Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Monday, July, 4 1994

## The Besieged Press

The press in Bangladesh has seldom faced such a serious threat to its existence or free functioning as it does today. First is the open challenge to a free press by a group of extremists who are try ing to use the religious sentiment of the common people to throttle the press. Then there is the example of government itself taking recourse to some archaic laws to arrest and harass the editor, publisher and other senior staff of a newspa per, and thereby intimidate the press. And then there is the example of arbitrary cutting down of government advertisement from newspapers that are supposed to be falling out of line. Finally, the open attack on newspaper offices, the burning of copies of several newspapers and the bomb blast at the office of the photo journalists, have together made the present situation among the very worst facing the press in Bangladesh.

The recent spate of attacks on newspapers and journalists have made the general public genuinely worried about the future of the free press in our country. What is the reason behind this widespread attack on one of the most important organ of a democratic system of government? We witnessed a most elaborate and planned attack on the press during the hartal of last Thursday. The journalists travelling on assignment were stopped and newsmen harassed at several places of the city. In district towns of Sylhet, Comilla, Rajshahi, Noakhali and some other places newspapers that the hartal proponents do not like were not allowed to be distributed.

The message of the recent attack on the press is clear. Multiplicity of views, which is the most sacred aspect of a democratic polity, will not be permitted by an extremist group. Even if our Constitution should guarantee it, the fundamentalist political force will not permit the existence of the press which may express a viewpoint other than their own.

The role of the government has been most disappointing in all this. Instead of acting as the defender of the Constitution and assuring the fundamental freedoms, especially that of the freedom of press, the government on two occasions acted to harass the press itself. The government's action greatly emboldened the forces of reaction and made them continue to act with impunity. A belated, but welcome, statement by the minister of information, has helped somewhat in stemming the fast eroding credibility of the government regarding its commitment to press freedom. The minister's reiteration that the government will uphold press freedom at any cost made striking contrast with his inexplicable silence over the last several weeks during which an editor was dragged into jail, and newspaper offices were openly attacked. Yet the information minister's warning comes at a very critical time, and serves a very useful purpose. However, the real test of his words will come only if severe action follows his stern warning. For one thing, the people who have been regularly attacking some selected newspapers should be made to face legal action. The bomb attack on the office of photo journalists should be thoroughly investigated and the persons responsible punished. The information minister should take some personal interest in these matters as these fall directly under his jurisdiction. Without such follow up measures, his belated but useful statement will appear no better than mere words.

## **Setting Things Right**

The government has been worse than niggardly in showing respect to Jahanara Imam and recognising the inescapable fact that she is a national hero. The government, as the most representative of the many manifestations of the will of the people, owed it to the people to register, on their behalf, a sense of gratitude to and appreciation of one who almost literally seeded a rather wayward national mind with the values and ideals of the Liberation War in times more trying and confusing than even that of the war itself. The government has horrendously failed to do that, presumably as a matter more of choice than of compulsion. The failure stems understandably from the government's reacting to the death of a truly great citizen of the state in the manner of a party that, as a political entity, did not find many of her public actions congenial. The sooner the government comes to respond to this event of great national loss as behoves the supreme organ of this nation the better for us all. And a failure to do that will vitiate not only our present realities but also our posterity by setting up a very deplorably bad precedent.

The coverage of Jahanara Imam's death in the government-controlled state media has been poor, in fact quite indecently so. This has been an act of meanness, lacking in grace and violative of a myriad social norms. We are afraid lest this should continue even when her body arrives today and the lack of respect be manifest in all the rites that would follow. We do hope our worst apprehensions would not come true and the government's representation would be there in an ac-

ceptably appropriate manner.

More important, however, than such attending to the demands of propriety is to negate, right now, one of the government's worst mistakes and right the wrong it did to Jahanara Imam by indicting her as an enemy of the state. And the government can still very well offer to inter her

mortal remains with all state honour. This sad affair has been made the sadder by ironies emanating from the government's strange and self-willed abdication from positions that belonged to it as a matter of prerogative. Why wouldn't there be elements of Bangladesh Army turning out a last guard of honour and the army buglers wail a last post? How will it serve the government's position if, instead, all the living commanders of the different sectors of our Liberation Army give her a salute in a much more meaningful gesture to the departed hero?

