

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.

Arrest of foreign journalists

I wholeheartedly agree with *The Daily Star* editorial regarding the government's actions against the two foreign journalists. We seem to have a penchant for charging people with treason. Someone should explain what it means to our government. Throughout its history, the US has only had a handful of treason cases; we seem to have had several dozen in the last year alone.

I do not agree that we should condemn them for having concealed their identity. Journalists, unlike what is suggested in the editorial, are human and so have their preconceived notions. It is logical for someone to try and follow up on persistent rumours of terrorists being harboured in our country. Do I believe that we knowingly allow the Taliban to take refuge in Bangladesh? Of course not. But can we really be sure as to what the Jamaat and their friends are up to in places like Chittagong? No.

It is not an impossibility that there are Taliban who have taken refuge among the many fundamentalists in Bangladesh. It wasn't entirely disinterested people who protested daily during the beginning of the war in Afghanistan.

If you are looking for a scoop on a story that's being denied by the government, announcing your presence would not really be the best way to go about it.

Sharon's war crimes in Lebanon would not have been revealed by Time magazine if they have gone about carrying a placard announcing their intentions. Reporters follow leads and to an outsider most reports, including *The Daily Star's*, can be (mis)construed to indicate the presence and support for the Taliban.

Being branded as such will be suicidal for us. Rather than arresting the journalists, the government upon discovering their identity should have at least tried to make them meet the editors of different papers, NGO workers etc. to try and get a balanced view. Now that they are arrested, don't expect a positive report being filed with Channel 4 upon their release.

Azad Dhaka

The government has recently arrested two foreign journalists on charges that they worked against the interest of Bangladesh and they also tried to project Bangladesh as a Taliban state.

I question the wisdom of the Government. This Government is repeatedly saying that some opposition leaders including Sheikh Hasina and some intellectuals are trying to project our country as a Taliban state and hence many Bangladeshis are suffering abroad. On the other hand the Government claims, Bangladesh is a moderate Muslim country and there is no Taliban element here which is also approved by the USA and its ambassador. If that is true then what are we afraid of? There is no harm if people from home and abroad come and talk to people from different profession and groups and make a report based on that.

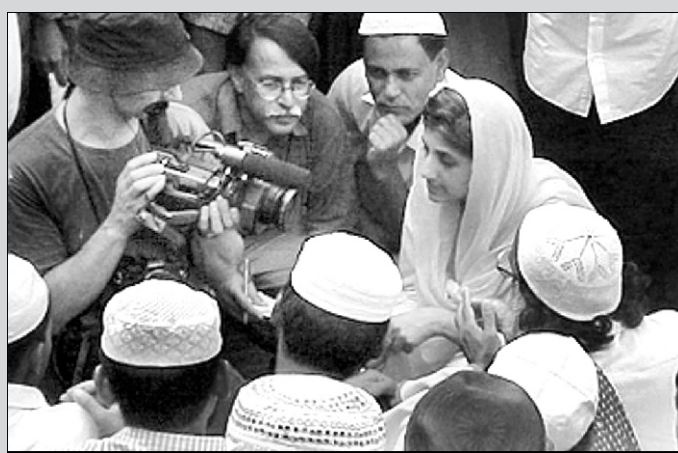
Frankly speaking, Bangladesh will not become a Taliban country just because Sheikh Hasina claims it to be. But can PM Khaleda Zia deny that religious extremist groups do exist in her government and within her 4-party alliance?

The government, in fact, by arresting those two foreign journalists are making more noise than Sheikh Hasina tried to do internationally. Instead of helping Khaleda Zia this arrest is going to raise more questions about the presence of Taliban element in Bangladesh. Are they not curbing the internationally recognised norms of journalism too?

Sonia Mirza, Banani, Dhaka

In efforts to prevent the two foreign journalists from possibly portraying Bangladesh as a fundamentalist country to the foreign media, the government has done precisely the opposite. The government's actions only draw further attention to the intolerant attitudes of the current coalition government.

