

The Drama at DMCH

Special cell under Women's ministry should look after abandoned infants

THIS is one story that ended happily. An abandoned mother, admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for delivery of her baby, sold her new born to a nurse who bought the few hours old male child for Tk 1,000 for her childless sister. However immediately afterwards the mother realised what she did, returned to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, claimed her baby back and got him. We are happy for the mother and the child that what could have been a permanent tragedy was averted by the last minute realisation by the mother that she had made a fatal mistake.

Underneath the happy story, there is a hidden sad story here which is far more important for us as a society. The story is that extreme poverty often forces people to abandon their children and that infants are bought and sold unknown to the authorities concerned. Women who are abandoned by men when they become pregnant sometimes get rid of their infants by either selling them to individuals or gangs dealing in child trade or sometimes giving them away to relatives or people known to them. All this happens in silence as the mother who sell, the person(s) or gangs who buy keep their nefarious activities strictly under cover. What we need to do is ask ourselves what sort of society have we built where a mother is forced to give away her child for money. It may hurt us deeply but we must come face to face with the fact that there is a bottom tier of our population who are victims of extreme poverty and to whom neither the NGOs and far less the government have been able to reach. The large number of women and children who are trafficked abroad are part of the same phenomenon of trade in human beings that exists in our country. Occasionally some one gets caught and we see picture in the newspapers of a few children and women, who are rescued. Obviously we have no way of knowing about those who are not rescued.

The 'happy story' at the DMCH should trigger a serious investigation as to the nature and extent of abandoned children in our country and what happens to them. Can we not set up a special cell under the Women's ministry to look after abandoned babies and then arrange for their adoption through legal means? Some specialised NGOs could assist the ministry in this work.

G-8 lukewarm on US proposal

Let there be an international conference on Middle East

BUSH'S 'dump Arafat' call to the Palestinians and touting it as the cornerstone of his so-called new Middle East peace plan met with a generally negative response at the G-8 summit last week. To cite some obvious reactions, French President Jack Chirac and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien thought it was entirely for the Palestinian people to decide who they would like to be led by. Who wouldn't agree with them?

Palestinians go to polls in January next year to elect their President. Arafat is determined to seek endorsement of his people to continue in office. At a time like this, Bush is bent upon getting a change in the Palestinian leadership almost like an alter ego of Sharon demanding it. To this end, he tried to drum up support among his allies for Arafat's ouster. Obviously, he hasn't got what he aimed for at the G-8 summit. But his line of thinking was that if he had the G-8 colleagues on his side, Arafat might feel pressured to quit or alternatively his people might vote him out. But how can removal of an elected chief of the Palestinian Authority be the sole point of a peace offensive that must, for all practical purposes, be targeted at Sharon representing the other party in the conflict. It takes two to make peace.

What is even worse is telling the Palestinians who they should discard through what is supposed to be a free exercise of leadership choice. That's not the stuff of which democratic elections are made; and Bush as the US leader ought to know it better than others.

The US has also threatened to put assistance programme for the Palestinians on hold till they have shown 'concrete progress' on reforms. What about the multi-billion dollar US support for the Israeli aggression to-date? While pressures are vociferously put on the weakening to yield to US demands the stronger side is pampered and strengthened by Washington in deplorable doublespeak.

The latest Israeli attacks on the West Bank -- they have entered and ransacked six Palestinian-ruled cities -- have had direct US blessings and approval. After Bush's call for Arafat's exit, comes this series of Milosevic-style violence on a hapless people. Faced with a possibility of extermination, the Palestinians could only hope for an international conference on Middle East to take place and bring justice to them. Let it happen sooner than later.

Bush's M-E peace plan unduly favours Israel



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

RESIDENT Bush has finally announced this week the US peace plan on Middle-East after having waited a couple of days due to the suicide bombings that killed 31 Israelis in three days' time. Israel responded heavily, again put Arafat under complete siege and reoccupied seven out of eight Palestinian cities and towns. In their onslaught they killed scores of Palestinians and destroyed Palestinian houses and other properties. Israel says the reoccupation would continue until suicide bombings stopped. The general feeling is that this will only increase the violence.

