

Face-off in Bosnia

The UN Security Council is to go into a special consultation session today, at the urging of the Bosnian government that Bihac be protected from an imminent Serb onslaught.

The prospect for international support dangled off and on, rather tantalizingly, before the moist eyes of the aggrieved Bosnian government short of really falling as a ripe fruit on its lap.

Hopefully, this will change now, after the United States has decided unilaterally to withdraw the arms ban on the Muslims and Croats who are fighting a common war against the Bosnian Serbs.

There is another way of looking at it. The peace plan was co-authored by five big powers, including Russia, a cultural ally of the Serbs; and to that extent, it is a document with a clear international character.

The USA deserves the thanks from conscientious people all over the globe for its unilateral gesture of goodwill to the aggrieved party. She has put the ball in the court of other powers to follow suit, particularly those in the NATO.

She has shown a great courage by distancing herself from her NATO allies on this particular issue. Earlier, some veto powers including Russia and China had objected to a US idea of a Security Council resolution calling for withdrawal of the arms ban.

Super-selling Manuscript

Decades ago there was a fad for measuring intelligence not only of living mortals but also of long dead men and women of genius. One man's name popped above all in quite a few of such attempts. Leonardo was the name.

A manuscript of Leonardo's notes and comments on wide-ranging topics, penned in about two years' time, exactly 486 years ago, has been sold by Christie's in New York on Saturday at the all-time record price of 30.8 million dollars or more than 123 crore taka.

This was indeed a fit recognition for the perfect renaissance man fusing art and the sciences. Although Italian renaissance dealt a mortal blow to European medievalism, intolerances and rule of dogma and prejudice continued to bedevil Christendom for another two centuries.

As a higher and more many-sided genius than him will ever be difficult to find, so also a more precious manuscript is unlikely ever to abound — specially when mankind is on the point of abandoning writing in long hand.

Exploiting the Healers

The Unemployed Doctors' Association has in a recent meeting held at the IPGMR canteen adopted a three-point charter of demand. There is nothing of earth-shaking nature in these demands. Rather these reflect a side to the medical profession almost wholly unknown to most people.

To avoid this nightmarish situation medical students have long been agitating for guaranteed government jobs on passing out from their colleges. As overall government policy is moving away from the welfare state — that has become a lost cause. Private clinics and hospitals are, however, sprouting all over the towns and the young professionals are left with this only quarter to go to save their souls.

The demands of the Unemployed Doctors' Association relate to fixing a minimum salary at the clinics and making it binding on clinics to issue appointment letters, and to keep to a code of conduct ensuring appropriate service conditions for medical employees.

The clinics cannot be allowed to continue with their awful exploitation of the medical professionals. The government must intercede, if necessary intervene.

In reply to a question from Cable News Network (CNN) reporter a couple of days ago one of the conscious US electorates apparently from Midwest said — Clinton should go back to Arkansas — his wife too.

Undoubtedly, US peace efforts after the collapse of Soviet Union largely changed the political landscape of M-East. PLO got some patches of land in the occupied territories where they established their self-rule which is expected to expand in the coming months thus laying the foundation of the proposed Palestinian state which even Israel cannot stop now.

The peace agreement has formally put to an end 45 years of hostilities between Jordan and Israel. After the peace agreement, King Hussein said, "... all the children of Abraham will remember this day as the 'dawning of a new era of peace'.

THE mediating — or should we say facilitating — effort of Commonwealth Secretary General Emeka Anyaoku's emissary Sir Ninjan Stephen and his two aides in resolving the current political impasse of the country has unfortunately not been universally welcomed.

Peace and War in M-E

Historically, peace comes after war but this peace has apparently ignited a new war — a war by those who have so far been ignored or left out of the peace process.

declaring that two nations would "draw on springs of our great spiritual resources, to forgive the anguish we caused each other, to clear the mine fields that divided us for so many years".

