

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.

"Who the government is trying to fool?"

Your editorial comment published on 3, December captioned above has attracted my attention.

The government's trail of actions leading to the arrests and detention of the two foreign journalists have become murky. On one hand the Government is "happy" to announce and proudly declare that there is no restrictions on the visit of foreign journalists and the overall freedom of operations of the media in Bangladesh and by the same token directs the NSI to "keep an eye" on the journalists both local and foreign!

The current issues relating to Al-Qaida links and growing Islamic fundamentalism anywhere in the world, rightly or wrongly is the high point of media attention all over the world. The focus on Bangladesh being one of the largest "Muslim" nations in the world is therefore natural. Our government must realise that this is a complex game of the media and hence it must take the media into confidence. There are always good apples and bad apples in a tree but cutting down the tree can never be the solution. The government cannot and must not "haul up" any one on charges of sedition at random.

In all honesty I find that our media has given this government a "fair deal" on upholding Bangladeshis image, in particular, relating to accusations made by the foreign media about growing fundamentalism.

The government therefore must find ways to combat media onslaught with "Media measures rather than arrests, intimidation, threats and coercion".

The question however remains: has the government the will to do so?

Shamsher Chowdhury, Dhaka

Gas supply in Northern Bangladesh

I must thank Mr. Mozammel Huq for his news item, "Industrialisation in northern region: Entrepreneurs still wait for gas supply" (December 2). It may be mentioned that since the independence of Bangladesh all the governments did pledge to develop industries in northern Bangladesh and with an effort to bring about economic transformation a number of BSCIC industrial areas were established in several districts. Lately, two EPZs, one in Iswardi and another in Saidpur have been declared to be established.

As everybody knows, the electricity supply in this region is not at all satisfactory, the thermal power station based on Barapukuria coal field will take some years to bear fruits, again this energy source will not be sufficient for this region as it is likely to meet the shortfall in energy supply for the whole country. The only option remaining is to build gas-fired power stations in northern Bangladesh. But this is not under plan by the present government. Meanwhile, according to a knowledgeable source, a survey is underway to construct gas pipeline to Iswardi and Khulna towards the border with India. Its intention is not inexplicable in various ways.

With this background let us review the government's position as regards gas supply to northern region vis-a-vis economic development of this region. Many suspect that the government is bent towards exporting gas to India since the FM has expressed openly that there is no use leaving gas underground! Yes, he is correct, very much like potato or carrot, it should be used in right place and time. I would only like to bring into notice of the government that there is a right place and time to extend gas network in the northern region to save the existing industries and build the much publicized so-called industrial estates/EPZs. It should be noted that in the main industrial hub of Northern Bangladesh - Bogra, most of the industries established during the pre-Independence period and even later have been closed down due to persistent energy crisis and the latest casualty is the Tajma ceramic industries. And none of the BSCIC estates could flourish properly during the last three decades. Apart from the household usage of about 28 per cent of the country's population, I hope the government will see a potentially large domestic industrial market in gas in the northern region.

Dr. K. Maudood Elahi
Professor, Jahangirnagar University

Rankled Governor

Dr. Fakhruddin's frustration with the NCBs strikes a pathetic note on the quality of the key personnel staffing the nerve centres of the Bangladesh economy. If the top tier managers of the NCBs reporting to the Governor of the Bangladesh Bank cannot account for key figures such as cost of funds or identify the worst defaulting sectors, they personify themselves as laughing stock, not as members of a professional cadre called bankers.

Under the circumstances, what the governor might bring about is cosmetic changes-- perhaps by replacing some of the incompetent elements from the top tiers. But there is a deeper and endemic malaise-- the collapse of the education system-- over which he has little control. It is this system that contin-

ues to produce incompetent types in large numbers that are often not ready to man the vital centres. It is time for the political leadership to understand the debilitating effect of incompetence on the nation. Consequently, it is the education system that must be held accountable and geared, upgraded, and refurbished to create top-notch personnel for all sectors. Until then cosmetic changes will be the mainstay of policies and the nation will continue to remain hobbled in its pursuit of emancipation from the poverty trap and the state of perpetual underdevelopment.

Syed Saad Andaleeb
Pennsylvania, USA

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

Comments and opinions are coming out in *The Daily Star* on Mr. Mahfuz Anam's commentary. And I thank Mr. Nasir of Dhaka for his views (November 5).

