

## Feature

## Development

# Regreening Rural China: A Tale of two Counties

Seldom has a single project changed a poor region so radically and so quickly for the better, by Peyton Johnson

CHENGDU: Neighbouring Gongxian and Gulin counties historically have been famous for just one thing: grinding poverty.

Both Gongxian and Gulin have traditionally been among the poorest of the 2,300 counties that make up what is known today as the People's Republic of China. They are part of southwest Sichuan, the largest and most populous of China's 23 provinces.

Now Gongxian and Gulin's days of massive poverty may be over, thanks to an afforestation drive over the past four years. Seldom has a single development project changed a poor region so radically and so quickly for the better.

"Both counties did very well," said an official of the Ministry of Forestry, visiting from Beijing. "That really can't be argued. We think they are on the way up now. They might never have done it, though, without the help from the WFP."

The WFP he was referring to is the World Food Programme, the United Nations agency that uses food as aid. In the Gongxian and Gulin case the US\$16.3 million WFP aid consisted of 43,618 tons of wheat from Canada and the United States and 60 tons of ingredients for soup, delivered between 1985-89.

The two counties extend over 432,052 hectares grouped into 868 villages, with a total population of 1,030,000.

At the peak of its reforestation activities the project benefited 340,000 people from both counties.

The project in these two counties of the remote mountainous border of the great Sichuan basin is part of China's efforts to reforest the entire country. This, before environmental deterioration and population growth sink China's hopes to raise its living standards.

China's sheer size and the immensity of its 1.1 billion population make this objective one of the most ambitious

tasks any nation has ever set itself.

"There are no 'small' tasks in China," the official from the Ministry of Forestry said. "Jobs that might look relatively simple in other countries always end up as colossal operations for us."

"Still we have to pay careful attention to individual projects and it's important to tackle the hard cases first. That's why Gongxian and Gulin counties are so important. If we can win here, we can win anywhere in China."

In Gongxian and Gulin the WFP-assisted project planted 21,500 hectares of new forests and 2200 hectares of seedling beds, or nurseries for further forestry expansion. Another 48,000 hectares of young forests were "tended" to make sure they will grow into healthy forests producing both more and better timber and higher incomes for the rural people.

The major species planted provide good timber plus a number of other valuable forest products such as resin and turpentine.

A century or so ago about half of this southern rim of the great Sichuan Basin, bordering on the provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou, was heavily forested. But social strife, civil war, indifference, natural disasters, and irresponsible cutting without replanting greatly reduced the forests over the troubled years.

By 1958 Gongxian county's forested area was down to just 8 per cent while Gulin's at slightly above 10 per cent, was not much better.

Today Gongxian has increased its forested area to 29.5 per cent while Gulin, which began its afforestation campaign a few years later, has reached 23.4 per cent, no mean feat by anybody's standards.

Mountains or high plateaus cover 84 per cent of Gongxian and 81 per cent of Gulin. The soils in both counties are poor for farming. But they are almost ideal for forestry, with

good rainfall and mild subtropical winters.

Afforestation in both counties began in earnest following the merciful burning out, or sheer human exhaustion, in 1976 of the highly destructive 10-year-long "Cultural Revolution."

In the years before the WFP-assisted project, tree replanting averaged only 184 hectares a year. Within two years under the new afforestation project, replanting zoomed to 2,210 hectares a year, twelve times the old annual average.

The WFP commodities financed 11,342,500 man days of work, paid at 3.25 kilograms of wheat per day for each of 150,374 workers.

Since its inception in 1963, WFP has poured food aid worth more than US\$1 billion into some 150 developing countries around the world.

Unlike in many other developing countries, by no means was the food aid committed to Gulin and Gongxian just handed out to those who worked, or claimed to work, on the project. The Chinese insisted on a system they call "check and acceptance."

Before any project worker could collect his or her rations, the work was, and is, first "inspected." If the work is done well, he or she receives a "certificate of acceptance." Then and only then can a project worker collect the promised WFP rations.

If applied throughout the Third World it might well revolutionise the whole international development effort. Such application, to put it mildly, is highly unlikely. Yet the hardworking and disciplined Chinese see it as both fair and logical, even necessary.

