

Save Our Children

For Bangladesh, there is quite a bit of good news in The State of the World's Children (SWC) report for 1992. But it is overshadowed by the overall challenge — national, regional and international — of saving millions of children in the developing world from high rate of mortality, continuing malnutrition, growing illiteracy and all forms of avoidable diseases. Credit goes to the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) for presenting us with what seems to be a balanced report, released globally on Thursday, and to its office in Dhaka for focusing on the organisation's performance, both success and failure, in Bangladesh.

On balance, UNICEF and local authorities have worked well together to achieve what the local representative of the UN body, Cole P. Dodge describes as a "phenomenal success" in recent years, especially in the field of the Extended Programme on Immunisation (EPI), with the target reached in some selected areas, such as the Rajshahi division. This success is matched by decreasing trend in child marriages, the increased supply of pure drinking water for the rural people and a rise in the enrolment of girl students in schools. Here, Mr Dodge is right in commending the pragmatic steps taken by the government in the Fourth Five Year Plan to redress the problems of children. Similarly, one must give due credit to several Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), both foreign and local, for the role they have played in the endless battle to save our children.

It is truly an endless battle, not just for Bangladesh but also for most developing countries, especially those which face twin problems of low rate of economic development and excessive population growth. This explains why while the "Under Five Mortality Rate" (U5MR) has decreased in Bangladesh from 156 per thousand in 1960 to 114 in 1990, the country is still ranked 23 among the 38 nations with exceedingly high U5MR. There are other statistics which paint a grim picture of the fate of our children, in the urban centres as well as in rural areas.

The publication of the annual report on The State of the World's Children serves as a reminder of what more national governments and, by extension, the international community could do to face up to the challenge. The size of the allocation in budgets for human development, in such fields as health care, sanitation and education, still falls below 12 per cent on average in developing countries. On the other hand, rich nations which provide assistance to developing countries allocate, on average, ten per cent of their aid to health, education and family planning. Seen in this context, whatever some developing countries, including Bangladesh, have achieved in tackling problems of children, this has been possible despite the paucity of funds from national and international sources. This also means that these countries would have saved more children, raised the level of literacy higher and met other pressing needs better had we been more generous with funds for children-related projects.

In the final analysis, this is the crux of the matter. If we have to do better in the coming year in saving our children, we have no choice but to generate more funds from national and international sources for projects in this field. We can do so by diverting funds from unproductive sectors and by reducing our defence budgets, while rich nations must increase their allocations for the developing world, especially for the reduction of poverty, from the saving in their military expenses.

A Most Despicable Act

Politics in Pakistan has taken a sad turn for the worse, following the 27th November incident when a group of masked armed men allegedly gang raped Ms Veena Farhana Hayat, the 40-year-old daughter of a respected politician, Mr Shaukat Hayat Khan, a personal friend and political associate of the country's founding father Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Ms Hayat is a close friend of the Bhutto family, to intimidate whom the attack was carried out. It is alleged that in the 12-hour ordeal, during which the victim was tortured and raped, the armed attackers repeatedly questioned her about her links with the Bhutto family. Ms Hayat claims to have overheard her tormentors mention the name of Sind Chief Minister Jam Sadeq Ali and his Home Affairs Advisor Irfanullah Marwat as the masterminds behind this barbaric act.

The whole episode takes on a far more sinister and deplorable dimension because it happened in the backdrop of opposition charges of political vendetta by the Pakistani President against the former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, whom he sacked in late 1990. Sadeq Ali is a well-known camp follower of President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. The President happens to be the father-in-law of Marwat. Marwat's brother also heads the Crime Investigation Agency of Sind. Just prior to the alleged assault on Ms Hayat the Sind government launched a massive attack on the opposition Pakistan People's Party arresting more than 2,000 of its workers, all in the name of rounding up terrorists.

