

New WB Guidelines

The World Bank's new action plan, just announced in Washington, signals a reformulation of its policy guidelines on lending. Initially, it could pose problems for the countries enjoying the benefit of the Bank's programme. The move in this particular area could even slow down fresh assistance in providing loans. However, if the action plan succeeds in bringing about a significant improvement in the performance of World Bank financed projects and programmes, at the end of the day, the new initiative would provide a rich reward for the countries concerned too.

The main features of the action plan, as a World Bank news release puts it, are to move the management of projects under implementation to centre stage, involve borrowers and communities more in the projects, and increase supervision and other resources to assist borrowers in carrying out projects better. The plan, it is said, is designed to increase the World Bank's effectiveness in meeting its fundamental objectives of reducing poverty and promoting sustainable growth and development. The plan, it appears, represents the follow-up action on the findings and recommendations of a study commissioned by the World Bank authorities. The study looked at the implementation record of World Bank supported projects and recommended measures to reverse the decline in the proportion of successful operations over the last decade.

The World Bank has some 1800 projects and programmes under implementation. The number of World Bank financed projects with major problems is said to have doubled over the last decade, reaching a high of one out of five in 1991. It would rather appear that the Bank admits of a share in the blame for the implementation lag. Project designs will be simplified. World Bank will also bring in internal changes with a view to alter institutional behaviour and attitudes. More weight will be given to loan portfolio management in promotion policy. Increasing the continuity of its own staff during an operation's life, will be another internal change.

Under the new dispensation, effective implementation of existing projects probably will form an important consideration in sanctioning new loans. This might create difficulties for countries like Bangladesh where implementation lag is too much in evidence. However, the measure would also create an increased awareness of the urgency to complete projects in time. On its part, the World Bank will place portfolio management at the core of its country assistance strategies. The entire portfolio of loans to a country will receive attention and if a country faces difficulties in implementing existing projects, it can expect the Bank to help deal with the problem.

Sustainability of a project is to be adjudged by its ability to continue to function after the termination of the programme period of a loan. This could stop the practice of dovetailing a project scheduled for completion with a newly designed project. However, restructuring or redesigning of projects, found not viable in the implementation stage, ought to be allowed.

World Bank's new guidelines also envisage closer supervision of progress in implementation of projects and programmes funded by it. Achievement of development objectives — poverty alleviation through accelerating sustainable growth — will be monitored more effectively. Let us hope that the borrowing countries will not view intensified supervision as increased interference.

World Bank plans to involve borrowing countries and communities affected by projects in the planning and execution of projects. This appears to us as a welcome move to make World Bank lending programme a participatory venture in the borrowing country. It would interest many to know exactly how the World Bank would secure participation of the poor in the design and implementation of projects directly affecting them. At this stage, we can only suggest that rather than be guided by any global design, this component of the programme should be country specific, tailored to the exact needs of each particular project.

Less Food for More People

That soil degradation has been taking place is a phenomenon known to many and only a few — soil scientists to be precise — are aware of the full scale of the largely man-made crisis. The enormity of the problem has just been revealed by a study released by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). According to the study, an estimated area across the globe of the size of Alaska will mostly be unfit for agricultural use in 20 years. One corollary of this issue — the abnormal fall in the world's food production — is certainly going to set the alarm bell ringing. By the year 2025, the world will be nowhere near to feed its population which by that time will increase by another 2.6 billion.

The message from the Rome-based UN organisation is quite unambiguous. Already man's abuse of lands through such processes as deforestation and overgrazing has been responsible for leaving worldwide an area nearly the size of western Europe almost infertile; another 2.25 billion acres — an area larger than Australia — have substantially deteriorated and call for urgent restoration. Continent-wide, the loss of soil's productivity for Africa and Asia is four per cent of the total agricultural land, for Europe it is 2.3 per cent, for South America 1.4 per cent and for North America 1.3 per cent. These figures are worth comparing with the 11 per cent land surface of our planet used for agriculture.

