Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Sunday, August 13, 1995

### Shock Therapy to Bosnia

US President Bill Clinton has, as expected, vetoed the bill approved by the Congress to unilaterally lift the arms embargo on Bosnia. The president felt no compunction in announcing his decision even after the terribly shocking revelation that thousands of Muslims were executed by the Serbs before dumping them into mass graves near Srebrenica. As many as 2.700 Muslims are feared to have perished in a most brutal manner at the hands of the Serb forces after the capture of Srebrenica. If the spy photographs and eye witness accounts of mass graves are correct, the victims could be just about half of the 6,000 people still unaccounted for after the fall of that once-safe enclave.

The veto has, therefore, come about at a most inappropriate moment. Already the successful Croatian military campaign has shown how hollow and bankrupt the West's position on former Yugoslavia has been. Over the past one year. Croatia built up a huge stockpile of arms, to which the West had virtually turned a blind eye and something that has lately proved so decisive against the Serbs. About the same time the Bosnian Muslims — regrettably civilians included — were so thoroughly butchered. Even the UN-designated safe havens proved to be a death-trap for them. All this because the Bosnian government forces have been poorly armed and unable to defend themselves and their civilian population.

The Croatian offensive gives a clear message that a parity of military strength between parties would have a better chance of forcing upon the aggressor an internationally mediated peace formula than all the power-packed diplomacy. It is from a position of strength that Croatian President Tudjman can now bargain for any deal.

The Serbs have been receiving weapons from different sources apart from their huge stockpile from the arsenal of former Yugoslavia. So it is unfair and even criminal to deprive the Bosnian government of their right to defend themselves. By ordering the arms sanction on Bosnia, the West has not only condoned the crime but become a party to the same. In the Balkan war, it is the Serbs who are the worst offender; and the mass execution and burial only tragically expose the West's hypocrisy in

to a new pitch.

### **Utilise the Respite**

the face of Serbian atrocities now being pushed

The political parties are playing with fire. This impression has gained ground following two latest developments in the election-related atmospherics. Even though there has been, not just one, but a plethora of formulae, going to meet the ruling party's concern for keeping within the Constitution and the opposition's seminal demand for a non-partisan arrangement to hold the next general election, these have gone with the wind, at least by the present reckoning.

The Ishtiaq formula, developed on the basis of certain basic concessions having been already traded off verbally between the ruling party and the opposition, banked on the byepolls 'as a way out' to get an agreed number of politically neutral persons elected uncontested to form an interim government to conduct the general election. This principle has not enjoyed support of the people who think that a wider electorate is not being proposed to be involved in the choice of incumbents to the neutral set-up. There are also those who question the very wisdom of political leaders abdicating their primary responsibility in resolving

a political crisis themselves. This should be thought-provoking for the leaders of major political parties to come to grips with the problem on their own by initiating a dialogue. At any rate, the well-meaning formulae were given with an eye to resolving the crisis at the earliest under the discipline of a time-table.

Now the EC's suspension of bye-elections until after mid-December by invoking the 'Act of God' clause of the Constitution loosens the time-frame diluting the sense of urgency somewhat. But this can only be turned to the advantage of the political parties if they decide to utilise the respite to have a dialogue and end

their stand-off.

By the present sights and sounds, the opposition and the government, far from readying themselves for talks, are hardening their positions towards each other. The opposition parties may have differed in their instant reaction to the Ishtiaq formula; but given their common stake in political agitation, they are likely to pull their unified and full weight behind their agenda for the dissolution of parliament and the holding of early elections under a neutral caretaker government. It will be courting violence if the stand-off is not ended here and now.

### **Good Tiding**

In conflict-management, the Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and the PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat have set something of an example for negotiators acting under severe constituency pressures. While previously it was the political and armed extremists on both sides who administered shock therapy on each other and frustrated the early peace moves, it is now the turn for the Israeli settlers on the West Bank to be apprehensive, even resistive, of the expansion of Palestinian self-rule over there.

But this is a teething period that Israel and the PLO must go through as one-time arch enemies. The settlers' protestations have thankfully so far remained within the bounds of nonviolent gesticulation reflecting a qualitative difference from the abrasive shoot-outs and bomber attacks of the earlier days.

