

Yugoslavia at a Crossroad

Slovenia and Croatia's June 25 unilateral declarations of independence, although a major disappointment, can hardly be described as a bolt from the blue. Slovenians in particular have been steadily laying the groundwork to that end ever since a centre-right coalition of nationalists took power in last year's local, multi-party elections. The new leadership in Ljubljana followed it up with a referendum last December which authorised it to negotiate a loose confederation with the five other republics of the Yugoslav federation by June 26, or get out altogether. Its decision to declare UDI, along with Croatia, has cast a dark shadow over the future of Yugoslavia and raised the spectre of ethnic and political turbulence in the Balkans once more, threatening the new era of peace and stability in Europe.

Things have not really worked out for Yugoslavia since the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980. Without the powerful gel of the late marshal's dictatorial yet magnetic leadership, the six republics of the federation have shown themselves to be too easily prone to the ethnic jealousy and rivalry that characterised their relationship in the violent pre-1918 days when the Balkans were a happy hunting ground for every imperial beast under the sun. It is a supreme irony that after four and a half decades of benevolent socialism, Yugoslavia's various nationalities seem bent on reverting back to those days of bitterness, this time draped in the popular but provocative colours of nationalism. And this is happening at a time when Western Europe, whose model-society the self-proclaimed democrats of Slovenia and Croatia claim to admire, is gradually shedding old-fashioned nationalism in favour of a new federalism.

Yugoslavia is now at a crossroad, the most crucial juncture in its history since the Slavic peoples of south-east Europe were united within one boundary in 1918. One path leads nowhere but civil war — and Slovenia's rejection of talks with Belgrade is a sure, sorry nudge in that direction; the other leads to accommodation, understanding and preservation of Yugoslav unity. Belgrade's call for a moratorium on the use of force is a welcome indication that federal authorities are more interested in negotiations than battles, while the actions undertaken by the military were perhaps unavoidable as no state should be expected to accept establishment of "border" checkpoints within its territory by unauthorised militia forces.

Both the Slovenian and Croatian leaderships can claim to have a powerful argument in favour of their UDIs — public consent as expressed in their respective referendums. While we uphold the principle of every nation's right to self-determination, we still have to ask if secession is the only or even the best option available to Slovenia and Croatia, particularly within the unique Yugoslav context. There is little doubt that if current fissiparous tendencies in the region, in Yugoslavia as well as the Soviet Union, continue unabated, they will contribute nothing towards future stability and harmony in Europe. Disintegration of Yugoslavia will cause animosity and tension to rise and sow the seeds of greater conflicts in the future. It will be a tragically ironic process by which the Balkans will re-Balkanise themselves with all the uncertainties that accompany it.

On the other hand, all six constituent republics of Yugoslavia have a lot to gain by staying within the union. But the federal authorities as well as leaders of Serbia need to recognise that for the union to remain viable, much greater degree of political and economic autonomy has to be accorded to the republics. A fully-fledged democratic federation of equal republics is surely the way forward for Yugoslavia, rather than secession or central control. Instead of pursuing UDIs and civil war rhetoric, all republics should enter into meaningful negotiation, with unity in diversity as their ultimate goal, for the sake of prosperity of their peoples as well as peace in Europe.

Smoking and Flu

Now that every other person we know in town is suffering from influenza, especially after the Eid holidays, it is useful to find out what has caused the incidence of this disease of which the only known — and convenient — cure is believed to be complete rest at home. It is caused by a virus, whatever that may mean, aggravated by sudden changes in temperature and humidity. That sounds reasonable and perfectly convincing.

However, there was a time when many people refused to accept such a simple explanation. They saw a definite connection between tobacco and flu, like today we link lung cancer to smoking.

The theory about smoking and flu is not particularly contemporary. It goes back to 1891, just a century ago, when "opponents of tobacco" in England found out through a survey that of all the men who had contracted influenza in London in a particular year, full 90 per cent were addicted to the use of tobacco, which, in our today's language, is smoking. The "discovery," based on statistics and nothing else, seemed important enough for the New York Herald Tribune to report it and for the International Herald Tribune to reproduce the story last Sunday, a century later.

There is no evidence that there was any serious medical research into the subject during the hundred years or any attempt to turn what was obviously a popular notion into an established scientific fact.

