

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.

"101 eminent citizens decry repression on intellectuals"

I have read with interest the statement of the 101 eminent persons alleging the Government of repression against writers, journalists and cultural activists. It may be interesting to note that we have not seen the same group of people making any statement while the Awami League was in office and when there have also been action against writers, journalists and cultural activists. It may therefore need no great power of deduction to know where the political sympathies of these people lie.

My view regarding the matter is that the Government, no matter which party forms it, should be under scrutiny from any group of eminent persons or anyone for that matter when people in categories such as writers, journalists and cultural activists are unlawfully harassed or oppressed. Then again, no one, whether he/she is a journalist or a writer should be exempted from the laws that apply to other sections of the society while undertaking his/her professional work.

The present Government has arrested those for whom the eminent persons have raised their voices not arbitrarily but for alleged violations of law. Let the law then take its own course and let no one, not even the eminent persons, exert any influence in this matter. In the current army drive, no one is outside the purview of this drive. So what makes the journalists or the writers so special that they should be exempted? High-sounding phrases such as freedom of expression should not confuse us for we know how much responsibility our writers and journalists show in either writing or their reporting.

There is a conspiracy afloat to tarnish the image of Bangladesh as a liberal democratic country with a Muslim majority and identify it as a fundamentalist Muslim country where religious intolerance is nurtured at the highest political level. This conspiracy, if succeeds, will set Bangladesh decades behind in its development efforts. If there was truth in this contention, then one could take a different view of those behind the conspiracy. But that the truth is quite to the contrary is the sad part of this conspiracy. It is only some of our journalists, writers and cultural activists who believe to the contrary and play to the hands of the conspirators or that some of them are either voluntarily or involuntarily part of the conspiracy. The statement of the eminent persons has reminded us also of the recent utterances of the Leader of the Opposition and we see a clear link between the statement of the eminent persons and those of coming from her. **Shahjahan Ahmed Dhanmandi, Dhaka**

'Sheikh Hasina and our image abroad'

This is in reference to the letter "Sheikh Hasina and our image abroad".

It is solely Sheikh Hasina's responsibility to maintain the image of the nation? Or in another word, is it only the Leader of the Opposition who is up against ruining our image?

What have the ruling party done so far? Have we already forgotten the minority oppression which started immediately after the general election? This wasn't considered as another feather added in the

Wishful thinking

On the New Years Day, I wish that no new bombing incidents take place in our country. And the mystery of the previous ones are solved and the culprits brought to justice.

I wish the Government realises that by arresting foreign journalists, local intellectuals and by banning international journals, they can no way improve the image of the ruling party and the nation. They need to be open-minded and need to suppress the path of oppression. And there is no harm in investigating an allegation be it the presence of Al-Qaeda elements in the country or anything else.

I wish the Opposition realises that by complaining to the international body their image would in no way be enhanced rather it would prove the otherwise. The people would feel humiliated and they would lose faith in the opposition. Complaining never solves any problem.

I wish the death toll in custody won't increase. The hearts of all the criminals will finally be cleaned and the army would return to the barracks. And most importantly, the police would learn to perform their duty responsibly and honestly.

I wish our relation with the neighbouring countries would improve and the debate over gas issue would be resolved.

I wish our cricket team would play their best in the World Cup and our reputation won't be further ruined. I want the commentators to admit that the ICC did the right thing by bestowing us with



the one day and Test status and we have the same if not more potential than the Kenyan team.

I wish the enmity between Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina comes to an end and they become best of friends and work unitedly to prosper the nation. But what am I saying! There's a limit to even wishful thinking!

Munia Mamun, Gulshan, Dhaka

cap of our improved image! What about the ban on FEER issue? How was our image improved by banning an internationally reputed magazine? Then started Operation Clean Heart. We are so desperate that we need the army to maintain law and order situation and we are concerned about our image! At least we didn't need the army when AL was in power.

AL didn't at least arrest any foreign journalists. They didn't lock up our intellectuals with criminals like 'Banga Babu'. There wasn't any death in custody, at least the number remained under 40.

We don't acknowledge anything positive as long as we have it. We never acknowledged AL and the good things they have done for us. This is not fair.

Shahin Samad Purana Pallan, Dhaka

This is in response to Mr. Sultan Mahmud Sharif's letter.

First of all he lives in the UK and has a rudimentary knowledge of the real situation in Bangladesh! He is just like any other blank Westerner who has been made to believe that only Sheikh Hasina is suitable for ruling the country because she is the so-called daughter of democracy or she is secular while Khaleda Zia is pro-Islamic and undemocratic.

