

Hopes For NAM

Despite differences among members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit over the Bosnia issue, the consensus reached at the historic Jakarta meeting covers a much wider ground than many had expected at the start of the conference.

In the long run, it may not matter if the NAM takes up a moderate or aggressive posture. What matters most is whether this unique forum of developing nations understands the challenges facing them in the post-cold war era and, what's more, whether it can put into effect various resolutions adopted in Jakarta.

Among all these resolutions, nothing sums up the mood of the Summit better than the call by Nyerere for increased South-South co-operation, one of the many elements in the NAM's drive for self-reliance.

Once this new spirit of self-reliance within NAM starts producing right results, the Third World would gain a bargaining power to deal with the industrialised North from a position of strength on issues ranging from the reduction of trade barriers put up by the West to reforms in the United Nations.

On most of these resolutions, a great deal more work remains to be done before they are put into effect. For example, should the Security Council have more permanent members, perhaps at least two more, from the developing world? Or should NAM press for the abolition of the veto system in order to give more powers to the UN General Assembly?

The NAM can start moving in this direction if its co-ordinating body, or whatever it may be called in future, functions with greater effectiveness than it has demonstrated in the past.

No death is dismissible

This may be coincidental. But is far from dismissible. In three different traffic accidents three persons were killed and eight injured on Saturday. All of these happened in Mymensingh. In rather close proximity, Muktagacha, Trishal and Gouripur.

At Kaltapara, Gouripur a bus just rode over a scooter in the bright day light of a cloudless afternoon. Of the five passengers, one was instantly killed and the four removed to hospital.

In Muktagacha a minibus ran over and killed a 16-year old boy. Another minibus ploughed through a throng of five persons and killed one and injured others in Trishal.

It is possible that all the vehicles were so-called 'non-stop' or 'gate-lock' types doing their trips to and from Dhaka within a fixed span of time. These vehicles including the rather famous ones such as Padma and Teesta, which charge premium rates for travelling non stop, do not at all run non-stop but try to make up last time by driving at speeds extremely unsuitable for the vehicles and for the roads and most perilous both for the passengers and for the pedestrians.

We have time and again refused to call all of these fatal road events as accidents. Most of these are results of road vices being regularly practised. The government, the transport operators and, strangely enough, the passengers themselves have all a hand in causing these deaths and maimings.

Appropriate and truly roadworthy buses running with a regulated road and strictly according to a regulated speed can surely curb such unnecessary deaths and injuries. We reiterate our call for police patrols on the highways, for speed-governors in both passenger and goods vehicles, for duly trained and educated drivers and crew members of the vehicles.

Three deaths is nothing in unpredictable Bangladesh. But can we hardly dismiss that for just-being so small in number. Each human life is equal to all the rest that is there on the earth — that's what civilisation is about.

AS DIPLOMATS SEE BANGLADESH

Obsession with the Past Hinders Economic Development

FOR a variety of reasons, including some unflattering ones, Bangladesh remains at the receiving end of advices, admonitions and even exhortations from its allies and friends. Sometimes, they are reflected in conversations with diplomats here representing these friendly nations abroad or the donor agencies.

By and large, these envoys are well-meaning persons, who look at the progress in Bangladesh as part of their concern as it — or should be — ours. After all, diplomats from donor nations work hard to get this country its legitimate, often generous, share of international assistance.

With Hanoi opening up to the outside world and introducing liberal pragmatic economic measures, Vietnam has emerged as a strong rival of Bangladesh in attracting foreign investment for countries in East and Southeast Asia, with Japan, Australia, Malaysia and Singapore leading the list.

This has several implications. One is, when a foreign investor talks to a Vietnamese, he feels that his local host, perhaps soon to be his partner in a joint venture, has his mind well-focused on future. A foreign entrepreneur seldom gets the same feeling in his first which is often the last encounter with a potential Bangladeshi businessman.

There are also differences in business negotiations between Hanoi and Dhaka. A Vietnamese comes up with plenty of facts and figures and presents them against the backdrop of the country's difficulties in transport and communication, among others.

On the other hand, a Bangladeshi is long on generalities but short on facts. He presents a rosy picture of the potential of investment in

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the diplomat had expressed the view, politely but firmly, that outside the Export Processing Zone, (EPZ) in Chittagong, there has been extremely insignificant investment in this country. Again, the size of foreign participation in EPZ was also nothing much to talk about.

The comparison with Vietnam has a special significance.

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his country, criticises several official policies, blames political parties for problems facing the country and, in the end, often leaves his foreign guest in a state of confusion.

