

Children in War

The Amnesty International (AI) and other human rights groups have rightly taken a strong line against the killing of Palestinian teenagers in the occupied Arab territories in the Gaza Strip by Israeli army and other para-military forces.

The course of historic developments gradually isolated Central Asia from our part of the world. First, it was divided by the huge Asian land mass by two major colonial powers: the seafaring British established hegemony over coastal Asia while continental Russia pursued its imperial ambitions within the interior of the vast continent.

The Tel Aviv authorities should take the admonitions from AI and other concerned bodies seriously, especially when all the parties, including Israel, have been trying to generate the right atmosphere for the success of the current Middle East talks.

Elsewhere too the number of children falling victims to armed conflicts, atrocities committed by the army or sheer victimisation, is rising rapidly. Here, the picture presented in Bosnia, as seen by millions of television viewers in the world every day, is particularly dismal, a heart-breaking one, one that puts our civilisation to shame.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding a feeble defence given by the United Nations authorities in Mogadishu and New York of the killing of some 20 Somalians on Sunday by Pakistani peace-keeping troops, the action has raised several awkward questions.

There are several other instances which focus on the fate of children in war, in many of on-going armed conflicts.

The global conference on human rights, now moving towards its climax in Vienna, probably looks at this phenomenon as part of an overall scenario. We believe, that's not enough. We urge the participants of the meeting to treat the fate of children in occupied Arab territories in the Gaza Strip, in Bosnia, in Somalia and in all other places as a major issue in itself.

Improving City Traffic

An inter-ministerial meeting has taken some welcome, although somewhat belated, decisions to improve the city's traffic system. Not that all those decisions are new, a few of them certainly are. But the important point is that the meeting presided over by Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury has sought to remodel some of the existing traffic laws to enhance their effectiveness and also added supplementary measures with the same end in view.

Of the set of measures, the most radical one concerns the ban on manufacture of new rickshaws and provision for training for the rickshaw-pullers. Parking of cars at places other than the parking lot or marked places will collect heavy fine. Buses and mini-buses will be barred from picking up and dropping passengers at their sweet will in the middle of the road or anywhere other than the bus stoppages.

Evidently there are laws to deal with many of the traffic offences the newly recommended measures have sought to do away with or lessen. For example, this time vehicles found guilty of emitting black fumes will be fined Tk 5,000 instead of the existing amount of Tk 200. No one can deny the merit of tougher laws: sometimes such laws have the desirable deterrent effect.

The only response to many such unpleasant questions is likely to be an awkward silence. When the police vehicles themselves are found spewing black fumes, the hope for enforcement of anti-fume law simply disappears. When the buses and rickshaws obstruct almost the entire road leaving no passage for other vehicles to move and all this under the very nose of the traffic police, they make a mockery of the provisions of the laws.

Without a political will and respect for democratic values, it is a losing battle one is going to wage. To bring order into the traffic system, therefore, the men in uniform will have to be backed by socio-political considerations and supports.

THE six Central Asian Republics — Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — emerged as independent nation states, in 1991. Yet they are very old countries with historic links to the sub-continent.

1991 was the year of momentous global change. Its unprecedented dimensions have not fully comprehended even after two years of the break-up of the Soviet Empire. Several new nation-states recently joined the United Nations and they are by no means small countries.

By the beginning of 18th century, colonial armies of various European powers practically divided the entire planet

Central Asia : What it Means for Us

earth and their respective spheres of influence. In so far as Central Asia was concerned, colonial isolation was followed by ideological separate and for long seventy years, iron curtain did not allow Central Asia to know anything about the rest of the world except the hounds of socialism within former USSR.

Future Developments
The population of the six Republics together would amount to half the population of Bangladesh. But in area, it would be about forty times Bangladesh with millions of hectares of farmland very sparsely cultivated or used as grazing land due to lack of working hands.

endowed with fertile land and ample oil may have the greatest potential for prosperity among the six nations. However, construction of a pipeline to make its oil accessible to world shipping lines will be needed. Kazakhstan, population 17 million, possess one million square miles of steppe, desert and mountains.

WINDOW ON ASIA
Shahed Latif

Industry supplies most of the nation's electricity. Turkmenistan has a population of near around 4 million. Cotton and natural gas are the economic mainstays of this Spain-size nation, 90 per cent of which is covered by the Kara Kum desert.

