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.

Thoughts on gas export

The Finance and Energy Ministries are spreading propaganda in favour of natural gas export. Mr Ministers, it will be a very long time before natural gas is considered an obsolete commodity. Bangladesh is approximately a \$58 billion economy and the foreign oil companies are offering \$177 million annually through taxes and other revenue from the pipeline export. This is charity in terms of the economy and Bangladesh can earn a lot more by selling only fruits and vegetables.

Bangladesh has a proven recoverable natural gas reserves of 13 trillion cubic feet (TFC). With growth and proper utilisation of this sector, Bangladesh can exhaust this reserve within 10-15 years. Can it afford to export this most needed commodity? Let's not make error today to regret for generations to come.

Concerned Citizen On e-mail

I fail to understand why the government is so much interested in exporting gas to India or for that matter any other country. I am against this idea for one single reason: adequate reserve of gas for domestic consumption is yet to be proved beyond doubt. Only assumptions are being made by the Western oil companies and their cronies in Bangladesh.

Then again, if we have to export gas, why not export it in the value added form? What will the importer country do with gas? Make fertiliser? Make electricity? Use it in required industries as raw material? Why can't we do that ourselves and export it then? What is the price of 100 CF of gas and the price of fertiliser made from 100 CF of gas? When will our policy makers understand

When I was young, I used to read in text books that, before 1947, the English would import raw materials from India, make finished product from those raw material, and re-export those to India at an exorbitant price; thus breaking the economic backbone of the then undivided India. Won't the same thing happen to us in future? Won't the gas-importer country export to us the



Export is the answer?

finished product made from gas at an exorbitant rate?

In mid-90s I was in India for more than a year. Like any other ordinary Indian citizen, I used to buy a cylinder of gas of the same size available in Bangladesh at rupees 90 only. Whereas, that time at my mufassil town, a cylinder was available at taka 350 (government rate). But there was always a shortage of supply. So in the black market my family had to buy the same cylinder at taka 650 or so. Now my question is, if India could supply gas to its 900 million people at rupees 90, then is India running short of gas or we?

My fervent appeal to all is please rise up to the occasion and foil any evil design to export raw gas. We must go for an all out campaign to save the assets of this country.

Dhaka

Terrorists in Kolkata

The most wanted terrorists in the country are caught in Kolkata and we don't know what's going on. Every newspaper seems to have a different report. Some say they were released, the others say they were handed over to Bangladeshi Intelligence (a contradiction in terms if there ever was any)

The government seems to be as much in the dark as the rest of us.

On the other hand, it seems that the Kolkata police seem to be about as disorganised as ours!

This should be interesting. The most powerful terrorists are in Indian hands and this time, hopefully the police won't be able to kill them like they did Kala Faruk. Dhaka

Bangladesh should guarantee the prisoner's safety

am a citizen of India of Bangladeshi origin and I closely monitor the news and developments in Bangladesh.

Recently I read about the arrest of two Bangladeshi accused criminals Arman and Liaquat in Kolkata. As a citizen of India, I strongly oppose handing them over to Bangladeshi authorities, unless the Bangladesh Government guarantees the safety of their life while in police custody and a fair trial. Bangladesh police has a history of torturing and shooting the "fleeing" prisoners while in custody.

The police can only shoot in selfdefence and torture of prisoners are beyond the question. **Arun Chandra Roy** Kolkata, India

Our rights

Your report on the Indian press' portrayal of Bangladesh as a home for ISI raises a few questions.

Doubtless India now has a common scapegoat to blame all its ills. The Nazis blamed the Jews and Shivsena blames Muslims. However, we must ask ourselves, are we any different? We still have SPA (1974). PSA (2000) was passed in our time without any hitch!

The military detains anyone at will and the death toll in army custody has risen to 23! As a card carrying member of the Amnesty International Lam appalled, Lcannot begin to express my indignation at the lack of rights our citizens face in this country without going berserk!

The constitution had been mutilated by the people in power. The Americans take pride in their political system because theirs is a fair system guaranteed by the Constitution to prevent any abuse of power and protection of rights. We need something similar. Anthony Maskarenhes had said in his "Legacy of Blood" that Bangladesh in 1972 was one of the poorest countries in the world but it had a constitution to be proud of. Bring that pride

Yahya

No death in army custody!

I do not agree with PIO's statement on the question of death in army custody. Even if the victims did not die in army custody they died shortly after they were transferred to the police or the hospital. Then how can the army deny their responsibilities regarding these deaths?

