

Nascent Journalism

Issues in the Islamic Movement 1983-84 (1403-04),
 Edited by Kalim Siddiqui, The Open Press Limited, London, 1985,
 Hbk £18/Pbk £6.95

THIS IS the fourth anthology in an annual series issued by the Open Press Ltd., the publishing arm of the Muslim Institute for Research and Planning. Essentially, the book is composed of selected lectures from the Institute's conferences, articles from the *Crescent International*, and some material from the Institute's monthly *Muslimmedia*.

The purpose of the annual anthologies was spelt out when announcing the second volume covering 1981-82 (1401-02). "There is now an alternative worldview, unmistakably Islamic, demanding attention. This worldview is best manifested in the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic State that have emerged in Iran The Islamic worldview is carried by a 'fringe media' throughout the world. This annual anthology is designed to make the Islamic worldview more widely accessible. It will also help the 'fringe media' itself to develop and become more effective." However, in the view of Dr Siddiqui this 'fringe media' is restricted to the publications of the Muslim Institute. In his foreword to *Issues in the Islamic Movement 1982-83 (1402-03)*, he writes, "... this book, and the *Crescent International* and *Muslimmedia* from which it is largely compiled, are still virtually the only sources of regular, informed and authoritative commentary on world affairs from the point of view of Islam."

Indeed, only once in the four annual anthologies, has any other 'fringe media' been considered worthy of mention. In the 1982-83 series an article first published in *Radiance*, Delhi, by Khurram Jah Murad, then director of The Islamic Foundation in Leicester, has been reproduced. This *holier than thou* attitude runs through the whole enterprise, be it in styling Dr Siddiqui as the doyen of Muslim journalists, or in assuming the mantle of the global Islamic Movement, or in lambasting every Muslim country's leadership for every conceivable hardship befalling the hapless Muslim masses. Many admirers of the works

of the Muslim Institute have complained that if this is the sum total of the 'new mood in Islam' than the future of Islam is bleak!

Given then, that the anthologies represent the media output of The Muslim Institute, rather than as claimed, of the sum total of the global Islamic Movement, it is still a formidable contribution and Dr Siddiqui needs to be congratulated for delineating such a well-planned strategy for putting himself and his team of writers on the map.

The coverage of the anthologies is by now standard. There is an opening article by Dr Siddiqui attempting to conceptualise the issues thrown up by the Islamic revival, particularly in the area of the theory of the state in view of the emergence of the Islamic State in Iran. This is followed by selections of articles and editorials from the *Crescent International* and the *Muslimmedia* dealing with events and occurrences in all corners of the Muslim world. The selection is more skewed in favour of articles depicting the various facets of the Islamic Revolution in Iran - an area the Institute claims to be particularly proficient in - and is reinforced by the inclusion of

other material by Dr Siddiqui on the Islamic Revolution, delivered at conferences and symposia. The anthology is rounded up by a listing of the titles of all the articles appearing in the *Crescent International* in the relevant period and by a good index to the volume.

Whilst the articles provide a useful record, and on occasions valuable commentary, on events occurring in the Muslim world, the views presented are not always consistent and sometimes reveal startling 'changes' of mind. Take for example the coverage of the introduction and implementation of Islamic banking in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the *Crescent International* of September 16-30, 1982 one reads, "The (Islamic Banking) bill is a novel piece of legislation, and may well be the most important single measure passed by the *Majlis* since the Islamic Revolution. The fact that the Revolutionary process has been allowed to shape this bill is a measure of the confidence of the Revolutionary leadership." And again the Editorial in the *Crescent International* of June 16-30, 1984 had this to say:

"The manner in which Islamic Iran has handled the transformation of its banking system is a model of maturity, pragmatism and commitment. The capitalist banking system was not demolished in the first flush of the Revolution. It was allowed to exist and perform essential banking functions. Slowly, workers of the Islamic movement were appointed to lead the banks. Then the new bankers, the old bankers, the economists and the *Ulema* sat down together to work out a new system....."

We do not have the learning neces-

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sary to evaluate the contents of the new law, The most important point to note here is that the law is 'Islamic' not because it was drafted by an 'Islamic party' or because it conforms to the literature on 'Islamic economics'; it is Islamic because it has been passed by the Majlis-e Shura-e Islami of an Islamic State."

