

## Disputed land conflict sign of unresolved urban crisis

*Attack the disease please and not just the symptoms*

**T**HE four dead and fifty injured as a result of firing caused by a clash between two contending groups is symptomatic of the land and grab crises. While one is in short supply, the other is on the rise in the city. The disputed land was a patch of earth on which a mosque had been constructed while the Telegraph and Telephone Board was also a contender. The entry of the Ansars into this fray who sprayed lead into a belligerent crowd was an inevitable part of the urban crisis that keeps growing. An investigation committee has been duly formed and commiseration offered to the affected parties but the conditions which lead to such crisis are here and there are little signs that they will go away.

Since a committee has been formed one supposes some facts will come out but the problem is not that of an isolated piece of land in a city almost desperate for more. Dhaka has outstripped its capacity to accommodate even half of the people that reside here but the number keeps swelling. And as long as this continues such tragic accidents may continue to happen.

Urbanization is never seen in its perspective and one doesn't recognize that the root of the problem is in the extreme concentration of Dhaka as the point of all urban locations. The pauperized countryside has no option to offer its people except migrate and with one of the highest migrant rates in the world, it's ready-made recipe for disaster all the year around. In fact, one is surprised that so few happen.

Hidden within the news is a small information that a number of families residing in the disputed area complex were recently evicted and this fight was basically between two representative institutions with sufficient clout to mobilize an armed crowd. While T&T sought the Ansars, the mosque sought the madrassah students. Whether we like to admit it or not, violence is a common weapon applied to hold on to land and this is usually followed by a court order which puts a status quo on the situation and the more powerful of the two hang on to it till they get possession.

We shall have to wait and see who is more powerful in this case. There are many other such plots and evicting the dwellers is not a new matter and happens in Dhaka every day. We call for effective preventive measure so that such violence does not recur in future. One may also try to look at the underlying causes that lead to such situations to begin with.

## Fish supply crisis caused by many factors

*Change is inevitable is the message*

**T**HE government has initiated a fish fortnight and that is indeed welcomed. The objective is to focus on fish both as sources of protein and employment by fish hatchers and breeders. A good news which should also take into account the fact that Bangladesh has over-fished and over-eaten while under-managing its supply and consuming patterns.

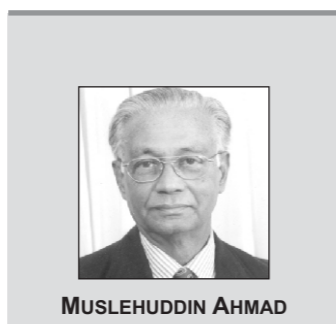
Reports say that given a meagre estimate of 100 grammes of fish per person per day would mean nearly 48 lakh tons of fish per year, which is met about 40 percent only. Some have pegged it lower but nobody doubts that there is a serious fish shortage.

Another issue that is causing concern is the extinction of certain species and in the last decade at least 50 species have disappeared. This is a silent environmental breakdown and will greatly affect bio-diversity. This is not being mentioned.

There are two aspects of the problem and none is easy to handle. One is the present trend of meeting the supply shortfall through import and that trend, it seems, will dominate given the way we manage our lives and economy. The other is to cultivate fishes in the water bodies. While this is definitely laudable, one should also remember that the rate at which deep water sources are being contaminated by naturally occurring chemicals and through neglect, fish culture will also have to be handled smartly so that enough water bodies are left to be used for safe drinking water sources.

The root of course is in environmental management. Experts say that overpopulation, destruction of water bodies for commercial needs, lack of awareness and a general lack of awareness of the problem itself have contributed to fish depletion. We have to take care of them all. Otherwise the days of happy fish eating may well be over for us.

# End of occupation will end violence



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

**T**HE end of occupation will guarantee the end of violence. Anybody can bet his life on that. Israelis except the members of Peace Now Movement in Israel have not yet understood that the end of occupation is the only way to achieve peace in the Middle East. The most unfortunate was that a person like Ariel Sharon was elected to lead the country of Israel. It was very clear right from the beginning that there would be no peace as long as Sharon remained in charge. Indeed, Israel lost hundreds of lives (Palestinians lost about three times the number of Israeli dead) during the last 22 months of Intefada. The process is likely to continue unabated as long as Sharon is in power and continues his repressive measures.

