

Foreign Arms Fan Yugoslav Civil Strife

by Petar Hadji-Ristic

Arms dealers from around the world have contributed to the bloody civil war in Yugoslavia, a founding member of the non-aligned movement. While Serbs are allegedly being armed by the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army Croats and Slovenes are believed to have varied sources of military supply. Despite repeated ceasefire declarations, the conflict has raged on, thanks largely to the flow of arms into the loose-knit federation created by Josef Tito and now being torn apart by his heirs.

A Commendable Initiative

We welcome the timely and well thought out initiative of the Sangskritik Jote regarding autonomy for our radio and television. The 19-point recommendation worked out by the 'Jote' and presented at a seminar last Wednesday contains some valuable suggestions. What the 'Jote' suggests could form the basis of a thorough discussion on the subject between the media professionals, the radio and TV authorities and the government. We consider the proposal to set up an autonomous National Broadcasting Authority (NBA) with the task of overseeing the functioning of our audio-visual media as one of critical importance. Such a setup will be able to ensure the freedom and the creative working environment which are fundamental to the successful operation of any media body.

The question of autonomy for our electronic media is a very important one because it was a part of the pledge made to the people during the anti-autocracy struggle. However, it is also very important because it is linked with the question of implementing the fundamental tenet of democracy, namely that of ensuring a free and unbiased flow of news and information to our people. Successive regimes, ever since the time when we were part of Pakistan, failed to ensure such a flow of information and to allow the radio and television to operate under professional norms, rather than party dictates — or shall we say, personal whims. Throughout our struggle for self-determination and later for independence from Pakistan, the issue of decontrolling the radio and the TV formed a core part of our basic demands. Following our liberation in '71, the expectation ran high that finally the repeated pledges made during the past decades would be fulfilled. A brutal answer to our hopes was BKSAL. Subsequently though a part of the print media was released from the stranglehold of the government, the plight of the electronic media continued unchanged.

The rebirth of democracy revives the hope in our hearts that the popularly elected government will not shirk away from the pledge it made in the 'joint declaration' to which the information minister eluded during his speech in the 'Jote' seminar.

It is not only to keep its commitment to the people that Begum Zia's government should make the radio and the TV autonomous. There are other compelling reasons to do so. The first and foremost of which is to establish credibility. As long as these media will remain under government control, they will never attain any credibility in the public eye. Endless hours of propaganda through them about how great the government is will make no difference in the public perception of things. The BNP government should know this more than anybody else because their electoral success is the most dramatic example of how little impact the Ershad controlled radio and TV had on the people. In fact more and more Ershad and his cronies appeared on these two media, the more people got turned off from them. The message here is that the opposite is just as true. The less the government will control our electronic media the greater will be their credibility and more the message of the government — professionally selected and edited — will be acceptable to the people.

Inseparably linked with the question of autonomy for the electronic media is that of professional standards, ethics and the ability of our media professionals to do their job without fear or favour. We pervert our professional judgement — and ethics — often out of fear, but not too infrequently out of favour. The ability of our autonomous electronic media to acquire a high level of credibility with the people will therefore depend to a large extent on how we are able to rise above our personal preferences and be impartial, fair and fearless.

We urge the government to seriously consider the suggestions contained in the 'Jote' initiative and immediately open a wide ranging public debate on the subject. The faster the government will act on this issue, the higher will be its credibility regarding democratic institution building.

Talking in Percentage

More than 51 per cent of our children up to the age of seven suffer from malnutrition, the Parliament was told on Wednesday. That is a startling piece of information specially when it comes from government. The sense of pain it must generate in all healthy minds is somewhat balanced by an interesting supplementary information. There are more children suffering from malnutrition in the towns than there are in the villages, said State Minister Serajul Haque. This is quite contrary to the prevailing idea that in the towns they all live well and eat well — including children. Perhaps this can be explained very easily — in the villages there is want widespread but no bastees packing humans sardine-fashion into canopies.

This is one of our national maladies — this talking in percentages which, except for the statisticians and economists etc., no one can make a head or a tail of. Exactly, 51 per cent of children up to age 7 doesn't mean a thing until one knows the population of that particular age group. It can be anything between 30 million and 60. And only if we were told that 2.5 crore of our children are suffering from malnutrition most of us could have grasped the reality better. This heightened sense of reality added with the knowledge that cases of malnutrition mostly included cases of straight hunger could possibly inspire us to action aimed at salvaging children. But can one stop at that point of realisation — and forget that hungry children are born of only hungry parents? And how many of them are straight-away victims of continual hunger?

It is perhaps more important than that to realise that some two to five crore people will be here — all adults but having very little IQ — results of protein deficiency that malnutrition entails in the first instance. A nation of morons are we going to turn into? You cannot be a Hitler and prescribe 'euthanasia' for those tens of millions. What would then be the way out?

