

# Return from the Brink?

In 1960 when the Congo crisis broke upon the UN the Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, wanted to cut out a niche for the UN in the international power game. Since Hammarskjöld, there has not been an activist Secretary-General. Is Kofi Annan emerging as an activist Secretary-General?

THE signing of the deal between Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the UN and Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of Iraq, will be greeted throughout the world with a sigh of relief. That feeling will be mingled with the thought if all this hullabaloo raised by the US and Britain, were at all necessary. The threat of a strike on Iraq has never looked credible in spite of the din and bustle and the assembling of a huge fighting force in the vicinity of Iraq.

That the deal is going to hold is evident from the following facts: 1) The UN Secretary-General had detailed consultations with the Permanent members of the Security Council before undertaking the journey. He was in constant contact with them from Baghdad during the negotiations; 2) the Secretary-General was preceded by an advance party, which was allowed unlimited access to visit whatever sites they wanted to visit inside Iraq; 3) with the ground well prepared, the Secretary-General was well set to take up the final talks with the final arbiter of the situation — President Saddam Hussein; 4) right from the start Iraq had given enough signs that she had learnt a hard lesson seven years ago; 5) by signing a deal with the Secretary-General, Saddam Hussein drew a sharp distinction between the US and the UK on the one hand and the UN on the other. By refusing to sign under the threat of a strike by the US and the UK but choosing the UN instead Saddam strengthened the hand of the UN and its Secretary-General and managed to save his own face.

The crisis broke out on the issue of unlimited access within Iraq by the inspection team of the UN looking for weapons of mass destruction and preparations of such weapons by Iraq. It may be recalled that a similar situation had arisen in Novem-

ber last and the US had adopted a threatening posture. This time around the build up was on a much larger scale and the noise from Washington was as threatening as could be imagined.

Yet as the build up continued apace and threatening armada approached the Gulf with fighter aircraft and a great assortment of weapons, there was an air of unreality. The Security Council was helplessly divided and the US could enlist the support of its automatic ally Britain alone. The three other members of the Security Council — China, France and Russia were solidly opposed to any military solution. The US diplomacy crisscrossed the world but could not get any sup-

# Saddam Scores in Short Run

by Dr A R Chowdhury

Now that Kofi Annan has succeeded in averting bloodshed at least in the short run, he should concentrate on a long-term solution to the region's problems.

THE latest round of stand-off between Iraq and the United States has been peacefully settled through the efforts of Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General. According to published reports of the settlement, Iraq has agreed to give the weapons inspectors, accompanied by diplomats, unrestricted access to suspected weapons sites. No deadline or limits on the number of visits to the sites are included in the agreement. After conferring with Boris Yeltsin, Tony Blair and other Western leaders, President Clinton has agreed to the settlement.

Both sides are claiming victory. On the surface, the agreement seems to resolve most of the issues which bedeviled the inspectors. However, a quick analysis of the events would show that, at least in the short run, Saddam Hussein has scored a victory. Although what happens to the plight of the Iraqi people remains to be seen.

The provisions that Saddam agreed to are nothing new. They were included in the April, 1991 UN resolution stating Iraq's obligations to halt certain weapons programme. He didn't concede anything more than what he had already done in 1991. However, his defiance brought him admiration among the Arab population. There is a Middle Eastern proverb that 'the jackal is the lion in its own neighbourhood'. He has again proved its significance.

With the crisis temporarily defused, the Clinton administration, on the other hand, faces a number of new obstacles. The US must maintain an expensive policy of containment, requiring a large military presence in the Persian Gulf for an indefinite period. It must convince an increasingly skeptical Congress and public about that policy, and hold off



## The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

port from any quarter except such tiny pockets as a token support from New Zealand. The Arabs, who were directly affected by the crisis, all solidly opposed military action and solid allies of the US like Saudi Arabia withheld support. Indeed as the crisis gathered momentum street demonstrations against the US reminded viewers of such anti-American protests of the past. The coup de grace was administered by the US youth, who confronted the UN leaders in angry outbursts against military adventure of any kind. The declaration of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright that the US cared much more for Iraqi children than Saddam did, sounded very hollow.

