

Redrawing the Map through Ethnic Cleansing will Not Work

by Hybat J Chowdhury

The seemingly desperate situation in Bosnia Herzegovina could only be resolved through some really sincere and meaningful attempt on the part of those who provide the leadership and guidance to the world community.

In writing this piece, I echo the feelings of vast multitudes of conscientious people of my own country and the world at large who are aware of the most painful episode in Bosnia and who strongly feel that something tangible should be done to save the Bosnian Muslims from the perpetual carnage, a genocide of extreme proportion, being committed by pinning down the majority Muslim population under the vice-grip of superior weaponry at the hands of the minority Serbs.

Nobody with the minimum perception should have any doubt as to where these superior armaments are coming from and that too under the vigilant and watchful eyes of European countries and the USA, who claim or at least project themselves to be the source of guidance and protectors of peace and human rights.

The great atrocities initiated and fuelled by the Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic have been rolling on for nearly four years, with negotiations and resolutions on record that turned out to be all fruitless. Waves after waves of teams of negotiators having different titles and compositions were put on the stage and they have acted very well indeed. Out went one team of negotiators without achieving any tangible result, and in came another set of actors on the stage projecting some high-sounding determination and optimism and the process has kept on and on. Of course it cannot be denied that the situation is most difficult to deal with and the peace process is most painstaking. Some new ones (negotiators) are put on the stage once again with visible determination supported by the show of strength to find a rightful and acceptable solution.

So far so good, but has the seemingly battering of Serbs produced the desired effect? Sadly enough, not at all, as is evident from the belligerent utterances from the Bosnian Serb military leadership on the ground namely Gen. Ratko Mladic.

Against the bombings by NATO with occasional breaks to give some respite to the Serbs but on the surface projecting the idea of giving some chance to the ongoing peace negotiation, the Serbs seem to be absolutely unperturbed that is obvious by their refusal to move their heavy guns. How long the UN and NATO would tolerate such



Legend: Muslim (dark grey), Serb (light grey), Croat (white), UN controlled (grid pattern)

blatant defiance is being keenly watched by the world community. Deception and outright lies have all along been the regular tactics by the Serbs since the Balkan crisis erupted about four years ago and one does not need any extraordinary perception to understand and feel such cunning art. Now with the onset of Toma-Hawk Cruise missile attack what differences it would make are yet to be seen.

With so much of massive air operation, by now touching almost 2000 operational sorties, using the latest high precision laser guided SMART bombs the story should have been quite different. But no, the situation on the ground does not prove to be so. In one of the 8.000 AM (local time) CNN transmission a few days back the so-called self-styled Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic appearing on the TV Screen bellowed arrogantly that the US air assault wherever executed had to be pulled back or retreat under pressure at the field and at home and that they (the Serbs) would

what is this going on. Is the air operation some sort of a stage-managed deceptive act or does it really mean business?

We have been made to understand that the air operation have two distinct objectives, firstly to compel the Serbs to pull back their artillery pieces and other heavy weapons at least 20 km away from around Sarajevo and secondly to press the Serbs to come to the negotiating table for peaceful solution. The Serbs refused to move their heavy weaponry although they did come to the negotiating table.

At the start of this vital negotiation which looks to be or at least appears to be heading well in the right direction as indicated by the chief US negotiator Richard Holbrooke such utterances by the Bosnian Serb leadership project another picture. We are also hearing the roar, loud and clear, from wings of the stage against the air operation with a threat that future help for the Bosnian Serbs will not be confined to humanitarian assistance only, that volunteers are ready to join the Serbs and the conflict if allowed to escalate by NATO assault would spread all over Europe and thus it must stop forthwith. However much people think of this roar as a casual remark one cannot ignore the impediment it would create on the progress of the peace process.

The seemingly desperate situation in Bosnia Herzegovina could only be resolved through some really sincere and meaningful attempt on the part of those who provide the leadership and guidance to the world community.

It is about time they should realize that re-drawing of maps by means of ethnic cleansing is a thing of distant past as had once been tried on the African Continent by the European nations and the consequences are starkly evident through all these years. The result of such futile attempts to create artificial boundaries in Africa for the benefit of colonial powers are very clear for anyone to see. The violent cross-border disputes and perpetual ethnic conflicts all over the continent, are the direct result of such attempts.

The author is a former official of the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, based in Geneva.

Education: Uplift or Face Lift?

by Mujibul Haque

ONE veteran professor of our country commented in a local daily on June 20th '95 on the new curriculum for SSC and HSC.

The paper was prepared by people who were not aware of our students. The level has been upgraded too much and in my paper there are 24 chapters. It won't be possible to follow the syllabus in details.

Surely the concerned authorities would like to believe and prove the gentleman's remarks most calumnious after what they — the Higher Secondary Education Project authorities claimed to have done and in what manner. Of course, the Taka 245.18 crore Asian Development Bank (ADB) funded project may also fall apart and every effort "to upgrade the standard of Secondary and Higher Secondary education in the country" may face a serious set back. With that the (well known) one hundred and twenty authors, who have been selected, would be deprived of proving their worth! What was the actual number of authors out of which the one hundred and twenty were selected of course, remains a trillion taka question.

