

## Government bans *Matir Moina*, hopefully for the moment

*Are we becoming what some quarters are accusing us of?*

MATIR Moina, the film by Tariq and Catherine Masud which depicts the experiences of a young boy from a highly conservative family in a madrassah and his interactions with his family, school and society in the back drop of the 6-point and 11-point movements of the late sixties. The film ends where our Liberation War begins, with the mass killing by Pakistan Army and the beginning of our armed struggle.

The film is going to be screened at the Cannes Film Festival tonight. This is a unique honour for Bangladesh and the film has already received positive reviews at home and abroad. Just at this juncture, Bangladesh Film Censor Board has banned the film. Given that the Board had earlier greenlighted it and chose to withdraw its consent afterwards displays that a malaise deeper than cinematic ethics is at work.

Out of the total eight members who saw the film first time around at the Board, six members decided in favour of an uncut version while one dissented and the other agreed to a qualified consent. But now the ban has come saying that it is "religiously sensitive". Given that the film depicts madrassah education in a very sensitive light and presents the socio-religious contradictions in any society trying to adjust to the modern world, one is left wondering what caused the ire of the censors. In fact the film takes a very sympathetic view of madrassah education which contrasts radically with Western depiction of Muslim religious education in such institutions.

Whatever has been shown in the movie would be critical of any religion based education system in any society in any part of the world. The Censor Board is confusing depiction of madrassah education as a criticism of our religion.

The government is aware that Bangladesh was billed as "cocoon of terror" and as a fundamentalist country. On our part we have proclaimed ourselves as a tolerant, liberal and democratic Muslim majority society. Independent international observers also endorsed the idea of a liberal Bangladesh not run by a narrow minded theocracy. The latest decision on Matir Moina will definitely influence world opinion against us and give fodder to those who malign our image.

The film has been a personal and articulate rendering of memories on a subject which has never been dealt with appropriately. There is no evidence of the reasons for which the film has been banned. Which leaves us to ponder what reasons led the Film Censor Board to withdraw an official go ahead. We cannot also understand why some specific "cuts" were not suggested before refusing permission altogether.

Just as the Censor Board reversed its original positive decision to a negative one, we urge them now to reconsider their decision once again for the sake of our national interest, which is to establish ourselves as a tolerant, liberal and democratic country in the eyes of the international community.

## Making business of launch disaster

*What a way to shirk culpability!*

AFTER the cataclysmic capsizing of MV Salauddin in the Meghna, neither the launch owner nor the government's supervisory authority BITWTA or BIWTC feels any responsibility for payment of compensation to the 400 victim families. On the contrary, the Shipping Ministry has struck a novel idea to cash in on the misfortune by way of requiring the future launch passengers to pay for their own insurance cover. Shirking the present obligations to the dead squarely, and putting a sop on the accountability exercise, the ministry has romped into the embrace of the unknown future. It has basically decided to create a special fund by having the passengers pay an extra bit over the usual fares for compensating future launch disaster victims among them.

That is, the premia from the river commuters will accrue to the fund, and as it grows in size exponentially overstripping the rate of accidents, there will be a huge revolving insurance fund to operate. Although it will be managed by a board of trustees comprising government officials, people's representatives and launch owners, one wonders why no well-reputed insurance company could be trusted with the job to take the pressure off the shipping ministry. After all, it could be a distracting preoccupation for the inland water supervisory authorities of the government.

We will reiterate what we said in our first editorial comment on the Meghna launch disaster: May be a court direction to pay compensation to the victim families will oblige all concerned to ensure safety of river journeys. Let that be the starting point.

The thrust of the argument was that since the multiplying statistics of river accidents and the heaping recommendations of various inquiry committees accompanying them have failed to sensitise the authorities, perhaps payment of compensation will din the right sense into their ears.

The question is: will the families left in the lurch by the last launch disaster be compensated for their losses in any manner?

made in my country while my government denies me the right to do so as well.

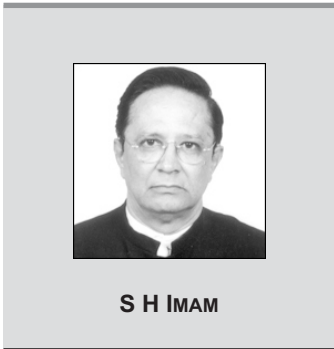
I think the censors spend too much time watching buxom women swinging their hips in bad parodies to Hindi films. So much so that anything out of that stereotype is too sensitive for them.

