

Looking Seaward

THIS is an obvious choice that has looked ironically remote so far. Largely by default, Landsat pictures for long have been showing how parcels of new land are barely rising from under the sea fronting out our long, rather jagged coastline. The accretions in the Bay could one day form into a huge land mass much to the benefit of a land-short country like Bangladesh. In the face of diminishing land-man ratio in our country compounded by fragmentation of land holdings and the loss of cropland due to industrialisation, urbanisation and river erosion, the new land formation process, out in the sea, is a potential boon of a Providential nature.

We have known this phenomenon for quite sometime, and on the basis of Landsat images there had been some mapping of the barely surfacing veneers of land splashes as well. Some studies were made, too. Yet somehow these got left on the dusty shelves of archives, so to speak. Indeed there has not been any dynamic follow-up of the preliminary findings on the new accretions.

Against this backdrop, it is heartening news that the government is looking towards the sea for a massive land reclamation undertaking with foreign technical and financial assistance. Although belated, we think it is a step in the right direction. The southern part of Bangladesh is a relatively new land-mass in comparison with the old and ancient *Barendra* or the northern flank of the country. Since a long time has elapsed after the formation of mainland Bangladesh geologically it is about time we started looking around. Agriculture Minister Motia Chowdhury sounded upbeat to The Daily Star when she expressed the hope that a swathe of land 'as big as Bangladesh' is likely to emerge in not-too-distant a future. We have also to take into account, on the debit side perhaps, the 'swatch of no ground' or the bottomless pit which is said to be gobbling up some alluvial deposits not far from Srimangal. On balance though, accretions outstrip sedimentation losses.

Land accretion is a natural phenomenon, but consolidation of the same warrants sustained human efforts. The latter process is called development of soil capital, principally through mangrove afforestation, examples of which abound in some of our offshore islands. We have to replicate this on the new accretions, an agenda that certainly calls for a massive dose of foreign investment. The prospects for dyking against cyclonic onslaughts and those for wind and solar power exploitations are all there to attract resource inflows provided we can make out a strong case for it. Moreover, our idle youth power can be most profitably utilised in that area. That, in short, is our idea of *Lebensraum*.

Can't Wait to Fleece the Victims!

AS if the ordeal of leaving their jobs in Iraq and Kuwait were not enough for the 71,321 Bangladeshi Gulf War victims, some officials and employees at the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training are taking 'toll' from them for simply passing the UN compensation money to them. The rate, one to five thousand taka per head, amounts to some four lakh taka every day and, over the two months, more than two crore taka given the total number of eligible recipients. The corrupt practice runs deeper than what the topnotches at the BMET want to have us believe. There appears to be a conspiracy of silence going on with nobody willing to talk about it. The director general, ironically a former official at the Bureau of Anti-corruption, has seemingly been under 'heavy pressure from a strong lobby of officials' since taking over.

What is really intriguing, however, is the government's indifference to the whole issue. This paper drew attention to the devilish design of some corrupt elements at the BMET in 1998 when the previous instalment of compensation dues were being paid. Some 26 lakh taka was extorted from the compensation. No action was taken at that time and it doesn't seem likely there would be any this time around, especially given the BMET authorities' policy of sweeping the dirt under the rug. By saying, "No official is involved. I think that some outsiders are cheating them," the director of UN Compensation Council Affairs has, in fact, admitted that a heinous kind of wrong-doing was taking place. Why then hasn't there been any action beyond punishing "some of them in the past"?

Many of the Bangladeshis, who lost their jobs at the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1990, do not have any steady source of income. The compensation money, to them, holds the key to their future at this juncture. The extortionists at the BMET have no right to stake a claim on the money that belongs to others. There should be an inquisition into the allegations of extortion rightaway. The culprits evidently have influential links at the BMET and relevant ministry, i.e. the ministry of labour and manpower. Therefore, it needs an intervention from a high level, preferably from the prime minister to make sure that the money goes to the right person without any cut claimed by anyone.

