

The Arming of Iraq

While it has become fashionable to suggest ten different reasons for the start of the Gulf War and ten different ways for ending it, few would admit the unpalatable truth that it is the West which is very much behind the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq as well as Baghdad's militaristic posture towards the region. To put it differently, the current Gulf conflict is essentially the product of the arms race in which Iraq managed to stay ahead of others with the help of the industrialised West, East European countries, The Soviet Union and China.

A report published by this paper on Sunday on this page, under the appropriate title, "Rich Pickings for the Merchants of Death", presented us with the facts to back the writer's assertion—which is now ours—that had the outside world, especially the West, seen the danger of putting so much and so sophisticated arms in the hands of Iraq, Baghdad might not have developed its enormous capacity for invading Kuwait, threatening the Saudi Arabia and then confronting the West and the international community. These arms were not given to Iraq as a military aid to beef up its defences against an unknown enemy. These arms were sold, as in any commercial deal, for profit, with the bidders competing among themselves to get the highest orders.

Not surprisingly, over the years, the Soviet Union sold to Iraq around \$10 billion of arms, France around \$ 5 billion, Britain over \$1 billion and the United States over \$5 billion. West Germany provided the most sophisticated technology in upgrading Baghdad's missile capability, in building shelters and in setting up plants which can produce chemical weapons.

How many of these arms deals were negotiated on government-to-government basis cannot yet be listed. Obviously, such deals would take a fair proportion. However, the race was kept up by the private sector, with or without the knowledge and approval of the governments. In many instances, private arms dealers broke their own national laws. Here, a number of German firms have turned out to be the worst offenders, followed by France and Italy.

A commonsense view of the situation is, when a country's military capability is bursting at the seams, it is only a matter of time before it is tempted to put this power to a test. Whatever other factors influenced Iraq's decision to invade Kuwait, Baghdad's confidence in waging a long battle was based on its own military might.

Does all this serve a lesson for the outside world, especially the West? In principle, we are all against arms race, especially when it involves the developing countries. Even in regions, such as in the Middle East where the unresolved Arab-Israeli dispute provides the main reason for each country arming itself to the teeth, something should be done to curb the race. Since it is the United Nations which has so far unsuccessfully tried to resolve the Gulf conflict, it should be the world body to take an initiative in this matter. Indeed, it should be linked to the conference on the Middle East, especially on the Arab-Israeli dispute, that the UN is committed to hold when the Gulf war ends. In other words, a halt in the arms race in the Middle East would be the best guarantee for lasting peace in the region. And if it can be done in the Middle East, it can be done in South Asia, Africa and Latin America. Let us put the merchants of death out of business.

Long Live the Mail

Our old friendly and once-dependable postal service seems to be getting into more and more serious trouble. Having lost, somewhat grudgingly, part of its business to telegraph, cable and telex services—almost in that order—over a long period of time, it is now up against the competition from fax and electronic mail. A letter is no longer mailed but faxed. So, as the saying goes, "Fax me your reply." So, one gets fewer and fewer letters by mail and even the telex machine which is not as cost-effective as the fax, lies idle in the corner of your office collecting dust, while the brand new sleek fax machine is placed next to the word processor on the Secretary's table.

They say that this technological communication revolution has finally reached Bangladesh and that offices in Motijheel are working more efficiently than before. We like to think that this is true, atleast partly. Does a business query sent by fax gets a more prompt attention than one despatched by registered airmail or by a special courier service? Again, being on the side of progress, our answer to this too should be a positive one.

However, there is a price to pay for this progress. Europeans have started complaining that letters sent by ordinary mail—the only means of communication for millions of people—are taking longer time, while postal departments in several countries are staring at red figures at the bottom of their balance sheets. It is a pity. We do want our good old postal service to survive and even grow. After all, those who are young at heart know that there is nothing nicer than scribbling a few lines to a friend on a nice blue writing paper, putting it inside a slightly perfumed envelope and sealing it for mailing. Who would like to fax it?

QUOTES

We must be realistic. There will be losses, there will be obstacles along the way, and war is never cheap or easy.

—George Bush

The main weight of the military battle may be Iraq, but the war will reach every struggler and fighter whose hand can reach out to harm aggressors in the whole world.

—Saddam Hussein

GENERAL amnesties and peace parleys are far from the minds of Burma's ruling military council. The commander-in-chief reiterated this after a renewed crackdown on political dissenters, student and monk activists and allegations that political parties are planning with rebel groups to establish a parallel government.

Gen. Saw Maung, the chairman of the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), said past amnesties and peace talks were not successful. He sees no reason for renewed pressures calling for a political settlement to the 42-year-old insurgency that was born almost together with independence from Britain in 1948.

