

Md. Shamsul Islam

RECENT TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION : A THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

The present age is being described as an information age. Various terms are used to identify the new information age, most notable among them is a phrase popularized almost two decades ago by Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell — the "post - industrial society"¹. The term denotes that the unprecedented advances of communication and information technology is the main feature of the age. Bell put the information factor at the centre of the concept of post-industrial society. The result, he suggested, has been a seismic shift of the economy from goods production to information-based services, with professionals and technicians replacing business entrepreneurs as the prominent social class.² Some years ago Zbigniew Brzezinski coined the word "technetronic" to describe this new age in which communications will play a greater international role : The post-industrial society is becoming a technetronic society; a society that is shaped culturally, psychologically, socially, and economically by the impact of technology and electronics — particularly in the area

1. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, Basic Books, New York, 1973.
2. Wilson P. Dizard, Jr., *The Coming Information Age, An Overview of Technology, Economics and Politics*, (Third Edition), Longman Inc., New York, 1989, p. 3.

Md. Shamsul Islam is a Research Associate of BIISS.

of computers and communications.³ As a spin-off, the information-led revolution is bringing dramatic changes in the world's political, economic and cultural atmosphere. "The globalization of a particular system of economic growth, as well as the 'fragmentation' of society, characterized by a resurgence of regionalism, ethnic or religious conflicts, and identity-based struggles are symptoms of this condition"⁴

Every nation state, be it developed or developing, is trying to keep pace with the technological advancement that the world has recently witnessed. Communication satellites and computer-based electronic methods of moving and storing information have dramatically altered the global scenario, making it difficult on the part of specially the developing countries, lagging far behind in technological advancement, to identify their priorities and policies. The coming decades are for those nations who can manipulate these new communication technologies. Michael Poniatowski, a former French minister of the interior, predicted that "The nations that develop the new planetary communications will command economical and political power in the next century as surely as the railroad building countries have dominated the last century of history."⁵

The "pervasiveness and invasiveness" of the new communication technologies within divergent economies and cultures have given rise to some policy relevant issues for the nations, related to their political priorities, public expenditure and so on. Transborder

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3. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages : America's Role in the Technetronic Era*, Viking Press, New York, 1970, pp. 9-14.
 4. Pradip N. Thomas, "Informatization and Change in India — Cultural Politics in a Post-Modern Era," *Asian Journal of Communication*, Volume Three, Number One, 1993, p. 65-66.
 5. Josheph Fichett, "Europe Sits by the Phone, Awaiting a Revolution," *International Herald Tribune*, Dec. 4, 1985, p. 1.

data-flow and its economic implications and cultural ramifications can be a case in point here.

On the other hand, in the political sphere, the relations among nation states have also undergone some transformations with the collapse of Soviet Union and the eclipse of communism as an ideology. The ideas of liberal democracy are sweeping across the world as a part of what political theorist, Francis Fukuyama, aptly described as the "end of history"⁶. Fukuyama argued that the changes in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe meant not just the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the emergence of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.⁷ It is also the reality that democratic governments have been established in many of the Third World countries. However, the shifts in global power structure in the present unipolar world have reduced the political weight of the developing countries to a great extent in the various international fora which they enjoyed during the period of East-West rivalry. Backed by Soviet Union, in the Cold War era these newly independent and the Third World countries came to the forefront of issues on international communication, thus becoming the strong proponents for New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The end of East-West rivalry, characterized by the present era of "techno-democratic revolution" has also changed the trends, issues and the context of debates on international communication. Catchphrases like "New World Information Order" or "balanced flow of information" which were used to mark the disparities and discrepancies of international flow of news and imbalances in communication technologies

6. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, The Free Press, New York, 1992.

7. Fukuyama, *ibid.*

between the West and the Third World countries are, it seems, considered as euphemistic words in the present global context as well as they are less cited in the policy considerations. On the contrary, Muhammad I. Ayish suggests that, in the 1990s, challenges presented by the new techno-democratic revolution to the Third World in the area of communication will centre on four issues : freedom of information; reconceptualization of information ; development of national telecommunications; and integration into the global economy.⁸

The issues in international communication, arising from the "techno-democratic revolution" and their implications are now more complex and varied, especially for the developing countries, which warrant careful examination and which have some serious policy implications. The present article attempts to explore some of such trends and implications of international communication in the post-Cold War era, giving special attention to Third World countries and Asia. It is true that NWICO debate has been toned down to a considerable extent and "free flow of information" — a central corollary of democratic concept is a much discussed term now. The advent of new communication technologies in the global communication raises the issue of transfer of communication technologies. Taken as a whole, all these have important bearing on present day post-Cold War international political, trade and cultural relations.

The issues and trends are being seen here from a broad perspective without going into the details. The first section of the article traces the Great Debate on communication between the West and the Third World, backed by Soviet Union. Popularly

8. Muhammad. I. Ayish, "International Communication in the 1990s : Implications for the Third World," *International Affairs*, Vol. 68, No. 3, July 1992, pp. 487-510.

known as NWICO debate (some prefer to call it as MacBride Movement) the debate was an important part of the Cold War international relations. The next section focuses on some recent trends of international communication arising from the advent of new communication technologies and post-Cold War realities. The third section discusses in brief the implications of the changes. The question of communication policies — from both national and regional perspectives — is analyzed in the fourth section.

THE GREAT "COMMUNICATION" DEBATE

The imbalance in the international communication system was at the centre of international debate during the 1970s. The flow of news, its fairness etc., became important components of international politics as well as academic scholarship. Non-aligned spokesman like Mustapha Masmoudi of Tunisia and American scholar Herbert I. Schiller charged that Western news, and government and military business interests, were deliberately manipulating the flow of world news to their advantage, to keep the Third World in a dependency position.⁹

In fact, the debate started much earlier. For example, news value controversy dated back to the early 1950s. Concern over underdevelopment of national communication and information infrastructures was apparent in 1960 at the beginning of the United Nations' First Development Decade. The controversy over direct-broadcast satellites arose in the United Nations soon after the launching of the first satellite.¹⁰ The first articulation of the need for a new information order came in Montreal, Canada. In

9. Jim Richstad, "Understanding International News Flow," *Handbook for Third World Journalists*, edited by Albert L. Hester and Wai Lan J. To, Athens, Georgia, USA, 1987, pp. 4-49.

