

## Do We Need a Media Policy?

Judging by what Information Minister Nazmul Huda told the parliament on Thursday, the stage seems set for the announcement of a media policy for the country. It is hard to say if the policy or its guidelines have been already formulated by the ministry or some other government agency. We trust, it is not so. After all, a policy in this complex field should not be worked out without detailed consultation, with relevant quarters, such as the owners and publishers of newspapers, journalists' unions, the Council of Editors and other media personnel.

Indeed, these consultations cannot remain confined to practitioners of the media alone. After all, a cross section of our people who are not directly involved in the field are just as interested in the healthy development of the media as journalists or, for that matter, Minister Huda. It is also in the interest of the Government that a media policy that is placed before the Jatiya Sangsad reflects a broad national consensus, instead of it turning out to be yet another issue in the divisive politics of the country.

Here, one must face a fundamental question: Does a truly democratic country, need a separate media policy? What would such a policy offer if all the democratic norms are fully observed, and the country guaranteed freedoms and rights in such fields as expression of political dissent, freedom of association and dissemination of ideas through the press or electronic channels? Of course, in a country like Bangladesh where democracy is yet to take roots, one may see the need for setting certain limits to the exercise of these rights for the dubious purpose of creating a "responsible" press. Some fear that this is what the proposed media policy may be all about.

The alternative which we favour is to promote the concept of self-restraint in the media, based on a code of ethics, with a Press Council serving as a watchdog or even taking up complaints of alleged misreporting. There are also normal laws of the land which should be applied to cases which fall outside the jurisdiction of the Press Council.

What the country needs — and, indeed, needs badly — is a policy declaration from the government, outlining a few guidelines, not so much for the media as for the administration. The industry in which cores of Taka have been invested and which is the nearest thing we have to what is called the conscience of the nation needs all the help it can get from the private sector and the government, not as subsidies or doles, but as legitimate assistance. For instance, shouldn't the rate of advertisements from the public sector, which are distributed, quite arbitrarily, by the Ministry of Information, be the same as those of the private sector? Shouldn't disbursement of dues owed to publications be less lethargic to prevent avoidable hardship to newspapers, a hardship that, in turn, causes financial agony to staff members? Shouldn't there be a moratorium on increase in newspaper prices for a year or two and some efforts made to improve the quality of our product, at least for the satisfaction of our exporters?

Indeed, the time has come for the media to know what the government is prepared to do to help the industry, not what the press should do for the government. Unless the Minister for Information starts looking at the situation from this perspective, an adversary relationship is bound to grow between the government and the media, something we should — indeed must — avoid.

## A Tribute to Kanan Devi

She was for many years Kananbala, the irresistible charmer of the tens of millions of cinemagoers all over the subcontinent. And the admiring multitude had elevated her to Kanan' Devi long before her bewitching presence on the big screen gave way to a suave lady of ponderous personality. Hers could be termed a rags-to-riches story. But truer should be the description if one called the transformation as one from the gutters to the pantheon of gods. At ten she was our Shirley Temple and at twenty our Ingrid Bergman; she from her juvenile beginning till the premature retirement, carried with her a Greta Garboesque elegance together with a mystifying something. Her looks and her speech spoke both of supreme beauty and purity and this magnificent stuff the great directors of three decades starting from Pramathesh Barua, Nitin Bose and Debaki Bose moulded into things that made legends of her. Kazi Nazrul Islam cast her against the stupendous Monoranjan Bhattacharya and squeezed out of her sheer unsurpassing talent — in histrionics and in singing — in the film Sapurey.

This universal darling of two generations and more evoked through her art a spontaneous love garnished with unalloyed respect and this phenomenon cut across the barriers of language and culture and nationality, not to speak of caste, creed or class.

That this could happen owes in no mean manner to the quality of the songs she rendered for her films. She remains unique with her haunting timbre till today, full fifty years after her best performances. And the expressiveness of her renditions transcended the limits imposed by linguistic barriers — just as it happened with the legendary Kundanlal Saigal. There were millions who hadn't seen any of her films but worshipped her songs all the same.

