

Why Not Televising the Reference Session?

The nation is in the clutch of an all-enveloping flood. A respite in rainfall is holding waters to gentler ways. This broken, which it can at any moment, a disaster of the '88 size will take hold of this hapless nation. When such is the setting the attention of all our citizens, specially the politically conscious ones, is all concentrated on the goings-on at the Supreme Court's special reference session. Our people are on the whole more responsive to political aspects of the society's being than even most of the developed nations. They are specially interested in the current politico-constitutional crisis that has led up to a reference being made to the Supreme Court for its valued opinion on a subject of enormous public importance.

They, in fact, have a right to know about the crucial happenings at the SC that may have bearings on their lives. And, we are confident, they are also interested in the thought-processes by which the destiny of the nation is being made or unmade. They are as deeply down the waters of Shrawan as they are in the thick of partisan political talk. They would be tremendously helped in their understanding of the political right and wrong by the proceedings of the SC reference session.

What the SC is currently seized of is producing one of the best educative symposia in our history on a matter of the supreme law of the land which the Constitution is. And, by the way, if our people could only be exposed to the sessions more directly and extensively, this could amount to their participation in the governance in a very positive manner.

The above is all to say that as the reference session should have a far better coverage than now and in all media, we crave of His Lordship the Chief Justice to so order that journalists get better access to the proceedings by way of better accommodation and post-session briefings and a helping of the transcripts. In fact, we appeal to His Lordship to let the proceedings be televised. For this last wish, of ours as well as the whole nation's, to materialise, the Ministry of Information must quickly move the Supreme Court for necessary permission.

Banks Must Walk the Extra Mile

Bangladesh Bank, as the central bank of the country, has had its angle of vision to perfect the agricultural lending operations of banks and specialised institutions in the public sector. The ultimate objective has been to ensure stepped up farm productivity. The Bank's focus has recently even broadened beyond the conventional parameter of strictly financing agriculture to encompass fisheries and livestock, commercial nurseries and silk industry, and quite importantly, manufacture of agricultural tools including irrigational implements. Even within the realm of agriculture proper, BB sees the need for crop diversification and mixed cropping programmes to be bank-rolled.

However, the central bank's guidelines have mainly worked - not always to the expected degree though - with the NCBs and specialised institutions in the public sector over which the BB and the Finance Ministry jointly exercise control and supervision. The private sector banks, both indigenous and of foreign origin, have been somewhat lukewarm towards the government initiative for invigorating the small credit operations, both for agriculture and cottage industry. In addition to what the NGOs are doing to provide excellent material support to assorted self-employment projects, private banks should perhaps come in a bigger way to finance economic uplift in the rural areas.

The programme guidelines issued by Bangladesh Bank to the NCBs and the specialised credit institutions for fiscal 1995-96 require that priority be given to small and marginal peasants including the tenant farmers. The fact that crop loans for upto 2.5 acres of land will be exempt from collateral requirement is expected to qualify many marginal farmers as beneficiaries. On paper the small farmers have always remained on the sympathy list but in reality it is the peasants currying favour with the local influentials who take away a sizeable chunk of the loans.

The loans must reach the farmers speedily and on time - not out of reason. In fact, the floods make the situation more demanding. The banks must be prepared to walk the extra mile.

Bosnia Over the Precipice

The outrage felt in Bangladesh over the Serbian invasion of Srebrenica and the bandying about like chattels of the evicted innocent Muslim refugees from that UN-designated 'safe haven' becomes insufferable now with the news of a fresh advance by the aggressor towards Zepa. This enclave is said to be locationally indefensible.

It is in Gorazde that NATO allies can take a firm stand. Gorazde is militarily highly defensible, a strategic factor that evidently induced a laudable French ultimatum upon her NATO allies that they prepare to teach the Serbs a lesson there or else France came forward to do that unilaterally.

How France is going to convert this threat into a military attack on the advancing Serbs remains to be seen. However, let the basic premise for action change into accepting the fact that the Serbs have to be subdued with the force of arms alone.

