Dhaka, Monday, March 29, 1993

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. There are other examples which, in one form or another, add to an unfolding dangerous scenario throughout the region, from the two Koreas to Pakistan and beyond.

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. One west ern report says that Beijing has doubled its military spending since 1988, using the additional budget more for its sea-going navy than for land and air forces. It has even threatened to move against Taiwan if the former Formosa, now flexing its economic and political muscles, takes a step towards independence. On the other hand, the build-up of the Indian navy has caused concern to several countries, including Australia and Indonesia. These countries may not feel threatened by New Delhi. But what they are worried about is the rising arms race which eats up vast resources of countries, like India, Pakistan and Indonesia, which seek aid for their development.

Meanwhile, Malaysia and Indonesia, Pakistan and Shri Lanka have embarked on arms-buying sprees. And so has Myanmar. For many of them, China remains the biggest seller. From having been a manufacturer and exporter of small weapons for decades, India has now moved up to the big league. The other danger lies in the individual republics of the former Soviet Union picking up shopping lists from all sorts of countries.

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. Now, the whole system is in a shambles, with each country now pursuing its nationalistic or regional ambitions, instead of acting as proxy in the superpower rivalry.

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. Both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been saying again and again that future aid programmes for developing countries must be linked to their cuts in their defence budgets. In endorsing the proposal, this paper has suggested that a system of inspection of arms sales by exporting nations, including China and India, should be in force and be conditional to investments and joint ventures.

Such measures cannot be arbitrarily imposed by the United Nations. To start with, we should discuss the arms race in Asia at a regional conference, perhaps with ASEAN playing a pivotal role in organising it. We see no reason why some kind of a think tank cannot come into being to put together all the relevant information. We have depended too long on bits and pieces of news from outside to know what is going on inside the region. The position should be reversed and we should then work out agreements which call a halt to the arms race in Asia.

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. Mercifully, no other accident often caused by crowding of passengers beyond capacity - has been reported this time. Yet the ill-fated launch that was carrying more than 200 passengers is more than enough to rob the celebration of both Eid and the Independence Day of its fervour. Nor is there any reason to be complacent over the fact that not so many accidents made headlines after the festive occasions.

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. In this case, it is clear that either on part of the weather forecast or its reception by the launch, there was a serious miscalculation. The passengers had to pay with their dear lives - a phenomenon we are only too acquainted with to be highly alarmed. But on the part of those whose concern really matters, it seems they are less enthusiastic about a drastic overhaul in the rules and their proper implementation.

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. It is exactly at this point the role of the law enforcing agency matters - and matters so much specially when the passengers of a whole vehicle or vessel are evidently exposed to risks of serious accidents. Laxity at the time of festivals notwithstanding, there should be a limit to the number of people travelling on roof-top of a bus or a launch that has to negotiate foul weather in the river.

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. Corruption and irregularities are so entrenched in the transport system that they serve some people quite well. The need is to give the whole system a major shake, up and only then the chances of accidents can be lessened.

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

CCORDING to a press report, the Metropolian 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. But MCCI argues that micro-level performance, representing ground level economic situation facing individual enterprises, remains lacklustre. MCCI then goes on to list three factors, namely, (1) public investment (ii) real exchange rate and (iii) credibility of the government policies, which come to affect the micro-level scenario in any economy like that of Bangladesh.

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 carned 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 MCCl 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? While it would be erroneous to blame the business community and industrialists en masse for such phenomena as bank loan default, under-invoicing and over-invotcing in foreign trade, rampant tax evasion and the like, the fact remains that such behaviour, even by a minority in the business community creates, an air of distrust. Credibility is a two-way street.

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 clusive, 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 joits 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

ALONG MY WAY

S B Chaudhuri

policy decisions which hurt the credibility of the government. Incidentally, it has been said, perhaps with a degree 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.

What happened was that a Cell for revival and rehabilitation of sick industries was set

were submitted to the government in the middle of last year. The Cell had called for applications from the owners of non-performing industrial units and had then identified about 1500 out of these (which comes to nearly one-third of the total number of industries in the countryl as 'sick', qualifying for rehabilitation. Naturally, this had produced high expectations among the owners of these industrial units that they would become 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, Pinance Ministry dug its heel in and said that bank financing would be on purely "bank-client relationship". In short, owners of the stek industries were, for all practical purposes, back to square one. As one sees from the reports of the meeting held in the International Conference Centre on March 20 last to review the progress in rehabilitation of sick industries, the tangle is now being sorted out at the highest level

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

desh Employers Association (ISEA) 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, according to a press report, 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.

industry enormously. Bangla

At this juncture, it is reassuring to note that BEA as well the chambers, of commerce and industries 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 uninter-

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

THE POPE IS INSENSITIVE ON THE ABORTION ISSUE

Clinton must Get Tough in Ending Serbian Massacre of Bosnian Muslims

HE 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. Since the inauguration of the new US President, there has been more and more evidence of ethnic cleansing, rape, and whole-sale massacre but it has drawn less and less response from the White House.