Maksudul Haq San Diego, California, USA

Now, this is simply too much! I quote from The Daily Star of 19-November "government vesterday flatly denied that there was any death in army custody since deployment of troops...". May be, we should also redefine "death" as per Bangladesh government.

Hey citizenry: those persons did not die- their life abruptly ended! A Distressed Observer

Anwarullah Chowdhury as High Commissioner!

I was surprised to read the news that the government has decided to make Mr. Anwarullah Chowdhury former VC of Dhaka University Chief High Commissioner to Bahrain. don't know what prompted the PM to select such a controversial person like him as the country's representative abroad. Mr. Chowdhury is the man who couldn't wait even the night to capture the Chair of DU VC. And then we all know about the Shamsunnahar Hall saga.

Unfortunately all the successive governments have been selecting their loyal man as DU VC since long. This is a unique practise. But the way Anwarullah Chowdhury handled the Shamshunnahar Hall incident is still fresh in our mind! So I would request the PM to change her decision for the greater interest of the country. If you (PM) have to send somebody loval, there are plenty around you better than Dr. Anwarullah Chowdhury. Sonia Mirza

Operation Clean Heart: Heartless cleansing

I cannot understand why it should take this long for the people to shake themselves out of their stupor. The mass was disgruntled by the lawlessness pervading the society and could easily be led into a delusion when the army promised to cleanse the heart of the society of its resident evil. But, this delusion should have been over by this time.

It has just been a month since army entered civil life and already twenty-three people have died in army custody. These people should not be called criminals, as, though all of them were charged with different allegations, their criminal indulgences have not been proved beyond doubt in civil courts. Now,

since no formal declaration regarding the introduction of a different legal structure for civil life has been made, we, the mass, presume that we are still living under civil law. And, we, presumably living in a democratic society governed by modern humanitarian values, also have to remember that every accused, in such societies, is entitled to a fair trial - to the right to defend himself/herself within the legal frames of popular law. In this context the deaths resulting in army custody are in no way different from the killings rampant in the society todav.

The military men never seemed to realise that 'heart' universally implies the collective consciousness, the cultural sense of the mass, not a machine-gun or any other machine, and that this 'heart' cannot be purged of its fester overnight by retaliating individual offences with general terror. Military rigidity, heartlessly mechanical and characteristically fundamentalist. doesn't seem to accept the fact that while this collective 'heart', flexible as it is with its changes spanning over centuries, has to be gradually educated to its moral height of impeccable humanity, the terror will only expedite the process of internal putrefaction. Its external manifestation may be temporarily smothered with terror, but the malady will continue to undermine the heart' infecting it with either a pitiable moral barrenness or an uncontrollawhich is not at all desirable.

"An appeal to Bill Gates"

I am really shocked to read the letter by Prof. Chowdhury. What was he thinking? Bill Gates would read the letter and donate a handsome amount to this hapless country of ours? Sorry, that was not to be done. Instead Prof. Chowdhury has damaged the image of the country home and abroad.

The Daily Star letters page is one of the most popular pages and many people--local and international read this page through the

Internet. What would these people think of us? That we don't hesitate to seek donation through letters column as well! Don't we have any selfrespect?

Like our politicians, Prof Chowdhury has also let us down. Hope he realises what he has done. **Abed Khan**

New Eskaton, Dhaka

This refers to the letters of Shukla Mirza and Sonia Chowdhury regarding their humiliation over Professor Dr. A. M. Chowdhury's request to Bill Gates (November

I do not understand the reasons of their concern. Bill Gates do not provide fund to buy bread and butter or Dal-Bhat nor he feed the hungry people. So far I know, Bill Gates, from his foundation money assists developing countries for addressing Public Health issues and for developing IT sectors. Did we achieve enough progress in the above sectors? Don't we need to develop the above two sectors? Over and above do we have enough resource to address our health issues? Is our government not seeking money from the donors? Currently, we have a lot of public health issues especially related to mother and children which needs immediate attention. Then which one is more important? Our unrealistic ego or seeking assistance from the philanthropists or donors to relieve our people from different disease. I think Professor appealing Bill Gates to help us solve our problems. If Indians can get this fund, being a poor country we should also be considered by the Gates foundation to receive some money for the improvement of our mother and child health.

