

A Developing Country is Called a "Stretcher Case"; Third World Journalists Fight for Better Understanding; and How President Zia Faced a Test from a Rome Publication

THE international media never gets tired of coining expressions for all developing countries, which, apt but slightly derogatory, are often picked up by the concerned countries themselves.

For over two decades, Bangladesh has been dubbed as the "International Bazaar Case", the expression said to have been first used by Henry Kissinger and then given currency by the media. Our official publicists in Western capitals have managed to convince at least a section of the international media that, having made some progress in certain areas of its economy, Bangladesh is no longer an "International Bazaar Case". So, the expression is going out of fashion. In any case, one gets a little tired of using the same expression again and again, for long 20 years.

Now, a new expression has come into use. It is, "Economic Stretcher Case," but not about Bangladesh. The term has just been coined by a regional weekly about the Philippines. Or maybe it had been used before, and we missed it.

What a way to wish well to President-designate Fidel V Ramos who is due to take over the new administration of this Southeast Asian country on June 30!

We should soon know where the "Stretcher Case" is headed for. To the surgery where officials of aid agencies and donor nations are whispering among themselves how they should start, with a heart transplant, the removal of kidney or a relatively simple case of gallbladder operation? Or will they take the stretcher to the intensive care unit where the patient will be given a slightly milder but round-the-clock treatment? Or will the stretcher be kept in the long airless corridor of the Manila General Hospital until Ramos has worked out a new basic agreement with the US administration? Well, here, your guess is as good as mine.

Of course, the so-called international media — meaning, the Western press — has certain expressions reserved for the Third World, which it avoids using for identical situations taking place in an industrialised nation. So, as the noted Sri Lankan journalist Tarzie Vittachi once put it, "It is always a mob going on a rampage in the capital of a developing country, while in the city of an industrialised nation, it is a protesting crowd." Again, a liberal pragmatic Third World leader is invariably "Western-trained, preferably Oxford-educated", while with his Sandhurst training, the late Ayub Khan and a West Point graduate, Fidel Ramos belong to a special category.

Slowly but surely, some of these invidious categorisations have started becoming obsolete. After all, old notions do change when a mob in a Balkan city in Europe goes on a rampage, babies are abandoned by single mothers on Moscow pavements or cars are burnt by Los Angeles rioters. Mindless violence and senseless killings no longer remain the monopoly of any part of the world. First, Second or Third.

FOR all these years, journalists in the Third World have been fighting on two fronts — to make their colleagues in the West join in efforts to create an equitable international communication system; and to make their own leaders and government appreciate the role of the media in a development-oriented democratic set-up.

Over these decades, I have always felt uncomfortable about our relationship with politi-

clans, in Pakistan and then in Bangladesh. We, the journalists, have been treated in all sorts of ways — shabbily, patronisingly, generously and sometimes even surreptitiously, but never quite correctly. We are often blamed for knowing too little and sometimes dreaded for learning too much.

In pre-liberation days, Urdu-speaking politicians used to refer to us as *akhbarwalle*, a term that always sounded to me like *sodawalle*, *bandukwalle* or *bottlewalle*, the kind of family names one finds in Bombay or Gujrat. Again, an *akhbarwalle* could be a reporter, feature writer or even an editor. For reasons I cannot explain, I resented the term and often wondered why such a rich language as Urdu had not produced a more polite word for a journalist for every day use.

Mohammad Ershad.

All three attached a lot of importance to the media, but more as a political tool than as a channel for communication. Not surprisingly, therefore each in his own way, failed to promote the development of the media as an institution, one that was independent, responsible and free, with a forward-looking agenda for progress. Again, instead of looking at newspapers as organisations, they judged them in terms of individuals who either owned them or worked there, by their political leanings and personal loyalties. In this respect, they got precious little help from their hand-picked ministers for information.

In some tangible ways, it was President Ziaur Rahman who came pretty close to appreciating the role of the media in

Information and Research Centre (AMIC) for organising a series of training activities in Dhaka for development journalists.

It is said that the late President had issued some guidelines to the Bangladesh Television (BTV) on providing a balanced coverage to national affairs, instead of focusing virtually exclusively on the activities of the government. These guidelines, probably just verbal, were buried during the Ershad regime — but were never revived when BNP returned to power.

President Zia's ambivalence towards the free press was put to an interesting test, of all places, in Rome in 1979, during the FAO-sponsored Conference on Rural Poverty. The Bangladesh leader had been invited to address it as one of the two keynote speakers, the other one being Julius Nyerere, then still the President of Tanzania.

