

Need for United Action

The Prime Minister has again called upon all to forget differences and work unitedly at this hour of national emergency. President Shahabuddin Ahmed has also given a call to face the challenge unitedly. In fact, there can be no two opinions about the need of unity now with two-thirds of the country under full fathom five and one-third of population directly affected by the abnormal and unusual flood-waters. Before long the deluge is going to affect all in the land and directly too. And not only Bangladesh's present, its future too is also going to be very adversely influenced by the effects of this unprecedented flooding. When would we need an all-in truly national endeavour if not now? No politicking with the floods, warns the Prime Minister. Yes, we say, now is the time for all good people to run up to the breaches — physical, economic and social and plug them before much is irreversibly lost.

Now, how will this unity be effective? The BNP has been conducting their own relief work all by themselves. If they decide to join the government's planning and relief efforts, how will they be accommodated and given share in the work and leadership load? Will their joining the government's toil bolster the thrust against flood sufferings and losses beyond what the two parties could do separately? The Prime Minister's call for a united front against the flood disaster should have been preceded by a lot of home-work.

The united approach should mean pushing to the fore the BNP MPs in their respective constituencies in the matter of relief and rehabilitation leadership. If the government fulfils this minimum need for active and fruitful co-operation, it will have won the battle for unity by one fell stroke. A united front for disaster mitigation will not exhaust its usefulness with an eventual mopping of the relief operations. Housing and farming rehabilitation will take much time and much more funds than required by relief work. But the biggest operation would have to be in the field of reconstructing the communications — this time with provision for such abnormal floods never again breaching the road and rail connections. This will call for still more time and money. And hundreds of bunds and embankments will have to be made breach-proof too. Let the unity extend up to this.

This nation must do a lot of re-thinking. The dynamics of the yearly floods must be well understood. The physical planning of the country must undergo vigorous scrutiny and new approaches be developed and old blunders rectified. It will be a long long story — extending beyond the remaining years of the present government's tenure. We strongly recommend that a united front be forged to take on the flood related problems well into the future.

Tighten the Leash Now

It is a reassuring piece of news that The Daily Star came up with yesterday, specially for the jumpy nerves of those worried about country's food situation: supply in country's food market, says the report, is normal. But this assurance tends to get considerably watered down when read in the backdrop of the market reality. Price of rice, the traditionally most effective yardstick in any market review shows an alarming upward surge. Prices of different varieties of rice have increased by Taka 100 to 120 per maund. Even after one takes into consideration all the impediments a crisis like this brings along, the 'jump' in rice price if not that of vegetables is too much and largely artificial. It does not boil to a demand-supply crisis. The havoc caused to the overland communications system should not be used as an excuse. Roads and railway tracks may have become unipliable but the river route is there. The fact is businessmen in the habit of profiting from people's miseries are hoarding essentials like rice. The fear psychosis of the public which has triggered a tendency to stock for future is also responsible.

Floods always lead to rise in the price of essentials. There is nothing new about it. But the government would be well advised to take stringent measures against the soaring tendency of the price index right now. Active intervention is necessary to dissuade hoarding of essentials. The government can make effective use of the media to discourage panic buying. Besides, it should take steps to streamline the distribution system. Open Market Sale of rice can be considered to tackle with the unscrupulous hoarders. But the authorities have to make sure that the objective of OMS is not lost through a perfunctory approach to the job. Unfailing vigil must be kept up to ensure that the step does not dissipate into a mere papy exercise with the need of the 'real needy' going unaddressed. Specially, the interior parts of the country should be given priority.

Someone Has to Pay

Praying for a miracle while preparing for the worst in her hospital bed is all young Asma can do at a time when she should have been busy making the most of life's best part. It is a most pathetic situation the ill-fated girl is trapped in. Robbed of her only kidney, she is struggling for life while doctors who attended her move around emitting an air that can be described at best as indifference and at worst irresponsibility. Indeed some serious questions loom large over the situation under which Asma was operated upon. A number of doctors whom The Daily Star has interviewed are of the opinion that the removal of Asma's lone kidney was a 'mistake'. But was not this 'mistake' avoidable? Was not there any specialist around whose opinion could be sought before the surgery? Why did the surgeons rush with the operation if they were not sure about what they were doing and its possible consequences? It is a case of gross irresponsibility. Professional ethics demand the buck has to stop with someone; someone has to pay for it.

