

Bosnia Conflict Creates Dangerous Religious Divides on the Global Scene

The Attack on Baghdad

If Bill Clinton wanted to turn some of the strongest US allies during the Gulf War into critics of his fledgling administration, to give President Saddam Hussein a boost on the domestic front, to take a calculated risk about unpredictable Iraqi retaliation against American citizens and, finally, to be accused of double standard for his failure to act, even marginally, as firmly with the Serbs as he has done with Baghdad, he could not have indeed put on a better performance.

The US weekend missile attack on Iraqi intelligence headquarters in retaliation for an alleged Baghdad plot to assassinate former President George Bush raises all kinds of questions and doubts, only a few charitable ones for Clinton, and hardly any that would put the US leader's political judgement in a favourable light.

To take the worst possible view of the scenario — and many in the Arab world do so just now — we may be witnessing the beginning of a new challenging chapter in Washington's relations not just with Baghdad but also with several other Arab capitals, one that Clinton, with his limited experience in world affairs, may find difficult to handle. Our scepticism may prove groundless — we hope it does for the sake of peace and stability in the region — and that some moderating influences, perhaps through the United Nations or from countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, play their role to prevent the situation from going out of control.

At this moment, the only gain that the Clinton administration has made from its exercise on Sunday is an impressive measure of popular support at home for its action, with a sizable number of people even approving the assassination of Saddam in an opinion poll organised by a TV network. This is sheer jingoism. It is just possible that the White House, still fighting to win a respectable rating for Clinton in opinion surveys, is too pleased with the popular support for the assault on Baghdad to evaluate the cross-currents of views outside the United States.

To varying degrees, the disapproval of the US action among non-western, especially Islamic, nations is based on almost identical reasons. In the first place, it must have been known to Washington that Iraq's intelligence headquarters, the target of the missile attack, were located in civilian populated areas and that the assault would most certainly cause deaths among ordinary citizens. This is precisely what happened, which has been regretted by Clinton. On the other hand, tens of millions of TV viewers around the world have seen, perhaps with uneasy conscience, thousands of Iraqis parading the streets of Baghdad with coffins of victims of US aggression. We are in no position to measure the total impact of this spectacle on the Muslim world. Again, one would wonder how many of US allies were consulted in advance by the Clinton government about the attack and how many of them went along with Washington's plan. The overall impression, confirmed by the White House, is that it was very much an unilateral US plan. While Clinton thought it wise to avoid involving any of the allies in what he must have known as a hazardous mission, the action also underscored Washington's growing tendency to act on its own, outside frameworks of multilateral consultation, even the United Nations. It may also cause dismay among many nations that the US assault on Baghdad took place just when the trial of alleged plotters of the attempted assassination of Bush had been going on in Kuwait. Many would see Washington's action as an affront to the judiciary of the Gulf state, a demonstration of lack of respect for the Rule of Law on the part of a country whose constitutional guarantees in this field, as in so many other areas, provide lessons to the world.

If we see the weekend US missile attack on Baghdad as an avoidable disaster, we also pray and hope that good sense will prevail on both Washington and Baghdad to ensure that consequences of the action remain within the limits of sanity and commonsense.

A Deplorable Act

The attack on the meeting of Dr Kamal Hossain allegedly by the Awami League activists in Faridpur has once again exposed the political intolerance and immaturity at their crudest. The love-hate relations between the AL leadership and the once-key member of that party has by now perhaps plunged into unalloyed hatred. Dr Kamal Hossain had his share of humiliation at the hands of some unruly and indisciplined members of the party's young cadre. That incident brought about the rift between the respected politician and his parent political organisation. He then floated his own organisation, the Democratic Forum.