**Tintin Dhaka**

### Home Minister is right!

First Ms Nasreen, now Mr 'By-

## Journalists in the news



THIS is a sensational test-case dilemma between journalistic freedom and a concern aired by an international court to get to the truth. The Hague international court trying Milosevic for war crimes in former Yugoslavia has subpoenaed journalist Jonathan Randell. The prosecution having drawn upon his reports on the atrocities committed by Milosevic, the court has summoned Randell as a star witness in a bid to ascertain the veracity of his stories.

But the journalist has refused to testify arguing that he is not bound to comply with the summons and that his right to defend his source would be violated if he did so. That a question of journalistic ethics is

entailed here can hardly be in question.

At the same time, what's so baffling is, why must the international court take the extraordinary initiative of summoning Randell if it were not absolutely convinced of the need to do so?

In the face of the journalist's refusal to stand witness at the Hague the court has to either settle for some other corroborating evi-

girdle the globe work undeterred if the fear of subpoena hangs over them.

At home, on paper at least, a journalist's right not to divulge the source of news when scowled at by one ruffled by it is donkey's years old. It's a safeguard a scribe and his or her source need against possible reprisals. In reality though, this 'immunity' has often been treated with disdain, even trampled under-

drawn-out litigation, what if it dangles monetary compensation for the defamation. Allegations of criminal libel have been the journalist's bane under sections 500 and 501 of the CrPC whereby newsmen have been often detained or arrested. The incidents are far too many to bear any repetition. In one instance, the victim even landed hand-cuffed on a hospital bed.

What, however, deserves men-

gone? Doesn't it raise an unassailable legal point? But who cared, so long as the 'hurt' was avenged through a third-degree method!

Obviously, all this goes to stifle freedom of press, which is the other name for the people's right to know and the government's ammunition against those who are insidiously destroying its credibility from within.

No one is above law; a newsman ought to be far less so, because of

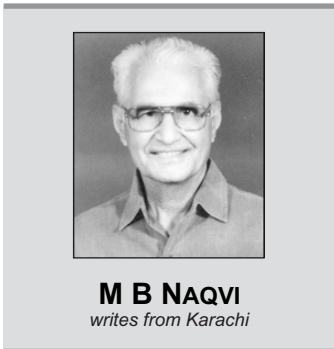
Council as an Ombudsman for the media and an independent quasi-judicial body.

Given the very high incidence of brutalisation of investigative newsmen and the physical threats put out to them, court directions could be sought through a public interest litigation for protection of the people's right to know and the journalist's right to work. And, if as part of the same judicial intervention process, sections 500 and 501 of the criminal procedure code are suspended till such time as a revised legislation is put in place, the morale of the news people will have been boosted immensely.

It is generally believed that if the overall law and under situation improves the working environment of the journalists will be congenial. The journalist community can see that happen; but this does not mean that the need for specific legal underpinnings to their professional functioning can be overlooked. It is our firm belief that should the government enact a suitable right to information bill based on a consensus with the opposition it will have made a signal cultural contribution to the consolidation of democracy in the country.

SH Imam is Associate Editor of The Daily Star.

## Religious terror persists



A suicide car bomb's ramming into a Pakistan Navy's bus in Karachi on May 8 is yet another reminder that religious fanaticism is still active and powerful. Earlier the targetted killing of Dr. Murtaza Malik in Lahore seemed convincing to this writer and many others that there is a bigger game going on than merely satisfying the hatred felt for the 'other' sect. The earlier sequence was instructive. A day before a Shia educationist had been gunned down in Malir. Next day it was Lahore's turn and that too the murder of a level headed and moderate Sunni. In Karachi there has long been this alternation.

One part of the background is clear. Out there in the society there is no sectarian polarisation or noticeable hatred. There are different sects as they have always been and the people had more or less happily learnt to co-exist long ago. No eruption of an ugly sentiment has been reported from any of the major urban centres in the country, not even from the traditional spots in the Northern Areas and some NWFP-tribal areas where sectarian clashes have earlier been frequent. The question of questions is who is

behind these targetted killings and whether there is a political design behind them.

