

Dhaka, Saturday, December 21, 1991

## Stability in Asia

As the two Koreas take their cautious steps towards reconciliation, India and China set up new bridges of co-operation and even Beijing and Hanoi move away from past hostility, the immediate reaction among experts, officials and non-officials, is one of relief. At long last, Asia seems ready to enter the post-cold war era.

However, behind this relief lies some cautious thinking about long-range security considerations for Asia. After all, there are nuclear powers in this region — China and India — and there are others which are in the process of developing their nuclear capability, not necessarily for peaceful purposes. Unresolved bilateral issues which threaten to touch off shooting wars are getting fewer in number, but they are still there. Again, some countries in Asia spend enormous funds on their defence budgets and maintain huge armies which, by their very presence, cause concern among their neighbours. In this context, many feel compelled to study prospects for a new security arrangement for Asia, instead of complacently accepting the status quo.

Nowhere is this interest in a new security arrangement stronger than among some members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Their strategic location, the memory of the Second World War as well as of the Vietnam conflict and, last but not the least, their lingering uneasiness about the growing military might of Japan prompt them to look at their own collective defence needs with a sense of urgency.

It is this sense of urgency that probably lies behind a new proposal made by an expert in Singapore calling for the setting up of an Asia-Pacific equivalent of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The expert, Tommy T. B. Koh, a former ambassador of his country to the United Nations and currently the Director of Policy Studies in the city republic is apparently speaking in his personal capacity. However, one can assume that the proposal may well represent part of the official thinking in the island state.

According to the proposal of Ambassador Koh, the proposed forum would "draw together ASEAN, the United States, Japan, China, Russia, India and other regional countries" and help "provide stability in Asia." In other words, without being directed against any power, it would serve almost like a mini-United Nations for this region.

Since the proposed body would not be a defence grouping, but only a forum for consultation on security issues, the proposal should not cause any alarm. However, it raises several questions. What can this proposed forum do that cannot be undertaken under the umbrella of the United Nations? Can such a body persuade China and India to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and use some persuasive skill with all its members to cut their defence spending in favour of increased allocation for development? Or will it only create a consultative framework for the sharing of defence burden among such major powers as the United States, Japan, China and India and make smaller nations, like Singapore and Bangladesh, accept them as custodians of stability in Asia? Answers to these questions will decide whether one should welcome the Koh Proposal as a potential forward-looking move or see it with serious reservations. We believe, the real stability in Asia — or anywhere else in the world — should be linked to peaceful development of all nations, especially of the poorest ones, instead of being based on some out-dated premises of military strength and defence.

## Herbal Medicine

Last couple of centuries have seen knowledge and practices from the First World supplanting those of the Third World. Not all of them have been good and beneficial for the recipient countries. On the contrary a lot of undesirable and even harmful things have spread their roots in the colonies, thanks to the West. Medical science, as we know it now and as introduced by the Westerners, is definitely not going to figure on a culprit list, but it surely has dealt a telling blow to the once highly-rich tradition of indigenous system of combating diseases. The blow came in the form of a disincentive to further research, experiments and improvement with and to the treatment system that drew its strength from centuries of inherited knowledge. On the one hand the handing down of preparation formulas and acquaintance with herbs received a serious setback and on the other, the possibility of the system's development as a true discipline vanished with no organised back-up measures to patronize research and experiments.

Against this backdrop, a three-day regional seminar on Research Trends in Medicinal Plants held in the city recently pointed to our belated interest in traditional methods of treatment. Highly encouraging though such seminars and workshops at first look to be, without institutional supports from the governments of the region, the results in practical terms cannot be much spectacular. Sure enough, the experts on the subjects have argued to show the relative advantages — particularly in terms of non-side effects and cheaper costs — but the message stands hardly a chance to be well received by those who matter.

But those two considerations do really matter. Synthetic or chemical drugs have long posed serious threat to both health and environment, coupled with this the ever increasing costs of such medicines have forced the poor to shy of modern treatment. And admittedly, the poor and the illiterate of this society still turn to either the homeopathic or herbal treatments. But the unani and kabirji methods of medicine have fallen in inept hands more to the point; some of the practitioners simply resort to bluffs taking advantage of poor and illiterate people's ignorance. This makes it obligatory, rather than the opposite, that the traditional methods were systematic in all possible manners. All aspects of this type of care should be looked into and streamlined so much so that none falls a victim to self professed doctors.

