

#### DHAKA SATURDAY MARCH 17, 2001

## **Bangabandhu's birthday**

Prevent misuse of his name

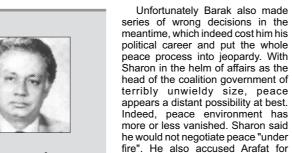
ODAY is the 81st birth anniversary of the founder of our State and the supreme leader of our Liberation War, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. But for him and his lifelong political struggle, Bangladesh would not have become an independent State in 1971. He devoted his whole life in a single-minded goal to work for the political, economic and cultural emancipation of the people of what was then East Pakistan. For his beliefs he suffered nearly a decade and half of jail terms and life long oppression of various sorts. From the very inception of Pakistan in 1947 he devoted himself to the task of establishing the rights of the Bangalees. From then on he participated and later led almost all the civic and political movements that occurred in what later became Bangladesh. In February 1966 he presented his famous 6-point programme which caught the imagination of our people and made him the foremost leader of the people. The infamous Agartala Conspiracy case, in which he was charged with conspiring to break up Pakistan further increased his popularity and made him the beloved Bangabandhu. His famous speech of 7th March 1971 clearly indicated the path towards our independence struggle. In independent Bangladesh he can be credited with giving us a most forward looking and liberal Constitution, which tragically he himself destroyed by making a one party State.

His patriotism was exemplary. His love for his people was rare, and his capacity to face oppression, almost inexhaustible. There was something electrifying about his presence that energised all who came in contact with him. Today we salute his memory and express our deepest sorrow that he was so brutally murdered in the prime of his life after making so much sacrifice for the people. This paper had always condemned the protection given to his killers in the shameful indemnity provided in our Constitution and hopes that his killers will be given the punishment they deserve, following the due process of law.

Today, as we remember him for his unrivalled contribution in the creation of independent Bangladesh, we also cannot help but express our deep concern at how his name is being abused for selfish and political ends and how his legacy is being distorted and maligned to serve personal ends.

**MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD** 

IOLENCE must stop to resume any peace negotiations but talks must also be held in order to find ways to stop violence. But who acts first? Violence started from Sharon's act his visit to the holy sites. While discussing the issue a senior family friend who studies international affairs a lot said: it was not necessary for the Palestinians to react so much on Sharon's visit to the holy sites Palestinians could have simply ignored Sharon's visit. What they should have done was to ask Sharon to take off his shoes while entering the holy sites as other visitors do. What he wanted to say was that this would have reduced Sharon to the status of a simple visitor to the holy sites. Our senior friend's comments carry a lot of sense as this visit. though apparently intended to convey Israel's sovereignty over Jerusalem including the holy land, would not have made any difference in terms of the peace negotiations where Barak's decisions mattered and not Sharon's. Indeed, the Palestinians' instant reaction has cost them heavily in terms of life and indeed elevated this man to such high position in Israel that he is now in charge of region's peace something he is guite unfamiliar with.



appears a distant possibility at best. Indeed, peace environment has more or less vanished. Sharon said he would not negotiate peace "under fire". He also accused Arafat for fomenting violence and said,

Peace talks must resume

the circumstances. Arafat cannot stop people's protests and associated violence as long as the blockade remains in place. The United States also called upon Israeli government to 'ease economic restrictions and take measures to prop up the Palestinian authority'. It is reportedly in very bad shape financially. One of the measures mentioned was to release millions of dollars tax revenue collected and withheld by Israel because of

Arafat again spoke of the peace of the brave. He said. " Our hearts are open and our hands are stretched out for the peace of the brave. We are ready to move forward in the negotiations with the Israeli government.".. " I call upon all Israeli leaders, regardless of their line, to move forward toward this peace for the sake of our children and their children, for our future and their future. The peace can be achieved and can be a real actual alternative to the Intefada. Jerusalem Post reported state of daily killing imposed on us."

What Sharon has assured is that he would not reoccupy the land already returned to the Palestinians. But one cannot be so sure about that too; he may do it if violence escalates which is likely as many Palestinians and particularly Hamas members and other radicals do not trust Sharon at all. They feel that only violence can bring Israelis to their senses and they show Lebanon as the instant case. However, it is widely believed that Israeli coalition government,

cannot expect much from Sharon.

the US, Russia and the EU to take a stand against Israeli actions against the Palestinian people and specially against Israeli blockade.

