

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.

"PDB contradicts WB review"

Our attention has been drawn to an article "PDB contradicts WB review", quoting BSS, Dhaka, which has been published in *The Daily Star*.

The article starts with a statement from BPDB that the figure of BPDB's loss of tk 460 crore for the last fiscal year stated in a World Bank review on public enterprise performance and strategy is not correct.

We are writing to clarify that the source of the above data is an official document of the Government of Bangladesh entitled 'Budget of Autonomous Bodies, 2002-2003, published in June 2002 by the Monitoring Cell, Finance Division, Ministry of Finance.

As you will note, the loss figure for BPDB for 2001/2002 stated on page 239 of the report is tk 45585 lakh, which is the basis for the figure referred to in the Bank review. This is a revised budget number prepared by BPDB and submitted officially to the Ministry of Finance as part of the budgetary documentation for this year's budget. This would change as part of the standard processes of finalisation and closure of accounts. This is true not only for BPDB but also other entities covered in the Bank review. There is always a time lag involved between issuance of revised budget estimates and disclosure of final audited accounts, which can vary from one year to 2-3 years for some entities. In the meantime, this is the latest available official estimate for 2001/2002, prepared by the BPDB, and reflected in the official documents for 2002/2003 published by the Ministry of Finance. This is why we have used the latest available official estimates, not only for BPDB but also other entities covered in the Bank review.

We would appreciate it very much if you kindly share this clarification with your readers so as to remove any confusion that might have been created among the readers by this article
Subrata S Dhar
External Affairs
The World Bank

Why opposition street agitation not allowed?

The Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad, Sheikh Hasina has posed a question to the international community: Why opposition sponsored street agitation not allowed?

Simple. No need to question the international community. No government in the world will sit idle while activists of the opposition go on rampage, creating anarchy and public unrest, burning cars and buses bought with the tax payers' money, paralysing major thoroughfares of big cities, besieging the entire nation in the name of *hartal* and giving covert threats like, obey our movement or else...
Respect and tolerance earns respect and tolerance. It is high time somebody pointed this out to Sheikh Hasina. No international forum can help Awami League or Sheikh Hasina, if their so-called 'agitation' is not accepted by the majority of the ordinary citizens.
Stop complaining to foreigners!

AA
California, USA

Courtroom outrage

If half of what *The Daily Star* reported (December 13) about the CMM court appearance of the Awami League leaders is true, we all should be mightily outraged.

That a senior law officer of the Republic, a public prosecutor, and a sitting magistrate would openly disregard and dismiss the instructions of a High Court bench is unthinkable in a despotic backwater country. In a constitutional republic like ours, it is abjectly unpardonable. Such cavalier behaviour undermines the stature of the judiciary, makes a mockery of the rule of law, and contradicts a citizen's right to a fair trial. In many jurisdictions, any member of the bar or the bench who publicly ignores a ruling of a higher court can be severely sanctioned, including disbarment.

Two former American presidents and an ex-Solicitor General of India were prominently disbarred from practising law when they showed manifest disrespect to the verdicts of the higher courts. As harsh as that punishment may sound, it is proportional to the conduct when we consider one simple fact: Wilful disregard of a high court's verdict is an act of subverting the Constitution. In other words, sedition.

Given the arrogance displayed at the CMM court, I am certain that some individuals there should be tried for sedition. But the Awami League leaders and the journalists are not the ones.
Esam Sohail
Kansas, USA

Arrest of Dr. Muntasir Mamun: State coercion and our judiciary

Arrest of Dr. Muntasir Mamun, a professor of history in University of Dhaka under section 54 of CrPc and arrest of former Air Chief Jamal Uddin Ahmed in charge of snatching a wrist watch on the street has revealed the shrewd attitude of the present government towards the

"The day of deep mourning"

I read with interest your editorial "The day of deep mourning" (December 14). As always, you have written a very eloquent piece.