However, it will not be easy to revive the glory of the traditional medicines. The stiffest of competitions or should we say resistance may come from the multinational pharmaceutical companies. Individually a government or country may not face them but unitedly the governments of the region can take a stand for the wellbeing of their peoples. Even in the remainder of the decade upto the year 2,000, the move can perhaps yield some good results towards contributing to the elusive goal of health for all by that time.

## The Giants of Asia Come Together

D.K. Joshi writes from New Delhi

*The end of the Cold War ideological divide has led to new equations developing among old foes. The two Asian giants, China and India, are reassessing their relations to adapt to the changing times. The world's two most populous countries share many perceptions on global issues and want to find areas of cooperation to check any US-dictated new world order.*

**T**HE ripple effects of disintegration of the former Soviet Union have led to a reassessment of Indian foreign policy priorities. Having lost the diplomatic support of its erstwhile ally, India is trying to even up relations with its old adversaries — China and Pakistan.

While relations with neighbouring Pakistan, with which India has fought three wars, have continued to worsen over Kashmir, the border dispute with China and Indian support for Tibet have antagonised China.

Now, in the changed international scene, India and China are reviewing their ties. To this end hardline Chinese premier Li Peng visited India this month — the first such high-level visit in 30 years.

India is becoming nervously aware that it will come under increasing international pressure to resolve its disputes with Pakistan. New Delhi also fears it will not be allowed to pursue its independent line on issues such as resistance to signing the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT).

The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the end of the Cold War has brought in its wake a new balance of international forces in which Washington seems to chalk out the new agenda for, what it regards, a new world order.

Soviet support for a Pakistan-sponsored proposal at the United Nations for a nuclear weapons-free South Asia has sounded a warning signal to New Delhi of the new realities and for the need to make an agonising reappraisal of its foreign policy perceptions.

India, so used to unquestioning Soviet support in the UN, was rattled by the sudden change in Moscow's international behaviour and at once despatched Foreign Minister Madhavsinh Solanki to meet Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. He returned with the realisation that Moscow's priorities had changed and its support in future could not be taken for granted.

As if by design, US Under-

Secretary of State for International Security Reginald Bartholomew then visited India to persuade New Delhi to sign the NPT and take positive measures in relation to Pakistan in the nuclear field. Of immediate importance to Washington was the Indian proposal to sell a nuclear test reactor to Iran. New Delhi was persuaded to review the proposal.

India realises that in the post-Cold War period warring

sides are coming to the negotiating table to settle their long-standing disputes. Major nations or groups seem to be acting more and more in concert on issues impinging on global or regional peace.

The conflict between India and Pakistan lies at the heart of instability in South Asia. Both countries have been at loggerheads over Kashmir right from the time they emerged as free nations.

During the Cold War the

problem could not be resolved bilaterally and nothing much could be done by outside powers because India and Pakistan were on the opposite sides of the superpower divide. Now there is no such hurdle.

A visiting European parliamentarian delegation and Bartholomew indicated to the Indian and Pakistani governments that they should negotiate a deal over Kashmir.

Meanwhile, China is trying to improve its ties with India.

which it used to regard as little more than a proxy for the Soviet Union. It had suspected that Indian hostility, which erupted into a military conflict in 1962, was largely due to Soviet encouragement to India to be intransigent on its border dispute.

On a visit to India in 1956 Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev has said the Soviet Union would help India any time and it could shut from Kashmir to the Soviet Union across the border.

The deteriorating Sino-Soviet border dispute and ideological differences synchronised with the souring of Sino-Indian relations. Chinese leaders saw a link between the two. China also fretted over the massive sale of Soviet arms to India.

Now that the importance of Moscow in Indian economic, political and military calculations has diminished China should find it easy to look at relations with India in a different light. China wants a joint strategy to build defences against US pressure.

For its part, India faces increasing economic and diplomatic US pressure. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have been breathing down its neck. It has considerably diluted Nehruvian socialist policy and the government of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao is tightrope-walking on economic policy, keeping popular sentiments and nostalgia for democratic socialism in view.