Mr. Anam's commentary surprised me because 'Operation Clean Heart' looks like a success to me and already been praised by the common people. Therefore, a commentary as such may encourage the criminals and weaken the moral strength of the joint force. It seems that the Editor became quite anxious when some suspected criminals died in army custody. There was a headline in *The Daily Star* like 'Another dies in Army custody' on the front page (5th November). But you should have focused on the success of joint drive mission instead of giving such headlines.

Screaming for human rights is a mockery where murder, hijacking, extortion and rapes are regular phenomenon. I urge the editor to focus on the result of the joint drive. Please give pragmatic suggestions to the government to fight crimes and terrorism.

Engr. Mustafa Iqbal
Chittagong

"Inferior indeed!"

This refers to Fuad Hussain's letter "Inferior indeed" (November 28). Mr. Hussain's assumption is based on flawed logic and it seems that he is pathetically suffering from some kind of illusion about London. Just because, "The O-level and A-level exam papers are checked under the

have little value in the world of science and technology. Learning the contents and thorough understanding of the subject matter is what counts. I have personally known quite a number of world class scientists, engineers and doctors of Bangladeshi origin in USA all of whom (without exception) had completed their secondary education in Bengali medium schools in the formative years of their life.

Dr. Abdul Jalil Pramanik
NY, USA

Bangladesh and rule of law

A nation stands tall in the eyes of the world when it's ruled by the norms of law. This basic necessity of a civilised nation is sadly missing in Bangladesh. This politics of peril by the Bangladeshi politicians has brought shame and disgrace only. It's not at all true that the people of Bangladesh, despite their poverty and other social ills, do not know how to appreciate a good government. But whither good governance?

The civil administration failed miserably to improve the law and order situation and therefore the army had to be deployed. It will be a grave mistake to think that this army drive will eradicate all the criminal elements from the society for good. The improved situation is a very short-lived one. The main responsibility will come back to the civil administration again and that will test their sincerity to the cause.

Looking at the behaviour of our politicians, it seems that they consider Bangladesh as just a piece of land. They forget that all their activities are being reported in the world media and people are watching. They have constantly failed to understand that the question of survival in politics does not depend on patronising the criminals. The fundamental aim of politics is to serve the people not to victimise them.

If this army drive against the criminals fails what other option is left with the government to improve the situation?

Akbar Hussain
Toronto, Canada

What's on BNP's mind?

It is really sad to realise that our political parties will probably never be able to get out of their usual

Indian allegation against Bangladesh



Protesting propaganda

tory has been written and they are trying to change it their way whenever they can. We have seen similar actions from the past Awami League government too.

I implore the two parties, for once, to drop these nonsense behaviour and work for their salary's worth and do some actual good for the people they are elected by.

Shafiqat
USA

Our leftover, their food

As I step out of the gate of my high-rise apartment complex and walk through the pavement, I felt embarrassed for trespassing their dwellings. Baby lying naked on the hard-core concrete, toddler playing with a piece of Styrofoam, mother breast-feeding her new born-- all these are a daily scene.

The other day on my way through their households I found that some of these families are drying *chola-muri* in the sun. That *chola-muri*, we threw out on the previous day. Observing closely (but pretending of being oblivious) for a few days, I realised that in the month of Ramadan leftovers are often superfluous. So, they dry those titbits and preserve them in polythene bags for the difficult days. How ingenious that is! ... Now, what do I call that? Survival instinct?

I urge the affluent people, please don't throw your leftovers in the dustbin, rather hand over those to these hapless people.

S. Shaer Hassan
Shantinagar, Dhaka

"Secularism and the West"

I congratulate Chaklader Mahboobul Alam for his well-written and scholarly article "Secularism and the West" (November 30) which is an eye-opener for all of us. Let me add another perspective to the writer's assertion as to why Islam and Christianity are at different stages of secularism.

Islam never experienced any Inquisition like Christianity did during the Catholic reign of Ferdinand and Isabella when thousands of Muslims and Jews were massacred, forcibly proselytised and evicted out of Spain. The revulsion of the Christian psyche in the aftermath of this abominable act together with their heartfelt cry for human dignity against Church's cruelty translated into a common call of separation of the Church and the State during the European Renaissance. And thus is born the Western secularism and whatever that means to the world.

Nevertheless Islam's limited experience of theocracy (using Western terminology) during the lifetime of its Prophet and four Caliphs remained a supreme example of justice, peace and human dignity and inimitable to this day. There were some individual examples of Muslim rulers attempting to establish Islamic rules in their individual lives and those could not be construed as institutionalised theocracy. Nor can the modern day Iranian Islamic governance be taken as showcase, for the reason of differences with the mainstream Islamic society and its social justice system.

