

What is the Gulf War Really About?

by Sabir Mustafa

After having deployed massive firepower against an inferior, blockaded and isolated enemy, the pressure to unleash that force must have been irresistible in Washington, London and Riyadh.

Israel's Game

While the western powers, especially the United States, have been praising Israel for its "restraint" in refraining from launching any counter-attack on Iraq, Tel Aviv has started providing some clear hints as to what it expects from the current Gulf conflict. In other words, it is putting a price tag to its so-called restraint, as if it is doing the world a great favour.

In a statement issued on Monday, an Israeli official spokesman has called upon the international community and the United States to withdraw their recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, in view of the support extended by PLO to Iraq. In the same statement, Tel Aviv has reaffirmed its opposition to the holding of an international peace conference on the Middle East which would be participated in by all parties concerned, including the PLO as the spokesman of the Palestinian people. The aim of the proposed conference which has been endorsed by the UN Security Council is to work out a comprehensive solution of the Middle East problems, such as the withdrawal of Israel from occupied Arab territories, the creation of a Palestine state and the security of all national borders, including those of Israel.

In rejecting the idea of this international conference, Tel Aviv has again offered to discuss and sign separate security treaties with its neighbouring Arab states, based on one it already has with Egypt.

Tel Aviv's counter-proposal primarily serves its own interest, no more and no less. It offers no solution for the Palestinian Arab population and no possibility for the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from the Arab territories. But, without paying any price, it asks for guarantees for the security of its borders from Arab countries.

On both the points -- the withdrawal of recognition of PLO and the rejection of the international peace conference -- Tel Aviv is all wrong. We may criticise PLO for supporting Iraq in the present conflict, but the organization's right to represent the Palestinian people rests solely on the support it enjoys among its people, more specifically, within its parliament in exile. The United States which had been engaged in talks with the PLO in Tunis, now interrupted by the Gulf war, ought to make it clear to Tel Aviv that it has no intention of changing its policy in this regard. The same goes for the international peace conference on the Middle East which is now supported by Washington. Any attempt by the United States to move even a centimeter away from this commitment would put the entire multinational alliance in jeopardy, if not in shambles. No matter how the Gulf conflict is resolved, through military defeat of Iraq or a truce brought about by mediation of, say, Soviet Union or France -- the Middle East will not be the same again. The conventional US approach to the Arab-Israeli crisis, one based on hesitation, a certain amount of double-talk and private assurances to allies on both sides, will no longer work. It will only further alienate the rulers of pro-US Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt, from their own people and raise the level of anti-US sentiments in different parts of the Middle East and Asia. When this happens, no one will give Washington any credit for standing up for justice and freedom in the Gulf.

Books, Ekushey and Academy

The Ekushey Book Fair got off to an unpleasant start on Tuesday afternoon. The incident helped the event to be blown up in importance -- in terms of media coverage. In point of fact the fair is quite an important event by itself and such incidents can neither add to nor detract from its true significance in our national life.

The Ekushey Bô Mela has been a vindication of the pro-people and pro-culture positions in tussles of broad national significance over and over again. Not only it comes as a fitting celebration of the great Language Movement of 1952 but it also is a part of that memorial to the 21-point programme of the 1954 popular awakening that swept away the founding fathers of Pakistan and cleared the way for the politics of the Bengalee people's self-determination -- the Bangla Academy.

One among the 21 demands on which the '54 elections were fought and won by the popular phalanx led by the trio -- Fazlul Haq, Bhashani and Suhrawardy -- was the conversion of the Burdwan House -- the then official residence of the Prime Minister of East Bengal -- into an academy devoted to the promotion of researches into Bengali language and literature. The institution with such a momentous beginning over the years, built up a record of not altogether unblemished achievements. The Ekushey Book Fair instituted in the wake of independence greatly helped revive the popular connection of the Academy's genesis. Once a year the whole of the society started converging on this living monument to the Bengalee people's quest for their true identity so much blurred by the relentless flood of lies by the Pakistani occupiers. Three great things were rolled into one by this new national festival -- a book fair, the Academy and the Ekushey. And it so clicked that in a matter of couple of years, it became the great thing it now is.

