Refugee rights

the Refugee Convention.

instrument.

prolonged detention

Some of the governments of 141

countries, who met in Geneva on 12-

been violating core provisions of the

Refugee Convention in recent

years. They are Australia, the United

refugee definition is being restric-

tively applied and narrowly inter-

preted in many countries, particu-

larly in Western Europe and

Australia. Moreover, the events of 11

September have been used as a

pretext by many countries to intro-

duce ever more restrictive immigra-

taken by some states in the after-

math of the 11 September events on

the United States will also seriously

erode core refugee protection

standards. Human rights organisa-

tions have criticised a new anti-

terrorism law in the United States

and a bill which is under discussion

in the United Kingdom allowing for

the indefinite detention of non-

citizens suspected of terrorism,

including asylum seekers and

recognised refugees, without ade-

quate appeal rights. In both coun-

tries the new measures contain an

overly broad and vaque definition of

terrorism that includes individuals

with links to a terrorist organisation.

no matter how tenuous or distant in

time, thus risking quilt by associa-

exclude asylum seekers from refu-

gee protection if they are suspected

of terrorism, without any substantive

investigation of their asylum applica-

tion. This runs counter to UNHCR

guidelines that asylum seekers

should receive a full and fair exami-

nation of their asylum claim before

they are excluded from refugee

falsely prosecuted for crimes in their

countries of origin, especially if they

belong to a persecuted political,

States must comply with their

obligations under the Convention to

cooperate fully with UNHCR in its

duty to supervise the implementa-

tion of the Convention. States cur-

rently interpret and implement the

Convention in vastly inconsistent

ways that often serve their own

political interests, rather than protect

the interests of refugees. There is a

need for an independent monitoring

body that will review the compliance

of states with the Convention.

Independent oversight bodies

currently operate in the United

Nations system to evaluate compli-

ance with other human rights trea-

ties, such as the International

Covenant on Civil and Political

Rights and the UN Convention

We call ourselves a democratic

nation. But do we really practice democracy? Why has there been

nomination for posts like an MP or

Mayor or others? Why not a local

election amongst the party for any

particular post? Any body who is fit

shall be selected by the party people

be the candidate from the AL or BNP

or JP or others. The nomination

opens venue for illegal transaction

and false promises. Election

reduces the party leader's headache

and also gives a good representa-

tion of people. In USA, all judges

even police chiefs' are elected by

vote. My request to all parties of our

country is to give a thought on this

Is this democracy?

against Torture.

M. A. Obaydullah

ethnic, social or religious group.

Asylum seekers often have been

protection.

Furthermore, proposals in the UK

The anti-terrorism measures

tion and asylum laws and policies.

Khatib's unsolicited remarks

On Eid Day congregation at National Eidgah, Dhaka, the Khatib of Baitul Muqarram Mosque has criticised the US and UK government and strongly supported the Taliban and Osama-bin-Laden. He has also questioned the validity of observing Pahela Baishakh.

Moulana Obaidul Hoque Khatib holds an official job and represents the government and the people, as he is the chief religious

In the past he had commented on various political issues and created controversies. 4-party BNP alliance always took his side while they were in the Opposition. In the presence of the President of the Republic and in an official Eid congregation his comments should not be considered as personal comment.

In fact there is strong lobby in the government by those who represents the fundamentalist political parties or supporter of them and are very much active to bring religion into conflict with Bengali culture and nationalism. Religious minorities, NGO personnel thus become vulnerable to political and criminal attacks and violence. Growing issues of fundamentalism and violence make it clear that after the defeat in Afghanistan extreme fundamentalist groups are active to carry out atrocities in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India

BNP was very close to "fatwabaz Mollahs" who declared the two High Court judges "Murtad" for their landmark verdict prohibiting fatwa by unauthorised persons as epoch making judgement. If BNP is a liberal democratic party and have respect towards women's rights then they should implement the judgement through enacting new law.

> Kamal Ghazi Silicon Valley, USA

Poor publicity 13 December to affirm their commitment to refugees, have actually campaign

adopted laws and policies that The government is handling the undermine the letter and the spirit of It is ironic that the very same states that conceived the 1951 Refugee Convention fifty years ago are now the main culprits in whittling away this important human rights Key industrialised states have

experts and advisors? There is hardly any news about viable substitute/s, and Research and development on the same. Only jute as a raw material is being mentioned, without the economically feasible report. The main issue is a cheap substitute, mass-produced locally, with local raw materials. The polybags are cheap enough to be given away free of charge, as it is a

States, the United Kingdom and other member states of the European Union. These governments and others have returned refugees to places where their lives or freedom are under threat, sometimes in a discriminatory manner, and subjected asylum seekers to For the past two decades, these Band banned states have steadily eroded their obligations under the Refugee Anyone who admires Rabindranath Tagore should be a supporter Convention. For example, the

why he's still remembered.

to new ideas.

