

Punish the Traffickers

Kidnapping of and traffic in children are part of an organised illegal human trade clandestinely carried out throughout the country. According to Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, there were 19 trafficking cases in 1993 and the police recovered 200 people, 86 of them children, during the same period. These official figures which are supposed to be only the reported cases and therefore much less than the actual number — alone can indicate how serious the problem has become for our society. The home minister informed the Jatiya Sangsad on Monday that the police were on the trail of traffickers who kidnapped 21 children from among whom Fahim Rahman Amit could manage to escape and safely reach his parents.

Trafficking in women is done with a purpose different from that of the same trade in children. In both cases they are subjected to abuses of the worst type but the kidnapped children sometimes are meant for gruesome murder and sale of their different organs in foreign hospitals. Others who are not used as human spare parts find themselves doomed to a wretched life with deformed bodies and begging bowls.

Either way it is a trade that gives the organised gangs a hefty profit and, needless to say that without a transborder network this vile traffic could not be carried out. Most of the reports conclusively point not just to one route but several destinations ranging from India to Pakistan to countries in the Middle East. Some Middle Eastern countries had until recently a great demand for children from the sub-continent for use as jockeys for camel race. Reportedly a few of the children's organs, including skeletons, even find their way into US hospitals.

But the members of the same species, who traffic in them, do commit a crime no less than cannibalism or even worse. Now it is baffling to see that societies less prone to violence have become the supplier of these bizarre wares. Certainly the violent societies may have a role in opening the illegal channel and poverty might have made a few in the supplying countries a party to this mind-boggling crime.

Admittedly, therefore, the challenge is quite daunting for the law enforcing agency. But considering the nature of the crime, the provision of punishment for them has until now been inadequate. So when the home minister discloses that the government is now contemplating on capital punishment for abduction and traffic of children, we find in it a most positive line of thinking. There are crimes that cannot be prevented physically all the time but harshest of punishments are designed to be meted out in some cases only to have their deterrent effects realised to the maximum point.

While some law enforcers have shown extraordinary alacrity and honesty in dealing with human traffic, some of their fellow members have failed to maintain that same standard of professional integrity. A uniformly high standard of service would surely have reduced the incidents of trafficking in children and women. Perhaps a closer coordination between and among organs of different security forces as well as governments of the South Asian countries will be in order to root out this problem. The scrutiny has to be tightened both at the supplying and end points for better information and further measures.

The World Cup's Health Hazard

This particular glory always belonged to the Latins of America. This week's death of 12 Mexican aficionados in a plane crash was a telltale proof of that. We are talking of the glory of dying for football. It has been a commonplace for South American fans to die of shock when on the domestic miniscreen they saw their pet side go down. And cases of suicide in similar surges of emotion over soccer disappointments are also a familiar and accepted Latin preserve. If the history of proto-football being first played centuries back by the lucas or the forebears of the modern-day Bolivians and Peruvians has anything to do with this infatuation, one can never be sure. But that the original love of the Latin's for gladiatorial cruelties subsequently mellowed down to the bull fight, has in South America been further replaced by a most sophisticated football is a testament to man marching towards humanity.

The exclusivity of the Latin streak of feeling life is for football has at last been broken by a coffee shop owner in Macao. He has died for football — dying of heart failure after two nights of continuously gluing his eyes to World Cup coverages on his TV set and alongside working the whole living-long day catering to his customers, World Press reports give the martyr a Chinese name. But would it be too farfetched to connect his excessive socceromaniac feelings to the Portuguese Latin legacies of this Asian Las Vegas of an island?

The most pertinent question that comes to mind over the death of 37-year old Lo Chou-yin is how many more are on the same path as Mr. Lo's? The whole of Asia and Africa falls in time zones where football fans will have to pass a monthful of nights without snatching a wink of sleep in order not to miss on what they have been waiting for long four years. Their number should be at least more than five times that of tenacious viewers of the Cup matches in Europe and Latin America. And that number is to be counted in billions.

We have only half a cheer for Mr Havelange on his being reelected as the FIFA Chief. His awarding the WC '94 venue to the US has yielded match timings that ignore the football lovers of Asia and Africa. For very many reasons the interest of the European viewer is supreme in the mind of the world managers of football. Isn't it yet time that the convenience of the Asia-African viewers also were taken into account. If only the will were there — things could be devised about the finals in a fashion creating a little less health hazard to us than at present. That will was simply not there.

