

# The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

REMOTE control in hand, the viewer watches the cricket match from halfway across the globe on a thin screen hung on the wall like a poster. In a corner of the screen an inset shows the programmes on other channels. With the flick of a finger, the arrival time of a plane appears on the screen. A few minutes later, the phone rings, and the caller's name and number flash in a corner of the television screen, waiting for the viewer to take the call or type an excuse into the remote control.

This is now, soon. According to International Telecommunications Union's Chief Technical Advisor Mr. Sunuhi Cav, within a decade broadcasting science will be 100% transformed. A tremendous volume of research is going into telecommunications, both at the competitive industrial level and at the government services level. All the conventional screens and telephones that we are used to will become obsolete.

Clarity of television images, to take one example, will increase a hundred-fold. The fine dots to be seen when we approach the screen will be closer together, resulting in much higher picture-resolution. If the present quality is comparable to 18-millimetre camera film, then the future will compare with 35-mm film. This kind of high-definition TV is ready, but still not economically viable in most of the world.

In Europe, viewers can catch hundreds of channels simply by installing satellite dishes in the backyard. The global village is beamed into their living-rooms. French TV owners can buy Teletext, a subscription service that inserts information on to the screen. Punch a few keys, and the railway schedule appears, or the weather, or even shopping possibilities.

Of course, the scenario in Bangladesh is still far from backyard dishes. Broadcasting technology in this country suffers from a crippling lack of funds. A recently-launched 1.2 mil-

## WHAT WILL TOMORROW'S TELEVISION BE LIKE?

by S. Bari

**Although technical quality on Bangladesh Television conforms to international standards, the broadcasting technology in this country suffers from a crippling lack of funds. A recently launched 1.2m dollar International Telecommunications Union project aims to upgrade this technology in the region, says Mr. Sunuhi Cav, ITU Chief Technical Advisor, in an interview with The Daily Star.**

lion-dollar ITU project aims to upgrade this technology in the region. The increasing power and educational potential of television make it imperative that this medium be developed. The basic needs, according to Mr. Cav, are better and more up-to-date equipment, technical assistance, maintenance service, and advisory services. "All this converges on trained personnel," he says, stressing that manpower is a crucial element even in the ultra-mechanized world of telecommunications. "Humans are the most important resource in any country."

A work programme for the next two years under the project has been laid out. ITU is collaborating with local broadcasting personnel to provide software and engineering codes. "There is a considerable degree of know-how

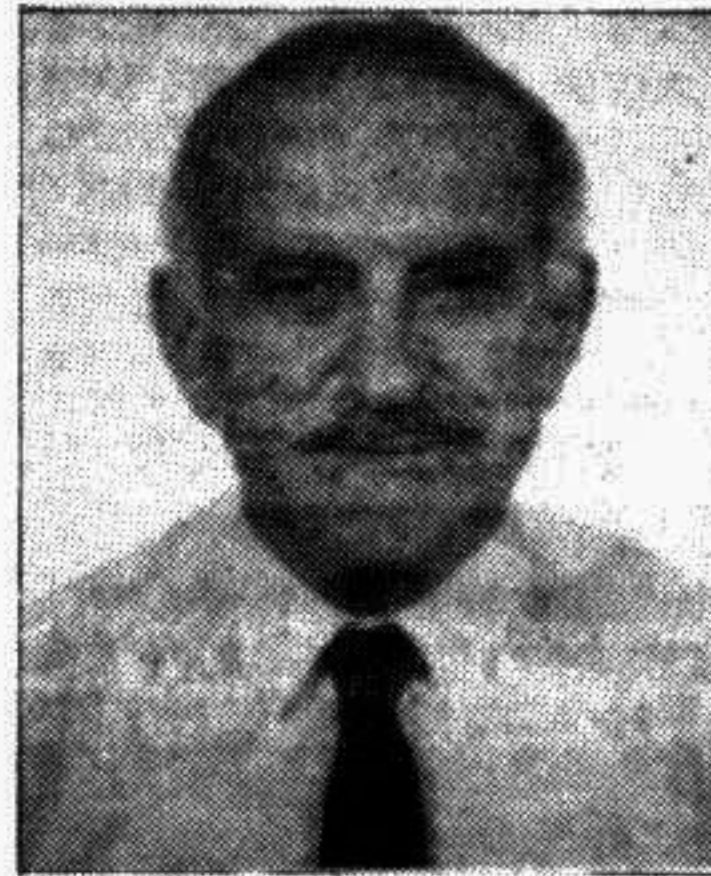
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in Bangladesh," asserts Mr. Cav, despite the economic and political restraints. Since his last visit six years ago, he sees a not-negligible amount of progress. "Systems are still in operating condition. People plan for future programming needs, and a new studio complex is under construction." Technical

