The Baily Star

Dhaka, Sunday, March, 14, 1993

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. Although press reports of Saturday suggest that the Congress of People's Deputies, the nearest thing the republic has to a parliament, will let Yeltsin have the referendum that he had been pressing for, no one should rule out yet another unexpected development that makes the deputies forget about the Russian leader's proposed move. At this moment, nothing can be taken for granted.

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. The Russian leader's commitment to economic reforms, market economy and private ownership of land represents the wave for the future - the prescription for the survival of the republic - but it is yet to be translated into hard realities which change lives of millions of people who are still going through a severe winter, made worse by equally severe shortages. In such a scenario, old-style communists who dominate the Congress offer a return to the past, with subsidies, assured jobs and homes and all the "benefits" of a controlled economy.

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. However absurd it may sound, the Congress has used its power to have reformist ministers dismissed and to encourage the central bank to print excess currency notes to deal with inflation. In short, the Congress has been exercising what in any other country would be regarded as the executive authority.

Yellsin 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. This is what Yeltsin means by the survival of his country, the alternative being the "civil war" which the Russian leader has also mentioned as a warning.

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 authoritarian for any one to assume the Russian electorate would offer a clear-cut choice for the harassed president. Yet, there is nothing Yelisin needs so badly today other than a positive outcome of his referendum. A massive flow of western aid to Russia could help in turning the tide in his favour. Unfortunately, the United States, for one, would not like to get too involved in the internal power struggle in Russia. There are surely no easy answers to the challenges facing Yeltsin.

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. And now comes the unprecedented devastating series of bomb blasts giving a severe jolt to the confidence of the people and the government of India alike. Suspected to be remote-controlled car bombs, they were set off one after another in India's commercial city Bombay still reeling under the atrocious impacts of communal frenzy. The death of about 200 people and injury to 1100 certainly give an idea of the power of the bombs and still more of the sophisticated but macabre plan and programming that have gone into causing the loss of life and destruction.

That the incident has necessitated a state of alert to be sounded all across India points to further havoes the terrorists may have in their plan to wreak. Indian leaders have promptly indicated their accusing fingers at foreign conspiracy. If such a possibility cannot be ruled out altogether, there are however others who hold right-wing Hindu militants suspect for the terrorist act. Whoever might be responsible, one thing is crystal clear that they are bent on destabilising the country's poise for a recovery from the carnage it has gone through in the past months.

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. But then internal political adventurism by indiscreet leaders have already proved what black passion and communal rage they can unleash to press for their advantages. This time they have one compelling reason to undermine the Rao government which, thanks to finance minister Manmohan Singh's courage and vision, has given a budget almost to everyone's liking.

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. This certainly cannot be to the liking of those busy planning to go to power, means notwithstanding or the Hindu zealots disliking secular policies of the Congress (1). We hope and pray that such tragedies will happen never again. A thorough investigation at the highest level will hopefully uncover the plot and help catch the culprits. The government of Narasimha Rao cannot but rise upto the challenge and take India out of troubles of the trying times.

Noble Laureates Champion the Cause 'international commu-

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." They accused the junta of violence and cruelty and called on it to honour the result of the 1990 general election.

Suu Kyt 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. It is a challenge at the concept of domestic jurisdiction of a state under which the military junta of that country has suppressed the democratic rights and aspirations of the people of

Thailand was the theatre of

T E often use the term

global issues. I have often

wondered whether there is

really any basis for the use of

such a term. Evidently there

are common interests but are

there shared feelings and sen-

timents which bind the na-

tions of the world into a com-

munity? The concept of

sovereign nation states has

tended to accentuate the dif-

ference rather than emphasize

our common humanity.

However modern science and

technology and the explosive

growth of the communications

media has initiated a process

tions of war and peace, human

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 distur-

bance spills across national

boundaries. Similarly, we all

now recognize that questions

such as the ozone layer or the

sea level rise or the pollution

of the marine eco-system are

not issues that can be dealt

with on a national basis. The

international community must

tackle these questions because

they clearly transcend national

interestingly enough, hu-

man 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. It is, in my view, the