Oli Md. Abdullah Chowdhury

Dept. of English, M.C. College, Sylhet

What is the government trying to mourning?

Partisan political agenda got us nowhere and it never will. The country has far more pressing things to be addressed given the state of our economy. It is a shame that the government decided to waste government time to address national holidays, especially when the main purpose, with all likelihood was to cancel the holiday on the

Such thoughtless decision will only provoke violence and cause

Maybe a better approach would have been to keep these holidays while reinstating November 7, thus

But with the leaders we've got on both sides, AL is more likely to just call a couple of hartals and get their

Apart from the threat to democracy, freedom of speech, civil

liberties and women rights there are growing risk of the fundamen-

talist groups in Bangladesh, they may obtain sufficient strength

under the umbrella of present government and may cause serious

damage to our political culture. The Khatib's remarks are nothing

but provocation to a political crisis. It is to be noted that some

We, the freedom loving people of Bangladesh condemn the

Khatib's unsolicited remarks and demand unconditional apology

Secretary General, Center for Social and Peace Studies, Spain

Khatib Maulana Obaidul Haque is a veteran Islamic thinker.

Recently, he has made comments against America in the pres-

ence of the President. Some people have protested against his

sermon. He is not a government employee. He just receives some

honorarium from the Islamic Foundation. He made comments on

the basis of Islamic ideology. It does not necessarily reflect views

of the government. Therefore, let the Khatib speak his mind freely.

At the same time, the Khatib has the liberty to speak freely in his

newspapers are also working on it.

Freedom of speech

Principal Delwar Jahid

Big talk-and big failure

The species known as the Awami general election. We have to do

A disappointed voter

Islamic programs on

Nasir, on e-mail

cohesion.

What makes

Shahriar tick?

verance Shahriar Kabir has shown

by going to a foreign land for super-

added vicarious substantiation of

alleged accusations through audio-

visual recordings. This is just one

putative facet of journalistic gallantry

While we cry for the dingy incar-

discernible in the Shahriar episode.

ceration of the noted journalist,

another stark facet of suchlike

missed journalistic gallantry seems

to elude me rather poignantly. This is

the case of atrocities committed,

often in full view of the public,

against members of the majority of

Nasibun's son Sumon tortured two

young men most brutally in com-

plete disregard of extreme remon-

strance of horrendously distraught

helpless parents, did Mr. Shahriar

make any attempt at audio-visually

recording activities of such medieval

crime committed in broad daylight

Did he say or do anything during the

act, after the mutilated bodies were

exhumed from gutters, or after the

ex-PM tacitly agreed on the TV that

Nasibun was her friend? When the

ex-Chief Whip's son forcibly took

possession of another's residence

illegally or bashed windshields of

cars in a traffic tangle the most

impishly simply because he was the

boastful son of an unheeding god-

like Chief Whip, did the intrepid

When the ex-PM's friend

our motherland.

With the enhancement of the media world, people have the accessibility of watching various cable channels. The channels cover various types of programs including Islamic programs.

Besides BTV there are three other local channels, i.e. ETV, ATN Bangla and Channel i. Among these channels, Islamic programs are mainly covered by ATN Bangla and Channel i. Although, some Islamic programs are aired by BTV but not a single Islamic program is aired by

The most popular Islamic program is the "Namaz O Masla Masayel", aired by ATN Bangla. In this program, an Islamic expert answers the questions regarding religion and life. A large number of people have been benefited from watching this program. But BTV or ETV never air such programs.

I would like to request the authorities concerned to step into the shoes of ATN Bangla and Channel I, so that people all over the country particularly the villagers can be benefited from such helpful programs

Sameer Ahmed Khan Moilish Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Emergency areas

It is high time to declare Pallabi and Mirpur areas as "emergency zone", following unprecedented lawlessness and chaos after assumption of power by the the present government.

The residents of these areas are in no way secured of their life and property. The measures taken by the law enforcing agencies have failed miserably.