Given the tradition of politics in Pakistan — we are all partly victims of this disease — reaction to this barbaric attack will take on party colours. Haters of the Bhutto family will find some flaws with the opposition story and the members of the opposite camp will want the so-called masterminds already hanged or 'stoned' to death. Any failure to distinguish the fundamental principle of democratic practice — civilized practice, really — from what is obviously a criminal act of the most despicable kind will lower the standard of politics in Pakistan. When politicians tolerate party violence, gangsters find their way into political parties. Rapist will enter the political arena if this violent, dastardly and debasing act is judged according to party lines and is not condemned by all parties and all politicians, regardless of which side of current political divide they belong to. President Ghulam Ishaq Khan will be wise to take all possible steps to clear the air and get to the bottom of this sordid episode to protect his own reputation, as his own relations and political followers have been accused of the crime. More importantly, he should do so to protect the reputation of the political system of his country.

As Central Asia's geopolitical tectonic plates adjust to the dramatic upheavals in Moscow, three countries in the region are being drawn inexorably together — China, Pakistan and Iran.

Proof of the emerging alliance is the flurry of diplomatic activity between Islamabad, Beijing and Tehran in recent months.

Recently, Chinese President Yang Shangkun visited Pakistan and Iran. Pakistan's new chief of army staff Asif Nawaz, on his first foreign tour after taking office, went to Beijing and Tehran.

The visits are the latest indications of growing ties between the three unlikely bedfellows which is sustained by their common suspicion of the United States and their increasingly close trade and military ties.

"All three countries feel the need to be closer to each other given the changes taking place in the region," explains a leading Pakistani military analyst, speaking privately.

Bereft of US political and economic props, military Pakistan officials, for one, seem to be insecure about its role in the region. Islamabad is also nervous about what it sees as a growing intimacy between the United States and India, its powerful eastern rival.

The US Factor in the Alliance of China, Iran and Pakistan

A shared suspicion of the United States is drawing China, Pakistan and Iran together in an unlikely triangular alliance, writes **Mushahid Hussain of IPS from Islamabad.**

And with the Soviet-US agreement to disengage from Afghanistan by the end of the year, Pakistan sees itself treading an arduous and lonely foreign policy path.

After the collapse of the communist party in the Soviet Union, China is also feeling the heat — both ideologically and politically — from Washington which has made no secret of its desire to see an "action replay" of the Soviet collapse in China.

