Dhaka, Tuesday, August 2, 1994

New Realism in SAARC

The just-concluded Council of Ministers' meet, coupled with the special meeting of the SAARC finance and planning ministers on poverty alleviation that preceded it, has strengthened our faith in SAARC. This has created fresh hopes for the SAARC's future, darkened only a couple of years ago when even routine meetings had ceased to be held in the wake of very disturbing summitry dislocations. It is not, however, for the resumption of the routine charter obligations that we put our faith back in the SAARC, contented that it has after all bounced back, we are rather impressed by some clear signs of maturity that the organisation has demonstrated on the occasion of the council of ministers' meet in Dhaka. Not so much from the podium as such, nor through the specific agenda-bound deliberations of the ministers but by the virtue of a series of bilateral meetings held separately with a gusto.

The candid expression of views by the ministers, specially those from India and Pakistan, before the multilateral meet got underway, set the tone and temper for addressing bilateral issues on a different scale than had been observed beforehand. Their making no bones about the distrust in bilateral relations and the incongeniality of the regional environment standing in the way of realising the full potential of SAARC, proved as an invaluable input to the overall outcome of the ministerial meeting. That is because these did not go down as intemperate accusations of each other, brushed aside moments after these were uttered only with rancour harboured as usual in their minds. Nor were they semantically designed to emphasise the differences within the organisation or to play to the gallery. There was a certain genuineness of concern about the regional environment and hence the following bilateral meetings we have seen to advance multilateralism. We read into this a new sense of direction to face facts and do something about them in the bilateral relations for a cohesive and forward looking existence learning from the present-day trend of old enemies forging cooperative relations. This is the first definitive sign that SAARC has not just come of age but is acting as such.

What stands out in terms of bilateral equations - seemingly on the mend is that Dhaka turned out to be an oasis for India and Pakistan faced with a new bad patch in their relations. They bristled much too much in their inter-state relations following the reported assaults on each other's diplomats to be able to have any meeting between them soon enough. But this was made possible because of the SAARC meeting in Dhaka as Pakistan Foreign Minister Sardar Aseff Ahmad Ali and Indian State Minister for External Affairs R L Bhatia met in what was regarded as the first ministerial level meet between the two big neighbours since last December. It was no fruitless contact either; they agreed to work for the creation of a congenial atmosphere to have dialogues to resolve the contentious bilateral issues including Kashmir. The resumption of talking after the unsavory diplomatic incidents, bears testimony to the SAARC's potential utility even in the political sense.

Serious discussions also took place on the bilateral issues between India and Bangladesh, with an obvious focus on the water sharing question, hopefully made the mellower by the success in tribal repatriation followed by the resolution of the Tin Bigha issue. With Pakistan, too, Bangladesh took the opportunity of reviewing the state of her bilateral relations, especially the status of the stranded Pakistani's repatriation. The interactions expanded usefully to put on record the bilateral and regional perceptions of Sri Lanka, Nepal Maldives and Bhutan.

Sanctions should be Strictly **Imposed**

We fully endorse the decision by the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France and Germany to impose sanction on Bosnian Serbs for refusing to accept the peace proposal worked by them, on a 'take it, or leave it' basis. We also give our full support behind their decision to extend the same to Yugoslavia, which is the principal backer of the Bosnian Serbs. For the first time there appears to be some 'bite' behind the 'back' against the perpetrators of an unparalleled genocide in Bosnia, whose Muslim-led government has already accepted the plan. The latest development is that the Bosnian Serbs want to reopen the dialogue. But the five countries have refused to do so, if it means renegotiating the borders.

The genocide in Bosnia was a crime against humanity and against all the values and norms of our civilization. The killing and torture that the Muslims of Bosnia have been subjected to, have raised the spectre of religious persecution which, the modern world had come to believe, it had left behind, far in the past. The genocide was a rude awakening for us all, as to how little progress we had really made when it comes to having internalised the humanitarian values of our time. None could have ever believed that Tito's socialist Yugoslavia, the country that was a leading member of the Non-Aligned Movement, and served as its most courageous and persistent activist throughout the sixties and seventies, would turn into a 'devil' of a country, reviving some of the most inhuman and backward traits in our civilization.