Also it does not do any good to society's conscience to see a young girl inch to death minute by minute for no fault of her own. It is regrettable that until now doctors have not spelled out against it in a body and shield away from recognising it as an act of untenable irresponsibility on the part of the doctors concerned. Ideally, a body of senior and specialist doctors should have been there to probe into this incident. They do it abroad. Why can't our doctors muster enough candour and professionalism to uphold the dignity of their commitment? We would urge the doctors not to hedge over the matter and push for a thorough investigation with the firm resolve to penalise the culprit.

Did India Foresee Unintended Consequences of its N'tests?

By Barrister Harun ur Rashid

A greater upheaval in South Asia may unfold in near future and one may point fingers at India's nuclear tests which have reverberated in unforeseen directions... one has to take a long term and broad view of the consequences of such nuclear tests that may impinge on the political, economic and social life in South Asia.

INDIA, while conducting the nuclear tests (May 11 & 13), made it clear that its security concerns are not limited to Pakistan or to South Asian region. Prior to the tests India's Defence Minister bluntly identified China as the number one strategic threat to India. It is safe to conclude that India's nuclear tests were chiefly to match China's nuclear arsenal with Pakistan playing only a subsidiary role.

I would argue that India must be worried at the turn of recent events in Pakistan. An unstable Taliban style of government is the least India wants in Pakistan. India may have belatedly realised that the occurrences in Pakistan which are likely to have impacts on India were a chain of events that followed after it conducted the nuclear tests early May this year. Why do I hold this view? Let me discuss it.

First, India's nuclear tests propelled Pakistan to hold its tests (28 & 30 May). Pakistan was placed into a 'corner' by the conduct of nuclear devices by India. From the security perspective, India's action was seen by Pakistan to have changed the balance of power in South Asia to its detriment. One could argue that Pakistan would not have openly and unilaterally proceeded to nuclear path if India did not in the first instance explode its nuclear devices.

It is an admitted fact that India has superiority over Pakistan in conventional weapons. If during the conventional arms conflict, India is able to inflict a fatal blow on Pakistan, Pakistan claims that it reserves the right to use nuclear option. That may be the com-

elling reason why Pakistan does not agree to conclude a 'no-first use' agreement with India, though it is willing to enter into a much wider non-aggression or no war pact with India.

Second, the sanctions slammed on Pakistan following the nuclear tests have crippling effects on its economy. Its national reserves are said to have dwindled to about US\$500 million and its currency has devalued considerably, leading to possible run-away inflation in the country. The International Monetary Fund's reported refusal to lend US\$ 1.6 billion to Pakistan is expected to worsen its economy. Further Pakistan is likely to default on sovereign debt unless it obtains loans from Islamic Bank and Islamic countries. The economic crisis may lead to political instability in Pakistan which will be starting India in the face. It is intriguing to note that there is a view that India wants sanctions to be lifted from Pakistan so that its stability is not rocked by its weakening economy.

Third, the Taliban whose ideological dispositions and draconian laws will appear to have gradual impact on the domestic scene in Pakistan as it continues to face a deepening economic crisis. The people in general, having been frustrated with the market economy and globalisation, are likely to turn

to religious orthodoxy which is perceived to be a panacea to all modern day evils. The recently (29 August) proposed 15th amendment to Pakistan's Constitution empowering the government to take necessary steps to enforce Islamic laws is an indication of this trend.

A view prevails that the political leadership in Pakistan in an environment of severe economic problems have been under tremendous political pressure from religious parties to introduce more strict Islamic laws and regulations. To satisfy them, it appears that the leaders declared that a solution to problems faced by Pakistan should be addressed by adhering scrupulously to the tenets of Islam and tabled the amendment of the Constitution.

Put simply, this means that the directions of the government may include stressing observance of daily prayers, an improved system of Zakat (charity) as well as steps to suppress 'evil practices' in Pakistan. India is naturally alarmed by the rise of theocracy in Pakistan. India's ruling party BJP cannot absolve itself from the rise of militant views as BJP's ideology of 'one nation, one people and one religion' appears to be an added factor to growing Islamisation in Pakistan.

Fourth, Pakistan is in possession of nuclear warheads and missiles. It may not be in-

terested to suggest that the domestic instability may often lead the political leaders to plunge in misadventure that deflects the public from its internal trouble. It appears to be uncomfortable to India that a 'theocratic' neighbour will have nuclear capability. More so when the territorial dispute of Kashmir between the two countries remains unresolved. Indian-administered Kashmir is under attack by Muslim militants, many of whom are allegedly trained in Afghanistan. This appears to be a matter of great concern for India.

