

Peace-making for Middle East

In its range of dynamism, dimension of contents and directional thrusts, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher's shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East is assuming almost an epochal proportion.

Christopher's shuttle diplomacy under the Clinton leadership has seemingly changed all that. It has made possible a hand-shake and an accord between arch foes Israel and the PLO on Palestinian self-rule by phases over some of the Israeli-occupied territories with the crowning return of Yasser Arafat to his homeland.

President Hafez Al-Assad is emerging as a tough negotiator on the Golan Heights question demanding that Israel make these over wholly to Syria without much ado. Israel on the other hand has conveyed it to President Assad through the US Secretary of State Warren Christopher that it could transfer only parts of the Golan Heights to Syria.

It is understood that the final peace treaty between Jordan and Israel will be consummated after Syria and Israel signs a peace accord between them. The controversy over the status of East Jerusalem and some other areas in Israeli occupation has to be settled as quickly as possible.

A Sherbet Treat!

It happens only in fairytales. But in a country as unpredictable as Bangladesh, fairytales are not altogether absent. They take place in the most unlikely places and situations, throwing a challenge to our rational faculty.

A whole pond has turned into a sherbet jar of enormous capacity and the villagers are taking the sweet drink home for sugary treat. It has been possible because of a combination of incidents. Smugglers knowing not what to do with 150 sacks of sugar, only hours before the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) raids on the village, had found the easy way out by dumping the whole lot into the now-turned sherbet pond.

Surely, the excessive sweet content was not to the liking of the permanent residents of that pond. All the aquatic animals, chiefly fish, died. They served the purpose of sacrificial animals all right. However, the report is not clear about the population of fish in that pond.

Well, the smugglers are the real losers in the process. They did invent a way out. But the solution is the last one they had opted for. They are known for all kinds of ingenious plans and tricks to outfox the men in uniform.

THE coverage of the Taslima Nasreen case makes it quite clear that the twin preoccupations of international media are — sensationalism and "anti-Muslims", if I may be permitted to use the word.

Sensationalism in its most virulent form, the prurient and merciless attention of the "paparazzi", has devastated the lives and loves of many people all over the world.

With the spotlight on our own infamous feminine novelist, we too have felt the heat of its light and can sympathize with its other victims. In our case the media has made its second priority quite apparent, that is, the extravagant attention paid to any instance or situation where Muslims or Islam can be criticized.

DHAKA has grown over the years without a comprehensive town planning exercise in its background. Most of its new areas that were allowed to come up literally neglected are served with very few secondary roads but lanes and by-lanes.

Fare Meters The cabs and autorickshaws that ply the streets of Dhaka

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.

Role of NGOs

Sir, The Director General of the NGO Affairs Bureau has relieved the confusion from the public mind by clearly refuting the allegations against NGOs that they are indulged in anti-religious activities.

However, the recent allegations of so-called fundamentalists against the NGOs and the silent role of the government have confused people like us who started doubting whether the NGOs are really indulged in anti-religious activities.

Anti-Muslim Bias in International Media

by Yasmin Murshed

Why do we never hear of Serbian Christians or Irish Catholic Separatists or Jewish Fundamentalist Settlers.... Oh no, those appellations are not really necessary, only Muslims have to be distinguished by their religion.

and the feeble death threats made by "minor right wing groups, who are neither representative of Bangladesh public opinion nor taken seriously by most reasonable persons in the country, merit this kind of attention?"

For the Western media the answer is obviously yes because it gives them the opportunity to indulge in an orgy of hysteria about Muslim Fundamentalism! Even a cursory review of the facts of the case shows that the entire Taslima Nasreen affair was created by the West Bengal press then taken up and blown out of proportion by the Indian and subsequently by the world media.

positively while the Washington Post in great indignation said, "Murder is Murder. Mr Ambassador" in reply to the Bangladeshi envoy's letter pointing out that the lady in question is a Bangladeshi citizen to whom the law of the land is being applied just as it would be to any one of us if we were guilty of breaking the law of the land in any country for whatever reason.

I cannot help but agree that murder is murder but so far all that has been "murdered" has been our literary sensibilities (as any one who has tried to read Taslima's writing knows), and most tragically Bangladesh's record for tolerance and non-communalism which was perhaps the best in this entire region.

