

Disturbing Signal from Bosnia

The presence of two women prime ministers from the Muslim world together in Sarajevo on Wednesday was nothing more than symbolic. But a symbolic presence sometimes is no less important than actually providing for material support.

Whether this message will prompt the guardians of global parity to pursue the uneven path of peace in the Balkan region is however a completely different matter. The way this region is burning and bleeding for years together now legitimately gives its historic connection to the other similar convulsive event exactly 80 years ago.

In fact, the world leaders should have been alarmed by the happenings in the region and disturbing signals it is sending for the whole world. The European Parliament's clear expression of no-confidence in Lord Owen, the chief negotiator of the organisation for the past one and a half years, shows that the West is aware of the danger of prolonging the war in former Yugoslavia.

The West is sending food and the frank admission by UN peacekeeping forces there of the difficulty to reach food to the besieged Muslims has not been of much help to talk tough to the Serbs. Endless rounds of talks held in capitals and cities of neutral countries have failed to make progress in their position even by an inch.

The Muslims are already cornered and it appears all the talk is meant to protract their painful annihilation. The Serbs have committed the worst crime against humanity but the international community will be held blamable for condoning the crime, the Western leaders only more so.

More Women Workers

The number of female labour is rising in Narail. Reporting this a correspondent of a national daily volunteers an explanation. He feels this rise corresponds to a rise in divorces as also in the number of girls remaining single past age of marriage owing to beyond-capacity dowry demands.

In a land of constricted employment situation, those two factors cannot alone explain the influx of women in the labour market. The main deciding element in this has been wide employment berths waiting eagerly for women workers all because they can be gotten very cheap — almost at half the rate of male worker's wage.

The report cites a survey giving a breakdown on the new workers' nature of job. Forty per cent are doing field work, 30 per cent working in husking mills, and 15 per cent are employed as domestic servants. Without accounting for the remaining 15 per cent, the survey goes on to quote a decidedly overlapping figure of 55 per cent as being engaged in smuggling.

While this scenario is being enacted, a substantial part of male population reaching employment age is rotting without landing a job. This cannot be allowed to go too far to generate a new kind of social imbalance.

THERE is no denying the fact that the recent visit of Awami League president and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina has drawn attention of different quarters including, obviously, the political circles in Bangladesh. Attempts have already been made by many to prove that the visit, in fact, has brought a positive feedback for AL which was for a long time detached from this leading veto power of Asia.

Why all these assumptions, conclusions and analyses? What is the real feedback even AL and Hasina can think of having obtained by a single tour?

Yes, Hasina visited China at the invitation of the Communist Party of China and with this very visit the Communist Party of China officially claimed that it had reached the point of destination in establishing formal ties with almost all the political parties in South Asia.

Without focusing on the on-going national, regional and international scenarios, in their multi-dimensional perspectives, it would not be wise to willy-nilly pass comments on the visit of AL high-powered delegation, headed by the party chief and leader of the opposition in parliament, Sheikh Hasina.

Political atmosphere in the world and that of the sub-continent has drastically taken a new shape and course after the final exit of the USSR-led socialist empire from the international stage and the onset of the phenomenon reducing the former Soviet Union into an entity dependent on the capitalist West headed by the unipolar supreme power, the United States of America. In the absence of a unified USSR it has now become very difficult and challenging for India's foreign trade losing out, to a large extent, on her diversified markets of commodities and goods.

Benazir Bhutto and Tansu Ciller have just conveyed the concern of their respective countries, the Muslim world and also the South Asian nations. Squabbling among the Western powers has brought every good move back to square one whenever an individual country has expressed its desire to take a bold step against the Serbs.

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Sheikh Hasina's Visit to China Seen in the Wider Political Perspective

by Sinha M A Sayeed

series of attempts and dialogues at various levels to clear the air.

India once tried her level best to convince USA to list Pakistan as a terrorist state and all sorts of diplomatic steps, manoeuvrings and media publicity were geared up to this end. Even a year ago, Pakistan's tensions and anxieties were exposed like anything at different bilateral, regional and international fora.

With the assumption of power by PPP headed by Benazir Bhutto, the relations

India go back to the boarder incidents of 1954. Attempts were made to soften relations. Premier Chou En Lai came to India in 1954 and 1956, had a wide range of talks with the Indian counterpart but no positive results were to follow.

It was premier Rajiv Gandhi, a forward-looking successor of the great Nehru family of India, who took a historic initiative to break the stalemate or isolation of long 34 years; went to China on an official visit in December 1988 that formally paved broader avenues for multifarious cooperations between these two big neighbours of Asia.

helf to paper statements, continuous propaganda through media like radio newspapers etc and limited supply of light weapons. USA stopped supply of arms and ammunitions to both India and Pakistan putting Pakistan into a further imbalance in terms of stock of weapons with India. The war of 1965 had to be mediated by USSR and was settled through signing of Tashkent Agreement in 1966.