The Secretary General of the Arab League Ismet A Meguid in his opening statement warned the US, EU and other countries against transfer of their Embassies to Jerusalem. Secretary of State Colin Powell while briefing the Congress last week said that President Bush was committed to moving "the embassy to the capital of Israel, which is Jerusalem." This has created serious reaction in the Arab world. Such a statement is undoubtedly against the spirit of UN resolutions 242 and 338 which put East Jerusalem as a part of the occupied territory and which must be vacated. Therefore. Jerusalem issue must be resolved first in an acceptable manner before any action is taken by any country to shift its Embassy to Jerusalem which is now undoubtedly a disputed territory. Unless the US, which has been the prime broker of peace in the area, takes these UN resolutions and sensitivities attached to the holy areas into serious consideration, the situation may spin out of control any time. The factor that created such a dangerous situation in the area has installed himself in a terribly magnified and powerful form. So the area is in a critical juncture. The international community must act cautiously and appropriately. A wrong step by any country of the international community may ignite the already volatile situation. This time it may not be a "Desert Storm" coming from across the Atlantic, it could be an indigenous "Desert Tornado" arising from the desert itself that could blow up all nearby establishments dear to

# SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Secretary of State Colin Powell while briefing the Congress last week said that President Bush was committed to moving "the embassy to the capital of Israel, which is Jerusalem." This has created serious reaction in the Arab world. Such a statement is undoubtedly against the spirit of UN resolutions 242 and 338 which put East Jerusalem as a part of the occupied territory and which must be vacated... The international community must act cautiously and appropriately. A wrong step by any country of the international community may ignite the already volatile situation.

believe that Chairman Arafat is in control of his forces and, as you do know, most of those terrorist activities are carried out by Arafat's forces, or the security forces, or even the closest presidential quard [force 17]." Such statements can only make things worse.

However, Arafat did not react directly to these accusations. He demanded that Sharon should ask Israeli Security Forces (IDF) to lift the siege of the Palestinian territory which Arafat termed as the " collective punishment". If the settlements are left aside, then the Intefada is really against the IDF presence. So the IDF is the main target. Once the targets are removed, the Intefada is likely to end. Unfortunately Sharon as usual

set his own terms for any talk, which is impossible for Arafat to meet under

that the US was also of the view that blockades would not prevent terror attacks. This has been the view of many but Israel always goes for the blockade of Palestinian areas whenever an attack takes place. This indeed aggravates the situation. However, there was a suggestion for a meeting with a view to finding ways to lift the siege which could lead to reduction of violence, but now it seems that Sharon would not like to talk to Arafat before he meets President Bush in Washington, which may take place on March 20.

Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) met on March 10 for the first time since the Intefada began. Several members could not attend could be resumed the PLC meeting because of denial of their entry into the Palestinian areas by Israeli Security Forces. While addressing the PLC President

to resume the negotiations from where it was left off in last Camp David and later in Taba. He also referred to UN resolutions 242, 338 resolutions on land for peace and 194 relating to the rights of the Palestinians to return home which is now in Israel. But Prime Minister Sharon's position remained where it was before. He said he would "negotiate on the basis of the written and signed agreements and obligations between us." He ruled out negotiations on understandings reached at Camp David and Taba. But his precondition of stopping violence remained before any peace talk

None can expect quick resumption of the peace talk under Sharon. The Palestinians rightly feel that they

He also called on Israeli government with too many odd political elements in it, may not last long. Thus the future of Israeli politics is also very uncertain. This may affect the region as a whole.

The Arabs have started meeting frequently to take stock of the situation. Arab Foreign Ministers now meeting in Cairo are preparing the summit to be held in Amman on March 27. There is a serious demand from the Arab Foreign Ministers for an international protection force for the Palestinians and decided to ask the UN to take immediate steps in the matter. President Arafat have also been asking for the International protection force for some time clearly signifying that it is the Palestinians who are subjected to Israeli military onslaught resulting in deaths of over 400 Palestinians Arab Foreign Ministers also asked

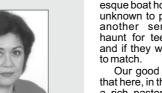
### Watching Dhaka go to the frogs There was Gulshan, for instance, a

Global warming and Annan's message

Set up interministerial task force

N our view the most important message that the Secretary General of the United Nations left for us to ponder about concerns global warming. In his speech at the ICC last Wednesday, he said, "Sadly Bangladesh figures prominently on the world stage, it is expected to suffer more than any other place on Earth, the devastating effects of climate change...sea-level rise to cause the disappearance of vast swaths of this region... It suggests that crop production and aqua-culture would be threatened, and with them the livelihood and food security of many of the delta's inhabitants.

