

**This Must Not Happen Again**

We welcome back a group of Bangladeshi children who had been kidnapped and kept in Bombay prior to their departure for some Gulf countries to be used as jockeys in camel races. Out of some 25 teenagers who were rescued by the local Indian police from an abandoned house in Bombay, 17 were flown back here by Biman yesterday. The remaining eight, including one barely a year old, were being kept in Bombay to be used as "exhibits" in the trial of the kidnapers who are said to be Bangladeshis, claiming to be parents of the unfortunate victims of one of the most heinous plots recently reported by the press.

For saving these kids from the tragic fate and possible death — the game is to tie these kids to the camels which would race faster provoked by the screams of their teenage riders — credit must indeed go to the Bombay police whose action underscores the real and largely unpublished SAARC spirit of regional co-operation. However, the prime-mover in the unique rescue operation and the planned rehabilitation of these teenagers in an orphanage in Khulna is Faith Willard of the US-based Friends of Bangladesh which runs the home in Khulna. The photograph that appeared in this paper's front page yesterday, showing Ms Willard carrying one of the teenagers in her arms and holding another by hand, is something in the category of a picture of the year. In its underlining message of compassion and international understanding that link nations — in this case, the United States and Bangladesh — through, appropriately enough, non-governmental bodies committed to humanitarian causes, transcending race, colour, religion and nationalities.

While we also thank the Bangladesh High Commissioner in India and his officials for what Ms Willard has described as their help extended to this complicated but unique operation, we urge the authorities in Bangladesh, India and the Gulf countries to conduct a thorough investigation into the matter. The case, under study, which will soon go before the court in Bombay was not surely the first of its kind nor, if we relax our vigilance, the last one we will be hearing about. We are sure that the 25 kidnapped Bangladeshi teenagers rescued in Bombay could not have been taken through the border without the connivance of frontier authorities in India and Bangladesh. The agents must have had their own plans of smuggling these unfortunate kids into the Gulf region, without, we assume, valid travel documents. What kind of money did the kidnapers plan to make out of this barbaric game? Who, in the Gulf countries, provide the links in the chain? We must not stop until all the facts have been unearthed, people involved are identified and the guilty ones firmly dealt with in various courts, in India, Bangladesh and in the Gulf countries wherever they may be found. In many of these countries, kidnapping carries death penalty. Let the kidnapers, if found guilty, face this punishment.

These kidnapped Bangladeshi children have been rescued and are now in the process of being rehabilitated in an orphanage in Khulna just when governments in different countries, including Bangladesh, have been indulging in rhetorical exhortations marking the International Children's Week. National leaders have reiterated their administrations' commitments to the application of children's rights in fields ranging from education to recreational facilities as well as to the opposition to child labour. The circumstances surrounding the kidnapping of Bangladeshi kids, rescued in Bombay, show that we do have a long way in carrying out these commitments, including the basic one, the right to life.

**A Gesture from Hanoi**

An election is certainly the right time for an incumbent president to break a piece of good news to his electorate. George Bush has done exactly this, by disclosing over the weekend that the Vietnamese government has finally agreed to make available "all information" on US war prisoners. This means that the controversial MIA (Missing In Action) issue that had so long eluded a solution is at last being resolved, closing a chapter in Washington-Hanoi relations.

Whether or not this disclosure will improve the rating of Bush in the opinion poll remains to be seen. If the ardent supporters of the Republican leader may applaud the news as another triumph of the President, there will be cynics who may well wonder what took Bush so long to get this agreement from Vietnam.

All said and done, it is a good breakthrough in Washington-Hanoi relations. It opens the way for full normalisation of ties between the two countries, just what Hanoi had been asking for. Bush has already announced that as an opening gesture, United States would be sending some humanitarian aid for flood victims in Vietnam.

Of course, Hanoi needs a good deal more than just relief goods. It needs bilateral aid and assistance from multilateral agencies which have been facing resistance from Washington in meeting Vietnam's requests. Now, with the prospects of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Hanoi and Washington looking brighter than before, the way is cleared for Vietnam getting its due share of international assistance. This should be welcomed by all friendly countries, including Bangladesh. After all, with the process of economic liberalisation set in motion, there are no reasons why any country should even think of obstructing Hanoi's revival in trade, commerce and investment, the key to an improved standard of living for the country's teeming and largely impoverished millions. In the final analysis, this is also the key to political stability of the country in this changing time.