As killings and other crimes are increasing day by day, it is suggested that the government immediately declare these areas as "emergency area" and deploy army to bring situation under control and restore law and order in Pallabi and

Shahriar take any trouble to project that? When Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya's son terrorised hundreds of children of a renowned English-medium school and gave the quardians the litters for not getting the full amount of the extortion money demanded, did Shahriar take any pain to drive only about a score kilometres to put before the public an aspect of hushed-up terrorism? Examples may be multiplied I ask favour of your perceptive readers for getting a line on this. If he did show any such concern for the majority too, he deserves my unqualified praise. If he did not, then Mr. Shahriar's cry for the minority, righteous as that in itself may be, is I am afraid more propelled by political motive than caused by journalistic fervour.

> **Eklimur Raza** Lalmatia, Dhaka

India against Pakistan

Some of the Pakistani intelligence cadres have reported that India has taken around 100 Pakistani fighters from Northern Alliance custody to India. This in fact is a very serious development. India can use these poor fighters to implicate Pakistan in the so-called "terrorism" in Kashmir. This matter should be taken seriously and be brought to the notice of the world leaders before India could play any disastrous game against

Pakistan. After the attack on Indian Parliament, the Indian media poorly imitated American media. Indian politicians raised the very inflammatory questions and tried to make the best out of this attack. The complicity in this case is that India is not approving Pakistan or FBI's involvement in impartial inquiry. The reason could be that if joint probe will take place then much inflated air in the propaganda against Pakistan will be deflated and Indian claims will fall

People have not forgotten when a supposedly hijacked plane drama occurred in India a month ago. Their minister announced that hijackers want to go to Karachi or Lahore. While the fact was that plane was not even hijacked but the accusation against Pakistan started coming out

"Biman Wakes Up"



The article "Biman Wakes Up" (December 21) states that Biman officials offloaded 16 passengers to accommodate the Foreign Minister, State minister and their families "in the interest of the state". This boggles my mind. I don't understand how someone who is a key figure in the government; someone who should set an example towards the general population; display such disgraceful behaviour?

I commend The Daily Star for reporting such an article but I am ashamed to read that the minister failed to comment on the "Interest of the state". When will the government servants in Bangladesh realise that with power comes responsibility? If we fail to be accountable for our actions, we as a country will go nowhere. This is even more disheartening for professionals like me who plan to come back home someday and start a business in my motherland.

The head of the state (PM) should track such acts and make sure such actions are not repeated. Everyone, including ministers should be made accountable for their actions and must report to people. Unless they realise that they are 'employed' by the people and for the people, they will continue to display such disrespectful acts.

Boston, USA

It is shameful to read the news of off-loading regular passengers to accommodate ministers and their families. How dare the foreign ministry official invoke "national interest" to accommodate not only the ministers, but also their entourage.

In the interest of the nation, the off-loaded 16 passengers deserve apology from Biman, form the Foreign Ministry, and personally from the honourable ministers. By the way, the ministers have been elected to serve the people not to serve selfinterest.

Mohammad Zaman North Carolina, USA

I was surprised to see the news "Biman Wakes up". I was also surprised to see The Daily Star not commenting anything in this regard. Foreign Minister M Murshed Khan and State Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud and their family members missed their flight. Whose fault is it? Why did the 16 innocent passengers suffer for the fault of the immature ministers and their family members?

People have voted them to power not to insult people. People have voted them to work for people. The people who can't reach the airport in time and create sufferings for other innocent passengers, how can they represent the country? It's a same for us to see these ministers as our representatives.

Arif Hasan

University of north London, London

Please read the editorial "Biman Investigates Power Misuse by Minister" (December 22).

from political sections. This is what India is. Any incident, which happens against India, is considered to be the handiwork of ISI without even

any impartial inquiry. There was a storm which broke out when it was revealed that Indian defense ministry was making money from the coffin deals during Kargil war while the so-called brave Indian soldiers were dying in Kashmir for Bharat Dharti Ma. The leaders of this Dharti Ma were not even bothered about the dead soldiers. They were filling their bank accounts. To cover this up an incident was likely to take place to divert the attention of masses. That's exactly what has

happened in Delhi Parliament. USA and other world leaders have to distinguish between terrorism and genuine freedom movements. Kashmir is burning. The Kashmiris want justice. They want to exercise their right of selfdetermination, according to UN charter, which has not been granted by India. During all this war against terrorism, India did not take any step to resolve the burning Kashmir issue with Pakistan. The world leaders should press India to have a joint inquiry of this attack on Delhi Parliament building. The evidence gathered by the joint probe committee should then be presented to UN Security Council. Let the world see

how serious India is in eradicating terrorism. Shah Affan

Ontario, Canada

Women University

Women University. I see only positive result out of such a decision. I have been living in the US for the last 19 years and will soon be moving back to Bangladesh. There are still a lot of families who do not like their daughters to go to a co-ed university and as such these daughters are deprived of higher studies. They

lend up getting married instead. When somebody wants to do something good, please do not discourage. As it is we have very low literacy rate and education is one of the main pillars of success, opening more universities (co-ed or no coed) is very essential to the success of our people and the country as a