If figures are capable of presenting the magnitude of the problem then these should be enough for the grim prospect awaiting us. The shrinkage of arable land and feeding the world's population are directly related, no doubt about that. The crux of the problem is that today the world produces enough food to feed a far larger population than it now has, and yet about two thirds of the species either have to live on poor quality of food or simply go hungry. If the food production declines by 30 years from now, these overwhelming majority will find themselves in a far more disadvantageous position to procure food. There is no reason to believe that the multinational companies which control the world's agribusiness will be generous then any more than they are now. Certainly, the poor's share of the world's produces will further decline, spelling unprecedented disaster for nation after nation.

To avoid such a catastrophe, governments must work out a formula together, and urgently. Small and landless farmers should be reached first to help them in every conceivable way for meeting their food and fuel need. Deforestation, overgrazing and refugee settlements are the upshot of poverty. So reallocation of resources is the only solution to the problem. Of course, the arms of the multinationals have to be curbed.

Go to any European city, you will find a centuries old cathedral as centre of urban development. Next to it would most likely be the museum (sometimes more than one), university as well as other centers of learning, while few blocks away shopping areas and then the entertainment district, hotels and what not would emerge. On the other side will be the public buildings like Government offices, Municipal building etc. This is the typical city centre evolved through centuries of development reflecting the depth of the christian origin of modern Europe — its history of almost two thousand years apparent at every nook and corner. They are so old, but like priceless antiques constitute treasured possessions of proud cities and towns to which people belong in a very intimate and intense kind of way, and people nurture the places with love and tender care.

Ancient cities are glories to the people who live there for generations. It is said that a man without a sense of history is no man at all. Every day passing by the church, ancient Roman aqueduct, the remnants of an old castle or the five century old university library, the city people live through the past — their very own heritage and culture.

Apart from Europe, this is true of Bangkok which is only 200 years old but certain parts where the city began — Royal Palace, Temples, Courts etc — carry the continuity with the past. The other instance is that of Tokyo which was badly devastated, first by the earthquake in 1923, followed by massive bombings during second world

war but the Imperial Palace and whatever else survived have remained as important landmarks of city architecture — not only well preserved but very much as an integral part of the heart-throb of modern 20th century Japan inspite of glass and steel skyscrapers of Tokyo's business districts or neon lights of Ginza in the evening.

Characterless

Metropolis

I was born brought up in Dhaka — lived my life here. I love Dhaka; it sings in my blood. The city is my heritage — it is practically me. I find Dhaka to be unique and different compared to any other place, apart from the fact that it is my birth-place. Take for example inimitable Dhaka humour. It sings in the air of the old city inspite of dirt and poverty. The humours are splendid — with and vibrant. Poet Shamsur Rahman wrote a poem in Dhaka dialect. Although it is not on Dhaka but old Dhaka humour and wit carry me back to my roots of glory which otherwise I seem to have lost in the midst of a characterless metropolis that we call our national capital.

It is a tragedy when I find the sordid decay of old Dhaka, dying a slow painful death. I am sure Poet Shamsur Rahman knows it best. Famous Dhaka — of history and glory, of life made out of bricks and mortars — has been thrown into the trash heap of history. During my school days, I read that Dhaka was a city of million

people — the world famous centre of finest textile — when London was a small fishing village.

What has happened to that? Perhaps the city proceeded in the reverse direction — the weavers of muslin being forced to go for fishing while Londoners, from fishing emerged as pioneers of a mighty industrial civilization. Like a stone, Dhaka has gone on rolling downwards into the depths of a bottomless pit.

There is no end to it since it has assumed the perpetual state of

Dhaka was also a provincial capital.

