

Verdict on ETV

Violators could be punished but institution retained

THE Appellate Division of the Supreme Court has rejected ETV's leave to appeal and upheld the verdict of the High Court. While there is still a scope for a review petition, it can reasonably be concluded that the fate of our first genuinely successful private TV channel is effectively sealed. We have mixed feelings about the whole thing. As the bench itself said "We also watch the ETV. We would be deprived if it were closed down. But we have to deliver justice in light of the law." Every time law wins over fraud we are strengthened, every time transparency wins over opaqueness we are better served, every time accountability wins over abuse of power we are saved from a repetition of it in the future. All the above victories are embedded in the verdict of yesterday and therefore we fully support the position of our Supreme Court. While we express our solidarity with the victors of justice we cannot rejoice at it as it comes at the cost of multiplicity of news and programme sources.

During the last several years of ETV's excellent performance TV viewers in Bangladesh had gotten used to alternative sources of news and views, not to mention excellent innovative programmes. Living on the stale diet of BTV people had a taste of what creative programming can do. Suddenly our TV took on a refreshing, creative and highly entertaining look. In fact ETV gave us a great sense of confidence that we can match the successful TV channels of our neighbouring country whose programmes are now flooding every home where cable TV is available. The big question that is now confronting our TV viewers is that are they to be condemned to that same of BTV miserable diet of poor programmes and tasteless government propaganda?

The biggest lesson from the ETV episode is that no one should cut corners with the law even if the product of that corner cutting is highly successful. It is lesson that the law ultimately catches up if we violate it. Ever since the beginning of the court case against ETV we had, while upholding the supremacy of the law, hoped that a distinction could be made between the faulty start and the successful product. We had hoped that the institution could be safeguarded while punishing those who had violated the law.

Biman needs a thorough overhaul

Form a taskforce for the purpose

BIMAN has done it again. The so-called flag carrier of Bangladesh made a mess of its European duties and got stuck at Rome and afterwards at Heathrow. Both these airports have in the past been scenes of Biman's dismal performance and its inexhaustible capacity to make a scene of its monumental inefficiency. Public wrath of passengers reached such a level that Biman's office at Heathrow was attacked and ransacked by extremely irritated passengers. In fact police had to be called to restore order in the end. The scene was once again symptomatic of the fact that something is desperately wrong with Biman.

At this point of time, the main question to be asked is, how soon are we going to divest Biman of the public sector stranglehold. At least the previous plans for collaborative privatisation need to be revived and pursued to their logical end. Adamjee was an internal nuisance but this outfit is nothing more than an excuse for a large number of people to rip off the public exchequer.

However, Biman's story is nothing new and we have been hearing about its mismanagement since it was born. It has never been a source of pride of performance which has given rise to the argument that it's just a convenient place to make money. It would be extremely difficult to find a positive statement about Biman from anyone; so the question about its justification for continued life must lie elsewhere other than providing necessary service to the people.

If one goes by record one will notice that with every regime come accusations of hatching schemes to make huge quantum of money. Plane buying related corruption is just a visible part of that corrupt iceberg and there are many issues that can be looked into. The mismanagement in Biman offices, trade unionism and surplus staff—all call for a thorough overhaul. So, let's form a task force to streamline Biman on a top priority basis.

Bangladesh at the HIV/AIDS crossroads



S H IMAM

IT was a pleasant eye-opener to a quietly unfolding mini mental revolution among a nucleus group of girl students at the rather mundane sounding Population Services & Training Centre (PSTC) near Mouchak last Monday. In progress was a peer educator training session participated by secondary level students drawn from different city schools when Henriette Hansen, Programme Associate of Bangladesh UNDP and myself were ushered by Dr. Nitai Kanti, Ph.D., Director Training and Communication, PSTC. Organised as part of a UNDP-aided project designed to raise awareness among adolescent pupils of HIV/AIDS so as to prevent and contain the scourge, it offered a key-hole view to the broader canvas of beginning a bottom-up sensitisation process with the students reaching the school leaving stage.