The question is, do we understand the underlying meaning of Kofi Annan's message based on the most recent findings of a UN expert body's report in which Bangladeshi scientists also took part? In fact, our own experts have been crying hoarse for several years now about the dangers we face from this unprecedented natural phenomenon. From her brief comments on the occasion, following the Secretary General's speech, our environment minister did not seem to have any clue as to what Annan was talking about. The UN report clearly points to the fact that vast areas of southern Bangladesh are likely to go under the sea. Seawater will be pushed deep into the rest of the surviving territory devastating our sweet water reserve and



ALMAS ZAKIUDDIN

F one were to throw a frog into boiling water, it would leap out immediately. That same creature would not even notice,

however, if the pot contained cool water and was slowly brought to the boil. The frog would lie there, unmindful of its dangerous predicament, until one fine day it would shrivel up and die.

I don't fancy frogs, (my apologies to the French) but these days I like this city even less. It is a city that I could, in a manner of speaking, have once called my own.

I was brought up in Dhaka in an age when people went for long drives to Mirpur and thought of Road 27 in Dhanmondi as a brave new frontier. A fresh-faced young boy on

'model' town that boasted a picturesque boat house on the lake which, unknown to parents, served as yet another sensual topographical haunt for teenagers with crushes and if they were lucky, heartthrobs

Our good fortune lav in the fact that here, in the 'new' Dhaka, amidst a rich pastoral landscape, the air was fresh and the streets were wide and clean. We had left the old town behind, said goodbye to narrow concrete lanes and crowded shops, so that my mother could rear cows in

According to my doctor, the level of chronic illnesses here should not surprise us at all. "The amazing thing is", he said, "that so many are

not ill' Like most people, one tends to shrug off cynical statements like these. Or, if one is momentarily Or. one is momentarily these nonplussed, the desire to avoid the unpleasant is so powerful that one turns away and contemplates something more exciting. Like waking up with a 20-inch waistline. Or the possibility of Shah Rukh Khan dropping in for tea one day. (My little fantasies, forgive me.)

Why has Dhaka degenerated into an insidious health trap?

Experts have been warning everyone for a heck of a long time that the city cannot support so many people without sustaining damage. Not unless drastic steps are taken to change the way of life, the transport system, sanitation and to curb pollution.

Experts have been warning us that we have been hit by a silent disaster. Levels of carbon monoxide, lead, sulphur and toxic wastes are so high in the air and water that the damage has already been done.

been importing a large supply of scooters, mostly from across the border where the authorities have very wisely decided to ban the wretched things outright. So what happened to the institution that broke the law? To my knowledge it got no more than a symbolic rap on the knuckles. So much for government assurances.

If that sounds too pessimistic, take a serious look around the city. Dhaka is not only crawling with scooters, but also many look quite unwilling to being 'phased' out in the near future. Indeed, many scooters

poison every day. Not strong enough to kill them quickly. Not weak enough to do them no harm.

manv

Two years ago, I could have raced up The Daily Star stairway without lurching like a beached whale. These days, I make judicious pit stops along the way, and pretend I have paused because my foot hurts. Not very long ago, I used to boast that I could eat nails for breakfast. Now my digestive powers are as reliable as a politician's word of honour.

Being chronically unwell, but never on one's deathbed, is a silly way to be, but alas this has become a way of life.

My hope is that one day the spell will break. People will work voluntarily to end the poisoning of healthy bodies. There will be no need to coerce, to warn of hellfire and brimstone. Governments, politicians and business interests will think and act like, and in the interests of, ordinary people

One day, perhaps, people will stop behaving like frogs

ERRATA

In our yesterday's issue the names five years? of columns and authors were If a home dropped on would react wildly, no doubt. But the problem is not just that we have lousy leaders, or unscrupulous businessmen, or that we are being bombarded by noxious gases. The problem is that this city has gone to the frogs. The people of this city are being boiled alive slowly. They are being given tiny, deadly doses of caused.

