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.

Cyber cafe



Cyber mania

Young men and women sitting inside a brightly lit café, their eyes glued to the computer screens. The level of concentration suggests as if they are far from the city's hustle and bustle outside their small café, where the Internet has mixed with coffee and snacks. This is a place, which is called the cyber

The cyber café culture first started in the Western world and then quickly transferred to the other parts of the world, including the Asian countries. The young of the world took no time to fall in love with cyber cafes. Now Cyber café is the latest craze for the young generation in Bangladesh. Although the country lags behind in terms of this branch of technology the number of cyber café is increasing. With growing interest in using e-mail, Internet, web browsing and chatting the country's younger generation is gradually becoming a 'cyber generation' despite all difficulties prevailing in a third world country like Bangla-

Cyber café is getting popular among job seekers, chatters, writers as well as those who are fond of music and movies, as they get to download songs and movies from the Internet. Besides, one can exchange information through the Internet in these cyber cafés as well.

Cyber cafe offers a number of facilities to those who doesn't have personal Internet connection. But there are some drawbacks of these cafes also. Often teenagers skip their class and visit these cafes to browse porno sites etc.

Shouldn't the authorities concerned monitor these cyber

Mamun Ali Khan, Kalabagan, Dhaka

Notice

The readers are requested to send their comments on the series of bomb blasts in Bangladesh starting from the Udichi meet at Jessore, Ramna Batamul to the recent Mymensing Cinema Hall incident and other similar incidents.

The readers may focus on the efforts of the authorities to bring the culprits to justice, the accusation and counter accusation from amongst the political parties regarding the incidents and the consequent effect on the general people about the carnage.

Reply to the letter from Reporters Sans **Frontiers**

This in response to the letter by Robert Menard, Secretary General, Asia Pacific Desk of Reporters Sans Frontiers (December 5).

First, I would like to put on my strongest reservations about some of the views expressed in the letter. Some of the comments and statements contained in the letter are simply outrageous and as a citizen of this country, I protest them in the strongest possible terms.

Mr Menard's contention that the present government in Bangladesh is trying to silence the voice of the media people is a blatant lie. He also got it all wrong when he said that "a chaotic situation" was prevailing in Bangladesh. Mr Menard would do a great service to the people of Bangladesh and the rest of the world if he could substantiate his allegations with concrete evidence. As a former journalist and a journalism teacher for over 20 years. I know how illinformed some of the western journalists and media are about the situation in the Third World countries. What is most unfortunate is that they report only those aspects of the situation, which serve the interest of a vested quarter.

About Mr Menard's allegation that Bangladesh is gradually turning into a country of fundamentalists, I would request him to educate us further on this subject. But if I say my prayers five times a day, fast throughout the month of Ramadan.

of their activities.

and perform other religious duties and Mr Menard brands me as a fundamentalist then I shall not definitely accept his contention. He must come up with a refined and acceptable concept of fundamental-

Mr Menard laments the 'recent violations of certain human rights. specially press freedom' in Bangladesh. If this is so, how could he get his letter published in the media here in the first place? Mr Menard also made a serious accusation that the government in Bangladesh was trying to imitate the military regime in Burma and North Korea. May I ask him the basis of such an accusa-

This is a gross misstatement and I do not know how our government will react to such an audacious statement. He has also mentioned that "the Bangladesh government is making a serious mistake by preventing foreign journalists from working in the country". There cannot be a greater lie than this because many foreign journalists are currently working in Bangladesh with proper identity and accredition.

I sometimes wonder as to why some of the Western media are so much obsessed with our religious matters. Religion and human rights are possibly the only two subjects for them to write concerning Bangladesh. How about the series of bomb explosions two years ago and the latest one in Mymensingh that killed a large number of innocent people? Are they not fit subjects for investigation? In this connection, we must

also remember that the media works in a social milieu, it should address itself to the goodness and wellbeing of the people and society. Unfortunately, the media does so as a salesman and often a propagandist. More tragically, the media sometimes overplays its role. This has resulted in the public distrust of the

media too. That is why the media's commitment to telling the truth and acting as the neutral guardian of the public trust is increasingly coming under close scrutiny. I hope Mr. Menard will agree with me in this regard.