Saddam Hussein has already started crowing victory. Since he is unburdened with any dissenting voice the Iraqis will celebrate their victory. More importantly they will savour the victory because they did not cower down before the threat of the US. Indeed Baghdad became the centre of all diplomatic activities and peacemakers came from such big powers as Russia and France. And most importantly the Government of Iraq signed the deal with Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the UN. During the press conference after the signing of the deal Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz was at pains to establish that Iraq had not submitted to the 'sabre rattling' of the US and the UK but signed the deal with the UN. We never had any quarrel with the UN. Aziz went on insisting and thereby drew a line between Iraqi relations with the UN on

the one hand and the US on the other.

The US, the sole superpower, is so strong that it does not need to explain anything to anybody. Yet what has become patent through this crisis is that she has failed to convince anybody including her own citizens about the necessity of a military strike against Iraq. The Senate Majority leader, Newt Gingrich, who was advocating removal of Saddam by force, does not look like a very good representative of his electorate.

The UN, which is routinely lampooned for its ineffectiveness in handling crisis, has given a brilliant account of itself. It is true the UN is an assembly of nations from all over the world and harmonizing so many conflicting interests is an impossible task. This is why frequently UN failures seem so glaring. Yet in the current instance the UN has performed responsibly, with deft diplomacy and has been led by a brilliant diplomat in the person of Kofi Annan.

In 1960 when the Congo crisis broke upon the UN the Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, wanted to cut out a niche for the UN in the international power game. 1960 was the year of Africa as a large number of states from Africa joined the UN. They needed a helping hand and Dag Hammarskjöld was more than willing to extend his. His effort was cut short by his death in the jungles of the Congo following a plane crash. Besides Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union had blackballed him from re-election. Since Hammarskjöld, there has not been an activist Secretary-General. Is Kofi Annan emerging as an activist Secretary-General? While charting his future course of action he can not afford to forget that he is the servant of the organisation of the UN and particularly its big bosses — the Permanent members of the Security Council.

Why did Clinton agree to the settlement drawn up by Kofi Annan despite some domestic criticism that he is allowing the United Nations to formulate US foreign policy? The answer lies in the fact that the Clinton Administration has been facing some problems of its own.

First, domestic support for striking Iraq was waning fast. It was nowhere more evident

than in Columbus, Ohio where last week the 'ABC trio of America's foreign-policy team' — Madeleine Albright, Sandy Berger and William Cohen — were shouted down by anti-war protesters. Some questioned America's moral right to bomb Iraq, while others criticised the premise that bombing will serve US national interests.

The incident in Columbus mirrored the same problem Clinton faced in trying to persuade former UN-war allies. Most of the world agreed that Saddam should live up to the Security Council resolutions he has accepted and should allow inspectors to check any site they feel necessary. But they balked at enforcing the rules with air strikes.

Second, maintaining a massive military build-up in the Persian Gulf region is turning out to be more expensive than anticipated. Defense sources estimate that the cost of the latest military build-up would exceed 750 million dollars. So any long-term commitment to deploy such a massive force would put a damper to Clinton's quest for a balanced federal fiscal budget.

Third, the morale of the American military is becoming genuinely tired of the cycle of getting ready to strike Iraq and then backing off. Repeated tour of duty in the Persian Gulf is being cited as one of the major reasons for many elite air force pilots leaving the service.

Fourth, the continued crisis in the region is having an adverse effect on the now-stalled peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Fifth, Iraq's neighbours don't want the crisis in the region to escalate. They are afraid that if Iraq falls apart due to a major US strike, then it will destabilise the entire region. In

the absence of a unified Iraq, Iran becomes the major military power in the area. Southern part of Iraq with its Shi'ite majority may decide to join Iran.