After retirement she spent a near-saintly life of a recluse, full of charity and piety. Together with Devika Rani Roerich and Leela Desai — both of whom came from the house of Jorasanko Tagores — this girl from the gutters did the heroic path-breaking for Indian, specially Bengalee women to come to the films.

We join millions in mourning over her death on Friday in Calcutta and hope that the current Satyajit festivals would be supplemented by a Kanan one of a fetching kind.

# Aftermath of Rural Development: The Brutalised Landscape

**T**HE soft earth of the silt-laden delta give easily to digging. Only through manual efforts, literally miles of canals could be dug, roads built or embankments constructed. Since the advent of the rural works programme in the early 1960s, earthwork as a part of rural development or famine relief have been the primary source of government efforts to promote rural welfare rather than nation-building. Result: the ravages of monumental digging are everywhere. The rundown state of rural roads, canals or embankments on which hundreds of crores worth of cash and food had been allocated and shown as utilised on papers during the last 30 years are visible everywhere — from Tentulia in the north to Teknaf in the south.

The brutalised landscape is the aftermath of rural development in Bangladesh. Also it is not the land alone that stands over the country. From its very inception during 1960s, the then government used rural works programme as the vital instrument to spread its political tentacles among the elected functionaries of the local government institutions. Later during 1970s, the food for works programme financed through massive food aid sustained the high levels of rural-political corruption at the grass root level.

Of the three major types of rural works — road, canal and embankment — priority of late has shifted to canal digging so that irrigation may spread rapidly. It is well and good but without proper technical planning, engineering inputs, water control structures and above all conspicuous lack of any follow-up maintenance work, the dug up canals get silted all too easily. Hence the need for a perpetual canal digging programme: the canal is dug and it gets silted; so dig again. It is a very natural system of self-reinforcing obligation, useful for sustainable mobilisation of people and for objectives which are first political and then developmental.

### Short-term Misadventure

In reality, it is a short-term misadventure wrecking havoc to the delta. The indiscriminate digging for canals, roads and embankments results in mountains of loose earth all over the country. At the end of the dry months when the digging season is over, the monsoon rains and the floods, remove the loose earth right upto the Bay of Bengal. Year after year, the coastal water depths get shallower since the silt deposits are creating a rising mound all along the southern coast. Consequently, the high elevation of the north and the rising mound of the south leave a shallow interior of the delta. If the trend continues, the whole nation would turn into a huge Chalan Beel type of swamp in the near future. Then the 15 crore people expected by the year 2000 must survive as marooned animals on the patches of high

lands left free of water. Not that digging is a crime but unplanned digging most certainly would lead to brutal conclusions. During the last thirty years, what we really gained through the rural or food for works programme or the canal digging programme of the recent times: compared to the cash and food resources officially spent, the gains could at best be only marginal. If at least 80 per cent of the mandays which on papers appear to have been created, allowing the balance 20 per cent as the cost of management including leakage through corruption, then the basic rural

### Lack of Commitment

After 30 years of works programme in Bangladesh, if infrastructure consisting of roads, canals and embankments should have been built already. Instead we have nurtured a self-perpetuating, massive digging programme on an everlasting basis. Come June-July, the monsoon inevitably brings the flood of water that either wash away the earthwork or fill-up with silt what have been dug.

Once travelled for 34 hours by train between Shanghai and Canton. It was a journey practically all along the eastern coast of China. During this travel, I saw hundreds of rivers, big and small with embankments on both sides, irrigation canals, water control structures and all-weather rural roads stretching right upto the horizon. In addition, there were tree plantations all along the few thousand kilometres of the rail track and at each railway station, there were atleast a few factories with smokes gushing out of the chimneys. Obviously, the transport linkage provided by the railways have been the basis of such widespread industrialisation of the vast countryside of rural China.

one travels by car from Teknaf to Tentulia, similar scenarios of permanent rural infrastructures should have emerged as well. Their conspicuous absence is the cruel manifestation of the utter lack of commitment to rural development on the part of the politicians in particular and the bureaucracy in general.

