

Solidarity Day

The National Revolutionary and Solidarity Day will be observed throughout Bangladesh today, mostly under official and ruling party sponsorship. If we put the rhetoric aside, what is observed today by the ruling party is the coming to power of General Ziaur Rahman, back in November '75. With the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman earlier in August of the same year, our country came under army rule through the guise of Mushtaq's so called government. This period, known as the 'rule of the majors' — reflecting the fact that the putsch against the elected government of Bangabandhu was carried out by a group of highly ambitious and power-hungry majors — resulted in the decision by the senior officers, led by Deputy Chief of Staff, Maj Gen Khaled Musharraf, to capture power and restore what was euphemistically called 'the chain of command'. This was a highly misunderstood move, as it entailed putting under house arrest the popular Chief of Army Staff, Gen Ziaur Rahman. A soldiers' uprising led to the fall and murder of Khaled Musharraf, and many of his colleagues, and put Ziaur Rahman at the helm of the country's affairs in a military regime.

Yes, Zia's was a military coup, but one with a difference. He was in power, but could legitimately claim that he did not try for it. He was placed there by the popular uprising of the soldiers. That single fact gave Zia an extraordinary moral strength that brought him a large following in the civilian arena, and helped him to mobilise the public support that he was able to. Among the first of Zia's achievements were the restoration of multi-party political system and freeing of the press from government control. The other significant success, and one that occurred outside the public view, was the restoration of discipline inside the army. The coups of August and November 3 and 7 wrought havoc inside the army and common soldiers started killing officers for personal revenge, as it occurred during those terrible days of November. Zia's firm hand was able to restore some semblance of order, but not before he had to quell, and violently at times, several coup attempts against him.

He founded BNP and won popularity through commitment, leadership and emphasis on a development agenda. As to his failures, one that disgraced many of his ardent admirers was the needless and reckless manner in which he placed many collaborators into positions of power and public office.

Since then the army has come a long way. In 1991 anti-autocracy struggle, it helped to restore democracy. On this solidarity day, it is our firm belief that the effort towards strengthening democracy will gather speed and the current political deadlock will be resolved in an amicable manner.

A Mother's Desperation

The country's laws prohibit sale of human beings. Yet at times children — the new-borns in particular — get sold in public. One such incident has just taken place in a village called Sasash in Rangpur district. According to a report published in a Bangla daily, one Sabura Begum, who came to live there a few months back after her husband had died of diarrhoea, has sold his 12-day old baby to a childless couple. Has she made a crime?

The question may reverberate across the length and breadth of the country and still the answer may not be easily available. Even the laws are likely to stand helpless before the tragedy and desperation Sabura Begum was subjected to. Sabura, unlike another mother who made sensational news by killing her daughter with the purpose of selling the young one's eyes and other organs, is more sinned against than sinner.

Her fate has brought her to a place that has been severely hit by drought and where virtually exists a famine-like situation. The large family of her sister, with which she came to live, can no longer afford to feed its members. Hers might not be a totally unwanted presence in that family but pregnant Sabura surely was a burden on it. Half-fed or starved, Sabura does not have any breast-milk to feed her baby and the question of buying powder milk for her simply does not arise. Unless she left the baby in someone else's care, the baby's life would be in danger.

Faced with such a difficult choice, Sabura has perhaps taken the right decision. After all we cannot expect generosity from our society or the state itself to save the lives of such babies. Her outsider status even did not qualify her to get a card meant for such disadvantaged mothers. At least she now can hope her child will survive. Her husband dead and now without the baby, Sabura finds a life so terrible in a loveless society. Has that society any right to persecute her for what she has been forced to do?

No Last Word in Love

Love and war know no laws, so goes a dictum. A lover can do everything under the sun for the beloved. Didn't Hamlet, in his eloquent best, claim his was a love for Ophelia thousands of Learites could not match? This shows that lovers tend to brag of their love more than they actually do. Hamlet's indifference was what led to Ophelia's death and yet the same man in the grave dug for her burial declares his unfathomable love for the dead girl.

Modern heroes, unlike Hamlet, date with their fiancées accepting living together without marriage as a way of life. There are thousands of different styles that modern lovers have invented to enjoy life. But on one fundamental issue, the reactions of all lovers follow a pattern: betrayal or unrequited love and the pattern may be either deep disappointment or revenge. A Sri Lankan soldier of the elite commando unit has demonstrated what tragedy even the news of a spouse's betrayal can lead to. The commando shot dead as many as eight people, including his wife, from his father-in-law's side. In China a jilted man torched the dormitory where his girlfriend resided, and succeeded to kill as many as 12 of the inmates. Whether his beloved was among the dead is not known.

Modern lovers however no longer try to show that they experience any emotional breakdown. The only inconsistency that is noticeable most of the time is that the lovers themselves make an overt attempt to prove that they are unaffected by the separation. Unfortunately, this is not always the case among lovers of less enlightened background. They are accustomed to reacting the way the Chinese and the Sri Lankan have done. Love loses its meaning in either case of 'couldn't care less' or of fiery jealousy. A middle course may be ideal. But there is no last word in love.