In their latest ice-breaking accord, Arafat and Peres have resolved some contentious points between them, such as those that have defiantly revolved around the question of extending Palestinian autonomy to the West Bank after its establishment in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho township. On the future of Hebron, both sides · wanted the security of minority Israeli settlers protected. However, Arafat is willing to amend the Palestinian Charter to drop the call for 'destruction of Israel' within two months of signing the final accord with Israel on the expansion of self-rule over the West Bank. So, he keeps a lever.

# The Story of a Dead Cow

Accidents can, of course, occur at any place and at any time. Human error, act of God or a combination of several factors may cause a sudden accident. But an easily avoidable error or neglect of duty is not a justifiable cause of accident. If the neglect occurs with almost predictable regularity then it must call for some action, some remedial steps. But nobody cares.

country the reaction to such a report is just indifference. The authorities would probably say: why such luss over a dead cow? As if they would have taken notice if the victim, instead of a cow, was a human being.

I have chosen to write on the subject because I cannot forget the incident. Accidents can, of course, occur at any place and at any time. Human error, act of God or a combination of several factors may cause a sudden accident. But an easily avoidable error or neglect of duty is not a justifiable cause of accident. If the neglect occurs with almost predictable regularity then it must call for some action, some remedial steps. But nobody cares. At least that is the impression one gets from confact with those who are supposed to be in charge of such services. I do not wish to single out DESA as the only agency responsible for such lapses; other agencies are known to be operating at the same low standard of efficiency. But power supply in

such a vital function that it is difficult to accept such absence of responsiveness nonchalantly. Recently we have had frequent power cuts in our area - two or even three times in the day. The explanations that were given. when requested, were that either the wire had snapped

Asian countries but neither the transformers or the wires behave in such errant manner in those countries. In Bangladesh a special curse seems to be attached to these instruments.

What is exasperating is the indifference of the authorities. Take for instance, the



or the transformer had burst Of course, wires can get torn or transformers can burst nothing in this world is supposed to last for ever. But why is it that it is only in Bangladesh that these transformers burst at the slightest provocation or the wires snap as if these are made of cotton? I have had the privilege of living not only in many de-

veloped countries but also in

bus service of Dhaka. An effi cient public transport system is the key to the economic success of a nation. It is certainly true in respect o Bangladesh where only a few people can afford to own private vehicles. A modern bus service, clean, efficient, fast and regular, can speed up the pace and make a difference in our economic life According to a newspaper

report, entrepreneurs are able and willing to place large number of new buses on Dhaka routes but they do not do it because of the toll collection by gangs of thugs. In fact, the report gave an estimate of the daily toll collection — the amount squeezed out every day under threat of violence - from the existing bus owners. Naturally, not many people with capital are interested in venturing into a field where the profit is skimmed off by these organized gangs of mastaans who operate out of the different bus terminals of the city. It is a matter of deep concern that these gangs reportedly

and protection of the ruling party. Indeed it is no secret that there are often armed clashes between rival factions of mastaans for the exclusive right of toll collection. The authorities must be fully aware of the problem because there have been many news paper stories on these organized extortions but no one has seen any action being taken to curb these anti-social elements. The government talks about raising the level of investment in the country but surely they are neither sincere nor serious in what they say. Because if the government was serious about restoring the confi- not know what struck him or dence of the investors, it why,

operate under the banner

would have eliminated these dangerous parasites who are acting as a brake on economic activities of all kinds. Let the government give an explanation to the allegation that had been made about these toll collections. Let them say that it is not supporting or conniving at these toll collections or that the collectors do so under the BNP banner The Daily Star has taken a

most commendable initiative to save Dhaka from the predators. I hope the roundtable debate on the subject and the publicity given to various problems faced by the city will get positive response and some action, not just vague words of sympathy. About two years ago, I recall, I wrote an article in The Daily Star on the Dhanmandi lake. Did anyone in the City Corporation or any other authority take any notice? Not to my knowledge. In fact, the conspiracy to fill up a part of the lake - the land will fetch fabulous sums - has been reportedly hatched in secrecy. Does anybody care? Will anyone in authority tell us that the report is not correct?

