LATE S. M. ALI DHAKA SATURDAY APRIL 7, 2001

Police repression on the rise

Politics becoming more confrontational It is clear that the AL government is going the way all most repressive governments in the past did. More the politi-Lcal agitation against it, more the police repression against the protesters. In a sudden and well planned move the government arrested the Secretary General of Jamaat-e-Islami party, Ali Ahsan Mohammed Mujahidi. Later more than 150 workers and leaders were also arrested when protest processions were taken out against the arrest on Thursday. Similar arrests also took place yesterday. These arrests have direct link with the hartals and the consequent civic unrest.

What is in a way sad about this situation is that it has a deja vu element about it. For, as long as we can remember, the parties in power always behaved exactly the way the Awami League is reacting - with more police repression as the opposition protest begins to spread. If our past history bears any lesson for the present we can clearly see that such arrests, instead of solving any problem, will create new ones for the ruling party making the political situation far more complex, and its resolution more complicated.

The central question to pose at the moment is where will all this lead to? Obviously once when the repression process starts government cannot stop half way. On the other side the opposition cannot allow its agitation to stop in face of police arrests. Given this political prognosis it is not too difficult to predict that police repression, instead of lessening violence, will intensify it. Therefore we see no resolution of the present political crisis along the path that the government appears to have chosen. We know the role Jamaat played during our Liberation War, and we have no words to condemn it. But the police repression of today will have to be judged in relation to what they have done in the recent past. The present ruling party knows more than anybody else the futility of preventive detention or police repression as means of stopping political violence.

This paper had pinned a lot of hope on the government opting for early elections and thereby preventing the present politics of confrontation. Its inexplicable hardening of position and later imposing conditions on the opposition for early elections have, in our view, eroded the government's position whose head had unilaterally declared the policy of "election any time the opposition wants it." We still believe that early election is the best solution for the present crisis and the ruling party should opt for it without all the preconditions that it has recently imposed on the opposition. Such a policy will be good for the country, and we dare say, good for the ruling party.

BTTB's bungling of phone bills

Another act of mis-governance

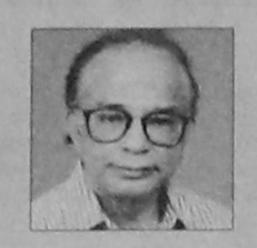
It is yet another act of sheer disregard for the basics of governance. We are referring to the astonishing fact that L since January this year, the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) has not issued a single telephone or telex bill across the country. Consumers have been kept in the dark while the BTTB has been locked in a dispute with the private firm responsible for preparing bills. The firm's contract ended on January 31°, but the BTTB has neither renewed the contract, nor struck a new deal. A tender floated in December has been stayed after the private firm went to court. We demand to know, both from the Board and the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications why this breakdown in billing has been allowed to take place? And why no action has been taken to rectify the matter? What is the job of the authorities, if it is not to ensure that the basic act of bill preparation is done on time?

Nearly 5.5 lakh telephone and 20,000 telex subscribers are now faced with the prospect of having to pay several months' arrears in one go. This inconvenience is totally uncalled for and could be construed as harassment of customers, not to mention breach of promise.

The BTTB's bungling is causing a loss to the exchequer as well. Customers' deposits through commercial banks provide valuable bank interest to BTTB which makes a net profit of Tk 600 crore annually. Since no deposits have been made since January, net profit will undoubtedly suffer. The delay has also opened up avenues of misuse and corruption. Unscrupulous users can now run up huge bills but elude payment by abandoning the telephone numbers by the time the Board makes billing arrangements.

Telephones are essential tools of communication. Instead of making improvements in this sector, the government has bungled the very basic operational job of maintaining the billing system. With this level of mis-governance, how can the people have confidence in the authorities?

