

# Putting Up a Dish on Your Roof; Happy Anniversaries of Two Asian Publications; A Tribute to Bhashani

WE guess, it won't be long before we see satellite dishes being put up on the roofs of houses in Dhaka and members of the affluent community start watching the BBC World Service and/or CNN from early morning to midnight.

Rumour has it that interested parties have been busy finding out how to secure the franchise for distributing either or both the networks. Being a little out of touch with technical aspects of this breakthrough in broadcasting, I plead my ignorance about the details, such as the feasibility of bringing the two services to this country, the cost and the transmission system. One expert says that it has all been worked out; another warns that it is all very complicated and expensive. Both probably speak on the basis of rumours, endless rumours, which fill the air of the capital's communication scene.

However, as we know, this is already happening in several other Asian cities. In Bangkok where we spent several weeks last month, it is no longer a rare status symbol but a part of even middle class life to watch CNN and a couple of other US-based networks on two separate TV channels. For programmes ranging from news and commentaries to popular sports, from soap operas to Americanised comedies. With the rental charge for the two channels being less than \$100 a month, the cost is affordable for middle class families. After all, in the consumption-oriented society in Bangkok, many of these families now have their second cars to add to the horrid traffic jams in the Thai capital.

Committed as I am to free flow of information across the

world, I am all for providing our TV viewers with access to additional sources of news and commentaries.

However, having watched the services in Bangkok, I regard this new phenomenon more as a complex challenge than as an outright boon.

In the first place, is it reasonable for a network like CNN (or CBS/ABC) to assume that all the programmes it puts on for US viewers would be appropriate for the TV audience in, say, Bangkok or Dhaka?

My answer to the question is in the negative. Fair enough. But, then, can we expect any of these US-based networks, especially CNN, to produce an international version of its service in which the American view of contemporary events is balanced with a broader perception offered by non-US — western, Japanese and Third World — sources? A CNN source could very well say, "Not yet" or "Not until we have acquired a big market to justify the additional expense."

Here, the BBC World Service could well steal a march over the US-based network. The prototype of its 30-minute TV newsreel I had seen at a broadcasting conference in Istanbul some five years ago had dealt with this problem of balance in its presentation much better than any of the US-based networks we had watched in Bangkok last month.

There is still another challenge we should be concerned about.

How will our own national TV networks face up to the competition posed by foreign services, such as the BBC and CNN? The only way a national station, whether it is BTV or Doordarshan, can deal with this challenge is to raise the level of its own performance, especially in its presentation of news and commentaries, to ensure that a viewer does not switch off the local channel to see what's going on in foreign broadcasts. If we can effectively face up to this competition, the threat posed against our national network may turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

WHILE we were in Bangkok, two media-related anniversaries evoked in me some fond memories of the early days of a couple of publications in this region. Both owed their success to the innovative zeal of their sponsors, the kind of zeal that, alas, is seldom seen these days, especially in this part of Asia.

One was the thirtieth founding anniversary of *The Asia Magazine* which, as many old timers here may remember, used to be distributed in this country, as in other parts of the region, every Sunday in the sixties, as a weekend supplement of two newspapers, the *Pakistan Times* and the *Morning News*.

Type-set in Hong Kong and printed in Tokyo, the journal, based in the British colony, was distributed throughout the

region, from South Korea in the Far East to Pakistan in South Asia, as a Sunday supplement with a dozen or more leading English-language dailies. Thus the magazine

commanded a circulation of over a million copies among the highest income group in Asia. This was precisely the selling message the journal used in persuading local, re-

gional and multinational companies to advertise in it. Readers got the magazine free, but carrier newspapers met part of the transportation cost — the magazine was shipped every week from Tokyo to a dozen different countries — on the understanding that they would one day have a share of the profit.

The publication was the brainchild of Adrian Zecha, an Indonesian-Chinese entrepreneur, who was only 27 years old when he collaborated with considerably older Chinese journalist, Norman Soong to set up *The Asia Magazine*. The two travelled around the region in 1960-61 — this writer met them first in Lahore — selling the innovative concept to the magazine's potential partners. Some reacted to the proposition with a mixture of bewilderment and fascination; others were just carried away by Zecha's youthful and vigorous salesmanship.

Edited by writers and journalists handpicked by the Zecha-Soong team from countries in Asia and the West, *The Asia Magazine* thus earned the distinction of being the first international publication started in Asia.