However, I felt like crying out loud when I read the paragraph where you described the two ways we can repay our debts to the martyred intellectuals. Don't you feel in your heart that the first and the foremost way in which we can repay our debts to those intellectuals is by punishing the individuals responsible for the heinous crimes so that such a pre-planned crime is never committed again? My heart bleeds when I hear people say that we should forgive and forget and move on. How can we have a society "where rule of law, justice and fair play will prevail" if such an unspeakable crime goes unpunished?

Many of those alleged criminals are still roaming the streets of Bangladesh and some are even in responsible positions of the government. I dare say that they have not changed their character. They laugh at us all, including you, on 14 December every year. And, they and/or their next generation, brought up with similar philosophy, will not hesitate to finish their unfinished task at their first opportunity.

It is perhaps understandable (though not without pain), within the context of the nature of Bangladesh politics, why the political party, that boasts itself of a brilliant freedom fighter, has to appease these alleged criminals. The same political party will also remind me that it is Sheikh Mujib's fault because he pardoned them all. Interestingly, this political party which has virtually negated all the decisions of Sheikh Mujib and, in fact, tried its best to erase his name from the land, is using Sheikh Mujib's this particular decision as a justification for its unholy politics.

The reality is that Sheikh Mujib's decision, whatever the reasons behind the decision were at that time, has been proven to be incorrect. So, we need to make amends for that incorrect decision in order to establish a society where 'rule of law, justice and fair play will prevail.' The civil society needs help from the media in this regard.

As I said, the present government's alliance with the alleged criminals may be understandable, but, it is not understandable why an Editor like you has to condone them indirectly by not speaking out about their trial.
Bamandas Basu, USA

honour of the highly placed citizens and security of the common people of the country as a whole.

No specific charge has yet been framed against Dr. Mamun. How can the general people feel safe and secured when such a highly placed citizen is being harassed without any specific allegation? How ridiculous it sounds when a former Air chief is charged with snatching!

Dr. Mamun's arrest by police and the directives by the lower court headed by the government magistrate when produced before the court has been overruled by the higher judiciary. This seems to be a state of tussle between the higher and lower judiciary headed by High Court judges and government magistrates respectively. The remand prayer granted by magistrate court has been overruled by the higher judiciary. This again

reported the release of the two foreign journalists. State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Reaz Rahman, stated that their release had nothing to do with international pressure. This statement would be more believable if Priscilla Raj and Journalist Saleem Samad had been released as well.

The charges of sedition have been dropped against the foreign journalists, so how is it possible that Ms. Raj, who was contracted as their translator for two days, can be guilty? Since her arrest on 25 November, Ms. Raj has been denied access to her lawyers and family and has been subjected to electric shock treatment in the Joint Interrogation Cell. The Bangladeshi authorities who are so concerned with the way in which their country's image is portrayed should think about the message they are sending right now. They seem to think

full-time yearlong workers. Then why do we see them planning, talking and working for textbooks only in the month of December? Everyone knows it very well that the students need the books in the first week of January. We need to make it sure the books reach the market by the first week of December.

The communication and transportation system of Bangladesh is time consuming. Therefore the planning and other necessary tasks should be completed nine months ahead. It does not make any sense to me when I see the concerned persons and institutions start planning about textbooks and the changes to be made in December.

If looked back, for the last ten years the students never got the full set of textbooks in the first week of January whereas the so-called note books were on sale by the second week of December.

Long live Thai-Bangla friendship

The recent upward trend in the mutual relationship between Thailand and Bangladesh has been surprisingly pleasant so far. Many thanks to Thai premier Thaksin who has initiated this renewed friendship and had led a delegation to Bangladesh earlier this year. He clearly did his homework before visiting our

unexpected but a very welcome uplift to the recently upgraded airport in Chittagong. So far, Silkair flights from Singapore and Biman flights from the Middle East were the only significant international services at Chittagong. I hope the present trend will continue and Chittagong Airport will see

profile as a tourist destination. Thailand has been running a very successful and profitable tourism industry for decades, so their advice in this area would certainly be helpful.