Talking in percentages saves us from having unceasing nightmares. Is that why it is so popular with governments and managers of all kinds?

FOR the tens of thousands of Yugoslav refugees and the thousands killed or wounded in months of hostilities, the United Nations Security Council arms embargo has come decades too late.

Greedy and years of foreign laxity have already made Yugoslavia and its shattered homes unsafe for a long time to come. The Yugoslav army, built with decades of help from foreign arms dealers, is widely believed to have armed Serbian rebel fighters loyal to nationalist Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.

Less well known is the alleged role of weapons dealers from countries as far-flung as Romania and Singapore in arming Slovenian secessionists and Croatia, the breakaway republic headed by Franjo Tudjman.

Tracing who provided what and to whom in the shadowy world of arms trading would require an army of detectives with the authority of the UN investigators in Iraq. Still, some information can be gleaned from official statements.

When fighting first broke out and the British announced their embargo of arms sales to Yugoslavia, for example, a staggering 400 licenses for the export of military goods and high-tech products with military applications had to be revoked, according to the London-based Campaign Against the Arms Trade.

Until at least two years ago, Britain also had a hand in training the Yugoslav military.

Indeed, in 45 years Yugoslavia's federal government has built up the fifth largest fighting force in Europe. Despite losses and desertions it still has more than 100,000 soldiers, 1,500 tanks, 400 warplanes and a vast weapons industry which can supply 90 per cent of domestic purchases as well as those of many developing countries.

All of this for a country which was never threatened by the West; a place military experts never seriously believed could resist a sophisticated Soviet invasion for more than a day or two.

"I never understood why the army was so big," said Col. John Speight of the Centre for Defence Studies at Kings College in London. "One often wondered what it was doing at that size, what it was defending and against whom."

The Yugoslav military has consumed 30 per cent of the country's federal budget. Until dissident republics seized its registers, most of the country's 24 million people were listed as reservists and conscripts.

The military build-up has given Yugoslavia's generals confidence to resist republican demands for a looser federa-

tion. It has also prompted secessionist leaders to make arms deals with black-marketeers.

Tracking those illicit arms sales is a more difficult task. The trail leads to at least a half-dozen countries, to men who ask no questions and expect payment in suitcases of used \$100 bills.

Slovenian secessionists are believed to have shopped extensively in neighbouring Austria, where arms can be bought over the counter. Scores of Slovenian agents were sent out to buy small arms, quietly building up the republic's arsenal for more than a year.

Austrian arms dealers even set up makeshift markets in the forests 50 kilometres away from the Slovenian border, where buyers and sellers met

regularly in secrecy. The arms — usually in packages of less than 50 and therefore not requiring export licenses — were then spirited across border crossing trails that were not manned by federal authorities.

Besides Austria, sources say Slovenes have travelled to Romania to buy AK-47 assault rifles, and to Singapore to purchase the German-designed anti-armour weapon, the Armbrust. Mines which proved effective against federal tanks last June are thought to have come from Hungary, Italy and Singapore.

Speight says black-market purchases such as these are common: "There are illicit deals all around the world, particularly where large amounts of money are concerned," he said. "One can buy anything from small arms to

hand-held guided missiles from these people."

Size, it seems, is the only restriction: Anything that is too bulky to ship in parts, such as a tank or plane, is generally unavailable. This did not apply, of course, to the 4,000 pack horses bought from Poland for work in the mountains; these animals transported themselves across the border.

Nor, apparently, did it stop Croat secessionists, also discerning and active buyers on the illicit arms market, from putting out feelers. Reports from the US say Croat agents enquired about buying a Boeing 727 for shipments of arms and helicopters.

Like their Slovene counterparts, Croat secessionists shopped around in Eastern Europe where the end of the Cold War and retreating Soviet soldiers' thirst for hard currency has created a huge black-market in Soviet-made arms.

Croat agents are thought to have purchased 20,000 Soviet Kalashnikov rifles in Hungary. The Ultimax light machine guns they are using are believed to have come directly from Singapore.

Some weapons have also been imported from the US and other countries with large Croatian expatriate communities. One small commercial outlet in Illinois, for example, is reported by US Customs officials to have shipped \$30,000 in military equipment to Croatian secessionists.

Some Croat deals have come unstuck, however. In August a Ugandan Airways

Boeing jet crammed with 19 tonnes of weapons allegedly destined for Croatia was seized by the federal army when it landed at Zagreb airport.

US customs officers nabbed three Croats and a US citizen who are accused of having tried to smuggle \$12 million worth of rifles and Stinger anti-aircraft weapons to the breakaway republic.