While we welcome the decision to impose sanction on Bosnian Serbs and on Yugoslavia, we feel duty bound to express a bit of scepticism as to how rigorously this sanction will be imposed? Legitimate questions have been raised all over the world, as to whether or not the leading Western countries, especially the US, UK, France, Germany and Russia, could have worked more sincerely to prevent the human tragedy that occurred there.

It is the record of their performance that force us to be spectical about the sanction. We urge the international community to impose the sanction most strictly. Till the peace plan is accepted by the Bosnian Serb, they should be completely isolated from the international community. This sanction should be extended to any other country which violates the present sanctions.

Another Historic Peace Declaration

Washington witnessed the signing of another historic peace declaration between Israel and the Arabs indeed the third one - first was with Egypt in 1979 and second with PLO in September 1993. President Bill Clinton while inaugurating the signing ceremony declared that two former enemies 'with the world as their witness" had pledged to "settle their differences by peaceful means." The joint declaration signed on Monday. July 25, 1994 by King Hussein and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin with President Clinton sitting between them as witness formally ended 46 years of hostilities - the state of war between Israel and Jordan. king Hussein, after signing said, "On this day, at this house of the great American people, we have been able to take a historic sten W" have accomplished and what we are committed to is the end of state of war between Jordan and Israel " Prime Minister Rabin on somewhat reserved tone said. "Million of eyes all over the world are watching us with great relief and great joy. Another nightmare of war may be over. We have gone a longway toward a

HITE, House lawn in

full treaty of peace." President Bill Clinton happily and smilingly watched the warm handshake between King Hussein and Prime Minister Rabin. It was a different hands shake than the one the world saw in the White House lawn in September, 1993 between Arafat and Rabin. At that time it was Arafat who shook Rabin's hand but this time both King Hussein and Rabin shook each other's hand - the difference

exposure of weak children to

cumstances, an Ethiopian

would rather say his or her

child is weakened by a disease

rather than admit malnour-

thousands of children die of

starvation and related compli-

cations whenever drought hits

this Horn of Africa country and

go to every house to check

people in need of food assis-

tance," says Ayele Ashenafe,

medical officer in charge of a

feeding paediatric centre run

by Inter Aide France in south-

western Ethiopia. "Those who

come here (on the verge of

death) are just indicators of

the famine ravaging the coun-

Indeed, ten years after

footage of millions of gaunt

Ethiopians appeared on tele-

vision screens around the

world in 1984 and gloomy

stills were splashed across

newspaper pages, the same liv-

ing doubt is revisiting the East

Ethiopian officials on relief

begging missions overseas have

made the world believe, the

disaster is no longer looming.

thing before.... life is wicked,

says Jamaican photographer

Andrew Beswick as he takes

pictures of starving children

and women in south-western

like skin covering their skele-

tons and bloated bellies and

their equally emaciated moth-

ers turn up here at Areka each

week for food rations provided

(UNICEF) and the World Food

about 15 per cent of the coun-

try's 53 million people — face

starvation following a severe

drought that slammed the

Health workers, who simul-

taneously administer Vitamin A

and vaccines against measles

and tuberculosis, say most of

the children are severely mal-

nourished and have 50-50

An estimated 7.5 million —

by the UN Children's Fund

Programme (WFP).

country last year.

Babies with just parchment-

"I had never seen such a

And contrary to what

African country.

but has landed.

Ethiopia.

"It is very difficult for us to

causes massive crop failures.

Small wonder then that

ishment.

outsiders. If cornered by cir-

was glaring and obvious - a handshake that reflected warmth and eagerness of both to work for peace. Rabin said, Your Majesty, the entire state of Israel is shaking your hand." Undoubtedly, much of the credit goes to Arafat - the "brave" who jumped practically alone into the rough sea of uncertainty with the hope that peace will come one day despite mounting opposition and violence. King Hussein, however, has started sailing on more or less a quiter sea with the reasonable hope of reaching the other shore - the shore of peace. It is true that negotiations between Jordan and Israel were going on for some time. There are even reports of Shimon Peres's secret visits to Jordan for such negotiations. Peres at one stage reportedly said that peace agreement between Israel and Jordan was ready - one has to just take cut the pen and sign

