Dhaka, Friday, February 1, 1991

## An Offer to Saddam

The joint offer has been made by the United States and the Soviet Union that there would be a ceasefire in the Gulf War if Iraq would make an "unequivocal commitment" to withdraw from Kuwait and took "concrete steps" in that direction. The statement signed by the US Secretary of State James A. Baker and the Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander A. Bassmertnkyh suggests that the multinational force would suspend all hostilities even without an immediate total withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. The two superpowers and their allies would probably accept a token withdrawal as a "concrete step" demanded of Baghdad for the ceasefire. Much of the statement may be still a matter of interpretation. There is, however, no doubt that the US-Soviet offer contains a number of major concessions.

By far the most significant element in the statement relates to the Arab-Israeli dispute, with the two superpowers offering to treat the matter as a "priority" once the fighting ended in the Gulf. True, Washington has not gone all the way in linking the Gulf War with the settlement of the Palestinian problem, as repeatedly demanded by President Saddam Hussein. However, the new offer is backed by both the superpowers, an offer that is certain to get the overwhelming support of the United Nations. At this stage, can Iraq expect more?

This is the time for President Saddam Hussein to take a realistic view of his gains and losses in the two-week old conflict. All independent reports suggest that Iraq's war machine has been badly damaged, if not crippled. With over a hundred of its planes now flown away to what looks like a sanctuary in Iran, Iraq is unable to use its air force in full. Baghdad can still go on, perhaps for months, by stepping up the ground war and using some weapons of mass destruction against the Saudis and the multinational force. But is President Saddam prepared to go on and face an uncertain end of a conflict that no one wants. If the Iraqi leader takes a lesson from the recent past, when Baghdad could not win the war it started against Iran and suffered heavy financial and material losses for its mad adventure, what makes it so sure of its victory in the war against virtually the entire West and part of the Muslim world?

At the moment, Iraq can also count some of its political gains. The joint commitment by Washington and Moscow to step up efforts to solve the Arab-Israeli dispute once the Gulf war has ended should be taken seriously by Baghdad. If President Saddam would accept this offer, the Palestinians would certainly treat him as a hero, while other Arabs would agree that the Iraqi leader had been perfectly serious in trying to force the hand of Washington on this issue. An end of the conflict at this stage also leaves the Iraqi war machine atleast partially intact and the President himself in power. A month or two from now, it may be an entirely different scenario. Both Saudi Arabia and Iraq may be heavily devastated; Kuwait may well be in ruins; casualties on all sides, military and civilians, may be in tens of thousands; more ecological disasters may change the environment. And who can then speculate on the fate of President Saddam?

It is not too late yet for the Iraqi leader to respond positively to the joint US-Soviet offer for the sake of peace with honour.

## Avoidable deaths

Sixteen people were on Wednesday killed in five road mishaps in Dhaka and Bogra. Eight of them in one incident in Dhaka. Mishaps they were to be sure, but not accidents. The distinction is very important and is far from a matter of rhetorical nuance. When death is built into our traffic situation, it comes not as an accident, but as a matter of course. A course laid down partly deliberately and partly through sheer neglect and callousness. Mishaps involving death and automobiles are generally taken to be shaped by a combination of failings in human judgement and limitations of mechanical systems. As such drivers embroiled in fatal incidents are not charged with wilful violence and murder. We want very firmly to say that, although the drivers involved in the five mishaps on Wednesday are not by themselves murderers as such, the sixteen that died were murdered — and not accidentally killed. And this kind of murder, like all others, must be made to stop before many more sacrifices are exacted by the nature of our unfortunate handling of the motorised vehicular traffic.

Let us try to fix the responsibility of such avoidable deaths that befall our road-users every day of the year. First in the five fatal road incidents on Wednesday, two involved minibuses. This does not reflect the true proportion of deaths caused by minibuses. At least three in every traffic deaths within urban limits are caused by minibuses.

Two, trucks have long earned the horrible epithet 'killer' - and there hasn't been any meaningful effort to stop them in their killing business. Trucks caused three of the five tragedies on Wednesday. For the overall national figure that comes to about the right proportion. And all the three — as all the rest over the whole year — occurred in day-time. Who allowed the trucks to be on the roads in broad daylight? Those that fail to restrict the trucks to night time plying participate in the systematic killing of the road-users.

