Dhaka, Thursday, October 17, 1991

A TV Folly

There is plenty of justification for TV viewers taking a critical position against the appallingly long coverage of the performance of Umrah at Makkah by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia during the 8 O'clock Bangla newscast on Tuesday night. Not surprisingly, numerous members of the public phoned newspaper offices, including of The Daily Star, and Bangladesh Television (BTV) protesting the screening of what was reported to be an unedited video of a private religious ceremony observed by Begum Zia. The wave of protests probably had some affect of sorts. During the 10 o'clock English newscast later, the same programme was cut down to a five-minute telecast.

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 Oclock programme. This being so, we can expect similar mistakes to be repeated in future, whether or not there are angry phone calls made to the BTV against such a coverage.

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. An authoritarian ruler like Ershad probably saw the need for this kind of build-up, notwithstanding the anger and resentment it caused among TV viewers. Does a democratically elected leader of the country like Begum Zia who has won a place for herself among her people also need the same kind of electronic build-up? The answer to the question should certainly be in the negative. If authorities in BTV or in the Ministry of Information think- and act -otherwise, they are certainly doing a disservice to the Prime Minister, the people Bangladesh and the TV viewers, in this order.

It is said that senior officials in the Ministry of Information have asked for an explanation from BTV 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. However, while taking the "holier than thou" attitude, the Ministry of Information cannot shirk its responsibility in this matter. It is the Ministry which must provide the BTV with new guidelines for its news coverage, especially of the government-related activities, the coverage which is based on professionalism, careful planning, innovation and the minimum build-up of personality cult. There are no visible signs that any such new guidelines have been prepared, discussed or handed down to the television authorities. In such circumstances, any blame laid at the gate of the Rampura Complex of BTV by the Ministry of Information is very much a case of pot calling the kettle black.

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. The Sylhet people who caught it from their jungles needed to have a permission from appropriate authority being able to go hunting for it. Did they get the permission? Perhaps not. Did they regularise their catch with the proper agency afterwards? Perhaps not. In fact any agency helping to allow this kind of poaching would stand to face serious questions.

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. The correspondent asked why weren't knowledgeable people around the Prime Minister who could advise her to instruct the good men poachers of Sylhet to take the cheetah back to its habitat and let it be alone in peace. The Zoo at Mirpur is not the right place to send rare members of our endangered species and subsequently get them killed.

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. But in other countries, starting from Australia, the home of the fast growing herbal oil yielding tree, to Brazil where tropical rain forests are being defoliated in dangerous chunks, eucalyptuses are proving a regular boon. So, it cannot be said without well-established proofs whether eucalyptus forestry would be good or bad for our country. The authorities would do well to heed this little word of caution, for, ecologically speaking, there is hardly any reversing process for the harms already done. You can hardly bring back the gharials once infesting our rivers.

Administrative Culture and Related Issues

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. The members of the bureaucracy have, believably, realized that they have now a moral obligation, apart from their normal official duties, to do their part in helping the newly emerged democracy to take roots and flourish.

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. Without constant greasing at every step, the administrative machine does not move. A sense of frustration on the part of the general public, the business community, the industrial entrepreneurs and all concerned prevails. Sense of values has disappeared, corruption is openly there and nobody is ashamed of it. The administrative conscience has made an honourable exit. Of course, this is a very gloomy picture, but we have to face it if we want to move forward.

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. There was a sense of dignity. self- respect and desire to abide by discipline. Whenever a person was recruited in government service, he felt that

he had acquired a separate, honourable entity. He realized that his position carried some responsibility in related degree and he was expected to do fairplay in discharging it for anybody coming to him for relief or services. Generally, he developed a sense of pride associated with his job. It was not conceit, but self-esteem. The bottom line was that he could not think of betraying the trust reposed on him by the administration. A self-respecting officer thought it beneath his dignity to do something wrong deliberately in return of graft or some kind of undue favour. This was his culture - the administrative culture prevailing at the time.