Any minor incident involving "Islamic Terrorists," any

domestic fracas involving one wife or two and the stereotyping begins. The "anti-Muslimism", often by implication and sometimes openly, portrays Muslims as unsavoury and unreliable characters and of course as "fundamentalist" which in this vocabulary is equal to bigotry and fanaticism.

Well, so be it. I for one am proud and happy to be called a Muslim fundamentalist because I believe that the fundamental values of humility, charity and submission to Allah are the true essence of Islam.

Bangladesh is, in this the last decade of the twentieth

century undergoing great social transitions and changes and many of the established dimensions of our lives have to be redefined as we seek to reconcile our traditional values and ways of life with the demands of a technological world.

The champions of freedom of speech will say that freedom itself creates human dignity, but I disagree. There are limits to free speech everywhere because most people agree that Freedom is not the license to

do or say exactly what one pleases about everything. In fact in the every countries which advocate the cause of Free Speech libel, slander and privacy laws are much more strictly enforceable than in Bangladesh thus setting effective limits to freedom of speech.

As I said earlier it should be our debate, our discussion and ultimately our decision. If we choose our course wrongly we will learn the lessons of time as other societies have done before us and will or will not change when we reach the crossroads of decision making again.

Of course we also have to hope that soon Michael Jackson will be accused of molesting another young boy or that the glamorous Princess Di will talk indiscreetly to yet another "friend" or that O J Simpson will confess to a double murder on Prime Time TV or even that another Jennifer Flowers will lay siege to the White House so that those sensations will divert attention from sleepy little Bangladesh and we will be able to get on with our lives in peace!

The author is Director, Centre for Analysis and Choice, Dhaka.

Dhaka Traffic — II

There Must be Some Control Everywhere

by M Khaled Khan

on hire are not provided with fare meters. Whatever the drivers charge is put to bargain and finally negotiated. No standard unit rates could be established so far to give the negotiation a legal basis.

As I have mentioned earlier, most of bus stoppages are located either at the road intersection points or very close to it. I do not know what traffic rules would say about the locations of stoppages with respect to the roads.

the places where the cinema halls and shopping centres are located on the main road. Left with no parking space vehicles stopping at these locations have no option other than parking at the road side.

Tangible Formula Needed Now, to remove the causes of traffic jam Dhaka City Corporation, Dhaka Metropolitan Police and other concerned government and private organisations should put their heads together to work out a tangible formula and set the ball rolling.

Gulistan Terminal Gulistan and Fulbaria terminals with their present status are certainly not ideal places for parking of commercial vehicles. All the buses that ply within the city or coming from suburban areas stop here for return trip.

walk for a distance away from the entrance point of such commercial ventures.

Parking of vehicles both private and commercial, is an issue which everybody is concerned with. Most of the private buildings in the commercial areas do not have parking space of their own.

The road, in front of Banga Bhavan, that had once been open to all after liberation was declared out of bound for vehicular traffic ever since the political change over in 1975. During Ershad's regime some architectural features were built across the road denying any thorough traffic movement.

apparently not for implementation in its life time. They should have thought of converting the whole Fulbaria Station into a modern bus terminal with adequate provisions for parking space and charging fees for parking facilities.

The DMP also could have come up with an action plan to regulate the traffic in the city's busiest area where no semblance of discipline exists at the moment.

Level Crossings The railway track that has passes through the heart of the city has more than 15 level crossings, big and small, within the city area.

It becomes a very interesting subject of study if we take a look at the scene that ensues at each of these big level crossings following the departure of a train. Khilgaon crossing scenario is the worst of all. Such bizarre scene is repeated at least 30 times a day to the utter disgust of the people staying in Khilgaon. Bashabo.

Madartek etc. I cannot think of a situation when due to increase in frequency of trains these gates will remain closed most of the time in a day and will leave little or no time for the people from one side of the track reaching the other side riding a rickshaw, tempo, bus or car.

Lots have been said about the traffic system of the metropolitan capital city. There are lots of others that merit attention. Marked improvement of the deplorable situation may not be in sight in the foreseeable future. But pessimism has no place. Some drastic measures have to be taken by the appropriate authority under the leadership of the Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation on whom the residents of Dhaka have reposed their faith to guide their destiny.