Another major area Thailand could help us, is to improve the traffic situation in Dhaka metropolitan area. Even five years ago, Bangkok was a city of massive traffic jams and tremendous air pollution. But they have managed to turn it around since and Bangkok's profile as a major Asian city has been on the upswing. Bangkok has also installed a monorail type public transportation system, which could be a big source of inspiration for us.

Continued friendship between the two countries could benefit the region as a whole. The proposed highway link between Dhaka and Bangkok (through Myanmar), when finished, is bound to open up more avenues of trade, tourism and cooperation in this region. It is amazing to see a country so close and yet so optimistic and successful. More amazing is to see the Thai Kingdom offering its kind friendship to us in almost every sector. We should appreciate and reciprocate these feelings for our mutual benefit. Long live Thai-Bangla friendship.
Shafiqat
USA



Thank you Thailand

country and he proposed and undertook some attractive and useful initiatives. He also visited Chittagong and flew back home directly from there (first ever for a foreign leader).

As finalised then, two airlines from Thailand have already started their service to Chittagong (Phuket Air on the Bangkok route, and Thai Airways on the Chiang Mai route). This has been an

further services to the region's major cities.

The ongoing visit of the Bangladesh premier to Thailand seems to have gone well too. Thailand has offered us trade concessions on a number of items in some important categories. Thailand has also promised their cooperation in turning Chittagong into a major business city and improving Cox's Bazar's

provokes us to think that our judiciary should be separated from the administration to ensure our safety from state coercion.

I strongly condemn the arrest of Dr. Muntasir Mamun and demand his immediate release. I also appeal to the Supreme Court to keep its stand firm on Separation of Judiciary from the executive body to ensure the citizens' right against coercive attitude of the government.
Md. Zahurul Hoque Mozumder
Shahbagh, Dhaka

Detention of Priscilla Raj and Saleem Samad

I am writing to express my great concern over the continuing detention of Ms. Priscilla Raj and Saleem Samad. Your newspaper recently

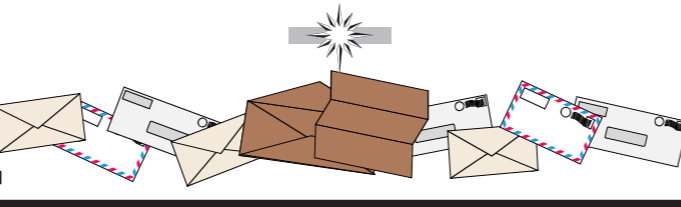
not international observers will not notice and not care that Ms. Raj and Mr. Samad's fundamental rights under the Bangladesh Constitution continue to be violated. I assure you; the international community is observing the double standard that Bangladesh employs in their treatment of foreign and local journalists.

I urge the concerned authorities to release Ms. Raj and Mr. Samad immediately.
Chitra Aiyar
New York City, USA

Textbook delay

The news on Textbook of secondary level (December 15) caught my attention.

I believe the persons, institutes and professionals who work with the textbooks of secondary level are



This is in reference to your editorial titled "The Day of Deep Mourning" on the occasion of the Martyred Intellectuals Day.

The opening lines of the editorial very correctly state "Every nation has some days to remember but very few have anything approximating a martyred intellectuals' day to observe like we do. Our being unique in the observance of such a day is obviously ascribable to the unprecedented nature of the viciousness and barbarity we were subjected to 33 years ago."

However, you omit to mention that we are also shamelessly unique in not only failing to bring the principal organisers and perpetrators of this unthinkable and unparalleled crime to justice but also installing them in our government. Our lame and dubious excuse in explaining this indelible ignominy is that they have been "elected" by the people, but we forget that they do not have the right to run in the election to begin with and that these same people would have mobbed them to death had they not vanished into the thin air after committing that most unimaginable of crimes.