BFF Should Explain

WE are delighted at the success of the Bangladesh Under-19 team at Rajshahi on Friday evening. Their 4-1 victory over the Maldives youths speaks very highly of the talent and calibre of the Bangladeshi players. Maldives are not a particularly strong team though our seniors had found it very tough going against the islanders in the SAAF football tournaments. The group IV matches now being played at Rajshahi among Iraq, a very strong outfit and easily the favourites despite their tremendous hardships because of the UN sanctions, the mountain kingdom Nepal, Maldives and hosts Bangladesh, will have the champions qualifying for the tournament proper. Our junior string of Under-15 has already qualified for the finals in Vietnam defeating the favourites India at Jamshepur. So the Rajshahi match outcome on Friday night naturally brought jubilation among the football lovers of the country. But our joys were tinged with sorrow as the coach of Maldives has very politely questioned the age-limit of some of the Bangladeshi players. He did not particularly specify any overaged player but softly registered his protest against some players representing contending teams who he thought did not conform to the age-limit rule of the tournament, including Bangladesh. This is rather sad. In the past we wrote against overaged players making it to the Under-19 cricket team. We hope this has not happened with our soccer, but if this has, then of course, the BFF owes an explanation to the nation.

The Menace of Small Arms and Light Weapons Time for Bangladesh to Take Note!

by Brig (Retd) Shahedul Anam Khan ndc, psc

To any perspicacious observer of our social-political-economic

scenario, the serious threat the accumulation and diffusion of small arms holds for us is only too evident. Given our geo-political location, our current political situation which is anything but stable, the existing nature of politics in our neighbourhood, the accretion of small arms and light weapons have great threat potential, not only for Bangladesh but for the entire region as a whole. This was recognised by all and sundry at a recently concluded seminar organised by the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka, in collaboration with the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs and International Security Research and Outreach Programme of the government of Canada, titled "Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation: A South Asian Perspective" from 20-23 of June 2000. Thirty experts, researchers and scholars on the subject, from South Asia and outside it, including four from Bangladesh, attended the conference.

The conference in Colombo was topical and relevant on two major counts. Firstly, proliferation and diffusion of small arms and light weapons in the region is proving to be the single most potent destabilising factor. Small arms find their way to insurgents groups in the region, aggravating political instability. "International small arms flows also traverse the region fuelling conflicts in other regions of the world." Unfortunately, no serious cognizance has been accorded to the threat potential of this phenomenon. It is time we woke up to the grave prospects of this situation before it was too late.

Secondly, the fact that the conference was held in the backdrop of the forthcoming UN-2001 Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, to be held in June/July 2001, lent enormous relevance and significance to it.

The Colombo conference helped to bring experts on the issue from all the countries of South Asia, as well as from the west, to address the use and abuse of small arms which were the true weapons of mass destruction and a major source of international insecurity. Being the primary cause of violence, it affects development efforts causing the flight of capital. More importantly the conference helped to create a platform from which consensus on the formulation of a 'South Asian Agenda' for UN-2001, albeit at track two level, could be initiated.

The stated aims and objectives of the conference were to allow the participants to examine the 'salient issues relating to small arms and light weapons transfer in South Asia with a view to identifying their causes and finding means to deal with them.' The external movements of these weapons to the region, intra-regional movement as well as domestic illegal availability were issues addressed at the conference. Stockpile management, and

lessons from around the world in dealing with this phenomenon were two very important issues that the conference looked at. At the back of the mind of the organizers of the conference was to look at and indeed enhance the individual and collective capability of the regional countries in dealing with the growing menace of proliferation.

Small arms and light weapons by themselves do not cause the conflict in which they are used. However, the accretion of small arms and the nexus of criminal and politics, 'criminality of business and life' and the predominance of these weapons in society, an overwhelming reality in Bangladesh, are matters for grave concern for us. The symbiotic link between drugs and weapons compound the problem.

For Bangladesh to remain impervious to the ill effects of the proliferation and diffusion of illegal weapons will be well nigh impossible, unless immediate corrective measures are taken to offset these. In fact we have already been beset by it, although in quiet a different

Sandwiched between the 'Golden Crescent' and the 'Golden Triangle', one, the largest producer of drugs and the other the largest repository of small arms and light weapons, Bangladesh finds itself at the receiving end of both these phenomenon without being the primary supplier or user of either.
Some statistics may help to put the matter in better perspective. It is estimated that there are between 1 and 2 lakh illegal weapons in the country, of which there are 50,000 in Dhaka city alone. By one account there are eighty criminal syndicates in the country, of which twenty-eight are in Dhaka city alone, which rely entirely on the force of arms to exist. Armed gangs protect the smuggling syndicates in the country. Out of nine murders in the country daily, four are from illegal weapons. Ten persons receive bullet wound from illegal arms daily. (The Daily Janakantha, Jan 30, 1999.)

way than other South Asian countries, but have failed to recognise this phenomenon, much less devise strategies to combat the menace. The fact that, "... small arms, rather than weapons system targeted by disarmament efforts, that cause the greatest bloodshed today, ... these are the true weapons of mass terror, ... their victims are all too often civilians ... and they undermine the security and development efforts of many developing countries," should engage our unmitigated concern. (Canadian Foreign Minister's address to the UNGA, 25 September 1997.)

