The Baily Star

Dhaka, Wednesday, June 30, 1993

A Precedent-setting Ruling

Sheikh Razzak Ali, the Speaker, has in his eagerly-awaited ruling on Sunday asked for the formation of a 'parliamentary committee' to probe into the charges brought in the Jatiya Sangsad against Irrigation Minister Majid-ul Haq. His action not only sets a precedent in the parliamentary traditions of Bangladesh, it also puts a very satisfactory end to days of unsavory rancour inside the Sangsad over charges of some minister's being involved in corruption. In giving his ruling the Speaker has himself hoped that the formation of the parliamentary committee would help reinforce the accountability of the government to the Sangsad as it would also promote further institutionalisation of democracy and demonstrate the effectiveness of the parliamentary system to the nation at large. We share in his hopes and join the senior parliamentarians of our nation in congratulating the Speaker on his precedent-setting action.

In fact, the Speaker's has been the concluding and clinching stroke of a chain of firsts. This was the first time government corruption came up for debate in any Parliament of Bangladesh which is as much a matter of shame for us as a corruptionridden society as it is a point of gratification for this Sangsad. And for the first time MPs were debating specific charges of corruption against named ministers and the accused ministers challenging the charges. This is very much a measure of openness of governance, made possible by both the government and opposition abidance. — all so very encouraging. As evenly this three-day drama of mean taste has been a measure of the extent corruption can travel - even if the charges against the Irrigation Minister aren't conclusively proved.

Bangladesh's governance has always been diseased in more ways than one. While the society slogs on burdened by corruption that has contaminated the remotest and the deepest and the highest reaches of our collective existence, our representatives and legislators and governments have so far acted to bar the evil phenomenon from a truly national exposure in the Parliament. The Speaker's seminal decision puts an end to this. Corruption was so far something to be blamed on government functionaries, big and small. The charm of the last three days' Sangsad proceedings was that leading politicians of the order of important ministers were now being blamed by not-quite non-entities and the accusations made in Parliament, were being made weightily too.

We all would hope only good to come out of it all. And the Speaker has, on behalf of the nation, put his best foot forward in the matter. However, this is patently the beginning of a process and not the end of it in any way. The corruption exercise of the Jatiya Sangsad very much amounts to all the constituents of the Parliament addressing the challenge as a whole. So that all in the Parliament, separately as individuals as also collectively as part of the nation's sovereignty, can successfully engage the hydra-headed monster that is bleeding the nation not only economically but eating out its very soul, it is required that they acquit themselves as honest people first in material terms but also, more importantly, in their essential being. After all corruption does not come to a position of omnipotence and omnipresence without emanating from the corridors of power and without being supported and nurtured by the structures of power.

Unrest in Nepal

During a political transition, from authoritarianism to parliamentary democracy, with the elected government still finding its feet on the ground, no country can escape some unrest. This seems to be happening in Nepal. Unfortunately, in this land-locked Himalayan kingdom, the unrest has developed into a turmoil. During the weekend, the police firing which one unofficial report has described as "indiscriminate" caused several deaths among demonstrators calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

An odd feature of the situation is that the agitation against the Koirala administration is led by the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist Leninist alliance, which ideologically is a dying force on the international scene. However, as in neighbouring India and on the other side of Nepal, in China. Marxism seems to be still carrying on, against many odds. The trouble in Nepal started in Lalitpur, a known communist stronghold near Kathmandu last week, and, then spread to the capital, triggered by a strike.

The protesters, no matter what ideology they believe in, must have their own reason for asking for the resignation of Prime Minister Koirala. However, a democratically-elected government cannot just walk out of office under pressure from a demonstration. Meanwhile, reports say, the ruling Nepali Congress which has a majority in the all-powerful lower house has won 13 of the 17 seats, vacated last week, in the Upper House. It is a mandate from the people that the leftist

alliance cannot — and should not — treat lightly.

It is good to note that the government of Koirala has taken a flexible attitude towards the communist-led agitation. It is reported to have started a dialogue with leaders of the leftist alliance on its demands. We have every hope that the discussion will be productive. What is important, instead of gaining breathing time, the administration and opposition forces should work towards reaching a broad consensus on an economic agenda for Nepal and offer the government, no matter who heads it, a chance to carry it out in an atmosphere of stability and peace. In this sense, the economic prescription for Kathmandu cannot be much different from that of Dhaka. However, being a landlocked country, Nepal faces a more difficult situation than Bangladesh. This makes it all the more important for our fellow-member of South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC) to approach its challenges, including the current turmoil, with understanding and care.

