

**Bosnia Beckons the West**

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has now taken a decision which appears to be the only effective course of action left to bring the madness in Bosnia-Herzegovina to an end. The UNSC's decision to authorise the use of force to protect humanitarian relief supplies to war-ravaged Bosnia may well raise the eyebrows of people who would prefer to see the UN stick to the letter of its Charter and keep out of internal conflicts of nations (unless it has been asked by the warring parties to act as an honest broker). However, given the magnitude of the sufferings of the people of Bosnia — Muslims, Croats as well as Serbs — it is doubtful if anything other than an international intervention can prevent the crisis from sliding into a catastrophe.

It is interesting to note that, as was the case with the Gulf crisis of 1990, the UN itself would not dispatch a force but has given the legal go-ahead to other countries which wish to do so. In addition, the use of force has been authorised, for the time being at least, with the principal goal of ensuring security for humanitarian supplies and not to take sides in the on-going civil war.

It is a pity that at the twilight of the 20th century, the most developed continent in the world should witness brutality and ethnic hatred more reminiscent of another age, another century. True, the Balkans have never been the happy family of nations that Yugoslavia's founder, Marshal Josp Broz Tito had hoped it would become under the unifying ideology of Marxist socialism. The age-old ethnic hatred and friction which made the Balkans synonymous with regional tension and instability, refused to die down. All those traditional mistrust and hostility, which merely laid dormant during the life-time of Tito, have resurfaced to split Yugoslavia asunder.

Now, it seems the chain of events has slipped out of the hands of the leadership in Belgrade and into those who would rather settle old scores than build a happy home for the future. The brutality in Bosnia, according to the International Red Cross, has not been confined to any one ethnic group. The Serbs have apparently committed more of the crimes possibly because they were better equipped. All parties seem to have violated human rights, the Geneva Convention on treatment of prisoners of war and of civilians at wartime on a gigantic scale. Given the depth of the hostility among these strangely-primitive 20th century Europeans, good sense and moderation have become commodities which can only be imported. Within that context, the UNSC's green signal for military intervention is a positive and significant development, even if a little late in the day.

With the stage thus set for Western countries to apply muscle where mere reasoning has failed, we can hope that the carnage will soon be brought to an end. That, however, would constitute only a first step. The hundreds of thousands of refugees — Serbs, Croats and Muslims — will then have to be safely taken back to their homes and rehabilitated. That promises to be a monumental task, considering that one of the main reasons why this conflict has assumed the brutal form it has, is the desire by each ethnic group to drive others out of its self-defined area of control. Monumental or not, it is a task the UN-backed forces will have to accomplish if their mission is to have any meaning. That should then pave the way for dialogue among the warring factions to arrive at a mutually-acceptable solution. Such a convergence of views may look remote at present, but without it, peace in Bosnia can only be maintained by a perpetual presence of foreign troops, and that cannot be a solution. This will be a good test for the ability and willingness of European states to put out fires in their own backyard, before they start playing the international fireman.

**Consumer rights**

The fact that consumers' rights in Bangladesh are least protected by laws has not sufficiently come into focus. In a mostly sellers' market, the majority of the consumers even do not know if they are entitled to enjoy certain rights as stipulated in the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection. Adopted in the UN General Assembly on April 9, 1985, the guidelines contain a series of basic principles and measures for protecting consumers from products, processes and services which can endanger their health and safety. Apart from the basic principles, there are a set of objectives to be achieved through framing appropriate legal measures by the individual countries.

This is an important point because the provision for apparent flexibility in the guidelines is necessary to address the obtaining production and market systems in different countries. In developing countries like ours, the concern about the quality of food or other consumer items is not enough; but the ethical side of business such as market manipulation, tinkering with weight and raising prices on flimsy or no pretext ought to figure quite prominently in the legislature. Indeed, arbitrary price hike of essential commodities has thrown the consumers into a most disadvantaged and helpless position. Specially, the festival times provide the traders with the best opportunities to make the most of the situation. Ironically, though, once the prices have registered such an abnormal increase, they seldom come down.

