

* Greenwar: Environment and Conflict, published by The Panos Institute, UK price £7.95.

ANTI-government troops are only kilometres from Addis Ababa. Decades of fighting in the Sudan show no signs of abating, and there is virtual anarchy in Mogadishu.

But civil wars in Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia are only some of the many conflicts in the Sahel today — the conflicts that have become large enough to attract media attention.

Less known are the many small-scale, everyday tensions that exist throughout the region between farmers and pastoralists, refugees and locals, all jockeying for position and access to the diminishing resources of land and water — and all of which have the potential to erupt into violence and open warfare.

This was clearly demonstrated in the violence and the disruption of diplomatic and trade links that occurred between Mauritania and Senegal in 1989 over what started as a grazing rights dispute in the overworked Senegal river valley, where competition for daily survival is fierce.

The Sahel region comprises a number of countries on the northern borders of the Sahara

BOOK REVIEW

How Competition Leads to the Kalashnikov

by Heywote Bekele

desert, reaching from Mauritania and Senegal in the west to Ethiopia and Somalia in the east.

Competition for land and water is not a recent phenomenon in the region. It has always been part of daily life, as Mahamet Hissene, a Chadain journalist with the Ministry of Information, writes in a new book, "Greenwar: Environment and Conflict".

Africa: the Sahel countries



• Sahel is Arabic for 'shore' — the edge of the Sahara.
• The semi-desert Sahel zone has annual rainfall of 150-600mm.

In his account of pastoralists in Chad, Hissene says that ritual provocation is common and considered healthy, and is even encouraged amongst youngsters:

"Everyone must assert their authority to get access to water, pasture, wild fruit and berries." However, he stresses that real fights were rare and "knowing how to avoid them as important as winning them."

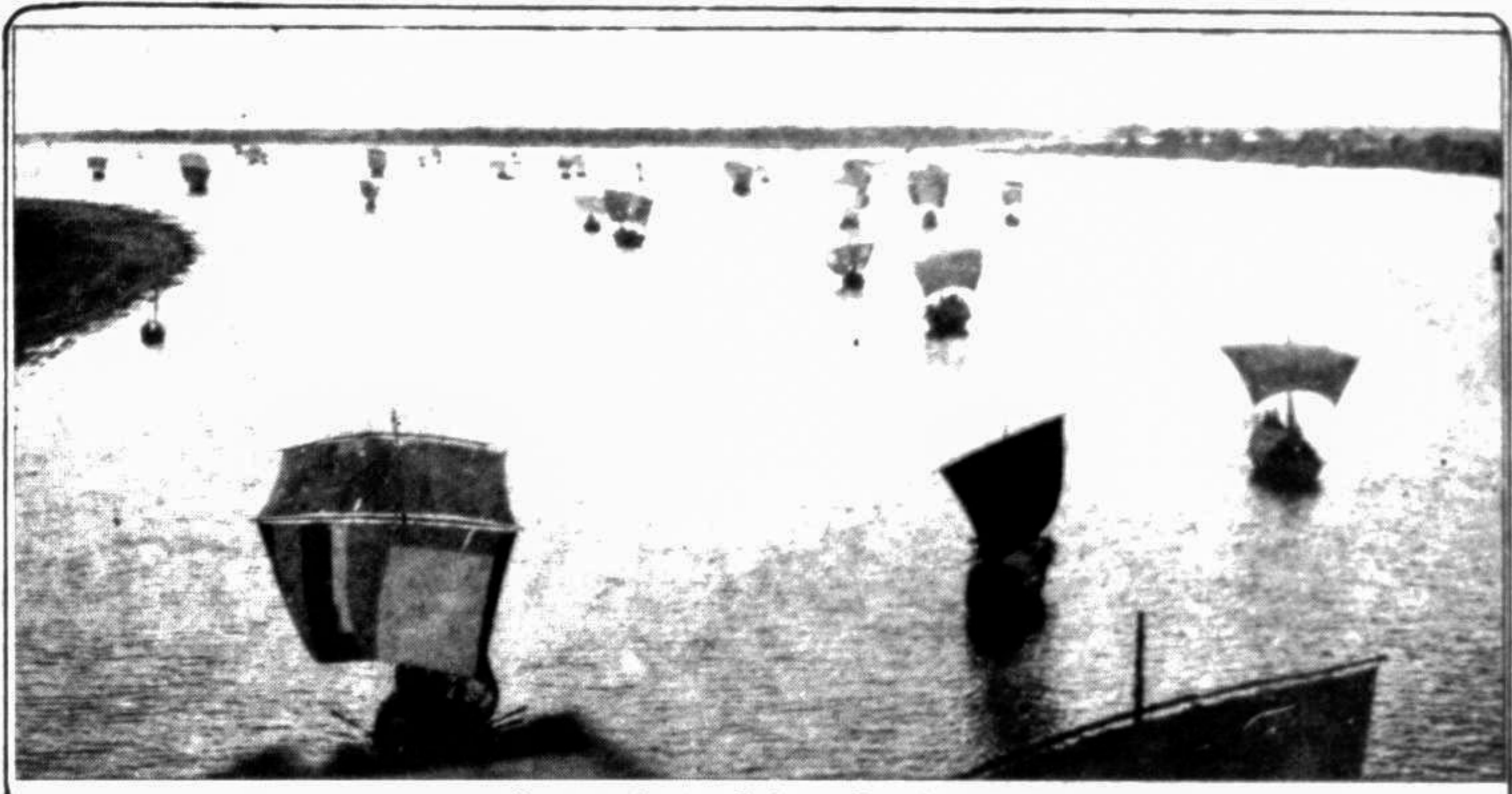
Competition went hand-in-hand with sharing. Farmers

