

## The flurry of white paper releases

**Demand grows stronger for independent anti-corruption commission**

**T**HE third part of the BNP-led coalition government's white paper on corruption allegedly committed by the preceding AL government has been released. Earlier on January 23 its first two parts had come out amidst some fanfare.

The disclosures of corrupt practices purportedly indulged in by the AL during its rule between 1996 and 2001 are by no means over. More white papers are on the cards as indicated by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's political secretary Haris Chowdhury apparently amidst a waning interest in such revelatory matters. We wonder whether the government is not biting more than it can chew.

This is, however, not to make a short shrift of the need to identify any serious omissions and commissions on the part of any government but to highlight the trading off of corruption charges between a predecessor government and a successor one without bringing the processes to any logical conclusion.

The previous edition of the white paper highlighted 40 cases of alleged graft, irregularity and abuse of power implicating 11 cabinet ministers including the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The latest litany of charges against the AL encompasses 20 instances of financial irregularities or misfeasance involving seven former ministers.

Significantly, the present white paper has been issued on the back of review or withdrawal of corruption cases that the AL government, in the second half of its tenure between 1996-2001, had instituted against the preceding BNP cabinet members. In some such cases, charges were framed and these awaited trial. It is largely by executive decision rather than any judicial opinion sought and received *a priori* that the corruption cases filed against BNP leaders by the erstwhile AL government have been or are being dropped. Respect for rule of law demands that we eschew a 'holier-than-thou' attitude in dealing with corruption and deal with mal-practices as mal-practices without any partisan connotation.

The problem with tit-for-tat approach to corruption is that the real culprits get away. Moreover, what is crucial here is that the anti-corruption bureau being an appendage to the PMO sees corruption through the eyes of the government of the day. We are institutionally unprepared to fight corruption from high moral and professional grounds.

If the purpose behind the release of these white papers is to bring about transparency and accountability of governance then we should have an independent anti-corruption commission to deal with the entire gamut of the business of fighting corruption. True to its pledge, the government must now form such a commission and put the matters of investigation and prosecution into the latter's hands.

## Opposition slot on television channels

**Democracy Watch survey tells an old story**

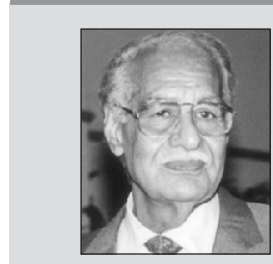
**T**HE Democracy Watch survey on the government-opposition ratio in news coverage by the Bangladesh Television has revealed nothing new. It has only put on record something the viewers in general are already aware of and have got used to over the years. With the change of power, faces dominating the news on the state-owned BTV only change. Pro-government and pro-ruling party bias in news coverage on these television channels remains regardless. Such apathy or antipathy to the opposition parties actually tells on the credibility of visual news media.

The BTV has not had any ideal reputation for objectivity in news coverage and as such its appeal to the general viewers has been rather limited. What is worrisome, however, is the fact that three popular private channels, namely the Ekushey Television (ETV), the Channel-i and the ATN Bangla, have offered small space to the opposition in their news coverage. The survey shows that the government-opposition ratio in their news coverage is 83:17, 84:16 and 85:15 respectively.

A commonplace argument in favour of preponderance of government and ruling party news is that their activity level is higher than that accounted for by the opposition. Hence, the asymmetry. Even so, the question remains whether whatever opposition event there is to cover is actually covered or not. And what seems possible is that coverage of opposition activities may come with a slant.

Whoever is in power makes it a point to control the state-owned electronic media first and then influence the private TV channels one way or the other. The trend cannot be healthy for a democracy; for, it is the media, which should objectively analyse and assess the performance of the government. The private channels are, and can be expected to be, more professional in its coverage and treatment of news and views. As for the BTV, let's grant it the autonomy it has deserved as the tax-payers' media.

# The President must act



**KULDEEP NAYAR**  
writes from New Delhi

**T**HE BJP does not seem to do anything right. Its participation in the government at Lucknow is not only ugly but immoral. The UP voters rejected the party in the state election. It finished third. After the defeat, its reaction was correct: people did not give it the mandate and it should, therefore, sit in the opposition. It is not the noble desire to span the distance between the upper castes and the dalits which has motivated the BJP to support Mayawati of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). It is the ambition to stay in power which has effected the alliance. On the top has been the consideration of 13 BSP members in the Lok Sabha, without whom the BJP-led government would have been in trouble to win the censure motion on its failure in Gujarat. How long the arrangement between the BSP and the BJP will last is anybody's guess. Each of the two earlier tie-ups collapsed after a few months.

