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.

### Our friends of the East

I welcome the BNP Government to seek friendship from our Eastern neighbours. Finally our Government is taking small steps towards the right direction. For too long we have tried to have a normal relation with India. But it didn't work out.

India earn more than three billion dollar from Bangladesh, and that is without counting the smuggled goods. Our people travel to India for vacation, medical treatments, for business and spend millions of dollars worth foreign currency. What we usually get in return is 2<sup>nd</sup> class service from their medical institutions, poor quality products from their factories and 3rd class treatment from their government officials and immigration. Overall India, in general, takes a very unprofessional approach towards its business from Bangladesh.

Thai people are known for their professionalism and friendly spirit. A trip to Thailand is going to cost us as much or less than a trip to Bombay or Delhi. Our people can get worldclass service from Thai hospitals and doctors. Our students can acquire world-class education from Thai universities. Our business can get quality materials, equipment and technology from Thailand, and it's not going to cost us any more or less than India.

So why pay for second class service from an unwilling and hostile nation when we can get first class treatment from a friendly nation? More interactions with Thai business will also have a positive impact on our business people and business environment. Instead of learning how to produce and sale base quality products from India. our businessmen will learn to produce quality products and the know-how to compete with world-class manufacturers and service providers.

Improved relationship with our other neighbour Myanmar is also very encouraging. Myanmar is a country with huge natural resources and it also could be our access to our other Eastern neighbour. It will be a win win situation for both the people of Myanmar and Bangladesh. A new economic region with Bangladesh -Myanmar-Thailand has huge potential. I hope that our Government will, from now on, take proactive foreign policy based on mutual benefits or its people. Sherif Saeed

Trenton, New Jersey, USA

#### AL's arrogant attitude I am really shocked and saddened about the language AL has used in

their Invitation Letter to the top party leaders of BNP (December 25). It seems AL wanted to insult BNP leaders before they could think over

whether to attend the council or not. We cannot understand how AL leadership can send the same card meant for their workers to leadership of a party in power using abusive language.

Again a leader like Mr. M. A. Samad requested Mr. M. A. Mannan to receive these cards from persons who were CL leaders only vesterday. Before AL can win the heart of opposing millions of Bangladeshis they must refine their uncontrolled tongues first and try to use civilised languages in their public and party meetings. They must know how to respect other political leaders and maintain a minimum of political G. Ahmed

Shamoly, Dhaka

# Journalists serving vested interest

groups! I wonder whether the Bangladeshi journalists will ever learn to be objective in their news coverage. Many a times I have observed that news are published in a politically motivated manner. It often seems that news are made from the news desk of the newspaper office instead of field observation of events that make news.

This is, perhaps, because most of our journalists are associated with sectarian political establishments of our country. Many of these political segments, I believe, have no respect and faith in the independent existence of our nation. That is why, we see many of them serve the vested interests of our enemies. They even do not feel any shame in maintaining relationships with anti-Bangladesh establishments. A lot of them are engaged in a continuous covert or overt struggle to tarnish the image of the nation in the international arena. They fail to understand that they are only engaged in a selfish self-destructive game. They do not understand the consequences of their actions

The time is ripe today for the truth and justice loving section of our journalists to stand up. They should not stand up for any body just because they belong to certain socalled intellectual segments. If their actions are harmful for our nation, for truth and for justice then there should be no room for them to be supported, unless they change their attitude and course of action. Md Sirajul Islam

NY. USA

#### The drive to curb crimes When a villager bathes in a hyacinth filled pond, the hyacinths are

removed with hands for getting access into water, after the water is used the pond is again filled back with hyacinths. I find a remarkable resemblance with our issue of army deployment.

Thanks to Mr Mahfuz Anam's commentaries "Denial that brings discredit to the government". The mysterious deaths under army custody, the undefined period of this operation, the interrogating procedures and right for self-defence of the suspects needs to be probed into. It is a blatant fact that the deaths of the suspects appear unfounded, the lawbreaker, murderers or whatever we may call them are cold-blooded mastermind criminals by nature who do not

bail. Bail is a temporary 'remedy' for the accused and of course, always there is a possibility to revive the case when the opponent party, here is the govt. (not the ruling party) feels that the case 'needs' to be

I strongly believe that the Bangladesh Govt. should withdraw its 'sedition' charge immediately against Mr. Saleem Samad and Ms. Pricilla Raj as the govt. has failed (?) to prove the sedition charge against them and keep them under custody. And in this type of cases, sooner it is

Tanbir ul Islam Siddiqui Shantinagar, Dhaka

"When one hundred

# Playing with the pawns



Pawns of politics

Ideally all political parties have one objective in common -welfare of the people. Since Independence we have voted each time, for one or the other party, hoping to see better days for ourselves. But never ever our wishes came out to be true. On the contrary, the politicians appeared to have played with us like pawns on a chessboard to be sacrificed for strategic gains, as and when deemed necessary.