The Palestinian delegation led by the Chief negotiator Saeb Erekat visited Washington to meet some cabinet members. This is the first visit of a Palestinian delegation to Washington since President Bush took over against more than half a dozen visits to White House by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. One does not have even the count of number of visits to Washington by Israeli officials during this period. The Palestinian delegation met

Secretary Powell, Condoleezza Rice, George Tenet and some other high officials. The details of the discussions were not released, but it seems that the US raised some issues like reform of the Palestinian Authority (PA), security matters etc. Secretary Powell said, "I reaffirmed to the Ministers that the President is committed to doing everything possible to find a way forward." Saeb Erekat in his statement said,

was not endorsed by PA cabinet as West Bank town of Bethlehem was excluded but apparently there was an understanding in Washington on the general security plan. President Arafat described the results of the delegations' meetings as "very positive". But Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said that Palestinians' provisional agreement to an Israeli security plan was a "trick". He always sees things in a crooked way.

needed is the reform of the PA.

Ariel Sharon's offensive against Arafat and the Palestinian Authority continued unabated. Apart from killing the Palestinian leaders on the allegation that they are terrorists, Israeli Army is arresting hundreds of young Palestinians and putting them into jail. Last April Israeli army arrested Marwan Bagouti, a 46 year old leader of Fatah on the allegation that he was responsible for dozens

of suicide bombings. Bagouti is seen to be a possible successor of Arafat. His arrest has made him more popular among the Palestinians. He was produced before the Israeli court the other day. He was handcuffed. He spoke to the pressmen who were in the court room and said he was a man of peace and wanted peace with Israel on the basis of two state solution for two people. He insisted that the only way to achieve this was to end occupation. Later he was whisked away by military police.

Last week Sharon looked furious while addressing the nation over national TV. He said, "Between us and the goal (of peace) stands the gang of murderers [murderers], terror, corruption of the PA. The only way to peace demands this gang of murder be uprooted from its political position and 14 other Palestinians including nine children led to series of revenge attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian radical groups. There were bus bombings, bag bombing in Hebrew University, car ambushes, attacks on the settlers etc that killed many Israelis. Indeed, a stage has reached where no Israeli is safe in Israel. All these terrorist attacks could be avoided if Sharon stopped his state terrorism.

One would hope that President Bush would not insist on removal of yet another Arab leader. Bush is already finding serious opposition from all quarters to his military action plan to remove Saddam from power. Prime Minister Tony Blair has been giving fumbling support to Bush's ill-conceived military plan to remove Saddam from power. British people in general seem opposed to it and

Tony Blair may not be able to carry his country with him. "Regime change" cannot be the policy of a democratic country. Let the people of Iraq and not President Bush decide on Saddam's fate. President Bush has too many things on his plate in terms of fighting terrorism. Everybody wants to fight terrorism but there must be an internationally acceptable way to do it. The best prescription will be to remove the causes of terrorism as terrorism cannot be fought by military means. The military actions only disperse the terrorists and force them to go worldwide.

Indeed, at every step Israel has been referring to America's war against terrorism in Afghanistan and saying that Israel has been fighting the same war against the Palestinians. But the world knows that it's not the same war; it's an unjust war and a war against humanity. The Palestinians are fighting Israeli occupation, killings, assassinations, siege, destruction of Palestinian homes and properties, deportations etc, and unfortunately they are using indigenous methods in the absence of modern and civilized killing machines like F-16, Apaches which Israel has got from the US. Obviously, the Palestinian actions turn to be terrorist acts under the modern definitions. The international community does sympathize with the Palestinians, but the superpower does not. The time has come for everyone to realize that the only way to achieve peace in the Middle East is to vacate occupation and allow Palestinians to have a State of their own with full rights and obligations. This is also the only way to ensure security to Israelis in their part of the land.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South University

## SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

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he was assured during the talk that "the end game is specified with a Palestinian State. We really hope to see an action plan that will define the time line for independence." He also added that the 'reform is the demand of the Palestinian people and we will do it as wanted by the Palestinian people and not because it was demanded by the US.' *New York Times* reported that 'both sides remained at odds over Bush's call to replace Arafat'. The meeting with CIA director Tenet was obviously on a plan to establish security and how the Palestinian security staff could be trained -- whether in Egypt and or Jordan.

