

# Lack of Action in Bosnia Upsets the Diplomats

Anna Kirsti Andrea writes from New York

Most members of the international community at the United Nations headquarters in New York believe key world leaders have all failed in their duties by not taking quick and swift action to stop the fighting in Bosnia. In what is being called "Auschwitz and Treblinka and Dachau, 1990s style," the killing of some two million Bosnian Muslims is drawing calls for more military forces. Gemini News Service reports on the growing frustration.



BOUTROS GHALI  
Indecisive?

It is a measure of the international community's increasing frustration at the West's impotence in dealing with the Serbia aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina that some members who rarely in the past agreed with former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher are confessing nostalgia for her leadership.

Said one British member of the UN staff: "Thatcher would have been the only world leader man enough to stand up against the Serbs. She has convictions and the courage of her convictions and stopping genocide to her would have been a moral imperative."

Still, months later, people are springing to Lady Thatcher's defence over the remarks by foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Douglas Hurd, supported at the time by some Washington politicians, accusing Lady Thatcher of emotionalism on the issue.

A woman American UN staff member said: "What a pathetic low-blow male chauvinist cheap shot. Shows how desperate and cowardly morally bankrupt they are." This in defence of the woman who, as prime minister in 1982, sailed the Royal Navy across the Atlantic against Argentina for a few sheep-herders — and the Crown — in the Falkland Islands.

The American referred to the time of the Gulf War in 1991 when Thatcher shamed her successor, John Major, and the war's architect, former US President George Bush, into stopping Iraq's slaughter of its Kurds. She said with admiration: "Maggie Thatcher is about as emotional as a steel door, you can go only so far and no further."

The Thatcher nostalgia is only one manifestation of the

tragedy. Like Nero as Rome burned, the Security Council fiddled for more than a year while the Serbs shelled, bombed, raped and killed their way through Bosnia and Herzegovina in full view of the astonished world.

In what has been described as their "Hitlerian drive to create a Greater Serbia," the Bosnia Serbs — with arms, assistance and directives from President Slobodan Milosevic's Serbia — disposed of some two million Bosnian Muslims either through death or dispersal as refugees, calling it "ethnic cleansing."

Some here are angry at the Security Council for adopting this "sanitized Serbian euphemism." They see something more sinister in the concentration camps whose floors, as described by the Helsinki Watch War Crimes report, "were covered with blood every morning after the night's haul of tortured victims were carried away to mass graves in the woods."

One delegate said: "This is Auschwitz and Treblinka and Dachau, 1990s style." Although in April, the International Court of Justice at the Hague validated their view by taking up Bosnia's complaint of genocide and ordered the Serbs to stop these practices, its decision had no effect on the Serbs and very little on the Security Council, which kept on issuing, in the words of one of

its members, "its toothless resolutions." Neither did the Secretary-General exhibit any greater resolve. Both the UN charter and the vaguely worded Security Council resolutions grant the Secretary-General considerable latitude in carrying out his duties.

But some diplomats echo the newly released Human Rights Watch report's contention that Boutros-Ghali has chosen not to use in full the moral authority of his office but has remained largely passive in defending Bosnian human rights.

Nor did Boutros-Ghali do his reputation any good by publicly reprimanding the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata of Japan, who took a field decision at one point on not to play along with Serbian games interfering with relief shipments to starving and entrapped Muslim civilian enclaves.

"Bad form," commented an Asian top Secretariat official on the Secretary-General's action, "also bad for staff morale."

However, it was the Secretary-General's widely reported displeasure at the brave stand taken by France's UN peacekeeper, Lieut Gen Philippe Morillon in not abandoning the threatened population of Srebrenica that caused the deepest dent in Boutros-Ghali's image at the UN and in France, which had sponsored his cam-

war. This whining did not go down well with several American representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

One NGO said: "got used to easy, no-risk carpet-bombing of civilians in the Gulf. They don't like to muddy their booties now, do they?"

And the Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children, co-founded by actress and UNICEF goodwill ambassador Liv Ullmann, says in its report: "It is difficult to fathom why humanitarian relief workers are allowed to put their lives on the line daily provide for the suffering millions, while the US government is not willing to position military forces in the same line of danger for the same humanitarian purposes."

