

Public Should Know

A national Bangla Daily of repute yesterday carried its first lead item under a startlingly revealing headline: "406 convicted terrorists set free at Matin Chowdhury's behest — President's constitutional prerogative indiscriminately used to remit sentences."

Quoting from government statistics the report stated that in one and a half years preceding the relinquishment of power by the BNP government 406 criminals sentenced by tribunals and courts in 63 cases of very serious nature were let off by the grant of presidential pardon at the recommendation of the home ministry. Most of them are alleged to be local level leaders and workers of BNP or its allied organisations. They have purportedly surfaced to work during the forthcoming elections.

The newspaper report projects the apparently scheming and hideous manner in which a flurry of releasing convicted criminals with party loyalties began as the opposition's boycott of the Parliament dragged on. And the second half of 1995 alone registered 60 per cent of the remission of sentences.

The President has all the constitutional power to grant reprieve, pardon or clemency to any convicted person. But he executes this on the basis of a mercy petition filed by a convict or a relative of his or her, which has to be duly certified by the prison authorities in the first place and then recommended by the home ministry for submission before the President. Purportedly the procedures were short-circuited in several cases.

We do not accept or reject the newspaper story off-hand, either in its totality or in parts; because this not only involves serious allegations of aborted justice and a political malcontent at an election time but it is happily also verifiable and worthy of confirmation by the home ministry of the present non-party caretaker government. In actual fact, it is also learnt that a process has already got underway at the initiative of the Chief Adviser's office to review the cases of the remission of sentences effected during the tenure of the erstwhile government. Let there be a public statement now whether or not sentences of so many criminals were actually set aside by the President, and later a statement whether such actions were legal and proper, and if neither, than what can be done about it.

Chemicals in Food

Indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers and insecticides has come under scrutiny in our country. People are getting increasingly aware of the various environmental damages caused by those substances. What is, however, less known is that the harmful chemicals have already entered into our food chain. The fact that vegetables sold at different city markets contain an unusually high level of DDT and other harmful chemicals has not yet given us many a sleepless night. The existence of the unacceptable levels of different chemicals was found in a test carried out at the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission's laboratory.

Now we learn that cow milk was found to contain DDT at a level enough to cause cancer to people drinking the same. A study carried out by a USAID project had established the fact three years ago. An expert in bio-diversity, Rakibuddin Ahmed revealed this at a speech-cum-slide projection on the occasion of the Earth Day. He has brought up in sharp outlines the incongruity between the government's preservation policy and the practice regarding bio-diversity. While we understand his concern for bio-diversity, we would like to concentrate on the lack of any definite guidelines on the use of chemical fertilizers, insecticides and harmful preservatives of food items.

The use of urea in puffed rice (*muri*) and of DDT as a preservative for sun-baked fish (*shutki*) has been reported in the press. It failed to create any furore and neither did the authority feel any urgency to take action against this abominable practice. Those are cases of direct application of chemicals in human food. Now how are people expected to react to the discovery of DDT in cow's milk? Certainly it will be nowhere near the protests and sentiments evoked by the mad cow disease in Britain. But this is quite a serious matter by itself. If unchecked, the proportion of chemicals will have heavier concentration in our foods as the years go by.

A Gentleman Cricketer Passes

With the death of Abdul Hafeez Kardar early this week the cricketing world will be the poorer having lost one who was at once an outstanding missionary and builder of cricket culture. A towering testament to his contribution is the formidable Pakistan team, built from nothing by Kardar, almost singlehandedly.

In the mid-forties Kardar went to play in England as a member of the touring Indian Test side. He stayed back to take up studies at Oxford and, as a matter course, became a blue. Taking up his first job he came to Chittagong and lived delightfully and cricketfully dividing his time between that city and Sylhet. In the early fifties Justice Cornelius, the BCCP president, summoned him to head a Pakistan team against a touring MCC. Although he never came back to live here, Kardar had always a keen interest in the land and people of Bangladesh and was always abreast of our cricketing progress.