Globalization of the third kind



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

■ LOBALIZATION of the third kind may have caught up with the world, at least to a degree and extent that are visible and measurable enough. At first it was the growth enhancing reality (for some countries) and the prospects (for many who can and will dare open their economies) of a borderless worldwide economy that trumpeted the glory of the new order. In a globally integrated economy, untrammeled by restrictions on free movement of capital and goods, production and trade would soar upward, it was pointed out. The reason is as simple as the economies of scale, the explanation came. This was the bright side of globalization. The developed counties and the multilateral institutions dealing with world finance and trade were the vociferous champions. It was also the final frontier of liberal economics after its resounding victory over orthodox socialism.

As one developing country after another tested the unfamiliar water the chilling experience revealed the underside of globalization. Dismantling trade barriers or reducing them drastically and allowing

sectors produced a shock therapy whose malignant side-effects few could overcome. For these countries the benefits of globalization were neither instantaneous nor automatic. Opening up of the economy through liberalization meant closure of many industries and resultant unemployment. Not only inequality between the developed and developing countries widened, the gap between the rich and the poor within the developing coun-

foreign capital in hitherto protected world's stock market with it. Following conventional wisdom investors in the past sought to reduce risk by diversifying overseas. The theory and practice pointed to the fact that when shares slumped in one country, the loss was offset by gains in other countries' markets. In recent months the old theory has been overtaken by events that nullify it convincingly. Stock markets across a large number of countries seem to have moved closer to each other. The realization has slowly dawned

tion has changed as a result of closer integration of the stock markets across the borders. The recent plunge in share prices in Europe, Korea, Taiwan shows that, the health of those countries' economies notwithstanding, recession now travels through the global equity market more freely and rapidly. In the process it spreads the financial contagion of a new type like a mutant virus. This explains why recession in Europe is not on the basis of economic fundamentals

made it easier for investors to obtain information on foreign firms more quickly and accurately. As a result, firms in the same industry, but located in different countries, now are valued on similar criteria. By breaking down the movements in share prices into global effects, country specific effects and industry specific effects it can be seen that global factors now explain for a greater part of the movements in share prices. The increased impor-

partner like America. The recent American boom in IT spending generated a great deal of exports from Asia (Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia) and helped the region to recover from its crisis in 1997-98. As America's new economy boom turns to bust, IT imports have dwindled sharply hitting Asia harder than during past American economic downturns. If high tech shares' surge in prices was a bubble, then high tech stocks are going to be not only another channel of spreading recession but also a powerful one to transmit the contagion throughout

the world economy like bush fire.

The experience of Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 together with the new form of financial contagion spreading through the stock markets points to the need for emerging economies to be ready with countervailing measures. Use of capital controls at the first sight of financial melt-down, as Malaysia did, is one solution. To address possible stockmarket debacle through affliction with the new from of financial contagion, diversifying shares according to industries, and not individual markets, appears not only sensible but also highly imperative. The bad news, that became public quite a while ago, is that globalization is not an unmixed blessing for developing countries. The good news is that most of these countries are still immune from close encounter with the third kind of globalization, being marginally integrated through the stock markets at present. This hiatus gives a strategic breathing space to shore up their economies. As in the affairs of men, there is a tide for the latecomers to globalization which taken

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were the symptoms of a temporary set-back, problems associated with the period of adjustment, the developing countries were promptly assured. The admission was however made that countries at different stages of development would have running play. differential benefits and with different timeframe. Many of the developing countries caught in the vise are still nursing their bruises and are yet to put their battered economy on an even keel. Now the world has to embrace the third incarnation of globalization.

It is not strange or unfamiliar that the recent slow down in the American economy has brought slump in its stock market. What is new and revealing is that Wall Street seems to

tries exacerbated as well. These that individual stock markets are increasingly being driven by global rather than country specific factors. In other words, globalization of the third kind has arrived, rather unexpectedly for many, like the police inspector in Noel Coward's long-

Traditionally, the standard economic model judged the likely impact of recession in a country (a major trading partner) on the rest of the world mainly through trade links. According to this model countries like Mexico and Canada with close trade links and a substantial part of their GDP accounting for exports to America are more exposed to the fallout of recession in America than say, Europe, whose exports to America is less than three be dragging down the rest of the per cent of its GDP. But this correla-

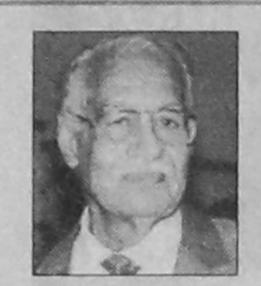
which are correct and stable. Share prices in European stock markets have fallen further from their peak than American shares in spite of their healthy economies. This fall in European share prices is the evidence that stock markets are becoming more integrated with one another than before.