The popular mood in India favours and understanding with China so that it can deal more effectively with Pakistan, which New Delhi alleges is fermenting trouble in the Indian states of Punjab and Kashmir. China has been close to

Pakistan and one of its main arms suppliers.

Recent changes in Chinese foreign policy, such as normalising relations with Vietnam, has impressed India.

Moreover, the Chinese world view does not conflict with Indian international perceptions. China insists that international affairs must be handled with the participation of all nations and not just a few industrialised powers. It calls for a greater role for the United Nations in international affairs.

India and China have much in common. Both are ancient civilisations with traditional societies and have a distinct identity to preserve. Both are poverty-stricken developing nations, too big to become a satellite of any other country, however strong it might be.

Although both countries have different political systems, both basically have charted an independent path of development. China has its own model of communism. The Soviet model might have collapsed, but it would be a mistake to believe the Chinese model will follow suit.

India believes China is as much in need of adjusting to the emerging world as India is. Relations have improved between the two, particularly since Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in 1988. He was the first Indian Prime Minister to go to China in 34 years and he indicated that India believed the border dispute was negotiable.

As India is detached from the Soviet Union and becomes flexible about the border dispute, it calculates China will give high priority to the need for their cooperation on global issues, particularly those affecting developing countries.

If the two Asian giants come closer this new geo-political equation in Asia will have repercussions worldwide.

