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Letter from Reporters Sans Frontieres



A nation accused

I am writing this in response to Robert Menard's very heartfelt letter to The Daily Star (December 5).

Firstly, when did Bangladesh ever enjoy a positive image abroad? Did you or your compares ever allow us to have a positive image? Channel 4 (I am sure CNN/BBC/ITN too) in your opinion could be "one of the world's most respected TV stations;" but do not impose your opinion onto how our government should execute its policies. We are all aware of how foreign/Western media handled the situation in Afghanistan. I truly believe that our government could do without your threatening attitude. So please do not go about telling our government of what must be done to end "violence and political intolerance" in our country.

Where do you get off comparing us to Burma or even North Korea? Our government needs to make sure that your beloved colleagues are not working undercover for some 'propaganda scheme' run by foreign states. You want to do investigative journalism? Come to New York then! I can assure you that the threat of the so-called Islamic fundamentalism (if you really know what it means) is far greater here than in Bangladesh. There is obviously a conspiracy

to present Bangladesh as a terrorist nation. Whether this is due to opportunism or sheer spite I do not know.

I do admit that Bangladesh may have Al-Qaida operatives hidden among its populace. But so do scores of other countries in the West. Foreign journalists have a tendency to misrepresent certain aspects of our culture. I have seen several reports on our part of the world in the US media that are totally biased and seriously out of context.

Why don't you concentrate on India for once? Your work in India should be much more rewarding as there is an abundance of communal violence and human rights violations there. I would expect journalists to be much more bipartisan in approach. If foreign journalists can call mafia dons like Liaquat and Arman Al-Qaida operatives, then I am Bin Laden myself.

We have plenty to worry about as a nation. So please leave us alone. And to our Foreign Minister and the Foreign Office what exactly is your function? Now, Mr. Menard, if you are reading this then I can assure you (without the faintest idea of your origins) that my homeland has more freedom of press than yours. **Ayman Chishty, Broadway, New York, USA**

The Opposition has further widened. I see ominous clouds in the horizon. There is confusion all around.

Now is the time for our intellectuals to come out and vindicate the stifling environment. Let us have their views on the Indian propaganda or tirade against Bangladesh. Let us have their explicit opinion on Bangladesh's possibility and or alleged growing signs of becoming a Taliban state. Let them come forward and put on the table some practical suggestions on some burning issues and suggest us a way out of the problem. Not just concentrate on what Sheikh Hasina is doing or saying or what Khaleda Zia could have done or did not do. No balancing acts, no partisan angles please. Bangladesh is here to stay with or without Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia or even the intellectuals. The intellectuals have an important role to play, they should play it now without any fear or favour. **Shams Chowdhury Dhaka**

Foreign journalists and media campaign

I am pleased to note Bangladesh government's stand on press freedom. Freedom of press is absolute necessity to flourish democracy. The two foreign journalists arrested should be released, but not before they are sued for attempting to malign the image of Bangladesh. A mechanism needs to be introduced to cork all forms of yellow journalism.

Bangladesh needs foreign trade and investment. It is not possible for the country to turn a blind eye to smear campaigns and live in isolation. FEER and Wall Street reports have done enough damage thanks to the patronage of a not so friendly neighbour. This damage will now have to be reversed. A good way to conduct this is through extensive media campaigns, both at home and abroad. Imagine running glossy commercials on Bangladesh during primetime on western television to highlight investment potentials in the country. The world should be shown all that Bangladesh has to offer, including a large market base, communal harmony, tolerance and the rule of law (something that still lacks a permanent solution).

It is time Bangladesh shed the image of poverty, floods and cyclones. Bangladeshis are dynamic people. With a bit of work, there is much potential out there that can be harvested to benefit all in the long term. **AA California, USA**

Arrest of Pricilla Raj

I am writing to you out of sincere concern for my friend and colleague Pricilla Raj. During my two years stay in Bangladesh as a researcher I came to know Pricilla as a dynamic, honest and intelligent individual. As you are aware she is being detained by court order for crimes of sedition against Bangladesh in connection to her role as a translator for two days for the two foreign journalists recently arrested.