Three, has any mini or truck - the two big culprits — been checked and penalised for speeding and overloading ever? What is the average speed of these, and the high mark, within town limits? Each one of these thousands of carrier vehicles reach over 60kph every now and then averaging possibly the highest in the world — 20kph for minis and 30, yes 30 for trucks. The average for bus speeds in London is less than 8kph-for a comparison. And London is a far less crowdy city.

The point is if we are genuinely interested in cutting down the road death toll: As decisionmakers as well as the implementors down to a wide level hardly ever take a 'mini' or a rickshaw ride — the bonafide of the intent in the pertinent issue remaining highly suspect. We are not ready to accept such an abominable possibility. The seriousness of controllers of traffic and more so of the operaters of buses and trucks in bringing down road deaths can of course work wonders. That it doesn't happen goes to show that maybe the machine itself is jinxed. Operators care only for profit and not life and there are many among controllers who are operators and there is still a greater number among controllers who reap a regular benefit out the duo's death dealing. All this must stop.

# Tourism is Another Casualty of Gulf War

OURISM around the world not just in the Middle East-has been crippled by the war in the Gulf. While some may find it frivolous to talk of tourism when there is a war going on, the crisis is having a debilitating effect on one of the biggest businesses in the world

Travel bookings to all destinations, including Europe, the Caribbean and East Asia are down by 10 to 15 per cent compared to this time last year. And the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean have all but dropped off the holiday

Gulf related losses by tour operators have so far been comparatively low because the first nine months of 1990 took tourism revenue to record levels. But if the conflict is a long one, it could take years for the industry to regain lost business.

Until now, 1986 had been the nightmare year for the tourist industry in Europe and the Middle East. A series of attacks scared off American tourists wary of becoming terrorist targets.

First came the hijack of the cruise ship Achille Lauro off the Egyptian coast in October 1985. This was followed by the bombing of a West Berlin discotheque in March 1986 and the US air attack on Tripoli in April. The nuclear fall-out from the Chernobyl disaster shortly afterwards was another factor in keeping Americans away from Europe.

It took two years before American tourists dared to venture to Europe again in any numbers. The Lockerbie crash of December 1988 appeared to be the last in a series of major disasters, and tourism picked up quickly again in 1989. Until the invasion of Kuwait, 1990 looked set to be a record year.

The Gulf war has now heightened concern about retaliatory terrorist attacks on civilian targets around the world and increased tensions

The global tourist industry has been crippled by the Gulf war. The Eastern Mediterranean has become a virtual no-go zone, few Americans dare venture to Europe and the livelihoods of tens of thousands of workers dependent on tourism are threatened.

by Robert Slagt

between Muslims and Christians. Already, Western European airports are being turned into military fortresses with security check delays averag-

ing two hours. Bookings on tourist flights from the United States to Europe have plunged by 60 per cent since November and may soon be virtually non-existent. British airways, among many other major airlines, has suspended all flights to the Gulf area, among them destinations such as Jeddah, Oman and Dubai.

Tourism prospects in the Eastern Mediterranean are even bleaker. A vital source of income for the economies of Egypt, Israel and Cyprus, the tourism industry has nearly ground to a halt.

Ari Zurel of the Israeli Tourist Office said bookings for January 1991 were 40 to 50 per cent lower than the previous year. After the beginning of hostilities, they will have dropped to nil.

Although revenues for the 1990 are only four per cent lower than 1989. Zurel estimated the loss for the Israeli tourist industry at about \$250 million - and that estimate came before the outbreak of

"A good year would make us about \$1.5 billion," he said. "One can say we have already lost most of the winter season. of which cruises from a substantial and very lucrative part. Summer tourism is less prof-

In Egypt, the picture gets worse. Bookings started to drop immediately after the invasion of Kuwait, with August

1990 bookings down by 40 per cent from 1989. The current situation is so bad that the Egyptian Tourist Information Centre has stopped its advertising campaigns altogether.