The present one too is bound to cave in because of the difference in their outlook. But by then both the BSP and the BJP would have corrupted the system more and exploited the state still more for their personal and party ends. That the lure of power should lead the BJP to

defy the people's wishes is a sad comment on the party leadership, which is already in trouble after its complicity in the Gujarat carnage.

The resignations of Coal Minister Ram Vilas Paswan and Omar Abdullah, Minister of state for External Affairs, have shaken the Vajpayee government because it can be the beginning of the end of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). At least it indicates that all

Doordarshan not to telecast live the Gujarat debate in parliament.) Yet, the question facing the nation is not the BJP-BSP alliance in UP but the normalisation of the situation in Gujarat where the government is asking refugees to fend for themselves without the state repairing their houses and shops or giving them even the meagre compensation. It not only shows insensitivity but also vendetta.

phy of exterminating the minorities act.

Still, if the BJP continues with Modi, the only way out is for the President of India to take the initiative. Normally, it is the central government which recommends the dismissal of a state government. Let him reverse this process and make Modi's resignation a point of his prerogative under Article 356, which empowers the President to dismiss

take time to reach conclusions. The immediate problem is the rehabilitation of lakhs of uprooted Muslims. Prime Minister Vajpayee had announced during his visit to the refugee camps that his office would monitor the resettlement work. The state, biased as it is, is dragging its feet. Necessary funds are not coming forth. What do the refugees do? There are cases where the refugees have been promised

the democratic Europe. I am amused to read the comment by Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi. He has referred to the treatment meted out to the Negroes in America. (Incidentally, Washington is conspicuous by its silence on the Gujarat happenings.) Of course, there is discrimination against the black in the US. But every time an incident takes place, it is followed up by quick and effective action. Only the other day did a Negro in Los Angeles get \$ 6 million as compensation for the injuries he got when four white policemen beat him up. The state does not join the rioters as it happened in Gujarat.

The manner in which America prosecutes the offenders is an example for India. The 3,000 Sikhs killed in 1984 are still a matter of various committees and commissions. None has been punished for the crime committed 18 years ago. In comparison, an American who killed a Sikh at the petrol pump after the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington has already been tried and punished.

In India, the state machinery has got contaminated and there is very little possibility of getting justice, at least in a short time. The essence of any action is quick prosecution of the guilty. If this is not done the murderers and rapists would not be afraid. This is exactly what has been happening in India. Situations of mass violence are a challenge to our legal system and social conscience. Failure on this count will upset judicial norms and undermine the standing of state institutions in the minds of the citizenry. It is still not too late to give due respect to the rule of law.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

**The essence of any action is quick prosecution of the guilty. If this is not done the murderers and rapists would not be afraid. This is exactly what has been happening in India. Situations of mass violence are a challenge to our legal system and social conscience. Failure on this count will upset judicial norms and undermine the standing of state institutions in the minds of the citizenry.**

the constituent parties have not sold their conscience for the saddle as the Samata Party of George Fernandes has done.

During the debate, the Defence Minister sounded like the drummer of the RSS. However, I am surprised at the BJP's persistent, without whom the BJP-led government would have been in trouble to win the censure motion on its failure in Gujarat. How long the arrangement between the BSP and the BJP will last is anybody's guess. Each of the two earlier tie-ups collapsed after a few months.

The present one too is bound to cave in because of the difference in their outlook. But by then both the BSP and the BJP would have corrupted the system more and exploited the state still more for their personal and party ends. That the lure of power should lead the BJP to

The first and foremost requirement for peace is the exit of chief minister Narendra Modi. The Prime Minister had said before he went to Gujarat that Modi "is already behaving like a hero," meaning thereby that he would try to parade himself as a martyr if and when ousted. But this was a wrong impression. Once the BJP withdraws its backing from him, he would get deflated in no time and his supporters will disappear.

They are there because he is in power and because the BJP is behind him. Some reports suggest that Modi may be out before long. I believe the apex meetings of the BJP and the RSS discussed Prime Minister Vajpayee's "unhappiness" over Modi's governance. Even if this is true, the RSS will not easily jettison him because he is the one who has implemented its philoso-

a state government on the failure of the government machinery. The BJP government will not risk a constitutional impasse over Modi.

The President should also insist on changing the state governor, another RSS man, who was hand-in-glove with Modi during the massacre in Gujarat. The President should at least ask the centre to entrust the inquiry on Gujarat carnage to the CBI. The state inquiry is half-hearted and superficial. The CBI has already been told to probe into the Godhra train incident. There is no reason why the agency's purview cannot be extended to the rest of Gujarat. New Delhi's plea that the state has to permit the CBI does not wash because the BJP rules at the Centre as well as at Gandhinagar.

