

A Surprising Move

We are taken by surprise at the formation of two committees aimed at improving the "standard and quality" of programmes of the BTV. When the nation is waiting for the report on the autonomy of television by a commission formed earlier, this move is hardly understandable. Better it would have been, had the committees followed the finalisation of the recommendations of the Asafuddin Committee. Now what will be the basis or guidelines for the committee responsible for bringing about improvement in the quality of programmes?

This paper has repeatedly pleaded through this column for executive orders aimed at ensuring some operational freedom for BTV pending finalisation of the autonomy recommendations. If the same set of staff could bring about a noticeable improvement in the TV programmes during the period of caretaker government, what holds them back from doing so now? We feel that executive orders could have created the right operational environment for the electronic media before the autonomy report comes into effect. We consider the move for committee formation a premature one. It could cast doubt on the intention of the government. It is an exercise in adhocism and cannot be an adequate measure to remove the mess created over the years.

As for the committees themselves, we also have reservations. Barring one or two members of the programme improvement committee, most are specialised in a single art form. How can you expect improvement of programmes in a comprehensive sense from them? An overwhelming emphasis on dramas is a fragmentary view taken of what really needs to be done to upgrade the quality of television programmes. We understand the BTV's compulsion to bring back its viewers from the cable TV channels. A case in point is Doordarshan which has been able to match its programmes with those of cable TV.

So, the challenge is to introduce and innovate modern, captivating and highly entertaining and educating programmes. To our knowledge, few on the committee can do justice to this challenge of making our TV programmes modern. Professionalism, creativity and dynamism are the names of the game. A purely professional approach with due recognition to news and entertaining values of telecasts will be in demand for the job. Are we ready for that?

An Expectation Met

The Prime Minister has instructed that National Stadium No 1, the one that is at the heart of the city, be used exclusively for cricket in preparation for the 1999 World Cup encounters in England. This would surely help sustain the great surge of cricket enthusiasm in the nation and contribute positively towards fashioning a satisfactory World Cup outing. Together with the rest of the nation we congratulate the Prime Minister.

Perhaps a full-fledged stadium with stands to seat up to 50 thousand spectators is not the ideal thing to be optimally utilised for coaching and training of whatever sport. What will happen to the stands and the other many facilities till the time the cricketers get their own stadium and switch over there? And will the Mirpur stadium alone be adequate to cater to the enthusiasm of the biggest spectator sport of the nation — soccer, for a spell of nearly two years? These misgivings do have an answer. The stadium will continue to serve as a stadium, a cricketing stadium this time offering venue to all cricket fixtures of the national level. A kind of Lord's or, nearer home, Eden Gardens — only temporarily. As for fairness to the football lovers — they should not grudge cricket the tremendous headway it has made. Let our footballers earn any comparable honour, they may well be gifted two more stadiums. But by far the best answer to the misgivings would be the delivery of that for which the nation is giving so much: a good showing in England and in the one-day internationals that should now be coming to Bangladesh's way, a promotion to the Test status and full membership of ICC.

In the dizziness of success a sobering thought may be helpful. Nobody is born a national cricketer. This nation or any other is not a cricket club. Schools and colleges and clubs groom the boys — perhaps very soon also the girls into cricketers the best of whom are to constitute the national team. It is at that grooming stage that the players need their best helps — by way of coaching and training and tournament practice and gear and monetary support. Club efforts in these matters must greatly be improved through generous government help and guidance. School cricket must be raised to the national importance it deserves, with suitable and numerous incentives to better performing schools.

And, let Gordon Greenidge develop his boys in a way that would best celebrate his citizenship of Bangladesh.

A Serious Test

To paraphrase Tolstol one could say goodness has but a known familiar face and crime comes in an inconceivable variety. With the growing criminalisation of our different social stations and strata crime has been coming in a great variety of kinds ever since the biggest of them all — the genocide of 1971. Everyday brings in reports of ever newer ways of finishing off an individual.