This shall change, as things with cricket already have, irrevocably. Valiant Africa's contributions to that end are already great. The miracle of a socio-political revolution in Mandela's South Africa will surely have its due role in the change already begun.

THE recently concluded 53-nation Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) could not have come at a more opportune moment. Although events in South Africa continue to dominate the media and those events are something to cheer about, news from the rest of this continent continues to be grim.

The first ever multiracial elections in South Africa, which proved the Cassandras totally wrong, have brought a wave of hope in the minds of men everywhere. Out after 27 years of jail barely four years ago, Nelson Mandela has appeared on the stage of Africa and indeed the world, as a beacon of hope. He came to the OAU Summit in Tunis as the leader of new South Africa with a message of concord and brotherhood cutting across race, religion and ethnic differences. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali pleaded in his speech for closer cooperation between the OAU and the UN. He deplored the fact that the international community and his organisation had failed the people of Rwanda. Although OAU has promised 5000 troops for peace keeping oper-

OAU Summit in Tunis: South Africa Sets Example for the Rest of the Continent

by Arshad-uz Zaman

ations in Rwanda, this falls very short of the need in that hapless country. A civil war has been raging in Rwanda for several months and casualties run in many thousands. Ethnic conflict at its worst form has raised its ugly head there.

Civilians not belonging to the ruling tribe are fleeing the country by hundreds of thousands. It is a pitiful sight — men, women and children fleeing for their lives from the security forces of the state, who are supposed to protect them. The magnitude of the tragedy has been masked somewhat because there are quite a few trouble spots around the world and most of them in Africa.

Nigeria is another such country, which seems unable to settle down. When Nigeria became independent in the early sixties, she had lots going for her. It was a big country, with many natural resources including oil. It had a trained elite and an elected Prime Minister Tafewa Balewa. On

the minus side the ethnic and religious differences were deep with Muslims concentrated in the north and the Christians in the east. Tafewa Balewa was toppled early by a military coup and assassinated. Thus began a cycle of military coups which are continuing to this day. The victor of the elections last year has been denied power by military rulers. Now the victor has declared formation of his own Government. The situation looks dangerously volatile. In the years after independence ethnic and religious conflicts threatened to tear apart this vast country. It is anybody's guess when Nigeria will settle down.

North Africa also known by the Arabic name Maghreb, which is separated from the southern part of Africa by the vast desert Sahara, is currently witnessing severe turmoil in one of its largest countries — Algeria. After its independence in 1962, following eight years

of bloody war with France, Algeria had become a model of development for countries emerging from long years of colonial domination. A big country with a small population, endowed with great riches including oil and gas, Algeria went in a big way to develop human resources by investing heavily in education, health and mainly the social sectors. In the drive for industrialisation they invested mainly in heavy industries. In the process they neglected consumer goods and housing and frustration grew among the population clamouring for a better life. Power remained concentrated in a few hands, mainly the military, and the broad masses felt left out. A coalition of the disenchanted whose leadership was provided by the Islam-oriented party, scored a stunning victory in the elections nearly two years ago. President Chadli Ben-Jedid, who appeared willing to

hand over power to the party called Front of Islamic Salvation, was not allowed to do so and he was replaced by other military leaders. This has triggered an armed conflict which has claimed several thousand lives on both sides. The leaders of the victorious party are in jail. Lately, however, contacts have been established between them and the present rulers of Algeria. It is to be hoped that Algeria will be able to put behind this sad chapter of fratricidal conflict and resume her due place not only in Africa but amongst the international community.

It is due to these conflicts and there are many lesser ones, that OAU is no longer the organisation of the sixties.

In the sixties Africa became the last continent to be decolonized. The process started in earnest in 1960, with the granting of independence to Belgian Congo, now known as Zaire. This was followed quickly by granting of inde-

pendence by France of her colonies in West Africa. With the departure of Portugal from Africa, colonialism was rung down. Virtually the whole of Africa had one thing in common — domination by European colonial masters. There was thus a bond of affinity and this made for one voice for Africa. For decades Africa often took a similar stand in the international fora. Recent conflicts within their own borders and also among the neighbours have gravely weakened the voice of Africa. Salem Ahmed Salem, the Tanzanian Secretary General of the OAU, was no doubt voicing these sentiments when he called upon the leaders to 'close ranks for the sake of Africa.'