10. See, Howard H. Frederick, *Global Communication & International Relations*, Wadsworth Inc., 1993.

1969 a UNESCO meeting of the experts on mass communication and society for the first time used the expression "New World Information and Communication Order". The report of the meeting observed that disparities between nations of the developed and developing world made free circulation of news and information a one-way flow rather than a real exchange and it stressed the need to safeguard the cultural integrity of the developing countries from the destructive effect of programmes carrying alien values.¹¹ This subject was extensively discussed in the UNESCO-sponsored MacBride report, which was published in 1980. Critics say, both parties' viewpoints were reflected in this report. On the one hand, it supported the concept of open information flow and on the other, it also put forward a number of restrictive proposals, which had the effect of compromising the concept.

In many ways the NWICO debate was exciting. For example, never before in the past the Western world, especially the USA faced such a combined onslaught from so many countries which partly accounted for the withdrawal of the USA followed by UK and Singapore from the one of the main centre of such debates — UNESCO. This was indeed the partial Anglo-American response to the efforts of the Third World and former Soviet Union to project the negative implications of the Western domination of the international communication.

Urho Kekkonen, the then President of Finland, was one of the first to use the term "information (cultural) imperialism"¹² in the

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11. Hamid Kandil, "UNESCO and a New World Information and Communication Order : The Landmark and the Issues", in *Towards a Canadian Perspective on International Communication Issues*, Ottawa, Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 1982, p. 1.
 12. *Television Traffic — a One-Way Street?*, UNESCO Report No. 70, 1974, p. 44.

mid-seventies when he expressed concern over the fact that "two-thirds of all information distributed in the world comes in one way or another from the United States".¹³ In the 1970s, advocates of the NWICO estimated that "the Western agencies accounted for at least 80% of global news flow, exerting a *de facto* form of imperialism".¹⁴ By communication or information imperialism, it is implied that because of the inadequacy of the growth of mass media and overall underdevelopment, the Third World countries are faced with ideological expansionism of the Western media with considerable political, economic and cultural implications.

The Western ideological concept of "free flow of information" also faced incisive criticism in the past decades. Third World countries, in various international fora argued that so called "free flow of information" is only good for those who control this flow and, when necessary they can manipulate it. Their concern was that in the name of such attractive terms the West, especially the United States, was hindering the development process of the Third World nations and tried to preserve the vestiges of colonialism in these countries.

Critics like Schiller argued that the "free flow of information" theory was, in fact, an attempt to justify the United States' information and propaganda offensive which provided ideological support to its aggressive policy and claims to world domination. They cited the remark of John Foster Dulles : "If I were to be granted one point of foreign policy and no other, I would make it the free flow of information."¹⁵

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13. Eduard Baskakov, *Information and Nuclear-Free World*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1987.
 14. Mustapha Masmoudi, "The New World Information Order," *Journal of Communications*, Spring 1979, pp 172-75.
 15. See, Herbert I. Schiller, *The Mind Managers*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1973, p. 30.

As indicated earlier, the UNESCO first began to discuss the imbalances in global communication in the late 1960s. The Ljubljana symposium of 1968 and the experts' conference in Montreal in 1969 can be mentioned here. Later, International Telecommunication Union (ITU) also became a centre of the debate. In 1984 ITU produced the "Maitland Report" also known as "The Missing Link" which identified growing disparities in telecommunications between the developed and developing countries and focused the obstacles in the way of telecommunications development.

The West, on the other hand, denied all the charges saying such empirical studies do not provide any conclusive support. For example, Tracey said that the frequently made assertion that Western news agencies and mass media ignore the Third World is "simply untrue": about a third of foreign news stories in northern media systems originate in the Third World; in the Third World, about 60 to 75 per cent of all foreign news is from other Third World countries. Where major gaps in news coverage occur are in the relative dearth of non-regional "Third World" news (Latin American media have little coverage of African affairs, for example) and the lack of coverage given to Eastern Europe.¹⁶ As far as freedom of speech is concerned, the Western approach was based on Article 19 of the United Nations' "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", adopted in 1948, that stated, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any medium and regardless of frontiers." So it is evident that the West can claim it is difficult on its part to move away from this basic principle of democracy.

16. Michael Tracey, "The poisoned chalice? International Television and the idea of dominance," *Daedalus*, Vol. 114, No. 4, 1985, pp. 17-55.

Is the NWICO debate becoming dead? In 1987 Federico Mayor of Spain was elected new Director General of UNESCO as successor to Amadou-Mahtar M'bow of Senegal. After taking over, he pledged to reorganize the organization's programmes so that the United States and Britain could return to the UN body. Surprisingly, the Agency's five year plan (1990-95) did not make any reference about NWICO issues in the operational sections of the book. The reason of this "air of realism" is analysed by Muhammad I. Ayish : "This emerging pattern of pragmatism seems to be reinforced by shifts in global power structures, characterized by the growing global dominance of the United States, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union (a traditional supporter of the Third World calls for a NWICO) and the reinvigoration of the role of the United Nations in international affairs as affirmed by its new Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali".¹⁷

Recently Musa argued that much of the debate about the NWICO has been constrained by its location in dependency theory. Continued reliance on a centre-periphery model ultimately obfuscates analysis by diverting attention from the basic internal dynamics of news and information production, selection, distribution, and control in "Third World" countries.¹⁸ In the present global context, the flow controversy is viewed in a manner which is linked with international movements of capital, conflicts between transnational corporations and different national regulatory frameworks.

In fine, whatever the reasons, it can be said that NWICO debate does not exist as such in the present day international politics, nor

17. Muhammad I. Ayish, *op. cit.*, p. 494.

18. Mohammed Musa, "News agencies, transnationalization and the new order," *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol. 12, 1990, pp. 325-42.

does UNESCO is a place now to highlight the issues. But attempts are still on at the international level to face the emerging challenges in this regard. Protection of cultural environment from degradation like the physical environment, it seems, is gaining increasing importance in the current debates of international communication. In the various MacBride Round Tables, held in recent years, this issue is being focused but not avoiding MacBride Report's original principles. For example, the third MacBride Round Table, held in Istanbul in 1991 warned that the MacBride Report's principles are threatened by the "monopoly of global conglomerates" and by the "transnational industrial-media complex under the American military protectorate." It also observed that the MacBride Movement must "build new peoples' coalitions and constituencies" and must "demilitarize cultural products and processes."¹⁹ According to Howard H. Frederick "In the 1990s the MacBride Movement (or NWICO movement) is merging with the Cultural Environmental Movement....This movement of the 1990s is trying to create a democracy based on systems theory—interaction and flexible feedback with no fixed flow of information and power from top to bottom."²⁰

TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The unprecedented advances in communication technologies coupled with the changing global scenario have brought some significant changes in international communication and its global impact. These changes, more varied and complex than ever before, have been viewed differently by different scholars. For example, Robert L. Stevenson mentions five global trends in

19. Istanbul Statement of the MacBride Roundtable on Communication, *Few Voices, Many Worlds*, Istanbul, June 21, 1991, in *Few Voices Many Worlds*, pp. 31-32.