So far as President Bush's peace statement is concerned, this appears heavily tilted towards Israel. At least one commentator said that this was drafted by the Israeli government. There were also reports that this was drafted and redrafted and ultimately finalised by some one who was pro-Israeli to say the least. *The New York Times* reported quoting an official of the Administration that Mr. Cheney played a significant role "internally, shaping the broad outlines of the speech" over the last several days and Mr. Ramsfield's view that "terrorism should not be appeased" was reflected in the speech. Apparently Colin Powell was sidelined and President himself went along the Jewish wind that now blows in the upper echelon of the Administration. Whoever might have designed this policy statement it has turned out to be one-sided totally favouring Israel and it would not take the peace process forward. This is why Israeli government warmly welcomed

Bush's statement. One Minister of Israeli cabinet, Danny Navah, said, "it marks the end of the era of Yasser Arafat and constitutes a victory for Israel".

The most interesting was President Bush's last minute departure from his earlier stand on Arafat. He reportedly told President Mobarak that 'Arafat is not the issue'. It was reported that President Bush decided to add at the last moment that Arafat must go. 'It was at that point, the official said, that President Bush added the sentence calling for

where the principles of democracy and international relations were involved, the US should have firmly rechecked with its allies which are also keeping watch over such situation in the Middle-East. It was all the more important for the reason that Israel and particularly Ariel Sharon were involved in the development of such information. The US could not simply go by what Israel said or produced. Sharon wanted Arafat out any way and he could go to any length to achieve this. He and his associates have best brain and

arising from Israel on Arabs and particularly Palestinians. Israel being the "committed friend" takes the US for granted and tries to twist everything in its favour. It was good that President Bush resisted for some time Sharon's demand of Arafat's ouster, but unfortunately gave in at a very crucial moment. As it seems, President Mobarak did not even like to accept that President Bush really meant Arafat while he talked about leadership change in Palestinian authority. Of course, the change in the Palestinian leader-

other EU countries, however, reportedly expressed the doubts on the validity or even the desirability of asking the Palestinians to change their leader -- Arafat. This is totally against the democratic principle that these countries promote and practice. Thus President Bush appears to be practically alone in the field on the issue of replacement of Arafat. Only hope one can have is that the President will go back to his original position that "Arafat is not the issue" which he held while talking to President Mobarak and other Arab lead-

ers. And he has indeed never mentioned Arafat's name in his formal statement. Arafat has already announced the election to be held between 10 and 20 January 2003. Therefore, let the Palestinian people decide on their leader(s). President Bush insisted that the "Palestinian people have new leaders..." but he never talked about any change in the approach of Sharon government to deal with such an explosive and violent situation. Indeed, President Bush again gave practically green light to what Sharon government has been doing in terms of re-occupying the Palestinian territories. Sharon has practically re-occupied all the towns and cities of the Palestinian territories. For the purpose of establishing US' balanced approach, Bush should have asked for immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces and close cooperation with Palestinian security to stop further suicide bombings. The lack of such considerations has blurred the whole vision of peace.

The initial reactions from Pales-

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

It is known that Arafat is not a new entrant in politics. He has been the leader of the Palestinian people for over three decades. Just because Sharon has personal problem with Arafat, the US Administration should not ask Palestinian people to elect some one else. It should be left to the Palestinian people to decide who their leader should be without any interference from outside.

the replacement of Mr. Arafat.' [*NY Times* 06/24/2002]. Further reports by *NY Times* on the same issue add that the reason for his decision was an intelligence information last week "that the Palestinian leader had authorized a \$20,000 payment to a group that claimed responsibility for the most recent suicide attack in Jerusalem." The group happens to be the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. That Last minute intelligence report gave upper hand to Dick Cheney and Donald Ramsfield to finalize the speech, as it seems, in favour of Israel.

Here it has to be carefully noted that such intelligence reports were certainly prepared by Israeli Intelligence apparatus to mislead President Bush as he was about to announce his M-E Peace plan. Sharon himself tried such tricks earlier and indeed carried "fake" documents to Washington showing such payments under Arafat's signature to suicide bombers' families. It is felt that before announcing such a policy decision about another people's leader

technology for such work and could easily prepare and produce such documents. May be some Palestinian families have regularly been receiving financial support given by the donors because of their extreme poverty and Israel might have put some of those family members in the wanted lists deliberately to make out a case against Arafat. Such lists of terrorists prepared by Israel are wide and random and hardly have any proof. The sad thing is that the US acted somewhat hastily. The US could have waited some more days, the announcement was delayed any way due to suicide bombings, to finally recheck and consult allies on such a sensitive issue before announcing the peace plan.