Fifth, Pakistan's support to the Taliban appears to have alienated Iran and the Central Asian Muslim Republics bordering Afghanistan. Russia is also uncomfortable with the Taliban and does not wish to see the spill-over effect of the militant Islam at the periphery of the Russian Federation. A view prevails that the Taliban may not be wholly successful in their fight against the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance as Iran, Russia and the Central Asian Republics are likely to restrain the power of the Taliban by providing material assistance to Northern Alliance. Observers believe that we have not seen the end of fighting in Afghanistan. It could be the beginning of a regional war.

The military exercise (codenamed Ashura-3) by Iran

on 1st September with its 70,000-troops, tanks, aircraft and medium range SAM-6 missiles on the border of Afghanistan appears to send a strong signal to the Taliban that they are not to be allowed to do whatever they wish in Afghanistan. It is reported that Iran's diplomats stationed in Mazar-e-Sharif were captured (8 August) and transferred to Kandahar and thereafter alleged to have been killed by the Taliban. Iran does not believe that their diplomats were killed and holds the Taliban responsible for their safety.

This ugly incident has severely strained Iran's relations with both the Taliban and Pakistan. Iran is reported to be annoyed with Pakistan which was believed to have assured Iran that nothing untoward would happen to Iranian diplomats. This appears not to be the case. Iran claimed that it had the right to rescue the diplomats if the Taliban did not release them immediately. The military exercises by Tehran have unnerved the Taliban who asked for UN or OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) intervention to ease tensions with Iran.

Finally, if the Taliban are not successful in controlling the whole territory of Afghanistan, they will not be able to obtain recognition from international community. As a result, there is a view that Tal-

ibans will have their influence prevail in Pakistan with the same Islamic orthodox dispositions and laws. Many political analysts believe that a Taliban style of government may emerge sooner or later in Pakistan if economic woes persists in the country.

Conclusion

A prosperous, moderate and stable Pakistan is beneficial to India and to the South Asian region. It appears that BJP-led government in India did not envisage that its tests would trigger the present course of events in Pakistan. The US military strikes on Afghanistan (21 August) have further encouraged the Islamic militants both within Pakistan and Afghanistan to pursue their mission vigorously and in a crippling economic environment this form of Islam appears to attract the average restive person in Pakistan. Neither India nor the international community as a whole has any leverage with the Taliban or with the Islamic militants in Pakistan.

Let me reflect for a moment on a more cynical view: that a greater upheaval in South Asia may unfold in near future and one may point fingers at India's nuclear tests which have reverberated in unforeseen directions. I would argue that one has to take a long term and broad view of the consequences of the nuclear tests that may impinge on the political, economic and social life in South Asia. India appeared not to have done so. This is a sad conclusion for India's friends to reach.

The writer is former Bangladeshi Ambassador to the UN in Geneva.

OPINION

Foreign Office Mandarins in the Role of Information Gurus!

by Abdul Hannan

THE government has recently constituted a committee to refurbish and strengthen external publicity. The external information arm of the government, out of touch with today's information revolution, was clearly dysfunctional and drifting without strategy, objective and purpose. The initiative for restructuring the organisation in content and form is this welcome. But what is disconcerting is that the committee which has since submitted its report was extremely skewed, composed that it was of predominantly career foreign service officers. There was not a single person in the committee from the Information Service nor was there anybody from professional or academic journalism. Yet, we have a number of experienced persons who held very senior-level posts in the external publicity wing. It is not understood why they could not be included in the committee. It is a pity, professionalism is often ignored by institutional tribalism in our bureaucratic culture. Such committee is bound to suffer from flawed perception and warped thinking and make lopsided recommendations. The change, at best, will be cosmetic and not qualitative.

I am, however, not suggesting for a moment that our foreign service officers are incompetent. Many of them are extremely talented and outstanding and can be more than favourably compared with those of any country in the world. The track record of their performance is not insignificant. What I am worried about is that they cannot, of necessity, be experts in Information and Communication which today is a highly specialised and skilled profession. There is a clear dividing line between the two professions. To expect foreign service officers to reinvent external publicity is to expect architectural perfection from a civil engineer. These are two separate disciplines.

