

Fighting Fundamentalism with Poetry

The just concluded Sixth National Poetry Festival had as its motto Poetry shall resist fundamentalism. There are enough reasons for taking the poets and their platform and their yearly slogan seriously.

The Poetry Festival stands anointed by the most joyfully sacred and proud remembrance that it brings yearly of Qamrul Hassan, the painter. The history of man's struggle for liberty is not replete with poets and artists dying to the executioner's axe or the marauding horde's bullet.

There was, however, a sordid postscript to that heroic death. The autocrat whom Hassan had called the 'bishsho-behaya' — Mr Universe in shamelessness — took upon himself the task of wiping off the memory of the painter and his cause and creations.

Not with gratification alone but in deep gratitude we take in the elevating sentiments expressed this year by the doyen of our creative literature — Begum Sufia Kamal, while opening the festival.

As Tagore had pointed out in his — shall we say valedictory? — address on his turning 70 — a nation does not only express itself through poems, it realises itself through this linguistic expression.

Closing Restaurants No Solution

Following others, the owners and employees of restaurants, who are not known to be in the best of terms, also took to the street. Most of the eating places remained closed for two days putting their customers to great inconvenience.

That the threat will be punctiliously carried out seems certain. But what is surprising is the fact that the issue has brought together employees and their employers to fight for a cause that should, by all accounts, be considered misconceived.

But the nagging question that troubles the mind is — why the employees have also joined hands with the employers when they are hardly likely to be the beneficiaries of concessions.

Nevertheless, the owners and employees of eating houses have a real issue to fight for. The issue in question is the illegal toll collection by musclemen and anti-social elements.

S UDDENLY the word commonwealth is in fashion. The adoption by most of the former Soviet Union of the name Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), however, is sowing international confusion.

Nor is that all. The Turks are now talking about the formation of a Turkic Commonwealth which would link Turkey with all the Turkic-speaking peoples of the former Soviet Asia.

Oddly, only a few months ago suggestions were being floated that the solution to the problem of the Soviet Union was the adoption of the (British) Commonwealth model — the kind of voluntary and loose grouping of autonomous states that had evolved from the British Empire.

In December a letter to the London Times drew attention to ways in which the experience and the functional cooperation of the Commonwealth could be a pattern for the new Commonwealth. The letter was reprinted and discussed in Moscow and the respected Literary Gazette there has now asked the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London to set up seminars to discuss ways in which the Russian Commonwealth can learn from the British version.

All this is in a way flattering to what we may call the original Commonwealth, but in hijacking the word problems are created.

The Commonwealth of Nations, for that is its proper designation, cannot go back to calling itself the British Commonwealth.

Which Commonwealth is Which?

by Derek Ingram

When the grouping of most of the states of the former Soviet Union called itself the Commonwealth of Independent States the word Commonwealth was suddenly all over the headlines. Many people could be forgiven for thinking that suddenly Russia had joined the group of 50 former British Empire countries now known simply as the Commonwealth.

All those who have been trying to underline the quite different nature of the relationship between member countries from imperial days have spent years trying to stop the media from using the term British Commonwealth.

Pacific see themselves today as belonging to a British Commonwealth. Yet how is it to be made clear when radio, TV and press refer to 'The Commonwealth' whether they mean the anglophone grouping or the CIS?

It so happens that in the weeks since the CIS was formed the Commonwealth of Nations has not been much in the news. After the burst of stories about the Commonwealth resulting from the heads of government meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, the subject has gone out of the headlines.

Nevertheless, references to Commonwealth this or that — all of them referring to events in Europe — are calculated to lead many people to conclude that the former Soviet Union is now part of the (British) Commonwealth.

Commonwealth has always been a chameleon of a word with political attractions, even though it is long and cumbersome and in newspaper headline terms wholly impracticable since it cannot even produce an acronym.

To this day four American states — Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Kentucky — use the term Commonwealth in their official title. Thus the first British colony in North America is today known as the Commonwealth of Virginia.

We have also the Commonwealth of Australia (where the title of the country has always led to confusion with the Commonwealth of Nations, to which it also belongs), the Commonwealth of the Bahamas and the Commonwealth of Dominica, the name those countries adopted at independence.

The use of the word 'commonwealth' in relation to the British Empire first turned up officially in a constitutional resolution on India in 1917, which said post-World War One relations 'should be based upon a full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth'.

The Balfour Declaration of 1926, which marked the starting point of the evolution from Empire to Commonwealth, said Britain and its Dominions were to be 'freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations'.

