



As the first light breaks, a hundred and odd singers and musicians of Chhayanaut heralds the Bengali New Year — Pabeha Baishakh — at the Ramna Bautomul. Started 25 years ago this has become a mother to a growing national festival — a rare case of institution building involving the whole people. —Photo: Mohsin.

Video News Services are Catching on in India

Commercially produced video news magazines are cashing in on public distrust of the government-run television service in India. They have launched a virtual cultural and news revolution.

With the government channel Door Darshan still as staid as ever, the appeal of video is growing fast.

Pioneer in the field is Newstrack, which began appearing two years ago. In a 90-minute capsule, it devotes 10 to 15 minutes to each controversial news topic of the day, showing footage that the public will never see on the government station, Door Darshan, known as DD.

Executive producer of Newstrack Madhu Trehan says it is time Indians got to know the truth about their country: "We have to fight with the censors for every story that damages someone in power."

Though Newstrack sells only 20,000 copies priced at Rs.150 (\$7) each, its viewers number more than seven million. One main reason for this is that video lending libraries have sprung up in the last decade all over India. Most stock Newstrack.

At first these libraries focused on stocking and lending video cassettes of Indian and foreign films at Rs.10 (US cents 75) a day. Since Newstrack appeared, it has been added to their lending

lists on popular demand. Mohan Ram, who owns a library in Karol Bagh, Delhi, says: "One issue of Newstrack

may be viewed by as many as 100 families or 400-700 persons. It's good business." Now Newstrack is no longer

a lone player in the market. Three others — Observer News Channel (ONC), Kaalchiakra (Hindi Video magazine), Video Samachar, and Dev Features Sports Channel — have moved in.

In a few months, Independent TV (ITV), Hindustan Times Television (HTV) and Times Television (TTV), will join the club.

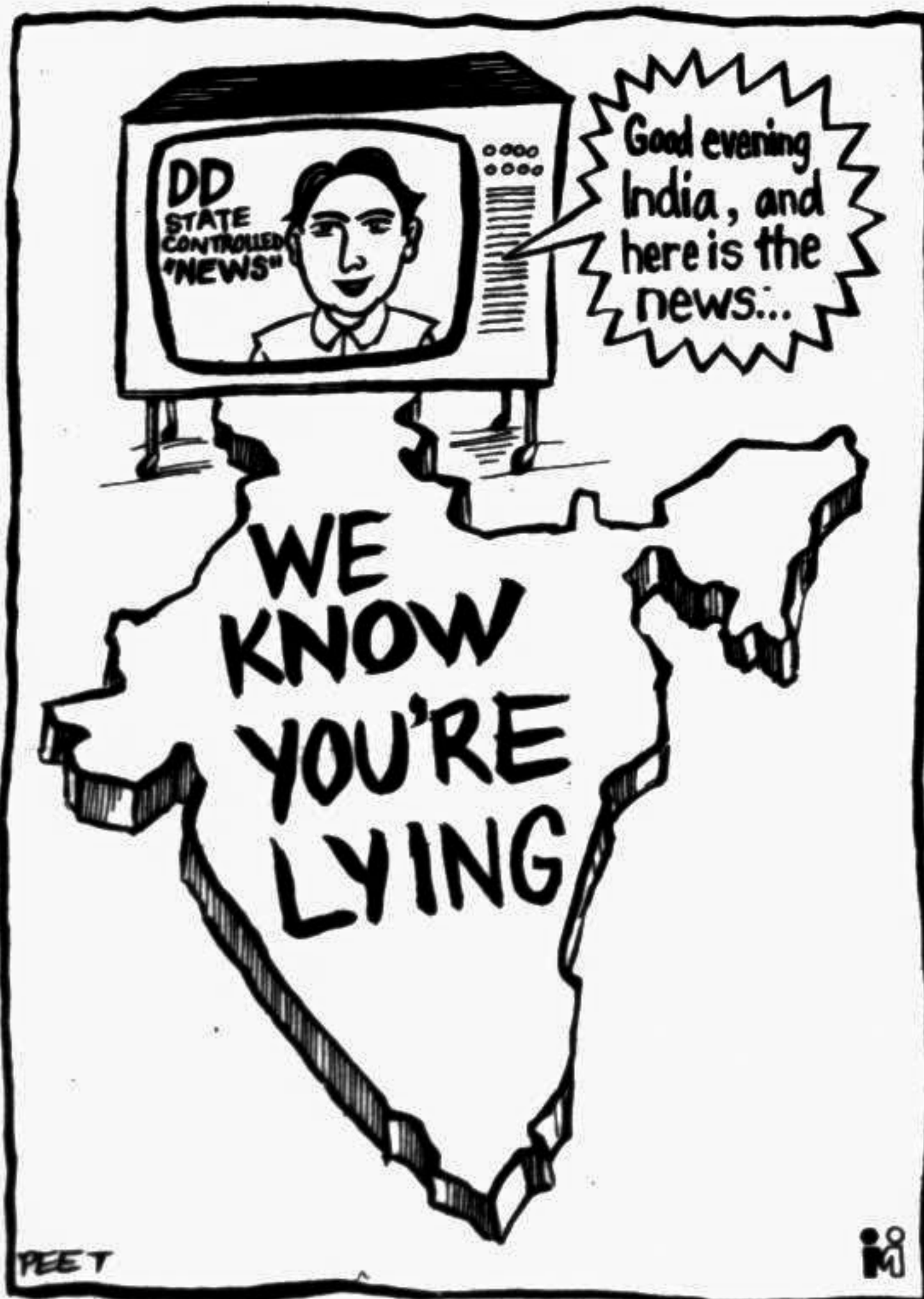
No one knows the size of India's middle class, but estimates put it at 150-200 million in a country of around 840 million people. It is growing with each year, creating an insatiable appetite for consumer goods. With pockets full of money, owning a video cassette recorder (VCR) has almost become a matter of prestige.