The recent transfer of external publicity wing from the Information Ministry to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was a welcome step for reasons of convenience of functional operation. However, external publicity division must be allowed independence to operate in a professional manner free from

interference from the foreign service officers. When the mandarins of Foreign Office sanctimoniously arrogate to themselves the role of information gurus like Walter Lipman, Wilbur Schram or Marshall McLuhan, they inevitably end up in cognitive dissonance, PR debacle and disarray. Examples abound. To quote a few instances from recent memory: the press handling of the reported offer of mediation by Bangladesh to India and Pakistan to defuse tension caused by nuclear tests by the two countries was clumsy. When it became known that India had rejected the offer of mediation, the Press reported a flurry of diplomatic activities which conveyed an impression of crisis management. It came out in the Press that the Indian and Pakistani High Commissioners were summoned to the Foreign Office and that Bangladesh High Commissioners from Delhi and Islamabad were called to the headquarters in Dhaka for urgent consultations. There is something called quiet diplomacy and media publicity was not essential. It only exacerbated gossips and rumours.

Again, much of the controversy over the issue of signing of Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the United States was rooted in desultory and conflicting Press leaks and briefings by the Foreign Office. It was given out in the Press that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had a positive thinking on the US proposal. Then it was denied. The State Minister for Foreign Affairs was quoted as having said that Bangladesh was going to sign SOFA soon. Then it was denied at the peak of the controversy. Faced with widespread criticism of the US proposal, the government finally backtracked and decided against the proposal. Now there is that fresh speculation over Foreign Minister's statement that the issue is not over yet and that the government has signed an agreement on Humanitarian Assistance Needs Assessment (HANA). The see-saw, willy-nilly acquiescence to the proposal gave rise to suspicion about a hidden agenda. Such prevarication, conflicting messages and schizophrenic responses only cause credibility loss to the government and

harm the interest of the country. If anything it speaks of amateurism, incompetence and lack of professionalism.

To quote another instance, when the controversy over the issue of SOFA was raging, a report in a section of press quoting a foreign office source said that our Ambassador in Washington was called to the US State Department and was told by the US Asstt Secretary of State Carl Inderfurth to sign SOFA. Allow Peace Corps operation in Bangladesh and grant lease of gas reserves to US oil companies in the second bidding for gas and oil exploration in Bangladesh. The news must have been terribly embarrassing to the US government and humiliating for Bangladesh. Such disasters are bound to happen if the Foreign Service officers do not work in tandem with the Information Wing of the Ministry and if press relations are conducted by persons not professionally trained to know and grasp the subtle nuances and effects of communication. The news about Prime Minister Hasina writing to her counterparts in the Commonwealth seeking support for Faruq Sobhan's candidature for the post of Commonwealth Secretary General in 1999 is no less indiscreet and inappropriate as it compromises the strategy of our campaign.

I wish to quote two instances out of many of my personal experiences to show how advice of a press officer can make a difference. Foreign Minister Humayun Rashid Chowdhury became the President of the UN General Assembly session in 1986. It is customary for the heads of government and state to pay courtesy call on the UN Secretary General and the General Assembly President before addressing the General Assembly. Humayun Rashid Chowdhury would often call me to ascertain if I was sending the photographs of his meeting with international high dignitaries to Dhaka for release to the Press. His position was certainly enviable. I was sending his photos at intervals lest they should give the impression that he was building his own image for furthering his future political ambitions at home.

President Reagan, as usual, before addressing the General Assembly called on Humayun Rashid Chowdhury in his chamber. He called me the following morning to make sure that the photograph of his meeting with President Reagan was sent to Dhaka Press. I said that the photo taken by the UN photographer was not a photo opportunity of one and one meeting between him and President Reagan but was a group photo of a motley crowd of half a dozen foreign service officers with President Reagan flanked by him on one side and his Asstt. Private Secretary, a political appointee, on the other. I said the picture was bad and was neither elevating to him nor honourable to the US President and that it would be improper to send it to Dhaka. With disbelief in his eyes he looked at me to reassure himself that I was serious. I said, I was. The matter ended there.

After about three weeks, the photo was published in all Dhaka newspapers. Evidently, some overenthusiastic foreign service officers in the group photo sent it to Dhaka. Later, I learned from an impeccable source in Dhaka that the President had expressed his displeasure at the photo. My worst fears came true when after a few months Humayun Rashid Chowdhury was dropped from the cabinet on an apparently trivial ground which is often ignored. I still have lingering doubts if the remote cause of his inglorious exit from the cabinet did not have something to do with his publicity blitz which went haywire during his GA Presidency.