"Nobody in this world should expect something for nothing," a forestry officer explains. "You don't even have the right to ask for it. Do it right, or don't do it at all." —Depthnews Asia.

## Landless Peasant's Movement Makes Headway

Zakeria Siraji

Mohammad Nurul Islam, 45, a resident of village Bhatra near Sherpur, a northern district, was becoming steadily impoverished. He had lost his ancestral land to the machinations of village gangsters. To take land for farming on lease from the big farmers needed money. There was no question of borrowing from the sharks called money-lenders. A landless farmer does not qualify for agriculture credit from the bank; and, moreover it is not easy to line up credit as many self-appointed brokers and intermediary interests are to be gratified.

In this predicament Nurul Islam who had finished eight years of schooling organized a cooperative group with other landless and small farmers. Every member was required to contribute one Taka (US\$ 1=Taka 35) a week to a common cooperative fund. The organization soon grew in size and had to be divided into several groups. At that stage a development agency - Swallow - helped to build up their fund through a cash grant of Taka one thousand per group. Nurul Islam himself is Secretary of one such group.

This was six or seven years ago. Today the cooperative has a membership roll of 330 persons and its fund totals Taka 120,000. Members take land on lease, after harvest share profit on cooperative basis. In this way the cooperative has 17 acres of land at its disposal. The fund is also drawn upon to give low-interest loans to members for viable enterprises. Rate of repayment is satisfactory. Out of this fund members also distribute relief among themselves after the devastating flood of 1988.

There were certain initial obstacles to be surmounted. For example the village touts and traditional money lenders who exploited the villagers were being supplanted and their groups were obviously antagonistic to the cooperative movement. —Devfeature.

## Village Cooperative : A Success Story of Indonesia

Durga P. Paudyal

COOPERATIVES have long been recognized as an institution primarily designed for the economic and social development of the poor. In many countries of Asia such as Japan, Korea and Thailand cooperatives have now been developed as business enterprises. With the adoption of modern management techniques in production and distribution of goods and services they are able to compete with private business enterprises. In the whole process, it is being noticed that the focus of such cooperatives have been shifted from "making a member" in a routine manner to "attracting a member" with efficient supply of goods and services.

Examples of such fast growing and efficient cooperative enterprises are found mostly in the non-agricultural sector and within the urban and semi-urban areas, where business opportunities are relatively high. On the other hand, majority of small agricultural cooperatives in the rural areas are suffering from lack of dynamic leadership, lack of participation of members in the business activities, lack of management skill of the members etc. It has often been reported that one of the important reasons for the failure of village cooperatives is the domination of rich members who tend to use the cooperative's resources for their personal benefit to the detriment of the collective benefit of all members.

It cannot be denied, however, that many of the village cooperatives are left to their own to emerge as viable economic units without constant guidance and support from the higher echelons of the cooperative organizational structure. Therefore, in many cases they are unable to cope successfully in the competitive market. As Saxena comments "while the village level cooperatives have been adored conceptually and publicized as big and vital instruments of rural economic growth and change, they have been neglected and frustrated operationally" (Saxena 1990 : p-5).

Is there any way to rehabilitate such cooperatives, which have failed to achieve self-reliance? If so, where should one

start in reactivating such mismanaged and defunct cooperatives? What are the missing factors that prevented them to achieve success? Will the members cooperate again? These are a few of the pertinent questions which some institutions are trying to answer. An attempt has been made here to illustrate one successful example of Indonesia in which a defunct cooperative was able to stand on its

rapid change of the cropping pattern to other cash crops such as vegetable and fruits, and sudden price fluctuation of agricultural products in the early '80s left many cooperative members in a position of indebtedness. The members could not pay back their bank loan for which the society was the guarantor. The society also could not pay the bank loan, taken for its own business. Moreover, during this crisis



The village Iwul situation near Bogor, West Java, Indonesia

own feet within two years, through constant extension and training from a higher level institution.

This story is of a small village named Iwul, situated near Bogor, West Java of Indonesia. A good road cuts across the village which is linked to the Jakarta-Bogor highway. The village also has a good irrigation canal which can provide irrigation water round the year.

