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Letter to the Chief of Army Staff

Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Hasan Mashud Chowdhury, would you kindly reply to the nation as to why a number of people have died in army custody and as a consequence we have now 10 deaths in 11 days? Who knows how many people have been admitted in the hospital? Who has given your troop such an authority?

Those who are responsible for applying alleged excessive force, would they be brought to justice? We want a proper investigation of each death and wrong doers punished according to the laws of land.

Army's joining the civil administration to root-out evils from the society has been appreciated by many but; that does not give your troop a blank cheque to abuse power. The latest report reveals that our army members are alleged to have kicked and punched Shahatunnesa, an 85-year-old lady! What a strength they have demonstrated!

It would, however, be unfair not to recognise and appreciate those good efforts and achievements that your troop has made as of date to curbing crimes and criminals. But we are troubled when we see that the army continues crossing its jurisdiction.

Md. Sahed Ali
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

I am also concerned why most of the BNP leaders caught by the army was later released. Is this an army drive eyewitness? The country is also under tremendous economical pressure, the government should also take into consideration that whether this army drive is doing good to the business community. Army should not be used by the government as a means to harass or wipe out its political opponents.

I strongly support the government's bold move to eradicate crimes from the society, but unless corruption is removed crime will always be there.

Qazi Rubayet Ahmed
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Is army the solution?

Like many other millions of Bangladeshis I am also closely observing what's going on in the country in the name of "Operation Clean Heart". Till today they have failed to arrest none of the listed terrorists. Surprisingly, the army have also not arrested any one of Jamaat-Shibir group though there are plenty of allegations against many of their activists and leaders. Why this one-sided approach?

However, they have arrested a most sober person and new-generation politician like Saber Chowdhury but has not even searched the house of Salahuddin Kader Chowdhury!

On the other hand, more and more people are dying (because of

have been assigned to remains above any controversy. We want to live in a society like others countries-- free from violence, terrorism and corruption.

But the question remains-- what will happen once the army is back to their barracks? Will the Government make necessary reforms in the police force and take action against the incompetent and corrupt ones?

Shahriar Shams
Sweden

Better than nothing

Your report "Army 'beats up' 85-year-old lady, SI's wife in city" (29 Oct.) contradicts with the report on the same incident published in the Bengali daily. Which report should we believe to be true?

Political parties, including BNP, AL, Jamaat, JP and even the tiny leftist parties are liable for the miserable law and order situation in this country. Long ago Bangladesh has turned into a 'Moger Mulluk' in its true term. We are all looking for a way out from this unbearable situation. And asking the administration to take tough measures to rescue us from the hands of the criminals. When the administration has taken a rather tough measure, some of us started asking question about it and raising hue and cry regarding its toughness.

We want democracy and law and order at the same time. But as a nation if we are not destined to have both at a time then we will prefer law and order to democracy, because without law and order democracy is anarchism. This anarchism we have been experiencing in Bangladesh since long. The human rights of millions of citizens of this country are being downtrodden by a handful of criminal.

We are sure that the godfathers and 'godgrandfathers/mothers' will remain untouched during the present drive against the criminals. But if the present drive can curb the middle order and petty criminals we will think ourselves lucky enough.

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

"Operation Clean Heart"

I see now that the army has stopped blaming heart attacks and are now citing brain haemorrhage as a cause of deaths in custody.

I don't think we would be amiss in asking the army to clarify exactly what orders have been given to the soldiers on patrol. The military is a bureaucratic organisation, nothing happens without a written order. Well what guidelines have been set for interrogation of suspects? I mean by now we know that suspected criminals and policemen can be murdered and 85-year-old women can be beaten, is there more?

Joyonto
Dhaka

Gas export

I read with considerable annoyance the Asian Development Bank's insistence that Bangladesh export gas. Don't they realise that this is a democratic country? A big decision like gas export should not be taken unless public debate has both ascertained its benefits and convinced the person on the street that this is the right course of action for the country.

The ADB has no right to dictate policy on this matter.