The Croats may have their Stinger missiles anyway. Unconfirmed reports indicate they found the missiles in Austria. Croats are also likely to have made secret arms purchases from Slovenians who were desperate for hard currency. Meanwhile, mystery still surrounds the 20,000 tonnes of unclaimed arms that were discovered on a ship in the Adriatic port of Bar.

The UN and European Community arms embargo will make weapons purchases abroad more difficult for federalists and secessionists alike.

But the embargo may have prompted both the Slovenes and Croats to develop their own arms industry. Serbian press reports say that Slovenes have begun manufacturing their own automatic rifles and that Croats are now making armoured personnel carriers and mortar parts.

For foreign arms dealers, Yugoslavia is probably no longer the lucrative market it once was. But their involvement in the Yugoslav conflict may not be over. International lawyers have begun discussing the idea of holding war crimes trials for atrocities committed during the civil war.

If this happens, the courts will inevitably hear of the arms that were used, and questions will be raised about where they were obtained. That could turn out to be a major embarrassment for the international merchants of death.

— GEMINI NEWS
PETAR HADJI-RISTIC was based in Yugoslavia as a Western correspondent from 1977-87.

Tito's warring heirs



Defining Home-based Work

Home Workers

Under this head it is very difficult to assess the number of workers employed in the conditions to do some work at home or in others' premises for any related packing, finishing or fabrication work.

Some women groups, however, are involved in group work at home which is related to ready-made garment making, sweater knitting etc. In those cases the entrepreneurs supply design, fabrics, wool, needles etc. and the groups deliver their finished work to the entrepreneurs for payment of wages. In terms of the existing laws they are termed as self-employed persons.

In another industry we found that a 'Biri' company through its agents supplies tobacco and papers to women, particularly in rural areas, and during leisure time they make the 'Biris'. Those 'Biris' are collected by company agents against payments at piece rate.

Some unauthorised plastic industries, who with the help of workers, make water taps and supply them to plumber merchants. Similarly, there are some indigenous brass industries, who at home make brass spares and water taps for supply to the plumber merchants, but they do it for price per piece. Here the relationship between the manufacturers and workers is maintained against verbal agreement for conditions of service and payment terms. The manufacturers in these cases procure the raw materials themselves and sell at a price to merchants. They cannot sell their products direct to consumers.

In Tongi (Dhaka) Industrial Area some women procure

order from the shoe industries and make packing boxes for them against payment at piece rate. The workers work in their own premises and raw materials are supplied by the industry. Some other workers make the packing boxes for other industries and finally sell to hotels, restaurants, cloth stores, sweet-meat shops. They sell their products at negotiated prices. In these cases workers buy the raw materials themselves.

Some persons make 'incense sticks' in their own premises and sell to traders for marketing at a negotiated price. They procure raw materials themselves, i.e. they have some investment in the business.

Some women collect coirs and take out the fibres to sell to the cushion makers, and other related furniture industries, auto-rickshaw body makers etc. at a negotiated price. They procure the empty green coconuts from the streets or in some cases they buy from the green coconut traders, process the fibres and sell.

Some women collect cut-piece fabrics from the tailors, garment industries and various other sources and after shorting them out sell to various industries for cleaning of machines and spares. Those are sold against a negotiated price.

Few renowned cooks have now started to supply cooked food in various functions and ceremonies against a negotiated price. The cooks procure the materials. They also have some assistants to help them. In turn the assistants learn the cooking and in course of time they become main cooks. The

assistants work against payment on contract basis for a particular function or ceremony. The cook make the finished food at his own premises and deliver to the buyers on time.

In rural areas some women are involved in 'embroidered quilt' making against a contractual rate per quilt. Those finished quilts are sold to traders specially those who sell cottage industrial goods. The work is done in the industrial fashion.

In making lungis, saris, fabrication of threads are some kind of work which also falls within the definition of home-work.

Rural Home-work

Rural women are involved in lot of home work like making of Chira, Muri and related materials. They substitute their income from the work and sell them directly to collectors at their doorsteps. For social reasons they do not come out of the house to sell them directly to consumers. This kind of practice creates subsidiary trade or business for their counterpart male members.

Earthenware making is also popular and falls within the jurisdiction of home-work. The self-employed persons' home and place of work are in the same premises. There is a decline in this business because of aluminium and brasswares. The business of brasswares is also declining because of cheaper plastic, aluminium, steelwares etc. The potters' business have been shifted towards making flower tubs, flower vase and other decorative articles.

Legislative Provisions

The workers, mentioned above, are not taken into account in the currently enforced labour legislation nor do those protect the workers who are or were self-employed.

'Biri' Workers Federation found to be in existence but their demands only related to unemployment of 'Biri' workers from time to time, however, with very little success.

