

This Madness Must End

The Nazi-style terror has been unleashed against the people of Bosnia. Reports just published in the international press talk about "ethnic cleansing" in areas marked out by ruthless Serbian forces...

So much of what is happening in the strife-torn region is reminiscent of what history knows as the "final solution" imposed on the Jews by Hitler's Germany...

What is this madness about? There is little doubt that Serbian leaders want to expel all non-Serbs — Muslims and Croats, constituting 44 per cent and 13 per cent respectively in pre-war Bosnia...

The situation is intolerable. But there are ways of bringing it under control, indeed of ending this madness. Many liberal experts in the United States who do not see the situation in Christian Serbs versus Bosnian Muslim terms but, rightly so, as the persecution of a section of suffering humanity...

The irony is that the United Nations, especially its Security Council, seem unable to act firmly and decisively. The continuing in-fighting between the Secretary-General Butros Butros Ghali and members of the Council has drastically reduced the effectiveness of the world body...

A Boost for Asian Sports

As the row over the declaration of Moroccan runner Khalid Skah as the 10,000 metres Olympics gold medalist continues in Barcelona setting two African nations against each other, Asia is quietly going about its business of achieving more glories...

Eversince Japan ceased to bask in Olympic glory, Asia has always seemed to be a lost cause. But the gradual rise of China and South Korea, as sports power to reckon with, has more than compensated for the loss...

This comparative better performance by the Asian athletes is no fluke. Indeed, the nations of Asia now amongst the medals have set themselves the arduous tasks of going to the top through rigorous training and painstaking preparations...

Promoting Accountability in Administration and Politics

by Dr Fazlur Rahman

Responsibility is the job one is doing; accountability is answerability for achieving expected results of assigned job. Accountability presupposes performance, standards to be achieved and criteria to be met.

THE more power is concentrated in one point in society, the greater is the need for safeguarding against its abuse. The power vested in public representatives now is great and will surely become greater...

Allegations are there that bureaucracy in Bangladesh is plagued with corruption ramifying the entire administrative machinery; corruption seems to be institutionalised, and an accepted order of the day...

Very recently we have stepped into and envisaged democracy — a government by the people, of the people and for the people. Here, in our socio-economic background, this democracy is not something which can be taught...

Accountability is an ethnically silent but intellectually fuzzy phenomenon and therefore an attempt should be made to define the concept clearly. Because accountability is still a vague notion, it is necessary to decipher the meanings and ramifications of this elusive concept...

clans and bureaucrats, because when accountability is ensured, it is possible to put a restraining hand on corruption, arbitrariness, favouritism and discrimination, and healthy environment for development can be created.

As the electorate and the tax-payers 'the right to know' is the first privilege the people should enjoy. An anonymous bureaucracy keeps people in the dark. Morally speaking, all people have a right to know 'who is doing what' and 'for whom'...

Manipulation is the act of controlling people without their knowing it. Manipulation is closely linked to hypocrisy. It is like saying 'yes' when we mean 'no'. When manipulation is in practice, transparency automatically disappears...

competent bureaucracy is needed by the government in order to establish a just and equitable social order. Whatever may be the present level of consciousness of the people, Bangladesh needs a development-oriented bureaucracy as an independent nation...

Democracy and transparency seem to be linked to each other. Democracy implies sharing of views or opinions on particular issue. A transparent administration which thrives on a democratic culture allows people to know the goals, plans, ideas of the government...

Interference by politicians is considered as the major roadblock that prevents enforcement and promotion of accountability of civil servants. In such a state, transparency and accountability in bureaucracy can be established if politics is also concurrently made transparent and accountable to electorate...

him, to be transparent is to be authentic; he speaks in a language which is transparent. Transparency is a positive approach to problem-solving; in this approach, the bureaucrats, politicians and the beneficiary share the concern for solving a particular problem...

There are adequate provisions of laws and rules to enforce accountability of civil service in our country. But laws and rules delineate what cannot be done; they rarely prescribe what should be done. The force of laws and rules is a cumbersome strategy. But by appealing to the moral conscience of the administrators or the administered, government may evoke from them a higher level of integrity...