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-

VER the last 30 years,

has been fighting leftist

guerrillas and their Indian

sympathisers in the Guate-

malan highlands. For the

Indian population this has

meant repression, war and the

Amnesty International, 50-

70,000 have been killed,

100,000 have fled the country

to escape the violence, hun-

dreds of thousands have be-

come internal refugees,

46,000 have disappeared and

half a million have been forced

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 un-

der trees covered with plastic

sheets in the rain and cold,

unable to grow maize and

forced to cat roots, herbs and

word spread into the moun-

It was only in 1989 when

berries.

Indians lucky enough to

into detention centres.

In that time, according to

suppression of human rights.

the Guatemalan army

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. Let us atleast concede that we are not possessed of enough wisdom to lay down a prescription for the

by Kaiser Rasheed 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 wherewithall to cope with her immeasurable misfortune.

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

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

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

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 acerue to us all but a larger measure of responsibility will lie with Washington whose pa thetic 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

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



tains that there was a United Nations presence in the Ixil Traingle, the region hardest hit by violence, that people started to return to their ancestral villages. A &115.4 million UN Development Programme for

Juan Pablo, the national coordinator in Guatemala, says: To have lasting peace you have to climinate 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

Displaced Persons, Refugees

and Returnees in Central

America, known as Prodere, is

funded by the Italian govern-

ast decade." As a result of Prodere programmes, infant mortality. mainly due to diarrhoca, has been drastically reduced, 327

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 communi-

Prodere also supports craft and agricultural co-operatives whose products are exported to Europe and the USS, 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-operative 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 reestablish documentation by providing municipalities with computers, photo machines for IDs and vehicles for local justices.



With hope

and apprehension

Manuel, who chose not to use his real name for fear of retribution, is preoccupied by his desire to bury his dead parents and brother in a proper grave. As he sat in the shack which is home to him and his wife and five children in Aldea Batzucail, he told a

"Both my parents and my brother were killed by army bullets. Then they were thrown into a mass grave with 12 other bodies. I know exactly where they are buried and as soon as I get my documentation I will ask for permission to bury them in Aldea Batzucail, where they were

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 the most important aspects of Prodere's work. An adult education programme includes broadcasts in lxil 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 lxil 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 enrollment 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 Juana, a widow with three children, has just moved into one of a group of adobe houses in Aldea Cambalam, whose population consists largely of women who have lost their husbands at the hands of the

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

When asked where she was living before the resettlement programme, she suddenly be-

comes 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 he 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival of the New World, when her people's suffering began.

"When there is already a war, when here 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 are war resolved.

RUTTI MASSEY is a photojournalist who works for the UN Development Programme.

which party or group first in-

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 I am-6 am morning at Kalyanpur-Mirpur Road-Manik Mia Avenue on one side and Bijoy Sharani to 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 Clive'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 banned for

heavy vehicular traffic to save the beautiful road leading to Savar Smrity Shoudha and Mirpur Martyrs' site for VVIPs from home and abroad and on it stands the country's most palatial state guest house, Karatoa. And on the South Plaza of this well protected site civic receptions handing over Dhaka's golden key and and medal distribution funetions 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 per haps 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 take Road and Mirpur Road who went for a walk in the fresh air after saying Fazar prayers in

Igbal Road Mosque There is no effective force or coordination between BICIA and Traffic police to deal with road hazards or victim's transfer to hospital. In July 1992, 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 vietim. 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 prophets of disaster disappearl

Ghulam Murshid Dhaka 1207

Religion-based politics

Sir, I was also sure that Mr Shal Rahman of Chor Kondapur, Faridpur will promptly unswer (his letter

19 3 93) to my letter with certain excuses for his inability to furnish the addresses of some Madrashas where, according to his claim made in his previous letter dt 7-3-93, training is being given to the young children on how to use the bow and arrow and vide the same letter he advised me to visit those Madrashas.

My letter was fully based on general principles and ethics of Islam and that was meant to correcting those who are making misinterpretation of the Islamic ideals on the basis of certain incidents. Mr Shaf Rahman has deliberately turned my general observation into specific discussion. But to be specific, we have to listen to all the parties like in the court. And even before that we have to locate some neutral bodies to study and find out

troduced 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 back grounds in which several fac tors 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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