With such a rich background the book fair can however be only as rich or poor as our prevailing situations in book production, cultural activity and educational endeavours are. Things are not moving capably in any of these areas. As a result while the bustle and din grows and the crowd snowballs to a bursting point -- the main issue, a cultural resurgence through a catalysis worked by books and a growing love for the printed word goes abegging. As a great national event bound up with the remembrance of the 21st February it could be made into the greatest show on earth of books published in Bengali anywhere around the world -- which it is at present not. And quite pertinently it should be pointed out that Bangladesh should hold at least another world-size book fair devoted to displaying and selling the year's best books in all the world languages, especially English. English is the nation's second language through which our nation can keep track of all the literatures of the world which is important for the nation's intellectual and artistic nurturing and maturation.

On the surface the US-dominated international alliance ranged against Iraq appears to be holding firm. But, into the third week of what President Saddam Hussein has dubbed the Mother of All Battles, signs of creeping unease are already beginning to emerge in a number of world capitals involved directly or indirectly with the war in the Gulf.

The recent resignation of the French Defence Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement and public expression of official Soviet disquiet about the direction the war is taking, have brought one crucial question into sharp focus: what is this war really about?

President George Bush and Prime Minister John Major would no doubt find the question a total non-issue. As far as they and their allies on the battlefield are concerned, the war is about implementing United Nations resolutions calling for the liberation of Kuwait, with the use of force if necessary.

For the Emir of Kuwait, the use of force became necessary on August 3, 1990. For him, of course, that force was essentially to be applied by extra-regional powers, since his own armed forces had failed to put up even a token show of resistance in the face of Iraq's August 2 invasion.

Since then, a series of resolutions have been passed by the UN Security Council, starting with one demanding an immediate Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, and ending with one setting a deadline for, and authorising the use of force "necessary" to effect, such a withdrawal. In other words, the total economic blockade imposed on Iraq by the UN was adjudged to have been a failure after only four months, even though there was no shortage of learned opinion claiming that it would take at least 12 to 18 months for the sanctions to bite. Quite obviously, somebody was in a hurry, not wishing to wait to see if the blockade would indeed work. After having deployed such massive firepower in the desert against an inferior, blockaded and isolated enemy, the pressure to unleash that force must have been irresistible in Washington, London and Riyadh.

Diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis turned out to be mere sideshows to the real business of preparing for war. Little wonder then, that King Hussein of Jordan, who probably put in more effort into the diplomatic field than the rest of the players put together, has bitterly lamented the extraordinary energy put into the war effort as opposed to efforts to find a peaceful solution.

War is now abroad, but the much trumpeted short, sharp shock has failed to materialise. It was always assumed that Iraq's air force would be no match for the aerial armada pitted against it, being outnumbered 4 to 1, as well as being outclassed in aircraft and weapons technology and pilot quality. A "non-contest" was declared by the anti-Iraq alliance even before the battle had begun, and the target to

achieve was "air supremacy", rather than your everyday, mundane "air superiority". The question exercising people's mind then was: to what end would that supremacy be used?

Many if not most observers had expected a 48 to 72-hour blitz, a devastating knock-out punch against Iraqi missile and aircraft capability, disruption of military command, control and communications, and destruction of Iraq's supply lines to her troops in Kuwait. That would have paved the way for a successful flanking attack into Iraq, by-passing and cutting off the main body of Iraqi garrisons in Kuwait proper. An encirclement would ensue and a humiliating surrender enforced, leading generals in Baghdad to ponder over the defeat and whether there was any rational reason to persist with a lost cause. Whether Saddam Hussein remained in power or not would be a matter for the Iraqi army and the Arab Ba'ath Socialist party to decide, not the Americans to dictate.

Too simple? perhaps. But there was undoubtedly a strong basis for viewing such a scenario as a plausible one. Israel's destruction of the Egyptian army in the Sinai in June 1967, and her lightning strike across the Suez Canal in October 20-24, 1973, resulting in the encirclement of the 20,000-strong Egyptian Third Army, had shown the results bold use of armour could achieve when aligned to control of the skies. However, those pinning their hopes on a quick end to the conflict were apparently expecting the US to concentrate her overwhelming power on the singular, limited objective of driving the Iraqi forces out of Kuwait.