Humayun Rashid Chowdhury was an astute diplomat, suave and flamboyant. As the President of the General Assembly he conducted himself with remarkable ease, gusto and aplomb. It was his persuasive diplomacy which salvaged the floundering negotiations on financial reforms of the UN. Appreciating his contributions in the adoption of the historic resolution on the agenda item well after midnight, the British Ambassador said that the GA President proved once again what Gokhale said, 'what Bengal thinks today the whole of India thinks tomorrow.'

In 1988 Bangladesh had one of the worst flood disasters. The

Foreign Office in Dhaka sent an urgent cable to our UN mission in New York to extend VIP protocol facilities to a lady who would be soon visiting New York as a special emissary of the President to brief top UN functionaries on the flood situation. Earlier, in 1986 she came to attend the General Assembly as a delegate. She was articulate, smart and accomplished. But as for her credentials to become the special emissary, she was no ace diplomat nor an elder statesman, nor a national celebrity in her own right and neither a person of outstanding social distinction. Imagine a mid level Consultant to a UN Agency based outside Bangladesh introducing herself as an emissary of the President to the UN Secretary General, the Chiefs of UNDP and UNICEF and top notchers of World Bank and IMF. I anticipated a public relations disaster and an international scandal. I spoke to my colleagues from the foreign office. They would not open their lips on the subject lest it would be taken as an effort to tamper with the decision at the highest level considered sacrosanct and inviolable. Finally, I requested Ambassador Muzaffar to react. He talked with the President who was persuaded to abandon his proposal. She came all right as a delegate but not as one larger than life. I felt relieved, a potential crisis was averted.

These are not digressions but relevant to discussions of external publicity particularly to underscore the useful role of a Press officer who must perform his duties in the best tradition of professional integrity and judgement and not be intimidated or stonewalled by dreadful arrogance, befuddled pride and smug conceits and naivete of the high and mighty that be.

Today job of a press officer is very challenging. Routine efforts by putting out press releases of statements and speeches is obsolete and ineffective today in an age of instant and unrestricted communication through satellite TV, Internet e-mail, mobile phone, and when you have the expansion of any number of information outlets will not strengthen external publicity unless there is a professionally competent staff. Policy makers seeking reform and renewal of external

publicity must realise that communication effort is cerebral and not visceral. The strength of a press officer lies in knowledge, skill and valued resources in the brain. An information rag, to begin with, being with ill assorted political hand picks may not be professionally competent to serve the best interest of the government. Politicisation of information service is harmful to the government. A career information service officer serves the government faithfully if not the party. There is a distinction between the government and the party. The job of a press officer is to ensure that the government is successful and not the party in power is re-elected.

The external publicity division in the ministry should be reorganised based on geographical area desks. Messages will be region, country and culture specific, based on feedbacks from the Missions. I remember I received a large number of records and cassettes of Tagore and Nazim songs from the External Publicity Division for distribution. External publicity is not about pleasing and cultivating the Bangladeshi community only but to project abroad our political, economic, social and cultural performance. Director General, External Publicity, ordinarily, should be the spokesman in press briefings provided he is professionally competent and taken in to confidence in all decisions, policy initiatives and responses by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Lastly, the name 'external publicity' is an anachronism today and smacks of propaganda and has an undertone of negativity. It should be renamed External Information. The byways of crooked micro-management of the media is anathema to high speed information super highway today. At the end of the day, the image of a country abroad is a reflection of its domestic and foreign policy performance. The spin doctors, let alone dilettantes, won't do well to remember philosopher Schopenhauer's warning 'if a fool looks into a mirror, you cannot expect an angel to look out.'

The author is a former Press Counsellor, Bangladesh Mission to the UN in New York.

To the Editor...

Simple solution

Sir, We have read news of diarrhoea epidemic and polluted water use in Bangladesh in various newspapers. The flood affected people are regularly using dangerously polluted flood water and contracting diarrhoea and other infectious diseases. Therefore, we are interested to give a simple solution to prevent such infections from polluted water.

Bleaching powder is one of the effective disinfectant of polluted water. Concentrated solution of bleaching powder (for example, 100 grams of bleaching powder dissolved in one litre of water) can be used for household treatment of water by adding half tea-spoonful (2-4 milli-litres) bleaching powder solution into 10 to 15 litres of contaminated water and allow 15-30 min contact time to get safe water for drinking and all other household purposes.

