# TOTHE EDITOR

# A few days of pollution free air



On January 30, the Auto-rickshaw Sramik Union called a day long strike in Dhaka city protesting the government's decision to remove faulty auto-rickshaws and tempos from the city. They also declared that if the government does not change the decision the strike would go on indefinitely.

Oh, what a relief it was! We thank the Auto-rickshaw Sramik Union for declaring this strike as it gave us a chance to breathe fresh air for at least a couple of days (as the strike was ultimately withdrawn in a couple of days). We thank the government for the steps they have taken to

combat air pollution. They must be relentless in their efforts to create a pollution free country and we hope the government will not hesitate to take necessary steps in this regard and would not compromise with anything or anyone.

tion sector can help to develop

reading habit ("Read, to enjoy and

learn"). A quick survey would reveal

how many middle class families

Clubs, later extended into mail-

order purchase through books-by-

mail catalogues (use the local

websites also and pay by e-cash). In

The debates over the Father of

the Nation, Declarer of Inde-

pendence issues have again

started fermenting anew with

the change brought by the

BNP-alliance government in

the school text books. It seems

that we, as a nation, are des-

tined to be in the vicious circle

of these age-old debates

forever. Our garrulous politi-

cians and their coteries will

never let the destitute people

of this country get out of this

religious and ethnic!

citizen of this country.

circle.

The same old debate anew

Why did we fight our Libera- The never ending debate

on Bengalis, and still, even in the capital city of ours, we are burn-

ing people to death. How sadly are we treating our minorities both

'minority' will be no more in our vocabulary. After the last general

elections we have cowed our religious minority to shrink into no

The word 'independence' does not work as opium on the hun-

gry millions, as some of the politicians and their pet intellectuals

think of. In spite of this reality, what an unquenchable thirst our

politicians and intellectuals do have for the debate on Father of

We had a notion that in independent Bangladesh, the word

The next stage is to open Book

have home/family libraries.

Nur Jahan Chittagong

#### The nation wants to know the correct statistics

There is a big controversy prevailing in Bangladesh between the previous government and the present one. The previous government the Awami League is claiming that before stepping down from power, they have left sufficient foreign currency reserve, enough for running the government smoothly They are claiming the same as far as food reserve is concerned.

On both the issues the present government is providing a complete opposite picture. The present Finance Minister is claiming that, his government started with an alarming low level of foreign exchange.

Now I have two questions and I want answers from some authentic sources

How much foreign currency reserve the last government i.e. Bangladesh Awami League left behind when they stepped down? I will prefer the statistics of the last three months.

How much food reserve the last Awami League government has left prior to their stepping down and ain I will prefe three months

I will appreciate if someone provides the statistics, mentioning the sources.

Kh. S. Omar Faruk California, USA

# Home-library culture

It was heartening to read the news (February 3) that one local publisher has published in Dhaka Naipaul's 'The Enigma of Arrival. This is an encouraging trend for the book lovers who like to build up personal library at home

The target of the publishers and

distributors should be the middle class market, because it is the biggest market, but its purchasing power is low, as the personal purchase of books for one's own library is still a luxury in the LDCs. Also the number of small public libraries evenly distributed in the country is too under-developed as yet; including mobile libraries in vans and launches for the countryside read-

The NGO network in the educa-

Student politics, Bangladesh style

As a former teacher in Bangladesh and a current Professor of a

university in the United States, I am deeply concerned about the

excessive politicisation in the seats of higher learning in Bangla-

desh. Excessive politicisation among the teachers and students

at the universities in Bangladesh has exacerbated the level of

violence by creating a reign of terror and disrupting the learning

government leads to a change in the administrative positions in

the universities, and a change in the control of dormitories. It is

tragic to see the university professors involved in partisan poli-

tics, which is a characteristic of politicians. Excessive

Bangladesh is the only country in the world where a change in

atmosphere in academic institutions in Bangladesh.

to buy imported in original edition. India has established a foundation for the paperback book industry. which is quite popular.

Another venture is missing the publication of annual anthologies by Bangladeshi writers, both in Bangla and English. The government has to develop the Translation service in the country with the guidance of UNESCO. The publishing industry cannot be established quickly in the third world without technical cooperation of international donors.

