

Serbian Ruses

If the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina had so long cuddled the on-lookers' blood, the latest spate of happenings there has been so torrid a cocktail of unmixable chemistry that these are bound to boggle the mind into a state of complete bewilderment.

Let's take a look at the new things happening in the Balkans. The UN commander in Bosnia, Lieutenant General Sir Michael Rose has threatened air strikes for the first time on the Muslim-dominated Bosnian government troops for 'violating' the war Exclusion Zone around Sarajevo, a charge that was otherwise principally directed against the Serb warlords.

While the Muslims on the one hand have provoked a seemingly non-discriminatory threat from the UN commander for their purported violation of the war exclusion zone, which is applicable to them as well, they, have, on the other, a somewhat heart-warming piece of news. The US administration, Congress and Pentagon are of the view now that the arms embargo on the Bosnian Muslims would have to go if the Serbs were to continue to spurn the peace plan of the 5-nation contact group.

It has become crystal-clear by now that the Serbs are trying out all the ruses in their bag to wriggle through the international pressure so visibly mounted on them. The self-styled Parliament of theirs having rejected the peace offer thrice and scheduled a referendum over the issue for the end of the current month is now on the verge of ordering mobilisation of forces on a war footing — a chain of ploys to buy more time.

Such a damning expose of the Serbian ruses should provide the extra-ordinary reason for the international community not to loosen their gripping pressure on the Serbs, so that they can see the wisdom of abiding by the civilized norms of international conduct. The realisation should better dawn on them that their turning the back to the peace formula could wreck the hard-earned support to the same by the Muslim and Croat federations.

Agricultural Aberration

Alarm bell has been sounded for long against the use of heavy amount of chemical fertilizers. That the warning has gone almost unheeded is no surprise. For once the farmers have decided to break with their traditional farming practice they are confronted with unheard-of problems and newer challenges.

A report carried in the national page of this daily yesterday comes up with yet another agricultural aberration in that the farmers are now cultivating the same crop on the same plot for years together. Add to this the total abandonment of the use of organic manure in their lands and one knows how fast they are acting to render their lands completely unproductive.

Other less known adverse effects associated with the modern practice of agriculture are the heavy iron contents in the irrigated water extracted from underground and the siltation caused by such continuous pumping and even river flooding. The cumulative effects of all this surely point to a tragic scenario. It is also a proof that the agricultural sector is least managed.

Today the world is turning its back to chemical fertilizers and rediscovering virtues in the golden rules of supplying natural substitutes for the shortage of soil nutrient. Some experiments have yielded startlingly good results. Known as ecological farming, the new method however has one big constraint to overcome. This is the scarcity of green manure or organic fertilizers.

East and South East Asia Takes a Step ahead

REGIONAL SECURITY

Despite assurances to the contrary, American military presence in Asia is no longer what it was a few years ago. Absence of the Soviet threat has created an impression in the region that unlike the past, the protection of a US security umbrella may not be available to them any more.

Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei and Singapore, the United States, China, Japan, Russia, the European Union, Australia, South Korea, Vietnam, Canada, New Zealand, Laos, and Papua New Guinea.

The ASEAN Regional Forum is clearly a response to the security needs of the countries in the region. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union are around with their vast armies and armadas to fight against each other or to give protection to their respective allies.

pleading for continued American presence in Asia though others seem to have mixed feelings about the proposal.

The first meeting of the Forum was really a very modest affair. The initial aim seems to be to end a Cold War mind-set of secrecy and mistrust about each other's military intentions.

regional security structure. East and South East Asia, unfortunately, is not free from potential trouble spots. The Korean peninsula is the hot spot at the moment. North Korea's nuclear ambition is a source of great concern for the entire region.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

and a key participant at the forum meeting said, "The idea is really to engage all the major security players in the region and get them working cooperatively together, rather than seeing their security lying in strategies of deterrence and arms build-ups."

friction among several countries of the region. The Spratly and other islands in the South China Sea are claimed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia. The possibility of finding oil deposits in the offshore areas of these islands has increased the chances of conflict.

On Track for Healing the Great East Africa Rift

Neil Bakshi writes from Kampala

Nearly two decades after being halted for political differences, the Uganda-Kenya train service is back on the rails. As Gemini News Service reports, it is more than just transportation but a symbol of renewed cooperation.

AT 10 o'clock on Tuesday morning the Uganda Express groans out of Nairobi station, creeps past the city's tin-roofed shantytowns, climbs to the top of the Kikuyu escarpment, then begins its long descent into the Great East African Rift Valley.

