

Hope for South Africa

Once known as the "Land of Hate" South Africa is slowly turning into the "Land of Hope." President F.W. De Klerk has taken another major step towards dismantling the apartheid system in his country. He told the Parliament on Friday that within months, his government would be scrapping race classification, segregated housing and reservation of most farmland for white, which are the three most important pillars of the white-ruled society. While these three laws are being removed from the country's statute book, work will start on introducing racially integrated local government as well as on desegregated schooling.

All these are most promising developments which will be applauded by the entire civilised world, barring the hardline white opposition within South Africa. The press has not yet reported the detailed reaction of Nelson Mandela, the leader of the African National Congress (ANC). He has welcomed the move in general terms but he has appealed to western governments to keep their sanctions against South Africa in place, until the transition to democracy is complete. In other words, the African leader is sticking to the line he had taken earlier, which has met with approval of countries which had all along opposed apartheid. Mr Mandela who has developed a personal relationship, based on mutual respect, with President De Klerk might have been tempted to soften on this point. We are glad, he has not. The system in South Africa must be kept under international pressure, as represented by sanctions, if President De Klerk is to impress upon the white hardline opposition that sanctions which are definitely hurting the country's economy, would go only when apartheid goes. In this sense, the continuance of the sanctions are indeed, to the advantage of the South African president.

While the latest measures announced by Mr De Klerk have raised hopes, there is no certainty that process underscored by the latest moves will not yet be derailed by the white hardline opposition. Other obstacles can also delay or even thwart the movement towards desegregation. The violence among the rival black groups can continue to pose a serious law and order problem, which hardliners within the administration would love to exploit. The formal talks between ANC and the government have not started yet. Such talks may also run into all kinds of bottlenecks.

Let us hope that both Mandela and De Klerk will pursue their shared objective vigorously and bring about a new South Africa, on the ruins of the hated apartheid system.

Back to Enduring Poetry

The Fifth National Poetry Festival went into session on Friday at the now-celebrated TSC road island. Shamsur Rahman presided over the proceedings in his capacity as the president of the sponsoring organisation — the Jatiyo Kabita Parishad. And Begum Sufia Kamal inaugurated the festival with words of revolution and pledge. For five years this has been the routine. And yet it refuses to smell stale. These are issues and achievements that hardly age — and the Kabita Parishad has had an enviable quantity of both in its short but very elevating career. We congratulate the national association of our poets on the occasion of the fifth festival.

Repetition it was only superficially — and rituals cannot help being so. Our thoughts go back to the genesis of the Kabita Parishad and the proceedings of the four earlier festivals. The Parishad came into being to oppose autocracy and its first festival as well as the three that followed, were frontally counterpoised against an autocrat who suffered from poetic pretensions and used the state coffers liberally to get himself recognised as a poet, if not at home at least abroad. Kabita Parishad and festival were an active and militant collective action by poets against the condition of the nation — with all its ideals and promises — put into a straitjacket. The fifth festival came in the wake of full vindication of their action. If the earlier ones against something very steadfastly indeed, the fifth took off, to cap its glorious achievement of seeing the autocratic regime kiss the dust of humiliation through, with tying itself, hopefully as steadfastly, for something — for democracy.

As we felicitate the Kabita Parishad, so we must as well celebrate our poets in the hour of their glory. And how best to carry this victory of poetry forward than heed our one and only Sufia Kamal and act? Opening the festival she observed that now was the time for the poets to cleanse the society with their action and works. It was for the poets to call in all to the side of the beautiful and the true. From resistance to creativity — that was the substance of her call.

It was well that she signalled for setting the sail on a different tack. There couldn't be a better moment for doing so. For it is years that poets themselves had started feeling that militancy verging on the political was tending to make poets churn out slogans — long and hollow — rather than take deeper dips into the recesses of their soul and come out with things of enduring beauty and truth.

QUOTES

Iraq and Palestine represent a common will. We will be together side by side and after the great battle. God willing, we will pray together in Jerusalem.