Human history unfolded very differently for Europe and the Muslim worlds. The development of political institutions and social governance has always been intimately intertwined with human experience and culture, and uniquely reflects its local hue. What was experienced by the European man before and after Inquisition is quintessentially different from what the Muslims did during their fifteen hundred years of social evolution. Secularism is a natural growth for the European mind and not necessarily so for us.

Secondly the personal and the institutional value system in today's Europe is fundamentally Christian. It is natural. The European and their cousin Americans have evolved out

of a primarily Judeo-Christian tradition and thus endemic to their moral, social and judiciary value systems. It is their umbilical cord and thus inseparable.

Thirdly we all rational humans have to ask ourselves-- is the European experience ubiquitous? Is it a necessary condition that what has happened to the Europeans in their socio-religious-political revolution has to happen to all societies? If the answer is affirmative, then we intrinsically accept our underdeveloped stage of social development relative to them, even though our civilisation is much older than theirs. We are also a proud partner of an old Indian civilisation preceding the European by thousand years. These facts tend to deny that we are inferior human beings relative to our European counterparts. Our social evolution took a very different course and it is not necessary that we have to follow the same development as the Europeans insofar as the separation of the Church and State is concerned. There is a third way.

Ferdous Islam
Ontario, Canada

Foreign Cargo Ships

I do not understand the intricacies of the Flag Protection ordinance, nor do I need to. It is clear that our typical shortsighted Bangladeshi businessmen are trying to profit through whatever means possible.

Foreign ships are stranded without being able to unload their cargo. Without this cargo our country's export industries will die. These delays can mean the difference between bankruptcy and survival for many factories. Already with so many shutting down, can we risk more such shenanigans?

Amazingly enough the BGMEA is silent. This so-called apex body of our RMG exporters is more interested in their own gains than looking after the interests of our RMG industry.

Azad
Dhaka

Catalytic converters

The government has made a new "law" asking the citizens to fix "catalytic converters" for all cars and trucks. The reason shown is that it will protect the "environment" by controlling the emission of black smoke from the exhaust of the vehicles.

Only one importer so far has imported such item and that costs Tk 18,000/- to Tk 25,000/- for cars and Tk 3,00,000/- for trucks. No other importer has imported this item because of its high cost.

The scientists have reported that the "catalytic converters" really do not lessen environmental pollution so much as we think. It all depends on the quality of "fuel" that is produced and supplied to the vehicles. We all know that there is widespread "adulteration" of fuel in the petrol pumps of our country. Often they mix kerosene/diesel with petrol and octane and this mixture causes environmental pollution when burns. The government has no means to check the quality of "fuels" of every petrol pump of the country. Furthermore, the quality of fuel varies in different supplies and the production at ERL from batch to batch.

Therefore, even if the car and truck owners spend money on catalytic converters, we cannot expect proper return of investment. The country will also not get the 'benefit' as reported in the press.

Whenever the state introduces a new law, it is for the welfare of the citizens. But if it is a law that is not farsighted, we cannot expect good results out of it.

Therefore it is requested that both the Environment Ministry and the Energy Ministry re-examine the matter and take appropriate action keeping in mind the greater interest of the nation. We must remember that ours is a poor country and therefore we must act with prudence before spending such huge amount on any sector.

A concerned citizen, Dhaka

A worthy Finance Minister

It is due to our Finance Minister's wise measure, the state reserve increased significantly although there were worldwide sharp recession in the USA and EU countries. The amount of remittance sent by the overseas Bangladeshis increased alarmingly.

It was mainly because of our Finance Minister's honest effort and sincere deliberations with the foreign banks operating in Bangladesh that they responded positively by opening remittance special booths for Bangladeshis in different major cities in the world.

It is because of his prudent policies and action plans in finance and banking sector that this sector could be more organised. The authorities concerned started to bring the bank defaulters to justice. But, the writing off process of long outstanding arrears' loan may be harmful for the country. It may set a bad precedent for the future borrowers. It also might incite the default culture.

In the sector of income tax and other revenue matters, the FM did a lot to improve the situation. More and more taxpayers are inducted and tax net has been more widened. Evasion of taxes has decreased markedly.

Saifur Rahman has rightly suspended the mysterious instrument

Population problem



Population problem: Waiting for the explosion?