IF YOU ASK ME

The people of this city are being boiled alive slowly. They are being given tiny, deadly doses of poison every day. Not strong enough to kill them quickly. Not weak enough to do them no harm...Being chronically unwell, but never on one's deathbed, is a silly way to be, but alas this has become a way of life.

our backyard (a stone's throw from where the five-star Sheraton Hotel now stands), my father's Hillman Minx could hit all of 40 m.p.h. on 'Mymensingh' Road, and families could together build a perfect subur-

That we have allowed our dreams to be polluted might be uttina it n

must be faced. Dhaka has the same level of air pollution as Mexico City and if one speaks to anyone who has ever visited the latter, it is a horrific experience

Around me, people complain of chronic headaches, aches, pains and stomach problems. A friend of doen

But serious, depressing truths Pollution is eroding the body's resistance, wearing down healthy tissue and increasing vulnerability to disease. It is hampering mental

growth especially in children, and causing damage to unborn babies. No one, to my knowledge, has done an assessment but I am convinced that chronic ailments are also harming productivity, reducing working hours and limiting creative output. The government has been saying that it is dealing with the problem. Quite some time ago it declared it would 'phase' out the two-stroke auto-rickshaw, a major cause of the problem, over a five year span. That seemed to be something of a start, until it was revealed that a local institution has

EDITOR TO THE

sport an unquestionably new look, almost as though they had been freshly constructed and their internal bodies or chassis had been recently procured. Where are these scooters coming from? Why are they being allowed to live for another hour, never mind another

destroying our aquatic life.

The facts are obvious. We need to immediately set up an inter-ministerial task force to assess the implications of the latest UN report and immediately start taking steps to mitigate the destructive impact of sea-level rise. For several years now our government has been ignoring what our scientists have been saying. Hopefully, it will wake up now that the Secretary General himself has added his voice to it.

whom I proceeded to develop my first teenage crush happened to live on that particular road, but that is by no means the only reason why its seductive topography has remained etched in my memory.

Dhanmondi was one of several suburbs that formed 'new' as opposed to 'old' Dhaka. There were several other extensions to the city.

Take the predicament faced by children. My doctor told me this week that a visiting German surgeon who was operating on a four-month-old infant had been shocked to discover that the infant's lungs had 'aged' prematurely to the level of a 40-year-old's lungs back in Germany.

and nightmarish nose bleeds that display no inclination of responding serious doses of antibiotics Nearly every other person one meets these days complains of lingering ailments that are undoubtedly linked to dirty air, dirty water, dirty city life.

Who is to blame, one wonders.

nadvertently not inserted in respective post editorials. "The budget speech" was written by Hasnat Abdul Hye under his column"In my view" and "Sermons on the wall" was written by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan under his column "cross talk". We deeply regret the inconvenience thus

HE EDITOR

#### TO THE

#### Medical malpractice

The views expressed on the above topic ( 'To the Editor' March 11 and 13) reflect a sense of frustration among ordinary people at the standard of medical care. I am a member of the younger generation and I find the attitude of doctors in this country to be patronising and arrogant. They treat their patients as though they are all retarded. When they talk to young people, especially young women, doctors adopt a very lofty attitude. Sometimes they are taken aback by the questions we ask about matters to do with our health. especially reproductive health or about sensitive things that have psychological elements, like depression or being under duress of some kind.

My friends in western countries do not face the same sort of attitude from doctors. Why is this so? I think it is because people in the west, or even in neighbouring countries like India, Thailand or Singapore, are much more aware of the problems that young people go through when they are growing up Since there are many cultural

taboos about women in this country, it is difficult to find rational answers to important questions from our families. Even our own mothers are shy about talking to us. We search for impartial and sympathetic treatment from doctors. But they treat us the same way as other adults tend to

#### **Teenaged student** Dhanmondi, Dhaka

#### Taliban act

I vehemently protest the demolition of two ancient statues of Buddha by the Taliban. Many countries have protested this act. The Indian Prime Minister has termed it 'barbaric'. agree with him. But he should also condemn the fanatic activities of Hindu fundamentalists in his own

country. As we all know, they demolished Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and wish to erect a Hindu temple in its place. Mr Vajpayee should take necessary steps to stop this from nappening

It is ironic that the world conscience was relatively silent when the irreplaceable ancient maiestic mosques of Bosnia were destroyed by the Christian Serbs and their remains were thrown into the sea to prevent the relics from being used to rebuilt the mosques.

All such acts in the name of religion should be condemned and be stopped once and for all. The movement against the acts of destruction by the Taliban should be expanded to include protests against all such vandalism throughout the world.