The unfolding of Operation Desert Storm and the targets assigned to it for destruction have gone a long way to reveal the existence of a hidden, much wider US agenda in the Gulf, one that is quite separate from what the UN resolutions had apparently sanctioned. Many observers in the Middle East had feared that the US had a secondary objective in the conflict, one that runs contrary to wider Arab interests in particular, and to prospects for future peace and stability in the region in general.

The pattern of air strikes suggest that the US is aiming to destroy not only Iraq's military assets, but also its painfully built economic infrastructure and industrial base. US military

commanders in Saudi Arabia have recently boasted about having knocked out 25 per cent of Iraq's electricity generating capacity, with more raids being launched on remaining power stations. Bridge and roads in the west and north of the country are being attacked with monotonous regularity, shattering the civilian infrastructure. There is increasing confirmation that widespread bombing of urban areas are resulting in heavy loss of civilian life and property. The effect of such a long and intensive bombing campaign on a country like Iraq would be to cripple its economy, and throw its industrial and infrastructural development back by many years. The strangulation of Iraq as a civilised entity may appeal to some in the region, particularly in Tel Aviv, but it is most doubtful whether that formed any part of UN recommendations.

Furthermore, the scale of Desert Storm has raised several questions concerning the future balance of power in the region.

In a politically volatile region armed to the teeth, whose principal problems--the question of Palestinian statehood--is still not even on the negotiating table, the issue of balance is of critical importance.

The destruction of Iraqi military, including its nuclear, biological, chemical warfare (NBC) potential is now a publicly stated US objective. Two nuclear reactors have already been damaged beyond repair (though it is doubtful if those reactors possessed the capacity to produce weapons-grade uranium), while strikes are continuing to destroy Iraq's chemical weapons manufacturing capacity. The aim is clearly to deprive Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, not only for now, but for the foreseeable future. For the present, of course, if US campaign against Iraqi missile launchers and aircraft is successful, a chemical warhead in Iraqi hand would be as useful as an aircraft carrier in the Swiss Navy!

However, Iraq is not the only power in the region possessing weapons of mass destruction. Israel is believed to have a confirmed stockpile of nuclear and chemical weapons, together with highly reliable launch vehicles (US-built F-15, F-16 and F-4 aircraft, indigenous Jericho II missiles and a ballistic missile capable of putting satellites into orbit). Iraq's acquisition of a missile and NBC capability had gone some way to redress the region's military balance

which has remained tilted heavily in Israel's favour since 1967 (and re-emphasised through its emphatic victory over Syria in Lebanon in 1982).

Iraq's challenge to Israeli power was a credible one since it sought to threaten, for the first time, the Israeli heartland and deny Tel Aviv the prospect of another quick victory. Under the changed circumstances, Israel's policy of holding on to and eventually colonising the occupied territories of the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon became untenable.

The idea of trading land for permanent peace and security--establishment of a Palestinian state in exchange for a general peace treaty with frontline Arab states and the PLO--was beginning to take hold even inside Israel.

However, with the destruction of Iraq's military capability as well as potential, the most serious threat to Israel's security since 1948 will have been removed. The de-militarisation of Iraq will destroy whatever credibility the Arab challenge to Israel may have had. In other words, the US is deliberately removing the only deterrent Arabs possess to Israeli expansionism and further aggression in the region. Israel's air supremacy and nuclear preponderance are again likely to remove any pressure on Tel Aviv to change current policy and negotiate with the PLO. It is no wonder that Israel has so far refrained from overtly retaliating to Iraqi missile attacks. It can afford to sit, smugly satisfied that the US-led attacks are doing the job it would otherwise have had to undertake itself.

Many believe defeat of Iraq--a logical, but by no means a certain outcome of the current conflict--will help to establish a new peace in the region. But it is hardly likely to be one conducive to Arab interests, since Israel's security concerns are likely to receive overriding priority. The collapse of Arab power could mean a renewal of the Camp David process, by which Syria and Jordan will be invited to conclude bilateral peace treaties with Israel, leaving the Palestinians in the wilderness yet again.