Between 1996 and 2002, there were half a dozen of bomb blasts in the country, each time claiming a huge toll of innocent lives, as in Udichi function; Ramna Batamul, church premises at Gopalgonj; Paltan Maidan meeting of the Left front in Dhaka; Shamim Osman's office at Narayangonj; finally, and very recently, four bomb blasts in the cinema halls in Mymensingh. In these attempts the members of the public were the only victims, but none of the political or the cultural

Leaders of the two major parties accused each other for such heinous occurrences. Both the parties demonstrated their unflinching determination to bring to book the culprits. But what has been the result till date? None of the culprits have been arrested.

A long time have elapsed since the gruesome bomb-blasts in Jessore and recently in Mymensingh, but our intelligence services could not make any head and tail of these incidents. Moreover, Governmental efforts to clear off the smoke screen surrounding the bomb blasts appear to be quite inadequate and ineffective. All these have left us to do guess work only as to who among the national leaders are our real friends.

We are tired of hearing speculative findings, rumours, charges and counter charges of one party against the other. We want to know for sure who are those treating us like pawns and playing foul at the cost of national interest.

percent support is

Thank you Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed

for your analysed article (December

20) on America's one-way support

is fully controlled by Jews who has

the vision to look after Israel and are

masterminding to destroy the Mus-

lim world. These are the people

taking decision for the American

people. They have captured the

American ideology and brain

washed the entire nation. Do they

really care about the people of

America? I don't think so. By ignor-

ing the Muslim world and taking a

path where only Israel's interest will

be served, America is heading

towards a depressing future.

Like you said, I think White House

not enough"

Moni Khan. Dhania. Dhaka

readily succumb to "heart attacks" in course of interrogation. I confidently believe that we have a proper judiciary system and significant number of human rights organisations that will open up a dialogue with government to safeguard the human rights of the citizens. In this regard Amnesty International has a vital

The deployment of Army to curb up crime is the last resort and final trump card for the government. There is absolute vagueness as to when the army will be withdrawn, no clear cut perception have been so far given to the citizens. Does the government realise how depressive and de-motivated the citizens of this country are?

Army deployment could be only a temporary solution, which certainly cannot last for an unlimited period We are concerned regarding what policy the government has adapted take-over the Operation Clean Heart by our police force. The police force have proved fruitless and miserably failed to curb crimes in the past. It is about time that the government took appropriate step to strengthen our police force. If the government can spend substantial amount for training up army why not the same for the police force? Should we not take up some initiative to mould our police force even if it requires some foreign assistance? Kishwar Sayeed

## Legal issues about Saleem Samad and Pricilla

Thanks to the Honorable High Court Division of the Bangladesh Supreme Court for granting 'bail' in favour of Saleem Samad and Pricilla Raj. The day, the two main 'accused' Ms. Zaiba Naz Malik and Mr. Leopoldo Druno Sorrentino were released from the charge of 'Foreigners Act' and not from 'Sedition' charge, it became a moral obligation for the whole nation as well as the concerned court too to release the 'accomplices' to ensure and establish rule of law in the

In fact, after granting bail and subsequent release of Ms. Pricilla Raj, it was a matter of time for Mr. Salem Samad to get justice and that happened on 23rd December 2002. But Saleem Samad has not been released yet.

Getting bail is a fundamental right for any accused unless there are extraordinary causes not to grant

I ask every sensible American what will they gain from war against Iraq. Nothing only Israel's interest will be served.

A number of analysts have predicted that around 50 thousand innocent people will lose their life in this war against Iraq. And I think this 50, 000 will have another few hundred thousand close relatives who will become the enemy of the US. And out of these hundred of thousand at least 1000 terrorist will be born and out of these 1000 there will be at least 100 terrorists who will be planning to take revenge upon the US. If one of them succeeds in his/her mission then whom should we support-- the so-called terrorist or America?