Even in this dense forest of killing innovations, there was one on Tuesday that would be hard to beat. A man was driving a car on his way to Narsingdi. A bus travelling the same way allegedly was not giving the car enough room to overtake. Infuriated, the man allegedly shot four times at the bus. And the helper of the bus, Ukil Miah, allegedly shot, fell down from the running vehicle and died. The man, said to be related to someone high and mighty, is understood to be in custody.

It will be for the courts to decide what Fayed Khan, the man, actually did and how Ukil Miah came to his end. But first reports from the spot do say of an irritated driver's mad shooting at the bus in front — implying also that the victim was targeted. If this turns out indeed to be so, criminality will surely find a new dimension in Bangladesh.

This is a certitude at even this stage, that the whole nation's attention will be on this man till he is proved guilty and is sentenced or is cleared and let free. This is one of those small things that put a society's law, justice and governance to serious test. Failing such a test can be costly to who the day belongs.

Financial Morality: A Simple Case Study

The principle of punishing the honest and rewarding the dishonest has not paid and will never pay.

THE other day, I found myself seated beside a prominent and friendly personality, the head of a private university in Dhaka. We were travelling to Sylhet en route to Shillong. We were discussing, rather chatting on a host of subjects, from the trivial to the sublime, as people generally do on a long haul.

We talked about morality and veered towards financial morality. This would generally make people think that the talks would revolve round the recent scam in the stock market. It was obvious to expect, but surprisingly it did not come about that way. He, say, Dr X, asked me what he would tell his three-and-a-half-year-old grandson to do when he grows up.

Though I knew well that he did not have a three-and-a-half-year-old grandson, I replied to his metaphorical question by asking as to on what subject he would like to educate his imaginary grandson

with, as much as possible. The government who exhibited colossal failure for its inability to control the situation will be guilty of further malediction and wrongdoing, if it fails to prosecute the real guilty ones seriously and resolutely.

I was so glad that my friend did not ask me the serious question about such a burning national issue and spoiled my mental framework looking out for a little time of peace and quiet, if not of some simple fun and long-sought for recreation. To his question about the art of making black white, I comforted him saying that none should be surprised at that. From time immemorial, magicians have been doing it with success and earning admiration from all. Black causes darkness and generally represents evil, whereas white is synonymous with purity and all that is good. If it were the other way round, turning white into black, you could have blamed the government, I asserted.

On the contrary, I continued,

soning, upholding virtues and the positive aspect of the action. He said the issue is not as simplistic as it outwardly appears to be. Black money is ill-gotten money and to amass such wealth is morally wrong and legally culpable. Such money could be earned mainly through fraud, deceit and evasion of taxes or, in other words, by depriving legitimate revenue income of the poor nation or poor people. Such action is both wrong and illegal, he reiterated.

I knew I was losing ground, but I did not give up. I told Dr X, who had studied and been trained abroad, to be both pragmatic and compassionate. In our country, as the most of the people live below poverty line, we should give up the question of morality and give in to the measures designed ultimately to provide the poor their basic needs of food, clothes, shelter and medicine. Moreover, the government has announced that the investors will not be entitled to tax holiday, unless they pay a tax of 7.5



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

with his profound wisdom. He was quite serious. He looked up from a recently-published *Commonwealth Report on Human Resources Development* he was browsing through, despite the aches and pains the coaster was inflicting on us. He said he was thinking of the recent government decision of turning black money into white for the purpose of investment.

Involuntarily, I heaved a sigh of relief. I thought, as one would be prone to thinking, he would ask me about the stock market scandal. The scandal, as all are well aware of, was monstrous, though complex. Yet, it was infinitely sad for having caused the gravest financial harm in nation's history to a vast multitude of simple-minded people and draining thousands of crores of taka in hard-earned foreign exchange from the poor and the innocent across the borders. This happened, unfortunately, through active collusion and wilful acquiescence of our own people who were to guide our destiny in business and financial sectors, and also by shrewd connivance of unscrupulous financial wheeler dealers from abroad.