Prepared concentrated solution of bleaching powder (stock solution) can be kept several months in closed glass bottles (without losing potency significantly) for regular use. One litre stock solution (100 grams bleaching powder) can be used to treat about 3-5 thousands litres of contaminated water.

Bleaching powder is cheap and locally available. Good quality bleaching powder should be used. Use clean solution of bleaching powder from the bottle (don't shake). Treated water should have some small of chlorine. Public health workers, NGOs and other social organisations can make and distribute such solution and teach the general people.

This is a simple and safe solution.

Alam M. Jahangir & Khurshida Begum, Japan.

Repairing of Dhaka-Chittagong Road

Sir, The Dhaka-Chittagong road is the main road which matters in our economy. It has been closed for last one month and will remain closed for next one month. Repairing this road is essential to revive countries economic activities.

It is possible to repair road even during flood. Two sides of the road are to be fenced with bamboos and tin sheets and then gravels and coarse sand mixed to be filled on submerged road. As boats are accessible from all side, so filling of gravel

and sand mixture can be done employing a hundred boats only and within a very short time, only 30 man submerged road can be made motorable with a approximate budget of 150 crore taka only.

30 km = 30,000mx3.29ft/m=1,00,000 ft long x 60 ft wide x 5 ft high = 3,00,00,000 cft to filled up with a mixture of gravels and sand @ Tk. 50 / cft = Tk 150, 00,00,000 = Taka One hundred eighty crore only.

Engr A K Sarker, Dhaka.

Blair and Clinton

Sir, We are bewildered and fail to understand as to why the British Prime Minister Tony Blair did not make any retaliatory measure against the terrorist IRA Republican Group for Omagh bomb attack in Northern Ireland but why did the US President Bill Clinton make cruise missile attacks on the suspected terrorist spots of Osama bin Laden in Sudan and Afghanistan?

Both the USA and the UK are close allies and friends. Does not the peculiar action of Bill Clinton smell rat? Who would deny the fact that

Bill Clinton has tried to save his own skin and diverted the attention of the people all over the world from his infamous and inappropriate sexual relationship with Monika Lewinsky to terrorist Saudi Arabian billionaire Osama bin Laden?

We are not only outraged by the conduct, trickery and the macabre action of Bill Clinton but we are also greatly concerned with the image, honour and sanctity of the high and prestigious office of the President of the United States of America.

The US is a great democratic country and a colossal military power but truth is never suppressed and hidden to us. We are waiting for the day when the people of America would prove accurately and confirm if US arms might is right or Monika Lewinsky sex scandal is true.

O. H. Kabir, 6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1203

SM Hall's name-plate

Sir, There is no name-plate of Salimullah Hall, an old hall of Dhaka University. It is a matter of great regret for the students of this hall.

seems to us that the authority has kept our proposal in the cold storage to be more modified.

But we don't want them to act like that — please turn it into reality. We the students of this hall want to inscribe a decent name-plate at the main entrance.

Shahidul Islam, SM Hall, DU

Credibility of propaganda and supine BTV

Sir, It is really disgusting and highly irritating to watch the way the electronic media of the government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh is being misled and misused for one-sided propaganda, blacking out the other multi-sectors of the society. There are many types of power blackouts!

The propaganda techniques used are amateurish and of poor standard. Not to cause irritation is part of the propaganda technique. There are standard textbooks on the subject and plenty of bibliography, but perhaps unknown to the policy-makers, who appear to be very keen to make hay while the sun shines (quite all right, so long

the motivation is acceptable). The administration is run on the mood of the moment. Why the media cannot be neutral? It means freedom.

Most of the air time is devoted to what is happening in the public sector, and how the people's representatives in power were passing the time. Perhaps there is a TV camera team permanently attached to each Hon Minister, just like Private Secretaries are on shift duty round the clock.

It is a mystery how the professionals in the BTV News Department could be a party to such supine subservience, forgetting professional code, pride practice, and credibility. What to broadcast, and how to present a programme or bulletin should be left to the professionals without interference from other professionals. Policy directives should be in public, not party or personal interest. What is ironical is that all the time the leaders (in and out of power, and the intellectuals) sermonise about democracy and freedom of the media and nauseam. Bangladesh is full of Platonic politicians. Only our floods are real, if not distorted by BTV.

A ZBR, Dhaka.