No Resemblance to Historic Past

In case of Delhi, it was much more stunning. Delhi was and continued to be a city — huge and sprawling — for at least one thousand years. But the colonial masters tried to banish the past into a brutal oblivion. The Delhi of historic glory, as colourful as Rome, simply decayed like fallen leaves of winter. Next to it came up New Delhi — a brand new city with

of the British Raj, not only followed the past trends, we felt proud of it. It is interesting to observe that in the fifties the chief architect of the Government of East Bengal used to be a Britisher who obviously could not get a job back in his own country.

In case of India, the two Delhis remained disjointed in heart and spirit. It never occurred to the sovereign Government to move the newer centres of bureaucracy to the Red Fort which was really the seat of Government before India became a colony. If it was done, perhaps the deep-seated communal hostilities could have been avoided to a large extent.

In Pakistan, they built a new capital city, Islamabad, out in the wilderness of Margalla hills, in a style and manner closely akin to the taste and culture of a Sandhurst graduate instead of reflecting the hopes and aspirations of the post-independent generation who must take the nation to a new age of glory like Taxila or Moghul Lahore.

Same Mistake

After 1971, we have committed the same mistake once more, although no Englishman was heading Dhaka Improvement Trust. I wonder why we are not proud of our past — it is a pity! From a provincial capital, Dhaka became the heart and the head of a new independent nation. Never for once, did we think of obliterating the division between old and new Dhaka. Till date, old Dhaka continues to

remain in its perpetual state of decline while new Dhaka has spread further to the north — beyond Tongi and Joydevpur. While southward, bridge across river Buriganga has been constructed after decades of procrastination but the other side is yet to experience urban growth.

We should have tried to recover our past glories of Moghul days by integrating old Dhaka into the building up of the new capital. It could have been done by locating public buildings along Buriganga river or developing the present central jail area as a new urban centre. Similarly, Wari and Gandaria areas could have been revived as top class residential localities. Multi-storied flats can be located by pulling down old, dilapidated houses with large compounds. The Buckland Bund must be revived along with new commercial areas by the river.

The possibilities are numerous but what is scarce is open-minded free thinking. Never it occurred to us that more and more national institutions should be located in that part of the city where it all began, several centuries back, when London was a small fishing village.

In Bangladesh today, we are losing faith in the future. Talented people and bright students are leaving the country. The new strategy of urban revival should be a part of national revival that all of us must seek today.

In the meantime, I urge Poet Shamsur Rahman to write a poem — 'Where is my old Dhaka. Let that poem be the beginning of that revival.

Where is My Old Dhaka!



The beginning of the dismal state was deliberately promoted by British colonial administration. To begin with, Calcutta was their city since they built it from scratch and therefore the city looked more Victorian than Indian. But at places like Dhaka and Delhi, they deliberately shunned the past — by creating a new Dhaka as a new provincial capital where urban planning was characterised by huge open fields with landscapes resembling England since exerts from Kew Gardens were employed; while public buildings like Curzon Hall or the old High Court did not have the remotest connection with Moghul architecture when