This appears to be the most serious economic crime the country has ever experienced and perhaps represents so in any developing nation in recent times. The matter is sub-judice now and leaves little scope for further discussion. Still, the best justice people would expect is to devise means to regain the lost money for the hapless victims and the ever tolerant na-

you should express undulated admiration for the government for having taken such noble steps for the sake of the much-needed investment in our country. The government steps were prompted by a genuine spirit of patriotism to develop the nation through increased investment and employment. As such, the government deserves full support of the people for this well-thought out and highly beneficial venture. Furthermore, only a few years ago, President Ershad had transformed black money into white, selflessly and not for his own benefit, only for the economic good of the nation. I spoke all in one breath, without allowing him to intervene in my presentation of the point and indisputable arguments I advanced.

Dr X nodded his head, vertically. Though he did so somewhat unthinkingly, I took it meant "yes". It is so in our part of the world. In Greece, for example, a vertical nod would mean "no". I was quite happy at my performance and of my ability to convince someone who is known not to be satisfied easily. But, lo and behold, slowly he raised his eyes from the report and asked me if I thought the government measure was morally desirable and whether it would reach the desired goal.

I was a bit perplexed. All my endeavours for so long went to naught, I surmised disappointedly. I tried to fathom his mind. Having failed to do so, I asked him a counter question as to what he thought about my rea-

soning, upholding virtues and the positive aspect of the action. He said the issue is not as simplistic as it outwardly appears to be. Black money is ill-gotten money and to amass such wealth is morally wrong and legally culpable. Such money could be earned mainly through fraud, deceit and evasion of taxes or, in other words, by depriving legitimate revenue income of the poor nation or poor people. Such action is both wrong and illegal, he reiterated.

Dr X looked at me with a sidelong glance, as we were sitting side by side. The sight was that of a mixture of curiosity and incredulity, as if he was trying to gauge whether I was talking through my head or heart. I evaded his glance. He said, slowly and sadly, I know Karim, you know and I know and also that I know that you would portend for the future of the nation. There may be some short-term gains for the sake of promoting publicity, but in the long run this would bring in disaster for the nation. Businessmen and industrialists will avoid taxes, will spare no efforts and means to amass as much black money as possible and await government's periodic announcements for reprieve in turning black money into white. As a result, the sum total of government revenue will fall and the businessmen and industrialists will be thrown to the threshold of commitment to immoral, illegal and unhealthy practices. The principle of punishing the honest and rewarding the dishonest has not paid and will never pay, Dr X asserted.

I felt silent. He was looking straight ahead from his jump seat, as if staring in the not too promising future of his non-existent grandchild.

Lesson from India's Moment of Truth

by Nilratan Halder

India's turn-around from a political turmoil should provide for a much-needed lesson. The option for the leaders was so long to lead people. Today that equation has somehow changed and now we must expect our politicians to read the signals properly and act accordingly

WITH Inder Kumar Gujral taking over as the 12th Indian prime minister, India has indeed averted a serious political crisis. The country's polity that has long looked suspect and was yet able to tide over the critical situations has once again proved its democratic strength and sustaining power. That India's democratic institutions have come of age is made clear. The country may still have a long way to go to ensure socio-economic justice for all — particularly at the lowest level of society, but its political maturity has reached the level of the developed democracies. The Indian electorate is no longer willing to extend overwhelming support for one single party. But look at the respect politicians tend to show to the verdict of the people. In fact, they have been in an intriguing situation ever since the Congress Party's fall from grace. Yet the politicians hold the electorate's opinion in high esteem.