As one can see King Hussein is the third peace victim of US-Israeli diplomatic onslaught under Camp David first was Anwar Sadat of Egypt in 1979 and second Arafat of PLO in September, 1993. Camp David spirit is -- tackle or even capture Arabs one by one. This is what has been happening. Camp David apparently takes care of Israeli problems too in why that ceding of occupied land at one go under any form of comprehensive M-East peace accord could create serious political problem in Israel itself. Gradual Israeli withdrawal from occ-

upied territories under separate agreements over a period may prove less irritating.

Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad is likely to be fourth in the series though he is still holding back and talking in terms of Arabs unity and joint front - something of a nonstarter - to negotiate comprehensive peace treaty to obtain the best possible deal from Israel. In any case, Gulf war destroyed whatever was left of "Arab Unity"; apparently the chances of its revival under the present M-East political situation are extremely slim unless major initiatives are taken by

sider myself to be a soldier in the army of peace." What a change for a general who captured the Arab land as Israel's Chief of Staff during 1967 Arab-Israeli war! Now he is prepared to give up the captured land for peace - the peace that will nullify the purpose of earlier Arab-Israeli wars and also possible future wars - to destroy Israel

Therefore, today Rabin's diplomatic war for peace under the wise advice and supervision of the US is undoubtedly to ensure the existence of Israel in the M-East - a big

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE BAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

the influential Arab States. King Hussein realized it and hence his present quick step with open and extended hands towards Israel. Future is still uncertain, but peace in any form through any means diplomatic pressure - self interest, etc between century old enemies is welcome and deserves whole-hearted sup-

Hafez Al-Assad would do well by joining the present peace procession -, nothing like recovering own land beautiful Golan Heights, if necessary, in parts through peaceful means. Any idea of waging war against Israel for recovering the entire lost land appears preposterous if not madness. Rabin said. "I conachievement for Rabin and his

Time is, however, running out for both Arabs and Israelis. Rabin and his Labour Party will have to face the general election in about one and half years time. Future is always uncertain. In ease Likud returns to power, the peace process will come to a grinding that if not shelved altogether. The US's leverage over Israel may seen eternal but may turn out to be less effective with Likud. Therefore, all three parties in the present peace process -Arabs, Israel and the US must pursue the peace negotiations with a view to achieving the maximum results at the shortest possible time. Haiez Al-

Assad's insistence on Israel's

quick withdrawal from Golan Heights is probably based on the assumption that if Likud returns to power further withdrawal may stop. But Likud is expected to respect international agreements and here US's role will be crucial

Therefore, Assad should en gage himself in the peace ne gotiations and try to bring down the withdrawal period from Israeli proposed eight years to probably half or even less. Egyptian President Mobarak's effort to talk President Assad into the peace process is laudable. Assad appears receptive. The idea of a joint delegation of Syria and Lebanon promises progress as this will ensure Syria's historic influence on Lebanon, Israel need not worry about it. If Lebanon is neutralized through Syria and Israel's self declared sec urity zone in South Lebanon is returned to Lebanon, Hizbullah activity will be considerably reduced.

The warmth generated in the signing ceremony in Washington should not lead Israelis to a wrong track in the peace negotiations. King Hussein is important but Arafat is a priority in terms of M-East politics and peace negotiations. This must be recognized in the peace negotiations. This Peace Declaration has an important paragraph; "Israel respects the present special role of the Hashemite. Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim Holy Shrines in Jerusalem. When negotiations on the permanent status will take place, Israel will give