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on a democratic culture allows people to know the goals, plans, ideas of the government and also the changes that it is contemplating to introduce for the benefit of the people.

The present government seems to be poised for making a transition from one configuration to another; that means, it is making efforts to make bureaucracy transparent and accountable to politics. This is of course a noble wish. This will help in preventing waste, fraud and abuse in which almost all the previous governments indulged...

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Moral value or a sense of ethics acts as a stronghold against irrational or irregular behaviour. Moral values often act as the substitute for laws. Laws are coercive whereas moral values are unobtrusive or persuasive. Moral values flow from the conscience. The will to act rationally and legally is explained by the logic of conscience...

The accountability of the government official can be best ensured if a conscience culture can be built in the government.

Two types of authority live together in one person — internal authority and external authority. If the internal authority, represented by the dictates of conscience, and the external authority, represented by the penal codes, meet and reinforce each other, the situation is ideal.

In the light of the above discussions, we need to devise a curriculum to promote accountability. But before doing so we need to identify the clientele group of the curriculum and only then the elements have to be considered. From our consideration the clientele group of the curriculum should be the public representatives and the politicians and secondly, the administrators...

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Australian Media Portrayal of Asia under Attack

Kalinga Seneviratne writes from Sydney

THE government-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) indicated in April that they are planning a satellite television service for the Asia-Pacific region to be beamed from Australia. The Assistant Managing Director of the ABC, Malcolm Long, said that it will beam the best of Australian television to the region and will not be a government propaganda service.

This announcement was made at the same time as two controversial Australian-made feature-documentaries on Asia were released here and just a few weeks after ABC-TV's leading current affairs programme 'Four Corners' had broadcast an extremely one-sided report on the AIDS threat in Thailand.

In recent years many academics, media researchers and ethnic community representatives have criticised both the ABC and its sister 'multi-cultural' broadcaster SBS-TV for not responding well enough to the cultural diversity of today's Australia and the country's regional realities.

A good example of ABC's Anglo-centric bias was exposed by their recent report on Thailand. 'Four Corners' introduced it thus: 'Up to a quarter of a million Australian tourists visit Thailand each year. Many are men eager to sample Bangkok's bars and brothels. These pleasure seekers now risk a death sentence. At least a dozen Australian men have returned from sex tours carrying the deadly HIV virus. Some to infect partners at home.'

Then it went on to say that by the end of the decade, four million Thais are expected to carry the AIDS virus and if the Thai authorities don't take desperate measures to limit it, this is set to become 'our re-

gion's greatest challenge since the Vietnam war.'

The report starts with images of an American Christian priest trying to help AIDS-infected Bangkok slum dwellers. And most of the rest of the 45-minute report is devoted towards pursuing the argument that, even though there's a perception that Australian and Western men are responsible for the burgeoning sex trade, it's the Thai men who make up the bulk of the customers and help to spread the disease.

As usual, white Australian and Western 'experts' are interviewed for their opinions on the subject and all the interviews with Thai people were edited in such a way that they confirm the reporter Neil Merzer's line. The longest grab given was to a Thai feminist who said that women are exploited and abused by Thai men and 'we live in a part of the world where men can do anything'. Merzer then says to her that women in the West will not tolerate it.

'The Good Woman of Bangkok' was one of the two films recently released here which deal with Asia. Produced and directed by Dennis O'Rourke with the help of the government-funded Australia Film Commission (AFC)'s Documentary Fellowship scheme, it is a fictionalised rendition of the life of a Bangkok female prostitute.

Going to Bangkok after the break-up of his marriage to a Papua New Guinean woman, O'Rourke spent nine months filming hours of footage in a Bangkok hotel room with a Thai prostitute named Oai. In numerous media interviews, O'Rourke has been asked why he didn't do it in Sydney's Kings Cross; his answer basically has been that he wanted the cross-line of culture. It has to be First World, Third World, of brown and white, rich and poor,' he told one interviewer.