Quazi Abdul Mannan Faculty, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism University of Dhaka

Press freedom in Bangladesh

It was, at the very least, amusing to read the opinions of Mr. Menard of Reporters Sans Frontiers and Mr. Yahya. Perhaps Mr. Menard can enlighten us as to whether it is accepted practice for journalists to enter and operate in a foreign nation while concealing the fact that they are indeed journalists, passing their professions off as something else entirely. And if it is so, perhaps he can then tell us what the fate of similar journalists would be if they entered the United States (that bastion of free speech so beloved by Mr. Yahya) under similar false pretences, and tried to manufacture documentary that portraved the US to the Muslim world in a negative

Mr. Yahya, comfortably ensconced as he is in the United States, perhaps forgets that Bangladesh is a sovereign nation unto itself and not a part of the US. Why else would he presume to lecture us by citing the first amendment of the US Constitution in the Bill of Rights, and not the Articles from the Constitution of Bangladesh?

Shaad M. Ahmad, Ph.D. Stanford, California, USA

Unanswered ques-

tions

Despite the fact that many of the socalled nation builders of tomorrow choose to detach themselves from the prevailing problems in our country, I urge the authorities to acknowledge that there are still some of us in the younger generation, who have minds of our own, and opinions and questions that should not go unnoticed. Many of us are still familiar with

the name Muntasir Mamun and his contribution in instilling in our growing minds, through his many books on Dhaka, the pride and patriotism that text bookish history failed miserably to accomplish. Now he is being arrested for supposedly ruining our country's image. My question to the Government and to the people who support this view is how can somebody who writes about this country's heritage and history with such passionate fervour be a traitor to his country? Anybody who has read Shahriar Kabir's books for children and watched his films on the Liberation War cannot believe that the same man who expressed such ideas of patriotism in his work could be accused of treachery. How can the same people who have written about Bangladesh with such love and compassion want suddenly to stain its image?

These are our parents, our elders, the people who led us to be who we are, who taught us to dream and to live and to question. Who are we to turn to, if they themselves are condemned without specific cause for what they believe in, for saying aloud undaunted what many others feel but fear to speak out? Are we also to be condemned should we question the authorities and their activities regarding the present situation in our country? Why then do we still assume the disguise of a democracy?

Dhaka

A prayer to the politicians

The recent serial bomb blast in four cinema halls in Mymensingh town claiming 18 lives has added extra pain to the soar in our mind that we bear due to such heinous acts in the past in CPB meeting at Paltan Udichi cultural gathering in Jessore and Pahela Boishak program at Ramna Batamul.

These attacks are an attack on our soul and in most of the cases the victims are from toiling masses. We spend very little time thinking over their sufferings-- their poverty, living standard, health condition, education for their children to name a few. Politicians are used to trade with these issues as the election approaches. After the Cinema hall blast in Mymensingh on the day following the Eid Day, it has been proved that these toiling people doesn't even have the right to enjoy a cinema by their hard earned money let alone their other rights. Again the politicians are playing a blame game with this issue. They are blaming each other without seeking for a remedy to such heinous act.

I request the politicians not to play game with such an issue and to chalk out an action plan to prevent such activities in future irrespective of their party affiliation.

Md. Zahirul Hoque Mozumder Shahbagh, Dhaka

Why bring sedition charge?

It is not new in our country, especially for the party in power to charge the renowned personalities with sedition charge. The BNP govern ment during their tenure in 1991 brought similar charge against Shaheed Jononi Jahanara Imam. probably for her effort to bring the war criminals to justice

Now the BNP is at it again. They first accused Shahriar Kabir with similar charge, then against journalist Saleem Samad and other two foreign journalists. It seems that whenever the BNP is in power, the traitors mushroom in the country! Does the ruling party know the distinction between anti-state and anti-government and what type of charge is a sedition charge! They should realise that it is too serious a charge and not something like charging somebody for theft. By bringing sedition charge against some one, the person's commitment to his country is questioned and he is charged for involving in conspiracy against his own country and countrymen. Anyone, especially the government should think for hundred times before charging

somebody with such a charge. But our government seems to be unaware of this. The most interesting and noticeable feature of all these cases of sedition charges mentioned above is none of the charges could be proved; the government even could not (or did not?) continue the cases.

In our country lodging cases claiming compensation for damaging someone's public image is not very usual. If such a charge was made against somebody in a developed country and the accuser could not prove that, he would indeed have to pay the accused a heavy compensation.