However, there is no evidence that the attackers then were reprimanded, let alone any appropriate action — as demanded by such a rough treatment with a man of Dr Kamal's standing — against them by the party high command could be taken. This time the attack has taken place in Faridpur and yet this does not exonerate the AL leadership from the responsibility of the guilt for two reasons: first, the AL leaders have condoned the earlier musclemanly and offence, making way for further attacks on Dr Kamal and his meetings; second, and no less important, the party high command seems to have lost control over its activists at different levels.

Neither of these inferences can be palatable for the party that has so much to its credit, including the leadership in the struggle for independence of the country. Any failure on the count of keeping the democratic values aloft by a party like the AL is a serious breach of trust between the party and the people who closely follow its moves and desire to find it in its proper role as the opposition party in parliament. If the party resorts to such undemocratic activities, it surely loses the moral right to condemn attacks by government agencies or other parties on its meetings.

What, however, the party patently fails to realise is that such misconceived behaviour to reap political dividends does no credit either to itself or to the country's politics in general. The need of the time is to come out of the abominable practice of musclemanly and work for better political programmes that hopefully have the potential to catch the imagination of as many people of the country as possible. The choice, therefore, for any party is political savvy or wisdom. This time the option for the AL is harder still because it will have to prove its innocence by taking action against its most hard-line followers.

With the credibility of governments in the United States, in several European countries and in Japan reaching all-time low, the disenchantment in the developing world with the industrialised North casts long shadows over global co-operation.

As this disenchantment gradually turns into alienation, creating new divides along religious, ethnic, cultural and regional lines, even the established frameworks of co-operation, such as the United Nations, remain in a limbo. We may well be witnessing the worst possible scenario, marked by drift and indecision, on the international scene. And, sadly enough, a change for the better is hardly in sight, not certainly after the missile attack on Baghdad.

The developing world places the blame on the Clinton administration in the United States, on several powerful countries in the European Community (EC) and with the United Nations, almost in this order. They are not acting together. In fact, their inability to agree on a single forward-looking plan of action serves as a negative factor in the situation. However, acting under its own volition, each is adding to the crisis, turning a volatile situation into an explosive one and a clash of arms into a bloody conflict, with thousands of Muslims fleeing from Bosnia as homeless refugees looking for a sanctuary in a faraway Pakistan.

It is the conflict in Bosnia which, of course, tops the list of dismal failures of the international community. It is also Bosnia that underscores indecision and abrupt change of signals of the Clinton administration. It is Bosnia that has revealed the anti-Muslim bias at the decision-making level of some EC members. Finally, it is Bosnia which has put into focus the failure of the Islamic world to come to the rescue of the strife-torn republic. But, then, to quote from the Die Welt of Bonn, "Even if this war ends with an almost total victory for the Christian Serbs over the Muslims, even if one accuses — obviously rightly — the Muslim states of having done nothing for their brothers-in-faith than to provide a few good words and little money, even then, the Muslims will not forget how the West let Bosnians face their destruction without lifting a finger."

This comment from a leading German newspaper provides one of the clearest — and the grimmest — possible signals of what lies ahead in Europe and the international scene. If the western plan for creating three ethnic states in Bosnia goes through, then a chunk of the republic, now belonging to Muslims, will be just like the occupied Arab territory in the

A section of US experts have picked up a new outcry: Save the western values and standards from a concerted attack from other civilisations. Some even see a threat from a combination of Confucian and Islamic states.

Gaza strip and the Golan Heights, except that Muslims may be driven out, completely cleared off, from their own homes.

In 1947, the division of India to create a religion-based state of Pakistan was seen as a political anachronism by many present-day sophisticated western politicians or their forefathers. Some of them also rightly saw the creation of Israel, another state based on religion, in the same light.

More than four decades later, they are out to do something worse — much worse — right in the heart of Europe. To some of these so-called experts, "world politics is entering a new phase in which the fundamental source of

sponses of the non-Western civilisations to Western power and values." Then, he wakes up to another "danger" which many would find outrageous: "The most prominent example of anti-Western cooperation is the connection between Confucian and Islamic states that are challenging Western values and power."