The government has been narrow and unperceptive in its assessment of Jahanara Imam's achievements, all of which have been in the cause of our people. The government should know how to set this right going far beyond our limited counselling. It should also know that by alienating itself from Jahanara Imam it is in effect alienating itself from many things of enduring national im-

#### ld of the 1940s and 1950s. many a government of the day chose nationalization of in dustries, banks, insurance companies, airlines as the favoured path to restructuring economies. We saw the phenomenon in the early years of the 1970s. In our case, exigencies of circumstances also may have acted as a motivating force Owners of mills, factories, fi

N the non Communist wor

framed a policy on privatization, the government should follow its provisions faithfully and with consistency. production. Now the state is nancial institutions had left the divesting itself of these assets. country and the state stepped The citizens of the country can in, taking over the assets. In very well be seen to have a any case, we also came to have prior claim to shares of these a nationalized sector in the assets. In fact, ownership of economy

state is reverting to the citi-

denied that the modality for

privatization adopted by the

former socialist states will

make the ownership of the

state assets being divested in

these countries broad-based.

By all account privatization is

the only popular reform pro-

gramme in the former com-

mand economies. Privatization

is a component of the eco-

nomic reforms being imple-

mented in these countries

which looks really irreversible.

copying East Europe's privati-

zation model. Nonetheless.

many of them are building into

their privatization strategies.

measures aimed at broad-bas-

ing ownership of the state as-

sets divested and for making

the programme more readily

acceptable to the affected in-

terest groups. Nearer to home

Sri Lanka gifts 10 per cent of

shares of the state-owned en-

terprise (SOE) being privatized

to the employees. Length of

service of each employee

forms the sole criterion for al-

lotment of these shares. A

manager having put in 10 years

of service in the enterprise

gets the same number of

shares as an ordinary worker

with the same length of ser-

To be sure, our privatization

policy framed recently also

recognises broad-basing of

ownership of SOEs being sold

off as a part of the strategy

Other countries may not be

All the same, it cannot be

Perspectives have changed now. Government in Europe Latin America, Africa and Asia are selling off state assets Privatization is the name of the game. The former Communist states appear even more aggressive among the players on the field and are privatizing with a vengeance. Russia, it is said, plans to sell off nearly all state assets eventually barring a few such as cemeteries and the central bank. And the voucher privatization programme looks like an innovation that the countries in the former East European bloc have introduced. Governments issue privatization vouchers free of charge to the citizens. The vouchers can then be exchanged for shares of enter prises being privatized. A citi zen can also sell his voucher straightaway instead of buying a share for himself in the privatized industries. In another variant of the voucher system. citizens pay a nominal fee, just enough to cover administrative costs, for a booklet of coupons that can be exchanged for sha res of privatized enterprises or of funds investing in those

undertakings. There are obvious reasons why privatization in the former centrally planned economies of East Europe cannot serve as a role model for other countries. For one thing, the context is quite different. In the former socialist countries, the state had taken over all private property in the name of collec tive ownership of means of

WO years back Grameen

Agriculture Foundation. We saw

how agriculture in Bangladesh

lagged behind other countries

in the region because it was

left to people who did not have

the knowledge, financial capa-

bility or interest to bring any

change in agriculture. People

with money and ability left vil-

lages for urban areas where

they adopted other profes-

sions. They have very little link

left with agriculture except

collecting rent from the share-

Bangladesh suffer because the-

re is not much activity during

the slack season in agriculture.

ture to break the traditional

production cycle. Grameen

Agriculture Foundation (GAF)

now produces unfamiliar crops

like maize, soybean and sun-

flower, besides rice, wheat

sugarcane and other traditional

crops. GAF does not own any

land. It enters into agreement

with any willing farmer to be-

come a partner in the produc-

tion. GAF supplies all or some

critical inputs and gets and

agreed quantity of the harvest.

