

Arms Race in Asia

The erratic, generally defiant, attitude displayed by North Korea on the question of inspection of its alleged nuclear facilities provides perhaps the most significant example of the growing arms race in Asia.

Two most populous countries of the world, China and India, have been concentrating on modernisation plans for their respective naval forces, one competing with the other.

Meanwhile, Malaysia and Indonesia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have embarked on arms-buying sprees. And so has Myanmar. For many of them, China remains the biggest seller.

During the Cold War era, with Washington and Moscow monitoring what was going on in each other's camps, intelligence networks kept the international community better-informed than it is today of the size and dimension of the arms race.

In what is undoubtedly a bleak situation, a slim hope is offered by the six-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to discuss a regional security arrangement, which has been endorsed by the Clinton administration.

Unfortunately, it keeps a number of countries of East Asia, including China and Taiwan, out of the deliberation and leaves us in some doubts if the ASEAN meeting might not end up setting up a military alliance of sorts.

In the final analysis, what the world needs are not new defence alliances, but international agreements, promoted and sustained by the United Nations and its agencies.

Safe Transport

Saturday's launch accident is not quite related to the mad rush of home-bound passengers on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. A cyclonic storm is what has caused this tragedy in which scores of people have died.

After all there is a serious lapse in our whole transport system — be it in the area of road or river. Early warning system is as much necessary as is the reception by the concerned individual vessels before the impending natural calamity.

This is not to mean that there are not laws for the vehicles and vessels to abide by. Only they are not enough and often leave room for manipulation and even violation. Let us, however, face the reality. The drivers and conductors are not the only people to be held blamable; passengers are, more often than not, not simply aware of the hazard they might cause by crowding the vehicle or vessel beyond capacity.

All this is overlooked in the name of festivals and the inevitable happens. This can be possible not because the extra money earned is lining the pockets of the transport workers alone but also, allegedly, of the law enforcers.

Sick Industry : Did the Finance Ministry Halt its Quick Revival?

ACCORDING to a press report, the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) in its February issue of Chamber News, takes note of the fact that the government's policy measures for macro economic stabilisation have yielded good results.

One could, of course, argue that the list was not exhaustive or that the priority assigned was not quite right. However, there is no denying the fact that these are critical elements in guiding business and investment decisions.

The last item on the MCCI list, namely, credibility of the government policies, indeed merits fuller treatment. Expanding on the theme, MCCI says that the government's business-friendly policies and postures have not fully earned the confidence of the trade and industry. During the

While one cannot blame the entire business community and industrialists for bank loan default, under-invoicing and over-invoicing in foreign trade, rampant tax evasion and the like, the fact remains that such practices even by a minority in trade circles creates an air of distrust.

last two years, it adds, handling of issues which concern business, such as labour, tariff, localised law and order, has fallen short of the expectations of the business community.

The misgivings of MCCI are indeed well placed. And yet, one wonders if the process of building up 'credibility' is really a one-way traffic. Do not the government or for that matter, the country as a whole, have 'expectations' from the business community as well?

Turning back to the issue of credibility of the government policies, it has to be recognised that revival of business confidence is a precondition for economic recovery. And, business confidence can prove elusive, particularly when the

economy is sluggish. Considered from this angle, it does seem true that there have been instances in the past when contrary signals emanating from the policy-makers have delivered jolts to business confidence.

The saga of 'sick industries' perhaps provides a glaring instance of contradictions in

up under the chairmanship of the Industries Secretary. The Cell included, among its members, top level leaders of industry and chambers of commerce. After prolonged deliberation, spreading over months, the Cell formulated its recommendations for the rehabilitation of sick industrial units. These recommendations

automatically entitled to fresh loans from the banks on the strength of the Cell's recommendations. An allocation of 500 crore taka for the rehabilitation of sick industries was also being talked about.