often allowed pastoralists to graze their cattle on the stalks of the recent harvest. In return their fields were fertilised by cattle manure.

But when resources become scarce, human kindness and traditional checks and balances come under strain.

Today, with land being increasingly appropriated for farming and cash crops, with the ever-increasing population and with the successive droughts and deteriorating environment, the daily competition for basic survival is fiercer and more easily spills over into violence and sometimes open warfare.

In eastern Sudan, pastoralists have lost much of their traditional grazing land to



Sailboats on the river Padma. — Star photo

farms, and with the encroaching sand dunes and droughts, they are pushed more and more on to marginal lands, and into areas on the Ethiopia-Sudan border where armed bandits (faloul) roam.

Falul are people who have themselves been displaced by

drought and the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and are also trying to survive with their only possessions — firearms.

Violence and war are now common in the Sahel, and the availability of firearms all over the region means that even in

the smaller disputes arms may be used. It is not uncommon to see young cattle herders with Kalashnikovs casually slung over their shoulders.

"Greenwar" quotes a former Senegalese farmer, now a smuggler: "When the land is no longer fruitful and the authori-

ties have abandoned us peasants, we can only survive by using guns."

The book argues that by addressing environmental issues and working towards a more equitable resource allocation, the small disputes might be avoided — and so might the wars in the Sahel. —Panos.

REFLECTION

THE BRAVE SOULS

Zamal Arslan

In real life we never ask a mother of a dead son how she feels about not having him around anymore. Nor do we ask the departed soul's father, brother or his sister how much they miss him and how much they loved him. If the son happens to be a victim of a road accident we do not carry the mother nor the father to the place of occurrence to show the spilled blood of the deceased person. But then, 'never' is a far-fetched word which some people do not follow. And it is because of this reason some people think and believe that a very close relative should be asked to express her or his feelings about a son who no more moves around the house or the city to be lived in. They ought to be shown the place of accident where the spilled blood of the son of the soil met its tragic end.

There are times when we get carried away by emotional thoughts and feelings, though not quite impossible to control, but enough to do or make us perform things that

ordinarily would not be considered to be normal. After all we are human beings and our emotions do betray our true feelings sometimes. Then there can be also the reason where a person might himself or herself voluntarily tend to do certain things which in an ordinary case would never think of doing.

About more than a year back in our locality a mother lost her elder son in an accident where the victim was run over and crushed under the wheels of a bus. His bones were broken and there would have been no means to put them together even if he had lived. This however has been kept secret from the mother. The fact that at

the hospital when 'post-mortem' was done his 'brain' and 'liver' were supposed to have been taken out by the working doctors or doctor claiming it to be the regular practice for any 'body' that goes through that proceeding could in no way be revealed to the mother.

The stitches on the forehead was visible for which the mother was told a lie by the relatives. I dare say she would have suffered a fatal stroke had she been told that the 'brains' of her son now lay with the doctors at the hospital and that it might not be buried ever along with the boy or in accordance with the Muslim custom.

The death of this boy did not take me by surprise. Why, I can never explain. About half an hour before his fatal accident I saw him. Young and strong. And an expectant father. He had stopped to chase a group of naughty children who were making a row near my window and spilling muddy waters all over. Our eyes met for may be a fraction of a thousandth second. He left never to return alive. What followed the next few days and for several months is difficult to believe. The mother often ran towards the road 'stark naked' and the other children (not the boys) ran after her with her sari, caught her and took her home. I used to think why did

ness of losing her son. She wailed and took off her clothings offering herself to be buried with her son. That she had four more sons and two lovely daughters did not matter or at least not then. It took her more than five months to become what we may say 'normal'.

