

Hard Times in Moscow

The agreement by the Communist-dominated Congress in Russia to "reconsider" the proposal for a referendum from President Boris Yeltsin marks a breathing time in the volatile drama now being enacted in Moscow.

Several issues are involved in what is anything but a straight-forward power struggle. The reformist anti-communist faction in the Congress, led by President Yeltsin, is obviously in a minority, almost in a hopeless minority, probably with a much less grassroot support than what western observers assume from outside.

This is overshadowed by a constitutional issue which centres on the authority and power of the elected President - Boris Yeltsin himself - as against those of the Congress. Under the constitution that is still in place, it is the so-called parliament that enjoys and, indeed, exercises greater authority than Yeltsin.

Yeltsin is right in taking the position that a reallocation of authority, with himself functioning as the head of the government, is imperative if Russia is to survive as a state in political and economic terms. It is as much a question of governing the republic as of introducing the wide-ranging reforms without which Russia would not receive the much-needed western support it so badly needs.

Assuming the Congress finally accepts the referendum which may decide how Russia is to be governed, the question would still be how the people will vote - and for whom. The situation is too uncertain and the image of Yeltsin too authoritative for any one to assume the Russian electorate would offer a clear-cut choice for the harassed president.

India's Trial

India's woes seem to be far from over. When the fire of communal violence looked to be smothered after a conflagration in the aftermath of the Babri Mosque demolition, it has in reality been smouldering.

That the incident has necessitated a state of alert to be sounded all across India points to further havoc the terrorists may have in their plan to wreak. Indian leaders have promptly indicated their accusing fingers at foreign conspiracy.

True, India has made many an enemy by its policies towards neighbours, no matter if conflicting interests were or not the issues to fight for all the time. So the international conspiracy theory can be substantiated to a certain degree, more so because of the sophisticated and frighteningly high technology involved in detonating the powerful bombs that have rocked whole Bombay on Friday.

India's economy is now in a better shape than it was at the time of Rao's taking over. The sound economic policies have already started giving dividends and even brighter days have been predicted.

WE often use the term 'international community' in analyzing global issues. I have often wondered whether there is really any basis for the use of such a term.

When peace is threatened anywhere in the world it no longer remains a local or even a national issue. The rest of the world feel concerned and even threatened when the disturbance spills across national boundaries.

Interestingly enough, human rights have also become such an issue. A nation cannot today take shelter under the plea of national sovereignty to violate basic human rights with impunity.

However the award of Nobel Peace prize to the Burmese opposition leader Aung San

Noble Laureates Champion the Cause

Democracy in Myanmar

Thirteen Nobel Peace prize winners wrote an open letter to the State Law and Order Restoration Council (Slorc), the official name of the Burmese military regime and urged it to release opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, "without condition and without delay."

Suu Kyi has put international spot light on the plight of the Burmese people groaning under the heels of a brutal and totally insensitive military regime. Freedom-loving people everywhere have been encouraged by the bold and imaginative initiative recently taken by the Nobel laureates against the Burmese military junta.

Thailand was the theatre of the drama in which eight world famous recipients of the prestigious Nobel prize for peace played a pioneering role in challenging the Burmese military junta. By implication, they questioned the concept of so-called domestic jurisdiction of states. Many autocratic regimes have used the argument that foreigners have no right to interfere in the "internal affairs" of a nation.

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the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. These are illustrious names which included the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez, Betty Williams and Mairead McGuire of Northern Ireland, Adolpho Perez Esquivel of Argentina, Ross Daniels representing Amnesty International and Donna Kyle Anderson, representing American Friends Service Committee.

Arias Sanchez, speaking for the laureates, described Suu Kyi as a symbol of liberty throughout the world who remained courageously committed to the principles of freedom and democracy.

Her brave vigil is a reminder to the Burmese people that one day the atrocities of Slorc would be only a "gruesome memory". Three of the signatories - the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Tutu and Arias Sanchez - called for an

one minute that the so-called constructive engagement by ASEAN with the Burmese State Law and Order Council will make the military rulers any less brutal," he said.

The Nobel Peace prize winners who came to Thailand have left and the excitement surrounding their presence in Bangkok has subsided. But I believe these distinguished persons have performed a great service and a pioneering role. They spoke up for the suppressed people of Burma as fellow members of the human family.

The Nobel laureates' visit to Thailand became a controversial issue in Thai politics. The Thai military authorities have always maintained a "fraternal" link with the Burmese military and as a result Thailand is known to have influenced the ASEAN position towards Burma.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

realities who did not come to Thailand but put their names in the open letter include: former USSR president M Gorbachev, Guatemalan Rigoberta Mench Tum, Elie Wiesel and Linus C Pauling.

The laureates called on the junta to allow the democratically elected civilian government to rule in its own sphere, and thus to permit the constitutional process to begin anew.

arms embargo. "Sanctions are what the junta fears most," said Archbishop Tutu, adding that the Burmese regime was using whatever arms it could acquire to suppress the people. The laureates later demanded the expulsion of Burma from the United Nations.

Secular Saddam Plays Islamic Card

Michael Jansen writes from Baghdad

The US-led bombing of Iraq created divisions in the Arab world. Fearful of the rising tide of Islamist opposition, Morocco, Syria and Egypt, distanced themselves from the bombing. At the same time a reunion between secularists and Islamists was demonstrated at the International Islamic Conference in Baghdad.



SADDAM HUSSEIN Nationalism plus Islam

delegates from 51 countries were the headgear of men of religion and the caftans and flowing robes of their many countries. Pale men from the Caucasus sported caucasic fur hats; dark Sudanese loose white turbans; North Africans hooded cloaks; Arab scholars red fezes wrapped with muslim; Shia clerics black turbans and Tajiks round caps with long tassels.

