

**Invasion of Our TV**

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad of Malaysia has expressed his concern over what is seen as an invasion of west-based satellite television networks of the Asian region. Dr Mahathir's criticism has specifically referred to the acquisition of majority shares by the News Corporation of Australian-born American, Rupert Murdoch in the Star-TV which has a wide exposure. These shares are being bought from a Hong Kong-based British-Chinese company.

The concern of the Malaysian leader focuses on two interlinked issues which are being closely studied by media experts in different countries. In the first place, the growth of monopolies and cartels, in which the News Corp of Murdoch has a staggeringly high position, has come under strong criticisms from independent media organisations. Many of these criticisms also reflect the concern of several European governments, with some of them looking at some regulatory options, with limited success. Many of these cartels have been also tightening their grip on the print media, in several industrialised countries, especially Britain, Germany, Australia and the United States. This poses a serious threat to mid-level newspapers which cannot generate the kind of massive cash, rather bank loans, which cartels can use for buying high technology.

The alarm sounded by Mahathir is well-founded. On the other hand, with programmes of Star-TV and CNN shown by the Bangladesh Television (BTV), for a limited period — viewers with their own satellite dish can see them, and other, programmes almost round the clock — the exposure of our audience to foreign news, views and documentaries is welcome. The costing of the exercise, to Bangladesh or, for that matter, to Star-TV and CNN, however, remains virtually unknown.

At the same time, there is little doubt that more and more viewers in Bangladesh — and a far greater number in other countries — have been spending an increasing amount of time watching foreign networks. That some of these programmes are primarily geared to the cultural taste of the western audience — and to that extent, unsuitable to people in the developing world — has been emphasised by media experts in the West, in some cases, by studies conducted by UNESCO.

While we go along with the concern of the Malaysian leader, we believe that we should not look for simplistic and regulatory answers to deal with the so-called invasion of our electronic media by foreign networks. Instead of introducing restrictions which hinder free flow of information and drastically limit the choice of our viewers, we, in Bangladesh, should work out guidelines, if we have any choice, on the contents and presentations of programmes presented by satellite networks.

The real answer lies in local television networks, in Bangladesh as much as in Malaysia, facing up to the challenge offered by the CNN, Star-TV and other foreign networks. We have to bring about qualitative improvement in our TV news coverage, in content and presentation — we have made this points again and again — while we should identify more topical issues for our documentaries. In this area, some progress is visible. However, a great deal still remains to be done. Again, there is clear need, more urgent than many people would agree, to increase the number of locally-produced programmes in English, in discussion programmes, press conferences and documentaries, for the benefit of our English-knowing public, foreigners as well as local. It will be a long haul to win back this untapped audience for BTV. However, a start can be made now — the sooner the better. We are in no position to do anything about the acquisition of equity participation of Star-TV by Murdoch. But we can — and must — do something with the network which is our own — BTV.

**US Policy in Bosnia**

The gap between words and actions in the US policy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina is widening by the day. From the principled position of aiding the people who were being subjected to "ethnic cleansing" that President Clinton promised immediately after getting elected, to the present one of total inaction, which in fact is all but allowing the Serbs to annihilate the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina, is a complete reversal to say the least. The lack of action on the part of the Americans has been a subject of criticisms all over the world. But now the criticism has come from his very staff and Mr Clinton has got the clearest of signals that his policy — or the lack of it — is raising serious doubt about his ability to provide global leadership in similar situations.