Analysts said Gen. Saw Maung came out with the statement because of feelers made by insurgent groups through outside intermediaries. Political parties which won in last May's elections were also calling for a political settlement of the insurgency which has hampered development for more than four decades.

These political parties argue that military settlement has failed even as the annual defence budget has risen. Gen. Saw Maung agreed that insurgency was a political issue and not a military one.

But he pointed out it would be better for political parties —

as people's representatives — to enter into the business. He said he would not do so as a state employee, which would be criminal.

"It is true that we had done it in the past," he said. "But today we do not subscribe to this idea. We do not have a political ideology or political party background," he added.

General amnesties were announced in 1963 during the revolutionary council days of Ne Win, in 1974 when Burma returned to one-party constitutional rule and in 1980, marking the successful congregation of all Buddhist religious sects.

In 1963, the Kachin, Karen, Mon, Shan, Chin and Arakanese insurgent parties seeking autonomy went to Rangoon for talks which later broke off. Talks with the then pro-Chinese Burma Communist Party — including delegates from China — also bogged down. It only took 10 days before talks with the Trotskyite "Red Flag" Communist Party collapsed.

Only the Karen Revolutionary Council signed a peace agreement by 1965. There was a second round of talks with Kachin insurgents in 1972 but that also failed as well as negotiations in 1980-81.

In 1980, during the rule of the recently deposed one-party regime of the Burma Socialist Programme Party, talks

by Min Thu

Burma's junta sees no reason for a political settlement of the 42-year-old insurgency

were held with the Burma Communist Party. But it collapsed as the demands for the recognition of the party, its liberation army and liberated areas totally unacceptable to the government.

Now the ruling military junta readily says that communist and other rebel groups are out to destabilise the government. Even foreign elements are involved, according to the government.

SLORC First Secretary Khin Nyunt, in a lengthy press conference last month, named names for the first time. He said a second secretary of the American Embassy, Keith Riggan, provided the diplomatic pouch to a local dissident for his communications with insurgents in Thailand.

He said that in the very recent past, Martin Adams, also from the American Embassy, had contacts with political parties as well as dissident monks and students.

At one point, Nyunt, who is also the director of Defence Services Intelligence, also hinted that some countries were even arming the insur-

gents at the borders. He did not elaborate.

For the first time since the SLORC came to power, India was mentioned. He said in 1988, during the pro-democracy movement, an embassy provided assistance, including financial, to some students to create disturbances and to let others go underground.

"That embassy is from a neighbouring country, the Indian embassy to tell you frankly," Nyunt said.

Nyunt said that all insurgents talk about democracy while instigating disturbances instead. He said some political parties, including the National League for Democracy, also have links with insurgent groups.

The NLD won majority of the votes in last May's elections but, along with other elected candidates, has yet to come to power. A legislature has not been allowed to convene over the insistence of the SLORC that a Constitution must first be adopted, voted in a referendum and approved by itself.

Together with the illegal

Democratic Alliance of Burma, some members of political parties, including the NLD, are alleged to have discussed the formation of a parallel government in exile. Last November, the Democratic Alliance of Burma (which represents 20 rebel groups) announced with the Karen National Union the formation of a "provisional government."

Nyunt said the Patriotic Democratic Front and the Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma have also attempted to form parallel governments.

He said the Patriotic Democratic Front, which left the Democratic Alliance Front, was also planning to bomb towns and assassinate military leaders while preparing for a parallel government. Some of the insurgents, he said, have carried out their plans while others were preparing to do so.

Nyunt said the diehard Burma Communist Party is basing its cadres in the ancient capital of Mandalay to establish a Democratic Patriotic Army. In Mandalay the communists have formed committees which use monks and students to cause disturbances last October.

Mandalay is an ideal base for communists as monks and student activists are strong there. Nyunt said communists

in Mandalay have contacted other dissident groups along Burmese borders as well as infiltrate of fields.

He said the communists have sent emissaries to various groups, including the Karen National Union and the All-Burma Student Democratic Front, the latter having formed battalions in rebel-held areas.

The All-Burma Student Democratic Front, Nyunt said, plans to launch "Operation Mondain" ("storm") in Mon state to welcome dissidents into the jungles should another disturbance erupts.

He said that together with the Burma Communist Party, the students plan to extend their political activities in the Pinyinman area of central Burma. With the Karen National Union, the students have agreed to turn the Irrawaddy delta region into a Karen base. The communists and the Karens were ejected by the military from the area in the 1960s.

According to diplomatic analysts, the Burma Communist Party has disintegrated from internal revolts. China has also withdrawn its support. And some of its old leaders have retired and taken refuge in China.