Israeli Defense Minister Ben Elizer's proposal "Gaza First" ie. Israeli withdrawal first from Gaza against Palestinian Authority (PA)'s commitment to ensue full security

This is why President Mubarak said to Shimon Peres last week when the latter visited Egypt that "This falso Sharon", apparently referring to his bulky size, "I hear he eats an entire lamb for dinner. How can any one fall asleep after that?" Probably Sharon does not sleep at all and this is why he goes on saying and doing things in a way that leads to serious irritations and problems for many. The man has bizarre background of mass murder and war crimes, but to cover up his deadly past he termed Arafat as a terrorist and convinced President Bush of it. And that apparently led Bush's demand for removal of Arafat. This was very unfortunate and made the M-E issue terribly complicated. But after his very recent talks with King Abdullah of Jordan, President Bush said -- individual is not the issue; what is

broader with each helpless gesture. Sample: morning, and the clean, dry sun is already 30 degrees hot. We ask him to put the air conditioner of the car on. He swivels the button of the AC switch twice to show how useless it is, then winds the windows down with a broad smile to offer us air conditioned by God. The one moment I did not immediately recognise him was when, most solemnly, he sat beside me at the general banquet for the two delegations at the Palace where President Hamid Karzai works and King Zahir Shah, the Baba-e-Qaum (or father

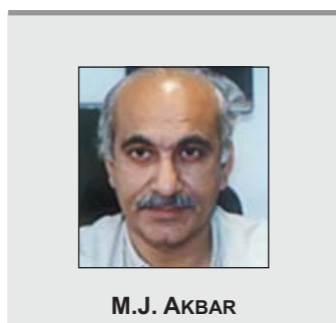
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# Liberty had a close shave in Afghanistan



M.J. AKBAR

**T**HE past is littered across Kabul airport. Most of the planes are broken neatly, snapped like twigs by a giant. Only a few look as if they have been subjected to a searing torture that had defeated their forms and mangled their innards. On one decisive night in October, a giant, the United States, took each machine in the service of the Taliban regime, civilian or transport, apart with the laser precision that modern bombs can deploy against squatting ducks. The wreckage across the field has a surreal, museum quality to it, a memory of war, anger and deadly revenge. Salvage would not do justice to such wreckage. For some unknown reason a line from *Macbeth* echoes in a recess of the mind: *How much blood was there in the old man!* How many planes were there in the old regime!

The only military plane I saw, a MiG, was intact, and parked like a stuffed trophy on a banner outside the airport, on the fork of a road turning towards the city. To which war did this MiG belong, to which jihad? It had not been bombed, even by mistake. It was a dead survivor. They exist in countries like Afghanistan.

The live survivors, American helicopters and gunships, sit in obedient rows amid the art deco of what is surely the world's only aeroplane graveyard. The present

lives, if uneasily, between yesterday's and tomorrow's wars.

OUR craft ovalled twice in the air, following the route of a racetrack, before landing on a patch in a valley 4,000 feet above the sea, ringed by mountains. From the air, Kabul looks flat and flattened. Brown is the colour of this world, of mountain, earth, habitat and man. Even rock seems to be made of mud, like the homes that cling to their sides. Nothing rises higher than the second floor, except for nature. Occasional flashes of green in the fields

is elegant. Agift has been given with grace and received with hope.