**Birth of Kurdistan: A Long-Held Dream Comes True**

Arshad-uz Zaman writes from Istanbul

**Kurdistan is a long-held dream of the Kurdish people, who live mainly in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. It is also a long-head goal of the Western powers, who narrowly missed foisting it on the soil of Turkey following the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War.**

IN the beginning of October, the birth of Federation of Kurdish state was announced. This undoubtedly is the most important fallout of the Second Gulf War, which culminated in the total rout of the Iraqi forces of President Saddam Hussein in the hands of Western forces led by the US.

The birth of this Federation is no sudden development. At the end of the Gulf War, when the forces of Saddam Hussein were in full flight before the advancing Western forces and the exposed Iraqi troops were being decimated, the US operating through the UN, which had become its handmaiden, imposed draconian ceasefire terms on Saddam ceasing virtual dismemberment of his country. In northern Iraq, beyond the 34 parallel, where the Kurdish majority live and more importantly, where the rich oil wells are situated, Iraq was prohibited from entering that area on the ground of protecting the Kurdish minority. As a practical measure a special force named 'Poised Hammer' was set up composed of Western forces and stationed on Turkish soil. It is worth recalling that at the beginning of the crisis, which was triggered by Saddam's

invasion of Kuwait, her two pipelines — one going through Saudi Arabia and the other through Turkey — were shut off, thus nearly asphyxiating Iraqi economy.

Kurdistan is a long-held dream of the Kurdish people, who live mainly in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. It is also a long-head goal of the Western powers, who narrowly missed foisting it on the soil of Turkey following the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. It is therefore no wonder that Turkey is following every development regarding the emergence of this new entity, within whispering distance of her south border. Her official reaction is that Kurds, Turkmen, Arab and Suriani, living in northern Iraq are dependant on Turkey for their security. "Only the last federal state decision is a one sided one and we see it as a step leading to the partition of Iraq. We do not approve of this today as we did not in the past," stated the official declaration. The US official

reaction is that the declaration of a federal state cannot be considered a declaration of independence and the US State Department 'strongly supports the territorial integrity of Iraq and Turkey.' The US, however, underlined her support for the protection of cultural and political rights of Kurds of Turkey. Out of a population of nearly 60 million, there are nearly 15 million Kurds. The Turkish state since time immemorial has been composed of many ethnic strains and they never have attempted to separate them. Thus there are nearly as many Bosnians living in Turkey as in the present day hell, known as Bosnia-Herzegovina, and everyone living in Turkey goes under the description of Turk. This, of course is a phenomenon that exists throughout the world.

To complicate the situation for Turkey, her security forces have been locked in battle for several years now, with a Kurdish organisation known as the PKK (Turkish Workers Party). The war has been

greatly intensified lately and the casualties on both sides at least run in double figure daily. On the day of the declaration of the Federation of Kurdistan, the leaders namely Jalal Talabani and Masud Barzani ordered her irregulars known as Peshmaraga to expel PKK terrorists from her soil. Newspapers report of intense fighting between the two forces, who are both of Kurdish origin. The plan appears to squeeze the PKK, who have been causing enormous damage to life and property among security forces and civilians alike in Turkey.

The Federation of Kurdistan has a tiny territory of 36,000 sq km with 6.5 million people of whom 4 million are Kurds and the others Turkmen, Arab and Suriani. The Turkmen inhabit the oil rich Kerkuk area. Outside of oil the new federation has no resource worth mentioning.

The birth of the federation has cast its shadow on the domestic politics of Turkey. Some newspaper columnists and a few politicians have

targeted President Turgut Ozal as sympathising with the Kurdish aspirations. They point out that the cutting off of the Iraqi pipeline and the stationing of foreign forces under the 'poised hammer' scheme were okayed by President Ozal. A columnist of a prominent Istanbul daily reprinted an interview of President Ozal with the German daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, in 1991, where he states that the creation of a Kurdish federal state will pose 'no danger for Turkey'. The same columnist further writes that Messrs Talabani and Barzani were guests of President Ozal in Ankara in March 1991, first time in 60 years for any Kurdish leader to be so honoured. What is noteworthy also is that Turkey traditionally has kept her foreign policy above partisan controversy and the present situation is intensifying the unease over the creation of the new federation.