20. Howard H. Frederick, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

international communication. These are i) Anglo-American dominance, ii) resurgence of culture, iii) a global culture, iv) triumph of independent journalism and v) new media moguls.²¹ However, some of the major trends in international communication, which have potential significance upon various societies and cultures are outlined below.

Western Dominance

Western or Anglo-American culture is becoming the global culture, still leaving room for "cultural imperialism" argument of the past decades. This dominance is visible in terms of language, news or technology or information flow.

As far as language is concerned, English language is now the most popular media language in international communication. According to the statistics of the year 1993, among the world languages with at least 10 million speakers, English ranked second with 463 million speakers. Mandarin Chinese with 930 million topped the list, and Hindi was placed third with 400 million speakers.²²

Perhaps gone are the days when the dominance of English was attacked. As a medium of international communication its influence is increasing year in and year out. With the advent of new communication technologies like satellites, some other languages e.g., Japanese, Hindi or Chinese can pose threat to other languages "regionally" but English has gone far beyond. "English has gone from the language of British colonialism and American post-war hegemony to a third stage, independent of either of its

21. Robert L. Stevenson, "Defining International Communication as a Field," *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 3, Fall 1992, pp. 543-553.

22. See, *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1994*, Funk & Wagnalls Corporation, New Jersey, p. 578.

roots. It is now the universal language of international politics, science, computers and air traffic control as well as tourism, business and pop culture".²³ Developing countries like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan etc. depend almost entirely on English language as far as technological knowledge or information is concerned. The artifacts of popular culture or mass culture are also in English that entice millions of people around the globe. According to British media critic Jeremy Tunstall, English is the language best suited for "comic strips, headlines, riveting first sentences, photo captions, dubbing, sub-titling, pop songs billboards, disc-jockey banter, news flashes, sung commercials."²⁴ But, it is now the global language by which nations communicate with one another to keep their survival in this information age.

With regard to technology, apart from Japan we see communication revolution is taking place in the United States or Western Europe. These "information societies" all in the rich, industrialized North, are widening the already broad information gap between themselves and the Third World.

The flow situation, one of the major aspects of NWICO debate, has deteriorated at best in the recent years. With the help of new communication technologies Western information and entertainment materials are penetrating Third World countries with an ever accelerating pace. The flow is not reciprocal. As notes Bagdikian : "In the Third World, global news and entertainment purveyors like the Associated Press, Reuters, and US television producers have swamped local news and culture. Despite 30 years of organized protest by Third World countries, the Western media

23. Robert L. Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 544.

24. Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media are American : Anglo-American Media in the World*, Constable, London, 1977.

presence has only grown."²⁵ The following table shows that the "Big Four" news agencies, in the 1990s, still dominate the international news flow. Television programmes and global film industry are also dominated by the United States.

Table : The Big Four News Agencies

Press Agency	Number of countries served	Number of subscribers (domestic & foreign)	Number of countries covered by correspondents	Number of words issued daily (million)
AP (USA)	112	15,500	67	17
UPI (USA)	100	6,000	81	14
AFP (France)	144	12,500	150	3
Reuters (UK)	137	29,310	77	0.3

Source : Mark D. Alleyne and Janet Wagner, "Stability and change at the Big Four News Agencies," *Journalism Quarterly*, Spring, 1993, 70/1.

New Communication Technologies

With new communication technologies affecting every sphere of life a communication revolution is clearly underway. In recent years innovative development have occurred in the fields of print, posts and telecommunications, and information technology.²⁶ Cable, broadcast satellite, videotext, and teletext systems, laser vision, Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), telephony, message-handling services, fax, teletext, mobile radio communication, satellite services, optical fiber communications, computer-based information technologies are some of the names, which have changed the world so dramatically.

25. Ben Bagdikian, "The Lords of the Global Village," *The Nation*, 12 June 1989, pp. 805-20.

26. See, *World Communication Report 1989*, UNESCO for details of new communication technologies, Paris, pp. 45-78.

Convergence of computer and telecommunications industry has opened up a new horizon in human life. What is occurring has been described as follows : "All modes of communication we humans have devised since the beginnings of humanity are coming together into a single electronic system, driven by computers."²⁷ The merger of, among others, computers, micro processors, telephony, cable, fiber optics, video tape and communications satellites has created a new world before us. Interestingly enough, it is increasingly becoming difficult to differentiate between a computer and a telecommunication device.

Transborder Data Flow : Borders Becoming Symbolic?

When Nora and Minc²⁸ suggested that "borders will become symbolic" to mention the impact of transborder information flow it sounded utopian but now-a-days it has become a reality. Transborder data flow (TDF) is now the subject of much concern among the developing countries, not to speak about some Western European nations who also complain that it has violated national security and privacy. With the advent of new communication technologies information are now sold and used across national frontiers. Many developed countries are now taking protectionist provisions to protect their local markets from the hands of US data banks. Sweden, Canada, Japan already have enacted laws which will ensure their security, confidentiality, privacy in terms of data processing. Some other countries are also considering to enact such laws. American firms are doing much of the data processing work of Europe. They receive information like personal banking, insurance and credit information of

27. John Wicklein, *Electronic Nightmare : The New Communications and Freedom*, Viking, New York, 1981, p. 30.

28. Nora, S. and A. Minc, *The Computerization of Society : A Report to the President of France*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1980.

Europeans via cable or satellite, leaving room for much concern among the governments about the confidentiality of their countries.

Broadcast spillover as a result of widespread satellite broadcasting is another phenomenon that the countries are now experiencing. For Asia transnational broadcasting is fairly old experience considering the static voices of BBC or VOA radio services. But the visual images of such broadcasting is a more recent phenomenon. In 1990, the Chinese Long March Satellite placed Asiasat I in orbit and it changed the Asian media scenario. A year later, STAR TV began beaming to 38 countries with a combined population of 2.7 billion.²⁹

According to Langdale, the shift towards an international information economy has made national boundaries largely irrelevant, with nation-states generally unable to control information movements and the types of information being disseminated effectively.³⁰ The characteristics of the "information economy" is that the economy is predominantly service oriented rather than manufacturing oriented, there must be an extensive computer communications infrastructure, information is regarded in this economy as a commodity, but what concerns Langdale is the growing internationalization of the particular aspect of information economy which is primarily transnational rather than national and trade expands beyond national borders.