The war of 1971 between India and Pakistan was the most important one having with the so-called territorial integrity of Pakistan which was lost through the creation of Bangladesh. Z A Bhutto paid an official visit to China and what type of discussion took place between Bhutto and his Chinese counterpart remained shrouded in secrecy. However, everybody noticed that it was the first time in the diplomatic history between China and Pakistan that "no joint communique" was issued. It might have indicated that China

Therefore, it is against the backdrop of USA-Pakistan relations, China-Pakistan relations, China-USA relations and, above all growing China-India relations that China's invitation to Sheikh Hasina deserved to be considered.

One has to agree that AL is the most organised, well-funded, goal and programme oriented political party with a tradition of long 42 years having very broad-based grassroots level units. With the demise of USSR, India itself is going to renew relations with China and China's long-held conception of AL's blind inclination towards its rival is no more strongly in existence. AL should not be in isolation with China when China has been maintaining relations with a number of political parties including BNP and JP. AL was also trying or waiting for a good ground to have a formal connection with China through its Communist Party. AL's political and diplomatic moves to build up ties with almost all the major political parties in the western countries, including USA, have already

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between USA and Pakistan have been developing so dramatically that the USA's stand on Kashmir has made another big problem for India. The USA has officially made it clear that Kashmir is a disputed area and hence, the problem has to be solved politically through negotiations instead of use of military force.

Benazir understands well that Islamic Bomb is not only a nuclear bomb to the people of Pakistan, it is also a symbol of their existence against the mightier nuclear power, neighbour India. That's why India apprehends that Pakistan will go on with this very programme. To India's utter surprise, the generalised conclusion that Pakistan's importance to USA has lessened as the Afghan issue is no more there, has itself now been in question.

So, the basic issues of India's concern — enlistment of Pakistan as a terrorist state, pressure on Pakistan otherwise to give up the programme for a nuclear bomb and ensure the determination of the rights of India over Kashmir now seem to be tangled for reasons, known or unknown, obvious or remote. The very roots of the tense relations between China and

communicate at the end of the official talks between Rajiv and Li Peng is considered to be the real basis of future course of actions and discussions between China and India. They had an understanding for strengthening further relations without putting any more fuel to the burning issues existing between China and India.

Rajiv's visit was reciprocated by the visit of Chinese Premier Li Peng to India in 1992. Premier PV Narasimha Rao visited China very recently and both China and India now seem to be of the same opinion for feeling that "Under the changed circumstances, past hostilities backed by uncompromising approach of arrogance and caprice should have their own peaceful ways to die down or cool down."

Pakistan fought three wars with India, two on the issue of Kashmir and one relating to the liberation war of Bangladesh. What was the extent of China's promises to stand by Pakistan in times of her crises and wars with India? The war of 1948 between India and Pakistan was limited and short-lived while the wars of 1965 and 1971 had their own proliferations, peculiarities that continued for some time. In 1965 Pakistan thought that something very big would be done by her mighty ally China, but China only confined

asked Pakistan to go for a political settlement of the problem. But Pakistan mysteriously played the same music, of course, with a renewed assertion that "China is always with Pakistan and it will come forward militarily, if need arises".

Records show that Pakistan's claims about China's promises were either not correct or China deviated from her stand in reality. At any rate Pakistan's use of "China card" did not produce any clear positive results for her at least in her crises and wars with India.

China did not recognise Bangladesh till the change-over of August 15, 1975. This was not because of Pakistan rather it was due to China's firm conviction that Bangladesh had, in fact, become a satellite of India backed by USSR.

Bangladesh's relations with China have their own logic and reasons based on national, bilateral, regional and international considerations. It was General Ziaur Rahman, the then Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator, who visited China in 1976 and after her recognition of Bangladesh, formally initiated the process of bilateral ties between Bangladesh and China. Hasina might have her own sufferings and mathematics about China.

reached a point from where it officially looked to be in the fitness of things in the changed global atmospheric that Awami League have a rapport with the Chinese Communist Party.

But Hasina should not come to a quick conclusion that her talks with the Chinese leaders will be remembered for all times to come. Chinese leaders are basically less emotional and very much practical, pragmatic and careful about national, bilateral, regional and international phenomena depending on time, space and dimension.