The government has lost lofty purpose and the administration even the last bit of fairness. It is either callousness or corruption. There is no machinery which an independent civil servant can approach to uphold

It's Same after Emergency — Timidity in the Atmosphere

emergency in India on the night of June 25 in 1975 his right to have his say. They may even recall some of the excesses committed by are more guilty because they Indira Gandhi and her son, also have the party in view Sanjay Gandhi. But what they Mot bureaucrats go along with do not realise is that it was not them for an out-of-turn proa raid here or a wrongful arrest motion or some prize posting. there, nor an irresponsible behaviour of some individuals. in the process, ethical

Politicians on one side and bureaucrats on the other went beyond the accepted and acknowledged limits. They became tyrants overnight. And they misused power to perpetuate an order which had no legal or constitutional authority. It was a dictatorship of sorts.

It was the subversion of the

EOPLE may remember

the imposition of the

I recall asking Sanjay Gandhi after the defeat of Mrs Gandhi how they thought they could get away with the subversion of the system. His reply was that in their scheme of things there were no elections for a decade or so and that "We would have ruled" with the help of "a few bureaucrats of our liking."

One would have expected such steps as would have prevented the type of maladministration and misuse of power and authority that occurred during the emergency. But this has not been the case. Politicians and bureaucrats continue to tresspass in to each other's areas with the consequences that are there for all to see.

There is some weight in the allegation that both have forged a nexus. All administrative norms and rules have been thrown to the wind. Both have bent or broken the rules for their personal ends. Politicians

OUTH Africans have gr-

own used to change in

the air. Now they are

getting ready for change in the

airwaves. The first steps

towards restructuring the

South African Broadcasting

Corporation (SABC) - by far

the country's major radio and

television network - have

been taken with the app-

ointment of a new and more

representative board of

disposal for informing, educat-

ing and influencing the people

in the country are unrivalled.

Newspaper readership is esti-

mated at only one person in

sion channels — watched by

eight million people a day -

and 24 radio stations, with a

combined listenership of 12

million people daily. The cor-

poration has an operating bud-

get of some R1 billion. One

quarter comes from licence

fees and the rest from adver-

tising and assets worth an-

around the SABC is moving

through three stages. Stage

one involved prising the SABC

free from the hands of the

government, which controlled

exclusively the appointment of

the Board and used radio and

television for its political ends.

That much has been conceded

by previous board members. A

new board has been appointed,

in controversial circumstances.

It remains to be seen how

on the role of the national

broadcaster during South

Africa's first democratic elec-

tions - scheduled for April 27

1994 — and on measures to

ensure fair coverage to all

parties. And the massive edu-

cation and information capac-

ity of the SABC is used effec-

tively to educate voters in time

challenge of building a national

broadcaster that meets stan-

dards of quality and financial

viability in the face of expected

deregulation and competition;

offers jobs and job advance-

ment to South African broad-

casters and technicians; and

contributes to developmental

and educational needs. That, in

the long term, is the most im-

Stage three looks at the

Stage two will focus closely

much it can change.

for the balloting.

Public and political debate

other R1 billion.

The SABC runs three televi-

The means at the SABC's

directors to set policy.

considerations have become dim. The government has lost

tration even the last bit of faircommon. During my visit to Bombay ness. It is either callousness or corruption. There is no machinery which an independent civil servant can approach to uphold his right to have his say. No wonder then that most government officials have

caved in, and a few who have not known that in clinging on to the shrunken authority they have, they are jeopardising their careers. Several senior central hands, even of the level of secretary, have perforce left their positions because their independence has not been to the liking of ministers. The rule of graft and power

lofty purpose and the admirtis

which Sanjay Gandhi initiated with Mrs Gandhi's consent has continued in one form or the other. Misuse of power and corruption have become a way of life with politicians and bureaucrats. The story is no different in the states either. The system required over-

hauling after the emergency. It called for considerable heartsearching both at the political and administrative levels. Morarji Desai, the first prime minister after the emergency. was only a moralist. He believed he had answer to every problem. But once he achieved his ambition to sit on the

chair, he thought everything had become all right. The system was not corrected; it remained as flawed as before. A new set of politicians and bu reaucrats began to use authority for their purposes. The excesses were few but the misuse of official machinery was

after Mrs Gandhi returned to power in 1980, I met Justice J C Shah, who headed the commission of inquiry and held her guilty of perpetuating

One evil practice noticed during the emergency was proliferation of seats of unconstitutional power. Once again people have emerged at all levels claiming authority on the basis of proximity to Narasimha Rao. They are privy to government decisions in the same way as Sanjay Gandhi and his coterie were. And once again government servants have started acting on tele-

phonic instructions. The most abominable measure of those days was the

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

power by imposing the emergency. His office was bare, no secretary pounding on a typewriter in the corner, no clerk, not even a peon.