I know this is the year the UN is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. On such an occasion, one is expected to come up with gushing panegyrics. And there is no dearth of persons, sometimes with the behind-the-scenes help and encouragement of the sizable UN public relations outfit, who are exactly doing the same. They remind us of the great ideals and noble sentiments enshrined in the UN Charter. They list the great "Declarations" adopted by the UN over the years. They recount the many resolutions adopted by the numerous commissions, sub-commissions, committees and ever proliferating specialised agencies created with the ostensible purpose of implementing all the declarations and resolutions. The implicit assumption is that all the expressions of noble sentiments never berating in the debating halls, all the epic struggles in the committee rooms over the right placings of the commas and semi-colons, and all the toils of the huge army of UN bureaucrats on the banks of the East River in New York, the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland and sundry other exotic locations must have contributed to the making of the world a better and happier place.

I wish I could join this chorus. I belong to the generation which has already witnessed the shatterings of almost all their illusions, both in the national and global context. Long gone are the illusions of socialist paradise on earth, and a democratic and prosperous homeland. Any more disillusionment cannot but cause more misery.

Yet, a look any day at the newspaper or the television is enough to destroy any illusion about the UN as an instrument of global peace or a defender of basic human rights. If the atrocities being committed day in and day out in Bosnia by the barbarous minions of Milosevic, Karadzic and Mladic cause reference and spineless acquiescence of Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Yasushi Akashi to the same cannot but destroy the last remnants of the illusions of any credibility of the organisation they represent. That these scenes generate contempt for these gutless

To the Editor

They want to be voters

Sir, I am a teacher by profession. I have many students from Reinkhyong Mouza. There are at least five thousand people living at Pukur Para, Boratholi Para, Charing Para, Baraya Para and Proyang Para, who were grouped here since 1956. These people had settled here after the Karnaphuli Dam was erected at Kaptai which caused the people to evacuate the valley which submerged under water in the same year. For more than two generations, these people are living here having nowhere else to go. It is an established fact now. There are two army camps, one each at Boratholi Para and Pukur Para. The area of the locality measures at least 36 square miles. It had so far been in Rangamati district under Bilaichari thana and these people had previously participated in upazila election in the year 1989.

Now myself being an Assistant Registration Officer in the area, many of the guardians of my students approached me to be identified and enlisted as voters which they endear to be. Therefore, I would like to draw the attention of the concerned quarters to this issue and request them to allow the poor people feel that they are not left out.

Md Tasaddak Hossain, Asstt Registration Officer, No 2 Ruma UP, P.S. Ruma, Bandarban.

France and nuclear test

Sir, 14 July 1995 was Bastille Day, and the French Government brought out articles and "specials" in many newspapers to remind us of France's glorious past and humanitarian commitment.

Can this then be the same France that is preparing to resume testing of nuclear weapons in its colonies in the South Pacific, safely miles away from Paris? The tests raise profound health, humanitarian and environmental questions. The tests also raise memories of the deaths of Greenpeace activists at the hands of the French undercover agents who bombed the environmental organization's flagship the "Rainbow Warrior" a decade ago. And perhaps worst of all, the tests have raised questions about the commitment of France, and indeed of other western nuclear powers, to nuclear non-proliferation. And there

Bosnia and the eUNuch on the East River

Weren't they trained to fight and are being paid to fight? Are they deployed only to count the number of shells lobbed by the Serbs or the number of children killed, or to accompany the odd food convoys the Serbs would occasionally let through their blockade?

wonders is really of little importance. The role of the UN in Bosnia has been far worse than that of a passive spectator. In many ways, it has been acting as an accomplice to the long running butchery. It imposed and still maintains, at the bidding of its Euro-American masters an embargo on the shipment of weapons to all combatants without discriminating between the aggressor and the victim. It made no distinction between the mass rapists and their hapless preys, between the 'ethnic cleansers' and their defenceless targets.