You go on to state that "...what the high command of the sur-rendering Pakistani forces did in cohort with the Razakars, Al-



Mourning the martyrs

Badr and Al-Shams lackeys of theirs was to follow a 'scorch intellect' policy, an ugly new addition to the vocabulary of parting atrocities and barbarities." After giving a moving description of how cruel and heartless that scorch intellect policy was, you opine that there are two ways in which we can repay our debts to these greatest of our foreparents: "first, by measuring up to their love for the people and country and the supreme sacrifice they made for both and secondly, by living up to the legacy of their excellence." I think there are two more indispensable things to do which, in terms of both importance and immediacy, should precede the two that you mention: first, to refrain from spreading or condoning the misleading propaganda that the principal organisers of this heart-rending, monstrous crime—e.g., the leaders of the Razakars and Al Badars, including their "Commander and Deputy Commander in Chief"—should not or cannot be tried because of the delay in the trial and for the sake of "national unity" and secondly, to make sincere, dedicated and sustained efforts to finally bring them to justice.

One other thing—not that unimportant—to do is to stand staunchly on the side of those regrettably few upright men who have spent their adult life in campaigning for this cause, some of whom are right now being persecuted for their upright-ness.

At the end, you also state "Finally, the best homage we can pay to them is by striving for excellence they stood for in their respective professions -- and the greater arena of life". These are good semantics, but are essentially hollow, when the other part of the whole truth is not spoken. The best way to pay homage to them is to first ensure that those who had done them to cruel and untimely death is brought to proper justice so that the honour of the martyrs' sacred memory are preserved undiminished and undivided.

Half-truth is worse than lie. If we cannot or do not want to speak the whole truth, for whatever reason, on such a profoundly moral issue, it is better that we not speak at all.

Shafiq Ahmad
Canada

Pacifists like to portray themselves as non-violent, yet if they are attacked they themselves will use violence or get someone else to stop the aggressor.

The other point he mentions is the 'suicide bombers' in Palestine killing 'innocent civilians'. For Muslims the rules of war are laid down by Islam and the Mujahids fight, according to the Islamic rules, not the rules of the opposing side, who in this case lay the rules according to their ration which they change or do not follow.

Abu Nasher
UK

"No compromise on national security"

I fully agree with the point made by Sayed Nazmul Ahsan (December 13) that "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".

It is a tragedy and a disgrace that our democratically elected leaders are using the innocent victims to climb their political ladders. It is very sad to know that our own people have no feelings or the slightest of sympathy for us. We just had enough of these leaders using our money and resources to play their corrupt politics, it has been going on for far too long now.

It is important for the people to withdraw their blind support from these politicians, to become united and let our leaders realise that they "will be" held responsible for failing to protect and serve the people of Bangladesh.

This country does NOT belong to "them" alone, it belongs to all of "us". God bless Bangladesh.

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

People of different profession

Very often I have seen that students if they don't get a chance to study medical, engineering, law etc they become depressed and reluctantly continue their studies. Students have to understand that our society doesn't only need doctors, lawyers, engineers, economists, Architects etc. We need to balance our society with people of different profession. What the students need is whatever subjects they are studying they should concentrate on it to get the best result.

A citizen
Dhaka

Textile industry watch dog

In Bangladesh, the number of textile industries with A-Z set up is growing rapidly. At the same pace, small dyeing/printing factories are mushrooming too.

Recently I had the opportunities to visit a couple of textile industries in Gazipur, Konbari and Tongi. I have noticed that very few of those industries are paying any attention to the environment. Illegal dumping of effluent-dye-water is a very common practice. Just to give an example, on average 35 kgs of water are required for each kg of dye. Tons of dye materials are being used everyday. It is a matter of simple mathematics, as to how much water is being generated from all those factories cumulatively. Some of the companies attempt to be environmentally conscious by incorporating an effluent-water treatment plant. However, high operating costs prevent most of

them from operating continuously. Generally, the major is turned on just before any major inspections. It is one of those open secrets!

Who are the ones that ultimately suffer? People who are living around those factories are the main victims. How? The untreated industrial wastewater contaminates both water reservoirs and land. Therefore the rights of the people to drink fresh water are lost. The factories are polluting their land.