How can a loyal system of a supposedly democratic, secular government, not allow an individual access to their lawyers? Is it not a basic right to be afforded legal representation? My concern stems from the alleged "confession" that Pricilla has submitted. In the absence of her lawyers she was apparently sequestered in a police guarded room and "allowed" to confess.

I personally know Pricilla and can't imagine what wrongdoing she could confess to. Is interpretation an illegal activity? If so, I too have broken the law in Bangladesh as have any individuals capable of speaking any language other than Bangla. Regardless of my personal affiliation to Pricilla, my concern is more with the treatment and safety of an individual in captivity in Bangladesh. The lack of respect for her right to speak to and consult with her lawyers is highly suspicious. I am not surprised by Amnesty International's declaration of their concern for the ill treatment and torture of the individuals arrested in connection to this case.

The high profile nature of this case is an opportunity for Bangladesh to demonstrate to the international community that it is a country with a functioning, fair and just legal system. **Sincerely, A concerned Canadian Toronto, Canada**

English Telephone Directory

Recently in a Dhaka hotel I was most surprised to find perhaps the only telephone directory published in Bangladesh and is in English apart from a variety of privately published yellow pages.

When I rang the publisher of the Database Telephone Directory (Private) Ltd I was told that it was not available to the public except at certain times of the year as the number of copies published are limited to between 5000 and 10000 copies only. I was also told that the copies were not free but I had to pay Tk/50 per copy when they were made available through small advertisement in national newspapers. Unfortunately the general public easily misses such advertisements. My first thought was - how convenient an arrangement but for whom?

As a subscriber to the Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board network I would have thought that the BTTB had an obligation to supply free of charge or perhaps at a nominal fee, at least one Telephone Directory per household as was the case about 10 years ago for Bangla Telephone Directories, but this is not being done. Therefore the public at large is completely unaware of its existence! They have no idea whatsoever that when the Bangla directory was stopped 10 years ago an English directory replaced it.

So the publisher by publishing just a handful of copies nominally satisfies the requirement of their contract with BTTB as long as BTTB do not question the number that are published!

This is no doubt a very convenient way of making a neat profit for the publisher for the last 10 years, by not having to publish 4 lakh copies, which is the approximate number of subscribers in the country and most likely, the requirement laid down by the BTTB?

This limited publication of English Language Telephone Directory must have been the best-kept secret by BTTB since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 as when I asked others about it their reply was the same i.e. almost 100% ignorance.

Isn't there anyone to question or investigate the matter thoroughly? **Mohammed Imran Ali Mohammedpur, Dhaka**

"Think before you ink"

Miran Ali (December 2) wrote, "Pakistan reverted to the Sunday weekend; that had nothing to do with religion either". On the contrary, I believe these weekends have everything to do with religion! Saturday is the Jewish Sabbath and Sunday Christians go to Church. For Muslims, Friday is a special day of the week. Just as Ramadan is the most holiest and special month out of the 12, Friday is similarly special out of the rest. Muslims go to Mosque on Friday for "Jumma". Unlike other "Namaz", Jumma can't be said on your own. You have to say it in a "Jammat". And since Bangladesh's population is majority Muslim, I think it is perfectly sensible for Bangladesh to have Friday weekend.

As for trade revenue, you say Bangladesh is losing money by not doing business on Friday. Aren't "they" also losing money by not doing business with us on Saturday/Sunday? You can call Bangalis silly for having Friday weekend and we can call them silly for having Saturday-Sunday weekend! The argument goes both ways.

Big businesses in UK/EU are now moving to India and other developing countries, mainly for cheap manpower. These businesses will be happy to move in Bangladesh, which will create jobs and even

greater revenues than some "week-ends". But, there is a problem and Friday is not!