Farmer does not have to worry

about funds, inputs, or market-

ing. They are now wiling to

experiment with any crop and

Come and Join Hands

with Us

and friends around the world

to find new technology, new

market, new crops, new man-

agement system. GAF will like

to enter into export market for

banana, okra, gherkins, toma-

toes vegetables, or anything

that has a market for. Any indi-

vidual or organisation who is

willing to use the tools and

concepts of capitalism to

benefit not the greedy, but the

needy, may come and join

GAF wants to enter into

bietechnology in a big way - to

eliminate chemical fertilizers

and chemical insecticide/

pesticides and replace them

with bio-fertilizers and bio-

pesticides. We are hoping to

organise the bio-fertilizers and

bio-pesticides in people-based

ways - rather than in mass-

industry to allow all farmers

access to first-rate seeds so

that his hard work is not

GAF wants to set up seed

scale factory production.

hands with us.

GAF is looking for partners

crop-cycle.

We saw how the poor in

Grameen entered agricul-

Bank created another

company called Grameen

However, this is seen more as a desirable outcome rather than an objective. Workers and employees of an enterprise have been allowed to participate in a tender for sale along the property taken over by the with other bidders. The only concession, if at all, is that all their dues from the enterprise could be adjusted against the

sale price. No gifts here. Enterprises can also be disposed of through public offering of shares. State-owned shares may be offered to the public either direct or through the stock exchange. Indica-

sharing the ownership of enterprises being sold off It's possible that certain practical considerations make the government more inclined to dispose of SOEs through tender to a single buyer. For one ' thing, it is easier to sell off mills and factories to a single buyer than to a heterogeneous group. Then again, privatization is not an end in itself. It is also viewed as a tool for enhancing efficiency in the enterprises privatized. Prospects of improving performance of an industrial unit are brighter whe-

## ALONG MY WAY

Privatization Policy: Ensuring

Transparency and Consistency

Transparency is a crucial ingredient for the success of a privatization programme. So is consistency. Having

## S B Chaudhuri

tions are that shares will be sold through the stock exchange only if there is a rea sonable prospect of realising a favourbale price. Otherwise, shares also will probably be sold through tenders. In other words, it does seem that privatization programme will continue to follow the course charted earlier. The SOEs will be sold of lock, stock, and barrel, mostly through tenders to the highest bidders. In short, to the relatively well off who have access to larger funds. This is hardly the way to broad-base ownership of privatized enterprises. Nor is it the way to stop detractors raising whispers of so-called

sweetheart deals. The state need not give away its assets to the citizens the way East Europe is doing. Yet, it ought to allow the citizens a fair opportunity of

re its management is taken over by an established entrepreneur rather than a motley of citizen-shareholders.

Conceivably the state could first offer minority shareholding, say 30 to 40 per cent of an enterprise, for public subscription through the stock exchange and let the market de termine the price, irrespective of the face value. Let the mar ket decide if the shares will go at a premium over the issue price or at a discount. The majority shareholding of the enterprise could then be auctioned off in one lot to the highest bidder - the price obtained on the stock exchange providing the benchmark. This way, sales of SOEs would be more transparent as the market would clearly be seen to have determined the price of shares. All the same, the management of the privatized en-

terprise would pass on to experienced hands and the citizens also would share the ownership of the new entity.

It would, of course, be argued that divestiture of SOEs ! through share sales is not a practicable proposition as most of the enterprises are not public limited companies anyway. However, converting the SOEs into corporate bodies should not present insurmountable problems. Other countries are there who went for conversion of their SOEs into corporate entities before launching the privatization programme. It is to be noted here that contradictory reports have appeared in the press recently about government plans for converting industrial units in the public sector into companies. There is a report which says that all state-owned industrial concerns would be turned into public limited companies by next December. However. there also are reports which suggest that only the lossmaking industrial units would be converted into companies. Hopefully, the first version is the correct one. Privatization then could take on a new course which would add to the transparency of the process.

