

# Globalisation, Security and Civil Society-II

Imagination is more important than knowledge  
— Albert Einstein

## The Myth of Information Revolution

by Ahaduzzaman M. Ali

*It seems that mere technology cannot bring about real changes in society unless there is an effective social technology that ensures the proper use of technology and other resources for the greater good of human society. The unprecedented growth of technology cannot provide us cornucopia. The development of human values is dwarfed by the contradictions in the socio-economic order. It is time we thought about fair distribution of opportunities and socio-economic benefits.*

THE western media have given wide publicity to the 'Information Revolution' which refers to massive production and distribution of information that brings about great changes in our life. Information here is used in the sense of news and entertainment. The pattern of media ownership, distribution of information, distortion of information, agenda-setting, uninterrupted flow of superficial media entertainment, however, negate the claims made by the Western media in respect of the free flow of information. The information revolution is actually a myth. In contradiction to the revolutionary changes one notes the control and manipulation of societies and peoples through information. This article highlights the information order in global and Bangladeshi contexts.

### Pattern of media ownership

The new media corporations get their products to the largest number of people. They aim at constructing very wide audio-visual spaces and markets and annihilate old boundaries of nationalities. Audio-visual geographies are detached from symbolic spaces of national culture. An international consumer culture grows by making onslaughts on indigenous cultures. In the existing media situation television without frontiers is the ideal and based on this ideal global corporations acquire power and reinforce along with other economic, political and cultural forces the process of globalisation which is to all intents and purposes a process of reinforcing inequality and imbalance.

In the process of globalisation the media moguls regard national frontiers as a remnant of antiquity. National identity matters little to the media corporations. The reality in media world is the market opportunity. What happens in the name of free flow of information is transnational corporate cultural domination. The media corporations like Sony, Time Warner, Matsushita, Walt Disney company and Rupert Murdoch's News are creating a media world in which they are the dominant and set rules. Powerful commercial channels like

CNN, and Cartoon network have emerged. Generic channels are growing rapidly. The growing super-highways will take us into the age of personalised media. However, the individual choice is limited by what is available. In the mid-eighties we heard about global cultural convergence which was deemed favourable for the acceptance of a single product across a wide range of geography. *Dallas*, *Star Wars* indicate the growing homogenisation and standardisation of the market. In the nineties American movies like the *Flintstones* are reinforcing the same pattern. Satellite and cable channels are making standardisation a global process. CNN, which is symbolic of American cultural dominance, achieved spectacular success through worldwide circulation of a single news service. Star TV is integrating global ambitions with local dynamics. Global corporations are taking local credibility seriously in order to maintain hegemony, but local, it may be said, amounts to a multi-national region. The logic of globalisation lies in the creation of a few media giants.

### Cultural domination

The global dissemination of TV entertainment and flow of news is interlaced with the idea of cultural imperialism. Herbert Schiller regarded communications imperialism as a planned attempt by US military-communication conglomerates. L.R. Beltran identified nine forms of U.S. cultural influence, such as international news agencies, international advertising agencies, international public opinion, marketing and public relations firms, transnational business corporations acting as advertisers, exporters of printed and audio-visual programming materials, exporters of communication equipment and technologies, international telecommunication companies, the official propaganda agency and the official security agency.

The multinational corporations are the ideological apparatus of imperialism. The globalisation of production means the globalisation of cultural merchandise. Mass culture becomes universal culture which makes possible the enslavement of each country's national

consciousness. The economic profitability of such a process is greatly enhanced by its ideological profitability. National culture in this era of globalisation has to guarantee the reproduction of the dependence of the upper classes on the USA at the same time as that of their own domination as the ruling class in a particular nation. The modern media enter the developing countries before the other potential for production reaches anywhere near the level in developed countries. Television, for example, is used by these countries when they are not capable of producing adequate programmes. Cultural imperialism may be viewed as an absence of co-ordination between hardware and software growth of media. Several dimensions of media imperialism may be distinguished, viz., foreign ownership and control of media outlets, transfer of the metropolitan broadcasting norms and institutionalisation of media commercialism at the expense of the 'public interest'.

