

# Gulf War: Give Diplomacy Another Chance

Arshad-uz Zaman  
Special to the Star

WITHIN a little over two years of the guns falling silent, they have started booming all over again. As the signs are ominous, it is useful to start with the previous one, the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, for a proper understanding of the stakes involved and the danger the Gulf region and, indeed, the world faces to-day.

The Iran-Iraq war started in September 1979. It is established beyond any shadow of doubt that the Iran-Iraq war was started by Iraq. Her forces crossed the international borders of Iran and through this lightning strike tried to secure territorial advantages, particularly in Shatt-el-Arab waterway. It is useful to recall that Iran at that time was in turmoil. The monarchy had been overthrown and the regime established under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini was grappling with numerous internal problems. Her difficulties were compounded by the hostile reaction of the West, mainly the USA. It is also useful to recall that throughout the eight years' war, most of the Arab states stood by Iraq and provided Baghdad with funds and materials. The Western nations and all the merchants of death did a most profitable business in selling most sophisticated arms to Iraq, paid for by the oil money of Iraq and her Arab allies. There weapons have now been turned against Saudi Arabia, the then principal financiers of Iraq, Israel, close ally of the USA. We also witnessed the extraordinary business of sale of western weapons to Iran with the involvement of US President Ronald Reagan and the government of Israel—two sworn enemies of the Imam of Tehran.

Then more as a spectator of the Iran-Iraq war, I was an active participant in the peace making efforts in my capacity as the Assistant Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in charge of political affairs. This largest Islamic Organisation with 46 Muslim States as members is located in Jeddah. The Islamic Summit was held in Makkah-al-Mukarramah in January 1981. I vividly recall the opening in front of the Holy Kaaba by King Khaled of Saudi Arabia. It was a moment of grandeur for the OIC over shadowed by the lengthening shadow of the Iran-Iraq war.

The Summit was boycotted by Iran. It was decided by that Summit to set up an Islamic Peace Committee, composed of eight Heads of State. Since Iran was the aggrieved party, the Committee had only one Arab representative, the PLO Chairman Mr. Yassir Arafat, who, at that time, had excellent relations with the new rulers of Iran. The committee also included eight Foreign Ministers.

The OIC secretariat was represented by the Secretary General Mr. Habib Chatty and myself and we organised all the meetings. We drew up a peace plan and the peace committee made numerous trips to Baghdad and Tehran. Our peace effort floundered on the hard rock of Imam Khomeini's demand of nothing less than the ouster of President Saddam Hussein, for the Imam refused to sit with him. Finally, the peace making effort succeeded through the UN intervention after eight years of bloody war, which is supposed to have left more than a million dead and colossal material damage. The OIC emerged from this war, gravely weakened and marginalised.

On 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded tiny Kuwait and occupied it and the rulers took shelter in Saudi Arabia. This time the Gulf crisis has taken on a very different shape and the drama

is still unfolding in front of our eyes. Within days of the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq, the UN Security Council was called into session and a resolution was adopted unanimously calling upon Iraq to withdraw unconditionally and immediately from Kuwait.

The campaign to restore status quo ante in Kuwait has been led globally by the United States. There has not been a word of dissent from any quarter as far as the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait is concerned. It is interesting to note that the global co-operation of the two Super Powers has been maintained throughout the crisis in the Security Council and elsewhere. The US diplomacy has helped in mobilising the entire world on its side in a coalition against the regime of President Saddam Hussein. The US began with economic sanctions on the strength of the Security Council resolutions. Iraq is heavily dependant on her oil income and the oil flows principally through her pipelines going through Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Those pipelines were shut off by those two countries immediately after the outbreak of the crisis. The US navy with the collaboration of the navies of the Western powers established a complete mastery of the waters and imposed an iron-tight blockade around Iraq. Yet such are the laws of trade and commerce that the sanctions failed to break the back of the Iraqi economy.

One interesting fall out of the present crisis is the total elimination of the last vestiges of Iraq's war with Iran. Iraq has completely normalised her relations with Iran, with

whom she has very long frontiers. The US has tried to wear away the Arabs from Iraq. The US and others, who have contributed troops, have their forces stationed in Saudi Arabia, the most solid ally of the US in the present crisis.