This peace agreement of King, President and Prime Minister created a war-like situation and indeed sent shiver among ordinary Palestinians and Arabs in Jordan, West Bank and Gaza and also elsewhere in the Arab world. Reportedly many Jordanians asked why King was in a "rush" to conclude such a deal with Israel? Peace agreement stipulated trusteeship of holy places in Jerusalem with Jordan, which infuriated Palestinians and led to strong condemnation by them. Jordan, however, pledged in Casablanca Economic Conference last week to transfer the trusteeship to the Palestinians in due course which eased the situation.

The most radical group Hamas which was reportedly responsible for three terrorist attacks in Israel during the last couple of weeks that killed over 30 people indeed declared an open war against all the peace accords signed with Israel. Syria reportedly allowed a Hamas leader to warn Israel against any action against Hamas. He said, "If Rabin attacks Hamas, we will hit back harder". He "vowed to take its fight against the Jewish State anywhere in the world. Rabin will be responsible for expand-

ing the arena of battle and harsh actions would follow in any parts of the world if Rabin starts transferring the war".

Historically, peace comes after war but this peace has apparently ignited a new war — a war by those who have so far been ignored or left out of the peace process. Of course, President Clinton had issued strong warning to the terrorists. He said, "We can not, we must not, we will not let them succeed". But the Super Power is simply no match for the invisible terrorists. The spokesman of the terrorist

Such a mission led him to undertake a visit to Syria which is still in the State Department's list of terrorist countries. A straight flight from Washington to Damascus with the sole idea of meeting Hafez Al-Assad would have been an awkward one diplomatically. Hence President Clinton's visit to Jordanian desert.

President Clinton's meeting with President Hafez Al-Assad did not produce any breakthrough in Syria-Israel relation. He, however, said "I believe that something is changing in Syria. Its leaders understand that it is time to make peace". US President's visit has its own weight and implications. The US emphasis on peace with Syria may make hardline Israelis somewhat flexible and this may enable Rabin to commit total withdrawal, may be over a shorter period than stipulated, from Golan Heights for total peace with Syria.

Hamas is now a formidable force in Gaza and West Bank and all efforts must be made to arrest its growth and expansion, otherwise peace in M-East will be in jeopardy. As it is a terribly fanatic force and ever ready to die to embrace their brand of "martyrdom", no amount of force can deter them. Force will only make them more aggressive and desperate. A year ago Hamas had about 10 per cent

Palestinians' support. But now one puts it around 40 per cent. The way Hamas treated Arafat during last week at the funeral of a radical Palestinian journalist Hani Abed allegedly killed by Israeli Secret Service agents should be a lesson for the peace makers. The militant group later officially apologised to Arafat but the fact remains that he is losing control of the situation.

Therefore, if "dream of peace" of President Clinton is to be made a reality the total strategy to deal with fanatics and radicals has to change. Follow how others have reconciled with their sworn enemies. Why not do it with Hamas? Tackle Syria and Hamas simultaneously; the peace talks will be easier. It's only counterproductive to burn and bomb houses of alleged terrorists. In the process innocent civilian population including women and children get killed. These create snowball effects in terms of terrorism; one calling the other a terrorist and attacks continue. Israeli tactics of physically lifting of radical leaders and putting them in jail further ignite the anger of the radicals and fanatics. The situation is getting worse and indeed wild every day. They do not even spare Arafat now. The only alternative is to negotiate with them and bring them into the peace loop. This is not surrender, only tactic is changed. Go for a general amnesty with release of prisoners including radical leaders provided all terrorist attacks are stopped and they join Arafat and the peace process. This is the only way out; bombs and bullets can not stop them. When peace is the objective, war must not be the option any more.

The regular weekly column "Along My Way" by S B Chaudhuri will be published tomorrow.

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Muslehuddin Anmad

group Hamas openly said "threats do not scare us because we in Hamas want martyrdom".

Indeed, nothing can be done against some one who is determined, though wrongly, to die while carrying out deadly attacks against others. The world has witnessed many such horrifying attacks.