Over the past 30 years, the journal has changed hands, its format and contents. Having left the publishing business, Zecha is now a powerful figure in the hotel and tourism industry in the Asia-Pacific region.

The other anniversary was that of the *Nation*, the English daily of Thailand, which is

now just 20 years old. It started as a poor second to the *Bangkok Post* in the year when we were fighting our war of liberation in Bangladesh. Today, it is competing well against the *Post*, in contents, in the coverage of local and foreign news, in good writing and even in the volume of advertising.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the success of the *Nation* is that its editorial staff is almost wholly Thai, unlike the *Post* where non-Thais whose mother tongue is English hold senior positions. At the time of its inception, the *Nation* required the help of English-speaking rewriters to brush up copies of local reporters. Then, most sub-editors were foreigners. Today, it is a different story altogether. There may still be a few rewriters around. However, by and large, local reporters and feature writers are working on their own. We have read some excellent reports and features in the paper, all under Thai bylines.

If *The Asia Magazine* was the brainchild of the 27-year old Zecha, the *Nation* owes its success to another young Asian, Suthichai Yoon, the editor-publisher of this daily was just 30 when he left a senior position in the *Post* to work with two other Thais, Thamnoon and Sundia, to launch the *Nation*.

It is nice to know how much young journalists in other countries in this region have achieved in a matter of 20

years, individually and collectively, demonstrating their innovative zeal and professional skill through a newspaper of their own. I am sure, there is a lesson we, in Bangladesh, can draw from the kind of success story epitomized by the *Nation* in Bangkok. There is no need to be too specific about it.

IN mentioning the meeting between Moulana Bhashani and the late Labour leader Nye Kavan in London in the mid-fifties, in my column last Friday, I overlooked that it was the week when the country observed the birth anniversary of the Bangladesh leader. It was not done on a grand scale, but there was solemnity in the way tributes were paid to the great leader by his admirers.

As journalists, we had covered the activities of the Moulana for nearly five decades, reporting his speeches, meetings and his trips abroad. But how much have we written on the man, on his personality, on his ways and life style, and, for that matter, on his family life? Of course, every little. Here, one exception is the book, titled "Bhashani Jokhon Europe" (When Bhashani was in Europe), written by a dear friend of mine, Khondoker Mohammad Ilias. It was deservedly a best-seller when it was published in the late fifties. It remained so for perhaps a decade. If the book is now out of print but people are still curious about Bhashani's life in London, I should certainly do a piece on this unique man, knowing full well that it will never be anything like the work of Ilias, in style, thoroughness or details.

## MY WORLD

S.M. Ali



Adrian Zecha, the first publisher of the Asia Magazine

## Entering a Tormenting World!

By Rahat Fahmida

"For her own sake and in her own right I claim for woman her proper place in the scale of created beings. God has given her intellect, a heart and feelings like your own and these were not given in vain," said a great intellectual while addressing a public gathering about hundred and fifty years ago. But now, even at the threshold of the 21st century we suppress women in all possible ways.

Women's rights have been discussed for years together both by the non-governmental organisations, feminist groups and government institutions. Their rank in the offices, job offering, benefits and salaries has often been subject of discussion and critical analysis. But has anyone seriously looked at their position at home? How they are treated

and taking care of all the members of the family. However in recent years, this trend is gradually fading out.

If the society insists a daughter is never your own, then she is not! As long as minds are swayed by conditioning which insists that a daughter is a daughter till she is married, while a son is a son all your life, daughters will be second class children — burdens to be borne with a shrug and whimper and off-loaded with a tear and a sigh of relief.

The basic roles of the women in the family, both in the urban and very much so in the village areas, with few exceptions of urban educated and employed women, have remained the same for decades.

In our religion marriage is looked upon as essential for

Weddings become vast extravaganzas, the celebrations of which could go on for days together. They provided occasion for display of family wealth and status. They also put even wealthy families solidly in debt.

Tania has been married to her first cousin for the last ten years. Marriages amongst cousins were earlier very common within Muslim families. Tania sadly mentioned that her concept of a happy family life and loving husband totally fell apart, only a few months after her marriage. She said that she could never imagine that the handsome husband, coming to claim her, would turn out to be a spineless man, whose mother has lavished everything on him — making him totally emotionally dependent on his mother. Wife

mother power over their wives and put her in the coveted position of mother-in-law.