The final point I want to make is that all the talk about an accountable government in Bangladesh is just hollow rhetoric. In this country nobody seems to mean what he says. Glib talks about democracy and accountability are just populist slogans to be used to whip up public support or to enlist the support of the donors. The fate of the common man or woman is just like that of the hapless cow on the street which did

## Ministerial Jostling Gets the New Man Off to a Fractious Start

Chadin Tephaval writes from Bangkok

The new Thai Cabinet has been described by one newspaper as being "stuffed with provincial barons, rabble-rousers and ambitious businessmen," and its factions have already shown their propensity for political maneuvering. Gemini News Service reports on the first round of squabbling.

HAI Prime Minister Banharn Silapa-archa's new coalition government has got off to a rough

was taken aback by a sni-

ppet I read in the Daily

Janakantha of 9 August,

1995. To put it briefly, it was

the sad story of a cow which

was electrocuted suddenly

and unexpectedly while going

from Swarighat to Khilgaon

with a load on a push cart.

Apparently, an electric wire

connected a roadside light

post with a traffic light.

However, the job was done so

sloppily that the live wire was

jutting out at one point right

in the middle of the street.

The luckless cow stepped on

the wire and died instantly. It

was the victim of the care-

lessness of the electrical

workers who made the con-

nection. It goes without say-

ing that if the wire was

stepped on by a man instead

of a cow, he would have died

equally suddenly and unex-

pectedly. If such an accident

occurred in any other coun-

try some one would have

taken notice. The electricity

authority or at least the po-

lice would have taken an in-

terest in the incident in

order to fix the wire and also

to fix the responsibility for

the criminal neglect of duty.

But here in Bangladesh it did

not deserve more than a

snippet - in one little corner

of a newspaper. In a devel-

oped country the victim's

relatives would have sued the

Dhaka Electric Supply

Authority and the court

would have awarded a fair

compensation. But in this

Even before the King confirmed Banharn's Ministers, MPs from his own Chart Thai Party and his coalition partners were publicly denouncing him. Main cause of the row was

in-fighting over who was to get the powerful Interior Ministry job, which controls the police department and all local administration. One contender, Narong

Wongwan of Chart Thai, failed to win a seat — though that is no bar to ministerial position in Thailand — and has been accused by the United States of involvement in the narcotics trade. He agreed that until he was cleared of the allegations, the Premier should hold the Interior portfolio.

But in clear defiance of Banharn and Narong, a group of veteran Thai Chart MPs threw their weight behind party Secretary-general Sauoh Thienthong as the man for the job.

Sanoh finally agreed to take the Public Health Ministry, but his brother, Vithaya, also a Chart Thai MP, launched a vehement public attack on Banharn. He described the party leader as a dictator and predicted his government would last no longer than six months.

Deputy party leader Vatana Asavahame - also accused by the US of links with drug trafficking — was another bidder for the Interior Ministry.

In the event, he failed to get any Cabinet post at all, losing out in the bargaining because his faction is much smaller than the Narong and Sanoh factions.

The result of the maneuvering is a temporary truce rather than a permanent

peace: Narong wants two-tothree months to clear his name, after which his supporters will demand that Banharn hands over the Ministry



When this happens, neither Sanoh nor Vatana are likely to set aside their aspirations without a battle.

Narong's Therd Thai faction claims to control 35 of the 92 Chart Thai MPs (the coalition won 233 seats out of 391 in the 2 July election); and one of its key figures, Suchart Tancharoen, has been given the post of Deputy Interior Minister.

The faction hopes he will run the Ministry's day-to-day operations while Banharn is busy as Prime Minister, allowing him to pave the way for Narong's renewed claim.

Banharn's agreement to handle the portfolio only temporarily indicates how carefully he has to balance the groups within the party.

Therd Thai has no real lovalty to Chart Thai since it inerged with the party only when Narong's Samakkhi Tham Party was discredited in the 1992 Black May incident in which troops fired on pro-democracy protesters.