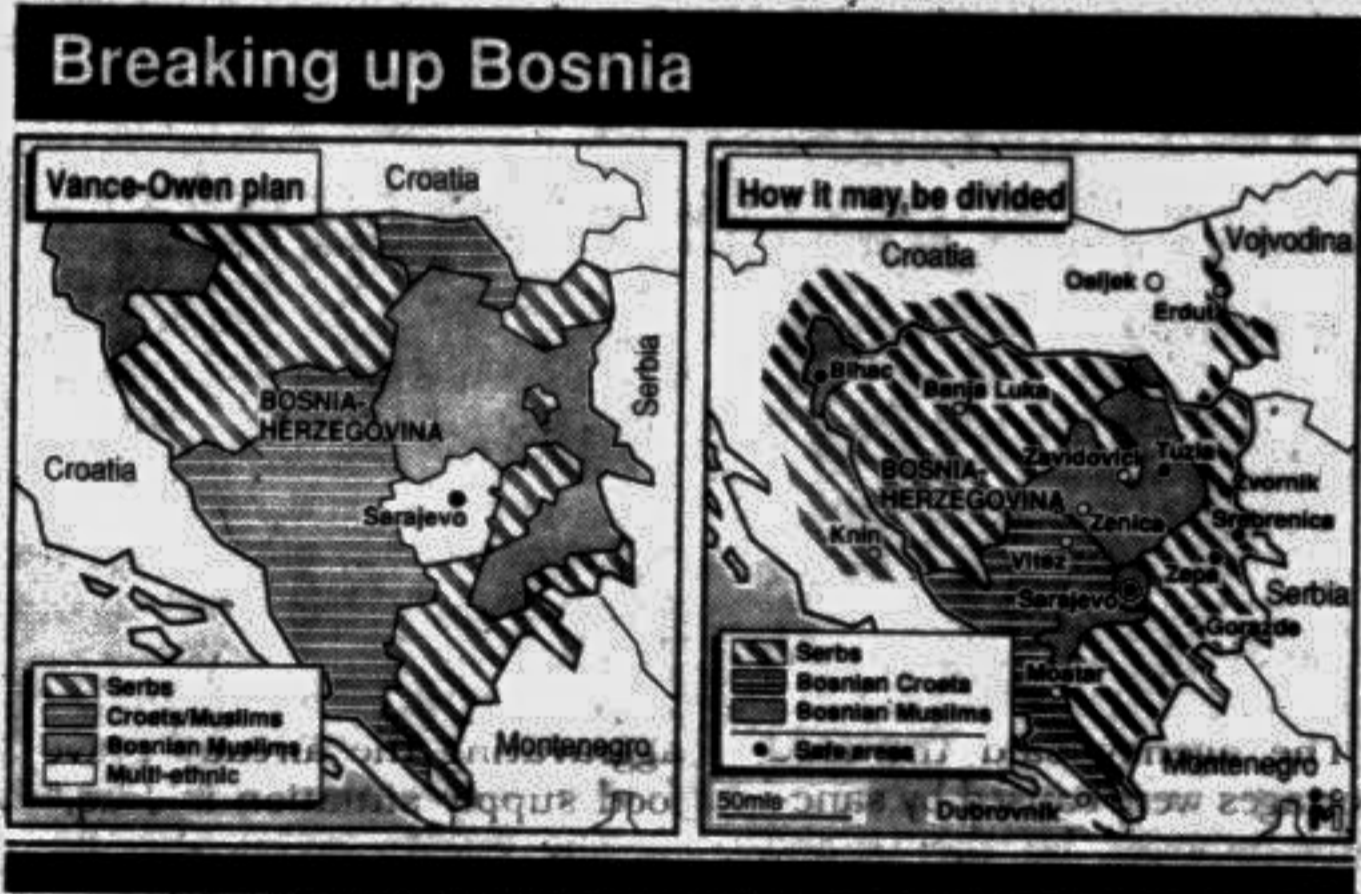
no resemblance whatsoever to its historic past.

After partition in 1947, British Raj had left but native Sahibs proved to be more catholic than the Pope. Dhaka emerged after centuries of sleep and old Dhaka had all the chances to stage a comeback. From a small district town, it had to be transformed, within a short period of time, to a provincial metropolis. Unfortunately, we had already lost the sense of history. Old Dhaka continued to remain in oblivion and not a single state institution was located there. New Dhaka expanded rapidly while renovation of the old was never considered. It is amazing but true that even after the end

Life in Sarajevo 'Like Playing Russian Roulette'

Petar Hadji-Ristic writes from Sarajevo

The siege of Sarajevo 15 months ago marked the beginning of the war in Bosnia. Depression and a sense of abandonment by the outside world is writ large among its 380,000 citizens. As Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian leaders discuss the carving up of Bosnia, a sense of foreboding pervades Sarajevo. In this graphic account a Gemini News Service correspondent reports on the conditions in the besieged capital of Bosnia.



