

Carries No Conviction

The government has issued what we would call misplaced orders to the Roads and Highways Department to stand guard over the setting up of roadblocks for extortionist purposes anywhere in Bangladesh. They are being banked upon to undo these, when put up, with police assistance. In other words, the primary responsibility is being vested in the R&H Deptt. Provisions of a 1925-vintage Bengal Highway Act have been invoked to respond to a many-fanged problem of mid-nineties which must not have been foreseen nearly three-quarters of a century ago. A height of contemporary amnesia taking refuge in a hoary past! Psychiatrists may have their own explanations for this phenomenon of an excavation mentality, but we, in the media, regard the aberration as tantamount to scratching the surface, or scratching the back, if you will, because in prudence perhaps the problem could not be faced head-on without stirring the hornet's nest here and there. So, the move carries little conviction. Toll collection has been narrowly viewed as something causing dislocation in the road communication so that it is the highway department which is to be involved in enforcing the law there. The citizen's right of way is highly sacrosanct. From this point of view blocking his movement is a big offence no doubt. But then comes robbing him of his money and may be his other belongings with a scowl which constitutes a virulent criminal offence coming under the jurisdiction of the law enforcing arm of the government. Can the Roads and Highways workers match the armoury of the *mastaans* at work on the roads or their assorted veiled threats? It is a job for the highway and local police; they must be in the frontline of information-gathering and action-taking and not as a rule called in by requisition after the thugs have taken over the roads. Moreover, the queer initiative misses out on the unpteen instances of extortionist collections that take place in the business houses, *bazars*, remote alleys, *mahallas* and tucked-away locations all over the country. So endemic has 'toll collection' become in the cities and mufassil areas that we urge a beyond-the-roads action to clip all the spread-out wings of *mastaani* and extortionism. There has to be a total law enforcement against them. Our hope is also that the licensing authority of the R&H Deptt to allow setting up of check-posts for 'certain reasons' will not be abused to impinge on free public movement.

Mubarak must Live

The assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia, where he had gone to attend the OAU conference, is a stark reminder of the radicals' power and reach. Thank God, Mubarak and his entourage were unharmed and could return home safely. The radicals, although unsuccessful in their murderous attempt, have achieved enough through this criminal act. Egypt has been passing through a crucial — and no less bloody — phase of its modern history, thanks to the rise of religious fundamentalism there like in many other countries in the Middle East and Africa. Ever since the assassination of his predecessor President Anwar Sadat, Mubarak has been fighting the threat of an Iran-style Islamic revolution. Under his leadership Egypt has been able to pursue the ideals of secular and modern democracy so far. But the cost too has been great. The fundamentalists' cunning and guiles have won over a sizeable number of people in society. No denying the fact that some of the social and health programmes run by the radicals have had an immediate appeal for the poorer section of society. Hosni Mubarak has certainly made possible the recovery of his country's economy, but the benefits are yet to reach the bottom layer of society. The radicals are exploiting the situation to their advantage. Things, however, could certainly be better, if Mubarak were not forced to fight off the radicals. Attacks on foreign tourists by these groups have had their impact on the country's economy. Terrorist acts within society — such as attacks on progressive clerics and writers — by the fundamentalists have upset social stability. But Mubarak's government does not seem to be fighting a losing battle like its counterpart in Algeria. A man of vision and courage, Mubarak must receive support from governments across the world. Indeed, he has been receiving support and sympathy. More — perhaps in the shape of logistic support and training expertise — will be needed to help the Egyptian President. Given our friendly relations with Egypt, we are outraged beyond measure by the dastardly attempt on his life. We strongly condemn it.

Rohingya Repatriation

The repatriation of the Rohingyas has hit a snag. Lately, the Myanmar authorities have been rechecking the Rohingyas refugees as they crossed over to the other side. Now the question is, why this rechecking at the receiving end is necessitated? Both Bangladesh and Myanmar authorities are being helped by the UNHCR in the repatriation process. The Myanmar government is only complicating the issue by insisting on rechecking of cleared cases which slowed down the return of the refugees. The issue is certainly going to figure in the three-day Bangladesh-Myanmar official level meeting starting today in Yangon. The point must be driven home that no Bangladeshi would find life in Myanmar greatly attractive, specially after what has happened to the Rohingyas in 1991. Rather, as reported earlier, many Rohingyas are missing from the camps. The reason is understandable. The memory of their sufferings at the hands of authorities in Myanmar made them desperate to escape repatriation. So the delaying tactics as adopted by the authorities on the other side of the border cannot be allowed to go on. For its part, Bangladesh has done what it could do to bring the Myanmar authorities to the negotiating table and also to provide food and shelter for the refugees fleeing the atrocities at home. Still as many as 58,410 Rohingyas are staying in camps in Bangladesh. Among them only 2,767 have had clearance from Myanmar authorities for repatriation. The fate of the rest is uncertain. This is unacceptable. They are the citizens of Myanmar and the government there must be ready to accept them. Let us hope the talks in Yangon on the subject will yield positive results.

