

Gulf War : Civilian Deaths and Soviet Initiative

The inevitable has happened. Up to 1,000 civilians, including many women and children have reportedly been killed due to allied bombing of an air raid shelter. Given the incessant bombing and thousands of sorties being flown, it was only a matter of time that a highly packed air raid shelter would be hit. The U.S. insists that the target was military. But what we see are only civilian bodies. The CNN correspondent said the destroyed shelter was in a middle-class neighbourhood "with no immediate military targets within a mile".

All wars are ugly and brutal. But the air war against Iraq is one-sided and devastating. According to their own claims, the allies have air supremacy. This means that they have the capability of hitting any target within Iraq at will. And it is only a matter of time that machines will malfunction, identifications will be wrong, intelligence will prove to be false and civilian targets will be hit. This journal has earlier expressed grave concern at the outbreak of the war and cautioned about the possibility of high civilian deaths. If the bombing continues the possibility of recurring of such innocent deaths are not at all unlikely.

The justification of continued incessant bombing is that the supply line of the Iraqi forward troops will have to be cut off and Iraqi military production capability will have to be destroyed. Having had virtual monopoly of the Iraqi air space for most of the time that the war has been going on it is not illogical to assume that all military targets of any significance have already been destroyed.

Why then is the continuation of this heavy bombing? The intention may be to bomb Iraq into acquiescing to the terms of the UN resolution. If such be the intention then civilians will continue to run the risk of being bombed into pulps and incidence like that of the day before will recur.

In the midst of this tragedy the Soviet initiative is a welcome one. The Soviet envoy Primakov, who met President Saddam said his talks with the Iraqi President has given him "cause for hope" for a diplomatic solution to the Gulf war. As a result, the Iraqi Foreign Minister Mr. Tariq Aziz will visit Moscow for talks with President Gorbachev. The Baghdad Radio report that Iraqi President was ready to cooperate with Moscow and other nations "in the interest of finding a peaceful, political, equitable, and honourable solution to the region's issues including the situation in the Gulf" is a welcome shift from the original Iraqi refusal to negotiate on any terms.

The Soviet initiative can be said to have made a new opening for a dialogue to solve the present crisis. It is our hope that no efforts will be spared in taking this new opening to its furthest limit in search for a peaceful solution of this terrible crisis. The NAM countries, involved in the search for a cessation of hostilities in the Gulf, should exert their own influence in further widening this prospect of negotiations. Bangladesh, which is taking an active part in the NAM efforts, should do all in its power to further this new possibility of negotiations.

Respect to Herta Rotter

It was a portrait of a woman—from close. Beneath the suave and aging mien were the particulars: "Vienna, Feb 11: Passport picture of 68-year-old Herta Rotter who committed suicide Feb 10 in front of the US embassy in Vienna. Rotter said in a suicide note her death was a protest against the Gulf war."

The first reaction was not to canonise her or to dismiss her as a freak either. At least before one knows more about her and her final act than there was in that photo-caption. But it is hard to so restrict oneself. It is difficult not to hear a chord go twang inside in sympathy and to have a flash of altogether fresh and different approach to the war in the Gulf. Thoughts spring up and strain to reach her. Did she act in desperation? Perhaps she had for some unrelated reasons reached the tether's end. Or perhaps this was indeed a supreme act of sympathy. Or even empathy. Feeling the sufferings of those bombed into shreds in Iraqi shelters and the foolishness and inhumanity of it all.

We opt to take her act as indeed she meant it to be—a sacrifice and a protest. We want to respect a price that is paid with life—a price for wanting to see an end to modern-day cannibalism. Self-immolation, specially as a human-torch, became quite familiar in the early days of the Vietnam war. More than a burning protest, the first and the most celebrated of that series of suicides provided an impressive study in the powers of Buddhist meditation—the ancient monk sitting it out still in unsullied composure till all was left of him was ashes. But those monks had two relieving points. First they were in the thick of the events they were protesting. Then their long practised powers over their bodies enabled them to be transported beyond the realm of physical pain or all fear of that.

Herta Rotter didn't have these props to make her act easy. Hers was an act more in affinity with the central figure in Ingemar Bergman's poem of a film—Winter Lights. The tragedy of Hiroshima gets into the head of the protagonist. Seeing in that an end of all hope for humanity, a conclusion is reached that life was as such no more worth living. So comes the act of suicide—in far Sweden, precisely in a sleepy Swedish rural retreat.