But that peace is likely to be an illusory one, like so many mirages in the Arabian desert. The defeat and destruction of Iraq will not cause "good sense and good taste" to break out in Tel Aviv; on the contrary, it will give added momentum to the Zionist drive to establish greater Israel. On the other hand, Arab masses from Mauritania to Yemen will be left with a feeling of anger and frustration for deeper and more wide-spread than ever before. It is a lethal combination, which can only holdout prospect of further strife and instability in the region.

The author is a freelance journalist, formerly Assistant Editor of the weekly Dialogue.

Wasteful smoking of the Nile perch, East Africa's leading money spinner from Lake Victoria, may soon be a thing of the past following the invention and testing of a fuelwood saving kiln.

The kiln, built from local materials such as mud bricks, consumes about 36kg of fuel per 100kg of wet fish. Local kilns, traditionally used by the fishermen, gobble 100-150kg of wood fuel per 100kg of fish. The modern kiln, therefore, saves up to 65-75 per cent on fuel.

The kiln was designed by J.F. Rogers and A.S. Tariq, both scientists from the British based National Resources Institute in collaboration with the Tanzania Fisheries Research Institute.

The kiln has already been introduced in Tanzania and it is hoped that it will catch on in Uganda and Kenya. Like much of East Africa, all three countries are suffering serious deforestation, much of it due to wasteful use of woodfuel.

Kilns for Nile Perch are needed most during the rains when the volume of fish surges and fishermen have to smoke their catch to save it from spoilage.

Local kilns cannot stand the ravages of the wet season and their wasteful and inefficient use of firewood causes charring of fish. The fat embedded in the fish belly melts and causes outbursts of flame. The local smoking techniques also result in further loss of the nutritional values of the fish despite flavour retention.

During the dry season, when catches are at their lowest, only minimal amounts of fish require smoking. This is the most common and acceptable method of preserving fish around Lake Victoria, which is shared by the East African states of Uganda, Kenya and

Nile Perch Kiln helps Save East Africa's Forests

by Deogratias Byabafumu

A new kiln for smoking the "monster" Nile perch found in Lake Victoria could well help slow down the rate of deforestation in the three nations that border the Lake. Tanzania, which helped develop the kiln with the British National Resources Institute, is already using it and it may soon catch on in Uganda and Kenya.

Tanzania. Smoking is preferred to boiling and frying which both consume large amounts of woodfuel.

The kiln inventors say in a recent report that 50 per cent of the catches are landed between February and May--the

rainy months when firewood is difficult to obtain. Bad roads also hamper smooth transport of products to the markets and unless the fish are properly preserved their shelf-life of about three weeks is much reduced.

On the Tanzanian side of the lake alone, as much as 15,000 tonnes of the Nile Perch catch is lost a year, which corresponds to a landed value of 3.6 million.

Nile perch, the species that earned a bad name for itself a few years ago for being a cannibal, depleting other species of fish in Lake Victoria, has gradually earned a good reputation as the only profitable fish to come out of the Lake, the second largest fresh water lake in the world.

The perch, referred to as the monster of the Lake, is an agile swimmer and a fast breeder and was introduced into the Uganda waters of the lake in the late fifties. Kenya and Tanzania introduced it later.

It has found a market in big restaurants and hotels in major cities in East Africa and frozen filets are now shipped overseas. Oven-smoked cuts are exported by Uganda. The Nile perch skin is becoming a high-value item from which handbags, purses and belts are being made.

The kiln was designed with the reduction of firewood consumption as the major objective, says John Rogers of the Natural Resources Institute. The inventors also aimed to reduce processing time and enhance the ability to carry out smoking in all kinds of weather.

In order to meet these objectives, two versions were designed, one with a vertical flow of air through the drying chamber and another with a horizontal flow.

In main furnace structure of the vertical kiln is made from fired bricks with a mud mortar, but since fired bricks are not readily available all around the lake shore in Tanzania, dried mud blocks have been used. Wooden struts are used to support the arched brickwork and blockwork until the structure is completely dry. The drying chamber is constructed from cement blocks with a sand and cement mortar.

