

We Need Rethinking about the Code of Conduct

The Price of Bullying Nature

Dhaka starts resembling Venice after every 20-minute drizzle which it now experiences ever so often. The highlanders of the city seem to take it as good fun while the others are washed out and forced to a life among the elements. The water-logging problem of the capital city grows and grows, fashioned by man's inordinate greed for real estate. All of it is man-made. Men who make it should hardly be expected to lay down their lives for remedying such flooding, however may it hurt the city and the majority of its residents and finally the nation's economy.

The phenomenon has now struck the nation's second city and only significant entrepot — Chittagong. It is a good copy of what overtakes Dhaka during the rains. One could never even dream of a hill city to come to such a pass. Hilly Chittagong had never any great use for the drainage system — the undulations of its contour took care of that. When some drains were dug in the last decades of a dying Pakistan they served more as embellishments than utilities.

Large areas of the port city are now submerged after a shower — in tune with Dhakaite fashion, says a Daily Star report on Saturday. How could this impossible thing happen? But nothing is impossible for man. For man's greed to be precise. If in Dhaka the landgrab rush has eaten up all water holes and canals and open spaces and blocked all ways through which excess water could run out, in Chittagong it's the mud washings of hills cut down against law that are choking up the rain-water's escape routes.

An exasperated Henry II asked if no one would help him out of Beckett's bullying ways. The ordinary citizens of Dhaka and Chittagong are more helpless than the misunderstood king specially because the government has very evidently forsaken them and condemned them to the lunacy of whoever cuts the hills and blocks the way of the waters. Greedy developers couldn't do that all by themselves. At least some people in the government and their hangers-on are helping in these crimes against nature which would surely exact a big price from this nation.

Viewed as a strategy for promoting global growth, the agreement on reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade should count as the most significant achievement of the Tokyo summit. The agreement might bring the long-stalled Uruguay Round of talks on a new world trade treaty to a successful conclusion by the end of this year. The market access package, hammered out at the summit, envisages, inter-alia, complete elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers for specified products, harmonisation of tariffs at low rates for some and tariff reductions, ranging up to 50 per cent, for a fairly wide range of industrial goods. Provided the pact finds fruition through successful completion of the Uruguay Round, improved market access for products, identified for tariff reductions of up to 50 per cent — such as ceramics, glass, textiles and apparel — combined with a generally freer environment for trade, would benefit our exports too.

The summit in Tokyo took place at a time when the parliamentary elections in Japan were hardly ten days away — an election the ruling party might lose. Yet, the summit was held alright. Policy decisions adopted at the summit hold far-reaching implications for the Japanese economy too. Tokyo summit bears testimony to the depth of consensus on national issues among the mainstream political parties in Japan — an example other democracies could emulate.

Mixed Results from Tokyo

The outcome of the just concluded Tokyo summit of the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States — the Group of Seven (G-7) — leaves us with a mixed feeling of achievement and disappointment. It also renews our faith in the traditions of democracy.

Billed as an economic summit too, the annual gathering of the heads of governments of the seven leading industrial nations of the world also issues a political declaration. In the backdrop of the move by the Serbs and Croats to carve up Bosnia-Herzegovina into three ethnic states, the Tokyo summit's political declaration was being awaited with keen interest to see if it would provide any further clue to the latest collective thinking of G-7 on the future of this afflicted country. Well, the clue that emerged from the summit is truly disappointing. It signals that G-7 has, in effect, given up preservation of the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a lost cause.

Also disappointing is the absence of any commitment to improve the level of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the developing countries, on the ground of recession at home. Indonesian President Suharto, current Chairman of the 108-nation Non-aligned Movement (NAM), who visited Tokyo just before the summit, had tried, without success, to obtain a collective meeting with the G-7 leaders to plead the case for the developing countries.

At the same time, the joint initiative by France and Japan, announced on the occasion of the summit, to help developing countries cope with sharp decline in commodity prices, undoubtedly rates as a positive move. Besides, although ODA may not improve, there are hopes that the level of conversion of official debts into grants, might increase in the case of the poorest and most indebted developing countries.