—Yasser Arafat

Allied pilots are facing among the most difficult air defences assembled in the world.

—General Schwarzkopf, Commander of allied forces in the Gulf

Who armed Saddam?
Just about everyone, including all five permanent members of the UN Security Council and many of the Western nations now part of the alliance trying to dismember Iraq's military machine.

It was a lucrative business. The Soviet Union sold around \$10 billion of arms, France around \$5 billion, Britain over \$1 billion, the United States more than \$5 billion.

German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher was the first to come clean. Arriving in Israel on January 24 after four nights of Iraqi Scud missile attacks, he faced the anger of protesters — one shouting "Why did you help create a new Hitler?" — and Israeli government ministers. It had been German technicians who helped extend the range of the Scuds so they could hit Israel.

Genscher, who carried a gas mask in case of a chemical Scud attack, told reporters in Jerusalem: "The government is taking steps to tighten control over foreign (arms) exports, but Germans did participate in violations of these laws. We must own up to it."

Yet even now German companies are still reported to be trying to sell arms to Iraq. Said Luiz Stavenhagen, a minister in the German Chancellor's office: "The government is outraged that individual firms are still trying to cut dirty deals with Iraq." Officials are investigating evidence that up to 110 German companies may have violated a UN embargo against arms exports to Iraq.

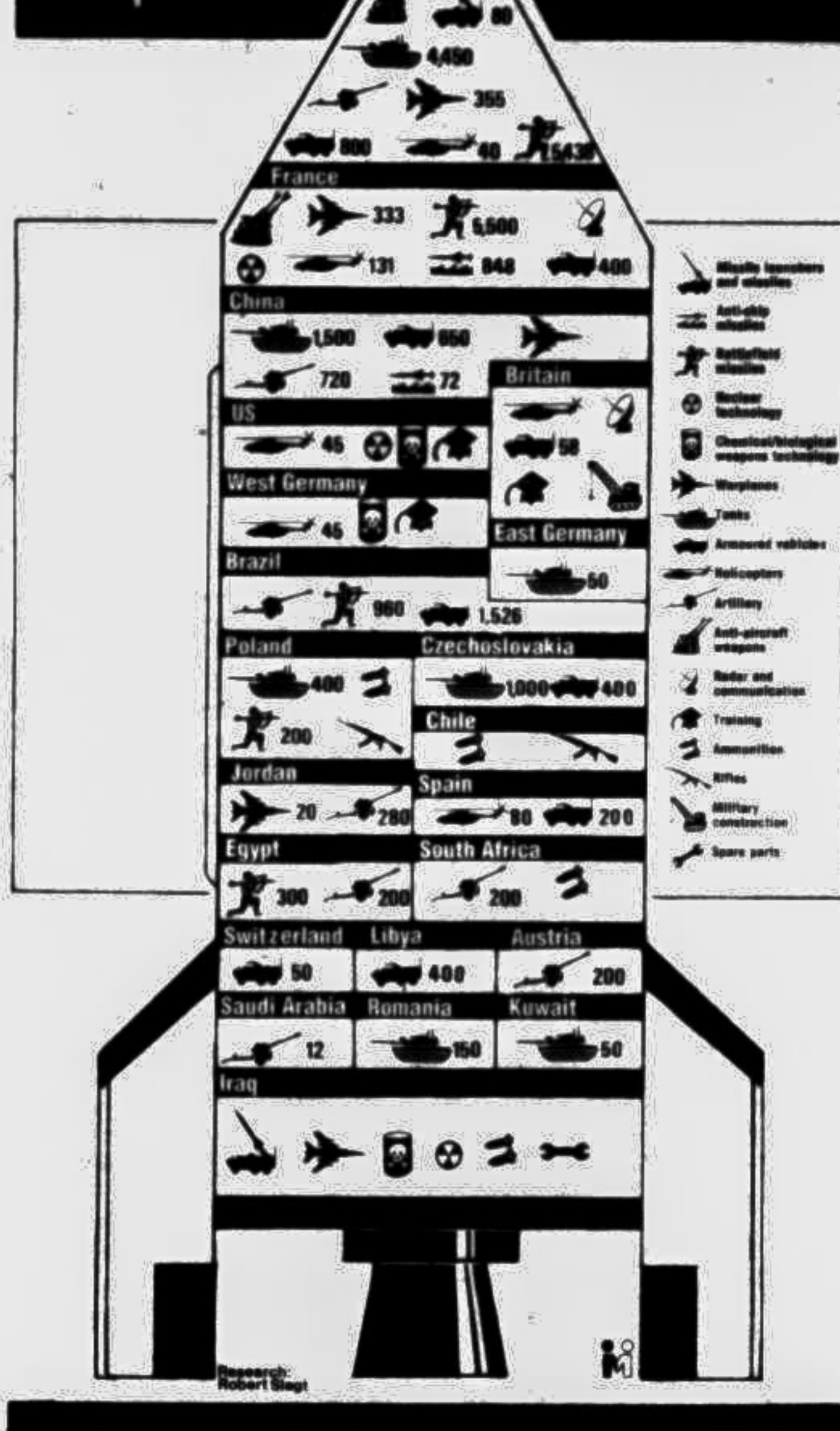
France was the next to apologise for arming Saddam. President Francois Mitterrand sent a special envoy to Israel to express "France's sympathy and solidarity after the Iraqi attacks on Israel."

Despite the regrets, it is unlikely that Saddam will be easily or quickly beaten given that he has been receiving plentiful supplies of some of the world's best military technology for more than a decade.

Apart from helping to build a formidable conventional arsenal of missiles, planes, tanks and artillery, Western companies also helped supply the technology necessary for developing nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

Saddam also knows how to fool intelligence satellites, by deploying cardboard Scud missile launchers, for instance, and the limitations of Western satellite surveillance — for the US, then Iraq's ally, provided

Who armed Iraq?



most of the necessary information during the eight-year war with Iran.

Reports are now emerging that some of the specially hardened shelters built by European construction companies to protect the Iraqi air force from attack are built to a higher specification than those of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

In practical terms this means the shelters are immune to attack from conventional bombing, conventionally armed cruise missiles, incendiary devices and air-to-ground missiles. They may even be able to withstand explosions from tactical nuclear warheads. According to BBC TV, at

least one of the air bases in northern Iraq even has underground living quarters and logistical facilities. Multiple runways mean that it is likely to require several allied air attacks to disable bases.

Quoting anonymous sources within the British construction industry, the BBC said the bunker built beneath the Air Defence Ministry in Baghdad has been designed to resist an airburst from a 250-kiloton nuclear warhead.

Saddam's dream of becoming the major military power in the Arab world relied on the massive oil revenues that flowed into Iraq following the 1973-74 oil price rises. Traditionally supplied by the Soviet

by Tom Aston

Much of the formidable array of weaponry now confronting allied forces in the Gulf was supplied by Western firms and governments. As well as conventional weapons, chemical, nuclear and biological technology found its way to Baghdad, much of it slipping through official loopholes and bypassing half-hearted export restrictions.

Union, Iraq was now able to afford high-tech Western weaponry. The "merchants of death" flocked to Baghdad.

French arms companies, with the backing of their government, made millions. Dassault supplied more than 100 Mirage jets between 1977 and 1987—two of them were early casualties of the current war. When Iraq came to be regarded as a bulwark against Iranian Islamic fundamentalism in 1980, sophisticated Soviet missiles followed to add to the Scud missiles already supplied by the Soviets.

Western suppliers such as the British and the US, lacking the audacity of the French, found loopholes in their own morality and military export restrictions. Bell helicopters made in the US, were sold to Iraq for "agricultural use" even though they could be converted for military use.

The British government used the term "non-lethal" meaning equipment that would not "prolong or exacerbate the Iran-Iraq conflict": to justify the sale of a range of military hardware to Baghdad including Thorn EMI's Cymbeline battlefield radar system and 300 military Land-Rovers.