Businesses can't afford to spend millions on a plant/factory and not being able to open it and do business because of our hartals, load shedding, mastans and our pathetic politicians! We can change our weekends and everything else, but our problems will not go away.

Blaming an auspicious day like Friday is naive. **Azad Miah Oldham, UK**

Death in custody

As a conscious member of the society I cannot but protest the Supreme Court Bar Association's recent statement on the alleged "deaths" in army custody. The law enforcing agencies are now waging a war against the enemies of the society. But why? Don't we have a right to live in a peaceful society? 'Operation Clean Heart' is the demand of time.

Where were the so-called supporters of human rights when the criminals and terrorists held the entire nation hostage to their criminal activities? Did those intellectuals ever commented condemning the terrorists who are nurtured by the political parties? Let us not criticise the army only for the sake of criticism. Let us extend our wholehearted support to make this Operation a success. **M Ataul Hoque Dhaka**

Operation Clean Heart

A month ago, when Operation Clean Heart (OCH) was launched we were relieved. The terrorists and all lawbreakers all of a sudden fled the area and went into hiding. The society became very calm and peaceful. We felt and are still feeling comfortable and thus our anxiety regarding deteriorating law and order situation began to fade away. All these could be possible only because of army deployment. Our army deserves kudos for these. Once again the armed force has proved their efficiency in taking any challenge. We feel proud of our army.

Few people have expressed their concern against this army deployment. With all due respect to their view, I would like to comment that although there may have occurred some unintended incidents I would request the Government to continue 'Operation Clean Heart' until the last terrorist disappears from the society.

Perhaps these people who opposes army deployment are not aware how much we as an innocent citizen suffered and paid for these unprecedented terrorist activities. Virtually, we became hostages to these terrorists. These criminals and terrorists snapped our freedom of free movement and kept us in deep anxiety. Now after the army deployment the situation has changed and we are able to enjoy our human rights. **S. M. Khaleque Zaman Mirpur, Dhaka**

About Bengali medium students

When I first read the letter by Mr. Hannan on 'Nation Builders of Tomorrow', I certainly could not agree with him. But in the reactions to that, I saw some of them being very rude on Bengali medium students which was shocking to me.

This letter is in response to them who simply wrote Bengali medium students off by saying "The reason why English medium students make it schools abroad because they have better academic qualifications". For them I would like to mention two points which are important when it comes to studying abroad.

(1) First of all, definitely, academic qualifications. Now to get an I-20, the requirements are the results of SSC and HSC and some evaluation tests i.e. TOEFL and SAT. The universities of USA and other developed countries don't have any problem with SSC and HSC and also most of these universities recommend a TOEFL score of 213

in CBT system. If a survey is carried out you will find that thousands of Bengali medium students are passing that score. Even you will find some of them scoring above 270 which is excellent. And the same is true for SAT too. So academic qualification is not a problem. (2) Secondly and most importantly the parents have to be financially viable to convey the expenses of their children in abroad. Most of the students of English medium school come from very well off families. So they have a better chance of convincing the counsellor of the embassy in this issue which sometimes becomes a problem for Bengali medium students.

So my point is, if the parents of the students of Bengali medium students are financially viable then

are still to reach the root of terrorism and eliminate it from the society. Everyone should come forward and suggest a way out.

The first and foremost action that should be taken is free the political parties from terrorists and criminal elements. And if any politician is found associated with terrorists and criminals he should be barred and discarded by the respective political parties. Moreover if the Prime Minister is really sincere to eliminate the root of terrorism from the society she should create more job opportunity for the youth and instead of banning students/teachers or trade union politics cut the link these organisations with political parties permanently. If the politicians stop patronising criminals, terrorism would automatically be eliminated. **M. S. Zoha**

DV or no DV?



Next stop wonderland

Do any one mind telling me what kind of game is the US Immigration department playing with the life and hard earned money of the innocent people of this part of the world?