According to the Egyptian Tourist Office the loss for the Egyptian economy is estimated at \$1.5 billion on an expected revenue of \$3.5 billion. As for the months ahead, clients are enquiring, but not booking.

The Middle East Travel Centre, a tour operator in London, has received just two bookings for Cairo since Friday January 11. Until September, bookings had been at a normal level, but they have dropped considerably since. December bookings were 65 per cent below 1989 levels, and book-

for the months ahead.

ings are virtually non-existent



that cover the Eastern Mediterranean, 1990 had been a record year. Until August, and for some operators, even October, it had promised to be even better.

Michael Malatouma of Cyprus Travel London Ltd. says his business has been seriously affected by the Gulf crisis. although business for the year was 25 per cent higher in 1990 than 1989.

The slump of recent months was gradual, but, he says. January has meant a drop of 80 to 90 per cent: The situation reminds me of 1974 when I took over this business. After starting to work on July 8 the Turks invaded Cyprus a week later. I was in big trouble right away, as f am now.

"All the tour operators know of are nowhere near to normal figures. But people are still going, and we have some bookings for March."

There seems to be some optimism among tour operators about the length of conflict. For representatives from Turkey. Morocco and, to a lesser extent. Tunisia, there still is some hope left.

Salami, a press officer at the Turkish Embassy in London said: "If the war drags on it will affect tourism, especially in the south-east of the country. But places like Istanbul are very far away from the fighting."

The British Foreign Office has advised its citizens on holiday or residing in Israel to leave the country, while Egypt,

power are patronising them as

done to President (Hussain

Mohammed Ershad) in

Bangladesh within a few days.

We have this new government

for a few months already,"

complains a young dissident in

the ruling Nepali Congress

A 12-member Coordination

"Look at what they have

"dedicated and efficient."

Cyprus and Turkey are considered as safe enough.

Travellers to Tunisia and Morocco have been warned against 'disturbances, particu larly in cities," but leaving the country is not considered nec-

However, tour operators have jointly decided to take no chances and are evacuating all holidaymakers. While the Moroccan Tourist Office says that statistics on the effects of the war will not be available until March" and "campaigning is going on as normal," their Tuntstan colleagues appear to be more realistic.

Since the crisis started they have lost about 30 per cent of tourism revenues, while visits to the Britain dropped by 20 per cent. At the moment, the Totrist Office says "all we know is that the country is safe," but the Tunisian situation has been muddled by the killing in Tunts on January 15 of two senior Palestine Liberation Organisation officials close to Yasser Arafat.

The crisis began in August. but it was the beginning of the war that dealt the death-blow to tourism.

"Until that point it was still reasonable, but at the moment people are growing more reticent," says Russell Amerasek era of Thomas Cook, one of Britain's largest travel agents.

Thanks to the two exceptionally good previous years. the downturn hasn't been major up till now. But large losses all depend on the war outcome. And nobody knows how long it will last." -GEMINI

ROBERT SLAGT graduated in European Studies at the University of Amsterdam and worked at the European Commission in Brussels. He is currently studying for a Masters in International Journalism at London's City Univer-

## Civil Servants Test Bhattarai's Patience

by Jan Sharma

T EPAL'S new democratic government is facing one of the toughest challenges-- this time from civil

scrvants.

Civil servants, who recently formed the Nepal Civil Servants Association (NCSA) and asked for salary hikes, paralysed ministries and departments last December 18 by refusing to work.

Western tourists waited for several hours to buy stamps. Mails in the foreign post office were disrupted. There was no work done in any government

The interim government, installed by King Birendra last April following the popular pro-democracy movement, has accused the NCSA of sabotaging the delicate transition to democracy by playing at the hands of revivalist forces.

The new government is in the middle of preparing for the country's first free elec-

tions, scheduled for May. The law and order situation has deteriorated. Political meetings of various mainstream opposition parties have been attacked and members of even the ruling Nepali

Congress have been beaten. The on-going Gulf crisis has added a serious element. The economic growth rate, which was 4.5 percent during the former one party regime, is headed for sharp decline. The rate of inflation, officially claimed at 12 percent, is much higher.