Understandably, priorities differ in respect of aid to Russia. Boris Yeltsin, the Russian President, came to the Tokyo summit, according to some of the media, not as a beggar but as a brother. He had a joint session with the summit leaders. G-7 also agreed on the creation of a three-billion-dollar fund to help privatisation of Russian state enterprises. This is one billion dollar less than what was promised last April but one billion dollar more than the figure proposed just ahead of the summit.

To a recession-weary G-7, the nearly intractable problem of unemployment constitutes the major issue of immediate concern. At the summit, the G-7 leaders agreed on a double strategy to tackle the problem, namely, to follow prudent macro-economic policies to promote non-inflationary sustainable growth and, to carry out structural reforms to improve the efficiency of markets, especially labour markets.

A move by the Bangladesh Press Council (BPC) to frame a code of conduct for journalists and to lay down professional qualifications for the post of an editor has created waves, with an undercurrent of serious misgivings among a section of newsmen in the country.

Having just seen a typed copy of the proposed but somewhat bland nine-point code, presented to me by an agitated reporter of this paper, I do share these misgivings, more as a member of the fraternity than as an editor.

Perhaps, the most disturbing statement appears at the bottom of the code, wherein it is said, in Bangla, in unambiguous language, "Adopted by the Bangladesh Press Council." Since it does not say, "Proposed", one is obliged to take the code as a kind of *fait accompli*, no longer subject for further discussion among concerned circles, such as journalists, media practitioners and editors, among others.

The statement at the bottom of the nine-point code is contrary to the understanding given to me by a leading owner of a newspaper on the day before my reporter gave me the circular from the BPC that the subject was open for further discussion. Since he was present at the meeting where the code was adopted — where none from The Daily Star was invited even as an observer — we would expect him to reopen the issues.

In my view, this should be done not through another closed door meeting of the Council but in a series of seminars, promoting an in-depth deliberation among all sections of the journalist community, especially reporters, members of the newsdesk, feature writers and editors.

To start with, this round of discussion should focus on a number of immediate questions.

First, does the print media here — for the time being, let's keep the electronic network outside the scope of our study — need a code of conduct, one that is written-down, codified and backed by a mandate from a representative body with certain powers to enforce it?

Why should journalists need a code of conduct when there is none for teachers, engineers, politicians or parliamentarians? What's so special about people working in the media? Does a country need special laws to prevent newsmen from committing acts prejudicial to the society?

Secondly, what are the areas should such a code cover? One would obviously think of the editorial operation in a newspaper. But then what about advertising, circulation and production departments which, covered by the periodic wage board awards, play key roles in media?

Finally, should a code of conduct imposed on or adopted by the journalist community be a one-sided affair? Should not there be a supplementary code that is observed by the administration

parties and, of course, the media.

To the question if we needed a codified set of "dos and don'ts" as guidelines for journalists, in other words, a code of conduct, the answer was unanimously in the negative. It was almost a resounding 'no' even from non-media participants at the meeting, such as members of the business community, politicians and parliamentarians who, on so many issues, took a critical position about the media.

AT HOME AND ABROAD

S. M. ALI

In the government, the private sector, the bureaucracy, among others? As a case in point, if it is suggested, to quote from one of the provisions of the BPC code that journalists must not accept any gift or financial benefit in carrying out their responsibility, we should certainly insist that a reporter should not be enticed by a source with a gift for the publication of a story. Who exposes an otherwise honest journalist to temptations he (or she) cannot resist or to offers which cannot be turned down?

The crux of the matter is simply this: Does the journalist community need a code of conduct?

The question cropped up during the Media Round Table, organised by The Daily Star earlier this year, which was participated in by some 20 well-placed personalities from the business sector, academic world, the parliament, political

We would not suggest that the opinion expressed at a Media Round Table, organised by one daily newspaper, reflected a consensus in the country. However, it certainly offered a clue to the thinking of a group of leading personalities from different sectors of life.

The opposition to the idea of a code of conduct was based on a number of precise, straightforward reasons.

First, it won't work, partly because it could not be enforced by a self-regulatory body like the Press Council. Secondly, why should journalists need a code of conduct when there wasn't one for, say, university teachers, engineers, bankers, businessmen or even parliamentarians? Again, were the normal laws of the land inadequate for protecting members of the journalist community or for preventing them from committing offences

DAI BING'S elders were upset when he quit his government job last year. But they were agast when he spent his entire savings on a synthesizer and trained his girlfriend to play on the keyboard.