LATELY the country's top business leaders seem to have joined the bandwagon of so-called economic diplomacy. Reports suggest that a group of 23 businessmen, led by Salman F Rahman, President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), last week set out for a month-long mission to Europe and North America "to promote Bangladesh's image before the overseas investors." To these business leaders, improving the image of Bangladesh appears to be "crucial in bringing foreign investment" in the country, and they are scheduled to visit most of the western cosmopolitan cities to accomplish this mission. A country that only two decades ago was unmercifully labelled as "bottomless basket" for its disaster-prone, aid-dependent character and still suffers from "image problem abroad," perhaps needs such initiatives. Moreover, there is no doubt that despite the existence of remarkable macroeconomic stability, flow of foreign investment — both direct and indirect — into Bangladesh remains dismal in any standard. Also, the question of substantial foreign investment cannot be ruled out once, among others, the needs for privatization of the utilities sector and establishment of backward linkages in the textile and clothing sector are considered. Foreign investments are often associated with transfer of technology and better management —

two important ingredients for success in contemporary global markets. Viewed from this perspective, the mission of the business leaders perhaps deserves appreciation. None denies that image is a crucial factor in attracting foreign investment. Countries that enjoy superb images, such as Thailand, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan, China and South Korea, Brazil or Mexico do attract a big chunk of foreign direct investment. But one should understand that the images of the Asian and Latin American countries that succeeded in enticing huge inflow of international capital are based on sheer economic realities — on the promise for higher growth and larger returns — not on the strength of cheap propaganda or tattle-tales. The anatomy is unbelievably simple. As the investible surplus capital mounts up in the developed world, and the developing economies are freeing themselves from numbing web of regulations, competitions for foreign investment is getting fiercer with the passing of every day. As the developing countries mentioned above promise higher growth and larger profits — compared to those in the developed countries — investors of the developed world are demonstrating increased willingness to accept the hardships of living and in-

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vesting in these countries. The business leaders — that have undertaken the arduous job of portraying Bangladesh's image abroad — should know that Bangladesh's image as a prospective land of foreign investment would depend largely on how high growth and large rates of return it can promise to foreign investors. Moreover, one should know that image cannot be manufactured for the purpose of alluring the foreigners — a

and there exist numerous ways to verify the information independently or otherwise. Moreover, real images hardly need to be conveyed — they do fly within the country and abroad — often in momentous speeds and magnitude. The remarkable macroeconomic stability that Bangladesh has orchestrated over the last few years is globally acclaimed, the models of Grameen Bank or BRAC

informal schools are replicated in many parts of the world, and the nation's success in attaining food self-sufficiency and population control are matters of world-wide discussion. These are just a few home-grown examples how sustainable image can be built on solid grounds. In fact, in the global village that we live in today, only such images can be conveyed with purpose without risking credibility. These examples — along with reduced dependence of the economy on foreign assistance — should send strong message to the global com-

munity that Bangladesh is no more a bottomless basket although it still falls far short of "an emerging Asian Tiger" as depicted by the Board of Investment (BOI) at a recent seminar in the capital city. But a major role in reversing Bangladesh's "poor image abroad" should be handled by the government — especially by the embassies and high commissions abroad. According to many observers, Bangladesh's image problem abroad has largely to do with the government efforts to collect tolls from the rich countries by showing excuses of cyclone, flood and poverty.