The library book market in Bangladesh can be developed, with a huge base population of 130 million and recent literary rate soaring to the 50 per cent mark. The local publishers have to contract jointventure terms with foreign suppliers for cheaper reprints in the developing countries. Cheaper books create more readers, if the distribution network is wide in depth and

Abul M Ahmad

### Non citizen

businessmen As a patriotic citizen the growth of a new class of non-citizen business-

men has been bothering me. Many of us can vouch for the presence of hundreds of Indian citizens either directly or affiliated involved inn our country's busi-

In some instances they just borrow existing business names or enter into so-called sleeping partnerships.

Not that we are free from guilt either. Seeing easy money many of us gobble up opportunities without caring about country's interest. However it is the lack of institutional process that gave rise to such situations. Yet these citizens, almost all Indians move, make money and take it away at will. Yet:

(1) Bangladeshis do not enjoy any reciprocal acceptance either at the public or private level in India. (2) Bangladesh is losing enormous amount of revenue to underworld

remittances (3) Unlawful businesses such as these are detrimental to national interest, which the government is supposed to protect against.

ment of her first 100-days seemed to have one glaring omission. While the desire for increased accountability is really nice, actual accountability seems to be another matter. Have you forgotten the government's handling of the minority rights abuse issue? Is it that low in relevance?

The new government would have been better served had it initially not denied what took place and had it actually taken some real steps to protect innocent minorities. One would expect a second term PM and her experienced government to be aware of PR and image issues, even if it could care less about a secular Bangladesh, as is being alleged by many.

Anyway, by now all that is old news. One can understand why the government is the way it is. We have never had an administration that was accountable during its term, that word is not even in our national psyche. Perhaps this government will somehow find the strength to change that unfortunate pattern.

The Daily Star seems to have forgotten this as well.

Rafiq Ahmed Chicago, USA

# Gas is not only gas

I have carefully read the article by Professor Rafigur Rahman published in your esteemed daily on January 25, 2002. I fully endorse the views of Dr Rahman. He has realistically approached the gas issue and has analysed it from different practical angels.

Technical experts analyse things from bare technical angles and tend to overlook the fact that gas is not merely gas, it is linked to various strategic issues. He has rightly pointed out that saying 'NO' to selling gas is the easiest and safest route because that is how the current wind is like.

I would like to thank The Daily Star for publishing the article and I look forward to reading such objective articles in the future. It seems selling gas could be Bangladesh' gateway to many other possibilities, so let's give a patient hearing to both the sides and not be carried away by the prevailing wind, specially on such an important national topic.

Osman Chowdhury

How can President George Bush call the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat a terrorist and term South Korea, Iran and Iraq as 'an axis of

If the Americans can struggle for their statehood and wage a war of independence from 1783 against the British colonial rule under George Washington how and why President George Bush define and classify freedom fighters Yasser

#### bush

I am sad to comment on a letter by Nasir Siddiqui under the heading "Arabic speaking CSWS?"(Arabic speaking Commercial Sexual Workers).

Firstly, this 'Caption' is not a civil one. Mr. Siddiqui's anger is venomous, which appears surprising and abnormal. So. I read the letter in question of January, 28 under the title "Make Arabic Compulsory in

#### **Objective reporting** of murders

I am a regular and keen reader of your esteemed daily since 1996. Recently I find it a little disturbing that your reporting is sometimes devoid of objectivity. For example, on January 28, on two occasions, you have mentioned that two BNP leaders/activists were murdered by some unknown assailmuch in power with two-thirds of majority.

Now it is anybody's guess if the election result was just the opposite then what the AL would do. Nasir. on e-mail

#### Bangladesh's Test status

Some of the former Pakistani Test players suggested that, as Bangla-

desh is losing the Test inside three

days, so the ICC should withdraw

the Test status given of Bangladesh.

Here I would like to mention what

the former English Test player Bill

Edrich had said in the early '60s. At

that time the three countries namely,

Pakistan, India and New Zealand

were playing very badly in the Test

series but were also whitewashed in

some of the series. After seeing the

poor performance Bill Edrich said

that, "Pakistan, India and New

Zealand should play three day tests

instead of five days.'