This would pose a direct threat to eastern Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the possibility of an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq worries Iran, Syria and Turkey. So while Saddam's neighbours would like to see him go, they are not ready for a disintegrated Iraq.

What the US has in mind is a cold war-style containment of Iraq. Continued economic embargo, constant threat of military attack, and occasional bombing seems to be the main thrust of US policy toward Iraq. However, it is difficult to see where such a policy will take the US in the long run as Saddam doesn't seem ready to leave and the US is unwilling to go for him directly.

The irony of the entire Iraq crisis is the untold misery and suffering of the civilians in Iraq. The economic embargo imposed by the UN has gone too far and is hurting Iraqi women and children who have no say in who leads their country. They are being attacked from both sides. Saddam's autocratic rule and his oppression of Iraq's civilians are well-documented. On the other hand, the US, by continuing the economic sanctions, has driven the Iraqi people to the brink of despair.

Now that Kofi Annan has succeeded in averting bloodshed at least in the short run, he should concentrate on a long-term solution to the region's problems. A starting point would be the initiation of a process that would eventually lift all economic sanctions on Iraq. The United States, in its zeal to punish Saddam and continue the crisis until he is removed from power, is actually punishing the innocent people of Iraq.

# Women without Wings

by Dilara Choudhury

Violence against women in Bangladesh seems to have become a way of life. Dowry deaths, forceful abduction, rape and murder are a routine matter. How can there be genuine development of women propagating them to take part in nation building if this rampant and excessive violence against women is not dealt with in an integrated manner?

IT has become fashionable these days to talk about women in development. Everybody seems to be worried about the severe underdevelopment and status of women in Bangladesh. The government as well as the donors seem to be seriously engaged in alleviating the situation by pouring money into gender-related microcredit, employment opportunities, and education projects. Numerous NGOs and consultancy firms are also working hands in glove with the government in order to uplift women's overall socio-economic conditions. Despite such involvement by government and NGOs and numerous studies the conditions and status of our womenfolk are far from satisfactory. The female literacy rate is still at dismal 17 per cent. The drop-out rate among female primary and secondary students is harrowing. Malnutrition is pervasive. And they are still subjected to age-old discriminatory social traditions and misinterpreted religious laws. Most important of all is that the violence against women in Bangladesh seemed to have become a way of life. Dowry deaths, forceful abduction, rape and murder is a routine matter. How can there be genuine development of women propagating them to take part in nation building if this rampant and excessive violence against women is not dealt with in an integrated manner? But

despite international and national endeavours, the problem is persistent and still endemic. Actually, violence against women is on the rise, and trafficking of women (which is considered violence against women) from Bangladesh has replaced Thailand and the Philippines as the epicenter of the regional business in trafficking women.

It should be mentioned that trafficking of women is not only a national or regional concern but also an international one. It has been a very lucrative business for organised crime groups for a long time. With the end of the cold war and changing security environment these criminal gangs have now become brazen, particularly so in the countries where the law enforcement is atrophied, and economy is transitional and disarrayed. Trafficking from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus, for example, into Western Europe and Israel is now a matter of great concern for the United States and European Community. During her visit to the Central Asian Republics in 1997 Hillary Rodham Clinton spoke about this new white slave trade which has developed fairly rapidly. The United States and European Community are making plans to work together in order to stop this trade. Unfortunately, there is not yet a global network to deal

with issue although it is increasingly becoming a global one. The sheer number of people involved in trafficking makes the whole scenario even more disturbing. According to the International Organisation for Migration, as many as 500,000 women are annually trafficked into Western Europe alone. This is happening today in a world which we thought would be a better one once the threats of communism are gone. Trafficking of women from Bangladesh, however, is confined within South Asia and Middle East.