A corollary is why are they doing it. And it is *they* and not an odd individual or even a few of them. It would seem that they are not merely well-funded but are also well organised: they can hit at any time and place of their choosing and get away. What is more they are able to keep several jumps ahead of the intelligence agencies of the state, civil and military. It is quite remarkable that no undercover agency of

motions of trying.

A second question then emerges: is there a bigger political game going on? For, Karachi-like incident and targetted killings are not an eruption of a sentiment; they are not done in hot blood. They are coolly planned in advance. Which is why one talks of the mastermind with resources. The recent spate of sectarian killings, on both sides of the historical divide, has come after an interval of relative quiet following the Afghanistan war. For some months there were fewer targetted

they should do what they are doing.

This is fine but for several facts. One, the utter incapacity of Army's otherwise much-feared and supposedly efficient secret services as also of other secret services to identify the big culprits stands out. Outside world, especially Indians, swear by the efficiency of the ISI with its supposedly long reach. It is certainly active inside Pakistan. But what has it achieved? Was it ever mandated to find out religiously-oriented terrorists? The results are disappointing? The Pakistan tax-

a whole. There is also the dark suspicion that there may be reasons of state that would allow the religiously-oriented violence to go on. That would involve a nod and wink from on high. Some opposition elements have long held that intelligence agencies have earlier worked in close mesh with the sectarian outfits and other religious groups. One leader of Karachi's MQM told this writer the other day that whenever and whenever there is religious violence, particularly sectarian, you can safely look for official agencies'

for himself. If this state of affair persists, the opposition parties might then sweep the polls in October or whenever they are held. Raising sectarian tensions by whipping up popular passions and creating polarisation might divert the attention of the people away from the elections and/or the government. A few eruptions at popular level here and there might then come in handy to put off the polls or to do other things.

It is however too unworthy of the military ruler to entertain such base tactics; it is hard to believe this, though it may be natural for intelligence agencies to suggest things like this. A satisfactory explanation however remains to be discovered.

A preferred explanation is that General Musharraf has enemies within his own constituency --- again hard to believe --- but the Western governments and media appear to believe that. At least the Israeli Foreign Minister confessed to going to bed after praying for long life of Pakistan's Strongman. It is absurd to think that agencies working directly under army high command can be so rebellious and unreliable as to work against their own Chief. And yet the enigma remains.

If the common people are relaxed and cool, without high passions and tensions, the continuance of such violence and the inability of the secret agencies to get to the root of the problem remains inexplicable. Why should it remain an enigma wrapped inside a puzzle? Everything is taking place in broad daylight. Remedial action and revelations of the causes must also be made in the same daylight.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## Increasing Indo-US defence alliance Is Pakistan feeling the heat?

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

PAKISTAN President, who had just ensured his position for next five years as President through a national referendum, seems to be feeling gradually the 'heat' at the increasing India-US defence alliance. This was quite evident from the sharp reaction voiced by Pakistan over the recent \$146-million sale of US sophisticated radars, billed as "Firefinders", the first military contract between India and America in more than a decade. And these radars are likely to be used in Indian Kashmir to detect the location of militants involved in terrorism in Kashmir. To add fuel to fire to Pakistan's apprehension about the consequences of such deals, India's Army Chief had recently paid a week-long visit to Washington "to cement warming military ties" between the two countries. Meanwhile, Pentagon had also declared that the deal for the sale of 'Firefinders' radars was a historic move that further signals improving relations between India and the United States. So these consequential development of events has further heightened Pakistan's anxiety.

If Pakistan president, instead of playing to the gallery before his countrymen prior to the recently-held referendum, saying that India was 'afraid' of him, now takes the Indo-US deal calmly, he would have to admit that it was not just a new development, coming overnight

from behind. The process had started long ago and Pakistan knows it well when and how it began. In fact, during last couple of months it was being processed. It all began a couple of months back when a top US military official, Gen Richard Mayer, Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, arrived in New Delhi with his new mission. Gen Mayer, on arrival in New Delhi, told pressmen that "warming of military ties between India and USA was vital" in the fight against global terrorism. And later Gen Mayer had struck a joint defence deal with India "with the common goal to fight terrorism." And the recent deal for sale of radars was just a follow-up.