WHAT do you call a traffic jam that does not have too much traffic? A traffic butter? This was more of a traffic *jalebi*, a squiggle that turned upon itself ignoring the wide space around its internal snarl. We wormed our way through curiosity, with authority, we shot past the American embassy, a fortress crowned by a forest of technology. The Radio Afghanistan building looked distraught; the Afghanistan Films office forlorn. Shops began to

broader with each helpless gesture. Sample: morning, and the clean, dry sun is already 30 degrees hot. We ask him to put the air conditioner of the car on. He swivels the button of the AC switch twice to show how useless it is, then winds the windows down with a broad smile to offer us air conditioned by God. The one moment I did not immediately recognise him was when, most solemnly, he sat beside me at the general banquet for the two delegations at the Palace where President Hamid Karzai works and King Zahir Shah, the Baba-e-Qaum (or father

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The star of the growing show is Sikander the Barber, now proudly displaying his profession without fear or favour. Just a year ago he would have been whipped for daring to snip the beard of a believer by the barbaric Taliban. The clean faces of Kabul suddenly strike you. A year ago the Taliban thought the police would drive men to mosques and punish anyone who dared to shorten a beard. Liberty has had a close shave in Afghanistan.

seem like lipstick and nailpolish, pretty but marginal.

A Turkish crescent barely stirs above the control tower of the airport. Turkish troops are in charge; the security of a renewed nation has been handed over to brother Muslims from the edge of Europe after Britain slipped away and America decided to concentrate on the search for an enemy, the Taliban and Al Qaeda, that is probably sitting elsewhere. The door opens and we see a swarm of people who have come to welcome the external affairs minister of India, Mr Yashwant Sinha. Paradoxically, warmth rather than discipline creates the straight lines out of a dispersed welcome.

Mr Yashwant Sinha has arrived on a magic carpet; in the first of the three Airbus-300s that India has gifted to the Afghan national airline, Ariana. Cake is served with cold drinks. Speeches are made against the backdrop of most glorious flowers. The Afghans are emotional. The external affairs minister

appear, from Khayate Abdullah, *pardana* (or men's) tailor, to Popolana, offering Italian food in a *dhaba*; to Milad Computer Service, Shafaq English and Computer Agency, D. Butcher's Market and Sharif Market Japanese. (You can take Japan out of a market but how can you take a market out of Japan?)

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IS wizened an Afghan word? It should be. Name one country with more wizened faces. The most wizened of them all was the face of my driver, whose beam became

of the community) lives. There was complete lack of social distinction at this formal lunch. Everyone involved in the two delegations took a seat at the table, including the police outrider and the driver of hired vehicles. Everyone was an equal at the table. The one difference was that my driver beamed even more after roast meat, pilao, bread, brinjal, beans, salad and melon.

WHILE Mr Yashwant Sinha served the nation with exemplary zeal (10.10, hand over plane; 10.45, meet foreign minister; 11.30, meet finance minister; 12, call on Baba-e-Qaum; 12.30, talks with Mr Hamid Karzai; and so on), I took my wizened driver towards Baagh-e-Babar, the last garden and final resting place of Babar. My driver had some difficulty finding out where Mr Hamid Karzai lived, but he had no problem taking me to where Babar lay dead.

The beauty of this garden ascends on you. The rise is decep-

tion. War and the ignorance of the Taliban have left it desolate, but there were lush grass lawns, beds of hovering flowers and a straight line of playing fountains once. Some of the flowers have returned and foreign restorers have brought their instruments of alignment to begin rejuvenation, but this beauty's scars will take time to heal. We walk, helped by half a dozen steps every once in a while, without discerning the gradual slope that is taking us towards the breast of the mountains. We reach the first building, a pavilion, and look back

upon what once must have been a natural delight enhanced by man's art. The pavilion is a shock. Bullets and mortar have ripped it apart. The mosque above has not been spared either, its tiled roof tumbling out of control. The grave is small and simple; the obituary elegant and factual. From the high point of the grave, the meaning of war becomes terribly clear, both in the immediate and in the extended view. Below us lies a devastated area of Kabul, hectares of homes and roads that have been smashed by shell and wrecked by the fire of the fiercest battles. This is the famous road to Kabul University, the dividing line between forces of the Taliban and those of Ahmed Shah Masood, leader of the Northern Alliance. Masood, the Lion of Panjsher against the Russians, lost out to the Taliban and was marginalised, along with General Dostum, to Mazaar-e-Sharif where he remained in the fight as leader of the Northern Alliance. Destiny was cruel to Masood. It gave him his

hour after September 11; but it took him away a minute before the hour struck. Masood was assassinated by two suicide bombers who fooled him into giving an interview by posing as European journalists.