Uzbekistan, given a population exceeding 21 million, is the most populous of Central Asia Republics. Cotton is he king here and south of its great deserts, fertile valleys including Farghana, are watered by runoff from Tian Shan mountains. Huge reserves of natural gas

should help assure energy self-sufficiency.

Narrow Range of Specialisation

While the economic of the former USSR characterised by a high degree of self-sufficiency, there was considerable regional specialisation within the economy. The effect was that the Central Asian Republics used to trade mostly other republics of the former Union rather than outside world.

One can easily visualize the economic plight of all con-

Germany and the New World Order

The Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) in a Changed Security Environment

Wolf J. Bell writes from Bonn

Germany's involvement in establishing the regulatory framework for a new world order...

Germany feels that the institutional framework of NATO and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council as the forum for increasing cooperation with the nations of the former Warsaw Pact should be used to develop the CSCE's security policy.

Germany's involvement in establishing the regulatory framework for a new world order...

Such assignments would require changes in the constitution which can only be carried by a two-thirds majority in parliament. This is still a controversial political issue in Germany. The urgent need for a decision is obvious, one reason being that the members of the Bundeswehr will have to be motivated for their new role.

New Mission

In this newly developing international framework the political mission of the German Bundeswehr must be redefined in the light of existing disarmament commitments and with a view to its specific role in the Alliance. It must be a role acceptable to the German public.

national and regional cooperation can safeguard world peace. New forms of deterrence are called for which must also include the international prosecution of those accused of violating human rights.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali has submitted his reform plans under the name of a "peace agenda", which also provides for the deployment of UN personnel for conflict prevention purposes.

OPINION

Like it or Not

I read with interest Mr Latif's piece, "Close neighbour or distant relative", in your issue of June 5. (May I just point out here, perhaps irrelevantly, that Singapore, not Beijing, is it well known that regional trading blocs have assumed a growing significance over the last two decades or so, the best known and most talked about being the EC, NAFTA, ASEAN and related Pacific Rim proposals.)

Yes, we do have to greatly expand our trade with India, beginning with the Indian government giving far greater access to their markets of our exports of tea, jute, frozen fish, garments, textiles and other goods and services. I do not see any need to hurriedly start selling our natural gas to India, when this only finite valuable commodity of ours can be put to far more valuable use by developing it to industrialize Bangladesh.

I am all for the SAARC concept, but in order to expand our trade and investment links with India, it is essential to move forward on a structured, equal and firm footing. This will not happen as long as there is no visible progress towards a resolution of long outstanding bilateral issues on both the political and economic fronts. These too are realities which Mr Latif, to use his words, has to accept, like it or not. In the meantime, Bangladesh can reap sufficient and handsome dividends by accelerating its growing business links with the rest of Asia and the industrialized north.

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.

Sunday as weekly holiday
Sir, I strongly support the idea that we go back to Sunday as the weekly holiday. Let us float the weekly holiday in the open market, as we are going to do for our currency.

PWD and Dhanmondi RA
Sir, Recently Public Works Department served notices to the owners of houses in Dhanmondi RA to stop any kind of non-residential use of their premises even partly, be it a school or college, a clinic or a hospital, a medicine shop or a flower shop, an office or a chamber, whatever it is other than purely residences. PWD takes plea contending that in the year 1958 (long 35 years ago) when plots were allotted, it was mentioned in lease clause for use of residence only. After a long period of thirty five years, this lease clause has lost its realistic

improvement of roads and railways etc. Our democratic government is expected to invest time and energy for problems on merit and priority basis rather than allowing PWD to exercise such meaningless and unproductive efforts.

Zohurul Haq
Dhanmondi RA, Dhaka.

From Ghulam to Ghulam

Sir, There has been a welcome change in the political scene in Pakistan when judiciary has taken firm stand in protecting the constitution from the extra-constitutional interference in the democratic process by the president Mr Ghulam Ishaque Khan. The first such interference was made by Ghulam Mohammad then Governor General of Pakistan when he dismissed the elected Govt of Khawaja Nazimuddin. Unfortunately the then Supreme Court of Pakistan refused to uphold the constitution on the extra judicial plea of prevailing circumstance. It is interesting to speculate on the consequences — if the Supreme Court of Pakistan and ruled strictly on the basis of constitution, the history of Pakistan might have taken a different course.