Part of the problem lies in the fact that in a newly-emerging democracy like Bangladesh, a local entrepreneur does not necessarily speak for the government or in support of official policies. But, in Vietnam, still governed along authoritarian lines, negotiations with potential foreign investors follow a set pattern.

Unlike a Vietnamese, a Bangladeshi not only lives in the past but he is also a highly politicised person. There are of course exceptions,

which, as anyone can see from the columns of newspapers, in full of contentious issues. On most of these issues, there can be no national consensus. Unfortunately, a Bangladeshi, a highly educated sophisticated individual, is in no mood to leave these issues alone and concentrate on the job at hand, namely, the economic development," says envoy.

This explains, as one foreigner puts it, why a national debate seldom takes up major economic issues and policies, with emphasis on various options and alternatives. Instead, the debate, always a heated one, invariably seems to be about the past.

"Here, one comes up with all kinds of bitter controversies. Political parties would not agree even about the duration of the past authoritarian rule, whether it was for 15 years or nine, or who first thought of independence for Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujib or Ziaur Rahman. It is amazing that Bangladesh enjoys the luxury of this endless debate, when more than half its people live below the line of absolute poverty and the country needs massive foreign assistance just for its survival."

In a sad tone, the diplomat adds, "It is an impossible situation, by any standard."

Among members of diplomatic missions, part of the disappointment lies in the fact that with all their commitment of support for the prevailing democratic system and their realisation that the ousted Ershad regime had done so much harm to this impoverished nation, through corruption and erosion of moral values, they just do not know which way Bangladesh is now heading for.

One redeeming feature in what is otherwise a dismal situation is that several heads of diplomatic missions maintain close contacts with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Awami League chairperson Sheikh Hasina and several other national leaders. So, a dialogue goes on through which diplomats offer suggestions and their own evaluations of problems and prospects facing Bangladesh. Unfortunately, it is still anyone's guess as to how many of these suggestions are accepted by either the Prime Minister or the Opposition leader—and how many are just shrugged off.

AT HOME AND ABROAD

S. M. ALI

like foreign-trained young entrepreneurs and, rather surprisingly, a handful of old-style businessmen. An official of an international agency pins a lot of hope on the young breed, but worries that its efforts to introduce modern management techniques, including rational labour relations, may continue to be thwarted by the continuing politicisation of the national climate.

As one diplomat puts it, quoting an executive of a multi-national company the politicisation goes all the way down the line, generating a restiveness in the middle and militancy at the lowest level.

"We have no training or even the mental outlook in dealing with the South Asian type of labour militancy which is strongly linked to political cross-currents, instead of being based on internal problems within a plant or factory," adds the diplomat.

One diplomat offers some examples of how an educated Bangladeshi lives in the past

Yugoslavia — an Unproductive Show on Bosnia

THE recent conference on Yugoslavia, held in London, is the largest such gathering on this conflict, whose scale in bloodshed and human suffering, has surpassed any in recent times.

This gigantic conference, which lasted three days was preceded by a lot of hand wringing as to how best to deal with a situation which was worsening on the ground by the hour. For during the entire conference, bloodshed in and around Sarajevo did not cease for a minute and even found a well known victim Martin Bell

operating in a London hospital from shrapnel wound. The TV pictures told the story—the well heeled gentlemen meeting in the comfort of London and the Sarajevo sky lit with flames and victims writing on