The resignation of the State Department's desk officer in charge of monitoring the events of the Bosnia-Herzegovina is the strongest rebuff coming from within Mr Clinton's administration against the unprincipled nature of the policy that is being followed by Washington. The much-talked-about air strikes against the Serbs — considered by observers as too little too late — has not materialised. In fact it is not at all clear if the US will take any action at all to show that aggression will not be allowed to win. Marshall Freeman Harris, the official to resign last Wednesday reflecting widespread dissent from within the administration, has raised a very serious question. What should be the role of a permanent member of the Security Council, regarding the dismemberment of another member of the United Nations, especially when that dismemberment was being brought about through force of arms? The role of the United States and that of the leading countries of Europe in dealing with the plight of the Bosnians smacks of religious intolerance, ethnic discrimination and every other 'crime' that the United Nation's Charter renounces in the strongest of terms. A country is being broken into pieces, a people being deliberately killed, their homes being systematically destroyed and their land being taken over — and yet the international community could do little better than uttering some pious words.

President Clinton may not realise it but he is losing credibility. Along with his policy indecisions, the United States is losing all moral authorities to take credible and effective positions on such issues as democracy and human rights. Mr Freeman Harris may not be a high enough official to cause President Clinton a lot of embarrassment, but the reasons for which he has decided to make public his dissent lie at the very core of what our civilization stands for. The US President would be foolish not to see the deeper meaning of Mr Harris's action.

JAPANESE politics has entered a new phase. The Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) lock on power for more than four decades seems to have been broken. The recent election just did not force Kijishi Miyazawa out of office but it shattered the grip of LDP on the politics of the country. More than that, it also marked the exit of the old guards of the LDP from the stage. Japanese politics will not be the same again.

Breaking the control of the scandal-ridden LDP on the lower house of the Parliament, the opposition parties won as many as 288 seats against the 223 seats won by the LDP. The prospect of a non-LDP government in Japan had sent shock waves throughout the world. Its status as an economic super power makes this one of the most significant political developments in recent years. The break up of the election results is as follows:  
 Liberal Democratic Party: 223  
 Social Democratic Party: 70  
 Japan Renewal Party: 55  
 Democratic Socialist Party: 19  
 Japan New Party & Saikigake: 48  
 Kometto: 51  
 Japan Communist Party: 15  
 Independent: 30  
 Total: 511

The LDP is still the largest party but in the wake of its debacle it might not be able to keep its unity. In fact, it was

Tautomu Hata, the front man for the group of LDP defectors who led the revolt against Miyazawa earlier last month. Hata's party, Shinseitō (Renewal Party), emerged from the election with 55 seats in the Diet. But the old guard was caught napping. Even after the poor election results were in, the secretary-general of LDP Mr Kajiya was smug enough to claim that the Japanese voters were still keen on the stability of an LDP-led government.

Political stability, it is generally believed, is an important factor in facilitating rapid economic growth. It is certainly true in the case of Japan. A long and unbroken record of electoral success by the LDP ensured the continuity of political, economic and social policies of Japan. In foreign policy the LDP leadership was perfectly content to follow Washington's lead on virtually every critical foreign policy issue, as long as the United States kept its markets open to Japan's exports. During four decades of the Cold War, Japan was happy to be under the protective umbrella of the American military might. Private enterprise was the driving force for the economy but the government guided the business community along the chosen lines. In fact the bureaucracy played a crucial role in orchestrating the country's economic miracle. The LDP

politicians created a secure political base consisting of farmers, the construction industry and the huge business conglomerates. It was, as the NewswEEK magazine described, "all a cozy network of relationships in which Western notions of political leadership meant little. The arrangement benefited so many of the powerful that no one bothered to reform it." Some political analysts have described the LDP as a centrist front with many factions led by party stalwarts. There was,

protest against the corruption of the leaders. The new coalition of seven parties will have to redeem its election pledge of cleaning up the politics of the country.

The new Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa starts with a clean image. A former governor of Kumamoto Prefecture in southern Japan, he left the Liberal Democrats last year to start his own party. His principal partners in the coalition and contenders for leadership, Mr Hata and Mr Ozawa are old

the Japan Renewal Party Mr Hata admitted the possibility of strain in the coalition. "Once the new government is launched," he said, "there could be certain areas where there could be certain debate." Mr Hata cited defence and taxes as possible areas of difference and said, "Taxes are an area where we had very heated discussions quite recently."

