

Japan renews land lease for US base in Okinawa

TOKYO, Mar 29: The Japanese government signed documents today to renew leases for US military facilities in Okinawa, overruling objections from the local governor, reports AFP.

It also asked for an emergency extension of leases about to expire. Despite a court order Monday, Okinawa Governor Masahide Ota had refused to sign the documents, citing local opposition to the bases following the rape of a 12-year-old schoolgirl by three US servicemen in September.

400 file nominations for Lok Sabha election Pro-India Nat'l Confce won't take part in Kashmir polls

JAMMU, India, Mar 29: One of the largest pro-India parties in Jammu and Kashmir, the National Conference, said today it would not contest coming general elections in the troubled state, reports Reuter.

National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah told a news conference in the state's winter capital Jammu that the party would not participate in the election unless the federal government granted the region a greater degree of autonomy.

"My party will not be participating in the forthcoming elections for six seats in Jammu and Kashmir state," Abdullah said after a three-day meeting of his party's leaders. Polling for the state's six seats in the federal parliament is set for May 7, 23 and 30, with voting taking place in two different constituencies on each day. The elections will be the first in the state since the start of a separatist rebellion in 1990 in which more than 20,000 people have died.

Pilgrims warned against bringing books, leaflets during Hajj

RIYADH, Mar 29: Saudi Arabia on Thursday warned Muslims planning to make the annual pilgrimage to Makka next month against bringing political publications and pictures in the Gulf kingdom, reports AFP.

"It is strictly forbidden for the pilgrims to introduce into the kingdom books, pictures or pamphlets that have an ideological or political character," the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

EU summit opens in Italy

TURIN, Italy, Mar 29: A summit of leaders of the European Union, designed to launch the inter-governmental conference (IIG) on the EU's future, opened here today, reports AFP.

4-ex republics of Soviet Union to sign accord

MOSCOW, Mar 29: Leaders of four former Soviet republics meet at a Moscow summit today to sign a deal on strengthening ties ruptured when the Soviet Union fell apart, reports Reuter.

Civilian govt takes over in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, Mar 29: A civilian government takes over in Sierra Leone on Friday from soldiers who have dominated the West African nation for decades, reports Reuter.

Bosnian fed isn't falling apart: US NATO for pressing Balkans to implement Dayton accord

TOLEDO, Spain, Mar 29: NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana called here late Thursday for international pressure on leaders of the former Yugoslavia to apply the Dayton peace agreements "in the letter and the spirit," reports AFP.

On NATO's relations with Russia, which strongly opposes plans for the Atlantic alliance to expand eastwards, Solana said it would be a mistake to isolate Moscow.

BRIEFLY

3 Bahrainians jailed for sabotage: The newly established State Security Court handed down its first verdicts in Bahrain's political unrest on Thursday, sentencing three men to prison for sabotage, AP reports from Manama.

The judgment by the court, set up on March 20, underlined the government's determination to quell rising violence in Bahrain, a central Gulf island that is a financial hub and home to a key US Navy base.

Libya to send hijackers to Egypt: Libyan authorities will extradite to Egypt three hijackers who seized an Egypt air flight and forced it to land in Libya, Egypt's embassy in Libya said Thursday, reports AFP.