This has already put King Hussein at odds with Arafat. indeed PLO protested saying that it is the right of the Palestinian to take charge of the holy places in Jerusalem which shall, as per PLO demand, be the capital of Palestinian State. OIC has also reportedly lent support to PLO's claim. Though King Hussein at present pays for the maintenance of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and other Waqf properties. King Hussein has to move very cautiously on this issue. It is known that "King Hussein formally renounced any responsibility for the West Bank and Gaza Strip." He may have to sort this out with PLO in advance so that this does not create unnecessary bitterness which may jeopardize the progress of prace negotiations and particularly the negotiauous on the most contentious issue - the status of Jerusalem. Undoubtedly. King

high priority to the Jordanian

historic role in these shripes

Hussein's peace move was facilitated by PLO's agreement with Israel. Jordan's population consists of more than 60% Palestinians and once they are in the peace process, King Hussein's problems are brought to the minimum. The rightist elements in Jordan do not pose a big threat. Joint Action Group in Jordanian Parliament, the supporters of Islamic Brotherhood, already rejected the Jordan-Israel Declaration but this Group being small would not be able to gather much support from the public. Therefore, King Hussein's move was timely and would have wider support in Jordan.

Ethiopia: Famine by Another Name Y Ethiopian custom it is taboo to tell myone that there is a dearth of food in one's family. Social norms also prohibit

chances of survival. Those who do survive will not enjoy normal mental and physical

Like in past years, there were warning signals about the impending disaster that local administrators and the central government should have spotted. But as one official of an international agency involved in emergency relief operations now under way in Ethiopia observed. "The government slept too long."

In traditional African farming communities, local people sound the alarm bells after observing the situation on the ground. But governments usually depend on high-technology early-warning systems and slow-moving bureaucracies. As a result, they often delay in taking action against drought

In Ethiopia, the family tradition of silence on hunger appears to extend to the state. One civil servant says, "There is an unwritten policy which forbids government officials to publicise famine."

Weather records over the past two decades show that drought is cyclic in the Horn of Africa countries: Djibouti. Eritrea, Ethiopia. Somalia and

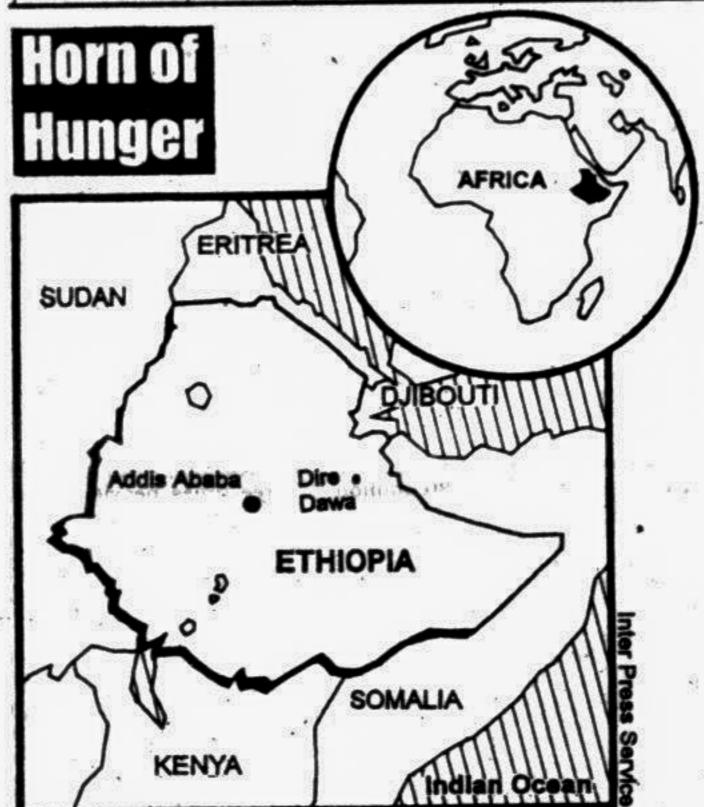
According to Fekade Selassie Beza, chair of Bolososore District Council in the famine-stricken North Omo Zone, the current disaster was foreseeable.

"We informed the zonal offices of the regional administration and the relief and rehabilitation commission beforehand about food deficit in our (district), but the aid did

not come on time," he says. "We have 43 (local governments) in this district and all have been affected by the drought. It is a densely populated area and the people have nothing to eat," Beza says, adding that at least 30 deaths caused by famine are reported every day in Bolososore alone.