There are radicals, fanatics, terrorists everywhere and in all religions. It is no use blaming only Muslim "fundamentalists" (in my opinion, fanatics, radicals and terrorists should not be termed as fundamentalists as any one believing in fundamentals of a religion which teach goodness and peace cannot indulge in terrorist activities). The most precious thing to any living being is its life. One must try to understand why and at what stage one becomes prepared to

Chairman of the self-rule area and sits in the same sofa and shakes hands even informally with the Israeli Prime Minister. Latest and most interesting is John Major's recent overture to Jerry Adams of Northern Ireland. If all these could happen why not stretch the idea and the strategy a little further to M-East for an overall peace which could meet the "dream of peace" of President Clinton. He seems to be on the track except one or two deviations like dealing with Iraq, Kuwait etc.

The President of the United States does not come to the Jordanian desert just to witness the signing of a peace agreement. He had some other mission; the mission of peace and war (message of war to Iraq) that would help the US and its friends in the region.

Ninian has Brought Us No Shame

by Mahbubur Rab Sadi

If a respected personality from a friendly country volunteers to help resolve the problem at such a critical juncture, any complaint on the pretext that it is an intervention in our internal affairs, should be considered narrowmindedness instead of sensitivity to national prestige.

the tragic consequence.

When both democracy and the country are passing through such a crisis, the secretary general of the Commonwealth, a body of more than 40 democratic countries, has taken initiative to bring the feuding parties to the negotiating table.

The choice of Sir Ninian is no fluke. A respected national of a friendly democratic country, Australia, with a record of immense goodwill to his credit for resolving bloody confrontation in many other places of the world, Sir Ninian's is an august presence at the talks between the two parties.

It is indeed difficult to make out how his mediation can be an affront to our national prestige. If some consider it a shame on our nation, an MP of the ruling party has even crossed all limits of courtesy in his protest against the foreign mediation. Such irrelevant utterances could be

dismissed without comment, had it not concerned as important an issue as the holding of elections freely and fairly.

What really is shameful? We have been accepting loans, aid and assistance from foreign countries and aid agencies. Not only are we looking for such help but have earned the dubious distinction of not properly using them. At least the donors make such a complaint. After becoming independent, we have failed to rule ourselves and allowed autocracy to lay its stranglehold on us. In place of cultural exchange, we have imitated alien ways and developed a perverted culture in the process. The list of all such shameful account of ourselves is long. All this is enough for us to hang our head low.

If the political parties take opposite stands on a serious issue, politically conscious people of the country are most likely to have divided opinions. In fact, for the politically con-

scious people it is very difficult to be neutral on that issue. Even if there are a rare few, they cannot be of much help. For they have to enjoy the confidence of the contending parties. This is almost impossible. If a respected personality from a friendly country volunteers to help resolve the problem at such a critical juncture, any complaint on the pretext that it is an intervention in our internal affairs, should be considered narrowmindedness instead of sensitivity to national prestige.

Since before the birth of Christ, the people of this land have been accustomed to peaceful coexistence. Our ancestors have hated war. Engaging in muscle power, quarrel and battle is devoid of humanity. Muscle power is animal power. Human power lies in the head and heart. The Bangladeshes have historically inculcated such values and followed such a philosophy in

their life and society. The Bangladeshes may have lagged behind others in warfare and animal power, but in the exercise of mental faculty they were never a push-over. Today Moscow and Washington may search for peace after they have stockpiled war machines to destroy the world many times over, but we can take pride in our long tradition of non-violence.

Cannot a citizen of this nation with that enviable tradition behind it expect to play a mediatory role in resolving a crisis in any other country? In that situation, if the people there cry hoarse that foreigners' intervention is demeaning, how shall we receive it? Can we say that South Africa, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, Cambodia have behaved shamefully by accepting foreign mediation?

Member of the army or police of Bangladesh join the UN peace-keeping forces. Is it not

one of the programmes to resolve internal crisis in different countries?

The world is turning into a global village fast. It would be foolish to oppose the idea. Perhaps we are not in favour of revival of parochial nationalism. Many of those who feel ashamed to see foreign intervention, believed in a theory according to which the same class from abroad are closer than the different classes of this country. The fact is, such people's idea of respectability is also not free of mental poverty.