They are building a statue of Masood on the Great Masood Road, which is what the principal artery of Kabul is now called. The honour will dominate Kabul; at least until the next war.

WELL Come, says the sign at the gate of the Kabul Intercontinental. English can go to the devil in these circumstances; I feel welcome. Even the Turkish soldiers who check me out do it with a smile. We drive through the gate and past a hall that says what it was rather than what it is: BALLROOM. The hotel reopened after the defeat of the Taliban; the carpets are as frayed as the uniforms; there is one local soap in the bathroom and it makes more sense to wait till the evening brings the temperature down than complain about airconditioning. But I feel at home. From the Drug Store Cum Antiqu (sic) Shop in the foyer, owned by Yak E. Bood and Yak E. Naboo, come the strains of *Aa jao tarapete hain armaan, ab raat guzarne wali hai*, which is soon followed by *Ghar aaya mera pardesi, pyas bujhi mere ankiyon kee*. Across the hall from the shop is the Powder Room. I blink. I have not seen a Powder Room being called a Powder Room -- ever! Ballroom. Powder Room. Queen Victoria is alive and in Kabul.

The portrait of Ahmed Shah Masood looks down upon us. But he doesn't mind, really. Where else would a Hindi song meet Queen Victoria except at an Intercontinental in Kabul?

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

## A suggestion to write in Bangla

The 'Letters to the Editor' section in *The Daily Star* regularly attracts constructive views from persons who care a lot about nation building. Please consider a sub-section for letters in Bangla to make it easy for our politicians and bureaucrats to learn about these views first hand.

Since not many who send letters by e-mail would have Bangla fonts, *The Daily Star* editors could translate their letters into Bangla if those writers so wished.

Syed Nazmul Ahsan  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

## Flood in Europe, global warming and USA

A number of European countries including Czech Republic, Russia, Germany, Austria and Switzerland are experiencing the worst flooding in their history. Such unexpected flooding has been attributed to global warming, which triggered unusually heavy rainfall.

When European governments in general showed serious concern for environment, the USA earned the notoriety for being the worst pol-

luter of global environment. The USA government time and again ignored the request of the global community to cut down on the emission of carbon-dioxide. So far, it was believed that such defiance of the lone super power of the world would largely affect the developing countries, which do not have any bargaining power. Now, the list of victims includes the developed countries as well.

The European countries should pressurise USA to adopt strict anti-pollution measures. The task, however, is not going to be easy, as USA is unlikely to compromise the interest of local industries for the sake of "others".

Ahmed Zamil  
MBA student, IBA, DU

## Export of gas by pipeline to India

For a long time now the gas export issue is being discussed and as we know the government has been under pressure from various quarters/lobbies within the country as well as abroad.

From the news published in *The Daily Star* (August 10), it appears that the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) of India has floated tender for supply of gas,

through Pipeline or LNG gas, to be transported by LNG carrying ships and from the same report it appears that two companies, Dahej and Hazira, are now involved in advancing the projects of terminals on the Indian West coast for receiving liquefied natural gas (LNG), which is carried in special type of liquid gas carriers (LNG carriers) and requires special type of terminals/storage facilities etc. If that is the case then I would think it is best for all the concerned that Godspeed the projects undertaken to be undertaken by earlier mentioned companies named Dahej and Hazira as this will take off the pressure from Bangladesh and the Govt. of Bangladesh, for export of gas by pipeline to India.

The same report of *The Daily Star* mentions "It is clear that gas export from Bangladesh to India represents a win-win opportunity". But for whom? However the common feeling is that unless there is a correct assessment of gas reserve and the quantum of our own requirement, Bangladesh can not think of exporting gas and we do hope the authorities concerned will not get carried away with the 'win-win opportunity'.  
ShujaAlim

## Agrabad, Chittagong Split the Dhaka University into two

After the recent turmoil in the Dhaka University many of us have drawn the conclusion that it cannot properly run if teachers and students are involved in active politics. Conflict regarding political ambitions, mostly within some of the unscrupulous teachers, have made the divide wider. The students are like tools that are forced to serve to teachers ambitions.