In the light of Japan's influence in global economy, the rest of the world is watching the developments in Tokyo with keen interest. The United States as well as the EEC are deeply interested in the economic policies of the new coalition government. Is it going to open up its domestic market a bit more than what was agreed to by the LDP government? It may be recalled that only recently the G-7 had agreed to open their markets to foreign imports more freely. Or, is it going to be more nationalistic and inward-looking? No one knows for certain because a coalition of seven parties will be subjected to all kinds of pulls in several directions. How Mr Hosokawa will reconcile these conflicting pressures is yet to be seen.

Bangladesh and other developing countries should not expect any dramatic change in the near future. The foreign aid programme, as far as one can see, will be maintained and supported undisturbed for the time being. Whether the new

government will increase the quantum of foreign aid or take special measures to encourage investment in developing countries, are questions that will be answered with any certainty only with the passage of time.

Mr Hosokawa has taken office on 6 August amidst a surge of support and enthusiasm among the people for the new government. Its clean image is its greatest strength; its lack of cohesion is its biggest weakness.

But the Japanese people have an innate sense of discipline which will no doubt provide a degree of stability to the government. A former leader of the Socialist Party, Ms Takako Doi has been elected as the Speaker of the Lower House. It seems to be a subtle sign that though the Socialist Party has the largest number of members in the coalition, its influence may be less than what the numbers suggest. Meanwhile, the LDP will not sit idle. It has already taken steps to shed its image as a corrupt party. It is also trying to bring younger elements into leadership positions. It will no doubt fight hard at the next election to regain power. One-party rule for long 38 years has ended but the shape of Japanese politics is still not clear. It will largely depend on how the coalition under the leadership of Mr Hosokawa functions in the coming months and years.

**ON THE RECORD**

by Shah AMS Kibria

however, hardly any ideological or policy difference between the factions. They all represented the national consensus on economic and political issues. The fight among the factions, to put it bluntly, was for power and office. Over the years the system had become corrupt. Power brokers haggled and bargained behind the scene and the election of the prime minister was never open to the rank and file of the party. It was decided by party elders and faction leaders in secret caucuses. A series of scandals involving the top leadership of the party had eroded its public image. The electoral loss was really a public

LDP members whose link with the corrupt "money politics" of the long-ruling party make either one of them somewhat less acceptable as the leader of the coalition. But the problems that Mr Hosokawa, who has no experience of national politics, will face are enormous. As the New York Times, in an editorial said, "He must hold together a group of parties and personalities ranging from the dovish left to the hawkish right, representing constituencies from organized labour and rice farmers to big business and urban consumers". No one knows for certain if Hosokawa will be able to meet the challenge. Leader of

**Bureaucrats Try to Exercise Control on Economic Activities**

by A Z M Shamsul Alam

THERE is a tendency on the part of the bureaucrats at many levels to be the guardians of the affairs of the people in as many spheres as it is possible. This is a universal bureaucratic tendency and more so in our country. In the name of promotion of the developmental activities, the policy makers also, being influenced by the bureaucrats, try to exercise as much control on the economic activities as it is possible.

Many of the politicians are also seasonal. They get opportunities of remaining at the helm of the affairs for a very short period. In the name of promotion of economic activities, the bureaucrats and politicians try to regulate and even strangle the initiative of the people.

The character of the Bangladesh bureaucrats is not anything unusual. Comparatively more talented boys of the educational institutions adopt service as a career. In the

western countries, many of the service holders, after understanding the tricks of the trade, quit the service and adopt trade and business as a career.

In Bangladesh, those who adopt service as a career are very loyal to it. They do not quit service unless they are kicked out. Even if they are kicked out, they will try to get it back with all humiliations. The Bangladesh bureaucrats do not believe in changing masters. Many bureaucrats instead of being helpful, generally handicap the growth of private enterprise in this country.