I came across a mother once who wanted to visit the place where her son was killed in a motor accident. She even insisted on seeing the car which had caused her son to die.

All those people whom she approached could not bear the thought of doing so and she never got the chance of seeing the two things she so much desired. I firmly believe she should have been given the opportunity and taken to see the place of the accident as well the car. At least it may have given her some consolation.

What her relatives thought or believed hardly matters here. She should have had the right to her 'wishes' but alas, she was never given

that chance. I hear even today she cries and tells people she could not see what she wanted to see only because no one would care to take her. If she could she would go alone by herself.

Brave sons of the soil do not die in road accidents only — they embrace martyrdom while fighting for the country or for justice against their enemies.

The mother who gave birth to these sons must be twice as much brave as their sons and must also have the courage to meet any kind of situation in any kind of consequences. So what if it may sound too ghastly for a mother to see the pale blood of her son on the pavements of a city road or the remains of a mutilated body that can hardly be recognized? Or to sit for hours at a place where her son had met his 'death' — only to become a martyr. At least she must be finding some kind of solace which no living being could give her nor can anyone know how to bring 'peace' to

the soul of the mother or the soul of the departed one. Who knows, the son living 'beyond' may himself find peace 'watching his dearest mother sitting near the place he embraced martyrdom'.

Unless our religious customs forbid us to do a thing in the Holy Quran, why should we on our own account believe in something and deprive others of the 'peace of mind' they may have had if only we listened to them? The mother whom I knew very well and the son who got killed under the wheels of a bus did not want to visit the grave of her son for more than a year. On the other hand, relatives and neighbours tried to play all sorts of 'tricks' to force the mother to visit the grave of her son. I fail to understand why they felt it was her duty to see the grave of her son or that she was committing a 'crime' by refusing to see the grave. Is not a contented 'mind in its 'normal form' better than an unquenched soul?

Europe Celebrates Mozart

At a time when Europe is celebrating the bicentenary of Mozart's death, the continent has curiously returned to its situation at the time of Wolfgang Amadeus. It has gone back to music can once again be celebrated just as much in Berlin or Prague as in Vienna. For this newly reconciled Europe, Mozart's music is the best of passports.



period: in Vienna, in Paris, where young Mozart played before Louis XV, in London and in Italy.

But the young prodigy was not interested in playing before sovereigns and courtiers.

What he wanted was to compose. At the age of 10, he wrote his first symphony, at 13, a little opera, at 14 his first string quartet. By the age of 18, he already had the output of a great master behind him: 250 pieces including 25 symphonies.

Was he going to find a place in society commensurate with his genius? It was the very opposite. Throughout his short life, Mozart was to find trials and obstacles of all kinds and above all, a social obstacle. In the 18th century, a musician, were he the most talented in the world, was only an employee, not to say a servant of princes. He had no freedom and depended on his master's good will. As Wolfgang did not have the spirit of a valet, he revolted.

His master at the time, the Archbishop-Prince of Salzburg, Colloredo, insulted him. He answered back and was thrown out.

The prince had hoped to crush him, but, in fact, he made him greater. From then on, Mozart felt free and happy. His true genius burst out. He turned all his difficulties to advantage and they enabled him to discover the greatest inspiration within himself. He became the 'divine Mozart'. 'Ar nadeus, "the beloved of the gods". Mozart became Mozart.

He asserted himself on the face of the world, on all levels and innovated in thousands of ways.

Mozart was the first composer to have chosen his freedom (and this is a milestone in the history of music) and, from then on, he gave priority to his personal creation. He overturned musical art. In place of music as a simple, pleasant but superficial court entertainment, he gave a depth and meaning which had been unknown before him.

Scouting for Spouses

(From preceding page) In the programme, the fourth such show to run in China, have included businessmen, retired officials, journalists, factory workers, teachers and even a graduate student studying in the United States.

"Our programme differs from TV dating games in Japan and the United States which are meant to mainly entertain. When the Chinese let themselves be shown on television looking for a spouse, they are serious," said anchorwoman Yang Guang.

A surprisingly large number of applicants have a high professional and social status, being the most receptive to new ideas, says Yang.

Liao Guangrong, a 27-year-old chemical engineer working for a French company in Beijing, said he joined the programme because "TV provides me with a better chance to know more people outside my immediate environment."

Ren Li, a middle-aged and divorced journalist who said she was looking for a "virtuous" husband, met a sports coach through the show. The two have been dating regularly since.

Yang said attractive women and men with above-average social status and housing are the most likely to receive responses.