29. Vijay Menon, "Regionalisation : Cultural Enrichment or Erosion?" *Media Asia*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Singapore, 1994, p. 40.

30. John Langdale, "Transborder data flows and national sovereignty ," in Trevor Barr (ed.), *Challenges and Change, Australian Information Society*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987, ch. 11.

Deregulation and Privatization

Deregulation and privatization — these two trends in global communication have been spreading across continents since the beginning of the 1980s. Deregulation is a product of classical (liberal) economic theory. Like *laissez faire* capitalism, deregulation is based on a faith in the working of the "invisible hand" of the market place. Liberalism calls for privatization and deregulation in areas that were previously the preserve of the state or quasi-state enterprises, of which communications and telecommunications are significant.³¹

Deregulation of telecommunications first began in the United States, but the privatization of government-owned monopolies and deregulation of privately owned ones has caught on rapidly in many other countries including Great Britain, several European countries and many developing countries as well. As far as Asia is concerned, these trends are most visible in the countries of East and Southeast Asia. Deregulation is having its effect in developing countries, who are now privatising the traditional broadcasting and telecom sectors — the pace varies in different countries. In many developing countries, the broadcasting organizations have been or are being converted into semi-autonomous or autonomous corporations.³² In others, broadcasting media is permitted side by side with the government controlled ones. For example, All India Radio and Doordarshan of India are still under government control, but private networks are given permission to set up. In Bangladesh also the telecommunications industry, potentially one

31. John Armstrong, "Deregulating the International Telecommunications Satellite System : The Implications for INTELSAT and the Shape of International Telecommunications" paper presented at the Conference of the International Communication Association, New Orleans, 1988.

32. A. M. M. A'abad, "Electronic Mass Media, Some Good News For Developing Countries," *The Bangladesh Observer*, July 27, 1990.

of the most profitable sectors of Bangladesh economy, appears set for effective deregulation. The government has already liberalized certain areas of telecommunication services and tried to attract private investment for its development.³³

As the nations are opting for deregulatory methods and increased privatisation, telecom industries are engaged with recasting and reshaping their strategies to meet the future challenges. However, deregulation and privatisation of broadcasting in many developing countries are yet to take firm shape.

A Global Pop Culture

From Rome to Jakarta or from Dhaka to Harare, Anglo-American or American power in popular culture is prevalent. Through this culture an outline of a global culture is looming large. "Whether conveyed by printed word, electronic image, or recorded sound, Western motion pictures, television programmes, popular music, books, video and audio cassettes, and magazines have had an impact on traditional cultures around the world that can only be described as revolutionary."³⁴ The good side of the culture is that it is really global by any yardstick. For the first time in history, through this global culture a "unity in diversity" has been established among the various cultures of the world. But the darkest side of the so-called global culture is that it is truly commercial, superficial and posing threat to real culture or native culture of individual state. This global culture is swallowing up many indigenous cultures. It represents the Western values whose invasion into the peripheral countries are now the subject of

33. *Report of the Telecommunication Development Conference for Developing Countries of West and South Asia*, organised by BT & TB in collaboration with International Telecommunication Union, Dhaka, 3-5 Feb, 1994.

34. William A. Hachten, *The World News Prism, Changing Media Clashing Ideologies*, (Second Edition), Iowa University Press, 1987, p. 53.

intense debate and discussion. What are the so-called culture giving to the recipients other than reckless consumerism, endless violence or shameless sex?

Analysing the relevance of this culture in the context of India—which is a peripheral country, a writer notes : This emerging culture, consonant with the growth of global "cultural tendencies", is evolving into a dominant culture in India. It expresses itself as a reflection of a universal tendency, but in the process negates its grounding in the community. Moored in the narrow confines of its logic, circumscribed by its "certainties" and enveloped in a cocoon of instrumental rationality, this culture has become increasingly unable to situate itself within the larger Indian reality, with its social, economic and cultural dramas of existence — life and death, poverty and exploitation, schisms, resistances, struggles and counter struggles.³⁵

But there is another school of thought which suggests that such globalization might not be deep-rooted among various indigenous culture and its impact would not be as far-reaching as anticipated. Marjorie Ferguson argues, "The sharing of emblems of a common culture of consumption associated with American lifestyles—jeans, theme parks, fast foods, CNN does not reduce cultural diversity and difference. What such phenomena do is to add another layer of complexity to collective identity formation and cultural policy based on ethnicity, region, religion or custom...a pervasive (primarily Western) electronic media popular culture does not 'McDonaldize' the world. It does not and can not impose a 'totalistic' global culture that erases local, regional or national cultures, or their expression or mediation".³⁶

35. Pradip N. Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

36. Marjorie Ferguson, "Globalisation and Cultural Industries : Myths and Realities", in *Cultural Industries : National Policies and Global Markets*, CIRCUIT Conference, December, 1992.

"The Lords of The Global Village"

The interesting part of the global communication revolution is the emergence of many private corporations owned by a new generation of media *moguls* who have become living legend. Bagdikian called the corporations engaged in communication services as the "The Lords of the Global Village".³⁷ Five major corporations now dominate: The American Time-Warner, Inc, with broadcast, magazine, book publishing, cable television, and recording interests; The German firm Bertelsmann, with holdings in recording, magazines, book publishing and satellite television service interests; The Australian-British News Corporation Limited, controlled by Rupert Murdoch, The French Hachette, SA, publisher of influential magazines in France and books in the US and elsewhere, as well as owner of television and radio operations in Europe; and, The American Capital Cities/ABC Inc, a newspaper and broadcasting conglomerate.³⁸

Most notable among the Lords is the Murdoch empire. The Murdoch empire spans three continents. In England, among his newspapers are : The Times, The Sunday Times, and The Sun. In Australia his newspapers include : The Herald in Melbourne and The Australian. In the United States he owns the New York Post, and magazines like vastly profitable TV Guide. This is only his newspaper industry. Rupert Murdoch is described as the world's first global media baron. As far his television network business is concerned, he launched a fourth television network in the United States — the Fox network. In Europe SKY Television Network is the most successful part of the Murdoch empire. In Asia he owns

37. Ben Bagdikian, *op. cit.*, pp. 805-20.

38. Sewart M. Hoover, Shalini Singh Venturrelli, and Douglas K. Wagner, "Trends in Global Communication Policy-Making : Lessons from the Asian Case," *Asian Journal of Communication* Vol. 3, No. 1, 1993, p. 111.