A village cooperative society called "Sumber Mekar" was established in 1973 to provide inputs and credit to the farmers, who were mostly involved in paddy farming. The society recorded success during the initial years and as such, it was made one of the model KUD (Village cooperative) in 1978. It borrowed credit from the bank to expand its activities during 1979-80. However, the

time, some members of the management committee had also taken personal advantages. The society was then classified as defunct meaning that it could not get a new loan from the bank, before clearing the overdue.

This situation created a feeling of skepticism among the villagers, which naturally affected their participation in cooperative activities. Consequently, they again started to depend upon the private money lenders for their credit requirement with a high interest rate.

In 1988 the Agency for Cooperative Research and Development of the Cooperatives Department selected this society for an action research project to find out the ways for reactivating such defunct cooperatives. A survey was conducted to identify the local

leadership, which was followed by the formation of groups at the sub-village level.

The group leaders were invited to a meeting to discuss on forming a new cooperative society for the village. The group leaders, however, suggested to reactivate the defunct society and utilize the remaining assets, rather than forming a new society. They also suggested to hold group leader's meeting every month and members meeting once in every two months, to evaluate the cooperative's performance and to suggest the future programme.

The local tradition to save for the Idul Fitri (a Muslim religious festival) was adopted with some improvements for mobilization of saving. Each member was provided a small locked box where the member would save his/her coin exchange left over from his/her daily expenses. The group leader would visit every week to collect the money which would be deposited in his/her saving account in the cooperative.

With a small beginning of 36 members and a saving deposit of 45000 Rupya in 1988 the cooperative now have 3060 members and a saving deposit of over 18 million Rupya. The sincere efforts and leadership of Mr. A. Rahmat, the Manager have contributed significantly to the success of this cooperative. Mr. Rahmat thinks that when the leaders have a sincere desire and make meaningful efforts to develop the village the task of mobilization of member's participation in cooperative activities is not so difficult. But the village cooperative leaders need constant extension and training to ensure that they use their resources efficiently.

The Agency for Cooperative Research and Development which acted as a promoter did not introduce a new concept, but followed and guided the villagers in the process of reorganizing themselves. This approach helped the cooperative society to gain self-confidence and to stand on its own feet.

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## Gulf crisis

### Camouflage a science as old as war itself

WASHINGTON, Feb 19: From the Trojan Horse to the Gulf War, the time-honoured tactic of military camouflage has taken a multitude of forms, reports AP.

The US Army has a contemporary version of the equestrian decoy - a phony M-1 tank made of canvas that is designed to attract enemy fire.

"If we can get the bad guys to fire one round into one of our tank decoys, then we have saved some lives gotten the enemy to give away his location and allowed US tanks to destroy him," said Nicholas Vamvakias, who manufactures the decoys.

Recent reports by allied military officials that the Iraqis have set up phony Scud Missile launchers as decoys is another example of such tactics. While allied planes zoom in on the dummy launchers, the real ones are firing on Tel Aviv and Saudi Arabia.

Whether designed to fool the enemy about geographic positions or to trick them into revealing their own location, these techniques have sometimes changed the course of a battle.

In 1942, British forces emerged victorious from the

Battle of El-Alamein after tricking German troops into redirecting their offensive by planting phony canons and tanks along their lines of defence.

The Iraqis are "quite good" at the game of camouflage, according to General Colin Powell, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff. In addition to the masquerading missiles, the Iraqis have painted bomb craters on their airfields to make allied bombers think they had already been hit.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's army has had excellent training, they learned from the Soviet school of "maskirovka," or deception, which has used similar tactics since World War II.

In his book, "The Art of Deception and War," Red Army specialist Michael Dewar writes, "deception and surprise are, in the Soviet Military mind, inextricable."

The Iraqis also have fake armoured vehicles which, according to unconfirmed sources, were manufactured by an Italian company. Like the American version, these plastic personnel carriers have been reinforced with enough

metal to cause a very real blip on allied radar screens.