Whatever interest the public may have had for the information gathered by these journalists, the interest will be much more now that the government has chosen to indirectly admit that the footage is unfavourable and may hurt the reputation of the country.



Journalists rounded up to rescue our image?

Once these journalists are released, as they indeed will have to be, their stories will reach the public.

It would be interesting to know how the insightful DB Inspector quoted in the article knows that the journalists "recorded their information tactfully" and that their motive was "to give a distorted image of the present political, social and religious situation of Bangladesh." The government's need to confiscate the footage and censor information seems much more likely than the two foreign free-lance journalists' desire to create misinformation about Bangladesh.

It seems that the government is afraid of further international attention on the human rights abuse and increased fundamentalism in the country. This complete denial of recent injustices and, contrarily the labelling of these facts as propaganda, only further disrepute the people of Bangladesh. By choosing not to recognise the increased prevalence of prejudice and fanaticism, we only worsen the situation. It is most unpatriotic to stand by and witness

injustice in one's own country without raising any objection at all.

Detaining the two foreign journalists, the government should be rest assured that the foreign media will indeed highlight the intolerance of the current government. Surely the government will not be able to deny reporting of its own actions as mere propaganda!
Julie Ahmad, Texas, USA

The news of arrest of the Channel-4 journalists will get more publicity than their reports would have.

The Government could have done a better job by inviting more credible reporters of the international press and showed them around to expose the positive sides of Bangladesh.

But after the current episode the international media would probably shun visiting our country and prepare reports on it based on second-hand stories and rumours.

MAH, Dhaka

I support the Bangladeshi Government in arresting the so-called Channel 4 journalists. Although Channel 4 here in the UK has done a few good programmes like the "Islamic Awareness Week" and will be airing a programme on Hajj sometime in March, lets be honest here: a programme on Islamic fundamentalism will sell more than the Hajj programme.

Why should we let them profit out of *videotaping* a few bearded Muslims in Baitul Mukarram? Bangladesh has a right to protect its image and this time we took some action against the Western propaganda machines.

Whatever said that, I feel Bangladesh is in a lose-lose situation. Whatever we do now, try them or let them go, these "journalists" will go back to the UK and tell the media the spiced up version of what they have "seen" and how they suffered while trying to get that information. It's good for the business.

Freedom of the press is one thing and irresponsible journalism is another.

Ariful Islam, London, UK

"Miss World pageant and Nigeria riot"

This letter is to make my position clear in response to the remarks by Ms Mostafa and Mr Abdullah (November 27) on my opinion about recent human casualties in Nigeria published in the same on 26 November.

I do not support at all the communal violence that followed the sarcastic remark about our noble Prophet (peace be upon him) published in a Nigerian newspaper on the occasion of the beauty contest that was meant to be held in Abuja. My concern was the irresponsible mind-set of loose journalism. Usually some people of highly professional calibre run a national newspaper and responsible professional behaviour is reasonably expected from such people. So how was it possible that an irreverent sardonic remark about Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) came in the front page of the said newspaper as main news story?

As regards the consequent riot, it was committed mostly by agitated youths and mass people (both Muslims and Christians), from whom we cannot expect fullest responsible behaviour, which we can from the management of that newspaper. But the newspaper showed total disrespect to their

professionalism and triggered the unpleasant riot. I appreciate the apologies of that newspaper; but the truth is that when people's religious sentiment is deliberately attacked, they pay little heed to such official apologies.

Mahmud, Portsmouth, UK

In response to Mr Mahmud (November 26) I find it disturbing that criticism of any kind is met with such violence by the Muslim youth. I remember my local mollah condemning Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism during the Ju'ma. However, I am yet to recall any Christian or Hindu young men starting a riot on that account.

As to the issue of the Prophet, I think that from an academic point of view, nobody should be above criticism. History can always be revised and reinterpreted.