**Tabibul Islam** Mirpur, Dhaka

#### **Dateline request**

As one of your regular readers, please allow me to tell you that your daily indeed excels in all respect and that its new look appears excellent and international. However, what is missing is the date. As we understand, the date of a news item or a report and that of a newspaper are not the same. Putting a date beside the source of a news item or a report is, therefore, essential. Carry on your excellent job and consider putting a date beside your news items and reports.

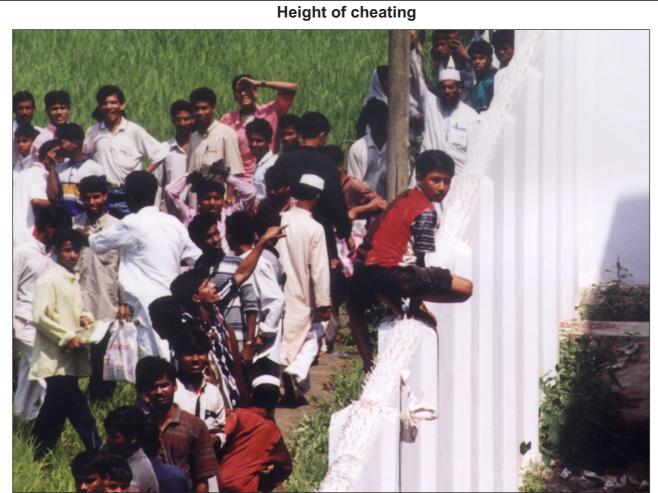
M.A. Obaydullah Banani, Dhaka

### Utility service bills The process of settlement of utility

bills is so complicated and cumbersome that it has a definite discouraging effect on consumers. Yet, consumers line up in front of the

## PHOTORIAL

cluding date. place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information i



#### STAR PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

As the SSC examinations began yesterday across the country, cheating raised its ugly head once again. A youngster was caught scaling the wall of the Chandina Redwan Ahmad School, Comilla, with the suspected intention of carrying dubious 'guides' for candidates inside the school premises, while 'suppliers' waited outside. We need a combined onslaught from the authorities and civil society to eradicate this evil practice amongst the younger generation!

banks to pay their bills, in spite of the fact that most banks do not provide designated space for their ease and comfort. Of course there are defaulters -- but they are not the ordinary consumers who not only show eagerness to pay for the services they enjoy but also undergo sufferings while making

these payments. The problem was examined indepth by the Public Administration Reforms Commission (PARC) appointed by the Government, which made core recommendations, including the introduction of One Stop Bill Payment System, an acceptable billing date to make payment of bills easier, launching a pilot project initially in a limited area of Dhaka and subsequently all over the country. The PARC recommended that the Ministry of Finance should be directed to take necessary action towards implementation of the proposed system Nearly three years have passed since the recommendations were submitted. But they have not yet been implemented. I believe that the recommendations were accepted by the government. The people have a right to know why the recommendations, formulated after spending considerable amount of taxpayers money, are not being implemented. Have the recommendations

been found unworkable? If so the government should say so. Or like all other recommendations towards administrative reform this particular one is also going be shelved? Then why was the PARC established at all?

**M.Hafizuddin Khan,** *Uttara, Dhaka* 

#### Shutting down ISD lines

I was astonished to see that the T&T Board has disconnected the ISD lines of 67 Internet Service Provid-

ers on the pretext that they have been using these lines to allow their subscribers to call overseas. According to the T & T Board, the ISPs were 'misusing' their ISD lines and thus the government was losing a substantial amount of revenue. The T & T Board is well aware

that people do not use any ISD line to talk with people overseas. They use the Internet lines to do so and there are hundreds of types of software available to do so. All you need is a microphone and speaker and the required software. Perhaps the ISPs use these lines to maintain a link with the people in the countries where their "actual" servers are. As far as I know they have their "main" servers in Korea, Thailand Singapore, and so on.

Why then has the T&T Board one after the ISPs? Perhaps the Board is against the technological advances being made via the Internet which allows consumers access to global communication. This is something the T&T should embrace instead of which it is trying to hold it back.

Since the digital telephone stems have been introduced in Bangladesh, a group of unscrupulous and dishonest personnel in the T&T Board have been deprived of an illegitimate income. I know several people who have been approached with the offer that if they paid an official a certain amount per month, they would be able to make overseas calls for free. And I also know some of those people, who refused, were forced to agree to the proposal, after receiving bills of Tk.10,000 or more at the end of the month. Those owners who can, have also protected themselves by

locking their lines using a password. The government should look into this matter and the entire sector mmediately

An Observer