Zeeshan Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Thoughts on army deployment

Now that I have seen a barrage of letters and, finally, a to-the-point commentary from the Editor himself, I felt like expressing my thoughts through some pertinent points/questions:

- 1) If the government won't explain the legal basis of deployment, then they should make out a list for the common citizenry about what to expect from the army and what not to expect from them and also what we, as citizens, should or should not do when faced with such an army team.
- 2) The BNP had to search for examples (elections, etc.) to justify deployment and the next government can do it with the twinkling of eye just by saying that the BNP had done it before!
- 3) So, what do we call the government/administration of four-party alliance who are mainly using the army in the name of "joint forces"?
- 4) There must be some sort of reason or cause for suspicion (e.g. an intelligence tip-off) for checking by the army. They simply should not go about checking all and sundry for the sake of checking only!
- 5) Can the army really do whatever they like, as some are people are saying so?
- 6) Absolutely whatsoever the case may be (even for a "listed" criminal), can the army beat up anybody? The deaths being caused as such- is the army trying to act as judges also?
- 7) The army chief is quoted as saying "everyone has to see to it that innocent people are not harassed"- is the army really capable of telling the difference between a criminal and an innocent man?
- 8) The army has complaint-boxes against "criminals"- and where do we get the box to drop our griev-

ance-letters against army excesses?

9) And finally a line from the lead-news of *The Daily Star* of 29 October reads "Masum succumbed to his injuries at the DMCH on Sunday after he fell sick following army interrogation"- since injuries are not caused by "sickness", shouldn't we rather read it as "torture" in place of "interrogation"?

A Distressed Observer

Chittagong

DCC tenders

This is so rich. While the army drive goes on BNP backed musclemen grab papers for 91 crores of DCC work. I'd have thought that staking out the various ward commissioners' offices and homes and Nagar Bhaban would be more than sufficient to nab most of the criminals in the country. Rather than going after the small fry, the army should concentrate on the whales.

Personally I have no problem if a couple of AL MPs are hauled off to prison, although these two in question are the better of the lot. But it amazes me that the army has not seen fit to arrest a single BNP MP for aiding and abetting terrorists. Leaving aside the cabinet ministers, are we really to believe that none of the State Ministers have criminal links?

I would really like to know if any of those involved in the various misdeeds in the last year have been caught. What of the JCD cadres who attacked the women's hall in DU? Any of those caught in Operation Clean Heart? What of the gangsters in the employ of Jamuna Group who were trying to fill up the wet lands in Ashulia? Or the gang leaders mentioned in the Daily Star report on extortion in Shewrapara?

The army would be much more appreciated if they actually did something concrete rather than beating up old women and prisoners.

Emile
Dhaka

"Miss Photogenic"

I refer to the letter by Ms. Nazia Nayla (October 29). What we choose to watch or not watch is a matter of personal preference and if I have insinuated otherwise, it was misconstrued.

I have no problems if one wishes to flaunt good looks or any other "talents" one may possess. I do, however, have problems when the media- from Cartoon Network to MTV- incessantly bombards you with images where anything less than a 36-24-36 body and fair skin is considered a lesser form of beauty. Naming products like "fair and lovely" do not help the situation very much either! You and I may be conscious enough not to be influenced by these images, but what about the young and impressionable minds of children and teenagers? Every time Hot Wheels comes up with a new toy on Cartoon Network, my 6-year-old son wants it. Whether I give it to him or not is another issue, but that illustrates how powerful the mass media is. Now of course I can take away the TV, stop subscribing to newspapers/magazines, and retire as a hermit. But unfortunately I do not have enough resource at my disposal to take such a bold step.

I ask you, Ms. Nayla, when was the last time you saw a dark-skinned model in a Bangladeshi advertisement? You can again argue, "No one is compelling you (or your six-year-old) to watch these images?" to which my response is "How can I (or my six-year-old) escape them?" Please advise.

A. Farjad Ahmed
Rajshahi House, Dhaka

Triggering a new cycle of violent terror?