Yahya, USA

European Parliament resolution

The crocodile tears shed by European Parliament about the so-called human rights violation in our country due to 'Operation Clean Heart' undertaken by the Government for curbing crimes in the country, is totally uncalled for.

Their action appears to be ill motivated and biased to defame

Bangladesh-- a predominantly Muslim and democratic country. It is very clear, the resolution has been taken by the so-called name sake organisation, is only to please a particular coterie or group and does not reflect any reality of the situation whatsoever.

'Operation Clean Heart' has already achieved tremendous success and as such been hailed by the general public in the country. A large number of terrorists have been arrested and put on trial under the existing legal system of the country. However, a few prominent terrorists have been granted temporary refuge in a neighbouring country. All actions are now directed against the known criminals irrespective of their political affiliation as we have seen party cadres of both the ruling as well as the opposition are rounded up. Therefore, the allegation of arresting only the members of the opposition group is totally false.

The Prime Minister already declared that, the criminals did not have any party colour and directed the law enforcing agencies to nab and try them under the law of the country, irrespective of their party affiliation. Use of Armed Forces in assisting civil administration in national calamities in the country is well within the constitution and falls within the jurisdiction of their duties in addition to the defence of the motherland. Use of Armed Forces in curbing crimes in the country is not something new. In the year 1972 also the then Prime Minister of Bangladesh deployed Armed Forces for this purpose.

May I, therefore, ask, what these undesirable elements have been doing when the Israel is engaged in indiscriminate killing of women and children, destruction of their homesteads and illegal occupation of their motherland? What was this 'Parliament' doing when thousands of innocent men, women and children were killed by the communal forces in Gujarat, India under the direct umbrella of the state security forces. What is the definition of human rights violation in their dictionary?

MA Talat Hoque Dhaka

This is in regards to the letters by Ahmed Mohiuddin and Yahya criticising *The Daily Star's* coverage of the EU censure on Bangladesh and the EU in general. The gist of their arguments seem to be that just because the EU parliament is not criticising Israel or other repressive countries, their much justified criticism of us is hypocritical. In a similar vein the Foreign Ministry has called this interference in our domestic affairs.

Just to set the record straight, the EU countries are one of the most enlightened, boringly so, groups in the world. They are also one of our largest development partners and export market. I think it is quite justified for them to criticise the killings during the army drive. No one said anything about the army. The EU is echoing what has been reported in our papers over the last few weeks. I don't think anyone in this country can approve of suspects being killed in custody. The EU is just adding their voice to that simple call for the rule of law.

Sometimes we should get off our inferiority complex and try to emulate the better aspects of Western Civilisation. The rule of law, sanctity of property, human rights and liberty.

Kim Dhaka

Bangladesh's image

Much has been talked about Bangladesh's image abroad and the government is constantly denying what the international press has been saying about Bangladesh's

denial of its Al-Qaida links. Remember, what Sheikh Hasina and other civil society groups have been advocating overseas stem from their helplessness in trying to motivate the current government to come out with truth and deal with fundamentalism. These days, Internet is good enough to tell the world about the state in which Bangladesh is in. If Sheikh Hasina is wrong, Khaleda Zia must be right and she should prove this and not resort to denial and silence. Megawati did the same, Musharraf did the same but at the end, truth prevailed.

I recall Jamaat-e-Islami's website (hosted until September 11 and then replaced by a 'secular' version) which proudly talked about its support to Al-Qaida and Osama's preaching. Harkatul Jihad openly announced its support to Osama and in fact signed the joint declaration for Jihad against the Western world. Are these not good evidences?

Our Prime Minister said at the Khulna University that Bangladeshi students were facing difficulties with foreign university admissions because of adverse propaganda by some 'national leaders'. What about the image Bangladesh earned when they cancelled the 'Bangabandhu Postgraduate Scholarships' just because the nomenclature had Bangabandhu in it. The result was the premature return of 80 Bangladeshi students from Commonwealth country universities in the midst of their degree programme.

Please remember that denial does not help!