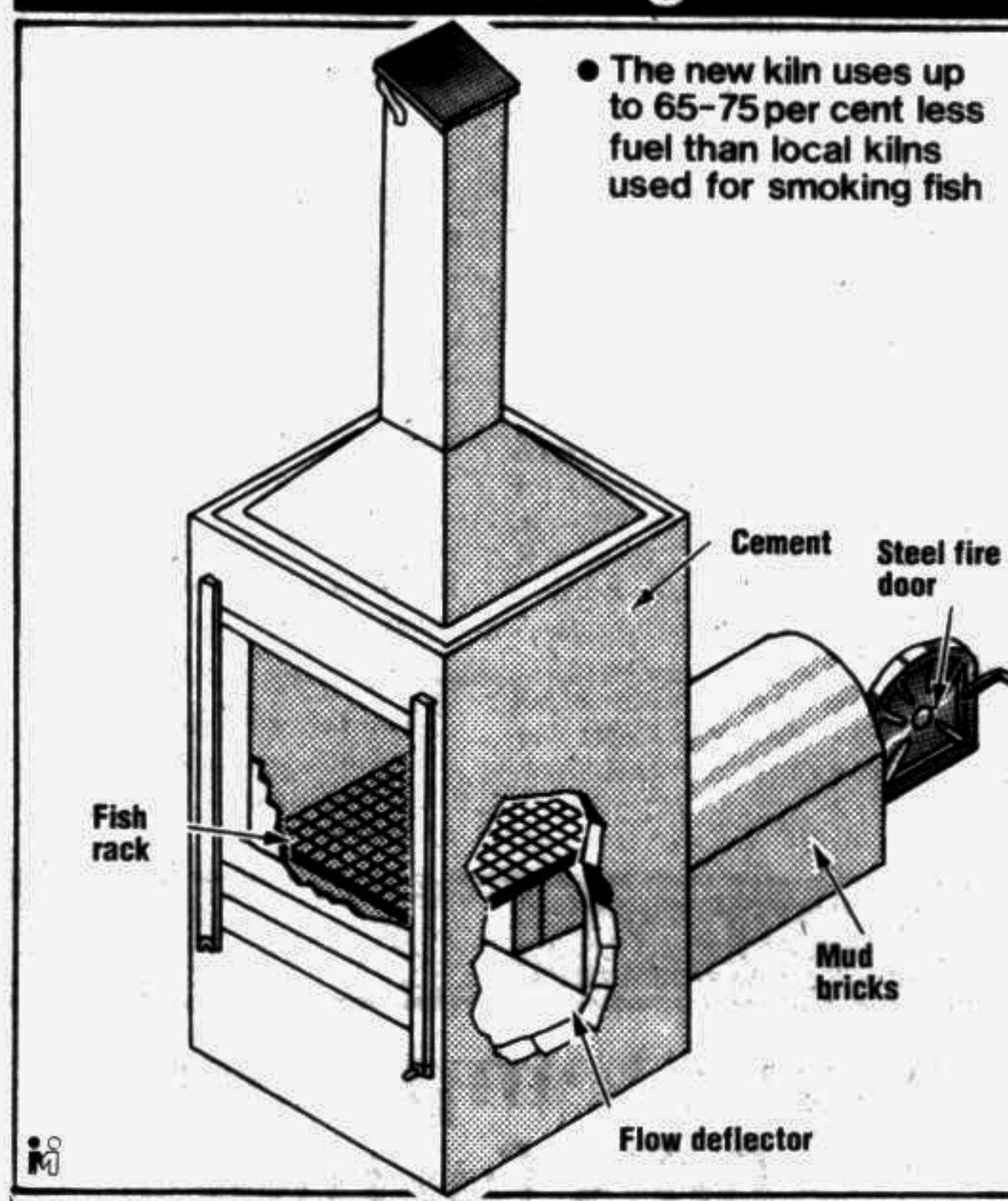
The fire-door and ash-doors are constructed from 6mm and 2mm thick mild steel plates respectively. Fuelwood is supported on a cast-iron grate.

The new kiln takes less time to smoke the perch than the local kilns. Processing times are in the order of 11 hours for smaller fish and 15 hours for larger fish, compared to processing times of 18 hours and 36 hours for the local kilns.

The reduced smoking times allow operators to fulfil the preparation, loading and unloading chores within a period of 24 hours, fitting in well with the regular daily landing of fish. -- GEMINI NEWS.