The creation of the Federal State of Kurdistan places

Turkey in a strange situation. Officially she has stated unambiguously that she supports the territorial integrity of Iraq as indeed is the official position of the US, who is responsible for the birth of the new federation. All observers here are unanimous that the next short step to independence is a matter of short time. Iraq, with or without Saddam, cannot be expected to look favourably to the dismemberment of her territory. Turkey and indeed the other neighbours like Iran and Syria, have never looked favourably to a Kurdish state for reasons of their own. For this new federation to survive, the only supplier of oxygen is Turkey. Newspapers here have printed speculative stories of oil consortium with the US and Turkey as partners for Kerkuk oil.

The birth of the Federal State of Kurdistan adds a dangerous new factor to the Middle East, scene of continuous conflicts. It is too early in the day to forecast if the baby will survive or disappear in the inhospitable terrain of its birth.

The writer is retired Ambassador and Assistant Secretary-General, OIC

**The United Nations in a Changing World-II**

**Balance of Power Equation Fails to Secure Lasting Peace**

by Muhammad Shamsul Huq

THE agonies and anguish of both the developed and developing nations appears to be due to causes embedded in an anachronistic world order inherited from a by-gone era and totally unsuited to the emerging new realities of the contemporary world and the security needs of the overwhelming majority of the countries of the world.

In the calculus of global changes, the "balance of power" equation has beyond doubt played a crucial role for many centuries, but failed to secure enduring power or lasting peace. The history of last 500 years shows that the quest for such a balance saw the center of power shifting from the Portuguese to the Dutch, then to Britain, and finally to the United States and Soviet Union, bringing in its wake many catastrophic upheavals, wars and untold sufferings. The world is currently witnessing a further transforma-

tion in the global power structure with the dawn of a new era of democracy and knowledge-based prosperity rendering conventional security — doctrines obsolete.

The changing world political environment appears to be favourable to the United Nations in playing its role as envisaged in the Charter. An important trend appears to be the growing acceptance of the UN intervention in coping with transnational and domestic crises. This is the position that Bangladesh consistently and unflinchingly supported ever since her admission to the UN as a member in 1974.

A new dimension has, however, been added to the responsibilities of the UN by the alarming environmental degradation caused by the reckless and predatory use of the natural resources. A solution of this problem is inseparable from that of poverty in which

over a billion, that is, about a fifth of the world's population is still trapped.

**Changing Needs**

It is now widely recognized that the United Nations must also change to meet the changing political, economic and social needs of the international community. The first ever United Nations Security Council Summit meeting in New York on 31 January last was a historic event. In a declaration issued at this summit, the new Secretary General Boutros Ghali was invited by the Security Council to recommend steps the United Nations might take to strengthen its capacity for "preventive diplomacy, peace making and peace keeping." Hopefully, the Secretary General will present proposals for some creative and bold initiatives falling within the ambit

of the UN Charter.

It is, however, necessary to note that pressures to reform the UN Charter have been building for many years, and they are likely to increase. Secretary General Ghali will have to find a balance between the demands of these pressure groups and the thinking of the powerful lobby representing the five permanent members of the Security Council and their allies.

Restructuring of the United Nations has acquired a new urgency because the UN role has already expanded beyond international security concerns into such areas as interim governmental administration, (for example in Kampuchea), election monitoring, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Many including the British favour the establishment of a new high level UN position, (an under Secretary General

for disaster relief). The assistance provided to the Bangladesh cyclone victims in May, 1991 by American marines (who were returning home from the Persian Gulf), was clearly an instance of the inadequacy of the present UN system.

**Sustainable Biosphere**

Another global problem facing the UN and the international community is the maintenance of a healthy and sustainable biosphere. Hopefully, the UN conference on Environment and Development held recently in Brazil will contribute towards creating a body of an environmental law as well as the enforcement mechanisms for global environmental protection. There are also other problems like traffic in drugs, terrorism, AIDS, which transcend national boundaries and fall within the frame of UN responsibilities.

Another important area which deserves special attention of the United Nations is the widely shared Third World concern that the reformed UN will be dominated by the First World and Third World interests will go by default. These interests center on increasing debt burden, low prices of raw materials, diminishing assistance for development and, above all the vast waste of human capital caused by perpetual poverty.