Now known as the 'D D Rhythms', Dai and his girlfriend have become part of Beijing's Western music circuit. Appreciative whistles greet their original songs that talk of "jobs with no respect" and "making a living but wasting time", their youthful audience swaying energetically to the beat.

Such a scene would not have been possible immediately after the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising, where rock bands and singers had entertained the pro-democracy students for days before the tanks rolled in, killing hundreds.

But with Beijing's present reformist attitude, Chinese officialdom has become more tolerant and is slowly beginning to recognise that Chinese rockers and their "noisy" songs are here to stay.

Although largely ignored by the state-controlled media, famous Chinese rock stars like Cui Jian have carved a niche in a fledgling music genre that has growing following in China

Bureaucracy

Beijing Changes its Tune on Rock-and-Roll

Rajiv Chandra of IPS reports from Beijing

Cultural specialists here say Beijing is also hoping that the "new music" will soon acquire Chinese characteristics.

"Officially, rock music and rock singers are still viewed as innovative, rebellious and threatening," says Chinese cultural history specialist Geremie Barne. "But now rock music and the Chinese government live in the gray zone of cultural tolerance."

Rock performances often still go unpublished, and their excessive promotion is frowned upon by authorities. But Chinese officials now allow rock concerts to be held quite openly, although they have a final say on the venue and audience number.

Some bands disguise their concerts as benefit shows or private parties. There are also hotels authorised to hold musical performances in their restaurants.

Large-scale stadium performances are still banned, and most of the shows are strictly out-of-bounds to foreigners.

By permitting rock performances, Barne says the officials hope "this most ferocious and commercial form of Western culture will be safely assimilated in the Chinese soy sauce vat".

Indeed, some say Chinese rock music is already distinguishable from that churned out by popular Hong Kong and Taiwan stars.

Hong Kong and Taiwanese singers like Andy Lau, Jacky Chuang and Leon Li Ming are hot sellers in China. Their popularity, says a local cultural magazine editor, lies in their skill in presenting themselves as "dreamboats".

In contrast, the songs of local rock groups are about the realities and dilemmas faced by Chinese youth. Says the editor: "Pop songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan focus on love and feelings while mainland composers care more about social problems and human virtues."

Songs of Chinese rockers



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.

Association of banks

Sir, We are glad to know that Islamic Bank Bangladesh Ltd. is coordinating formation of an organisation in the name and style of Bangladesh Association of Banks. I personally thank and welcome the initiative of Islamic Bank Bangladesh Ltd.

Banking is one of the biggest and important sectors in the country. But unfortunately the sector's activities has not been properly manifested to the further benefit of general public for want of leadership. Banking sector can keep an enormous participation in nation building activities and help generate employment. The poverty alleviation programme too can be implemented through the network of banking sector. But very often we treat the banks as only custodians of depositors' money and lending houses.

The association, if formed, will help exchange matured ideas and develop fraternity among the bankers. The bankers do many good jobs but their activities are never evaluated properly. It's the bankers who directly help the government to implement the different developmental policies. The people of different professions

have got their respective forums but bankers don't have any. I appreciate the idea and request the coordinators to bring all the bankers in the fold of the association.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury
Kalabagan, Dhaka

Port Klang — a Malaysian achievement

Sir, Recently I had the pleasant opportunity of attending a seminar on 'Port Promotion', sponsored by Klang Port Authority of Malaysia, held at Sonargaon Hotel.

Port Klang of Malaysia is offering itself as a supplementary transshipment port modelled after the historically established port of Singapore.

Port Klang tells the story of a successful marriage between an enlightened private sector and an honest, committed and far-sighted scientific government!

It is not intended to present statistical details here, for such information is easily available at the Malaysian High Commission, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

While it was deeply informative to ponder over the Malaysian achievement, I wished that Bangladesh too

would develop the necessary political and social will to improve the deplorable state of affairs prevailing in nearly all dimensions!

Ports and their allied support mechanisms are the gateways to commerce. If banks are the 'heart' of the economy, ports are its 'arteries' which maintain the two-way cycle of flow to keep the economy alive and kicking!