As competition grows, video magazine prices will fall as more subscribers are won over. Attractive advertising rates will help to subsidise production costs and prices.

Tough, privately produced video news magazines may be cashing in on the news sanitised on DD, but there is an inherent danger in their popularity.

They often distort the news. Some viewers believe that a change at DD and more objective news would make the video magazines redundant.

Atiya Singh



From Page 10 dominant currency in Indo-Bangladesh smuggling or in trade through the seaports is the taka.

Where have all the law-enforcers gone?

Less than effective law-enforcement encourages smuggling. The proximity of large-scale smugglers to the centres of power strengthen legal trade. Though most customs officials are honest, the few who are not simply suffice for smugglers' bribes. In some law-enforcement and other government agencies, border postings are much sought-after because of the substantial kickbacks from local operators.

Three agencies are concerned with illegal international trade. The customs is in formal charge of all ports of entry, as well as intelligence. A short trip to Benapole proves what a joke border controls can be. The police can arrest smugglers, pursue cases, and carry out raids. Few people are ever actually sent to jail after these raids. The third agency, the Bangladesh Rifles, has a deterrent role to play in cross-border illegal trade.

A customs officer notes, "Everyone thinks we are all for sale, totally corrupt. Well, there is a lot of corruption, but we're not all out for quick money. Besides, smuggling is profitable. As long as it's profitable, the toughest controls cannot stop it." And while people have no alternative equivalent income, they will turn to illegal trade.

Inter-agency gripes threaten unity of purpose. Customs complain about the BDR who in return complain about another agency.

Raids are often organized to show action. Not surprisingly, only the lower links in the chain are caught, the carriers and sub-agents, or the smugglers operating on an individual basis. Raids usually follow a misunderstanding in the bribe system or a public pronouncement by the government on a crackdown. Goods worth Taka 109.24 crore were

SMUGGLER

seized in 1989. The seizure represents a fraction of the real money involved in this business.

Pros and cons

The revenue lost by the government through smuggling is not compensated for by the vast amounts of money acquired by the individuals involved, because the wealth generated by smuggling activities does not go into constructive use. In addition, local industries suffer in the unfair competition with foreign goods.

Because smugglers will import an item from the easiest obtainable source, they are not necessarily buying from the cheapest. This is economically unsound. Capital flight out of an already weakened country is

aggravated by the smuggling trade. And finally, smuggling is the single most important source of black money in Bangladesh.

But trade is one of the primary activities of any civilization, and smuggling is merely a symptom of classical economics. It supplies a demand at a maximum profit. Economic rationale has little to do with a moral stand, which is what the law is based on. In fact, with neighbouring countries ready markets, Bangladesh makes a huge profit from this illegal act.