WAR has finally begun in Bosnia. It is a development most humanists should welcome. For thirty-one months the world had been witness to genocide. It carried all the insignia of an earlier holocaust — an exclusionary nationalist ideology, the stated goal of ethnic cleansing, concentration camps, emptied towns and burnt villages, refugees in the millions, and ceaseless suffering. It carried also its own special signature — rape camps — which were discovered in the United Nation's Year of the Woman. The great western powers which had sworn, for five uninterrupted decades, to let it happen 'Never Again', acknowledged that a genocide was in progress but let it go on at the centre of their enlightened world. At cold war's end, supreme moment the triumph of the free world, humankind was given a long plunge into the heart of darkness.

The cynicism which provided the framework for Serbian atrocities was in fact greater than that which characterised Europe and America during the Nazi assault on Jews and Gypsies. After all this is a time of peace and great prosperity in the west, a time when the virtues of multi-culturalism are extolled and alarm bells are sounded against the menace of religious sectarianism. As though indifference was not enough, in this instance the world powers effectively aided the aggressor by maintaining an arms embargo on the land locked victims. Their studious wallowing has been worthy of a comic opera. Take note of these howlers: The UN

Now it's War in Bosnia

Eqbali Ahmad writes from USA

The rebound of the Bosnian Army's V-Corps offers a lesson to defeatists who abound in contemporary third world. Ill-equipped and ill-trained, it had been fighting desperate rearguard battles in the Bihać area.

Security Council passed resolutions while ensuring that they shall not be enforced. UN peace keeping forces were sent to Bosnia without a mandate to stop even open slaughter of civilians. Western leaders and UN officials accused Serb leaders of war crimes but accorded them the protocol of statesmen, wined and dined with them, and had their smiling photo opportunities with the declared war criminals. Officially, they have described Serb assault on Bosnia, a UN member, as 'aggression' and, also officially, proposed rewarding the aggressor a hefty 49 per cent of Bosnian territory. Bosnia's besieged government accepted this unjust peace proposal. The Serbs rejected it. This is where things stood on October 25, 1994, when war miraculously began in Bosnia.

For one who has brooded over the Bosnian tragedy, this has been a week of relief. In the northwest, the Bosnian army's V-Corps has been gaining dramatically in pincer moves. It has reclaimed more than a hundred miles of territory from the Serbs in the Bihać pocket. The Serb forces are reported to be fleeing in disarray, abandoning significant amounts of weapons in an unusual display of panic.

Success improves relationships. By November 2, the

Croats had joined the Bosnians in capturing the strategically important town of Kupres which Serb forces had captured and 'cleansed' in April 1992. When the Bosnian army consolidates this gain, it will open the strategic highway between central Bosnia and Croatia's major seaport at Split, thus ending Bosnia's crippling handicap — its logistical isolation.

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The town of Bihać where thousands of people from the neighboring villages have taken refuge of sorts, was declared a safe haven by the UN. But the Serbs continued to shell it from surrounding hills they held. A renegade politician and businessman named Fikret Abdic organized defectors from V-Corps, joined the Serbs, and occupied the northern part of the Bihać area. But the Commander of the V-Corps, Atif Dudakovic held on with a single tank and two mortars: trained and exercised the remnant of his army, and five months ago swept through Abdic's enclave and captured weapons including two tanks. On September 12, he also beat back the Serb

offensive which had followed Abdic's defeat.

The V-Corps' story is especially dramatic: but the improvement in Bosnia's fighting capability is broad based. Its training and morale has improved. It has improvised backyard factories to produce arms and ammunition. It has taken initiatives to capture enemy weapons. Above all, since last March when US officials helped restore the severed alliance between Croatia and Bosnia, land locked Bosnians gained some access to supply routes and received modest amounts of arms.

It looks like a coordinated Bosnian offensive. On the eastern front the Bosnian army is pressing on the important town of Kulen Wakuf. To the south of Sarajevo, it has pushed forward toward Trnovo. Advance toward it has already yielded the Bosnian army its biggest gain to date in captured weapons including 7 T-55 tanks, 5 armoured personnel carriers, and 20 mortars. If Trnovo is recaptured, Bosnians shall be able to resupply besieged Gorazde where thousands of refugees have congregated. Bosnian army units have also taken rare initiatives around Sarajevo in the Mount Igman area, a UN enclave from where Serb artillery pounds the capital city at will. The UN's British

commander has warned the Bosnians to withdraw and, with uncharacteristic haste, threatened NATO air strikes. The hitherto pliant Bosnians have responded that they shall not withdraw from the UN 'demilitarised zone' until it is really demilitarised and Serb bombardment from there or Sarajevo stops. Meanwhile, the UN and NATO have just agreed on a more aggressive air-strike policy. Is that a hopeful or an ominous sign?

For those countries and peoples who care for the fate of Bosnia, it will be a mistake to assume that these developments assure an end to Bosnian suffering. Their survival as a sovereign people remains in question. The Serb forces shall most likely receive renewed support from Belgrade. If the Bosnians are starved for supply they could again be facing genocide rather than ending the war successfully.