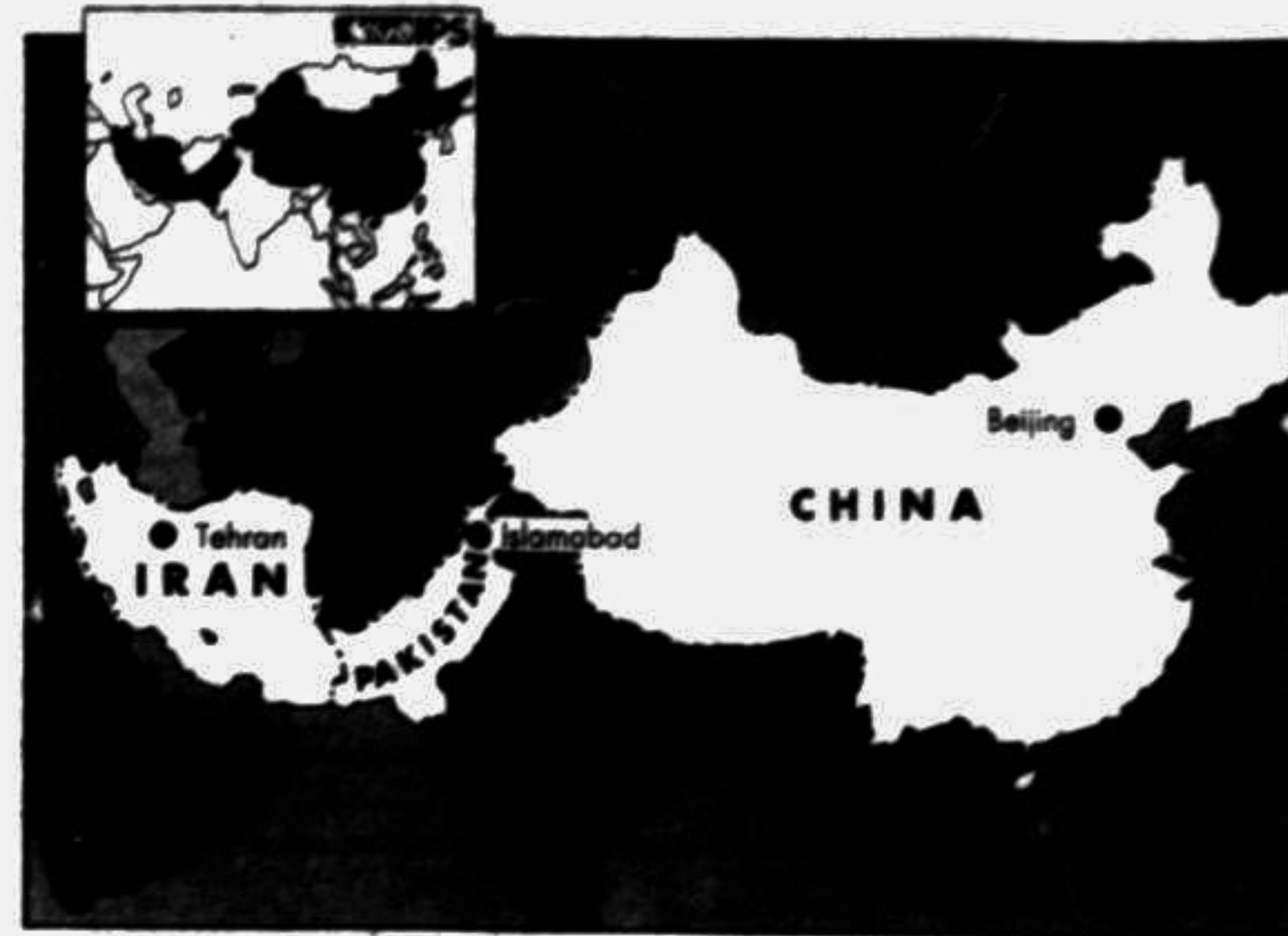
Beijing has therefore moved swiftly to re-establish closer ties with the remaining Stalinist bastions in Asia: North Korea, Vietnam and Burma. Simultaneously, it is also strengthening its links with Iran and Pakistan along its western flank.

Despite the end of the Gulf

War, Islamic countries say there has been no change in Washington's attitude towards the region: the United States continues to see Iran as a greater threat to its interests than an emasculated Saddam Hussein.

"The US factor" has emerged as a common uniting bond between the three countries in recent months. The United States has been pressuring all three countries and has attempted to curtail military cooperation between them.

In April 1991, the US House of Representative passed legislation certifying penalties if China sold missiles and other military equipment to five countries in the region — Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Libya and Syria.



While four of these countries are already on the US State Department's list of states allegedly "supporting terrorism", a recent US envoy told her Pakistani hosts that Washington was considering placing Pakistan also on the list for its alleged support of Muslim separatists in the

Indian state of Kashmir. Although China recently signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), both Pakistan and China have for long resisted US pressure on their nuclear weapons programmes. And Iranian Vice-president Seyed Atallah Mohajerni in

recent interview supported the right of Muslim countries to acquire nuclear technology. Mohajerni even criticised the alleged cooperation between India and Israel to undermine Pakistan's nuclear programme. The recent international conference on the initiative in Tehran is also seen by analysts as a reaffirmation of Iran's hardline attitude on the question of Middle East peace.

In September, China organised a big conference in Beijing in support of its own concept of a new international political order which the Chinese felt should govern by the principle of equality among nations.

Cementing the bond between Iran, Pakistan and China is a convergent foreign policy outlook. For instance, all three have a shared experience of pursuing similar policies on Afghanistan.

They are all suspicious of US designs in the region to varying degrees, and all three see their alliance as having a "strategic dimension".

China and Pakistan share common perceptions about India's role in the region.

China is extremely sensitive about Western criticism of its efforts to put down an uprising in Tibet, and military circles in Beijing fear future pressure from Washington on Tibetan autonomy.

The Western Media and the Muslim World

by Md Azher Zafar Shah

WHILE it is widely acknowledged that Islam led the world in scientific and intellectual discoveries, Islam is still a deeply misunderstood and misrepresented way of life to the majority of the West. The origin of this misrepresentation is controlled by a few hands, has a near monopoly over the production and dissemination of international information and possesses a high level of credibility on the audience it aims to influence.