Under the wise and dedicated leadership of Kardar his fledgling charge took to a precocious flight in no time, winning at least one Test against all sides it played. Imagine a team born in 1951 beating England squarely at the Oval in 1954.

But Kardar was more than a player. He was a gentleman. A man of culture and wide cultivation. Cricket is a competitive game replete with men of exceptional literary and aesthetic prowess. But that mark of distinction has steadily been getting worn over the recent years.

Post-election Complexion of Government Media

It is an axiomatic truth that media plays a dominant role in moulding public opinion in any society. In a totalitarian state, of which only a few have been left, media invariably being state-run carries out its functions by projecting, propagating and supporting the policy and actions of the government. This is comprehensible, as in these countries no rival political party worth its salt exists to seriously contend against the government party. However, the number of such monolithic states has shrunk drastically with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in the late eighties.

Despite such drastic reduction in strength of the so-called communist world, the government monopoly and control of the public media expanded in the rest of the world. It is interesting to witness the rapid growth of such facilities in what we term as the free world. In a free society, a state controlled media, specially television, in the absence of a private or semi-private channel faces many shortcomings. It is subjected to all the criticisms that are applicable to a monopolistic organisation. The difference in this case is that such an entity tends to be used mostly for securing political benefits in a free society instead of making both political and material gains in the other.

We must take cognizance of the two principal broad based division of countries, the developed and the developing

ones. There are qualitative differences of media in these two groups. In the rich industrialised nations of the so-called capitalistic world, competition in almost all sectors of the society is seen to be acute. The principle of survival of the fittest applies there in the true sense of the term. In not so prosperous but politically conscious societies, competition exists but generally on a modest scale. In the other group belonging to the developing world, in many countries media, particularly the electronic media, remains in the sole ambit of governmental authority. Lack of competition and extension of governmental control undermine democratic values and are not desirable to lovers of democracy.

In traditional democracies, besides the element of competition, another important balancing factor is represented by an effective application of legal and moral code of conduct for journalists. The rigours of conforming to these codes of journalistic behaviour render any departure from the desired path almost an exercise in futility. These codes, however, exist in some form or another in almost all countries. The difference, in this case, arises in the degree in which these codes are adhered to by those concerned. The

under-developed nations by and large are endowed with less will and means for enforcing such codes.

In Bangladesh, we find an admirable degree of independence minded journalists, specially those who are associated with national dailies and weeklies. That their views and reports are completely impartial and objective or not are a totally different question. Good journalism, one must admit, is

press generally loves to veer away from governmental party in order to cater to the sentiments of the general public, who are traditionally anti-establishment. Thirdly, the government party has been unable to cultivate the journalists well during the former's tenure of office, whatever may have been the reason for it.

The radio and television are the sole monopoly of the government in Bangladesh and as

undemocratic method must go. During the pre-election campaign in 1991 there was an understanding among the major political parties to impart some degree of autonomy on government control media. But this did not happen and the opposition's activities received much less than fair coverage. Some governmental sources sought to explain vainly by saying that the reporters and photographers representing these media quite often were afraid to venture in opposition's mass functions of being harassed and mishandled. There had, in fact, been a few such cases, it was asserted.

Whatever may have taken place in the past, it is in the interest of all political parties to receive a fair share of these very important governmental facilities as well as in general public interest that both the radio and the television should be placed under the supervision of an impartial and autonomous body. One may consider the example of the BBC worthy of emulation.

