Dhaka, Sunday, August 14, 1994

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. Granted, the new incidents provide a break from the monotonous past but they do not add up to any basic improvement in the situation. On the contrary, the message is reinforced that unless the Serbian genie is pushed back into the bottle and chastened, its defiance of world opinion will snow-ball as an unwanted slur on ethnic coexistence as such.

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. Following an actual NATO air attack on the Serbian positions on August 5 and the threats issued to them that similar assaults lay in store for them, the Serbs returned some heavy weapons they had seized earlier on from the UN forces. But no sooner a week had passed they stole heavy arms and ammunition from a UN weapons collection point. Then the UN Protection Force was sought to be tricked into accepting a gun for the much bigger one they had lost in the stealing. The Muslim-dominated Bosnian army is said to have mined a road South of Sarajevo Airport allegedly to prevent UN monitoring of their troops movements. We can safely presume that one thing led to another as the war flared up again between the Muslims and the Serbs not merely in the UN monitored exclusive zones but elsewhere as well.

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. Even Russia, a member of the contact group, which has hitherto stood by the Serbs, seems now to be chagrined by their intransigence in dismissing out of hand the peace formula so arduously put in place. Even Yugoslavia has threatened economic sanctions upon and the sealing of borders with the obdurate Serbian minority in Bosnia.

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. What a warped thinking on the peace plan that offers them 49 per cent of the territory despite their being a minority as against 51 per cent envisaged for the Muslims, who themselves are in a clear majority, to say nothing of the Croatian population.

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 hardearned 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. In the absence of any systematic methods and clear-cut guidance they are bound to commit all kinds of errors in their decisions and practices. If indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers is one such error, they are doing quite a number of them.

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. The report is specific about the soil of Manikganj and Dhaka districts, but one can safely assume that the picture will not be much different in most other areas of the country.

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. A switch-over to a new technology and method calls for vigorous and extensive groundwork. Nothing

has been done here. Farmers have been left to take their own decisions and get used to the process through trial and error. Farmers have known that chemical fertilizers raise production of crops and they are using it as if the more the better. Some rudimentary training would have been very useful

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. The question of producing natural substances for organic fertilizer does not arise. What can at best be thought of is the cultivation of different crops with a few years' spacing. Even there is some problem because farmers are used to think in terms of cereal production and even the government is satisfied to know that it has achieved near self-sufficiency in food, meaning food-grains. This approach has to be changed and the sector brought in order to get the best possible long-term results.

REGIONAL SECURITY East and South East Asia Takes a Step ahead

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

HE demise of SEATO did not end the security role of the United States in Asia. In fact the East Asian countries such as South Korea, Taiwan and Japan depended on US military might for their protection. The huge military and naval bases maintained by the United States in the Philippines as well as troops and facilities based elsewhere in the region was convincing evidence of its security commitment in East and South East Asia. But the end of the cold war has led to fundamental changes in the security scene. Americans do not consider Russia to be a security threat, at least for now. So they feel they can scale down their military presence in the region. The pressure of budgetary deficit is also a major factor. Thus there is an emerging power vacuum in the region. Inevitably there is an arms race among the regional powers which are keen to fill the vacuum. The ASEAN countries are also drawn into this arms race but they don't like the way things are developing. They would like to bring about some order and accommodation. At their initiative the first meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum was held in Bangkok on July 25, 1994. Our press, absorbed in the exciting developments in national politics, hardly noticed the event. But it was a significant development. It indicates a willingness, on the part of the major players in the regional scene, to sit down around a table to discuss security questions. A total of

18 countries attended the

meeting which included

T 10 o'clock on Tues-

day morning the Uga-

▲ nda Express groans out

of Nairobi station, creeps past

the city's tin-roofed shanty-

towns, climbs to the top of the

Kikuyu escarpment, then

begins its long descent into

the Great East African Rift

extinct volcanoes, dome-

shaped lava flows — rise from

the arid valley floor. Beyond

them lay Lake Nakuru and Lake

Elementeitia, pale blue

splashes sprinkled with thou-

As we roll through the val-

ley, 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 re-

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 engi-

neers and 18,000 Indian

labourers laid the first 580

miles of track between 1895

and 1901, linking the Kenyan

coast with the lush interior

to Kampala after World War I,

and for 50 years it served as a

vital trade link and symbol of

East African unity. But the

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

They extended the railway

around Lake Victoria.

sumption this year.

sands of pink flamingos.