Their discussion process is also interesting. They first invite the guest to speak phase-wise on national, bilateral, regional and international matters. After having learnt the guest's views they present their own analysis, interpretations and understanding on the very matters. Here reference may be made to the great experience of former Secretary of States, US, Dr Henry Kissinger, widely known as the monarch of diplomats of his time. After his formal talks with Chairman Mao, Dr Kissinger came out and faced a group of journalists standing outside. One of them asked him, "What are your impressions about Chairman Mao?" Dr Kissinger quickly responded, "Chinese leaders are very cautious of using their words and

sentences. Each and every word and sentence of Mao can be measured and weighed". What Dr Kissinger said of Mao twenty years ago, held good about the Chinese leaders in 1987 when I had a chance to visit China as a member secretary of the high-powered delegation of Jatiya Party headed by the then secretary general and deputy prime minister Shah Moazzam Hossain, at the invitation of the Communist Party of China.

Sheikh Hasina being the political successor of Bangladesh has some plus points. She has also learnt a lot over time as the president of AL and the leader of the opposition in parliament. She has to go a long way if she wants to have a footing internationally. She appears to be keen on strengthening AL's image outside for which the party's sub-committee on international affairs headed by deputy leader of the opposition in parliament and former foreign minister Mr Abdus Samad Azad MP is looking for experts and veteran ex-diplomats who have understanding of international affairs.

But whatever links, lobbies and bases AL may have, it is Hasina who has to prove her own excellence with a grasp and understanding of national and international politics and happenings — past, present and future. Hasina would have to take into serious consideration what Benazir has achieved within a short period of time. What Nobel prize winner Suki of Burma earned within her limited span of political life, what Corazon of Philippines showed surprisingly within the time she got, even what Khaleda Zia has demonstrated promisingly by this time with her own style and despite limitations, if any, before she moves with her mission from country to country, forum to forum, party to party.

Growing importance of Asia to the West and USA is at present a reality. Asian economy particularly the economies of Korea, Taiwan, Hongkong, Singapore etc. Japan besides, have been booming so promisingly that even President Clinton had to take note of the surge. His seriousness for APEC is a direct sign of USA's concern. Clinton administration has also opened a new section at the State Dept. to deal with the countries in the sub-continent.

We remember Hasina's guarded remarks "China can play a positive role in Asia" made during her press briefing at the Zia International Airport immediately after her return from China. Diplomatically and politically, Hasina shall have to ensure that AL-China relations are not disturbed or influenced or jeopardized by AL's relations with India and USA. She must also be watching how India-China relations and or China-USA relations shape up in the future.

Philippines Tries Gas to Root out Heinous Crime

Abby Tan writes from Manila

AFTER four years' debate, the Philippines has decided to restore the death penalty that was abolished in 1987 after, the "people power" overthrow of President Ferdinand Marcos.

But the executioner may not be in business for a while because the budget just passed by Congress makes no provision for construction of an execution chamber.

Legislators decided on a gas chamber rather than an electric chair on the grounds that it is more "humane." Legislators joked that it would be difficult to electrocute people given the constant power failures in the country.

The controversial Death Penalty Bill was passed by Congress in the wake of public outrage over a spate of sensational crimes of rape, murder, coup attempts and drug trafficking involving prominent Filipinos as victims and accused.

Ironically, President Fidel Ramos signed it into law a day after Defense Under-Secretary Jose Crisol was stabbed to death by burglars in his Manila home.

Before signing the bill, Ramos admitted the death penalty alone would not improve the Philippines' investment-detering image of a gun-

After "people power" President Corazon Aquino came to office, the Philippines became the only Asian country to abolish the death penalty. Now, still troubled by violent crime Congress has brought back the ultimate penalty.

Doing away with death

Capital punishment abolished
52 countries
16 others for all but exceptional offences
19 have not carried out executions for at least 10 years
Source: Amnesty International

happy country. "It's not a quick fix, it is not the total solution to suppressing crime," he said. "But it is a powerful deterrent in my view."

He noted that even Western countries under siege from violent crime are re-examining their methods of fighting violence.

enforcement and gun-slinging politicians — often cited as the root causes of criminal problems — needed to be reformed and controlled.

In a recent clampdown on the private armies of warlords and politicians, the government claims to have dismantled 350 armed groups. The country's still often feudal society has spawned a network of private armies run by politicians and businessmen.

A week before the signing, Ramos, a former soldier who has long advocated the return of the death penalty, presided over the symbolic burning of 4,000 firearms and 24,000 other weapons surrendered by the warlords.

Abuses by government officials in recent years have also become commonplace. At least five town mayors are under investigation or on trial for murder. One mayor in the north is accused of murdering eight people from two families. Another is on trial for the rape and murder of two college students.

Ramos admitted that many of these cases had been brought to public attention by a vigilant press and a community tired of such abuses. Kidnap and murder victims and their families had formed citizens' watchdog groups to pressure the government on the prosecution of the criminals.

"For the past six years our society and our criminal justice system have been placed under severe stress by violent crimes," commented Ramos. "Public sensibilities have been lacerated by acts of great cruelty and heartlessness, ranging from crimes or rape to murder, from drug trafficking to economic sabotage, from kidnapping for ransom to the wholesale massacre of families."