Evidently, market monitoring is an essential part of the whole business. But this task, although done perfunctorily or even half-heartedly, is not followed by measures matching the challenge of the time and situation. In the bargain, it is always the buyer who becomes the loser and never has the chance of enjoying a greater choice at lower prices. In fine, it is a hostile market for the consumers, which is why consumers here need greater legal protection of their interests. Then, of course, the question of quality of products is directly related to the demand and supply, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the quality of life and society's ethical standard. On both these counts, our record may be really poor, but still we must set a standard to safeguard the interests of the consumers, the poor one's in particular, against the manipulative business practices. The Consumers Association of Bangladesh has suggested the framing of a 'package law' and appointment of 'consumer ombudsman'. We add to its suggestion, the formation of a Citizens' Advice Bureau, in line with similar organisations in developed countries, providing legal advices free of cost for consumers.

I am often asked to explain the reasons for the phenomenal success of the East and South East Asian countries and our own poor record in economic development. I can see the reason for asking me the question because, after all, I did have the opportunity to observe from my vantage point in ESCAP, the most spectacular period of economic growth in Asia in recent years.

It is not very difficult to see why these countries made such rapid progress. The basic strategy was sound. The policy framework for the management of the economy was stable. They used international trade and in particular, exports as the engine of growth. Private sector was encouraged and its drive and creativity was fully utilized. Foreign investment and joint ventures with foreign investors including the transnational were given consistent official support. The government invested heavily in education and the physical infrastructure to improve the quality of the human resources and facilitate growth. Labour productivity has been steadily rising. Their ability to make use of the external opportunities should also be counted as a major factor. There must be other factors which contributed to this process but above all, in my view, the people in these countries have been working very hard. They seem to have shaken off the slow-moving life-style of agricultural societies and absorbed some of the characteristics of industrial culture. This transformation is clearly visible not only in the little Dragons but even in the ASEAN countries.

What about Bangladesh? We can point out many reasons for our failures. The long period of colonial exploitation and neglect is certainly a fact of history. The political instability during the last twenty years and the concurrent uncertainty about the basic economic policy must have acted as a brake. Density of population and limited resources in a small land area are equally important negative factors. Natural calamities like recurrent floods, cyclones and droughts

**Do We Work Hard Enough? Let Us be Honest about it**

When I talk to the members of the higher bureaucracy about the reasons for our failures, they always come up with excellent explanations. In fact I am convinced that we are, as a nation, very skilful in finding reasons and excuses for our failures. Donors often complain that a good part of aid to Bangladesh remains unutilized because of slow moving government machinery.

slowed down our pace. All this is true. We did get a lot of foreign aid but we could not make proper use of the help due either to corruption or inefficiency. Vast majority of the people are illiterate. Their productivity, whether they work in the field or factory, is low. Small wonder that our record is so dismal. But apart from these well documented reasons for our poor track record, I often wonder whether as a people we work hard enough compared to the other Asian nations.

It would, of course, be wrong to suggest that our farmers do not work hard. They do work from dawn to dusk to earn two meals a day. Workers in the factories also work hard if the conditions are right. But what about the white collar workers? The working hours in the government offices in Dhaka and Chittagong are from 8 am to 2.30 pm. Following the government practice, most other offices including those in the private sector working these hours. In theory there is nothing wrong with these hours if the number of hours and minutes are added up. But what happens in practice? Do the officials really work from 8 am to 2.30 pm? It is common that very few people go to the office at the precise time. With one of the poorest public transport systems that one finds in a metropolitan city, it is not easy for officials to be punctual in the morning rush hours. The government has tried different methods to improve punctuality. I recall a head of state personally, standing at the gate of the secretariat to check attendance. Not much was achieved by these dra-

matic gestures. To-day the picture is as bleak as ever. There is another odd feature in the system which has always baffled me. The working hours in the districts and other centers are different from Dhaka. I have never understood the rationale for this peculiar practice but in Bangladesh one should not expect logic in such decisions.

What about the working habits? By mid-day the time for lunch and prayer start; pressing down on the office activities. In six and a half hours of working time there is no lunch break. People cannot be blamed too much if they

take lunch break or extended tea time out of the official working hours. The inevitable result is a drastic shortening of the working hours. If you are in an office at mid-day on business, you are often told to come back next day because there is not enough time to complete the business at hand. By 1.30 pm, the journey back home is already under way. What are then the effective working hours? Perhaps from 9 am until mid-day. Am I being too generous? Those who have to roam the corridors of the government offices on the business will no doubt corroborate this description. Of course, there are exceptions. There are hard working officials who not only work well beyond the official working hours but many of them burn the mid-night oil in the ser-

vice of the nation. But I am talking about the average person the vast majority who work only a few hours — far below the required number of hours. Gossip, union activities, time off for prayers and tea and "pan" leave little time to attend to official business. Is this how the business in the offices of a country, one of the poorest in the world, should be conducted? White collar workers in affluent countries, not only in Europe and America but also in Asia work much harder and longer. The richest country in Asia, Japan has working hours from 9.30 am until 5.45 pm with a lunch

working hours in India are from 9 am to 5.30 pm. In Thailand the hours are from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm with a lunch break of 30 minutes. If these hours are good for India and Thailand, why are these not good for Bangladesh? I am told that the lower staff are opposed to working in the afternoon. Working hours should be determined in the national interest and not in the narrow sectional interest of a group of officials. Of course my reasoning would be valid only if achieving efficiency and raising productivity are the goals.