The story of Durdana's life is even a worse story of destiny. Married at the age of 15, losing her mother only when she was months old and her father at the age of nine, she dreamt of eternal love, affection and happiness. Tormented by her mother-in-law, and tortured psychologically by the other in-laws she managed to barely survive, only because of the intensity of her feelings for her husband. Losing her first child in an accident, and the third and last child during his birth, she is left with only her second child, who is unfortunately a daughter. With the years the tortures and insults seemed to be never ending, and with everyday it seemed to take a new shape. Surviving in this situation, her stannina helped her to be an earning member in the house, alongside her husband. She was an active business woman within a short time.

Managing to struggle through twenty years of marriage, Durdana still hoped and strived for peace and happiness; when fate decided to take a cruel step. Unexpectedly her husband died of cancer, putting an end to not only her hopes, but also of her destined dreams. Why did it not put an end to the humiliation by her in-laws? They still crave to find faults in her, in every way possible. Life is a mirage to Durdana. Though now she has a grown up daughter to hold on to, who is also working; she is terrified of what might happen next — ? She does not dare have any wishful dreams, lest she be disappointed.

It is amazing how tenuous the claims of conditioning can be. Education, progressiveness, awareness — even feminism is a poor adversary where conditioning is concerned; nothing can quite prise through the layers and effect a change.

The in-laws should understand that just because she enters their home and family, a girl cannot have a memory blank, an emotional blank, and treat her parents, if not as outsiders, at least as distant connection. The in-laws find it hard to believe, that emotional bonds can never really be broken.

Thus for both parties marriage is at the same time a burden and a benefit; but there is no symmetry in the situations of the two sexes; for girls marriage is the only means of integration in the community, and if they remain unwanted, they are, socially viewed, as wastage. This is why mothers have always eagerly sought to arrange marriages for their children.

This is the case of many others not only in our country but in South Asia. Ultimately in their bitterness they do what so many generations of women have been doing before them. They concentrate all their starved emotions on their sons. When small, the sons are the only solace and when they grow older they will be instrumental in giving their

## 1991 : The Year . . .

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be too much influenced by the fronts at the same time, particularly in his handling of the Middle East hostage issue.

The successor to Perez de Cuellar was chosen in November after months of jockeying for the job. He was Egyptian Deputy Prime Minister Boutros Boutros-Ghali — the first African to head the UN.

One more sign of the changed times at the UN came in September when North and South Korea were admitted separately as members as a result of China and the Soviet Union no longer opposing South Korean membership.

An issue the UN still had not got to grips with was East Timor, the Portuguese colony occupied by Indonesia after the Lisbon coup of 1974 and largely forgotten by the world ever since. It came back into the headlines with news that up to 100 people had been shot down by police in Dili, the capital.

In the Philippines the return home from the US of Imelda, the wife of former President Marcos, coincided with news that American troops would withdraw from

their bases in the country.

An agreement that they should stay for a further ten years was rejected by the Filipino Senate mainly over the low compensation terms Washington was offering. President Bush refused to renegotiate the terms and the US said it wanted four years to withdraw.

In a year in which the countries of Central and South America moved further down the road to democracy hopes had been high that with the election in Haiti at the turn of the year of Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide as President, dictatorship had at last gone. But in January the army crushed a coup attempt even before Aristide was installed and he governed for only a few months. The army itself staged a coup and he fled. Haiti seemed to be back to square one.

When the Group of Seven leaders of the rich countries met in London in July they paid little attention to the problems of the developing world. Their minds were on what was happening in the Soviet Union and their own recession and they were in no mood to step up financial flows

to the South.

Their answer was to tie their help to democracy and to apply the rules of the market. The now triumphant capitalist system was showing its downside.

### The BCCI Debacle

The collapse of the Bank of International Credit and Commerce (BCCI), which operated in 69 countries and was 77 per cent owned by the ruler of Abu Dhabi and mainly supported by Arab shareholders, marked the unweaving of what was called history's biggest fraud. Hundreds of millions of dollars had been misused all over the world, mostly at the cost of those small investors in developing countries it had purported to be helping.

As inquiries proceeded and bankers were arrested the full extent of the fraud would take years to uncover. A report in December said the bank had assets of \$1.16 billion against debts of \$10.6 billion. Depositors were owed \$10 billion.

Of all the tycoons of the Eighties who had begun to come to grief in the US, Australia and Britain the most remarkable was Czech-born British publisher Robert Maxwell.

