Crafting the News in a Digital Age

The digital age has created an entirely new medium for journalists. Just as they did during the earliest days of radio and television, journalists explore this new medium, learning how to find and present the facts in cyberspace.

by Brad Kalbfeld

A CENTURY and a half ago, covering international news was straightforward: wait for a ship to arrive from overseas, interview the passengers, then run as fast as possible back to the newsroom and try to beat the competition to print. Communications between countries involved physical presence. A reporter literally had to be there to hear the news and had to get back to the newsroom to file.

Journalism has changed dramatically since then, as technology, starting with the telegraph and telephone, has made it possible to find out about events without actually being there.

The Internet, of course, makes it possible to peek into many places without that physical presence, and while that is a boon to journalists and their audiences alike, it also carries certain risks.

The internet connects uncounted computers around the world, making it possible for an elementary school student in Akron, Ohio, to read files on a university's server in Berne, Switzerland, or a journalist in Tokyo to see the latest news release on a government file server in Washington.

This makes the Internet an unparalleled research and reporting tool. A reporter today can, with a few minutes of searching on the World Wide Web, find information that would have taken hours of expensive long-distance telephone calls just a decade ago.

In addition, the Web has made it possible to interview someone without actually having a conversation. If a news source can't be reached by telephone, he or she can always be e-mailed.

Interviewing someone on paper isn't new, of course Mark Twain famously told The Associated Press by telegram in 1897 that "reports of my death are greatly exaggerated" but in today's world, the question and response can be exchanged in minutes, not the hours required for hand-delivery of a telegram, or the days it takes for an exchange to occur through the mails.

All this convenience has its drawbacks. How does a reporter know that the person receiving or answering the e-mail is the person they purport to be? There's no voice to recognise, no face to see only an e-mail address, which the reporter may have obtained from a colleague, from a Web site, or from a news release.

The same problem arises when a reporter or researcher goes to a Web site for the first time. All the person sees is what the people who created the site want to be seen. So, for example,

a person sitting in their garage could create a site that purports to represent a giant corporation. Because the reporter sees nothing more than the site after all, the whole idea of the Web is that they don't have to physically be there he or she has no way of knowing whether the corporation has one employee or a thousand.

In 1996, a site with the URL www.dole96.org looked, at first glance, like the official site of Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole. A casual observer would not have noticed that it was, in fact, a parody site surely not something the Dole campaign would have chosen to put on the Web itself. While no one can be certain of the motives of the author of that particular site, the use of misinformation to influence voters is nothing new political history is full of examples of "dirty tricks" that rely on hiding the identity of the author. The Web raises the possibility of anonymous troublemaking to new heights because it provides so few obvious clues to the identity of a site's proprietor.

The Web might be used to subvert the democratic process, or to promote a freer society. During the political upheaval that eventually led to the downfall of Yugoslavia's President Slobodan Milosevic, the independent station B-92 took on a new Internet identity, B2-92, to keep information flowing after the government seized its radio and television studios.

From political debated to the investigation of airline crashes, Internet hoaxes have made their way into mainstream news reports, potentially damaging the reputation of the reporters and certainly misleading the public. During a 2000 election debate in the state of New York, the moderator asked candidates Hillay Clinton and Rick Lazio about their views of "bill 602P," which was described as a proposal for the US Postal Service to impose a five-cent tax on every e-mail sent on the Internet. Both Clinton and Lazio voiced strong opposition to such a tax. But there is no such bill. The television station that sponsored the debate says the question was received via e-mail in response to a public solicitation for ideas. The question made it to the debate even though the Postal Service had sent out an advisory in May 1999 saying that the bill was fictional.

This is not to say that everything on the Web is untrustworthy or even that a majority of sites are. But it does mean that, with more information available to the general public (and journalists) than at any time in human history, the skills that journalists practice factchecking, identifying and qualifying their sources of information, and displaying a healthy skepticism about appearances are more important than ever.

Edward R Murrow once said that "a loud voice which reaches from coast to coast is not necessarily uttering truths more profound than those that may be heard in the classroom, the bar, or country store," an idea that clearly applies to the Internet. In an age of ubiquitous information, the integrity of the information assumes central importance. Consumers need to sort fact from gossip, and want to know that they can trust what they see. They will rely more heavily than ever on the journalistic practices of news organisations such as The Associated Press to identify sources of information and to verify facts.