The order to open fire was given by leaders of the National Peacekeeping Council, which had staged a coup the previous year and whose interests Therd Thai was dedicated to support.

Therd Thai agreed to stay on with Chart Thai when outgoing Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai dissolved Parliament and the faction found it did not have enough time to form a new party of its own,

As well as dealing with faction-fighting within his own party. Banharn is sure to encounter difficulties from the other coalition parties. Some MPs from the New

Aspiration Party (NAP) have denounced their leader. General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, accusing him of allocating Cabinet seats only to close allies. In early July they warned

party could explode unless Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the NAP leader restructured top party posts. The unashamed jostling

for posts has reinforced the Banharn government's negative public image. - Though the Prime

Minister has promised that he "will not disappoint the people," the "godfather" reputation of some of his ministers is unlikely to reassure the public.

His administration's honesty will come under close scrutiny by the public, the press, academics and pressure groups.

Scrutiny will be particularly close because the government is responsible for several multi-billion-baht projects, including the

Bangkok mass transit and the expansion of the telephone network, which have a price tag of at least 800 billion Its handling of the land

reform scandal, which brought down the last government, and of changes to the political system will also be closely observed. Banharn has assigned MPs to work with academics in

preparing the ground work for political reform, but conflict within and between parties on the issue is inevitable. Another sensitive issue is the recent murder of Prawian

Boonnak, leader of the Assembly of Small-scale Farmers of the Northeast, a key farmers' organisation. The Assembly alleges that those responsible for order-

ing the shooting have links to key Chart Thai Party politi-Without a satisfactory po-

lice investigation, the Assembly will probably lead further protests against the government. On the opposition front.

the Democrat Party will that the situation inside the challenge Deputy Prime leader of the Palang Dharma Party, over his constitutional qualifications, an issue which forced his resignation as Foreign Minister earlier this

> A Democrat Party official says they will hammer away at Palang Dharma in the hope of forcing him out of the government, in which case he might take his party with him and try to bring the government down.

> Banharn has reached the pinnacle of his political career - but is going to need all his considerable political savvy to survive. - GEMINI NEWS

CHADIN TEPHAVAL is a Bangkok-based Thai journal-

# **Buchwald's** COLUMN

# Selling Out

HE \$19 billion news concerning Disney and Capital Cities/ABC has the entertainment business agog. It is the largest transaction of its kind - until the next one comes along.

It dawned on me after reading the story that there was more money to be made in mergers than there was in producing a product. I decided to have a go at it myself.

I called up Russell Baker, a giant in the newspaper column business, and asked him if he would consider merg-

ing with me. He said. 'Are you talking about a friendly or an unfriendly takeover?"

"I can go either way," I said. "I'll offer you \$10 billion for vour column.

"You have to be joking." Baker said. "Dave Barry offered me \$12 billion and the use of his company plane." Barry has all his columns written in China."

protested "Mine are made in America. If a Barry column doesn't work, you can't take it back."

I could see that Baker was bitting. "How do I know you have \$10 billion?" he asked.

"I don't have \$10 billion," I said. "I have \$156 - the rest I'll float in junk bonds. Russ, this is a marriage made in heaven. You're in software and I'm in hardware.

"We could give Disney-Capital Cities a run for their

money. Wall Street will go nuts over this deal." Baker said. "I don't know if I want to merge. I'm happy" at the New York Times. I have a cubicle behind a dirty wall where no one can find me - I have a secretary I can send out for sandwiches at the Gaiety Delicatessen, and the ink comes off the paper when someone reads my column. Why

would I want to merge with another colossus?" "Because in America you can't stay still. If you don't sign up with a partner, the parade passes you by, Walt Disney is

going to own the world if we don't stop them.' "What do I do about Dave Barry's offer?" "Dave doesn't have \$12 billion. He's hoping to get it from Rupert Murdoch for writing a book with Newt Gingrich. My offer is hard and fast.

"If I sell, can I still keep my hunting lodge in Wyoming?"

"Of course." "And my 200-foot yacht on the Hudson?"

my grandchildren's pictures on them."