THE lilacs were suddenly blossoming and pedestrians clapping spruces strode along streets shielded from sniper fire by gigantic steel sheets or scurried through the sheltered backstreets. Cyclists peddled past with bunches tied behind their saddles. Everywhere people seemed to be hurrying, across the city to exchange the same, gratuitous treat to lift each other's morale.

Then came the gunfire from the hills, the mortars and the carnage. The interlude was over. Sarajevo was bombed back into the hell it was thrust 15 months ago. People dived for cover and the lilacs appeared at the besidings of the new victims of the long siege.

This pattern has been repeated over the past 15 months. A few days of peace and confidence began to return. People went out on the streets. A restaurant or two reopened and then the guns in the hills ended it all.

Depression, humiliation and a sense of abandonment by the outside world seem to be written on the faces of those who have remained. People avoid eye contact with foreigners in their flak jackets, who may fly in and out with UN passes and cross the deadly sniper alleys in their armoured cars, although most have come to help and could become victims too.

But the terror there once was has gone.

"Living in Sarajevo is like playing Russian Roulette — nothing more," said Milan Cupovic stoically. Before him a rubbish heap was smouldering in the street. Shortage of fuel, dumps and even the risk of sniper fire forced people to light bonfires in the street.

"We no longer fear as we did in the first two months," said another man, supplementing his aid rations by running a

stall at the local market. Before him were a few packets of European Community food aid to supplement the rations which the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) brings in by truck convoys and air to keep the citizens alive; baby food, cheese, sugar and oil. Everything was on sale for foreign currency.

Other stall keepers were selling handfuls of nails, door locks and plumbing materials — bits and pieces that might patch up the war damage and keep the city life going.

It was a miserable display, illustrating how the 15-month siege had impoverished the lives of Sarajevans. There was virtually nothing to buy and no money changing hands in a city that was once a prosperous trading centre on the cross-

roads between East and West. Nor does there seem to be any confidence that the end is in sight — unless some outside power takes a stand and flushes out the gunmen from the hills. "It could last for another year," said Jamal Kamenica, a journalist on Sarajevo TV. "The Bosnian army has no arms."

A visit to the Bosnian Presidency with its sandbags outside illustrated this. President Alija Izetbegovic's bodyguards carry an assortment of weapons from various countries, including an elegant American Smith & Wesson pistol claimed to have been donated by former United States president Gerald Ford.

The never-ending gunning down of people in the streets and lobbing of mortars at ran-

dom into the city centre served as a continual reminder to the citizens of Sarajevo that they are hostages to be traded in any eventual settlement. The gun covers in the hills also came off spontaneously to turn up the pressure.

"It is (the city) one of the pressure points of negotiations," said Tony Land, the UNHCR mission head in the city.

The Serbs may also reason that in any future negotiations their hand is stronger if they can not just offer the freedom of Sarajevans to come and go but also to bring an end to the random killing.

Sometimes the snipers appeared to take an added diabolical delight in bringing some order to their haphazard work. A doctor said that on some days the victims or wounds are all of the same type. On one day alone 14 women were admitted to the hospital wounded by sniper fire, he said.

Some buildings have been specifically targeted to deliver special messages. The main city

hospital was one of these. Said Dr Edo Jaganjac: "In the first six months we were hit by 500 shells."

One employee suggested that it was hit because its multinational staff was living proof that all nationalities could live together.

The building housing the newspaper *Oslobodjenje* has also been shot to pieces. Its staff braved the barrage of attacks, moved their desks and files into the basement — and even set up camp beds to defy the attempt to deny Sarajevans an independent daily source of news. Like the hospital, it had become a symbol of resistance.

But why have the Serbs not taken Sarajevo?

Opinions differ. Some say they no longer have the power. Others say that to take it they would have to destroy it. UN officials say their presence has prevented it.