Realising the basic nature of the Government bureaucrats, American people preferred to keep the size of the Government small. The United States is the largest manufacturing country in the world. It is a surprise that there could be such a great industrialization without a Ministry of Industry or a Minister for Industries. American businessmen believe that

the bureaucrats in various agencies connected with the grant of permission would be generous and open minded to support the cause. If they like they can raise so any points and issues against new banks which cannot be answered even by the Devil. Our bureaucracy is terribly efficient in negative role.

There should not be restrictions on the setting up of new banks, if the banks behave within the laws and regulations relating to banking. It is of course, admitted that the Government should care for the interest of the depositors, and for this, the banking laws should be very strict. But the emergence of new banks must not be prevented in the name of protecting the interest of the depositors. The sponsors or management of the bank should suffer and be punished if they commit breach of trust. There should even be capital

punishment for the breach of trust of the criminals, but the well meaning sponsors should not be stopped from rendering beneficial services.

Banking should be viewed as a business. Industries are set up at private initiative. Funds are raised by selling shares. If any industry collapses, share holders suffer losses. Banking is also a type of business. Government has a responsibility to the workers. The private entrepreneurs exploit the workers. Because of this, the growth of industries must not be restricted.

The way pharmaceutical companies or even newspapers are allowed to grow and die, the financial institutions may be allowed to grow and die and those who will not play the rules of the game be punished very severely.

Banking control and regulations must be so framed and made very strict by the Government as to protect the interest of the depositors. If the

Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance are not capable of protecting the interest of the depositors, it should be made very clear, so that the depositors can be careful and make deposit at their own risk.

Those who will deposit fund in a wrong type of institution, they will suffer. The role of the Government should be limited to warning the people about the type of investment and financial position of the banks. In spite of Bangladesh Bank's warning and caution, if some depositors want to take the risk, they should be allowed to do so and suffer the consequences. In the process they will learn.

The bureaucrats should be courageous enough to admit that the people themselves understand their own financial interests better than the bureaucrats. Whatever economic development the people are attaining in our country is not that much because of the bureaucrats, but it is so much in spite of them.

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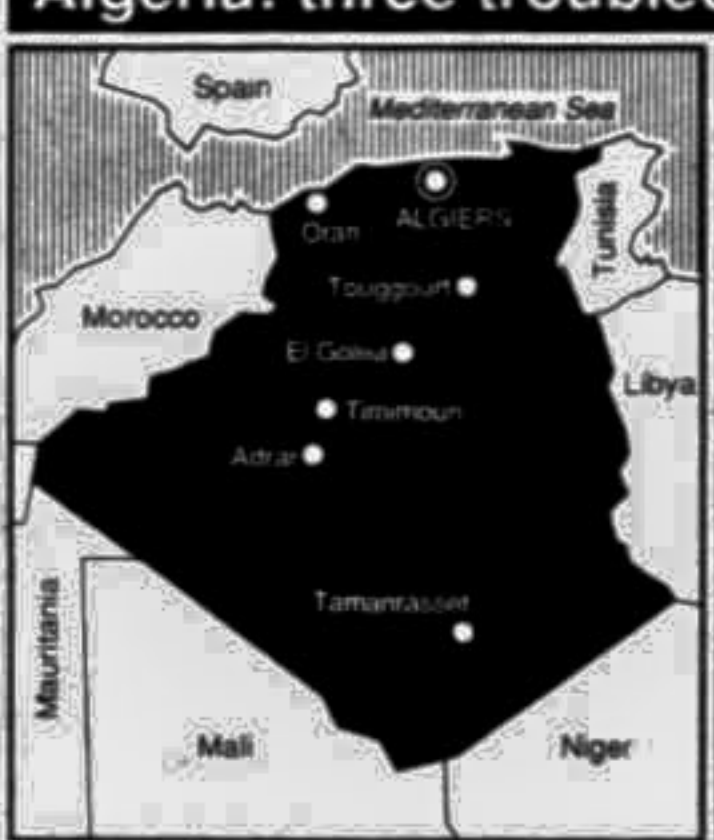
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**Fundamentalists Shock the Algerian Army**