In 1982 the British Ministry of Defence company International Military Sales (IMS) openly admitted supplying Iraq with "non-lethal" spare parts for British-supplied Chinook helicopters captured from Iran. In 1984, 80 Iraqi pilots received training from the Carlisle-based company Specialist Flight Training. Several British machine tool companies supplied Iraq with lathes and jigs that were diverted directly into weapon and ammunition factories.

A string of British ministers visited Baghdad to boost these sales. One of them was the present Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, then a Junior Foreign Office minister, who shook Saddam's hand and attended the anniversary celebrations of the 1968 revolution that brought the Ba'ath Party to power.

When the oil revenues waned after 1983, then Prime

Minister Margaret Thatcher provided Baghdad with export credit loans.

Last year, when British Customs intercepted parts allegedly destined for an Iraqi "super gun" manufactured in Britain, it transpired that the Department for Trade and Industry had approved the deal. Charges against the managers of the firms involved have since been dropped and the affair has been officially described as "too sensitive" for an inquiry while the Gulf war continues.

Although the Italian government declared an arms embargo against Iran and Iraq in 1984, arms exports continued to go to both countries from the port of Talamone (in Danish ships). When confronted with this fact, the Italian minister for foreign trade claimed he had not been informed of the embargo by other ministers so had been unable to enforce it.

Arms dealers were also able to export arms to Iraq by using forged "end-user" certificates giving a bona fide destination for weapons from the West that instead ended up in Iraq. Some reports suggest US and British government complicity in this practice.

Iraq used a network of front companies in Europe and the US to acquire technology and weapons that could not be obtained directly. West German, Dutch and Italian companies supplied this network with the technology and raw materials for the 40-square-mile chemical weapons production complex at Samarra, 45 miles northwest of Baghdad. A British company, Primary Medical Aid, supplied Iraq 10,000 chemical protection suits.

Threatened with competition from the Soviet Union, China, Czechoslovakia, Romania and South Africa, as well as emerging weapons suppliers in the developing world such as Chile and Brazil, Western arms suppliers did all they could to win orders from Saddam.

The result of this fight to sell arms to Saddam is a hybrid army of weapons. The air

force includes Soviet MIG 23 and MIG 29 fighters, the French Mirage F-1BQ and Chinese Chengdu J-7.

The army has everything from Brazilian multiple rocket launchers to South African howitzers. Around 5,000 Soviet-supplied tanks including T-54s, T-55s, T-62s and T-72s (known to Iraqis as Assad (Abel or Lion of Babylon) form the backbone of the Iraqi army.

From 1976, Saddam started recruiting Arab scientists, many of them trained in chemical, biological and nuclear sciences in the West, and buying technology from anyone who would sell it to him, to build up Iraq's indigenous arms industry. Unusually for a military power outside the West, Iraq is self-sufficient in fuses and ammunition for all of its arsenal.

Soviet Scud missiles were converted into the longer range Al-Hussein and Al-Abbas missiles so they could reach Israel. With Egypt and Argentina, Iraq developed the long-range Condor-2 missile which appears to have foundered despite help from West German and US firms to help equip the Condor-2 complex near Mosul in northern Iraq.

Materials and technology crucial to developing an atomic

reactor: the first step towards producing nuclear warheads came from West Germany, China and Brazil.

Equipping Saddam was extremely profitable for many Western firms, just as the current conflict is boosting Western arms suppliers whose future had been made uncertain by the breakthrough in East-West disarmament. Mass TV coverage of the war has provided them with a free shop window with manufacturers' sales videos featuring prominently in news reports.

But the true price of the arms trade will become clearer as the ground war intensifies and Iraqi air defences shoot down more allied planes.

As George Bernard Shaw put it in *Major Barbara*, the arms trader merely "gives arms to all men who offer and honest price for them, without respect of persons or principles." GEMINI NEWS

TOM ASTON is Associate Editor of Gemini News Service. He researched into Western arms exports to Iran and Iraq as part of his training at London's City University Graduate Centre for Journalism Studies.