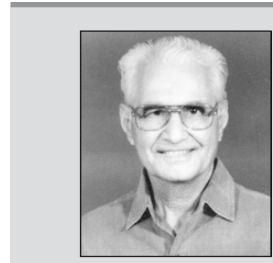
The inquiry will understandably

assistance on the condition that they withdraw their FIRs, which, in any case, are not many in number because the registration has been selective. The evidence of the boys who have seen murders and rapes with their own eyes is not being taken into account because they are not adults.

The Prime Minister is saying again and again that Gujarat is a "shame." What has he done to erase the black mark? Modi is there and so is his terrorist instrument Vishva Hindu Parishad. The state machinery is the same, with the biased officers and the police in position. Vajpayee has admonished the foreigners.

They are not interfering but feeling appalled over the country which they have found more liberal and accommodative than many in

# Troops at borders: Something extraordinary



**M B NAQVI**  
writes from Karachi

**O**PINIONS and assessments about what the two armies are doing on the LoC, the working boundary and the Redcliff Line have veered away from imminent danger. Time was when, in January, tension was telling on everybody's nerves; people expected war soon. The bellicose tone of the Indian leadership more than matched their action and it seemed as if India was quite ready to use its armed might to punish Pakistan for its perceived sins of omission and commission. That situation has cooled down and even this threatening forward deployment is now being taken in stride.

The latest example of this sangfroid was shown in the questions put to the Pakistan President by a panel of Dawn journalists in a recent interview. One of them was: why do you not unilaterally withdraw Pakistani troops from the borders, as no one now thinks that the Indians would actually march in. The President refused to do anything of the kind, of course. He said that Pakistan cannot take even one per cent risk to its national security. It may be remembered that he found it necessary once or twice to remind the world, particularly the Indian government, about Pakistan's readiness to use its nuclear weapons first, if necessary. Why then Pakistani analysts and commenta-

tors are no longer so impressed with the imminent danger of a possible nuclear exchange? Despite all the bad blood between the two countries and a certain amount of aggravation of anti-India feeling here as a result of Gujarat pogroms, many seem to think that the purpose of the Indian troops' deployment in an attacking mode is not simply invading. After all it is four long months that the troops are now sitting in

position to, or saw no need to, use the troops for the threatened purpose. Why?

If India was actually deterred by the nuclear weapons of Pakistan or other complications arising from possible American and western reactions or any other disincentive, it should have been logical and cheaper to beat a retreat. India has not done it. Why?

There is a proposition that has been extensively discussed in

with the infusion of 265 million more Muslims in the revived historical India. Whichever way people thought, risking a possible nuclear war did not make any sense, though the continuation of high tension and bad relations between the two would seem to politically benefit some Indian parties, like those now in power.

Some others in Pakistan have argued that the massing of Indian troops on the Pakistani border -- and

at the border. It looks on the face of it irrational; adopting a publicly threatening posture requires the will to do what is threatened or after a short while stop threatening and start doing other things like negotiating. The idea that India's Home Minister will give a list of 20 persons for taking custody from Pakistan and the latter would meekly hand them over, given all the background of bad relations, is ridiculous. The fact

diplomacy, people have begun to explore the less obvious reasons.

India's actual political and military assessment of the regional situation is not really known here. But the American one is. The Americans are uneasily, but fiercely supporting Musharraf and they are paying a certain political price for it. They are not asking pointed questions about his 'roadmap to democracy'. Behind the public show of confidence in Musharraf lies a good deal of unease and indeed what may be called alarm. The trends of Pakistani opinion, as their experts perceive, are none too reassuring. The Islamic extremists have not dissolved into thin air; they are there. The official Islamabad action against them was moderate, to begin with. Later Musharraf seems to have diluted it further and released most of those arrested. Americans continue to assess the situation as dicey and insofar as the American experts are concerned, President Musharraf is nowhere near being as powerful as the previous military dictators were. Hence they would require some kind of possible checkmating of the threat to Musharraf's survival.

A look on the map would show that other than India there is no other power that can help the US. The uncertain Sino-US relations might be an additional attraction of India in American eyes. And some of the Sino-Pakistan moves are being passed without a single comment by the US about these being unhelpful to whatever the Americans want in Asia. All these enhance the utility of India for the US. For the Vajpayee government, nothing could be more welcome and sweeter. Even so, the idea of Indian army massing itself on the Pakistani border for intervening in favour of General Musharraf is as startling as it might be unsettling for many headline Indians.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## PLAIN WORDS

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exposed forward locations. According to military opinion, this sort of deployment is done only when actual operations are intended or in cases of coercive diplomacy; it is done for sharply defined purposes for a brief while. The drill in such cases would appear to comprise making the demand, giving a fairly short timeframe for compliance and to back up the demand, bringing up the troops to attacking locations, including preparations for finally going through with the intended action; or bring them back to their normal stations fairly quickly, if hostilities are not intended.