The world undoubtedly would be a better place to live if some more people could feel as strongly for others—others as far in the Gulf sands as from the Austrian capital. True enough. But the realities of a third world town—of the thousands of them that are there—snatch and pull at the sensibilities of man to a contrary extreme. One must be able to shut off—as quickly and as often as the yes and no switches of a computer—all powers of and even disposition towards sympathy in order to survive. In the crudest sense. Failing, one would not be able to travel the mile from his place of work to his home. Every minute of existence here is informed with abysmal degradation and all-round insult to humanity. We are forced to resort to yet another inhuman act of covering our sensibilities with the rhino's hide. In order to save us the day—one more day—with the faint and hesitant hope of someday overcoming it all.

Our deep deep respect for Herta Rotter.

As the case for global warming has grown from theory to scientific fact, a wave of anxiety has rippled across the developing world.

Discussion about ozone holes and the greenhouse effect has turned deadly serious. And why not?

The odds appear to be increasing that as some nations vanish beneath rising tides, others will starve in the wake of floods, drought or insect pests, depending on their geographic location.

The estimated costs of simply coping with the pace of climate change have also taken on nightmarish proportions. By one estimate, an increase in atmospheric temperature of 2.5 degrees centigrade (a middle projection) could cost the world US \$ 400 billion a year.

Twenty-five per cent of that would fall on the developing world—an expense which few, if any Third World nations are prepared for, are able to shoulder. The World Bank estimates that Bangladesh's share for protecting its coastline would be US \$ 6 billion.

Just who might drown and who might starve, and when, are questions which will keep legions of scientists employed well into the next century. Unfortunately the answers are hostage to imprecise sciences at the present time and there is a great risk that policymakers will take this as an excuse to wait and see, rather than act on the knowledge which is precise and uncontested—

British immigration officers are refusing entry to an increasing number of Jamaican visitors to Britain without justification, according to immigrant welfare groups.

Jamaican visitors denied entry—who number about one visitor in 42 according to church estimates—are sent back home on the next plane, often ruining plans for family reunions, weddings, funerals or holidays.

Cases abound: one young man denied entry because he was carrying a letter from a relative telling him he would have to "work hard" in Britain—he was going to help his aunt and uncle move.

Another involved a 28-year-old man with a wife and two children back in Jamaica, who was denied entry because he did not seem to have enough clothes with him. Relatives told him that since he was coming in winter he would do better to buy clothing in England.

Immigration officers, who have the power to grant or deny entry at their personal discretion, usually point to what they see as evidence that the would-be visitor actually intends to remain in Britain—or a lack of evidence that they intend to return to Jamaica.

What infuriates immigrant welfare campaigners is that the immigration officer's decision can only be appealed in Jamaica. And increasingly it is incumbent upon Jamaican visitors to provide evidence that they do not intend to settle in Britain. Some think it should be the other way around.

Said Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn, who campaigns on immigration affairs: "This is the only service where there is a presumption of guilt before innocence and there is no appeal in this country—only in Jamaica."

"An awful lot of people are being denied entry into this country without being given a chance to make their case," he said.

In 1979, when 35,000 Jamaicans were admitted to Britain, only 48 were refused or

World Food Producers Face Climate Roulette

by Ian Steele

namely, the need to rein in industrial and domestic emissions of carbon dioxide, chlorofluorocarbons and other greenhouse gases which have placed the phenomenon of global warming on our doorstep. Unfortunately again for the

warming will have a major impact on agriculture for the better and for worse.

The IPCC, which draws on a range of international scientific opinion, and experts from agencies such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, estimates that if

wheat in Siberia and Scandinavia, it is not certain that northern soils would be suitable for cereal crops.

Agronomists are also concerned that increasing temperatures could extend the habitats of harmful insect pests and crop diseases which are

populations most likely to suffer would be those in low yielding parts of the developing world where the technology and resources to adapt are scarce.

There is no doubt that developing countries will need a lot of help to sort out their

Just who might drown and who might starve, and when, are questions to face until well into the next century

developing world, which appears likely to experience some of the earliest and worst consequences of climate change, those decisions will mostly be taken elsewhere.

Short-term responses are very much in the hands of the industrialised countries which generate most of the pollutants and control new and cleaner technologies which could make future production and economic growth much less costly to the environment.

A report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated last June that

temperatures rose by an average 3 degrees centigrade by the year 2090, global food resources would probably be sufficient to meet demand.

