long refugee trail all the way from the strife-torn Yugoslavia, to a sleepy suburban town Kajang, some 20 km from Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, has become part of the changing. unpredictable scene of our contemporary world. Over 300 Bosnian Muslims have covered this journey, moving from one climate to another, from a mountainous region to the flat plains of South-East Asia, from one lifestyle to another - but in the process finding safety and security in a friendly atmosphere.

For these families, with whom this correspondent spent some hours, it was a escape from terror, and possible massacre of innocent women and children, not to mention of an uncertain future.

Talking to them sometime in English or through interpreter, the overriding feeling that one detected among them was one of utter relief often expressed in the smiles of the children, relaxed faces of women and the warmth of older ones. At this moment, most of

them are not thinking of their future in Malaysia where they are being treated as asylumseekers rather than refugees. It is not clear how many of them would like to go back to Bosnia or to some other countries which would accept them as European Muslims.

But at this moment, no one, neither the Bosnian Muslims nor the hosts in Malaysia want to be very specific about their future plan.

However, visitors from Bosnia are more communicative about what they have gone through in their country which is now bleeding to death under Serb-Croat aggression.

"We are safe here - we have shelter, food and everything we



by Chapal Bashar back from Kuala Lumpur



Bosnian women and children talk to the Star correspondent at



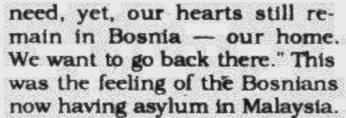
HEETAH

Sanela: I want to go back home.

"We are safe here"



Dr. Ermina: Describing the woes.



The 300 plus Bosnian Muslims, mostly women and children, are living in different camps in Malaysia. These unfortunates were brought about eight months ago from the warravaged state in East Europe.

Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, known in short as ABIM, along with some other voluntary organisations look after the Bosnians who are considered as guests.

"We are living here in a different atmosphere, culture and language - however, after eight months we are used to it", said Dr Mujadzic Ermina, who stays at ABIM's camp in Kajang. A total of 61 Bosnians, 21 mothers and their children, are housed

Dr Ermina, 29, a physician by profession, reached Kuala Lumpur with the first group of Bosnia).

Bosnian refugees in October last year with her two sons, Muamer and Tarik. Ermina's husband Mirsad Mujadzic, also a doctor, is working with Bosnian army to fight against the aggression of Serbs and Croats.

Ermina had a cosy home at Prijedor, a town in north Bosnia, where she worked as a general practitioner at a government hospital. She had been living there for some years with husband and children, but her blissful days did not last long. Just 15 months back, Prijedor fell victim to Serb-Croat attacks - many of the Bosnian Muslims were killed and their properties destroyed.

Ermina managed to escape from the invaded town with her children and reached Zagreb, the Croatian capital, braving a long dolorous journey. Ermina found a transient shelter in Zagreb while her husband Bosnia). Continued on page 11

"Bihac is now besieged by Serbs, there is no electricity and fuel in the town, shortage of food and water is also acute". said Ermina in a choked voice.

Ermina gratefully mentioned of Merhamet, a relief organisation of Zagreb, which helped her and many others to have an asylum in Malaysia. ABIM has also opened an office in Zagreb for a better coordination in relief operations.

At the ABIM centre in Kajang, Dr Ermina looks after medical treatment of women and children with the assis-

tance of local physicians. Ermina is the only one in the camp who is fluent in English and helped this correspondent a lot to communicate with others.

Husbands of most of the women at ABIM centre are in Bosnia fighting the Serbs and the Croats while some have been killed in the war.

"Where is your husband now?" one woman accompanying her 7-year-old son, was asked. She understood the question, but did not or could not answer. She was mute, with tears of

Ermina narrated the story of Rasema Delimustafic, 28. Her husband Mustafa and many others were killed during a Serbian attack on Olouo, an east Bosnian town, in September last year. Rasema took shelter in a camp under protection of Bosnian army, but could not avert Serbian brutality. The camp was heavily shelled one night in which Rasema's right leg was badly injured. After recovery, Rasema and

her son took shelter in Zagreb, and later were flown to Malaysia. Her mother and sister took refuge somewhere in Germany, but she is unaware about her other close and dear ones who are still in Bosnia. Nurkic Subhija, 35, is living

in the camp with her three children - one teenage girl and two boys. Her husband Sahabit is in Bosnia fighting the Serbs.