Weird geological forms -

Valley.

pleading for continued Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines. Brunei and American presence in Asia though others seem to have Singapore, the United States, mixed feelings about the pro-China, Japan, Russia, the European Union, Australia.

a US security umbrella may not be available to them any more.

South Korea, Vietnam, Canada

New Zealand, Laos, and Papua

is clearly a response to the se-

curity 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 re-

spective allies. Of course some

regional powers such as China

are rapidly building up their

military strength to fill up the

vacuum but that is seen more

as a problem rather than a so-

lution. A rich and militarily

strong China makes most

countries in the region very

nervous. Even Japan, with its

brutal expansionist policies in

the thirties and forties, is

viewed with misgivings.

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gion that unlike the past, the

protection of a US security

umbrella may not be available

to them any more. Countries

such as Singapore, Thailand,

Brunei and Malaysia have suc-

cessfully created affluent

economies without a strong

military capability to assure

their security. In fact

Singapore has been openly

The ASEAN Regional Forum

New Gutnea.

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. It is this mistrust which has turned this affluent area into the fastest growing arms market Gareth Evans, the Australian Foreign Minister

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. Cambodia is still smoldering. Despite the massive UN effort to bring back peace to this troubled land peace is still eluding Cambodia It is still a stage for regional

power play. South China Sea is a potential source of serious

by Shah AMS Kibria

ON THE RECORD

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, the traditional way of looking at security." The region should seek a security policy based on "engagement instead of containment" and "friendship rather than the identification of enemies." said Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the Malaysian Foreign Minister.

The participants at the conference are under no illusion about the difficulties of reducing tension and building up confidence. Such confidence is a sine qua non for building up a

friction among several countries of the region. The Spratlys 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. It is undoubtedly a sign of maturity of these nations that despite conflicting interests they all agreed to meet at a high level to discuss the question of regional security. It has to be noted that a number of the Forum members are Cold War adversaries and have had little contact with each other in the past. According to Singapore's Foreign Minister S Jayakumar,

"A comfortable relationship among participants, a relationship which encourages candour and understanding, must come first before we take on more ambitious plans." Drawing China, an emerging economic and military giant into a network of closer regional security cooperation is regarded by ASEAN officials as vital to the Forum's success.

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. A US official said that America hoped the Forum would develop "Preventive diplomacy so that nations that have been historical rivals and are potential antagonists in the future will convey to one another directly" their military intentions and capabilities. Prasong Soonsiri, Thailand's Foreign Minister and chairman of the meeting, said that as a result of the accord, the Forum was now in a position to make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region." The most perceptive comment about the Forum was made by Indonestan

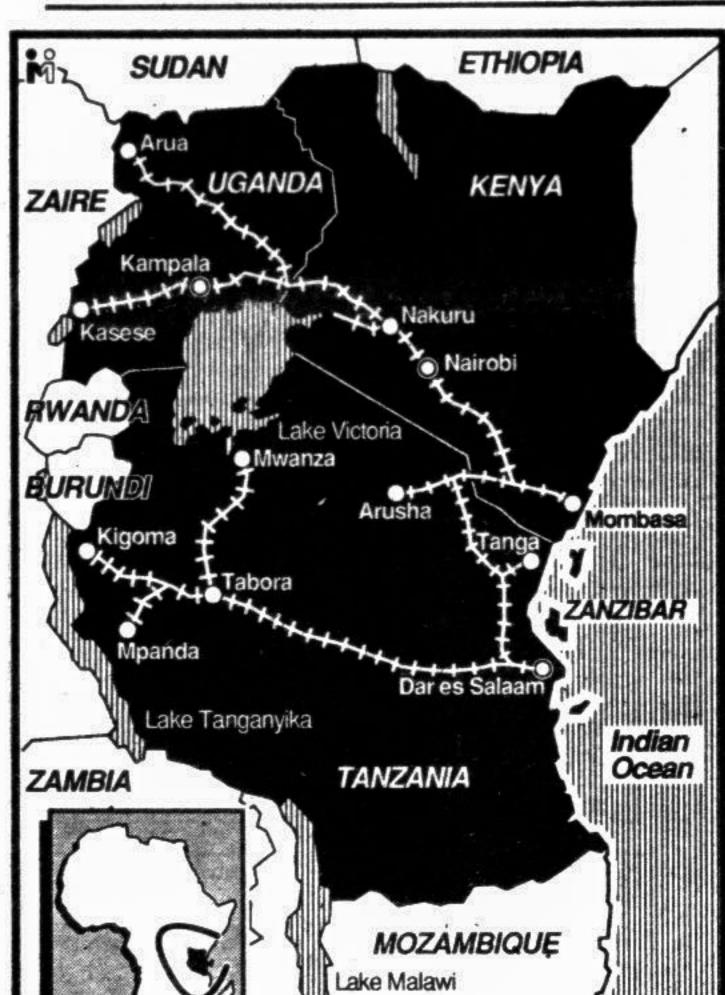
Foreign Minister Ali Alatas who said that the Forum was attempting to manage strategic change in such a way that a new equilibrium among the major powers in the Asia-Pacific region could evolve gradually and peacefully over the next decade."

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 securify 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. The United States has given its strong backing to the initiative. instead of working unilaterally, perhaps the United States would like to work through the Forum to achieve its security objectives in the region. It will be very interesting to see if the establishment of the Forum and the beginning of confidence-building measures will slow down the arms race in the region. If they succeed in reducing their arms purchase then South Asia, plagued by the long-standing dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, will become the biggest buyer of arms in the world. One wonders if we in the South Asian region will ever have similar forums to discuss security issues. As long as India and Pakistan will remain locked up in the continuing conflict over Kashmir such hopes may seem like wishful thinking on our part.

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 transporta-



tion but a symbol of renewed cooperation.

Uganda soon fell into a decade-long civil war that killed hundreds of thousands

service linking the countries

was stopped the following year

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

revive the rail line for both passengers and goods. The new symbols of cooperation are striking. On our 24hour westward journey, a Uganda Railways engine pulled 12 Kenya Railways passenger cars. Framed portraits of Moi

to lower trade barriers and

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 disapapartheid lives on. The \$40 one-way, first class sleepers with comfortable bedding and drinks delivered to the compartment are filled almost exclusively with white tourists, while most Africans pay \$6 to sit squeezed on benches in the last six cars of the train.

Uganda Express economic

For Kenyans and Ugandans, the revived service holds the promise of greater prosperity. Land-locked Ugandans again have a cheap alternative to importing fuel and other goods by road through Tanzania, then by ferry aeross Lake Victoria; Kenyans have access to a market slowly reviving after a

decade of lawlessness. Joseph Mutuni, a Kenyan textile importer who travels to Uganda a dozen times a year. boarded the train at Eldoret, the halfway point, exultant about the new ease of travel and trade.

"It takes half the time it once did," he says. Nevertheless, Uganda's bloody recent history has left psychic scars on people from both sides. Stephen Wakhol, a Kenyan civil servant was riding as far as his hometown on the Kenyan border and had no intention of crossing it. "Once you differ

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.

OPINION

peared decades ago, on the

Highway Accidents: Points to Ponder

by A Zabr

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

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

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 had 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/'Week's 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 pa thetic in effect and completely

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

ous 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 knowhow to drive safely and according to regulationsall the time. That means indoctrination ofgood 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 indif-

ference 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.

training standard of the driv ing schools, and strict control of the private driving schools. Weeding out of the bogus tion

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 theservice 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 selfregulation is enforced; and

why these are not publicised? The vehicle fitness is an other big grey area, where similar questions may be posed. At routine level of working, we get very poor - Review of teaching and marks. The situation is not improving even in decades. Why? That is the biggest question for any Administra-

Disciplining Doctors

Sir, Bravo for you editorial on 'Disciplining Doctors' of August 3, 1994. Congratulation 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 of its request remains unheeded.

Being a doctor for over four decades, and a student to the late National Prof M Ibrahim, I shudder to think of myself belonging to the same professional group. The reasons are many but I will just quote one line from your editorial i.e. The wicked practice they have been carrying on is common knowledge.' For doctors to remain absent during duty hours, it is little less than a heinous crime. Late Prof. Ibrahim used to term it as an intellectual crime', which means stealing the public service time by the intellectual people to reap personal prof-

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 environ-

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.

200mls/320km

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

M Zahidul Hague Publicity and Press Secretary. BSCE, Dhaka

"An Inspiring Tale"

'Sir Thank you for your edi-

torial "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

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