South Asian Scenario
The South Asian scenario insofar as it relates to the phenomenon of proliferation and diffusion of small arms and light weapons presents a very dismal picture. The effect of small arms and light weapons is far more devastating than 'big arms' and 'heavy weapons'. This is so because the indiscriminate and multifarious use, to which it is put, small arms directly impact people and society in a way that 'big arms' do not. The impacts are not only physical but also psychological and societal, and therefore, longer lasting than any physical impact.

In India the consequences of weaponisation has resulted in the non-state and sub-state actors gaining supremacy due to

gal. Pakistan's woe, brought about by the massive infusion of small arms and light weapons in the urban areas, continues to afflict the society, perhaps more than any other country in the region. Weaponisation of the society, where 'gun culture' has assumed a distinct character of its own, has compelled the military government to undertake a 'seven step' de-weaponisation policy, to rid the society of illegal weapons and arms. Although some may question the implementability of the policy, the formulation of the same indicates the gravity of the situation for Pakistan.

In Sri Lanka, the insurgency phase has graduated to open conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE and a state of low level conventional war is obtaining in that country.

Bangladesh Scenario
The phenomenon in Bangladesh can be characterised as diffusion rather than large-scale proliferation. "Diffusion suggests the dispersion of arms within societies, extending not only to governments and state-owned entities but also to private armies and militias, insurgent groups, criminal organisations and other non-state actors." (Michael T. Klare, "Light Weapons: Diffusion and Global Violence in Post Cold War Era",

In Jasjit Singh, ed., Light Weapons and International Security, Indian Pugwash Society and BASIC, New Delhi, Dec 1995.)

The situation in Bangladesh is not like what is obtaining in other South Asian countries like India or Pakistan. The issues that motivate proliferation and diffusion is different and the magnitude of the problem somewhat smaller in Bangladesh. That being the case one cannot but be concerned at the large number of illegal weapons that are in circulation in Bangladesh today. This in itself should be matter of serious concern for the government and a subject of serious study for our social scientists and intellectuals. Although they are being used in a different mode and for different purpose than that in India, Pakistan or Sri Lanka, small arms and light weapons have very similar impact on the society and the nation. It is human security that is at stake.

Sandwiched between the 'Golden Crescent' and the 'Golden Triangle', one, the largest producer of drugs and the other the largest repository of small arms and light

local manufacture of weapons and those finding their way from across the borders, losses of weapons from government agencies as also from the 'maikhana's' have added to the diffusion of illegal weapons in the society. Of particular concern is the loss of almost two hundred thousand rounds of ammunition over the last three years from government agencies. (The Daily Janakantha, Feb 1, 1999 and The Daily Sangbad, Mar 21, 1999.)

It is difficult to determine the number of weapons that come across the borders into Bangladesh. One estimate has it that about one hundred small arms are brought in from the border areas every day. (The Daily Ittefaq, Dec 29, 1998.) According to another report between six and seven hundred pieces of illegal weapons are smuggled into Bangladesh from India and Myanmar daily. (The Daily Sangbad, Jan 2, 1999.) There are about thirty different routes of ingress of illegal weapons into Bangladesh. (The Daily Janakantha, June 8, 2000.) Reportedly a large number of indigenous weapon factories have sprung up on the In-

dian side of the West Bengal-Bangladesh border. Local manufacturing of small arms of light calibre has also taken the shape of cottage industry where weapons of small bore are indigenously manufactured with the help of local ingredients. The police discovered seventeen such factories in 1998. (The Daily Ittefaq, Dec 29, 1998.) The police drive in 1997 and 1998 yielded 797 and 986 illegal weapons respectively, which, according to the police is not more than 10% of the estimated illegal weapons in circulation. (The Daily Ittefaq, Dec 29, 1998 and The Daily Janakantha, Jan 30, 1999.)