To match Iraqi military power, which is impressive by any standard, the US led alliance has assembled men and war material which is truly overwhelming. As the crisis has hurred along from that dawn on 2 August 1990, the US must have concluded that at some point or others, a trial of strength would be necessary. We have witnessed summit level diplomacy for more than five months. They have failed to achieve one essential objective, force the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait. Thus as the deadline of 15, January set by the Security Council resolution passed without the withdrawal of Iraqi troops and the verbal duel reaching fever pitch, conducted mostly through the Cable News Network, it is interesting that the Iraqi authorities, while expelling all foreign correspondents from Iraq, allowed CNN to continue. President George Bush ordered his forces to strike at Iraq and the allies joined in. According to reports, the bombing raids have been carried out by the US, British and Saudi forces. Thousands of tons of bombs have been rained on in Baghdad and elsewhere. Iraq has retaliated by missile strikes on Saudi Arabia and Israel, targets within reach of Iraq. Iraq has downed western airplanes as well and captured some pilots, who have been shown on TV throughout the world. Prior to the out break of war, as the

leaders crisis-crossed the world in their peace, making efforts Iraq linked talks related to her withdrawal from Kuwait, with the withdrawal by Israel from occupied Arab territories, indeed the heart of the Middle East conflict, Palestine and the emotional Muslim time bomb, Jerusalem. President George Bush firmly replied "No Linkage." By bringing Palestine on the front of the stage, President Saddam Hussein has achieved a number of objectives. The solid alliance built by the US, against Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, is showing severe signs of strain. By hitting at Israel, who likes to hit rather than be hit, he lifts the Arab psyche to an incredible height. With one swift blow he turns the public gaze away from Kuwait. People throughout the Islamic world are chanting in favour of Saddam and the cry for the withdrawal is being drowned in that crescendo. Pressure will mount among the Arab states to come openly on the side of Iraq. This has happened in Algeria. More are bound to follow. In Iran, the historical adversary of Iraq, there is growing voice to join the Iraqi side against Israel and by extension, against USA.

The US diplomacy from the beginning has been to limit the crisis to the single issue of Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, whereas Iraq has continued to talk, gain time, create dissonance among the adversaries and most of all widen the conflict. Now that diplomacy has taken the back seat and the guns are roaring across the desert floating on oil, the objective of Saddam Hussein to widen the conflict is effectively achieved.

The Iran-Iraq war remained strictly limited. The two combatants were aided and abetted by others, but none joined openly on either side. The OIC made a valiant peace making effort but ended ingloriously. The present war pitched Iraq versus the USA-led coalition around the globe. Given the lethal nature of the weapons, it has already started being very bloody indeed. If the war continues and the signs are that it will for sometime, more and more countries will be sucked in governments, particularly of Arab countries, will come under heavy pressure to come on the Iraqi side. If Israel joins the fray, as seems increasingly likely, we may witness a conflict on a large scale.

Whereas in the Iran-Iraq war, the OIC played some role, in the present crisis, it has been totally on the sidelines, despite the fact that it involves two of its important members. One of them is Kuwait an important financier of the organisation.

The year 1990 heralded the dawn of a new era—an era of peace and concord of people's will reigning supreme everywhere. As the sun sets on the 20th century, a century when science made it possible to bring events anywhere in the world in our drawing rooms, and we stand on the threshold of the 21st, a pall of uncertainty fills our hearts. From the optimism of a rosy future, we have moved to a future of uncertain foreboding. With democracy bursting forth all over the world, including Bangladesh, war has become unfashionable. What we have witnessed since the out break of this second Gulf war, is a beginning of a process that can bring death and destruction on an unimaginable scale. Only a tiny portion of the destructive power has been put on display. The ground troops are still in their bunkers. There is time yet on all sides to rein in the dogs of war and late diplomacy another chance.

The writer is a former ambassador and Assistant Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).



A view of the conference of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), held in Baghdad in 1981. President Saddam Hussein (in military uniform) is seen presiding. The writer is first from the left in the official gallery in the right side of the picture.