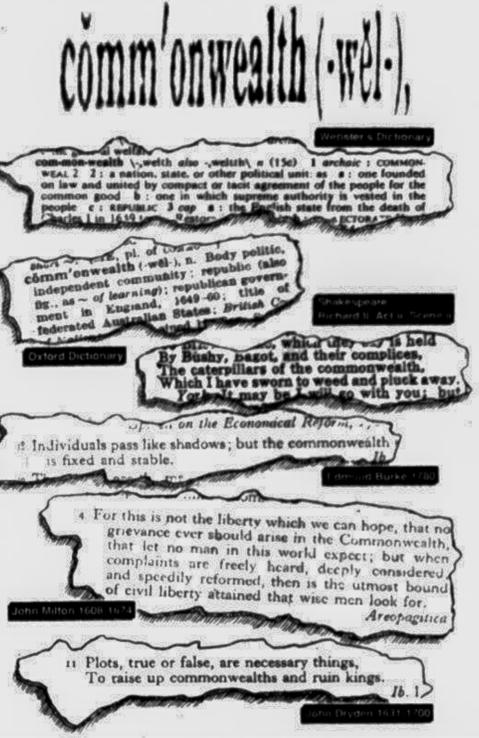
Now the confusion that has arisen with the CIS is setting a real problem for the Commonwealth of Nations. It is not easy to see how it is to be rescued from this hijacking.

It may be that the CIS will not survive, but if it does then the time may have come for the Commonwealth of Nations to think up a new name for itself — something that is more succinct and more accessible in public relations terms.

Although it might be thought that the word the Russians are using — *sodruzhestvo* — only roughly translates as commonwealth this is not the case. It is the word the Soviet Union has always used in referring to the (British) Commonwealth. It means fraternity, bringing together, and is an exact translation.

Interestingly, the West European media, unlike the British, are using the word Community — GEMINI NEWS

DEREK INGRAM is Editor of Gemini News Service.



Mass Communication : Its Role in National Development

by Helal Uddin Ahmed

WILBUR Schramm, a pioneer in the field of development communication, had opined that if economic development is to occur there must be a social transformation and in order to achieve this, human resources must be mobilized and difficult problems solved.

Unless a nation develops its human potentialities, it cannot develop much materially, socially, economically, politically or culturally. The basic problem of most of the underdeveloped countries is not poverty of natural resources, but the underdevelopment of human resource.

Hence, their first task must be to build up and develop their human capital. This entails improving the education, skill attitude and temperament and thereby the physical, mental and attitudinal health of their men, women and children.

Mobilization of human resources require a great deal of attention to what the people know and think of national development. Encouragement to attitude, custom, habit and knowledge favourable for development is vital.

The communication tasks for bringing about social changes conducive to national development are of three categories. In the first place, the people must have information about development programmes, their attention must be focused on the need for change, the opportunities for initiating, and finding out the methods and means for change.

Secondly, there must be an opportunity to participate intelligently in the decision-making process. The dialogue must be broadened to include all those who must take decisions on desired changes.

The leaders must have an opportunity to lead and the common man. The issues relating to sought-after changes must be made clear and the alternatives given a chance for discussion, analysis and evaluation in various forums. Information should flow both up and down the hierarchy.

Thirdly, the required skills must be taught. Adults must be taught to read, children should be educated, farmers must learn the methods of modern farming, teachers, doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs must be trained, workers must muster technical skills, people in general must learn more about how to keep themselves

lect appropriate mass-media for proper communication with the target group, and execute multi-media communication campaigns for development.

It is now established that the mass communication media are strong instruments of development. They have always been used by those in power to contact and influence the political, intellectual, spiritual and economic outlook of the audience either to preserve the status quo or as an instrument for social change.

The problem of a developing society is that the mass media in such a society consciously or

Information Department, Department of Films and Publications, and Department of Mass Communication must be emphasized. As stated by Lasswell and Schramm these three social functions are: (a) 'Scanning the horizon', or 'surveillance of environment', which is a watchman function. (b) Correlation of the components of society in making response to the environment. This is a policy function. (c) Transmission of social heritage from one generation to another, which is a teaching function.

The watchman function entails monitoring of the environment, undertaking socio-economic and politico-cultural surveys, and also provide feedback to the concerned parties including those in the government.

The policy function entails devising policies on the basis of social consensus and understanding, and taking measures to spread them throughout the length and breadth of society so that they can be accepted and absorbed.

The teaching function entails passage and transmission of the knowledge gathered and stance taken through watchman and policy functions from one segment of society to another, from one generation to the next. This requires institutionalization of the whole process and regular and uninterrupted flow of experience and knowledge from one generation to the next.

In Bangladesh the electronic media, i.e. radio and television, are controlled by the government and meant to inform, educate, entertain and motivate the people as well as project government views on various issues.

Amongst other Communication organs of the government the Department of Mass Communication, affiliated with Ministry of Information, has a country-wide network of district information offices. It undertakes IEM campaigns through display of documentary film-shows at grass-root level, distribution of leaflets, pamphlets, documentaries and photographs, providing public address and sound communication systems at mass gatherings, creating awareness

socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects of the country. The Press Information Department is entrusted with looking after the Press affairs, maintaining liaison with the Press on behalf of the government, arranging Press-conference, Press-briefings etc, Press-coverage of important public and private sector events and supplying the newspapers and news agencies with news, views photographs and features on events, issues and activities having direct or indirect bearing on the government.