Paradoxically, this also means that "being there" to cover news stories is more valuable than ever because of the premium put on having rock-solid facts. Few companies can afford to invest in in-person news coverage, but those who do provide a vital service to Web consumers. And without the costs of newsprint, without the time limitations of television and radio, journalists on the Web are free to present those facts in greater detail than ever.

What's more, the Web's point-and-click format makes it possible to present this depth in "layers." If a reader wants more depth, links are provided to sidebar stories, biographies of people quoted in the story, and transcripts of events. As digital technology progresses, viewers will be able to see the video of events as well as read the transcripts.

News sites even provide links to newsmaker sites, enabling readers to see for themselves, in great depth, the information provided by the people covered in the story, unfiltered by journalists.

This has transformational implications for news consumers and the journalists who serve them.

Despite its depth and extensive use of text and still photographs, Web journalism is not newspaper journalism. Even though it uses audio and video, and reports information in real time, Web journalism isn't broadcast journalism, either. It's something in between.

On the Web, the consumer is in control of how much depth he or she sees on a story, and whether the story is "experienced" through audio or video, "described" by a reporter's prose, or both. It's like a newspaper on steroids: Just as a reader can decide which stories to read, in what order, a Web viewer decides which stories to read and which links to click on. With so many choices, each consumer experiences each story in his or her own way.

How will all of this choice affect the news consumption habits of the public? It's too early for anything conclusive, but a June 2000 study by the Pew Research Centre asked Americans who regularly get news online what kinds of news they seek when they log on. World news ranked fifth on the list, at 45 per cent, behind weather, science and health, technology, and business news. Political news ranked eighth, being sought by 39 per cent of those who regularly get news online. (1) Web viewers are clearly taking advantage of the ability to target specific kinds of information.

The biggest, most visited Internet sites have links to general news coverage, giving consumers the opportunity to navigate through the top stories or click down to specific topics. There are, of course, editors for these information pages, people who make decisions about what stories to display most prominently (just like the lead in a newspaper or on a newscast), how much detail to put in, and what multimedia elements to link to each story. Most important, Web editors must bring to their sites the same journalistic standards of accuracy and objectivity that they bring to newspapers and broadcast stations. In a sense, that makes editing a Web site more difficult than editing a newspaper or a newscast, since the same high standards must be applied to the depth of a newspaper with the speed of a television or radio station.

With all of this work on the part of journalists in-person reporting; gathering video, audio, and still photos; making graphics; verifying facts; and applying professional news judgement and standards of accuracy and objectivity newsgathering companies are making significant investments in Web journalism. The technology makes it work available to everyone. But the same technology also makes it possible for unscrupulous Web sites and other media outlets to misappropriate the results of a competitor's original work. It is possible for someone sitting in a garage in an European city to make a Web site resemble a legitimate news site by swiping stories from others.

This, of course, is illegal, and harms the newsgathering organisations that make the investment to send reporters to cover stories and to check facts. But this sort of cyber theft is hard to police.

That is why copyright notices, and specific licenses regulating how information on the Internet may be used, are so important. Web viewers often think that, if they can see something, they can use it. Before downloading a photo or sound bite or article, the copyright terms so easy to ignore should be read and respected.

The consumer as editor, the use of technology to misinform, the need to protect intellectual property: it is surely a complicated world for today's journalists. The Internet is a powerful new reporting tool, giving reporters easy access to detailed information on the full range of human knowledge. The Web puts that power in the hands of the audience, too, coupling the blessing of availability with the curse of overwhelming volume.

One hundred fifty years ago, most newspaper readers couldn't get to that ship bringing news from overseas, so they needed journalists to do it for them. Today's new consumer can go directly to the source behind a news story. But even in the Internet age, journalists do more than bring information to the public. We've gone from an age of too little information to an age of overload. With all of the information now at the user's fingertips, Web viewers need context, need someone to verify facts and identify sources, to make sure all sides of the story are told. The newsroom of the future needs to be better than ever at good old-fashioned journalism.