The International Monetary Fund is asking for austerity measures, new taxes, and better tax collection. Finance Minister Devendra Raj Panday

with his sagging popularity is reluctant to propose unpopular measures in an election year.

"Most of the problems will be solved once a single party returns to power," said Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai who heads the coalition government. As president of the Nepali Congress, he looks confident of coming back to

But the challenges are

enormous for Mr. Bhattarai

who spent most of his life

fighting for democracy and

human rights. One of his main

problems is that he does not

have the team of competent

colleagues to steer clear of the

mess left by the previous

home and economic fronts. His

colleagues are not in the grip

NCSA launched a 10-day

protest program. In response,

employees tied black arm

bands and observed a "pen-

down" strike by attending of-

mands has already been met by

the government: the official

recognition of the union on

April 20. The tricky demand -

the salary hike \_may not be

mate claims for a salary hike as

they bring home a redundant

Civil servants have legiti-

one of the two major de-

fices but refusing to work.

of the situation, critics say.

These he needs both on the

Last December 12, the

regime.

monthly salary hardly enough for a week. They have sympathy but what is surprising is the timing when the country is preparing for the first free

polls in 30 years. The prospects for an early pay hike are slim as the state coffers are empty. The new leaders have blamed this for the mismanagement of the national economy under the previous regime.

In a veiled warning, the

Ministry of General Adminis-

tration urged civil servants to

be "disciplined" and continue

their service to the nation. The

strike was called a violation of

the legal code of civil service

unanimously agreed by the

termined to provide maximum

facilities to the civil servants in

accordance with the ability of

the country's financial position.

However, the government

would not at present be able to

take heavy financial burden

due to the weak health of the

economy," the Ministry of

General Administration has

sured that a decision on the

salary hike would be taken

"within 15 days of the promul-

gation of the Constitution." The

promulgation was made last

November. But there was no

The civil servants went

positive sign in the direction.

Authorities had casually as-

"(The government) is de-

NCSA.

stated.

ahead by observing a one-hour" pen down strike on December 13. The next day, the strike lasted for two hours. Since mid-December, they tied black arm bands and observed fourhour "pen down" strikes. This will go on with demonstrations and rallies.

"We are ready to solve the problems through talks peace fully," the NCSA said in a press statement urging all civil scr-

vants to continue with the pre-

planned program until the

government takes "positive

chief secretary Lok Bahadur

Shrestha. "The issue is getting

his like are instigating con-

spiracies to destabilise the

Bhattarai interim government

to make room for the return of

disgraced functionaries from

much in dealing with the

problem. Some Western

diplomats are surprised that

the most powerful prime min-

ister in Nepal's history, as he

has often been described.

lacks firmness expected of

civil servants is the result of

Mr. Bhattarai's failure to pun-

ish corrupt officials. There are

reports that instead of punish-

ing them, political parties in

The current unrest among

him to deal with the issues.

Mr. Bhattaraí has not scored

the previous regime.

Many fear Mr. Shrestha and

politicised."

"This is utterly illegal," said

Council to look into the problem has not been of much use. It met the NCSA but failed to reach an agreement to end the The current unrest is the result of failure to punish corrupt officials

The civil servants should be impartial, incorrupt and politically neutral," Mr. Bhattarai said. "If bureaucracy were to remain determined and dedicated to selfless service, there would not have been such mismanagement and corruption as was witnessed during 30 years of the (one-party) era when civil servants were exploited politically."

The Nepali bureaucracy was formally shaped with the enactment of the Nepal Civil Scrvice Act of 1957, on the eve of the first free election in the Himalayan kingdom. There are now 137,000 employees in government and corporation

"We will explore all conciliatory avenues before embark ing on unpleasant and harsh measures." warned Nepali Congress spokesman Basu Risal. "No government can excuse the civil servants engaged in undiscipline and undestrable activities under the instigation of reactionary forces."

- DEPTHNEWS ASIA

# WHAT

## Why Invite Further Blows

And so the horror has begun. No one can say how the war in the Gulf will unfold or when it will end. It could well trigger an unpredictable chain of devastating clashes that will march across the desert and change the course of history in the region.