The other information-related organs of the government include the National Institute of Mass Communication, Press Institute of Bangladesh, Press Council, Film Archives, Film Censor Board, Film Development Corporation, and BSS, a national news agency. These agencies attempt to supplement, co-ordinate and reinforce the overall communication effort of the government. But side by side with the public sector, the private-sector communication agencies including the print medium has a vital role to play in contributing positively towards socio-economic development of the country.

Although theoretically the stipulated or assigned tasks of the district information offices appear to be quite substantive, the actual picture is however quite different. There is in fact a great deal left to be desired, and this may be due to lack of initiative and drive on the part of personnel engaged in these offices coupled with various resource constraints.

Another government agency, the Department of Films and Publications is engaged in producing documentary films on current affairs and developmental issues and also in publishing books, magazines and periodicals on

amongst the general masses of government programmes and measures through inter-personal and mass communication, and providing feedback to the government and the people on local socio-economic and politico-cultural issues and events.

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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Chaos and vandalism

Sir, The letter of Mr M A Haque, published in your daily on January 21, is remarkable for the moderation in language and the constructive suggestions he has given for restoration of normalcy in this country, where human activities have been badly affected by a total absence of security everywhere.

Mr M A Haque, whose book *Rahugrasta Bangladesh* published just two years ago, eliciting so much of reviews and

comments, had for the first time identified the total problems of the country, sub-divided into political, administrative, social and economic problems. With his vast knowledge and practical experience, the author of the book had given practical suggestions for solution of all the problems through short-term and long-term plans of action. I understand, Mr M A Haque is now working on the economic front only, through his new NGO, Direct Action for Alleviation of Poverty — which has received support from the World Bank and other donor agencies.

But the most immediate need is the restoration of social discipline congenial for work; of security of life, property and honour; of educational atmosphere in the campus; of

at least some preventive actions against the wide-spread epidemic of corruption. These are the top priorities at the moment.

The guidelines and techniques referred to by Mr M A Haque in his letter are very much there in his book spelt out in detail. The despotic regime, for obvious reason, did not implement any of those. It is high time the people's government gave these practical suggestions a serious consideration they deserve. Those suggestions are lawful, practical and at the same time innovative.

M Arwarul Haque Johnson Road, Dhaka

HHC: A tribute

Sir, You deserve utmost thanks for your very touching and memory-stirring tribute with a difference to Hamdul Huq Chowdhury (Jan 24). I had a short glimpse of this towering personality during early 50s and my reminiscence of HHC in those days has prompted me to pay my personal respect and homage to his memory. By bringing out

the Bangladesh Observer in late forties (1948) he in fact laid a basis of our political, cultural and educational foundation. He could see well ahead of time and feel that without a strong 'mouth-piece' — which the Bangladesh Observer virtually was followed by his another publication, the Purbadesh (Bangal) — this nation would hardly be able to set national goals. If 'Azad' of Calcutta could be described as one of the founders of Pakistan (of course, along with Altaf Hussein's 'Dawn', Muslim League, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Calcutta Mohammedan Sporting Club), then certainly the Pakistan Observer and the Purbadesh played their part in the creation of Bangladesh (along with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Awami League, Maulana Bhashani and the Ittefaq).

But my tributes to Hamdul Huq Chowdhury relates to a personal reason. In 1951 while I was serving the Bangladesh Observer (not as a working journalist) for a short time, one day it so happened that the then Manager Advocate, Abdus Sattar (Then Assistant to HHC, later became Justice

and President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh) was annoyed with me for allegedly leaving office before time. (I was guided by my watch as he was guided by his I). Instead of tackling me single-handed, he lodged a complaint with HHC who summoned me next morning to the office of the Manager. It was my first encounter with the appointing authority I appeared before him with a long 'Assalamo-laikum' thinking that it would work miracle but it did not. He retorted: 'Are you from Noakhali?' 'No, sir, I am from Comilla', I replied with a feeling that his surmise have been falsified by the sheer fortune of myself being born in Comilla. 'Sit down', he asked me to take my seat by his side and instead of punishing me, he at once started to narrate a story how an ordinary worker in a German colliery rose to the highest position by dint of his labour and sincerity. He pointed to the chair of the Manager and said: 'One day you will be in that chair if you work hard and sincerely'.

For me his advice did not go in vain. Later, in my life I

rose to a position in official hierarchy. Abdul Kader Purana Pallan, Dhaka. Traffic problem Sir, Some of us think that the traffic problem in Dhaka is a minor one in national perspective. Further, that the problem would be solved if we learn to stop and wait for our turn when the traffic signal turns red. But imagine Dhaka as a mega-city at the turn of the century and the Gullistan square full of rickshaws with their amusing caricatures! Personally, I think a little fellow-feeling amongst the vehicle drivers, habit of walking and a touch of civilization and decency in our way of life can be of help in minimizing this nuisance. But to grope with this issue in a haphazard manner will be like a blind trying to describe an elephant. It has so many facets! Shouldn't the authorities think now for 10-20 years hence and engage professional consultants, local or foreign, to prepare an action plan? M A Haq West Rajabazar, Dhaka.