Let us all work hard to make our country a success in the global market. Do not compare us with countries like USA. Find countries similar to Bangladesh and then

Shahid Ullah Los Angeles, USA

banning of polybags in a tardy manner. Only the news about the ban and the legislation is coming in the newspapers, without the necessary technical details about the manufacture of the substitutes. Why does ministers talk in general terms without being properly briefed by the

Biplob Kumar Halder Dept. of Philosophy, JU

Holidays cancelled

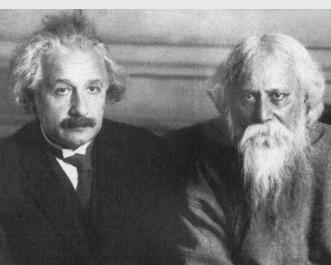
accomplish by cancelling August 15th as a National Holiday? Can the government truly justify that the 15th doesn't merit a national day of

further rift between the major political parties. The unfortunate fact is showing political maturity and silencing criticism.

holiday any ways.

MA, on e-mail

Leaguers somewhere in the legendary mystic land known as former Bengal, do know how to talk big. But they do not know how to take a big fall-- not even a peoples' verdict in a something more than try to solve national problems through politics and political leadership. Here politics divides the society and ruins the unity of the nation. The people were



lyrical appeal.

European music is epic in character; it has a broad background and is Gothic in its structure." -- Rabindranath Tagore (conversation with Einstein).

Pir Saheb Glencove, NY, USA

Our own music touches me more deeply by its fundamental

of post-modern literature. That's what Tagore preached and that's

But I'm surprised to see that today's Rabindra lovers are as

I am very hurt to learn that singer Maqsud has been banned

If you are given the original version of Romeo Juliet would you

Well, that's exactly what Maqsud tried to do, make things easier

for the new generation plus it was a good experiment. Magsud

alone brings more audience than all the Rabindra Sangeet sing-

Banning or censoring is something that belongs to our former

"The measure of a singer's freedom is in his own creative per-

sonality. He can sing the composer's song as his own...If in our

conduct we can follow the law of goodness, we can have real

The principle of conduct is there, but the character which makes

it truae and individual is our own creation. In our (Indian) music

there is a duality of freedom and prescribed order...I am deeply

moved by the western music; I feel that it is great, that it is vast in

No matter how they justify, the reason is their ignorance.

from BTV and was criticised by the so-called caretakers of

Rabindra culture for his "Rabindranath 2010."

read it? Would you understand it?

CMLA's and we have to get over that!

its structure and grand in its composition.

backward as much as he hated backwardness. They are not open

one-time used item. If a bag can be used several times, its price would

liberty of self-expression.

Jute has been there for decades. but this industry is dving due to faulty official policies. Jute is eco-friendly and cheap, but why then it has not captured the world market? The publicity campaign does not

explain the failures. How can jute compete with polybags? Our paper industry is also in the sunset years, and there is no official urgency or priority (same with sugar and agroprocessing, cold storage network, co-operative marketing facilities for

Appreciable action

As a citizen I should thank our State Minister for Education for his bold action against the incident of tender snatching. Most of the government officials take themselves as very clever opportunists, as were the case of the sub-assistant engineer and a few other officials of the Madrassah Board, who were assisting the malpractice for their personal

Like the State Minister, it has become very important to start similar bold actions by high ups to make a workable atmosphere. Otherwise any good is difficult to attain. I once again appreciate the action of the State Minister for going down deep into this case. Such steps are required to save our society from further deterioration.

Syed Towhid Hossain anmondi, Dhaka

"Brutality Bangladesh stvle"

I've just finished reading Anita Lee's letter 'Brutality Bangladesh Style' (December 5). And I would like to thank her for her feelings for the victims of such brutality.