quality on Bangladesh Television conforms to international standards: "I am not talking of what you see on screen. I mean the equipment and broadcasting behind it."

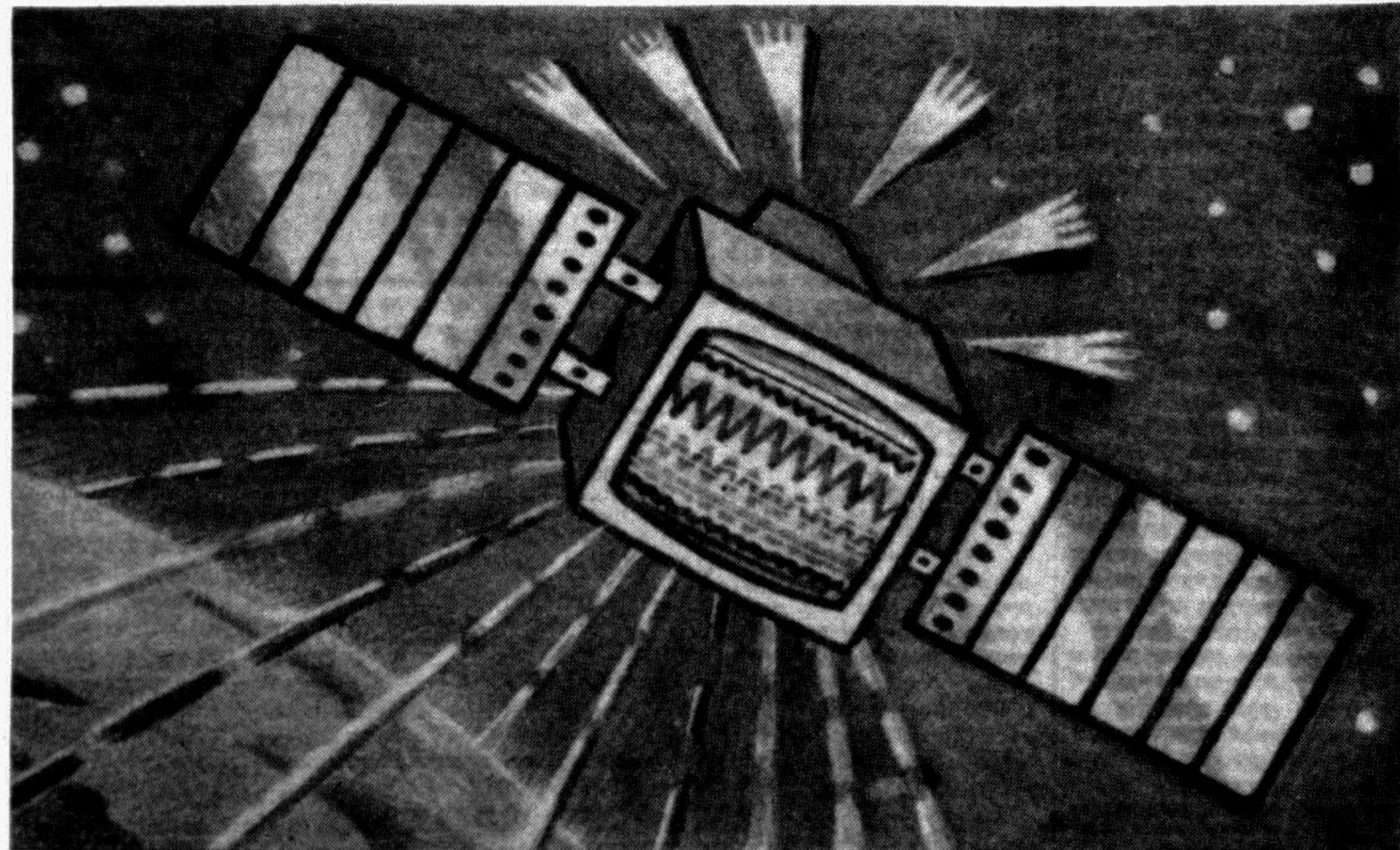
Programming is another story. Mass media has become extremely powerful over the past three decades, and TV is its most influential arm. Unfortunately, TV is also very vulnerable to political pressure or vested interests that refuse to let it loose.

