

Turning-point in Bosnia?

Events in Bosnia Herzegovina are moving at a very fast pace. As the UN-approved aerial bombardments by NATO on Serb positions around Sarajevo and Serb-held territories in Bosnia continue, the Bosnian Serbs assert that they have pulled out most of their heavy artillery beyond the 20 kilometre safe zone. The UN and NATO observers are yet to verify the Serbian claim. If it proves true, the NATO air strikes — viewed by many as relentless, ruthless and disproportionate — will definitely have achieved their objective. What really was the objective? Was it just to force the Serbs to abandon their threat of attack on Sarajevo and other remaining UN-declared safe areas?

Well, that was the immediate purpose behind the air strikes. But the important underlying goal was to bring the defying Serbs to the negotiating table. Even this seems to have been partly achieved. There has been an agreement between the foreign ministers of Bosnia, Croatia and Bosnia Serbia, brokered by US envoy Richard Holbrooke, which apportions 51 per cent of the territory to the Croat Muslim federation and 49 per cent to the rebel Serbs. Two separate entities are envisioned under one unitary state. That seems to have satisfied the war-weary politicians; but then notes of dissent have been sounded by the warring parties that they are reluctant to cede any territory.

The plan is similar to the one reached a year ago, with the difference that it allows the parties to get more of the areas of their preference under the 51-49 formula. The question is why the foreign ministers have agreed to the peace plan about which they seem to have some reservations? Each side may have differing reasons — some of them well-intentioned and others just ill-motivated. The Serbs in particular may have calculations beyond this agreement. In the prevailing situation, they know they have no chance of establishing a greater Serbia. So buy time to hit back at the opportune moment. Even if that prospect is overruled, there remains a lot of work to be done. There is no prospect for the refugees to return to their homes which are in enemy territories. The ethnically divided country will be ethnically segregated too. Serb-controlled areas in Bosnia will feel a natural affinity towards Serbia proper. Bosnia as one state would be hardly tenable then. How that problem is resolved will determine the fate of the Balkan conflict?

Bank Rate Option

In a matter of three years, between 1991 and 1994, the government reduced the bank rate half a dozen times. The rate which stood at 9.75 per cent before November 19, 1991, was whittled down to 5.5 per cent by 1994. Just a year on, the Finance Ministry has decided to raise the bank rate from 5.5 per cent to 5.75 per cent for the first time since the government came to power. Even though the increase is by a slender margin of 0.25 per cent, it represents a significant policy shift on the part of the government.

The government's professed objectives behind the earlier reductions in the bank rate were to raise the level of investment in trade, commerce and industrial activity through vigorous credit operations, and equity participation where necessary. Although we are well past the worst phase of economic stagnancy, as evidenced between 1991 and the early part of 1993, the problems of investment have not vanished into the thin air, regardless of the cuts effected in bank rate from time to time.

Without quite minding this aspect, we seem to be turning now towards administering a credit squeeze. Lending tied down to long-gestation schemes is said to have substantially increased, so that this has had to be capped. But it is baffling why a credit squeeze would at all be applied when the banks are having excess liquidity to dispose of. Actually one would have expected the banks to lower their lending rates to work off the liquidity overhang.

This paradoxical situation leads us to deduce that it is the rising inflation that the government wishes to contain in an election year. Not only is the price index in an upward curve, public expenditure at a time like this is expected to go up as well.

The very slight increases in the interests on savings and fixed deposit accounts will not quite wean away small investors from the share market to the banks either.

Shrimp Woes

The foreign exchange fetched by shrimp culture is seemingly outweighed by its adverse impact on geomorphology in the coastal belt. A study conducted by the BIDS under the auspices of the World Bank reveals the negative side of shrimp culture. Highlighting the induced 'depletion and degradation of the limited stocks of natural resources', a researcher, involved in the exercise, concludes that perhaps the current national income from shrimp is exaggerated.

He has stopped short of making a definitive statement on the subject, as the use of the word 'perhaps' suggests. This is because of the fact that his study was confined to 'three polder areas' in the Paikgachha thana of Khulna district. But this sense of academic integrity on the part of the researcher does not detract from the intrinsic importance of his or his colleagues' findings. Shrimp culture leads to salinity concentration in the soil and water of the working area. Resultantly, where this is done in rotation with rice cultivation, it is the latter which is the loser. Rice yield is dropping. Fruit trees are wilting. Aquatic weeds and grasses on which the livestock thrives have been affected by the high level of salinity, too. There has been a fall in the production of meat and milk due largely to the shrinkage of the grazing pastures.