It is a part of America's global network to fight terrorism to which Pakistan had proved itself to be the most important 'key-player' as a front-rank state, siding with USA for launching war against terrorists in Afghanistan. So the sudden outcry of Pakistan over the deal was perhaps done to bemuse the people. Pakistan's reaction was irrelevant because as they knew full well what shape of things may come up following the visit of a top US military official to Delhi and his subsequent statements. Hence Gen. Musharraf and his government should not get 'scared' if more such 'deals' follow as part of the game of which Pakistan is a 'key-player'.

**Triangular love-affair**

If Gen. Musharraf thinks that by winning a 'big pat' from USA as a reward for his key-role in Afghani-

stan against terrorists, as "a leader of courage and vision", he had outshone the Indian PM Vajpayee in diplomacy then he must be day-dreaming. Hence Musharraf shouldn't indulge in unnecessary complacency of US patronage at the cost of India. Judged from US strategy towards global anti-terror war America, both India and Pakistan are just two 'players' to America on its chess-game. Thus each of them has its own part to play to keep America in humour. In fact, it is a matter of 'triangular love-affair' between America, India and Pakistan and America as a 'seasoned lover' knows well how to play the 'game' for the highest score in its favour. So the 'oldest' US ally in the sub-continent shouldn't get 'panicky' with America's a little bit of 'honey-mooning' with its 'newest ally' in five decades.

**Tussle goes on**

However, to settle old scores, India missed a God-sent chance to get Pakistan declared as a 'terrorist state', when India was prompt enough to offer its all-out cooperation to USA in its fight against terrorism. Had Pakistan not opted for siding with America to fight against Taliban forces and Al-Qaida network in Afghanistan, following September 11 terrorist attacks on USA, it was on the verge of being branded as a 'terrorist state'. So India missed the bus. But India got another opportunity to get it done, following two consecutive boom blasts, last year, within a couple of months, one,

on Kashmir state assembly in Srinagar and the other on Indian Parliament in Delhi, killing several persons. India then mounted a world-wide campaign against Pakistan for promoting terrorism against India across the border. It indeed produced favourable results. Being pressurised by India and America, Pakistan had to swallow the 'bitter pill' to ban forthwith two Pakistan-based terrorist outfits said to be responsible for bomb blasts in Srinagar and Delhi, followed by a crack-down on the activists of the two organisations, arresting thousands of their activists. So it was a big victory for India over Pakistan, although it was a big body blow for Pakistan to see America siding with India to demand the ban. That must have given Gen. Musharraf a broad hint for what future shape of things may emerge as part of America's global anti-terrorist network. Perhaps Pakistan felt the first flash of heat when Indo-US defence agreement was signed.

**'Hand-outs' for India and Pakistan**

However, Gen. Musharraf deserves credit for what he has done in Afghanistan risking his own life as he had himself admitted in a recent US TV interview that "siding with the United States (in its anti-terrorist operation) posed a danger for him." In return, what he had received from America is not enough, although in the financial field, US decision to write off US dollar one billion of debt

out of \$2.8 billion loan, plus some economic assistance and World Bank/IMF loans, provided Gen. Musharraf a big boost. However, there had been no big deal, during Musharraf's recent Washington visit, in the trade sector as well as defence matters. Even there was no mention about US reaction to Pakistan's request for supply of F-16 fighter jets for which Pakistan had made advance payments in billions of dollars, perhaps more than a decade ago. So far, Pakistan had neither received the F-16 jets, nor the money-back. There was also no indication of sale of any fresh war materials, although Washington recently had lifted the restrictions imposed on arms sale to both India and Pakistan after their tit-for-tat nuclear tests in 1998. As against this, the sale of sophisticated radars is the first such sale by America to India. Just as the "straws say which way the wind blows," similarly such developments also show which way the 'US-wind' is blowing. Hence a big pat for Musharraf by US does not mean Vajpayee has fallen from US estimation.