What about the number of holidays? I am told that in Bangladesh to-day, there are 13 government holidays, 8 executive holidays (I do not know the meaning of this category but it is my ignorance) and 3 optional holidays. Rich people in rich countries take paid vacations. We are not rich; in fact we are the poorest of the poor but what stops us from enjoying holidays? So we have a total of 24 holidays in a year! The earned leave, sick leave and casual leave etc are there, of course. One is astonished that under these circumstances in this country any business gets done at all. In Malaysia, a neighboring country but very rich by our standard (per capita income is at least ten times higher than ours) give themselves a total of 13 public holidays. Indonesia has a total of 15 public holidays. Both Indonesia and Malaysia — two Muslim countries — do not consider it un-Islamic to work on Fridays. We have, however, introduced a system which cuts us off from most of our trading partners and neighbours on a working

day. We work on Sundays but no international trade, banking or other economic transactions can take place on that day of the week. We seem to have no concern about the resultant loss to the national interest.

When I talk to the members of the higher bureaucracy about the reasons for our failures, they always come up with excellent explanations. In fact I am convinced that we are, as a nation, very skilful in finding reasons and excuses for our failures. Donors often complain that a good part of aid to Bangladesh remains unutilized because of slow moving government machinery. If the concerned officials are asked about it, they will have a very eloquent explanation. Ask about frequent power failures and massive system loss and you will get a perfectly reasonable explanation for it. Our telephones do not work; to add insult to injury one gets billed for calls made by others. Year after year we lose money in industries in the public sector. Our primary education system is inefficient and ineffective. Without any community-based support and supervision, the primary schools, under direct government management, have become a part of the vast bureaucracy. The health system including the administration of hospitals is so poor that practically all the affluent people seek medical treatment in neighboring countries. Our judicial system is one of the slowest in the world. Above all, the law and order is fast breaking down. This is almost like the last straw on the camel's back. Indeed the picture is not a pretty one. However, if one talks to some one in authority, one gets a very convincing explanation for all these failures. In my view, the time has come to decide if we want to live with these explanations and shattered dreams or if we want to make an honest effort to lift ourselves from the depth of poverty by hard work. If we really want the latter, then we must look at the way in which we work. I do not know of any magic which can change our condition except hard work.

**ON THE RECORD**

by Shah AMS Kibria

break. They have practically the whole day for work. In Bangladesh we work only in the forenoon and waste the whole afternoon. For the senior officials the best part of working day — often the whole working day — is gone if they have to attend either a departmental or inter-ministerial meeting. They would be indignant if they are questioned why the files piled up. Is it not an officer's duty to attend meetings? Of course, they are right. Meetings are a way of life and business in a modern office cannot be done without consultations and meetings. However, this would not have paralysed business if they worked both in the morning and afternoon. Even if one spent the morning hours in meetings, he could do his file work in the afternoon. The

DURING the week July 11-17, I was privileged to witness and participate in the extraordinary expression of America's democracy — the national convention of the Democratic Party.

The procedures by which US political parties select their nominees for President and Vice-president have traditionally intrigued the students of comparative politics. The American nominating process manifests a greater degree of decentralization and diffusion of power than that of most other western democracies. It is a process that quadrennially gives rank-and-file the fundamental choice of determining the direction of the party.

Every four years, the national conventions nominate the presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the parties. The conventions represent the final stage of the nomination process, which comes after months and months of state primaries and caucuses during which time it enables the presidential candidates to articulate issues that address the concern and real needs of the American people. The nominating process has historically produced talented and good candidates who are capable to lead the nation and face the challenges.

According to Walter F. Mondale, chairman of NDI, the conventions also serve to reaffirm the strength and vitality of a democratic system introduced in the world's oldest and continuously applied constitution.