Restructuring the UN to meet these global problems is a challenge that is bound up with the management of human affairs and continuously increasing degree of interdependence of the nations. Hopefully, the international community will rise to meet this challenge through global efforts to cope with global problems.

Concluded

**Children: Selling Innocents Abroad**

**The trafficking of children from the Third World for prostitution and pornography across national boundaries is intensifying, experts warn. Yuli Ismartono of IPS reports from Bangkok.**

A growing number of boys and girls no more than 12 or 13 years old — mainly from developing countries — are being transported from continent to continent for the pleasure of paedophiles.

Third World children are kidnapped, lured or sold by international crime syndicates and individuals in what experts claim is a growing sex trade involving minors.

The underworld in which girls and boys are immersed spreads its tentacles far and wide," said Vithit Muntaborn, associate, law professor at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University who spoke at the annual conference of the Campaign to End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (Ecpat) held in the Thai capital in April.

A report submitted to the United Nations Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery says children in the Third World are sold to the developed countries of

Europe, the United States, Japan and the oil-rich nations of the Middle East.

The report identified the transnational trafficking routes from Latin America to Europe, from South-east Asia to Northern Europe, from South Asia to the Middle East and from Africa to Europe.

But the report said "recruitment in neighbouring countries is also common. Children from Burma are sold to Thailand and children from Nepal and Bangladesh go to India."

Child prostitution is growing in many Asian countries, where poor families are forced to sell their children to procurers of the sex trade serving the booming tourist industry.

But the problem has been internationalised with the expanding network of paedophiles worldwide that has facilitated and increased the demand for child prostitutes.

"The dark side of a global, unfettered free market is that human beings become commodities unless some controls are put in place," said United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) senior adviser Clarence Shubert.

In Thailand, where the girls have priced themselves beyond some markets, procurers are looking across the border to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos as cheaper sources of supply.

Paedophiles sometimes even hide under the guise of charitable organisations like orphanages and foster homes.

Stopping the trade in children starts with admitting the

problem exists, experts say. "But it is an extremely sensitive issue that shames governments and community leaders," said Shubert. "This hampers the institutional support needed to lead an effective fight against it."

Governments are also reluctant to take any action that would hurt the lucrative tourism industry, thus boosting the growth of child prostitution in South-east Asia. Budgetary constraints and a lack of political will also weaken the enforcement of laws and implementation of programmes.

But some communities have

come to grips with the problem. In the popular tourist town of Puerto Galera in the Philippines, a committee with a rather controversial name — Alyansa Laban sa Kalalakihang Bakla (Alkab), or Alliance Against Gay Men—has been formed to address the problem of sexually exploited children.

Alkab, whose membership includes community leaders, the chief of police and government officials, has started income-generating projects, reasoning that poverty is a major contributing factor to child prostitution.

The committee also has an information dissemination campaign on the nature and dangers of paedophilia. Observers say Alkab has caused the deportation of several paedophiles. Victims have also joined rehabilitation programmes.

Another favorite sex tourist spot, Thailand, now has the

Khamla Programme, which is being implemented in 500 of the country's poorest northern villages. Khamla circulates a booklet vividly describing a 12-year-old prostitute's tragic death in a burning brothel in the resort island of Phuket last year.

The Ministry of Education is now considering making the booklet supplementary reading in all public schools in Thailand.

At the international level, Ecpat is lobbying for the United Nations to call child prostitution a "crime against humanity" and bringing it before the Committee on Human Rights.

Some governments have begun exchanging names and pictures of people accused of paedophilia and deported, to prevent their entry from one country to another. Noted Shubert: "The international dimension of child trafficking must be controlled if measures are to be effective at the national level."

**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.

**Export strategy**

Sir, It is heartening to note that the Government is going to formulate a comprehensive export development strategy for the next eight years with a view to boosting the volume of exports.

Our country tends to import more than what it exports. And this one-way trading phenomenon has virtually caused an adverse effect on the 'Balance of Trade' as well as on the 'Balance of Payment' of our country. Increasing exports is of vital importance for the steady growth of our economy. The more we export, the more shall we prosper.