Eighty per cent of the globe's news data originates from the four major Western news agencies — Associated Press, United Press International, Reuter and Agence France Presse — while the Third World, which comprises seventy-five per cent of the earth's population, accounts for only twenty per cent of the news coverage, and that too mainly concerning famines and disasters and coups AP, UPI, Reuter and AFP, daily cable more than 45 million words to 110 nations. The quantity of news sent by them to Asia, Africa and South America is 100 times more than the quantity of information flowing in the reverse direction. The United States controls over two-thirds of all information in the non-communist world. Ninety per cent of foreign information for press, radio and television in Africa arrives from the West. In South America, over seventy per cent

of all foreign information is provided by the two American news agencies, UPI and AP. Modern technology is supported by trained expertise and abundant financial resources. For instance, UPI has 238 bureaux with about 10,000 employees in 62 states. A similar monopoly is possessed by the West in international radio broadcasting. Added to these media outlets monopoly in the West is the fact that newspapers and magazines are usually owned by a few press barons. Thus Lord Thomson, Katherine Graham, Randolph Hearst and Rupert Murdoch are famous among those in the West who can claim to be influential owners of press "empires". Eighty per cent of the British press is owned or controlled, partially or wholly, by a few multinationals, and six of the nine British national daily newspapers have final control vested in an individual, family or a trust. At the British Trades Union Congress held in 1979, TUC leaders accused newspaper owners of "censoring" their papers and turning them into "political and social propaganda sheets."

The cultural and political belief systems of editorial staff also exercise a major role in the media's policy on various topics. Such a tilt is apparent in the American media, which is characterized by a strong pro-Israeli, anti-Arab bias. The New York Times, "The

Washington Post", "Time", "Newsweek", "The International Herald Tribune", all are partly or wholly Zionist-owned or have Zionists in prominent editorial positions.

Specific Frameworks

The Western perception which is conveyed in media coverage of the Muslim world can be analyzed in three specific frameworks: cultural, political and ideological. In the cultural sphere there is the identification of western customs with civilized virtue and modernization. This involves ingredients of a "holier-than-thou" morality and a somewhat naked double standard. A few years ago, the famous American politician William Fulbright emphasized the need to "overcome excessive moralism" and condemned "the Western tendency to attach a mythological sanctity to policies and practices which in themselves have no moral content or value."

Anything Western Christianity, Capitalism, Colonialism — is usually portrayed positively as a factor in favour of modernization. This "moral" dimension is exemplified in the West's relationship with Israel. While support for Israel is projected as a "moral commitment", sympathy for the Arab perspective is portrayed as surrender to "oil blackmail". Considered from

the historical viewpoint, the West's "moral" support for the Zionist causes appears quite shallow due to the West's silence when crimes were being perpetrated by the Christians of Europe against the Jews of Europe during the preceding centuries.

The West's double standard is most blatant in presentation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, with Palestinians normally described as "terrorists" while the state terror of Israel is either overlooked or underemphasized. Arabs who subsidize the West are persistently caricatured, while Israel which depletes Western resources is not. As a Christian Palestinian asked rhetorically: "Was Islamic punishment, which annihilated the press, more irrefutably vicious than napalming Vietnamese peasants 'Israel's' reference to 2000-year old biblical testaments to sanction its occupation of Arab land is never viewed as 'return to the past'."

Popular Theme

Islam's apparent incompatibility with modernization is the most popular theme among Western scholars and media. The fact is that if modernization represents more schools, hospitals, roads, houses, economic progress and social security, then Islam is all for it. If, on the other hand, modernization means

gambling, free sex, pornography, alcoholism, drug addiction, vandalism, and crimes of violence, then Islam is totally opposed to such "modernization".

Politically, the West and its media have generally perceived the Muslim world mainly in the framework of the competition between the two superpowers. The Muslim world's own particular identity is usually underplayed. The Western perception of the Muslim world is more on the level of a Soviet gain or western loss. Some illustrations: A Palestinian sovereign state must be opposed because it will be a "Soviet satellite"; Turkey is "important", because it provides facilities to monitor the Soviet Union; the Iranian Revolution must be opposed because it is also against Israel.