The author is Deputy Director and Managing Editor of the Associated Press, Broadcast Division.

— USIS

PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT
Flickering Hope in Sight!
by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

THERE appears to be a flickering hope in the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis when we heard that Shimon Peres, former Foreign Minister in Yitzhak Rabin's cabinet, was looking for the seat of the premier in the next general elections scheduled to take place in about 60 days' time. Rabin was brutally assassinated in November 1995 by an ultra rightist element in Tel Aviv following signing of Oslo peace treaty with PLO. Shimon Peres, who became Prime Minister after the assassination of Rabin, is banking on the support of the left liberal Meretz party, which is an arch enemy of Ariel Sharon of Likud Party. Sharon is required to secure endorsement of at least 20 members of Knesset (Israeli Parliament) to contest for the premiership. According to Israeli law, only sitting members can compete in the election for the premiership. Therefore, the question of contesting by the former premier and a hardliner right wing leader Benjamin Netanyahu does not arise as he is not a sitting member of the Parliament.

It may be recalled that Shimon Peres took a bold stand in conducting negotiations with Palestinians which ultimately led to the signing of Oslo peace treaty in 1993 and for which his standing in Israel was critically low, but presently Shimon Peres has been gaining popularity because of his steadfast attitude to strike a deal with Palestinians to stop unnecessary bloodshed and continuous violence which general public in Israel do not want. Basically hardliner rightwing politicians like Ariel Sharon, who is the chairman of Likud Party and the former premier Netanyahu have been adding fuel to the ignited fire.

Shimon Peres, 77, who won Nobel peace prize with Yasser Arafat, is currently holding the portfolio of the minister of regional cooperation. If Shimon Peres is backed by Meretz party, Ehud Barak, the present caretaker premier as he had tendered his resignation from the premiership and is forced to call an early election, stands little chance to be reelected. Ehud Barak could not deliver the goods as was expected of him since he was elected premier on a peace platform. During the one and a half years tenure of Ehud Barak there occurred more violence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip which caused death to more than 300 people, mostly Palestinians. And Israel was condemned by the world body for its brutal action on the innocent Palestinians. Therefore, if he backs out from the race, it is better for Israelis, and then Shimon Peres is likely to be elected the next Premier and the peace process be on the right track as he has been maintaining friendly relations with Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian leaders.

One wonders why a few Israeli politicians are behaving irresponsibly and irrationally with their Palestinian brethren in the first place. The history of Judaism points out that Jews in today's Israel were the most persecuted and tyrannized minority in Europe at the hands of the Nazis of Germany, fascists and communists and now they have turned out to be perpetrators of genocide against the Palestinians. Instead of directing their fury and resentment against those leaders in Europe they are hitting at innocent Palestinians whose crime in Jewish eyes is possibly that of having lived in Palestine for millennia before and after the Hebrews had established themselves in the territory for a comparatively brief period of its long history. The irony of the fact is that the Palestinians are an integral party of the Ummah which acknowledged Judaism as divine religion, its Torah as the law of Allah, and welcomed and protected the Jews wherever Islam was predominant. For example, in the first constitution of Al-Madinah prepared by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself the Jews were brought under one political entity. It would, therefore, be more appropriate for Jews to come to term with the wishes and aspirations of the Palestinians to resolve the problem once for all for the sake of the Jews and Palestinian community both inside and outside occupied Arab territories.

Despite cycle of violence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip one came across a news item, which speaks of progress made in the new round of negotiations in Washington. According to Israeli newspapers as reported by AFP news agency, the Jewish state has agreed to negotiate on the basis of the June 1967 borders (of the state when Israel captured the West Bank and the Gaza Strip along with other territories including the eastern sector of Jerusalem). They are reported to have come closer to an agreement on Jerusalem as well. This remains as a vital issue to the crux of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

The issue of return of Palestinians, who were expelled from their territory after the establishment of Jewish state in 1948 should not come as a possible hurdle for negotiations. Palestinians, who left their home in 1948 were settled in Europe, America and Arab countries and are apparently enjoying better life there. I met a number of Palestinians in Germany, who became the citizens after marrying German girls and are maintaining a comfortable living standard and there was no reason for them going back to Palestine state in the near or distant future. But there should be option for them to return to their homeland, which is an inalienable right of the Palestinians as has been the case in respect of Jews.