We owe Sir Ninian and his two aides our heart-felt thanks and gratitude. Whether their mediation will help save the crisis or not, the nation will really benefit from their sincere effort. We feel happy and proud for that. At the same time we congratulate both the ruling party and the opposition for participating in this good effort without thinking of losing their face. As the prospects of a reconciliation are getting slimmer, can we remind them that the vast majority of our people whole-heartedly like to see a peaceful solution to this crisis.

The writer is an ex-MP and founder of "Ganotantra Anushlon Kendra".

Applying Free Market Principles in Rural Bangladesh

by Nizam Ahmad

WE often discuss economic reforms at five star hotels' conference halls where participants include top bureaucrats, politicians, industrialists, chamber elites, journalists, economists, representatives of various UN bodies etc. In a much inferior conference hall, a small body called MOER has also had a pleasure of discussing free market concepts since 1991.

Moer's (Making our economy right) basic objective is to rub shoulders with the ordinary folks to reaware them of their natural rights to economic freedom as found in a free market. Our top bureaucrats and elite, even politicians and industrialists, are mostly believers in a government-led economy and not in the dynamics of the market. Much of their present success, wealth or status, are more or less directly linked to regulations and interventions of the government. Apparently, an industrialist is enormously successful because he had been sanctioned easy loans, given a protected internal market or, the exclusive right to his chosen business. Hardly any economic activity is possible without government permission. Also

the government honours the successful businessmen with CIP or other privileges to avoid stringent airport custom inspection or baggage rules which the ordinary travellers must comply with.

Lack of democratic institutions such as independent judiciary, TV, radio and press, often makes it easier for many a bureaucrat to do whatever he likes disregarding our disadvantages. Our villages in the northern districts are reportedly terrorised by under ground radicals. Life and property is most unsafe yet government acts poorly to counter this menace. But, where the government has acted in regulating and intervening in the rural economy. As such, seemingly, rural market forces are rather suppressed and economic activities threatened.

Government-approved import-substitution industrialists enriched themselves at the cost of the agriculturists. Our protected industrialists had sold power pumps assembled in Bangladesh almost at double the price till liberalisation of import rules. Examples are endless how our market potentials had been virtually destroyed for the sake of a

favoured few. It all began with late Shaful Azam's industrialisation drive in the then East Pakistan when he had headed the East Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (EPIDC). Their plan to industrialise the country required the tough handedness in forcibly curbing cane growers producing brown sugar and gur. All cane output must be sold to the North Bengal Sugar Mills so that the "approved" industries would not run short of raw materials. Home production of gur in villages is still a punishable offence. We have inherited such economic planning from the British Colonial masters prohibiting the farmer-craftsmen of Bengal to produce high quality textiles which English could not produce.

The policy of import substitution and inward looking industrial thinking is still held dear at posh conference halls. In contrast, rural Bangladesh having no access to Planning Commission and Ministries craves for economic policies based on the law of comparative advantage and also market demands freed of government

controls. Protectionism and government controls are creating neo capitalists who, naturally, control bank, insurance, export market, local market, chamber body panels etc. MOER initiated discussions with the rural people on the question of applying free market principles in rural Bangladesh. It is surprising and very encouraging that the common rural folk and economic activists understand market forces instinctively.

Kumarkhal upazila weavers do not get yarn at actual rates. Seventy per cent of the country's yarn requirement is locally produced in million-dollar spindle industries. These spindle industries actively lobby for higher rates of tariffs to protect their industrial privileges under anti-dumping laws flouted by Indians and Pakistanis. Higher tariff walls simply mean higher prices which the weavers must bear.

Who should survive then — the spindle plants or the country-wide weaving industry? Under a government-led economy, those having ready access to the corridors of economic

policy makers will be the ultimate winners. It is no wonder that Kumarkhal which had been in the Textile business since the last 100 years has lost the battle. Unfortunately though, they are now dependent on smuggled yarn from India. They have to pay once price for local yarn in the morning and another in the evening. An urban labour dispute or a power disruption further leads to hoarding and price fluctuations.