'The Good Woman of Bangkok' has been widely crit-

icised in Australian academic circles for being both racist and sexist. O'Rourke has dismissed these criticisms, arguing that it's a documentary fiction trying to analyse human sexuality. Sociologist Dr Jeannie Martin, Head of the Department of Image and Text at the Sydney University of Technology, argues that this film is a good example of how a male agent of a one-time colonial power (Anglo-Celtic) reasserts their privileged position by an aggressive intervention on behalf of a one-time colonised (Third World) woman.

'Wittingly or not 'The Good Woman of Bangkok' is almost a text book example of this process right down to the exclusion of the post-colonial male,' observes Dr Martin. 'What struck me first was not the treatment of women, but the treatment of men, particularly the radical absence of Thai men.'

That men given a verbal presence in the film are a pimp and a blind beggar,' says Dr Martin. 'Apart from these, the other Thai men who appear in the film are Oai's ex-husband and her dead father, who are featured as disembodied catalogues of sins and failings endlessly reiterated through the text.'

Dr Martin compares them with the images of Western men in the film, 'who are presented as racist, sexist, driven by aggressive, drunken sexuality or they are disembodied knights or the solitary hero like the film maker, committed to the salvation of the

fallen maidens (whores), distributing largesse and moral education. The film ends with O'Rourke buying a rice farm for Oai (presumably with AFC money), only to return a few months later and find her working in the Bangkok brothel again. The post-colonial missionary zeal with which Anglo-Australian film makers and journalists go about interpreting Asian culture and society was perhaps well reflected in a comment O'Rourke made on ABC Radio recently about Thai Buddhist culture.

'Faith, in the Thai Buddhist concept, has a much more complex meaning than it does here,' he said. 'She (Oai) was born a woman — bad karma. She was born blind in one eye — worse karma. She married against her will and the husband left when she was pregnant. She was sent off (to Bangkok) to pay off her father's gambling debts. He died, but she still reverse him as a man like the Buddha. She wants to do good karma for a better life next time.'

'I don't agree with these values. The patriarchal values that are enshrined in the religion in the land of smiles is sort of like the Catholic Church in the 12th century in terms of its horror — towards women in this regard,' he concludes.

The other film which created controversy in Australia recently was 'Turtle Beach', produced by another leading Australian film maker Matt Carroll. Even the Australian government was worried about

its potential to offend Asia, especially Malaysia, that Foreign Minister Gareth Evans made a statement in parliament upon its release in Australia in March, disassociating the Australian government from the film.

Based on the novel by the Australian author Blanche d'Alpuget, 'Turtle Beach' is set on the east coast of Malaysia at the height of the Indo-Chinese refugee exodus in the late 1970s, but was filmed in Thailand. The story is based on the journey of an Anglo-Australian woman journalist of Malaysia, determined to expose the plight of the Vietnamese refugees in Malaysian camps and her friendship with an ex-Saigon bar girl, now the wife of an Australian diplomat.

The climax of the film is a massacre scene where, as Vietnamese refugees jump off their boat and make their way to shore, Malay villagers brandishing their parangs widely and yelling 'Pergil Pergil' slaughter every one of the refugees in the water. The scene was handled with overdramatic violence.

'The massacre scene is not only historically and factually unsubstantiated, it also portrays Malay villagers in the 1970s as being inhumane and barbaric,' says Malaysian journalist Deborah Abraham, currently a post-graduate student in Sydney.

Carroll defends himself against accusations of factual errors in the film by arguing that he based the massacre scene on reports of villagers throwing stones at refugees and of the Malaysian Navy turning refugee boats away, which were later attacked by Thai pirates.

In addition to the prolonged massacre scene, the film depicts a member of the Malaysian royal family in full regalia dancing mindlessly to Western rock and roll music, transplants a Bangkok brothel scene to Kuala Lumpur and in

one of the dialogues, a central character in the film refers to Malays as 'disgusting people'.

'Generally, most Malaysian viewers in Australia have found the film to be offensive and extremely racist in its abuse of cultural stereotyping of Asian societies,' says Eugene Tan, a Malaysian Political Science student at the University of New South Wales in Sydney.