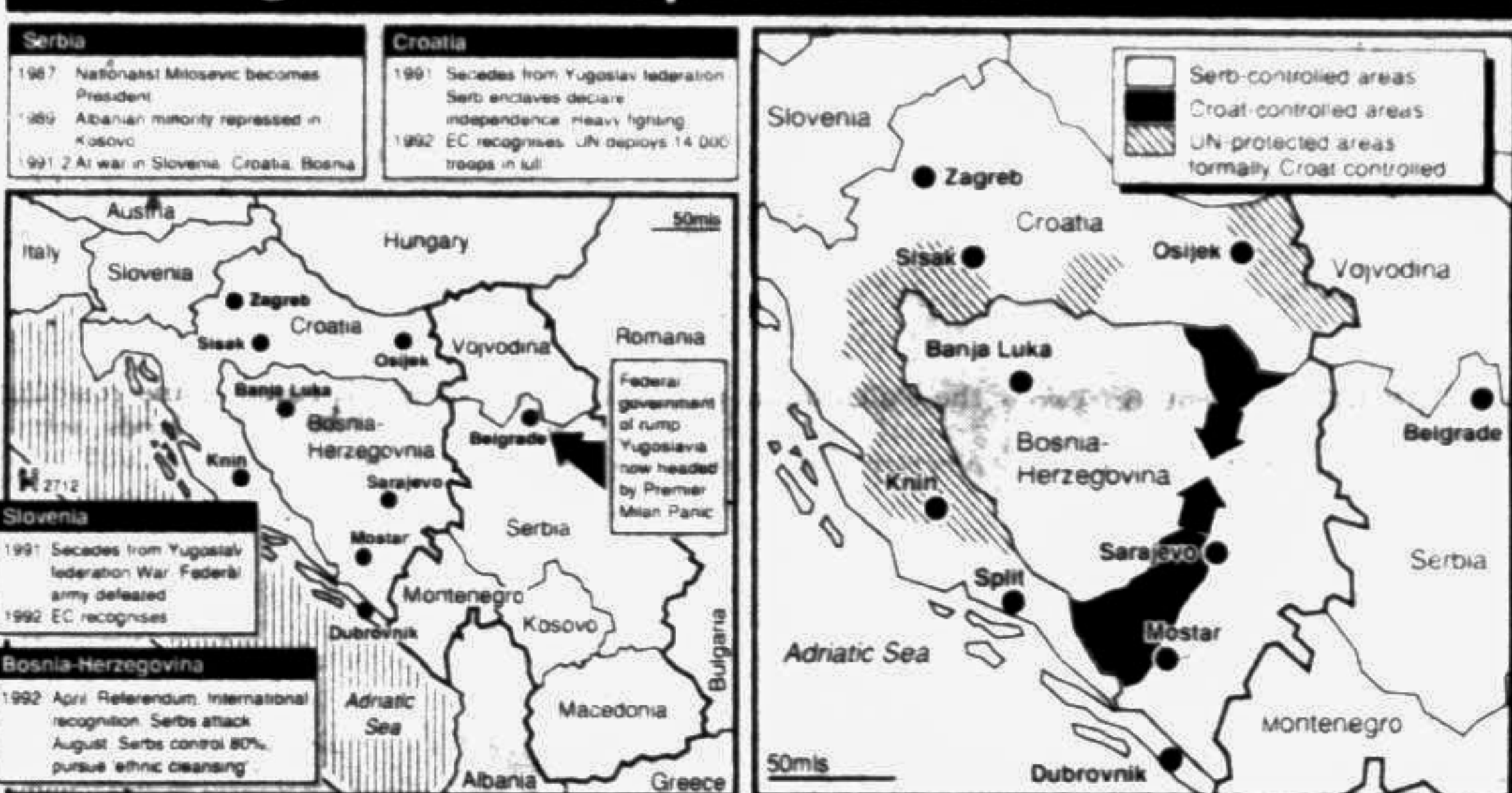
Arshad-uz Zaman writes from London

the ground. Since there was no expectation that troops would go marching in Bosnia and call a halt to the relentless pounding of the city by Serbian guns, the gains achieved by the conference should be considered substantial. For the first time the conference brought

vowed to maintain the forth-cooling Geneva conference, where a permanent body is to be set up to oversee the implementation of the London decisions. Lord Owen, a former Foreign Secretary of Britain is to replace Lord Carrington, as head of the European Community's peace effort. It may be recalled that a few weeks ago, there was a public dispute between the UN Secretary General and Lord Carrington, which was later smoothed over by what Lord Carrington described as a 'hand son' letter from the Secretary General. Lord Carrington has been loudly complaining about Serbian leaders signing on any paper — placed before them only to go back on them the moment his back would be turned. The media describes Lord Owen as unsympathetic towards the Serbs, who have been literally on the dock during the entire conference. One interesting side show has been the public squabble between Mr Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian leader and Mr Milan Panic the Prime Minister, who is a US national and earned a fortune in his adopted country. Mr Panic has been making endless speeches vowed tougher sanctions, promised to stop ethnic cleansing, close camps, station UN monitors for Serbian-Bosnian border. A momentum had been created, which they

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How Yugoslavia collapsed into war



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.

Exercises in futility

Sir, What the Opposition parties have gained, since the general elections, by indulging in hartals, movements, agitations, shutdowns, barricades, protests, denunciations, filibustering, and unimaginable and unimaginable negative activities?

What the nation has gained from these non-activities on non-issues, diverting attention from development work (in a non-violent atmosphere)? Whom have they made happy (besides themselves) by their tantrums and passions? How much the country has progressed due to Opposition activities or non-activities since we won or captured the elusive maiden called democracy?