What is happening on the borders between Pakistan and India is something extraordinary. It is more than four months since India gave an ultimatum backed by the menace of troops on the borders in the attacking mode. Their troops are still there with all the paraphernalia of an invasion, costing Indian exchequer a minimum of Rs.60 crore a day. And yet India was in no

Pakistan -- outside the corridors of power, of course. What precise objectives can India have in fighting a war with Pakistan, supposing it has a good reason for it? No strategic or long-term interest of India would seem to require a defeat of Pakistan, not counting the emotional desire for it. Indeed many argue that the attempt to do so might produce too much of destabilisation in the region, while the threat of a nuclear winter over large parts of India and Pakistan was ever present. The whole Indian exercise appeared to many Pakistani senseless. Politically, some argue that an unfriendly Pakistan is now a useful political ploy for the votaries of Hindutva. An external bogeyman comes in handy to the more chauvinistic and jingoistic Indian. One thought that has been expressed was that no matter how much men like L. K. Advani may talk about a confederation, it will be the likes of him who would be most unhappy if there were to be an Akhand Bharat

their inaction for four long months at some cost to the morale of Indian troops -- so soon after 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan must have had something to do with the American war against international terror. What could it be? is a query that has been discussed among some analysts.

In the opinion of some analysts here the revived Pakistan-US alliance is a fair weather bird; it is not something deeply embedded in the long-term American or even Pakistani strategic thinking. In contrast, the conclusion of the Indo-American Alliance against Terror is seen here as something substantive and of strategic nature. India is perceived here as the big catch for America and not Pakistan which has merely been commandeered to serve American purposes. Pakistan-America alliance serves while its utility for American objective lasts. It is not comparable in quality with the Indo-US strategic partnership. Few governments ask their Army to go sit

that India says so and has kept the troops for four months with an aggressive stance becomes a riddle. But linking it with American purposes would impart it a rationale.

The American purposes can of course be discerned clearly enough. For them, any political troubles in Pakistan, such as a rebellion against General Pervez Musharraf by hardline generals or the Islamic zealots or both would be a situation in which it would want to intervene. But few can visualise America intervening with its own troops. That is simply unthinkable. It would need proxies. And given the state of goodwill between the US and India, Indians appear, on this theory, to be ready to become such a proxy. The Indian troops would thus move when and if needed for the American purposes. That is a theory being advanced by some. It may seem far-fetched and perhaps it is. But since no other rational explanation suggests itself for the pattern of this so called coercive

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



## "ETV, law and our emotion"

This refers to Mr. Faruque Hasan's letter "ETV, law and our emotion" (May 3). The writer successfully identified the separation of emotion and the consequence of performing illegal act. In this situation the illegal act is alleged to be performed by the committee who issued the license, which should be labelled as lack of transparency.

It is good news that legal system of Bangladesh has learnt to be neutral and penalise any party for its illegal act but we do not see any illegal act performed by ETV in acquiring the license. The license issuing committee should be penalised for the non-transparency if it is indeed proved (at the Appellate court) that they broke rules in their selection procedure.

We as a nation should learn side by side to compensate for any of our wrong doings. So if our law finds that ETV was issued license in an illegal fashion, we (or our government who issued that license) should take full responsibility for causing unnecessary hassles, and compensate ETV by providing it with an authenticated

license and reasonable amount of financial compensation for damaging its image.

And that's when we can say, yes we have put our emotion aside and punished the real culprit which is our course ourselves.

**AM Yusuf**  
San Jose, California, USA

## Between yourself and me

I must say I completely agree with K A S Murshid in regards to getting rid of the royal houses of Bengal. Again I would agree with his comments on H M Ershad. I have also been tempted to imagine that a Musharraf may be what we need.

However, being in complete agreement with his prognosis, I don't agree with his remedy.

I don't like the idea of legislation to prevent a PM from standing more than twice. Not that I want more of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, not at all, it's just that I don't believe in legislating our way out of every bind. The solution as I see it would be in a break up of BNP and AL along their family lines. Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina with their courtiers split up

into separate parties, while the more sensible members of both go off on their own. I think then most people would vote for the alternative rather than these two leaders and their kin.