He was picked up dead from the waters of the Can-

aries after disappearing from his luxury ship. Apart from the London Mirror group, he owned newspapers, book publishers and a myriad other companies spread across much of the industrialised world.

Within days of his death he was revealed as probably the biggest fraudster who had ever lived, having stolen something like \$1,000 million. It was a story of proportions few fiction writers would contemplate.

As the year ended with more and more revelations of financial disasters presided over by banks and accountants the now fashionable philosophy that everything should be left to market forces was looking a little ragged round the edges.

Robert Maxwell was larger than life in every way. So was 1991.

— GEMINI NEWS

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'From the saucepan into the fire!'

within their own 'kingdom'? What about most of them who are terrorised by the mention of their in-laws? And Why? Many of them are even beaten, while others are silently slain. Hence why is this major problem so much over-shadowed or rather ignored? Almost every day we read in our daily newspapers, of housewives being burnt to death, or beaten severely, and also of committing suicide.

both men and women. It is 'sunnah' and is regarded as an essential obligation to be fulfilled.

Although dowry was never a great consideration in Muslim marriages it has become increasingly so in the last few decades. Needless to say that the amount of dowry is negligible. It has become quite a business to marry a girl, confiscate her dowry, divorce her and marry again. This is in a way common mostly in the villages. What happens to the poor rejected girl seems to be no one's concern but her own and that of their families.

At no time did her position as property come forward so strongly as at the time of wedding. Even in the early years when marriage within the family was not too great an issue — even affectionate aunts would turn into a tyrannical mother-in-law, the tears could not be anything but natural and spontaneous. The songs or music played at the time of departure are also calculated to wring the last drop of emotion from the occasion and make even the most unemotional melt into a veritable deluge of tears.

## WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,  
I find it very difficult to lose weight and to restrain myself from eating rich food. Few months ago I went on a crash diet and lost 10 lb. in a month but gained it all back as soon as I stopped dieting. What should I do? Do you have any suggestions?  
Nila,  
Shegun Bagicha

the child is concerned there is no research or statistics which show that children of working mothers suffer adversely. On the contrary such children have known to be self confident, extrovert and independent. What the child needs most is a happy, secure warm and loving environment at home, and a mother who stays home does not necessarily provide such an environment. A good day-care center with competent, affectionate care provider is much better company than a maid who can provide no stimulation for the child.

Dear Nila,  
Most people trying to lose weight have similar problems. It is more difficult to retain a certain weight after a crash diet than it is to lose weight. Going on a crash diet for a month and then on an eating binge for the next month is not an ideal way of dieting. Good eating habit and regular exercise should become a way of life. Only then it is possible to stay at your ideal weight. Don't try to lose all the excess weight in one month. Spread it over the months.

Dear Mita,  
In January my daughter who is 3 will go to school. What can I do to so that she likes the school and does not feel afraid to stay without me?  
Saira, Dhanmandi

Dear Mita,  
About 6 months ago somebody known to me committed suicide because she could not bear the torture that her husband inflicted on her. Her husband went scot free and is going to remarry soon. I want to know if any charges can be brought against him. I also want to know who is responsible for her death.  
Anonymous, Dhaka.

Dear Saira,  
The first day of school is very important for all children. It is normal for most to cry in the beginning. Usually this lasts for a few days and before you know it they become eager to go to school. You can start by talking about the new school, perhaps take her for a visit and show her the building. Buying school things such as a new bag, tiffin box etc creates enthusiasm in a child.

Dear Anonymous,  
It is difficult to bring charges against anyone in such a case. The first question usually asked is why wasn't a case of cruelty, assault or violence reported when the victim was alive. It is tricky and difficult to prove this in court and would require solid and irrefutable proof and witnesses. As to who is responsible for her death, well the obvious person is her husband but her family, close friends, and our society will also have to take part of the blame. Perhaps she did not get the support and confidence which would have enabled her to break away from the traditional notion of marriage and start a life of her own.

## WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,  
I am a working mother with 2 children age 5 and 2 1/2. The older one goes to school and I have put the younger one in a day-care center. My mother-in-law is very unhappy about this. She thinks I am cruel to put a child of only 2 1/2 in a school and she insists that the child will suffer psychological damage. What do you think? I feel very guilty but cannot stop working.  
Meena,  
Sobhanbag, Dhaka.

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, Toynee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.

Dear Meena,  
Most working mothers suffer from guilt and therefore this feeling is not uncommon. As far as psychological damage to