If Mr Sharif has been following the events in Bangladesh he would have learned that Sheikh Hasina is the only Bangladeshi who has branded her country as a Taliban-terrorist-fundamentalist state! She did it while she was the Prime Minister and as the Opposition Leader as well. Let Mr. Sharif tell me what he expects from the non-Bangladeshi.

What will they think of Sheikh Hasina?

If Mr. Sharif thinks by tarnishing the image of Bangladesh abroad, Sheikh Hasina is doing the nation a great service then where is his patriotism? And what about his intellectual reasoning? Who is Sheikh Hasina to attract international attention for human rights violations in Bangladesh when the media is as powerful nowadays as it has ever been? Nothing can be hidden in this age of information super highway. She could have done the same during her rule which was the worst in living memory!

And finally no sane thinking Bangladeshi will ever think of thanking Sheikh Hasina for the mess she is creating in the name of alerting the international community for human rights violations. Nobody asked her to do that. The Bangladeshis are conscious people. Sheikh Hasina should concentrate on the human rights violations in her party and step down for not living up to the people's expectations!

Imran Karim University of Rochester

I am glad to hear that the new RAT squad will come into action from January with 'smart officers'. Sort of a Bangladeshi SWAT team or a Tactical Firearms Squad like the English have.

BB On e-mail

I have read quite a few letters with interest on this subject. Some people's view is that Sheikh Hasina should not have said those things in foreign countries. I feel strongly that she should have been criticised if she told lies. But nobody has made an allegation that she did so. So, my conclusion is that she has stated the facts. It is an absolute fantasy to think that people outside Bangladesh knew about what is going on there only when Sk. Hasina said it.

The best way to maintain the image of our country is to not let any bad things happen here. If bad things do happen here then these should be discussed and criticised. It will be dishonest to suppress them. We should remember what philosopher Machiavelli said. He said that dishonest politicians wouldn't dare to do bad things if they get known to the people. This is the reason why bad politicians try to suppress freedom of news media.

If as the Leader of the Opposition Sk. Hasina does not speak out against any undesirable happenings then I am sure she will be accused of failing to do her duties.

Waheed Nabi Sheffield, England

Sheikh Hasina and her comments regarding Bangladesh's current Government allegedly patronising and sheltering Al-Qaeda have purged the intellectual appetites of many lately. Let us not be emotional about this but rather rationally focus on the possible consequences of her remarks and her motives.

The consequences to the world would be that our image as a country that has achieved democracy in a relatively short span of time would be tarnished, we will be put in the group of countries that are non-cooperative to the current world fight against terrorism and as a corollary we will receive less aid and economic support from the developed countries. Therefore, this would definitely not assist the export earnings and even internal infrastructural development. One cannot but think that whether she is not aware of the consequences mentioned above, she does have a huge pool of think tanks! So, it can be deduced that it is unlikely she is unaware.

If that is so, then one has to question whether making a global uproar about Bangladesh's sheltering Al-

Qaeda was her only option given that her statements were true. She is the opposition leader and the chairman of the oldest and most decorated political party in the country. She could have flashed this information in the local newspapers provided she had at her disposal the necessary evidence to back her statements. This way the world would have known that even if the Government is pro Al-Qaeda, the people of Bangladesh will not tolerate it and they can force the Government in doing otherwise. Adoption of the latter strategy would have benefited her in both ways, improving her and Bangladesh's image and would have gone a long way in facilitating her chances of victory in the next election.

Imran Karim University of Rochester

I was quite pleased to read a letter ("Growth of slums in Gulshan, December 28) on the ever-growing slums in the Gulshan area, especially the lakeside areas of the Gulshan-Banani lake that has been completely occupied by slums.

I go for regular walks in this area and get disgusted seeing the slums. Their growth and strong hold on the area indicates that they get either police or political protection. These slums provide a safe haven for the drug dealers and criminals.

I request the authorities concerned to take immediate steps to

investigate the matter and force RAJUK to give us an answer.

F Hussain UK

Slums in Gulshan

I was quite pleased to read a letter ("Growth of slums in Gulshan, December 28) on the ever-growing slums in the Gulshan area, especially the lakeside areas of the Gulshan-Banani lake that has been completely occupied by slums.

I go for regular walks in this area and get disgusted seeing the slums. Their growth and strong hold on the area indicates that they get either police or political protection. These slums provide a safe haven for the drug dealers and criminals.