Further, those mandating the weapons ban could not surely have been so naive as not to know that the effect of the same on the Bosnian Serbs could only be very marginal, if at all. They had already been fully equipped with all kinds of heavy weaponry including sophisticated missiles and combat aircraft from the well-stocked armouries of ex-Yugoslavia by Milosevic who deservedly won the epithet as 'The Butcher of the Balkans'.

It is a matter of common knowledge that he is still doing it despite all the UN resolutions and blandishment. He is still serving as the paymaster of the Karadzic's pathological marauders. He is still providing the technical support to enable them to shoot down even American warplanes. The practical effect of the ban has been to deny the Bosnian government troops the right to fight for the honour of their women and the lives of their children, not to speak of fighting for their own lives.

The UN decreed 'no fly' zones, but Karadzic knows full well that its violations would be overlooked. After all Serbia is not Iraq where the least suspicion of non-compliance of a minute provision of any UN resolution is enough to deny milk and medicines for babies.

In April 1993, the UN Security Council decided to turn Srebrenica and five other Bosnian towns, namely, Sarajevo, Bihaq, Gorazde, Tuzia and Zepa as 'safe areas'

to be protected by UNPROFOR, the UN Protection Force in Bosnia. The Serbs hardly took any notice of it and continued their killing spree. The favoured technique was to cut off the supply of food and water. Then the beleaguered inhabitants of the 'safe area' would be forced to come out of shelter, only to be killed or maimed by snipers' bullets or lobbed shells. Children are the preferred targets.

The mandate of the UN representative and the UN soldiers in blue helmets seems to be confined to say-

ing, 'please, please, don't do it again or we'll be frightfully cross'. When a particularly gruesome scene of carnage is flashed on the TV screen or a UN personnel is publicly humiliated, the UN unleashes its ultimate weapons - another resolution of the Security Council deploring violence and calling upon 'all' sides to solve the 'problem' peacefully!

Now by overrunning Srebrenica and threatening to do the same in Zepa, Karadzic has made fully explicit the utter contempt in which he holds the UN, its resolutions, its soldiers and its functionaries. It is a contempt they have fully earned. What is even beneath contempt is the duplicity with which the UN have been treating the victims of Karadzic. It promised the inhabitants of Srebrenica and Zepa (most of whom are traumatised survivors of earlier rounds of ethnic cleansing) that they would be safe in there. They were made to surrender the few weapons they had. The women and the children have been thrown out by force, and their menfolk including even twelve-year old boys have been taken away to be massacred. And all these happened with the blue helmets looking on. UN Secretary General reacted

ter, because they were foolish enough to put trust in the works of the great eunuch on the East River in Manhattan. Televised humiliation of the blue helmets by the Bosnian Serbs was a little too much even for the Western governments to ignore. They were not Bosnian women or children even torture and killing of whom matter little. These soldiers were all West Europeans, and the voters in those countries would not be amused. Then governments, therefore, announced the deployment of a Rapid Reaction Force, a reinforcement of about twelve thousand fully equipped troops.

The residents of Sarajevo and other enclaves thought the new forces might restrain the murderous Serbs from sniping and shelling at will, and ensure that their supply of food and water would not be cut off. The sadistic killers, by all accounts, were alarmed when they heard that this force was coming. But they were promptly reassured by the UN representative Akashi - the man with a unique ability to treat the most gruesome carnage or blatant violation of any agreement as events of no consequence to be met head-on with the blandest

cliche and sophistry. He despatched a comforting letter to Karadzic assuring him that the force would be under UN command and would not take sides, that it would not interfere with his murders and depredations. Perhaps that assurance served as the green signal for attack on Srebrenica and other safe areas.

I cannot help wondering what the other UN agencies changed with task of looking after the rights and welfare of the children and women have been doing all these times. I may be mistaken, but I don't recall having seen or heard of any protest or condemnation by any of these agencies or any attempt on their part to save these children. (Perhaps they have been treating the situation in the same way as the killing of hundreds of Palestinian children by the Israeli soldiers in the days of 'Intifada.' There at least some of the children threw stone to the soldiers, an accusation that cannot be made against the children of Sarajevo).