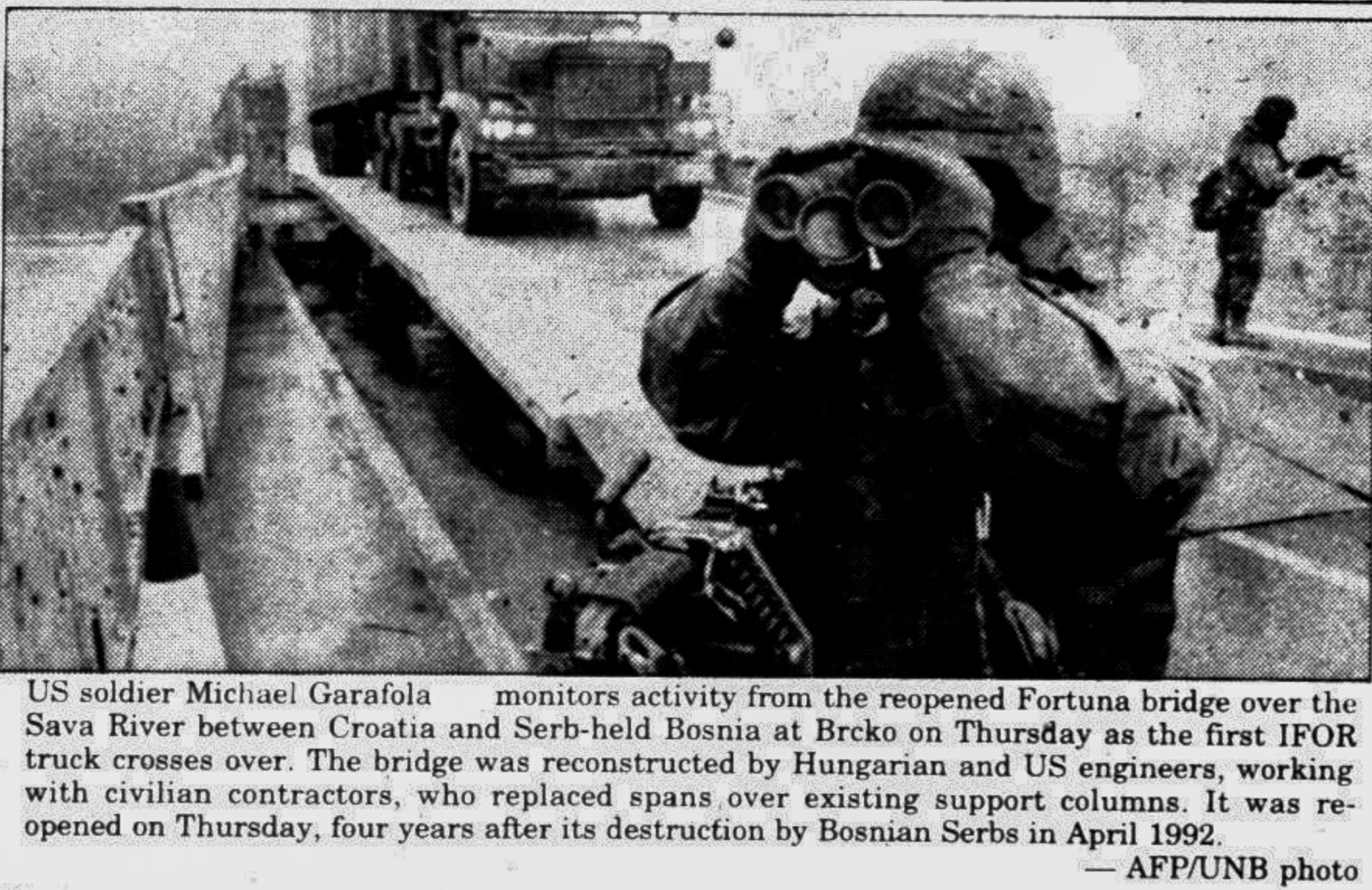
The hijackers will be back to Egypt, "The embassy's Consul, Hamdoh Shoer, told the government daily Al-Akhabar. The paper's Friday edition quoting an embassy source, added that the extradition would take place within a matter of hours.

Hillary stresses religious tolerance: US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton stressed the need for religious tolerance as she ended on Thursday a visit to Turkey and underlined her message by saying "We face enormous challenges in the future and the religious community will have to be in the forefront of assisting the rest of us in meeting those challenges." Hillary said at a meeting with religious leaders, Reuter reports from Istanbul.

Strong quake claims 19 in Ecuador: A strong earthquake jolted central Ecuador on Thursday, killing at least 19 people and leaving dozens injured, a civil defence spokeswoman said, Reuter reports from Quito. "So far we are aware of the death of 19 people and there are four who were buried by the toppling of a mine," a civil defence spokeswoman said. "We presume they are alive because they answer with knocks the calls of rescue workers." The quake, which destroyed many houses throughout the Andes Mountain range, struck central Ecuador around 6:30 pm est (2305 GMT) with a force of 5.7 on the open-ended Richter Scale.

Clinton to visit ROK, Russia in Apr: US President Bill Clinton will visit South Korea and Russia next month, adding these itineraries to his trip to Japan, a South Korean spokesman said yesterday, AFP says from Seoul. South Korean President Kim Young-Sam will meet Clinton in the southern island of Cheju on April 16, Kim's spokesman, quoted by Yonhap, said.

Russian newsman killed in Tajikistan: A Russian television journalist was shot dead in the Tajik capital Dushanbe on Thursday, the 29th reporter to die in four years of civil strife that have made the country one of the riskiest for the media, Reuter reports from Dushanbe. Russia's ITAR-Tass news agency said Viktor Nikulin, who worked for ORT-Russian public television, was killed outside his office by two pistol shots fired by unknown assailants.



US soldier Michael Garafola monitors activity from the reopened Fortuna bridge over the Sava River between Croatia and Serb-held Bosnia at Brcko on Thursday as the first IFOR truck crosses over. The bridge was reconstructed by Hungarian and US engineers, working with civilian contractors, who replaced spans over existing support columns. It was reopened on Thursday, four years after its destruction by Bosnian Serbs in April 1992. — AFP/UNB photo

"War in Korean peninsula imminent"

SEOUL, Mar 29: North Korea accused South Korea on Friday of being "on the verge of attacking it" and said a second war on the tense peninsula is not a question of if, but when, reports AP.