The Palestinian refugees of the 1948 war think to return to homes in areas west of the armistice lines those parts of Palestine. The PLO's decision to give assent to a two-state solution is implicitly acceptance of the principle that state and homeland can be construed as separate concepts for the Palestinians. Meanwhile, President Bill Clinton of America, who seems to seek a solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in order to have his name registered in history as a peacemaker before he leaves office on 20 January 2001, floated a compromise idea which reportedly involves Israel turning over control in Arab neighbourhoods of occupied East Jerusalem to the Palestinians along with the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound while in return Palestinians would waive the right of return of refugees, with only a small number allowed back to Israel for family reunification. President Clinton also suggested that Israel would withdraw from 95 per cent of the West Bank and 100 per cent of the Gaza Strip territories it has occupied since 1967 Arab-Israel war. The idea sounds logical and it seems to be an improvement over Oslo accord except the right of return of refugees. As pointed out in the preceding paras most of the refugees would not return after 52 years of exile. Therefore, the idea floated by President Clinton should be acceptable to both parties in the conflict.

Israelis should be told that Palestinians have made practically supreme sacrifice in accepting the existence of the state of Israel in spite of strong opposition from radical Arab countries. If necessary, Israel can also conduct a referendum on the proposal floated by President Clinton in order to resolve the question of final status of Palestinian territories allowing both Palestinians and Israelis to live in peace. This longdrawn manmade crisis could have been resolved long time back had both the sides in the dispute showed sign of a give and take policy. The 1994 Gaza-Jericho agreement between the PLO and the Israeli government is a shining example of cooperation.

First Total Lunar Eclipse of the Century
by Syed Ashraf Uddin

The first Total Lunar Eclipse of this century will take place today (January 9). The eclipse will be visible throughout the whole country. The eclipse will begin at 23th 43m 33s BST and will end at 04th 57m 37s [the next date]. The local circumstances of the eclipse for Dhaka city are given bellow:

Eclipse Prediction for Dhaka City Prepared by Astronomy Club of BUET

Latitude: 23°42'; Longitude: 90°25'; Elevation: 7m; Time Zone: +6hrs. GMT

EVENT	TIME [BST]	MOON'S AZIMUTH	MOON'S ALTITUDE
Moonrise	2001 Jan 09 17:00	65.3	-
Moon enters penumbra	2001 Jan 09 23:43.5	108.5	86.2
Moon enters umbra	2001 Jan 10 00:42	264.3	80.4
Moon enters totality	2001 Jan 10 01:20.5	272.2	65.4
Middle of eclipse	2001 Jan 10 02:20.5	274.4	58.5
Moon leaves totality	2001 Jan 10 03:59.1	280.7	36.8
Moon leaves umbra	2001 Jan 10 04:57.6	284.6	24.2

About this eclipse: The lunar eclipse occurs at the time of full moon when Sun-Earth-Moon lies in a straight line. At this time the shadow of the Earth falls over the Moon and reduces it's brightness. For a total lunar eclipse the Moon must be within the Umbra of the shadow.

The totality of January 9, 2001 eclipse will last for 62 minutes and will be observable from Eastern Hemisphere [Europe, Africa and Asia]. The Moon will not pass through the centre of the shadow axis but north of it. At the time of mid eclipse the southern limb of Moon will pass 6.1 arcminutes north of Moon. In contrast, the Moon's northern limb will be 6.5 arcminutes from the northern edge of the umbra and 39.5 arcminutes from the shadow centre. Thus, the northern sections of the Moon will appear much brighter than the southern part that will lie deeper in the shadow. The Penumbral magnitude is 2.18707 and the Umbral magnitude is 1.9468.