However, it also stated that food costs would be higher and the regional availability of food stocks would be uneven.

It is possible that some cereals such as wheat and rice would benefit from increased levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. But this would not be the case for maize, sorghum or millet.

And while the warming of the northern hemisphere might make it possible to grow

currently confined to tropical countries.

The IPCC noted that it might only be necessary to adapt today's basic crop varieties to new climate, soil and water conditions. But the ability of agriculture to adapt would hinge to a large degree on the technical resources available to farmers.

Industrialised countries with the research capacity to create new varieties and cropping techniques might actually gain advantages from rising temperatures and manage to minimise the negatives. The

crop and other agricultural options for the future. But as FAO and other partners in the IPCC have noted, it is very difficult to organise assistance when forecasting is imperfect.

Current predictions associated with global warming have been based on global models focused mostly on countries in the northern hemisphere—an imbalance needing urgent correction.

The developing world urgently needs a rational distribution of remote sensing satellites, observer stations, and the expertise and computer

Jamaicans Claim Discrimination at British Airports

Allan Thompson writes from London

Immigrant welfare groups charge that too many Jamaican visitors to Britain are being refused entry at the airport and bundled off to Jamaica on the next plane.

removed—one in 729. In 1989, the last year for which there is complete data, some 803 out of 32,300 were refused or removed, giving a rate of one in 40.

Groups like the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), and prominent individuals such as the Anglican Bishop of Jamaica, claim the increase in refusals is a discriminatory practice. They say it is based on the misconception that Jamaicans are more likely than others to break the rules.

"For every aeroplane which lands in Britain from Kingston or Montego Bay, at least three Jamaicans are sent back on the next plane," the Anglican Bishop of Jamaica, the Rt. Rev. Neville de Souza, said during a recent

London visit. "These entry refusals, which have risen tenfold in the past few years, cause tremendous distress."

During his stay the Bishop called on Peter Lloyd, Minister for Immigration Affairs at the Home Office, to discuss the high rate of entry refusals to Caribbean visitors.

"Clearly the authorities must be able to exclude illegal immigrants. But I am concerned that people of Caribbean origin are being singled out," Bishop de Souza said. "Genuine visitors must be able to spend time with friends and families."

Lloyd reportedly told the Bishop and his delegation that the government believed some 20 per cent of visiting Jamaicans ended up staying in Britain.

The Bishop said the Minister told him Caribbean people were not unique in the treatment they received and that other national groups, including many eastern Europeans, had a very high refusal rate.

"He said an estimated 20 per cent of (Jamaicans) who come in and give assurances didn't go home," the Bishop recounted. "He didn't have any evidence because there is no way of checking whether a person goes home or not."

But Don Flynn, an education worker with JCWI, says the 20 per cent figure is a fiction, misconstrued from other immigration statistics.

Flynn said the 20 per cent actually refers to the number of people who fail to keep their assurances when initially denied entry for an extended period, but allowed into Britain for a week or so.

The Home Office continues to deny allegations that it has a policy of rejecting large numbers of West Indians and stands by its position outlined in July 1990 that rules for West Indians entering the country are exactly the same as for other people subject to immigration control.

Refusals do not always mean immediate return to Jamaica. Sometimes people who arrive intending to stay for six months are allowed to stay for only a week or two.

That was the case for 17-year-old Launzia Soloman, who came to Britain in October hoping to spend six months with her aunt, Angelita Edwards. Soloman had just com-

pleted high school in Jamaica and was registered to begin a college course there in the spring.

Soloman's request to enter for six months was refused. She was initially allowed only a one-week stay in Britain but after her aunt's protest, the stay was extended to two weeks. The immigration officer said he suspected Soloman intended to look for a job in Britain because she had brought her high school report card with her. Soloman, now back in Jamaica, said she simply wanted to show her cousins what marks she re-

ceived. "The immigration officers didn't really seem to care, they had their minds made up already," Edwards said.

The Caribbean Entry Refusals Action Group, (CERAG), an offshoot of the JCWI, wants the rules changed to transfer the burden of proof from the visitor to the immigration officer. It also wants the establishment of a right of appeal before the visitor can be sent back. But most of all, it thinks the full guidelines under which immigration officers make their decisions should be made public.

Bishop de Souza made a similar point when he asked the Minister for a list of requirements Jamaicans should fulfil to enter Britain. That would allow travellers to make sure they have all the proper documentation in hand before heading to Britain, he said.