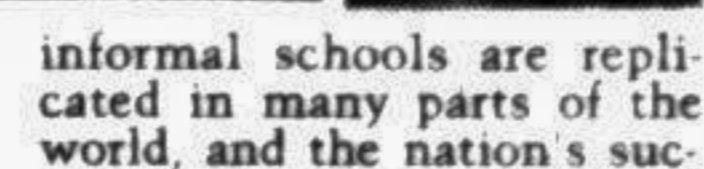
The government can easily promote Bangladesh's image by strengthening its commitment to economic diplomacy. In fact, in the post-Soviet, post-Cold War world, the focus of foreign relations has literally shifted to economic arena — as the future leadership of the world would depend largely on economic strength, not on military might. Largely in keeping with global tempo to this direction, the leadership of Bangladesh — including the prime minister and the foreign minister — often talked about economic diplomacy. Often there had been high sounding seminars and workshops that grabbed newspaper headlines, but at the end of the day, nothing substantial accomplished. The diplomatic mis-

sustainable image is built over a period of time, not manufactured to suit purposes at hand. Those who wanted to build empires on manufactured image — personalities like Hitler or Stalin, for example — have been dumped into the garbage of history. The images that Japanese workers are hardworking, the Vietnamese workers are loyal and disciplined, etc. are based on solid grounds, not on hearsays. Also, manufactured image can hardly survive in the contemporary world — where information flows across the oceans and continents almost instantaneously

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CROSSCURRENTS

by CAF Dowlah



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BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Not a Single Mosque Remains in the Uneasy Calm

Paul Hockenos writes from Banja Luka, Bosnia

Only a few thousand Muslims and Croats remain in Banja Luka, the biggest city under Bosnian Serb control, and every mosque has been destroyed. Gemini News Service reports on "ethnic cleansing" at work.

The pressure put on minorities to leave now takes softer forms, but it is no less effective. Muslims and Croats, for example, are sent to the frontiers as part of obligatory work crews. "Most Civilians would rather leave the country than risk their lives like this, and the authorities know that," says Curko. The UN estimates that from over 500,000 Muslims and Croats in northern Bosnia before the

war, today there are less than 70,000 in Serb-held territory. The city's Civil Migration Office processes the paper work and arranges transportation for evacuation. The mandatory price is 250 German marks per head, in hard currency. An uneasy calm prevails over Banja Luka in the wake of the successful Croatian military offensive in Western Slavonia in March. Heavily armed police, part of an ex-

tensive paramilitary force, stand at nearly every intersection. The region's Catholic Croats have paid dearly for Croatia's victory. A week after the offensive, four more Catholic churches were blown up. "We have nothing to do with Croatian policy or West Slavonia," says Banja Luka's Bishop, Franjo Kameric. "But soon there will be no trace of a people that has lived here for 1,700 years.

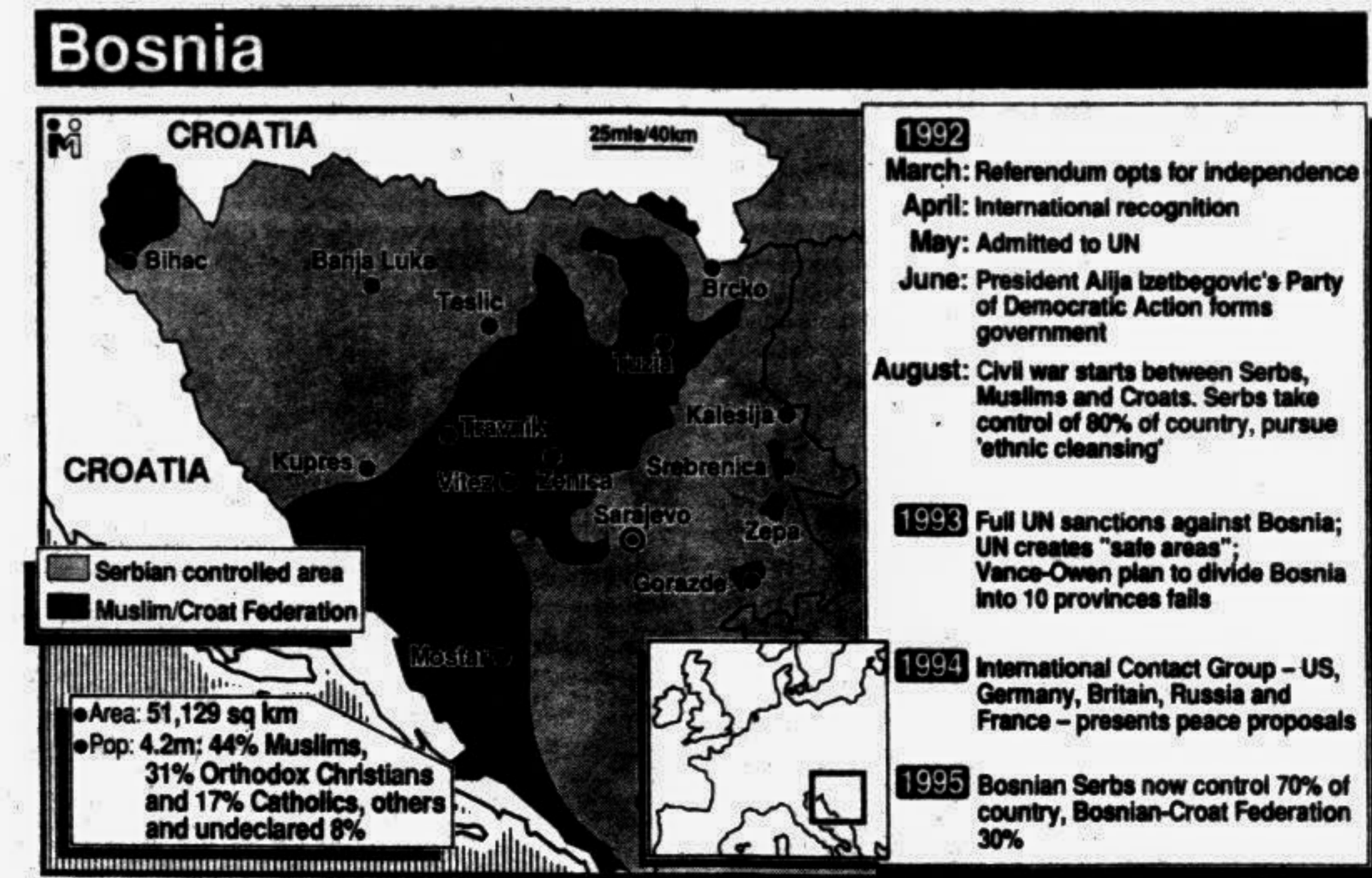
The Serbs are accomplishing what neither the Huns nor the Avars, the Turks nor the Tatars, the Turks nor the communists, managed to do." People preparing to leave Banja Luka Gather at the far end of the outdoor market, where they offer their last possessions for sale. On old blankets they display pots and pans, tools, window frames and doorknobs, anything they cannot carry with them. Six Gypsy women, squatting in a circle, say they wanted to leave but the authorities closed the borders when fighting broke out in western Slavonia.