Most of us don't realise how sinful it is to act this way. However there are many people in Bangladesh who sympathise with such victims. But those who realise it are only the

that the government knows that more than anybody else and still went forward with the decision to boost their egotistical arrogance. My sincere request to the government is opportunists. to stop repeating the mistakes of the The secret malady is easy to last five years because the world is a totally different place these days and

Anwar Babar

meaningless muscle plays.

Dallas, Texas, USA

BNP has thrown away another opportunity to bring about rapprochement amongst themselves and the opposition by cancelling holidays on August 15 and March

we'd be in for a big surprise if we

waste all our time and effort on

never exposed to so much hate campaigns. The pity is that the nonpolitical leadership failed the people miserably, and has taken sides as

identify. The politicians have no faith in themselves and are not faithful to those they serve. Instead of being public servants they wish to be masters without the probationary period. They have no faith in other political parties, and denounce them right and left.

A bad worker finds fault with his tools. It is not the people-- get the system right first- and the people will respond voluntarily. AL knows why the people rejected it but won't admit

Matin bin Zahir Gopibagh, Dhaka

Protesting what? I was surprised to read that Mahila

(women) AL protests the repeal of SSF and other security for Hasina and Rehana (December 10). Where were these women when the AL government patronised state terrorism and persecuted their own women folk for the last 5 years in a systematic way?

The rape incidents by AL backed Chatra League leaders at TSC and Jahangir Nagar University are still very fresh in our mind. Why did not we hear a single protest by these mohilas (women)? Where were they during the last five years of the AL

The purdah, *The Daily Star* and...

Two letters published in The Daily Star about Bangladeshi women and purdah have drawn my attention. The writers' opinions are not what I object to, I believe that as citizens of a democratic nation, they have a right to hold whatever opinions they want to-- no matter how ill informed and illiberal those opinions are. What I do object to is The Daily Star's decision to belabour the rest of the readers with this type of twaddle.

Whatever one's personal beliefs regarding the purdah, a ple espousing state intervention in what should remain very pri-

vate religious practices and observances of citizens.

Among the two letters, the second one was worse. At least the first guy knew what he was aiming for when he wanted to enforce the purdah.

The second guy wants women to observe the purdah the stated objective of which (whether effective or not) is to protect women from the lust of men....and this guy wants women to observe the purdah because it makes women look sensuous. I mean how confused can you get?

Covering half the head with a diaphanous piece of clothing is the purdah that Muslim women are supposed to observe? And people say Islam can't be modernised! As to the "historical" fact that Bangladeshi Hindu women used to wear skirts and frocks...the less said the better.

I realise that this is a reader's forum and as such the opinions of the readers-- whatever they are-- are printed here. However, there is or if there isn't, there certainly ought to be-- a limit to the nonsense that the readers have to suffer in the name of free speech. The first letter did not deserve to be printed because its suggestion of state controlled religious behaviour undermines the concept of individual freedom espoused in democracy, and the second letter should not have been printed because it was utter balderdash.

Please God, deliver us from evil but first, deliver us from fools. Shabnam Nadiya

Green Road, Dhaka

Regarding purdah

In response to my letter published in *The Daily Star* on November 20, I found comments of Mr. MA published on November 21. A concerned citizen, Dallas, USA and Mr. Manzur Hasan also expressed their opinion November 22.

I would like to mention here that may be because of constraint of space some important lines were missing from my letter published which made the difference, such as "Islam does not prohibit females seeking education and employment. Muslim females may work side by side with males. Even there is no bar to join in army or be a pilot. As Muslim females they only need to protect their modesty in their dresses" "Islamic code and conduct is not deterrent to modern life style."

Female students must not be prohibited from moving or talking with their fellow male students. What they need is to keep themselves within veil not necessary they have to wear Borkkha.

In this regard I would like to draw the attention of the readers specially Mr. Manzur Hasan and Mr. MA to consult Ayats 31 and 59 of Surah An Nur and Al-Ahzab respectively, quote 31 of An Nur ("...

and tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms (in public) beyond what may decently be apparent thereof; hence, let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms. And let them not display (more of) their charms to any but their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons or their womenfolk, or those whom they rightfully possess, or such male attendants as are beyond all sexual desire, or children that are as yet unaware of women's nakedness; and let them not swing their legs (in walking) so as to draw their hidden charms..."

These are the authentic verses of The Holy Quran. All believer of Islam must follow these. Ziaul Huda

Uttara, Dhaka

democracy's support of individual freedom should be even greater. Therefore, whether or not a Muslim woman decides to observe the purdah or not is her decision. Yet, here we have peo-