Thirty-six schools were covered last year under the programme and, a similar number, if not more would be reached before the current year is out. By virtue of the peer educator training programme, conducted under six modules, necessary messages have been transmitted, with a multiplier effect, to ten thousand school-level adolescents already.

With the teaching community, school management committees and parent representatives taken

might have been afflicted for anyone of the number of reasons that can be ascribed to it and yet wouldn't come into the open to seek treatment for fear of stigma and social alienation.

After the numerous schools in Dhaka will have been covered, the next challenge would be to take the information dissemination undertaking to other metropolitan cities and the 60 other district headquarters in a rapid succession of phases. We are in a race with time; this can't wait.

overcoming it have serious misconceptions about HIV/AIDS. About half of the new adult infections are among that age group and yet a majority of them do neither know how the deadly disease is transmitted nor how they can protect themselves from it.

A new package of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) material prepared at the instance of UNDP has been awaiting government approval since last August. A part of the text material

change communication strategy assumes critical importance in terms of reducing transmission risks at the extremely vulnerable points comprising commercial sex workers, homosexuals, truck drivers, migrant and floating populations, to name the obvious few vulnerable groups.

The testing facilities are extremely sparse and limited. Only ICDDR,B, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP) and BSMMUH

Such essential services should be saved the roller-coaster ride through routine government transfers. The incumbents so specially trained on purpose better stay for at least four to five years on their post. It is also important that the screening centres are rationally located and dispersed so as to have command areas all over the country. Arrangements for confirmatory tests duly accompanied by pre-and post-test counselling need to be put in place.

In international documents, Bangladesh figures is one of the first countries to reflect a concern over the HIV/AIDS issue by forming a national committee as early as in 1985 and subsequently having a task force to home in on it. But the country took some twelve years to produce a National AIDS Policy -- in 1997. Government policy is important, because it is the mirror-image of the political commitment being brought to bear on the issues centring around prevention and control of HIV/AIDS. Although some of the legislations to complement the national AIDS policy are awaited, a safe blood transfusion law is in place inclusive of a bye-law pertaining to bio-waste disposal which is important from the standpoint of the dangerously recycled used syringes.

Fourth and last instalment on media role.

SH Imam is Associate Editor of The Daily Star.

JUST ANOTHER VIEW

The testing facilities are extremely sparse and limited. Only ICDDR,B, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP) and BSMMUH have them. Till such time as the ten other centres which are planned get established there is no telling how gaping the holes in the detection apparatus remains to enlarge the ring of darkness around the spread of HIV/AIDS.

onboard sustainability of the exercise seems guaranteed. Events-centred transmission of knowledge, such as through debates, essay-writing competitions and cultural functions is widely encouraged in a bid to make an indelible impression on targeted, even broader, audience. The institutions of religious learning are likely to be brought under the ambit of a wider information dissemination strategy. An Imam module is also being given shape. The barriers are breaking.

One only wishes the silence will break, too, on the part of those who

too long if we are to make a country-wide impact with the strategic programme of imparting the knowledge of basics to our people. Then we go on to touch-base with the region and the world at large.

The exposure to the school girl programme enlightening as it has been remarkably also rhymed with the gist of a UN landmark report jointly produced by UNAIDS, WHO and the UNICEF and released only on Tuesday. It stresses the point that young people aged between 15 and 24, who are the hardest hit by the disease and potentially the key to

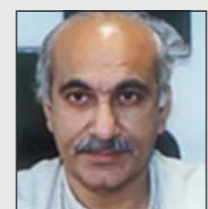
has to do with persuading healthy young men and women to come forward in large numbers to donate blood voluntarily thereby obviating the necessity for drawing blood from the professional sellers who risk transmitting infections through transfusions into the receivers. There could be networking with the youths to form panels of volunteer donors awaiting their turns to give safe blood in easily sustained cycles.

Hopefully, the programme will commence over radio and television in two months' time. The behaviour

have them. Till such time as the ten other centres which are planned get established there is no telling how gaping the holes in the detection apparatus remains to enlarge the ring of darkness around the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The 97 blood screening centres there are -- set up in accord with WHO standards -- represent a step forward no doubt in terms of capacity building; but the equipment provided to the centres risk getting rusty when officials receiving training to use them are transferred out.

A shuffle is not a stride



M.J. AKBAR

QUIZ Question: Who was K. Kamraj Nadar? It is not a trick question. But it may seem an unfair one in an environment where many might find it troublesome to answer "Who was Nehru?" Kamraj was a politician from Tamil Nadu, an astute and honest man who rose from the nameless ranks of Indians who fought for their freedom to hold, for a while in the Sixties, the destiny of the nation in his formidable hands.

Kamraj never became a minister in Delhi. He reached a position infinitely more powerful in those days, when he was elected president of the Indian National Congress. Those were days when the Prime Minister of India was not afraid of the president of the Congress. Those were also days when the president of the Congress was not afraid of the Prime Minister of India. That generation was confident of its stature and therefore had no problem when it came to sharing power. The Congress lived by a different philosophy then. Every region of the country was represented in the central power structure, unlike today when one individual seeks to represent all the regions of the country. It was collective leadership, and even a titan like Nehru realised its value when the moment of crisis arrived.

It did arrive; and as suited a titan, the proportions were titanic. Neither Jawaharlar nor his government were the same after the humiliating defeat in the 1962 war with China, a confrontation purchased by hardliners in the government led by Morarji Desai but also bought by Jawaharlar himself. Although the next general elections were scheduled only for 1967, Congress leaders could see defeat as clearly as the next politician, even against a disunited Opposition. Any thoughts of replacing Jawaharlar himself quickly dissolved in the heat of his continuing popularity (much as Gamel Nasser seemed even more indispensable to Egypt after his humiliation by Israel in 1967). But

the Congress knew it had to reinvent itself, and reset the compass of its government. From this conviction emerged the plan named after the Congress president, the Kamraj Plan. Nehru dropped half his Cabinet including his virtual deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai, with instructions that they leave power to return to the people via the party. This would also create space for a younger generation who would bring to governance the dynamism of new ideas and the rewards of simple hard work.

That was the theory in any case. It could not really be put to test because within a few months of the Kamraj Plan Nehru suffered a stroke, while sitting on the dais, at

stuck in a whirlpool of despond and inaction. The BJP was wiped out in the first Assembly elections it fought after coming to power. That seemed to wake up the Prime Minister. Within weeks he crafted two policy lines that have become the sinews of this administration: one line thrown to Pakistan in the hope that someone on the other side will pick it up; and a second to the economy, in the hope that reform will change India for the better.

By early this year it was evident that both lines had become hopelessly tangled. Relations between India and Pakistan are always prone to the dramatic, and every initiative is fraught with unseen dangers. The rewards of

Circumstances helped of course. America has now made it clear, to Pakistan as well as to Palestine, that it is not ready to see any merit in the use of suicide-bombers, or the blood shed by self-styled "jihadis". The very success of such tactics became a problem for those who hoped to benefit from them, for the dominant power of America weighs heavily on governments such as the one in Pakistan, which do not have the ballast of popular support. But the world is a little larger than America, although it may not often seem so. Delhi was able to place its arguments with some success across the Islamic world. It did not isolate Pakistan, but it did not allow Pakistan to dominate the debate

no resurrection of his government without an economic vision. Yashwant Sinha has presented five budgets, and you will find it difficult to find a word that defines such a long reign in office. He began well. He started with the pace of a hundred metres dash, and ended up as a pedestrian. In the last two years Mr Sinha has been going nowhere very fast. As a result finance has become a ministry without purpose, helplessness about revenues uncollected and relieved by ministries that have left their allocations unspent.