Outwardly, Banja Luka, which never experienced fighting, appears prosperous and upbeat. Even the houses that belonged to Muslims and Croats are mostly intact, unlike the charred, ransacked Muslim villages outside the city. The houses' new occupants tuck small blue-white-red Yugoslav flags on their doors. "This means that a Serb now lives there," explains Ljubica, a French teacher and child of a mixed Muslim-Serb marriage. "It shows they're proud of it." Along the sparkling waters of the River Vrbas, the gray-white ruins of detonated mosques lie in toppled piles. "We old folks, we're the only Muslims left," says a withered peasant woman tending a

small garden plot with a friend. "My sons, grandsons and now great grandsons are in Sweden, Croatia and Canada. I'm too old to leave. I'll die here one way or another." Today, there are fewer "problems" than before, she says. The police are more responsive when their houses are shot at, for example. As she speaks, a young blonde man rides by in a horse-drawn cart. The other woman raises her finger to her lips. "Quiet," she whispers. "Those young ones from the village, there's nothing they won't do." The Serbs in Banja Luka show little remorse about the fate of their city. "Nobody wanted to see this happen," says 29-year-old Maria, a mother of two. But why, she asks, were there 16 mosques and only one Orthodox church? "It wasn't right to blow them all up," she reflects, "but perhaps 16 was too many."

Serbs and non-Serbs alike have noticed a definite change in mood in the city. The nationalist euphoria that gripped Bosnian Serbs when the war broke out has waned. "Before, any word against Karadzic (the Bosnian Serb leader) was considered treason," explains Ljubica. "Today, everybody curses Karadzic and the war. But they only criticise the corruption and the shortages, not his political goals or ethnic cleansing. People here want to live in their Greater Serbia in peace and quiet."

PAUL HOCKENOS is a Berlin-based US journalist.



IN SERBIA

Church Praises Unity and Blesses the Guns

Paul Hockenos writes from Belgrade

The taking of UN hostages by Bosnian Serbs has put the spotlight on differences between the rebel Serb leadership and President Milosevic of Serbia. The clash presents problems for the Serbian Orthodox Church which sees itself as guardian of a divided national interest — but blesses the rebels

tionally isolated for their policies in Bosnia. In Serbia's hour of need, the Orthodox Church has re-merged as the self-proclaimed guardian of national interests, which it sees threatened by the break between Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and the rebel Bosnian Serb leadership. While Milosevic has put his former allies under economic sanctions, the Church hierarchy has sided with the defiant Bosnian Serbs, sharply criticising the blockade against their "crucified brothers west of the (river) Drina."