I am not overstating, nor am I holding a brief for the British colonial system of administration or a bureaucratic pattern of Pakistani style. These had their own drawbacks, own shortcomings and sometimes were sources of unethical and unacceptable acts from a true national point of view. And moreover, there were blacksheeps, corrupt persons and those overzealous people always ready to please their masters. Worst of all, they were very often used as tools (barring exceptions) to promote and accomplish the narrow colonial interests which, to the top bosses, was of supreme importance. This was as much true in British days as in Pakistani times. Apart from this particular aspect, the members of administrative cohort at all levels cultivated a tradition of discipline, fairness, dutifulness and honourable conduct. True,

by Tafazzal Hussain 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

Erosion of Values 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. The inescapable result was lawlessness, looting of public properties and a sort of anarchy all around. In the bureaucratic sphere, usual standard norms were discarded, officials were summarily sacked and new appointments made without assigning any reason. Instances of blatant harassment of offictals were very common. Bureaucrats' morale broke down completely.

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. The administrative set-up was re-structured and it got back on the rail and selfconfidence of bureaucrats reappeared to some extent. However, corruption was not altogether uprooted from different levels of administration; but as the Head of Government was known to be personally

clean and free from any kind of nepotism or dishonest practices, there was no corrupting influence from the top echelons of administration to its lower levels. By and large, a salutary atmosphere was created discouraging corruption and favouritism or nepotism.

President Zia's constant efforts were to direct the bureaucrats and all concerned towards nation-building activities. In his time, emphasis was laid on overall national development by working in villages through canal-digging, mass literacy, and village uplift and population programmes; and in all such activities, he gave his personal lead in the actual field. The Swanirvar programmes got a real boost and a spirit of self-help developed. In short, the nation got a new sense of direction. As the people and public servants were working from the common platform, a spirit of mutual trust grew and the sense

New Administration Culture

of aloofness on the part of gov

ernment servants largely dis-

appeared. This was a good au-

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. A tradition of man-to-man trust and self-confidence was missing, Previously, an attitude of mutual trust — an intra-service healthy relationship - existed throughout the bureaucratic

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 mischiefmaking perpetrated on him. Another good trait which gradually lost ground was the initiative of a public servant. These two virtues, in former days, combined to make the administration efficient and dedicated. A few typical cases of true stories can be cited below in this connection.

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. He travelled far outside his jurisdiction, beyond the then province of Bengal, to locate his boss and get the required approval. He did it on his own initiative, as there was no time for taking prior approval. The young offcer was not punished, nor even reprimanded for 'unauthorised' leaving his station, but actually appreciated. as the assigned job started on

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

Yet another case of exemplary sense of integrity was found in a junior administrative officer, posted in Feni war-zone in 1941-42. In a direct attack of aerial bombing by the Japanese, his residence

was destroyed completely and he lost all his belongings. He claimed as dictated by his conscience a meagre compensation of Tk 670/- when the government announced that all government servants who sustained loss in that aerial bombing would be fully compen-/ sated. The officer had the mental satisfaction that he did not cheat the government and thereby degrade himself.

In those days, a boss used to

back-up his own officers, when in distress of trouble, magnan imously - which is perhaus unthinkable today. An SDO h II seriously ill while working very hard to organise a big event as deputy of the then Divisional Commissioner. It was a case of para-typhoid, for which specific antibiotic drug was not yet available in the market. However, he recovered quickly, but the illness relapsed to continue for a month more. The officer in his month-long bed-ridden condition forgot to make a formal application for leave, although the District Magistrate came to see him at his residence and advised him to get well first and not to bother about leave, The Divisional Commissioner was annoyed and directed the District Magistrate to take disciplinary action against the ailing SDO. The District Magistrate replied that the SDO was not at fault and that if anybody was responsible for delay in making the leave application, it was he and not the SDO, as he himself advised the SDO not to bother about leave while lying sick.

(To be concluded tomor-

CHOGM: Human Rights Will be a Hot Issue

by Derek Ingram

T 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

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 Comm onwealth 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." Member countries pledged "to promote... those representative institutions and guarantees for personal freedom under the law that are our common heritage."

The leaders may still fudge it a bit this time round, but the changing world climate is steadily making it impossible to do that much longer. The upheavals in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War have shown that people power has suddenly become a most potent force.

It is now just beginning to be accepted that in this shrinking globe the old notion of "non-interference in internal affairs" is no longer tenable. If your neighbour is poisoning the water you drink you have to do something about it pretty fast, even it means breaking into his house.

