

Bosnia Update: Stiffened Attitude of the West?

By Arshad-uz Zaman

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Acid Test for the UN

Never before in the histories of NATO and the UN have they faced such a litmus test of their prestige, credibility and effectiveness as they do today before the audacious ploy of the Bosnian Serbs that knows no bound. Yes, we do welcome the shaft of light in the gloomy situation coming through the decision adopted by the majority of western powers to deploy a multinational force in the area in aid of the UNPROFOR taken hostage by the Serbian forces. But are their objective clear enough and is it equal to the task?

For one thing, the consensus has a gap in that the US, the only superpower in the world, is not committing any ground force; only that she is willing to provide equipment support to the MNF. For the other, after what the Serbian tormentor has done by rationing the release of the UN troops held hostage and linking the freedom of the remainder to a guaranteed stoppage of the NATO air strikes, the pertinent question is: what is the precise objective set behind the rapid deployment of the MNF?

It will be nothing short of a roar turning into a whimper if the additional force being put in place end up facilitating withdrawal of the UNPROFOR rather than re-strengthening it. This will mean throwing the Bosnian Muslims and Croats to the wolves especially when the discriminatory arms embargo remains arrayed against them. The Bosnian Serbs are the most well-equipped, they having taken the advantage of a ceasefire to arm themselves to the teeth. The US view that arms embargo should be lifted on the Bosnian Muslims to place them at par with the Serbs in terms of military capability needs now to be endorsed by her NATO allies. Secondly, the UN has no option but to graduate from peacekeeping to peace enforcement. The UNPROFOR must have the mandate to act decisively and an arsenal on the ground more than matching that of the recalcitrant party so as to force a result for peace and establishment of rule of law and justice.

The whole purpose behind the Serbian offensive is crystal clear now: they are up to renegotiating the contact group's peace plan to legitimise their annexation of the Bosnian territories. Russia can help a good deal in bringing them to the path of reason by not stretching the Slavic connection beyond a certain point. Her being a NATO partner now should brighten the prospect for this.

To Save Environment

The country loses, according to a report, as much as 25,000 acres of forest land each year. Part of the problem is explained by encroachment but not all of it. There are other processes at work which can be attributed to official irregularities, neglect and underhand dealings. Coupled with this, the flawed afforestation programme has seriously exposed our environmental vulnerability. An afforestation programme taken up in 1986-87 at a cost of Tk 157 crore aimed to raise our forest or tree cover to 20 per cent by the year 2015. A stock-taking after just eight years reveals how the programme has got messed up. During the period 11 crore saplings were planted but only 40 to 50 per cent of these have survived. The survival rate is expected to fall further.

The depletion rate of forest land — five lakh acres in the past 24 years after the liberation — and the serious shortcomings of the afforestation programme foreshadow a bleak future for the country's environment. Now why can't we protect the existing forest cover and gain from a well-intended afforestation programme? In the answer to this question lies the solution to much of our environmental problem. A vicious circle is in operation both on the social forestry front and on the natural forest front. Reportedly the high rate of the saplings' destruction is attributable to, among other things, vandalism and gross neglect. Involvement of a section of forest officials in illegal deals for logging has been found responsible for the depletion of forest land. This is a serious matter.

When our future is at risk due to environmental degradation, such wanton destruction of trees cannot be allowed. When reports on the destruction of saplings were published, the authority showed little concern. No enquiry of any significance was made to punish the offenders. Social forestry means society's involvement in the matter. If the involvement is total, the protection of saplings becomes easier to ensure. At the same time, forest management must undergo a radical improvement if we are to preserve a few more patches of the wooded land. It must be well-equipped and adequately manned and the staff must be made accountable for any loss of forest wealth.

Why Herbal Treatment

Health and Family Welfare Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf has aptly eulogised at a seminar the role of herbal medicine in improving primary healthcare in the country. The stress has been on the efficacy of this traditional cure for people who can hardly afford expensive medicines. Needless to say also that herbal medicines mostly have fewer side effects than other kinds of drugs. However the problem is that this great tradition of *kabiraji*, *ayurvedic* and *yunani* variety has witnessed a decline over time — thanks to lack of research and experiments.