"Russ, we're not going to take any of your perks away from you. All we want is the column and the Australian rights to 'Masterpiece Theater." OK. On one condition — I want our junk bonds to have

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Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed Russians, their next enemy. with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

#### The Holocaust in Japan

Sir, On 9 August, fifty years ago, the second Atom Bomb was dropped on the innocent citizens of Nagasaki only three days after the first bomb was exploded on Hiroshima. Two small cities of an Asian country were made victim of such coldblooded murder. Even Hitler did not have the heart to do so. In one of his speeches Hitler said that he was in possession of such a dangerous bomb that the use of it would bring destruction to millions and would exterminate nations for which God would not forgive him. Even man like Hitler was afraid of any divine wrath. A few years later this bomb was exploded on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in quick succession of three days only. Those who gave orders had no shivering in

their hearts and there was no

biting of conscience.

Earlier, four Japanese cities were methodically destroyed by pounding fire bombs. During 10 days in March, '45 as stated in one of the issues of the famous American Magazine, 11600 B-29 sorties had destroyed 32 square miles of Japanese cities killing about 200000 people. In earlier part of May again another fire bombing besides killing huge number of Japanese rendered another 100000 people homeless. The bombs of the 25th May '45 created such a huge fire storm that the bomber crew could smell the burning of flesh thousands of feet below. All these were cold blooded murder. Weren't these committed without having any sense of guilt? According to the contention of the modern historians, by early summer of 1945 Japan was beaten and no further invasion was required. Then what was the necessity of blasting two atom bombs in Japan? Some of them argue that it was done to scare

Overnight the same peo-

ple have changed their colours and turned into great humanists. They have become the pioneers and promoters of human rights who only see flagrant violation of human rights in the Third World countries. What are they doing when Bosnia is burning? United Nations is following the footsteps of the League of Nations as it acted like a sitting duck during the Italian-Abyssinian War when Abyssinian was burning.

War-mongering nations cannot sit idle. They would continue to fan the flame so that there could be another devastating global war. It would help them in selling their manufactured arms and ammunition and other military hardwares. History cannot lie. Modern historians are of the opinion that the cycle is moving fast. The civilization will change its seat to East again. Already the signs are there who knows who amongst us will survive to see

AMF Quadir

Dhaka

#### Annual increment Sir, Government has re-

cently sanctioned ten per cent financial benefit to all Govt., Semi-Govt. and autonomous body officials. As a consequence many officials have reached the maximum of their pay scales and they would not get any more annual increment. But price level is not static. Prices of daily necessities are going up by leaps and bounds. So unless annual increment is allowed to these category of officials, they will be hit very

I therefore, appeal to the Finance Ministry and the Cabinet to look into the matter sympathetically and allow annual increment to officials who have reached maximum of their pay scales.

hard due to erosion of their

real income.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment

### OPINION

### Underground Car Parks M M Ahmad

Here are some tentative be delays if the responsibility

sites where underground car parks could be constructed in the metropolitan area of Dhaka/Chittagong and other cities. If the land belongs to the government, construction can start immediately: 1) Underneath the Govt/

DCC parks, stadiums, markets, schools, office buildings, or any other landed property, along the highways and at the commercial and New shopping areas. shopping centres my be designated as such for this purpose.

2) Under the open spaces available at present, regardless of the category of owner, in the commercial and shopping areas, within the DCC zone. Technical arrangement should be feasible for future construction of buildings over the underground parking lots. In fact the underground park may be constructed quickly on behalf of the owners on suitable terms/loan by the agreed parties. The right to construct underground parking

is left to the owners. 3) Commercial multi-storied buildings to be constructed in future may have twin parking arrangements both above and under the

building. Some tax rebate may be allowed for the former category, for a limited period, say five years, as an incentive. Several thousand vehicles are parked overnight in the city along the roadside (no garage) 4) Thousands of residents

in Dhaka (and Chittagong) have cars but no private garage. These are difficult to get on a rental basis. So the larger underground parking lots may have monthly rates for overnight parking at discounted rates funder proper security arrangement).

level or below, must display the official logo for public information that it is authorised: along with a notice board showing the tariff rates, to avoid argument. All attendants must be in unimay be gazetted. There might form

5) All car parks, at road