During the conference, a group of NGOs brought out a daily eight-page tabloid paper that focused on the realities on the ground, especially on the failure of governments in developing countries, the industrialised nations and the aid agencies in helping the poorest of the poor in the Third World.

The day President Zia was to address the conference, the NGO paper devoted its entire front page to the growing rural poverty in Bangladesh, with a highly critical analysis of the flaws in the government's approach to the crisis. It was a hard-hitting piece that can be a good example of investigative reporting even today, on the same subject.

Then in Rome on an invitation from FAO, I accompanied a nervous Bangladeshi official to the hotel suite of the President to show him a copy of the publication, just as he was getting ready to leave for the conference hall.

Zia read the piece, frowned a bit and then smiled. "Well," he said after a pause, "the paper is right, because there is so much to be done."

Maybe Zia had learnt something from Nyerere when it came to accepting criticisms from outside, with a frown followed by a smile.

Just the day before, the Tanzanian leader had spoken about what his government was doing to reduce the level of rural poverty. In this context, he had quoted from a book, just published by a British expert, that pointed out several serious shortcomings in the Tanzanian approach.

Then, discarding his prepared text, Nyerere had looked straight at the audience and said, "The critic is right. We have made mistakes which must be corrected." The statement was greeted with a loud applause in which the Bangladesh President had also joined.

It is indeed a rare ability in a politician, especially if he or she is the head of a government or heading the opposition to admit a mistake, especially when it involves the media, whether it is a broadcast or a piece of writing in a newspaper.

I would not know whether this little unpublished incident from the life of the late President Ziaur Rahman will provoke some rethinking in relevant quarters or serve as a source of inspiration to a national leader of today. I have stopped guessing about other people's reaction to what I write in this column, which is part of the reason for the survival of "My World", metaphorically and otherwise.

Pangs of Making a Film

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trouble he took," he recalled. "Towards the end of the film making," he narrated there was the great Calcutta riot, which started after the Suhrawardy Action Day in '46 and I had to suspend shooting for about a month. After this I faced more trouble. Some of the Hindus in my team became indirectly hostile and they stole three exposed films. One or two of the artistes who had work unfinished demanded much more beyond the contract amount. In 1946 the cost

films when they are refused by the Censor Board.

Abdul Ahad

I spoke to Abdul Ahad in connection with film making. He recounted, "I lived in Calcutta in Park Circus and Fateh Lohani, took me to Obaidul Husq. He had been a deputy magistrate before, and could tell of many adventures that he had on his cycle. I was acquainted with the film world somewhat as I had acted in KC Key's 'Tamanna'. I worked with Hemanta Mukherjee, Shudha Mukhopadhyaya and



Another scene from "Dukhkey Jader Jhon Gora" — L to R — Nabadwip Haldar, Kamu Banerjee and Jahar Ganguli

of the film came to three lakh rupees."

"The severest blow came," he recalled, "when the exhibitors refused to show the film despite the earlier contract. I changed my name. There were letters and telephone calls from rival theatres that the place where the film was to be shown would be set on fire. I couldn't go to court and sue. People explained to me 'Not only will the theatre house be on fire, you will lose the film too.' This was a great blow to my ego but I took the name of Hinadri Choudhury."

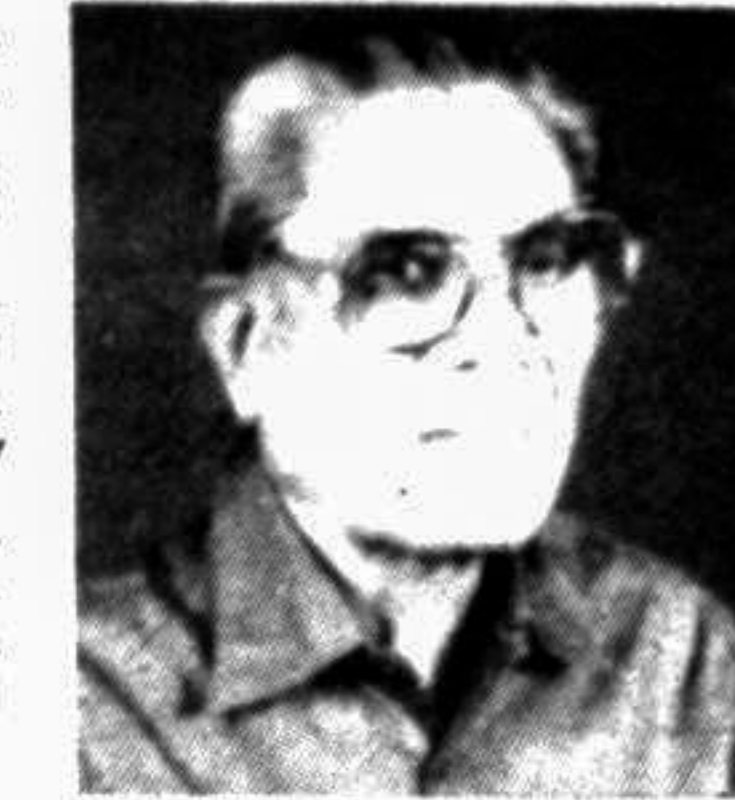
When I left Calcutta in '47 I succeeded in recovering only a part of the money that I had invested, i.e. two lakh rupees. I had to pay the studio and the band. I lost everything. My career was munched up. Before I joined journalism in '51 I went to Calcutta in '48 to resume my career, when I got the news that Gandhi had been killed by Nathuram Godsay. When I returned from Indrapuri Studios one evening I found the word 'Muslim' in big block letters. My younger brother who controlled the purse string insisted that we return. Mentally, physically and financially I was ruined," he narrated.