The Government of Malaysia must be credited for its far-sightedness in its bold attempts to offer the international business community an alternative to Singapore.

While such far-sightedness is not or may not be there in our situation request is made to the leadership on behalf of the Shipping Sector to at least provide a minimum level of management structure to ensure the return on investments in the Inland Container Depots (ICDs) of Dhaka and Chittagong and the ports of Chittagong and Mongla. This will not involve much money, only a change in the attitude towards a concept.

The Government of Bangladesh is requested to analyse the Malaysian experience, for they too are an Asian nation!

If the Malaysian Government can strike up a serious achievement, why can't Bangladesh follow suit beginning with reforms and improvements in the ICDs and ports of Bangladesh.

M Satter
A B Sapani Shipping Department, Dhaka

OPINION

Should Bangladesh and India Avoid Trade War in Jute Goods?

Abu Shakil

Presently I am reading the book "A Brief History of Time" written by "Stephen W. Hawking" reportedly the most talented person alive today. In chapter 9 he explained "imaginary time" in which events flow backward. A person in real time see a tea cup falling from the table to the floor, breaks into pieces and spills tea on the floor. In imaginary time the event flows backward and one see the same event as the tea coming back from the floor into broken pieces which make themselves into a cup and the cup jumps from the floor to the table.

Reading through and article "Bangladesh and India should avoid trade war in jute goods" (Daily Star, 21/6/93) by Mr S B Chaudhury, I had the feeling of profound sorrow that a personality like Mr. Chaudhury is writing an article in imaginary time on a very important national issue.

Mr. Chaudhury has meticulously condemned the Govt. proposal for a jute goods export support fund for a revolving credit of 2.5 million US dollar, a block allocation for compensating jute goods export loss suffered by Bangladeshi exporters due to Indian competition.

Mr Chaudhury is afraid that the Govt of Bangladesh action will invite Indian wrath and start a jute goods trade war between India and Bangladesh. It is surprising that while writing the article Mr. Chaudhuri forgot to remember (I don't want to allege that he is ignorant about it!) that India had already started the war long before and grabbed substantial traditional Bangladesh market through price undercutting.

I will put only two examples out of many in order to elaborate the issue. In a tender for about 1,02,000 bales of jute goods for Syrian market, prices offered by Bangladesh and India were for cotton packs \$241.52 and \$199.20 per bale and for sugar twill \$206.04 and \$194.0 per bale. Bangladesh had no option than to accept 10,000 bales of cotton packs and 40,000 bales of sugar twill at Indian price.

A similar tender was floated by Govt. authority in Sri Lanka for 40,000 bales of jute goods. Bangladesh price was \$82.00 per bale against Indian price of \$71.82. Obviously Bangladesh is about to lose the tender.

The above two examples, among a large number of such

events show that Mr. Chaudhuri is in imaginary time and is in a state of seeing the event from broken cup on the floor jumping to the table. For his kind information, a jute goods export support scheme is in existence in India and exporters to Syrian market were compensated by an amount 15% over the value of the goods. The question to honourable ex-Governor of the Bangladesh Bank now is "would you still insist on Bangladesh not to wage trade war with India?" The war is on and India waged the war long before.

Mr Chaudhury compared prices of jute goods offered by India and Bangladesh for the three main products — hessian, sacking and CBC. He is not probably conversant with the export market structure of these three products. The export of these three products in thousand tonne during 87-92 are:

	Hessian	Sacking	CBC
Bangladesh	1554	1900	617
India	1534	87	257

As such it is useless to compare Indian sacking price with Bangladesh as Indian sacking is not a particular threat to Bangladesh though India in recent time is trying to make inroad in the sacking market of Bangladesh.