The hostage drama in Moscow has ended. Yet has it?

Russian troops stormed the Moscow theatre to relieve and rescue the hostages-- men, women and children. Regrettably, the troops managed to kill over 100 innocent hostages, hundreds more

are precariously ill of which many might eventually die. The troops used a poisonous gas that killed all these people including about 50 of those who took the hostages. This is an indiscriminate act with consequences that no State can be proud of. The Russians put a cloak of secrecy on the episode; persistently refused to say what kind of gas they used. The doctors treating the sick would not know what is it they were up against. It is now being reported that it was a nerve gas that surely must belong to the prohibited list of weapons even in war.

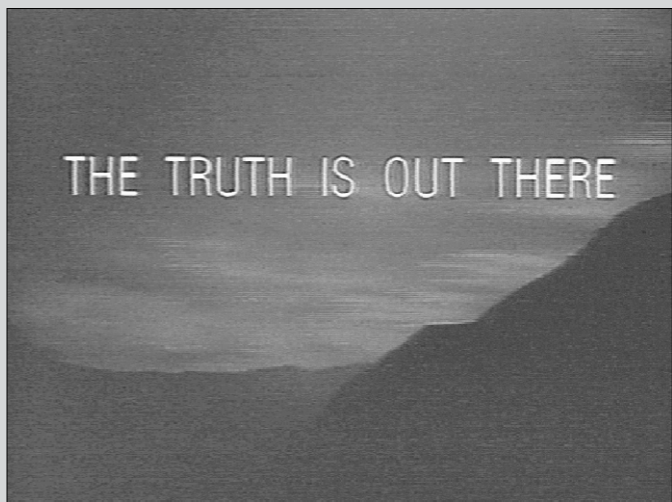
Though much less publicised, America's war on Afghanistan was tarnished with serious violation of

When Sates unleash terrible retribution with or without legal cover and boast their determination not to seek any alternative means to fight terrorist groups, the States are entrapped in a situation fraught with cyclical violence of unimaginable kind- the very process they profess to prevent or minimise. If there is any need to repeat, the "war on terror" will not be won by counter terrorist acts that are even more atrocious and vicious than those chosen by terrorists.

Hussain
Dhaka

Mushrooming mar-

"Will our elected government tell us what is happening?"



This is in reference to Mr. Akku Chowdhury's response to Mr. Mahfuz Anam's timely commentary (October 31).

It comes to me as a sad and ironic revelation that the keeper of the Muktijuddho Jadugar would declare that without a "surgery" by the army, "we shall never be able to overcome the social-morale degradation that seems to have taken control over all of us".

According to him, "Our army boys are taking great risk to rid of the cancerous growth that has inflicted our nation." I wonder how Mr. Chowdhury feels so certain that intervention by these "army boys" -- will uplift our social-morale situation.

Mr. Chowdhury, the cancer that you have diagnosed is manifest most as an appendage to our head rather than to our posterior. If you really want the army to strike a dent to the cancerous lesions, you should press the government to first apprehend and blindfold those top-level godfathers who form part of that very government (how many, if any, so far have been?), before the risk-taking army boys carry on with their drive.

Unleashing the army boys to haul and maul some low level criminals and ruling party "activists" for some time to create a smoke screen for the persecution of political opponents will not do much to cure the disease, for such "activists" can be bought and sold anytime at very cheap price. To the contrary, it has the very serious potential of causing another much more painful, chronic and extremely-difficult-to-cure ailment.

The reasoning that you offer in favor of the army call-up is a hackneyed but very dangerous one: "We had reached a point of no return and to bring back the 'rule of law' I believe there could be no alternative but ask the army to come in aid of the civil administration."