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Mr. Sunuhi Cav

Such restraints operate in all countries, and Bangladesh is no exception. As a result, the working platform of television is unstable, and the public-service role of broadcasting is frustrated. When TV becomes a personal tool, it does more harm than good. "For such reasons, I believe in decentralized management," opined Mr. Cav. "But I hope the political atmosphere will be modified now." Only conscious effort will enable television broad-



casting to break free of any pressure that holds it hostage.

In order to decrease dependence on the government, BTV needs money. "BTV has a good income, did you know that? But it goes directly into the National Treasury." The influence of that money can control and affect services. Mr. Cav suggests that private individuals tap the money-making potential of TV.

CNN is big business. News agencies like Reuters and Agence France-Presse are big business. This business potential could be explored in Bangladesh. "There are people with a lot of money to invest. Both television and these people could profit from private TV channels. Privately-run broadcasts would also give apolitical programming a new lease of life."

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satellite TV, Mr. Cav deplored the rising popularity of sex and violence in programming. "This is particularly bad for young people. Each country has the right to set broadcasting policy and decide what it wants on its airwaves." Bangladesh suffers mainly from an influx of videos. In Europe, cable channels and Ameri-

can programmes on private channels are under attack. France consciously fights this onslaught, and has in the process strengthened its own soap operas and variety shows. "There is no barrier to radio waves," advises Mr. Cav. The only remedy is to improve domestic programmes.

Another difficulty lies in balancing quality-control and outright censorship. The standards a country wishes to apply to its television programmes have to be upheld, but it is easy for standard-setting to lapse into totalitarianism. Mr. Cav cited this as another argument for decentralized management.

Mr. Cav spoke enthusiastically of global exchange possibilities, though he pointed out that ITU only handled technology, not programming. Proponents of global exchange expect it to lessen Third-World dependency on Western programmes, especially news. The UNESCO conflict a few years ago was brought about due to an attempt to create a Third-World news agency, attempt that met with fierce opposition from established rival agencies understandably against any challenge to their monopoly. "We depend too much on Western media," says Mr. Cav. "Several world-wide agencies, be they leftist, rightist, whatever, would balance the picture better." The viewer could choose among various opinions and angles to form a clearer judgement.

"Technology and programming are two different things," reminded Mr. Cav. But the former serves the latter, and the latter cannot improve without the former. In a country beset with economic and political instability, BTV's efforts are, in perspective, encouraging. As the world grows ever smaller, and we watch wars from our sofas, the future influence of television becomes ever apparent. This influence must be used for the best.