However, it is significant that there were "opponents of tobacco" in England a century ago and that they did try to create an awareness among people about the harmful effect of smoking. What is equally significant and somewhat sad is, smoking has survived all the attacks and all those people "addicted to the use of tobacco", as they put it a century ago, have gone on puffing, whether they fall victims to flu or lung cancer. Bravery — or sheer foolhardiness — comes in all shapes and forms.

Middle East May be the Key to US Worries

by Sabir Mustafa

THE issue of nuclear proliferation in South Asia was recently forced back on the front-burner of debate by Washington's decision to suspend economic and military aid both to India and Pakistan, followed by Islamabad's proposal for an international conference to discuss the possibility of a nuclear-free zone in the region.

The proposal received an early, possibly fatal setback when India dismissed it as nothing more than "a propaganda ploy". India's rejection was also a demonstration of New Delhi's unwillingness to accept any extra-regional intervention in matters of regional or bilateral concern.

Meanwhile the United States kept up the pressure by warning China not to sell any ballistic missiles to Pakistan. Beijing said the missiles to be sold were only a few and would have less than 200km in range, but the Americans are clearly worried. Washington is well aware that Pakistan is trailing India badly in missile development, and is desperate for technology to develop reliable delivery systems for its nuclear warheads.

Despite US efforts to look even-handed in its handling of the nuclear issue in South Asia, it is quite evident now that Washington is far more concerned about, and determined to prevent, the nuclearisation of Pakistan's military than any move on India's part to acquire an atomic arsenal. While this may look unfair, the American position is dictated by a much wider concern than a simple desire to prevent a Third World country from going nuclear.

Pakistan says its nuclear programme is designed merely

to counter-balance the threat posed by India's nuclear capability. But this line of rationale may not be as flawless as its proponents would have us believe.

For one thing, there is ample reason to believe that India's nuclear programme, together with its missile delivery systems, is not being developed with Pakistan in mind at all (India is quite capable of taking care of Pakistan through conventional means). For another, the whole idea of nuclear weapons enhancing security is not as straightforward as it may seem on paper.

The point is, if faced with defeat on the battle-field, would Pakistan seriously entertain the idea of launching a nuclear strike on India, knowing

would not have been undertaken without a clear-cut strategy and goal that made sense to its formulators. The real theatre of operation for Pakistan's nuclear forces may well lie further to the west, in the Middle East to be precise, which is why it worries the US as much as it does. It has long been suspected that the Pakistani nuclear project is financed entirely by Arab states, hence its nickname The Islamic Bomb.

At present Israel is in the unique position of having both a nuclear monopoly and a decisive edge in conventional capability over its regional rivals. Tel Aviv's acquisition of nuclear weapons is primarily an

Israeli cities, Islamabad will be, theoretically, in a position to provide a nuclear umbrella for Arab states confronting Israel.

For the United States, which sees the survival and security of Israel as one of two non-variable factors in its Middle East policy (control of oil being the other), the current balance of power in the region is an ideal one, since it would prevent Arabs from enervating any thought about dealing with Israel militarily, while leaving the US the option of pressuring Israel into making concessions on the issues of territory.

At the same time, Washington is keen to stabilise

disarmament — would also be put in jeopardy as Tel Aviv would be most unlikely to be part of a general Middle East arms control regime, since that would leave a de-nuclearised Israel facing the possibility of Arab states being extended nuclear cover by Pakistan.

Thus a Pakistan armed with nuclear-tipped missiles can, in theory, pose a serious threat to Israel, jeopardise an overall disarmament process in the region, and destabilise the security balance in the Indian subcontinent itself by triggering a self-defeating arms race.

India, on the other hand, does not have its eyes on the Middle East at all, and thus does not worry the US to the same degree. Washington may

than China. Although New Delhi has maintained a staunchly non-aligned foreign policy since independence and has often clashed with US interests, particularly in the Third World; its democratic institutions and free market economic orientation are likely to make India gravitate towards the West.

For its part, the West has already withdrawn from the South Asian scene and allowed India to act quite independently, as was evident from the amount of elbow-room New Delhi was given in Sri Lanka in 1987 and the Maldives in 1988. India is clearly shaping up as a major power in South and South-East Asia, taking in a wide expanse of the Indian Ocean from the Straits of Malacca to the east to the Strait of Hormuz to the west. Maintenance of a strong nuclear force and a blue water navy are necessary for India both to deter the Chinese in the north and project its power across the ocean.