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OPINION A Reader Reacts

Re: What is the Gulf War Really About: Daily Star; 7 Feb 1991

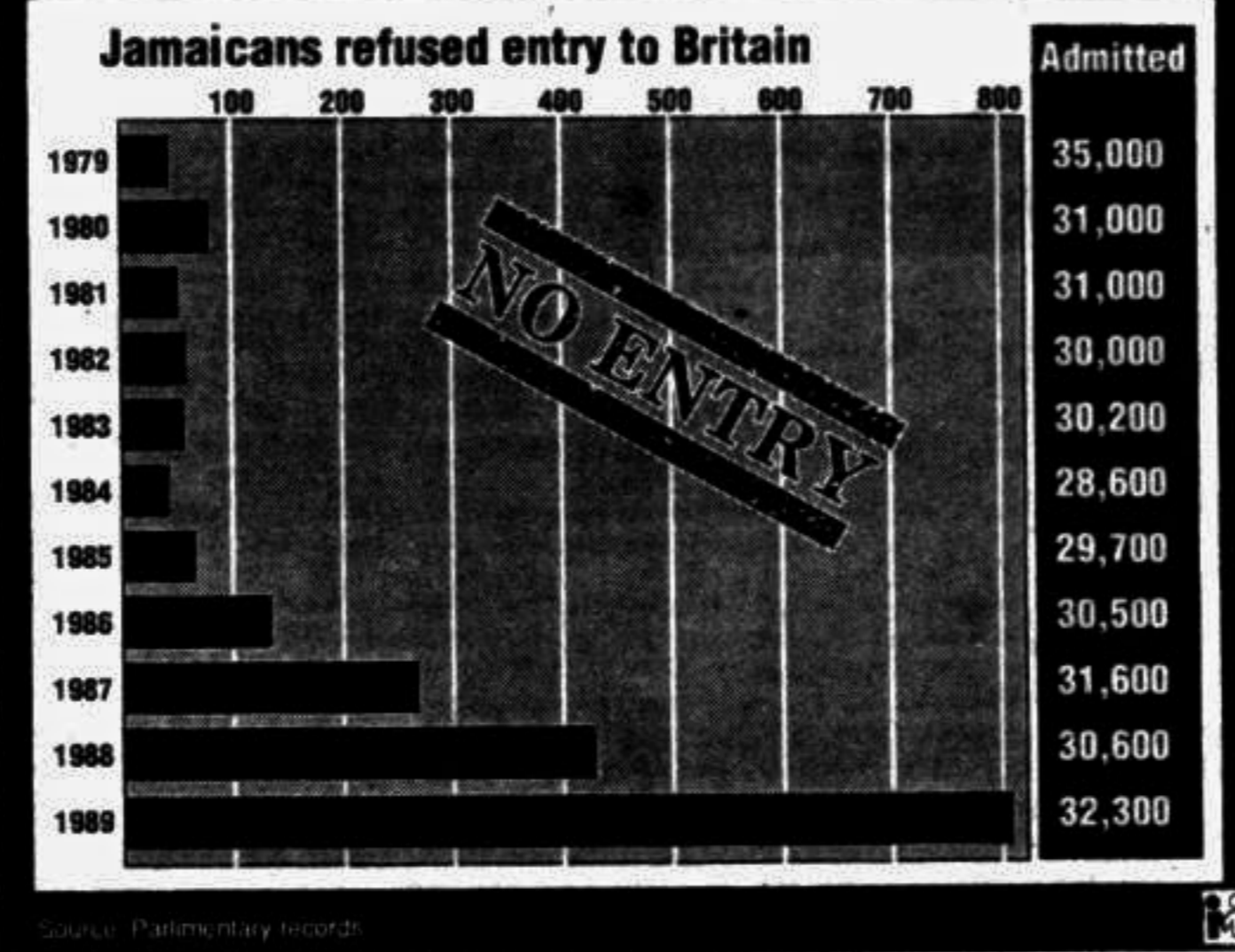
Sabir Mustafa would have us believe 1) that Allied powers did not explore all efforts to a peaceful solution to the Gulf crisis; 2) that the economic blockade of four months was insufficient to hurt the Iraqi economy thereby providing incentive for Saddam Hussein's forces to withdraw from Kuwait; 3) that the Allied forces rushed in gung ho, ever anxious to spend hundreds of billions of dollars in sophisticated weaponry and war machinery for the joy of seeing Hussein's chemical weapons factories (with all varieties of exotic nerve gases) and nuclear facilities go up in a phantasmagoria of firework display; 4) that by championing the PLO cause, Hussein "legitimizes" his invasion of Kuwait.

