

FOCUS

THE advent of satellite television in Bangladesh has renewed fears amongst some quarters of moral degeneracy of our youth, cultural domination, the intrusion of "alien" values, and many other similar sins. If one is to believe some of the reports in the news media, and random anecdotal conversations, Bangladeshi youth are facing a crisis of monumental proportions, a battle between "indigenous Bengali" values and "imported foreign" ones. Many an earnest intellectual (and there seem to be no shortage of these) has made dire pronouncements about the need to protect young minds from the insidious onslaught of foreign television programmes. Some have called for regulation; others for outright censorship.

The issue of regulating the media, whether it be the spoken word, print, radio or television is an old one. Censorship appears to be a primal urge — the desire to control access to unpalatable opinions, images or thoughts. There is a long history around the world of initial fear of new trends in music, fashion, and most dangerous of them all — ideas, with campaigns to try to limit their spread, followed by eventual acceptance into the mainstream. I was intrigued to recently discover, that jazz, (one of the more genteel of musical forms) when it first appeared on the public scene in the United States was labeled as licentious, subversive, and a threat to

Seduced by Z, Lured by V The Fear of Foreign TV

public morals.

How seriously should one take these comments about limiting access to satellite television? Allowing for the inevitable pontification of "intellectuals", is there any merit in these arguments? Should sensible people worry?

I must confess, that I am puzzled as to what exactly these "self-styled guardians of morals and culture" are worried about? I am always suspicious of topics where both the left and the right agree — the cynic in me somehow feels that there is a certain hypocrisy here, a conspiracy to deny choice to the average woman, man and child. Inevitably, when you cut through the jargon, the debate is about values, and the molding of malleable minds. If I understand the argument correctly, by watching various nubile women (I suppose I should include men — but can men be nubile? — something to think about) prancing around trees in suggestive clothing, the young may be influenced into — (I will leave it to the reader's imagination). Is this a concern about aesthetics or morals?

In societies such as ours, with a strong authoritarian streak, and no real tradition of open debate, many are at-

tracted to the notion of selective access to information — "keep what is good" and "eliminate what is bad". Unfortunately, what is deemed "bad or subversive" is often what is unfamiliar or different, to self-appointed arbiters of national taste and morals.

What values are we talking about defending, and why should our youth be the can-

did of the explosion in choice of television programs is that Bangladesh Television (BTV) is making some efforts to improve the quality of their programs, although there is still a long way to go as yet. Advertisements have definitely become more professional and creative. Music programs are now catering to more than just staid middle class, middle aged tastes. The dramas have improved, especially the packaged variety. Unfortunately the tendency to present overly melodramatic fare has not lessened. Doom, gloom and injustice still seem to be the order of the day. I wonder if this reflects a strong streak of morbidity amongst Bangladeshi playwrights or is comedy just harder to write and present — more on this at a later date. There is still an abundance of exceedingly dull talk shows on weighty issues, which neither inform nor provoke debate. Given the paucity of creative, entertaining or informative programs on BTV, is it any wonder, that those who have the ability, switch on to the glitzy fantasy land of Hollywood and Bollywood.

And what of our moral guardians, our intellectual Brahmins who care so much and do so little for us common folk? My advice is: leave us and our children be, switch off our own TVs, not ours.

Dr Omar Rahman is Assistant Professor of Demography, at Harvard University.



REFLECTIONS

by Dr Omar Rahman

those on the right, "the lifestyles of the rich, the beautiful and the famous a la Holly and Bollywood" glorify an individual hedonism antithetical to family, god and country. Viewing these shows will presumably corrupt the young, make them into godless, sex-crazed capitalists, who will rebel against their elders, abandon their family obligations, and pursue their individual dreams and aspirations.

Even if such an apocalyptic vision were even remotely true, could we really control

the media to eliminate all that we fear, and keep the sanitized version of the familiar. To be effective, one would have to resort to a kind of authoritarian control that would have severe damaging effects on the fragile democracy that we now have. To me one of the hallmarks of democracy is allowing a diversity of opinion/thought and information, much of which may be personally offensive to any one individual's aesthetics and/or morals. As a society, we need to acknowledge that, individuals, and not some other authority, are the best judges of what they should read, hear and see. Children obviously need guidance and protection, but that should come at the parental level and not at the state. In any case censorship and banning, often leads to perverse results, where what might have been just boring now becomes titillating and sought after, precisely because it has been censored or banned — "the attraction of forbidden fruit".

Leaving aside the issues of the desirability and the effectiveness of regulating foreign television, it is worth noting that exposure to these programs has definite advantageous spill-over effects. One of the less appreciated mer-

or less easily, and believe that working and living here is not so different except in quite superficial ways such as entertainment and social life.