The world's most powerful country supported by top diplomats and well-equipped Intelligence Agencies acted on intelligence information which undoubtedly had come from Israeli sources. To maintain its credibility particularly in critical areas like Middle-East, the US should always double or even triple check any intelligence information

ship is necessary, but it may not specifically mean Arafat. Any way, President Bush did not mention the name and one may hope that President Mobarak is right; it's not Arafat, it's some others. May be such a position would save the peace plan. Let the Palestinian people decide on their leadership. Whoever emerges as the leader, the US and the world should deal with him.

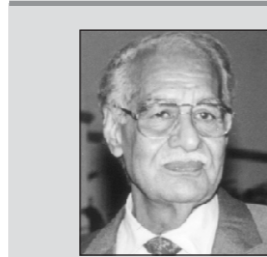
It seems that President Bush's statement on a 'new Palestinian leadership' has not been welcomed by other European allies. Canadian Prime Minister avoided making any comment on this while he was talking to the press along with President Bush. British Foreign Secretary earlier said Britain would deal with Arafat if reelected. But British Prime Minister Tony Blair was vaguely supporting President Bush on the leadership change. While he said the Palestinian people should decide on their leadership, he strayed into other areas like negotiating difficulties with Palestinian leader and change was apparently necessary. Several of the

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The foreign hand



KULDIP NAYYAR

writes from New Delhi

THE government's announcement to allow foreigners to buy shares in newspapers and journals is indeed a surprise. There was no debate in the country, much less in parliament. The standing committee of the two houses has rejected the proposal. Twice the Editors' Guild of India passed a unanimous resolution against the proposal; the third time it was divided in its opinion, more opposing it. Many bodies of journalists also opposed the proposal. And at least 95 per cent of papers in the country do not want any foreign competition. Still, the government has gone ahead with it.

What could be the reasons? They must be pressing ones. One reason could be the pressure of the World Bank, which is guiding globalisation without bothering about the harm it is causing to the developing and underdeveloped countries. It is not surprising that Disinvestment Minister Arun Shourie, once a World Bank employee, is said to have favoured 100 per cent foreign equity in the print media. He probably knows what will happen gradually: the 26 per cent will become 50 per cent and eventually 100 per cent. This is what has happened in the case of foreign

banks. Now the foreigners own 100 per cent. The 26 per cent may prove a Trojan horse. It is an open secret that the establishment can be controlled with as little as 10 per cent equity. Still more disconcerting is the "anxiety" of the NRIs to own shares in Indian newspapers. Lately, many among them are parading their "Hindutva" identities chauvinistically. It is more than a coincidence that the Vajpayee headed government issued the order after the Gujarat carnage, which was vehemently condemned by the press.

will continue to remain in their hands." Is it that difficult to find dummy editors? The same thing applies to the management. The entire ownership can be fictitious.

Suppose some terrorists from abroad acquire shares in a newspaper under false names and have Indians as their editors and managers? The country has known how the hawala case had an Indian as the kingpin. He was the one who was behind financing terrorists in Kashmir and in some parts of India. The government's decision is fraught

with dangers, the consequences of which may harm the nation. Information Minister Sushma Swaraj in her anxiety to do something new has not considered the disturbing implications for the quality of democratic discourses in the country. I may not like it, but I can understand the government bringing foreign capital in a field which requires high-grade technology. The Indian press has the best of machines as good as anywhere else in the world. Our journalists are inferior to none. What foreign capital is supposed to do except to interfere in the running of newspapers? It looks as if the government's agenda is different. Those who invest in the print media from abroad will be its stalking

horse. The whole operation has been hush-hush from the very beginning. Not surprisingly, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has been made the authority to permit investments in the print media. When India became independent, its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru saw to it that all foreign-owned newspapers were transferred to Indian hands. Not only that. He even had the cabinet pass a resolution in 1955 banning foreign participation in the print media. It is

decision. It is, however, ironical that the decision to open the door to foreign investment has come on June 25-26, the dates when the emergency was announced 27 years ago. The people now in power then suffered the rigours of the emergency. Strange, they are following in the footsteps of Mrs Indira Gandhi. She had introduced her own rule and reduced parliament to a mere body to endorse her authoritarian ways. She is remembered for press censorship and all that she did to make a mockery of

publications. Not in Indian languages, I hope.