By stopping unplanned and haphazard shrimp colonisation which is the villain here, we can get the best out of this avocation without hurting the environment.

THE razzmatazz of the UN Conference on Women being held in Beijing has almost succeeded in making the world believe that women are really the weaker sex being chased around by the muscular and bullying zombies in the shape of men! Even the US First Lady was carried away, perhaps more by the grandeur of the assemblage of a motley crowd of the world leaders, feminists, women workers, NGOs, women libbers, priests, bishops, monks, and missionaries than by the possibility of a practical and realistic outcome of the conference. When she said, "It is time to break the silence," she attempted to kill, as it were, two birds with one stone: first, she bemoaned the abuse of women world-wide and second, she called for empowerment of women and their right to be treated with dignity and consideration.

But Hillary Clinton was most convincing in her stout defence of the Conference when she said, "It is also the celebration of families, the bedrock of any society." Further her challenge to the unfair portrayal of the Conference by the conservative critics as an assembly of "radicals and atheists bent on destroying our families", really electrified the Conference and its agenda-setters.

By an estimate of ILO, women will make-up more than half the labour force in most countries in the next millennium. But they, like the same study shows, are still underpaid and their work-term is poorly regulated.

The new Secretary-General of the Conference Gertrude Mongella of Tanzania, a disciple of Julius Nyerere, wants to change all that. A former Ambassador to India, Mongella, who grew up in an island surrounded by poverty and despondency, might as well succeed. And she needs to.

In this context I'm tempted to refer to a period

of US-UK diplomatic history which has always fascinated me, a time when women were made to play a larger-than-life role, in promoting their respective national interests. I have particularly in mind the name of Lady Victoria Sackville, the daughter of Pepita, the Spanish dancer and Lionel Sackville-West, the distinguished British diplomat.

The year was 1881, when His Majesty's Government still didn't have an Embassy in Washington. It was a Legation only. British Minister Lionel Sackville-West, with the support of Foreign Secretary Lord Granville and blessings of Secretary of State, James Blaine, got his daughter through Pepita as the official hostess in Washington. Victoria-West had soon become 'the toast of Washington'. At a White House dinner President Chester Arthur, with Ms West on his right and a two-hundred-pound wife of a Senator on his left, reportedly proposed to marry Ms West to which she burst out laughing in his face and said, "Mr President, you have a son older than me and you are as old as my father...!" But British Minister's contribution in improving the Anglo-American relations was phenomenal!

Times have changed, so has men's ability to persuade women to believe that they are the macho-superior in the gender race! The American First Lady certainly remembers the famous 'crisis paper' drafted by Thomas Paine in 1776, which read "These are the times that try men's souls." Thomas Paine could have stated 'men's and

women's souls' to be even-handed but who would dare today to call Thomas Paine 'a male chauvinistic pig'?

A young doctor — not a spin doctor — from Argentina sent the Fleet Street moguls on their feet, in the early seventies by publishing 'The Manipulated Man'. I do not know the whereabouts of the author Esther Vilar today but I am certain that she is not within the precincts of the Great China Wall! She believed that men are strong, intelligent and imaginative; women are weak, dumb and

our own experience Esther Vilar's thoughts are reflected almost every day, in every home. Women are perhaps more power-hungry than they seem! Even in our traditional society starting with the ancient Rajputs and Moguls, ending with the British-pampered Maharajas and Zamindars, the peccadilloes of men folks have been meekly tolerated only to broaden their stranglehold on their men folks! Of course, in the power groups, women's exploitation by men assumes a different dimen-

early, and kept cloistered before that, in order to protect her from the unwholy attention of unwanted elements. Young girls have to be married for this same protection purpose. But exploitation of man on woman enters the picture when he demands a dowry in exchange of this protection/marriage! He forgets the life long duties he wedded wife shares and imparts to him, bears his children, and later becomes his inconsolable widow.

Writing in early 70's Esther Vilar has some strong arguments to support her: the War in Vietnam, for example, impacted on women's attention only when the press sent around the photos of Madame Nhu. The problem of Northern Ireland became topical with women with the advent of Bernadette Devlin. Golda Meir of Israel and Indira Gandhi of India had a great deal to do with focusing women's attention to politics. In mid-1995 with Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Begum Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh and Sheikh Hasina as the leader of the Opposition, Ms Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka and not to speak of the Iron Lady Maggy Thatcher in Great Britain, power-broking by women has become an accepted reality.