It is thus surprising to see the about turn enunciated in the Editorial of the

Crescent International of 16-31 December, 1985. It runs, "The bill on the banking system was passed by the Majlis in August 1983 and was *fully* (emphasis added) implemented on March 21, 1984. Recent reports reaching us from Iran suggest that, apart from a few semantics regarding *riba*, banking is carried on in much the same manner as before."

In sum then, the anthologies are

useful and a valuable contribution in their own place, but the claim to be the only source of authoritative information on the Islamic movement, the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the state of the Muslims, should give way to a greater willingness to interact with the whole gamut of Muslim media that has sprung up over the last two decades.

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Crushed by the Information Juggernaut

A New Information Order or Psychological Warfare,
by A. Grachev, N. Yermoshkin, *Progress Publishers Moscow, 1984,*
264pp

FREEDOM of the press is a sacrosanct right in the West. It is considered indispensable for the just functioning of any kind of political rule. However, as interpreted and applied by the West to the Third World, freedom of the press means merely freedom for the rich to control and media and silence the poor. 'Holding forth on the free flow of information', the two Russian authors argue in this provocative study, 'the West imposes its own views on world developments, its ideals and values on the peoples of newly independent countries. The goal it pursues is clear - to slow down national liberation and create a climate favourable to bolstering its economic domination - in other words, to replace classic colonialism with the now colonialism of transnational corporations. And so the shock waves of the "information explosion" are radiating from western propaganda centres, both private and government-owned. In a word, *the mass media remain a powerful tool the imperialists use to back their economic and political expansionism.*' (emphasis added).

Despite the obvious ideological slant, the Soviet writers' depiction of 'communication imperialism' (we owe the coinage to the former President of Finland, Uhro Kekkonen!) is not altogether unreasonable and unjust. The sheer dominance of western news agencies, to select but a single motif, fully vindicates the non-westerner's

perception of being crushed by the occidental information juggernaut. The four major news agencies of the world, Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), France-Press and Reuters, virtually control the entire global news supply. In terms of word count, the combined turnover of the four biggest news agencies of Asia, those of India, Indonesia, Philippines and Malaysia, is little over one percent of that of the four western agencies. The same holds for radio and television transmission. The share of imported TV programmes (mostly violence and sex from USA) is quite revealing. Guatemala, for instance, imports 84% of its programmes. The corresponding figures are 78% for Singapore, 71% for Malaysia, 64% for Zambia, 63% for Nigeria, 62% for Uruguay, 57% for the Yemen Arab Republic, 55% for Kuwait, 52% for Iraq and so forth! When we supplement to this information the well-known fact that western news agencies have close affinities with, nay indeed they are fully controlled by, the political centres of state power, the picture that emerges of the media monopoly becomes even more disturbing and terrifying.

The most sinister aspect of this one-way information flow is that the non-western world has been rendered incapable of forging its own image. It sees itself literally reflected in the western mirror. When a Middle East-

erner, for instance, opens his morning paper, eight out of ten stories that he reads have nothing to do with his own situation. He is either served with insanities like the latest fashions in Paris, or is given a heavy dosage of the ideological medicine. The West that he encounters is but the Shangri-La of the journalistic imagination. It is plagued by nothing more serious and reprehensible than welfare boredom and impractical humanism! Thus, in subtle and insidious ways, the cultural tastes, aesthetic preferences, political ideals, even moral values of the non-western world, are daily being coloured by the gigantic information machines of the West. No wonder these instruments of 'psychological warfare' are proving more lethal than weapons of mass destruction. The battle cry for 'a new information order' which is issuing from Third World lips is in fact the agonizing shriek of an endangered species - the non-western man.

Though obviously conceived as a tract of anti-western ideological polemics, the Soviet work offers much that is of interest to a non-western reader. In fact, the Russian writers' skilful weaving of an argumentational web against the dominance of the western media in the Third World is not altogether unredeeming. The exposé of 'sensational facts' alone, all carefully selected to embarrass the West, is worth the modest price of the book. However, their facile bid to convince the reader that the Soviet Union is pursuing a more altruistic policy in the global information warfare is less convincing. How come that despite all the weight and power of official news agencies and other media, the war crimes of the United States in Vietnam could be exposed mercilessly to the whole world, whereas similar Soviet atrocities in Afghanistan keep on going undetected, unexposed and unindicted? Freedom of the press is not such a vacuous ideal after all. ■

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