

A TV Folly

There is plenty of justification for TV viewers taking a critical position against the appalling long coverage of the performance of Umrah at Makkah by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia during the 8 O'clock Bangla newscast on Tuesday night.

In shortening the controversial coverage for the English-language newscast, the BTV authorities probably made an instinctive response to criticisms made of the earlier Bangla newscast rather than due to any conscious understanding of the professional incompetence displayed during the 8 O'clock programme.

Let us go to the crux of the problem. What was wrong with the coverage given to the performance of Umrah by the Prime Minister in the Bangla newscast? Devoid of any intrinsic news value as such, it was essentially an exercise in image building of the Prime Minister as a deeply religious person, the kind of exercise which was "perfected" for the benefit of the ousted president Hussain Mohammad Ershad by BTV.

It is said that senior officials in the Ministry of Information have asked for an explanation from BTB about the handling of the 8 O'clock newscast on Tuesday night. It will be interesting to know what kind of explanation, if any, is offered by the television authorities.

Ecological Points to Ponder

A correspondent writing to a Bengali national daily has recently put some very pertinent questions about the cheetah that was presented to the Prime Minister the other day. The cheetah — or was it a leopard, which is unlikely — has been put on the list of endangered species in Bangladesh and is as such not lawful quarry for anyone.

Yet, the cheetah was brought to the Jatiya Sangsad and ceremoniously presented to the Prime Minister who very graciously donated her unusual gift to the National Zoo. Thus the Jatiya Sangsad as also the Prime Minister was made into unwilling parties to the violation of a law and, more importantly, to the violation of the spirit behind the current worldwide surge for letting the environment to live.

We feel that all these questions are very pertinent and deserve to be gone into with all seriousness. Ecology and environment haven't to date received more than mere lip service in our country — to the peril of all of us who live here as well as our posterity.

Another correspondent has the same day questioned the wisdom of going for large-scale eucalyptus forestry in Bangladesh. In neighbouring India there has been a very strong resistance against eucalyptus plantations and the popular movement has been able to stall the government attempt to bring large areas under eucalyptus forests.

Administrative Culture and Related Issues

by Tafazzal Hussain

THE Prime Minister the other day gave a clarion call to all civil servants to be efficient, honest, just and people-oriented in their activities as public servants.

Let us hope that this is no wishful thinking. The actual facts have to be faced if one means business. The real scenario is that bureaucracy today is in shambles. The effective chain of command is gone. There is no discipline, nobody listens to anybody.

If one looks back, one has to admit that bureaucracy had a noteworthy past, particularly in respect of its discipline, efficiency and integrity. The members of administration in those days had a culture. They had a standard of conduct.

they, as representatives of the ruling class, tried to keep aloof from the people; yet at the same time, in their day-to-day work, they tried to exercise justice and fairplay to the people.

However, the erosion of values began with the Second World War, but nonetheless substantially remained till independence of Bangladesh. Then, quickly, discipline was gone and corrupt practices started creeping into all levels of the government set-up.

When Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman came to power, he did his best in bringing back some discipline. Efforts to bring the civil servants and the service structure under a rational system were made and in the process, a 'Pay and Services Commission' came into being.

New Administration Culture

A new administrative culture developed, without the British or Pakistani content of aloofness and guardianship role working. Yet, all was not well among the bureaucrats.

structure. A true public servant was confident that so long as he was in the right path, to the best of his belief, nobody would touch him or get away with any wrong-doing or mischief-making perpetrated on him.

In later years of the British rule, a young and trusted officer was assigned the task of starting a field job, involving hundreds of workers, on scheduled time. He had to take formal approval of his absent boss to start the job, under the rules.

In another case, a British field officer was punished by his superior officer (also a British) for failure to accomplish his assigned job. In desperation, he committed suicide.

CHOGM: Human Rights Will be a Hot Issue

by Derek Ingram

AT the centre of the Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Harare will be issues that the Commonwealth — or most other international organisations for that matter — has never before really tackled head-on: the quality of government, the implementation of democracy, and human rights.

Yet the Commonwealth has been founded and built since the Empire began to disappear 40 years ago on firm principles of democracy. The Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, adopted in 1971, talks of the people's inalienable right "to participate by means of free and democratic processes in framing the society in which they live."