Thirty kilometres away, along country tracks and roads where the Bosnian Serb snipers and tanks look down on the

city, is the resort town of Pale where the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic holds court in the Hotel Pinaroma.

It is an idyllic rural resort — more suited for a gathering of pensioners than a capital of the Serbian state which Karadzic says he has already created in Bosnia.

It was for this reason that when people behind the Serbian frontlines were asked to vote on whether they would accept the Vance-Owen Peace Plan in May, their voting papers were given more authority with the name of the city of Sarajevo, not Pale, printed over them.

Karadzic, who fled Sarajevo at the beginning of the siege, expects to return there and make it his capital. He may find that whatever he and others think can be horse-traded in final negotiations, Sarajevo is one prize that he has lost.

The 380,000 citizens of Sarajevo who stayed and have endured torture and torment could prevent his entry as effectively as the snipers and Serbian army kept them locked up. Sarajevo could become a lasting symbol of opposition to everything Karadzic and his boys have done in destroying Europe's unique community of nations.

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OPINION

Primary Health Centres

My uncle A Sattar Mridha, Headmaster of Gangarampur High School, had a sudden heart problem and expired recently. His premature death has greatly shocked us all and I believe that in our country there are endless examples of death without treatment.

The medical officer (MO) Nohata Primary Health Centre readily responded to the call, measured the patient's blood pressure, checked the heart and lung function, and sensed the pulse. Later he sent someone to buy some drugs and syringe. But, the patient had expired before the medicine arrived. Although, he was given a rough description of the symptoms by the messenger it was rather surprising to learn that he came to attend the patient without any preparation.

If I may be straightforward, I should say that he failed to take an immediate scientific medical approach to save the patient's life. I would request him to reflect to the situation of that day (April 13, 1993) and make a critical assessment of his role in light of the following questions: a) Why didn't he carry any essential drugs and instruments while attending an emergency call? b) Shouldn't he do that? c) Had he ever been given training on how to act in such critical situations and if not, had he ever reported to the higher medical authorities about the need of such training? d) What active treatment did he provide to save the patient's life? e) Why didn't he apply external compression to assist circulatory function? f) Did he possess any essential drugs and instruments and if not had he requested for such items? g) How do he accept that the patient, who himself was a science teacher died in presence of a graduate medical doctor without receiving any scientific treatment? h) What significant role did he play to save the patient's life that could not be of-

fered by any non-qualified village doctor?

Death is inevitable. My uncle is no more with us. His wife and their six young children had to accept the Allah's will. But, it is Allah who has given us knowledge, wisdom and technology and therefore, this kind of death is unacceptable in the civilised world. Their youngest child who is hardly four years old today, will have to grow without father's love and care. I doubt if this child will ever be able to forgive our society for failing to provide medical treatment to her father.

I understand that the MO is a young doctor with extremely limited capabilities, experience and training. Besides, he is provided neither with any advanced reliable medical diagnostic and therapeutic technology nor with adequate essential drugs. Primary Health Centres (PHC) lack telecommunication and ambulatory transport link with the district hospitals. Though, he is graduate medical doctor he had to remain absolutely passive watching an important life pass away due to lack of proper training and adequate facilities!

It is most unfortunate that the PHCs in our country are extremely neglected although 85% of our population are concentrated in the rural areas. It is completely unacceptable that all the experienced and specialised doctors and skills are available only in the urban areas which cover hardly 20% of the country's population. During the last decade I have travelled to about 30 countries around the world as a bioengineering scientist and as consultant for the World Health Organisation. My heart breaks to realise that disparity and disproportion that exist in health care services in Bangladesh is indeed unique.

In a predominantly agricultural country like Bangladesh, the rural people are the true workers in the production sec-

tor. Their contribution towards the country's economic growth and development is much greater than the heavily resource consuming groups who unfortunately, most often corrupt. It is time that the rural people should react and demand their due share in health care services.

