for that matter "a Muslim US ally") was not enough for exclusion from the list.

Abul Hasan Dhaka

"Saddam Hussein and Iraq"

This is a reply to Shukla Mirza's letter of January 23. I would like to ask her about her analogy of the U.S. and Iraq. As she said, "Suppose you gave a gun to your best friend on his birthday thinking it might come handy one day, now would you accuse him for keeping a gun in his house?"

My answer is if I gave my best friend a gun for his birthday, it was for my friend to defend himself from a common enemy. But I would hope that one day my friend would NOT start pointing the gun at me. Of course I would like to take that gun away or at least defend myself. Isn't that obvious?

Sam Khan Queens, NY, USA

Dark are the clouds

Flooding are darkening, lightning flashing. War drums are beating louder. By all accounts, the US seems to be bent upon war with or without its allies, with or without a clear or imminent cause. If reason is not forthcoming through the UN inspectors, reason shall be invented. The inspectors are already under heavy pressure, have even been blamed for not providing a pretext if that indeed is needed.

Opinion polls inside US itself are showing clear signs of division; the Security Council members are divided too. Public demonstration against war is spreading across many world capitals. It is thus amazing how world's leading democracies are apparently oblivious to the concerns of their own people! When there are priorities at home - health,

Wanted: A Pied Piper for Dhaka city

My son happens to study in an English medium school where they are currently studying the story of 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin'. My son is in class I and I guess this is the age to get excited about everything that goes around. No wonder, he is always thrilled to see our Mayor on TV, as he has just come across the word "Mayor" in 'The Pied Piper'.

For the last few days, I have been helping him understand the story and this time I was delighted (actually disappointed) to draw an analogy between the Mayor of Hamelin and that of Dhaka. The Mayor of Hamelin did not keep his words; when the Piper freed the town of rats, he only had fifty (instead of one thousand) pieces of gold to offer him. Thus the people of Hamelin had to suffer by losing their children because of the Mayor's treachery.

Thinking deeply, I was quite frustrated as I realised that our Mayor was much worse. I don't know what responsibilities fall under his job description, but we all know that he hasn't kept his words about getting rid of the mosquitoes, doing something about the garbage, or the increasing crimes etc. The worst part is, we don't see that he does have any such intentions in the future. At least at the end of the story, Hamelin's Mayor realised his mistake and tried to offer the Piper much more.

"Mr. Mayor", do you realise how many people have lost their children because of the dengue fever alone which you could do nothing about! Do you realise we regularly get delayed by 15-20 minutes in every appointment because one of your garbage trucks is busy collecting the garbage at 1:00 pm at a busy intersection of the road? I am exempting you of the rest of your responsibilities.

I guess it's high time we needed a Piper for our Dhaka city.

S Chowdhury, Dhaka



Pied piper for Dhaka?