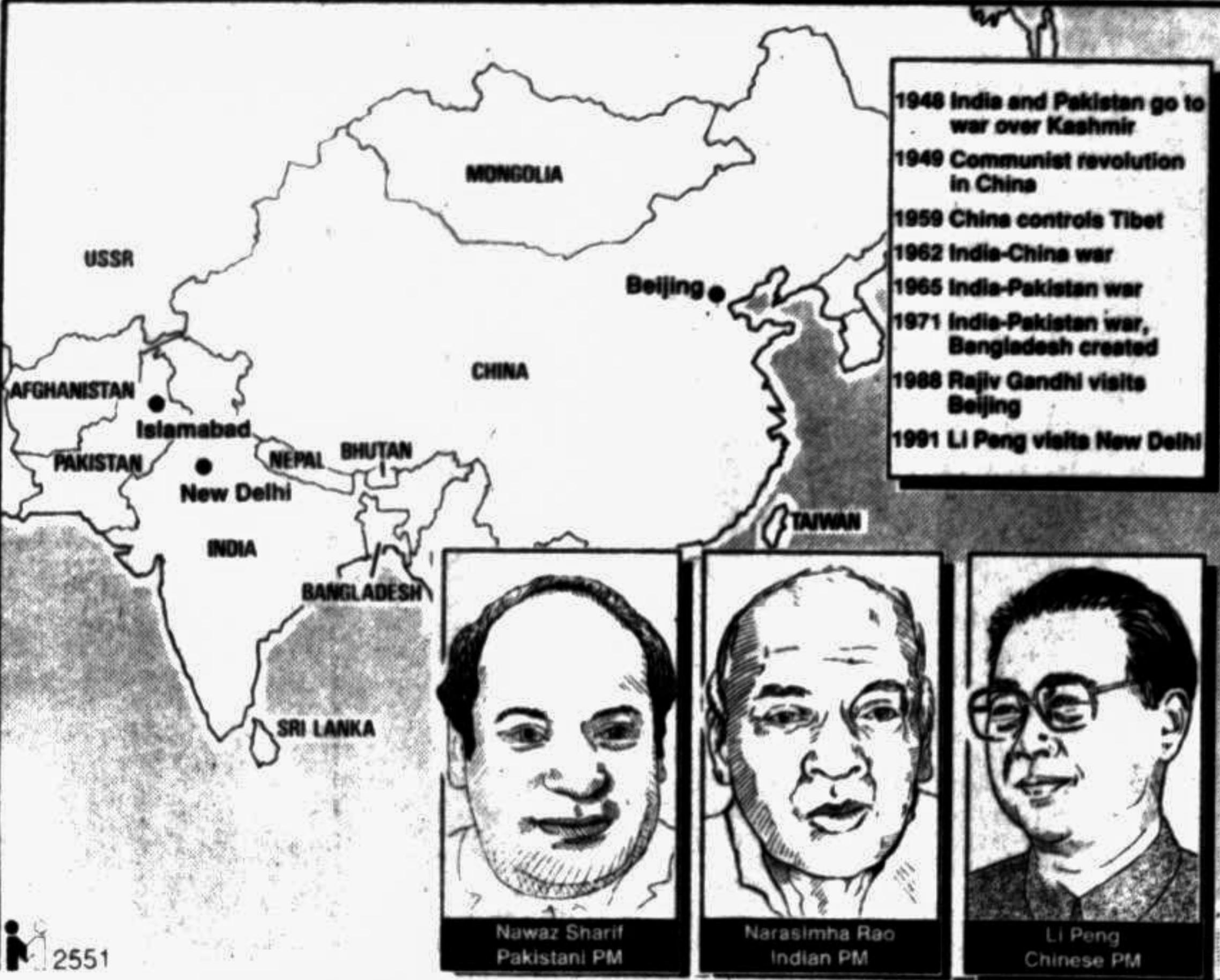
— GEMINI NEWS

is said to be poor.

Food production during the coming years will be seriously constrained by acute shortages of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, agricultural machinery and spare parts. War-damaged irrigation and drainage systems are unlikely to be rebuilt in the near future and there has been only a partial restoration of power supplies for the agricultural sector. Acute shortages of animal feed, veterinary drugs, vaccines and equipment have brought poultry production to a virtual standstill.

— Depthnews Asia

## Rivals are getting together again



## Food Picture in Far East Unsettling

by Ian Steele writes from the United Nations

## Agricultural production in the Far East as a whole is at its lowest level in more than two decades

stricken harvest of 1990, 3 per cent growth in India following a year of stagnation, and growth of 4 and 6 per cent respectively, in Cambodia and Pakistan.

The most obvious early response to these indicators has been a rise in world market prices for wheat and 8 per cent growth (14 million tons) in the wheat trade which will be mostly absorbed by the Soviet Union and China.

The picture in the Far East is unsettling. The region is anticipating agricultural production growth of just 0.7 per cent this year after annual average increases of more than 3 per cent during the 1970s and more than 4 per cent throughout the 1980s.

China's performance is the largest factor in these averages but Bangladesh, North and South Korea, and Nepal also lend weight to the overall decline.

The most promising signs are from strong recovery in Thailand following the pest-

tions are now dependent on air drops. The supply situation remains difficult also in Ethiopia, Angola, Liberia, Mozambique, and urban areas of Zaire.

In Iraq, malnutrition is taking hold among children

## OPINION

## Rohingya Muslims

Alarming reports about the plight of poor people in Arakan province of Burma, an overwhelming majority of whom happen to be Muslims, have evoked sensible concern. Several appeals have been addressed to individuals, leaders, institutions and world organisations against what is termed as an "extermination" campaign in Arakan.

Of course, the conscious democratic people of Bangladesh are looking at what development is going over the issue of the Rohingya refugees repatriation to Arakan after a visit paid by our Foreign Minister to and talks held with the Rangoon military regime. They have agreed to take back the refugees who had crossed into Bangladesh over the last few months, on the basis of, what they insisted, identification of the genuine citizenship by the Burmese authorities.

It is an important fact to be noted that the ethnic Rohingya's origin has been traced as far back as first half of the seventh century A.D. when Arakan was known as "Rohang" the ancestral home of Rohingyas. It is the most authentic reference and direct evidence to settlement in Arakan of Rohingya Muslims.

The refugees are the members of ethnic, religious and lingual minorities of Burma. The influx of this section of people into Bangladesh is not a new event. They have been frequently migrating since Japan's occupation of Burma during 2nd World War. It was accelerated by the communal riot of 1942 when nearly 4,00,000 Muslims were thrown out at gun point into Bangladesh. It was on 18th July this year that the regime ruthlessly initiated so called Pra Saya campaign against the innocent Rohingya Muslims in which about 550 Muslims were arrested, and are still under detention without any reason, from northern Arakan. Their belongings of business institution, properties and documents were seized and confiscated entirely.

This all led to the present influx of Rohingyas — now about 50,000 wandering across the Bangladesh border without shelter, food and security. The outcome of the Foreign Minister's visit to Rangoon at this stage boils down to identification of "genuine Burmese citizens" what they said is to screen the list of refugees to be provided by us.