He wrote a story for a film in '62 "Dui Diganta" which dealt with the disparity between the rich and the poor. It was shot in the street and in the verandah of a house. "It was really an apology of a film," he commented.

From '72 he has been on the Censor Board for several terms. He has been the chairman of the Film Appellate Committee which examines

Supritree Ghosh. Obaidul Husq gave me a lot of liberty."

After the riot," he continued, "it was impossible to stay in Calcutta. I got an offer in the Radio in Dhaka and joined as a producer. When I came to Dhaka there was a dearth of singers and there were only Latifa Arjuman Banu and Afari Khanum. The from one place to another easily. Lalampur, Nawabpur, Wari and Armanitola was all one had in Dhaka, at that time Gulshan and Banani were jungles and people came to hunt here."



Abdul Ahad

Abdul Ahad had broadcast songs from Calcutta All India Radio in '35. He was the first Muslim student recognised as a specialist in Tagore songs. He had gone to Santiniketan in '38 and had earlier learnt from Ustad Manju Saheb. He was a regular artist of All India Radio. He studied music in Spain in '56. He got the "Tamgha-i-Imtiaz" and Sitara-i-Imtiaz in '62 and '68 respectively, from the then Pakistan Government. He got the Independence Day award on '78 from Bangladesh Government.

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

So if a reporter arrived at the office or residence of a politician for an interview, someone would go to the boss and say, "One *akhbarwalle* has come to see you." The boss would reply, "Ask him to wait." The reply would be the same even if the poor reporter was there by appointment. Keeping a journalist waiting served a certain purpose, as a reporter once found out from none other than the late Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy, a founder of the Awami League (AL).

The reporter had arrived at the Dhaka residence of the AL leader by appointment and very much on time. Instead of being asked to join other visitors in the waiting room he was immediately taken to the living room where Suhrawardy was talking to a dozen people, sometimes in a loud voice and sometimes in whispers. He simply nodded at the reporter, directed him with a gesture of his hand to a chair in a far away corner of the room and then, for half an hour, completely ignored him as if he did not exist. Finally, the reporter lost his patience and blurted out, "Look, Mr Suhrawardy, I am here by appointment. Either you talk to me, preferably alone, or you don't. Just do not keep me waiting indefinitely."

This certainly took the AL leader by surprise. "Well," he said, "I am on my way to the Court." So, you will ride with me in my car and we can talk on the way and later in my chamber, he added.

Once seated in the car, the reporter, a British journalist, asked straightaway, "Tell me, Mr Suhrawardy, why did you treat me like this, keeping me waiting and ignoring me as if I wasn't even there?"

"Well, my friend," the AL leader replied with a broad smile, "that was just to impress my followers, that I do not care all that much for journalists, especially the foreign ones." Sorry about it, he added, after a pause.

Journalists, all of us had varied experiences — good, bad, forgettable and unforgettable — in dealing with the three presidents of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ziaur Rahman and Hussain



The late President Zia had issued some guidelines, probably only verbal, to Bangladesh TV on providing a balanced news coverage to national affairs. They were buried during the Ershad regime, and never revived when BNP returned to power, more than a year ago.

grassroots development. On this subject, he listened to people outside his administration, including to a visiting journalist like myself, on what other countries in Asia were doing in this field. I believe, his government was very much behind the agreement signed between the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) and the Singapore-based Asian Mass Communication

A Romantic Fare with Patriotic Fervour

PRAGMATISM, the philosophical doctrine propounded by William James, is the rage of the day. Anyone who wants to mount at the zenith of worldly success, must be out and out pragmatic; in other words, practical. But the nature of the worldly ambition is such that fulfillment of one ambition spawns only new ones giving rise to a vicious circle. Hence, in the last analysis man remains discontent.