But why this lack of commitment to rural development? A large part of the answer should be sought from anti-rural bias of our Bhadrakol culture. The permanent settlement of land to a particular class of Zamindars and the gradual spread of the sub-

sidary rent receiving interests — emerged along with the so-called Bhadrakol class based primarily on the exploitation of land and those who actually cultivate the lands. With the growth of population, land has become scarce to meet the exploitative needs of the expanding Bhadrakol class.

Under the circumstances, the rural works programme during 1960s was a very welcome development. A new avenue for exploitation was offered on a silver platter. In the light of the strong anti-rural bias, the operators of the programme — the CO (Dev) and the UC Chairmen — willingly accepted building up of rural infrastructure as the facade and maintained it carefully so that new resources were allocated each year, a large part of which ended up in the personal coffers of bureaucrats and politicians.

Rural development have been further intensified through promotion of co-operatives, rural credit, irrigation, health, education, agriculture extension, input distribution and very many other projects and programmes. Literally thousands of crores of Taka of mostly donors money, have been spent. But what happened as a result? Poverty intensified further and a particular class of people monopolised most of the benefits. The operators of development have developed an unique capacity to reduce all schemes to

### Agrarian Reform

Because of the norms that are followed and the values that are cherished by our society as well as exploitative institutional arrangements promoted by bureaucrats and politicians — belonging to the same social class — no dramatic improvement of the conditions of the rural poor should be expected until and unless the entire system have been drastically reformed. Hence the first task of rural development must be agrarian reform whose first objective ought to be the creation of seven million strong owner-operated farmers as the only farming system for the nation so that these farm families emerge as the dominant rural force; while, the existing rural elite given their urban bias, become the promoters of modern business and manufacturing development. The agrarian reforms as envisaged would cut the root source (the ownership of land) of anti-rural bias of our Bhadrakol culture.

Today, not only the land resources stand brutalised, the village based Bengali society have become overtly exploitative. Hence not only the land, the entire landscape is brutalised. Only agrarian reform, sought deliberately is capable of launching a frontal attack against all such brutalities of exploitation and counter-development.

Planes taking off from Kabul's mountain-ringed airport also used flares as they made a quick corkscrew ascent to get out of range of the missiles.

A more advanced model of the Stinger, also supplied to the mujahideen, is even more effective. A detector first locks on to aircraft engines and homes in on the hot jet exhaust without being fooled by flares.

Washington has been trying, so far unsuccessfully, to retrieve the Stingers. The missiles have become central to US policy in Afghanistan, and officials in Islamabad said they suspect the missiles are being stored on the Pakistani side of the Afghan border.

In 1989, the United States tried to buy back the unused Stingers from the mujahideen, but failed.



merical airliners are regarded by experts as ridiculously easy targets.

Alexander Vassilenko, general manager in Kabul of the Russian airline Aeroflot, showed a group of visiting reporters here just how easy it

# Afghanistan: A Stinger Nightmare

**T**HE Cold War is over and the civil war in Afghanistan is finally fizzling out but the huge arsenals supplied by the United States and the Soviet Union to Afghan factions are posing a new nightmare.

The Soviet Union equipped the Afghan army with wildly inaccurate but deadly Scud surface-to-surface missiles and the United States supplied Afghan guerrillas with their versatile shoulder-fired anti-aircraft 'Stinger' heat-seeking missiles.

There are fears now that residual weapons may not only prolong the Afghan war, but also get into wrong hands.

Many military analysts say the guerrillas got an upper hand in the war after the Stingers proved to be highly effective against dreaded Soviet helicopter gunships and jet bombers. Without air cover, Soviet and Afghan army convoys were exposed to guerrilla ambushes along Afghanistan's desolate mountain highways.