If politicians in the West are in confusion, so is a section of their experts. They have one thing in common. Instead of sorting out their confusion, they keep trying out their tentative answers, their half-baked ideas, including some racistist ones, on their uninformed — or ill-informed — public. Then, there is the media, all too willing to publicise views which, di-

to the dismal performance — how I wish, I could put it more politely — of the Clinton administration.

It was perfectly within the power of President Clinton to remain firm on the question of safeguarding the territorial integrity of Bosnia, take a firm line against "ethnic cleansing" launched by Serbs and help in the creation of "safe havens" for Muslims. All this had been once agreed to by Washington, based on resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council.

Then, as Anthony Lewis, one of the best US commentators, says in his piece in the *International Herald Tribune* (IHT) last Tuesday, "President Clinton had just signalled that he might accept a three-way partition of Bosnia, allowing Serbs to keep the fruits of their aggression... He inherited an appalling problem because of George Bush's weakness on Yugoslavia. But Clinton made it worse — dramatised the weakness — by calling for stronger action and then giving up. The precedent is a terrible one, for other areas of ethnic tension and for American prestige."

Then comes a grim warning from Lewis, which, one hopes, has reached the White House: "The failure to lead on this painful problem — the failure to act against murderous aggression — will haunt Bill Clinton for the rest of his political life. (Italics mine.) No, Lewis is not talking of the rest of the first term of the Democratic leader or, for that matter, of his reelection.

So, one cannot help talking about Washington's selective application of human rights and question the US credibility at the just concluded global meeting in Vienna. At the same time, one cannot also stop wondering why when Washington once nearly squeezed life out of a socialist Nicaragua, launched invasions against Granada and Panama to protect its somewhat questionable interest, waged a war to drive Iraq out of Kuwait and has launched missile attack on Baghdad should be indecisive, setting a process of drift in motion, in Bosnia. Is it just the failure of Clinton to lead his country? Is it the end of the myth of a new world order emerging with the break-up of the Soviet Union? Or does it demonstrate the inherent weaknesses of the socio-political system in the West which never ceases advising others how to manage their affairs before setting its own house in order? These are difficult questions to ask. They are also more difficult to answer — just now.

AT HOME AND ABROAD

S. M. ALI

conflict will be neither ideological nor economic." It is the "clash of civilizations" which will dominate relations among nations.

Is it part of some kind of a consensus that is emerging among experts in the West, especially in the United States? Hopefully not. However, writing for the *New York Times* earlier this month, Samuel P Huntington, Director of the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at the Harvard University says, "In the short term, it is clearly in the interest of the West to promote greater cooperation and unity in its own civilization." (Italics mine.)

If one takes Huntington's argument to its logical extreme, how can one deny Hindu fanatics or Muslim fundamentalists their right to create their own frameworks for the so-called co-operation and unity within their respective folds?

In fact, this learned Professor of the Harvard University takes up a more dangerous line when he elaborates on this thesis. To quote from his article again, "The central axis of world politics is likely to be the conflict between the West and the rest, and the re-

rectly and indirectly, fuels the sense of alarm about the crisis in western values.

At one stage or another, one must attribute this crisis to the intellectual and political climate in the United States, to the prevailing mood in Washington and, last but not the least,