beginning, doubtless a tenta-

tive beginning, of shared feel-

ings and sentiments of men

and women as human beings

and not as nationals of a par-

ticular nation. These feelings

and emotions cut across na-

tional boundaries. The sight of

a starving child of Somalia or

Cambodia or Bosnia, brought to

our homes by the television,

moved all decent men and

women everywhere. The brutal

suppression of human rights in

neighbouring Burma (now re-

named Myanmar by the pre-

sent regime) did not stir the

world community to the same

extent because the military

junta ruling the country iso-

lated it and prevented normal

contact with the rest of the

Peace prize to the Burmese

opposition leader Aung San

I messages of solidarity

and support for Baghdad from

popular Muslim groupings

around the World: from

Morocco in the West, to

Nigeria in the south and the

Egyptian and Jordanian par-

hamentarians pressed their

governments to take a strong

stand against the actions of the

tripartite coalition of the

United States, Britain and

Arab and Islamist opposition,

Morocco, Syria and Egypt,

Arab members of the 32-mem-

ber "Desert Storm" coalition of

1991, distanced themselves

from the tripartite mini-war of

attrition against Iraq as did

Pakistan, a Muslim coalition

January, events in Iraq seized

the attention of Muslim public

opinion, previously preoccu-

pied with the bloody conflict

in Bosnia and the sorry saga of

more than 400 Palestinians

deported to a snow-covered

hillside in southern Lebanon.

As a result, Iraqi President

Saddam Hussein, a secular

Baathist, the Europeanised

Muslims of Bosnia and

Palestinians deported for re-

sisting Israel's occupation,

have, in contradictory fashion,

become the latest folk heroes

of Muslim peoples everywhere.

tween secularists and Islamists

was dramatically demonstrated

at the opening of the

Conference in Baghdad in mid-

January. From a stage draped

International

Furthermore, a reunion be-

For a few critical days in

partner.

Fearful of the rising tide of

Pro-Islamist Tunisian,

Philippines in the east.

However the award of Nobel

ECENT Western aerial

attacks on Iraq brought

world.

borders.

When peace is threatened

of instantly "globalizing" ques-

rights and the environment.

nity in analyzing

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 "interna affairs" of a nation. But are human rights a purely internal affair of a state? Is it not an issue in which the entire human race has a stake? The Nobel laureates have demonstrated by their stand that human rights and democratic aspirations of a people are matters of universal interest and cannot be suppressed on any plea.

Thirteen Nobel Peace prize winners wrote an open letter to the State Law and Order Restoration Council (Slore) the official name of the Burmese military regime and urged it to release opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, without condition and without delay." They accused the junta of violence and cruelty and called on it to honour the result of the 1990 general election. Eight of the thirteen Noble Laureates visited

Thailand and campaigned for

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 Matread McGuire of Northern Ireland, Adolpho Perez Esquivel of Argentina, Ross Daniels representing Amnesty International and Donna Kyle Anderton, representing American Friends Service Committee. The campaign was organized by the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development of Montreal Canada. The other Nobel lau

Arias Sanchez, speaking for the laureates, described Suu-Kyl as a symbol of liberty throughout the world who remained courageously committed to the principles of free dom and democracy. Refusing to accept the offer of her own liberty on the condition of exile from her country, she continues to inspire the people of Burma," he said.

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

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

reates who did not come to Thatland 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 open letter reaffirmed the admiration and support for Suu Kyi and for the struggle for human rights in Burma which she personifies. "Despite an indomitable spirit and courage, she languishes under house arrest - silenced for her desire to serve her people and imprisoned for her ability to do so," said the letter. "It is time Slore realized that the current repression sustained by violence, cruelty and torture only prolongs the uncertainty of Burma's future as a nation."

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." At a press conference, former Costa Rican President

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. They demanded sweeping international sanctions including an arms sales embargo against the Slore. Touching a sensitive issue for the ASEAN the laureates called on it to end its "constructive engagement" policy with Slore. Ross Daniels of Amnesty International said at a press conference that the challenge of giving democracy back to the people of Burma lies with the governments of ASEAN. "ASEAN governments have to bite the bullet and accept the fact that these human right abuses carried out on the Burmese people cannot be allowed to continue. This is a matter of regional urgency, and none of us here buy for

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 win-

ners who came to Thatland 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. Disregarding the plea that the human rights question is an internal matter they challenged the right of the junta to deny basic democratic rights to the people. One may recall the traumatic experience of the people of Bangladesh in 1971 when they were fighting for survival as a nation. The Pakistani military regime used the same arguments and the same brutal techniques to suppress the people of Bangladesh. One can therefore understand how the Burmese people, fighting a brutal military establishment, must have felt at the gesture of the Nobel

Peace prize winners. The Noble laureates visit to Thatland became a controversial issue in Thai polities. The That 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. By allowing the Nobel laureates to operate from Thatland the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai asserted its authority against the That military establishment. The Thai top brass did not conceal their unhappiness at the presence of the Nobel prize winners in Thailand but Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai stood firm on his decision to

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 re-

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 ar organized and dramatic manner.