Weird geological forms — extinct volcanoes, dome-shaped lava flows — rise from the arid valley floor. Beyond them lay Lake Nakuru and Lake Elementeita, pale blue splashes sprinkled with thousands of pink flamingos.

As we roll through the valley, which is being slowly wrenched apart by immense tectonic forces, the metaphor is hard to miss: the chasm mirrors the rift between Kenya and Uganda that stopped the East African train service for nearly two decades until its resumption this year.

Travelling by rail into the heart of Uganda was once a great colonial adventure, a journey made by, among others, former British and US leaders Winston Churchill and Theodore Roosevelt at the turn of the century. British engineers and 18,000 Indian labourers laid the first 580 miles of track between 1895 and 1901, linking the Kenyan coast with the lush interior around Lake Victoria.

They extended the railway to Kampala after World War I, and for 50 years it served as a vital trade link and symbol of East African unity. But neighbouring countries nearly went to war after Uganda's brutal dictator Idi Amin accused Kenya of assisting Israel during the commando raid on Entebbe in 1976, and the train



service linking the countries was stopped the following year.

Uganda soon fell into a decade-long civil war that killed hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed the economy; even in recent years relations between the two countries were confined to border incursions and other acts of aggression.

During summit meetings last year, Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi and Uganda's leader Yoweri Museveni agreed to lower trade barriers and revive the rail line for both passengers and goods.

The new symbols of cooperation are striking. On our 24-hour westward journey, a Uganda Railways engine pulled 12 Kenya Railways passenger cars. Framed portraits of Moi and Museveni dominated the buffet car.

Vestiges of Africa's colonial past remain: white-jacketed waiters ring chimes in the narrow corridors to summon first class passengers to meals served on starched white linen and eaten with silver cutlery. Zebras and gazelles gallop across the savannah. And though the enforced racial divisions of colonial Africa disappeared decades ago, on the

"A comfortable relationship among participants, a relationship which encourages candour and understanding, must come first before we take on more ambitious plans."

One of the powerful countries in the region, Indonesia, regards the Forum more as an instrument for confidence-building and consultation than as a vehicle for solving existing disputes between member countries. Confidence-building measures could include agreements to allow foreign observers at military exercises and publish information on military spending, force structure and doctrine.

Foreign Minister Ali Alatas who said that the Forum was attempting to "manage strategic change in such a way that a new equilibrium among the major powers in the Asia-Pacific region could evolve gradually and peacefully over the next decade."

The Forum had, admittedly, set itself very modest goals. But it is considered to be a pragmatic approach. These countries must get used to the idea of sitting together to deal with security issues. From this point of view it is an achievement worth noting. The foreign ministers and officials of the member countries will meet at least once a year but the actual impact of the Forum may be much greater than its modest beginning suggests.

with a Ugandan, the only recourse for him is to take a gun and shoot you," he observes laconically.

Even some Ugandans were nervous about going home; a professor who fled to Kenya during the Amin years was returning to his parent's village for the first time with his American wife. "I'm a bit fearful," he says as he stands at the immigration office in Malaba at 3 am. "The memories are still strong."

At dawn the train crosses the source of the Nile at the northern end of Lake Victoria, which is barely visible through the dense mist. The landscape has changed overnight from the eucalyptus groves, maize fields and concrete block homes of the rolling Kenyan highlands to Uganda's mud huts, cassavas and shaggy banana trees.

At 9 o'clock we arrive on the bustling outskirts of Kampala. Allen Mutono, a student at Kampala's Makerere University, points to a new Pepsi bottling plant and a soccer stadium under construction. "So many things prevented us from being the brothers we were before," he notes, "but now Uganda is unrecognisable from what it was a decade ago."

The Nairobi-Kampala express is a small yet powerful symbol of that renewal.

NEIL BAKSHI is a freelance journalist based in Uganda.

To the Editor...

Disciplining Doctors

Sir, Bravo for you editorial on 'Disciplining Doctors' of August 3, 1994. Congratulations to the Health Minister for his courageous action, which has been taken on the basis of Vigilance Team's report. Probably he could be singled out from his other colleagues for his bold action against such a powerful professional group of government doctors.

Already the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) and Doctors Association of Bangladesh have asked the government to withdraw the punitive action taken against the concerned doctors as published in a leading Bangla daily of August 4, 1994. BMA even threatened to go for a bigger movement if its request remains unheeded.

It seems what the BMA, Prokrichi etc. really mean by a

bigger movement is indefinite countrywide strike/hartal by the doctors. If they do so, the retired doctors like myself and many other young unemployed doctors, I believe, would respond positively to face the challenge of treating the patients during strike/hartal period. Only the government has to formulate a hartal management plan of action well in advance like disaster management plan of action.