But diehards, according to Nyunt, are determined to continue the communist armed struggle. —Depthnews Asia

PARADISE is being lost.

That is the fear of many in West Papua, the homeland of the famous bird of paradise, who feel their country will soon be desecrated if its Indonesian masters continue their plunder.

Now known to the rest of the world as Irian Jaya - the 26th province of Indonesia - West Papua occupies the western half of the South Pacific island of New Guinea, at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago.

Thousands of people are said to have been slaughtered, forests are being cut down, the soil is being depleted and wild game is disappearing.

Since 1963, some 300,000 of the 1.2 million Papuans have been killed in genocidal attacks by the Indonesian Government, claims the London-based Anti-Slavery International (ASI) in a new report. The world's oldest international human rights organization, ASI was founded in 1839.

In the report entitled Plunder in Paradise, ASI claims that villages have been bombed with napalm and other chemical agents, and leaders and political activists have been arrested, tortured and often killed by the military regime of Indonesia.

Indonesia officially denies the allegations and in a letter to the ASI has attacked the new report as being full of "slandorous allegations and insinuations against the government and the people of Indonesia, in total disregard of all historical facts of my country."

Indonesia does not accept the right of self determination demanded by the West Papuan people since the island was made part of Indonesia in 1963.

And many criticise the United Nations for its seeming compliance in the annexation.

Said Andrew Grey, a member of ASI: "West Papua was snatched away and handed over by the United Nations by not making any condemnation of the proceedings of the Act of Free Choice."

In 1963 the New York Agreement between the Netherlands and Indonesia decided West Papua's fate. West Papua was not consulted. The Act of Free Choice was a refer-

New Report Chronicles Agony of West Papua

by Mercedes Silva

West Papua, known to the world since 1963 as Indonesia's 26th province of Irian Jaya, has been the scene of mass slaughter and brutal occupation, a new report charges. In a biting condemnation of both Indonesia's annexation of the island nation and the United Nations' compliance, the respected Anti-Slavery International organisation details Indonesian atrocities.

endum held in 1969 to find out if the Papuan population was happy with six years of Indonesian government.

"The Papuan people's opinions, hopes, fears and aspirations were not represented," says the ASI report.

Despite proof of local rejection of Indonesian rule, the United Nations not only agreed with, but supervised, the referendum process. It went against all rules established by the international body. The poll was not free and universal, and UN observers were kept at a distance.

UN Representative Fernando Ortiz-Sans, in charge of the supervision of the 1969 poll, wrote in his report: "When... some elections took place without the presence of the United Nations observers, I went so far as to suggest the holding of fresh elections." He went on to report unrest and petitions against repressive government attitudes.

Only 20 per cent of the polling stations were observed by UN officers. "No doubt cer-

tain elements of the population of West Irian held firm convictions in favour of independence," he concluded.

Despite the misgivings of Ortiz-Sans, the UN gave its stamp of approval to the Indonesian presence.

With the communist leanings of President Sukarno's government, the United States thought it better to comply with Indonesian claims and pressed for a "convenient" solution. The United States is reported to have lobbied, together with Australia, for the approval of the poll as legitimate. "West Papua is a victim of the Cold War," said Alan Whittaker, editor of the ASI report.

With growing protest against the war in the Gulf, the Indonesian intelligentsia has, for the first time, realized the plight of the Papuans. A group of anti-war activists has recently released a document in which they ask for the UN to be consistent.

Natives of the island consider the Indonesian presence

as an "invasion of a free country," says Papuan activist Viktor Katsiepo, son of Max Katsiepo, who participated in negotiations with the Netherlands. Now living abroad, the younger Katsiepo is the coordinator and the spokesperson for the West Papuan Popular Front, the diplomatic wing of the Free Papua Movement (OPM).

Says Katsiepo: "The OPM is the mosquito. It belongs to the place. It is buzzing there to annoy and remind the Indonesians that West Papua is its place. But the solution to the problem will be through diplomatic means."

Papuans want Indonesian to leave the area, and to deal with Papuans with respect for their natural rights to the land and its resources.

Papuans are a Melanesian people. Most follow local animistic religions, and have their own ways of organising society, politics and the economy.

Totally different from the Papuans, Indonesians are Asi-

atic. Muslim and already fully integrated in a market economy.

Yet, Indonesians see West Papua as theirs, an area from which they can draw resources, natural and human: timber, gold, copper, oil, landscape for touristic exploration, cheap labour and land for crops and human settlement.

Through the process of transmigration, hundreds of thousands of Indonesians are being taken into West Irian. "They are trying to make us a minority in our own land," says Katsiepo.

Indonesia has some 150 million inhabitants - more than half of the population of the United States - crammed into a territory that is about seven times smaller.