Did the Social Summit in Copenhagen even mention the plight of thousands of ravaged Bosnian women? Does it even feature in the agenda of forthcoming Beijing extravaganza on the rights of women? I wonder. It seems to that to the western media, and women's right organisations - even some governments - the infringement of the rights of expression of Taslima Nasreen (no doubt deplorable) deserves more importance and attention than the lot of the thousands of hunted, raped and tortured women's right in their midst in Europe.

One reason the governments in the West and the UN spokespersons as their faithful mouthpieces have always put forward for the inaction of the UN forces is that it would endanger their physical safety. But didn't these soldiers volunteer to join the army with the full knowledge that their duties would entail facing dangers? Weren't they trained to fight and are being paid to fight? Are they deployed only to count the number of shells lobbed by the Serbs or the number of children killed, or to accompany the odd food convoys the Serbs would occasionally let through their blockade? In that case a few companies of Boy Scouts or Girl Guides could have done the job equally well.

Another Voice

Kazi Fazlur Rahman



ing, 'please, please, don't do it again or we'll be frightfully cross'. When a particularly gruesome scene of carnage is flashed on the TV screen or a UN personnel is publicly humiliated, the UN unleashes its ultimate weapons - another resolution of the Security Council deploring violence and calling upon 'all' sides to solve the 'problem' peacefully!

ter, because they were foolish enough to put trust in the works of the great eunuch on the East River in Manhattan. Televised humiliation of the blue helmets by the Bosnian Serbs was a little too much even for the Western governments to ignore. They were not Bosnian women or children even torture and killing of whom matter little. These soldiers were all West Europeans, and the voters in those countries would not be amused. Then governments, therefore, announced the deployment of a Rapid Reaction Force, a reinforcement of about twelve thousand fully equipped troops.

Student politics

The resumption of French nuclear testing has raised a storm of international and local protest. I, and millions of others worldwide, call on the French government to reconsider, and to call off the tests, and thus to reinforce the moves towards an effective nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and ultimately a nuclear weapon-free world. This would be a leadership worthy of the people of France, and of 14 July 1995.

Graham A N Wright, Gulshan, Dhaka

Road accidents

Sir, Road accidents have become a major problem in our country. It is happening every day, leaving in its wake disaster and heartrending scenes. Lives are being lost prematurely and many have to live with the burden of a crippled body.

In advanced countries, number of vehicles are much

more than ours but comparatively accidents are much less.

We know that in our country driving licences and fitness certificates of vehicles could be obtained even illegally. As inexperienced drivers and unfit vehicles are responsible for the majority of accidents, care must be taken to stop these irregularities. Traffic police should patrol on highways to check on the speed of vehicles as exceeding speed is a major cause behind accidents.

Driving is a very responsible job, one should never become impatient and try to overtake as it can result in accident. Adequate rest is a must before long-distance driving because, if one is tired, sleep can overtake at the wheel and it would be fatal.

We hope government will take necessary steps to minimize road accidents and those who will be in charge will execute them zealously.

Nur Jahat, East Nasirabad, Chittagong

OPINION

Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory

Anwarul Karim

tory, the present value of which is around two thousand crore taka was closed down nearly a year back. The factory was set up at Joydevpur in the year 1968 with the aim to cater to the requirement of the then Pakistan, that is, eastern and the western wings. After the independence of Bangladesh the market for its product was squeezed up. The factory used to produce Lathe machine, Drill machine, Diesel engine, Ring spinning frame, Reeling machine, Jute mills spares, Railway slippers, Railway spares, fittings of REB, PDB and various other types of work. Due to market constraint and mismanagement it became a losing concern and the liabilities increased every year. The liabilities increased to maximum limit after its management was given to a foreign management contractor during the past regime.