The point now is not whether a war will break out in the Korean Peninsula or not, but when it will be unleashed by the South, Kim Kwang Jin, the North's vice defence minister, said.

Kim pointed to recent military exercises conducted by South Korea, saying they were much greater "in scope and intensity" than in previous years. South Korea had no immediate comment, but has said in the past that its exercises are purely defensive in nature.

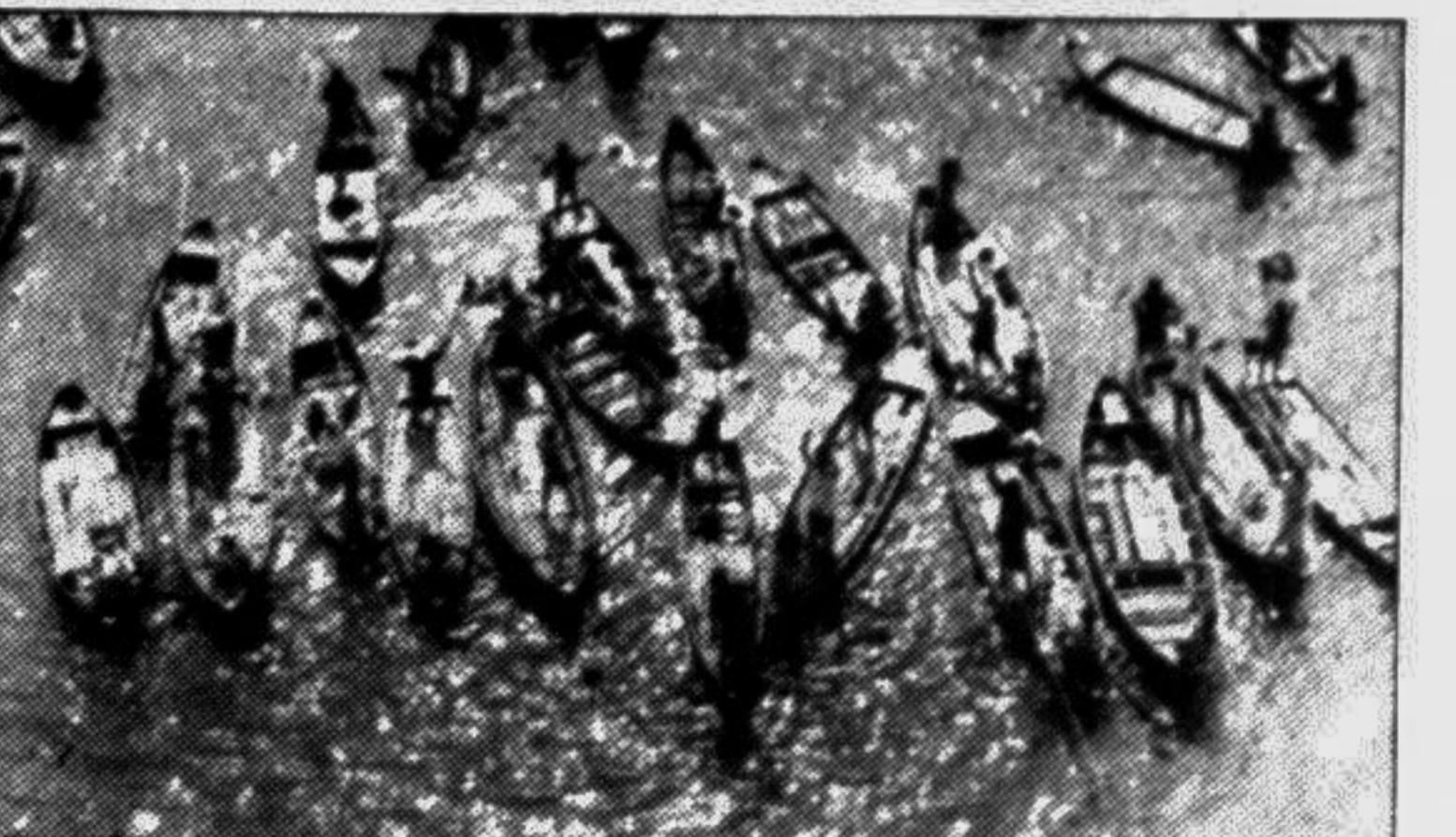
Kim, however, called them provocative and accused the government in Seoul of seeing food shortages and other "temporary difficulties" faced by the North as an opportunity for aggression. He said Seoul also was trying to divert public attention from scandals that have seen two former presidents and a host of lesser officials charged with taking millions of dollars in bribes.