With confrontation a continuing fact of life, George Fernandes had the opportunity to rise in public esteem. Instead he has given the

wants to return to aggressive reform, then he needs a person who has the conviction to push through an agenda and the clout to carry the party along. That is the job profile, but who gets the job?

This mid-point crisis has inadvertently also revealed the limitations of choice before the Prime Minister. The party president Jana Krishnamurthy is being soothed by a Cabinet post but his reaction to the change has been immature at the very least. There is no permanent job in public life, and he supposedly comes from a branch of the Hindutva family that never entered public life for cushions. You do not open fire on your own side from the trenches. That is inexcusable. He has done that. But at least it is clear that there would be a new party chief with a new team that would include some of the better ministers like Arun Jaitley.

How major is major? Will the word include all senior levels of power in the ruling structure? In other words, will there be accountability among chief ministers? If good governance is at the heart of Mr Vajpayee's intentions then he cannot leave Gujarat and Narendra Modi outside his balance sheet. I suspect, although of course I could be wrong, that Vinay Katiyar has been made chief of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh to soften the hardliners for some bad news ... If they have their man in the largest state, they should be willing to accommodate a change elsewhere.

Farooq Abdullah is likely to find a place in the new Cabinet if only because the National Conference is going to be left unprotected in Jammu and Kashmir. When Delhi promises free and fair elections it means that it will not permit any rigging. It is the National Conference's turn to pay the price of power. That could mesh with a parallel strategy on the whole Kashmir debate. But that is too far into the future.

The first step towards the future is taken on Monday. We have been promised a stride, not a shuffle. You shuffle only sideways, and many a reshuffle has ended up taking a government backwards. On Friday Mr Vajpayee ended the suspense when he announced that changes would take place. On Monday he ends the speculation. On Tuesday we take another look at the balance sheet and see if there are enough credit lines left to prepare a new business plan for the government.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age

BYLINE

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the Bhubaneswar session of the Congress in January 1964. That changed all equations. After he died in the summer of that year Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister, and gave a place to Indira Gandhi in his Cabinet. The rest is as much mystery as history but that is another story except to note that it was Kamraj who surprised the Congress and the country by installing Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister when Shastri died, suddenly, at Tashkent just after the historic talks with Pakistan's Ayub Khan.

It is apparent that at some point during the last session of Parliament Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee decided that his government and his party needed a Kamraj Plan-style shake-up and shake-out. All doubts ended with the failure of governance and collapse of civil society in Gujarat, for which Delhi had to share responsibility. The government that had been sworn in after his reelection was dead. Rebirth was essential. Instead of a government behind him Mr Vajpayee had a carcass around his neck.

Mr Vajpayee has one motto that he does not advertise: Sweet are the uses of adversity. The worst moment of his prime ministership came during his first term, when despite the high of formal nuclear-power status the government was

success might be high; the cost of failure can be devastating. The collapse of the Agra gambit had direct consequences on the ground as the conflict in Kashmir took on the proportions of a semi-declared war.

The Prime Minister had two options. One was to use the Advani-Fernandes route to open war with Pakistan despite the possibility of nuclear devastation; the second was to use the much more difficult, painstaking and non-glamorous option of diplomacy. For the record Mr Vajpayee left both choices open but there is no doubt that he put his own credibility and hopes behind the efforts of his foreign minister.

The performance of a government is by and large measured by that of its key ministries: home, finance, external affairs, defence, human resources. The one ministry with a consistent record of deft success has been external affairs; and in the last few months Mr Jaswant Singh has excelled himself. This is not the place for a fuller analysis of foreign policy; suffice to note that the minister had the extremely difficult task of telling a confounded world that India was ready for war without sounding like a warmonger, and simultaneously arguing the Indian case on Jammu and Kashmir without sounding like a self-server or, worse, an authoritarian.

either. It is an irony therefore that Mr Jaswant Singh has been the favoured candidate to become the next finance minister. It is the kind of reward that he would have hoped to avoid.