How else do you explain the Bharatiya Janata Party's acceptance of a political accommodation where by far the largest party had to settle for an opposition role? This is all because the party stinks of Hindu fundamentalism and neither the left and secular parties nor the Congress would like to see it in power. The BJP certainly does not like the arrangement but at no point does it show its impatience for irrationally advancing its political claim. It is ready to wait and rather would concentrate on long-term political benefits than on myopic and partisan interests. We would be extremely delighted if the same could be said of — at least — the largest of our political parties. True, the BJP was in favour of a mid-term poll, but now that the Congress Party has once again put its weight behind the 13-party United

Front there is no possibility that the BJP will let its agitation forces loose. The largest party in Lok Sabha is more likely to repose its faith in the electorate and therefore is unwilling to give the impression that it is in a rush for power or is irresponsible in its political behaviour.

The Congress Party that engineered the fall of H D Deve Gowda's government is not foolish either. It moved swiftly with an objective in mind. It might have been a political tactic rather than a no-confidence in the peasant-turned premier. By throwing Gowda out of power the Congress has achieved its immediate objective perhaps at the cost of long-term gains.

Maybe, its calculations weighed in favour of Gowda's removal. Now it will be interesting to see whether the corruption cases initiated by the Criminal Bureau of Investigation (CBI) will be dropped or proceeded with. Whatever it is, the underlying fact remains that the parties involved respected the voters' verdict by not going for a snap poll. This is because all knew that the outcome of a mid-term election would not be much of a difference — a hung parliament was the likeliest result. Only the BJP thought it could improve upon its previous polls showing, so it pressed for — but not very strongly — such an election. Even the BJP perhaps knows in the heart of its hearts that a little more waiting would bring it the political dividends it longs for. Because that way it can project its image in a clearer and sharper outline.

Whether the BJP will emerge as the unrivalled majority party is, however, a different matter. The answer lies in the future and the set of realities to emerge. But presently the party has demonstrated its poise and

sobriety quite convincingly. The United Front too has indicated a political alternative to both the Congress and the BJP. In short, the political stake for each of the parties has to be accommodated within the democratic framework of the country and within the confines of people's wish. So the respect — either for political parties or for people — is mutual. An environment for nourishing a democratic political culture exists there. The political arrangement they have opted for may not be ideal, but taking into account the realities, they have settled for the best possible solution.

This is exactly where our politicians can be faulted. Now that we have made our minds clear about a popular verdict, we must respect it and more importantly bring into play some sort of a working formula. The driving force behind political parties has to be nothing but democratic spirit. For our democracy it is a defining moment and if the political parties dwell mostly in the past or find their forte in irresponsible utterances or behaviour, they surely show utter disregard to the people's will and judgment. That is no way of advancing the cause of democracy. We expect political maturity from our leaders. Neither they nor the people must hold each other in contempt. India's turn-around from a political turmoil should provide for a much-needed lesson. The option for the leaders was so long to lead people. Today that equation has somehow changed and now we must expect the politicians to read the signals properly and act accordingly. India's politicians are accustomed to do the exercise for long, it is now for our politicians to begin the process. Let the people emerge as the ultimate arbitrator of their affairs.

South Asian Growth Quadrangle and Misplaced Nationalism

Bangladesh faces no confrontation with any country; neither it is desirable to create such a confrontation in order to come at par with conditions prevailing in the western part of the subcontinent.

FOREIGN Secretaries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal signed a memorandum of understanding on the proposed growth quadrangle covering the eastern part of the subcontinent. There is a prevailing opinion, as stated in the columns of this newspaper, that such a proposal is highly disputed and controversial. The Foreign secretaries 'identified several sectors in which the four countries will formulate plans and projects in a bid to cooperate for mutual benefit'. If so, what is the harm in it? How can it become controversial and disputable at the very beginning? Those plans and projects are not even off the drawing boards. The criticism is impossible to understand unless it is the view that anything to do with India cannot be good for Bangladesh.