When the TV channels have not been stopped from having foreign investment, why should the print media be? Newspapers fall in a different category. TV discussions have a fleeting impression like fleeting pictures. But the printed word is what people take seriously. They sit and digest articles to mull over the problems discussed and make up their minds. In India, the printed word is sacrosanct. People still say: *Woh akhbar mein nikla tha* (it appeared in the newspaper). Their faith in what appears in print is overwhelming. So the TV and newspapers cannot be compared.

I also believe that the press is a profession, not an industry. It is an interplay of ideas. Some newspaper magnates have spoiled it by reducing a newspaper to a commodity like soap or talcum powder. To them, marketing is more important than editing or giving news. But I am sure in the long run they will be forced by discriminating readers to correct themselves.

The government has probably changed the nation's priority by bringing in foreign investment. Now people would be more concerned about saving India's unity and cohesion than about the shoddy professional job that the market-oriented newspaper will continue to do.

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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With 26 per cent share, the NRIs will have a veto power on the board of a newspaper and can influence it. Maybe, the Vajpayee government feels that this is one way to chastise the press, which is against it.

The argument that the induction of foreign capital will not affect the functioning of journalists may be correct. But what happened to them during the emergency is a case in point. As LK Advani, then Information Minister, aptly said after the emergency: "You were asked to bend but you began to crawl." This may happen again after the government order. Information Minister Sushma Swaraj says: "We have made sure that the editors will be Indians and that the management

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democracy. Even now the writing is very much on the wall. The National Democratic Alliance may also go the same way and come to be remembered for exposing the Indian press to the dangers of foreigners who may have other axes to grind. Foreign newspapers will benefit the most. They have already said that they will be bringing out Indian editions of their publications. Nehru was so particular that he did not allow the *New York Times* to print its paper in the country. Not only that. They can print and also have their editorial content. They have their own agenda or politics and are diametrically opposed to ours. In fact, some foreign papers have said that they may bring out their own

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

What about Mongla Port?

A very informative article "A national Strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction" written by Dr. Mohammad Yunus was published in your esteemed daily. I dare not comment on such a thought-provoking piece of writing, which may serve as a pointer to our economic survival. However, I would like to add few more suggestion as far as port facilities are concerned.

We have only one major port i.e. Chittagong serving the country and if I may be allowed to say the country has become hostage to this port. We should have alternative/option in case this port is rendered inoperative due to human action or natural calamity. As alternative we should develop Mongla Port to harvest the full potentials and other existing facilities. With the completion of Rupsha Bridge this port can serve the whole north-western region of the country.

The sea trade of Nepal can be best served through this port and the country can earn sizeable foreign

exchange. We should also look for developing small ports, which can handle medium size ships at Barisal, Kutubdia, St. Martin. These ports can be of immense assistance during and after the closure of Chittagong port for any reason. The administration of port as suggested by the learned author must be given due consideration to overcome the present hassle at the port.

Commodore AMA Alam (Retd.)
New DOHS, Dhaka

Closure of Adamjee Jute Mills

Adamjee Jute Mills-- the world's largest jute mill has been shut down. Why? Because it was making huge losses. Why was it losing? Because it was filled with irregularities and corruption. So, what's the solution? Simple! Shut it down! Computers are being smuggled out of the country. Solution? Impose duty on it! Political groups of students have clashed in the university with firearms and a student has been killed. Solution? Close down the university for an indefinite period! What kind of

rationale in our national decision making is evident from these examples? Why didn't we rather decide to eliminate irregularities and corruption from Adamjee, stop smuggling across the border, and ban student politics in the country?