Commonwealth Secretary-

General Emeka Anyaoku said in London on the eve of the Harare meeting that "as we discuss human rights it will become progressively accepted that some of the concerns shared by all will be allowable. You can't do it in one jump. Better in a hop, step and jump. We are in the first stage of

Anyaoku determined when he took over the job in 1990 that he would do all he could to improve the quality of democracy and human rights in the Commonwealth, which had already moved some distance on these fronts by virtue of the election observer group exercise it carried out in Zimbabwe in 1980 and by the

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. Soon afterwards an observer group went to Malaysia. Later another went to Bangladesh.

A group will go to Zambia immediately after CHOGM for the October 31 elections there. And after that, observers will go to Guyana. a fifth country has already asked for ob-

Commonwealth: human rights

The legal and parliamentary network in the Commonwealth is able to provide many other elements to buttress democracy — advisers, for example, on parliamentary drafting and procedures. It helped to draft the constitution of Namibia and it stands ready to help in South Africa.

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.

The Commonwealth can provide help to strengthen election commissions, review election laws, upgrade electoral systems by computerisation of voter registration.

The moment for all this activity is ripe. Today the Commonwealth political scene is greatly changed from what it was a decade ago. Of the 50 countries, only three -Nigeria, Ghana and Lesotho still have military governments and all are pledged soon to

return to civilian rule. Only five countries still have one-party rule and three of these — Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Seychelles - are at different stages of considering multi-partyism. Only Malawi and Kenya are still resolutely opposed to any change.

This new scene runs parallel internationally with the rapidly spreading popular demands for multi-partyism or pluralism by aid-givers and by UN organisations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) for what western governments variously call good government or good

governance. Improved human rights follow from better quality democracy and are increasingly seen as vital to a country's development, so the time has never seemed better to press for these too. In the Commonwealth, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been making the running.

A report compiled on behalf of five of them - the doctors. lawyers, journalists and trade unions - has just plopped on the desks of member governments. It has come near to becoming an official conference document - quite an achievement for NGOs.

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 Common-

wealth 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. Str 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.

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.

- GEMINI NEWS

Third World: Fears for Social Justice

VEN 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 in 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."

UN bill of human rights

charter of human rights

Countries which have no

For most developing countries, the Soviet Union was a countervailing force to the power of the United States and its allies in the global arena.

During the Cold War, neither Moscow nor Washington attempted to ride roughshod over Third World nations whose interests were protected by either bloc.

But with the dismantling of the bipolar world. Indian experts fear New Delhi, close as it was to Moscow, may have lost its past influence in world affairs.

"The Cold War gave India

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

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

As the Soviet Union unravels, observers here warn "the very notion of sovereignty has been rendered less sacro-

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.

"New Delhi will have to gear itself to put up with a lot of Western presumptuousness and arrogant advice on dealing with matters which till now were considered as our internal business," said Khare.

"The danger is that with the communist parties too disheartened to warn and caution the country against US pressures, we may lack the necessary political will to stand up to Washington," he added.

With the United States setting the terms of the "new world order" of free markets and private property, the developing world will have to realign its domestic policies according to Washington's dictates, some analysts say.

"Any talk of correcting social inequities or alleviation of poverty or redistribution of national wealth would be simply dismissed as 'left-wring' foolishness," said an analyst.

Though the Indian Left insists that what has failed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was a "certain model of

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.

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 lawenforcing 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, pedlars 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

from the royal view. If the authorities are so concerned about appearances, - when so much real work remains to be done, it hardly bodes well for any development activities.

As far as he flower-sellers

are concerned, this action is depriving them of their fundamental right to earn a living and survive. Until the socioeconomic situation of the country improves, until there is full employment at fair wages, such children and their families will have to eke out their earnings in this way and others. It is only the reasonably

well off who can buy garlands and flowers. Confine these children to their slums and they will turn to the sale of more lucrative things.

Yes, it is worrying that the children should take the risks they do to sell their flowers. But that is not what is bothering the authorities. If this were so they would have made alternative arrangements for the children to pursue this work in less hazardous circumstances. What shames us or should shame us is that so many children must work to

survive: that this should be visible in the least of our problem.

(Advocate) Ain O Salish Kendro Shantinagar, Dhaka

Victuals at odd hours

Roushan Jahan Parvin

Str. 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 normal, to stave off their hunger at odd late night hours, the write-up may smack of traces of humbuggery. If people who fall sudden 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.

Dhanmandi, Dhaka.

A S M Nurunnabt