Clinton's relations with the military began poorly because he had profoundly disturbed its bigots by announcing among his first decisions the right for homosexuals to enlist.

To world astonishment, the forces which had paraded themselves after a no-contest victory in the Persian Gulf two years ago, now spend their time debating and worrying about who will take showers with whom and how.

An African delegate expressed pity for how the mighty had fallen: "The biggest and best equipped military force is sitting in its barracks preoccupied with little-boy fears of their manhood being threatened by a few homosexuals. No wonder the Serbs are laughing themselves silly at the American army."

ANNA KIRSTI ANDREA is the pen-name of a former UN officer with extensive contacts in the UN.

## New Signals for Japan

Long-delayed by window-dressing and manipulation among the so-called kingmakers, the split in Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is now an open one, a stunning development that may well change the country's political scenario beyond conventional predictions.

It all started last week with the exit of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, caused by the government's defeat in a no-confidence motion in the Lower House in the parliament—the second one in the party's history since it has been in power from 1955—with a rebel faction inside the ruling party joining the opposition in bringing down the administration. Headed by a leading LDP dissident, former Finance Minister Tsutomu Hata and backed by several power-brokers, including a number of former ministers from one faction or another, a new party of some 45 members has emerged on the scene. This follows the formation of a considerably smaller party set up by 10 disenchanted former LDP members, called Sakigake (Pioneer Party).

It is against the backdrop of open splits within the ruling party, the erosion, if not the end, of consensus among various factions and a growing understanding between the opposition Socialist and LDP rebels that the country goes to the election for the Lower House on July 18. Whoever wins a majority in the next month's polls, either on its own or in an electoral alliance, will form the next government in Japan. And, at this moment, no one can say with certainty that it will be another LDP government.

Reasons for disenchantment with the traditional LDP leadership among the party's rank and file, not to mention the country's educated elite and the media, are several, mostly concerning alleged corruption, connections with the mafia in Tokyo's underworld and the loss of contacts with the new generation of Japanese electorate. However, still enjoying enormous support from big business and a broad acceptance of its economic and external policies by a cross section of people, the LDP is anything but a spent force, although it may well be in serious trouble. This explains why in the latest opinion survey, the group set up by Hata won a nine per cent backing, which added to eight per cent support won by the Socialists, put the opposition only marginally ahead of the LDP. Again, in the election next month, Socialists may well win more seats than the new party floated by Hata. So, a coalition remains a possibility. However, the question is, whether the Socialist chairman Sadao Yamahana will head the new government or let Hata run the show for the sake of continuity of LDP policies and international support.

All these possibilities, largely academic, overshadow the changing scenario in the politics of Japan. There is little doubt that no established party or faction, not even the Socialists, want to rock the boat too much, but there are angry young men and women who are craving for a new system, one that offers them an increased participation in mainstream politics, a relatively clean underworld which is kept far away from politicians and, above all, a better quality of life, especially in housing, in the country's major cities. This alienation from the existing system has manifested itself in the local election in the graft-ridden Italian politics, in the further traumatic drop in the dwindling popularity of Prime Minister John Major of Britain and in the growing disenchantment of the Clinton administration in the United States. A tradition-bound conservative Japan may be in a stronger position than many western countries to resist the major cracks in the old system. However, the forces are already at work, with new signals, loud and clear, sounded not only for LDP but also for the country as a whole.

## SAARC's Unfulfilled Promises

The first follow-up meeting between Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Secretary-General Ibrahim Hussain Zaki of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation has just taken place in the capital day before yesterday. After the 7th SAARC summit hosted by Dhaka from April 10—11, such a visit was overdue. That it could not be made possible earlier perhaps owes to the fact of Shri Lankan President Premadasa's tragic assassination. But Zaki has amply demonstrated that he is alive to the responsibilities he has been assigned to perform. Hopefully, his three-day visit will be more than just a courtesy call and the chairperson and the secretary-general will concentrate on business at hand.