\*Floating shares for sale would also be a surer way of attracting foreign investment funds for financing privatization. Global privatization has assumed massive proportions. More than eighty countries are privatizing their SOEs. It has been reported that privatization deals worth \$240 billion or so are now available in the global marketplace. Indications are that the volume would double in the next three years

New institutions who operate globally to finance privatization deals have also come up. These agencies have come to be known as global privatization funds. They generally invest part of their resources for financing privatization deals in the developing countries also. Some of these global privatization funds allocate as much as 40 per cent of the portfolio to emerging markets in the developing world. Usually, these funds invest by way of buying shares of enterprises being privatized.

Assets of our SOEs listed in 1991 for the first phase of privatization have been estimated roughly at around \$600 million. This is not much, to go by global standards. In fact, the latest estimate put the networth of all our SOEs at somewhere between 2.3 to 3.6 billion US dollars. Nonetheless, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to raise funds domestically to finance the entire privatization programme. Foreign funds would have to be attracted. What better way to attract foreign funds than to offer shares of SOEs at market-determined rates? Transparency is a crucial

ingredient for the success of a

privatization programme. So is consistency. Having framed a policy on privatization, the government should follow its provisions faithfully and with consistency. It is indeed disconcerting for potential investors to come across indications to the contrary. Reports appeared in the press recently to the effect that certain sugar mills would be converted into pulp mills to process green jute. Diversifying use of jute for \*paper manufacturing is no doubt a laudable move. However, the fact of the matter is that the sugar mills sought to be put into service for this purpose have already been earmarked for privatization in the very first phase. Implementation of the privatization policy is thus being stalled, Contrariness in policy implementation is sure to impair confidence of potential in-

## Does the Capitalist System Have to be the Handmaiden of the Rich? — II

wasted behind a questionable seed. We hope to use tissueculture technology in a peoplebased way to produce some of these seeds. We are looking for experienced partners to help us set this up.

One of the big plans for GAF is to produce orchids in a. home-based manner by inducting poor households to grow orchids in partnership with GAF for international market.

Health-Care for the Poor All researches done on Grameen Bank show that Grameen borrowers improve their income significantly. They also show rising erosion of income as the borrowers increase their income. Despite this erosion of income Grameen borrowers succeed in crossing the poverty line in ten to fifteen cycles of Grameen loans. We are trying to find ways to speed up the process of poverty reduction and help the borrowers to cross the poverty line earlier, say, in less then ten years.

If we can plug the erosion of income, we can help speed up the process. So we looked at it. This income erosion takes place primarily in procuring healthcare services. The poor have very poor health. As they improve their income they spend on one of the priority items \_ health. But the health services they buy with their hard-earned money is not only unreliable; mostoften they lead to more serious health hazards. In other works they end up buying more hea-Ith troubles with their money rather than overcoming them.

Grameen has decided to enter into this market and provide modern health services on cost recovery basis. Government of Bangladesh has a very elaborate health service infrastructure which is built to provide free medical services to all citizens. As a result the service is extremely poor, and it is available only to a handful of privileged people.

Grameen has started its experimental healthcare programme through Grameen Trust, another member of Grameen family of companies. This service is available to all villagers, both Grameen bor-

rower and non-Grameen villagers. Grameen borrowers pay a fixed amount of US \$1.25 per family per year as premium to a health insurance programme. They pay nominal amount (US\$0.02) each time they have to see a doctor. Medicines are available at a discount. Pathological tests are available also at a nominal fee. Non-Grameen

villagers pay a higher fee. From our initial experiment we feel that it is possible to run a modern healthcare programme on cost-recovery basis. If we can organise it in a nationwide franchise (even international franchise) we see a good possibility to turn it into a strong, competitive, sustain able pro-people entérprise.

### An Alternative Vision of the World

In this alternative vision of the capitalist world, instead of one motivating factor ("greed") to keep it in motion, we can introduce social consciousness or social dreams as another motivating factor. Both types of people can be in the same market place, using the same tools and concepts of capitalism but pursuing completely different goals.