If we review our health scenario we will see that we have one of the highest Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) and Infant Mortality Rates (IMR) apart from our alarming population growth and unprecedented malnutrition. Also, we do not have enough programs on STD/HIV/AIDS prevention and counselling. Moreover, a large number of our poor women are suffering from Prolapsed Uterine and festal related complications and

for these they are facing untold socio-psycho problems. Our government has limitations in addressing all health issues due to budget constraints. Thus, we need external help to ease our sufferings. Consequently. I would also urge upon the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to extend their help to reduce our public health related problems S. M. Khalequez Zaman Mirpur, Dhaka

"Caught in vicious circle"

This is in reference to Gora's letter "Caught in vicious circle" (November 20). I cannot agree with him more. "Pretending that the issue doesn't exist" would never solve the problem. We have to deal with it rationally and logically.

Prostitution has always been there and it will be there in near future. And the only sensible way to deal with it is to "come up with an enlightened policy on sex workers". Sex workers are also human beings and they should be treated as human beings. Like other human beings, they also have rights and their rights should in no way be

This is what we should concentrate on.

Mirza Chowdhury Mohammedpur, Dhaka

"A homogenous

nation?" My sincerest congratulations to Mr. K.A.S. Murshid for writing perhaps one of the best written and analysed columns (November 19) I have ever read in The Daily Star. The article written with a strong-sense of humour and laced with sarcasm is both thought provoking and also shines a light on the economic and social conditions currently prevailing in Bangladesh. S. Abedin

New York. USA

Our country and their country

The Indian Railway authority will give taka four-lakh compensation each for those four Bangladeshi who died in a recent accident. Can Bangladesh Railway act the same when Bangladeshi people die in

accident in their own country? What we find here instead is they are very prompt to hide the actual number of death. A few years ago we came to know that a Bangladeshi woman was raped by some Indian railway guards. Those guards were punished accordingly and the Indian railway authority compensated the victim taka ten lakh. Would we be able to find similar evidence in our country? The answer is a big NO

And what about those innocent four hundred people who died a few months ago by a launch mishap in Meghna? Were their family compensated? If yes, then how much?

And most importantly, during Ramadan launch and train accidents are quite common. What precaution, the concerned authority has taken this year to prevent such accidents? Nasir Talukder

Purana Paltan, Dhaka

Sheikh Hasina and Bangladesh

A lot has been said about Sheikh Hasina's recent comment in Brussels. Some said that she did the right thing as during this age of IT, nothing can be hidden from the rest of the world. So what's wrong with it if Sheikh Hasina wanted to attract the attention of others to the fundamental elements prevailing (!)

Then another group said, Sheikh

Hasina had no right to humiliate the nation this way. There's no proof that fundamental elements exist in Bangladesh. Then how come Sheikh Hasina so unequivocally claimed so? Doesn't she care a bit about the image of the nation?

Both the group has logic and we should pay heed to both the arguments. There's no harm in investigating Sheikh Hasina's accusation. At the same time. Sheikh Hasina should also remember that she is a leader of this country and she should be very cautious about the image of the nation Anom Molla

Gandaria, Dhaka

Rape victims

Rape victims should be allowed to lead a normal life. People should reprimand the rapists, not the victims. What is the difference between a rape victim and a woman who was never violated? Both are human beings and have the right to live a normal life. What prevents them from being our mothers, sisters, wives or friends?

It is high time we stopped pointing fingers at them and let them lead a normal life. **Enamul Haque** On e-mail

Repair the roads

If crime and issues of personal security are the biggest problems in the country today then they are closely followed by the dismal conditions of the roads of Dhaka and the traffic jams. Spending crores and crores of taka getting local companies to repair the roads every few months has proved to be a complete failure as these companies not only lack the technical expertise required to repair the roads properly but are also corrupt using substandard materials and doing half hearted jobs so that they can make more money when the roads need to be repaired again in a few months time.

Why not ask companies abroad that have better technical expertise and experience to do the job instead? For example, roads and highways in Malaysia are of excellent standard. Why not ask companies in countries with good roads and highways to help us rebuild/repair our roads? Even if this is expensive in the short term, we will gain in the long-term because the same roads will not have to be repaired again and again and the foreign experts could also impart their technical knowledge to their local counterparts.