Transmigration has brought ill health to both the local community and the newcomers as neither is immune to the other's diseases.

Differences in the quality of soil mean that the land in West Irian is not suitable for intensive agriculture. As a result it is suffering and so is the whole of the population settled in the area.

The various international companies operating in West Irian provide little benefit to the local population - Papuans are never called to take part either as coordinators or as employees.

The ASI report will be taken by Katsiepo to the United Nations, where he hopes it will set off a new campaign. Said Katsiepo: "We need new friends in this battle. The only peaceful solution will be achieved with the collaboration of the UN and international opinion."

Until independence comes, Papuans of West Irian are striving to ensure that their territory, already greatly depleted by the Indonesians, will still be their generous motherland once their day comes.

"West Papua, I love thee, thee gave me birth, I will die for thee," says the national anthem West Papuans have waited since 1963 to sing together, beneath their morning star national flag. —GEMINI NEWS

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New Guinea: Divided island



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.

More travel pieces

Sir, An inveterate traveller myself, I have enjoyed the travelogues written on Fujian Province, China and Malaysia. Both pieces gave us insights into off-the-beaten-track places and information normally denied us by travel agents. S Bari's piece on Malaysia was particularly useful as Malaysia, being a relatively close neighbour, is within most people's travel budget. However, as a former visitor to that beautiful country, I would disagree with Bari's treatment of Penang — as "case dismissed" with one solitary paragraph. There are lots of beautiful spots to see (not within the purview of this letter to mention) and the variety

and quality of food is "out of this world." Congratulations! please give us more travel articles.

Star fan, Dhaka.

Campaign and projection

Sir, I have gone through the "Third View" of the forthcoming parliamentary polls by Mr Mahfuz Anam (published in your esteemed daily on Feb 2, '91) with rapt attention. The writer's endeavour can be treated as a meticulous and timely hit from which our major political alliances and parties can get a guideline to be hot on the trail of election campaign in appropriate manner.

I fully endorse his views that if the leaders of the

Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) resort to mudslinging (as they did in the past) rather than engaging themselves in projecting ideas on which a stable democratic institution can be built, especially in the aftermath of ousting an autocrat, what they can hold out to the people for a better future?

Again, if it appears from the implications of election campaign or propaganda that our independence and sovereignty will be in jeopardy if a particular party is voted to power or we may revert to another autocratic regime if its arch-rival takes the leadership, then how can we expect that our voters are not going to make another mistake this time?

Md Atiqul Karim, Zibatola, Dhaka.

Electioneering

Sir, Elections had been held several times after independence, but not any of that could be called neutral, by and large. This time after much of waiting and sacrifices we are heading for one under a neutral interim government. Appar-

ently it must be a free and fair election, if any influence or overpowering is adamantly kept at bay.

People also are ready to cooperate in the process of making the so much expected polls truly free and fair. But many of them naturally might be apprehensive of anything untoward brewing from the extreme opposition of contending candidates or parties to each other.

Incidents, even clashes are natural during electioneering when parties or candidates campaigning for themselves do campaign against for opponents. But that must not be allowed to become extreme and contained spontaneously by the cooperative public.

Hopefully there is a code of conduct. Political parties, candidates and their supporters must abide by that in the greater interest of the public expectation. And thus only we can achieve a transition to democracy.

Muster Zahir Ahmed, Rangunia, Chittagong.

Coins of Bangladesh

Sir, The article in your column "Dhaka Day by Day" about coins provided a lot of information about the

state of coins in our country. It is a pity that coins are fast disappearing from everyday use. The reasons are manifold, one of them, of course, paper money is easy to carry.

We agree to the reasons. But coins are a part of our heritage; and now that they are going out of existence we should make all efforts to preserve them (the ones hitherto in use).

The rightful place for such things is the museum. I hope the authorities do take note of it and also the connoisseurs before it is late.

Nahar Banu, Khilgaon, Dhaka.

They have wide differences. The United States, for example, has a special commitment to the security of Israel. Europe and Japan would like to see an overall Middle East peace agreement usher in new opportunities for investment and trade. The Soviet Union and China are mainly interested in preserving their seats at the big-power table, not in establishing new international codes of conduct. And Arab members of the coalition against Saddam Hussein, having bravely broken with nationalist dogmas, need to show their populations that the world respects legitimate Arab grievances.

All these interests can be addressed in coming days, first by the way the alliance wages war, and second by the way it makes peace. And the best possible peace is one based on justice and regional stability, indulging feelings of vengeance would only lay the seeds for future conflict.

The Cold War era knew only the absence of global war. People learned to live with insecurity. The new world order offers a finer prospect: peace.

—The New York Times