Moreover because a lot of young returnees are here doing the same thing, they are accepted amongst themselves and there is support for each other, professionally and socially.

Yet, restricted freedom of mobility and lack of independence, especially for the young women, is the biggest obstacle and is the hardest snarl to cope with. For those who have lived in Paris, New York, London, Tokyo, Spain and Italy, lack of mobility and scarcity of things to do is a big downer. Someone pointed out, "I love eating out, but if that's all there is to do, it becomes less exciting". Lots of women returnees have reported a feeling of being fed up having always to depend on someone else for a "safe" mode of transport. Almost all of them have experienced some kind of harassment whilst on public transport, and in some instances, the incidences were extremely saddening, disturbing and not only frightening but also dangerous. Yet, mobility constraints can get to be so frustrating that one returnee says, "Sometimes I feel like I'd rather compromise my safety than to feel so offensively bonded."

When asked, "Do you wish to live in Bangladesh permanently?" A few said "Yes, at this moment I wish to", insinuating that perhaps at another moment they might not want to anymore. Others are not certain. The majority have said no, although some would like to come and go more often making Bangladesh a permanent base in addition to one abroad. Yet, no one has said that they definitely wanted to settle here. So on the whole, Bangladesh, for them, seems to be an experimental testing ground, perhaps only a transitory phase of their lives, yet from which they are learning and gaining many things. Hopefully, Bangladesh is also gaining something in return.

The commercial shows members of a big family fading away slowly, one by one. Anti-Japanese feelings remain strong. Recently, angry citizens in Shanghai occupied a main shopping centre.

There was a Japanese company involved in the building of a new shopping area," explained a Shanghai citizen. "The protesters knew they could get away with it and would get even support from the authorities if there was a problem."

Japanese working in China feel the hostility. Admits the Japanese general manager of a company in an economic zone near Shanghai: "Now everything is fine. But I want to live in an apartment with good security and a heavy lock. If something goes wrong in China, we will have problems."

FONS TUINSTR is a Dutch journalist studying in China.

THE collapse of the Soviet Union has meant a reprieve for the Russian Arctic. Market prices for fuel means it is no longer economical to exploit that ecologically sensitive region. Meanwhile, WWF is working to conserve areas in the Arctic Circle.

Conserving the Siberian Arctic

by Martin Hiller

MOSCOW, Russia: When the wild geese start their long flight north from southern and western Europe to their summer breeding grounds, northern Siberia is still under snow and ice. Only by the end of May does the ice on the rivers crack, and the snow melt sufficiently, for the plants to really start to grow again. The days get longer and longer, and soon the sun never sets.

The Russian Arctic still has a rare, wild beauty. Untamed rivers flow through the wide open spaces of the tundra, the taiga, and into the Arctic Ocean. These are among the last wildernesses on the planet.

The goal is to create a Russian part of the "Arctic Ring of Life" — big protected areas around the North Pole.

"The recent initiatives in Russia to establish a network of large protected areas, should serve as models for other governments in the Arctic," says Peter Prokosch, WWF's Arctic Programme Coordinator.

Fortunately, northern Siberia is not the most accessible or friendly part of the earth. That is why its northern, cold, and treeless regions have not been completely ravaged. Not that people did not try!

When Russia was part of the Soviet Union, there was a deliberate policy to tame the



Vast areas in North Siberia still remain practically untouched by man. They continue to be the habitat for the biggest free-ranging herds of reindeer, of lemmings, and the polar fox. The islands are home to the polar bear, the coasts have walrus and seals, and in the freezing waters of the Arctic Ocean are Beluga whales. Finally, hundreds of thousands of breeding birds: sandpipers, gulls, plovers, tern, skuas, ducks, and geese bring even more colour to the summer sky.

But that is not the entire picture. The city of Norilsk, far north of the Arctic circle, was founded 60 years ago as a camp for political prisoners. Today it is home to at least 200,000 people, a tenth of the Arctic's entire population. The main reason: a nickel and copper industry.

Norilsk is also an ecological disaster. The air pollution is so severe, you can detect it as a black spot in white surroundings from outer space. It is infamous as the city with black snow. The incredible air pollution has already destroyed hundreds of square kilometres of taiga. And organized hunting tours are decimating the polar bear. A plan to open the pack ice for commercial shipping along the "northern passage" could be asking for disaster. A single oil spill would play havoc.

Since 1989, WWF has been cooperating with the regional and national authorities to improve and increase the protected areas in the Russian North. Together, they are leading the fight against the environmental dangers inherent in this region. For instance, massive waste dumps are literally preserved forever since low temperatures prevent rotting.