Though it is obvious the tanks are decoys on close examination, as Vamvakias points out, "if you and I are in a tank and we see that, we're going to shoot first and ask questions later."

Camouflage has taken on new forms since the birth of the modern technical during the last world war. Radar-confusing chaff, thermal lures and jamming devices have become keys to air battles in what is at times as such a war of wits as of weapons.

The massive reflection produced by the Chaff-long strips of aluminum foil trailing from fighter planes-blind enemy radar. This method was invented by British flyers bombing Nazi Germany and is widely used by combat planes today.

Thermal lures are tiny flares dropped by planes and helicopters at regular intervals to draw away heat-seeking missiles.

An entirely different principal led to the invention of warplanes which evade radar detection, such as the F-117 fighter-bomber used in the Gulf and the B-2 bomber

and YF-21 and YF-22 fighters which are still being tested.

Nearly invisible to enemy radar, the F-117s were the first allied jets used to bomb Baghdad last week.

And finally there are the electronic measures and countermeasures designed to create a high-tech "smoke screen" that can hide an air attack.

Some specialised aircraft, like the EF-111 or the navy's Viking, are equipped with systems which can jam radar devices on several frequencies, allowing planes to fly through hostile skies undetected.

### Pakistani among 2 suspected terrorists held

PHILIPPINES, Feb 19: Police are holding a Pakistani and a Filipino suspected of having links with pro-Iraqi terrorist groups, an official said Monday, reports AP.

Florencio Villarín, an official with the National Bureau of Investigation, identified the Pakistani as Amir Ahmed Shaikh and the Filipino as Efrén Lacson.

On Sunday, immigration agents stopped the two from boarding a flight for Tokyo from this central Philippine city.

### Bhopal gas victims urge Bush, Saddam to stop war

BHOPAL, Feb 19: More than 300 school children who survived the world's deadliest industrial disaster marched through the streets Monday to call for Iraq and the United States to end the Gulf War, reports AP.

The children ended their procession at the gates of the now-closed Union Carbide pesticide plant where a gas leak six years ago spread a toxic cloud over this central Indian city and killed more than 3,700 people.

We have seen the deadly clouds of poison gobbling the fate of Bhopal children and we at any cost do not want any other city, village, nation or continent to turn into another Bhopal," the children said in a letter they planned to send to Indian President Ramaswamy Venkataraman.

In a brief speech at the Union Carbide gate, eighth-grade student Chandrabas Tiwari urged the children of the world to unite and persuade US President George Bush and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to end the war.

"Don't waste your blood for oil," said a sign carried by a 6-year-old girl who gave her name only as Anju.

### 'Allies should limit arms sales to dangerous states'

LONDON, Feb 19: Developed nations should agree to limit arms sales to "dangerous" countries, a Soviet spokesman said on Monday night, reports Reuters.

Sergei Grigoryev, Deputy to President Mikhail Gorbachev's chief spokesman, told British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio: "I think there should be mutual obligations of all the members of the anti-Iraqi coalition to stop supplying dangerous members of the international community with any weapons they can use against peaceful civilians."

He said the Soviet Union, Germany, The United States and Italy had all sold weapons to Iraq.

The four countries have supported United Nations Resolutions demanding that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait, seized by Baghdad last August 2. The United States and Italy are among countries fighting to force Iraq to do so.

US President George Bush has called on the Iraqi people to overthrow President Saddam Hussein, but Grigoryev said it was not up to the international community to try to topple him.

"I don't think that we should be really on the verge of

interfering in the internal affairs of the Iraqis as long as they will follow the legitimate demands of the international community," he said. He added that he doubted the Iraqi people would be eager to continue "any other military activities."

Earlier Grigoryev, who is on a visit to Britain, spoke on independent television news about a peace plan that Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev gave Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz on Monday. Details of the plan have not been made public.

The Soviet message to Iraq is that Iraq should leave unconditionally, Grigoryev said. "You leave unconditionally but you know at least that you can survive and there will be no further interference in the

internal affairs of Iraq."

Grigoryev said the plan was not a personal message to Saddam. "This man needs a kind of a plan to save his face and at this stage it may be time to tell him, may be not he but that his administration will survive."