Shafiq Ahmad
Canada

kets

I am a resident of Dhanmondi Area. Recently I along with the members of my family went to visit A.R.A. Center, a newly constructed shopping mall at Dhanmondi Road No.7, which has just been inaugurated. It was at about 7:00 p.m. when suddenly the power supply failed and the whole market plunged into total darkness. My wife and children got panicked. I thought that the PDB line might have failed, but soon I came to know that there was a fault in the internal wiring of the building, which has caused the power failure. I gathered that this fault was extremely fatal and exposed the market to catching fire. The shopkeepers started lighting candles and we were asked to leave the market since the power will not be restored before next day. I was surprised and utterly disappointed to see that such a modern market has no stand-by generator. I also found that the market lacks any fire-fighting facility. There was not even a single fire extinguisher -- not to speak of any modern fire fighting equipment.

A few days later I once again went to the same market (it was in the

opened. It is also the primary responsibility of the market owners to take voluntary initiative in this regard considering the safety of the customers as well as the shop owners. The security of the markets also needs to be tightened.

A citizen
Dhaka

Mahatma Gandhi, Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela, Yassar Arafat, Martin Luther King are some of the biggest names in terrorism, because these people fought for freedom, independence and justice! The poor Mr Mandela even went to prison for his people.

g) Bush and Blair keep whining that; we "think" Saddam has weapons of mass destruction and he would "probably" give them to terrorists and those terrorists "might" use them against us. And so we "have to" bomb Iraq! How can anybody come up with this crap?

h) According to those in Washington, bombing will not start during December because it will be the time for Ramadan. How very touching!

i) What started as a great war on terrorism, has now been cleverly muddied up with 'war on Iraq'. Which will eventually turn out to be the great war on Islam. Some might argue, it has already began! Fortunately for the Zionists, the Muslims are still sleeping in their big Royal Palaces!

Unfortunately for the Muslims, by the time they wake up, it may well be too late!

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

because as soon as they define terrorism, their own definition appears to prove themselves as terrorists!

d) Iraq is an independent country and both US and UK have been bombing Iraq for the last ten years. According to Mr Bush, attacking an independent country is an act of war. And according to Mr Bush again, it seems that attacking an independent country is OK. Confused? Well, you are not alone.

e) Anyone flouting UN resolution is to be bombed. And anyone flouting UN resolution is to be rewarded with F16, Missiles and Apache Helicopters! Confused again?

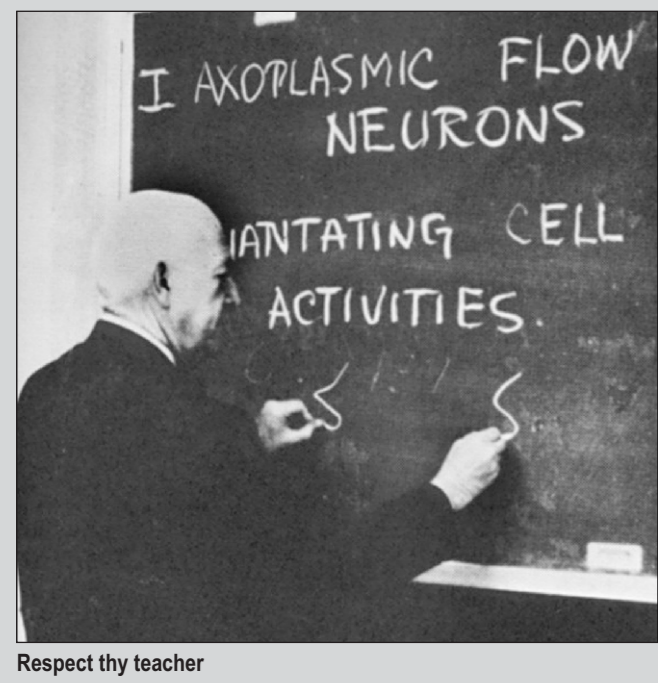
f) From this war, we have learnt that

Murder of Swapon Kumar Goswami

Just when "Operation Clean Heart" was literally cleaning the city of marked criminals, our faith has been shaken by the heinous murder of a teacher of Government Lab School. Murder, abduction, etc are not decreasing nowadays, but for the past few days some sort of relief came down upon us as the army arrested and carried out raids suspecting people irrespective of political label.