It is the ideological value system of the West that is at the root of much misrepresentation of Islam and the Muslim world. The West's ideological perception of the world contains ingredients of the customary Western secular, liberal disdain for religion as well as Christianity's traditional antagonism towards Islam. The Arab editor, Ihsanin Ihsanin, provides historical causes for this Christianity versus Islam enmity: The Crusades which led to Christian defeats at the hands of Muslim generals, and the conflict between western imperialism-Arab nationalism in the present century. Even

perception of Turkey with regard to its confrontation with Greece over Cyprus illustrates this prejudice.

Duplicity

The duplicity of Western "left-wing" liberals is also discernible when the Muslim world is under consideration. Many are practising "selective" anti-imperialism by keeping quiet about Zionist colonialism. In the United States prominent liberals who were "doves" on Vietnam are "hawks" on Israel; examples being Senators Edward Kennedy and George McGovern. Similar Western intellectual hypocrisy is apparent on human rights: there are massive protests whenever a dissident Jew is imprisoned in Russia, while repression of the Palestinians is overlooked.

The famous Pakistani journalist, Altaf Gauhar, is correct in his opinion that the western media may be "liberal" but that does not make it free of all cultural and ideological constraints. He adds that "liberalism is an ideology which has had an historic affinity and compatibility with imperialism", and the "liberal press for all its tolerance and dedication to freedom of thought is profoundly suspicious of, and hostile to, ideologies like communism and Islam."

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New Zealanders Set Ban on Age Discrimination

Derek Round writes from Wellington

THE age of New Zealand politicians reflects much about changes in the nation's working ages.

Fifty years ago it was not unusual for parliamentarians to be in their 60s and 70s. A cabinet minister under the age of 50 was rare.

Today there are more ministers under 50 than there are over 50. The ruling National Party and the opposition Labour Party each have only one member of Parliament over 60.

But, with the number of over-60s in the country increasing and the strength of the "Grey Power" movement growing, the trend may be reversed. And grey hair may once again be seen around the cabinet table.

Which is probably just as well, as New Zealand is poised to outlaw discrimination on grounds of age. The move follows the government's decision to raise the age at which New Zealanders can qualify for

a state pension. A major political row looms over superannuation, with the government arguing taxpayers can no longer afford a gold-plated pension scheme.

New Zealanders currently qualify for a pension at 60. But starting next April, the age of eligibility will be raised gradually to 65 over the next 10 years.

New Zealand prohibits discrimination on grounds of race, gender or religion, is keen to outlaw discrimination against disability and is debating whether to ban discrimination because of sexual orientation

But many people have been planning to retire at 60 — or are forced by their conditions of employment to retire then — in the expectation they would have a guaranteed pension at that age.

The decision to raise the qualifying age to 65 has meant many New Zealanders, forced to give up work at 60, face the prospect of going on the dole until they are 65.

With widespread unem-

ployment, people over 50 are finding it increasingly difficult to get jobs.

Justice Minister Douglas Graham, who is introducing legislation to outlaw age discrimination, says there is nothing the government can do to interfere with private contracts stating a retirement

age that employees have already signed.

But he hopes the legislation will make it easier for people to negotiate continued work with their employers. "The effect will be to make it apparent to employers that they cannot discriminate against people on ground of age," Mr Graham says. "That doesn't mean every older person is going to be able to go out and get a job. You

can't force employers to do things, but the general intention is to recognise there is a change in the age of superannuation. Therefore there are people who will need to be working on."

New Zealand already has legislation banning discrimination on grounds of race, gen-

der or religion. Mr Graham says he is also keen to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of disability.

Still unresolved is the debate over outlawing discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, a measure advocated by homosexuals and lesbians.

The government's decision to tackle the prejudice of "ageism" has been generally welcomed by politicians and

leader writers.

Labour Party leader Mike said the retirement plans of thousands of people had been thrown into turmoil and immense anguish had been caused in the over-50 age group by the government's decision to increase the age of entitlement for superannuation.