## An Environmental Disaster

One by one, some of the worst fears about the Gulf War have started coming true. Within days of the invasion of Iraq by the US-led multinational force, President George Bush told the world that the conflict could go on for weeks, thus demolishing the hope that the US leader had himself raised earlier that it could indeed be a short one. Then, in his latest statement, Mr Bush has hinted that the conflict could drag on for months. Meanwhile, all kinds of statements—take General Powell describing President Saddam Hussain as a "genius"—are being made from Washington causing more confusion and depression among people who desperately want nothing but the end of the conflict and the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait.

Now, one of the worst things that could have happened has happened: the oil slick as massive as 31-mile long and 8-mile wide, part of which is already on fire, spreading from Kuwait waters in the Persian Gulf towards Saudi Arabia. Iraq has been blamed by the United States for dumping huge quantities of crude oil into the Gulf waters and causing the slick and this enormous environmental disaster. Official sources estimate that the present size of the spill to be 12 times larger than the 11 million gallons that the Exxon Valdez tanker had spilled in Alaska in 1989.

The size of the disaster may come as a shock. But that something like this could happen had been predicted by many people, including King Hussein of Jordan. At a UN meeting on environment in Geneva last month, the monarch had warned about this danger, providing a grim signal to the world, especially to the Arab world, that a number of things, from the bombing of oil fields to oil spills, could bring about a situation which would be hard to cope with and whose short-term and long-term consequences could be felt throughout the region, even beyond the Gulf.

Environmental scientists who have been quick in reacting to this development—as if they have been expecting it all along—are of the view that this is only "the beginning of a nightmare", as one of them puts it. They have appealed to the United Nations and to the warring parties to help in bringing the conflict to an immediate end and thus sparing the region—and the world—of what may well turn out to be a total environmental collapse, the size of which may defy even our imagination. In such a situation, what can Iraq gain by hanging on to Kuwait? By the same token, what kind of Kuwait would the multinational force liberate? What will Saudi Arabia be like with its oil fields burning for years, waters surrounding the kingdom suffering from the highest level of pollution and a major part of its marine life dead and gone?

Such a disaster would first hit the Gulf states, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, but it will not leave us alone either. Scientists have already warned about how the spill would cause ecological imbalance among the coastline of South Asia. Regardless of political positions we take on the Gulf War, we must urge upon both sides in this senseless war to start talking and to look for a way-out of this terrible situation.

## Pre-emptive Book Strike

Books as something of both necessity and pleasure has not been a strong point with our society in the recent past. The situation was specially bad in the last two decades. Hardly any seminal thing came out from our creative writers except for some good pieces of poetry. No great strides were made in the translation of world classics and scientific and technical books. Production of text-books for higher education didn't either make any great headway. Things were as stagnant on the production side as they were in marketing. Artificial spurts from up above, meagre as they are in both intent and strength, have so far failed to make things move in the book sector. And this is a matter of concern for all.

But, all's not that gloomy on all sides. There's a flicker of hope here and there. Although there's not one respectable literary monthly in the whole of the land—and printing horrors regularly flood the pavements and burst the kiosks with a lurid fare and unending sadistic flair—some headway has been made in highly readable, almost racy, efforts in fiction and play writing. And on the consumption aspect there has been a masked improvement particularly with the beginning of the Ekushey Book Fair. This has over the years succeeded in enticing an ever bigger crowd and inducing it to go for a book of whatever sort.

If not many educated people reach for a book in the stalls in the course of a whole long year, there was no dearth of warriors volunteering in the cause of keeping the Ekushey book fair to its venue at the Bangla Academy and resist attempts by the earlier government to move it elsewhere. This may tend to show an unflattering slip—at first glance. But then what's a book for? A book inspires, or materializes—out of as if nothing—an ambience fashioned and massed by all that is best in culture. And not infrequently it gives one a cause to fight for. For many it gives meaning to life. The Ekushey Boi Mela at Bangla Academy has for years doing something to even those that are not great readers. And it is good that the fair will stay in its usual venue, contributing hopefully to yet another long-sustaining tradition.