Every year we see millions of aspirant citizen participate in this frenzy game of chance-- DV lottery. I had the misfortune of witnessing the hope of one of my less affluent relatives shattered in mere two minutes interview. Just like the millions of other people of my country, my relatives also applied for DV lottery last year. A few months ago a ray of hope became apparent at last to this family of three, when the wife of this village schoolteacher was selected as one of the successful DV winners. This was the beginning of their ordeal. To fulfil the basic prerequisite (as attached with each interview letter) from a simple birth, to marriage certificate to passport issuance they had to pay that extra amount which has become a norm in our society. The biggest burden was the non-refundable immigration and visa fee of US\$435 (i.e. TK.25, 000+) per person. For a dependent female, as in this case, plus having a minor, the regulation states that all three apply together for the interview, which meant TK.75, 000+. Even after paying this amount, the family was aware that they may not be selected. Still, they fulfilled these requirements, just presumably as all other DV winners do. In this case, they had to borrow from others to face the visa interview. Having come all this way, it just took TWO questions from the learned interviewer to reject the case - no explanation, no consolation, the interviewer just walked away.

Naturally, in Bangladesh the majority who apply for DV lotteries are poor. Why give them hope in the first place and then leave them at a worse situation than they were before? If there are criteria for selection (or rather rejection) why not spell it loud and clear prior collecting this fee, which may be meagre to the US standard but are hard-earned money for us. Expecting an explanation for rejection-- is it too much to ask for?

As I put this dejected family on the train back to their home, I just wonder whether the life will ever be the same for them. **Sani, Dhaka Cantonment**

Bengali medium students can also go better schools of USA and other countries and be the best at the highest level. **Md. Rashed Rafiq Khilgaon, Dhaka**

Nation builders of tomorrow

I was really enjoying the ongoing debate "Saluting the nation builders of tomorrow" and I would like to say something regarding the questions raised about English medium schools.

I appreciate The Daily Star's initiative to congratulate meritorious students, as it will inspire the younger generation to strive to do better. And I have no contradiction with going abroad because we are unable to provide them better scope.

But my question is -- why English Medium? Education is education, the purpose hardly differs with language. I don't have disliking towards the English medium students. But how many people in this country can afford English medium education, which is really expensive? And why those who comes from Bengali medium education are inferior to English medium students?

I admit that knowledge in English is necessary, but when it comes to contributing the nation, it is not at all essential. Actually, to be the nation builders of tomorrow, mode of education doesn't matter. What matters most is one's feelings for his/her country and one's intention to serve his/her motherland. **Auvi, Dhaka**

Terrorism and its root

People in our country have in general welcomed the on going operation by the army. However, any death in custody is unfortunate and condemnable. 'Operation clean heart' is not the final solution. We

On e-mail

Superpower USA

With a heavy heart we are watching the happenings all around the world. People are dying every day due to terrorist activities, natural calamities, accidents, diseases and the list goes on and on. A grim picture indeed!

President Bush has become light-headed by acquiring power and acting in a bizarre manner. His excuse for weapon inspection in Iraq is a sham and his real intention is quite clear. He wants to attack Iraq on any pretext to have a hold on that oil rich country.

President Bush has turned a blind eye to the atrocities being committed in Palestine, where Ariel Sharon is busy attacking the defenceless Palestinians. Still the US remains unmoved. **Nur Jahan, Chittagong**

The leaders should work together

There she does it again. So very unprofessional about her job. Slandering about her very own country. Yes it is Sheikh Hasina.

With her comments about destroying Bangladesh's image, has triggered reporters (the arrested UKs Channel 4 reporters) to come to Bangladesh and make documentaries on the negative issues. Who knows how many other reporters are here from foreign countries?