**Beowulf Dhaka**

## School rivalry

With nostalgia I have read the series of letters on Sunbeams vs. South Breeze issue. Rather than discouraging such competitiveness and pride, we should applaud it. Such rivalries are healthy and bring out our impassioned articulation and sporty competition.

This is in stark contrast to the rivalries generated in politics, business and religion when the worst demagoguery, random violence and limitless corruption are the choice weapons. Even so far away in time and distance, I am proud to call myself a rival to my school's traditional opponents in Dhanmondi and Mohammadpur. Occasionally, in some 'deshi' gathering or at random I run into some such folks, and trust me the disagreements are as lively as if we were debating congressional elections.

School ties, all humour aside, is

important. For us expatriates, they are another mystical bond to the innocent times when we were more concerned about rivalry between the Greenherald and Maple Leaf than the Cold War.

Whenever I see the name of my alma mater crop up in some school sport update in your paper or elsewhere, I am reminded of those halcyon days. Some special teachers, some special friends, the Meena Bazaars, the bunking of classes, the heartbreaks of unrequited teenage love, all these things cloud the mind. I wish I could tell some of my teachers how I sorry I am about being a brat and how much I appreciate the trouble they went through to teach us.

**ES Missouri, USA**

## Wastage of foreign exchange

This is in reply to AMA's letter (May 4), arguing for protectionism and some pseudo punishment for having, in his opinion, too much disposable income. I am not going to counter with the usual rigmarole about economics and the market.

Nor am I going to discuss the issue that it is my choice and my money I am spending. And if I make the annual per capita income in a day, well that's my credit.

My only comment is if he found these fancy (which I totally don't think they are) stores empty of buyers, why is he worried? If no one buys these things the stores cannot run and will have to close. But I think he's wrong, people seem to love these shops and they are usually very crowded, at least the ones in Rifle Square and in Uttara that I frequent.

I happen to like being able to have the choice of buying Diet Coke to drink with my Oreos and not having to carry Smoked Salmon home every time I go abroad.

**Dorji Dhaka**

## SSA deal

In typical Bangladeshi fashion the Secretaries committee on the private container terminal, rather than being forceful and definite, has given "options". Typical bureaucratic rambling as we well deserve for letting the government interfere in what should be purely a market

decision.

On another issue, I wish the media would investigate the persistent rumours of corruption of very senior AL and BNP members involved in the SSA deal. I do not wish it because I am naive enough to imagine that there is the remotest possibility of justice in Bangladesh.

But there is a very useful law known as the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act ("FCPA") of 1977, enacted in the US. The Congress enacted the law in light of the revelations of questionable payments by US companies. Those questionable payments were either illegal political contributions or payments to foreign officials, which bordered on bribery.

If the media were able to expose the connections of senior politicians to land sales or contracts with SSA, the company could be subject to investigation by the Dept. of Justice.

I sincerely believe that we need a private container terminal in order to survive but I also don't want these politicians to get away with it.

**Biggles Dhaka**

**'Yaba' the deadly drug**  
A couple of days ago a letter on

'Yaba'--a deadly drug was published in your daily. The writer focused on the adverse affects of this drug. The users of 'Yaba' remain overactive throughout the night in an abnormal state ignoring work or studies and they loose weight due to loss of appetite. Regular use of 'Yaba' is bound to cause serious side effect.

Like 'Yaba' other chemicals such as mandrax, sonari, phensydele, pathadrine, heroine etc have become popular with the young people. Much has been written on the negative impact of these drugs but a very little has been done to control its widespread use.

It is time to take measures at national level to control drug addiction. At the same time parents should also be more cautious about their children.

**HN Kabir Dhaka**

## Mir Zafar

This is in reply to Mr Faruque Hasan's letter (May 4) regarding traitors.

I agree that BNP shouldn't have been so gleeful when the Transparency Int. report came out, nor should AL have been smirking when

the FEER report was published.

What I disagree with Mr Faruque is him calling these people traitors. I may hold views that in your opinion or in everyone's opinion are false and biased. And I may choose to publicise my false and biased opinions in any arena where for even more malicious reasons I am given a hearing. In response you should criticise my arguments for their errors. But I cannot be pilloried for holding views, which are false and malicious in your opinion. Keep in mind I am arguing for the right to hold and disseminate opinions however spiteful they may be. I am not defending any acts of violence.

It is my right to believe in what I wish. And it is your right to argue against my beliefs. But no man can claim to have the right to accuse me of being a traitor just because he happens to disagree with me no matter how vehemently he believes in the integrity of his views. This just leads to oppression and censorship and stoning to death for blasphemy is not much further down this road.

**Tintin Dhaka**