S. Bari is a Feature Writer of The Daily Star.

THE newsroom of the New Nation, the afternoon daily of the prestigious Singapore newspaper group, the Straits Times, was always a little quiet, by South Asian standards. There some 30-odd subeditors, reporters, features and a few of senior editors sat in the big hall, talked in whispers and carried on their work with typical Singaporean precision which two South Asians — Shri Mulgaokar and myself — considered rather boring.

Here, one could always rely on Jackie Sam, a senior reporter cum feature writer, to break the monotony of the routine. Whenever he heard about a major development or seen an important news item on the teletypewriter, he would first rush to my desk and give me the news, with his own interpretation, then to Mulgaokar who was to leave in a year's time to join the Indian Express as the Chief Editor and then to other colleagues. Dick Wilson, a former editor of the Far Eastern Economic Review, whom many here may still remember as a former lecturer in Law in the Dhaka University, probably in the late fifties, would come out of his cubicle to find out what Jackie was talking about.

Thus, on March 26, 1971, it was Jackie Sam who brought us the news of the crackdown on what we then still referred to as East Pakistan. The first report probably came from either New Delhi or Calcutta. The paper which was normally printed around noon just managed to get it in and that too as an eight-column spread, together with a file photo of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his last abortive political talk with General Yahya Khan. There was no time for any editorial comment.

If we had some doubts about how my colleagues in the Straits Times and the New Nation, all Singaporeans with a few exceptions like myself, Mulgaokar and Wilson, would treat the news of the liberation

## How We Chose to Forget Our Friends and Forgive Our Enemies!

struggle of Bangladesh, whether it would be a reaction of support or one of indifference, these doubts vanished in matter of days. The support extended to our struggle by both the Straits Times and the New Nation was simply overwhelming. The local Pakistani mission which was headed by a trade consul told his friends that I must have been behind this anti-Islamabad press campaign, while the High Commissioner for India, the distinguished journalist Prem Bhatia, offered me his personal congratulations for the role played by our two papers.

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Both were totally wrong. The support given to our struggle by my colleagues in the Straits Times and the New Nation was totally unprompted and untutored. In other words, it was essentially based on their own journalistic judgement, human instincts and above all, on their own sense of solidarity with the suffering humanity in Bangladesh.

for writers, some of whom were established in the field and some were still struggling to make their mark. So, the paper carried post-edits and individual columns, all written by staff members, like Jackie, Pakir Singh, Pang Ching Lian, Abby Tan, Dick Wilson, Mulgaokar and myself. Then, there was the daily feature page where we had a lot of space to fill.

The problem facing — both Mulgaokar and myself was how to provide our young colleagues with enough background information about

Bangladesh that they could use in their columns. When we too failed to meet their demand, they would put all kinds of things in their pieces. "While normal human beings count sheep to fall asleep, Jackie once wrote in his weekly column, 'Yahya Khan counts dead bodies of his innocent victims in Bangladesh.'" In line with the advice from Wilson who served as a much-respected adviser to the paper, most edi-

torials on the struggle of Bangladesh for independence were written by Mulgaokar. Perhaps, Wilson was right in thinking that I was under too much of mental strain to write

### MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

what he would call balanced pieces in a foreign newspaper. Here, my protests were in vain. Instead, I would get into arguments with Mulgaokar over his "balanced" editorials in which he often offered unsolicited advice to Islamabad as to how the crisis could be resolved "amicably," that is, without giving independence to Bangladesh.

I used my freedom to write about Bangladesh in my own column. One piece was about Maulvi Bazar, a sentimental piece on my hometown which lived in total despair and frustration (maybe nothing much has changed yet for this town) which was somewhat symbolic of the whole country. After the piece appeared, a group of residents of Singapore, most of them originally from Sylhet, got together to have me over to give a talk on Bangladesh. Among them were two interesting persons, Ms Mani Chandala, the daughter of the late K.V. Chusa, formerly a member of the Indian Parliament from Nagaland and who had once served in Sylhet as a Civil Servant, and Mushahid Ali, a Singapore citizen working for the Foreign Ministry who now heads a Singapore diplomatic mission

somewhere in Asia. Our plan was to send a Singapore journalist to Bangladesh to do some on-the-spot reporting on the land fighting for its independence.