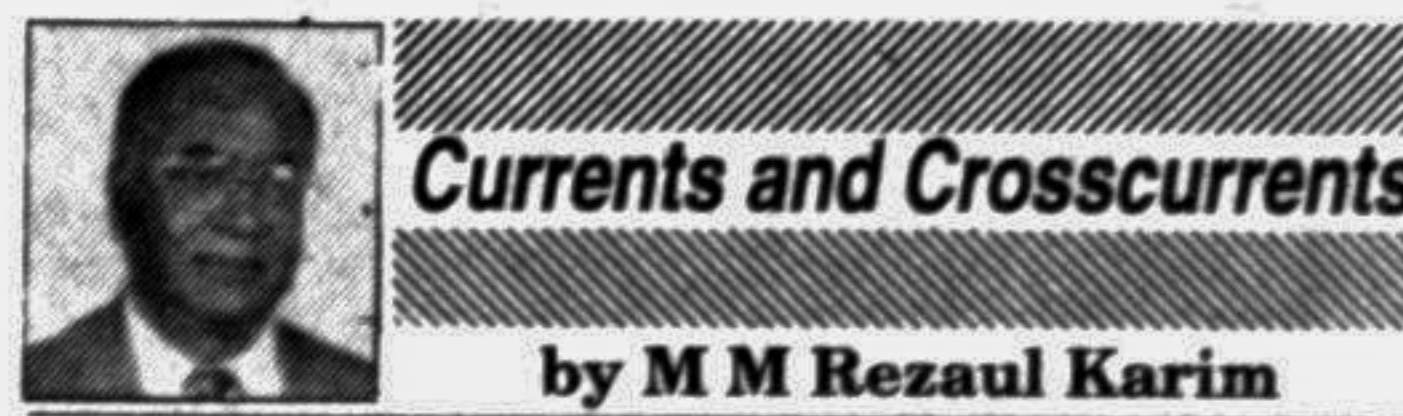
This would eliminate undue governmental interference and also limit the scope for making genuine complaints by the opposition of the day. Such action, besides fulfilling democratic norms, will, no doubt, benefit all political parties. The latter should, indeed, welcome such a proposal.

In fact, this should form a part of the manifesto of major political parties, if it has not been so done already.

If this is agreed in principle by the major political parties that the radio and the TV will be run by an independent and autonomous body, a full-proof system capable of implementing it needs to be devised. One should first explore the possibility of doing so by issuing a Presidential Ordinance on the advice of the present caretaker government, obviously after securing agreement of the major political parties. Legal experts should also pick their brain and examine this matter, in the light of the provisions of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. If the expert's findings are positive, there would be no problem. If not, perhaps a reference to the appellate division to seek a judicial opinion would be appropriate.

All these measures are to be ventured due to the strong possibility of political parties after having come to power of being highly tempted to go back on their words. If it is not possible for the present government to implement this decision, some effective measures must then be devised to bind the political parties in order that the next ruling party must implement the decision within a stipulated time. This would help impart fairness, transparency and justice to all and promote establishment of democratic norms on the land.

Some governmental sources sought to explain vainly by saying that the reporters and photographers representing these media quite often were afraid to venture in opposition's mass functions of being harassed and mishandled. There had, in fact, been a few such cases, it was asserted.



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

gaining ground in Bangladesh gradually. Nevertheless, parochial interests, greed and some other considerations are reigning high in the minds of many and induce them to make some departure from the charted path.

How does a journalist lose his or her objectivity and become biased? A primary consideration would be his political sympathy and partisanship. This might inhibit him from taking a neutral posture and tend to unduly influence his power of assessment and judgement. Secondly, the

such call for careful scrutiny by political analysts. The allegation of these two authorities being partial to and having served interests of the party in power is among the most serious criticisms made against the BNP. Unfortunately, these two media have been traditionally serving the cause of the government in power right from the inception of Bangladesh. This happened during the regimes of all the three major political parties — the Awami League, the Jatiya Party and also the BNP.