Both quacks and inexperienced healers have taken advantage of the absence of standardisation in herbal medicine. So the minister's observations will only hold truth when order is restored in the profession that has gone off-rail in the hands of uninitiated people. If the traditional herbal medicare is based on the therapeutic values of herbs and leaves, the outlandish claims by the so-called healers or mountebanks to cure each and every malady — both mental physical — have no basis whatsoever.

Things can indeed change if the illegal practice by fake healers is banned and the genuine ones are encouraged to pursue the study of well-documented herbal formulas and their application in treating diseases. No doubt, this system cannot be expected to compete with modern treatment of various diseases — particularly the complicated and serious ones. But then there are some common diseases where the herbs can work wonders.

THE three-year-old horror scenario that is Bosnia, has taken lately more violent and intriguing turns. In these fast-breaking events, one more bloody than the other, it is easy for the uninitiated to lose the thread. We may, therefore, try to put some sense to these events and see things in their proper perspective.

According to reliable statistics, this murderous civil war between the Serb and the Bosnian Muslims and sometimes the Croats, has left more than 200,000 dead, or missing. If we include those who have fled Bosnia the number would be more than a million. They have sought refuge wherever they could — but mostly among their kith and kin in Turkey. Islam in Bosnia dates back to the days of the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century. Indeed the Ottomans built beautiful palaces and bridges and they called the capital Saray (palace) Bosnia. The Serbs in their vandalism against the relics of the Ottomans, have no doubt demonstrated their hatred of everything Ottoman. Modern day Serbs have carefully nurtured, for all these centuries, their hatred against the Turks.

Faced with this situation, which essentially is Serbian expansionism at the expense of the two other main ethnic groups — Croats and Muslims — a divided world community has remained more a spectator than a player. The stark reality is that the Serbs, because of their superiority in numbers and weapons, have captured nearly 70 per cent of Bosnian territory. The Serbs have held the capital Sarajevo hostage by encircling the hills around this beautiful city with heavy guns. Sarajevo is no longer the bustling lively city it once was, which housed winter Olympics.

Shortly after the outbreak of the crisis, the world community got busy trying a negotiated political settlement. The efforts amounted to accepting partly Serbian gains acquired by force from the Muslims. This whetted the appetite of

the Serbs sufficiently and she continued to feign negotiations while expanding her conquests. In these three years many negotiators representing important Western powers have come and gone and the latest is Lord Owen of Britain.

For the United Nations Bosnian crisis has been one of the toughest. There is a sizable multinational force on the ground (UNPROFOR) whose main role has been peacekeeping. Yet against the guile and force of the Serbs, this force has looked less and less credible. The Serbs have successfully diminished the role of this force to one of carriers of humanitarian aid, with their concurrence. At the murderous assault of the Serbs on the hapless Muslims, UNPROFOR has looked on helplessly. There has hardly been a ripple when Serbian guns killed the Bosnian Foreign Minister, while flying in a helicopter within his own territory.

It is when the Serbs are eyeball to eyeball with the West, that we find a little stiffening in the attitude of the West. The Serbs have so perfected the art of guile that they withdraw a little when they think that this is really the brink. Taking 377 western hostages and release of more than a hundred is one such latest incident, which illustrates the point. Air strikes by NATO on Serbian heavy gun emplacements around Sarajevo, has achieved the desired result of bringing some sanity in the Serb leader Radovan Karadzic. The latest drama of holding hostage has led to another beneficial result. This is the formation of Rapid Action Force. This is reminiscent of the Rapid Deployment Force, which made Saddam Hussein of Iraq surrender and leave Kuwait.