The Americans, who are no strangers to the power game, are under no illusions about the logic behind India's nuclear drive. In the long-run, Washington probably sees a highly independent but democratic India as a more reliable ally than the ideologically suspect communist China. The US has always refrained from applying any pressure on India on such sensitive internal matters as Kashmir or Punjab, or on regional disputes such as the one with Nepal in 1989. These are indicative of America's willingness to treat India as a regional power. This policy of accommodation may have already expanded to accept India's emergence as a nuclear power as well.

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that the inevitable retaliation would leave Pakistan totally annihilated? More important under the circumstances, would India regard a Pakistani nuclear threat as a credible one? If it didn't, then the whole logic behind Pakistan's nuclear policy would collapse instantly, because nuclear arms are a viable defence option only so long as the intended "target" viewed their presence as a genuine threat to its existence. And if Pakistan were to take the plunge and launch, then that would again signal the failure of deterrence, with devastating consequences. With its credibility as a deterrent in serious doubt, Pakistan's nuclear option vis-à-vis security against India seems almost a non-starter.

But a high-risk programme involving billions of dollars

insurance against the long-term possibility of losing its conventional superiority. But unless Arab states can counter this new, strategic threat, they would neither be able to deter Israel from further aggression nor force it to accept the principle of exchanging land for peace. For its part, Israel has already demonstrated its intention and capability to prevent any Arab state from acquiring nuclear weapons.

That is where Pakistan comes in, and that is why it worries the Americans as much. Pakistan is beyond the reach of the Israeli air force (one assumes, but of course, one can never tell with the Israelis), and out of regional arms control considerations. Once Pakistan procures a missile system capable of delivering nuclear warheads on

the arms build-up in West Asia and begin a winding-down process from its current position. First step has been the destruction of Iraqi capability to threaten Israel. Next step would be to ban all states in the region from acquiring nuclear-biological-chemical (NBC) weapons as well as missile delivery systems. Characteristically, the US has not called on Israel to destroy its stockpile of NBC weapons, even though the only Arab state with such a capability, Iraq, has already been forced to disarm.

This fits in nicely with US desire of keeping Israel dominant in the region. But Pakistan's entry into West Asia's nuclear equation would seriously upset this aspect of US policy. The other aspect of Washington's policy — gradual

even view India's nuclear programme as an acceptable one, as New Delhi has to find ways of countering the massive nuclear and conventional threat posed by China with whom it fought a bloody, losing war in 1962. Even as late as 1971, India had to call on Soviet support to deter the Chinese from intervening on behalf of Pakistan. New Delhi knows only too well it cannot go on relying on such ready support, and has consequently moved steadily to build-up its own deterrence against China.

With the collapse of Soviet power and decision by the US to scale-down its permanent presence in Asia, India is being seen by many as the logical counter-balance to China's growing power in the region.

For the United States, India is politically more digestible

Aristide Sifts Through the Mess in Haiti

Kathie Klarreich writes from Port-au-Prince

HAITI'S democratically-elected president is confronting the hardships left from 35 years of dictatorship.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the 37-year-old priest who won an overwhelming victory last December, is now trying to fill empty coffers, replace a well-implemented system of corruption, rebuild a shattered economy and win over the reticent private sector.

"We're still trying to clean up the mess left by decades of disorder," says Herold Jean-Francois, director of the national television station. "You can't wave a magic wand after 35 years and make things work."

The attitude of this new government is to clean up corruption, from the military to the public administrations, to the rural sheriffs in the countryside, so that when new money starts to come in it will not, as has routinely happened in the past, be laundered out.

"We have had to spend over a month identifying what needs to be done just here at the station," Herold continued. "We need time to implement guidelines, have an observation period. It's not even been three months and we're hearing all kinds of criticisms. If after a year you're hearing the same thing, okay — but not yet."

There have been some remarkable changes in the short time that the new government — which consists of prime minister, 27 senators and 83 deputies — has held office. One of the most significant has been reform of the 7,000-man military, which doesn't differentiate between police and soldier.

The military had the reputation of condoning, if not directly participating in, much of the crime and repression of the last three decades. They were allegedly involved in the 1987 election-day massacre which left 34 people dead. But in the December 1990 election they provided tight security, and have been doing so ever since.

Head of the military, General Herard Abraham, has retired over a dozen high-ranking officers, transferred twice as many, and even arrested several who are indicted of crimes, some of which date back five years.

