

Cult of Violence

The circumstances of a Dhaka College student's death at a Nilkhet market on Tuesday last are most tragic. There are controversies over the immediate cause of the incident that led to his death, but all reports are unanimous that he succumbed to beating by some shop-keepers. No matter whether the intention was murder — or not, the fact remains that a cult of violence has been set into motion leaving human qualities to perpetually suffer. A broad generalisation such as this will, however, not help overcome the problem. Even by the present Bangladesh standard, the student has been abominably treated and the incident deserves condemnation in the strongest possible terms. Then no condemnation, it seems, can rouse sanity in the wrong-doers. Apparently, the system itself has gone rotten.

Sure enough, there were better ways of dealing with the student — even if he were a real offender — other than taking laws by the shop-keepers in their own hands and dispatching him to the world after. But it is not the first time that the businessmen in and around New Market and the students of the neighbouring educational institutions have found themselves locked in battles, mostly over the illegal toll collection. The fact that the relations between the students of those institutions and the shop-keepers are now marked by extreme hostility and mistrust is not for nothing.

This reference to the abnormal deterioration of student-trader relations, under no circumstances is meant to condone the crime of those involved. The necessity for looking beyond the immediate cause of this tragic incident is what should count most of all. Otherwise, similar incidents will continue to occur. Each of these incidents, in its turn, will spark off violence of the order of the one that followed the student's death. And each time the chaos and confusion to be created around the area, like it did on Wednesday and Thursday, will bring trade and all other economic transactions into a standstill. Nor is this a localised event confined to the Nilkhet-New Market area, but a phenomenon that is dangerously posing a challenge to the entire country's commerce and trade.

Traders are increasingly falling victims to arbitrary demands. That the traders have brought out processions, observed strikes at different places and even threatened to go on a country-wide strike is enough proof how much adversity they are facing in carrying on their business. Their desperation and frustration have surely turned them edgy. People's respect, at the same time, for law and order, has taken a serious set-back. No doubt, the authority is to blame for the deplorable state of affairs. People have been forced to take recourse to extreme measures and their no-confidence in the law enforcing agency should explain their unprecedented cruel behaviour. The shop-keepers' insensible behaviour has its parallel in the gouging out of eyes of dacoits and rival political activists.

In this case, one student has become the victim of frayed temper notwithstanding his involvement, or not, in the battle. The underlying truth is that embittered rival groups are not expected to behave rationally and sensibly when settling the score through muscle power is the order of the day. This is why the shop-keepers behave as they did in this particular case and the students go on a rampage following the death of one of their fellows. The important point is to remove the mistrust that is reigning supreme in society. This cannot be done without instilling a sense of discipline through strict enforcement of legal provisions without fear and favour. The students in general, on their part, have been facing a serious image problem, not because all of them are blamable but because there are a handful of them who are really engaged in activities unbecoming of their vocation. The general students have no reason for suffering for no fault of their own. They can isolate the hooligans and even collectively take measures against those few laying their reputation as a community so low.

Who Refused to Fly the 25?

There are two big aspects of the story published in The Daily Star on Friday about Bangladeshi children being interceded in Bombay by police and now being sent back for residence in a Khulna home for orphans. First comes the gruesome inhumanity of the whole thing. And that, being the root of trafficking in children, should get top priority treatment. The second aspect involves an executive failure on the part of some Bangladesh functionaries which is as unthinkable as the sport to which the four-year-olds are employed, if not more.

It has been known for some time that Bangladesh children of that age and even less were being kidnapped and smuggled out of the country with the purpose of using them as an accessory to camel race — a favourite pastime of some Middle Eastern countries. Pictures were splashed in world print media of such children strapped to camel back. The idea behind is also by now widely known. The children start screaming out of fear as soon as the camels start running. The scream possibly makes the camels panicky and they run even faster than they can. It is a way to fun that must sicken every civilised human being. Who knows about what happens to these victims when they grow past the age of screaming as only a four-year-old can?

Bombay police caught 25 of these Bangladesh children, headed for the Middle East. Things started happening. People in far off United States, a Bangladeshi among them taking pivotal role, arranged for their return home to an American-run orphanage in Khulna. Bangladesh Biman was approached to ferry them free to their native land whose flag Biman carries. And it refused. UNICEF was persuaded to pay their way to Bangladesh.