Grigoryev brushed aside suggestions that the Soviet initiative may have angered Bush, whose country is in charge of the anti-Iraqi coalition fighting Iraq.

If President Gorbachev is in a position to stop this major war and to prevent the further escalation of this military conflict, he should do it for the benefit of the Soviets, the Iraqis, the Americans and any other human being living in this world, he told the BBC.

### Saudi desert will be a giant cemetery, warns Iraq

BAGHDAD, Feb 19: Iraq on Sunday renewed its vow to set "half of Israel" ablaze and turn Saudi Arabia into a graveyard for Allied forces if they launched a land war against Iraqi troops, reports AFP.

The warning was carried in Ath-Thawra, the newspaper of the Ruling Baath Party, on Sunday after the Iraqi capital had enjoyed its first calm night since the start of the Allied air offensive January 17.

For the first time in more than a month, we did not hear the sounds of explosions, bombing and anti-aircraft fire, one resident told Agence France-Press.

Inhabitants said the calm could be attributable to the heavy rain that fell on the city overnight, which would have complicated air raids.

Iraqi newspapers went on the rhetorical offensive Sunday, warning the allies of disastrous consequences if they attacked Iraq over land. "By virtue of their experience, their destructive arms and their morale, our forces will cause surprises and shocks for the aggressors, as they drown the invaders in their impure blood," said Ath-Thawra.

The Saudi desert will become

a giant cemetery, where the forces of aggression and their war material will be buried," it vowed, adding that "half of Israel will be set ablaze if a land war is launched."

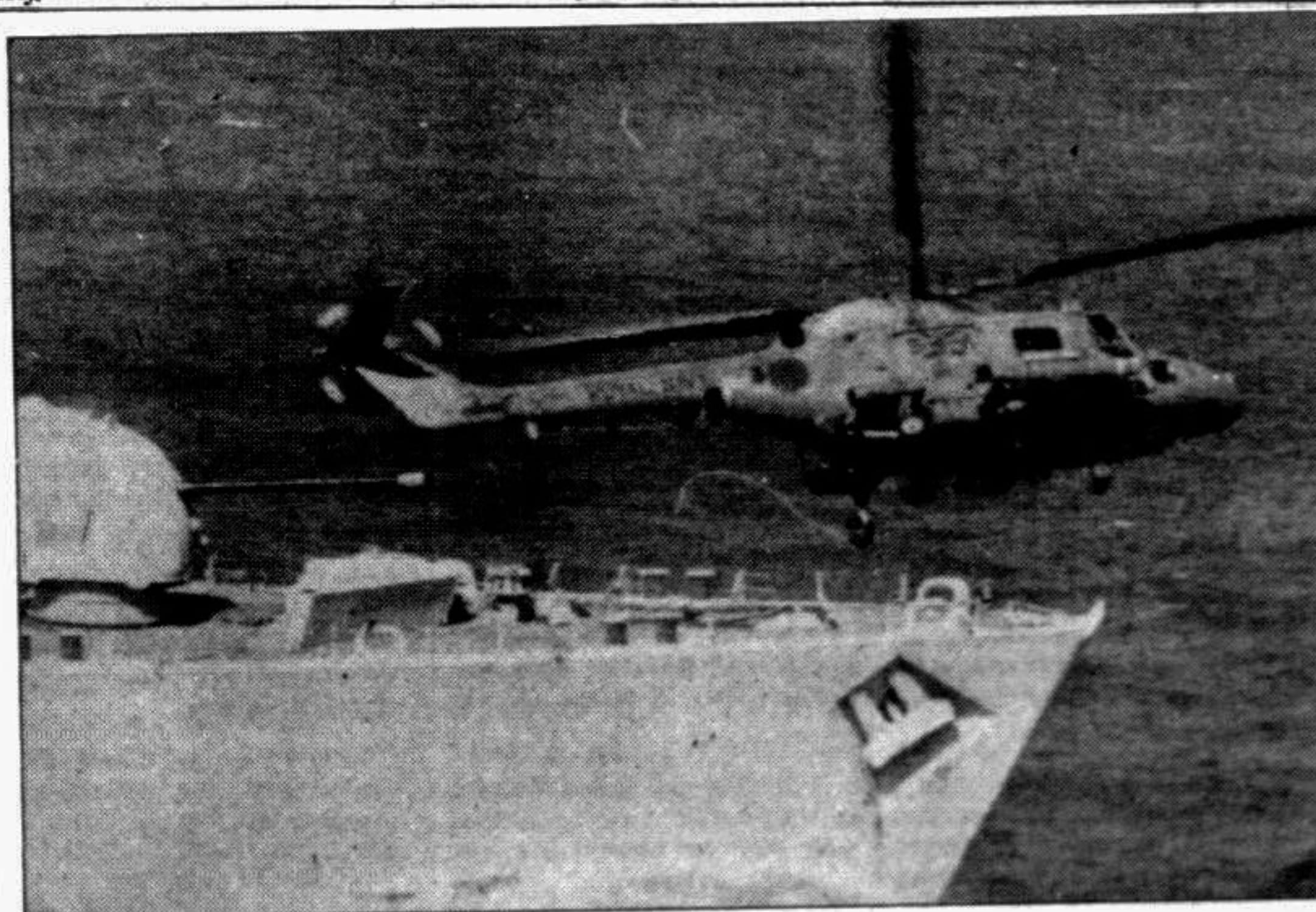
President Saddam Hussein early last year issued a similar warning, saying that half of Israel would burn under a hail of Iraqi weapons if Iraq were attacked.