The Dominion newspaper

prised 12 per cent of the population. Today they are 15.4 per cent, growing steadily toward an estimated 26 per cent by 2031.

In 1936, 83 per cent of New Zealand men aged 60 to 64 were still working full-time, compared with 35 per cent in 1986. This despite the gains of longer life expectancy, better health care and wider education.

For men 65 and over the drop has been even more dramatic. In 1936, 39 per cent were still working. In 1986 only 7 per cent were working.

"That shows how expectations of helplessness and dependency can become self-fulfilling prophecies — even though most over-60s, then and now, are healthy, alert, and offer added value in a perspective and experience that only the years can bring," the Dominion newspaper said.

— Dephneus Asia

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed 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.

Hypocrisy

Sir, On December 13, there was an untoward incident in a local cinema hall where usually English films are shown. As is common all over the subcontinent, Friday is the day on which new films are released. It is also common locally, to show two English films on one ticket. As regards the aesthetic content of the films shown the less said the better.

But what I have to protest against is the highly emotional — one can almost say violent — protest made by a local daily on its first page.

The incident occurred when two new English films

were advertised to be released on Friday, one of the entitled "The Naughty Girl". The advertisements included some very provocative posters. Naturally there was a large crowd present at the booking windows, and also naturally, ticket black-market dealers made a heyday of the opportunity. But after the first of the advertised films was shown, instead of "The Naughty Girl", another, previously shown film was started. At this, the audience reacted violently and began to break the furniture of the hall. This reaction of the audience, although undesirable, is one that can be expected in such a situation, even in such a case

when the advertised film is not so sexually provocative.

The above mentioned Khulna daily has, in its said protest, criticised the administration including the police and relevant authorities that can apply censorship rights for their acquiescence in this process of erosion of ethical values, and I want to record my protest against such criticism on the ground that when the same authorities actually wake up and take similar action, newspapers as well as social and political leaders and aspiring leaders raise a hue and cry about encroachment by the government on "freedom of expression." The very same journal has in the past criticised the government in respect of the restrictions imposed on staging of "Jatra."

Why this hypocrisy?

Anwar Pirose
Babu Khan Road, Khulna.

Malafide intention

Sir, Thanks to Julien Francis for his letters "Democratic violence" and "Inhuman" published in The Daily Star, on 11th and 18th December respectively.

Before I write anything in support of the views expressed by Mr Francis, I would like to express my heart-felt sympathy with the victims. I would further like to request Mr Francis not to blame the people of Bangladesh as a whole for the misdeed of handful of hooligans. The silent majority is not in favour of any violence.

People of Bangladesh shed their blood twice for democracy in 1971 and 1990. We want to protect, preserve and nourish democracy. But a section is trying its level best to create chaos and confusion with a malafide intention to kill the new-born democracy. Mr Francis would appreciate The Daily Star for its second leader of December 18, under the caption "A Cool Ten-hour

Raid". Now looters and hooligans raise slogans glorifying some political party or other!

M Saleem Ullah
Motfheel C/A, Dhaka.

Western Samoa

Sir, We heard through the BTV news that Western Samoa was being hit by a powerful cyclone last week which killed a number of people and destroyed huge properties.

Western Samoa is a country of islands in the Pacific in the Oceania. The capital is Apia. Recently through some personal contact, I learned a lot about Western Samoa and published in 'The Samoan Times' one of my write-ups covering information about Bangladesh. The country is among the developing ones, but its economic condition and population status are better than those of ours. There is another country near Western Samoa known as American Samoa which is rich and within the territory of America. Coconut

grows abundantly in Western Samoa and they have some coconut processing plants. Remittance from Samoans working abroad is one of the major incomes. People are simple and quite friendly. The form of government is parliamentary. Very few Bangladeshis know about Western Samoa but this country has direct tele-link with Dhaka. As far as I know, about ten Bangladeshis are working there in responsible positions.

Meanwhile, we understand that an epidemic is broken out in the Western Samoa following the devastating cyclone. We would earnestly call upon the international communities and the UN system to intensify rescue and relief operations in there and extend our deep sympathy to the people of Western Samoa and hope they will soon overcome distress.

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