It may be recalled that the operation of 1982 which aimed at citizenship law had in effect disfranchised the ethnic Rohingyas. The National Registration Cards (NRC) were issued only for Maghs in 1983. Likewise another refugee exodus preceded by news pub-

lished in Burma's state-owned newspaper "The Working People's Daily" dated 14th July 1991 which said 81% and 90% residents of the bordering Maung Daw and Buthidaung townships of northern Arakan were Bangladeshis. The fabricated allegation is the main instrument of the Rohingya problem that has led them to be "Stateless people in the State".

In the present annihilation drive of Rohingyas, most of them who crossed into Bangladesh might have been tortured, harassed, seized of their documents, got destroyed and snatched of belongings before or after struggling to escape persecution.

Recently, a column in the widely circulated "Far Eastern Economic Review" by Bertil Lintner on 29th August, 1991, over anti-Muslim campaign in Arakan said, "many Mosques, religious institutions are being razed and boarded up." Some were even wrecked to settle military rest posts and Magh settlements were then brought on the deserted Rohingya villages and places. A tearful fact to know is that the Rohingya people of their own ancestral homeland are not allowed to move freely one to another township without passes and testimonies from local authorities. Visit by them to Rangoon is totally prohibited. "Where is their way to".

Today, here it is widely believed that the exodus of the Rohingya Muslims to Bangladesh will probably touch four lac figure. However, Bangladesh is merely concerned, but we fear, that it might not remain an eternal question with us.

Let all peace-loving people of this country, including students, social organisations, political parties and religious bodies pay attention to the just cause of the Rohingya Muslims and settle the issue permanently to ensure their life and security under the Burmese regime that is widely condemned nationally and internationally.

N. Kamal  
Momin Road, Chittagong.

## To the Editor...

## Dakar summit and Arabism

Sir, Once more some Arab Governments have dealt a blow to Islamic solidarity by the boycott of the Islamic Summit in Dakar. This has not only deeply offended the Sene-galese hosts whose President rightly stated "We respect the Arabs more than the Arabs respect us" but is an insult to aspirations of the entire Islamic Ummah, from Indonesia to Morocco. The Dakar Summit could have been a great opportunity for healing the Arab wounds after the Gulf crisis. Delegates had hoped to start repairing relations with pro-Kuwait countries. The absence of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, Husne Mubarak of Egypt, the President of Syria and others unfortunately seems to have been a coordinated effort to belittle the OIC system. If Saddam had attended there was some reason for the boycott.

The question may arise — was it done at the behest of a foreign power trying to broker an elusive ME peace with a state born of Western imperialism? The emerging power of the Islamic world with a potential Islamic nuclear capability (in Kazakhstan) is causing nightmares in the corridors of power in the West and there are strange parallels with the recently aborted SAARC Summit.

The absence of Gulf leaders underlies the persistent enmities caused by the Gulf crisis.

and the myth of Arabism. The Senegal President Abdur Rauf said he was very hurt by the Arab abstentions. As some consolation to wounded African pride the rich Arabs promised to write off or reschedule loan of poor countries. These rich Arab countries have violated a cardinal principle of Islam's traditional hospitality enshrined by the Holy Prophet's (SM) injunction that 'If a Muslim invites you accept his invitation'; wounded pride and dishonour cannot be compensated by handouts.

The Arab Governments have hurt the sensitivities of one billion Muslims who wish to see Islam as the alternative force in a dangerous unipolar world dominated by the West after the demise of Communism. The Islamic world will now have to shift the focus from political issues to economic consolidation and from the Arabs who cannot transcend their narrow Arabism, to a new consensus of the Muslim African nations, the Central Asian Muslim republics and the S-E Asian Muslim nations. If these Arab Governments are not willing to participate in wider Islamic solidarity but wish to tinker with Arabism and Arab common markets instead of the broad Islamic one, those unrepresentative regimes who do not reflect the true aspirations of the Arab people will be relegated to the footnotes of history as the banner of Islam is taken up once again by more vigorous Muslims of

the large scale extermination campaigns such as the brutal military operation of the 5th Burma Regiment in Nov 1948, the Burma Territorial Force (BTF) operation in 1949/50, the 2nd Emergency Chin Regiment operation in March, 1951, the Mayu operation in Oct 1952, the Mot