The South China Morning Post. He has a controlling stake in STAR TV which he bought in 1993. His publishing companies include such big names like Harper and Row and William Collins. In movie business, he owns 20th Century Fox studio.³⁹

There are other players who dominate global popular culture as well as news business. For instance, Cable News Network (CNN), owned by Ted Turner has become a global phenomenon.

IMPLICATIONS

The implications of the communication revolution in the present age will be manifold. Because of technical improvements, the potential sources of information are virtually unlimited, and the possible varieties and kinds of future communication excite the imagination. The two-way capability of cable television, tied in with cosmat and personal computers, means that information users can seek out specific kinds of information or news and will not remain a passive audience as in the previous years.

The wave of democratisation in many parts of the world may be linked with instantaneous communication revolution. It will not be a mere exaggeration to say that people of Nepal or Bangladesh had become encouraged to see the way young people of Eastern Europe were breaking the walls of communism. Looking ahead, there are reasons to believe that both democratic and authoritarian governments will have to be concerned to a considerable extent in facing diverse public opinion — nationally and internationally. The emergence of public opinion — in the form of democracy and with the help of new communication technologies — may put an end many undemocratic norms but simultaneously it can give birth to many dilemmas. Even in the United States media's role

39. See, for the details of the Murdoch empire, *SUNDAY* (cover story), "Enter, Repert Murdoch," India, 20-26 February, 1994.

trivializing the democracy is the subject of intense discussion among the political scientists. Probably current decades will witness frequent changes in the governments because of the media's watchdog role.

Communication technology is making it possible to send and receive news and other essential information almost anywhere in the world. It is raising the aspirations of the poorer nations to keep pace with the industrialized countries. Awareness of indigenous culture is also growing up in view of the increasing dominance of the Western culture.

However, concern has frequently been expressed by critics about the implications of the information technology revolution for Third World countries. Rada, for example, contends that the readjustment policies of "industrialized countries", together with their development and mastery of information technology, is simply reinforcing the present international division of labour through substantial increases in productivity and concentration of information-intensive sectors in them.⁴⁰

Concentration of media ownership and control in the hands of a few media *moguls* may have far-reaching impact. On the other hand, the unit cost of international transmission of news will continue to drop as usage of the world news systems increases and efficiency, speed and reach of the hardware become greater. Advertising expenditure is rising, competitiveness among various media is also rising.

Many writers have argued that the accumulation of capital since the booming economy of world in the 1970s is mainly responsible for the rapid expansion of communications and

40. Juan Rada, "The microelectronics revolution : implications for the Third World", *Development Dialogue*, Vol. 2, pp. 41-67.

information activities. According to Geoffery Reeves, international expansion of information activities may also be seen as part of two highly interrelated processes of transnationalization and informationalization. The former is related to the activities of transnational corporations, while the latter process involves radical shifts in the means of storing, processing and retrieving information, the rapid development of telecommunications hardware, software and television.⁴¹ The combined process of transnationalization raises fundamental questions for all societies regardless of whether they are advanced capitalist, peripheral capitalist, or socialist ones subject to strong insistent "disintegrative" pressures and economic "liberalization" tendencies. Reeves says the questions relate to a number of basic issues : "cultural domination and subordination; the control of communications, cultural production, and distribution; access to economic, political and other information; the creation of a 'new world information order' and the regulation and control of transborder data flows; the determination of state policy in economic, cultural and other areas; the development of "indigenous" technological and production capacity; and the understanding and constant reconstruction of what is 'national' in the cultural, historical or any other sense. While such issues have a universal applicability and relevance, for many in the 'Third World' countries, including key sections of the intelligentsia, they appear as more pressing and poignant"⁴²

As democratic processes in many parts of the world, e.g. in Asia are still fragile and liberalization movement is not giving expected result, some believe these countries may have a facade of liberalization. Javed Jabbar, chairman of the South Asian Media

41. Geoffery Reeves, *Communications and the "Third World"*, Routledge. London and New York, 1993, p. 2.

42. Geoffery Reeves, *ibid.*

Association, notes that liberalization (in mass communication) is accompanied by self-indulgence, trivialization, escapism and the pandering to the lowest common denominator of taste and quality in the name of economic viability, profiteering, circulation, audience size ratings. Liberalization in Asia, in parts, showing signs of leaning towards a vulgarization of media content.⁴³

The arrival of almost uncontrollable transnational satellite entertainment programmes (and advertisements) with their potential consequences of cultural dilution and social change is an issue which concerns consumer groups as well as national governments and public service broadcasters. For example, international consumer codes governing television advertisement content, and the regulation of interactive and information services with respect to access and legal protection as suggested strategies for an information age.⁴⁴ The plight of the national broadcasters is easy to anticipate. Facing challenges from foreign countries' programme they are awakening up to provide their viewers a diversity of tastes. But structural limitations and problems in resource allocation will continue to haunt them.

Socio-cultural problems due to spillover is a case worth mentioning. The dramatic growth of satellite systems in broadcasting has given rise to some sensitive issues e.g. issues like control of information, preservation of cultural identities and religious heritage, and even the question of survival of traditional broadcasting. For instance, in Bangladesh, the recent spillover reception of programmes of foreign television networks like Star TV, Zee TV, BBC or Channel V through dish antenna has also

43. Javed Jabbar, "The Liberalization Movement and Communication in Asia — Implications for National Communication Policies," *Media Asia*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1992, p. 209.

44. *The Information Society : A Strategy for Consumers*, National Consumer Council, London, 1984.

raised such questions. A survey conducted by Centre for Communication and Research shows that 37% of TV owners in Dhaka City receive programmes of foreign TV network through dish antenna, rest 63% yet to take connection.⁴⁵ Interestingly enough, 60% of the rest 63% are considering to be hooked up by satellite broadcasting. Only 3% of the TV owners of Dhaka city are not in favour of alien programmes in their TV. In terms of channel preference Dhaka TV viewers who are receiving satellite signals 41% prefer Zee TV, followed by Channel V, 21%, Star Plus, 11% and then Bangladesh Television (BTV) 8%.⁴⁶ This only represents the plight of national broadcasters of a poor nation like Bangladesh in facing open challenges from other communication networks.