I request the authorities concerned to take immediate steps to

World Cup crisis

The British and the Australian government have opposed the staging of the World Cup matches in Zimbabwe and reportedly both countries' prime ministers have asked the respective cricket boards to consider their participation. The two leaders are going along with the Commonwealth's decision to suspend Zimbabwe and condemn their leadership. If both England and Australia play, there would not be any sanctions against them, but as both Tony Blair and John Howard are active voices against Zimbabwe, there position would be dented. Australia has earlier cancelled a tour to Zimbabwe this year and also forfeited the Sri Lanka match in World Cup 1996.

Questions may sneak up on the racial violence in and around London last year when Pakistan was touring England for a Test series. Serious issues would have been created if they would have come back to Pakistan in protest of the British government's stance against the Asians, especially the Pakistanis. England was on tour to India this year when the Gujarat violence was brewing. If England had to play a match in Ahmedabad now, would they have done that? I am sorry to say that the answer would be in the affirmative.

Cricket, and sports in general, should be left off limits of politics and especially international politics. The matches should go ahead because it is the World Cup after all. Security is always a concern and if the authorities have accepted the measures, then

"Save Dhanmondi"

I agree wholeheartedly with Rabeya Rahim about the mess that Dhanmondi has become thanks to the mushroom like growth of schools, clinics and shops in the residential area. Massive amounts of garbage lie uncollected. Why does the municipal corporation not implement garbage bins for every household like in most major cities of the world? Households will be required to empty their garbage in the bins and the bins will be placed outside the house two designated days a week for the municipal corporation to empty. Why can this simple system not be implemented?

Sonku Dhaka

"Interpreting history"

Thanks to Hasnat Abdul Hye for his scholastic article "Interpreting history" (December 27).

E. H. Carr's view that 'History may be made by man (and women) but it has a mind of its own' is not acceptable to many scholars. Hegel's Philosophy of History was the first attempt to place history in the perspective of philosophy. Karl Marx tried to explain history in relation to its economic aspect bringing in the doctrine of dialectical materialism.

The class struggle was always there but for a revolution the proper time was not there. Future was never in India at all. The Indus Civilisation was a proof that India despite its very philosophical way of life the people of India had a vision of future.

After the liberation of Bangladesh, Romila Thapar came to Dhaka and I had a chance to meet her. As Mr. Hye said, she is indeed a genius and authority on Indian history. She is not influenced by any outside ideology and her scholastic

views are based on archaeological and historical facts. The question of Hindu nationalism which I don't consider as a threat to India's record as a tolerant nation. This is a frustration and a matter which will evaporate as education and economic emancipation takes place in the society.

Akbar Hussain Toronto, Canada

Right and wrong

I am referring to the letter "Let's act like responsible citizens" by Shafiqur Rahman Khan (December 23). I want to justify why I cannot act like a responsible citizen.

From personal level to national level, national level to international level, you'll see everywhere injustice, hypocrisy and double standard. Look at America's world policies. Look at their appalling aggression towards the Muslim world. Look at their use of power towards Iraq. Being the most civilised, educated and most powerful country in the world how they've become so blind to serve their selfish interest!

At the national level the same situation prevails. As Mr Shafiqur Rahman Khan rightly wrote when the American Ambassador says something good about our country, we very happily accept that but when the same person pinpoints the negative sides of our Government then we say we do not need foreign prescriptions to run our country. The Government is always perfect according to the ruling party and the opposition is always against the Government

Even at personal level we never dare to go against our loved ones if he/she does something wrong. We try to hide our loved ones' misdeeds with our best effort whereas the same misdeeds of others become the talk of the town.

I really don't know what should be done to become a responsible citizen. Why can't the definition of right and wrong be the same to everybody?

Shahrin Hussain Tania Old D.O.H.S, Dhaka

Slave-master relationship

The world has a new slave-master relationship. What was the need for the old colonial masters to go away? We might at least have been saved from the unnecessary illusions and the trouble of new adjustments.

A. K. M. Mohiddin, Lalmatia, Dhaka

It's not always about politics, rather a matter of decency

Political rivalry is obvious in a modern democratic society and it's

she needs to uphold to bring sanity into our politics? Couldn't she edit the invitation card before sending it to the BNP?

I ask Hasina and all Awami leaders engaged in making such arrangements to take a serious look not to deprive the party further from what they could earn just being decent.