Harkening back into ancient history on the plight of the manipulated man, one remembers how Cleopatra used her beauty, to be required, to save her Egypt — and even thought of extending it. It worked on both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony — but she failed because Augustus Caesar did not give her a chance to become a victim. Mind, you,

Cleopatra's plan was brilliant — and world history would have been different had she succeeded. In later day Rome, as late as 1973, a more pragmatic Italian president Giovanni Leone said, "The strongest evidence to prove that God exists is a beautiful woman!" Such is the way that a woman wields on man — almost in collusion with God!

With the whisper of the next millennium within our earshot we ought to realize that the phenomenal increase of population has imposed a new responsibility on all of us, men and women all over the world. The question today is not launching of thousand ships by a beautiful face or creating the grandeur of the greatest Empire on Earth; it is now essential for us to work together and the synergy of men and women to produce the optimum for saving us and human civilization. The Beijing Conference assumes special significance not only for women, but for men as well — the manipulated man including!

I like the Gaelic sense of humour (which her friendly neighbour Albion may not always like) when the French dedicated, in 1886, the Statue of Liberty as a gift of the French people to the Americans, commemorating alliance between the two nations during the American Revolution. Hundred fifty-two feet high on a pedestal of 150 feet the Liberty represents a woman holding a lighted torch in her hand, Emma Lazarus immortalized the Liberty with her sonnet: "Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

May the soul of the Manipulated Man be lifted by the Liberty sonnet, if not by the Beijing Conference!

The Manipulated Man

In mid-1995 with Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Begum Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh and Sheikh Hasina as the leader of the Opposition, Ms Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka and not to speak of the Iron Lady Maggy Thatcher in Great Britain, power-broking by women has become an accepted reality.



Waliur Rahman

unigenous. She also believed that women are exploited and they needed to be liberated but she was not sure who was doing the exploiting!

She made the Fleet Street Gurus (and grub-street too) go on a 'deux-temps' when she said that men have been trained and conditioned by women, not unlike the way Pavlov conditioned his dogs by making their mouth water merely by ringing a bell which meant dinner. Only women can break this vicious circle of exploitation. But she also believed that 'women will not do it for they have no rational reason for doing so.'

Even in the Bible we read that Eve was created from Adam's rib; she is a species, therefore, of an inferior order! Esther Vilar was excited with this thought. In

One takes a more philosophical view of the clarion call of the American First Lady in this context: empowerment of the underprivileged and the benighted of the society.

Idris Jazairy, former President of the Rome-based IFAD, in his monumental book co-authored with Dr Mohiuddin Alamgir, Director IFAD, tried to underline this reality. The Grameen and BRAC experience in Bangladesh also go to support this view.

Esther Vilar is perhaps talking about educated and moderately well off societies when she talks of the manipulated men. The subcontinent has seen women's exploitation at its degenerated worst. In our poorer societies a woman has to be married

A Strategy for Police Reforms in India

T Ananthachari writes from New Delhi

There are numerous complaints about unlawful detention, use of third degree, and even custodial death at the police station level. There has been persistent demand that the lock-up in the police stations should be thrown open for public inspection from time to time.

ACCUSATIONS against police are galore. The spate of accusations seems almost unending and unlimited. All discussions on any aspect of the sociopolitical problems faced by the society bring the police, its role, performance and accountability to the centre stage of public gaze. Gone are the days that the police contact with the public was mainly in the context of a crime or major law and order situation. Today police presence has not only become common but also a necessity in sports fields, examination halls, wedding reception etc.

This list is a long one and I leave it to the readers to complete it on the basis of their own experience. With all such wide-ranging contacts one would have expected the police to have worked out a strong base for good police-public relations. But unfortunately this has not happened except for short and sporadic intervals, that too due to enlightened leadership at that particular point of time. The need, therefore, is to identify and put into operation institutional arrangements which will ensure that good police-public relations are part of the police organisational priorities and policies in this regard are continuous and consistent.

Vociferous and influential sections of the public, many of whom are right thinking, well-meaning, objective and public-spirited, are increasingly concerned about the manner in which the police conducts itself. The revelations about use of third de-

gree, unlawful detentions, false encounters, kidnapping and failure to satisfactorily account for those taken into police custody, death in police custody and a score of other equally objectionable acts, have not only created a deep sense of anguish but have also highlighted the need to remedy the situation urgently.