It is unfortunate that we do not have any rigid governmentally mandated environmental guidelines to regulate textile factories. In other

aspects of the society, we are making strides to effect environmentally conscious changes. We have removed Polyethylene Bags from the streets. We are introducing CNG vehicles, which are a bit more environment-friendly compared to gasoline. Our country is heading towards a positive direction. Why can't we then establish a task force to micro-inspect, regulate and penalise the factories that generate effluent-dye-wastewater? We need watch dogs for textile industries. It is said that making a mess is always easier than cleaning it up.

Fahd-Bin-Marghoob
Gulshan, Dhaka

An appeal to NBR

I am not a self-assessee. For the last assessment year 2002-2003 I have paid income tax in excess than due. I was told by I. T Department that for this year the excess amount paid would neither be refunded nor be treated as advance I.T for the next year.

Previously such excess amount of I.T paid used to be either refunded or be treated as advance I.T for next year. What has gone wrong this year? I request the NBR to withdraw such order and not to unnecessarily burden an assessee.
A taxpayer, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Longer commercial breaks on BTv

On the second day of Eid I was really looking forward to see the famous magazine programme, "Ittadi". As it was supposed to be aired after the news of 10 pm, so I opened the TV at 10:25 pm and saw the news is over. So hoping that "Ittadi" would start within the next 10 to 15 minutes I remained hooked up with BTv. But to my amazement and disappointment "Ittadi" never seemed to start. I was getting tired of watching the commercials and was about to switch off the TV when it finally started at 11:05pm.

Then again, there was a 10 minutes commercial break in the middle of "Ittadi" in the name of starting the news of 11:30. All this left me wondering why BTv has started airing more commercials than programs, especially during Eid.

Saquiqa Islam
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.
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Editor

Reuters retracts its stories: A severe blow to its credibility

In my reporting classes at Dhaka University's Department of Mass Communication and Journalism over the past 20 years, I have been profusely referring to the reportorial excellence of Reuters, which is a distinguished international news agency in its own right. I have been telling my students that Reuters occupies a unique position in the array of news agencies



Reuters' reputation ruined!

worldwide. I also frequently used to tell my class that Reuters enjoys a reputation of being fiercely independent in its opinion and scrupulously accurate in its facts. Above all, this news agency produces the finest possible news for a very demanding audience without recognising friend or foe. I have myself known and believed all this while that accuracy and objectivity have the hallmark of Reuters' stories.

Unfortunately, Reuters' commitment to seeking and telling the truth without any bias or prejudice has been shattered. When a news agency like Reuters retracts a series of stories on a particular event, its credibility stands threatened. The Reuters stories on the Mymensingh cinema hall bomb explosions and their subsequent retraction have drawn international attention for obvious reasons. The retraction of the stories only suggests reportorial superfluity. I wonder how the Bangladesh correspondent of the news agency filed the story without checking and verifying the facts. As I understand, the news operations of a news agency like Reuters consists of several desks or departments, each of which has its own editors and writers. Editors either assign stories to reporters or help them shape their own story ideas. After the stories are written, the editors make sure that the stories are fair and untainted. As a media researcher, may I take the liberty to ask the Reuters Editor in charge of the Bangladesh Desk whether the stories on the Mymensingh cinema hall bomb explosions went through a similar process of scrutiny?

Whatever Reuters has to say with regard to the retraction of those stories, the Agency's reputation for hard-hitting journalism has certainly earned a bad name and it will take quite a while to heal the wounds. Reuters will be well advised to refrain from skillful manipulation of facts by compromising journalistic integrity.

Resorting to trickery and deceit in the name of freedom of the press cannot be called healthy journalism.

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

Reuters lastly retracted the blast reports in which they said that the Home Minister Mr. Altaf Hossain Chowdhury hinted Al-Qaeda link. *The Daily Star* also published a report in which they said that Mr. Altaf actually made that comment but he had to refuse it following pressure from the senior cabinet members. In this regard they went a little further giving some details of the inside story of the government.

Now I want to know from *The Daily Star* the actual fact.

Nasim Ahmed
Moghbar, Dhaka