It need not have happened. There was only a pocketful of time between the Jan. 15 deadline and the commence ment of the attack but there were still a few precious moments. Saddam Hussein should have pulled back from the brink. He still can pull out of Kuwait. He should if he wants to be a good Arab. He is not fighting a just war around which the Arab world can rally. but a war that will divide the Arab Middle East and sow new enmities and divisions. He should do that as a loyal Iraqi. and preserve with a stroke of statesmanship what is left of a situation that was so much his

to avoid. The world has largely given up on the man from Baghdad. is he still sane? Does he understand what is at stake? If so, there is still time to stop it.

- Los Angeles Times Let there be no gloating or euphoria over early successes; rather, as we watch this conflict unfold, let there be a sober assessment of the lessons of history, and a resolve not to repeat the mistakes that led to the war.

-The Baltimore Evening Sun

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.

## Expectations

Sir, By and large, the widespread agitations across the country staged by the opposition parties quadrilaterally, highlighted by the loss of lives and properties in the uprising and sharply reacted by the government pleading constitutional values, have finally been a successful attempt "to end the autocratic regime armed with coated democracy". Popular mandate extraordinary has proven one more time that popularity overpowers arm strength which is a cornerstone for democracy. History of this nation recorded mass upheavals before. At

this time new expectations

for a sound life are likely to energize the people to optimistically look forward to, regardless of who enters the Powerhouse. But not long past since, if new stands root in the old issues, "Old Gold" may be something for everyday to ponder over and so continues the "never ending story" of Bangalee struggle containing the right lesson yet to be learnt.

M.Rahman, Zila School Road, Mymensingh.

## Prison reform

Sir, The recent unrest in the prisons and the clashes of prisoners with the prison authorities had attracted the attention of all

the people. No changes are made in any system or organisation in our country unless a great furore is made about it. The condition in our prisons is reportedly inhuman and untolerable.

The jails were built in British time and since then nothing has been done to increase the capacity of accommodation though the number of inmates kept increasing. In fact overcrowding a cell for thirty people, thrice that number of people are kept.

Due to slow processing of cases a lot of people wantonly suffer while they might be acquitted finally.

The diet and medical facilities are also not up to standard. Imprisonment in itself is a great punishment and along with other conditions it doesn't have to be so inhumane that inmates accumulate hatred for the society. Rather prison should be a place where a prisoner can be reformed and regret his previous

sins, and can again become a useful member of the society. Although not all are alike, yet I feel prison conditions should be given a thought to.

Sharmin Rahman Dhanmondi Dhaka

### Ambulance service needed Sir, In Dhaka though

market-places and videoshops have mushroomed in recent years but essential amenity like ambulance service has remained primitive. The Suharwardy Chest and Cardiovascular Disease Hospital does have this service and it is at the disposal of its patients. Another organization which gives this service is the Fire Brigade. The private clinics only cater to their patients. So in an emergency people have to fall back on private or on hire transport which may be difficult as well as expensive to obtain at say an odd hour like middle of the night.

I think it would be for lucrative government and also a great service to the general public if government started such a service which will be open twentyfour hours and which people can use at a reasonable price. This can be started by a private organization also. It will mean earning money and also giving people a very useful

Parveen Choudhury Comilla.

service.

## Super-markets and hawkers

Sir, Amongst other things which have changed the facade of our capital, is the mushroom growth of super-markets. It is indeed a good sign, as it solves locally the many problems facing the consumers. It offers a variety of products, where to choose from.

Dhaka localities dwellers did not have such a widerange of things to select their favourite items from earlier. Besides, it also gives the city, a more colourful and decorative

However, one thing continues to baffle me, and that is the growing number of street vendors. With the growth in the number of super markets, their number has registered an influx Is there any link!

Personally I do not have anything against them, as they also have to make a living. And there is nothing as difficult as that in a city like Dhaka. I must mention one thing, they do cause problem to the pedestrians, as they generally sit on pavements, primarily meant for people to walk

Naimur Rahim Farmgate, Dhaka .