When one compares this recovery with arms recovered from various militants and armed groups of the Indian State of Assam where insurgency activities have been going on for the last ten years, one cannot but be concerned at our situation. In Assam only 1762 pieces of weapons were captured by the law enforcing agencies between 1991 and April 2000.

Major Issues for further Consideration

After the course of three days of intensive discussion, several points of understanding and issues for further consideration in tackling the problem emerged. Salient among those were:

The phenomenon is a na-

tional as well as a regional and an international issue where the respective compulsions and dynamics interplay with one another in sustaining it. Thus, corrective measures would need cooperative and synchronous response of regional and international players.

It being multifaceted, the issue admits of multipronged solutions.

Since different dynamics exercise compulsion on the socio-economic-political fabric of states, the solutions must be comprehensive so that all relevant factors are addressed.

Political will must not only exist but demonstrated by states also through legislation of relevant laws to combat the problem. The regional countries could consider evolving model legislation as was done in the case of human rights issue.

Before prescribing measures of arresting proliferation one must delve into the demand and supply side of the whole equation. The causes that motivate demand must be expurgated and the factors that exercise duress leading to its increased supply must be taken account of to make any measures workable.

In the countries of the region there is a lack of awareness on the part of people, of the harmful potential of this menace. Much of the blame for lack of awareness was attributed to bureaucratic tangle. It was felt that all the instrument of the government should be involved in this programme. Parliamentarians and politicians should involve themselves in this programme cutting across party lines. The media and the NGOs have a very important role to play in the awareness programme in respect of this issue.

Regional cooperation is imperative if this menace is to be effectively dealt with. Building of database, exchange of information and joint border management are some of the areas where regional cooperation could be effected. Regional cooperation is particularly necessary in tackling the issue of supply, which straddle international boundaries and involves clandestine organisations spread across the region. An interesting suggestion of joint border control through a loose but institutionalised border management was floated by some that merits serious consideration.

In view of the forthcoming 'UN-2001' the idea of postulating a common SAARC position was broached. However, it was recognised that there were to be 'Preparatory' meeting at the level of SAARC in this regard, it would have to take into account the different scenarios of the countries of the region before a common agenda could be formulated.

While regional infrastructures exist in South Asia to tackle this problem the countries of the region need to operationalise the supplementary mechanisms like the SAARC Terrorist Office Monitoring Desk, SAARC Drug Office Monitoring Desk etc. to make the existing arrangement efficacious.

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Koreas: Progress towards Reunification?

NEARLY a month after the first ever summit between the two Koreas, the event continues to remain a major issue of discussions all over the world. All eyes are on the progress towards reconciliation and reunification of two Koreas in the post-summit atmosphere. The euphoria in both sides of the Korean peninsula has not faded much since the summit between the two rivals early last month. The summit pledged for relaxation of tensions and for working towards rapprochement, and finally, the reunification.

The United States and the Japan, two main allies of South Korea, having big stakes in the Korean situation, have endorsed the joint declaration that was issued after the summit in North Korean capital. Junior ministers of South Korea, US and Japan met in Honolulu over a week ago and expressed great satisfaction over the outcome of the summit and called for early implementation of the five points contained in declaration. Earlier, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Seoul after the summit and was briefed by the South Korean side about the joint declaration. Albright had arrived here from China where she discussed the summit outcome and the current position in the peninsula. Beijing is re-

The Korean scenario is full of hopes despite the fact that all may not be 'bed of roses' since nitty-gritties need to be resolved and the process is both sensitive and complex. Differences and even the chances of 'going back to a kind of square one' cannot be totally ruled out. But, the picture is encouraging and this has to be maintained for peace and stability.

garded as the close ally of the communist North and Albright said that the Chinese leaders were broadly happy over the results of the summit.

The main issue that has now come to the fore after the summit is progress towards the direction of peace and harmony in the region. Is the progress in this direction satisfactory and what the two Koreas are expected to do toward reconciliation? What are broadly the problems that still stand on the way and what are the prospects to remove these obstacles? Obviously, these are questions that are being asked with varying interpretation but the general impression is that nothing so far has vitiated the positive omens generated by the summit and things may move in the right direction even though the road to reunification is full of complexities.