"We have listened to the louder and louder demands of our citizenry for a tougher stand against crimes and tougher penalties for criminal offenders."

"Heinous" crimes covered by the law include murder, rape, kidnapping, treason, drug re-

lated offences, bribery and economic plunder involving more than \$2 million.

Kidnapping for ransom has become prevalent in the last two years. Most victims have been wealthy people from the ethnic Chinese minority, which has accused police and soldiers of masterminding the crimes.

Japanese, Taiwanese and United States investors have also been kidnapped.

The law is not retroactive, so will not affect Imelda Marcos, recently sentenced to a maximum of 24 years jail for two corruption offences.

Human rights campaigners are challenging the law in the Supreme Court. But Ramos is firm: "In the last analysis, what a nation does about heinous crimes against persons and society is an expression of the vigour of its values."

"By drawing this line against heinous crimes, our people are saying that we will not live in a society that cannot defend itself against crime, that will not make clear distinction between the innocent and the criminal, that will not punish the guilty."

— GEMINI NEWS

ABBY TAN is a Singaporean journalist specialising in economic and political affairs. She has been based in Manila since 1977.

To the Editor...

'Doctors' strike' Sir, I am rather dismayed at the biased allegation made by Mr Pasha against doctors published in your... column on 27.1.94. Being a physician myself I think I should comment something to repudiate his statement which I suppose he had made out of his sheer ignorance of the whole affair. He must understand that the strike was not called on the spur of the moment. The BMA has been demanding for almost three years, to implement the commitments regarding the health problems of the country made by the three alliances during the anti-autocracy movement. Truly speaking, most of the demands are aimed at ameliorating the present dismal situation prevailing in our health service. But sadly, the reluctant attitude of the government and

non-cooperation of the opposition to play a positive role eventually led the situation to such an extent that doctors were left with no choice but to resort to the most unwished-for step — the strike. It is true that such inconvenience was meted out to the patients during the strike period but one should not be swayed by the general idea that mortality rate projected in the newspaper at the time had been due to the striking doctors. Actually the hospital casualty which occurs during strike is nothing but the same normal mortality which is never stated in the newspaper while doctors are not on strike. The letter writer must be aware of the fact that no patients of emergency nature are turned away or neglected during strike since 24-hour emergency is always exempted from the strike. If he can cite or trace out any such instance where any death has

been caused due to refusal of treatment during strike he should, I must insist, come forward with evidence and seek legal action against, for nobody would hold him back from seeking justice. Before heaping all the reproaches on the doctors he must seek the fact behind the undesirable situation that did crop up not solely due to a single organisation. It would be unfair and unjust to point finger at doctors only; he would rather urge human rights organisations to look into the government and the opposition as well for their failure to fulfil the commitments and neglecting the cause of health of the masses as health is a basic right of every citizen. Fairly speaking, none of us is to be seen with complete impunity be it the doctor, the government or the opposition for it should be a collective effort of everyone to discipline

our health service while aiming at ensuring health for all by the year 2000.

Md Jalaluddin Iqbal, Mohamadpur, Dhaka

Agri graduates

Sir, The Agriculture and Irrigation Minister M Majid-ul-Haq while addressing recently the Ambassadors and High Commissioner of Bangladesh countries and Malaysia urged them to arrange employment for Bangladeshi agriculture graduates and skilled and non-skilled agriculturists in the Middle East countries. We very much appreciate the Agriculture Minister's concern to solve the unemployment problems of agri graduates. We extend our thanks and gratitude to the minister and sincerely hope that the envoys will take urgent initiatives to translate the minister's re-

quest into reality. At the same time we would honestly call upon the minister to kindly take necessary steps for filling up the vacant posts in different agriculture oriented govt. and autonomous organizations by unemployed agri graduates and also to create some opportunity for their employment in govt. as well as in the private sector.

M Zahid Haque General Secretary BAI Teachers' Assoc. Dhaka

BUET classes

Sir, The classes for the students who got admission to different disciplines of the Engineering University in 1993 have not yet started. Meanwhile, the admission test result of 1994 has been published. The students are sitting idle for the last one year. It is not sure as to when the classes

will be started. Both the parents and the students are suffering from frustration. The general universities which were lagging behind in this respect have succeeded in reducing the session jam to some extent. In the meantime the private technical universities are diverting the good students from the BUET to theirs. The parents being frustrated are also sending their wards to foreign universities and colleges, as and when they find it feasible. I would request the government and the university authority to ponder over the matter seriously and arrange to hold classes without killing further time. I would also request the authority to chalk out academic plan in such a way as the time already wasted can be made good.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury Kalabagan, Dhaka