Subhija, a factory worker, was living with her family in Bugajno city which was also besieged by Serbian army since the beginning of the aggression. This city was also attacked by mortars and shells that killed

"We found a way to escape from the Bugajno city and took shelter in a safer place in Croatia, stayed there for six months and then went to Vienna", said Subhija who flew in to Kuala Lumpur seven months ago.

Her daughter Sanela, 14 said, We want to go back home, as soon as possible, but not in the situation prevailing there

Education for Sanela and

other boys and girls of the camp

Promoting Peace and Harmony Shabana Azmi in Berkeley

by Aasha Mehreen Amin back from USA

Twas a choice between Peter O'Toole's inaugura-L tion of his book at Cody's bookstore, or a lecture on communal violence by Shabana Azmi. The latter being closer to

'home', the choice was inevitable. On April 18, 1993 in a well lit auditorium at the University of California, Berkeley, scores

of Indians, a handful of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis buzzed with anticipation 'for their favourite actress. The event had been arranged by an organisation Coalition Against Communalism (CAC) formed by the concerned people of Indian origin in the San Fransisco Bay

She arrived with as little fuss as possible. In a simple black kurta pajama, her hair cut short but as a matter of fact, Shabana Azmi still could not avoid the slight tremor of excitement around the audito-

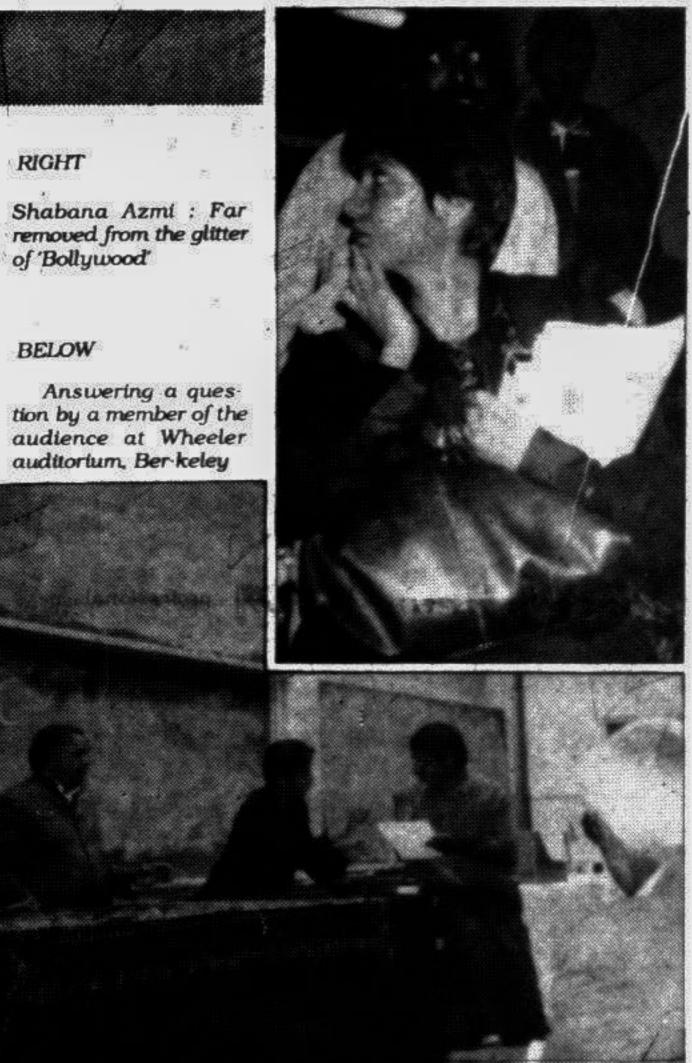
For the four-time National

tant at the grassroots level and communalists are giving bigoted interpretation of religion to mobilize people. We have to tell the people that what they (the communalists) are preaching is not religion.