This is the ultimate manifestation of misplaced nationalism which is being promoted without proper understanding of our vital national interests. I have no quarrel with nationalism but there is a cause for concern when such misplaced nationalism boils down to the utterly regrettable (but perhaps unrealistic) determination to keep the nation away from the potential benefits which are

ing, trade and investment are promoted, particularly with the seven states of north-eastern India, then the future of such nationalist politics is indeed very bleak. It had been stated that the concept of the proposed growth quadrangle runs parallel to SAARC and undermines its importance. No — it doesn't. ASEAN thrives in spite of several such growth triangles among members and even non-members of ASEAN; while, SAARC continues to stagnate — a fact admitted even by BNP stalwarts — since without any end to the existing hostilities in the north and south of the subcontinent, there cannot be any progress of SAARC as a whole. Neither can there be similar sub-regional groupings for promoting trade and investment.

On the other hand, Pakistan will benefit from such growth triangle, involving Iran and Afghanistan — once the conflict ends in one of those countries and all concerned may rest assured that Pakistan would not give up the opportunity for such a growth triangle for the sake of SAARC. It will not be necessary to do so. As constituted, such growth triangle or quadrangle cannot undermine SAARC; in fact, sub-regional groupings of

throw away the golden opportunity?

There is a lurking suspicion that the benefits from trade and investment might have been over-estimated. This calls for detailed studies and investigation. However, to suggest that trade imbalance that we face today can be improved or smuggling can be stopped independent of the trade and investment through the proposed grouping is illogical. In order to export more to India or reduce smuggling, we need the group since it opens up the opportunities for more trade. In fact, the flow of the group's trade through Bangladesh will itself promote greater balance of trade in favour of Bangladesh.

The differential egg pricing between India and Bangladesh is not a case of smuggling. It shows that our poultry farm operators are less efficient than those in India and their protection at the cost of poor consumers of Bangladesh was flatly refused by the previous government. Free trade is well accepted and therefore to preach against the economic grouping for the protection of inefficient domestic production cannot be justified.

The question of farm subsidy is also entirely out of con-



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

contiguous areas should strengthen the overall regional framework. It would set an example to the conflict-ridden parts of the subcontinent to the effect that trade and investment can achieve much more than guns and tanks. However, what would then happen to the leading flame of nationalism? How the flame of nationalism will burn if the slogan of threatened sovereignty becomes irrelevant in the streets of Dhaka?

Instead of the growth quadrangle, there is a suggestion that we should proceed at a snail's pace and take up 'one or a few items of cooperation'. This is an useful idea and the approach should be to prioritize those aspects of cooperation which would enhance trade and investment. The growth quadrangle is the framework within which we undertake those trade and investment opportunities which are likely to maximise economic growth of all the co-operating countries or regions thereof. From this point of view, the idea of allowing only limited trade through Chittagang port is not sensible since it would not maximise growth opportunities for the cooperating countries. Trade, after all, is the engine of economic growth and therefore we got to go ahead with the deep water port near Chittagang. Our gains will be substantial in terms of port and related services as well as long distance transportation business. Chittagang will become the gateway to the sub-region. It will become the second Singapore. Why should we

text. It is being provided to equalise urban and rural income. It constitute a very small part of the GDP — in fact agriculture itself constitute a very small part of the national economy and therefore the very large industrialized economy can afford to maintain a profitable income level for the farmers of Europe. In fact, the relatively poorer countries of Greece and Portugal due to lower wage level can sell their farm products to member-countries of EEC. Following the same logic, if our per capita income is lower than India, our agriculture should enjoy certain positive advantage due to the sub-regional grouping.

Compared to India, we are a small country. But that does not mean — we cannot trade and gain equally out of it. Being small must not be construed as a disadvantage. On the other hand, we have the critical advantage of location — being the gateway to the sea. We also enjoy the advantage of having the natural gas while India is short of energy resources. If Luxembourg gained due to its developed banking and allied sectors, we should also gain due to our ports and natural gas. The point is that big or small does not matter. Let us approach the whole issue with an open mind.

Days have changed. We now live in a global village. The world is becoming borderless. Therefore, the officers in the Foreign Ministry should also change their attitude and write more on cooperation and not confrontation.

To the Editor...

New postage stamps

Sir, The special commemorative postage stamps are being issued at too frequent intervals. The rarer are more valuable. The art design should be simple.