Sometimes with the help of Western governments, especially the Netherlands, WWF and the Russian authorities have succeeded in improving the situation in a majority of the huge reserves.

First there were the gulags to which political prisoners were condemned. In recent decades, there was a more deliberate attempt to systematically exploit the region. Young people were attracted by the especially high salaries: thrice the going rate for Moscow.

Today, with the Soviet Union's collapse, economic activities in the North are in decline — mainly because of spiralling fuel and transport costs. As roads were mainly dirt tracks and impassable most of the year, the preferred means of transport was the helicopter. And, as the fuel costs were almost nothing, people even went shopping in choppers! Today's fuel prices are more realistic.

This is the main reason for falling population. Only the indigenous people are unaffected. There are about 5,000 Dolgans, Nganasans, Nentsens, and other ethnic groups living in the Taimyr region. Although some have settled down, others still follow their traditional lifestyle, migrating with the reindeer herds and living sustainably in the great wilderness.

There is more good news from Russia. Although nature conservation is certainly not a priority for the central government, WWF finds officials at all levels, concerned biologists, local NGOs, and private persons supporting efforts towards the protection of their natural heritage.

"With all the enthusiasm and knowledge in Russia as a back-up, it's a great privilege for WWF to support initiatives such as those in the Arctic to ensure conservation of some of the largest remaining wilderness areas on earth," Peter Prokosch concludes.

Work in this difficult environment will undoubtedly continue. Men need this wilderness as much as the geese do.

Martin Hiller is a Press Officer with WWF.

Did you ever notice women who just can't keep their ornaments properly? That no matter how hard they try, the ornament happily keeps sliding off? You have perhaps also noticed those looking painfully suffocated in their salwar kameezes, not only because of the layers and layers of material and belligerent ornament, but also the heat. How about those who are afraid of salamanders and insects (especially the monster flying cockroach)? Or those who are avoid black smoke like the plague and walk with their noses and mouths covered? Do these sights seem familiar?

You have probably spotted a deshi who has returned from abroad. Just give them ten months in Dhaka, and they'll not only get used to all these trials, but might even start getting fashionable. One woman quite humorously defined her readjusting as, "I grew my hair and started wearing lipstick. It was really traumatic!"

An escalating number of young deshis, who have been brought up abroad, are not only returning to the homeland, but coming back for longer periods of time than before. Is this unexpected pattern just coincidence, or is it something more than chance? This question being worthy of investigation spurred a series of interviews with fifteen returnees. From the pool of fifteen, the majority have spent more time abroad than in Bangladesh. They range from age twenty to twenty-nine. Most of them were either born abroad or left at an early age accompanied by their immediate family. They have all either completed their Master's or Bachelor's degrees. Yet, the incisive question is, after all these years, what are their reasons for returning?

Some are here because of a strong luring pull, coupled with the enticement of a land and culture that was never fully experienced. Many have returned to Dhaka after the completion of a Bachelor's, not only to spend some time with family and for work experience, but also because

they had never lived in Bangladesh, deciding that this interval between studies, or that this transitional phase in their lives would be the most propitious time to undergo the experience of living here. Add another motivating ingredient, such as personal exploration, alongside suitable timing, and what you get is many young men and women coming back to ascertain their roots. A young man, aged twenty-eight (the son of an Australian mother and a Bangladeshi father), has spent his entire life in Britain, yet he invariably felt a very strong bond with Bangladesh and

has always identified himself not as Australian, not as British, but as Bangladeshi. And today, his presence in Bangladesh will give him the occasion, not only to experience and understand the reason for this strong vinculum, but also an opportunity to explore himself further. Many others coming from like backgrounds are susceptible to parallel experiences, and are searching for a similar breakthrough in Bangladesh.

Yet, the very top reason for returning to Bangladesh is for work experience. Most returnees have come back to work in between further studies. Today, Bangladesh is virtually a depot for develop-

ment work: a large proportion of these young returnees have come back because of their special interest in social work. Many work for BRAC, Grameen Trust, UN organisations and various other international organisations and NGOs as well as teaching, law and journalism. To name a few other professions. Due to the shortage in Bangladesh of some of the skills that they possess (degrees from abroad, proficiency in several languages, broad outlook on the world, familiarity with different cultures, etc.) a lot of them find

that job opportunities here are more stimulating and interesting than they are abroad. They feel that they are given greater responsibility than they would be given abroad and that their abilities are not stifled but, on the contrary, are encouraged to expand. Working in Bangladesh allows more personal contribution and on a much larger scale.