In this uncertain climate through which Africa is currently passing, the voice of Mandela is bringing hope. By holding peaceful elections, by transferring peacefully power from the whites to the blacks — an astonishing feat — South Africa has set an example for the rest of Africa. In the sixties OAU had appeared on the horizon as a harbinger of a new world order. Will Nelson Mandela of South Africa be able to carry that torch forward?

South Africa, Palestine — and Now Ireland?

Macdara Boyle writes from Dublin

Despite repeated protestations that it would never negotiate with terrorists, London has been engaged in talks with the IRA, the armed group dedicated to forcing Britain out of Northern Ireland, which stayed in British hands when the rest of the island became independent in 1921. A Gemini News Service correspondent reviews the prospects for a settlement of the long-running dispute, and says the omens are good.



British and Irish Premiers John Major and Albert Reynolds: Joint Declaration

the revelation that the British government had been engaging in secret dialogue with both the IRA and Sinn Fein over a period of three years.

A government response to the Hume/Adams proposals became imperative. The result was the Downing Street Declaration, jointly launched by British Prime Minister John Major and Irish leader Albert Reynolds last December.

The Declaration said little, but extended a conditional invitation to Sinn Fein to enter negotiations, if the IRA renounced violence. It signalled the official entry of Britain into a tentative peace process, as much by accident as design.

Since then, the process has been stalled. Sinn Fein is demanding "clarification" of aspects of the Declaration,

which Major has refused to countenance. However, the issue Sinn Fein is really addressing is that of British trustworthiness.

In the 1970s, British intelligence used the cover of a negotiated cease-fire to infiltrate the IRA. When the cease-fire broke down, the IRA came within a hair's breadth of being crushed. Equally, in 1980 a hunger strike by IRA prisoners was met with apparent concessions.

The strike was called off and the prisoners awaited implementation of the new deal. Nothing happened. The following year, a hunger-strike over the same issue left 10 men dead.

As an Irish newspaper, the *Sunday Business Post*, editorialised recently, Sinn Fein and

IRA leaders are acutely conscious that the 'British have double-crossed (them) at crucial junctures in the past.' Ambiguously worded documents, of themselves, will not erase that memory.

Yet there have been recent tentative signs that the clarification freeze-out may be thawing. This would be enough to keep the process going.

In the long-term, the British will need to address certain key questions, such as their intentions in Northern Ireland, even if only to confirm what many suspect: that they have initiated a slow, cautious process of withdrawal. Even a secretly conveyed confirmation of a willingness to talk about withdrawal could be enough to persuade the IRA to call a halt.

Equally, they could initiate a tentative process of "demilitarisation": reduce the number of army patrols and confine certain regiments to barracks for a set period of time. It is believed such actions would lead to reciprocity from the IRA.

For example, in 1975, during cease-fire talks, the British and the IRA agreed on "a progressive withdrawal of troops to barracks" in order to facilitate further negotiations. But a three-day IRA ceasefire in April failed to elicit any apparent response from the British government.

Several factors are believed to be holding the British back. One is a fear that withdrawal could destabilise the country. Major is on record as stating that he does not wish to pre-empt the "disintegration of the United Kingdom."

For disintegration, one could plausibly read destabilisation. Loyalist paramilitaries (who oppose the idea of a united Ireland) have exploited that fear by threatening all-out war if the British leave. Ironically, the existence of that threat owes much to past British actions.

For years, right-wing British politicians disguised a desire not to withdraw, by invoking the "bloodbath scenario," in which a civil war would erupt should they pull out.

There is also strong evidence to suggest that elements within the British military aided the creation of loyalist paramilitary groups during the 1970s to act as a counterweight to the IRA and to create the impression that the Northern Ireland conflict was internal and religious-based.

Now, at a time when withdrawal may be on the agenda, that gruesome myth has gained a new lease of life. For the last two years, loyalist paramilitaries have "outkilled" their IRA counterparts. This year they have been responsible for over 70 per cent of deaths in Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, an embattled Major will not risk alienating his own right-wing by appearing to make concessions to the IRA. If, for example, he were to re-open secret negotiations and news leaked, his already frail grip on the leadership could be terminally undermined.