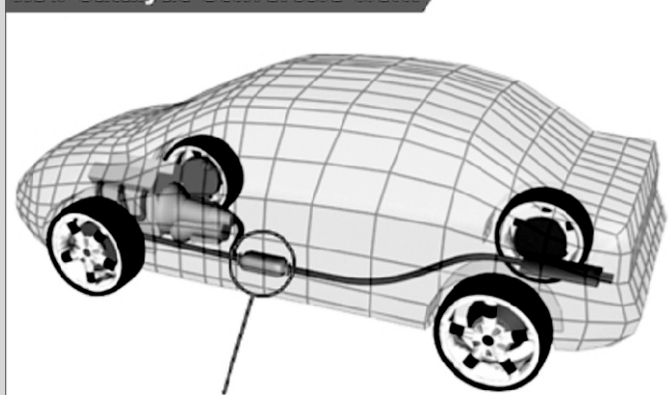
At a time like this, Bangladesh doesn't need this. The leaders should work together in improving the law and order situation, making it peaceful, provide high standard education system, eradicate corruption and improve the economy. **Mohammed Islam Gtr Manchester, UK**

Catalytic converters for automobiles

I wish to clarify a few things about catalytic converters for automobiles. In a vehicle with its engine functioning ideally, the exhaust gases contain nitric oxide, carbon monoxide and small amounts of hydrocarbons. Nitric oxide originates from the unavoidable oxidation of nitrogen in air, which is used as a source of oxygen to burn the fuel. Carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons result from incomplete combustion of the fuel. All these gases are invisible, and do not constitute a black smoke. However, they are pollutants. Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas, which prevents blood from carrying oxygen in a human body. Nitric oxide is itself a poisonous gas. Further, nitric oxide and the hydrocarbons react under the influence of sunlight to form several other far more toxic secondary pollutants. If due to meteorological reasons, pollutants are not dispersed, a dangerous situation may be created in a certain region, when breathing this polluted air may lead to fatal consequences. This is called "smog", and in western countries, a smog alarm is sounded, vehicles are prohibited from plying on roads, and citizens are advised to stay indoors.

A catalytic converter converts the mixture of nitric oxide, carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons into harmless products nitrogen, nitrous oxide, carbon dioxide and water, through chemical reactions. The reactions take place at the temperature of the exhaust gases on the surface of a catalyst. The active components of this catalyst are platinum, palladium, rhodium and cerium. These are expensive metals. That is why the catalytic converters are expensive. Further, the catalyst can perform only the specific job mentioned earlier and only under certain stringent conditions.

How Catalytic Converters Work



Catalytic Converter

Price to pay for fresh air

The Government of Bangladesh has passed a law making the use of catalytic converters mandatory. The defaulters will be penalised. The BRTA is still granting fitness certificates to vehicles without catalytic converters. The situation is rather mysterious. One should know that catalytic converters are not capable of freeing the exhaust gases of automobiles from "black smoke".

The black smoke consists of particulate, mainly unburnt carbon particles, and it originates from a faulty engine. Particulate in the ambient air are dangerous because gaseous pollutants become accumulated on their surface, and if they are small enough, they can reach the lungs along with the enriched amount of pollutants. In the developed countries, vehicles with such faulty engines are not allowed to ply on roads. Further, commercially available catalytic converters may not function at all in old vehicles, even if the fuel quality is ensured, because of too high hydrocarbon content in the exhaust gases. In vehicles which emit black smoke, the converters will be immediately damaged.

Further, BRTA does not have the capability to monitor the functioning of the catalytic converters in automobiles. Therefore if an importer offers you a black box calling it a catalytic converter, and you fix it in your car, BRTA will not be able to prove that your car does not have a converter.

I suggest that the government reconsider its decision. New cars and used cars which may be imported are invariably fitted with catalytic converters. At this stage, it is rather meaningless to make catalytic converters mandatory for cars which are already registered. The priority should be set on eliminating automobiles with faulty engines from roads. Catalytic converters will be meaningful only when the roads are free from such vehicles, and BRTA acquires the capability to monitor their functioning. **M.M. Rahman, Dhaka**