Azmi called for a stronger leadership of liberal Muslims in bringing peace. Said Azmi, "the liberal Muslim does not rise to help the community because of the fear of being called fundamentalist. He must therefore take a much more active role. We should decide whether we are looking for a mosaic or a melting pot."

Azmi also pointed out that there was already strong integration in India at certain levels where people were more con cerned with survival than religious differences, and that was the answer that liberal Muslims should work for. Yet how feasible was this

ideal? Change, admitted Azmi, would take a very long-time. She urged that working at the



Bosnia's Muslims: Palestinians of Europe?

N Saratev e . A. of the hand Yugoslav republic of Dosma, has a prominent Muslim Lamily, the Kulinoviches. They claim descent from Kulin Ban, the king of Bosnia in the 12th Century - four centuries before Muslim Turks achieved final dominance over the region in 1528. . The accuracy or the fraudulence of the claim

Rasema with son: Husband killed in Bosnia.

is less significant than the claim itself. It reveals a well of nostalgia among the Muslims for pre-Islamic Bosnia, Pagan under the Romans when its was known as Illyricum, it provided the empire with hardy mercenaries, Eastern or Greek Orthodox, under Byzantium until the 12th Century. After adhering to the Bogomil heresy, it was a sect ultimately based on the faith of the ancient Iranian prophet Zoroaster or Zarathustra By contrast, the Serbs and Croats harbour no

such sentiment for Bosnia's ancient roots. Asgenerally accepted, their real aim is to divide the country between them before merging their lots with the neighbouring republies of Serbia and

It is all the more surprising, therefore, that the Muslims are the one community among the three known by their religion, rather than by their nationality, particularly since they have never been rigourous observers of the edicts of their faith.

Until recently, they were often described as "Slavs first. Muslims second. They speak the same language as their adversaries. Serbo Croat. and their most revered King, Tvrtko i (sic), fought on the side of the downtrodden Serbs in the battle of Kosovo against the Turks in 1389 Indeed, the Serbs and the Croats regularly deny that they are a separate people at all.

In a land which has seen so many foreign invaders, such as Romans, Visigoths, Huns, Turks, French, Austrians and Germans, trying to trace

the origins of anyone would require real courage. Furthermore, whatever one may say is likely to be hotly disputed by one or the other of the warring parties. Reading the history books, safely written before the present conflict, it appears reasonable to conclude that the defining of the Muslim Bosnians by their religion, rather than by their nationality, has more to do with the religious loyalties of the Serbs and the Croats and with the political needs of the former state of Yugoslavia, than with anything of the Muslims own choosing.

In the long struggle between the Eastern and the Western Roman empires, the Serbs jound themselves in the east while the Croats came

under the way of the church of Rome The Bosnian Hogomils, finding themselves on the fault line, were neutral. Later, after a period of outward Catholicism due to persecution by the Popes, most of their nobility became Muslims while their peasants remained heretics, choosing by Hazhir Teimourian

The world woke up suddenly last year to the existence of a country called Bosnia when fighting broke out there between its three communities, the Muslims, the Serbs and the Croats. A common question is why are the Muslims known by their religion while the others are referred to by nationality? Gemini News Service's Middle East expert searches the history books for clues about a people who could become the stateless society of Europe.



one of the main religions only gradually.

Those among them who converted to the Eastern church gravitated towards the nearest Serbian monastery and became known as Serbs. Others mainly in the south and west, became Catholic Croats. The remainder stayed, or

became, Muslim. This is a implified version of the Bosnians history. A art from the original inhabitants of the land, there has been a regular infusion of Serbian and Croat blood into the population through immigration, and some people have

come from farther afield, such as Muslim Turkish officials from Istanbul, who settled in Bosnia after their mission ended.

The numbers of these newcomers have been relatively small and the Turks, in particular, were not numerous enough to change either the language or the national identity of their fellow Muslims in Bosnia.

in recent times, the Yugoslav ruler Marshal Josip'Tito, himself a Croat, had a political desire to cut the dominant Serbian element down to

size. Therefore, he recognised the Muslims of Bosnia for the first time as a separate nation. defining them by their Islamic culture in order to create a rival element to the Serbs in multinational Bosnia.