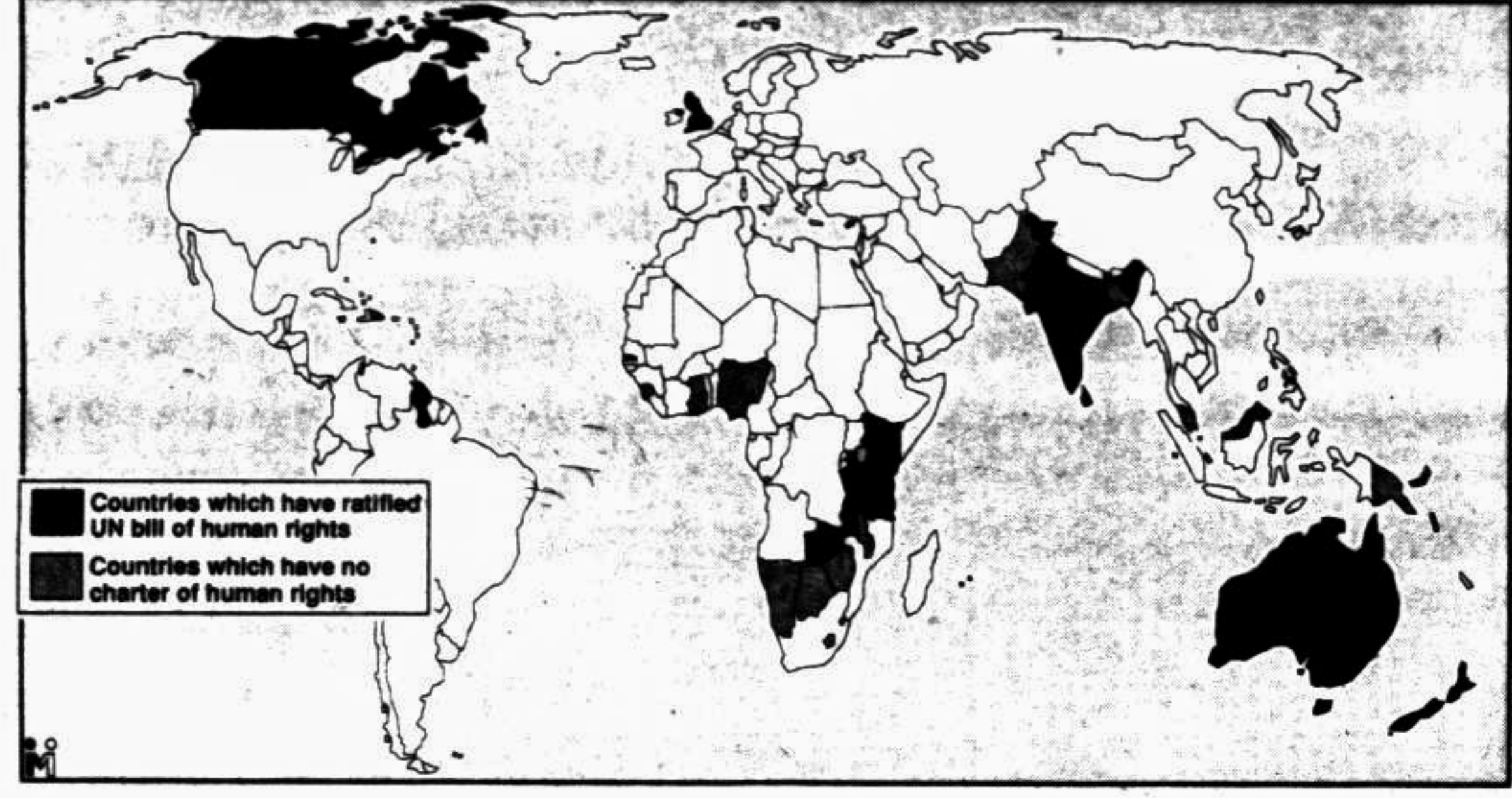
setting up of a human rights unit in the Secretariat. At the last summit in Kuala Lumpur it was agreed that the Commonwealth should provide election observer groups on government request and help in other ways to reinforce election and other constitutional processes.

Last February it helped run a seminar in Mozambique — a non-member — on preparations for multi-party elections in 1992 and help in planning and managing the elections and training officials has been requested.

It calls for the adoption of a declaration of principles on human rights; a fund for human rights activities and more resources for the Human Rights Unit; setting up of procedures to ensure constitutional or legal protection of human rights; appointment of a standing commission to advise on human rights in the Commonwealth; and a greater role for NGOs in education and provision of legal resources centres in every Commonwealth country to advise NGOs.