Recently, the return of Hasina Begum, daughter of a rickshawpuller of Arichpur in Tongi, seven years after being handed over to an Indian trafficker through Rajshahi border in 1992, has attracted nationwide attention. She remained untraced until 1994 when a group of Bangladeshi women lawyers found her at Lulu's home in Bali thana of Howra district. Even with the active involvement of women's organisations and cooperation between the governments of India and Bangladesh the repatriation

process took three more years. The fact that the repatriation could not be quickened obviously made many uncomfortable and upset.

Hasina, however, is one of the lucky ones who after being trafficked has been able to come back home no matter how long it took. Others are not so fortunate. As a matter of fact, hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi women who are routinely sent across the border into a horrid and uncertain future, don't make it back home and are lost forever. According to a recent finding, during last ten years, around two hundred thousand women have been trafficked into Pakistan and India. Forty thousand women including children are engaged in prostitution in Pakistan. Ten per cent of population in Calcutta red light area is Bangladeshi women. Even more horrifying is that Bangladeshi women are openly on sale in New Delhi.

Why are these women leaving their homes? Bangladesh is still a predominantly traditional Muslim country. As such

women usually remain within the bounds of their homestead and mostly perform the traditional roles. What then are causing such predicaments? First, it's economic. In a poor country like Bangladesh, the women mostly bear the brunt of our brutal poverty. Most of them want to escape the wrenching shackles of poverty and improve their lot. The lure of job opportunities and quick money usually prompt many to leave home for an uncertain future. Although economy may be the single most reason for their plight but there is also a social reality. Poverty as well as newly found empowerment has drastically altered the traditional social base of the rural areas. First, within last decade female-headed households have doubled due to economic reasons. They are now out on the street for their survival. Second, rural women for the first time have become conscious of their newfound empowerment, thanks to microcredit facilities and job opportunities. They feel that they have the ability and willpower to walk

away from the familiar surroundings in search of a better life. Yet they are oblivious of the existence of a worldwide network of organised crime groups who thrive on women trafficking. These are the women who become easy prey to the criminal gangs who operate across the national borders. They are not educated enough to comprehend the dangers of working in a foreign land and the great risks involved in it. And, the elaborate mechanism involving national, regional and international cooperation, especially a regional one, needed to protect these vulnerable groups of our population has not yet evolved.

What then the state must do in order to arrest the situation. First, the major thrust must be internal. In this regard the most important step should be to revamp the law enforcing authority. In most cases the law-enforcing agency works hands in glove with the criminal gangs. Trans-border trafficking is possible when police/BDR are party to such heinous trade. The operating chain is conse-

quently strengthened due to the law enforcing agencies' deplorable role in the neighbouring countries. This particular problem has been evidenced by a recent two-year study done by the Washington-based non-profit group Global Survival Network which concluded that 'police officials in many countries just don't care'. The network, after undercover interviews with gangsters, pimps and corrupt officials found that local police forces — often those best able to prevent trafficking — are least interested in helping. The police is the last place these women want to go for help. Obviously, the remedy must start with the local and national law and order agency. There should be special training and awareness programmes for the police. Special unit with sophisticated equipment should be established. Along with national endeavour a regional network of law enforcing agencies transpiring exchange of views and experiences, dissemination of information should be created. Second, the government as well as the NGOs, to educate the rural women about the dangers of working abroad, should undertake a vigorous awareness programme. Victims' shelters and counseling are also recommended. Third, there should be exemplary punishments for the women traffickers such as capital punishments. And, lastly, it

should be kept in mind that no matter how aware one becomes about the dangers of trafficking, or for that matter have a dedicated law enforcing agency, or awards of stringent punishments, the problem would linger unless the underlying causes are addressed. Twin factors of lack of education and economic necessity are actually at the root of this cancer. As such, vigorous education programmes for women along with eradication of poverty should be launched. Awareness, better and more job opportunities would hopefully arrest the problem.