And Major depends heavily on the votes of Northern Irish unionist MPs to maintain his slim parliamentary majority.

There are, however, rea-

sons to be optimistic. Recently, the British minister with responsibility for Northern Ireland, Patrick Mayhew, stated that the British were not seeking the "surrender" of the IRA.

His statement indicated that despite current problems the peace process at least has had the effect of moving matters beyond simplistic equations of defeat and victory. In their absence, compromise is an obvious substitute.

Furthermore, such an enduring conflict cannot expect to be ended in a matter of months. As the example of South Africa proved, initiating the process of change is the easy part: quantifying and defining the details of that change are more troublesome.

There is also the vital consideration that neither side will want to be seen as the one which scuppered the peace process, especially when, from South Africa to Palestine, intractable conflicts have been solved or are winding down.

These factors are unquantifiable, but should be significant enough to outweigh immediate problems.

Equally, once a peace process has been initiated, it is almost impossible to back down; the first, hard words have been spoken. Too many personal and political Rubicons have been crossed.

There are two sets of proposals on the table. And although there is a yawning gap between the two, bridging that gap could amount to little more than finding a formula of words.

If apartheid can be "withered away" and Israel engage in face-to-face talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization, surely that much is not beyond London, Dublin and the people of Northern Ireland.

Essentially, no side can risk being portrayed as having been defeated. It is that simple.

MACDARA DOYLE is a freelance Irish journalist.

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.

Budget Reaction

Sir, On behalf of the Bangladesh G P & C I Sheet Manufacturers' Association, I wish to make the following comments on the National Budget declared on 9th June 1994:

It is appreciated that the budget is designed to alleviate the poverty of the common people, particularly the rural mass, envisaging an increased expenditure on the ADP. The budget is also satisfactory on the ground that it does not contain any new taxes.

Although the duty on Zinc Ingot which is hardly 10% of the raw material consumed in the manufacture of C I sheets has been reduced from 30% to 15%, the overall position of C I sheet industries due to high import duty on C R coil (which constitutes about 90% material cost) still remains unsatisfactory. It will be noted that C I sheet which takes care of the housing problem of a big portion of our rural population, is, as a result of high duty on C R coil, going out of the buying capacity of the rural poor. During 1992-93, the duty on C R coil (below 0.40 mm thickness) was 15% which was enhanced last year to 30%. Our appeal to the NBR to bring the duty of C R coil back to previous 15% during this budget has made no effect. No doubt this will continue to affect the rural housing that goes against the avowed government policy to look into the problems of the rural mass.

Also, higher energy cost

due to increased rates of gas, electricity, etc announced through executive orders before the declaration of the budget shall result in an overall increase in the cost of production.

Deen Mohammad
President (Acting)
Bangladesh G P & C I Sheet
Manufacturers' Association

Salish and women

Sir, Amnesty International (AI) is very concerned about reports from Bangladesh, that local village councils or salish have tried women illegally and given order to execute, torture or ill-treat them. The salish has no authority to do so. This practice has not been stopped this far. To our concern, the incidents have increased over the last two years and almost all the victims were women. AI would like to ask the government to take all necessary and appropriate measures to ensure that local bodies do not assume functions for which they have no legal authority.

Referring to the articles 31, 32, 33 and 35 of the Constitution of Bangladesh, AI urges the Government of Bangladesh to bring men, who are responsible for illegal local village council, to trial. As far as we know only in one case in Moulvibazar nine men were sentenced to seven years imprisonment after a salish. We hope, that the recognition of the 'International Declaration

on the Elimination of Violence against Women' will help to improve the situation of women in Bangladesh.

In the course of the Bangladesh Women Action of AI, 1017 persons showed their support of our demands with their addresses and signatures on a list. This is attested by a notary. We sent the attested copies to President Abdur Rahman Biswas, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Minister for Social Welfare and Women's Affairs Fazlur Rahman Patel, Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Minister for Health and Family Welfare Choudhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf and Minister for Law and Justice Mirza Gholam Hafiz.

We all therefore hope to hear of improvement soon.