"Mayer deya mota kapor"

In pre-Partition days, the independence movement urged people to wear homespun cloth. That mentality has all but disappeared. If you go

Between Cows and Heroin

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the area of hard flesh. I came across an incident which is a pathetic commentary on the state of affairs prevailing in the border districts of both Bangladesh and West Bengal. In Gopaijur in West Dinajpur (in the northern part of West Bengal which borders Dinajpur of Bangladesh), there is a thriving trade involving the smuggling of cows from India in exchange of girls from Bangladesh. Indian cows, because of the better fodder on which they are fed, are in demand in Bangladesh. The smugglers who are involved in arranging the import of Indian cows into Bangladesh however do not have to invest any money, and have found instead a better mode of transaction. Six cows are said to be equivalent to one girl. The girls thus bought in exchange are then sold by the Indian smugglers to traffickers and

gangs who take them to brothels in Calcutta and other cities.

West Dinajpur also seems to have developed into a transit point for another bizarre trade. Some years ago the BSF detected the transportation of skeletons and skulls from India through this border district into Bangladesh. An international ring of smugglers was reported to be transporting them to Western countries through Bangladesh.

The smuggling network is quite an elaborate one, consisting of various stages and levels, and stretching from the border outposts into the deep interiors of West Bengal. A trip to Bangaon one morning, a discreet tour along the Ichhamoti during the day and a return journey by train to Sealdah in Calcutta in evening—this package programme provides an illuminating insight into the world of smuggling. Cycle-rickshaw pullers and auto-van drivers constitute the first stage for transporting the goods to the

banks of the river. Less conspicuous than them are the innocent-looking porters who may be carrying tiny packets of heroin tucked away safely in the folds of their lungis.

The evening train that takes off from Bangaon on its way to Calcutta is boarded by a variety of characters—toughies and traders, women, and children. Sacks and bundles containing foreign-made clothes, betel nuts, Danish skimmed milk and electronic goods are tucked away beneath the seats of the third class compartments. The train stops at Madhyamgram station. The end of the platform is in pitch darkness. One can notice surreptitious movement of people in that dark patch. The sacks and bundles are soon unloaded from the train compartments, and distributed among small groups of youngsters waiting in the dark platform. As if by prior signal, the guard knows how long to keep the train waiting on the platform. It starts moving as soon as the unloading is over. Its next stop will be a few stations ahead—

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

I cannot resist cashing in on free service you are extending to your readers. I approach you with a problem I have undergone for years — reticence — not deliberate but an inherent one. This anomaly has brought me almost to my doom. And I wonder, if there is a way out. Let me elaborate. Suppose I am in a position to argue in favour of something. I know that I have in my stock sufficient points to place before my counterpart. But words often fail me in the course of the discussion and I feel embarrassed. Once when the discussion is over points more reasonable to out-argue him crops up in my mind, only to shove me into the gorge of repentance. I am also ill at ease in presence of strangers. When I happen to talk to a person I have not seen before I stutter. How can I get over this problem? Please advise.

Anonymous, Chittagong

Dear Anonymous,

Your problem is basically a lack of self confidence from which we all suffer once in a while. I do not know your background to give any sound advice on how to gain self confidence but you can start by believing in yourself. Think of all the things you have accomplished so far, about the friends you have or what you have done to help others. Remember before other people feel good about you, you will have to feel good about yourself. Stuttering is also due to lack of confidence and nervousness. Consult a good and sympathetic doctor and find out if there is any physiological reason for your stuttering. My advice is to find out your strong points and concentrate on developing them. Remember it is not possible to argue and win every case. It is alright to lose, to become embarrassed, to look foolish etc. once in a while. We are, after all, human.

Rubina, Dhaka.

Dear Mita,

I have been married for 10 years and I now feel there has been a breakdown in communication between us. I think my husband holds back telling certain things to me and I do the same sometimes. I think he is not even interested in what I am trying to tell him, or what I think or feel. Life has become very boring and routine. This has been happening for quite some time but since the children were young I had no time to worry about it. Recently I have started to realize that the fun has gone out of our marriage and that we just live together as two strangers. Tell me, is this bound to happen in all marriages? I had very different expectations from our marriage. If there is still time I would like to do something about it.

Dear Rubina,

To answer your question, no, this is not bound to happen in all marriages, but it can happen very easily if one is not conscious about it. You are still communicating in many non-verbal ways but, this is not effective communication. You had certain expectations from your marriage but did not consciously try to live up to help your partner live up to them. Your awareness of the problem is a step in the right direction because couples let things slide and do not realize that the distance might become too wide to bridge. Someday, your course of action will of course very much depend on your husband. If he is willing to cooperate than I would suggest first talking about the problem with him. Analyse expectations both of you have from the marriage and how far they differ from one other. Take time off from your daily routine and spend time together. Try to recapture the romance and excitement that you one felt, reminiscing can be a very exciting experience and helps to recapture the spirit of the early days. Decide to spend some time together everyday to discuss the day's events, etc. Do something interesting and out of the ordinary, surprise him and most of all show him that you still care. It is not too late give it a try, it is worth it. Best of luck.