Mak Khan Australia

Government changes tone

The denial by the ISPR office regarding the army's role in a death and the comments by the PIO (November 24) are actually a good sign. It shows that the government and the army realise that they cannot go on doing whatever they want without some public criticism.

It is also a credit to our free press that they have been able to bring home this message. Having said that, to see where the real power is in this country, just look at the way most papers side step directly accusing army officers regarding deaths in custody and such. Even *The Daily Star* has mostly limited itself to criticising the civil administration and its secrecy, not the army's.

Emile Dhaka

"Community service"

I had followed all letters published on the subject of "English medium v Bangla medium" in your Letters column.

I noted, in general, the opinion expressed by the supporters of the each side in effect criticising each other's medium and did not appreciate that both the medium are in effect complimentary to each other as well as beneficial to the nation as a whole.

In my view there is nothing wrong if someone wishes to study and settle abroad for a better standard of living. Being a freedom fighter, I have done the same immediately after the Liberation War. I am a Bangladeshi and will always be prepared to contribute towards the progress of my motherland to the best of my ability. I feel that most Bangladeshi living abroad are contributing one way or another towards the development of Bangladesh. I am making this point only to illustrate that it is wrong to assume if someone settles abroad for a better life then he/she is not interested in the betterment of Bangladesh.

I also noted that most of the writers placed a great emphasis on the grades of the examination results. Although we should motivate our children to work hard to achieve better grades but by achieving better grades in examinations only, one cannot be successful in the practical world. Self-development is a major factor in the nation building and this cannot be achieved by academic excellence only. Our children need to get actively involved in community service.

Education systems in the developed country place a great emphasis on community service from school level and this involvement helps the child to grow up as an honest and responsible adult.

I thank Nayeem Mahbub for his

certain areas by putting the particular switches off, after a while we put these switches on and put some others off, carefully maintaining the electrical power consumed within the amount produced. When electric trains will be running those circuits will also be controlled by certain switches and it would be a simple matter of noting that those particular switches are not to be touched when "load shedding" is going on. In any case the demand of electrical power for traction may not be that great. In early 70's an UK company did an exercise for Dhaka-Chittagong railway electrification and the estimated power requirement shown at that time was less than 30MW.

Mr Nafees keeps on harping on the cost of this project, whether this

project of ours will only see the light of the day if the successful bidder for this job can find profit in building this project with his own money.
AM Mahmood, Gulshan, Dhaka

The less important people always suffer the most

On 28th November, *The Daily Star* reported that the country is going to face power crisis by 2004. This crisis is the result of lack of proper planning and investment in the power sector by the government. No doubt, it is the "Less Important People" (LIP) who are going to suffer as a result, rather than the "Very Important Person/People" (VIP) of this "very poor country!"

why they fail to work properly. If a bureaucrat with the highest university degree has to undergo pressure from a local student leader, then how can they work? On the other hand, many bureaucrats use the political parties as the ladder to climb the career tower.

If our Prime Minister can really depoliticize the administration, it would be her greatest achievement and the nation will remember her forever. Certainly she will be facing pressures from within her party, but she should be firm in her decision because the very survival of our nation depends on it.

MD. Ashequul Islam IBA, University of Dhaka

Invest in Cox's Bazaar and CHT

The direct flight service on the Bangkok-Chittagong route is clearly great news. Hopefully it will work both ways and we will be able to attract foreign tourists to Cox's Bazaar and Chittagong Hill tracts.

Does this mean that the government is going to develop Cox's Bazaar properly like Lankawi, Ko Samui, etc? We need to work with Thai tourist agencies in order to offer foreign tourists holiday packages that will include Bangladeshi beach resorts. Hotels, restaurants and shops will have to be set up and advertisements published in international newspapers and magazines.

If the government is able to make the atmosphere conducive, if criminals and anti-social elements are kept at bay and security for tourists can be guaranteed, this could really work.