At what level did Biman decide to decline the appeal? Was the minister in charge involved? Perhaps not. The MD? May as well not. Then who? We want to seriously question the so-called national flag-carrier whether they do or do not carry any non-tariff passengers. They carry a lot of such, in line with the practice of all airlines of the world. Then what made them think these children — with whom the question of national pride is very much involved — were not worthy of given the privilege?

A serious inquiry and follow-up action should be well in order.

DESPITE the idealism with which the United Nations was set up to usher in world peace, the institution is a tough place, not a playground for the weak. Power talks here. So does money. Both are needed to corner top management posts in the UN system. Little wonder then that men from rich, industrialised countries always occupy an overwhelming share of these key posts at the UN secretariat and at the UN's specialised agencies. Two disparate groups lose: women and nationals of developing countries.

The facts are clear-cut, though quite at odds with popular images about who staffs and manages the UN. Between 1946 and 1990, Western European and North American nationals held 71% of the executive-head posts in charge of UN funds and specialised agencies, notes a report by Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers, both former senior UN civil servants (A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden; 1990). American nationals have held a full-quarter of these top posts, partly because executive-head posts at the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank are, by unspoken tradition, reserved for them.

In contrast, the developing countries combined have never had nationals in more than 38% of the leadership posts at any time despite their decisive majorities in the General Assembly and in many governing bodies. An interesting fact in light of the frequent description of the UN as "dominated by the Third World," comment Urquhart and Childers.

The lack of developing country representation is particularly evident in the UN's major organisations, such as the secretariat, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank/IMF and a dozen other key agencies. Here, "decolonisation has only had a modest effect on the nationality of leadership," the authors note. "Nationals of Arab, Asian and African developing countries

Third World Under-represented at UN Leadership Level

by Siddharth Dube

Between 1946 and 1990 Western European and North American nationals held 71% of the executive-head posts in charge of UN funds and specialised agencies. In contrast, the developing countries combined have never had nations in more than 38% of the leadership posts at any time despite decisive majorities in the General Assembly.

have held only 11% more posts since 1970, with both North and South American shares reduced accordingly.

Appallingly, only one woman, Nafis Sadik of the UN Fund for Population Activities in New York, from Pakistan, has ever headed a UN organisation.

This pattern holds true at the UN secretariat as well — top posts are the preserve of men from select countries. The former USSR and China have shared in the pickings by virtue of their status as Security Council permanent members. "By an early 'gentleman's agreement,'" the Urquhart-Childers reports notes, five of the original eight senior-most positions 'were to be nationals of the five permanent members of the Security Council, introducing from the outset the element of national representation.'

The current dispensation by secretary-general Boutros-Ghali observes this rule strictly. Seven of the nine under secretary-general posts are today filled by West Europeans or Americans. With the exception of France, each of the Security Council's permanent members has their man at this rank. The US has two; one, Richard Thornburgh, a Bush confidante, holds an influential new post in charge of budget supervision and administration. There are no women USGs at this time.

One rung below, five of the seven assistant secretary-general posts are held by West Europeans and North Americans. The French have two. There is only one woman ASG at the

secretariat. Between them, these two ranks of officials head the secretariat's most important departments. This kind of staffing pattern is understandable, says Toby Trister Gati of the United Nations Association of the US, an influential research group. "If you believe that in the UN you have to reward power with power," Things are hardly any better at other professional levels at the secretariat. The bulk of professional posts are allocated by national quotas determined overwhelmingly by the size of a country's financial contribution to the secretariat budget; population gets little weight. The results of this formula are striking. The US gets roughly 400 professional posts at the secretariat, France 130, Britain 90, but China 50 and India 45.

One may ask whether this geographical and gender monopolisation of key posts matters. It does, for very many reasons. The practice of limiting leadership posts to a small gang of nations clearly does not serve efficiency in any way. The Western monopolisation of senior posts may have been tenable in the early years of decolonisation; developing countries needed their best people for important tasks at home or had few highly-qualified administrators. But it is silly to pretend that there is today a shortage of competent men and women from developing countries.

Equally, the UN's ability to live up to the new demands being placed on it hinges on the quality of its top leadership. (Fine pronounce-

ments in the Security Council or General Assembly mean little when the UN's management team cannot efficiently implement them.) If so, there seems to be little sense to limiting the pool of potential applicants to only Western men and excluding many excellent women and developing country managers.