MOER's few rural discussions gather, that poor weavers are more keen to face competition than lobby with bureaucrats. They do not fear Indian or Dhaka manufacturers but they abhor government's otherwise economic obstructions to free play of market forces. Raw materials must have easy access to Kumarkhal markets and their finished products must be easily disposed of to wherever the market pulls. Kumarkhal traders must be free to empty warehouses and ship bedlins without complex formalities.

Many Kumarkhal artisans now work in India since Kumarkhal textile market has been most affected by government import substitution industrial policies. India and Pakistan probably subsidise their textile which enables dumping of their textiles affecting our genuine producers. But subsidy will ultimately weaken their efficiency and downgrade their quality of product Kumarkhal or other more-capacity industries can then bounce back and recapture their markets. Protectionism is likely to destroy any such comeback other than erecting higher tariff walls which is counter productive. The much talked about backward linkage to readymade garment contractors is based on protectionist law and may not help genuine Bangladesh producers. No nation makes everything and neither is any country

gifted with producers able to produce all that an economy consumes. Free market permits free flow of goods, services, capital, skilled labour and technology, and this is what the Kumarkhal textile based exactly requires but, the rural producers and consumers are constantly taking the economic bashing under regulative practices of the government.

Simple agri-liberalisation has boosted our rice production. The removal of grain movement permits, BADC's monopoly on selecting deep tubewell sites and fertiliser distributor enabled the farmers double their production. Sky would be the limit if the same farmers enjoy free market access to capital, technology and as such, markets. Thailand the world's No. 1 rice trader is one such glowing example of obstacle-free potentials of the market.

Free trade of Hong Kong and Singapore made a small play in China's industrial vastness. By adopting Hong Kong's free market principles, Deng's China is now the fastest growing economy in the world. If Bangladesh too adopts free trade policies like Hong Kong and Singapore, the Indians' so-called superior industrial advantage can also probably be dwarfed to an extent.

If the newly autonomous Palestinian authority wishes to match Israeli living standards and productivity, only free market forces can help the Palestinians to do so. Arafat's timely adoption of Hong Kong-style economic freedom and liberties to each resident of Palestine can achieve economic miracles. No government approved loans or tariff protections or, protected domestic markets, can help industrialise Palestine. In our case, specially, the protectionist theory of helping industries to mature and then permit external competition must be done away with.

To the Editor

Telephone

Sir, From time to time, we have occasion to come across newspaper reports stating that numerous applications for sanction of new telephone lines are lying pending for want of adequate provision of capacity in the telephone exchanges to accommodate installation of new ones.

There are good number of applications who have deposited their Demand Notes and are eagerly awaiting not for days and weeks, but for months for wiring and connection. While the Telephone

Department has failed to provide satisfactory service to the subscribers of analog telephones, they have, however, attempted to introduce newer devices and facilities for the telephone subscribers viz. Digital, ISD, Card Phone, Pager, Chordless, Mobile phone etc. which have opened up tremendous possibilities for the telephone users.

These additional facilities would have been very much appreciated if they were added after ensuring flawless service to the analog telephone users. There are however a good number of single unit houses or flats enjoying multiple num-

ber of telephones, which if they were a bit liberal and accommodative, could have been given to others, who are under pressing need and are waiting for it for long. The Department before sanctioning a telephone should see if the particular unit/flat has the benefit of using more telephones.

M R Islam, Mirpur, Dhaka

Graphics

Sir, Thanks to The Daily Star's map (Oct 31) I could get a clear conception of the 2-in-1 'Meghna' bridge, and the

Meghna-Gumti' bridge. This is actually one bridge in two parts, separated by a char/ island. Still, the report missed to mention the names of the two ferry ghats which carry the present traffic load.

We are not yet "graphics" minded. This is surprising when the use of computer makes it so easy.

The government write-up may be graphic personality-wise, but not graphics-wise. Keep up the innovative trend.

A Zabr, Dhaka