It should be remembered that it is after waiting patiently for years, hoping that either the police themselves would set their house in order or the Governments, both at the Central and at the State level, would take determined measures to improve things, that the extreme step of approaching the High Courts and Supreme Court has been resorted to by various sections of the public. It is only recently that the Supreme Court convicted four police officials of Haryana and sentenced them to imprisonment. What is disturbing and even causes fear in one's mind is that even after such developments there is no evidence of any sincere attempts to remedy the situation either on the part of the police or the administration.

We have reached a stage where the public cannot any more depend upon the Governments to take initiative to rectify the wrong influences which the police have come to accept as a

necessary evil. If they were serious and genuine, the recommendations of the National Police Commission (NPC) would not be gathering dust and buried deep under it. The Commission's recommendations are contained in eight volumes and cover all aspects of police functioning. Even if some of its recommendations are implemented, police accountability would be ensured and police functioning thrown open in a more organised manner to public gaze and public participation. Since the National Police Commission gave its last report in 1980 and fifteen years have already elapsed, many of its suggestions may have to be reviewed in the context of the developments which have taken place since then, particularly in the field of crime, investigation and modernisation.

It will also be necessary without having to say repeatedly that such a review would be required even in respect of laws and procedures. But there are a few of the recommendations of the NPC, which have even more relevance today than in 1980 and which have to be implemented without any further delay. These also affect the core area of police-public relations and police accountability.

There are numerous com-

plaints about unlawful detention, use of third degree and even custodial death at the police station. There has been persistent demand that the lock-up in the police stations should be thrown open for public inspection from time to time. This matter was examined by the NPC and it recommended that a body of eminent local citizens, who are apolitical, be set up and they be authorised to inspect the lock-up in the police stations. Such an arrangement has become a necessity, particularly in the background of inadequate supervision and monitoring by departmental superiors and also lack of credibility about existing accountability measures. However, this new arrangement will succeed only if the body of eminent citizens is constituted with objectivity.

The second important step that needs to be taken is to implement the NPC's recommendations for automatic enquiry into police action resulting in injury or death. In respect of minor injuries, enquiry by departmental superiors may meet the requirement. In the case of injuries resulting in permanent physical impairment and/or death, a proper judicial enquiry should be resorted to. In this regard the recommendation of the NPC to have a standing panel of serving district judges for each district and that the senior most

available from among them will undertake the enquiry automatically without having to wait for formal Government orders in each specific case, merits not only serious considerations but also immediate implementation. By recommending that a senior police officer of the rank of SP (of course not from the district to which the enquiry pertains) should invariably assist the judge would help in objectively interpreting the incident and also to check all relevant records.

The third recommendation that needs early implementation relates to setting up of Security Commissions at the national, state and district levels, which will be presided over by the Home Minister and among the members would be the leader of opposition, besides representatives of various interest groups. But unfortunately no political party is willing to even consider this arrangement because it would almost make it difficult to use police for political purposes. Pending generating the required all round awareness to create a more conducive atmosphere for the acceptance of the Security Commission concept, it would go a long way if formal and statutory committees are set up to enquire complaints against the police.

While the most ideal arrangement would be for such work being entrusted to the professional hierarchy itself, in the prevailing atmosphere of distrust of the police, till such time as Security Commissions are set up and police totally insulated from political and extraneous influences, it would augur well for imparting credibility if the body to look into the complaints against the police included, besides the head of the police, public men drawn from NGOs, social workers, legal profession and retired Government officials. Once the public realises that they have a chance of getting their grievances redressed through impartial and inexpensive fora, they will start extending their helping hand to the police.

The three suggestions made in the preceding paragraphs, will not have any serious financial commitments. No changes in laws or the professional hierarchy would be required. At the same time, the public confidence in the police and its accountability will increase to a great extent.

We are already hearing about the elections to the Lok Sabha, which are in any case due to be held next June. Why not ask all the political parties to make a commitment on these issues in their manifestos? NGOs all over the country, particularly those who are concerned with human rights and a just society, should move in the matter.

— Mandra
T Ananthachari (IPS) is a retired Director General of Indian Border Security Force.

To the Editor...