Finally, I would like to say something about the arrest of the foreign ournalists. I read a letter by one Mr. N. Ghani (December 5) where he mentioned the arrest of those journalists as natural and emphasised on their entering Bangladesh with false identity. Mr Ghani should have remembered that when these foreign journalists first applied for visa disclosing their original identity and intention (which was to investigate the alleged presence of al-Qaeda element in Bangladesh and whether religious harmony existed in the country) they were refused. Then they came here with fake identity, which is very common for a journalist for performing his/her duty. If the position of the Government would be transparent on the

issue of fundamentalism and it would have nothing to hide then why did they refuse them the visa in the first place? Secondly it should also be remembered that these foreign journalists did not hide their identity

What our Government is doing is making the rest of the world suspicious about our country regarding the alleged presence of al-Qaeda elements. Instead of upholding the image of the nation they are ruining it and messing up the entire situation. Tariq Hasan, Canada

Home Minister on Mymensingh blast

Well, the damage is already done Even the New York Times, along with all major newspapers, press syndicates, networks etc. in the world have quoted our Home Minister as stating that al-Qaeda's hand was suspected behind the four bomb attacks in Mymensingh. Of course, he has now refuted his entire stance reading from a draft prepared by others reflecting the official version and stand of the ruling party, within 12 hours of the news breaking into international wire services, there is complete confusion in Bangladesh and the world just laughs at us.

When will our good leaders of all

consider the following compensatory packages for the ticket holders: Proportionate reimbursement for the days without show by cutting the match-fee of our 'extra-ordinarily talented' cricketers (particularly once they entered the country.

batsmen). Or 2. Staging of Shakespearean tragedies/comedies with our batsmen as actors and actresses on the unscheduled days to the entertainment of the ticket holders.

Hope our considerate cricket organisers would examine such an alternative form of entertainment for the otherwise hapless cricket fans. Kazi Mahmudur Rahman

Jabedul Hague Gandaria, Dhaka

No compromise on national security

We, the people, gave the 4-party alliance a massive mandate to uproot terrorism from our homeland. Haven't we had enough bloodshed in Shatkhira, Mymenshing and who knows where next? Why certain politicians are so bent on unleashing international wrath on us by mentioning al-Qaeda presence in Bangladesh. Why we should be paying for their self-serving figment of imagination?

Home Minister Mr. Altaf must go and may even be charged for com-

"European Parliament and Bangladesh"

In his letter "European Parliament and Bangladesh" (November 27) Mi Yaha disagreed with my opinion. Well, he has every right to dissent and freedom to express the same as he had done in his letter. From the USA, Mr. Yahva discovered that in Bangladesh there is "no freedom of speech, freedom from arrest and right to life". Permit me Mr. Yahva to inform that the people living within the territory of Bangladesh knows and feels it better whether or not there exist such freedom

Just for Mr. Yahya's consumption, I refer to the Indian Commerce Secretary's observation in Dhaka about the manner of conduct of our media. In early 2002 the Indian Commerce Secretary observed in Dhaka, "The Bangladeshi media always indulge in excesses and fabrications while reporting any event." What does Mr Yaha has to say about this observation about our media's role? Lack of freedom! Or the right to license of expressing anything?

It is alleged in random that the arrested people are dying in army custody. For the sake of objectivity, it cannot go without saying that the Operation Clean Heart is not solely

obtained their irrevocable bail orders notwithstanding their conspicuous records. A.K.M. Fakhrul Alam

The Palestinians can

Siddeswari Lane, Dhaka

achieve freedom Tashbih Sayyed, editor-in-chief of weekly Pakistan Today, recently wrote: "Yasser Arafat is supposed to be the leader of his people (Palestinians). But if the bloody events in the region are any indication of who has the authority over the Palestinians. even a blind person can see that it is not Yasser Arafat. The masses follow the instructions of Hamas, Hezbullah and Islamic Jihad. These groups do not want any peace with

Israel. They want its destruction." This is a surprisingly candid and eloquent statement by a prominent journalist from a Muslim country like Pakistan where Israel is singled out for all problems and suicide bombers are eulogised as martyrs and where non-Muslims and foreigners are routinely attacked by various terrorist groups. But it seems there are moderate voices who are trying to make themselves heard.

Only by eschewing violence and by resorting to Gandhian nonviolent political struggle, the Palestinians can gain what they failed to

Death in cinema hall

While our brothers and sisters were enjoying movies in cinema halls of Mymensingh, death struck them. 18 fun-loving innocent lives plunged in to pit of death. They will never know why they had to depart so early and so abruptly. Neither will their surviving and grieving relatives.

One may imagine that certainly some of the culprits, who planted the bombs and got away with it, have reported to their mentors about the success of their operation. The planners of this carnage may be more encouraged to do similar kind of operations in future because they could successfully trap the Government in the old cycle of blaming and arresting the opposition. Police was very prompt to prove their efficiency in doing some arrest to show the nation that they are capable of doing something. Was it not more logical for a democratic government to go for the real perpetrators, hunt them and bring them to justice? The enemies of our people seem to be stronger than our Government.