Sam Fuchs writes from Algiers

*The army in troubled Algeria has reinforced security measures to try to break an impasse between hard line anti-Islamists and moderates. Assassinations and military attacks by extremists have made this a difficult task. The Algerian authorities were shocked to discover that fundamentalist infiltrators in the army had aided the attacks. The country's leaders face a struggle because the mandate giving them power expires at the end of the year.*

**Algeria: three troubled decades**



- 1962 National Liberation Front led by Ahmed Ben Bella wins independence from France
- 1965 Revolutionary Council led by Houari Boumedienne takes power. Ben Bella arrested
- 1975 Chadli Bendjedid appointed president
- 1980 150 killed in riots. Bendjedid proposes democratic reform
- 1989 Referendum approves multi-party democracy. Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) founded
- 1990 FIS wins municipal elections in most towns
- 1991 FIS wins most seats in aborted parliamentary election
- 1992: Jan. Chadli resigns. Bouchara returns from exile to head presidential council
- Feb. State of emergency declared after 40 die in riots
- March. FIS banned
- July. Bouchara assassinated
- July. Ali Kafi appointed president

show that the hard line anti-Islamists in the army are winning a power struggle over moderates, who believe in conciliation rather than confrontation to win over the huge and passively hostile Islamic electorate. The moderates hope to win the hardliners over to a more neutral position so they can be integrated into the regime.

Many Algerians believe dialogue is the only way out of the political impasse. But the moderates' position was undermined by two factors. The first was the shocking daylight assassinations on the streets of Algiers of three prominent citizens.

Although close to power, they were members of neither the government nor the armed

forces. The killings are assumed to be the work of Islamic extremists.

Secondly, the most serious military attack in a year occurred when another group of extremists attacked an army barracks south of Algiers, killing 18 soldiers.

Even more alarming to the Algerian authorities was the fact that fundamentalist infiltrators in the army were responsible for helping the attackers. As a result, a power struggle within the armed forces has intensified in a bid by the hard-line Defence Minister and strongman of the regime, General Khaled Nezzar, to try to purge such saboteurs from its ranks.

He holds them responsible for an attempt on his life in February, as only a few insiders knew his constantly-changing route to work — and also for other lethal attacks on barracks.

The Algerian state's worst nightmare is of a 'fifth column' of fundamentalists in the army plotting to overthrow the regime.

There have already been discreet purges in the past, but those with secret sympathies are hard to detect. Perhaps, because of these tensions it is rumoured that one faction in the armed forces, which has already taken a more active role in running the country, albeit still indi-

rectly, wants to take direct power.

What will happen is still unclear. The present government, imposed by force on Algerians, commands little respect and is not only considered corrupt and ineffective, but also a hangover from the past 30 years of colossal mismanagement and corruption that have led Algeria to its current mess.

The army, fully aware of the limitations of its creation, urged the government to start a dialogue with opposition political parties — a process which has enjoyed only extremely limited success. Several parties have refused to participate, criticising an agenda limited solely to institutional procedures rather than issues of real importance to Algerians, such as unemployment and the pitiful state of the economy.

Critics remain convinced the real aim of the exercise is for Algeria's current leaders to hang onto power when the mandate of the High Council of State expires at the end of this year. Can they get away with this? The answer, as always in Algeria, depends on the army.

— GEMINI NEWS

**OPINION**

**Breast Feeding — the Spiritual Link**

A Mauaz

What is not stressed in the modern western literature on human breast feeding of the baby is the establishment of the spiritual link between the mother and the child. This has far reaching importance to family attachment and unity not only throughout life but extends into the successive generations. The family is the very basic unit and nucleus of the society. The sages, such as Confucius, pointed it out, later to be confirmed by the social scientists.