In the maze of daily unfolding events surrounding the former Yugoslavia, it is easy to lose sight of the essential. The bald fact is the world acknowledges that Serbs have conquered Bosnian territory defying the whole world. She must be obliged to disgorge those ill gotten gains. Diplomatic pirouette of the last three years has demonstrated that however talented the negotiators may be, it will yield results only when it is backed by credible show of force. That resolve has been lacking in the West, which alone have the power to oblige the Serbs to vacate her aggression. The formation of the Rapid Action Force is a right step in this direction. It has been clear all along that air strikes backed by ground forces can alone bring the Serbian leadership to their senses. Of all the Western states, France under new President Jacques Chirac appears ready to seize the initiative in this

direction. Yet, it is also clear that for the Bosnian crisis to unravel, total commitment of the sole superpower US will be needed. President Bill Clinton during his two and a half years of presidency has refrained from committing US troops on foreign soil. In fact US troops stationed in Somalia in the dying days of the presidency of George Bush were quickly withdrawn by Clinton. Sending US troops is not popular in the US. After the debacle in the mid-term polls, when President Clinton's Democrat party lost control of the Congress to his Republican opponents, he has to think hard before deciding on sending US troops on foreign soil. President Clinton has already crossed the halfway mark of his presidency and within a few months the race for presidency will start in right earnest.

Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown, goes an old adage. Nowhere it is more applicable today than to Bill Clinton, who appears on the world stage as the leader of the sole superpower.

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'A Thorn in Your Flesh'

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PAKISTAN is neither breaking up nor are its people losing faith in its *raison d'être*, as might be the growing impression outside. Were it to ever happen it would be a problem for India. To quote what former Pakistan President General Ayub Khan told me, "we will be a thorn in your flesh."

The Pakistanis' problem is the government, not the country. They have tried various alternatives — military dictatorships for three decades and civil governments for 15 years. It is the same feudalism in Sindh, the same overlordship in Baluchistan, the same tribalism in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the same chauvinism in Punjab.

The crucible of Pakistan has not been able to mix the various elements in a manner that would smoothen individual identities, those of Punjabis, Sindhis, Pathans and Baluchis. They continue to stick out like a sore thumb, even after 48 years of the country's formation.

The common religion, Islam has not provided the cementing force as is the country's experience. The fundamentalists remain unpropagated and demand a pure, an unalloyed Islamic state or whatever that means.

Belatedly Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has initiated action against the madrasas, reportedly a breeding ground for obscurantism. Loudspeakers at the mosques have been restrained; writing religious slogans on walls stopped, and foreign funds checked. According to her former Interior Minister Altaf Azhar she has thrown down the gauntlet at the fundamentalists by arresting five hundred mullahs of sorts.

Yet, liberals see such measures as only cosmetic changes. They believe that the action is too mild, too limited and too late. Although the mullahs have never registered any significant victory at the polls, they are a force to reckon with because liberals are reluctant to speak out against them out of fear.

During my one-week stay in Pakistan, I found support for the joint electorate in the drawing rooms. But very few take the position in public because the proposal is interpreted against the very grain of Pakistan, the two-nation theory.

That is the reason why Benazir Bhutto's repeated suggestion for the joint electorate has been vehemently opposed by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League, Jamaat-i-Islami and others. He

has even rejected her offer to meet him at any time at any place to discuss the proposal.

Indeed, the pathological hatred between the two leaders, spilling to their parties, Pakistan People's Party and the Muslim League (Nawaz group), has cast a shadow on any reconciliation in the country. It is now a simple matter of tit for tat. Benazir Bhutto did all to pull down Nawaz Sharif when he was in power and he in turn is doing the same now. All important issues have been relegated to the background. The economy has had the worst walloping.

The Benazir government has reportedly cancelled or revised all the projects the Nawaz Sharif government had initiated to liberalise the economy. Businessmen all over Pakistan have had a one-day strike to register their protest. She too has retaliated by arresting some and using official pressure to remove an elected business chief from a leading trade organisation.

Instead of mollifying them Benazir Bhutto has offered generous terms to foreign entrepreneurs. During her well-

publicised trip to America she has signed memorandum of understandings (MOUs) for an investment of \$12 billion. So diffident are Pakistanis that they call these MOUs as MOMs (memorandum of misunderstandings).

The strife-torn Karachi, in some ways, represents the defiance of locals against outsiders in the economic field. Not long ago, it was a thriving port which earned most of Pakistan's revenue. Now it is a shunned city from where both capital and investors are fleeing.

The estrangement in Karachi is not only economic but also political. The Mohajirs, who migrated from India to Pakistan in 1947 claim a share, rather a big one, in the governance of the country. Their methods over the years have become aggressive, their expression sectarian and their attitude haughty. But there is no doubting that they represent an opinion that needs to be retrieved.