Redress of grievances

Sir, The present government in one of its laudable steps to mitigate the sufferings of its employees granted ten per cent increase in the basic salary of all classes of government servants with effect from 31st December, 1994.

Later on, Ministry of Finance has issued an explanatory directive to all concerned how the relevant government order has to be implemented in the fixation of pay of the employees. Pension holders will get this benefit in the shape of 10% increase in their net pension and those on LPR (Leave Pending Retirement) during the period from 31-12-94 to 31-12-95 in the calculation of their pension.

However, the order and the subsequent explanation seem to suffer from ambiguity respecting persons employed on contract service. To be specific, an employee going on LPR on 31-12-94 but later on, even a day later, re-employed on contract, with the LPR severed at the instance of the government, will be

considered to be a retired one and ineligible to have the benefit of increase in the calculation his or her pension. This seems to be unfair and bereft of all human considerations, even if correct on legal consideration.

Let it be noted that an employee while on LPR enjoys all the privileges that are likely to be had while in service and the severance of his or her LPR and re-employment are done in the 'public interest'. Thus, denial of any benefit, otherwise admissible to him or her, had he or she not been appointed on contract is unjust, specially when such denial amounts to be quite high in pecuniary terms for any government servant.

It might be recalled that a lot of anomalies was faced in the fixation of the pay of the government employees when the benefit of time scale was granted to them, resulting in a situation where a junior employee was to receive higher salary than the one senior to him both in service and rank. But such anomalies were removed by a subsequent explanatory notification of the government.

May I now request our benign government through the

columns of your daily to look into the matter discussed above and consider the issue of an order allowing persons on contract service with effect from 1st January, 1995 to enjoy the benefit of the increase in the calculation of the pension, which they are now being denied for no fault of their own.

Rezaul Haque
36, Malibag, Dhaka

Power and madness

Sir, For the last few months the country witnessed a little respite from hartals and street agitations. People thought that due to pressure of press and public good sense is dawning on the politicians. But postponement of by-elections by the Election Commission has led to sharp reaction among the opposition parties and we are now passing through a wave of hartals, agitations and lawlessness. Our moribund economy is getting worse day by day. But who cares?

Both the Govt and the Opposition are responsible for this sad, shocking and chaotic situation. There are politicians in all countries,

But a total lack of rationality and patriotism is quite evident amongst the politicians of our country. It is crystal clear that their only objective is self-aggrandizement. They are least bothered about the welfare and well-being of the country. We have witnessed limitless corruption, mismanagement and inefficiency of Ershad regime too. So people can't bank upon the musketeers to bail out the nation either. Now that politicians are pushing the nation towards destruction for their own selfish ends, people themselves must rise up and goad the politicians to restore sanity in them. The idea may apparently look queer but perhaps there is no alternative.

Mrs Montaz Jahan
Dhaka Cantonment

Some questions

Sir, A popular demonstration of all kinds of protestations — right or wrong, are given vent to by barricading highway, blocking traffic, damaging public and private transports, causing colossal loss to the national property

and inexplicable suffering to the travelling public. These are criminal offences for which punishment of various kinds are prescribed in the law books of our country. Those have seldom been invoked for chicanery and political expediency. As a result, the practice has increasingly grown popular as handy and effective weapon for rowdies and vandals. Sufferers are common men who are in no way connected with policy making. But nobody seems to care.

Latest to join the band wagon are students agitating against abolition of 'question bank' introduced in 1991. The innovating experiment in our education arena was unique in that students were required to know answers within the perimeter of the so-called question bank and nothing beyond. Our pundits were anxious to thrust success in examination more than acquisition of worthwhile knowledge by student-examinees. As has to be, this was a last nail in the coffin.

"Dream success" as headlined by your esteemed daily saw more first divisioners than

second or third in Board results. But in reality many of the brilliant result holders did not qualify for admission into Medical and Engineering faculties in the past, not to speak of competing successfully for admission abroad.

Once used to slithering through the examination jungle, examinees found it blasphemous to have to go through the whole text, as of days of yore, once the authorities revoked the "question bank". Students struck back by massive muscle power creating nightmarish anarchy. There is no denying the angry students were at fault by resorting to lawlessness for which they should be squarely brought to book as per canons of law, but how about those pundits who conceived this novelty and brought about disaster for our education, and the loss and sufferings — the students caused? Shouldn't those responsible for creating a disastrous system called "question bank" receive their share of punishment?

Ghulam Mostafa
Dharamondi, Dhaka