Rural Industries can Revitalise the Economy

by Abdur Rahman Khan

Bangladesh, an area of 56,598 sq. miles consists of 68,000 villages. So the economic viability of this country understandably depends on the growth and development of its rural economy. After independence efforts were taken to develop agriculture on a priority basis but agriculture with low productivity could not solve the rural unemployment and under-employment problems.

Now, beside agriculture rural industrialisation can play a vital role in the country's economy generating permanent employment and also revitalising the agriculture itself. In view of the magnitude of the rural scene, small and cottage industries are aptly categorised as pragmatic measures in the past but agro-based industrialisation had never been stepped up with greater emphasis.

It is noteworthy to remember that despite influx to the urban centres not less than 80 per cent of the people of Bangladesh live in the rural areas and they live way down the poverty line. Particularly, for the cause of poverty, the rural people are compelled to leave their hearth and home in search of jobs in urban areas. Their exodus is creating so many social problems in urban life, apart from the most ap-

parent habitat problem. Most of these people fail to get jobs for lack of skill and as a result many of them indulge in begging or even criminal activities to earn a living.

Rural industries virtually are not new as a concept. The different handicrafts like bell-metal, brass, cane and jute products etc. of rural area still testify the traditional source of livelihood of some particular sections of rural people. A good many of these products including the historically famous Muslim cloth still give us a proud claim. But due to urban industrial development these rural industries are gradually declining because the slow traditional artisan's skill just cannot keep pace with the fast modern industrial technology. Moreover, the population of Bangladesh is increasing day by day and is seriously aggravating the rural socio-economic condition. Therefore, we need to think over the

problem and justify if a viable infrastructure of rural industries with cottage industry as its vital part could be developed on a top priority basis. At the same time, promotion and expansion of existing expertise and skill and even revival of some valued traditional crafts which might be dying out, may be taken up as grass-roots enterprise.

Here the prime need is to chalk out a well thought out plan for small and cottage industries which through introduction, adaptation and diffusion of labour intensive devices and appropriate technology using available resources, would produce goods for mass consumption. As such, the scope of small and cottage industries should be widened to become a practical means through which full time job opportunities will be created for both men and women in the rural areas.

Hitherto, many measures

were taken to set up thousands of units for imparting training in different crafts as to develop small and cottage industries in rural Bangladesh. But the desired result could not be achieved as yet. Because, there lie problems of provision of required capital, adequate supply of raw materials, sufficient promotional and expansion programmes, marketing, information facilities, appropriate institutions manned with qualified and experienced personnel as barriers.

Unlike USA, Japan, Germany and other developed countries where, for instance electronic products are treated as small and cottage industry items, we have to stress on such conventional items as may find a production base in the countryside and constitute an integral part of the national economy. Our once famous products are going into oblivion, whereas if

given a thrust, these can keep up their demand both at the domestic and in the international market.

However, priority should be laid on 'fast production at least cost' keeping in view the motive that the people get due share of their invested capital and labour in time. Regarding the development of industries in rural area which is obviously vast, adequate fund has to be made available for keeping the initiative moving to full materialisation without a hop. The qualitative development of industries in rural areas can be achieved only when the problems mentioned earlier hereto are solved earnestly.

It may be recalled in this context that although we have potentials, it is due to lack of appropriate plans and policies and also of skill, knowledge and technical know-how that we are still in the initial stage of development process.

Practically, a serious and concerted action plan has not yet been made to enable us to become self-reliant. Making Bangladesh prosperous virtually is not a dream. We are to bear in mind that prosperity lies in the proper utilisation of untapped and yet untapped resources.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

The Oil News Is Good

Mideast war is supposed to send oil prices skyward and oil-importing economies downward, but that is not what happened. Allied forces bombed Iraq and Kuwait — and oil prices nose-dived more than 30 per cent, the biggest one-day drop in history. That caught oil companies flat-footed.