New Eskaton, Dhaka

Iqbal Ahmed

They were not only losing the

# The Daily Star letter column: a place to express our views

If spring is the right season for the flowers to bloom then *The* Daily Star is the right place to express our views. It's a matter of great pride that this newspaper from a very conservative society have the audacity to publish very divergent views from its readers from around the world. This rare quality has lined up a galaxy of readers with different ideas and views. A number of very sensitive ideas on Islam, purdah

and the interpretation of Islam as a religion has TO THE EDITOR already been published and aroused deep interest among the thoughtful readers.

Looking at the history of the French Revolution of 1789, when thoughts played a very vital role in the making of that great event, The Daily Star is playing that role now. In this difficult times when the very existence of the entire humanity is in question thoughts guided by pragmatism and reality is a must for our survival. This will help us not to be overwhelmed by confusion and orthodoxism. This will help us to overcome and shine. This will show us the right path and guide us to our ultimate destiny.

Akbar Hussain

Toronto, Canada

I have been reading The Daily Star for years. No doubt that this

daily is playing a pioneering role in our society. I can still remember the time when I used to read another two English dailies and one day my father brought a newspaper that looked a bit less attractive than the others. But when I began going through it I was surprised with its materials and never gave up reading The Daily

In my opinion, the best part of this daily is its editorial and the letter section. In the letter

section people express their opinion and these letters often make some other people express their opinion as well. However, I have noticed that some writers often indulge themselves in useless debates such as what is Islam, whether we practise hijab or not etc.

The letter section is for discussing our national and sometimes personal problems that can be solved by constructive writings and meaningful thoughts. There is no space for any kind of debate that can lead to another debate. I really don't understand why some people indulge themselves in unnecessary debates. I request the writers please write 'To the Editor' but write construc-

Tarun

ants/miscreants or intra-party rivalry

one Awami League

leader/supporter or activist was

murdered allegedly by BNP sup-

porters. I am wondering how you are

so sure that in the case of the mur-

dered AL leader, it was allegedly

committed by BNP supporters and

in BNP's case, by unknown miscre-

ants and not allegedly by AL sup-

porters? If you are not sure who was

the attacker, it must be applicable in

both cases but you have only sin-

gled out the BNP and not the Awami

League. I am sure it goes against

the very spirit of responsible and

neutral reporting and earnestly

hope your esteemed newspaper

dangerous signal that, after being

defeated heavily and resoundingly,

how the AL goons dare to murder so

many BNP supporters/leaders and

Also the fact that BNP is very

Secondly, it also gives us a very

would avoid this in future.

activists after the election.

In the other report you said that

Arafat and the Palestinian people as terrorists? Bush's observation on Iran, Iraq and South Korea's is also malicious, fabricated and inten-

The USA had made a world-wide campaign and propaganda against the former communist USSR and termed the country as USA's number one enemy and an obstacle to world peace but now when there is no more USSR has the USA established and maintained peace. tranquillity and human rights in different parts of the world? Why and how are the people of Palestine, Kashmir, Iraq, Chechnya and Afghanistan suffering for decades?

To us the USA is no more 'a friend

30-years is enough time, as

our Asian neighbours, Singa-

pore, Thailand, Malaysia and

South Korea have proved, to

achieve economic emancipa-

tion. We have magnanimously

spent last 30-years debating

on aforesaid issues, elbowing

down the nation into the bot-

During the last 30-years we

have gradually reduced into

the most corrupted nation of

the world. During 30-years of

independence our country has

turned into a state of the art

tomless pit of poverty.

Schools"

I found that Mr. Mustafizur Rahman put forward his submissions logically. He contends: "Make Arabic compulsory in schools for Muslim boys and Girls along with other subjects." He is of the opinion that learning of Arabic for a longer period helps the students to read and understand Arabic and thus enables them to read "The Quran" meaningfully. And it is truly so. It is absolutely

logical in context of 'Rhyme and Reason'. Mr. Mustafiz in his letter did not try at all to split the 'Arabs' and the 'Non-Arabs'. He did not compare the merit of different languages. He did never describe the superiority of Arabic against our mother tongue: "Bengali" or Hindustani language. Mr. Siddiqui fabricated these

allegations. By doing so, Mr. Siddique showed malice towards Arabic and cunningly towards Islam. I presume that Mr. Nasir Siddique

did not go through Mr. Mustafiz's letter due to malicious intent. May Allah forgive him.