- (a) Population influx in the metropolis must be restricted. (b) The City Corporation should prepare a plan for a network of secondary roads in all the areas which are densely populated and where such roads are not existing. (c) Infrastructural facilities like water, electricity, gas and sewerage must be ensured to all those who need them. (d) Rickshaw, auto rickshaw and car parking areas must be earmarked on top priority basis. (e) Sitting areas for vendors must be defined and police must keep a vigil so that laws are strictly adhered to.

(Concluded)

not kill for killing's sake, they do it to defend themselves, to appease hunger and sometimes to take revenge for the death of a dear member of the same species. As they cannot use weapons, they have to use their teeth and claws, thus it is termed as savagery.

So, we should stop referring to any sordid act caused by humans as an animal act, because animals as it seems are more humane than human beings at most of the times.

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Tomato in summer

Sir, Tomato is a winter vegetable and does not grow in summer. But a breakthrough has been made for its growth in summer by dint of research and experiment at BARI's Agricultural Research Station in Thakurgaon.

The tomato seeds were sown in March and in April and later on transplanted with different kinds of fertilisers. In May, the plants began flowering and then the fruits grew. The yield per hectare was 42

and 39 tons from these two varieties of seeds, both ripe and green.

Summer tomatoes are being regularly planted and grown in Taiwan the Philippines and Thailand. A daily 2/3 times spray of a special type of hormone is a must without which the flowering will not occur.

The heat and drought tolerance of the plant, temperature range, soil texture and climatic conditions show that Thakurgaon region is ideally suited for summer tomato, along with Joydebpur. Though BARI has approved three varieties for cultivation at farmer's level, but basically it remains at research level. It may take time to popularise the cultivation of summer tomato among the farmers.

I got this information from a friend of mine who works at BARI.

N H Sufi Mohammadpur, Dhaka

SAARC spirit indeed!

Sir, While the SAARC Council of Ministers were holding a two-day meeting in Dhaka to work out a fresh action programme aiming at widening cooperation among the member countries some Indian bureaucrats with the help of Border Security Force (BSF) were constructing a road along Indian Kuchilbar border defying the protest made by Bangladesh and violating the protocol signed between

Bangladesh and India not to construct roads within 150 yards of no man's land.

We would like to request the Indian State Minister for External Affairs Mr R L Bhatia, who was our guest, to kindly enlighten us as to why New Delhi is interested in creating more and more new problems, one after another? Why India does not come forward to solve two decades old Ganges water sharing issue with us and many other bilateral problems with most of the SAARC countries? How long would the Indian apathy towards Bangladesh and other SAARC countries continue and why? Is not India violating the spirit of SAARC anyway?

Let New Delhi follow a neat, clean and pristine foreign policy to solve all the bilateral problems with her neighbours and make the mission of SAARC a success.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

"Does the Capitalist System ..."

Sir, I had had the opportunity of reading quite a few books and articles, including the exhaustive dissertation by BIDS's erstwhile DG Dr. Mahub Hossain, on the Grameen Bank. But after I have read the article captioned "Does the Capitalist System Have to be the Handmaiden of the Rich?" by Prof Muhammad Yunus, published in the July 3 and 4 issues of your esteemed daily, I am left wondering how much more I am yet to learn to fathom the secrets underlying

the series of Grameen Bank's success stories. In a country, where ingenuity or even the penchant for slightly departing from the beaten track is either rare to come by or summarily dismissed by referring to what are called precedents, but what are mostly the other names for a series of failures, Grameen Fisheries Foundation, as it has been modeled, can, for example, indeed bring about a miracle in its almost virgin sector of inland fisheries, in the prospect of which we are said to be second to none in the whole world. For heaven's sake, let us stop waiting for the time when some "greedy" entrepreneur, as Prof Yunus terms him, will discover our inland fisheries sector, at present trapped in two million idle ponds, as a source of minting money and learn to look forward to who are known as "why-notters" instead of "not-nowers" and "yes-buffers" at the decision making and implementation levels. We have had enough of our own varieties of "not-nowers" and "yes-buffers" and seen what they could do for the country. Let us give a chance to the "why-notters". It is they, people endowed with vision and innovative faculties — people with a ceaseless feeling of unhappiness over the "existing" state of affairs — who can move the world. To speak of this juggernaut of a country burdened with a myriad of problems — all calling for urgent solution —, they are sorely needed.

Fazlul Kabir 6/12 Baily Square, Dhaka