It is now up to the American people to decide how they want their future to be destined. Shahrivar Zaman Sydney, Australia

## The stalemate at **ADAB**

I have been closely following the growing stalemate at ADAB. I have served in one of the largest and oldest International NGO's for over four years as one of its Senior Management Executives during the mid-'90s. During my tenure of services I had the opportunity also to attend a number of Executive Committee meetings of ADAB representing the NGO I had worked for. During those years I had also interacted intensively with the NGO Community at large.

In retrospect, I have no hesitation to say that the contributions made by the NGOs in rural development interventions have been significant. Yet it must be said that it has never been too transparent and accountable in its management operations.

On the other hand over the years many of the Senior Executives of the better known and large NGOs have used the community to become their political power base on a national scale. In this regard these individuals have also exploited the Apex body of the NGOs-- ADAB. It is but too well known that ADAB for most part of its existence has never been a truly representative body of the NGOs. It has been a highly dictatorial organisation serving coterie interests much before the present executive body took charge of the affairs.

The Government therefore is well within its rights to investigate, review the working of ADAB with a view to make it more democratic and transparent in its management operations. I would like to put forward the following suggestions for consideration of the authorities

The review or investigations should be undertaken by a most neutral and representative committee consisting of a cross section of knowledgeable individuals from the Government, civil society, NGOs, recognised individuals from Chartered Accountant Firms, so on and so forth including a member from the donor community as an observer if found feasible..

2. The formation of the Committee should be recommended and confirmed by a retired Senior judge of the High court in order to ensure transparency and neutrality.

3. The Committee should operate under a clearly defined mandate and terms of reference under a given time-frame

4. Among others the terms of reference should primarily focus on its alleged involvement in the partisan politics of the country, the transparency of its financial operations, review of the ADAB Constitution including confirming a well-defined Code of Ethics for the entire NGO Community.

5. Once the Committee report is finalised it should be placed before the highest law making body namely the Jatiyo Sangsad for extensive debate and ratification before the recommendations are made into Law binding on all parties concerned.

Shamsher Chowdhury

## Who will save the world?

As far as I know, it's the US who first used WMD to kill more than 200,000 Japanese civilians in the last phase of WW II. It's the US who tried to invade Cuba. It's the US who invaded Vietnam, also killing a large number of civilians there. It's the US who supported West Pakistan (present Pakistan) to massacre around 3 million of its own people in then East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) in 1971. It even sent a naval task force led by nuclear carrier enterprise to supply West Pakistanis with food, arms and ammunitions. It's the US who is supporting Israel with billions of dollars and logistics to kill defenceless Palestinians for more than 50 years.

Now, in this new century we see USA as the self proclaimed saviour of Iraqi people from their (according to US) oppressive ruler named Saddam. But where was this country when more than two decades ago Saddam killed more than 5000 of his own Kurd people by dropping biological and chemical weapons (mainly Hydrogen Cynide, Mustard and nerve gas)? At that time US and its allies kept an ominous silence. Later in the '90 after Iraqi troop's withdrawal from Kuwait, an US prescribed embargo on Iraq killed millions of Iraqi children.

After engaging itself in such heinous activities, America is now saying that Saddam is a threat to world peace and stability! Why? Because according to US Saddam used WMD against his own people in the past and still has a hidden stock of WMD (which is yet to be proved by UN inspectors). If Saddam is really so, then past and present activities of US and its current stock of WMD (which is the largest in the world) clearly indicates that US is a much more bigger threat to world peace than anyone else.

# **Operation Clean Heart**

Recently, I have read a number of letters saying that the only job of the army is to protect the nation from outside aggression. I agree that was the purpose of creating an armed force but we have to be honest: who is going to invade Bangladesh and take the burden of 140 million people of which a massive percentage is unskilled, can barely make their ends meet! This is not the age where a nation would invade another with brute force; rather they would choose to indirectly control

Getting back to the purpose of the army, I have never seen anyone comment derogatorily when army is being called to help in flood control or in a massive cyclone. They are called at that time to contain the situation and the assist the respective government agencies. I don't think the theme of Operation Clean Heart is any different from that. The government had its back against the wall to combat crime in an efficient and fruitful manner. The police force was proven completely incompetent to do so. Therefore, the government called out the army to contain the situation and so far, it has proven to be successful enough. There have

# Internees and medical students on strike



So much for hippocratic oath

The internees and medical students of Dhaka Medical College/Hospital (DMC/H) went on an indefinite strike (though withdrawn post haste). It was withdrawn because we realised that we had gone on a strike for a very wrong cause. By our strike we were supporting extortion of money by a group of students headed by an internee doctor who did not relinquish his student union post.