Western governments announced that at the outbreak of war they would jointly release 2 million barrels of oil a day from government stockpiles. George Bush backed that pledge to the hilt by announcing as soon as the shooting started that the United States would release more than a million barrels a day from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which contains 600 million barrels stored in underground salt caverns.

Oil prices respond to fear every bit as much as to supply cutbacks. Hoarding, not an OPEC embargo, created most of the gas lines during the 1970s. And hoarding, not insufficient supply, was driving oil prices higher as traders nervously approached the Jan. 15 deadline for Saddam Hussein's withdrawal from Kuwait. The fear dissolved only after the allies knocked out Iraq's capacity to cripple Saudi oil production and the United States pledged to release reserve oil.

The Bush administration suffered, and deserved, criticism for refusing to release reserve oil last summer, when Iraq invaded Kuwait. But now officials have finally put the reserve to good use.

That is not likely to please the oil companies, but it is wonderful news for the economy.

—The New York Times

After Saddam is Dealt With

The Israel-Palestinian dispute plainly remains a matter of intense world concern and an area where renewed efforts to break the political logjam are urgently needed. But it is in no way linked to Iraq's attempt to destroy Kuwait, and no one should be fooled into thinking otherwise.

—Los Angeles Times

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.

Road accidents

Sir, Trucks have rightfully been named as "killer trucks". Many steps have been taken motivation through traffic weeks, seizing of the drivers licence etc. to stop them from being just hazardous. But unfortunately, till date nothing has changed.

Only yesterday (Thursday), a truck managed to end the lives of eight persons (as reported in the media), in Tejgaon industrial area. The accident took place, just because one truck was trying to overtake another! What silly a reason, too damn care so many valuable

lives! Now, that we are so conscious about rights and regulations will anybody take note and try to stop this kind of murder?

Mahbub Hossain
Sattar Road
Dhaka.

Academic dishonesty

Sir, British Mathematical Society recently alleged that two teachers of Jahangirnagar University plagiarized research papers that were published in 1970. If so, the accused are entitled to prosecution accordingly.

The matter obviously indicates dishonesty in the

academic industry which is meant for advancing the civilization with its products. The case in point, however, stands equally likely to affect each and every individual citizen as to the outcome of the defective moulders in the 'factory of excellence' of Bangladesh.

Now that the disgraceful fact has been brought to light by the authority, appropriate measures may arrest the probability of contamination of the country's education before it's too late.

M. Rahman
Zila School Road
Mymensingh

Short film festival

Sir, Thanks to the agency that sponsored the Short Film Festival held recently in the city. Certainly it provided us better opportunities to see good films by eminent film directors but it was very ill organised. On 28-1-91 I

went at 6:00 p.m. to see Mr. Miral Sen's 'Calcutta My El-Dorado' at German Cultural Centre. Around 6:20 when everyone was crowding the 2nd floor and pressing for the film to be shown it was announced that 'Calcutta My El-Dorado' would not be shown. Had this been announced or flashed earlier in the morning papers, viewers would have been saved from lot of botheration and tension. None amongst the organisers were found to be apologetic. It didn't speak well of them. There is no point in arranging such a festival in a half hearted manner. Viewers should not be made victims of organisers whims. Let us hope, better sense will prevail next time.

A. M. F. Quadir
Dhaka

Beggars' co-operative

Sir, The article written by S. Bari, in your column "Dhaka Day by Day,"

provides a new insight to the 'problem of begging'. It was interesting to note, that, they have a committee with a chairman.

They operate like a co-operative which seems to be quite organised and run efficiently.

Begging has always been looked down upon. But it is really heartening to realise that beggars too are trying to be self-reliant!

It is a nice and informative piece and gives a new dimension to the 'occupation of begging'.

Halima Begum,
Tophkhana Road, Dhaka.

An appreciation

Sir, The Bangladeshi Community Group and the Jalalabad Welfare Association in London express their good wishes for the successful career of The Daily Star.

S.A. Islam,
Chairperson,
On behalf of the organisation.