It started as an idea — we all felt that we should supplement the agency reporting — but it became a serious proposition, when Pakistani authorities invited a Malaysian-born, Singapore-based journalist, one Pillai (I would rather not use his full name) on a visit to Bangladesh. On his return, Pillai wrote a number of articles favourable to Islamabad. The series was offered to the New Nation and the Straits Times. If I remember correctly, not a line from any of Pillai's articles appeared in any of our publications.

Thanks to Leon Howell, an American freelance journalist, based in Singapore, the plan was eventually carried out with great success. Howell used a meagre financial support from a feature syndicate to meet a part of his expenses, but we raised some funds to supplement his modest budget. The New Nation agreed to use a three-part series from Howell at above-average rate.

Howell made the visit and on his return to Singapore, wrote a three-part series, titled, "Along the Rivers of Bangladesh." Unlike other foreign journalists who stayed in Dhaka, Leon (as we all called

him) travelled in villages, usually by boat, talking to farmers and landless peasants about their lives and problems, hopes and dreams. The series reported genocide, but it also dealt extensively with the worst form of poverty my American friend had seen anywhere in Asia. It was not based on dull statistics, but on the writer's own observations, with all the noise, dirt and smell of a typical Bangladesh village. However, Leon did not fail to catch the fleeting glimpses of the unfathomable beauty, whether one sees it in

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a sunset over Meghna or in a rainbow over Padma, and to convey it in his writing. All this had an impact on the educated elite and even the government of Singapore. The Committee that was set up in the city republic in support of Bangladesh consisted of some outstanding citizens like David Marshal, the eminent lawyer who was the first Chief Minister of Singapore when the island was still under

British rule and Tommy Koh, then the head of the Department of Law in the University of Singapore, who, until recently, was the Singapore Permanent Representative to the United Nations and the Republic's Ambassador to the United States.

The Committee enjoyed full support from the then Foreign Minister, Rajaratnam and tacit approval from Lee Kuan Yew.

Thanks to the efforts of our good friend, K.K. Panni, the

roving Ambassador of Bangladesh in Southeast Asia, the struggle generated the same level of support in other Southeast Asian capitals. The Thai intelligentsia and the country's leading English-language daily, Bangkok Post proved to be bastion of support for Bangladesh. In Indonesia, our leading supporters were journalists Rosihan Anwar, the Magsaysay Award winner

Mochtar Lubis and Sumono Mostafa who did a lot of writing in favour of our liberation struggle. In Malaysia, it was Samad Ismail and the lawyers, James and Dominic Puthucherry. In Manila, there was the Press Foundation of Asia which was then headed by Amitabha Chowdhury who provided jobs to two Bengalees, Ataur and Nasir, who had nowhere else to go. But there was several outstanding Filipinos like Magsaysay Award winner, Sionil Jose, Blas Ople, Juan Gatbonton, Chino Roces and Henny Lopes who regarded the struggle of Bangladesh as their own.

During the struggle, this writer always felt that we should find way of giving due recognition to these friends in Bangladesh. They did not ask for it. We just owed it to them.

On my arrival in Dhaka in February, 1972, I proposed to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman first directly and then through his aides who had the leader completely surrounded all the time that, with the help of our diplomatic missions, we should draw up a list of these outstanding Asians (or Europeans, Africans, Arabs and Latin Americans) who should get signed letters from Sheikh Sahib thanking them for the support they had given to our struggle. At that time, a letter signed by Bangabandhu was worth a ton to gold to many of our friends abroad.

Need I tell you that my humble proposal fell by the way side? It took only a few years for us to lose the friends we had gained in 1971. So every independence day fills my heart with a bit of sadness, side by side with some joy, because, as the saying goes, we chose to forget our friends and forgive our enemies.