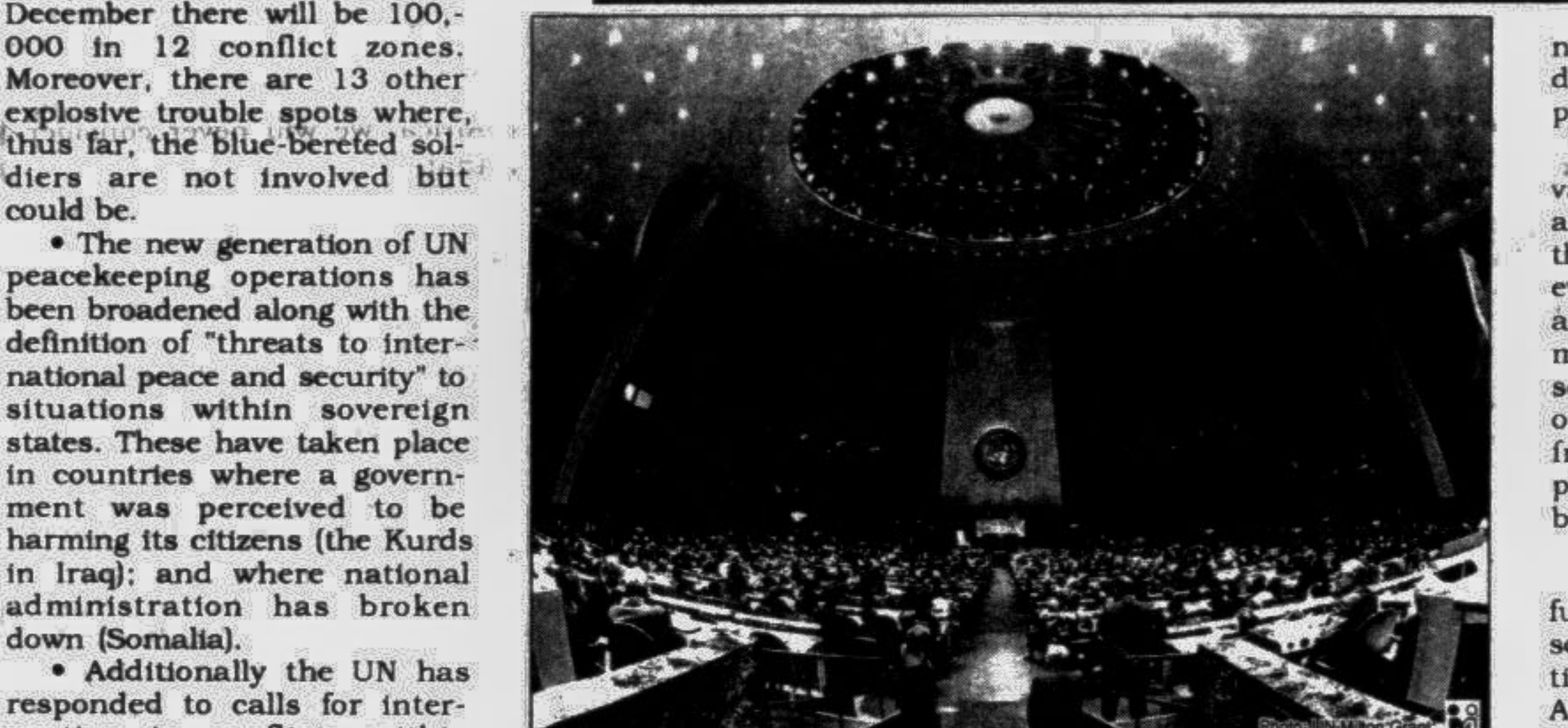


Courtesy: The International Herald Tribune.

Inside the UN — Doubt and Debt-II Who is to Pay for All this Peacekeeping?

Arthur Gavshon writes from London

With the end of the Cold War, United Nations peacekeeping has become a growth industry globally. A British parliamentary committee says by the end of this year there will be 100,000 UN troops in 12 conflicts around the world. As the UN raises its involvement in bringing peace to the world's hot spots, who, asks Gemini News Service, is going to foot the bills?



UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 183 members in need of more funds

The new generation of UN peacekeeping operations has been broadened along with the definition of "threats to international peace and security" to situations within sovereign states. These have taken place in countries where a government was perceived to be harming its citizens (the Kurds in Iraq) and where national administration has broken down (Somalia).

Additionally the UN has responded to calls for intervention in conflicts within states, as distinct from conflicts between states where an international dimension is deemed to exist. This has occurred within the former Yugoslavia and within some of the republics of the former Soviet Union like Georgia.