In particular, the agencies set up exclusively to assist the developing countries — UNICEF, UNDP and the World Food Programme — might arguably improve their performance if led by developing country nationals. To date, notes the Urquhart-Childers report, only a few of the executive heads of these organisations have had prior working experience in Third World development and even fewer have been developing country nationals. Keeping out qualified women from these posts means, ironically, that women have little say in programmes directed at improving the situation of women world wide.

Nor does the current system of patronage serve the aim of creating an international civil service whose members do not owe allegiance to any country. Today's patronage system means that senior UN staff are beholden to their governments for having secured their posts. (Needless to say, women need not apply for membership to old-boy networks.) Governments, for their part, calculate that there are many benefits to having one's man in top UN posts: in most cases they are a guarantee of direct access and influence.

The patronage may in itself be sufficient to compromise the independence of any international civil servant. But many governments go even further to tie their nationals to their apron-strings. The US and the West Europeans have for years blatantly subsidised their senior UN staff with rent-free apartments, cars and cash.

This has created two ranks of UN civil servants, observes Abdou Ciss, assistant secretary-general for personnel matters at the secretariat. UN wags quip that the system will be left without senior American or West European staff if secretary-general Boutros-Ghali forces these countries to end subsidies.

Equally, the monopoly on top posts enjoyed by Security Council and Western nationals bolsters developing country criticism that they have no say at the UN. The practice has been the focus of growing resentment from developing countries, reflected in a spate of General Assembly resolutions asking the secretary-general to ensure that senior posts do not remain the exclusive preserve of any member state. The signatories to the resolutions have not changed their ways.

This controversy has only strengthened the incipient North-South face-off at the UN.

A great deal of effort has to be made to make sure that you don't allow the UN to be paralysed by the North-South split," said Urquhart, currently scholar-in-residence at the Ford Foundation in New York.

If the secretariat is seen to be largely run by people from the industrialised countries; or from the Security Council or so other members, that's going to create a feeling of imbalance.

He added, "With the Security Council now in a much more active frame of mind, it seems to be very important that you don't extend the notion of the five permanent members to the running of the secretariat."

The imbalances resulting from overt Western monopolisation of key posts can be very serious indeed. Currently, Murrack Goulding from Britain heads the secretariat's department of peace-keeping operations. This, says Toby Trister Gati of the UN-US, was essential to get the rich industrialised countries to commit funds for peace-keeping.

But though most wars take place in the developing world, the rich countries are most concerned about wars in Europe. (The extraordinary lack of concern about Somalia is a telling example.) Gati puts the matter bluntly: "If it takes control by the First World to get money and attention, then how many conflicts in the Third World are going to be dealt with?"

Regrettably, there is little reason to believe that either secretary-general Boutros-Ghali or any of the UN's Northern members are aware of these tensions. Most First World governments have been lulled into complacency by muted Third World response to the reorganisation of top secretariat staff. But the US's stranglehold on the UN budget, its ill-planned push to employ the UN in military peace-making, and its efforts to relegate economic concerns to the World Bank/IMF will surely lead to a North-South storm at the UN.

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Information Policy: Functions Need to be Specified

by Syed Zinat Ali

A plan for publicity policy must necessarily begin with an account of what it wants to do or in other words, its aims and objectives, which again in their turn depend on a clear understanding and knowledge of the problems to be tackled in the area where such publicity campaigns are carried on.

It is common knowledge now that in all these years since independence, little efforts were made to formulate firm principles of publicity in Bangladesh. There was no such overall planning, no co-ordination or concerted action between the various publicity agencies whose primary concern was fixed round certain personalities or regimes. Since the country was rarely blessed with a united leadership, these agencies were not infrequently found to work at cross purposes. And this inevitably led to bewilderment and suspicion on the part of the people.

It is, therefore, of paramount importance that firm and clear principles and targets of publicity should be quickly laid down, with a view to ending ambiguities once for all. The guiding principles obviously are security of the state and welfare of the people, towards which all Government operation should be directed. These again are dependent on — (i) the consolidation of national unity through the elimination of parochial and sectarian trends (in other words, development of a conception of national unity for the stabilisa-

tion of the country's independence); (ii) reconstruction of Bangladesh society through the education of the masses so that they become enlightened, responsible citizens; (iii) removal of the sense of frustration from the minds of the people and restoration of the people's confidence in the Government; (iv) taking advantage of the newly elected Government to clean up the mess and gear up the nation to a new effort and, of course, to revive 1971 spirit.