Secondly, the standard/ordinary stamps are difficult to tear easily along the perforations. Not being an expert, I can suggest only two areas for checking: a) the distance between neighbouring perforations, and b) the grade and quality of the paper used. The 'tenability' factor is poor.

A Hussain
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Exuberant jubilation

Sir, on the 9th April Bangladesh gained a glorious victory over Scotland in the ICC Trophy semifinal turning a long cherished dream (to play in '99 World Cup Cricket) into reality when the whole nation burst into cheers of celebrations with all enthusiasm. Many awkward incidents, however, were reported to take place that day in the city streets.

The worst scene occurred when a section of revellers took position round the street corners and sprayed coloured water on the passers-by. Harassed and embarrassed the victims on foot and on vehicle had to bear this exuberant jubilation like helpless creatures as no protest could help it. Imagine how bitter an experience it was for one who was tidily making for office, school or college with his/her scheduled assignments.

It appeared probably intolerably hellish to those women who were intercepted and polished dye on their bodies, which assumed the posture of molestation in some cases. It was regrettable anyway. We felt more regrettable when we heard news of people getting robbed of money, ornaments etc., by the trouble-makers. Justly, people just began to think with priority and urgency whether any legal constraints could be imposed on such open and wild merry-making.

And it is at that pressing moment when Dhaka Metropolitan Police promulgated a ban under the DMP ordinance on exploding crackers and spraying coloured in the metropolitan area. We cordially welcome this legal measure which, we think, has been a fairly wise move to maintain discipline and decency in the so city.

Binoy Barman
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Flight of Fantasy

Sir, I am touched to learn that the British Airways (BA) has operated a 'Flight of Fantasy' for twenty underprivileged children of Bangladesh. The BA conducted the flight of fantasy vide its Boeing 747 Jumbo which took off from Dhaka airport for a one-hour flight over the Bay of Bengal.

The British Airways, sponsors of the programme, deserves appreciation for providing an opportunity to these children to enjoy and experience of a journey by air.

I look forward to such flights for the underprivileged children again in the future.

M Zahidul Haque
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Bank loan

Sir, Since the Awami League returned to power after 21 years, we are continuously coming across various news reports that a huge sum of Taka 13,000 crore is held back, remains outstanding and unpaid by 1800 persons for a long time.

Taka 13,000 crore is not a paltry amount of money. Who is the actual owner of the colossal amount of bank loan amounting to Taka 13,000 crore? Is it the 1800 persons, our nationalised banks or our poor people?

How and why public money of such an amount have been defaulted, misappropriated, remained outstanding and un-

realised? We wonder how long the economy of our country would continue to suffer and how long the untold suffering of our people would continue unabated due to defalcation of public money.

We understand that those who took bank loans amounting to Taka 13,000 crore are all living a luxurious life. But we fail to understand how long would our teeming millions remain hostage to their grip?

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Who are they?

Sir, The other day I read an article in the *Sunday Times* of UK (16.2.97), where Peter Conradi Utrecht writes, "A gruesome new crime is steeping Holland. Dutch fathers, angered by 'unfair' divorce settlements, are murdering their children as the ultimate act of revenge against their wives."

In our country, divorces are many and unsettled, as the marriages are unrecorded. The children of these "wedlocks" normally end up in our streets as, some call them, *tokaks*, *pahakals*, urchins, who when grown up become "mastans" — the political supporters for all demolition works to government and private properties.

We have laws without orders. In our case it is not taking revenge on the wife but flouting the legal system and the desire (rather selfish one) to get his own life back. He is then free to re-marry another would-be victim and produce the would-be criminals, covering our some-what-free streets!

The phenomenon — or should we call it "style of living", shows the character of our people not bold enough to face world with children and wives but leave them to their fate and run away like cowards. What will our leaders and enlightened ones called them — these children — sons of unknown father, or fatherless sons (*etims*)?

Mirza Shafi
Banani, Dhaka