But it is poetry alone that can assuage the bleeding heart split asunder by practical life. In poetry, we re-create that part of our life that has remained unfulfilled. Philosophically speaking, we act out our state of being in poetry. It is, however, a matter of hope that people of our country have started feeling interested in poetry nowadays. What is more important, is that many youngsters are trying their hands at poetry.

The name of the poet on the tapis is Mohammad Kafi Sheikh. He writes both juvenile poems and rhymes. Quite a number of books of poetry that has flowed from the pen of this young poet, speaks for his capacity to write in gigantic proportion. Lal Golapcr Rakta (blood of the red rose), Bshar Chhoa (touch of poison), Jhara Palak (fallen feather) are the names of a few among his voluminous writings. Very recently, two books of the poet, namely, 'Jhara Pala' and 'Doler Haa' have been brought out. Jhara Palak is a collection of rhymes, while Doler Haa a collection of juvenile poems.

The poet, Mohammed Kafi Sheikh, in these books, as in his other books, appears to be a romantic tinged with patriotic fervour. Green is the dominating colour used, both in illustrating and printing. It smacks of the poet's love of greenery of nature. The colour also implies the peace-loving nature of the poet inasmuch as it, in Bengali culture, traditionally signifies peace.

In Jhara Palak, Dhakar Shahr (the city of Dhaka) tells us about the variety of people in Dhaka. The poet has endeavoured to make some humour

in the poem Khoka O Shap (the child and the snake). The small child was angling when he got a snake instead of a fish. But he is not unhappy on that account, as he had the chance to give a lesson to the snake which frightened him the other day. Abasheshe (finally) attempts to reveal some social evils. It is a poem about a

ately after this poem, there is Shiter Buri (winter rhyme).

The poet's books show a glaring short-coming as to illustration. Picture has special significance in poetry. Picture quickens our imagination which always accompanies good poetry. It is to a greater extent necessary in the

to its appeal to the readers is the dramatic presentation. If a poem presents a chain of events, of any length, occurring in a specific time-place context, the readers, who are also bound to time and place, will find it quite pleasing. But being unaware of his spatio-temporal position, our poet only creates 'airy nothing', he fails to give it a local habitation and a name.

'Doler Haa', it is said, is a collection of juvenile poems. But as a matter of fact, it is little more than rhymes. The first poem of the book is Sonar Baran Pakhi (golden bird). It is a poem of romantic escapist dream. The small village girl wants to fly in the sky like a bird. Had she the wings of a bird, she would get rid of all the worldly worries, she would wander in the sky. The poem at once evokes the opposite picture of hectic city life.

Pubal Haa (eastern wind) is an address to the east wind. A child appeals to the eastern wind that it would come to the village to lull the babies to sleep. The wind will swing the verdure. The poet longs for the vicinity of nature. He seems to hate gross materialism. He yawns for the dreamy, the ideal.

The poet probably wants to say like Yeats—

Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us
whirled,

To the cracked tune that
Chronos sings,
Words alone are certain
good.

(The Song of the Happy Shepherds).

It is to be noted that almost all the romantic poets show an inclination to melancholia, morbidity of imagination. But our poet is optimistic in to. For example, let us consider the poem Bhalo Lage (I love). He loves the sunny noon of autumn, the flying bird, the song of the cowboy, the morning sun and he loves what not. The poet seems to enjoy the different items of nature with the gourmand's relish. While writ-

BOOK REVIEW



JHARA PALAK: A collection of rhymes and DOLER HAA: A collection of juvenile poems in Bangla by Mohammed Kafi Sheikh. Published by: Palak Publishers and Phool Prokashani, respectively. Hard bound, price Tk 25.00 each.

Reviewed by: Dipak Kumar Karmaker

mendacious pious man who used to blackmail people by abducting children. This microcosmic drama, however, shows fidelity to poetic justice. Grishmer Chhara (summer rhyme) deals with the scorching heat of summer. Immedi-

rhymes as children lack vivid imaginative power. But most of the pictures are very carefully drawn. Another obvious limitation of the poet is his failure to construct dramatic plot. Poetry is usually a subjective form of art, but nonetheless, what adds

ing poetry, he does not seem to be much interested in prosody. But he maintains a perennial loyalty to rhymes. Whether his poetry has propriety or not, it is clear, on the face of it, that at present poetry is no more at a discount. With all his limitations, we hope that poet Kafi will come off with flying colours someday.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,
The letter last week was very interesting and your answer was every good also. Being a woman I feel you should have condemned the man strongly for suspecting his wife. If I were her then he wouldn't have had it so easy. Women are too submissive, that is why men get away by behaving in this way. I am really shocked that he is allowing everyone to insult his wife in this manner. Please give your opinion.