**Politician can make 'waves'**

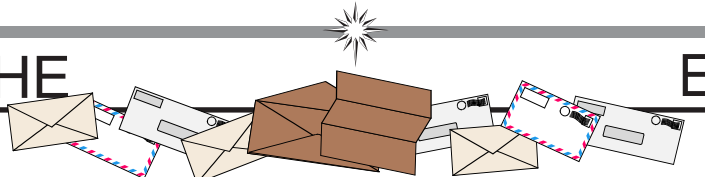
It is said that "a politician is a person who can make waves and then make you think he is the only one who can save the ship." This is exactly what the two leaders of the two Asian nuclear powers are doing to stabilise their position in their respective countries. Indian Prime

Minister, although very much embarrassed because of the worst ever communal riots, taking thousands of innocent lives, has been successful to save his sinking 'ship' by defeating the opposition censure motion. The BJP government had earlier raised huge 'waves' to convince the people that they are the 'only persons' who can save the 'ship' from Pakistani attacks. Perhaps BJP would hold the 'fort' till the next general elections are held. And Indo-Pak tension with massing of lakhs of troops on both sides along the border would continue till then. Now the troops on both sides stand eye-ball to eye-ball, providing enough mileage to their respective leaders to go on making 'waves' and then convince their people that they are the only 'saviours' of their country.

America definitely doesn't want further worsening of Indo-Pak relations. It is in the interest of the US anti-terrorist global operation that it, overtly or covertly, should bring the two countries together for the permanent solution of the most rancorous issue of Kashmir through dialogue, leaving the bloody war path for good. Till then let the peace-loving people of the sub-continent wait cross-fingered praying for the dawn of wisdom on their leaders. As they say, "the darkest hour is just before the dawn". Let not the 'darkest hour' of the sub-continent be further lengthened.

AM M Shahabuddin is a retired UN official.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

**Matir Moina**

I really don't think it's the place for the government to tell me what I can or cannot watch.

I should be allowed to watch Matir Moina if I so wish and from the reviews I have read so far it doesn't sound the least bit communal. Just because a film addresses issues of religion should not make it too sensitive for our poor eyes, especially since we are starved of good Bengali films anyway. The irony is that people in Cannes will be watching a movie

stander'. Truly, what Alexander the Great had said to Selucas was so true. Otherwise I have no other explanation how they could defend the comments made by our Home Minister while visiting Nausheen's home.

In response to Mr 'Bystander's' letter, let me say that the fact that his son died unnaturally makes his comments all the more insensitive. What kind of a comment is 'Allah has taken back its creature? Even more damaging was "It is impossible to stop murders because killers do not

announce they will kill beforehand". He should have known better than most people what to say in a situation like this. But then again, this is the same person who had outright refused to recognise the atrocities committed against the minorities right after the election, even after they were so publicised, claiming they were 'exaggerations'. I guess we cannot expect anything more from a man like him.

In the end, all I can say is the Home Minister's comments were bad enough, but the fact that some peo-

ple are actually trying to defend him disgusts me even more.

**Yamen Hoque, on e-mail**

### The HM's comments and a common man's reaction

The US had Dan Quale...we have Altaf Hussain, the Home Minister. Some of his quotes:

"It is not possible to prevent crimes including murders since criminals do not announce beforehand that they

are going to kill some one".

-What does he want? The criminals should take out an ad in the newspaper before committing a crime?

"Life and death are in the hands of Allah.... Allah has taken back his creature," said the Home Minister when he visited Nausheen's residence.

-Is this man for real? How about Allah take back this (The Home Minister) creature!

On press reports that the Hindu community was facing repression, The Home Minister told the BBC that

some reports were part of a "conspiracy", some were "rumours" and a few were "true".

-No comments!

On April 2 he said, "Murders have increased but crime has decreased in the country".

-The less said about this remark, the better.

On October 16, he declared that "I shall uproot the terrorists even those belonging to the ruling party" then on November 18 he said, "All those arrested belong to the 4-party alliance. So, an instruction has been given to make a new list of criminals"

-Let's analyse this. Are we to assume that the 'new list' will presumably include exclusively those who do not belong to the 4-party alliance?

...And the Oscar for making the most asinine remark in the country's recent political history. "There is no guarantee that a good launch (ship) would not sink...even the Titanic sank" (400 people perished when a launch capsized in the Meghna river about a week ago).

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