The United States routed the Stingers, like most of its US \$9 billion worth of arms for the Afghan rebels, through the Pakistani military intelligence during the 1979-89 war.

In all, an estimated 900 to 1,000 Stingers were delivered. Some 360 were fired, hitting

240 planes. A US official in Islamabad told IPS recently the number of Stingers in rebel hands was "in the high hundreds."

After Najibullah's fall in April, the guerrillas formed an interim coalition government in Kabul, and a fragile truce holds the factions together. A plane bringing interim President Sibghatullah Mojadeddi from a visit to Pakistan two weeks ago was nearly shot down while landing in Kabul when a missile blew its nose off.

Hundreds of Stingers remain unaccounted for and may still be in circulation. There are fears some missiles may already have been sold to radical groups in volatile regions like the Middle East.

Western fears about the threat to civil aviation have been heightened by reports that unemployed Afghan guerrillas are training militant Islamic groups in trouble spots like Algeria and the disputed Indian state of Kashmir.

Since Stingers are designed for use against high-speed military aircraft, lumbering com-



is for a Stinger to bring down an airliner.

Resting on a grassy area off the runway at Kabul airport is a cannibalised Aeroflot plane. Under the blue winged hammer and sickle emblem just below the cockpit is a gaping hole ripped open by a Stinger two years ago.

"The jet was hit and caught fire," said Vassilenko. "The plane was delivering fuel to Kabul. It was July 1990. Where the explosion cut the pipes, hydraulic fuel leaked." But the pilot kept his nerve and managed to belly-land the aircraft. The dust kicked up by the careening jet put out the fire and all 12 passengers miraculously survived.

At the edge of the airport is the carcass of yet another plane hit by a Stinger. "Every one on board was killed. This one was shot down in March, 1990," said Vassilenko, speaking with the air of a tour guide. "Twelve dead. We couldn't find any remains, only parts of heads and arms."

Planes landing at Kabul airport still make a steep descent directly over the airfield, dropping flares to confuse

# An Ageing 21st Century: 426m Elderly Expected

**T**OKYO — Asia will be an ageing world by the year 2000.

This is so because most of the world's elderly (60 or 65 and over) will be concentrated in Asia.

"World population will be characterised by a population ageing in the next century never experienced before in the history of humankind," says Prof. Toshio Kuroda, Director Emeritus, Population Research Institute, Nihon University, Tokyo. "Asia will be the focus of the ageing issue in the context of world population."

By the year 2000, the world's elderly will number 426 million, more than double the figure for 1970. It will be as large as 828 million in 2025.

"In this sense, the 21st century may be properly called the Era of Population Ageing," says Prof. Kuroda who was among those discussed the issue in a workshop held by the UN Economic and Social

Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Japanese Organisation for International Cooperation in Family Planning and supported by the UN Population Fund.

Most of the world's elderly (59 per cent) by the year 2000 will be in developing countries. Today Asia is home to over half the world's five billion peoples. By year 2000, about eight out of ten (86 per cent) of the elderly in developing countries will be in Asia.

Prof. Kuroda points out that the central area of population ageing lies in Asia. Some Asian countries are "ageing" as their birth rates are reduced. Other countries lag behind in reducing fertility rates and have a "youthful" population.

He says that the ageing process — in terms of the proportion of elderly populations — will be very rapid in East Asia and very slow in West Asia.

South Asia and West Asia will undergo a slower ageing process than Southeast Asia,

Prof. Kuroda says that attention be given to less developed regions where populations are still young but are expected to have a serious problem in the near future in terms of the magnitude of elderly populations.

In 1980 the proportion of the population aged 65 and over in developed regions was substantially high (11.5 per cent) compared with the elderly population of only 4 per cent in the less developed regions. But while the proportion of the elderly population is very low, says Prof. Kuroda, the absolute number is surprisingly large due to the huge size of the population in less developed regions: 4.1 billion, or 77.2 per cent of the world population in 1990.