Some of the increased correlation is the inevitable effect of greater cross-border movements of capital and technology fuelled by globalization. This is not only reflected by direct foreign investment (DFI) but also in increased cross border trading of shares creating a virtual global equity market. Simultaneously, it has become easier for big companies to be listed in more than one market. Finally, the Internet has

equity markets in the world today is more closely integrated. It also reflects the fact that stock markets tend to be more correlated at times of fluctuating prices of shares. In contrast, during normal period correlation tends to be weak and minor. It is also confirmed by recent evidence that by far the most important global factor explaining increased correlation has been information technology (IT). Whether in Europe or in East Asia, movements in IT shares have been much more highly correlated to those in America than non-tech shares. The new economy (IT) is a world-girdling supply chain making all the countries linked to it vulnerable to recession in a major trading

tance of global factors confirms that

Religious cover for education



KULDIP NAYAR writes from New Delhi

T N reply to my question in Parliament whether the L selection of teachers was on the basis of their philosophy, Human Resources Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi was taunting in tone. "The Honourable Member always tries to see ideology even when there is only an administrative matter," he said.

Joshi has been more than suspect in many eyes since 1992 when he, as president of the BJP, said: "The Babri mosque is a sign of slavery. An independent India won't accept it." His bent of mind is no secret. At the Liberian Commission, appointed to find out who destroyed the mosque, Joshi repudiated his Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement that the matter should be settled either through negotiation or in a law court. Joshi told the Commission that the matter could not be resolved by any court orders.

No document can be more relevant to know his leanings than the one, which the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) has brought out on school education. The NCERT is under his ministry and its members are hand picked by Joshi. The 1999 document,

which evoked wide protests, said titled, Education in Human Values in that the higher education stage should be "Indianised, nationalised 2000 curriculum framework is tional religions, especially by those "values with an emphasis on reli- which they derive their authority." gious values," or whatever it means.

What guarantee is there that under the guise of "religious values" Joshi's ministry will not insist on introducing textbooks, which do not spread venom against certain sections of our population? Will the holy and find in it the message of

the official NCERT journal: "The greatest damage to our intellectual and spiritualised." The December freedom has been caused by tradihardly different and talks about which have a single holy book from

Muslims, Sikhs and Christians believe in one book, the Quran, the Guru Granth and the Bible, respectively. All the three communities are called ehlay kitab, those possessing the book. They consider their book

aspersions on the religious beliefs of any community. He described his why should he have expressed them already done the damage.

values,' which has been adumbrated in the new policy will only legitimise the stress on religious education and push scientific and of the common man

polluted has become the atmowriting as his own views. If it was so, sphere is visible from the desecration of the Quran in a few cities. It as the Education Secretary? He has was meant to humiliate the Musissued a statement, withdrawing lims, sort of an answer by the Hindu what he said in the article. But he has fundamentalists to the destruction of the Buddha statues in Afghani-Still the emphasis on 'religious stan. It was nothing but one set of fundamentalists trying to settle scores with another set of fundamentalists by playing with emotions

that he had no intention to cast any perpetuate threats and strong arm trary to the official propaganda, tactics against minorities. How which seeks to paint the whole minority community as aggressors, in fact it is the minority community which has been victim of the communal violence of loot and arson perpetuated by sections of the police and the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC)." Coming back to the new educa-

in time may lead to good fortune.

tion policy, there is also an unashamed promotion of Sanskrit from primary stage. The reason given is that it has consistently been used in India for thousands of years and it is still "inextricably linked" with the life, ritual ceremonies and festivals of vast Indian masses.