Dear Mita,

My husband is very reserved and quiet at home but with his friends he is a different person. He is jolly, talkative and entertaining. I have noticed this behavior for a long time but have never said anything hoping he might change on his own. Contrary to my expectation he has grown quieter or more reserved and hardly talks to me or the children. I am beginning to resent this but do not know how to approach him.

Rokeya, Ramna, Dhaka.

Dear Rokeya,

Problems such as yours is common among married couples but is often accepted quietly by most wives. Over the years this can become a big problem because a point comes when couples completely stop talking to each other. The fact that your husband talks to friends is an indication that he is not basically a reserved and quiet person. Have you ever tried to bring up topics of his interest? Try it, this might work. Once he starts talking, slowly draw him out into areas that you really want to discuss such as children's upbringing etc. Remember getting angry and making accusations never help. He must be made to realize the benefits of communication and only then he might open up.

Dear Mita,

Lately I have been feeling very depressed but cannot understand the reason. I have two healthy children, 9 and 12 years of age, and a husband who is kind and considerate. Knowing full well that my actions will have an adverse effect on my family life I am not being able to get out of this feeling of dejection and listlessness. I also have lost interest in my looks, my garden which I used to tend with such care. Please tell me what I should do? Should I see a doctor?

Rubina, Malibagh, Dhaka.

Dear Rubina,

The term "depression" as commonly used is very often misused to describe symptoms such as temporary feeling of unhappiness, boredom, or feeling "down". Actually being depressed is a serious psychological state of mind which can have many serious implications if left untreated. You will have

WRITE TO MITA



Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star, GPO Box 3257 or to 28/1, Toynbee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.

For Those Languishing Behind Bars

Prof. Salma Chowdhury

"I am a convict and a whore and you are a gentleman and a prince. There's no need for you to touch me. You go to your princesses; my price is a ten rouble note"

—L. Tolstoy.

THOUSANDS of girls are rotting in the jail. No government has taken care of the girls left by their husband and family to earn their livelihood. So someone advised them to sell their soul. So they are in the jail for one week, next week they are on the streets. The Constitution says that every person should get a job to provide one's self. I humbly ask my Parliament members to save these unfortunate sisters.

Now to the jail problem. Here are some problems and the points to solve the same.

1. We have a number of "Hajatis" against whom there is no specific case presented in the court. These unfortunate ones should be released by the authority. A body of lawyers should enquire about the detentive's economic and social problems and the Social Welfare Department should solve the problems before releasing them.

2. It is quite common when one murder is committed, all members of the accused are sent to the jail. They rot in the jail for God knows how long! A special court should expedite release of these people, who are innocent, as soon as possible. Proper care should be given to the children and dependents of the accused. It so happens often that the land and the property of the accused are grabbed by some criminals as soon as the family

members have gone behind bars.

3. Jails are overcrowded. So all central jails should be expanded and renovated. Sports complex, flower and fruit gardens, industrial units should be included in them. Prisoners should be able to earn enough to look after their families when they are released.

4. Compulsory education programme should be implemented in the jail, and regular schools and colleges should be introduced. Technical school will be a great help for both the male and the female inmates.

5. Library facility should be expanded to all the inmates. There will be competition between groups thrice a year. Prizes should be given to the best groups.

6. Jail visitors and the elites of the society (including the Home Minister and Home Secretary) should have a free discussion with the inmates twice a year. All their problems should be solved forth with after the discussion.

7. One radio set to each room and newspapers and magazines should be supplied regularly. Bare necessities should be supplied to the detentive which is now banned under the rules.

8. There is no problem with the rich but the poor prisoners have no money to pay the lawyers. So, a group of lawyers should work for the hapless prisoners to guarantee justice to them.

The author is the Chairman of the Jail Committee and a Member of the Association for Correction and Social Reclamation.



PAHELA BAISHAKH IN THIMPHU

A cultural show was held at the residence of the Bangladesh Ambassador to Bhutan, Syed Muazzem Ali on April 15 to celebrate Bangla New Year. A group of Bangladeshis living in the Bhutanese capital presented songs and dances for the show which was also attended by local friends of Bangladesh.

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