Much of the running on human rights in the Commonwealth has been made by one small country, the Gambia, and its long-standing President, Sir Dawda Jawara. He will be in Harare arguing away with his colleagues as he has done for so long. Some of them will be nervous and cautious.

Commonwealth: human rights



Even as the West watches entranced the collapse of the Soviet Union, Indian political thinkers fear the eclipse of communism may jeopardise commitments to social justice in the developing world. The rapid changes in the Soviet Union have reversed notions of the primacy of the state it, ushering in a more egalitarian social order in the Third World.

It has also created a world where with the dismemberment of the East Bloc, the axis of power is the industrialised West. With the end of superpower rivalry, developing countries have lost their leverage in global affairs.

The dream of a welfare state that will help bridge the gap between rich and poor in developing countries has been shattered by the seeming failure of socialism. Commented Harish Khare in the influential Times of India newspaper: "In the aftermath of the Soviet debacle, we may be intellectually prepared to abandon the commitment to a humane social order, leaving the magic of the marketplace to cure our social and economic ills."

Third World: Fears for Social Justice

Experts are concerned that the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union may weaken commitments to social justice in the developing world. Astri Ghosh of IPS reports from New Delhi.

some leverage and some freedom to manoeuvre internationally. But as we move towards a polycentric world order, relationships will depend on the effectiveness of the nation in the global marketplace." Eric Gonsalves, former foreign secretary, told IPS.

"Not everybody can be equal and some like the United States will be more equal than others (in the future)," he added.

As the Soviet Union unravels, observers here warn "the very notion of sovereignty has been rendered less sacrosanct". Separatist groups in the troubled states of northern Jammu and Kashmir and north-western Punjab are likely to be heard with a new receptivity in Western capitals, they point out.

All know they have skeletons in their human rights cupboards — wrongful convictions in England and mistreatment in Ulster jails, the treatment of aborigines in Australia or the Indians in Canada are just as worrying as the plight of the untouchables in India, injustices in Sri Lanka or what is going on in Malawi and Kenya.

Of all the discussions in Harare human rights is likely to be the most contentious. Yet as an international forum for this kind of frank debate the Commonwealth is unequalled because of the informality it provides. The weekend retreat, this time to be at Victoria Falls, presents an opportunity to talk about issues like these that no other international gathering offers.

socialism and not socialism", there is no doubt that its collapse has left a gaping hole in the communist movement.

Most Third World countries are watching with trepidation the Soviet Union crumble. Moscow was the inspiration of liberation movements around the world where socialism, and not capitalism had, most often, offered a way for a more equitable social order.

Indian communists who continue to cling to their doctrinaire view of Marxism, fear a weak non-socialist Soviet Union would be an open invitation for Washington and its allies to use strong-arm tactics in the Third World.

"The US declaring itself the victor of the Cold War, is embarking on a course of creating its own 'new world order' ... this is bound to create a conflict between the developing world and imperialism," the Communist Party of India said in a recent statement.

To the Editor...

Question of survival Sir, We are seriously concerned by the recent and continuing harassment of the children selling flowers outside the Sheraton Hotel. In many cases the children have been picked up and taken to shelters for the homeless in Mirpur. These children are not homeless and their parents have often been frantic with worry until they were able to trace their children. When we made enquiries from the law-enforcing agencies as to why this drive was being mounted,

all they could say was that this was being done on orders. The so-called V.I.P. Road and its environs had to be kept clear of all hawkers, peddlars and so on so as not to create a bad impression. We are at a loss to understand the rationale behind this order. The fact the Bangladesh is a poor country is not to be disguised by such cosmetic operations reminiscent (historically) of the efforts in czarist Russia, where in Peter the Great's time billboards with scenes of rural prosperity were used to hide the rural slums

mal, to stave off their hunger at odd late night hours, the write-up may smack of traces of humbuggery. If people who fall down victims of needs of victuals at odd hours at night, cannot handle the emergency with easy-to-make coffee or tea or a few toasts with boiled eggs, they seem to be poor specimens of denizens of an urban milieu. They should starve rather than make a virtue of their culinary ineptitude at its rudimentary level.

Survive: that this should be visible in the least of our problems. Roushan Jahan Parvin (Advocate) Atr O Salish Kendro Shantinagar, Dhaka. Victuals at odd hours Sir, The humorous sketch under the caption "Eating out at 3 in the morning" in the column "Dhaka Day by Day" (Oct 12) may offer helpful guidance for the elite sections of our people, but for the general urbanites, even ready to foot a larger bill than the nor-