As we all know, we have the highest population density in the world. Besides, flood and corruption, it is our another world recognised status. The very obvious problem that hinders our development and all other problems simply follow that lead. Population pressure is already forcing poor to become poorer. It is creating urban economic and social problems that threaten to make cities wholly unmanageable. Illegal settlers are mushrooming all over the places and making civic lives almost paralysed. Isn't it time to wake up and address the issue more seriously? Why don't our policymakers make a law to control our population? It will take generations to create awareness of our mass population by lecturing on family planning issue. But, the question is do we have that time and resources?

These working poor go by their basic instincts. Because of their little or no education they are lacking socio-cultural values and don't care about the consequences of their deeds. This population sub-group is increasing in an alarming rate each year and seems never to be stopping. The number of people living in slums in our major cities is rising everyday. Can anyone imagine what impact these classes are making on our nation and on our limited resources? There is not even a clear strategy where these slum dwellers would go because most of them don't have any permanent residence or land.

What about those kids who were born in such poor and dysfunctional families? What future

of "Bearer Certificate of Deposit" which long been in practice in our banks. This "Bearer Certificate of Deposit" in most cases, has 'haven' and 'abode' of illegal (bribe and black) money.

He took another good decision i.e. to bring the mobile phone owners under income tax net. If he could implement this decision so, it will earn a huge amount of revenue which could be used for the betterment of the nation. It is understood that there are about two million mobile phone users in our country. If they could be brought under the tax net, it will help us immensely.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our Finance Minister for his ingenious and welfare policies and actions taken in favour of the benefit of the common people and the nation. He has been the right person for the right job.

Mustafizur Rahman
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Traffic signals and the task of the traffic police

This is in reference to the news and editorial on traffic signal (November 23 and 24). While it is disappointing that the traffic conditions in the cosmopolitan city have deteriorated, it is equally shocking that the pains of the traffic controllers have also increased.

While our policymakers are making long speeches about con-

trolling the city traffic, the concerned authority is reluctant to mend the existing automated traffic signals. This has obviously added to the sufferings of the city dwellers, causing wastage of time, energy and money. Thanks a lot to the authorities concerned for taking steps to repair the signals.

Have we thought about the traffic police who have to control vehicles manually as "59 of the 69 automated traffic signals of the capital have been out of order for over two years". These police have to work at least 8-hours a day, and throughout the day they are busy controlling hundreds of vehicles.

When will our sufferings end? How long will the low-paid traffic police have to endure the pains of controlling the traffic manually?

Md. Ashequl Islam
IBA, University of Dhaka

Curriculum for the nation builders of tomorrow

What is the objective of education? Knowledge or career?

If it (education) is for knowledge, you can acquire it from any language. You don't need to study in English medium schools. Aroj Ali Matubur was just a primary school literate, but he was a man of vast knowledge.

If it (education) is for career, obviously you have to look for the convenient language(s) for your education that facilitate your ambition. And there's no doubt that proficiency in English language is the demand of the day.

I strongly believe many of the parents are not aware (or care) of what their children are studying in the English medium schools. From my personal observation I have found that many of their books are from the UK and they follow the syllabus of the UK domestic schools. So they have to study the life of Shakespeare, Joan of Ark or King James but ignoring the story of Nazrul, Tagore or Lalan Shah. Is there any government policy to monitor their syllabus? I observed that the government has so far overlooked this matter consciously or unconsciously.

Why can't we prepare the textbooks of these English medium schools by ourselves? Don't we have enough English literate people in our country to do this job? To get a better job in the Western country one doesn't need to learn British folk story, do they?

So what we need is "A common academic curriculum for all the English medium schools prepared by local writers containing both local and global matters.

Haroon Rashid, Chittagong

prospects they hold in their lives? What can we expect from these kids if we fail to provide them education and fail to show them the right direction? Someday they would grow up and would end up being unskilled workers or beggars and chances are they might be involved in street crimes or so called 'political activists'.

In our male dominated society there is a tendency among middle class and lower middle class population to strive for baby boy. If any couple's first child were not a boy they would take chances over and over again until they get a baby boy.

We have played enough 'hide and seek' game and our nation has enjoyed enough flexibility for controlling population. Though we have been little successful by lowering our birth rate through family planning or through different government and non-government campaigns, by deploying field workers to rural communities and through many others programs. At the same time, improvements in medicine and science have led to a sharp drop in mortality rates and have accelerated population growth rates to unprecedented level. We can't afford to wait for few generations before our population stabilises. We must design an obvious law and its right implementation for controlling our population. I believe we can still build a future that is more prosperous, more just, and more secure simply by controlling our population growth rate.

Kamrul Syed
Kansas, U.S.A