In its investigation of the UN's expanding role the FAC members — comprising seven Conservative and four Labour MPs — visited UN headquarters in New York and Geneva and the three regions where major UN operations are taking place — Yugoslavia, Cambodia and Somalia.

With the end of Cold War, UN peacekeeping has become a sort of global growth industry. The world body has been drawn into new geographic areas far beyond the Middle East, African and Indian sub-continental confines to which the superpower struggle had restricted such activities.

Now, the FAC notes, Central America, Afghanistan, Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union itself are on the agenda. Each situation poses special de-

mands with military as well as civilian elements which include police monitoring, verification of human rights, maintenance of law and order, electoral supervision and the provision of protection for humanitarian relief operations.

The FAC report points out that the UN role goes beyond coxing parties to a dispute into negotiation, and then implementing any agreement, which requires special skills. The changing nature of conflicts in a destabilised world poses new problems, the report says. It argues: "The UN is based around the concept of the state and peacekeeping as it has developed is designed to deal with inter-state wars — policing ceasefire lines between two states, keeping apart two defined groups of combatants."

Peacekeeping operations to try to contain or end conflicts within states (as in Somalia) or between or within new states emerging from the collapse of

negotiated arrangements to deliver their life-saving supplies.

Against this background of vastly extended peacekeeping and peace-enforcing activity, the attention of the FAC, inevitably, turned to the UN's ability to fund its commitments. The tale it told was a sorry one and focuses mainly on critical problems arising from the arrears that have piled up by countries gripped by recession.

The report says the UN is funded under a system of assessed and voluntary contributions by its 183 members. Assessed dues cover membership and peacekeeping costs; voluntary contributions relate to development and humanitarian help. Membership dues are assessed on a country's ability to pay — ranging from the United States which coughs up 25 per cent and Albania which gives 0.002 per cent.

At the end of 1991 the UN was owed more than \$800 million in arrears. A year later the amount had come down to \$500 million. The US was singled out as being the worst of the slow payers and at one point was responsible for 80 per cent of the UN's debt.

This, the FAC report says, quoting former British Ambassador Sir Crispin Tickell, was because the Ronald Reagan administration was "out to spit the UN" as a way of retaliating against General Assembly votes critical of US policies. Since 1990 though, the US has been working off its arrears at the annual rate of \$40 million.

Other countries are in debt to the FAC noted. Russia, in 1992, owed \$175 million just for its peacekeeping assess-

several fund-raising ideas which appeared to leave the British parliamentary group cold. Among Boutros-Ghali's proposals:

- Charging interest on late payments;
- Borrowing money commercially for UN work;
- Taxing airline travel;
- Seeking World Bank and International Monetary Fund loans;
- Seeking corporate and individual endowments which could qualify for tax exemption.

Somewhat stiffly, the FAC commented: "We do not believe that donations from the private sector would have much impact on the UN's financial position; furthermore, it would be inappropriate for an organisation of sovereign states to be significantly dependent on charity."

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OPINION Tax Holiday for Publishing Industry

Edward D'Rozario

Your recent editorial and several letters from concerned readers on the imposition of import duty on books as well as the article "Import Duty on Books: Violation of Unesco Agreement" published on 24 June 1993 are most timely and elaborately dealt with a most important aspect of national issue which deserves proper attention by all concerned.

Without boosting a big publishing industry and a strong book trade network in the country, a movement of Educational and Human Resources Development is unthinkable. Whereas the Prime Minister herself announced that the country will be having a National Book Policy and a body was formed which worked for several months and it is understood that a draft policy is now ready to be approved and announced by the Government as per newspaper reports published in the recent past, sudden imposition of Import Duty at the rate 7.5% in addition to the earlier imposed 2.5% Licence Fee and 2.5% Advance Income Tax payable at Customs point clearly implies a most contradictory policy of the Government. Hence raising a demand on all sorts of duties, charges, fees and taxes on publishing industry and book trade and the suggestion for a total Tax Holiday facility upto the year 2004 is a very important policy matter on which the present democratic Government must take a prompt and careful decision. Even in the western developed countries, publishing and book trade is having such preferential treatment and facilities as it is the most important sector of Education.