The Benazir government has dealt with them with repression; a large scale arrests based on blank first information report, custodial deaths because 'the suspects refused to talk' and dire harassment of

people whose only crime is that they are related to the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM). Islamabad characterises the MQM as terrorism and deals with it ruthlessly. It has promulgated an ordinance like India's TADA whereby a confession before a deputy superintendent of police will be considered sufficient proof of guilt.

Human rights organisations and liberals have strongly protested against the measure. The Karachi Declaration, adopted by South Asian Human Rights Organisations on April 29, condemned efforts to curb individuals' rights. But Benazir Bhutto, who addressed the conference, rejected the plea not to legislate the ordinance. She is determined to use all methods to fight terrorism, an undertaking she has probably given to the Clinton administration when she was in America last month.

Her vow to fight terrorism has in fact paid dividends in the US, which has reportedly promised to make a one-time exception to the Pressler Amendment to supply 28 F16 planes (inscrutably, the num-

ber has come down from 38 to 28) for which Pakistan, paid hard cash some years ago. She may not have set river Potomac to fire but she has unfrozen the relationship between Washington and Islamabad.

Pakistan President Farooq Leghari's visit to New Delhi — Washington has watched it closely — may have been Benazir Bhutto's way to test waters, before she herself jumps in to mend fences with India. I found a sudden pause in the shrillness of her government's statements on India. People do give the impression of burying the hatchet, realising more than before that the fallout of unfriendly relations may spell disaster to the well being of South Asia.

But Kashmir is very much in the minds of the people, who want its settlement before normalising the relationship with India. One widely argued solution is that the Muslim majority valley should be handed over to Pakistan. They realise that Pakistan cannot forcibly take Kashmir from India, nor can it impose a solution on it by a proxy war. But they believe that by internationalising the problem — they are very much depending on Washington — they can gener-

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Don't Call 911

IT is one of the greatest unsolved crimes of the century. Hundreds of New York policemen descended on Washington and caused a drunken rampage — molesting people and causing property damage in their hotels and meeting rooms.

Witnesses said that the cops turned on fire hoses, slid down escalators and harassed women guests in the hotel. Despite such public behavior, the New York police brass claim not to have a clue about what happened.

Some of the world's most celebrated detectives were called in to solve the crime. Sherlock Holmes flew in from England.

He studied the photos of the drunken police hanging from the windows and then said to Miss Marple, "Did anyone hear a dog bark?"

Miss Marple shook her head. "If they did nobody will admit to hearing it. The New York police we interviewed all said that they were in the Library of Congress studying for their sergeant's exams."

Columbo, who had just arrived, said, "I talked to a police captain who claimed that when he walked through the halls of the hotel, his men had brooms on their shoulders and sheets tied around their necks and were clucking like chickens."

Father Brown joined in. "We had no choice but to eliminate them as suspects. The people who committed this dastardly crime had to have detailed knowledge of the inside of the hotel. Otherwise how would they have any idea how to slide down the escalators with cans of beer in their hands?"

"Did anyone find out where the butler was all this time?" Poirot inquired.

"He had a good alibi. He was being beaten up by a homicide squad from the Bronx, so he is no longer part of our inquiry."

Maigret asked, "Were the police armed?" "Each and every one of them. Don't forget, their role is to protect the public at all times. Even if they have lost control of themselves, they are under orders to keep their weapons tucked in their belts just in case a citizen goes crazy."

Sherlock Holmes was still curious. He walked around the Hyatt Regency lobby. "Miss Marple, why wouldn't the dog bark unless he personally know the policemen who were tearing up the hotel?"

She responded, "Perhaps they don't allow dogs in the hotel."

I talked to the policemen from New York City who attended the Washington gathering, and none of them has any memory of the event," said Mike Hammer. "One cop doesn't even recall being in uniform that weekend."

Father Brown said, "One of the guests in the hotel said that she observed three policemen dumping two banquet tables down the elevator shaft. I've had a DNA lab study made of their fingernails if anyone is interested."