But that was the end of the good news for the Prime Minister. Finance minister Yashwant Sinha is the favourite victim of the season, but the record of more admired ministers is hardly worthy of applause. I do not care too much for labels. Hawks and doves become so often meaningless cliché in the exercise of governance. Necessity is equally the mother of invention. A dove is required to polish talons and hawks must smile and smile on command. As a citizen all I want from a home minister is the right to live in peace in my country. I do not want to float on a river of destruction that has been carved out to leave Indian communities on different banks, because the ruling party wants a vote bank. A home minister may not be able to prevent a terrorist from crossing the border with Pakistan, but he should be able to prevent that terrorist from travelling hundreds of miles to try and blow up Parliament or sow havoc in the heart of India.

The collapse of the finance ministry was a harder blow to Mr Vajpayee because there could be

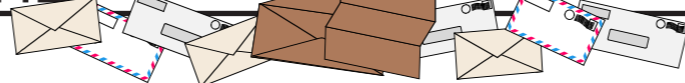
defence ministry its worst scandal since Bofors, and the guns of Bofors were really trained on the Prime Minister of the time rather than the defence minister or the defence establishment. He has energy but too much of it is spent in public or populist relations that is not necessarily appreciated by the command structure of the armed forces.

The Prime Minister has promised a "major" reshuffle. This piece is being written on the eve of the revelations, but if by "major" he is thinking of merely numbers then Monday does not serve any purpose as far as he is concerned. There should have been a qualitative change in the government as much as a quantitative one. The Kamraj Plan had impacted because Morarji Desai himself had to go. No one expected home minister L.K. Advani to be dropped; indeed he is elevated to the status of deputy prime minister. But with or without the home ministry?

It is a question that must be travelling repeatedly through the mind of Murl Manohar Joshi, who was home minister for a brief period under Mr Vajpayee.

To drop Yashwant Sinha is no longer news; the bigger story is that he is retained. The real story is his replacement. If the Prime Minister

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



What! No magazines!

This has gone far enough. We have not been getting any international magazines -- Time, Newsweek, Economist -- for the last one week. Has anybody noticed it?

I myself rely entirely on print for international news. Any other media is, as Walter Cronkite observed, jejeune (he said that half-hour of TV news can cover only one broad sheet). I earnestly request the government and all concerned to resume our supply of information.

Iftekhhar Sayeed
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Hasina's hartal

I am beginning to wonder how Sheikh Hasina comes up with her hartal dates. There are two ways she could have picked the 4th of July to call her hartal. It's a Thursday and since this government has made Thursday a half-day, the hartal will effectively waste the whole day's work.

Then again I wonder if she's trying to play a sick joke on us. The 4th of July is the Independence Day of the United States. You may think it

means nothing to us but it should. The 4th of July also commemorates the beginning of a more perfect union which in spite of its faults has successfully defended the liberty and freedom of its citizens better than any other nation before or since.

While you are sitting at home on the 4th of July, worrying about your losses or your business, remember there are people who are free and whose lives are not held hostage to the whims of one political leader.

Sheikh Hasina's last hartal was on the anniversary of her father's doomed attempt to stifle our freedom of speech and liberty through socialist dictatorship in the form of BAKSAL.

She does seem to enjoy her little symbolism doesn't she?

MA
Dhaka

Printing mistakes

We enjoy Afsan Chowdhury's column immensely and look forward to another masterpiece on every Tuesday. But in the July 2 column "An epitaph for Adamjee" (another excellent write-up as usual) I've

found quite a number of mistakes and errors in the write-up.

Would you please take care of the printing mistakes? Usually there are less mistakes and errors in your editorial page therefore I was quite upset with the errors in Afsan Chowdhury's column.

Sabir Rahman
Kalabagan, Dhaka

Circus in BNP and sacking of a President

It appears that there was something more sinister behind the resignation of President Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury than that meets the eye. The allegations of not visiting the gravesite and re-proclaiming Shaheed President Zia as the declarer of independence by Prof. Chowdhury are simply to hoodwink the public.