**Azizul Huq** New Elephant Rd, Dhaka

### Re-introduction of health check post

I was startled by the news "Checking up on health record of passengers at ZIA suggested", which was organised by The Bangladesh Manobadhikar Shangbadik Forum (BMSF) on 26th January 2002.

International health certificates for travelling passengers as well as the check posts had been done away with internationally long time ago. Re-introduction of the same in our country (well reputed for corruption right and left) means one more step of harassment for the passengers passing through the Land, Sea and Airports. Rather, we should wait and observe what the developed countries do in this regard.

The suggested means may only apply to a country, which is 100 per cent free from AIDS/HIV. But there is no such country in the world today. Such an enormous global problem has to be tackled in a different

But if above is reintroduced in our country alone the health certificates will only be purchased and tailor made in the open market. This will pave the way for the

unscrupulous employees of the Health Department and concerned outsiders to earn illegal money by extortion.

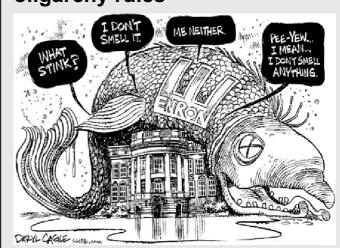
Their suggestions remind me of a law enacted during the Ershad regime that an employee having more than two surviving children is barred from foreign posting (what one may earn once a while during his service life) as a measure to curb the population growth of the whole country. Bangladesh has many such black laws to suit the individu-

als of the time We, as travelling public have our bitter experience of the various agencies functioning at ZIA, though since the last Caretaker Government a lot of improvement has taken place. So, please do not suggest adding one more agency to make our life further miserable. It is also worth noting, though unbelievable, that we do have a health check post at the border out post of Bhomra and some more may be at other loca-

They simply harass the travellers in the name of providing a health certificate or pushing an injection and extract money from the passengers, though no such requirement exists at the other end of the border. They are also helped by the local mastaans in extortion. May I draw the attention of The Health Minister to immediately dispense with all the health check posts from our border, which should not have been there in the very first place?

A.B.M. Zakaria

# **Enron case shows that** oligarchy rules



The Enron fish

Aristotle, in his The Politics, remarked "A democracy exists whenever those who are free and not well-off, being in the majority, are in sovereign control of government, an oligarchy when the control lies with the rich and better-born, these being

By this definition, the world's so-called greatest democracy, the United States of America, is an oligarchy. With both Republicans and Democrats beholden to the largess of the big corporations, political power now belongs to the rich and better-born and ordinary people have little access to the decision-making process. The latest scandals surrounding the giant Enron Corporation only confirm this. The New York Times reports that of the 248 members of Congress, no fewer than 212 were on the Enron's handout list. It is, therefore, not surprising that the same lawmakers, who are making noises about Enron's improprieties, were actually enjoying the corporation's favours and did nothing when the big bosses virtually swindled the shareholders and the public. It will be naive to expect that politicians can take corporate money without being bought.

Both concentration of wealth (the richest one per cent of Americans have almost 50 per cent of the nation's wealth) and domination of a few huge corporations have made American democracy extremely vulnerable. Plato also warned about such concentration of wealth and power in few hands. It was the controlling influence given to wealth that Plato found particularly disturbing. He had the deepest distrust of what today be called the profit-motive and of the public influence of private wealth. He draws a picture of growing disregard of public welfare by political leaders met by growing bitterness leading to unrest and chaos.

Given the power of big money, the Enron bosses may go away scot-free. But the lesson of this must be clear that private corporations are for private profit, especially for profit of small groups of people that controls the corporations and not for those who have any voice in the management. Pope Pius XI once said that totalitarian communism and unregulated capitalism are united in their "satanic optimism."

The satanic optimism of the totalitarian communism stems from the belief that the world's problems can be resolved through total control of the forces of production, while the satanic opposition of the unregulated capitalism stems from the belief that everything will be fine if market forces are allowed to dictate. The former was guided by the lust for power, the latter by the lust for profit. When power or greed is the motivating factor, the result can be disastrous. Ask the Enron

Mahmood Elahi Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

the mean time, the used or secondhand books may be developed. I have many books in my library, which I would like to exchange for other used books (also CD books). There are no such outlets outside the textbook category for students.

the Nation and Declarer of Independence.