This unhappy, unfair and

The Missing Link

by Sultana Nahar

No country helps another country without any political or economic interest. That is the way of the world. We feel shy to accept the truth and call spade a spade. Acknowledgement of help unburdens the heart that receives and rewards the one that provides

SOME readers do not usually read the 'mufassil news page' of a daily. Like them, I also very often skip over the page. I have been doing some research on the minorities of Bangladesh; the news story under the heading, 'The minorities of Madanpur under Satkhira district are harassed by many arrested in the past', the news sent by the local correspondent is even partly true, there is cogent reason for any right minded citizen to be worried. Madanpur is a village near Indo-Bangladesh border under Chandanpur Union of Kalaroa Thana in Satkhira district. Minorities, specially the Hindus, of that area are being harassed and intimidated by some interested quarters. Some local journalists in collusion with local influential people have chalked out an intricate plan to drive out the Hindus of Madanpur from Bangladesh. The Hindus dare not speak of this plan for fear of threat of death.

I do not want to quote the news in its entirety. I have elaborately narrated the agony of the minorities in the book I had written after field research both in Bangladesh and India and also in some recent articles published in local dailies. As a lawyer I appeared in courts with cases under Enemy (Vested) Property Act. I have come to know how local people, belonging to majority community, wielding influence evict Hindu minorities from their ancestral homes and property; how Thana Administration and local Tehsil office join hands with such people to take away minorities' property on some pretext or other, using physical threat as well as through manipulation of land records in Tehsil office. The process usually starts with an offer to buy Hindu property at nominal price; refusal to respond to the offer prompts the unholy alliance to force a member of minority community to abandon his property and flee to India. There are also instances where a member of minority community had legally sold his land, migrated to India and came back to claim his sold land in courts of law on the plea that his land was forcibly occupied. Such instances are few and far between. The involvement of the local officers was revealed in many judgments of the higher courts in some cases under Vested Property Act. In some cases the courts directed the government to take action against such delinquent officers.

Hindus living in border areas of Bangladesh are always branded as Indian spy and are subjected to intentional interrogation by officers of different law enforcing agencies. The situation perhaps would have been otherwise had India not been a Hindu majority country. Myanmar is our another neighbouring country with long stretch of border with Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts of Bangladesh. Myanmar is a Buddhist-dominated country and Bangladesh has also large Buddhist population living in Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts. But our Buddhist people are not accused of spying for Myanmar. Of course our Buddhist brethren are as patriotic as our Muslim or Hindu brethren. What happened in Myanmar about the Rohingya is known to all of us. Not so much hullahaloo was made and not much ripples were created after the forced exodus of the Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Imagine the scenario that we could have witnessed if India had forced few hundred thousand Muslims of West Bengal to migrate to Bangladesh! We made lot of noise in the country and abroad on 'push-in' programme of India, which West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu opposed tooth and nail. We can safely conclude that we suffer from double standard. In the Rohingya problem we have taken a placating posture but in case of India we are overtly belligerent. Can it be said that we still suffer from communal hangover we learnt from the Pakistanis?

Where was our hatred for India when in 1971 the Pakistanis were raping our women, killing our people and burning our houses? If India had not given shelter to more than one crore Bangladeshis and joined our War of Liberation with their army and weapon what would have happened — I simply shudder to think. Least I could say is that we would have become a slave race in perpetuity. We seldom care to recall and acknowledge the contribution India made to our war of liberation. I do not also deny that India joined the war on political consideration to break Pakistan. No country helps another country without any political or economic interest. That is the way of the world. We feel shy to accept the truth and call spade a spade. Acknowledgement of help unburdens the heart that receives and rewards the one that provides.

A few days ago we celebrated the silver jubilee of our independence. But none in the Government or in the Opposition had the civility and grate-

fulness to send a message of felicitation to India on the occasion for its contribution to our War of Liberation that paved the path to our independence. More than four thousand Indian soldiers got killed on Bangladesh soil fighting alongside our Freedom Fighters against the Pakistani forces. After the Second World War, Britain and the USA erected memorials in foreign countries for known and unknown soldiers where their forces fought against the Axis Power and got killed in action. Near ones visit those mausoleums to pay their homage. We proved to be an ungrateful nation. We could not

rise over the contentious political issues and offer India a piece of land to erect a memorial for their soldiers and officers killed in action in Bangladesh.