Our people's in particular, women's needs and demands are not sky high. They are not looking for any flashy lives abroad. All they want is to survive, raise their families and be at home. If it is only for this survival they fall prey to criminal gangs, and are sent into a life of servitude and slavery, then it should be considered as our national shame. We as a nation should demand to take steps to rectify the situation and create opportunities for us women, here in our own homeland, so that we can strive and in the words of Mark Twain 'hitch our wagons to a star'.

The author is a Professor, Department of Government and Politics, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka.

## Steering body to be formed to address problem of the year 2000 factor for computers

As the millennium time bomb is ticking, the government is going to form a steering committee to address the problem of year 2,000 factor (Y2K) for computers, reports UNB.

The national committee will comprise experts both from NGOs and private sector as the problem is not just an information technology issue but also a threat for the business continuity.

Science and Technology Secretary Fazlur Rahman addressing a presentation on the problem at a city hotel in the city yesterday assured of forming the committee.

He also referred to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's seriousness on the matter that she showed during a meeting with Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) on February 11.

The FICCI organised the presentation on the millennium bug issue yesterday afternoon considering the fact that the problem affects all companies and industries worldwide.

FICCI president AKM Shamsuddin addressed the function while two experts of Bangladesh Tobacco Company (BTC) — MA Matin and Nusrat Mirza — presented the video presentation.

It was also addressed by Hugh Tweed, the GM of BTC, a pioneer in Bangladesh in creating awareness among the community about the computer collapse after stepping into year 2,000.

The function was informed that the computer disaster will affect many areas, including

manufacturing and procurement, banking and finance, transport and communication system.

The millennium problem is caused by common programming practice of using 2-digit in a date to represent a year (viz 67 for 1967). This was adopted years ago to conserve memory and disk space.

### Int'l Women's Day programmes Mar 8

By Staff Correspondent

An elaborate programme has been chalked out by 'Antorjatik Nari Dibash Udjapan Committee' to observe the International Women's Day on March 8.

'Rights of Free Movement of Women' — is the theme of this year's Women Day.

The Committee, formed back in 1991 in collaboration with various women and development organisations, would launch its Women Day programme by organising a procession on March 6 in the city, says a press release.

Starting from National Museum the procession would be terminated at Osmany Uddiyan and would be followed by a cultural function.

Besides, the committee would also observe the day through various programmes at 17 other places outside Dhaka during March 6 to 17, the release added.