But this by-now hallowed cultural event has the other day been delightfully pre-empted by two other exhibitions of books—one of them very remarkable indeed.

An eminent Azerbaijanian collector of books, Ms Salakova, has brought down herself to Dhaka an interesting part of her precious hoard. From small to tiny—there are 113 of her books on show at the Public Library. And the exhibition is distinguished by the inclusion of a 1677 edition of Al-Quran of the size of less than one square inch.

The other show—absorbing it has been called— involves China-produced books in English featuring such important and interesting titles as 'An American in China' and 'Wit and Humour from Ancient China'.

These two book exhibitions and the fact that these are heralding in our many-splendoured month of February should harken us to the fact that we have not been putting our efforts to projecting our people and culture abroad in the manner these two are doing. There's no denying that we do not produce books in English and other world languages—French, Spanish, German etc.—in any significant number. And translation into these of our creative literature which is rich by all standards—has been even fewer.

The point is it will need will and imagination to send our books abroad for exhibition as well as, in some cases, for selling. Some private publishers have been doing so to the best of their means. Their initiative has resulted in fairs in Moscow and Calcutta to feature Bangladesh-produced books. Our publishers' performance in the Calcutta Book Fair has understandably succeeded in landing some selling agreements too.

But to date we have not heard of any state efforts in the matter. Why?

# Nepali Left Splits as Elections Near

by Jan Sharma

COMMUNISTS in Nepal, emerging popular after the return to multi-party democracy last April, have suffered a major setback.

Four of the seven constituents of the United Left Front (ULF) have parted ways. The communists have a tiny membership compared with the ruling Nepali Congress, or the Rashtriya Prajatantrik Party (RPP) which advocates a strong monarchy. But they have come to prominence by sharing the interim government with the Nepali Congress Party.

Four leftist factions announced last December their dissociation with the United Left Front, formed last January to fight for democracy alongside the Nepali Congress Party. The four factions are not represented in the coalition interim government headed by Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

Reacting sharply to the split, Sahana Pradhan, head of the United Left Front, asserted that the Front continues to exist. Mr. Pradhan is also second in command in the government after Mr. Bhattarai.

The United Left Front now

comprises three factions of the Nepal Communist Party—the Male (Marxist-Leninist), Marxist and the Manandhar factions. "This sudden step is a blow to the communist unity," Mr. Pradhan said.

"It is a political blackmail instigated by reactionary forces trying to disrupt communist

unity in Nepal," he said. The split comes at a time when communist leaders have been appealing for a common alliance to prepare for the parliamentary elections scheduled for May.

Political analysts predict the kingdom's first free elections in 30 years would be a bloody contest among the Nepali Congress, the former Panchayat (one-party system) loyalists and the communists.

The main source of strength of communists is their close ties with the Nepali Congress, the largest political party most hope will form a future government.

The Nepali Congress, op-

posed to the King's absolute rule, played a key role in launching the movement for the restoration of democracy in April when the King lifted the ban on opposition parties.

Senior communist officials have key positions in the government. Personalities from

which split say the United Left Front had become "almost lifeless," indulged in the interest of their own parties. "We left (the Front) because the ministers representing it had betrayed the people," said one dissenter.

The communists have broad appeal among restive campus

students and peasants. However, the sharp ideological differences on the question of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy have dampened hopes for a united communist alliance.

The first split among communists came on the question of whether to support or oppose King Mahendra. Puspa Lal decided to oppose and Keshar Jung Raymaji opted to be a "Royal communist."

Since then there are over a dozen factions fighting neck to neck with each other. The Male (Nepali name for Marxist-Leninist) faction looks better organised group, but little is known about the highly secre-

ted communists. They decline any information on the party, their memberships and their following. This secrecy makes it difficult to assess their actual strength or evaluate the potential role they plan to shape Nepal's future. In some districts, they are "better known for their

muscle power rather than ideological appeal.

Initially opposed to monarchy, the mainstream communists see the return to multi-party as opening the way for a peaceful progression towards the ultimate goal of a socialist state.