In our society, teachers are placed after parents and God and they give us lessons from beyond the boundaries of books. Where parents fail, teachers often succeed in showing us the right path. And if we lose such people in the times of crises, I see nothing but scary days ahead. Already due to commercialisation, the definition of teachers has changed and we seldom find the image of a person we could look up to. At this untimely hour, if we keep losing the "idols" the future becomes darker and we have nothing left to do.

Arani Siddiqi, IBA, Dhaka University



Respect thy teacher

Amnesty's concern

This is in reference to Amnesty International's concern about "Operation Clean Heart". I don't understand why such a named organisation takes so much interest in a country like Bangladesh where a very small quarter of the world's entire population resides. I doubt their knowledge about the law and order situation of Bangladesh and thereby believe that they do not receive ample right to comment anything about it be it good or bad.

I understand and honour that human rights should be respected, but the question of human rights only comes when HUMANS are in reference... do we consider these criminals (the ones recently arrested by the army) human? I do not.

Hundreds of people all around the world are being arrested in the name of Al Qaida and the so-called war against terrorism. I did not see Amnesty International react so sharply to any of those arrests.

Mashukur Rahman

Dhaka

"Worried about army!"

I have been extremely cautious in judging the army activities in the country. It is true that a lot of criminals are being captured easing the law and order situation of the country. But 12 people have so far died and a lot of innocent people have been harassed. In the past other nations have deployed army to bring back law and order and have always failed since the root of the trouble was not dealt with.

Army drive may bring only temporary relief to law and order, but unless the root of the problem is not solved criminals will spring out when the "Operation Clean Heart" ends.

How can anyone be 'jealous' of something like that? He says it is a simple question but I think it is a very strange question. Since he is in USA, he doesn't know exactly what is going on here. But he has assumed that there has already been some improvement in the law and order situation, which is very far from the truth.

In fact, the law and order situation has deteriorated. The muggers and murderers are still very active and in addition, people are living in constant fear of being harassed by the army. People are dying in army custody of "heart attack" and this is a serious abuse of power on the part of the army as well as the government. Violating human rights and oppressing opposition leaders is not the way to improve law and order situation.

Sonyia Hossain
Dhaka

Worst commentary?

Staying in the States what do you, Mr. Jasim know about the current army drive? So far more than ten people had died during army interrogation maybe they were criminals or innocents but they were human beings. The victims could had been anyone, maybe one of your relatives. What would had been your emotions then? Anyway, the game is not yet over.

Mr. Anam had done the right thing by asking questions to the PM. We need to know the answers, if not Mr. Jasim because he is staying abroad. People staying abroad can say many things. It matters to people of my age who are afraid of going out to different places with friends despite being innocent.

Fuad
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

This is in response to Mr Jasim's letter (October 30) about the Editor's commentary. Mr Jasim thinks that the October 29 commentary is one of the worst commentaries written by the Editor. He is entitled to his opinion although I think it is one of the best commentaries and reflects the opinion of the ordinary citizens. What bothers me is that Mr Jasim thinks the government should not answer any such questions as the ones raised in the commentary. The government is supposed to represent the people and so the people have a right to know what the government is doing and why. Everyone has a right to ask questions and the government must have accountability.

Also, I don't understand what Mr. Jasim means when he says the editor is "jealous of the improvement of law and order situa-

"Unilateral US strike will be disastrous"

This is in response to Mashiul Haq's letter (October 28, 2002).

In actuality, George Bush Sr. did not have the popular support-- for attacking Iraq that George Bush Jr does. George Bush Sr's argument for war was dubious at best: it was about oil, not liberating an autocratic state like Kuwait. George Bush Jr is using 9/11 to justify attacking a rogue state known for not only pursuing weapons of mass destruction, but harbouring terrorists.

On the point of the UN, though George Bush Sr. had UN support he was willing to go alone if necessary, as is George Bush Jr going through the UN is a courtesy, nothing more.

A. S. Byatt, New York, USA