All these points are fallacious. We know very well the intense efforts put in by numerous politicians and statesmen in and out of power, to work towards a peaceful settlement after Hussein's blatant act of aggression against its tiny neighbour, Kuwait. Most memorable of all is Hussein's rude and cavalier treatment of the UN Secretary-General, Perez de Cuellar, a 72-year old man, who having made the long, tiring journey from New York, was kept waiting for 12 hours before being granted an "audience". Is this any way to behave towards a bona fide peace-maker? Egypt's Hosni Mubarak revealed that Hussein did not inform him of his intention to invade Kuwait right up to the 11th hour when they met just the night before Hussein's attack. It was this very unpredictability which made the Allied powers regard him as such a dangerous man.

Well-informed people are well aware that economic blockades are notoriously inefficient (not to mention highly costly to monitor). In the Gulf scenario, 77 countries had already violated the sanctions in the course of four months, and German companies were major culprits in supplying war machinery and weapons during this period. Meanwhile, the world economy and worst of all, the least developing countries (who are the major victims in this war) are dealt severe blows by the whims and fancies of a greedy dictator.

Last, but not least, Hussein's "championing" of the PLO cause is at best a smokescreen for his own ambitions... which is to be leader of the Arab world. Speaking of which, Kuwait was one Arab nation which supported the PLO massively—in funds as well as morale. Let's not be blinded by Iraqi propaganda. Hussein is merely using Arafat and the PLO as a decoy to his real motives, which is to replenish his country's depleted resources after his eight-year war with another neighbour—Iran. This is what the Gulf War is really about.

Pro Bono



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.

Employing expatriates

Sir, "All dreams do not come true." This is true for many Bangladeshi expatriates. Although thousands of Bangladeshis working in Middle East have already become successful in materializing their costly dreams, the unforeseen Kuwait problem has shattered the dreams of thousands others in the troubled land.

Left out with the choice "leave or risk life", the Bangladeshi manpower in Iraq-Kuwait preferred home, became refugees in the adjacent states, and have been taken care of by the sympathetic nations and organizations. So, they have been brought back home. Unquestionably unfortunate is the whole affair, not only for the thousands of her workforce over there but for poor Bangladesh herself as well,

since the country's earnings will drop by millions of dollars—an aggravation of the worsening economy of an LDC. Unless these returnees find themselves employed again soon, they are most likely to be an impetus for further deterioration of the nation's overall condition.

One of the rewarding solutions to this unwanted influx of the skilled and unskilled manpower back home, rich or poor, may possibly be the re-employment at home and abroad; and the Manpower Ministry must have the best capacity in this regard. Possibilities, however, of immediate inclusion of the specialist returnees in the domestic labourforce maybe explored in order to re-inforce the economic bases.

In such a process, the administration may benefit from an interim listing of

them, classified by the skill, together with an inventory of their investable assets. Co-operative type or Govt. subsidized investment projects should be encouraged for the better-off returnees, specifically for the employment-generating, export-oriented establishments. For a wider financial base, also, a special Middle East Trust, or a more appropriate collective investment facility, chiefly for Middle East wage earners should be reviewed with regard to the national developmental schemes by the individual sectors.

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Misery of war

Sir, The petrol pumps on Thursdays, have a new noticeable scene to offer. There is a long queue of vehicles, mostly private cars, in front of each such station. It often causes obstacles to the traffic leads to a traffic jam.

Actually they are refuelling since Fridays have been decided as closed for petrol supply; all this of course in view of conserv-

ing fuel vis-a-vis the Gulf war.

We hope the war ends quickly and brings in peace for all. War is not something which anyone wants and it only brings untold misery to many, often without any result to none.

Faruq Ahmed
Rampura, Dhaka

Film festival

Sir, Recently a short film festival was held in Dhaka. This gave the cine lovers of this country a much awaited chance to see some rare movies. It was very well organised and the selection of films was also very good.

This was the second one of its kind in Bangladesh. It also gave the viewers a chance to listen to the film-makers themselves and hear about their experiences in the seminars arranged. I am taking this opportunity to thank the sponsors for their effort and pain. I hope this become a regular feature and we have more of this kind of festivals every year.

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