In our opinion the only solution of this conflict is to divide the campus between the two contending parties, the BNP campus on one side and AL campus in the opposite. Toeing party line, Vice Chancellors, Teachers, officers must be placed accordingly. More and more senior executive positions must be created so that nobody suffers from any sense of humility. Students should have the option to choose the campus keeping in mind the service they need from the teachers and the service they are ready to offer their teachers in exchange. This will certainly calm campus turmoil and violence. Much time and energy of political parties will be saved in this process and they will remain free to

devote to other purposes. Guardians will feel secured about their wards' present and future.  
Badiuzzaman  
Dhaka

## National University syllabus confusing

I am a student of the National University (NU), 1<sup>st</sup> year Honours, in the Department of English. Right after my admission I heard that the NU authority has changed the syllabus. And the new syllabus is a four years syllabus. According to the new format the courses for first year students is a total of 410 marks. But we have not got the marks distribution yet. We have a course on Political Science. But we don't know which language will be the medium English or Bengali? Even those who teach us that subject don't know in which language they will have to teach. Many other departments of NU are following the same syllabus of Political Science. I think that NU was established to solve the problems of mass students. But rather than helping us the NU authority is making our life more complicated. Therefore it is my earnest request to the NU authority on the behalf of all

students "please, give us a clear conception of our new syllabus and thus help us to study".  
AN MAI-Farabi  
Rajshahi University

## Rickshaws Vs motor vehicles

Over two lakh rickshawpullers of Dhaka earn their livelihood after each day's toil. They are surprised and shocked with the two classes of public roads: the VIP roads and other "not VIP" roads. This classification certainly affects them in a negative manner. They feel discriminated. They feel that the rights and privileges of the rickshawpullers as equal citizens of a democracy are denied. The rickshawpullers are barred from plying their vehicles on the VIP roads whereas the owners of motor vehicles are allowed to drive their vehicles both on the VIP roads and ordinary roads. Why? Some public roads are classified as VIP roads, banned for rickshaws and made exclusively for motor vehicles. So why not make some roads in Dhaka exclusive for rickshaws, prohibiting motor vehicles for smooth road traffic. We would request the DCC and

DMP to kindly consider, ensure and guarantee the rights and privileges of all Dhaka city dwellers equally as per provision of our Constitution.  
OH Kabir  
Dhaka

## August 15: A day to remember

August 15<sup>th</sup> each year reminds us of the loss of a father figure who dreamt of a "Sonar Bangla". The government should reconsider its present stand for the sake of democracy and not take rash steps to annul this day as a holiday to pay tribute to the national leader. It must ponder upon the matter before implementing the decision. This decision will certainly hurt common people's feeling. And a gesture of recognition of this indisputable Bengali hero would only strengthen the democratic process of the country. I personally hold this view that a holiday and the hoisting of the National flag to half-mast is the least we can offer this great Bengali hero in return for all he has sacrificed and contributed.  
Waz Ali  
Utara, Dhaka

Off with the three wheelers  
We are feeling elated by the govern-

ment's decision -- not to allow three wheelers to ply on the roads of Dhaka city from September 1, 2002. It is a heartening news because people are becoming ill by the fume emitted from these vehicles and if not stopped now, we will have to pay a great price for our own insincerity. We learnt that protesting government's decision of banning, the owners and workers of auto-rickshaws, tempos and auto-trucks have staged hunger strike. We abhor this sort of attitude. Because for personal gain they are neglecting the loss of the greater mass -- forgetting that their families will not be spared from the horrible effects of the air pollution. So, to save their own life, they should stop running these vehicles.

We hope that the Awami League and other opposition political parties will not support the irrational demand of the auto-rickshaw workers and owners. We also hope that they will not oppose the government's decision because it is a very positive step for the welfare of the people. We trust Awami League will join hands with the government in implementing the decision and if the opposition political parties do otherwise, people will not forgive them.

Nur Jahan, Chittagong