Secondly, the relevant Bangladeshi Roads and Highways and traffic control officials need to be trained by their counterparts in the developed countries so that proper traffic rules and international road signs and markings can be implemented in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh people drive with no regard to traffic rules and regulations. Driving Schools have mushroomed all over the city but they don't even teach basic rules about giving way to traffic at road junctions! The driving test imposed by the government needs to be much more rigorous and practical

We can choose to follow the written driving and road test imposed by the DVLA in the UK and make it more relevant to us by taking into consideration the different kinds of slow moving vehicles in Bangladesh. All current and future license holders should be directed to take the new driving tests to renew their licenses.

Traffic policemen must be properly trained to enforce these rules and regulations and on-the-spot fines should be imposed on violators. But most of all, citizens of Bangladesh must learn to respect rules and regulation. I have no suggestions as to how that will ever **F** Hussain

"The standard of English in Bangladesh"

I have some differing views regarding F. Hussain's comment (November12) about The Daily Star's standard of English. I don't know what the writer meant by the term 'poor English'? If POOR means EASY TO UNDERSTAND then I am satisfied with it and I'm sure most of the readers are happy as well. The reason we prefer to read The Daily Star is its English is easy to under-

Often people avoid reading topical and interesting articles of other English daily only because they use complicated language. 19th century English and 21st century English are not the same and obviously The Daily Star as a modern daily prefers the 21st century English.

Why did the Readers Digest become so popular? One of the main reasons is they use less complicated English Haroon Rashid

Agrabad Access Road, Chittagong

"Nation builders of tomorrow"

A nation requires all citizens from every section to perform their tasks properly in order to prosper. So all of us need to be united if we really want to move forward. There is no room for arguing who are the actual nation builders-- those from English

medium background or those from Bangla medium background. A student, who has done outstandingly well in his/her exams, be it Bangla medium or English medium. should be encouraged because he/she is going to be the next leader.

Arguing that all the English medium students leave the country to settle abroad is the funniest thing I've ever heard. Those who are claiming this information to be true probably have never seen anyone returning to his/her motherland after completion of education abroad. For their information, there are more than enough students who opted for their poor motherland rejecting the secured and luxurious life abroad.

Let's all be content about what we are and what we have. Only then can we build a prosperous, harmonious, corruption free nation. Dr. Basmah M. Jasir

This is in response to Mr. Hannan's letter "Saluting the Nation Builders of Tomorrow" (November 13). It seems that he doesn't have any

tion of the so-called nation builders nor do I blame them. It's a fact that almost all of them who have done at least something for this country are from Bangla medium background. And a very small group probably comes from the English medium background. Momen Dhaka

It really makes no sense at all when someone just points out of nowhere that 'How can English Medium (EM) students be the nation builders of tomorrow?'

First of all as we can see our country in not in a stable position and the army has been deployed to improve the situation. I firmly believe that only a better educated society will help lower the crime rate and will help bring our country back on line. The end result of comparing EM students with Bengali Medium (BM) students is zero. Both follow individual systems but have the sole intention to make us, better in most ways possible. Only better education can bring in better democracy and an improved economy.

Bush and the Republican hurrah



So it seems that George Bush's presidency has attained some sort of legitimacy. It is an occasion of pure joy for him as nationally GOP candidates got 53% of all the votes cast. Regrettably enough the chief executive who does not know the difference between Slovakia and Slovenia has just enjoyed the longest period of high approval rating for any U.S president after World

The Democrats got what they deserved for their party's characteristic internal feud and most importantly for failing to come up with a credible solution to address the ills of the economy. One of the Democratic leaders admitted after the defeat that Patriotism and the war on terror was foremost on the voters mind, a tacit (and in my view shocking) admission that his party can no longer appeal to the patriotism of Americans.

This Republican triumph will have some far-reaching implications. For one if the Bush legislative agenda does not face democratic filibusters in Senate we will see a bevy of conservative judges getting elected. If the tax cuts become permanent this coupled with the heavy cost of waging a new war every year will bring about a return to '80s style deficits.

The Democratic front runner (for 2004) is now surely Al Gore. But the U.S voters don't like candidates who have lost before and so George W. looks set for re-election in 2004.

The current cost of the war in Afghanistan is more than 12 Ilion US dollars and running (Vietnam cost 877 billion). By the recent admission of Richard Myers the US forces have lost a bit of momentum there against the Taliban and Al-Qaida remnants. If this trigger-happy president continues to display this pattern of behaviour (picking a fresh fight every year and then shifting to another one next year without finishing the fist) then the US voters can kiss the boom days of 1990s a permanent goodbye. Reward enough for not having a firm grip on

Shager Rasheed, Sylhet

idea that at present many English medium graduates are serving the nation in different fields. I've seen many of them working in multinational companies and banks throughout the country.