The unrestricted entry and consumption of signals from one country could, under certain conditions, wipe out the recipient's own culture and identity. By the invasion of alien culture the weaker groups or country lose their cultural authenticity and thus the indigenous culture becomes marginal culture. Threats may come from many directions as well. In an age of global AIDS phenomenon, the uncensored inflow of erotic movies and scenes may become responsible for erosion of moral values in relatively conservative societies and that, in turn, may spread illicit sex which also contributes to spread AIDS. It is often alleged that the content of the programmes which come through satellites may also spread violence and wrong ideas to children and youth. It can also create racial, national, and religious hatred or hostility through false information and stereotypical representation of age, sex, culture and nation. If foreign countries' commercials flow into a state belonging to relatively weaker economy, it could affect

45. Biplab Rahman, "Akash Dakhal, Satellite Culture," *Khabarar Kagoj*, July 26, 1994, Dhaka, p. 11.

46. Biplab Rahman, *ibid.*

the protection of domestic markets. For example, concern has been raised in Bangladesh about commercial of toiletries, toothpaste which are shown in Indian Zee TV. These Indian products which are also available in Bangladesh do entice buyers to prefer them, aggravating the already weakened domestic industries by smuggled Indian goods in the markets.

While information is being recognized as a commodity and a resource, the great concern of dependency theorists is that the concentration, organisation and control of data banks and information, and of information technology hardware, in the advanced capitalist countries especially, will further reproduce the old patterns of dependency and domination.⁴⁷ Experts suggest that the dependency would deepen in near future. The implications for employment are another major concern. The mainly intra-corporate shipping of data to centres in advanced capitalist or industrial countries for processing either leads to a loss of jobs or perhaps more important, a loss of job creation potential.⁴⁸

Considering their relative importance and relevance to the subject analysed, the following two sub-sections highlight on two points — transfer of communication technologies, and freedom of information.

Transfer of Communication Technologies

From the Cold War period onward the newly independent developing countries, which have little technological base, expertise and funds in the field of communication, have found themselves in the most awkward position. The renaming and reshaping of world political structure has changed little as far as

47. Rada, *op. cit.*

48. Geoffery Reeves, *op. cit.*

the transfer of communication technology is concerned. Several years ago, in the Cold War period, a Western writer commented that "For the foreseeable future, the system of international communication will probably maintain its present basic structure. Modification will come mainly from the adoption of more technological innovations and not by declarations of new order to end neocolonial control of international news. In the late twentieth century, communication technology has proved a far more powerful force for change than political ideology."⁴⁹

A highly industrialised nation like Japan can utilize any new technology much faster than any developing country like Bangladesh. The poorer nations want the new communications technology but lack the social and economic bases needed to make the best use of it. For many of the poor debt-ridden countries of the Third World, sophisticated and expensive electronic systems are completely out of reach. "Such factors only add to deep rift between the haves and have-nots of the world, a condition many consider the greatest of all global problems."⁵⁰

It is found that some mass produced electronic goods are assembled in developing countries, only because of cheap labour. This is not transfer of technology. Apart from some NICs only a few countries are able to absorb imported technology and go for R & D and high-tech. While the NIEs of Asia and ASEAN region are catching up with telecommunication technologies, access to these is still a far cry for many developing countries. There are other problems also. The rapid expansion of new communication technologies in societies pose a dilemma for developing countries. While the developing countries cannot avoid bringing the latest technology, many complicated problems arise at the

49. Willaim A. Hachten, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

50. Willaim A. Hachten, *ibid*, p.72.

planning, installation, operation and maintenance stages. Its inept handling can be detrimental to different groups of the society. Application of the technology depends on the particular environment.

Concerning application and relevance of these technologies to development to the poor and the developing countries there exist various viewpoints. If development is measured by what Gunnar Myrdal mentioned in his book *Asian Drama*, e. g. the upward movement of the entire social system then we may ask, what benefit a poor nation can get only by bringing sophisticated technology? 1) The technology was developed for military, space or commercial uses in the industrial economies. It was not designed for the needs of developing countries who neither perform the surveillance and control functions that the technology serves nor play a significant role in its production; 2) Satellite communication is not a substitute for structural reforms in a society. It will only aggravate the dependency of periphery countries and strengthen the domination of the centre. It will work to widen the information gap between the rich and the poor, the town and the countryside; and 3) So far the information revolution has not informed ordinary citizens better, has not raised their educational standards, has not changed much the content of media they patronize. The control over those decisions does not lie in their hands and it is unlikely that they will get the control in near future. They are made by governments and the transnational corporations which finance the steep start-up and opening costs of high-powered technology.⁵¹ The debate as well as Nora's argument may have their roots in the various development paradigms of 1950s, 1960s, but in ultimate analysis, perhaps these

51. Nora C. Quebral, "The Application of Information and Communication Technology to Development," *Media Asia*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1992, p. 214.

are some relevant observations that must be taken into consideration for development aspirant nations.

Having said that, it should also be pointed out that, keeping pace with the telecommunication technologies has virtually become difficult to developing nations. There is also no denying the fact that if properly used telecommunication infrastructure can contribute to the overall development process. "Telephone services to rural and remote areas can stimulate economic development and bring the rural residents closer to the mainstream of national life. Satellite television and radio network positively contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of a nation providing required information to the audience"⁵² However, Jussawala observes that transfer of such telecommunication technology is ridden with certain contentious issues of standardization of equipment and protocols for interconnectivity, as well as problems of allocation of the spectrum, services trade and equitable access to information.⁵³

To face these Third World countries rely mostly on donor countries. As far as external assistance in this area is concerned, Third World countries need donation or external assistance to face four problem areas. These are : the lack of available human resources in determining communication needs and planning, in implementing, in staffing communication institutions and facilities, and, scarce capital resources.⁵⁴ Existing examples suggest that the countries tend to suffer from a combination of all four areas of need.

52. Serajul I. Bhuiyan, "Satellite Communication and Rural Development in a Changing Asia : Policy Issues," *Media Asia*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1992, p. 214.

53. Meheroo Jussawala, "Information Technology and Economic Development in the Asia and the Pacific," paper presented at the conference on Communication, Technology and Development : Alternatives for Asia, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 25-27 June 1993.

54. See, UNESCO, *Reports & Papers on Mass Communication*, No. 76, Paris.

Freedom of Information

The Western ideal of the free flow of information or freedom of information are considered as essential elements in the armoury of individual rights within the liberal democratic framework. But there are apprehension that these concepts, unattackable *per se*, may pose a real threat to collective rights.