The local publishing industry associations may get together and draw up draft schemes to open the market to non-student readers; now that the government has assured to help as a facilitator outside the academic boundary. This includes reprinting cheap editions of worldfamous books, which are too costly (4) Flight of capitals out of the coun-

I would ask the present government to clarify their position for any non-domicile and non-citizen to carry out businesses in Bangladesh. Even it is lawful in our constitution we need to stop outflow of capitals from our country. Ferdous Islam

Toronto, Canada

"The PM's speech on first hundred days" Your editorial on the PM's assess-

Faruque Hasan

Dhanmandi, Dhaka

tion War? Just to get a Father of the Nation? We have incessantly example of abject poverty in the Western media. Still, raising our

been whining, for the last 30-years, over the Pakistani atrocities brazen faces, tightening our loin clothes, we have been going on

ence issues.

the world

survival of our corpses?

foreign policy of the USA.

deep into darkness and ruination.

USA and the rest of

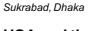
among the people all over the world against the biased and prejudicial,

# Politicisation and our academic environment politicisation has led to a backlog of graduation of the students hurting the economic condition of the poor and middle class

to the expensive private institutions in Bangladesh. The appointment of Vice-chancellors of universities by political connection has tarnished the image and sanctity of the academic environment, causing an administration of the sycophants rather than an administration by the qualified people. A politically appointed Vice-Chancellor will have the least probability of being effective because the teachers and the students from other political parties will not likely to support him/her.

parents who cannot afford to send their offspring either abroad or

I would like to suggest that the merit system rather than political affiliation should appoint the position of the Vice-Chancellor. An independent body should appoint the Vice-Chancellor for a fixed term of five years on the basis of his/her degree, academic excellence, administrative capacity, personal integrity and interpersonal relationships. In that way, the dignity and prestige will be restored paving the way for a peaceful resolution of conflicts prevailing among the students. The teachers of the universities should not get involved in partisan politics in academic life. The teachers should keep their political affiliation aside in their pursuit of educating the students. Once the teachers can eliminate their political involvement, they can encourage the students to get rid of excessive partisan politics, but not political awareness so that the students can become responsible citizens.



#### crook. Are the poor and underdeveloped countries becoming scape-There is growing hatred and rancour goats to the USA? O H Kabir

Power corrupts. It appears that the superiority complex, lack of wisdom and vision of some US

leaders and violation of human rights by them is plunging the USA

### Wari, Dhaka Shocked and burnt every single day!

quarrelling on the Father of the Nation and Declarer of Independ-

ence of Americans, Canadians, British, French, Germans, Japa-

nese, Chinese, Iranians, Russians, and Italians?

Who are the Fathers of the Nation and Declarers of Independ-

Can't we put these debates in the niche for the present, and

spend our entire times endeavouring for alleviation of poverty

from the country, and to gain a prestige for our nation in the inter-

national community? Or are those debates the mantra for the

I started reading your esteemed daily some seven years ago. Since then I have been an avid reader of your paper.

in need a friend in deed' but it is an

unprincipled and selfish country

which seeks its own selfish ends

and financial gains by hook or by

What I like most among the others are your honest and insightful story, a firm ideological and committed stand against any sorts of irregularities and wrong doings which go against the interest of our vast majority regardless of any party affiliation. Hats off to all your staffs.

Recently, a friend of mine, an Australian national, wanted to know about Bangladesh. I passed on her your web address

so that she could read the daily and get a chance to know the country. A few days later she got back to me with an expression of horror and utter surprise!

We shared few stories like burn-

ing the muggers down, misappropriation and robbing of our national money by our elected political Not to blame her, I myself find the

news items shocking, frustrating and disgusting. Nevertheless, I hit the daily every single day in the hope that I shall find something that would encourage me to breathe and live with dignity in the world! Alas! It's the same old story everyday!

Md. Mashi Ul Azam Khan

# Beating about the

Sydney, Australia

#### Prof Haroon A. Khan, Ph.D. Henderson State University Arkadelphia, Arkansas, USA