In the end, my humble request to the concerned authority is that it should stick to the gun if right thing has been done in a right way and set a strong example to right the many wrongs in our society.

Dr K M Maqsudur Rahman Gulshan, Dhaka.

For a better environment

Sir, The Bangladesh Society for Conservation of Environment (BSCE) would like to request, through your columns, the esteemed readers as well as the members of the public to actively discharge their individual responsibilities for keeping and creating a clean and healthy environment.

Efforts should be made both individually and in group to keep the locality clean. Indiscriminate felling of trees have to be stopped and more and more saplings should be planted. Emission of black

smokes and high decibel horns have to be avoided. The habit of spitting and throwing of litter hither and thither has to be changed. Every individual should make another individual conscious about the importance of conservation of the environment.

Let us all take active part in environmental conservation activities and create a better, clean and healthy abode for all of us.

M Zahidul Haque Publicity and Press Secretary, BSCE, Dhaka.

"An Inspiring Tale"

"Sir, Thank you for your editorial 'An Inspiring Tale' (8-8-94). Education is a birth-right of every human being. We can say education is not only a right but a necessity too. No nation can prosper without education. Amir Hossain has got primary talent pool scholarship though he is a servant of a house. We are also extending our congratulations to that house holder Mr Monoranjan Chakma. Perhaps, we may turn his deed into a social movement. It is true, only a social movement can bring about such a change. But we should at least make a beginning and Mr Monoranjan Chakma has done it!

K M Ali Azam 22/1, Eskaton Garden, Dhaka-1000

OPINION

Highway Accidents: Points to Ponder

by A Zabr

Public administrations have to become more publicly conscious in bombarding the public with a constant flow of information on deterrent measures taken to stem the rising traffic accidents on the highways.

The news about an accident is not immediately followed up with covering statement analysing the situation. It appears that it is safer to travel by train (whenever there is an alternative, in spite of higher average time taken for the trip).

The Government regulations on passing information to the press has to be reviewed and modernised. The present regulations are very restrictive, and only a few top officers can speak to the press. This outdated colonial attitude has to go in this information age.

For controlling traffic and bad driving, the administration has to feed the public on the measures taken. Since most of the accidents are due to human error, some of the areas are spotlighted below.

Crack-down campaigns/Weeks on false driving licenses and bad and dangerous driving, followed by statistics and public reviews. There is nothing to hide. Loopholes, monitoring and feedback system on detection and punishment. The public is not told anything. The reporters may be called for press briefings. What the PROs are doing? The Traffic Police 'Weeks' are pathetic in effect and completely useless.

The political implications of traffic non-control should be openly discussed. The re-

ported statement by the Mayor that the administration would not like to create another social problem due to the traffic problem has to be clarified in respect of administrative measures. Misplaced kindness cannot run any administration anywhere, at anytime. There is nothing political in life — all are disciplines; (what an obvious statement, but it is found necessary to stress it!).

The issue of driving licences to the right applicants who are qualified to hold licence. Examples of irregularities and corrective steps. Computerisation will reduce corruption. Both parties to the malpractices must be hauled up, those offering and accepting bribes.

The driver is expected to know how to drive safely and according to regulations all the time. That means indoctrination of good driving practices (like good engineering, business, medical practices). Good driving has to become second nature. The local problem is that due to the average low literacy level of the hired drivers, there is increasing level of indiscipline, and indifference to authority.

Surprise driving test of existing driving licence holders — random checks. A large number of ineligible drivers would have their licences suspended or cancelled.

Review of teaching and training standard of the driving schools, and strict control of the private driving schools. Weeding out of the bogus

trainers. Why Bangladeshi driving licence is not acceptable in most of the foreign countries?

Uniforms must be made compulsory for public drivers for easy identification, discipline, and conformity. One's profession in these service area must be visible to the public eyes. One should not be ashamed of one's profession.

Why the traffic rules cannot be strictly enforced on the highways outside the city limits? Control of corruption among preventive field staff. Why the law does not apply equally to all? How powerful owners bypass enforcement? Why the number prosecuted is so low?

Information on use of drugs and narcotics by the highway drivers. Are 100 per cent of the highway drivers sober? Any arrangement for detection and surprise checks?

The role of the owners/drivers' unions in trying to reduce highway traffic accidents. Such unions are visible only during agitation, strikes and hartals, and when they create law and order situation like road blockages. How effective are these unions in public interest? How self-regulation is enforced, and why these are not publicised?

The vehicle fitness is another big grey area where similar questions may be posed. At routine level of working, we get very poor marks. The situation is not improving even in decades. Why? That is the biggest question for any Administration.