How can we conceal our shame of electing and trusting this incapable party to run the Government? Can any body in the Government feel the frustration of our people?

Mohammed Avub Khan Ottawa, Canada

I feel greatly concerned and worried about the recent bomb blast in Mymenshingh. These violent acts can lead to very serious repercussions. The spectre of Al-Qaeda is omnipresent every where and there are interested quarters who will love to see Bangladesh get into troubles. I am also worried that the Government of Bangladesh will use these acts to the benefit of their political advantages. The Government must realise that these violent acts are affecting the very interests of the nation and there should be a national consensus to deal with them.

This becomes more imperative when we look at the fragile



Security that came late

democratic structure in Bangladesh. The present nature of this epidemic of terror is a global one and from a single cause it has spread its tentacles to many other areas. The religious fanatics have taken control of this reign of terror. Their vision is cloudy, their tactics are raw and dangerous and also without any clear mission. This frustrated element does not have any concern for life and their only glee is to see destruction. They are not serving any cause or religion. This is a very risky time for us. If we are not careful our mistakes will bring misfortune for us.

Akbar Hussain Toronto, Canada

political parties learn of maturity? These forms of statements, reversals, blaming each other etc everything turns Bangladesh into a laughing stock in the international world. We are a third world country with an enormous population, a small landmass, receive bad publicity globally, with our 150+ million popuation struggling to eat a couple of times a day. We certainly do not need individuals (regardless of political affiliation) making baseless statements and carrying out actions detrimental to the long-term future of Bangladesh. Our so-called 'leaders' should realise that they are not the owners of Bangladesh in turns of five years respectively. It is time they grew up. Bangladesh is not only theirs, but also ours, the remaining 150 million citizens.

5-day ticket for 3-day cricket!

This is a humble request to the organisers of the ongoing West Indies tour. Considering the frustration of the spectators who purchase tickets for enjoying the 5-day Test match and find no show left on just the 3rd day, the organisers may

promising national security if he cannot get Reuters to own up and apologise in black and bold. And leaders in position and opposition who are turning these tragedies into political soccer to score points should be dealt with. No head is big enough when the security and sovereignty of Bangladesh could be at stake.

Syed Nazmul Ahsan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

'V' sign misplaced! I have been wondering for sometime

as to why people (whether a political prisoner or a criminal) are adept in showing 'V' sign (victory sign) irrespective of their position, whether being released after serving their terms or taken to custody after or pre-judgement of their offences! How funny is their stance or the nuance! It seems it has become a fashion

or culture to show 'V' sign. Otherwise, how could Mukul Bose, who was arrested and brought to CMM's Court along with Mr. Tofael Ahmed showed 'V' sign when he was in police custody and was produced before the CMM! Did he know what the 'V' sign really means? A F Rahman

an armed forces business. It is a joint operation being conducted in collaboration with the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), the police force, the Ansars and the Village Defense Party (VDP). After arresting any person or persons, the armed forces immediately hand over the arrested people(s) to the police. The person or persons concerned expired either in police stations or in hospitals while undergoing treatment.

By "freedom" if Mr. Yahya meant to indicate the kind of freedom or liberty allowed to the media under totalitarian regimes like Nazi dictatorship in Germany then certainly there exists no such "freedom or liberty" in Bangladesh now. But the fact remains that the different sections of people in Bangladesh do now enjoy not only the freedom of speech but also the freedom of printing or propagating any kind of

From the USA, Mr. Yahya also alleged, "justice does not exist in our country (Bangladesh)." Here it remains to be added that it was from the courts of justice that Awami League leaders like Mr. Moqbool Ahmed, Mr. Selim, Mr. Kamal Ahmed Mazumdar, Mr. M.K. Alamgir, Mr. Saber Hossain Chowdhury and others more

achieve by violence. When Mahatma Gandhi launched his struggle against the British colonial rule in India, he strictly forbade all kinds of violence in the name of freedom struggle. Here are his own words: "If India makes violence her creed. I will not care to live in India She will fail to evoke any pride in

Yet, he was no passive pacifist. When he marched, millions marched with him. He brought an end to the colonial rule through his non-violent civil disobedience movement. Palestinians can achieve similar results if they give up their counterproductive suicide bombing campaign against innocent Israeli civilians in favour of nonviolent political movement. Suicide bombing is only providing an excuse for the Israeli hard-liners to crackdown on the Palestinians even

In fact, many moderate Palestinians are increasingly realising that such bombing is leading to nowhere

Mahmood Elahi Ontario, Canada

Release Saleem Samad and Pricilla Raj

I have been closely following the case of the two foreign journalists charged first with 'sedition; and subsequently with harbouring anti-Bangladesh conspiracies, assuming false identities. Frankly, I was really concerned not about this foreign duo but about the outcome

The role of some Western journalists in the recent US-led hunt for Muslim terrorists has utterly disillusioned me about the quality of journalism some of them have proudly presented to the world. It has also made me painfully aware of the risks such journalists put others at. At another level I am also concerned about the sweeping dangers of the strategies our government takes to deal with such matters

In this particular case I am acutely concerned about the two Bangladeshis, one a journalist, the other a translator who were arrested on a charges of assisting the foreign journalists. I am concerned about their fate now more than ever.