Rana, Lalmita

Dear Rana,
I agree with you only to a certain extent. The gentleman in question is also suffering along with his wife. He is a victim of our social customs and norms where a woman's reputation is made too much fuss about. I agree that he could have avoided a lot of pain and scandal if he took a bold and strong attitude and that is what I advised him. It is not my job to condemn anyone as I am not a judge but just a counsellor.

Dear Mita,
I am a Christian divorcee woman with two sons, one of which is grown up. I met a Muslim gentleman who is also a divorcee with one child who stays with his ex-wife. He was going through a very bad stage of his life when I met him and he by nature is a very weak willed person, he was almost on the road with a broken marriage, no job, etc. Basically, he is a very good person and needed someone to guide him back on the road again. I spent all my energy both mental and physical to support him through his bad times and brought him back on line again. He is now doing much better than he has ever done in his life. In the process we fell deeply in love with each other. I made many sacrifices to maintain this relationship because both our families are strongly against it. However, I fought the world to stand by his side. He has an ailing mother whose only wish is that he be remarried before she dies to a woman of her choice (the same as the first wife). We had committed to each other that we would never marry because he wouldn't be able to face the opposition of our families nor could he accept my children as his stepchildren. However, we faithfully promised to love each other and live for each other and one day when the children of both sides grew up and went their own ways, we would be together. We have both been living separately throughout our relationship but are in constant contact. Two weeks ago he went to his village home to celebrate Eid as he always does. I stayed back in Dhaka to look after his home as was the arrangement for many years. He called me from his village every day as was usually done but one day he didn't call. I thought nothing of it but called myself since I thought the lines were out of order or he couldn't get through. I was informed by his Bhabhi that he had been married three days ago and was visiting his in-laws. This information initially turned my insides into stone. I felt betrayed. He did call the next day and told me that he would sit with me and explain the reasons for his actions. When he did come back he explained he was forced into this marriage simply to please his mother, to ensure his meals

and to have a child to carry on his name. He told me that he could never love her the way he loved me and would not allow me to move away from him. He proposed that I still be his girlfriend and that she will be his wife only for the reasons mentioned above. I have decided to break off the relationship. I feel that he has betrayed our love and friendship in the worst way possible, whatever reasons he may have. I do not accept them. I would like to remarry but would not consider marrying anyone of my own type or in fact anyone from Bangladesh. I think the only solution for me at this moment is to go abroad where I can get over my feelings for him and concentrate on a new life. This too is impossible since I don't have any family here or abroad. I know your column is dedicated to giving advice but I wondered if you could publish this letter for me. What I would like is to meet an expatriate initially to form a friendship with possibilities of marriage in the future. I am a very sensitive, kind of woman and make a true friend and companion to any decent man. I have no demands and would accept an understanding person aged around 39-40. If I see any replies, I will write to you again giving my full details and address but at the moment, I wish to remain anonymous.

Dear Anonymous,
I would like to congratulate you for the courage and positive attitude you are showing in dealing with your situation. The man you get involved with seems to be a very weak willed, selfish kind of person who just took from you and gave back little in return. He certainly does not deserve you. Though you have not asked for advice I want to tell you that please be very careful next time. You are a warm loving person so never underestimate yourself and give in to an undeserving person.

Dear Mita,
My husband is kind, gentle, and loving. Since the last 12 years he has kept me and our two children in every possible comfort. Recently he has developed a drinking habit which is getting worse. He can get very unpleasant when drunk and makes a fool of himself in front of family and friends. What can I do to stop him? I am very worried. His friends don't take it seriously and think I am exaggerating. Please advise.

Ruma, Gulshan

Dear Ruma,
Drinking can easily become an addiction such as smoking and drugs. It creates needs in the body and a time comes, when a person cannot do without it even if he/she wants to. Your husband should check this habit before reaching that stage. He needs, good, sound advice from friends or people that he respects and also from a doctor. Persuade him to take a full medical check up and then curtail his drinking a little at a time. Under no circumstances ridicule or abuse him for his social behaviour when drunk. This will make him defensive.