When Milosevic rose to power as a nationalist-minded communist reformer in the mid-1980s, he opened new opportunities for the Church, like the chance to reconstruct the St Sava Cathedral. Simultaneously, the Church's bolder nationalist tone fueled the passions that Milosevic used to consolidate power. Today, the Church's high council of bishops, or episcopate, is dominated by hard-line nationalists, who are considered to wield significant power over the Church's supreme leader, Patriarch Pavle. In official memoranda it charges the "godless communist" Milosevic with forcing an "unjust peace" upon the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs. "Our Church is for the unity of the Serbian people and Serbian lands," reads one statement, "as well as for the just rights of other peoples who live with or near the Serbian people." Along with a handful of extreme right-wing parties in Serbia, the Church is one of the Bosnian Serbs' last supporters.

In Serb-held Bosnia, priests are in the front row of the self-styled parliament, as well as on the front lines, where units and even weapons are blessed before battles. "The Bosnian Serbs have given the Church everything it wants" says Dejan Anastasijevic, senior editor of the Serbian weekly *Vreme*. Religious instruction is mandatory, schoolbooks (even chemistry texts) are in Cyrillic script and all religious holidays are scrupulously observed. According to Mladan Zivotic, a philosopher and leading Serbian democrat, the Church and the Bosnian Serbs share a common clerical nationalist ideology, with a vision of a traditional, patriarchal society. "This is a fundamentalist, anti-Western ideology," says Zivotic. "It's something that even Milosevic can't accept." In Serbia proper, the Church has had less success in realising its political agenda. Last year, Milosevic personally vetoed a Church sponsored Bill to curb opportunities for terminating pregnancies. The nationalist clergymen emphasizes that a liberal

abortion policy drains the Serbian population and thus jeopardises the survival of the nation. Church insiders say that opinion among the clergy as well as their laity is far from united around the outspoken episcopate. But dissenting voices are seldom heard from the lower echelons of the strict Church hierarchy. Eighty-one year old Patriarch Pavle, widely considered a decent but apolitical man, is deeply disturbed over the war. In public, he condemns ethnic cleansing and war crimes, but places equal responsibility on "all three sides." The Patriarch is right, says Zivica Tucic, editor of the religious weekly *Orthodoxy*. "It's still to early to tell who's done what to whom. In this war, everyone is guilty." Church radicals, however, speak openly of the "Turkish aggression" against the Christian Serbs and the "crucifixion" of the suffering Serbian people. "In a recent issue of the weekly *Pogledi*, Bishop Atanasije of Herzegovina urged Serbs not to "capitulate to the world as Milosevic has. The vultures from the West will not get our signatures (for the peace plan)." Some observers say the Church could well face a backlash if it pushes its agenda too vigorously. In Serbia proper, people are weary of the war and increasingly impatient for sanctions to be lifted. Should the Church overstep its authority, it could find itself as isolated as its allies the Bosnian Serbs. GEMINI NEWS

To the Editor...

"Bengalee Muslim ICS" Sir, This is reference to Mr T A Khan's letter published in your daily on the 10th instant under the caption "Bengalee Muslim ICS". Late Mr Mujibur Rahman (of Faridpur) was indeed a nominated ICS. Any doubt about it can however be dispelled by confirming it from his son Mr M Rahman of Rahman, Rahman and Huq, a premier audit firm of the country. Mr Akhtaruzzaman Khan happens to be a nephew of Mr Humayun Kabir, a profound scholar, litterateur and Union Minister for Education of India. A celibate, Mr Zaman died some months ago at his residence in New Delhi. So far as I know, Mr Khan was a Bengalee. Incidentally, Justice S Rahman was the first Muslim to join the ICS through open competition in 1926. Tarun Kanti Barna Chittagong

Laudable steps

Sir, I was really thrilled to read about the long-awaited stringent measures taken up by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police to check crimes in the city, which includes checking vehicles on suspicious movement. It was also exciting to watch the smartly uniformed squads well equipped on motor bikes, ready to combat criminals. I hope this laudable step is continued for long and that they sincerely carry on their duties. If everything worked well the day may not be too far for the otherwise terrified citizens to breath peace and freedom. I hope in course of time the authority will also look into the vexing traffic problem, come out with some solutions that may prove effective. Vigar Moimuddin Dhaka