Both Khaleda Zia and Zaki have a challenge before them and they must be equal to the task simply because of the fact that the association has by now completed a round of its leadership for all the member countries. Obviously, the incumbent chairperson has to prove a point or two in that the immense potential of this region must be given a chance for rational utilisation. Admittedly, so far the SAARC has rarely fulfilled promises that were shaping up the conceptual organisation of the regional body. Compared with achievements by similar other regional groupings like the European Community (EC) or the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the SAARC boasts a very poor record.

It is this past record that should provide the stronger compulsion for tying the loose ends and going about the business in all seriousness. The first task would be to look at all the common issues, including the disputed ones, from a different perspective. The post-Cold War era has given a further cause to address such problems unitedly by adopting a common strategy. Since all the countries of the region have a fair share of the socio-political troubles, the leaders of all the countries cannot afford any luxury of stalling the burning issues or maintaining a platform hardly useful to effectively deal with the more mundane but basic requirements of its people.

To this end, the immediate task, as Chairperson Khaleda Zia has iterated, will be the detailing of steps leading to the implementation of the decisions taken at the recent SAARC summit. No doubt, leaders of all the member countries will have to ensure their seriousness for the purpose; but as chairperson of the body, Khaleda Zia must lead the group. The rapport established through Zaki's visit here, hopefully, will continue to expand and enable the body to arrive at concrete decisions for implementation of the agenda.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

# Global Media Power Dissuades People from Acting on Truth

The present global system is unjust because it allows a powerful, privileged minority to dominate and control a powerless, deprived majority, writes Dr Chandra Muzaffar of Third World Network Features.

This is his second article of a two-part series. The first part appeared yesterday.

INDEPENDENCE for the vast majority of humanity is in fact further circumscribed by the US and Western domination and control over news, information and culture. It has been estimated that about 90% of foreign news and information in the print media circulating in the world is controlled in one way or another by four news agencies located in the North.

These agencies, together with the hundreds of newspapers and magazines, dozens of radio stations and a number of television networks from the North, provide the information staple of the intelligentsia of the South. Cable News Network (CNN), for instance, reaches a substantial segment of the middle-class in almost every South country.

What this means is that the most influential strata of the South form their views and opinions about world events, about political happenings in other countries in the South, about the role of the North, guided by information provided by a handful of media services in the North. There is no denying that on certain crucial episodes — the Gulf War or Libya or Cuba or Tianshan — the mainstream Western media, as a whole, purveys a viewpoint which in spite of all the differences in emphasis is, nonetheless, identifiable as a common Western position.

This came out vividly in the mainstream media coverage of the Gulf War. Hardly any important Western television network or radio station or newspaper attempted to probe in a serious, consistent manner the underlying motives, the real goals of the US-led war against Iraq.

On the contrary, even after the guns had fallen silent, the Western media, orchestrated by Washington, stirred up a tremendous outcry of world opinion against Iraq by spreading exaggerated falsehoods. Indeed the [media] formed a near-single voice of praise for US militarism often

exceeding the Pentagon in bellicosity.

What are the implications of such behaviour for human rights? It means that on certain important issues people everywhere, are denied access to the real facts, to the truth. They are prevented from forming a just opinion based upon unbiased information and honest interpretation. Most of all, they are dissuaded — through media propaganda — from acting on behalf of truth and justice. To conceal the facts, to distort thinking, to corrupt emotions, to subvert just action is to prostitute all the values and ideals that a democracy lauds.

### Global Culture and Human Rights

Western media domination undermines human rights in yet another way. Through the mass media, especially the electronic media, Western foods, Western fashions, Western music and Western movies have been popularised to such an extent that in many instances they have displaced indigenous cultural forms and practices.

There has been, in other words, a massive 'taste transfer' from the West to non-Western civilisation — a taste transfer which is unprecedented in human history, both in terms of its magnitude and its impact. And, in societies in the South, it is the elites and the middle-classes which relish these new tastes and disseminate them to the rest of their populations.

While the transmission of new forms and fashions from one culture to another is natural, there is a very real danger that in the interaction between Western and non-Western societies, a certain local habit or

practice which, in essence, is superior to what is being imported may disappear in the long run partly because of the slavish adulation of the West within most non-Western societies. It could be an indigenous food item which is more nutritious than say Kentucky Fried Chicken or it could be an indigenous drink which is healthier than Coca-Cola or it could be an indigenous architectural style or an indigenous footwear which is more suitable to the local climate compared to what is being transplanted from the West.