I have nothing against Sanskrit But it should not hog all the attention. Muslims use Arabic to perform their religious ceremonies and Christians, Latin. A secular country cannot pick and choose the language dear to a particular community to exclude others. Too much emphasis on Sanskrit in the last NCERT report was resisted by many states in the South as well.

The real danger from persons like Joshi is that, in their emphasis on make Joshi act. How can he expect them to support a policy that will promote the Rastogis?

BETWEEN THE LINES

The effort to put history or social studies within the straightjacket of religion-based values destroys the sense of research and inquiry. It curbs freedom and gives birth to bigotism. Those powerless and disadvantaged will feel more handicapped after the new policy.

textbooks? Reports about the books under preparation suggest paro-

Joshi has written a letter to MPs us.' to help him implement the curriculum framework "in a desirable manner." Desirable is a strange word to use. It suggests that what he has in mind is desirable. In other words, what is not palatable to him will be undesirable. It is sort of a directive that the policy, enunciated by the NCERT, is "a desirable" one. It means that any dissent will be taken as an impediment in the way of saffronisation journey on which he has embarked and hence everything else becomes undesirable.

The fear is not unfounded. Joshi's secretary MK Kaw, said in an article

persons owing allegiance to the RSS God. Kaw's remarks are derogatory historical inquiry into the backbe kept out from the preparation of and provocative. To add insult to ground. The content in the texts Kanpur by a team of Hindu and injury, he says: "We tend to forget that these religions have been founded and written by people like

> Thank God, the National Commission for Minorities noticed his writings and called him suo moto to explain. The Commission put him on the mat and told him that his article might have an adverse effect on the country's pluralistic society. He tendered an unqualified apology. It is obvious that Kaw had no defence. If there had been a rationale for the new education policy, he would have stood his ground.

In fact, he gave an undertaking to the Commission that he would write a rejoinder to his own article in the next NCERT issue to make it clear circulated by backward-looking outfits like the RSS and the Markazi Maktaba Islami (MMI) will not even be required to meet the criterion of neutrality, scientific temper or frank inquiry. (The 1999 NCERT report had severally criticised the RSS and the MMI texts).

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We have been mute witness to the hate projects in public life in the past few decades, the projects which have misused religious labels to

The report on the rioting at Muslim women emphasises the same point: Pollution of the atmosphere. It says: "The incidents in Kanpur provide the most vivid example of how fundamentalist forces of both communities have strengthened each other. Clearly, in the last few years, Muslim fundamentalist groups have organised sections of young men of the community on the same lines as the Bajrang Dal. The growth of both fundamentalisms is a matter of grave concern and clearly any strategy to counter such forces will have where the communal politics of the BJP-led administration has caused

immense damage." The report adds further: "Con-

"religious values" and Sanskrit, they give fillip to fanaticism and jingoism. The new policy may not improve the quality of education but may certainly damage the nation's secular ethos. None will have faith in Joshi's claim to solve the cause of education when the NCERT still has on its staff Dr KG Rastogi, who has proudly said in his autobiography, Aap Beeti, that he shot dead a Musto be directed at both groups. This is lim woman during partition days. Even the protest by MPs did not

KAFCO contract

renewal

This refers to the front page news of April 1 on KAFCO contract renewal. As a Bangladeshi, my attention was immediately drawn to the following points for which both the government and World Bank/IFC owe an explanation.

How has IFC recommended 75 cents gas price which alone will cause a straight away loss of 1\$ million (Taka ten lakh) per day to the country? What was IFC or for that matter World Bank's objective behind such a recommendation? Cumulative loss to the national exchequer will be a nerve-wracking figure, given future possibilities of taka devaluation against the dollar, normal inflation and increased operational expenses of BGSL and others involved. World Bank/IFC was expected to deliver professional recommendations. Unfortunately, it did not.