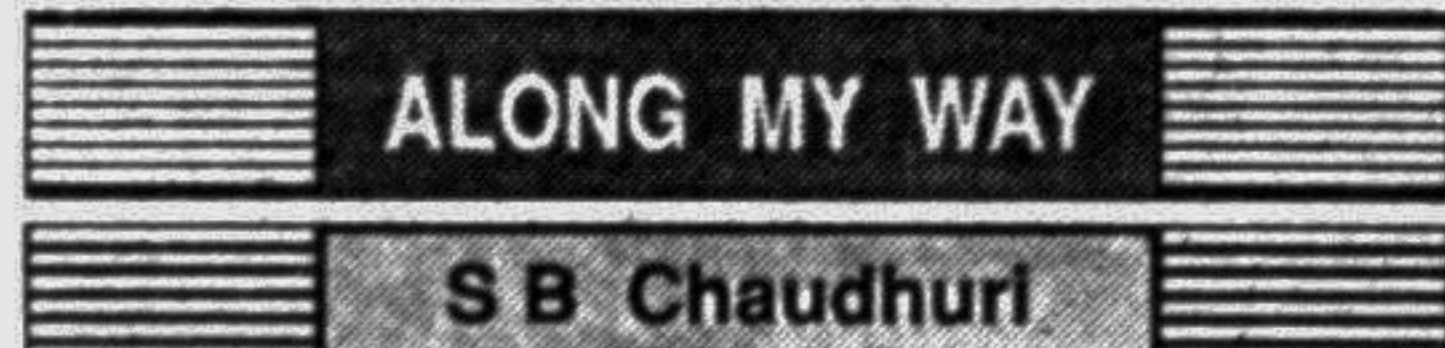
Alas, it was all in vain. As the owners of sick industries were making a bee-line for the banks' doors, Finance Ministry dug its heel in and said that bank financing would be on purely 'bank-client relationship'. In short, owners of the sick industries were, for all practical purposes, back to square one.

Meanwhile, the stance of the government over the recent call for a 48-hour strike by the Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) and certain trade unions has enhanced its credit rating with the leaders of the trade and

industry enormously. Bangladesh Employers Association (BEA) and the leading chambers of commerce in the country have given the government a vote of full confidence over this issue. On the other hand, SKOP and its allies in the labour unions are already planning to launch a new programme of agitations. It is said that upset by what they perceive as government's echoing the employers' voice by backing out of its previous commitments, the labour leaders are planning for a more 'effective' fresh action programme in the days ahead.

At this juncture, it is reassuring to note that BEA as well the chambers of commerce and industry have stressed the need for initiating fresh discussions under the auspices of the Tripartite Consultative Committee (TCC). Let us hope that this dialogue resumes sooner than later, at least before another crisis comes up, so that confidence in the economy may grow uninterrupted.

The writer whose guest column appears in this paper every Monday is a former Governor of the Bangladesh Bank.



policy decisions which hurt the credibility of the government. Incidentally, it has been said, perhaps with a degree of asperity, that there are 'sick industries' in Bangladesh but no 'sick owners'! In any case, such utterances tend to underline the sensitive nature of the issue which should have been handled with extreme care from the start.

THE POPE IS INSENSITIVE ON THE ABORTION ISSUE

Clinton must Get Tough in Ending Serbian Massacre of Bosnian Muslims

THE leader-to-be of the Free World recently spoke in righteous anger when he chastised the previous Bush administration for its insensitivity to the plight of the people in Bosnia-Herzegovina left to the tender mercies of Serbian military overlords.

While the 'World's news leader' (CNN) continues to beam vivid details of the most heinous crimes into homes in over 200 countries and territories, the warnings and condemnations which emanate from the Security Council ap-

pear more in line with similar noises in response to a recalcitrant Iranian contravention of 'no flight zone' restrictions. How the two events can be redrawn and to what scale, to justify the same response boggles the mind.

At the same time, no less a personality than the Pope has chosen to advise against termination of pregnancies brought about in the most cynical fashion as a part of the ethnic cleansing practiced by Serbian soldiers. It will not be much of a world order to look forward to if the tears and anguish of the pregnant Bosnian women were to be drowned in the celestial verbiage of obscure spirituality.

In the meantime, if we can do something to stop the killing of their kith and kin by crying halt to the Serbian bombing and shelling, let us do it now or for ever hold our peace. This is the message that

unfortunate women who feel that not only have their persons been defiled but their future has been condemned to bear the burden of shame in their genes.

It is not for nothing that some ancient doctrines prescribed death over dishonour. Let us not pontificate. Let us just pray that the Lord in His infinite mercy ordains that each in her own way is given the physical, mental and spiritual wherewithal to cope with her immeasurable misfortune.

should emanate from the Vatican. It is only by holding the moral high ground can the world community synchronize the pursuit of spiritual welfare for mankind in any meaningful way.