If DMC sells 6000 admission forms this vear, then the students' union have been deprived of almost five lakh taka. It's a huge amount of money and definitely a good reason for a wrong cause to go on a strike. This is not the first time that the students of a medical college have done this offence. This is done in almost all the govt medical colleges and is being practised for years. We wonder what did the previous unions do with the money thus collected in the previous years. Those students who buy a form from DMC know very well that only 152 of them will be admitted to DMC. Why the rest of them should be forced to buy a prospectus of DMC is well understood. The authorities are complacent with the highhandedness of the students. This very principal who stopped selling of prospectus this time, allowed the same offence (!) to be committed last year. What went wrong this year?

Coming back to the internees, we did not have any choice either. We had to show our sympathy to a leader (!) of ours. Although an intern, he was still clinging to a post of the students' union. What choice did the interns have? We know he is a *mastan* type but he tows the present party in power. We can look forward to him for future blessings, particularly in the next four years or so. When the term of

the Union was over, the Principal did not dissolve it. The Union was declared defunct only when things went wrong and not when it was due. Both the Principal and the student leader are supporters of the same party and were in connivance with each other when the going

But it's a surprise that the hospital came to a stand-still with the strike of the internees. The internees are supposed to be learners. We are here to learn. The hospital is supposed to be run by the non-internees, the so-called teachers. But where are they? Unfortunately, we learn whatever we can only through our perseverance and willingness to learn. Self-learning is now the essence in the government medical college hospitals. We try out all our innovative skills. Simultaneously, many of us do private practice and work at private clinics. (This is one thing we have learnt very well from our teachers). Because many of us held proper connections, we were guaranteed a pass in the examinations. At the end of our one year internship, many of us will not know how to set up a saline line, how to do a lumber puncture, how to conduct a safe delivery, how to do and interpret an ECG, how to tackle an emergency or even to clinically examine a patient.

Still then, whatever amount we devout in the hospital is the only service that the hospital gets. Quite frankly, was it not quite evident from our strike? Evidently, something very wrong is going on in the name of providing health service to the general public.

condemned, and government should try to ensure that such incidents are not repeated.

However, looking at the broader picture it must be said that crime is at least hibernating for the time being. I am not saying that a permanent solution should not be thought off and implemented, but the shortterm success should not be ignored either. We must not forget that we are an LDC, and a significant pie of the entire budget goes for developing the armed force. As a nation, we cannot afford the benefits derived from the army to be once in every 5-10 years. We have to be very versatile in appropriation of the wealth and services we possess. Calling the army to combat crime is indeed a flexible exploitation of the Army. This government has adopted a couple of measures that command commendation, and definitely, in my opinion, Operation Clean heart will definitely go down in the history books as one of them. Imran Karim

been casualties, those should be University of Rochester, NY, USA

## "Revisiting Indo-Bangla relations"

This is in reference to the article "Revisiting Indo-Bangla relations" (December 21).

A critical analysis of the Indian

foreign policy from 1947 to 1966 does not show any evidence that India was really interested in the prospect of a sovereign Bangladesh. This became evident when Sk. Mujibur Rahman proposed the Six Point programme for greater autonomy for East Pakistan in 1966. This gave India an opportunity to dismantle Pakistan which would weaken its arch rival. The brutal steps Pakistan took to retain East Pakistan in its fold brought in a revolution and India took appropriate steps to realise its most prized foreign policy goal. India's moral and material help was the deciding factor to bring this revolution to its victorious conclusion. The people of Bangladesh proved themselves as exceptionally rational in the realm of religious toleration and gratitude in relation to their great benefactor, India. This splendid situation started to decline into a mess when Bangladeshi politicians failed to take appropriate note of the situation due to their inexperience in the interstate relationships. They failed miserably in this respect due to corruption and personal bickering.