Street crime, which had the capital paralysed after dark, has all but disappeared. There has been a crack-down on drug trafficking and a programme is underway to eliminate contraband.

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JEAN-BERTRAND ARISTIDE
Remarkable changes in 3 months

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Aristide's consistent cry for justice is also being carried out. More than 15 people await trial for the January 1991 coup attempt, and one

man has already been sentenced to life imprisonment for his involvement in the attack on Aristide's church where more than a dozen people were hacked to death before the church was set on fire.

Another prisoner, however has been unable to find someone to defend him. Of more than 150 defence lawyers, no one is willing to take the case, so fearful are they of popular revenge.

Following the January coup attempt, thousands of Haitians took justice in their own hands, burning buildings and killing people associated with the old regime.

Aristide was then criticised for not controlling the crowds, just as he was last month when groups took to the streets protesting the high cost of food. In the northern city of Cap-Haitien, they looted buildings where they thought merchants were hoarding goods. One person died and at least eight were injured.

The demonstrators chanted in favour of Aristide but condemned the legislature and merchants and the United States, which is often a scapegoat for events in Haiti.

"There is some question as to who is really behind these kinds of demonstrations," said a member of the president's private cabinet. "What they were protesting is not what Aristide advocates. We are most definitely interested in collaborating with the private sector and the US."

The US has embraced this new government, though they were quick to criticise the 24-hour arrest of the former president, who was brought in for questioning about the coup attempt in January. The US has pledged \$84 million in assistance for this fiscal year,

though to date no money has been received.

Critics say money is slow to arrive because the government has no real economic programme. The private sector, which has a wait-and-see attitude, want something concrete before they invest their dollars.

Gerald Bially, president of the Chamber of Commerce, says it is too early to make a decision about the government, but they are not impressed with the accomplishments so far.

"Justice can't resolve things," he said. "As a business person, you make the smartest investment. We want to see an overall plan before we invest. Aristide has the advantage of popularity but that doesn't feed the hungry."

The government, with the country's dire economic circumstances in mind, has appealed for economic and technical help from the estimated one million Haitians living abroad. On April 28, "Voye Haiti Monte" (VOAM) — which means Send Haiti To The Top — a government-sponsored organisation, held an all-day marathon both nationally and internationally, and collected over \$1 million.

There previous request for help from the private sector was a flop. They received only \$8 million. The private sector blamed the government for poor terms (offering five per cent interest when the banks offer 14 per cent) and lack of a concrete plan of how the money would be spent. Others felt pressured to give.

"This government isn't perfect," says Venel Remarais, director of the Haitian Press Agency, "but you have to acknowledge that they are work-

ing under extremely difficult conditions.

No one, particularly

OPINION

Western Zone Railway

It is learnt from the Press that the bifurcation of railway administration — Eastern and Western Zones — will be abolished, and it will be re-shuffled by setting up of a Board with a Chairman at the helm replacing the present administrative set-up of two zones. It is learnt that the re-shuffling is necessary to minimise the overhead cost, cut the number of administrative staff, centralize the administration and invoke financial viability of its functioning. On such pleas, as many as six re-organisations had earlier been introduced, three in the Pakistan days and three after liberation. To me, neither the Railway Board nor any other administrative set-up seems responsible for the deterioration of Railway service. More attention should be given to the people who run the system their skill, efficiency etc. During the late President Zia's government, I had the opportunity to know the railway function at first hand as a member representing the passengers, the National Railway Consultative Committee, then formed for the first time in Bangladesh having the representation from Parliament, passengers, civil servants businessmen. It was during this time that the bifurcation of Railway Administration into two zones was thought over. Finally it was materialised by the Ershad government but no genuine attempt was made to give a life to this bifurcation.

The railway trains mean much more in the Rajshahi and Khulna divisions which comprise the western zone than they do in the eastern zone or the other two divisions only for the reason that the former region i.e. Rajshahi and Khulna divisions have far less roads than the latter Dhaka and Chittagong divisions.

The bad shape of the railway services in the western zone is but a reflection not only of apathy at the centre and inept railway administration, but more importantly of the lack of accountability of the administration both central and zonal. Besides, in the provisions of the railway budget, the region has so far been deprived of any separate foreign assistance.

Introduction of many non-stop trains, after adding extra coaches to these from other trains, does not boost the efficiency and image of the Railway Authority. After independence railway properties worth crores of Taka were either stolen or misused. The railway tracks particularly in

Aristide, has had the advantage of having a strong party to back them up because of the history of politics in this country. But he does have the support of the people, and that's a real first."