Rain is now pouring in the area which just a few weeks ago looked brown from horizon to horizon. Hills and valleys are once again covered by lush vegetation. But behind this cover lies what Musa Bungudu, a UNICEF emergency project

Famine is a taboo word in the perennially starving nation of Ethiopia. Anaclet Rwegayura of Inter Press Service reports from Areka, Ethiopia.



drought". Bungudu says the greenery should not be misinterpreted as the start of the end of the ravages of famine. He says, "As a result of low nutrition status, many men, women and children are sick and dying of resultant complications.'

Thousands of children are suffering from the effects of severe kwashiorkor (proteinenergy malnutrition) and marasmus - muscular wasting from protein calorie deficiency.

If the death toll is to be limited, the millions affected throughout the country need supplementary feeding, including micronutrients and medical supplies.

Ethiopia's rural communities are likely to depend on food handouts for their survival for the next two to three years. Many have fallen victim to loan

officer describes as "green sharks who provided money to tide the farmers over until the situation normalised.

These farmers would have to give up their entire harvests this year to local traders to repay the loans. Says Hastamu Zeleke, an official of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in North Omo Zone: "Their food problems will be snowballing."

Hastamu says Ethiopian farmers face problems in both good and bad years. "They get a certain amount of crop every year, but they are usually not in a position to plan for that

crop." "In some cases they borrow money from traders and promise to pay with crops," he adds. "When the crop matures, farmers are not actual owners of the harvest."

The need to narrow the gap between food requirements and domestic supply is at the

centre of the government's development policy concerns. It has come up with a land

use plan to expand the area under rainfed cultivation, estimated at seven million hectares. The country has 55 million hectares of arable land.

Draught power and farm equipment need to be made available to more farmers. while small-scale irrigation farming will have to be expanded to ensure that yields are stable during droughts.

The government's target is a five-percent annual increase in farm production until the year 2000 so Ethiopia can feed itself. This would increase gross food output from the present seven million tonnes to 12 million tonnes.

But even if another natural disaster does not force Ethiopia to depend on additional food aid. FAO does not expect the country to be selfsufficient in food within the next few years. It says food imports to meet domestic shortfalls will remain in the range of 650,000 tonnes annually over the next 17 years.

OPINION

Whither Democratic Practice?

.Today a hot debate is going on everywhere whether the future election ought to be held under a caretaker government.

This seems unfortunate. unworthy and simply a waste of time and energy. Everyone of us, the politicians, policy makers, professionals and bureaucrats are shouting at the top of their voice for institutionalizing democracy in the country but how much they are practising it themselves that is a million dollar question.

The main function of the democratic system, apparently, is to run the government by the people's representative and hold a free and fair election for a succeeding government to take over. But what is happening in

our democratic system? The

government is run by the bu-

reaucrats, because the Secretaries are still the chief executives of the government and the principal accounting officers, and not by the people's representatives called the ministers, and now the elections are proposed to be held under a caretaker government which, I suppose, would be a conglomeration of politicians with no political ambition and future, retired bureaucrats with no commitment to and practice of democracy, and some professionals with no accountability to the people at large. That means our democratic system is confined to electing some people to the parliament, the nursery of democracy, and then these public representatives would be busy in everything else than the function they were elected for - like their personal or group interest, having enhanced allowance, red passport, duty free car and abusing each other in the parliament, etc. and shifting the responsibility of running the government, holding the elections, to see that the constitution is followed in letter and spirit. in matters like separation of judi-

ciary from the executive machinery, strengthening the local government institutions, forming the correct rules of business etc. to some body else or in cold storage. Now let us analyze the democratic (?) practices and

political commitments of our

politicians, and the govern-

ment to the people. Our illiterate people never made any mistake in giving their verdict in favour of the right cause. But almost every leader of ours after going to the parliament - some connived with military or civil bureaucracy and brought in dictatorial rules, some fought for people's right all his life and behaved differently while in power, some hailed autocratic takeover and the like all in the name of democracy and people's benefit, but in reality without perhaps the slightest consideration for the mandate,