There is another undeniable truth in the whole gamut of the Indo-Bangla relations that we share the same culture, language, history and heritage. These forces are so strong that politics can't control or replace them. The issue of religion, which some people want to use, was never accepted by the people of Bangladesh. It is the corrupt politicians of Bangladesh who have brought economic and political misfortune to the nation. There are many countries in the world who shares very close cultural and historical ties but maintained a very healthy and constructive relations.

Bangladesh needs a pragmatic foreign policy for its own benefit. Any over enthusiastic notion that we will be better off without a working and constructive foreign policy with India is utterly unrealistic and shortsighted. No one should play the religious card here. This will bring Akbar Hussain, Toronto, Canada

#### Double standard of European Parliament The criticism by the European Parliament of the action taken by

criminal elements is misplaced.

cases are being investigated. if law has been broken, those responsible will be punished. However, since the incidence of crime has gone down remarkably throughout the country, majority of the people is happy with the military action which is a purely temporary measure. The right to live without fear from criminal elements is one of the most important human rights. The Bangladesh Government wants to guarantee that right to the people. When the European Parliament accuses the Government of human rights violations on account of its action against terrorists, it is missing

The law and order situation in

Bangladesh has been deteriorating

sharply in these past few years and

the people have been demanding

action to be taken against the terror-

ists and their local protectors. When

the police force failed to apprehend

the criminals, the government called

in the army. That has proved to be

very effective. Since the military has

no favourites or links with mafia

organisation, it is taking action

against criminals without consider-

ing their political connection or

It is true that the military's con-

frontation with the criminals has

resulted in some death. Those

background.

the whole point. There is clear double standard here. The Parliament is not criticising the USA for killing thousands of people in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine and its so many other activities that are clear violation of human rights. The only conclusion one can draw from this is that the European Parliament is harsh against the weaker and poorer countries, but is silent about the superpower

Dr. Ahmed Habib Manzur Buravdah. Saudi Arabia

#### The Government is responsible! As Sheikh Hasina now tries to

propagate that "incidents of bomb blasts in Mymensingh is a govt. staged drama" then should we confirm that all such blasts or killing incidents during the AL regime were also enacted by Hasina and her Govt.? She said to the pressmen that such awe inspiring dreadful incidents could not take place without the patronage of the Govt.! So, we can conclude (can we) that there was in fact no bomb blast in Ramna or for that matter in any other site or any part of the country inflicted by fundamentalists or antigovt. forces (as they claimed then) but all those must have been the outcome of a drama staged by Hasina and her accomplices! AF Rahman

# "Ban on use of children at the polls?"

With due respect to the editor of The Daily Star, I disagree with the fact that there has to be a law to ban on use of children at the polls. Here is why I believe such law will stand illegitimate and destructive to the morale of our democracy.

Firstly, all citizens of our country equally shares fundamental rights provided in our constitution. These rights do not differentiate in application on the ground of age identifying as major or minor. Therefore, isolating minors from exercising their fundamental rights to participate in any political associations violates constitutional provisions providing equal rights for all citizens. We must remind ourselves that minors are also citizens of the

Secondly, politics is significantly an educating process for the people of an emerging democracy like ours. It enables people of all ages to know the best of their rights and responsibility in a civil society. Minors of today will assume responsibility for days to come and lead politics to our future. It's possible that sometimes children are financed for participating in political activities, but it does not make them vulnerable to be abused for political purposes since they do not have power to exercise rights to vote. Minors' participation does not promote mandate for any political leader to win election or does any bad for someone who does not associate them. Increasingly, minors' rights are hardly discussed in political forums in our country. Therefore, making legal provisions to ban them from participating in politics will make their voice more unheard. Therefore, such provision will make democracy more inaccessible to our future. Thirdly, we must consider precedence of such legal provision

(if available) in other stable democracies of the world before we may enact such law. In the United States, youths are highly encouraged to participate in political dialogues, and in the state of Maryland, a teen contested in mayoral election of a town of three thousand people and won. He works in the local supermarket, goes to college, and works as mayor of a city as well While we consider enacting laws to ban teens from participating in politics during election times, we are discouraging them to know how they should understand their role as future leaders. I have never heard any country making such law. If Bangladesh



**Expolited inncence?** 

makes it, it is just a matter to time to discard it again since democracy cannot live without freedom, and freedom as a form conscience is indifferent for both majors and minors.

**Dhananjoy Roy** New York, USA

Bangladesh to control terrorist and