Formidable Task

Publicity policy under the Ministry of Information must, therefore, be related to social, economical, political and cultural factors. This admittedly is a formidable task and the publicist alone can touch only the fringe of the problem. The task of dissemination of information and propaganda cannot be left alone to the Public Relations Officer. It should be shouldered by all agencies of the government. For whenever they come in contact with the people the dissemination can occur, and then and then only can the magnitude of the problem be grasped and tackled notably by police, Ansar, Revenue, Food, Agriculture, Health, Jute and other Department staff.

Having decided the policy, programme and targets as well as the methods of operation, we come to the media through which these will be expressed and exploited. Modern propaganda is an art which dates from the beginning of this cen-

tury. Its major agencies today are: Press, audio visual publicity through Field Publicity Operation, Radio and Television as well as Films and Publications.

Apart from catering news from headquarters, news flow from districts and subdivisions has also to be arranged. Collection of information reflecting public opinion is essential both for guidance of government policy and as a contribution to the general public education and enlightenment.

The bulk of Bangladesh population having been clustered in the villages, publicity campaigns have to be so devised that they reach the rural population as quickly as possible. All-media publicity means mainly (a) a sound broadcasting — Radio and Television; (b) literature — pamphlets, leaflets, posters, folders, and sign boards; (c) journals — newspapers and periodicals; (d) display materials; (e) films and film strips; (f) gramophone records — should be employed. Since the keynote of government publicity will be educative, informative and nation-building, the field publicity organisation is destined to be looked upon as the major publicity agency in the public relations. Apart from modus operandi indicated above, field staff will be required to prepare points of talk for public meetings and group gatherings.

All these will, however, re-

quire (i) a clear statement and direction of what work is expected of individual officer; (2) periodical inspection and other system of regular personal contact between field staff and headquarters; (3) administrative support and prompt answer to correspondence etc.; (4) guidance as to report of news and other data for publications — how to interpret government activities to the people, how to talk on subjects like foreign affairs and foreign aid etc. For a successful operation it is essential that the field staff should comprise mobile units having film equipment and video cassette players.

Audio-visual and Entertaining

Among the various publicity media in the modern world motion picture has a place of pride. The need of utilising films and film strips as well as video cassettes for purpose of nation building and reconstruction of society cannot be overemphasised. In this context, the production of cassettes of songs and speeches for broadcast from Radio Bangladesh and for use by the field publicity division deserves special mention.

There is no gainsaying the fact that song publicity is one of the most effective media for toning up the morale of the people and stimulating national consciousness. People can be roused from their slough of despondency by pa-

triotic and entertaining songs. Song publicity organisation, to be effective, must produce songs to suit all temperaments, cultural groups and age groups.

The responsibility of preparing and producing publicity literature belongs to the publications division. This includes publications, journals, pamphlets, leaflets, posters, folders, background articles and points talk etc. The journal, reproduce, more or less important official handouts and speeches of leaders of the government with some news items having special emphasis on development and national welfare.

Written and spoken propaganda should be designed to show not only the sufferings of the people but also their skill, their erudition and their heroism they so often exhibit. Films, dramas and literature depicting happiness and achievements, dealing with decent people successfully engaged in overcoming the difficulties of the poor man and winning the victories that make up the sum of progress should be produced. The common man has also to be shown as the honest, courageous and not always as helpless figures of tragedy.

The all-pervasive but often unobtrusive influence of radio as an intimate and vital element in the daily life of a modern community has been appreciated. But facilities of community listening in urban and rural areas have not been developed. There has never

been any attempt to assess the cultural heritage of the country and to harness writers, authors, musicians, dancers and other workers of the cultural front for purpose of reconstruction of society and nation-building.

Clear-cut Policy

Although Information Policy is of great importance to our national and international affairs, yet there is no clear-cut 'policy' on it. The function and duties of Radio, TV, Mass-communication, Deptt. of Films and Publications, PID, Research and Reference Section, Film Archives etc. have been there since colonial rule. But the processes of function are not suitable for independent countries like Bangladesh. The function and duties of the above-noted organisations should be clearly specified to the people of the country as is done in our neighbouring country like India and Pakistan. Since independence of Bangladesh, the previous governments did not take any initiative to specify outlines of the Information Policy and its function and duties for the concerned organisations under the Ministry of Information.