Therefore, it doesn't necessarily mean that the only goal an English medium student has is to go abroad and settle there. And if the question comes on going abroad, why do you ignore those Bangla medium students who go to US, Canada and Australia for higher education? Do you think that they would come back if they get better opportunities over there? So why blame only those coming from English medium background?

Employment problem is one of the biggest problems in our country. Isn't it better that some of us started our career abroad? At least, that will decrease the number of jobless people here. And regarding the matter of cheating in SSC and HSC exams mentioned by Afreen Khan (November 15), cheating in exams occurs mainly at village schools and colleges due to poor guidance and poor quality of education. But such is not the case in city schools and colleges. The percentage of success in Dhaka College, NDC and VNSC proves my argument clearly.

Although I am neither an English nor a Bangla medium student, I congratulate The Daily Star for making an effort to organise such a praiseworthy award giving cere-Siddique

IUT, Dhaka

This is in reference to the letter by Abdul Hannan (November 13). He is absolutely right in pointing out that most of the students with good results in HSC or SSC stay home and serve the nation while the English medium students strive for developed country mostly Europe, America and Australia and plan to

I am not here to resent this inten-

Without doubt countries like USA and Canada provide better quality education and that's why so many EM students are going there and most of them are on scholarships. Now don't tell me that BM students are not going or not trying to go abroad. The fact of the matter is that every one who is getting an opportunity is going

abroad. These are encouraging signs because once the students graduate, they can do no harm but improve the economic condition of our country. Even if someone stays back, he is going to send his savings back to Bangladesh. Anyone with a little knowledge of economics would understand that this is going to do no harm but improve our country's balance of payments situation.

So it really isn't fair when someone questions that how can we be nation builders of tomorrow. People should thank The Daily Star and congratulate the award recipients and our efforts should be recognised. Although time will reveal everything I would like to ask the experts who pass baseless comments about EM students that 'Sir, How can we do anything worse in future to our country when already your generation has made Bangladesh the most corrupt nation, has made Dhaka the most polluted city and has taken us to such a situation where the army is required to control law and order?' Syed Rashed Zaman North Kafrul, Dhaka

Towel tradition Can anybody tell me how and when

all those colourful and decorative towels found their way on the seats of executives in all the offices of Bangladesh? Is it a status symbol? Dr. Rashid Hyder Baridhara, Dhaka

What about community service?



And build the nation

Indeed it seems that the issue is getting old, and much has been said from both sides about English medium vs Bangla medium, what is better, the reason for leaving to study abroad, arguments for this, against that. Where are we getting by this constant flow of opinions and explanations? Into a quagmire of words, nothing new is being presented.

Instead let's focus on what is wrong with our country's educational system. I think the emphasis we place on academically achieved grades is seriously damaging the psyche of the aver-

age student. If I don't have the highest grades, I have achieved nothing. I find it horrible that I am judged on the basis of grades I have achieved in school, and not on my other achievements in life. I find it sad that we are considered nobodies if we are not the What really matters (in English AND Bangla medium schools)

except for the grade? How many schools have a decent commu-

nity service programme? What emphasis is given on helping our

country and people? If we assume young minds to be impressionable (and they are) why are we not putting it into our youth's heads that we should be out there doing our bit? Are educational institutions interested in building human beings or academic machines? Whatever system you support, I do not think you can deny the inherent flaw that lies within our

system. It starts from the primary and carries through till the end. I am one of those treacherous English Medium students, who is studying abroad for my senior year of high school, where much emphasis is given on community interaction and extra curricular activities. I have also applied abroad for higher studies, because of the flexibility and the extra-curricular options available, yet I am seriously considering taking a year off and doing volunteer

Why is that not encouraged anywhere in our systems? And I would like to severely criticise rewarding students for achieving a certain number of 'As (a criticism which has been made already), because achieving this proves nothing, and creates an unnecessary hierarchy. If you have achieved a number of 'As in your exams by sitting at home and studying all day, or running to tutors to train yourself up to this, then you should ask yourself whether there is a point in all these. When will you reap the rewards of your hard work?

I suggest that schools (regardless of medium) started looking into integrating community service (with recognised merit given for participation, as an incentive, perhaps) from an early stage. In other words, start making massive changes in our educational

Nayeem Mahbub, Pune, India