Yesterday as I was listening to the BBC Bangla evening news it did not come as a surprise that the government has let the two foreigners out and expelled them from Bangladesh while keeping their two Bangladeshi so called 'accomplices' still in jail. For them apparently, according to government spokesperson, 'the law will take its course.'

I always apprehended such a turn of events. After all the foreigners had the strength and backing of their governments while the two Bangladeshis have only got their families and friends pleading their cases.

Pricilla Raj's mother has so far given two statements to newspapers explaining her daughter's situation and I believe her. Pricilla had only worked with the foreign journalists as their interpreter for two days. Does that make her an 'accomplice' of whatever the two



What about the local guides?

foreigners were trying to achieve by their amateurish teen-ager like adventurous journalism? Now that they have safely flown out of Bangladesh where does it leave Pricilla? And Saleem Samad too,

for that matter? The foreigners apparently did not think it necessary to refuse freedom and stand by the two persons who are suffering now on their account. Or perhaps they were not offered a choice. Before writing them off as essentially irresponsible on this count too, I'll grant them this benefit of the doubt while waiting to see what they do now for Pricilla and Saleem Samad.

I have always failed to understand conspiracy theories. But that

does not spare me worries about the consequences such theories can bring to implicated individuals especially if they are helpless

In this particular case I also fail to understand and that adds to my concerns, the course of justice as regards the two unfortunate Bangladeshis now left alone in the lurch. After all, the two main accused, the foreign journalists, have promised not to do the report they came here to do. Haven't they got their freedom on such conditions? If that is so why still hold the two charged as their mere assistants? Or do we need scapegoats as always?

Much as I would like to be proven wrong the world that we live in everyday throws at my face too many instances of the helpless being sacrificed as scapegoats. And yet every time I pray Oh God, prove me wrong at least this once.

Laila Arjumand Banu Dhanmondi, Dhaka

The Government should immediately release the two local 'collaborators', freelance journalist and human rights activist Mr. Saleem

Samad and NGO activist Ms. Pricilla Raj with due compensation. The Bangladesh Government has lost all legal grounds to keep them under custody as 'accomplice' of the two foreign journalists and continue cases when the main 'accused' were freed from the main allegation 'sedition'. Now, no law should come as a bar to release Saleem Samad and Pricilla Raj. I wonder, soon after saying "no sedition charges were filed against the two foreign journalists, they were detained under the Foreigners Act and released after they gave undertaking and apologised", how the political advisor of the Prime Minister Mr. Haris Chowdhury said with a smiling face that "cases against Saleem Samad and Pricilla Raj

would be dealt with as per law of the land and the court would decide their fate"! I can't understand and as per the statement of the political advisor, how their cases could be altogether different? Are we living in a fool's paradise?

It is not repairable what the Bangladesh Government has lost in terms of its credibility in the international arena after 'manhandling' the whole issue. It is not clear to us how the 'sedition case' could turn into 'Foreigner Act'?

Taking undertaking from the 'accused' persons under pressure or in custody in the name of 'voluntary statement' has got no legal value. People usually do so to avoid torture or to get released. The statement has been made before the Bangladesh Government by Ms. Zaiba Naz Malik and Mr. Leopoldo Druno Sorrentino through their legal advisor, could be changed soon after their departure from Bangladesh. The Government may have seized their documents but how will they 'delete' all the evidences and information already stored in their brain's 'hard disc'? If they are professional journalists they will write and tell to the world what they saw, gathered information and that is their 'professional obligation'.

I personally know Mr. Saleem Samad over the last 16 years as a colleague, friend as well as a human rights activist and Ms. Pricilla Raj for more than one decade. I strongly condemn the arrest of both of them and demand immediate withdrawal of the cases lodged against them and their release. This is not the way to protect al-Qaeda/Taliban activities in Bangladesh. We will have to go for realistic move without compromising the national interest as

Tanbir ul Islam Siddiqui, Shantinagar, Dhaka