Anyhow, the sudden decision made by the concerned authorities to finalise the whole programme and to implement, it from the year 1996 from class VI to XII is questionable. In the past (even at present) our authors have generally proved to be lacking in actual knowledge with biased and self-interested press whose ulterior motive was to please only certain quarters. (Mention can be made of the Bangla text where Sheikh Mujib had been portrayed as an unpatriotic for which he had been killed). And in the year 1986 the HSC English text bore such writings that shamed the government so much the very next year (1987) the

book was withdrawn. (The so-called qualified authors had made their money by then).

The present demand or need was the revision and correction of the existing texts and not an introduction of something new in the name of 'up-gradation'. And yet, as if to prove how blissful ignorance is, the concerned authorities have taken the final decision to do what they are about to do. What an irony for a poverty-stricken country like ours! Whoever said: "The idle brain is the devil's workshop, etcetra," had little idea of the commodity that is hatched there....

Foreign expatriates were reportedly brought in at the preliminary stage of 'upliftment'. They helped to conduct experimental classes in certain institutions based on teaching English as a foreign language. When some of us learnt the English language in English medium institutes, no one told us it was not a foreign language!

Back to the foreign experts on teaching English, who attended, and attend, seminars and counselled (counselors) our Education Ministry and its array of directorates. Soon this big overhaul the ADB project, was launched. Already our world is topsy-turvy with computers in examinations. (Of course, this need not have taken on this aspect if the computer was regarded as a tool to be used instead of a magical solution to problems that bedeviled the conductors of examinations.) What is happening to the learning process is evident from the personnel signing and lining up for employment. Undeniably in any system the truly knowledgeable ones are always the self-taught; be it through tutors or other guides. Equally irrefutable is that the 'flawed' old system worked and would or could have been improved upon without such radical surgery.

What will all the proposed changes, if and when af-

ected, do for the learners? Will it be mostly as before, namely, what you are taught, you are often told to 'forget it all' at the work place. Take just one instance — leave our education system for a moment — you have to get top grades or marks in TOEFL Test of English as a foreign language and SAT, GRE, A level, O level and Allah Knows what. True these help you get through a foreign university, where you have been admitted. But join the commercial world or the civil service of any of those countries, and you will find that you have to 'unlearn' what you have spent arduous years learning! Once upon a time, some young bureaucrats of our region — when English had not been discarded or 'promoted' to second language — complained about the 'secretarial' English they had to write. But it should be remembered even NOW what is issued by government departments of the countries from where the expatriates hail, is pure travesty of English — or formally 'bureaucratic jargon' — that is, the English of Shakespeare, T S Eliot, John Fowles, William Golding and others is murdered as carelessly there as Bangla in our sphere.

Does this apply to political science, physics, chemistry, medicine, nuclear physics? Oh, yes. Our past SSC-HSC system, so loudly decried today, produced brains which in the developed world, received highest ever recorded marks in a academic and are carrying on with the upliftment of their sphere!

Is the actual purpose of any educational system to enable the pupil to get along with the outside world — diplomatically? Yes! — and to earn a living. The pupil has to be inspired to use his mind and feelings, encouraging

There are just so many hours in a day; meals to be taken and sleep or rest. After that there is TV to watch or a video cassette or satellite TV broadcast cable-wise. Then social visits to be returned as well as entertained at home when relatives and friends arrive. And for those kind of families, trips to the zoo, the Sangsad Bhaban, the Botanical Garden, Eastern Plaza, museum, Ramna Park and other such places for refreshing the mind as well as learning how to deal with the practical world. "Behold....!! ...The Khan Manzil". And for little children play is a most crucial part of fueling the brain and other faculties. Play both indoors, like ludo, bagatelle and lego; and outdoors: barefeet in the afternoon, when the sun has dipped into coolness.



Now where is a child going to find the extra hours to do all the increased load of work? Is this supposed to be like in a developed country where children study at school and rush off to a tutorial afterwards with no time for play or any form of recreation and where examination is regarded as the first and foremost hell on earth. This is the country where the highest number of children kill themselves, where creativity is not on par with a country in the Middle East and another in the North American continent. Here too, the moment the children are big enough, parents get roughed up, sometimes very badly as the pressure on the brain becomes too much for the offspring.

If all this is true, then how come there is no change taking place in that land? Precisely. There are changes being affected as concerned parents and educational experts (genuine ones who fell for the pupils) fight for a system where the human feelings are free to find expression and the talents are developed more stimulatingly. New programme methods are used making mathematics easier and the same is being done for other difficult subjects. This method is being spread all over the globe. Why not here? In this method, recreation is the prime factor for winning the attention of the students. Singing and verses or 'nursery rhymes' for the infants are the best proven process for teaching any language.

Instead here we have the pupils in those beginners classes loaded down with 'Radiant Reading' and 'Rapid Reader'. The present arithmetic book of class IV or V will make one go mad....! When will they study them? At tiffin time. What is the purpose of such an overload of studies that cannot even be completed at the educational institutions?