He also gave political authonomy to the Albanian Muslims of the province of Kosovo within Serbia itself. Later, some militant Muslims, such as Alija Izetbegovic, now president of Bosnia, played into the hands of militant Serbs and Croats by going to prison for their religion.

On the whole, the Muslims of Bosnia were never as militant as their Christian counterparts among the Serbs and Croats. While the Christian clergy published strident periodicals, the Muslim imams of Bosnia preferred to stay clear of

Another point about the republic needs to be explained: Why is it called Bosnia-Herzegovina? The second part of the name simply means "the Dukedom", and is reminiscent of a time in the middle of the 15th Century when a chieftain by the name of Stephen Vukeic rebelled and forced the ruler of Bosnia to recognise his region as an independent principality. Herzegovina, too, later fell under the Turks.

The present war in Bosnia is easily the most horrendous in the country's bloody history. But if it results in the dispossession of the Muslims, with their eviction, it would also end, in effect, if not in name, the story of Bosnia.

The Muslims would then, in all probability become an embittered refugee population scat-tered in a number of neighbouring European countries and in a number of refugee camps under the United Nations. They could become the Palestinians of Europe.

HAZHIR TEIMOURIAN is the Middle East specialist of The Times, London.

Greater Serbia in 1355



Award winner for best acting the occasion was far removed from the glitter of Bolly wood. She was now in her other role as a social activist and humanitarian to protest the atrocities of communal violence in her native India.

Azmi who has been working with poor communities in Bombay, spoke of the plight of victims her organisation has helped rehabilitate during the riots of December who were far removed from the politics behind the violence. "On the 29th of December," said Azmi, her voice strained with emotion, "I found a woman crying on the street for her sister who had been killed. When I asked why, she said that some masjid had been demolished by Hindus When I asked where, she said - 'Rajiv Gandhi's country."

Azmi said that during her work with the riot victims, she witnessed all sorts of human rights violations. She said that after the December events, there had been a polarization in the communities creating a tense and volatile atmosphere. Her main appeal was to the secular liberal Indians - strongly represented by the audience. "Secular liberals have to do a lot of rethinking," said Azmi "the tendency for them is to find solutions away from religion. In the Indian society, this does not work. Religion is too potent a weapon to leave to zealots. The state has used religion as a means of acquiring power using symbols which are very powerful for propaganda. Meanwhile, the people who pay the price are very far away from this."

So what do you want to see happen? Azmi opts for social justice and sustainable development. She emphasized the need for a databank to dispense information. We must have a counter propaganda of truth, said the winner of the International Human Rights Award, "religion is very impor-

grassroots level and getting people in touch with their self esteem was essential so that cvery person would want this change. "Communalism is the worst danger we are facing," said Azmi, "and this means both kinds - majority (Hindu) communalism and minority (Muslim) communalism, because they reinforce each other. We are waking up to the fact that India can only survive if

secular." Shabana Azmi's love for peace and social justice dates far back from the Babri Masjid incidents. When playwright Safdar Hashmi was brutally murdered on New Year's Day 1989, Azmi protested the murder of the dedicated street theatre writer in front of the then Minister for Broadcasting and Information.

Other acts of violence all over South Asia prompted her to join Swami Agnivesh in a Padajatra from Delhi to Meerut to promote religious harmony, to talk to people and give them courage and hope.

In the same spirit, Shabana Azmi came to the slums of Bombay going on a hunger strike that lasted for five days to protest the demolition of slums by the government, in the name of cleaning the city.

Azmi got involved in the "Save Narmada" movement to protest the building of the dam which would uproot thousands of people and destroy the environment. And now she had come all the way to Berkeley to appeal to Indians living abroad to support her in her fight

against violence. With her twinkling eyes that promise wit and laughter and easy, down to earth manner, it is not hard to understand why she has won the hearts of so many. Even as the heartthrob of millions of film addicts, her other role as a dedicated social activist committed to peace, is hardly surprising.