What to do: If you want to observe this eclipse you should go to a dark place where from the western part of the sky is clearly visible. Also take a low power binocular [less than 20x]. The Moon will be at the western sky during totality. If you are an amateur astronomer you can do some valuable work. Here are some tips:

Observing the Umbra: The Penumbral phase is not so interesting as no appreciable change on the brightness of Moon occurs during this phase. As soon as the totality begins the Moon falls under the Umbra and a red-orange colour is seen on the Moon surface. Observe whether the edge of the Umbra is sharp or gradual. Also observe the shape of Umbra [it should be circular which is a proof of Earth's round shape].

Estimating Brightness of the eclipse: The relative brightness of the lunar eclipse is determined visually by using a simple scale established by Danjun. This scale is based on both the brightness and the colour of the eclipse. This scale is based on both the brightness and the color of the eclipse. This estimate should be made at the time of mid eclipse [about 02h20.5m for Dhaka], by observing the Moon's disk either with the naked eye or with very low magnification [7x50 binocular being ideal]. The Moon's brightness varies greatly from eclipse of eclipse, which would tell a lot about the state of the Earth's upper atmosphere if only we understood it better.

The Danjun scale is given below:

Number	Appearance of the Moon
0	Very dark eclipse, the Moon is very difficult to see.
1	Dark eclipse, with grayish to brown colour.
2	Dark red or rusty colour, details are difficult to see in the disk.
3	Brick red, the umbra often has a brighter, yellowish border.
4	Bright orange or coppery eclipse, with bright bluish border.

Another method of determining the brightness of an eclipse is to estimate the apparent stellar magnitude of the Moon, again at mid eclipse. The simplest way is to observe the Moon with reversed binocular so that the Moon appears almost pointlike. This allows Moon's magnitude to be compared more easily with nearby stars or planets. During this eclipse the winter Milky Way and constellations will be well placed for viewing. Castor and Pollux lie 8-10 degrees north of the eclipsed Moon, while the Beehiv cluster (M44) in Cancer is 17° to the east. Jupiter, Saturn and the Pleiades from an attractive trio in Taurus, about fifty degrees west of the Moon.

Recording times of contact of the Umbra with Lunar craters: Crater timings are used to determine the enlargement of the umbra due to the effects of refraction of the upper atmosphere of the Earth, investigating the geometry of the Umbra, especially it's oblateness, and to determine the change in the height of the atmosphere throughout each eclipse. The values of % umbral enlargement and umbral oblatness are used to form an improved lunar eclipse ephemeris for application to cannons of lunar eclipse. The desired accuracy of the timings is ± 6 seconds, but should be reported to one second or better if possible. To assist in your umbral edge estimate and recognition of features to be timed, use a low magnification so that a full image of the Moon is seen in your telescope's field of view. In your report, mention your full name, telescope aperture, magnification, and sky conditions. Just before the eclipse, be sure to set your watch accurately sing radio or telephone time signals.

Observation camp: Members of Astronomy Club of BUET will observe the eclipse and will perform scientific experiments. Besides Bangladesh Astronomical Association will arrange a public observation camp at Kalabagan playground.

Your observation report can be sent to: saushuvo@aitlbd.net

Here we say some predicted times of Immersion and Emersion of some selected craters.

BST of Immersion	Crater name	BST of Emersion	Crater name
00:45	Grimaldi	03:02	Aristarcus
00:49	Billy	03:05	Plato
00:57	Kepler	03:06	Grimaldi
01:04	Tycho	03:13	Billy
01:26	Plato	03:29	Menelaus

You should be familiar with those features before the eclipse.

Photographing the eclipse: To anticipate the Moon's size on film, divide the focal length of the camera lens or telescope (in, say, millimeters) by 103. An ordinary camera with a 50-mm lens will from an image just 0.5 mm across which leaves very little room for detail. A telephoto lens or telescope can provide a much bigger image. A 200-mm f/10 telescope (focal length 2,000mm) will form a Moon image 19 mm across, easily centered in a 35-mm film frame. For optimum results, disable the camera's automatic metering system. To capture partial phases of the eclipse on ISO 400 film, try a ¼-second exposure at f/8 so as to "burn in" the Moon's bright segment and reveal the sharp edge of the Earth's umbral shadow. During totality you'll have to boost the exposure to 3 seconds at f/4 if the eclipse is "bright" and a full minute or more if it is "dark." When you are making exposures longer than a second or two, a star-tracking camera mount is essential to avoid a blurred image of the Moon. Above all, include a wide range of exposures on either side of these starting points.