Let us get back to Satkhira incident. No sensible person can deny that the Hindus here are often subjected to persecution, especially those who are poor. They have already become second-class citizens after deletion of 'secularism' from the Constitution and declaration of Islam as state religion or anything but religiosity. It has encouraged the religious fanatics to fan communalism.

A golden opportunity came to us in silver platter when people of all shades of opinion gathered around the *Janitar Mancha*. Our noted poets and writers spoke of democracy and freedom of expression, our much admired playwrights and dramatists asked for protection of people's views on radio and television, our favourite singers sang melodiously notes of popular demand. Our political leaders demanded neutral caretaker government to hold free and fair election only. No one raised the issue of secularism — the missing link of the *Janitar Mancha*. A great opportunity was thus lost and secularism took the back seat. A caretaker government has

taken over the administration of the country at a very critical time. The Chief Adviser and the members of his Advisory Council are people of eminence, integrity and neutrality. It was thus logically expected that a member from minority community would be taken as adviser in the Council of Advisers. We are disappointed not to find 'one' in the list. May be pressing problem of law and order situation did not permit the Chief Adviser to pay attention to this legitimate expectation. I am confident that the Chief Adviser will give his thought over this matter very soon and induct an adviser from the minority community which, in my opinion, should not be an act of magnanimity but a rectification of an unintentional lapse.

The author is a lawyer. This article is based on her own research and experience as a practitioner of law.

Reveal Yourself or Shut Up

Pinch of Salt

by Chintito

ANONYMITY has its virtues. It's peaceful and sheer bliss.

Imagine walking into a cinema hall in an unknown area, looking right and left, waiting languidly over to the counter and asking for a Front Stall ticket. Always enter the hall after the lights are dimmed and then inch your way to the middle of a row, irritating people you don't know (Ah! the ecstasy!). There you are sitting in-between two persons whom you have never seen or ever will. It is essential that you leave before the lights are on. At the interval, pretend you are tired and slide low on your seat. It works like magic. It would be awfully embarrassing if someone yelled from Dress Circle by the way, people in all other seats are also dressed; so don't get ideas. 'Arre, oayed amago Mainka na? Oye Mainka!'

During the movie, you will be able to socialise in the dark without a word being spoken. The man on your right might slap your thigh (quite innocently) if there is a heart-rending dialogue on the screen. Tahole shuney rakhoon Mr. Chau-dhuree! Appar aye dhaaaan dulaat-kay Meena par-roa karew na. (Then hear this, Mr. Chaudhury! Meena doesn't care a hoot about your riches). SLAP on right thigh. By the way, that was the daughter speaking to her sun-glassed Dad.

The fellow on your left is surely to nudge you once in a while when a lascivious dance number is sending everyone into a trance; the more sensible ones go to the lavatory. Amay niye e-shechey baro

known to everybody. We reported for our past records, but shall have to think about our cricket from now. I think the following steps should be taken for the improvement of our cricket:

a) A reputed cricket coach (may be from the subcontinent) should be appointed as soon as possible to guide train our boys.

b) The government should declare Dhaka Stadium for playing cricket only and take necessary steps for handing over the responsibility of supervision of Dhaka Stadium to BOCB.

c) Bangladesh should not take part in any international tournament in any game except cricket (outdoor games).

d) Selected 30 players should get proper practice under the supervision of BCCB from now on.

e) Selected players should frequently visit the Test-playing countries and play a number of limited-overs matches

vidual or the nation at large. The person who is leaking the news does so usually with an ulterior motive.

Individuals who are not public figures and who risk being censured if identified may choose to keep themselves anonymous while revealing news that may help to bring justice to someone or that which may be of national interest. But, if there is meat in their information, they can always place it with their Union, which is official.