Ruth Oelgeklaus
Amnesty International
Cheruskerstr, Germany

Duty free

Sir, We all love bargaining. This elemental human trait results into \$13.5 billion business in duty free and tax free items sold in 2500 outlets around the world. The business is mostly in luxury goods: customers do not buy things they badly need but things just for enjoyment — life's extras like spirits, tobaccos, scents, jewellery, fancy watches and cameras and electronic items even fancy foods. Liquor is still the biggest selling item followed by perfumes, cosmetics and tobacco products.

Duty free outlets start with airports, military stores, foreign currency and sea-port shops. In-flight sales by airlines and on international ferries make up the rest.

What worries us is the extent of these items' entry into the local markets (through the privileged ones) and their effect on the affluent young gen-

eration, as many corners of posh areas are reportedly becoming secret outlets for liquor and the like.

Col Mirza Shafi (Rtd)
Banani, Dhaka

Playgrounds

Sir, Your columnist, Mr A S M Nurunnabi's write-up entitled 'Scarcity of playgrounds for children in the city' published on 11 June, 1994 in your esteemed daily was meaningful and informative for the entire nation. It was indeed very fascinating.

The healing powers of games and sports have a salutary effect on the minds of the children and the youths while they play and do any outdoor activity in the open spaces. As a teacher I strongly feel that at the stage of boyhood and adulthood, the youngsters have some positive emotions such as fun, excitement, enthusiasm, agility, etc and these can be generated to their betterment only through games and sport. Experts are of the opinion that psychological benefits can end or eliminate the spirit of destructive animus now prevailing among the youths. Their tendency for involvement in any kind of politics will automatically diminish even if they are allured by any interested quarter.

In the light of the above reasons, increased number of playgrounds in the cities and also the countryside will be treated as a key to the immunity of the youths against the 'flaw of the student-politics'. As a humble citizen, I earnestly request the authorities concerned to make provisions for increased number of playgrounds and open spaces in the crowded cities and towns as well as the countryside because the sporting spirit helps

bring out in each youth the best quality we have for the good of the nation. The sooner there's the action, the easier it becomes to make the violent youths understand the limitless healing powers of positive emotions in their lives.

Prof Abul Ashraf Noor
Jalalpur, Pabna

BCS exam and female candidates

Sir, It is heartening to know that the Bangladesh Government is going to hold a special BCS examination in teaching through its PSC for filling up a few hundred posts of teachers in secondary schools and colleges during the current year.

The PSC (B) in their notification sought, amongst other things, a minimum of honours degree (2nd class) in the relevant subjects in B A/B Sc/B Com examination as pre-requisite qualification for the said examination. Everybody in this country knows that females are much in backward position than their male counterparts in education and services sectors. And unless some impetus is given initially for some years at least, they cannot be brought up at par with the menfolk of the country.

Hence we request the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable leader of the Opposition in the Parliament and the honourable State Minister for Female Affairs of the government to give their prudent thought to the matter and allow the intending female candidates having second class Master's degree to sit for the ensuing BCS (special) examination of 1994, to try their luck in an open competition.

Froze Ahmed
Hatirpool, Dhaka-1205

Scholarship and B Sc (Ag) (Hons) degree

Sir, Our attention has been drawn to a recent advertisement offering some scholarships from the Prime Minister's office to the Bangladesh students for doing in-country M Phil, Ph D on various subjects. We congratulate the PM's office for arranging such scholarships from the Prime Minister's fund for assisting research and higher studies.

Meanwhile we are rather disappointed to note that the minimum qualification for doctors and engineers is MBBS and B Sc Engineering degrees respectively but for agriculturists, M Sc (Ag). I think the PM's office must be aware of the fact that as per the government regulation, the four-years post-H S C B Sc (Ag) (Hons) degree is equivalent to other professional degrees and general Master's degree.

Under this circumstance, we request the relevant authority in the PM's office to kindly revise the minimum qualification for the agriculturists and allow the B Sc (Ag) (Hons) degree holders and other graduates of Agriculture University to compete for the above mentioned scholarships.

M Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor
Bangladesh Agricultural
Institute, Dhaka

WC: Congrats

Sir, Congratulations to Germany for their good beginning in the World Cup football 1994. We hope and deserve that they will give us, in the whole of the tournament, all attractive games and wins.

Al-Mamun
Moulavi Para, Brahmanbaria