The moral high ground is equally important for the exercise of temporal authority. In the present global context, any flexing of Super Power muscle must be accompanied by impeccable moral content in order to promote instant global acceptance. Such acceptance can only be forthcoming if there is visible even-handedness in formulation of response to events round the globe. Even at this late stage enforcement of 'no flight zone' restrictions by a multi-national

patrol over Bosnian skies accompanied by an immediate ceasefire could be enforced if necessary by aerial strikes against artillery and heavy armour. This would perhaps bring the situation under some measure of control. While peace-makers hammer out longer term solutions, delivery of humanitarian assistance needs to be beefed up with adequate military support.

The burden of leadership falls even more squarely on Washington, with Moscow paralysed in its own power play.

President Clinton must arouse himself from his visible reluctance and wield the Big Stick or atleast speak up. If the Serbian shelling should obliterate the Bosnian Muslims, the

burden of non-performance might become a millstone round the neck which the New World Order can ill afford.

Any further delay will be tantamount to criminal dereliction of duty. Blame will accrue to us all but a larger measure of responsibility will lie with Washington whose pathetic air drops in Bosnia will be compared with strikes against Saddam Hussein. This comparison will hardly contribute to global understanding and harmony.

The writer, a noted commentator on contemporary affairs, is a former diplomat who held several high-level positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the erstwhile Pakistan.

OVER the last 30 years, the Guatemalan army has been fighting leftist guerrillas and their Indian sympathisers in the Guatemalan highlands. For the Indian population this has meant repression, war and the suppression of human rights.

In that time, according to Amnesty International, 50-70,000 have been killed, 100,000 have fled the country to escape the violence, hundreds of thousands have become internal refugees, 46,000 have disappeared and half a million have been forced into detention centres.

Indians lucky enough to survive either fled to Mexico or into mountains where they remained for ten years. For fear of being spotted from the air and bombed, they lived under trees covered with plastic sheets in the rain and cold, unable to grow maize and forced to eat roots, herbs and berries.

It was only in 1989 when word spread into the mountains that there was a United Nations presence in the Ixil Triangle, the region hardest hit by violence, that people started to return to their ancestral villages.

A \$115.4 million UN Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees in Central America, known as Prodere, is funded by the Italian government.

Juan Pablo, the national co-ordinator in Guatemala, says: "To have lasting peace you have to eliminate the causes that were at the root of war. Not only the political causes such as military governments and dictatorships, but also the poverty and hopelessness that spawned the violence of the last decade."

As a result of Prodere programmes, infant mortality, mainly due to diarrhoea, has been drastically reduced, 327

How the Roots of War are being Lanced

Ruth Massey writes from Nebaj, Guatemala

A development programme in Guatemala is helping the indigenous population emerge from the poverty and despair that triggered a 30-year civil war by improving medical facilities, constructing housing for the homeless, developing educational programmes and supporting work co-operatives. Gemini News Service reports on the progress of the United Nations programme.

Guatemalan refugees return



community health workers, including midwives and nurses, have been trained and 28 small health units have been established. Also, clean water has been piped to even the most isolated communities.

Prodere also supports craft and agricultural co-operatives whose products are exported to Europe and the US, and have an important impact on the local economy because people can earn ten times more than they earn with traditional maize production.

In Chajul, at the northern tip of the Ixil triangle, a peasant association of 1,400 families includes a weaving co-op-

With hope and apprehension



erative with a membership of 200 women, a garlic production co-operative which provides an employment for 750 families and a 62-member association which grows organic coffee.

However, many refugees and those who have returned have no legal documents and thus cannot join a co-operative. They have no access to credit, cannot register births and marriages or even give their dead a decent burial. Prodere is providing legal help to re-establish documentation by providing municipalities with computers, photo machines for IDs and vehicles for local justices.

After his house was burned, Manuel rebuilt it, and when the army burned it a second time, he rebuilt it again. When it was burned a third time, he gave up and, along with the rest of the village, moved into the mountains, where they lived in primitive conditions. Whenever the army saw them, they were shot at or bombed.

Protecting the human rights of people like Manuel and his family is one of the most important aspects of Prodere's work. An adult education programme includes broadcasts in Ixil explaining people's constitutional rights and duties, and a mobile theatre tours villages on a large truck presenting plays on human rights.

Prodere has also developed educational programmes for Indian children. Fifty per cent of Ixil children never attend school in Guatemala because lessons are given in Spanish. And this problem is compounded by the annual rural exodus to plantations in the south for the harvesting of coffee, sugar cane and cotton.

To boost school enrolment Prodere introduced Escuelas de Paz (Peace Schools), where children are taught in Ixil for the first three years and the curriculum is not divided into years, so that when a child comes back to school after a long absence he has no problem adapting.