When sound, rational, healthy local cultural habits, practices and tastes are eliminated because of the psychological subservience of the dominated, there is a need to defend the right of indigenous cultures to survive. It is in this sense that Western cultural domination is a threat to the cultural rights of individuals and communities in the non-Western world.

The elimination of what is good and valuable in non-Western cultures could lead eventually to the destruction of cultural diversity and variety which has always been one of the worthier attributes of human civilisation. Western culture masquerading as a global culture might then superimpose a sort of cultural homogeneity upon the diminishing cultural diversity of non-Western societies.

For human rights advocates who cherish cultural pluralism and all that it implies for diverse forms of expression and articulation, such cultural homogeneity would be a bane upon civilisation. This is yet another reason why Western cultural domination is a danger to cultural democracy and human rights.

So far we have shown why the existing unequal, unjust

global system is inimical to the well-being of the vast majority of the human race. But isn't there anything positive about the system? Hasn't it benefited humankind — especially the struggle for human rights — in any way?

### Communication and Humanity

One of the major characteristics of the global system is, as we have shown, a pervasive communication network. Over the last decade or so, this network has, from time to time, highlighted human sufferings and human tragedies in different parts of the world and, in the process, created a bond of concern and compassion among human beings everywhere, transcending ethnic, religious and national boundaries. Whether they are victims of an earthquake in Armenia or a cyclone in Bangladesh or a famine in Somalia, the communication media, by bringing to our attention the agony of our fellow human beings, has helped to remind us of our common humanity — which, in the ultimate analysis, is the whole basis of the human rights struggle.

The global media also responds to another type of human suffering — the suffering brought about by gross violations of human rights, more specifically civil and political rights. By focusing upon human rights violations, the media often exposes the oppressive character of certain dictatorial regimes.

Unfortunately, the mainstream media is not always fair or consistent in its treatment of political oppression. Like the ruling elites in many countries, the media is also guilty of double standards, of selective judgement.

This explains why Tianshanmen is given so much prominence in the media but not Kwangju. And yet Kwangju which happened in 1980 was a much more powerful expression of democratic sentiments than Tianshanmen. The massacre at Kwangju was worse than Tianshanmen. But then because the South Korean regime was, and still is, an ally of the US and the West, Kwangju was not highlighted in the interna-

## OPINION

# Towards a Reading Nation

Shahabuddin Mahtab

The second editorial 'Towards a Reading Nation' in The Daily Star of May 13th was a timely one. It is hoped that in future more such writings will come up in the form of educational supplements, expanded book reviews, book news etc. The Daily Star has been venturing new paths in journalism, and it is hoped that it would continue to do so.

As in all other things, there are the demand and supply side of books. We may examine both the issues.

In the Fourth Five Year Plan there is no separate mention of books and the libraries. Possibly it has been taken care of under other heads, such as education, culture etc. It is hoped that in the next plan period this important item relating to human development is taken care of. In the Human Development Report 1992 published by the UNDP, Bangladesh's position in the human development index is 136th (among a total of 160 countries). The position of Pakistan is 120th and of India, 121st. The salvation of Bangladesh, with very little natural resources, lies in the development of the human resources and an important ingredient thereto are the books and the expansion of our knowledge base and skills.

There are libraries of different kinds; the public libraries, school and college libraries, 'mahallah' (area) libraries, specialised libraries, the libraries maintained by UK, USA, Russia, India (now closed) etc.

The General Public Library at Shahabagh has a good collection of books, but its annual purchases are limited. Its magazine section is not adequate, and its lighting and sitting arrangements are far from satisfactory. About one hundred and sixty colleges have so far been nationalized, but the amount sanctioned for books is only a pittance, and do not reach the figure of Tk one crore (out of Tk. 1000 crore or so allotted in the revenue budget for education). The Dhanmondi Boys' School has a good collection of books, but it is reported that the post of librarian is vacant.

tional media the way Tianshanmen has been.

The blatant double standard over Kwangju-Tianshanmen merely serves to reinforce the principal thesis of this article: that the existing global system is unjust. The root of its injustice — if one may repeat — lies in the way in which it allows a powerful, privileged minority to dominate and control a powerless, deprived majority.