Such concerns are not new. V. Forsythe observed the traditional approach adopted in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is based on a persons' right to information, but has proved inadequate because "such concepts as the right to information and the freedom of information are themselves often based on the interests of particular groups; and they have developed within the value systems and laws of one particular culture."⁵⁵ Laponace, among others, has noted that it is important to distinguish between individual and collective rights. American emphasis on the former, understandable enough in that it best serves the country's interests and is congruent with its political theories, nevertheless fails to make allowance for the vital interests of smaller, weaker and culturally exposed states. By extending the notion of right based on the individual to the international arena, the US fails to recongize collective rights and certainly the right of a sovereign nation state to seek to protect its culture.⁵⁶

Though democracy has survived over all other political ideologies so far and democratic trends are going to become almost universal phenomenon, different interpretation of demo-

55. V. Forsythe, "Notes on the concept of the right to communicate," paper presented at the ICC Annual Conference, 1982.

56. See, John Meisel, "Communications in the Space Age, Some Canadian and International Implications", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1986, p. 322.

cratic norms have emerged. The question of press freedom is one of such issues. A Third World model of democracy is being discussed now, especially in the ASEAN region. The recent statements of Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Muhammad and his strong position *vis-a-vis* Western liberal democratic norms have been, to a large extent, contributing to this approach. According to Malaysian Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim, "A conscious effort to explore alternatives is now profoundly felt as Asia emerges as the crucible of economic growth. Not only is Asia more prosperous now, but in the realm of ideas that success story has demolished the proposition that there is only path to development, that is the path trodden by the developing societies ... Our societies now have confidence in their own positive values and traditions that will provide the guiding ideas for further development."⁵⁷ However Malaysia is not alone who are in favour of an Asian identity and value system. Those who are attacking Western concept of libertarianism frequently say it is based on the belief that mass communications should be privately controlled, run as capitalist enterprises and profit-oriented. West always gives free press prescription to the Third World countries for their smooth journey to development. But there are examples to show that this is not necessarily a true proposition.⁵⁸ The Philippines, a Southeast Asian nation, has enjoyed the freest press for the longest period of time but its inability to achieve economic growth comparing to NICs only suggest that a free press can not be *sine*

57. Anwar Ibrahim, Speech given at the conference on Communication, Technology and Development : Alternatives for Asia, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 25-27, June 1993, quoted in *Media Asia*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1993.

58. For an interesting discussion on Asian perspective on free press see, Kishore Mahbubani, "An Asian Perspective on Human Rights and Freedom of the Press," *Media Asia*, Vol. 20 No. 3, Singapore, 1993, pp. 159-166.

qua non for overall development process. The examples of India and China can also be taken into account here. In this context, according to Pradip N. Thomas, "Asian governments increasingly tend to say that Western forms of governments are a luxury the media work in the interest of national development and that the foundations of democracy in Asia need to be based on a symbiotic rather than antagonistic relationship between the individual and the state."⁵⁹

Among the four theories of the press — authoritarian, libertarian, communist, social responsibility — the last one i.e. "social responsibility" model of press freedom is gaining currency now. As a philosophy it dates back to Thomas Jefferson who believed in freedom with responsibility. "Social responsibility meant taking a moral responsibility for what was printed and, in particular, vouching for factual accuracy, taking the effect of published messages into account, and, in general, countering the tendency to allow the *adversary of government* principle to outweigh all others".⁶⁰ In January 1984, the Conference of Ministers of Information of Non-Aligned countries was held in Jakarta, Indonesia. The conference urged the world's mass media to eschew tendentious reporting in all its manifestations and to desist from propagating materials which directly or indirectly may prove detrimental or prejudicial to the interest of any member country of the Non-Aligned Movement. This type of viewpoint is still dominating in various political discourse regarding international communication, even after the end of the Cold War. In this case, the international debate would then centre not only

59. Pradip N. Thomas, "Reporting ethnic-religious-nationalist conflict : Western media and Asian realities," *Lanka Guardian*, Vol. 17, No. 15, Dec 1, 1994.

60. Neville Peterson, "Asian News Values, Changes and Challenges," *Media Asia*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1992, p. 186.

controlled vs. free press dichotomy, but on responsible vs. unrestrained perspectives of the press. Press freedom would, therefore, be defined in terms of views of media held legally and morally responsible for their utterances on one hand, and conceptions of media free of constraints on the other.⁶¹ So it is evident, that the "freedom of press" ideas of the West will no longer face criticism from the authoritarian and communist conceptions but from social responsibility perspectives in coming days.

COMMUNICATION POLICY : NATIONAL AND REGIONAL

"Communication policies are sets of principles and norms established to guide the behaviour of communication systems".⁶² They emanate from political ideologies, the social and economic conditions and value systems of the country. According to UNESCO "the modern communications explosion demands a clearer and even new philosophy and approach to communication issues, that is, newer communication policies for the reshaping of both national and international communication and social structures."⁶³

Lee said that the foundations of sound communication policies include first, harnessing media to national development objectives, such as political integration, socio-economic modernization and cultural expression. Second, a sound communication policy should not only be beneficial to country's own goals, but also fair to other nations. Third, the media should

61. Muhammad I. Ayish, *op. cit.*

62. UNESCO, *Report of the Experts on Communication Policies and Planning*, COM/MD/24. p. 8.

63. UNESCO, *Meeting of Experts on Communication Policies and Planning*, COM/MD/24.

not be subjected either to a market monopoly by a few conglomerates (such as the US model), or, alternatively, to control by oligarchic bureaucracies (such as the former Soviet model). Fourth, every nation, however small, should be able to design its own communication direction and its destiny.⁶⁴

According to some specialists while many Third World countries have successfully addressed the basic problem of international news flow, and have done a good deal to redress the imbalance in it especially — through the establishment of national and regional news agencies — they have not seriously addressed basic policy issues which arise from the nature of the new information technologies themselves.⁶⁵ Here the central idea is that the concentration on only content of the media in various international forum contributed largely to the failure of formulation of a comprehensive communication policy on the part of the Third World countries.

Because it has become increasingly difficult to separate broadcasting from telecommunications, the tendency to regulate has serious consequences for all communication policy decisions, international, national, and local. The impact of new communication technologies, on societies as well as on individuals and on global interdependence, lead to a wide range of public policies, implicit as well as explicit and international as well as domestic. Such policies are intended to shape the exploitation of communication technologies to public needs.

This is more relevant to the South Asian countries. It is now imperative for the Third World nations to cooperate effectively in

64. C. C. Lee, *Media imperialism reconsidered*, Sage, Beverly Hills, 1981, pp. 182-3.

65. Raquel Salinas Bascur, "Information in the Third World : adjusting technologies or strategies? *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol. 7, pp. 355-68.

developing regional and continental telecommunications and news. Among the 14 possible areas of cooperation among the SAARC countries which were identified by a Study Group for Science and Technology formed immediately after SAARC was established in 1981, informatics and transfer and adoption of appropriate technology got special importance. A lot remains to be achieved in this regard. SAARC countries can take a uniform position while formulating their respective communication policies expecting that it will reflect the hopes and aspirations of the people of the entire region. Exchange of scientific personnel among member countries can help strengthen mutual relationship by promoting the sharing of experience, skills and knowledge of new communication technologies. A code of morality can also be established. Integration of various national and regional institutions is need of the hour now.