The violence has made widows of many women. Prodere's human settlements pro-

gramme is helping them. Juanna, a widow with three children, has just moved into one of a group of adobe houses in Aldea Cambalium, whose population consists largely of women who have lost their husbands at the hands of the army.

Wearing the beautiful traditional costume of Ixil women, she sits outside the house she shares with her daughter, widowed mother, sister and her sister's children. Her hands are busy with the shuttle of her backstrap loom as she weaves a huipile, whose pattern contains the symbols of her tribe's history.

When asked where she was living before the resettlement programme, she suddenly becomes uncomfortable.

"When the army came we didn't think we had any reason to fear them, but they burned our village and shot seven people who were just standing there — including my husband. We rebuilt the houses after that, but whenever anyone approached we'd hide. We'd hide not just ourselves, but everything we had — the dogs, the animals, even the roosters."

Last year's Noble Peace Prize was awarded to Rigoberta Menchu, a Guatemalan Indian who fought for her people's civil rights and for an end to the years of violence. It is appropriate that the award went to Menchu, coinciding as it did with the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival of the New World, when her people's suffering began.

"When there is already a war, when there is already a conflict, when there are two parties involved, the way to bring about a solution is not merely to condemn it," said Menchu. "It is a matter of contributing so that the causes of the war are resolved."

RUTH MASSEY is a photo-journalist who works for the UN Development Programme.

To the Editor...

Truck racing in Dhaka city

Sir, Those fond of watching European car racing on TV screen now can see it live without a satellite receiver around the same time 1 am-6 am morning at Kalyanpur-Mirpur Road-Manik Mia Avenue on one side and Bijoy Sharan on Mirpur Road opposite Mohammadpur PS on Lake Road between Zia Uddyan Crescent Lake and South Plaza of the magnificent Parliament on the other, legislating little but transacting chaos at taxpayer's hard earned money.

These racing cars simulating Chengis Khan's Mongolian cavalry with Lord Cive's engines, and fitness certificate from a most chaotic apparatus, BRTA, driven by 'drunkards', with few helpers on 'hashish'

at the back, are known as marauding and moving messengers of death, called '5-ton trucks', a misnomer!

Lake Road is bamed for heavy vehicular traffic to save the beautiful road leading to Savar Smriti Shoudha and Mirpur Martyrs' site for VIPs from home and abroad and on it stands the country's most palatial state guest house, Karataa. And on the South Plaza of this well protected site civic receptions handing over Dhaka's golden key and medal distribution functions go for a decade. I see tall banner and flag carrier steel structures repainted in day but at night it becomes a no man's land. Night security policemen with 1949 model, 303 guns discuss their minister's well-known honesty and smoke and see the race perhaps with amusement as they

certainly do not own a satellite receiver. Last year I joined three Janazas for three young and old men killed on Lake Road and Mirpur Road who went for a walk in the fresh air after saying Fazar prayers in Iqbal Road Mosque.

There is no effective force or coordination between BRTA and Traffic police to deal with road hazards or victims transferred to hospital. In July 1992, I found one truck, abandoned, standing on Lake Road in the middle maybe at 5.30 am, I am not sure, because once my rings and a costly wrist watch were taken by force by four persons in a baby taxi which ran away to Geneva Camp driving just in front of Mohammadpur Police Station, after which I do not use these. A man was pushing the truck whose driver and helper had fled away after a man went

right under the engine which broke but the victim was not dead and was calling for help. Meanwhile other morning walkers came and overturned the truck to retrieve the victim. The result was, he was no more a human being in appearance but a horrible skeleton with no head, legs or hands in a sea of blood. Now I do not go there before 7 am when traffic police come and the truck racing with prophecies of disaster disappear!

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Religion-based politics

Sir, I was also sure that Mr Shaf Rahman of Chor Komolapur, Faridpur will promptly answer his letter

which party or group first introduced political and social terrorism in this country. Of course, I have every courage to publicly condemn any terrorist act done by any Islamic political party, be it Jamaat or Shibir. Mr Rahman, however, tried to generalize the incidents at Chittagong and Rajshahi Universities, but I think this is not enough for banning the entire party activity throughout the country. As a punishment, the activities may be banned at the two universities. The political terrorism in the educational institutions also have other backgrounds in which several factors are involved. In fact, my general write-up was also aimed at them for rectification as per the norm of Islam.

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