Was there any parliamentary oversight involved in this process? Particularly when the nation knows about KAFCO's devastating role in the national economy. How has Marubeni been rehired to work in other projects in Bangladesh after its most controversial role in KAFCO as well as other projects in the recent

If General Ershad's government had set the price to \$1.01 what prompted the Awami League government in association with World Bank/IFC to present KAFCO with a 37.5 per cent discount window while carrying a net loss of \$120 million since start-

Shamsul Arefeen Uttara. Dhaka

Role of ICC

It came as a great blow to every sport loving person that the Indian government has declined to permit its cricket team to play in the forthcoming limited-overs tournament in Sharjah, since Pakistan is taking part in the tournament. Recently, we witnessed the Prime Minister's Gold Cup Hockey Tournament held in Dhaka where these two arch-rivals have participated and played against each other. Then why couldn't they participate in the Sharjah tournament?

In the 1998 World Cup football tournament Iran and the USA, who had no diplomatic relations, had no reservations to play against each other. Then what is the problem with India? India has full-fledged diplomatic relations with Pakistan and is in no means, officially, at war with Pakistan. Then why has such decision been taken?

If FIFA can have the right to impose its decision on any member country, then why does ICC demonstrate a helpless attitude when a member country boycotts a venue or an opponent at will. I recall the 1996 World Cup Cricket tournament where Australia and West Indies team did the same thing by finding Sri-Lanka a dangerous place to play in. Shouldn't the ICC do something about this boycotting trend?

Mejbah Uddin Ahmed (Zaman) Rajarchar, Shibchar, Madaripur

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned

Road islands in bad shape



STAR PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

All the road islands from Paltan to Bijoy Nagar areas are in a deplorable condition. The grilled fencing is missing and even the island itself is in a state of ruin. These decaying islands disrupt the beauty of the city and are also dangerous for passers by. We would like to urge the authorities to repair the islands and erect proper fencing to maintain them from further ruin.

Higher education

Higher education is supposed to broaden the minds of people. But the recent mass cheating and copying in public examinations put serious doubt in our minds about our education system and for that matter, the educated lot. Then look at our present political state. The politicians are highly educated and are supposed to lead the nation. But do their destructive activities prove them to be educated? A little learning is always a dangerous thing and these areas may be imagined. our politicians have proved it

Mujibur Haque Mirpur Road, Dhaka

through their activities.

Political goal

The politicians. What should be the punishment? Honourable retirement. The citizens have the right to change political leaders, and this right has to be exercised during the coming general elections.

Who have divided the nation today?

The holier-than-thou attitude of the politicians has to be severely condemned. Anyway, the politicians have unwittingly handed over most of the power to the armed activists, who will desert them when the time comes. There is no internal democracy, and the entrenched netas talk big about freedom and democracy. Hypocrisy has reached a high standardin Dhaka.

The politicians have shattered the image of politics in Bangladesh, and there is no greater indirect crime. Vote for whom? There is a severe shortage of the right type of leaders.

AZabr Dhaka

Woes of the citizens

As a citizen it was good to read newspaper reports that Bangladesh is floating on natural gas. Now comes the foreboding report (March 29) that Dhaka is also floating on dangerous explosive gases, caused by decomposition of garbage dumped in some areas for years as ventilation pipes were not installed to remove the underground gas from the decaying compost. The trepidation of the dwellers in the buildings in

That is not the end of the woes of the citizens. The political situation is also, in a sense, 'explosive', prior to the general elections, as the two major political parties often resort to violent confrontation.

Will the citizens of the country everlive safely and peacefully?

PC show at twin sites

It was disconnecting to find this year's computer show being split and held at two different sites, causing inconvenience to the visitors, as also waste of time.

The ideal site would have been at the IDB Bhavan at Agargaon, which is known as the Computer City, and most of the dealers are located there. The one-stop concept has been discarded in this case. The organisers owe a clarification to the public for complicating the issue, although a big supplement was issued in the press. A symposium should also have been held, for technical awareness and exposition of the government policies.

Abd Dhaka