feelings and well being of the

people who had send them to power. During the autocratic regime when all the political parties took to the streets Some proclaimed the vertical in public that participation in the election under the autocratic regime would be amounting to national betrayal and next moment the same group participated in the election. Some participated in the election to be recognized as a political party and force and some did not participated at all, whether due to their political commitment or hatred for the person leading the autocratic regime - it is difficult to say now. But ultimately the autocratic ruler had to resign and a neutral, caretaker government came into being with the sole purpose of holding a free and fair election. But during that interim period the caretaker government went out of the mandate and added an additional undue laurel to the bureaucracy by giving promotion to a large number of

bureaucrats. As far as the election is concerned, it was held under strict discipline and with neutrality but with one flaw though strict rules were framed about the election expenditure, no action was taken against the candidates who crossed the limit and almost every candidate did so. However at long last a properly elected democratic government was established and by the 12th amendment a democratic system came into being in 1991. But what about it's practice? My guess is, not a single member of parliament had attended the parliament more than 50 per cent of the total time of parliamentary sessions and I am perhaps almost sure that many of the members did not spend more than 25 per cent of their time in their rural constituencies, So what could be the contribu! tion of our political leaders to the establishment of democracy being absent for more then 50 per cent of the time from the parliament, and what benefit they could bring to their voters being away from them for more than 75 per cent of the period?

What a pitiable state of democratic practice which seems to depend entirely on an election - either under a caretaker government or a political government.

May I as a common voter most humbly request our lead. ers to shun all shades of hypocrisy and be sincere to what they say, a bit more committed to democratic practices and norms and be a little bit more concerned about the well being of the people more truthful to the electorate by whose mandate and on whose behalf they are member

of parliaments. Md Masudur Rahman

New Elephant Road, Dhaka

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.

University Examinations Sir, It appears from various

newspaper reports that BUET teachers were very much dissatisfied with students since their students did not sit for examinations which were to be held during the World Cup football games. It is well known that H S C examinations (also to be held during the games) of all the four Boards had to be shifted as the students protested. It is also noticed that classes are often suspended during cricket tests whether that is held in Dhaka or anywhere else in the globe. Under the above circumstances should our learned teachers also have to 'learn'

something from history! I feel it would be just to practice total 'academic freedom' like that W Germany, as I experienced during 1958. Teachers would deliver lectures and students are at liberty either to attend or leave the class room. But examination must be held in time and a student may or may not appear!

Sadiq Alee Maghbazar, Dhaka

BAI professors Sir. This refers to one of

my previous letters through which I made an appeal to the relevant authority to solve the long-standing pay-scale problems of Professors and Associate Professors of Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka. Although the main problem

is yet to be solved, still we are glad to record here that the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) has recently given genuine pay-scales (Grade 3) to the Professors of BAI by implementing a previous order allowing fifty percent of the Professors on seniority basis to

draw their pay in Grade 3. Some of the Professors have either died or retired from the service, and majority of them have received their pay-scale, but the newly promoted Professors are to wait for several years to get their genuine pay-scale under the criteria.

Anyway, we extend our thanks and gratitudes to the Ministry of Agriculture for implementing the previous order. It is sincerely expected that the MOA will expedite the process to settle the pay-scale anomalies of the Associate Professors at the earliest thereby granting genuine payscales for both Professors and Associate Professors of BAL.

M Zahidul Haque General Secretary BAI Teachers Assoc

Euro-ambassadors Sir, My attention was drawn

to a news published in your hands of law. This is not only a

demonstration of disregard to the law of the country by these ambassadors but also a kind of intervention in our country's internal affair.

The writer, in hiding has presumably hurt the religious sentiments of our people and for that she has been indicted for the offence as per law of the country. Her innocence has to be proved at the court and for that she must come out from her hiding and surrender before the state for her protection. The state bears the responsibility to accord her full protection and she should not seek any other alternative to escape from the law of the land.

If the Western diplomats contemplate that our government cannot be able to offer a person an adequate protection in our country, how is it that they are here? Their job supposedly, here

is to represent their country not to offer protection to any fugitive.

they are residing and must refrain from meddling in the country's internal affairs.

Md Jalaluddin Iqbal

daily on 20.7.94 regarding some Euro-ambassadors' concern towards a feminist writer's protection in Bangladesh. It is with an effrontery as well that they have joined in hands to relieve an absconding writer from the

Diplomats must learn to respect the law of the country

Mohammadpur, Dhaka