The above scenario does not illustrate an isolated case. It clearly reconfirms that a graduate medical doctor alone is helpless to bring effective and efficient care unless the politicians, healthcare policy makers and administrators together work to provide well trained doctors and modern medical technology to the rural areas.

As a researcher involved in the improvement of the Health Care Technology, I should urge all the authorities concerned to immediately focus their attention to the following issues: 1) Medical education programme must be oriented towards rural people and their conditions. Medical students must be exposed to new medical technologies and it is imperative that they should have more knowledge on technologies application and impact in patient care. 2) Experienced doctors, valuable specialists and skills and modern medical technologies should be made easily accessible to the rural population 3) Ambulatory service facilities must be made available to the PHC in the rural areas 4) PHC, need telecommunication link with the district hospitals. 5) Emergency first-aid kit containing essential drugs and instruments must be made available at the PHC. 6) Cardiovascular diseases are no longer confined to the city dwellers only, and therefore necessary steps must be undertaken to improve the quality of life in the rural area.

Mannan Mridha Ph.D Researcher, Biomedical Engineering and a formerly WHO consultant.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina

Sir, As we observe the enmity of the Serbs and Croats against the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina has reached its peak and the situation is too worse to live these three ethnic groups of people in a single country. Already this reality has been understood by some corners and proposals have been given to divide the country into three independent ethnic states. However, the proposals are defective so may not be accepted by the Muslims. Here I want to give a just and implementable proposal.

(1) Before the start of the present civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, among its populations, 44% were Muslims, 32% Serbs, 17% Croats and 7% from other ethnic groups. With this 7% there is no problem and they can live with any of the three ethnic groups. So to divide the country among three main ethnic groups we have to count the 93% of the population as 100% and then the proportions will be as Muslims 47.3%, Serbs 34.4% and the Croats 18.3%. The total area of the country should be divided among three ethnic groups in such a way that each ethnic group will get their land ac-

ording to their pre-war population. (2) The main strongholds of each ethnic group should be given to that ethnic group. So the North-East and North-West area along with Sarajevo should go to the Muslims. Moreover a wide corridor to connect Sarajevo with Adriatic Sea should be given to the Muslim Bosnia. The Eastern and Extreme North-Western parts of the country along with so called Krajina Republic of the Croatian Serbs will be given to the Serbs and the Southern and South-Western parts will be given to the Croats.

(3) Muslims, Serbs and Croats living in the states other than their own ethnic state should be allowed to migrate along with their moveable properties to their ethnic country.

(4) Security Council should execute such a plan using force, if necessary. UN armed forces under air protection can easily land in the areas controlled by the Muslims including Sarajevo and then push the Serbs and the Croats to the borders to be drawn by the UN under this plan.

(5) Arms-embargo against the Muslim government of Bosnia-Herzegovina should be lifted so that they can defend

their borders after the execution of the plan by UN forces.

(6) International monetary help as grants should be given to repatriate the people migrated due to ethnic in conformity to their selected states and to reconstruct the countries. I think Muslim countries will suffice to help Muslim Bosnia.

Though, at the beginning, the Serbs will not agree to such a plan because they have usurped 70% land of the country and so will not be satisfied with 34.4%, but their dissatisfaction will be defused by international pressure along with military action and due to getting full independence along with Krajina of Croatia.

Hence I appeal to all who want peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina to support this plan, to raise their voice in favour of it and pressurise the Security Council, US, Russia and EC to end the war and massacre in Bosnia-Herzegovina through executing this plan.

Noor Hossain Majidi 84, East Testur Bazar Farmgate, Dhaka

What a shame!

Sir, What right have the west now to preach to us about democracy and human rights when they have allowed a heavily armed community to massacre an unarmed community supply because of religious and cultural differences? They have ever denied the right of self-defence. "Ethnic cleansing" has not only been legitimised, it is being rewarded. What a shame! SM Ahsan Gulshan, Dhaka