Literally inclusion of home workers in the area of making legislative provisions have not yet been conceived. The definition of worker more or less remain basically the same in all the Labour Laws.

Conclusion

In order to ensure justice to those Home Workers their exact numerical strength, conditions and terms of service have to be found out. At the same time consequential effect on their employment situation have to be studied in depth so that any measure does not adversely affect their employment situation. Only then those workers might be brought to books for their protection from all kinds of exploitation and problems.

It is, however, no denying the fact that the numerical strength of those workers are increasing every year and at the same time their standard of living is changing gradually. But the fact remains that they are completely unprotected from the original employer, contractor, sub-contractor and middleman, in whatever names they may be called.

The trade unions, in view of the existing legislative provisions could not make any efforts to identify the areas of 'home work' and it is a 'mirage' to them to run after it. So no initiative has yet been taken by trade unions to bring those workers to light.

spends for home work, of the kind.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

BCCI uncertainty

Sir, Lately, while wrestling with my thoughts I came to realise certain things from the reminiscences of my association with BCCI. And the crux of my realisation is that over the years I have become a thrifless debtor to BCCI's unrivalled performance. I have a very full and precise understanding that the majority of the staff of BCCI are monstrously efficient in handling customers, that is, their problems. And now that these are the very people who have fallen in searing uncertainty with the goody mess of BCCI. It might sound schizophrenic that many of them are in a state of agonised indecision whether to leave or

not to leave their organisation. In their hearts there is a kind of fighting. Presumably, none of them wants to quit though their patience is growing thin since events are spinning out of control.

One might hear saucy and delicious stories and casual remarks about BCCI by ignoring the unstinting efforts that BCCI has been making in the financial sector since long. There is no comfort in this truth that BCCI has served its usefulness in many ways despite the fact that it is neither all pure nor all good. At this juncture, the concerned authority should not let any corrupt individual get away with corruption. In case of any fugi-

tive he should be called back to the country to make him face the nemesis. He should know that to do harm sometime accounted dangerous folly. Besides, I think that it is not fair to generalize about BCCI. To speak feelingly of BCCI, let there not be any stranger of an already suffocated staff of BCCI.

K.S. Nazmul Hasan
Dharmond, Dhaka.

Climate for foreign investment

Sir, I read with interest the enunciation about foreign investment and its bearing with the Board of Investment made by Mr M Ghazul Haque in your issue of Oct 9. It is true that bureaucratic confusion, cavil and lack of clear mandate from the Government has set at tortoise speed the investment initiative and flow from overseas people.

But we also must create a climate for foreign investment with our good behaviour.

There were criticisms about the role of some prominent shipping lines in Bangladesh that they were allowed to open their own offices in Bangladesh and were indulging in unfair trade practise, carrying contraband and flouting foreign exchange rules. Such baseless and concocted news may be damaging to the future flow of foreign investment. Irreversible foreign exchange manual is there for shipping lines and any scope to violate it is microscopic. Foreign exchange is more beguiled by other means of business which should be plugged. We must also shun the politics of ill-motivation and narrowness to make inroads for foreign investment besides overcoming other misdeemeanours.

M I Hussain,
8/6, Segun Bagicha, Dhaka.

"Cantonment Edn Board"

Sir, This refers to Ms Nahtasha Kamal's letter (Oct 12) "Cantonment Education Board" criticizing my suggestion (My letter Oct 2) of creating a separate Education Board for cadet colleges and cantonment schools and colleges. It seems that Ms N Kamal considers herself as an intelligent person. On October 11, she wrote a huge letter criticizing Dhaka Board with reference to this year's SSC exam result of Mirzapur Cadet College.

Now, I would like to come to my idea of creating a Cantonment Education Board. Well, the idea although ventilated by me was actually evolved in an informal talk among certain responsible persons. Mr Mohammad Faizullah, Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, Dr K M Das, Director General, National Institute of Local Govt, Mr Dulal A Hafiz, Director (Finance), BFIDC, Mrs Hamida Ali, Principal, Vikarunnessa

School, Mr N C Baidya of the British Council were present. Everyone expressed their personal experiences pertaining to the SSC and HSC exams. Mrs Hamida Ali being a person in the line told us many interesting facts. Mr Mohammad Faizullah at one stage of our conversation told that it wouldn't be fair to say that certain favours have been given to the cadets but we can suggest alternative to end confusions. It was then the idea of suggesting a separate Cantonment Board came. In fact, a student of a general school, which is large in number in the country, gets less care and facilities in comparison to a student of the Cadet College. Hence, for developing healthy and impartial competition among the same type and group of students, creation of a separate Cantonment Board may be helpful. I hope, Ms Kamal gets the point.

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