Of course, in addition, there will be middle of the roaders who will mix both greed and social objectives according to their tastes and abilities.

This alternative vision of the world under capitalism will not be as back as it turned out it under greed alone scenario. This capitalist world can accommodate all shades: white, gray and black. I think this is the most realistic vision of the world under any frame

I am inclined to believe that the role of social-consciousness-driven entrepreneurs in the new configuration of the capitalist world is assigned to the State in a socialist framework. The State did not do a good job in this role.

work, capitalist or non-capitalist.

Can capitalist concepts, tools and framework allow, support and promote economic activities leading to achievements of social objectives in parallel with narrow personal objec-

by Prof Muhammad Yunus tives? My answer is emphatic 'yes'. Yes, it can be done provided we can create, strengthen and widen the role of social-conscious-ness- driven entrepreneurs through building supportive institutional arrangements, state policies, educational systems, social reward mechanisms and creating international support systems

> and solidarity networks. Through this forum I make an appeal to the Rotarians all around the world who are leaders of their profession to join and take up leadership among social-consciousnessdriven entrepreneurs. By join ing the ranks of social-consciousness-driven entrepreneurs you'll gain more in social respectability than what you'll lose in dollar and cents of personal income. Above all, you'll be a happier person than you'd otherwise ever be. If you become social-consciousness-

your total commitment, I can assure you'll build an entirely different world than what we have now. The world that we can build will be totally free from poverty and human indignity; it will be a world of friendship, cooperation and happiness rather than a world of aggression and destruction of human values and environment.

driven entrepreneurs with

### Are We Alert and Active?

I appeal to all entrepreneurs, professionals, management people, business strategists and fund managers to take upon themselves the task of setting up social-consciousness-driven enterprises and businesses throughout the world and create supportive financial and solidarity network to help sustain, grow and expand this type of enterprises.

There are already many small efforts in this direction scattered all over the world.

We need to bring them closer to find inspiration from each other. We offer to make Bangladesh an action-research site to demonstrate what can be achieved in a problem-ridden least developed country through the combined efforts of the social-consciousnessdriven entrepreneurs from all over the world. We must find ways to have

social-consciousness-driven entrepreneurs out-number the greed-alone-driven entrepreneurs in the world as fast as we can. We just can't leave the market place to be monopolised by the greed alonedriven business people. Let us not create a wrong world just because we laid down wrong postulations or we are too indifferent to notice opportunities to build a better world. Let the new millennium show that we are alert, active and committed. We can take the initiative to correct the errors of the past in a decisive way We cam set our course on the right track with full vigour.

Let us join our hands to create a world which we'll be proud to be part of, not ashamed of it.

( Concluded)

OPINION

# Blasphemy Law in Pakistan

A few groups in Bangladesh have raised a demand following the furore over alleged violations of section 295 A of the Penal Code that these laws should be strengthened. The alleged violations are, of course, sub judice and it is not proposed to discuss them here. Let us look instead at the issue of freedom of speech.

No one is arguing that people have an unqualified right to say whatever they want. Under the law of criminal libel people are even protected from having the truth about them used to incite violence against them. The Law of Torts protects persons against defamation. It is clear however, that a certain

tolerance of opinions and views contrary to one's own is expected of every one in a civilised society. Thus in a Christian state a Muslim, teaching the tenets of Islam one of which is absolute belief in the Unity of God, could not be held guilty of showing disrespect for the Christian faith which subscribes to the doctrine of the Trinity.