Deogratias Byabafumu has worked as a journalist in East Africa and has taught editing and design at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, and at Makerere University in Uganda. He publishes Uganda Farmer.

The wood saving kiln



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.

EEC aid to tea industry

Sir, I am to draw your kind attention to an article entitled "How much does EEC Aid Help Bangladesh Poor?" by Ben Jackson published in your esteemed daily on January 27. In the article mention has been made about Bangladesh Tea Rehabilitation Project financed by EEC. I am to inform you that Bangladesh Tea Rehabilitation Project is being financed mainly by ODA and GOB. EEC finance

amounting to ECU 6.6m was given to procure tea machinery for BMR of existing tea factories. This was done taking into consideration the fact that British Aid was tied and tea machinery was not available in the UK. Out of this 6.6m ECU, more than 5.00m ECU has already been utilized and the balance is being spent now for work like construction of roads/bridges in tea estates. Infrastructure Development of Bangladesh Tea Research Institute, con-

struction of dispensaries and procurement of medic-packs for tea estates etc. We have found EEC aid to BTRP very effectively and fruitfully utilized as will be evident from the improvement in quality of our tea over the past few years. EEC court of auditors expressed their satisfaction at the utilization of EEC project aid in the tea estates.

The EEC aid was not meant for creating extra jobs or for improving the living conditions of the tea workers.

The purpose for which the EEC aid was meant have already been achieved to the entire satisfaction of the Tea Industry of Bangladesh. The best part of EEC aid is it is not only untied but also achieves its

goal by engaging bare minimum number of overseas consultants, a positive attitude of a very effective donor. The article as presented does not reflect the true picture of EEC aid in the tea sector.

MS Rahman,
Dy Director (Planning),
Bangladesh Tea Board.

Reading for pleasure

Sir, It is a wonderful hobby to cultivate reading for pleasure. One does not only acquire a storehouse of knowledge, but spends his/her spare time in a very useful way.

There are books on a number of interesting topics, like gardening, painting, housekeeping, interior decoration etc. Then there are more useful

topics like how to develop one's skill, how to be more articulate, to be more social, to develop the qualities of being a team leader.

Famous biographies give insight to great personalities and the successes they achieved and, most importantly, inspiration to the reader.

Books on animal provide us with information about the habits and behavioural patterns of different animals, some of which we adore as pets.

Thus reading is in a number of ways a very good habit. But books on variety of such interesting subjects are less published here. I urge both writers and publishers in this regard.

Selina Rahman,
Moghbar,
Dhaka.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

More Cause for Restraint

Whatever the crimes of Saddam Hussein, American and their allies have no quarrel with his people nor any wish to devastate Iraq's cities, whether ancient or modern.

General Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has correctly stressed his concern for sparing lives of innocent civilians and avoiding damage to irreplaceable cultural and religious sites. But this calls for determined repetition, since experience confirms that zeal can overwhelm scruple in conducting aerial attacks.

With mastery of the air almost assured in the Gulf war, there is no excuse for bombing cities, religious shrines or renowned archaeological sites scattered through Mesopotamia. Sometimes by design, sometimes by chance, military targets are often close to ancient ruins. There is an Iraqi air base near the Sumereh city of Ur, the very cradle of civilization and birthplace of Abraham.

The Assyrian capital of Nimrud is near the arms plants and airfields of Mosul; the remains of ancient Babylon are on the Euphrates, 60 miles south of Baghdad, not far from the Iskandariya war facility. Samarra, with its great mosque and golden dome, is also the site of a weapons plant.

A single misfired bomb could obliterate these or hundreds of other ancient monuments, some sacred to Shiite Muslims, others unexplored by scholars seeking clues to the emergence of cities, art and written history around 3000BC.

General Powell's good intentions are welcome, but the proof will be in the precision and restraint of the allied armada. During World War II, General Eisenhower urged respect for cultural treasures--yet the unfortunate abbey at Monte Cassino near Naples was bombed to bits.

The conflict in the Gulf is not a total war, and those plotting targets should know that their errors may be remembered long after Saddam Hussein is forgotten.

—The New York Times.