Come on, Bangladeshi and non-resident Bangladeshi entrepreneurs! Good things are happening in our country at last! Come and invest in Cox's Bazaar and Chittagong Hill tracts.
F Hussain UK

Army excess at Rayerbazar

I was absolutely stunned to read the news item "Army excess at Rayerbazar". I can't agree more with the views of Mr Kim (November 17), Yahya (November 18) and Shonku (November 20).

Who empowered the army to maintain the sanctity of Ramadan? They have been deployed to improve the law and order situation not to beat up innocent shopkeepers and those who chose not to fast.

We all should protest this high-handed attitude of the army.
Akash Dhaka

Portrait of Bangabandhu

We are anxious to learn about the removal of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib's portrait from the mural on the side wall of the Bijooy Ketan museum.

Bangabandhu was kept here as a prisoner in the so-called Agartala conspiracy case and his portrait, a reproduction from the picture of his addressing the public meeting at the then Dhaka Race Course maidan on the 7th March 1971, perhaps constitutes an essential part of the museum and is a well deserved tribute to this great son of the soil.

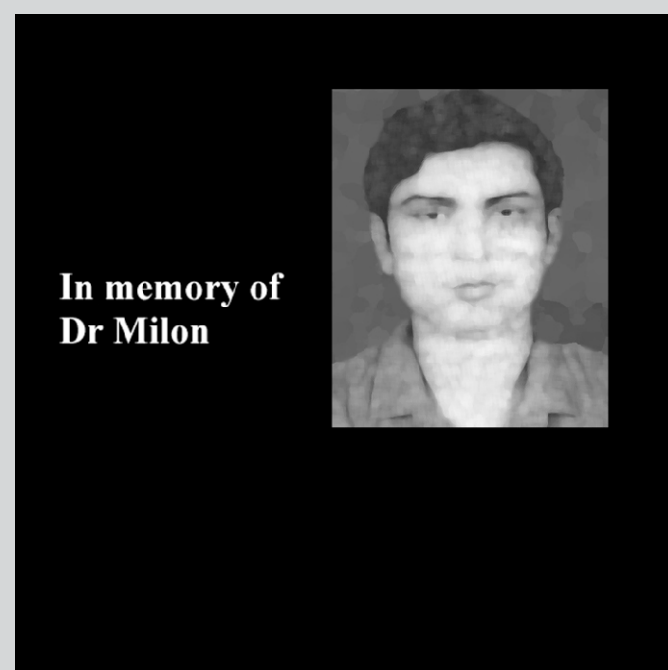
As reported in a few newspapers, the Communication Minister, Nazmul Huda said in the Parliament that the government has no knowledge of who has removed this portrait and that it was done in the darkness of night! What an explanation!
Ahmed Aurungzeb, On e-mail

We salute you, Dr. Milton!

November 27, 1990, it was a gloomy winter morning. The situation was very tense around the Teachers and Students Center (TSC) of Dhaka University. An armed group led by Sanaul Haque Niru and Golam Faruq Ovi with government patronage took over the control of Karzon Hall area. The activists of the All Party Students Unity (APSU) took position near the TSC. Sounds of stray bullets were coming from all around. After a period of lull, the sound of a single shot broke the silence. Noticing a small crowd, we rushed toward only to find that Dr. Milton was shot while he, along with Dr. Mustafa Jalal Mohiuddin, was on his way to attend a meeting organised by Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) at the mall area of PG Hospital. He was pronounced dead later.

12 years have passed since Dr. Milton's death. The unknown assassin is yet to be apprehended. Dr. Milton's death still remains a mystery. Let us remember the loss of a brave heart.

Dr. Milton, by sacrificing your life, you showed us a way in the ocean of darkness, you stimulated our soul at the moment of despair, and you



In memory of Dr Milton

strengthen our stumpled determination when we were falling apart. You sparked our expectation and we fought for the emancipation from autocracy and military dictatorship. You were the harbinger of democracy and freedom. Like Asad, whose sacrifice (in 1969) led to the birth of a nation in 1971, you led us to the path of democracy and freedom against social injustice.