The need for a regional communication policy among the SAARC countries is voiced in different quarters. Writing in 1986, Suneet Vir Singh, an Indian media specialist, mentioned some policy recommendations towards framing of a regional communication policy. She observed that "a purposeful communication policy for South Asia would work towards strengthening the centripetal forces operating within the region. It would create an orientation towards cooperation by a) seeking out and spotlighting areas of common interest; b) facilitating communication where there is a positive desire for it (as between India and Pakistan); and c) stimulating interest where it does not exist (as between the Maldives and Nepal). To achieve these objectives it is essential for the governments and the media to work for a greater flow of information exchange."⁶⁶ A sense of

66. Suneet Vir Singh, "A Regional Communication Policy for South Asia," *Regional Cooperation and Development in South Asia*, Vol. 1, edited by Bhabani Sen Gupta, pp. 70-101, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1986.

regional identity, mutual respect based on commonly-held values and priorities must be forged if we want to thrive in this coming technological decades.

With regard to international telecommunication networks, Jussawala and Hukill observe regional and international influences are also important in the reform process. Issues of tariffs, interconnectivity, and standards as well as allocation and use of the frequency spectrum all have significant economic, political and social implications internationally and regionally as well as for individual countries and societies.⁶⁷ Deregulation and privatization can not be grand panacea of all the economic woes of a country. The experiences of US or Europe may not be replicable in South Asian countries because of some social, cultural and economic factors. Even in Southeast Asia, telecommunication policies have largely been established on political, national sovereignty and cultural preservation consideration. For example, regulatory policies differ from a fully centralized system in Singapore to a mix of public and private sector operations in Malaysia.⁶⁸

There is a further related area of policy concern which also warrants public debate. This is the area of cultural policy under the broadest definition of communication policy which will determine the cultural dimension a nation prefers. The proliferation of electronic media delivery systems, and subsequent foreign media discourse has given issues of cultural content a new relevance for governments. It seems Samuel Huntington's much-discussed clash of civilizations⁶⁹ thesis becomes a reality which

67. Meheroo Jussawala, Mark H. Hukill, "Structural Change of Telecommunications in Southeast Asia, New Regulatory Regimes and Private Interest," *Media Asia*, Vol. 19, No 1, 1992, p. 3.

68. Jussawala & Hukill, *ibid.*, p. 8.

69. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49.

Canadian media sociologist Marjorie Ferguson predicted much earlier that the clash of culture becomes more evident as they are co-mingled.⁷⁰ Ferguson opined that this raises questions about how any national public good is served by the images and messages of a global, "show-and-tell" media system that uses the television screen. In an era of internationalized cultural production, which policies can or should sovereign states employ to defend and preserve national interests and identities.⁷¹

CONCLUSION

On the basis of discussion in the paper, it may be argued that the ongoing technological revolution followed by frequent policy changes in communication sector in the national and international level, a renewed global power structure, increased concentration on regional matters — both in terms of trade and cultural preservation, and so on — have made international communication currently a genuinely specialized area to explore as a distinct field of study. Here the main question should be where the Third World countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, India or Bhutan or other poorest countries of the world really fit in.

For such countries the problems are manifold. A sort of "fragile democracy" is at work in these countries where the politicians are largely divided on ideological and other issues, where the countries are to relentlessly fight with massive poverty, illiteracy, over population and unequal distribution of wealth. A redefined UN has given them very little room to argue in favour of "balanced flow" ; transborder spillover and data flow making

70. Marjorie Ferguson, *New Communication Technologies and the Public Interest : Comparative Perspectives on Policy and Research*, SAGE Publications, London, 1986, p. 182.

71. Ferguson, *ibid.*, p. 182.

their culture marginal culture ; language is marching towards Englishization ; and only a few are benefited by deregulation and privatisation. These are the problems, among many, Third World countries are facing and will have to encounter. The formal international institutions like International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and World Administrative Radio Conferences (WARC) are becoming largely ineffective in recent years and these are not considered as the places where Third World's interests are taken care of like that of previous years. The importance of the periphery is declining in the post-Cold War era as well as the countries are losing their leverage. "Freedom of speech" and "freedom of press", these notions sometimes place the Third World countries in a real unique position. Numerous examples can be cited in this regard but what is important that such Western concepts occasionally contribute to the creation of ethnic or religious tensions and rivalry within a region. As self-development is becoming popular among the various development theories from the 1970s, it is most expected the nations themselves will decide how they want to deal with the ideas of free press or freedom of information. Equally important factor is that by taking advantage of communication technologies, West's attempt to impose "free flow of information" doctrine around every corner of the globe might not receive warm reception everywhere. They must take into account the sensitivity of various cultures when they will deal with sensitive issues.

Equal access to the services provided by new communication technologies is becoming a more important question now. As far as transfer of communication technology in the Third World countries is concerned, one much-cited advice that must be taken into account before undertaking any investment in technology and before finalizing external assistance programmes, is that the donor and the recipients countries must determine what problems

they are really trying to solve. How will it influence the overall development process? The recipient countries must work hard to utilise the aid in the best possible ways. On the other hand the donor countries must be candid while describing the purpose of the aid.

Scholars can widen the arena of discourse by identifying the urgent questions about the social and political costs involved as well as the intended (if not always achieved) economic benefits of technological innovation.⁷² The involvement of economists and social psychologists in the policy making process—an area where the developing countries far lag behind—is a necessity for this.

But there are other problems as well. While making discussion on technological advancement and new political environment we tend to forget its human aspect — its bearing upon common man, upon interpersonal communication or upon entire civilization. Majid Tehranian says that the rise of religious consciousness in the world today may be interpreted as a crisis of modernity. He argues that modernization as a project of European secular enlightenment, based upon a scientific, technological, instrumentalist worldview, with a faith in infinite human perfectibility and progress seems to have reached a dead-end. Cultural and moral lags in human progress have made scientific and technological progress problematical at best and disastrous at worst.⁷³ Technology must be seen and used from a humane aspect so that technology in itself can not become winner. Perhaps it is time to be more sensitive about individuals' rights and culture, about their hopes and aspirations.

72. Marjorie Ferguson, *ibid.*

73. Majid Tehranian, "Roundtable," *Media Asia*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1993.