Yu emphasises, however, that the programme aims to serve and educate, to "establish among our audience healthy thinking about marriage".

For instance, one episode presented a 65-year-old widower looking for a wife to encourage the idea that older people also have the right to love and be loved — a notion rejected by most Chinese.

In another programme which featured a retired worker with a 12-room house, Yang reminded the audience not to put material things above all other qualities.

Yang also sets limits on what subjects are allowed to say. She admonished a young girl who said she wanted to appear on TV to find a foreigner so she could live a wealthy life and emigrate abroad.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita, I shall be very grateful if you help me with your advice. I was married 2 years ago. I belong to the Dhaka district, but my husband is from Comilla. The marriage was solemnised in Comilla, as my father was serving there. My father died one year ago. I find living with my husband very difficult as he has bad habits such as drinks, etc. I have come away from him and want to file for divorce. Please advise me on very priority:

- 1) Though our marriage was solemnised in Comilla, can I file divorce in Dhaka court? If so can my husband shift the case back to Comilla?
2) What claim can I charge him against in my divorce case, such as dowry, money, maintenance etc.?
3) How long it may take for the whole case to be finished?
4) I have studied up to B.A (Hons). Can I file the case myself without a lawyer as this will be costly? If a lawyer is needed, what should be the reasonable charge for the lawyer for the whole case?
I work in a private company and am living with my mother. Please give me your advice early, for which I shall remain very grateful.

Rubina Sultana, Wyre Street, Wari, Dhaka.

Dear Rubina, As your questions deal with legal matters I referred it to the lawyer in our team, who answers:

- 1) Yes, you can file for divorce in Dhaka.
2) You can only claim Mehr and some child support if there are any children. Contrary to popular belief a woman can claim Mehr even if she asks for divorce.
3) The whole process will take 3 months. If it is stipulated in your Nikah Nama that you have a right to divorce, then you can give a notice of divorce which will become effective provided your husband does not contest.
4) Yes, you can file the case yourself. If it is difficult to say how much a lawyer will cost as their fee is not standardised.

Dear Mita, I am a young girl of 16 and will appear for my 'O' level exams next year. My problem is that I do not have anything to do besides studying. There is no place to spend my time in a constructive way. I don't like doing the things some of my friends do such as going to parties or shopping. Is there an alternative? Many people of my age have the same problem.

Shaira, Lalmatia.

Dear Shaira, I agree there are not many existing facilities to entertain young people such as you. However, given the needs of our society there should not be a dearth of things to do if you have the interest and the energy. Forming a club with people of common interest is a good thing to start. The Green (dealing with environmental issues) is a popular theme with young people nowadays. The recent cyclone has generated a lot of enthusiasm among youngsters to lend a helping hand to their unfortunate country people. Projects such as children's education, schools for the mentally retarded, development for underprivileged women etc. could always use volunteers. These are some ways to open time and have a feeling of satisfaction too.

Dear Mita, Few weeks ago you answered a letter to a man who complained about his wife's spending habit. I would like to say something in defence of women who are accused of overspending. The husband brings home the pay check and gives

an amount to his wife after which his responsibility is over. She keeps accounts, shops herself, monitors the servants, does everything possible to manage with the amount given to her. Yet at the end of the month she is accused of being a bad manager, overspending if she asks for extra money due to some emergency. I can assure you that this happens in most households. Is this fair? What do you have to say to that?

Sheela Majumdar, Chittagong.

Dear Sheela, I agree with what you say does happen though I don't know if it is true of most households. Overspending is not a gender related habit as both men and women can be spenders, but when a woman does it she attracts more attention because traditionally women are supposed to be thrifty. This is a behaviour pattern which people acquire over the years due to social, psychological and economic factors and a habit which is difficult to break. In my experience, relating to money or to spending has created major problems among couples.

Dear Mita, I am curious to know whether you are a man or a woman, how old are you? Are you married with children? Do you also face some of the problems that you write about and do you solve them yourself or seek help elsewhere? Though I have never written to get advice I feel good that you are there to help me if I need it. I do have a small problem. My neighbours make too much noise especially when my son wants to sleep. How can I stop them.

Simmi, Malibagh.

Dear Simmi, Thank you for your nice letter. I prefer to keep my identity anonymous and therefore cannot answer your questions. I do few problems like most normal people and seek help if they are too complicated to be solved by myself. About your neighbours, it is really difficult to stop them unless they do so voluntarily. I suggest establishing some kind of relationship so that once you reach a level of friendship communication can become easier. If you live in an apartment then writing all your neighbours to common problems could perhaps help.

WRITE TO MITA

Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star, GPO Box 3257 or to 28/1, Toynee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.