**The Convention**

This year the Democratic National Convention is the culmination of the process that involved the direct participation of approximately 20.5 million citizens — 10.5 million in primaries and 10 million in caucuses. This year a total of 4288 delegates have attended the convention and out of that 3566 delegates were selected by a public process and are pledged to specific presidential candidates. The balance 722 delegates to the national convention are elected leaders

**Democratic Nominees Clinton-Gore Pledge to "Revitalize America"**

by Feroz M Hassan

to serve on ex-officio basis of their position as governors, senators, representatives or members of the Democratic National Committee. This was the 41st Democratic National Convention since the party's first national gathering in Baltimore in 1832.

From July 12, 1992, delegates from all over the United States started to gather in New York to reshape image of the Democratic Party and endorse the Clinton-Gore ticket at the convention held at Madison Garden Square. Arriving at La Guardia Airport in New York, Bill Clinton told the crowd that after coming out of the convention, the American people are going to know there is a winning team, there is a party, there is a new approach that will bring America back.

On July 16th, it was a high drama in the convention hall, when Governor Mario Cuomo in a power speech put the name of Bill Clinton as the party's nominee. Clinton-Gore received the highest votes to run for the November 3 election as Democratic nominees.

The early conventions were fresh air, not smoke-filled. Before 1830 caucuses of legislators had chosen the party's candidates. There was a lot of drawbacks in the system. The caucus system was out with emerging (Andrew) Jacksonian democracy. The first national convention was held by the Democratic Party in May, 1832, in Baltimore, which came to be a popular 19th century convention city.

The Republicans were late comers and they held their first convention in 1856 in Philadelphia.

**The Issue**

Democrats believe Bush does not have a plan to get the economy moving and their jobs back. They have seen that during the past 12 years things have deteriorated further than



Bill Clinton improved.

They charge that the Republican President Bush has ignored the real problems of the real people of America. And Reagan-Bush have failed to take bold new economic strategy to rebuild America and put Americans back to work. Reagan-Bush, who have been sitting in the oval office for 12 years have only taxed the many to enrich the few.

Clinton sought to pre-empt Republican strategy aimed at undercutting Mr Clinton's excellent record as governor of Arkansas by pointing out that unlike the 1988 Democrat nominee, Governor Michael S Dukakis of Massachusetts, he did not sell himself as a single leader who singlehandedly have brought prosperity to his state of Arkansas.

There is no Arkansas Miracle" he said in his acceptance speech "But there is a lot of miraculous people. Good people pulling together. Because of them our schools are better, our wages are higher, our factories are busier, our water is cleaner and our budget is balanced. We are moving ahead."

"And I say to those who would criticize Arkansas: Come on down," he said "Especially if you are from Washington, come to Arkansas."

Another major issue of this year's presidential election is family values.

Bush who officially becomes the Republican nominee for a second four-year term in the party's Convention in Houston on August 17, has begun stressing the theme of "family values" in his campaign appearances. Historically Republican campaign challenges the Democrats on the subject of family values.

The Democratic campaign strategist used the convention to present Bill Clinton as a champion of family values. One of the main thrusts of his speech, which was preceded by the film screened on huge monitors in the convention hall was to recall the story of Mr Clinton's journey from fatherless child to presidential nominee.

Mr Clinton sought to smother each accusation with a homely image of his own making. In his acceptance speech he spoke feelingly of holding his newborn daughter, Chelsea, "a blessing my own

father never knew," and of the lesson that "all children can learn," taught him by Mrs Hillary Clinton. He recounted the death of his father, "killed in a car wreck on a rainy road three months before I was born."

Mr Clinton also credited his mother, Virginia Kelley, his wife Hillary and his grandfather for teaching him about caring for women, children and minorities. He sought to portray himself as a man who completely identifies with the concerns of people who have felt neglected and burdened.

He mentioned his grandfather's little country store in the village Hope, Arkansas, where he said, he learned more than he did at Georgetown or Yale or Oxford. He mentioned his mother's fight against breast cancer. Every word was designed to make him sound humble, family loving and committed.

Recently, in a campaign speech, Bush said that the president of United States of America needs to set a moral tone for the nation and he was better suited to do it than Democratic rival Bill Clinton. To a crowd he asked, "When you're looking to restore American's moral fibre, why buy synthetic when you can get 100 per cent cotton."

Against this, Bill Clinton remarks, "I'm fed up with politicians in Washington lecturing Americans about family values. Our families have values. Our government does not.... I want an America where family values like in actions not just in our speeches."