The writer is Moderator, Astronomy Club of BUET.

HAVE A NICE DAY
Dr. Rubaiul Murshed

All health information to keep you up to date

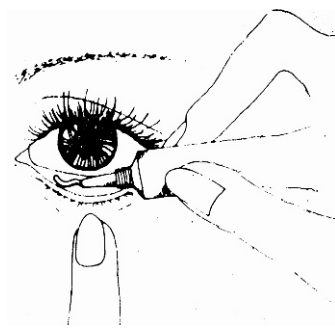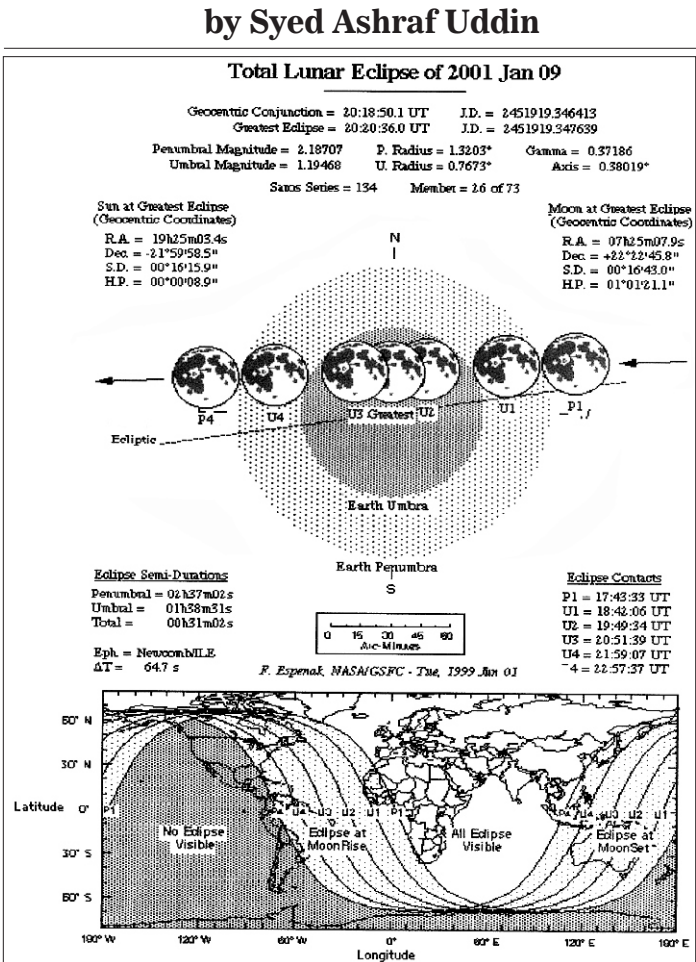## Aged first

Fever may be a serious symptom after 65

If you're over 65 and develop a fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, see a doctor immediately, especially if you have diabetes or a lung disorder. You're likely to have a serious illness which may require hospitalization, such as pneumonia, a urinary tract infection, or sepsis (a bacterial infection which can lead to blood poisoning, a life-threatening condition). A fever is one of the ways your body fights infection. However, older people's immune systems are often slow to begin the battle.

When an older person does have a fever (a sure sign the body is fighting off infection), doctors know that something serious is going on. If you feel a little fuzzy-headed or hotter than usual, take your temperature. If it's 100° or higher, don't worry about whether you should feed a fever of starve it. Just see your doctor immediately.

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Self-help

How to use eye ointments properly

● Wash hands thoroughly before applying ointment.
● Sit with your head tilted backward.
● With a finger, pull the lower lid of your eye down and look towards the ceiling.
● Squeeze the ointment from the tube along the inside margin of the lower eyelid. Do not touch the eye or eyelid with the tip of the ointment tube.
● Blink several times. Close the eye (do not rub the eye) and wipe off any excess ointment from the lashes.

Tomorrow : Commonly asked questions.

Garfield ®   by Jim Davis

James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY HORAK