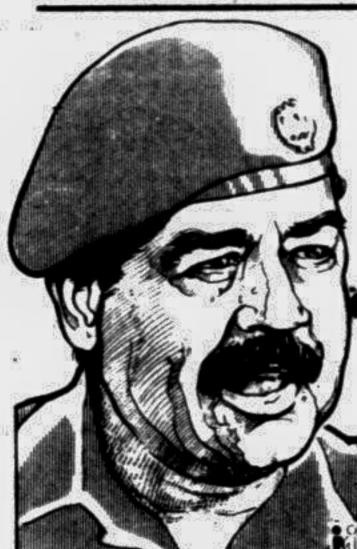
What is equally important,

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 com munity? As the next door neighbour Bangladesh should naturally maintain friendly relation 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. Having been passed through the painful process of a long struggle for restoring democracy we cannot but have sympathy and support for a similar movement in a neighbouring country. Should we not also raise our voice in support of the world-wide demand for the release of Aung San Suu

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. As the West dithers on helping Bosnian Muslims and expelled Palestinians the cry of Western double standards is gaining new converts in the Islamic world.



SADDAM HUSSEIN Nationalism plus Islam

with the three-starred Iraqi flag, the Vice Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, Izzet Ibrahim, wearing the olive drab uniform and black beret of the Baath party, welcomed the delegates.

But the assertive secularism of the flag had been softened by the inscription Allahu Akber - God is Great. And the 1,001

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

In the centre of this massive Muslim congregation, at the heart of the theatre, sat two rows of high-ranking uniformed Baathists, symbolising the reunification of secular nationalism forces with those of militant Islam, a revival of the alliance which fought for the independence of most Muslim countries.

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

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.

Future Muslim-Christian relations could be determined by how the Christian West and the Western-dominated UN respond to these three problems. The Iraqis, Palestinians and Bosnians are seen by Muslims as victims of Western double standards under which sanctions are imposed on Iraq two years after it pulled out of Kuwait in compliance with UN resolutions while Israel and Serbia remain in illegal occupation of captured territory in violation of other UN resolu-

Revival of the alliance between Islamists and nationalists on the external, international plane does not, however, necessarily mean a winding down of confrontation between

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. Although the tripartite Western coalition seemed to be observing the ceasefire called by Baghdad on January 20, as a gesture of goodwill towards the incoming US administration of President Bill Clinton, on the two other issues, the Palestinian deportees and the Bosnian Muslims, the US has taken positions to alienate the Muslim world.

On February 1, during his maiden visit to the UN, the new US Secretary of State, Waren Christopher, rejected the imposition of sanctions against Israel for its mass deportation of Palestinians and the use of force against Serbia for the murder and rape of Bosnian Muslims. On the de-

portee 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 - GEMINI NEWS

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

Islamic

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. But it is matter of great surprise that, the wrong law has quoted; the correct law is as follow:

"Section 140: Whoever, not being a soldier, sailor or airman in the Military, Naval or Air service of Bangladesh, wears any garb or carries any

token resembling any garb or token used by such a soldier; sailor or airman with the intention that it may be believed that he is such a soldier, sailor or airman, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three months, or with fine which may extend to five hundred taka or with both." (The Penal Code, 1860-Act XLV of 1860).

There is no other similar penal provision which says anything about such usage, or punishment either. The aforementioned penal provision is by itself exclusive that, there must be an intention, so the renowned Indian author commented in his book -COMMENT: "The gist of the offence herein made is the intention of the accused wearing the dress of a soldier for the

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 members of the Bangladesh National Cadets Core (BNCC) are immpune 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.

It is a matter to further note that, in western countries such times are sold at overt market places. If scmeone wants to camouflage through such to deraud, then such sort of notifications will never help. It rather seems that, the concerned officers have gone past their jurisdiction without even bothering to know the real law.

So, trying to make fool out of innocent civilians by misinterpreting a penal provision,

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

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

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.

Because the government has ultimately realised the necessity of employing new teachers though lately and there is a popular proverb - "better late than never".

Our democratic government has decided to appoint 1857 lecturers to its colleges in different subjects. It is natural that the BPSC will select the eligible candidates as lec-

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?

As there is a problem, there is a solutions. I do volunteer to give a solution in this regard which may solve the problem practically. I suggest the BPSC authority that they make a panel of lecturers in the 14th BCS that will contain more than 1857 candidates or they can prepare a waiting list from which the 'inevitable' vacancies will be filled up. I entreat the

concerned department that it ponder over this issue.

Rushayed Ehsan Supal

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 Tajgaon 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 emer gency. This can also be used for training flights and flights of plant protection depart-

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 Cantt.