Don't you agree, I asked

him, that the Janata government which should have implemented your specific recommendations for cleansing the administration, did not do so either? 'Yes, I realise that they were trying to make political capital out of the excesses. They too were not interested in improving things," he replied. Does this mean you do not find any difference between them (the Janata government) and the Congress rulers, I asked. Justice Shah said: "I believe they were

Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), which was used to detain one lakh people without trial. The number of detenus may not be fewer, although the nomenclature of the measure has changed. It is now called TADA (Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act). It is a penal statute, no less

stringent than the MISA. In fact, the series of measures enacted in the name of combating terrorism or bolstering security in border districts give more powers to an ordinary policeman than even the Preventive Detention Act of the British Raj did. The "public interest" has been so enlarged that even the privacy of the citizen can be violated

by any security force man. Not one of all those ministers who talk of democracy and open government has dared question the measure. That again is a reminder of what happened 18 years ago.

The role of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Central Investigation Bureau(CBI) was most obnoxious during the emergency. The Shah Commission was critical of them and pointed out: "The fairness and objectivity with which these organisations function would, in the ultimate analysis, depend upon the extent to which the higher executives of these organisations are allowed to function freely, fearlessly and independently and at the same time ensuring their accountability to statutorily constituted bodies."

Now they function as they were made to during the emergency. Rajiv Gandhi had asked the IB and the CBI to make dossiers on Congress(I) functionaries, MPs, MLAs and even persons slated to be appointed to senior positions, apart from critics. There is no reason to believe that there has been any departure from that practice.

The CBI is the best propa ganda instrument the govern ment has. Whenever there is an outcry for probe, the inquiry is entrusted to it. But if there were to be an assessment of all the cases referred to it, the CBI would have a sad record of justice denied. The number of hush-ups are many;

thing worthwhile. The St Kitts case against Narasimha Rao, then in the Rajiv Gandhi cabinet, has been pending for three years and Chandra Swami, who has politicians of all parties in his pocket, is too big for the organisation.

The people wonder whether the CBI and IB - now RAW as well — are acting within the law and in the best interest of the country. A public scrutiny, even by parliament, would have made them realise that politicking is outside the sphere of their domain. At the Centre, the approach may still be cautious but in the states it is blatant and crude. The intelligence agencies continue to be employed for political ends.

True, there is no press censorship. But it looks as if it is not necessary. The different pieces tend to fall into places without any one making an effort. Already there is a tendency to level out, to go along, not to question. There is timidity, if not conformity, in the atmosphere.

The return of familiar faces of the emergency days in the government may have mattered less if the values and standards, which had got eroded, had been revived. The thin line dividing right and wrong is as blurred now as it was in Mrs Gandhi's time. If officials on one side and politicians on the other do not set themselves on the process of reformation, the nation cannot be kept safe for a democratic system. This is the situation today although the emergency was lifted in 1977.

Moving Ahead in South Africa

The Battle for the Soul of TV and Radio



VAN ZYL SLABBERT Said No, and then Yes for two months

portant battle.

Appointment of a new board was fraught from the start. Last year the government conceded, after long talks with the African National Congress (ANC) and others, that the system whereby the State President appointed the 15person board must go.

The board sets policy but meets for only nine days a year. Day-to-day management programme commissioning and buying, scheduling, content, and technical development — is carried out by senior executives and managers. Even so, the symbolic importance of surrendering sole control over the board - whose term was up on April 1 — was seen on every side.

The ANC and others sharply reacted to Home Affairs Minister Danie Schutte last December when he called for nominees for a new board. Deadlock over how to proceed meant the old board's term had to be extended. Eventually a process was agreed. A panel of eight lawyers and judges, headed by Judges Ismail Mahomed and Picter Schabort, the co-chairman of the first Convention for a Democratic South Africa, would interview 86 candidates from 500 appli-

Members of the board now increased to 25 - would be "respected South Africans

Reform of the South African Broadcasting Corporation has always been seen as central to change in South Africa. In past years it has been the most potent purveyor of the doctrine of apartheid. The ANC and other political parties have demanded from the outset a clean sweep of its board. Now it is happening. Gemini News Service reports on the traumas involved in the reform of the SABC.

John Perlman writes from Johannesburg

who reflect the broad spectrum of the South African society and have a balanced sense of judgement." They should "broadly reflect the racial, gender, language, geographic, demographic, regional and social composition of the South African society."