One young man quite eloquently described his return as, "a feeling of somehow being propelled by an intense sentiment of magnanimity." He feels obligated to Bangladesh in an intangible way, "perhaps it's just an attempt to override the guilt that I

feel having abandoned my country and led a life of comfort elsewhere". Hence, among the returnees there are those with a strong sense of duty, and those who have come back to give and contribute something, whatever it may be. Another woman expressed this sentiment as she explained, "There are so many beggars on the street, and you know there isn't really much you can do for them. When I first got here, I felt horrible pangs of guilt every time I passed them. Now that I work for this NGO, I still feel bad for the

right match, a life-long partner. Has the process of living in and adjusting to Dhaka been easy? Some say yes and others say no; some find it easy in certain ways and difficult in others. Readjusting to living at home is a major issue for many returnees. Many have made a self-involved choice in living in Dhaka, and therefore accept the changes more easily than others might. "It has been difficult readjusting to living at home to the extent that my family continues to treat me like I'm still sixteen! At the same time, I value the time I spend with my family."

Yet, family support in many circumstances often buffers the feeling of isolation. Alienation is something that is often felt by returnees especially at work and during social encounters. Returnees have reported many experiences with deshis who have been rude or condescending because they have been brought up abroad. "It's really difficult to integrate with the young Bangladeshi crowd mostly because of the language barrier. Although I speak very good Bangla, I can't really joke or use slang... What they don't understand is that when I speak in Bangla, I've lost seventy per cent of my personality. Most of them think I'm stupid or something!" Another returnee reports, "There's this person at work... he is so rude to me... and I know it's because I'm a *bidesh phrot*. I used to get really upset at first. But it doesn't affect me anymore. I realize now that his behaviour stems from pure jealousy. Jealousy and resentment are not difficult attitudes to foster towards returnees, as some returnees rightly pointed out that most of them are experiencing a better relative standard of living than they would abroad. "People like us are the lucky ones. Life is easy and we can do pretty much as we like here." Most returnees have integrated more

There are others whose first priority in returning to Bangladesh was because they wished to spend time with their parents and/or grandparents. Some are even here in the hope of finding the



beggars, but I feel better about myself because I know I am helping others not to fall into their situation."

There is yet another group of returnees who have come back because of their interest in business. Business opportunities in Bangladesh have escalated dramatically in the past few years. The roar of the emerging tiger, and the prospect of making money has beckoned many to come back.

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World War Two.

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An exhibition near the memorial display photographs, many taken by the occupying Japanese army. The pictures have even shocked many of the Japanese who have visited the memorial.

Chinese claims about the Nanjing massacres have been substantiated by recent research.

Chinese historian Zhang Kaiyuan found documents, letters and pictures taken by

the United States missionaries who lived in and around Nanjing during the massacres. One document describes a 28-member international committee which formed a relief organisation and tried to save many Chinese from the imperial Japanese army.

The documents also confirm the large-scale rapes of Chinese women and the existence of so-called "comfort women" — women forced by the Japanese to have sex with Japanese troops. One of the letters speaks of 8,000 rapes at the Jianing University.

Groups of Chinese "comfort women" together with their fellow victims in

other countries, are lobbying to raise the issue at the United Nations Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in September.

These women's groups have the support of many influential communist veterans who fought the Japanese during the war.

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The issue will not get into the official agenda of the Beijing conference, but will get a public airing at the parallel meeting of non-gov-

Fifty Years on, War Memories still Sour Relations

Fons Tuinstra writes from Shanghai

MEMORIES of World War Two continue to haunt China's relations with Japan.

On 15 August 1945, Japan finally surrendered to the Allied forces, ending the war in Asia. But 50 years later the Chinese have not forgotten the cruelties inflicted by the imperial Japanese army on the Chinese people.

"I hate the Japanese," says a Chinese man in his twenties. "Whenever I can get them, I get them. They killed my grandfather and I will never."

The young man's attitude is shared by many.

China claims that 35 million Chinese citizens lost their lives under the Japanese occupation. Unlike the Germans, however, the Japanese have not apologised for their wartime crimes — though after months of negotiation Japan's coalition government has now agreed a resolution intended to be the definitive statement of regret for acts of aggression in

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ernment organisations.

For the Chinese government, eager to improve relations with Tokyo, virulent popular anti-Japanese feeling is an embarrassment.

In order to lure Japanese investment, Beijing told Tokyo that it would not demand any compensation for Japanese war crimes. But it has shown laxity in allowing anti-Tokyo sentiments to surface.

It did not suppress a film by one of China's top filmmakers, Zhang Yimou, which gave a realistic view of Japanese World War atrocities in China. And in television commercials, the government asks the Chinese people not to forget the past.