KATHIE KLARREICH is a US journalist living in Port-au-Prince who contributes weekly to the North American media.

Western Zone are not covered with sufficient stones and there is every likelihood of the presence of defective sleepers.

For the rapid deterioration of rail-function in the country both a section of passengers as well as railway officers and employees are responsible. To improve the rail-function, why the government failed to take corrective vigorous measures within and outside the organisation, is not understood. Purchases, both local and foreign, involve a colossal fund. To avoid defective purchases and to have it at competitive prices, a scientific approach is a must. Absence of defective purchases will undoubtedly enrich the rail-function since present rail-function is almost completely dependent on heavy foreign purchases.

The colonial attitude to analyse problems and find out solutions needs to be avoided particularly in our country plagued with enormous limitations. The people need to be informed to all genuine hindrances that stand in the way of better rail-function. Railway administration is still deprived of modern management. Information relating to the evaluation of leadership, performance, investment, income, loss, hindrances etc. needs to be regularly disclosed to the public. If necessary, workshops on the problem with the participation of university professors, experts — local and foreign — need be conducted.

Abolition of bifurcation of the rail-function will not yield any fruitful result unless both zones are equally treated in respect of allocation of funds, foreign assistance, authority, delegation of power, supervision etc. And to do that, the Railway Budget should show distinctly the income, expenditure, foreign assistance, aid allocated and used between the two zones. It may be mentioned that besides the allocation of fund in the railway Budget, the Eastern Zone has always been in receipt of separate foreign assistance, which are never shown in the Railway Budget. The Railway Budget should consist of two separate chapters — one for Western Zone and the other for the Eastern Zone. It may also be mentioned that Western Zone always shares 30 to 33% of Railway Budget. Steps are needed to be taken to remove the disparity.

Md. Anwarul Afzal,
Ex-Member, National Railway
Consultative Committee,
Raninagar, Naogon.

RAJUK plots

Sir, Few years back I suggested through the letter column of a premier English daily that instead of allotment of residential plots to individuals, DIT (now RAJUK) should think of building multistoried flats for allotment of hire-purchase system. This would mean maximum welfare to greater number of people in place of few selected persons and at the same time would enable the people in the middle income group including government servants to own a house in the city when they retire from service. In a city like Dhaka where land is becoming scarce and price beyond common-men's reach, this is, perhaps, one of the sensible welfare oriented propositions to solve the city's housing problem.

Sir, I wonder if suggestions offered, grievances ventilated through such columns are ever

given any thought by the concerned authorities.

H R Choudhury
Mogh Bazar, Dhaka.

ME peace

Sir, Of late there is little talk about the ME problems in the media. Virtually the problems as well as the sufferings the Gulf crisis has put the people of the region in are not over with the end of the Gulf war. Rather the war has added further dimensions to that, such as ravaged infrastructure/economy. Kurdish refugees among others. Besides sources of similar crisis and war still remain in the region. As such I feel something must be done to eliminate suspicion and chances of further suffering of the people, at the earliest. And hence the following suggestion.

The most important now is to take all necessary measures to eliminate any possibility of starting any military action

again in the Persian Gulf zone.

It is necessary to start discussions on post-war order in the region immediately and to build up regional security system which could guarantee against any military conflict in the area.

The future of the Middle East has to be determined by Middle East States themselves, including Israel. Otherwise such security system would not live long.

All measures in the Middle East must be coordinated and be comprehensive, should but reflect not only the point of view of only one state, even if it is a superpower.

It is very important to keep unity in Arab world and not allow the split among Arab states, because it would weaken the whole region.

The present post-war situation in the Gulf region gives a unique chance for political settlement of Arab-Israel conflict and just resolution of

Palestinian problem. The leaders of the world's great powers now better appreciate the urgent need for solution of all Middle East problems, because they become a source of instability, inconformity and continuing arms race in the region. Such a situation gives a good chance to Arabs, which they should not miss.

Some political quarters in the West and in the USA might try to restrict participation of USSR in the ongoing process of working out a new regional order in the Middle East. Such an attempt could cause negative consequences and be harmful for the Arabs as well as the region, since it was the USSR who from the very beginning of the conflict in the Gulf supported the claim for independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the region, including Kuwait and Iraq.

A K M Murshed
Chittagong.