In this context, the Muslim world has a special responsibility to aid the Bosnians who are victims not only of fascist aggression but also of liberal callousness which has roots in the western world's anti-Muslim prejudices. It is thus that it has permitted aggression and genocide against the most multi-cultural and universalistic among contemporary Muslim states.

During 1991-1993, Muslim governments failed abjectly to challenge and break the European powers' unjust and irresponsible arms embargo on Bosnia. In a post-cold war world in which the great powers are probing for vacuums and vulnerable world spots, that failure has been costly already not only to the Bosnians but also to the future of the Middle East and, possibly, South Asia. The rebound of Bosnian resistance offers Muslim governments a second opportunity to help Bosnia. On our part, the people world over have a moral and political responsibility to organise, on as large scale as possible, aid to Bosnia.

At the UN, there is talk again of lifting the arms embargo. The United States favours it. France and Britain do not. And Russia opposes militantly. It is a can of worms better left to the big powers who at best will keep the embargo for another year. What is desperately needed is the immediate start of quiet and unpublicised aid to Bosnia. Recent Bosnian territorial gains have made the passage of aid possible for the first time. It would require a modicum of organisation which Bosnians have: modest amounts of arms and money which Muslim governments do have, and a certain will to sovereignty and solidarity which our rulers lack and will have to muster.

The writer, an eminent scholar and commentator on contemporary affairs, is currently teaching at the Hampshire College in the USA.

The regular weekly column 'Along My Way' by S. B. Chaudhuri will be published the day after tomorrow.

Bill-bashing Likely Despite Haiti and the Gulf

Kevin J. Kelley writes from Washington

US President Bill Clinton has won domestic support for his handling of tensions in Haiti and the Gulf. However, despite these recent foreign policy successes, Clinton's Democrats are likely to be big losers in the forthcoming mid-term elections.

Mid-term mandate: Senate seats up for grabs



lations committees.

An enhanced role for these arch-conservatives will make the US less likely to intervene in situations like Rwanda and Haiti. At the same time, the Republicans are vowing to re-inflate military spending. They might also demand a more aggressive US posture toward strategic foes such as Iraq and North Korea.

All but one of the Black Caucus' 40 members are Democrats. With their voices drowned out by a conservative chorus on Capitol Hill, much of the sub-Saharan region would again be shunted to the margins, as was generally the case during the Ronald Reagan-George Bush era.

Greatly increased Republican power might also bring about seemingly contradictory shifts in overall policy toward the developing world. Washington could grow simultaneously more bellicose and isolationist if Southern right-wingers such as Jesse Helms and 93-year-old Strom Thurmond gain better bargaining positions on the Senate's military affairs and foreign re-

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The elections will thus de-

termine not whether the US

moves rightward, but how far

it swings in that direction.

Due to Clinton's so far

popular actions in Haiti and

the Gulf, the Republicans no

longer appear capable of win-

ning majorities in the 435-

member House and 100-seat

Senate. Shifts of 40 seats in

the House and seven in the

Senate are needed for the

Democrats to become the mi-

nority party.

But it is possible that

Democratic losses will greatly

exceed those averages. And a

Republican gain of about 25

seats in the House and four in

the Senate could be enough to

ensure effective control of both

bodies by conservatives. That

shift would take place because a

small group of Southern Democrats could be expected to vote against Clinton on many key issues.

With Congress acting as a roadblock to Democratic initiatives, the Republicans would be well placed to recapture the White House in 1996.

It is Clinton's performance during his first two years in office that accounts in large measure for the Democrats' weakness in the run-up to the elections. Until the turnaround triggered by his moves in Haiti and the Gulf, Clinton was rated as unpopular in most polls. Many voters considered him indecisive and inexperienced.

Clinton's political standing has also been undercut by doubts about his personal ethics. He is widely viewed as untrustworthy because of allegations concerning marital in-

dicts. We must also see that how many and what amount of our country-made products are being exported. If we cannot keep a close track on it to maintain a balance between export and import, the situation may turn worse.

Marketing a product and search for a market are very vital points. If we cannot adopt an effective marketing policy of the international standard and put all necessary efforts into it, we shall not be able to achieve the desired fruits of the policy. I hope the concerned authority will keep a closer observation to this matter.

Motius Samad Chowdhury

Phultola Tea Estate, Sylhet

French ban on headscarf

Sir. We know what a genuine contribution has been made by France in Europe and America in the 18th and 19th centuries towards freedom, democracy, liberty and human rights of the people.

But now it appears that all the glorious past has been shattered all on a sudden by some present French officials on a trifling but sensitive issue by banning the wearing of head-scarf by school-going Muslim Arab girls in France.

Don't the Sikhs of India always use 'Pagree' (a headgear)? Don't the nurses in the hospitals and the nuns in the churches use headgear? Then

why this discrimination against Muslim Arab girl students?

The French authorities, knowingly or unknowingly perhaps, have violated the Article 2 and 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which read as follows:

Article 2 : Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedom set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Further, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article