The Nepal Communist Party shrugs off questions about the failure of communism elsewhere. "Communist parties in Nepal have never been in power and consequently they have done nothing wrong. No calamity has been attached to their name, like the East European countries where communist parties have failed and earned the wrath of the peo-

ple," says Man Mohan Adhikary, general secretary of the Nepal Communist Party (Marxist).

"We do call ourselves communists, but we are prepared to go along with democracy, a multi-party system and constitutional monarchy. We not only tolerate opposition but believe in strong opposition," added the veteran leader who recently returned here after an extended tour of West European capitals.

Mr. Adhikary and leaders of the Male faction are seeking a unified party but have made slow progress. One main hitch is on sharing seats: Male wants to dominate because it has "massive" followers but no leaders of national stature. The Nepal Communist Party (Marxist) has leaders but not as much followers.

"Our unity can be only on the basis of equality," said Mr. Adhikary. "Equality is our only condition."

If the unity bid fails, each leftist faction will be registered separately with only one candidate in each constituency. — DEPTI/NEWS ASIA.

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Public toilets needed

Sir, There should be more public toilets in our city, as the absence of it, often is a cause of public nuisance. As responsible citizens, we should try to avoid any obscenity, mainly public, which is unabated at even the main Gullistan terminus.

Therefore we would like to request the authorities through your esteemed daily, to please look into this state of affairs, and take action.

Taher Selim  
Arambagh, Dhaka

### Video shops

Sir, Video shops are a new phenomenon in Dhaka as elsewhere in Bangladesh. Before the introduction of VCR just a few years ago, no such shops existed. In recent years their number has increased enormously keeping pace with the demand. As a result, there is only quantity but not quality. The prints of most of them are very bad, and a bad print affects the head of the machine on which it is played some video shops also have the bad habit of keeping aside the good

movies for friends and relatives. Other members only get to see the movies after these people have finished seeing them.

Any way video has added to the home entertainment at a low cost. Each cassette hire costs anything between Taka 15 and 20 for a day. In these days of economic strain it is indeed a boon, easily accessible. Then why not a little more care and effort to ensure quality of prints?

Afroz Yasmin  
Jhenidah, Jessore.

### Foreign penpals

Sir, I would really appreciate the chance, of gaining foreign penpals, especially now who are living in Bangladesh. Penfriendship keeps a person aware of customs, religions, cultures, living standards etc. of various communities in

different countries, and thus enlightens the thoughts and views of a person. It is perhaps, the best way to learn something new from each other, which is quite essential. This urge has led me to make this appeal.

I am a Bangladeshi boy of 21 who is still studying. My interests are correspondence, music, computers etc. I would like to hear from the citizens of any country.

Nayem Faruk  
Kader Bhaban (2nd floor),  
A/10 CDA R/A,  
Chandgaon, Chittagong.

### Extravagant wedding

Sir, The extravaganza of a Bengali marriage is not only a crude display of wealth, but shameful in a poor country like ours.

A middle class family has to spend near about 100

thousand Takas to cover 'absolutely necessary' expenditures like furniture, ornaments, even bridegroom's wedding clothes (which he is going to wear only that day).

Then of course is the tradition of inviting almost all relatives, as far remotely connected, and acquaintances. Food, specially rich food served at weddings, is costly, and a considerable portion of this expenditure is wasted.

This is about only a middle class wedding.

Weddings of the affluent rich cost too much more. A gift can be anything ranging from a car to a flat in a posh area of the city.

"Can we not stop this wasteful spendings for sake of greater welfare of the society?"

Hashem Ali  
Ishurdi.

Looking to War and Beyond

With reluctance, with sadness, but now with might, America—and the world—are at war with Iraq. When the war ends, it will take wiser diplomacy than brought us to this juncture to be sure that the Middle East in peace somehow becomes a more stable region. We have come, with great anguish, to support the use of force in the Gulf.

— Detroit Free Press.

The war's first phase—tactical bombardment—does not interest Saddam Hussein. It is in the ground phase that he hopes to inflict bloody defeat on the allied forces. This is the most hazardous part of the war, when Iraqi resistance can transform the first military victories into nightmares that will quickly become unbearable.

— Serge July in Liberation (Paris).

## WHAT OTHERS SAY