The volume of exports can only be raised if we take the following points into consideration: 1) Formulation of a pragmatic policy on export in coordination with the policy on industry and wages. 2) Sincere cooperation of all supporting agencies and financial houses. 3) Setting up of more and more export-oriented industries based on our tradi-

tional products. 4) Sound management system. 5) Efficient labour force under a standard wage policy. 6) Congenial labour-management relation. 7) Low cost of production. 8) Competitive price. 9) Guaranteed quality. 10) Active cooperation of our diplomatic missions in rendering pragmatic trade and market information. 11) Availability of wide shipping facility. 12) Promptness in delivery of merchandise.

Nitin Roy, Fakirpool, Dhaka

**A clarification**

Sir, We would like to thank your correspondent for pointing out that we are contesting the ensuing Jatiya Mahila Sangstha elections as independent candidates ('DU women teachers elect two representatives tomorrow,' The Daily Star, October 26). However, we would like to clarify our position which, we feel, has been somewhat mis-

stated in the report. We would like to make it clear that we are contesting these elections as independent candidates because we think that party and group affiliations have gone to unnecessary extremes in all university matters. We believe that the only way in which our educational institutions can function normally, achieve academic excellence, and contribute positively to society is by choosing people for their calibre and not for their party affiliations.

Niaz Zaman Associate Professor, Dept of English, and Perween Hasan Associate Professor Dept of Islamic History and Culture, Dhaka University.

**School for DOHS**

Sir, Defence Officers Housing Scheme, Mohakhali is a big residential area with nearly 2,000 residential units. Well educated people live in this area. But, unfortunately, there is no high school in the locality. As a result, people have to send their children to distant places for schooling. This is hazardous, expensive and time consuming. Government land is available in the

area for setting up a high school. What is lacking is initiative and interest on the part of the Education Department and other relevant authorities. The proposed school can also serve neighbouring areas like Gulshan, Banani etc.

I, therefore, appeal to the Ministry of Education to place fund at the disposal of Cantonment Board, Dhaka for setting up a high school in DOHS Mohakhali which will fulfil a long felt need of the area.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment

**Columbus and America**

Sir, Great celebrations are in process from the 14th of October, to mark the 500th year of the discovery of America. The majority of Americans are celebrating and will celebrate it. But quite a few American Native descendants (pre-Columbus), as they call themselves, will obviously not, for reasons best known to many. The world-wide belief is that Columbus discovered America on October 14, 1492, when he first landed in the Bahamas on his first, out of four voyages from Spain. But there is ample evidence that

America was inhabited by thousands of people, mostly from Asia (Siberia), coming through the Bering Strait over thousands of years. There is evidence that from the North, Yukon (Crow Basin Cave 38000 BC and Blue Fish Cave 22000 BC) to Chile in South America, a chain of caves, high temples, etc did exist dating back 10000 to 40000 years. It sounds unbelievable, but there they are — Meadowcroft 17000 BC, Orogrande Cave 36000 BC, Pedro Furado 45000 BC, South America; Monte Verde 11000 BC, Chile, etc.

These people (descendants) were very poor as Columbus did declare. However, since its discovery 500 years ago, America in this short span of time has tremendously advanced in many fields of technology, science, medicine, food, industry, nuclear and space research, fire-power. And now that her main super-power adversary exists no more, she seems to be the single super-power today, but how long? Will she, after thousands of years, meet the fate of the mighty Roman, Greek, Persian empires to decline and fade away only to go down in the pages of history? It would be well if she now uses her great wealth to accelerate her efforts to conquer cancer and the more deadly killer disease called AIDS, for her own

benefit and that of the mankind.

B Rebeiro, Chittagong

**Atanu kidnap case**

Sir, The Atanu kidnap case leaves many questions unanswered. How the police security detachment on duty at the Sheikh's Museum allowed the miscreants to enter the premises, and how did they escape after staying there for a couple of hours; and none was detained, or later apprehended, even after the arrival of additional police from the police station?

Why the building was described as a residence in the official version of the incident? Why there is no further follow-up report on the identification of the gang of terrorists, who could escape while the police were guarding the place? The police could telephone the senior officer, but could not obtain instruction to detain the group? Where is the Awami League's 'clear' version of the incident, as its name was 'so much' involved in the press report? There is something fishy about the reporting of the incident.

Is this the type of press freedom we are going to enjoy in this country?

A Mulla, Dhaka.