The knowledgeable circle is of opinion that the Information Policy of the Government should be formulated in order to gear up the information based communication and its development. And the sooner it is done, the better will it be for the country and the nation.

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.

Father Timm explains

Sir, May of my friends, former students and colleagues must have been wondering about all the attacks and complaints against me in various newspapers. I feel I owe it to them to make a statement about my position. I have been 40 years in Bangladesh and I consider myself as a Bangladeshi at heart. I love the country and its people and have devoted most of my life to their service. My first work was, as an educator, teaching thousands of students not only in the classroom but through my popular textbook of college biology which was used in all the colleges. As a scientist of world stature, I did research on nematode pests of rice and jute in Bangladesh. For the past 22 years my work has been more directly in the service of suffering hu-

manity. During the independence struggle I narrowly escaped death several times as I moved around the country on rehabilitation projects for cyclone and war devastated areas. After several years of relief, rehabilitation and development work with Caritas I turned to the promotion and protection of human rights. For all these activities I received the Magsaysay Award for International Understanding, the Papal Medal and an Honourary Doctorate. But human rights is not such a popular occupation. Like the religious prophet, a human rights worker is the conscience of the people and of society, pointing out violations of conduct and moral behaviour. It is above all the dignity of the human person that I recognise as the basis for human rights work. Hence, I support all those whose rights are violated, but especially

Information and communication

Sir, Mr Mohammad Amjad Hossain's article 'For a New International Information and Communication Order' (Star, Aug 22) is informative, with a good background. While ANN, OANA and IPS have been mentioned, it is necessary to point out that ASIAVISION, the daily TV news exchange service organised by the ABU (Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union) has made a revolutionary breakthrough in providing Asian news through Asian eyes (ITV is subscribing to the service). Asiavision items are now regularly picked up by the outside world for information on this region. Now the network is being computerised for faster

Export of shrimps

Sir, In your esteemed daily of 19th August there was a heartening news item which says, that in some selected areas of the country, the shrimp production has been 1700 kgs per acre, and this has been possible "through introduction of locally evolved technology," which comprised of "locally produced shrimp feed, oxygen and lowering of the level of shrimp land or more use of sea water." In other cases, the per acre production was only 50 kgs to 150 kgs. There is a veritable gold mine in the shrimp industries sector, which we have not been able to explore or exploit so far, though a decade has passed us by. During all these years, our exports of shrimps had increased marginally, both quantitatively and in respect of export earnings (Tk 300 crores in a year). There is a world-wide demand for shrimps, and even if we raise our shrimp production ten fold, this will be fully absorbed. Government policy support, promotional activities and supply of easy credits to the small farmers can lead us to the desired goal. At the same time rigid quality control of

the exportable shrimps is needed, to ensure the country's image to the buyers. The shrimp industry can provide a sizable employment to our people, as it is a labour intensive one, besides giving us an export earning of Taka 3000 crore or more. Shahabuddin Mahtab Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka

Roads need repair

Sir, I have noticed that in most of the internal roads, cars, buses, trucks, rickshaws etc avoid passing through the broken portion of the streets. Instead, they use road-side space meant for the pedestrians. For instance, almost all the internal roads in the Mohammadpur area are in a deplorable condition with large and deep pot holes here and there. Since all vehicles want to avoid these holes, there is always the risk of occurring accident and sometimes it really happens. May I draw the attention of the concerned authority to please arrange to repair the broken roads in all the areas of the metropolis. M Zahedul Haque Asst Prof, BAI, Dhaka

service, including a daily second linkage, to be followed, if possible, with round-the-clock service at a later stage, outside the usual time-block periods. Locally, the BSS is considering a computerisation programme for faster multi-point exchange service. Our digital telecom network will enhance the exchange of data communication also (ECNEC has just approved the data comm. project). The development of electronic devices and its miniaturisation has made a great impact on the free flow of information especially in the developing regions. Today we find dish antennas sprouting on Dhaka's rooftops, eager to tap in the various regional satellite TV services offered in Asia-Pacific. The encouraging part of the development is the fact that it is possible for the developing countries to go hi-tech, as the cost of electronic set-ups is coming down rapidly. Bangladesh should be able to play its part in the decade of the '90s, with a stable and representative Government responding to the needs of the moment. A Muzavir Dhaka