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Humanitarian Aid with a Human Face

Tony Samphier writes from Tuzla, Bosnia

The journey from Ireland to Bosnia takes about 12 days by truck. Two Irish brothers have made the trip three times, ferrying supplies to civilians in war-ravaged Mostar and Tuzla. Gemini News Service reports on a one-vehicle aid convoy that proves sometimes small is more successful.



Friends of Bosnia: Ireland's Brian and Bernard Quinn

In 1994, the situation had improved. The Bosnia-Croatia alliance was shaky but holding. However, it was still very difficult for Muslims to travel freely.

Bernard took a big gamble. He explains: "The night before we left Mostar, we were approached by some local people who asked us to take a young Muslim lad out with us the next day. He had been cut up by a shell burst and his shoulder was shattered. He needed urgent medical attention which couldn't be provided locally.

"So we smuggled him in the back of our truck. We got him through the first checkpoint — just. The guard nearly looked in the back when he was called away to deal with something else. In the end, we got the injured lad to Split in Croatia, then by boat to Ancona in Italy. We didn't hear any more after that," says Bernard.

This time, says Brian: "We pledged to deliver medical supplies to Tuzla Hospital — and that's exactly what we've done."

Fearing theft, the Quinn brothers do not leave their aid supplies in a warehouse. As soon as they can, everything is unloaded to those who need it.

Two days after arrival, with the customs paperwork out of the way, Bernard parks his truck at the entrance of Tuzla hospital. A senior doctor supervises the delivery of large boxes of bandages, and even a few wheelchairs.

After all they have seen, the Quinn brothers are not afraid to express their political opinions.

"The aid we bring might last a day, possibly a week, but it won't solve the underlying problem," Brian argues.

There has to be a political solution for Bosnia and, perhaps, a military one. Timid little dictators like (Bosnian Serb leader Radovan) Karadzic and (his army commander General Ratko) Mladic cannot be allowed to get away with what they are doing. If the United Nations does not stand firm, the next bully will see his opportunity somewhere else in Europe. Bosnia is only a few hours by air from Ireland.

Tuzla caused by the influx of refugees from Srebrenica.

Bernard is still haunted by his experiences in Mostar at the height of the conflict.

"The Muslim population in Mostar were literally being slaughtered," he recalls. "The Serbs were in the hills surrounding the city, the Croats in the new part of town, and the Muslims in a small pocket to the east. People were starving — many of them lived on grass and snakes.

With the help of the International Rescue Committee, Bernard got £60,000 worth of aid into eastern Mostar.

"The people were so excited because so little aid had actually got to them," Bernard says

In Bosnia, where war has ravaged small villages and battered the populace, big aid convoys often fail to deliver.

Sometimes, small is better. A group of friends and family in Ireland are putting a human face on humanitarian aid — successfully supplying relief to starving citizens of Tuzla and Mostar.

Friends of Bosnia, a voluntary aid group run by brothers Brian and Bernard Quinn, have joined a growing band of Europeans who are taking the collection and distribution of aid in Bosnia-Herzegovina into their own hands.

The Quinn brothers are combating "donor-fatigue" with modern day missionary zeal and their local community has responded enthusiastically.

"Ordinary people are frustrated that aid does not always get through, goes to the wrong people or ends up on the black market," Brian explains. "We promise those who donate cash or aid that we will report back to them with video and photographic evidence that we have done the job entrusted to us."

The small, do-it-yourself aid project was set up in 1993 by Bernard, a factory worker. Self-organisation is the key. The group is run from the Quinn family home at Limerick in the Republic of Ireland.

"Bernard inspired me to get involved and it's almost become a way of life," says Brian, an unemployed child care worker. "He has already done trips to Bosnia and this is his third."

In 1992, a chance meeting opened Bernard's eyes to the horrors of Bosnia. He met a large group of Bosnian refugees, crowded around a television, watching a video. "Some of them were in tears," he recalls. "They were watching the destruction and ethnic cleansing of their own village."

But it was the harrowing experience of a friend which finally convinced the Quinn brothers to turn an interest into a family obsession.

Their friend worked for an established aid agency. While delivering supplies to impoverished Muslims in Mostar, he had a gun shoved in his mouth by a Croatian

soldier, who threatened to pull the trigger. He was lucky to get away with his life.

Unlike the well-staffed national aid agencies, a network of family and friends do all the work for Friends of Bosnia, shaking a collection tin one day and driving an aid truck the next.

What they lack in professional qualifications they make up for in on-the-job training.

This is a risky business. The journey to Bosnia is a hazardous one.

Snipers line some parts of the route. Shells can land anywhere at any time and the front line of the war constantly shifts.

But it is the rough terrain which takes its toll on vehi-

cles and drivers. Makeshift roads carved out of the mountain side are of dangerously poor quality.

Bernard is an old hand. He steers his aging truck — Ireland Bosnia Humanitarian Aid emblazoned on the side — with confidence. Brian sits beside him, sneaking video shots of war damage and evidence of ethnic cleansing along the route.

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