A few organisations/groups are demanding the enactment of a so-called blasphemy law. In Pakistan the addition of subsection C to section 295 of the Penal Code was made in 1986 when the country was under the late President Zia ul Haq's autocratic rule. This amendment is inaccurately referred to as a blasphemy law. Blasphemy is contempt or indignity offered to God. 295 C deals with Gustakh-e-Rasool, insult offered to the Prophet. This may be an offence but it cannot be blasphemy. To describe this as blasphemous is to be guilty of blasphemy or Kufr oneself because this is arrogating divinity to a human

The text of 295 C is as follows: "Whosoever by words, ei-

Salma Sobhan ther written or spoken, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) shall be punished by death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine. The amendment is full of lacunae. It lacks provisions of mitigation. Guilt is established even if the offence is unintentional, indirect, through implication and innuendo. It has been used in Pakistan against the Ahmadis and against the Christians. Notable and revered persons like the octogenarian Dr Akhtar Hamid Khan have also been attacked under this law by persons who had personal grudges against

case of Salamat Ali an illiterate 12-year old Christian boy who was accused of writing derogatory words on the walls of a mosque. His father, Manzoor Masih, also illiterate and another member of the community who was semi-educated were also implicated. The father was shot dead and the other accused parties seriously injured as they left the court. Local residents say that quarrels amongst the village boys and other petty disputes were the real background to the case. Some of the lawyers providing free legal services to the accused say that the complainants case was weak and realising he was going to lose he set up the murder. Manzoor Masih was the third Christian to be killed on the basis of the so-called blasphemy law.

The most notorious appli-

cation of this act must be the

One of the three Christians killed was a Muslim who had converted to Christianity. In this context it is relevant to

know that "For an apostate, or murtadd 'one who turns back' from Islam, there is no punishment in the Quran. There are no recorded cases of the Prophet punishing those Muslims who renege [d] upon their faith ..... 'Muslims subscribe to the concept of freedom of worship'. The Quran makes it clear that 'there is no compulsion in religion how then can it pronounce death on those who 'turn away' from Islam or 'turn back' on it. On the contrary the Quran mentions that in place of those who have given up the right path, God will bring better and more faithful ones. In Verse 16:106 the Quran says 'anyone who having accepted faith in Allah, utters unbelief, except under compulsion, though in his heart, he remains firm in faith, on him is the wrath of Allah and he will be punished grievously "But the punishment, as is obvious, is for Allah to decide it is not to be inflicted by man here."

The above quotation shows us how pernicious the enactment of the so-called blasphemy law has been. Men have arrogated to themselves a right they were not given. And they have, further to compound the sin, acted for reasons of personal advantage.

To those of us who believe in it, Islam is a religion of justice and equity. Its message of belief is for all humans. It advocates tolerance. The most unacceptable part of the behaviour of those who are using religion to further their own political agenda is their debasement of Islam. To believing Muslims it is they who are the profaners.

The author is a well know legal expert on Muslim Law, and a leading member of Human Rights and Legal Aid Centre, Ain-O-Shalish Kendro.

### Saudi Arabia in World Cup

Sir, It was really a 'dearest storm' for the million of soccer fans all over the world when Saudi Arabia defeated Belgium 1-0 in World Cup soccer.

They have raised the head of Asia high. We all feel proud of Saudi Arabia.

It is reported that the Saudi Arabian players would receive US dollar 100,000 plus a Mercedes from their government for reaching the 2nd round of the World Cup.

We congratulate the Saudi players especially Sayeed Owairan on this historic success and wish them more laurels in future. And as a token of

our love and respect for the should say something against Saudi players we would request our government to invite the Saudi players to visit Bangladesh at least for three days and to play at least one friendly match with our national football team in Dhaka. O H Kabir Dhaka-1205.

No smoking, please!

Sir, I was watching BBC's TV programme on 30-6-94. It was disgusting to see Taslima Nasreen lighting up and puffing cigarette before giving her interview which was ofcourse against religion.

I have no comment for her opinion as it is her own, but I

smoking. Doesn't she know that smoking is causing harm to her, to the society, to the atmosphere of the country? Or it is also a part of her challenge against the society? And why should BBC propagate smoking on the screen? Was it necessary to show her smok ing before she talked? They should understand that if they think Taslima a celebrity, then a cigarette in her hand may not have a 'desired' effect on the mind of the viewers! So no smoking on the screen, please

Munira Khan Dhaka.