Kojak told the group, "If any of my people is involved, I'll take it straight to the New York police investigation bureau, and I will make sure that the officers who ran amok never get to play in a Kojak episode again."

Sam Spade was looking under the couch in the lobby.

"What puzzles me is why the police would sound a fire alarm when there was no fire."

Miss Marple said, "Maybe they're not as bright as we think they are."

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OPINION

Embankment before Relief

Tomotsu Kayano

even sometimes exceeding its expected capacity limit of 1,000 people per shelter. In 1991, there was only one cyclone shelter in the island which accommodated 1,200 people but 422 people had lost their lives in the same command area (1km radius) which was the tragedy of Nijumdwip in 1991. Since then, three more shelters have been built providing enough capacity to accommodate all people in the island with other small pucca buildings.

Today, Nijumdwip people are well-organized. The local committee which was formed for the six-month duration relief work after the 1991 cyclone, has survived four years and it is now working as the people's self-help, self-defence organization against natural disasters. They know how they can protect their lives and property at disaster times and, most importantly, what is needed for better disaster preparedness. They are confident that, if their island is protected by the embankment, they can manage the recurring natural disaster by themselves.

The disaster which hit the coastal belt in Bangladesh in mid May 1995 seems to be giving us a precautionary signal that just the synchronization of spring tide and depression can cause this widespread damage in the coastal belt. Experts may debate on the factors behind this phenomenon such as

have been totally damaged. Other damage to property recorded loss of 50 buffalo, 150 cattle, 800 goats, 200 sheep, 6,000 poultry birds and fishing net worth Tk 1 million. People were telling us that, unlike 1991 cyclone when the water came from only one direction, this time water came from every direction and left wider area inundated for longer time than in 1991.

However, what struck me most in Nijumdwip was not the devastation, but the people's initiative and effort for rehabilitation with their own resources without waiting for the relief coming from outside. Nijumdwip people themselves have opened the feeding centre with its own collected resources and started providing food to 360 people who were still staying in three cyclone shelters at that moment. No cry for relief was heard from them. When asked of their priority needs, they gave us a clear and uniform answer that was 'embankment'.

Nijumdwip is known to us as the area of high awareness for disaster preparedness. The survey conducted at 29 JRCs supported cyclone shelter command area in Hatiya, Nijumdwip and Monpara last year had shown that the cyclone shelters in Nijumdwip were most utilized during 1991 cyclone and peak warning time in 1992 and 1994.

To solve Bosnian crisis

Sir, Following holding of 260 UN troops hostage and to use them as human shields by the Serbs to meet their sinister designs, what would the UNO, USA, UK, France and NATO do next in Bosnia?

Although the Serbs have committed the most heinous and treacherous act of the 20th century and the bestial savagery of Radovan Karadzic can be best compared with the acts of Attila the Hun we are required to exercise maximum restraint and utilise our wisdom and diplomacy to save the lives of the UN peacekeepers.

Under the present complex and delicate situation we strongly feel that following two steps are the only possible ways to solve the great crisis peacefully and to save the world from great catastrophe:

1) The UN may station a minimum half a million troops

in Bosnia. 2) The UN members may put all the Serbs living in their respective countries including the USA, UK and France, under house arrest temporarily for the release of all UN peacekeepers.

O H Kabir Dhaka

A life I feel!

Sir, I intend to write on recent happenings of life. A life I feel definitely but never I think it is life! A system I follow but never I feel there is a system of law anywhere in Bangladesh. Today the world and its mankind are facing a grave situation caused by going against the system of laws. What happens in our country is due to our hopeless political. By which we never can expect anything better! This is our agony of fate. Difficulties of our life lie within the ongoing situation. A

complete picture of our life is not visible because of mistakes done by the politicians. They are doing everything but there is no sign of improvement anywhere.

A standard of life I maintain, but never with heart's content! It is mainly for the ever-soaring price of essentials! These are the realities of our life! But these are made by mistake — no solution is still dawning! Life is full of happenings — life is also full of understanding and full of adjustment! But for want of adjustment and understanding we, the hopeless citizens, are facing the situation created by none but our fellowmen.

The prevailing situation is the main reason for the degeneration of law and order situation. And no change can be expected if there is no adjustment.

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