Two Koreas, known as Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Republic of Korea (ROK), have been a source of tensions and intense enmity since the second world war, and little progress could be made for a thaw in their ties until re-



cently, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and his North Korean counterpart Kim Jong-il met in Pyongyang belying all scepticism. Indeed, this has been the most remarkable change in attitude in the international relations of contemporary times. However, no one should be under any illusion that one summit will solve everything overnight. It may be a long way to finally find a real peaceful environment in that region. After all it took East and West Germany 20 years to reunite after the first summit between their leaders in 1970. The mistrust and hatred in the Korean peninsula are deeper than that of Germany in many ways and no one should expect these to disappear soon. But a qualitative change has taken place. No one should expect that the 37,000 American troops sta-

tioned in the South will leave shortly or the belligerent postures will also totally be unheard of. Nonetheless, the first summit between the DPRK and the ROK was a historic and great occasion.

There has already been some positive impact in the bilateral ties following the summit as two sides have substantially stopped propaganda which characterised their relationship for last five decades couched with the spectres of war and constant tensions along the border. Two sides scaled down rival events as they observed 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean war on June 25. The propaganda and bitterness that normally come from both sides centring the occasion were largely a positive trend.

Unification fever is sweep-

ing Korean region following the summit and the mood is upbeat everywhere. South Korean president said that Koreans have reached a new stage which needs to be followed up with all seriousness. Same sentiments are being echoed in the North. In effect, the summit has accomplished more than what was expected since the tone and contours of the two Koreas have changed. Evidently, the nationalistic fervour has come to fore replacing the trend of accusing each other for the division of Korea and the 1950-53 war. Ordinary Koreans have begun to feel what they and the nation, have achieved because of division of the peninsula. "Is it not only deep animosity and severe destruction?" - a Korean asks regardless of which side of the region he belongs to. However, there are also hardliners who seek to thrive too much on ideological line rather than nationalistic fervour. But their number seems scant in the present circumstances.

When positive conditions notwithstanding, the euphoria may decline, as it may be difficult to retain the current spirit too long unless concrete measures follow. There may be complexities that may retard the pace of progress. There can also be differences in the approaches towards reconciliation and unification moves. For instance, the North wants an immediate federation of the two Koreas as a step in the right direction while the South prefers a more gradual confederation. Many things may come up when the two sides take up the brass tacks of the entire gamut of the relationship. South-backers led by the United States have supported the current reconciliation moves and so were the reactions from the allies of the North, like the communist China. But they have their own stakes and interests in the whole Korean tangle since they have been involved here militarily and otherwise for a long period of time. Japan and several other countries are in-

terested in the Korean scenario is full of hopes despite the fact that all may not be the bed of roses since many nitty-gritty matters need to be resolved and the process is both sensitive and complex. Differences and even the chances of 'going back to a kind of square one' cannot be totally ruled out. Nonetheless, the picture is encouraging and this has to be maintained for peace and stability.

To the Editor ...

It is time to save Dhaka

Sir, I would like to thank you for the editorial of July 5, "Citizens Must Launch 'Save Buriganga Movement'".

It is indeed very frustrating that like all other past governments, the present Awami League government is also indifferent to the environmental issues which has turned out to be a colossal problem and there seems no easy solution to it. The present government not only ignores the environmental issues but other important city planning and urbanisation requirements as well. The government is ignoring the Dhaka Master Plan prepared by the

professional planners, who took into account the environmental concerns.

The government's proposal to rebuilding the domestic airport in the middle of the city is another example of its shortsightedness. Instead of providing the citizens with more open spaces, the government is re-creating the existing ones. In addition, this decision will pose a big threat to Dhaka's existing traffic jam and air pollution (which is worst in the world). It is indeed about time for the professional and the ordinary citizens to build strong movement against all the ill plans to demolish Dhaka city which is the lifeline of the nation.

I would also like to thank Mr Mansoor Mamoon for his

write-up "Why is Bangladesh Placed so Low?" published in the same issue. For the reader's information, regarding human development index Bangladesh is not only placed lowest in the south Asia but also in the whole Asia. This information was published in The Washington Post dated 29th of June. After Bangladesh, there were only twenty-three African countries which secured the lowest positions.

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Standard of education

Sir, Since the emergence of

Bangladesh, the standard of education has deteriorated to an alarming degree. This is mainly due to the shortage of experienced teachers in our educational institutions from primary to university level. And as the number of experienced teachers, particularly in non-government school, college and madrasah, is decreasing, the situation is getting worse. If this state of affairs is allowed to continue, the nation will have to pay heavily. Teachers should be selected carefully as per rule so that quality teaching can be ensured.

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