It is known to all that with the strong support of the British and American governments, publishers from these countries are also bringing out

ELBS (English Language Book Society) — the highly subsidized low priced edition of educational, academic and scientific books which are available for the developing countries) and ISE (International Student Edition— low priced American publications available for the developing countries) editions of books for countries like Bangladesh and it is a most contradictory step taken by the Government to impose tax in the form of Licence Fee, AIT and Import Duty which must be withdrawn immediately. No one should deny that investment in this sector in the form of total Tax Holiday package will positively be giving a very fruitful return for the nation in Education and Human Resources Development Activities in the long run. The Government may consider this to be incorporated in the National Book Policy for which the existing Committee which is responsible for preparing the National Book Policy can do a little extra exercise in formulating a total Tax Holiday package for the Publishing Industry and the Book Trade of the country involving the Finance Ministry and the National Board of Revenue in the Committee for the National Book policy.

Although all other dailies and weeklies of the country are writing on this National issue it is The Daily Star which is in fact giving the leadership in projecting the issue to the readers and it is hoped that Government should look after the issue carefully and not only withdraw the Import Duty imposed in the National Budget but will also come up with the announcement of a pragmatic National Book Policy which will incorporate a total Tax Holiday package for the publishing industry and book trade.

To the Editor...

Stranded Pakistanis

Sir, Please refer to the letter captioned published in The Daily Star on June 6. Going through the letter of Mr. Nasim Khan one can well apprehend his miserable frustrations, due to the perennially stalled repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis since the tragic 1971 War of Liberation. Only seeing is believing as to the extreme, appalling and mediaeval plight through which these souls are languishing in 66 camps spread over Bangladesh, a living testimony to the scourge of a polity gone haywire from the era of the late Pak PM Z A Bhutto. While the stranded Bangladeshis returned back to their land of choice without a hitch the unfortunate stranded Pakistanis were slapped with

several restrictions e.g., "divided family", "Central Govt. employees", "Railway employees".

The worst effect was brought on in the interpretation of this sacred word 'family' which was used, misused and abused in the utmost comical manner compounded by the handy tool of "wheat relief distribution" which resulted in the birth of monsters similar to the mafioso clan. In the seas of abject poverty and human sufferings where the multitudes walk around like fish-eyed zombies incoherently mumbling due to starvation and widespread malnutrition a group of well-dressed, well-fed monsters holding sway of the lives of the inmates of the said 66 camps with their combination of wealth

and connections perhaps managed to safeguard their (evil) empires. Perhaps, these are the persons to whom Mr. Khan hinted, while on every occasion from the columns of your esteemed paper we had cautioned that these Frankensteins in the name of remunerating the census and other similar baseless charges will try to scuttle the entire repatriation. By Managing to flout the alphabetical order of repatriation during the recent breakthrough in the landmark repatriation process, maybe by duping the relevant authorities, they again succeeded.

"golden year of repatriation — 1993".

Pinky Jamal Firozshah, Chittagong.

VAT on reading

Sir, With the budget proposal to levy a tax on the import of books, it is a no-holds-barred situation. Therefore there appears to be ample justification to impose a 15 per cent VAT on reading. There is no doubt that value is added to the reader's quality of life. Also, as a national bonus, 15 per cent may be deducted from the Hon Finance Minister's personal income, as he is getting too experienced, having presented so far five national budgets; and in the process he is getting no time to read books.

Chuckles Dhaka

Let's hope our hon'ble PM will apply relentless pressure with the Govt of Nawaz Sharif to again jump-start this tragedy of the 20th century, to a logical conclusion, in this