Out of average 153.4 thousand tonnes of Indian hessian export, on an average 100 thousand tonnes was used to be exported to the captive Soviet market. After break up of USSR, Indian jute exporters emboldened by the exchange rate advantage and government incentive, marketed hessian products very aggressively in the European and American market, with price undercutting. Indian share in these two markets rose to 47% and 57% during '91-92 from 40% and 37% respectively and Bangladesh share plummeted to 53% and 43% from usual share of 60% and 63% respectively. Mr Chaudhury used FAO prices which are official prices. The actual position is that prices were at par in 2nd week of February at \$17.00/100 yds. Bangladesh price remained at this level till 2nd week of May, Indian prices plummeted to \$15.50. Bangladesh revised price to \$16.50 on the 3rd week of May, Indian prices went down to \$14.30 in July/August 1992. Recently, due to Indian

competition Bangladesh has been forced to fix prices at \$13.60 level, slightly below Indian price. When supply exceeds demand, price war is inevitable. With 33 private mills in Bangladesh and more than 60 private mills in India the idea of forming a cartel with India with a weak product like jute goods is not tenable.

Mr. Chaudhuri is, undoubtedly, the expert on exchange rate. But in his time, I quote verbatim from the report of the World Bank which he so eloquently praised, "OVERVALUED EXCHANGE RATE: The exchange rate policy is critically important for the jute sector because 85-90% of jute products are exported. Until recently the overvaluation of the exchange rate was very high; it amounted to about 30% in the early 1980s."

It may be difficult for the experts to understand the implication of the over valuation of local currency, for non-experts like us the message is clear "It is simply robbing exporters and pampering the importers with undeclared subsidy exactly equivalent to the amount of over valuation."

In a simulation on earning of BJMC mills it was found that even if secondary exchange rate were allowed to BJMC for converting their foreign currency earning, during 1972-1991 BJMC mills would have earned a profit of Tk 4900 million instead of cumulative loss of Tk 15680 million during the period.

It is clear that exchange rate is a major factor determining the financial performance of export sector like jute products where 85-90% of the produce is exported and the sector requires almost no import.

Mr Chaudhuri raised the question of exchange rate but failed to mention the implications in January 1991, \$1 was equivalent to Tk 35.79 and Rs. 18.33. The current exchange rates are Tk 39.54 and Rs. 31.27. The changes in exchange rates in Tk and Rs. are 10.5% and 70.6% respectively. I wonder how Mr. Chaudhuri failed to recognise the implication of the such a huge advantage Indian exporters are enjoying!

I would beg to Mr. Chaudhuri to be more in-depth in his analysis of issues as his opinions/comments are respected by all circles.

prejudicial to the society?

True, when it comes to good journalism, there are certain requirements which may seem 'unique' to non-media personalities but which are, in effect, part of the process of a potential newsmen becoming a good reporter, a sub-editor, a feature writer or even an editor. In this process, the person concerned acquires the skill, develops the right mental attitude, learns the professional discipline and makes the distinction between right and wrong.

In the ultimate analysis, it is by acquiring the right kind of professional training and skill that a journalist distinguishes a biased or a slanted report from an objective or balanced one, avoids making defamatory statements about people in the news and maintains a high level of honesty and evenhandedness in the discharge of his (or her) responsibilities. In the process, a journalist relies on his own judgement, but he must be entitled to necessary guidance from his superiors, especially the editor. Here, even the organisational structure, with its built-in mechanism to uphold professional norms, of the newspaper or the agency served by the journalist plays a major role.

When all these requirements are met, no journalist has to sign a pledge or an oath now prepared by the BPC in support of a code of conduct.

Then, when it comes to laying down qualifications for an editor, another issue the Press Council seems concerned about, we must also avoid a simplistic approach. This is also a complex matter that calls for more careful deliberation than the BPC seems to have given it so far. More on this later.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Due to unavoidable reasons, the regular column "On the Record" by Shah AMS Kibria does not appear today. It will be resumed next Sunday. — The Editor

members, the show featured local pop singers and their counterparts from Hong Kong and Taiwan. It was even televised for the Chinese public!

The only way Chinese rockers such as Cui and the popular group Tang Dynasty can get on television is through the music channel MTV Asia, beamed worldwide, by Hong Kong-based STAR TV network.

The mainland rockers have even gained considerable following abroad. The debut album of Tang Dynasty, for example, has already sold some 70,000 copies in Taiwan.

But at home, the long-haired and often black leather-clad musicians still live an uneasy existence in a culture dictated by the unpredictable winds of Chinese politics.

Sang Cui to a screaming audience during a rare stage appearance in Beijing recently: "It's hard for me to live, it's hard for me to go on honestly."