The crucial question, therefore, is this: how does one end this domination or, at least, how does one reduce this domination? For unless global domination is curbed, the dominated will not be able to realise their rights as human beings.

The Eden College in Dhaka has a very good library but this appears to be an exception. The libraries of Kagmari College and Kumudini College, both at Tangal are almost non-existent. No nation can grow unless its citizens can expand their horizons.

The National Book Fair that was declared open by the President on the 10th of May, was pleasantly housed in the Osmani Memorial Hall. It had drawn a sizeable number of visitors, and some purchases had been made. But here in the fair, we had only about thirty stalls. It is hoped that in future more of the publishers will be drawn in the National Book Fairs.

The Daily Star has stated in its editorial, "Unfortunately for the nation, not one [person] in every 50 of them do buy a book in a whole year." Though this may be a guess, it indicates an approximate situation, which is true. It would be hard to find many upper and middle class households who possess more than hundred books in their shelves (text books are excluded).

The supply side of books needs government support for the establishment of an adequate book trade. The government may supply both the newsprint and whiteprint in greatly subsidised rates. The inks, chemicals and other materials may be freed from customs and import restrictions. Both the TV and the Radio may be used at government expense to create and sustain the interest of books, for all categories of people. The booksellers may be exhorted for the issue of gift coupons for birthdays, and marriages.

It is a sad commentary on all of us that there are hundreds of video shops in Dhaka covering its lanes and by-lanes, but too few bookshops. Our sense of priorities do not augur well for the nation. Promotional activities for a long period is called for in sustaining an expanded book trade. The city corporations and the municipal authorities may be urged to set up local libraries.

## To the Editor...

### Recruitment of teachers

Sir, Every year thousands of teachers are recruited for non-Govt schools and colleges throughout the country. Whenever a single vacancy occurs in a school or college, advertisement is made in newspaper, selection committee sit and select the candidate for filling in the vacancy. A representative of Government is also included in the selection committee to see to it that fairness is maintained.

Each recruitment involves lot of time, advertisement cost, TA and DA of the Govt representative and other incidental costs. Moreover, many a time, due to local politics, it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to select the best available candidate and teaching suffers due to selection of unworthy teachers.

Hence to ensure fair selection and to minimise cost from

social point of view, it is suggested that a panel should be prepared centrally through some Govt agency by holding written competitive examination annually. This panel can be made subject-wise and district-wise. Whenever there occurs a vacancy in a school or college, they will just intimate the authority maintaining the panel and that authority will forward the particulars of the candidate to the managing committee of that institution who will issue the appointment letter. Except Dhaka and Chittagong, candidates belonging to a particular district should be appointed to the institution of respective district. Deviation can be made only if no suitable candidate is available from that district. There should be no viva voce because that may lead to corruption, nepotism and favouritism. In the written test also code number should be used in the answer scripts to

prevent manipulation.

Some such system should be developed to prevent further deterioration in our teaching standard and to maintain justice and fair play in recruitment. Will the Ministry of Education go into it?

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury  
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### NGOs and the poor

Sir, Addressing a seminar organised by the RDRS — Burianga Rotary Club at a local hotel recently, the US Ambassador in Bangladesh lauded the efforts of the NGOs working in the country for poverty alleviation.

There is no two opinions about it as expressed by His Excellency.

But the general allegations particularly about the national NGOs are that the money received from the donor agencies by them are mostly spent

on overhead expenditure — i.e. high salary of the staff, high rents both for posh office and residence, chauffeur driven cars etc. etc. As such nearly 80% of the donated money is thus spent on them although at least 80% of the amount is meant for the rural poor.

Therefore, I think that the donors should instead route the money through Grameen Bank which is reputed for its honesty and good work. The Grameen Bank will pass on the money to the NGOs who will send a monthly statement of accounts of expenditure to them regularly.

Further, allegations are that direct transaction by the donors with the NGOs and through NGOs Bureau allures high Govt officials to develop contacts with them angling for future benefit of employment after retirement.

This has to be stopped. Let the poor get the total benefits.

Dr Neamatullah  
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