Somehow, I held this belief that BNP was a more mature party to govern this country after the sad experience of the previous five years of AL rule.

Now, I am desperately looking for a place to hide my face in shame!

Ashfaq Chowdhury, Dhaka

Computer for schools

As per your esteemed daily dated June 29, the Science and Information and Communication Technology Minister Dr Abdul Moyneen Khan has declared that the government has taken up a program to provide around 12 thousand secondary schools across the country with one computer each and Internet connections.

But without a proper strategy this plan will fail.

At least five to ten computers should be provided at a time to each of the selected schools. Prior to distributing computers to the selected schools, at least one teacher from each school should be trained centrally for one month under some crammed program that will provide these teachers 9 to 10 hours' lessons on the basics of computer education.

I would further suggest that the government should seriously think of opening a special cell that will be responsible for providing basic knowledge of computer education to the students.

M. A. Sobhan, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Electing public representatives

Why is it that we cannot elect our leaders based on their own merit or contribution and not political khandan? Primary reason, there isn't any one worthy to select, i.e. the pool from which to select is very poor. Plus the political party's play by working on voter's emotion and sentiments that they prefer nominating someone from the political dynasty to take over the reigns, instead of others within the party, who actually may have been a better choice (as far as leading ability is concerned). The end result: we are having a monarch form of government in the name of democracy.

So, where lies the solution? Since we do not want to take away the democratic right of the citizens to elect whomever they wish, the only option is to ensure that the pool of candidate from whom to select, are all worthy to lead. There has to be some sort of pre-requisites qualities or achievements, before a candidate can be considered for the top party post. If popularity vote is to

be the only criteria to elect head of nations why don't we have the same procedure in electing Chief Justice or Army chief or Police IG?

Can't we the citizen expect a similar concept, while electing our national leaders, from the pool of the bests, and not just anyone simply popular!

Mehroz Jalil
Dhaka Cantonment

Good bye Professor... thanks for showing us a way!

Since the birth of the nation, I have learned that democracy is not. So, BNP on their latest use of muscle on B. Chowdhury added another bright example to that. Being an optimist I thank BNP to continue (as their ancestors) for giving the nation live lessons on 'what is not' and to leave the people to find 'what is'.

Nevertheless, within the range of boisterous and silent there are people whose conscience has aggrandised and came to a point from where the urgency has arisen to boycott the running game of politics and to unite the like-minded

for movement towards democracy.

A Citizen, Dhaka

Police training

This I write in appreciation of Mr Qudus for enlightening us on police training. But I would like to ask him why he wants to deprive this prestigious force of ours the opportunity of making a few quick bucks (their only vocation) training the Bhutanese police force.

Ahmad Kamal
Abu Dhabi, UAE

AL's positive approach

I do appreciate and congratulate Awami League's coming back to the Parliament. It is probably the best news for most of the people of Bangladesh in recent days. We want to see the ruling party and all its allies will also come forward with the same vision and manner to give democracy a chance.

I would honestly like to request all the political parties of Bangladesh, particularly BNP and Awami League, please try to realise the hearts and hopes of the vast majority of the people. They want

peace, progress, social security, live with dignity and honour. I do hope that despite many differences between the two major parties there will never be any circumstances that lead the opposition come out from the normal constitutional practices.

To ensure the opposition party's active participation in the parliament, both the parties have responsibilities though, but major responsibilities go to the ruling party and its allies to turn the whole atmosphere in favour of active participation of all.

Rashid
Mirpur, Dhaka

Non-grads

I just noticed an amusing item in the paper; President Musharraf has banned anyone without a university degree from standing in their upcoming general elections.

I think this would be wonderful idea for us to adopt as well. In one fell swoop most if not all of BNP's Young Thugs and a great many of AL's crooked lot could be consigned to the dustbin of politics, right where they belong.

Beowulf
Dhaka