The interviews were held in public and even televised in limited form. Few South Africans could fail to notice the change in the winds, especially when former board members like chairman Christo Viljoen were grilled for their willingness to let the National Party use the SABC for its political

But when the final 25 were chosen, controversy erupted again. President F. W. de Klerk still had the final say and he rejected seven names on the panel's list - journalists Allister Sparks and Khaba Mkhize, unionist Johnny Emstzen, university professor Jakes Gerwel, ANC media advisor Moeletsi Mbeki, William Rowland, who heads a coalition of organisations for the disabled, and Phila Ndlovu, a former Radio Moscow broadcaster. De Klerk also objected to the choice of Njabulo Ndebele, a distinguished novelist and academic, as board chairman. He said it was because he did not speak Africans. Ndebele, who reads and writes English, Sotho, Zulu and understands and speaks four other African languages, retorted: "The bilingualism issue comes from a man, who as far as I know, knows no indigenous lan-

guages. The objection to Ndebele was De Klerk's clumsiest action. There was a little more sympathy for his claims that he was seeking a better political balance on the board. So far only two people added after his intervention has responded to an ANC call and declined.

The board — at least half are black - held its first meeting under the chairmanship of Van Zyl Slabbert, former leader of the liberal opposition Progressive Federal Party. He had first declined the position and then agreed to serve for the first two months.

Viljoen - widely regarded as knowing more about broadcasting than anyone else in the country - and two other previous board members, were reappointed.

The dust has settled, as it so often does in South Africa, and the board will begin its mammoth task of setting appropriate new policies as soon as it can. It will soon be joined in its monitoring and shaping of operations by the Independent Media Commission (IMC), a multiparty structure to be set up as part of the transitional government that will oversee the entire election process.

The IMC's birth-date depends on how quickly agreement can be reached on setting, up a Transitional Executive Council. It will be specifically concerned with ensuring a level playing field during elections, as far as the electronic media is concerned. This will be no small task. The criticisms of the SABC come not only from the left, but from the right as well, whose leaders feel they were the victims of a propaganda

referendum. The other crucial part of stage two is voter education. The SABC role in this is paramount. The Independent Forum for Electoral Education, which had been negotiating

war during last year's all-white

with the SABC on voter education programmes, has angrily charged that the SABC is set-

ting up alternative forums.

Once again, the conflict is eminently resolvable, but it points to a more significant long-term problem. The SABC employs more than 5,000 people. Some at the top, particularly in politics and current affairs, must know their positions may be under threat. Equally, those seeking to change the corporation are well aware that a new board is simply not enough.

The Campaign for Open Media, a coalition of unions, political parties and others has taken the initial step of training a group of 16 journalists with a view to placing them in senior positions in television and radio. Nobody at the moment is talking about major cleanout. Such a step would not just encounter opposition from the right. The major black union in broadcasting, the Media Workers Association of South Africa (Mwasa), has fought a long, hard recognition battle with the SABC and will act vigor-

ously to protect members' jobs. Mwasa's vigilance will be sharpened by the fact that it tends to align itself with the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and has expressed itself strongly on deals between the ANC and the government. So changes in the way the

SABC is run on a daily basis will probably be slow in coming, although a new board and the IMC are likely to ensure pretty good balance of coverage as far as the election is concerned. While that event will dominate all else in the country for a year or so, the SABC's long-term needs are already beginning to assert themselves.

The present government has committed itself to deregulation, especially of radio, and the next regime will adhere to that. That means greater pressure on the SABC stations to make profit. Similarly, each of the three television channels has been set up as a separate business unit, and they are expected to compete vigorously for viewers, advertising and

There is much expectation that the SABC will be used to tackle the country's major development problems - literacy and education, Aids awareness and political reconciliation. There is also the hope that South African literature, music and arts will be given its due place — jobs and platforms for writers, playwrights, musicians and designers.

Yet political change will not guarantee this. Locally made programmes cost more than imported soaps, public interest television will have to fight against competing demands for entertainment and escape. This will be stage three of the transformation of the SABC. And there are indications that this is going to be the longest, hardest battle of them al

OPINION

Blessing of Water

Badrul Haider Chowdhury

Your editorial 'When Bless- when after seizing power, the

facts of history. To quote again the Economist (June 17, summed up under captioned article "Drowned by Politics" and concluded: "Politics is holding up schemes that would consign such devastating floods to history."