Gross racism of the early periods of American culture has diminished recently, but vestiges of it persist in the images of the Viet Cong and recently in the portrayal of Arabs and Islam. The expansion of global media has been a strong factor in the perpetuation of racism. The more insidious projection of Anglo norms on the world has been viewed by Dorfman and Mattelart. The underdeveloped countries exist only as a backdrop for the adventures and exotic vacations of the Whites. The global obsession with sports has been used by ruling elite as support for militaristic nationalism and capitalistic aggression. Organised sports in the underdeveloped countries reinforce class, racial and sexual lines and divert class conflict into infantile opposition between localities and between nations. Viewers of American entertainment see a

### Coverage of News

With the establishment of democracy the media audience's expectations about more information on society, politics, economy, culture began to rise rapidly. But much of the important information remains unknown. It cannot be said that the newspapers, not to speak of the broadcast media, are doing the surveillance of the environment properly. Most of the newspapers have a tendency to highlight politics in a narrow sense. The concept of news no doubt lays emphasis on prominence as one of the important factors of news value. But undue importance given to



names may mar the quality of news. The front page is frequently filled with political speeches and statements that have little consequence. Findings of newspaper content analysis indicate an imbalance in the flow of information. The imbalance is particularly evident in the coverage of urban and rural news. Even in covering urban news the newspapers seem to rely on stereotypes. There are more important, interesting and useful information in the urban areas that are ignored by the reporters. The elements of news are found not only in the core, but also in the periphery. Prominence may acquire new meanings in the marginalized areas of society.

Politics is certainly a very important element of news, but the way it is treated in the press must be altered. Politics is not mere mud slinging and political harangue; it is a comprehensive

term that connotes overall human development, based on fair distribution of socio-economic benefits, popular participation in political and socio-economic processes and integration between tradition and modernity. Newspapers may play an important part in reflecting policies in this sense. At this stage when the nation is undergoing the process of democratisation, the newspapers by covering news from the nooks and crannies of the country, all areas of life may widen the horizon of the people.

### Objectivity in news

The need to present news as matter-of-fact, free of prejudice, impartial and true to reality is ever more felt in view of the tendency of some newspapers to deliberately distort news. Many of the newspapers doing biased reporting. Partisan politics is to some extent responsible for this.

With the mushroom growth of newspapers in the country, there is an evident tendency to ignore the fundamental norms and practices. There is exaggeration and distortion. The prime responsibility of newspaper should be to report news and not make news. Exaggeration of minor incidents is making news. Rumour stories are also manufactured news. The newspapers should concentrate on reporting the truth. They should not conceal what should be offered to the public. But at the same time the press should not unjustly damage an individual's character for the sake of a story. They should play fair with an individual against whom derogatory charges are made. Many of the newspapers do not stay within the bounds of decency. They intrude upon the individual's privacy. They hardly play fair with persons quoted in their columns. They seem to forget that news is read by young boys and girls, the mentally unstable and the old people. Stories, pictures and advertisements published in our press often leave adverse effects on the readers. The newspapers tend to play up the negative aspects of life.

### Developing a democratic culture

The press may play a significant role in developing political culture through proper presentation of news and views. Even among the literate segments of the society there seems to be an absence of 'politeracy' to a considerable degree. Politeracy or political literacy is political knowledge, skills and attitudes, needed to make a person informed about politics, able to participate in public life and to recognise and tolerate diversities of political and social values. A strong democracy is largely dependent on a truly politically literate middle class and there the press may be helpful by informing and positively influencing the people. The press in Bangladesh are yet to play such a role.

There is an absence of proper communication and co-ordination between different segments of the society, such as, the government and the opposition, the bureaucracy and the party-in-power, the different departments of the government, the central and the local adminis-

tration, the generalists and the technocrats. This absence of co-ordination affects the socio-political and economic stability of the country. The press which may through continuous flow of objective information and interpretation help bridge the gap between segments of the society is hardly playing its part.

One may point to the danger to which the journalists are vulnerable and that is the inclination to let those items become news which correspond to their pre-judgements and predisposition, and make no difference between news and opinion. In the process of instrumental actualisation they tend to report those aspects of controversies which correspond with their views. There are signs that the growing ubiquity of the media and the changing nature of media ownership in Bangladesh may lead to a situation when the press and other media will create the sense of importance of news in the mind of the audience rather than the real importance of events induce the writing of news.

### Erosion of culture

Media culture reflects a sharp decline in the quality of content and form. There is an abundance of light and superficial content. Satellite culture has become a matter of grave concern. The mindless media programmes consumed by the audience regularly pose a threat to national culture. The infantilization of culture and eclipse of reason are becoming dominant characteristics of our culture due to the invasion of satellite culture.

### Conclusion

It seems that mere technology cannot bring about real changes in society unless there is an effective social technology that ensures the proper use of technology and other resources for the greater good of human society. The unprecedented growth of technology cannot provide us cornucopia. The development of human values is dwarfed by the contradictions in the socio-economic order. It is time we thought about fair distribution of opportunities and socio-economic benefits.