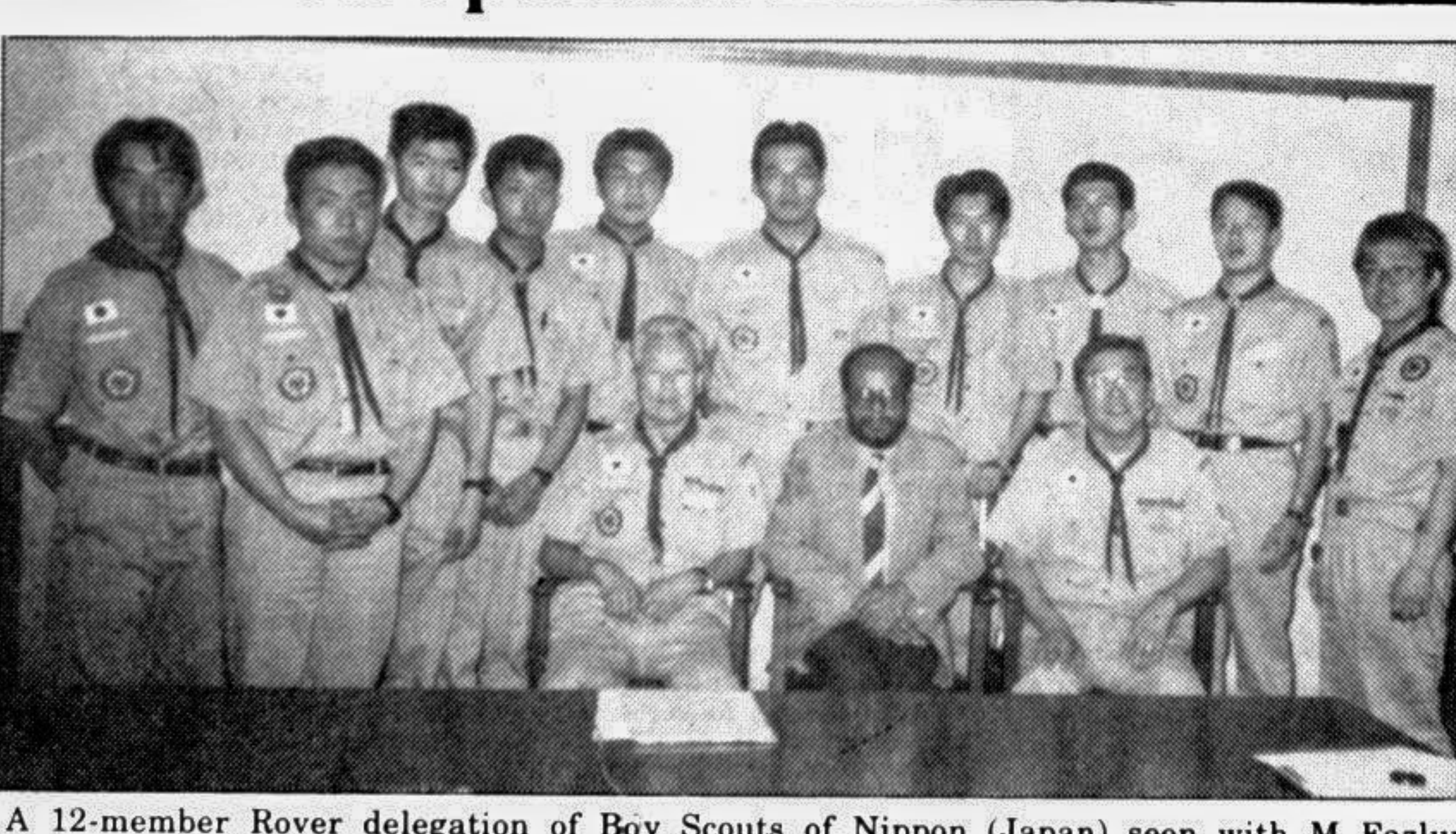
## Boy Scouts of Nippon in city

A 12-member Rover delegation of Boy Scouts of Nippon (Japan) led by Tomomichi Goke arrived in city on Wednesday to participate in 'Bangladesh-Japan Joint ORT Project', says a press release.

The other members are Takeshi Namimatsu, Yashuhiro Tsuzuki, Kazuhiro Eto, Yuichiro Okazaki, Akira Tanaka, Kenichi Shinkawa, Toshiya Tanizawa, Akihiro Arai, Takahiro Tanaka, Daisuke Sakakibara and Takamasa Mizutani.

At the first year of the five-year long project the team is scheduled to work in Keshabpur and Manirampur thana under Jessore district from today to March 5. They will promote Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT) to prevent diarrhoea and primary healthcare package programme to 1200 families in 6 villages with the assistance of 144 local Rovers including 48 Girl-in-Scouting (Rovers).

A discussion meeting was held on Wednesday at the National Scout Bhawan with the Japanese team. M Fazlur Rahman, National Commissioner (Community Development & Health) and Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology is supervising the overall project on behalf of Bangladesh Scouts, the press release added.



A 12-member Rover delegation of Boy Scouts of Nippon (Japan) seen with M Fazlur Rahman, National Commissioner (Community Development & Health) and Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology.

chehlum

The chehlum of Begum Saleha Mahmood, mother of noted Radio-TV newscaster Saleh Akram will be held today after Asr prayers at House 31, Road 3, Sector 5, Uttara, says a press release.

Relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to attend and pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

CASM's course on advocacy strategy

Centre for Advocacy & Social Mobilisation (CASM), a non-profit private organisation, offers development of advocacy strategy towards a sustainable society, says a press release.

CASM plans to organise monthly course for 'developing advocacy strategy' suitable for corporate executives, trade body leaders, social activists, environmentalists, civil society, politicians, NGO workers, and media practitioners engaged in the process of bringing a change in public policy.

CASM is accredited with the Advocacy Institute, Washington DC and American Institute of Urban & Regional Affairs, Maryland, USA.

BIUEF threatens non-stop strike from March 7

By JU Correspondent

Bangladesh Inter-University Employees Federation (BIUEF) has threatened a four-day non-stop strike from March 7 if their seven-point charter of demands are not met by March 6, says a press release.

The BIUEF has also warned to observe strike for two more days suspending emergency services from March 11 if their demands are not met.

In a statement, BIUEF president and secretary Rabul Alam and Mohammad Bashirullah respectively expressed resentment over government's reluctance to solve their problems.

VOA seminar lauds CHT accord

The determined efforts of the Bangladesh government to ensure peace putting an end to the decades old hostility in the country's south-eastern region were lauded at a symposium sponsored by Voice of America (VOA) in Washington DC Tuesday, according to a message received in the city yesterday, report BSS.

The Ganges water sharing treaty between Bangladesh and India was also profusely praised.

Beauty Boarding Sudhi Sangha: A day-long gathering and get-together of prominent cultural figures and writers will be held. Venue: Beauty Boarding premises, Banglabazar. Time: 10:30 am.

Exhibition on 'Solar Energy Tech': A 2-day national exhibition on 'Solar Energy Technology' will begin. Organiser: Bangladesh Solar Energy Society and Renewable Energy Research Centre of DU. Venue: Energy Park, DU. Time: 9:30 am.

Bangabandhu Jubo Parishad: A meeting on the 'Significance of Ekushey February and the role of youth community', organised by Bangabandhu Jubo Parishad, will be held. Venue: TSC, DU. Time: 10 am.

Launching ceremony: A publication ceremony of Bangla Academy's 'Lekhok Abidhan' (Writer's Dictionary) will be held. Venue: Academy premises. Time: 5 pm.

Association meet: The executive committee meeting and Eid reunion of the Chandina Janakalyan Samity, Dhaka will be held. Venue: Engineers' Institute. Time: 3 pm.

Planning meet: A 2-day planning meeting against sexual exploitation, jointly organised by the Ain O Unnayan Sangha and Coalition Against Trafficking in Women — Bangladesh, will begin. Venue: Hotel Sundarban. Time: ?

Memorial meet: A memorial meet on revolutionary leaders Tridib Chowdhury and Makhon Pal, organised by the Education and Environment Movement, will be held. Venue: Jatya Granthakendra, Bangabandhu Avenue. Time: 4 pm.

Publication ceremony: The publication ceremony of a book titled 'Kon Pathe Islam' (Whither Islam) by Prof Hawladar will be held. Venue: Jatya Press Club. Time: 6 pm.

Ntl fashion show: An exclusive fashion show on variety of traditional dresses and live concert by Sabah Tani, organised by Ntl, an advertising firm, will be held. Venue: Winter Garden, Dhaka Sheraton Hotel. Time: ?

MASES seminar: A seminar on 'Human rights and democracy in the spirit of Ekushey', organised by the Manab Seba Sangstha (MASES), will be held. Venue: Caritash auditorium. Time: 3:30 pm.

Painting Show: A 9-day long solo painting exhibition by Ashrafur Alam Paplu will begin. The show is dedicated to the martyrs of Language Movement and will continue till March 7 from 10 am to 6 pm daily. Venue: Art Gallery, Indian Cultural Centre, 754, Satmasjid Road, Dhanmondi. Time: 5 pm.

## What's on today....