We started with a new zero last year, and we are still near zero. How much is the Opposition responsible for this retardation and slow-down? Why they virtually do not allow others to work — those who are willing to work. Talk, talk, talk; and criticize and abuse ad infinitum — is this the definition of getting down to work? Sure it is masterly inactivity; but where is it leading us?

government would have worked miracles, because the same national problems had to be solved by the "government", whoever ran it. At best, the difference in quality would have been marginal, because all political parties come from the same society, which has an upper limit on its standard. There is no super standard with any group. So why so much fuss? What are we missing? What AL would have shown us to impress? Why the Opposition cannot agree to the basic wants of life? Why daily normal life is not allowed due to hartal? No party in power would like to create unnecessary situations. Those in power should like to work with minimum fuss. Our Opposition perhaps do not believe in such philosophy.

The mood of the nation is one of impatience, whether it is in the traffic jam, or during a parliamentary session. Much ado about small things. Small minds think in small ways. The current peculiar sensitiveness of the Opposition has to go, in national interest. It does not produce results, only disruption, as we have seen. What does not work should be discarded. Nobody is happy with the defiant, tense atmosphere of constant confrontation. It is all noise and thunder. Who is taking away our country? Are we at war? Yes, maybe with our own Opposition (or vice versa).

The Opposition should announce that it believes in the right to work, without interruption from any source, including anti-work programmes imposed on the nation by the Opposition activities. Blocking daily work is not good politics, by any standard, logic, or angle.

is bankruptcy of ideas, and the nation or the government should not be blamed for it. We get the Opposition we deserve. Is it not the honest truth? We are fed up of life — that includes the Opposition antics. They have shown the nation what they cannot do, after losing the elections. What else can they show? Life is not a circus. After coming out of the tent, we have to get down to business, not politics.

Alif Zabr Dhaka

Refugees remain

Sir, Islamic Development Bank will construct a camp in Bangladesh for refugees who fled Myanmar to escape "persecution". The humanitarian contribution will undoubtedly improve the dwelling condition of those displaced people now in emergency shelters that have been in operation ever since the exodus began.

The refugees have naturally been a burden on LDC Bangladesh and will be affecting the efforts to solve her manifold problems already hindering her development pace.

Still, should Myanmar hesitate to reinstate her citizens following agreement, all necessary moves should be made toward international mediation or mandate over the inflicted dilemma afflicting this LDC.

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OPINION

Back to the Villages

People swarm around offices to seek job as the bees do around the honeycomb. I knew that it was true for men only, but at present it is also happening among women. I have been working in the district towns with women for more than two and a half years. Women aged eight to fifty-eight are turning to me for a job. They come to me not with the hope of making an extra paise on top of what their fathers or husbands earn, but only to fill their empty stomach. More than four hundred women have been trained in various skills and trades by my organisation — the Trinaful — and they are expecting to get a job with the training set-up.

problem is that of the death in all senses of the villages of Bangladesh and the danger of all-round degeneration of urban life. The endless exodus of lakhs of people everyday towards the cities, implies the death throes of the villages; it is the beginning of the dwindling into the slums of the cities. Here man will have a life of only inhuman suffering — a life neither of honour nor of success. But to the rural life, there is another harrowing, horrifying aspect from which the educated sections of our society prefer to keep their eyes. In the red light districts of the large cities of India, Pakistan and all the middle-remote countries girls from the poorest villages of Bangladesh, are being traded in thousands. They are getting lost into the abyss of prostitution. This has become the most inescapable aspect of our present-day reality pushing into near oblivion the traditional culture, and large-hearted humanity and the glorious religious tolerance of Bengal.

checked. This would facilitate, I believe, the women to work in their familiar environments with every social mooring and interaction remaining intact. I do not know whether it is a feasible idea, but I earnestly request the specialists to ponder over this. It seems that we have already had the realization that the socio-economic progress of the rural people cannot be made by agricultural development alone. Industries have to be constructed in the villages, so that people can find job very near his door. This would to a great extent lessen the number of destitute people in the country, people will have a sense of security, pressure of population on the cities will be reduced. Industries are meant for the people of all classes. Its aim cannot be the profit of a handful of people. This should be recognized first of all and this outlook should be adopted in the policy-making of the state. My suggestion is not based on emotions merely. I believe that the practical aspects of the proposal deserve consideration. I hope that the intellectuals will throw light on this issue in their writings and it will find place in the editorials of the newspapers. I also call for the attention of the patriotic social workers who will launch organized movements on the national level. Instead of confining this to ink and paper, and holding of symposia only, I crave for determination on the part of the whole nation and the democratic government for the realisation of this dream of a movement back to the villages. Raezia Samad Adviser, Trinaful, Sherpur