Dhananjay Roy New York, USA

On Iraq

I must say that I appreciate Mahmood Elahi's continued efforts to try and convince some readers of the validity of the US position in regards to Iraq. I wholeheartedly agree with him. The American might has on the whole been a force for good.

Most Bangladeshis when criticising America also yearn to live there. This I don't understand. The American government and its policies are not independent of the wishes of their people. Although there are many dissenters in the US to the Bush administrations policies, it is still popular with most Americans.

The US should invade Iraq, reunite Korea, deal with the Chinese menace and try to spread the gospel of capitalism and freedom everywhere in the world.

Sabyasachi Dhaka

This is in reference to Mahmood Elahi's letter "America does not need new pretexts to attack Iraq" (December 28).

It's true, America does not need any pretext to attack Iraq. After all might is right. The only reason America is delaying the attack is that their initial financing strategy did not work as they expected. This time around there is a shortage of willing dummies to carry the cost of the war. Last time Saudi Arabia and Kuwait paid all the bills of the Desert Storm extravaganza. Since then the Arabs have learned their lesson. That's why no matter how convincing the media propaganda or the paid agents' arguments look, the Arab leaders are not stepping on Uncle Sam's petrodollar squeezing trap.

But what the heck, Iraq's enormous wealth would be enough to recover the war expenses, America can go alone. But the only drawback is that Mr. Bush's name would remain, on the pages of the history books as a bad guy, for the posterity to remember. Does he care?

Shukla Mirza Qatar

"Friends of the East"

I agree with Mr. Saeed on his observations about our relationship with

Eastern neighbours would be one of the processes to do so) in the country where people involved with medical services can achieve some credibility with the mass.

Rezaul Karim Malibagh, Dhaka

"The existing B.C.S exam system"

This is in reference to the letter of Mr. Sakur ("The existing B.C.S system requiring a massive reform").

Mr. Sakur, I appreciate your concern for our B.C.S exam system. It is certainly not the best way to recruit class one government officials. I also want PSC to give more thought in this recruiting system especially in the preliminary exam. We know that in every B.C.S exam the government fails to fill up some of the vacant seats in the professional cadre quota (like doctors etc.), which is highly required. It does not mean that, candidates for the professional cadres who failed in the preliminary exam are not qualified, but it is the exam system that fails to judge the candidates in a proper way.

Candidates who apply for the professional cadre should not take part in the preliminary exam as these candidates are not competing for the posts which the general students compete for through the preliminary exam.

The preliminary exam should be held in such a way that it has no bias for candidates from a particular discipline instead it should judge the candidate's communicative skill, analytical ability as well as his general knowledge national and international matter.

I have some reservations for some types of the questions regarding the papers like Bangla and History where specific dates, name of the character of a novel or the name of the writer are asked. These type of questions certainly give extra advantages to the candidates coming from history or literature background. And most importantly, these type of question force the professional and other cadres to memorise those topics, which eventually will not help to improve the candidate's efficiency. This is not only wastage of time but also wastage of merit.

Ms. Mynul Mamun, Dhaka

Bus route from Mirpur

Recently the Government has allocated BRTC's new city service buses to ply between Mirpur to Motijheel and Mirpur-Azimpur route. We appreciate the government's new initiative to ease people's diffi-



the venue is fit enough. Let's forget everything else come February and March and enjoy the World Cup. **Haji Mohammad Isam, Dhanmondi, Dhaka**

Meter-less auto-rickshaw

The government announced some time ago that all auto-rickshaw owners must install meter in their respective auto-rickshaws. The general people welcomed the decision wholeheartedly. But how long do we have to wait for the decision to be implemented? Because in plain and simple words, the auto-rickshaw drivers are 'robbing' us!

The other day, one CNG auto-rickshaw driver demanded 60 taka as the fare from Karwan Bazar to Dhanmondi! I couldn't say anything except for looking for another one which demanded 40 taka which is also exorbitantly high. But I had not other choice but to avail of it as there wasn't any other mode of transportation available.

From December 31, the remaining two-stroke 3-wheelers will be withdrawn and god knows what will happen to us then.

We are always with the Government in trying to reduce pollution and improving the traffic condition. But the Government should also look after our welfare. Before implementing a new decision isn't it the duty of the authorities concerned to make sure that people's interest is looked after? Couldn't the Government wait a few more days till there are enough alternatives available and ensure that the remaining ones install meter before withdrawing the polluting 3-wheelers?

Why is it always the mass who suffers the most.

Shahjahan Meraj Dhanmondi, Dhaka



Half-baked ban