On January 17, the second anniversary of the Gulf war, the delegates demonstrated outside United Nations offices here against the economic blockade of Iraq and the international isolation of this country. The US cruise missile attacks that night on the Al-Rashid hotel, where 700 delegates were lodged, was regarded as an attack on them

and on the entire Muslim world. Predictably, the conference returned to the rhetoric of the independence struggle, called for the "liberation" of Islamic Jerusalem from Israeli occupation and demanded the return of the Palestinian deportees and international intervention on the side of the Bosnian Muslims in the civil war in the former Yugoslavia.

these forces on the internal, national plane. Indeed, this confrontation appears to have intensified in Egypt, for instance, because of the secular government's equivocal response to the bombing of Baghdad. Jordan was the only Arab country where the ruling establishment, both king and government, strongly condemned Western military action in Iraq, placating public opinion.

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.

Wearing of combat dress by civilians

Sir, The news titled "Wearing of combat dress by civilians punishable" published in your daily on the 28 February, says quoting the BSS, that, wearing of combat dresses by civilians which are meant for Armed Forces, is a punishable offence. It is also quoted that, the government has noticed some civilians using combat shirts, trousers, caps and bags which is punishable under penal provisions of the country.

purpose of inducing others to believe that he is in service at the present time. Merely wearing a soldier's garb without the specific intention is no offence. Cast-off uniforms of soldiers are worn by many men. Actors put on different military uniforms."

It is not known to me, how the members of the Bangladesh National Cadets Core (BNCC) are impune from using such dresses, as the Penal Code does not exempt them from the offence. So, it is quite conspicuous that, mere usage is not punishable unless it is conjoined with intention to defraud someone.

now it is worked in reverse like a bumerang. And such officials must be called for explanations and disciplinary actions may be taken against them.

Quazi Reza-Ul Hoque Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh 27, Shantinagar Bazar Super Market

Of 14th (special) BCS

Sir, The BPSC is conducting the exams of the 14th (special) BCS to meet partially the dearth of teachers in our nationalised colleges. It is certainly an admirable step.

But the question is whether all the appointees will join their respective posts. To the best of my knowledge a number of the candidates who are now undergoing the 14th BCS are those already selected in the 11th BCS and they are now awaiting their appointment letters. A large number of them will also be selected in the 13th BCS. So, it is quite evident that many of the lecturers who will be selected through the 14th BCS will not join and quite a number of the posts of teachers in the government colleges will remain vacant which can never be desirable when there is a crisis of teachers. And if it happens, the education of the country will be hindered seriously. But what is the way out of this?

welcome the group. The King of Thailand granted them an audience. The only important country which is believed to be maintaining close relation with the Burmese junta is China. It is reportedly making a lot of money by selling arms to the junta. The Nobel laureates called for arms embargo, perhaps keeping in view the Chinese arms sales to a regime which is systematically using these arms to torture and kill innocent citizens. Of course these arms are also used against the Karens, Shans and other minorities including the Rohingyas in the Arakan region.

Given the stubbornness of the Burmese armed forces and their record of brutal suppression of all popular resistance, it is unlikely that the support given by the Nobel laureates will immediately change the picture. But its long term impact will certainly be significant. These illustrious men and women had no legal locus standi but they spoke on behalf of the conscience of humanity, something that has not happened before, at least not in such an organized and dramatic manner.

What is equally important, world public opinion has been aroused in favour of the struggling people of Burma who were really fighting a lonely battle all these years. The Burmese military junta is putting a brave front and pretending as if nothing has happened. But can they ignore the fact that they stand condemned by the world community? As the next door neighbour Bangladesh should naturally maintain friendly relations with the Burmese nation. However the military junta does not represent the nation. For the sake of dealing with the Rohingya refugee question we have to work with the government currently in power but in doing so we must not lose sight of the reality of the situation in that country.

ported issue, he said that Israel's compromise offer to repatriate one quarter of the men made it unnecessary to contemplate the use of sanctions against Israel for its refusal to comply fully with the provisions of resolution 799 of December 18, which demanded the immediate return home of all the 413 deportees.

On the question of the war in Bosnia, Christopher said that the US was not prepared to use force against the Serbs to obtain compliance with Security Council resolutions, although President Clinton had pledged to do exactly that during his election campaign and again during the transition period between the old administration and the new.

So far, Arab governments have been able to contain popular anger over the double standard. But, as Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri said when asked if Israel's offer to repatriate a quarter of the deportees would permit Lebanon to attend the Middle East peace talks, "We have our own public opinion to consider."

Meaning no, following the example of the Palestinian delegation which has made it clear that it will not resume negotiations with Israel until all the deportees have returned home or sanctions are in place. The time may be coming when governments may have to bend to the popular will rather than Western pressure. — GEMINI NEWS

MICHAEL JANSEN was born in the US, lives in Cyprus, and has covered the Middle East for many years.

concerned department that it ponder over this issue. Rushaka Ehsan Supal Dhaka

Tejgaon airfield

Sir, Within few years of its commissioning, the Zia International Airport (ZIA) has become overcrowded due to growth in number of International flights. With the passage of time there will be further growth of passenger traffic. To relieve pressure on ZIA it is suggested that domestic flights may be operated from old Tejgaon Airport after a little repair and maintenance of the runway. If this airport is recommissioned flights to ZIA can also be diverted here in case of emergency. This can also be used for training flights and flights of plant protection department.

At the moment we don't have any alternative airport in Dhaka. Will the Biman and Civil Aviation authorities ponder over this? Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Carut.