The Pakistanis built 76 jute mills in this country from scratch. Since liberation we have so far been successful in closing down around 40 of them whereas in the neighbouring India about 73 jute mills are running for over 100 years and setting up new mills. Jute is the only product where we have the raw material, industry, and world market leadership. This should have been our national pride. Even now only BJMC jute mills earn over 110 million dollars per year. When have we become so rich to afford to forego this amount of foreign currency? How fast is our GDP growing and how rapidly is our country becoming industrialised with creation of new jobs that we can afford to make thousands of people unemployed overnight?

I am scared someday our leaders might decide to permanently close

down all educational institutions of the country to get rid of political chaos and killings among students. I am scared some day hospitals might be closed down because pilferage of medicine, mismanagement, and unionism. I only wish that they might also consider disbanding the police force, abolishing customs and income tax departments, and finally, closing down Bangladesh Secretariat under the same rationale of their decision making.

Ahmed Shah Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

Multi-metering means corruption?

In the present day, almost every telephone user knows about the corruption dimensions of our one and only T&T Board. I think, we all know about those things well and it is not necessary to put those things forward again. But as one of the million subscribers, I am also suspicious about the new multi-metering telephone billing system. Will it be used as a method of increasing the revenue or as a method of earning

(of course illegally) for the T&T officials? Well, many of the subscribers will agree with me on the latter point as they have experienced those bitter situations from the very beginning of the subscription procedures.

Second point is that the cut-throat situation of the Internet users who have internet connection from those ISPs that did not have registered their Hunting Telephone lines in their company name. Now they have to pay in multi-metering rate if they browse the net with those telephone lines. So this is going to be a nightmare for all those net users. But T&T board seems to be indifferent about these issues. This unruly and monopolistic decision of T&T surely will tempt the subscribers to make illegal deals to cut down their giant bills. I just don't understand why the government has taken such a decision while T&T is a profitable SOE. Was it really necessary to make such a hasty decision without scrutinising the facts?

Kazi Emdad
Dhaka

Re Babul

It really does appear that poor Babul of Jamuna Group is having a bad hair day.

First it seemed that Babul tried to take care of all the officials and State Ministers to get his liquor licence and then these politicians turned against him for political expediency. Naturally this is very upsetting for the third richest man in Bangladesh. This might explain, but never excuse, his fury with Babar, who by the way, seems to be protecting himself while waiting for Altaf Chowdhury to get the axe.

It seems ironic that the government can find it justifiable to brew and sell liquor itself but not allow anyone in the private sector to do so as well.

Then the poor innocent Babul, who may have contributed to all the necessary levels of Rajuk, gets into trouble with his destruction of lowlands. Jamuna Group is not alone in destroying our wetlands. Remember a month or so ago there was another front page article in *The Daily Star* about a consortium including BRAC Housing who were destroying a jheel? If I recall correctly nothing happened about that

either. Earlier *The Daily Star* also reported on Sena Kalyan Sangstha encroaching on the Buriganga. It was a long campaign before SKS withdrew their equipment.

There is a lesson in all this. Up to now, the system in our country was, if you took 'care' of everyone concerned, you could get anything done, permissions, permits, ect. Now it seems that even if you pay the commissions, make the donations and all that, you still might be hoodwinked by these guys. If we're lucky, there might be some delicious revelations in the coming weeks.

Peter
Dhaka

The unkindest cut of all

The ouster of President Dr. B. Chowdhury is shocking and unfortunate. He was a die-hard BNP person, who did a great deal for strengthening of BNP after the murder of President Zia. However, the most unacceptable thing in this sordid affair was the complete silence of his erstwhile colleagues who did not even think of meeting him personally or even giving him a call over telephone.

This, perhaps, hurt him the most.

All his contributions to the party have been forgotten overnight. He will be a non-existent person soon for the BNP supporters. Is this what politics stand for?

Abul Mohsin
Dhaka

What a farce!

Only Bangladesh can show this kind of mockery! Only in Bangladesh it is possible to be ruled by War Criminals and remove the President with an absurd excuse. I guess, Bangabhaban should be just beside Zia's Mazar, so that the next President does not repeat the mistake of not visiting the *mazar* regularly! Won't we ever grow up? The whole world is laughing at us.

One should remember that besides Bangabundhu and Zia, there are a lot of people who fought and sacrificed their lives for our independence. This country is not owned by any particular person or family.

Fatima, Australia