What is happening in the Western way of life is the degeneration of the family and the erosion of filial piety, a factor attributed by the wise to the severance of the various links with the parents. This link should start early in life, in fact, right from birth. That is where the mother comes in with breast feeding. The psychological factors in this bond has been well documented.

Physically there are many practical advantages of breast feeding. The mother's milk is designed and fit for the human baby; it has the right formula, it is fresh, portable, pre-warmed, germ-free, and needs no separate container (may be full of germs) to be served. This close

physical contact between the baby and the mother is essential for the feeling of security by the child for normal mental growth and development. The medical profession can point out the medical benefits of this natural product, such as the presence of various kinds of "medicines" (antibiotics, and other preventive agents) which the baby needs after coming into this world.

An audio-visual campaign may be mounted not only for the rural women, but also for the working women in the cities. In fact, the village mothers have to fall back on breast feeding as long as possible due to the average low standard of living.

Sociologically we find that the Bengali family ties are very strong. The reason is not merely due to the economic inability to move the family to the place of work. The deep inner urge to visit the family members living far away may be due to the custom of breast feeding so widely prevalent in our society, and in the developing countries.

The main economic problem is the lack of abundant supply of fresh local cow's milk at a cheap price, needed after the weaning stage of the child. It is heartening to note that our Prime Minister is taking personal interest in the rapid development of the dairy industry based on rural economics.

Breast feeding is a big problem in the industrialized countries where the female labour force is lured out of the home and utilized to the maximum for the rapid economic development of the country. But at what a tremendous cost to the future generation! At least the Japanese mother is more sensible. She stops working outside temporarily to bring up the babies, and resumes work when the children are grown up.

It is a false notion to believe that a woman at home is idly passing her time. In fact she is over-worked as a mother, housewife, and wife.

She should be recognized for her invaluable contribution to the extremely important task of looking after the development of the future generation. The future of the country first depends on her, and then on the politicians and others.

**To the Editor...**

**Divisional HQ at Rangpur**

Sir, The people of greater Rangpur and Dinajpur district have been demanding for establishment of a divisional headquarters at Rangpur for the last few years. But no decision has yet been taken in this regard. The present government has already created a divisional headquarters at Barisal. This has helped the people of southern part of the country. The people of Sylhet are also demanding for establishment of a new division at Sylhet, which has too been praised by many people.

We the people of Rangpur and Dinajpur are suffering very much for want of a divisional headquarters at Rangpur as the present divisional headquarters is far away from the above district. The communication system is not good. We would, therefore, request the government to consider the demand for establishment of a separate

division at Rangpur which is ideally situated in the northern part of the country.

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 Dhaka

**Awards and freelancers**

Sir, The Philips Award, the Bata Award, the Coca Cola Award and other 'such' awards are quite interesting and eagerly awaited by writers and journalists. We greatly feel, however, that freelance writers are being neglected to a dire extent. It is time someone thought of awarding some of the freelance writers who contribute largely to socio-economic, political-administrative, cultural-educational developments. They serve as unofficial 'think tank'. They help to mould policy by generating ideas among the decision makers as well as galvanizing influential members of the public in helping to implement steps or

measures of long term benefit to the country. If they wise, worthwhile visions receive scant attention, the result is the setting into motion of the slow grinding of the forces of nature or providence or market'. The freelance writers definitely deserve awards. Every writer should be allowed to send ten writings of his/her own choice, and judgement should be made absolutely by those who have no connection with the journals or periodicals or dailies.

From the old and young generations there should be equal number of judges. Best would be to choose from among the justices belonging to the older generation, and school as well as college teachers from among the younger generation — of course, those who regularly read the Bangla and English newspapers and periodicals.

So let the free lance writers be awarded too.  
 Nahasha Kamal  
 Dhaka