Today, we see that ominous sign again. A dark cloud shadows our nascent political and social institutions. Democracy is threatened again. But, your example, still, lead us to believe we shall overcome. And, we shall overcome someday.

We salute you, Dr. Milton
Dr. ABM Nasir North Carolina, USA

letter emphasising on community service. I am pleased to see that someone of his age has been able to make very good points. There's no doubt that this is due to the knowledge he has gained from the system he is currently accustomed to. Although he is studying in India, he is interested in improving the education system in his motherland. He therefore deserves credit for identifying some important points and proves that he is interested in the nation building even though he is studying abroad.

Muhitul Islam Essex, UK

"Bangladesh Railway: Lines leading nowhere!"

Recently, my attention was drawn to the article "Bangladesh Railway: Lines leading nowhere!" (November 13) by Mr K Nafees.

Towards the beginning of his article he mentions about getting stuck due to "load shedding" along the Dhaka-Chittagong route. I wonder if the writer knows how the "load shedding" is done. When we find that the total demand of our electrical power is more than what we generate we cut off supplies to

is going to be feasible, what should be the level of the prices of the tickets etc. Reading his article it seems that he thinks Bangladesh Government is going to embark upon this investment itself and he does not mention anywhere that the whole idea behind this project is that it is to be implemented through private sector participation. Since our private sector is not strong enough to come up for such projects we are necessarily having to look for such private participation from abroad. This way the concern which will undertake this project will have to Build, Operate and Own (BOO) or Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) this project which means that the entire initial investment, the cost of running this project, fixing the prices of the tickets and recovering the cost and profit will all be its responsibility. Bangladesh will not have to spend any money.

For Mr Nafees's information Bangladesh has already received a number of responses from abroad. It remains to be seen whether we can negotiate this project on to a satisfactory conclusion. In his article the only relevant comment that I find is when he rightly says, "in this world of demand and supply, business will find its way to fund projects, which yield profit." This

On the same day, you reported that the Awami League walked out of JS over the introduction of a bill proposing omission of the name of Bangabandhu from the nomenclature of an annual agriculture award.

This is the year 2002 and asking for a proper electricity supply to your home (especially when you are willing to pay for it) is NOT a lot to ask for - to a government whose wages is being paid by the "blood" of poor Bangali people!

Why is it that PM, Khaleda Zia thinks it is more important to invest valuable time and money to erase Bangabandhu's name, rather than investing money and time to sort out this mess of power crisis?
Azad Miah Oldham, UK

"Depoliticising bureaucracy"

The editorial "Depoliticising bureaucracy" (November 25) was indeed very timely.

The more efficient our administration becomes, the better our condition will be. People from all walks of life have always dreamt of our administration to be free from political affiliation. Our bureaucrats, unfortunately, are caught in the vicious circle of politics and that is

EC and UP Polls



EC takes a bold stance

Bravo to the EC for not giving in to the government. But BNP should we are still in a democracy. There are still institutions in our country that will stand up to the government's totalitarian tendencies.

In addition to our free press, we can also now count the EC as one of the champions of democracy and the rule of law.
Shonku, Dhaka

The Election Commission had scheduled to hold the Union Parishad Election, the most important tier of local government fabric of the country between January 4 and February 27 of next year. Abruptly, the Ministry of LGRD asked the EC to postpone the election by two months. Why? The LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan argued that since the Army, Police, BDR and Ansar are in a tight schedule while carrying out 'Operation Clean Heart', it would be difficult for the same forces to perform election duties.

But me thinks, the timing scheduled by the EC is absolutely congenial for the election to be held swimmingly as the law and order situation is in a better shape because of the on-going army drive.

Thankfully, the EC has shrugged off the postponement proposal and taught the government a good lesson indeed. I implore the government to let the EC exercise its *carte blanche*.
Molla Mohammad Shaheen, Dept. of English, DU