FOCUS

Waterways : Life Source of the City

Opinions from Faridpur, fish from Barisal, poultry feed from Khulna, timber from Sylhet. The waterways surrounding Dhaka proved to be a source of life for a city under siege.

by Morshed Ali Khan and Rashida Ahmad



rounding the capital city, Dhaka enjoys the most natural accessibility from any part of the country. Abdul Gaffar Majhi and his ten-member crew have brought onions and some timber from Faridpur to the capital along the Padma, Jamuna, Meghna and Buriganga. He was hired for 5,000 taka by a trader to transport the merchandise which took him one and a half days of navigation.

When there is trouble transporting goods from the ghats inland due to lack of road facilities, the fishermen and other boatmen lose out. Gafur, in his long experience as a majhi, thinks that his business is intimately linked with road transport in the country. When the goods get moving by road transport, we hardly return home empty.

LETTER FROM HARVARD

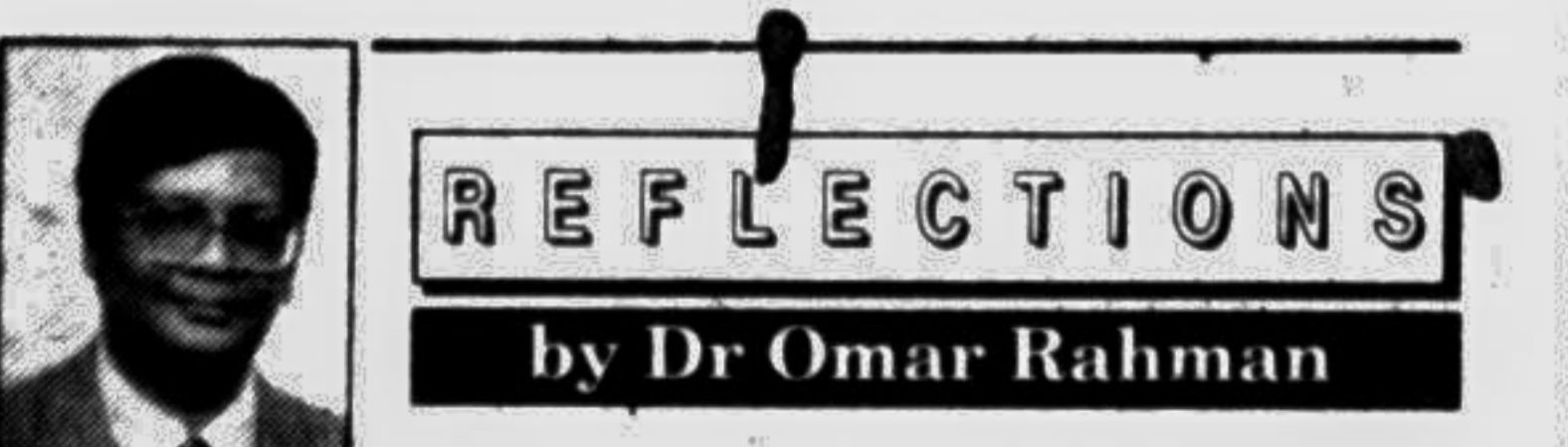
The Growth of Isolationism in America

SENATOR Dole with two thirds of the delegates in the bag is almost surely going to be the Republican nominee for President. However the battle for the heart and mind of the Republican Party is far from over.

partners, and being besieged by a flood of illegal immigrants. In an era where America is the only military superpower, some on the right believe that too much sovereignty is being peddled to multi-lateral bodies such as the United Nations, GATT etc.

has approved a bill which would slash roughly 30% of the total foreign aid budget. Given that Israel and Egypt, the two sacred cows of American foreign policy account for roughly 40% of the total foreign aid disbursed, and are unlikely to be affected, the rest of the world (particularly countries like Bangladesh) will suffer disproportionately.

way of buying the loyalty of third world hordes, who might otherwise be swayed by the chicanery of the communists. The more centrist and liberal views of foreign aid as essential for global economic development, and ultimately beneficial to the donors of such aid has never had much appeal in this quarter.



litical success has made these positions much more acceptable than in the past. Thus no matter who wins the presidential elections (now that Dole and Clinton are almost certainly going to be the respective nominees of their parties), they will have to deal with an electorate which is increasingly disenchanted with foreign concerns and is more often than not, willing to blame foreigners for their own economic woes.

While many in America and abroad may view Helms's vision of US foreign aid as somewhat extreme, the fact of the matter is that, it is gaining more and more legitimacy. While it is unlikely that the pendulum of American foreign policy will swing back to that degree of isolationism, it is clear that for the near future, countries that are dependent on American largesse will have to do with considerably less. America is changing and we in countries like Bangladesh can no longer depend on the "kindness of strangers."