Immediately after getting the endorsement of the party and winning the party ticket to the Capital Hill, Clinton set out on "the road to change America." The campaign started without resting from New York the following day taking his running mate Senator Al Gore,

and their wives by bus trip which would take them to eight states on a 1000-mile run.

**'New Covenant'**

Franklin D Roosevelt had his New Deal; John F Kennedy his New Frontier; Lyndon B Johnson the Great Society. If Governor Clinton has his way, historians in the next century will be studying the New Covenant. He has often used the slogan to describe the policies he advocates.

It is in his campaign literature and the platform the Democratic Party adopted on the night of the convention. He called it "a solemn commitment between the people and their Government based not simply on what each of us can take but on what all of us must give to make America work again."

He also said the New Covenant was "a new approach to Government. A Government that offers more empowerment and less entitlement; more choices for young people in public schools and more choices for older people in long-term care. A Government that is leaner, not meaner; that expands opportunity, not bureaucracy; that understands that jobs must come from growth in a vibrant and vital system of free enterprise."

In short, the slogan seems to refer to a course somewhere between the unfettered free enterprise of Republicans and the well-fare-state economics that the Democratic Party has presented.

"But like so many other political slogans," I asked a leader of the Democratic Party who was sitting beside me in the briefing hall of the convention, "the New Covenant is short on specifics."

But then, Franklin Roosevelt never spelled out the details of the new Deal before he took office either.

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**To the Editor...**

**More care from BTV**

Sir, The other day, I had an informal talk with Mrs Salma Khan who read my letters in the newspapers regularly. Whenever I meet her she would discuss with me about our existing social problems. It may be mentioned here that Mrs Khan is a society-conscious lady and in her capacity as a senior government official, she has been contributing effectively in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, this time she was telling me if I had noticed the trend of BTV of casting same old faces in almost every drama and of re-running old plays acted by particular artists. This has brought a monotony among the viewers. They are tired of seeing the

same old faces. Why not BTV gives lift to some new faces to play the leading roles in weekly and serial dramas? As far as we know, a number of artists have been enlisted by BTV and they are waiting for offers.

We would request the BTV authority to arrange to cast new faces on merit basis in the dramas and we would also urge them to be a little more attentive in screening various programmes. One Wednesday (29/7/92), the BTV couldn't show the full episode of MacGyver — last part of the previous week's series mysteriously entered into the running one which the BTV later referred as their editing gap! Didn't they watch the same before putting it into the air? The BTV should also take necessary

care while telecasting commercial ads. Often the visual of one ad is shown while the talk of others is heard. In case of news-casting, too, sometimes funny incidents were incorporated!

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**Blindness in children**

Sir, A news item published in your esteemed daily on July 29 indicates that the government is going to launch a project of Tk 37 crore for preventing blindness in children caused by a deficiency of vitamin A. The number of children that go blind every year has been stated to be thirty thou-

sand, an alarming figure. Distribution of vitamin A capsules to the vulnerable group is contemplated under the project.

The average diet of our people is known to be deficient in almost all nutrients. There are reasons to believe that these deficiencies are hampering the normal development of the body and mind of the population. Herein lies the root cause of the loss of efficiency of the people. Distribution of vitamin A capsules is only an emergency measure. The project must be designed to solve the problem of not only vitamin A deficiency but also the deficiency of other vitamins and minerals on a permanent basis.

Regular consumption of leafy vegetables can greatly al-

leviate the problem of deficiency of all micro nutrients. These vegetables are particularly rich in carotene (a precursor of vitamin A), vitamin C, iron and calcium. Luckily, a good number of leafy vegetables are available throughout the year and most of them can be grown by any family or bought at a relatively low price. Since carotene is only fat-soluble, these vegetables must be cooked/eaten with sufficient oil/fat in order to assimilate the vitamin. Within the digestive tract carotene is automatically converted into vitamin A.

Consumption of 50 grams of leafy vegetables per head per day will eliminate much of the deficiency of vitamins and minerals. The proposed project should include an element of creating consciousness

among the masses about the benefit of leafy vegetables. One should not forget the fact that due to ignorance, even well-to-do people also suffer from micro-nutrient deficiency in this country. Blind children are the extreme example of the consequence of the vitamin A deficiency.

NGOs and govt agencies concerned with rural development may initiate/ strengthen their nutrition programme. Nutrition and hygiene may be incorporated into the science curriculum of primary schools.

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