By the year 2000, Prof. Kuroda says, the elderly population in the less developed regions will be about 250 million as against 173 million in the more developed regions.

— Depthnews Asia

## To the Editor...

### The Rohingya issue

Sir, It is curious, that the Burmese military rulers assured opposition leaders of discussing issues freely on constitutional convention to pave the way for a multi-party political system. According to reports, the main opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) comprising of 15 members and eight from some other smaller parties along with 14 members from ruling junta were invited to attend.

We sincerely hope now that the Rangoon regime will transfer power to the politicians who won a general election in Burma in 1990. It should release all political prisoners including Nobel prize winner Aung San Sue Kyi and announce a country-wide cessation of all military operation against its people which caused exodus of about 3,00,000 Muslims from Arakan into Bangladesh, as many as 80,000 in Thailand, 30,000 in China and 2000 in India while

more than a million are languishing as internal refugees inside Burma because of massy human rights violation against ethnic minorities.

We further hope that the Burmese rulers will not debar again the Rohingyas representatives to participate in the national convention which had debarred Rohingyas many times from the constitutional rights. Burma, as per agreement, is quite committed to ensure her evicted refugees rights and security in their homeland Arakan, and a permanent solution of recurrent exodus of refugees.

We fervently appeal to the government of Bangladesh to oversee the latest constitutional development of Burma which may lead to a prosperous future for its entire nationals. Radio Rangoon reports, Gen Thanshwe who took over as its chairman in April, said that the draft Constitution should include guarantees for a stable government for the entire nation and lasting democracy for Burma.

The government of Bangladesh, therefore, should look to the matter that the rights and entity of the Rohingyas in Arakan be not again cunningly debarred from the constitutional safeguard of the Union of Burma. We doubt the effectiveness of the agreement between the two countries about the refugee problem and the unwanted Rohingyas burden on Bangladesh may remain unchanged until there is a permanent political solution.

N Kamal  
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**Neither reincarnation nor repetition**

Sir, The business-cum-pilgrimage trip to superpower neighbour by the Prime Minister has yielded "positive results" of unspecified magnitude awaiting materialisation as per minutes. Besides mixed impli-

cations of this Indo-Bangla rendezvous having simultaneously probable defence mechanism vis-a-vis domestic affairs more than promoting bilateralism and neighbourliness, so far so good.

At the elegantly ritualised premiers' meet revealing apparent return of the spirits of early seventies was 'good neighbour' attitude that was less expected at this time following less cooperation before last SAARC summit, tug-of-war over Tin Bigha corridor, arid situation out of international waters, and overlooking issues of ethnic disputes, territorial demarcation, border smuggling, etc.

However, "ice has started melting" to the utmost hopes of this nation afflicted by vicious circle, probably not to engulf this delicate state combating periodic calamities.

As regards bolder status between common-border states, declarations of SAARC summits should be of vital value to both countries, if implemented properly, toward lasting cohabitational harmony as well as national progress. Furthermore, Bangladesh's stand should be considerate enough to safeguard regional peace and prosperity, not due to any obligation, for instance, India's assistance in her emergence and in her battles against mother nature's aggression any time, else all may remain is the one and only point (of no return).

M Rahman  
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**Injured journalists**

Sir, There is no two opinions about the saying that journalists are the cream of the society. Their security must be given preference if they are not acting against the national interest. We pay sympathy for the injured newsmen and propose for proper compensation from the government.

In our opinion newsmen must be avoided from such action. The area or jurisdiction of action must be excluding the journalists on duty.

As the journalists are the cream of the society, they must be treated honourably. Their security must be given preference if they are not acting against the national interest. We pay sympathy for the injured newsmen and propose for proper compensation from the government.

MA Mottin Majumder  
Survey of Bangladesh, Dhaka.