India has averted the problem by building dikes to contain the monsoon-swollen rivers but they merely pushed the flood problem downstream said Time (September 19, 19881

You mentioned in your characteristic way "political tom foolery is barring the way to the growth of such commitment (to the cause of the nation and people) and the reminded of a historical fact noted social activist.

ings of water turn a curse' late General Ayub Khan (some (June 23, 1993) reminds one despots are considered as viof the article captioned 'The sionaries in history) concenmiseries of Bangladesh' in the trated his attention on the Economist in its issue of June much disputed water sharing 10, 1988 when the corre- business of the Indus River. He spondent pointedly asked how narrated in his book 'Friends much more must Bangladesh not masters' that he was disendure when each year from appointed with the bureaucrats April the monsoon rain falls on and experts. As he put it, the Himalayas and swell the "They did not fully realise the three great rivers that water gravity of the situation and Bangladesh and concluded: were asking for moon" - and "Much of the country is floo- then did some homework and ded so regularly that the finally was able to get the Govern-ment does not even at- Indus Water Treaty - 80% watempt to restrain the water." ter for Pakistan and 20% - for As you said "the nation India through the good office keeps on sinking while the of the World Bank when Nehru Governments come and go himself came to Karachi on 19 talking of a blooming El September 1960 to sign the Dorado" is supported by the treaty. That treaty has now become a source of international law in water sharing matters of 1988) in a critical analysis international rivers. It should be pointed out that more than 100 treaties govern the use of water around the world. To wit, the USA had made it up with Mexico over the Colorado river. Argentina and Brazil settled their water-usage dispute What we need, as you cor-

rectly pointed out - a national consensus and united platform - the rest will be done by the enlightened public opinion of the region provided we make a pragmatic approach. Otherwise, the world will "become inured to the country's repeated call for help."

coming of such visionaries." As The writer is a former Chief for the visionaries, one is again Justice of Bangladesh and a

Govt. office performance report

Sir, Those who are working in government organisations are, more or less, aware as to how their offices' fortnightly/monthly reports are being submitted to the relevant authorities/ministries, from time to time, either exaggerating or suppressing many facts and figures.

The works and functions of various government offices and public sector corporations vary from ones another and as such there is no prescribed proforma for submission of fortnightly/monthly report. Moreover, there is no appropriate authority to examine and scrutinize the reports. As a result the standard of services and the efficiency in the government offices and public sector corporations are deteriorating day by day.

With a view to streamlining and improving the works and functions of various government offices and public sector corporations we strongly feel that regular accountability and transparency of their activities may be made in the interest of public service and hardearned democracy of our coun-

Proposed as follows, is a draft for a standard prescribed proforma of fortnightly/monthly report for all government offices and public sector corporation, for kind perusal and consideration of our democratic government: 1) Period from... to..., 2) Number of receipts (cases) received for action, 3) Number of receipts disposed of, 4) Number of receipts pending, 5) Other activities in seriatim, 6) Income, if any, 7) Expenditure, if any, 8) Remarks, if any.

We also suggest that Performance Committees duly constituted with public leaders, government servants and members of the public may be formed at different levels, national and district, to look after the performances of the government offices and public sector corporations and to advice the government for taking necessary action.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

Dhanmondi Lake stinks

Sir, Dhanmondi Lake near the Musiid-e-Taqwah has a luxuriant growth of water hyacinth now-a-days, resulting in pollution of the water of the lake which is affecting the health of the residents of the area, especially the walkers of Dhanmondi residential area.

Generally lakes are meant for beautifying the area and creating a healthy atmosphere where they exist. But unfortunately Dhanmondi Lake is causing harm and is detrimental to the health of the populace and fishes both, as its water has become awfully polluted in view of the fact that it is neither cleaned regularly nor maintained properly.

are requested to kindly take necessary action immediately for removing the waterhy acinth from the lake and cleaning and maintaining it properly for the health, happiness and comfort of the inhabitants of Dhanmondi residential area, who pay a substantial amount of taxes for the same.

Kalimur Rahman Dhanmondi RA, Dhaka

Zee-TV

Sir, Those who watch TV programmes through dish antenna will found quixotic mistakes in Zee-TV programmes published in the press (The Daily Star included) everyday. For example, the commencement of a movie (which may last for three hours) is at 1 am, but the transmission mentioned to closedown at 1-30 am! The time for 'Sa Re Ga Na' and 'Ganne Anjaane' is hardly seen to be correct. And so are for the other programmes.

Please be sure of the cor-The authorities concerned rect timing and programmes and then publish it. Otherwise it creates unnecessary incon venience to the viewers.

> Ani 116 A. Hall, BUET.