But, if a minister reveals to a pet pressman the goings-on in a cabinet or other meetings, and then requests not to be identified, that minister is doing a disservice to the nation. He is trying to remain in the good books of his colleagues and the press, and simultaneously attempting to take it back on one or more of his associates, something he was not capable of doing in the meeting. It does not matter if the source of the information is trying to bring into the open something of national interest. In that case, he should resign from his position and fight from the outside. This attitude amongst most of us of eating the cake and having it too has left us with no cake.

Police, government officers and even private employees, have long been giving out information to the press without identifying themselves. If it is a secret, keep it. You are being

paid to protect such confidentiality. By virtue of your position, you may have come across some information. As an honest officer, you ought to try and deal with the matter internally. If you have the authority to make an information public, do so by all means but please let us know in what capacity you are speaking. Otherwise, you are only darkening the clouds, certain that no harm will come to you but hoping that someone else will get the bamboo. Isn't that dastardly?

If all the teachers took advantage of their position and revealed questions by remaining anonymous, would that symbolise a healthy nation? Teachers are morally bound to protect the secrecy of their entrusted task. So are all the other persons in public or private employment. If there is a matter of public interest or an issue demanding justice, and if one believes that one is in the right, then that person should have the boldness to reveal all, but only by identifying himself. Otherwise, the anonymous employee can be termed a 'spy', gaining access in the garb of a loyal worker, accumulating and revealing information unbeknowned.

Sticking posters, marking walls, issuing leaflets, sending letters etc. without identifying the "brave" sources can bring benefit to no one; not even to the timid sources of such so-called valuable information.

What about Chintito? Isn't that being anonymous? But, I was in the cinema hall being slapped by some one anonymous. Ouch!

To the Editor...

Election manifesto

Sir, I like to inform the political parties of our country, through your esteemed column that I and my friends will vote for the party which shall, *inter alia*, include the following in its election manifesto: 1) to convert the Radio Bangladesh and Bangladesh Television into autonomous bodies like BBC; 2) to enact legislation like PRODA i.e. Public Representative Offices Disqualification Act, giving original jurisdiction to the High Court to try complaints of corruption against ministers, members of parliament and other elected bodies; 3) to appoint Ombudsman in pursuance of the Ombudsman Act, 1980.

Results of general elections

Sir, All eyes are now focused on the caretaker government for holding a free and fair general election in the country and all hopes and inspirations of the people are centred round the results of the future elections 1996.

Our cricket

Sir, Cricket is gaining popularity in many countries of the world. But, there is nothing to feel proud about the latest performance of our cricket team. Bangladesh has been taking part in the ICC Associate Members tournament since 1979, and we have not got a single remarkable success so far. We were very much hopeful about our team in the last ICC tournament but the irony is that our boys failed again. These are the past stories and

Catalogue system

Sir, Most of the referred books of Dhaka University are written by foreign writers and they are very costly. Since most of the students are from middle-class families, their affordability for books is very limited. In this case, we have to depend on seminar library, central library and other libraries. Among them, the central library of DU is a very important one. But we have to suffer to find out our expected book from this library because of the catalogue system. In this system, each book and writer's name are typed on a card and they are kept in shelves. There are hundreds of thousands of cards in the shelves.

Results of general elections

In this system, there is no way to understand which card bears the name of a book on science, or commerce or arts. Besides this, the cards of important books are sometimes lost. In this situation, the book indicated by the lost card can never be found out. But the librarians do not give books if any one failed to write the correct names of books and writers.

Catalogue system

The catalogue system should be changed. All the books may be classified like Accounting, Marketing, Economics, English, Physics, Chemistry etc., and the books may be kept in different shelves.

Results of general elections

My suggestion to the university central library authority is that the catalogue system should be changed so that the students can get their expected books easily, and can study.