Iraq has a huge arsenal of chemical and biological arms, according to western military sources.

The government newspaper Al-Jumhuriya meanwhile charged that an Allied rejection of an Iraqi offer Friday to withdraw from Kuwait "unmasks the hypocrisy of the coalition of aggressors, their duplicity and their criminal intention of impose their will on the Arab region."

It denounced the Allied reaction as "hasty and enraged" and called US President George Bush, who dismissed the offer as a "cruel hoax" a "hateful criminal."

"In rejecting this initiative, Bush and his Allies confirm the falseness of their appeals in favour of international law."



GULF: A British Royal Navy Lynx helicopter flies over the bow of HMS Cardiff in the Gulf. —AFP/UNB photo.

### British commander says Foreign newsmen in Baghdad hotel housing bunker

RIYADH, Feb 19: The commander of British forces in the Gulf said here that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had begun setting up military targets around hospitals, schools and residential areas in Baghdad, reports AP.

Air chief Marshall Sir Patrick Hine also said that he believed a command and control bunker, possibly the "main one" in Baghdad was set up in the basement of the Al-Rashid Hotel, where foreign journalists are housed.

"We are convinced that a command control centre, if not the main one 'is in a bunker under the Al-Rashid Hotel," he said citing a Cable News Network (CNN) broadcast on the second day of the air war in which a correspondent had said he had just run into Saddam Hussein.

media organisations housed in the Al-Rashid toured the basement of the luxury hotel in the Iraqi capital this week, however, and reported that they saw no evidence of any military facilities.

"There are aircraft parked in residential areas, there is a military headquarters near a school, heavy duty fuel tankers are parked in a cemetery, and military vehicles parked around hospitals," Air Marshall Hine said.

"I am certain that Saddam Hussein knows how accurate our bombing is. He knows we are not going to attack these targets," he said, adding that under the Geneva Convention there was nothing to prevent Allied attacks on the hidden targets.

"But I don't think we will do that (hit them)," he said

stressing that he was speaking after a lengthy briefing by US Gulf Commander General Norman Schwarzkopf.

"From the pictures taken in the last two weeks we have a very difficult choice to make," he said, "they (the military targets) are alongside schools, hospitals and civilian areas."

The British Commander, who is on a flying visit from Britain to assess the progress of the 31-day-one air war, also said he was convinced that the bunker hit last week in Baghdad with the loss of some 100 civilian lives was "a legitimate military target."

The bunker was surrounded by an "extremely strong" Electro-Magnetic Pulse (EMP) protective field and, as could be seen on live television reports from Baghdad, barbed wire, he said.