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## The Statelessness of the Rohingyas

### Dimension of the Conflict

One can without hesitation divide the dimension of the conflict into three. The first one relates to the military intervention in the Rakhine State with the avowed intention of reproducing the power of the majoritarian Burmans. It may be noted here that the majoritarian Burmans follow Theravada Buddhism while the Rakhine Buddhists are mainly followers of the Manayana sect. In this context and also for having separate ethnic identities, the Burman-dominated military in the Rakhine State is at loggerheads not only with the Rohingyas but also with the Rakhine Buddhists. The testimony of this lies in the fact that between 1978 and 1983 as a result of Burman-led military atrocities in the Rakhine State a total number of 1725 Rohingyas and corresponding to the state of relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar were killed compared to 437 Muslim Rohingyas.

The second conflict in the wake of the refugeeization of the Rohingyas relates to the increased militarization of the pro-Rohingya political fronts (like, Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front, etc.), including the militarization of the refugee camps. While the activities of the former have created a militarised situation in the jungle, packed no-man's land along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, the militarization of the refugee camps has brought about further uncertainty to the repatriation of the Rohingyas and correspondingly to the state of relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The last kind of conflict is the most complex one and is also the least recognised one. This mainly relates to the not-so-voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya refugees. In fact, the repatriation of Rohingyas is unique on two fronts. Firstly, there has been a subtle change in the UNHCR policy of voluntary repatriation of Rohingyas. This refers to the change in the UNHCR policy, from one of individual interviewing before ascertaining one's repatriation to the promotion of repatriation through 'mass registration.' Critics have already questioned the principle of voluntariness in such repatriation, including the repatriation of Rohingyas. It is not surprising that given the involuntary nature of Rohingya repatriation many of them are found returning and choosing the life of a refugee or illegal migrant in Bangladesh. Exodus, return and conflict all are recycled and reproduced once again.

Secondly, and this is more fundamental, the Rohingyas, once pushed out as stateless people, are now repatriated also as stateless people. No fundamental change has occurred to their life-long condition of forced labour, landlessness, victims of arbitrary taxation and above all, statelessness. In fact, the resolution of their fundamental problem, that is, not being able to acquire citizenship rights, remains stalled and marginal as ever. How did the Myanmarese government succeed in keeping the fate of the Rohingyas practically frozen? The question merits close attention.

### LIC, Globalisation and the Marginalization of the Rohingyas

The Myanmarese government

is practically colour-coded!

Actually, following the launching of the 'Operation Nagamin' (Dragon King) in 1977, which continued for over a decade, almost the whole of Myanmar's population was registered and provided with identity cards. These cards are all colour-coded, mainly for the easy identification of the citizenship status of the bearer. Those residing lawfully in Myanmar can now be divided into four colours:

Pink, those who are full citizens;

Blue, those who are associate citizens;

Green, those who are naturalised citizens; and lastly,

White (not surprisingly) for the foreigners!

The Rohingyas were quickly told that they do not fall under any of these four colours and that no such cards would be issued to them. Instead, a year after the Operation Nagamin began (that is, in 1978-1979) a huge number of Rohingyas, totalling around 250,000, was forcibly pushed into Bangladesh. But this was only the first major push. Some more small and big pushes preceded and followed Operation Nagamin. 1974 push and 1991 push, for that matter, are small and big pushes respectively. Indeed, with all such pushes, LIC in the Arakan region and also beyond simply acquired a new dimension, without however having its 'intensity' transformed. More on this now.

sources — physical as well as cheap labour — to attract the pace-setters and real gainers of globalisation, namely the developed countries. To give one small instance of government's confidence, even after 1990, when the military government refused to accept the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi and handed over power to the elected representatives, more than a dozen petroleum companies undertook exploration in Myanmar.

Even with respect to the Rohingyas, the government of Myanmar succeeded in doing the same. That is, the government succeeded in attracting development funds from the developed countries, including international agencies, by way of agreeing to the repatriation of Rohingyas without, however, revealing the cause of their plight.

Three issues are critical here. Firstly, the government of Myanmar by reproducing LIC, with repeated exodus of the Rohingyas, has succeeded in impressing upon the donors that unless the region is developed such conflict and exodus would continue. Can we not dub this as a case where the government is using LIC, exodus and repatriation for attracting development funds from the developed countries, including international agencies, by way of agreeing to the repatriation of Rohingyas? It is not surprising that given the involuntary nature of Rohingya repatriation many of them are found returning and choosing the life of a refugee or illegal migrant in Bangladesh. Exodus, return and conflict all are recycled and reproduced once again.

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### LIC, Globalisation and the Marginalization of the Rohingyas

The Myanmarese government

needs to be credited for

productively utilising both LIC and the agenda of globalisation;

indeed, at a level and with such

sophistication that only a few

developing countries can

match. The government knows

very well that Myanmar has re-

sponded in the affirmation

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