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the media

Journalist

By M.B. Naqvi

It is an extraordinary situation. On the one hand, ~~electioneering is getting into its~~ usual swing and parties are making tall but bland promises. The polls now look more likely to be held on schedule, despite nagging doubts. In other words, it is business as usual.

On the other hand, a profound crisis engulfs the country. It has many dimensions and the outlook is rather dark. The question is how is the nation coping with this crisis that seems to be worsening daily?

Little attention is being paid to the all-enveloping crisis. The political leadership, in the government as such and the leadership of all the parties as a whole, seem to take politics normally. It is not ruffled. None of the parties seems to have any specific view of the situation, much less a programme to salvage the society and the economy from growing difficulties. All that the political leadership is aware of are two questions: corruption and their own ideological nostrums.

A greater degree of awareness is being exhibited by superior judiciary that has been inundated by issues that are basically political, such as the Eighth Amendment, vires and justification for the government's dismissal and other constitutional niceties. But in the handling of the issues, complex as they certainly are, the judiciary apparently does not exhibit any anxiety to be expeditious.

People ordinarily expect purposeful thinking from political parties on major national issues, especially those in the opposition. They are expected to analyse national issues, suggest solutions and make specific recommendations. Other than being carried away by the red herring of the day — and today it is accountability — they have displayed a remarkable incapacity for creative thinking on basic issues. This is not to say that there is not plenty of carping criticism of the government or each other's vaguely-defined policies or wrongdoing. But criticisms are no more than denunciations and political opposition is conducted as if it were a personal feud between the leaders — which it frequently is. Despite the manifestos season, the hope of coming across meaningful programmes that actually tackle the various facets of national situation is a forlorn hope. In the circumstances, one inevitably thinks of the media. There are its three hard divisions or sections: the first is the electronic media, supposedly more powerful. They have always been under the detailed control of the govern-

ment. They have been, and continue to be, used — even under the caretakers — for government's political purposes. They project or build up those in the government, those it likes, and demolish those whom government of the day does not like. This is almost a constant in national situation.

Despite privatisation being all the rage, not even Shahid Javed Burki talking of actually privatising TV and Radio or permitting private satellite channels. Whatever he anyone may entertain for a constructive role from the media, not the electronic media that will be helpful in doing objective analysis and helping to resolve national crises without thinking about embarrassing the government; moreover its lack of creativity can vitiate even well-intent effort.

The second segment of the media is seldom given due attention: agencies. Although there has been technical proliferation of agencies, one professional among them will show that all of them are not up to the mark. In addition, they are being used as censors of material being fed by foreign agencies. Very little of professional uprightness can be expected from those wire services that depend on official subsidies and yet their contribution to political news is negligible. There is little hope from this source, either.

The third section, newspaper journalists are what can be of help. Up to a point, they have been doing a fine job of reporting more or less fairly during the last ten years. While there are more things that a professional journalist would want the print media to accomplish, it has to be said that the Press by and large has done that there is room for improvement goes without saying. That professional standards also need to be substantially improved is a fact. Freedom of the Press is meaningless without the responsibility and intellectual integrity of all who work for the Press.

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However, the media should provide a platform for new ideas and purposeful th