Carroll, speaking at a special preview of the film, said: 'We've got to live in the region, but we've got to learn to live with our dirty linen. You can't trade off economic imperatives of human rights, it's not negotiable. We have a right to be as critical as we like of them (Asians).'

'Australia must face the consequences of getting things wrong,' says Alison Broinowski, the author of the recently released book 'Yellow Lady — Australian Impressions of Asia'.

It's completely wrong, if we go around assuming that somehow we are living in the middle of, as some people seem to, the Third World. When many of the countries in the region are more advanced than we are, had much longer or more sophisticated histories and have a great deal to offer,' observes Ms Broinowski.

'We have to understand that as newcomers to this region, we have to understand our place in it and work on it. We are the ones who intruded on the neighbourhood and we didn't bother to go and say "Good Day" to the neighbours.'

The question is whether ABC-TV's plan to beam satellite TV to Asia is a process in this direction or simply another imagination of the male Anglo-Australian mind to dominate Asia.

Third World Network Features/IPS

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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.

Remittance from abroad

Sir, One wonders why all wage earners of Bangladesh do not send their earnings to the country through proper banking channel instead of using the unscrupulous 'hundi' channel. We read in newspapers from time to time that a large chunk of our wage earners' saving abroad is lost to the country's foreign exchange reserve due to these 'hundi' operators.

I got an explanation the other day. A relative of mine

living and earning abroad sent a draft to deposit in his foreign currency account with the Sonali Bank foreign exchange branch at Dilkusha. It took lots of asking (for a newcomer there is no sign or directive) to reach the right person who had anything to do with the receiving of the draft. But it was only the beginning of my travail. As per the strict rules imposed (reportedly measures against pilferage) the draft I presented could not be received. It had only the name of the beneficiary on the face and on the reverse there was no

signature of the account holder. After a very long discussion it was resolved that the draft would be received for collection but the amount credited after the account holder sent a letter to the bank establishing the proper identity. I was then redirected to another floor to get the account number and the name correlated. At least I understood that. The person to whom I came raised the old point again. I refused to discuss a settled issue and requested him only to ascertain that the account number related to the particular name. He pointed to a vacant desk and asked me to wait there. The lady responsible for the verification job appeared to do only a part time job as she was not found at her desk on that and several other occasions. Eventually I managed to deposit the draft and obtain the receipt. The maze of proce-

dures and the style of working I saw raise in me an apprehension about the timely crediting of the amount to the account.

Now I wonder why people remit their money through drafts and legal channels at all. A sufferer

Be caught napping

Sir, While having a nap in the noon after experiencing bitter sultry of staying in the class room, I was all on a sudden disturbed by the tremendous sound of gun-shots and compelled to lie on the floor fearing the bullets traded by the two rival groups between the Zahurul Haq Hall and S M Hall of the Dhaka University might fare through the room.

While such a drama was being staged in the hall I was occupied by another thought: Is Dhaka University really safe to carry on our study, or for

the upcoming generation reading in schools, colleges? How can our political leaders, who pun on 'people' all day long, be silent in this situation? As a matter of fact, shooting in the university reminds us whether we live in Palestine or Lebanon! We call upon the leaders to stop the hypocrisy.

Mohammad Kamal Hossain Zahurul Haq Hall, DU.

Group politics

Sir, It is unfortunate that in most of our offices group politics has become very active, as a result of which normal office work is being greatly hampered and most organizations are failing to yield the expected output. Certain crazy vested group have apparently divided Bangladesh into two distinct parts — the northern part and the southern part. The sense of this division is

prevailing even in the top hierarchies. The craze is more prominent in case of getting the posts of DG/Chairman occupied. Some innocent officials are facing great problems while corrupt ones are making good profit. I overheard one helpless official sobbing — 'Now, if Zia was alive?'

Meanwhile, I think, we should at once stop the spreading of 'or the practice of 'districtism'. Bangladesh is a small country and its people are very poor. Majority of our people, on account of severe poverty, cannot even remain on their ancestral land — to them district is not the factor but food, clothing and shelter are. Can't we ten per cent privileged group do something original to make our ninety per cent poor people happy?

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