The government was forced to close down the factory which was incurring heavy losses every year. What I want to say is, by closing down such a factory for an indefinite period the factory will incur further loss since the costly machineries will be completely out of order if they remain out of operation for years. The authorities concerned should immedi-

ately take up all measures to run the factory, as a poor country like Bangladesh cannot afford to close it down for indefinite period, destroying its costly machineries. To open up the factory the following measures may be taken into consideration

i) Since no private entrepreneur is interested to take up & run the Factory as it is unlike any other factory, producing consumable products like edible oil or dry cell battery, the govt may think of running the factory from revenue budget as other organizations like BCSIR, Atomic Energy Centre or BITAC, keeping it directly under the control of Ministry of Industries.

ii) A high powered committee may be set up comprising senior engineers from the Institute of Engineers, Professors of BUET, members from FBCCI and the government to find ways and means to run the factory effectively and take step according to their suggestions.

iii) The Factory has a well equipped training centre which used to impart training in different trade to SSC/HSC passed students in the past. After receiving the certificate from BMTF many of these trained personnel

have been employed abroad earning foreign currency. As such this training centre can be immediately opened up utilising its adjacent workshop.

iv) With the existing facilities, machineries and equipment this can also contribute as a research and development centre, developing new/import substitute products, side by side with the training centre. It may be mentioned that both in developed and developing countries R&D is given high priority and huge amount of money and man power is utilized on R&D projects, as a result of which they are producing new products and developing the existing ones every year.

v) It is also suggested that some skilled engineers, technicians and other essential persons should be re-employed as soon as possible and start the factory as suggested above. Later more persons can be employed phasewise to effectively run the whole factory as per requirement.

In short all measures should be taken by the concerned authorities to open, operate and start the activities of the factory as soon as possible to save the machineries and the factory as a whole.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

A New Slogan for Virginia

HERE is a lot of pressure in Virginia right now to change the state's tourist slogan from "Virginia is for Lovers" to "Virginia is for Shooters." The reason for this turnabout is that Virginia has recently made it legal for its citizens to carry concealed weapons.

It is a triumph for NRA common sense and a big defeat for those who have maintained that carrying a handgun in your underwear can cause a nasty rash on your stomach.

I don't live in Virginia, but I now have to fear venturing there even to shop because we no longer know who is carrying concealed weapon and who isn't. As residents of Washington, DC, our only defense will be to resort to kung fu - our feet versus their guns.

Virginians consider this shooting fish in a barrel. Burt Freeman's house is in Virginia, and I have been going there for years to play chess - but even things have changed at his home.

When I rang the bell, his 90-year-old mother answered the door holding a semiautomatic.

"Grandma Freeman," I said nervously, "it's me, Art. I came to play chess."

"On your stomach or I'll fill you full of lead. Don't even think of trying to disarm me because I have a Glock .45 in my pantyhose."

Just then Burt came out. "He's okay, Ma. Just because you can now carry a concealed weapon doesn't mean you have to point it at everyone who comes to the house."

"Says who? Just wait until the Avon lady comes by and tries to set up her samples."

Burt took me into the library where he had the chess board set up. He apologized for his mother but told me that she wasn't the only one behaving like this.

"Ever since people started getting permits to carry concealed weapons, they're aching to blow someone away. I was in the supermarket the other day and a guy tried to jump the line. Three people shot him dead before he could use his Uzi. We're renamed the place The Safeway at the OK Corral. I'll tell you one thing - you better be a good shot in Virginia or move to North Carolina."

"I guess carrying concealed weapons can do that to a person," I remarked, "I wish I could carry one so that I don't feel naked."

"You have to have a no-nonsense governor and a real dedicated gun lobby to make it work. I don't like Virginia turning into an armed camp, but what can I do if the other fellow is loaded for bear? I can't just let myself become a sitting target. Most people who carry concealed weapons are honest, God-fearing straight-shooters. Hell, we're the state that gave you Thomas Jefferson and Ollie North. But we're living in a dangerous world where nobody can guarantee that when you take someone's parking place the offended driver isn't going to pistol-whip you."

It was time to play. I made the first move. He studied it and then took out his .38 revolver. "Are we playing with guns?" I asked. "It isn't for you," he said. "It's to protect me from Ma." By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB.