

Port Problem

We are relieved to know that the Port Users' Forum has called off its programme of indefinite strike to press home its demand. An enormously attenuating possibility for the economy arising from the suspension of all sorts of activities at the country's premier port, heaven knows for how long, has been averted.

Apparently, the problem has been defused by granting port users the permission for using private equipment in the cargo handling operation alongside fulfilment of some 'logical' demands of the port labourers, both assured to take effect within this month.

A timely preventive measure. But how durable is it going to be? With the functional control of the port lying with as many as eighteen associations, similar problem is likely to spring any time in the future. A web of vested interest has grown around the daily activity of the port which accounts for 60 per cent import and eighty per cent export business of the country. Any thing that may tell on the interest of any of these groups can cause revision of the nightmarish prospect.

The latest instance of wild cat strike should serve the authorities as an eye-opener. It is only after being pushed at the end of their tethers that the port users opted for a strike *sine die*. Lack of coordination among various associations, intractable labour force and rampant corruption have really lowered the Chittagong port in the eyes of the international shipping community. Today Chittagong port is the other name of delay and inefficiency.

It is both amazing and appalling the kind of lackadaisical attitude the major port of the country has received from the authorities. Things have come to a point where this apathy and tinkering job like the latest one would not do any longer. Because in the days to come, the load on the port can only increase. And with Nepal preferring Chittagong port to the one in Calcutta, an increase in the load looks a certainty. Whether through privatisation as it has already been aired about the deep sea port or through maintaining a status quo that port will get the ameliorating touch is something the government will have to decide quickly. The fact of the matter is the port needs to be modernised. Its facilities and efficiency cannot wait to be improved.

Hostages to Panic

Three persons were arrested by police on Saturday on suspicion that they were child-lifters. Well, this didn't happen quite like that. Two young men were challenged by local people because of their suspicious movement. Their replies to queries made by the locals only lent support to the suspicion and a public beating followed. Later the police moved in to save the youths by arresting. The third one was a woman and she was said to have been trying to entice some girl children. Here, too, members of the public gave Sofura Begum of Begumganj, Noakhali a good hiding before turning her over to the police.

Over the last week at least 24 suspected child-lifters have been beaten grievously by mobs in about eight district headquarters. In certain towns people have become panicky so that school attendance has started registering a discernible fall. Quite recently some mob beatings of alleged child-lifters have ended in death. Things have marked some improvement that this past week no child-lifter was lynched. But there cannot be any guarantee that killings would not occur in any panicky town any moment.

Now this society must be rid of this panic. And at the same time the child-lifting crime must be eliminated altogether. The problem is police have no way of knowing before the kidnapping that such was going to happen. Social resistance must combine with police vigilance to stop the child-lifter. Only the local people have the ability to know if somebody was from outside and was on the prowl. But they can be wrong and their summary justice cannot ever be condoned for two reasons. It would be one sure way to seriously injure the system of dispensing justice in the country and promote anarchy and violence. There is always a lot of people in any mob itching constantly to hit and maul somebody. Together with the child-lifter and other assorted goons, these unsuspected criminals must not be given any quarters.

The police, however, seems to have hit on the right track at last. They are targeting the dens. The human smugglers nabbed at the border areas can prove helpful in tracking down the mafia behind all such operation against children and as such society. Police must keep this up and intensify its search and destroy missions. A government cannot allow panic to vitiate the life of its citizens.

Shibir's Latest Exploit

The Chhatra Shibir has been doing whatever pleases them for years on end at the Rajshahi University. What haven't they done there — maiming and killing students, destroying university property and personal belongings, laying waste a whole residential hall time and again, reducing to cipher university's administration and academic norms.

Are they a bunch of incorrigible criminals, undiminished by anything in the world, or even by a care for divine wrath? The latest in their unending series of crimes has been disrupting all activities of the university. For two decades and more they have been doing this without ever being challenged.

It was gratifying to see that for some two weeks or so police was trying sincerely to catch up with their elusiveness. Dozens of Shibir stalwarts have been arrested, each of them charged previously with serious crime.

But Shibir is not one to take it lying. Pushed out of campus they spread around to destabilise the city life of Rajshahi and other towns in that division. When they found police tailing their procession of cadres carrying cocktails in bags they attacked them. In the ensuing battle some police officers were grievously injured and some Shibir elements also got hurt.

We had in the past asked the Jamaat what does all this avail them? We have no way but to repeat the appeal to reconsider their kind of keeping a university under perpetual siege. They have, thanks to the foolishness of our education planners, all the madrasahs at their will including those giving degrees equivalent to MA. Why should they aim to make a university consisting of their cadres and none else? This is what fascism is about. And fascism must not have a place in a democratic society.

Emerging Security Order in Asia-Pacific

by Brig (Retd) M Abdul Hafiz

Given the Chinese assertions on various issues, it appears almost certain that the United States would continue to maintain its position as a balancing force in Asia Pacific... It remains to be seen whether ARF would ultimately meet the Asia Pacific's requirement of a regional security framework...

DURING the cold war period a bipolar international system itself shaped the pattern of security arrangements around the world. In Asia-Pacific it was Indo-China problem which had lent definition to related regional and global alignments and maintained incentive for an elaborate US military engagement in the region with a constant Sino-Soviet attempt to break the monopoly. The US role in the region often took the form of a collective defence underpinned by her much to the advantage of the regional countries seeking US security umbrella. It was not until 1969 when Soviet Leader Brezhnev took definite step to weaken this American influence by floating the idea of collective security arrangements in Asia without, of course, much response. Twenty years later when Mikhail Gorbachev made a similar proposal in Vladivostok again there were few takers. Against the backdrop of this security scenario ASEAN, a unique undertaking of multilateralism came into being at the height of cold war in the late sixties. Although the organisation was founded very much with regional security against Communism in mind and a uniform perception of region's security issues it did not immediately assume an overt security role. Instead, it concentrated more on intra-organisational confidence building through what it called 'soft regionalism' and gradually undertook a security role based on the medium of political dialogue. The strands of both the approaches went along together with Indo-China remaining the strategic concern of the region.

The end of the cold war drastically altered the security context not only for South East Asia which narrowly escaped the strategic consequence of the US' ignominious exit from Vietnam war but for the entire region of Asia Pacific. While Indo-China was later reduced to mere regional issue in global politics, Asia Pacific area witnessed proliferation of fresh security issues and profound changes in the existing ones. At the centre of the changes is, of course, the rapid rise of China as a great power in tacit alliance with whom the United States only recently neutralised an attempted Soviet hegemony in the region. There were widespread concerns over the

expansion of Chinese influence almost corresponding to an American withdrawal from the region. The insecurity in the region also stems from the territorial dispute between Japan and Russia, the continuing division of Korean peninsula, the Sino-Taiwanese dispute, the Cambodian problem, China's territorial claim over South China sea and the poor state of Sino-Vietnamese relations. What have however assumed a menacing proportion are China's sovereignty over an extensive maritime territory extending close to the shores of ASEAN countries and her 1996 missile brandishing across Taiwan straits. In the prevailing void after the US withdrawal from the Philippines in late 1992, obviously the nations of the region were desperately in search of an appropriate security framework. But a comprehensive framework particularly on European model seldom appeared viable for a region as diverse as Asia where a clear-cut dividing line is difficult to find and the security issues often overlap each other's interest.

Yet the end of the cold war itself brought several positive developments in its wake and resolved many confrontational relationship in the region. The most significant of them is perhaps the resolution of Cambodian problem through the intervention of the permanent members of the UNSC although much of the ground for it was already broken by the multilateral efforts of the ASEAN. The consequence of the US military withdrawal also was mitigated to an extent through a series of memorandums, accords and agreements with some of the ASEAN countries offering the US the military facilities, ports and bases. Although the ASEAN had never articulated a common strategic perspective as a basis for defence cooperation they did share the view that a sustained US forward military deployment would have a stabilizing effect on Asia Pacific. The degree of overt support for such deployment was mixed however. Suharto, astounded during his 1990 visit of China by the latter's pace of progress,

lent Indonesia's influential support to promote a wider framework for security dialogue beyond the limited bounds of ASEAN itself. The concept of an extended security dialogue also attracted Thai interest after the end of Cambodian conflict. Thus the post cold war security context was at the top of the agenda of ASEAN summit at Singapore in early 1992 soon after the decision of US withdrawal from the Philippines and the disintegration of Soviet Union.

The ASEAN Regional Forum — a new and wider multilateral structure in the Asia Pacific with a clearly defined security role — emerged as a consequence of ASEAN summit of January 1992. It was because the participants recognised the necessity of looking beyond South East Asia to cope with the new regional security context. The 'soft regionalism' initiated and pursued by the ASEAN over the decades was no less responsible for an economic integration and market unification in Asia Pacific region which in one way or other contributed towards emerging security cooperation. More significant is that Asian nations succeeded in industrialising and in developing interdependent economies thus creating a stake in each others' security. As the economic consolidation intensifies in the Pacific rim it ensures an American presence in the region earnestly desired by most nations in the Asia Pacific as a countervailing force to Chinese expansion. More so, when Japan is barred from playing that role due to her second world war legacy.

Nevertheless, ASEAN's primary responsibility for this new security venture and its institutional development is reflected in the name of the structure: ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). ASEAN itself is responsible for organising the Forum's annual meeting and for co-chairing its inter-organisational activities. Moreover, the prime model for ARF is ASEAN's own distinctive political approach to regional security problems through multilateral dialogue. ASEAN's practice is based on diplomacy with

the foreign ministries enjoying a primacy of role and makes no provision for the institutional enforcement characteristic of the models of collective security. Somewhat in conformity with US-Japan perception the ARF would like to create an international framework that allows interested nations to participate in negotiation for resolving their security problems.

Notwithstanding doubts as to whether ARF offers an effective framework for stabilising vast Asia-Pacific region overshadowed by great powers like the USA, Japan and China its successes were instant when it first met in July 1994 at Bangkok. It brought together 18 countries; the six members of the Association of Southeast Asian nations, the seven dialogue partners of the ASEAN post ministerial conference which include Russia, China and Vietnam (later a member of the ASEAN) as well as Laos, South Korea and Papua New Guinea as observer states. A representative of European Union also attended the first session. As suggested by this

quarter assemblage, practically all the nations in the region were involved in one-way or other in ARF proceeding. It was the region-wide cooperation on security issues for the first time. The foundation of ARF and the successful holding of its first meeting demonstrated just how much the security situation had changed in the region and how deeply concerned the nations of the region had been. However, in the tradition of Southeast Asian nations the Forum sets forth its goal: To facilitate a constructive dialogue on politics and security, thereby deepening mutual understanding, building mutual confidence and removing the causes of confrontation and conflict between the nations in the region.

There are more reasons for ARF's success. It is also seen as a response to the emergence of Asia as a significant region of the world. The economic growth of the countries in Asia Pacific particularly has given confidence and increased the variety of exchanges concerning economic interaction. The smooth development of APEC from its founding in 1988 to the first informal summit in the late 1993 was a manifestation of this confidence, and this in turn has facilitated regional cooperation between many countries in security matters. It was also based on growing political clout of the region as well as growing American belief that in post cold war time it became necessary to create a more formal security system in the region. The United States and Japan which had been circumspect about multilateral security forum also revised their position to support a regional security dialogue based on existing post ministerial conference (PMC) framework. There were change of attitudes also on the part of important nations on Pacific rim as the cold war came to an end. Australia and Canada for the first time called for an Asian version of Conference on security cooperation in Asia (CSCA) concept. In the fall of 1990 Soviet foreign minister Shevardnadze responded positively to a proposal for a meeting of Asian foreign ministers. Japan also began to recognise the usefulness of a broader conference to discuss regional problems but on an issue by issue approach. The success of Paris conference on peace in Cambodia had however clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy and set the stage for ARF's summit.

A great deal of scepticism still persists as to the workability of the Forum in a region where there are several countries that do not have diplomatic relations with South Korea present one of the most difficult of the problems. Another is Taiwan which has almost no official relations although it has informal ties with many nations in the region. The lack of even neutral relations means that it is not easy for some countries to meet in the same room. The first question that ARF will have to address is how to deal with North Korea and Taiwan. North Korean participation is desirable, and indispensable for stabilising Korean peninsula and for discussing nuclear non-prolif-

eration. North Korea's meaningful participation is possible only after suspicion about its nuclear development programme has been fully resolved. The nuclear issue has been discussed in both ARF and in the United Nations, but it has basically been left to negotiation between the United States and North Korea. The latent problem over Taiwan's status also is one of the most critical issues in building a system for stabilising the Asia Pacific region. Taiwan like North Korea is an important regional actor that does not participate in the ARF. Given Taiwan's economic clout, a multilateral system that does not include Taiwan will be less meaningful.

Then there are snags about the model the ARF has chosen and the principles it adopted for its functioning. The consensus, one of the principles of ARF, for example, is simply out of question when state objectives of a rising power, say like China, would greatly differ from those of the smaller nations of the region. Although it may be perfectly alright for a major power, China is trying to create its own sphere of influence but it contradicts the move towards a cooperative multilateral regime in the Asia Pacific region and can become a serious problem in the future. If a member chooses to defy the consensus or for that matter any other principle, there is little that an organisation constructed along the line of ARF can do. Given the Chinese assertions on various issues, it appears almost certain that the United States would continue to maintain its position as a balancing force in Asia Pacific.

It remains to be seen whether ARF would ultimately meet the Asia Pacific's requirement of a regional security framework or CSCA, the Asia Pacific version of CSCE becomes a reality. On European Continent where two military alliances confronted each other integration or division could be effected easily. The Asian military balance is however diverse and difficult to integrate. It is such considerations that make it more realistic to create an international framework for resolving issues one at a time through negotiations between the interested nations than to create a structure based on European model. And that is where lie the prospects for ARF's survival and success.

Helsinki Summit: America Casts 'Security' Network over Europe

by AMM Shahabuddin

The question of European Security vis-a-vis expansion of NATO eastward to accommodate some of the East European countries, is vital to the interests of USA.

IT was not a poetic imagination but, say, Jack and Jill going up the hill to etch a pale of water but unfortunately tumbling down empty-handed. It was two weeks ago, one of the only super-power, and the other, 'not-so-super-power', Boris and Bill who, of course, didn't go up the hill with their buckets but, instead, they flew into Helsinki to 'climb' a 'summit' to make a deal, a rather big deal, to ensure European Security, with NATO as an expanded protective umbrella, towards Eastern Europe.

Although Bill Clinton was looking tired for his 'pain in the leg' and Boris Yeltsin was, as they say, physically 'all wet', they smiled, shook hands and 'reached a grand successful accord' on the future shape of European Security and expansion of NATO towards East to admit the eagerly-waiting newly-independent East European Republics, about a dozen in number, who had come out of the former Soviet empire with the demise of the 'evil regime', to quote Regan.

Now, 'security' is rather a confusing but a relative term. Just as water has no shape of its own, but takes the shape of its container, 'security' is also a shapeless conception when it stands or hangs alone, but assumes a many-dimension shape when judged from different situations. This it gains intensity and gravity when judged and analysed from different contexts the Helsinki Summit between Clinton and Yeltsin should also be looked into through that angle.

Security against Whom? 'Security' had a special connotation and a definite force when it was built up during the cold war, following the end of the World War II. Then European Security meant to contain and counter the emerging Soviet Union's influence over Europe which had its own security machinery in the Warsaw Pact members from East Europe against the NATO force comprising the US and the other European allies. But the scenario suddenly changed with the disintegration of Soviet Union, giving birth to a new

'psyche' to the newly-independent East European countries, that were gossiping under the Soviet subjugation for more than four decades.

So the new security question for Europe has a new dimension. It is true that with the fall of Soviet empire, security against menace of communism has won a great victory and the 'evil empire' had met its Waterloo. But that doesn't mean that the stable should be kept open and the horse will be safe. So this new attempt on the part of Clinton to draw a broad outline of the security of Europe. And that is exactly what he intended to do with Yeltsin at Helsinki. Because the best strategy in defence preparations is to acknowledge the time-honoured dictum that 'there is no such thing as little enemy'. And as a grand strategist, if one can win over such 'little enemy' and keep him under his 'protection' half of the game is won.

US Takes the Lead It must be acknowledged without fear of any contradiction that America, under President Clinton's new diplomacy, has for all practical purposes has taken over the responsibility of ensuring European security, posing as an 'European power', thus to participate in all practicability in the network of European security. That was exhibited when Clinton triumphantly shepherded all the European powers, despite all obstacles and hurdles that some wanted to put in, to march together to implement the US-sponsored Dayton peace plan for Bosnia.

That America is now the only indisputable super-power was shown again, when America, a veto-wielding permanent member of the UN Security Council, washed out the 14 other members' vote (including four other permanent members) when it opposed tooth and nail the reappointment of Butros Ghali as Secretary-General of UN for a second term and all followed America's lead to appoint a new Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

So when Clinton and Yeltsin were meeting in Helsinki, both knew each other's mind and both knew what they are up to. Certainly, it was not an 'equal match'. There are always 'more equals' among equals, just as there are 'more unequals' among equals. Judged from that angle, it was an 'unequal match' and a face-saving device for Russia and rather a 'fixed game'. Clinton was clear enough in his approach that he can go ahead with his European Security plan together with the expansion of the existing 14-member NATO eastward to incorporate, at least some of the break-away states of the former Soviet Empire. And Yeltsin also knew in his heart of hearts that it was just a 'courtesy' that Clinton has arranged this Summit as a diplomatic show-piece more for the convenience of Yeltsin so that he could also flex his muscle to show his opposition to the extension of NATO and then reluctantly agree to it for greater interest of peace and security.

To Pop up Yeltsin's Shaky Leadership Thus, Helsinki Summit had a deeply meaningful purpose. First, it gave Yeltsin an opportunity to show to his countrymen that he is opposed to any scheme that would tantamount to 'sell-out' country's interests to others. Secondly, Clinton, deliberately created a situation through this summit for Boris to emerge as a 'nationalist'

leader by announcing that he (Yeltsin) was not convinced that an expanded NATO eastward was no danger to Russia. And then only Clinton 'came in' to guarantee this security to Russia. So two birds were killed by one stone.

Clinton achieved what he wanted, and Boris also emerged as a 'nationalist', when a number of Army officers and former communist leaders are posing a big threat to his leadership as nationalist leaders. Clinton wants Boris to continue in office in Moscow as America and the West have put a great stake on him by throwing billions of dollars to pop up Russian economy and Yeltsin's leadership. So the political analysts and diplomats, including Dr Kissinger, who predicted that Yeltsin would never agree to the expansion of NATO eastward and Clinton wouldn't be able to convince him to remove his misgivings, have proved as 'false prophets'.

Summit was Not a Big Event In fact, 'Helsinki Summit' was not as big a world event as it was projected by the western media. Neither it was as historically important as Versailles treaty or Yalta agreement. The summitary has just put Yeltsin in his proper size in the context of today's world events, particularly in the backdrop of European security. It was a novel way of Clinton "to lock" him, as an Indian analyst said, in the process of world security system launched by America. And as part of it, in Europe, NATO is the most powerful mechanism to carry on this mission to success.

So Yeltsin ultimately agreed to sign the charter, prepared by America, to establish Russia's 'relationship' with NATO, not

as full-member, nor having any voice in its decision-making, but with the assurance that NATO wouldn't take steps against Russia's interest, and the bottom line was that Russia wouldn't have any objection for allowing membership of NATO to his former Warsaw Pact allies under by-gone Soviet Union.

Today's 'Moscow' of Russia and yesterday's 'Moscow' of the Soviet Union are two different things. One today is not even the shadow of the other. So Yeltsin knows that he can't live in water and fight with the crocodile at the same time', as they say. Russia is the economic shambles Yeltsin himself is physically unstable. A 'sick-man' heading a 'more sick' state. Political scenario of Russia with his powerful rivals prowling around to grab power, is precarious. Unemployment is getting from bad to worse. Even the employed people in army and civil service haven't been paid their salaries for months together. While ordinary people are selling their domestic items on the pavement to buy food, Russia, as a state, is suffering, by selling its old arms, ammunition, missiles, nuclear technology and what not.

In such a desperate situation, Yeltsin badly needs economic 'crutches' from America and the West for his survival. So he follows a wise policy of 'never look a gift horse in the mouth'. The 'gift horse' is urgently needed by Yeltsin, until he succeeds in putting his own house in order. If Yeltsin shows his willingness to tread the set course, as he has already shown it clearly, by signing the argument at an official ceremony in Paris recently, giving a formal shape to the Russia — NATO relationship, Russia may gain shortly the full membership of the World Trade Organization

It may be recalled in this connection that Clinton had already strengthened US security network spread over South East Asia, where there are quite a number of trouble spots that are either brewing or smoldering under the ashes. The hot-spots are: China-Taiwan relations, China-Japan relations, North and South Korea problem, and nearer home, India-China border dispute and India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir.

America as the only super-power has emerged as a peace keeper in this region as well. Its hands have been further strengthened with the understanding over the stationing of 47 thousand soldiers, majority of whom are based in Okinawa where a heavy storm blew recently against America but subsequently subsided amicably. It is, therefore, an open secret that both Japan and USA are 'committed' to maintaining current US troops in Japan 'to preserve regional and global security'.

The USA has thus consolidated its unique position in maintaining security regionally and globally. The stage has, therefore, been finally set by the vital decision to expand NATO eastward. President Clinton is now, undoubtedly in the driving seat, after his return from Helsinki Summit he thus, made another 'home run', as they say in Baseball, thus contributing largely in the process of his future third-term run for US Presidency.

Security Network over Asia

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To the Editor...

Office time, holiday and pay hike

Sir, Perhaps I am the first person who brought to the public attention the need for reforming the existing schedules of office time hours, week-ends and the number of annual holidays in Bangladesh to improve the performance of the government sector so as to prepare it for facing the challenges of the twenty-first century. I published three articles on this subject in my regular weekly column in your paper ('Pattern of Time-use in Bangladesh', October 27, 1996, 'Costs of Time Mismanagement and Public Interests', November 3, 1996, and 'Reforms for Facing the Twenty-first Century', March 23, 1997). Since rarely any one, except some high level officers and office cleaners, shows up at 8 am in the morning, for all practical purposes, government offices were working only for about 30 hours a week which was the lowest number of hours worked not only in the region but also perhaps in the whole world. How could Bangladesh afford this luxury? Similarly, by having Friday as the weekend, the country was losing about four working days in a week in its dealing with the outside world with which it has a growing trade relationship. One should also note that the country has too many official and unofficial annual holidays. However, since then it was a pleasure to see that this issue was taken up by various Chambers of Commerce and Industry and was brought to the attention of the Prime Minister. It is gratifying to see that the government especially the Prime

Minister has implemented part of the recommendations that neutral people like us and the representatives of the practical winners of the country such as the Chambers of Commerce and Industry have been clamouring for. I would like to congratulate the Prime Minister for taking this step.

However, it looks like the Prime Minister has almost purchased this deal at a great cost, as it were. In exchange for accepting this reform measure by the striking Secretariat office employees, the Prime Minister has given a hefty wage bonanza which will not only inflate the national budget deficits every year but also throughout the entire economy. No one will be able to escape the inflationary pressure in the economy. The other important part of the recom-

mendation for reform was the change of week-end from Friday to Sunday. Let it be understood that if the country has to depend on export-led growth, it has to come today or tomorrow. Hopefully, the Prime Minister will be able to implement it without another wage or other bonanza to any interest-group in future. Incidentally, an Islamic state like Pakistan has been able to shift the week-end from Friday-Saturday to Saturday-Sunday very recently without any financial compensation to any interest-group.

CNN's programme Sir, In most of the national dailies, detailed TV programme of BTV, BBC, ZEE TV, DD Channels, Sony TV, Star Plus etc.,

are available but nowhere we find the CNN's programme.

We are very much interested to know the CNN's detailed programme. May we through your esteemed daily draw the kind attention of CNN and request the authority concerned to let us know the CNN's daily programme?

Be honest Sir, We the readers strongly condemn a news item published in a Bangla daily on June 5 aimed at sullying the personal image and reputation of the editor of The Daily Star for which that daily (Dhaka) apologised on the following day.

This is very unfortunate that this type of false news makes an

honest person's profile unnecessarily bad in the eyes of readers.

Reporters should bear in mind that they should not write anything which may express their ill motives.

Mostafa Sohel
4/8 Bangladesh Bank Officers
Quarter

Transit Sir, After 26 years, India is reported to have given transit facilities for access to Chittagong port.

Why this long waiting period? As a public relations move for the next phase: E-W transit facilities to India by Bangladesh? Where is the transparency?

Abul M Ahmad
Dhaka.