

# US Now Leading Global Arms Supplier

by Frederick Clairmonte

*The end of the Cold War has seen the US becoming the undisputed leading arms supplier world wide. US arms sales in 1991 hit an all-time record of \$ 33 billion with the bulk sales in West Asia which has seen devastation and death of near apocalyptic dimensions in the recent Gulf war. This is first article in a special two-part series; the second one will be published tomorrow.*

## Welcome accord

With the signing of an agreement on the transfer of Tinbigha to Bangladesh by India, the two countries enter a new phase in their relations. According to the accord, Bangladesh is going to receive the lease of the corridor from June 26 next. The removal of this irritant, although long overdue, hopefully will make the beginning of an end to rest of the contentious issues between Dhaka and New Delhi.

A delay as long as 18 years to bring into effect a commitment is hardly viewed as a friendly gesture specially by the party on the receiving end. On this count, Bangladesh, particularly its enclaves Dahagram and Angarpota, has gone through both anxious moments and excruciating pain. The fact that cool diplomacy has at last won surely augurs well for both India and Bangladesh in particular and the region in general. The good work however need to be carried on to more areas through equally mutual understanding between the two neighbours.

What has to be recognised in a changed reality of the obtaining geo-politics by not only these two countries but also other members of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) is that the friendly neighbourliness ably complemented by economic, cultural, environmental and defence co-operation between and among them can be a key to their progress. Time may surely come soon for them to rue over missed opportunities — more so against the backdrop of still closer co-operation among European nations and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

We can however take heart in the positive developments now starting to emerge on both sides of the Indo-Bangladesh border, thanks to the pragmatic leaderships. The turn of the event is undoubtedly a result of that pragmatism. This obviously points to the fact that there is still hope for settling issues bilaterally through quiet diplomacy. Only the parties concerned have to be intent on doing so on the basis of mutual trust and understanding.

Given such a spirit of co-operation, the next issue on the agenda should be the sharing of the Ganges water. Now that the process has begun, hopefully both Dhaka and New Delhi would not be found wanting in the necessary will to bring about an enduring solution to the problem. The problem with South Talpatty Island, Chakma refugees and land and maritime demarcation can gradually figure in the bilateral negotiations for their speedy solution. Already the merit of increasing trade and industrial collaboration has been determined by experts on those subjects from the two countries. They are just awaiting the required touches for reaching the benefits to both the countries.

In this connection, it will not be out of context to point to a fact regarded more as an omission than a deliberate move. The fact is that the position of high commissioner in as important a point as New Delhi is at present lying vacant. The sooner that position is filled the better for Indo-Bangladesh relations.

## We Deplore

On the Independence Day four newspapers were attacked. It not only slighted the glory of the day, it also very significantly detracted from the other great achievement of the day — a sea of humanity converging on the Suhrawardy Udyan and making a great success of the Gano-Adalat or people's court. We deplore those attacks. We condemn them all knowing full well that some of them may well have been part of an expression of the awesome majesty of people's power and the others the acts of hired hoodlums and, worse than that, brainwashed zealots. But we deliberately withhold ourselves from making such discrimination and roundly condemn these attacks on newspaper establishments. And we would specially condemn the armed and patently premeditated commando-style attack on the Sangbad in which at least nine were injured and a gun pointed at one of the seniormost journalists of the country — all perpetrated on the 27th as if in reprisal for some raids on the previous day.

The print medium is an old institution and has been inviolate to such physical raids for centuries. We cannot let this crumble specially at a time of our building democracy which is another name for tolerance. And we need to build a democratic society true in both meaning and content and we are evidently by such acts cutting at its very roots soon after planting the sapling instead of watering it.

There couldn't be a more despicable act at this hour even if some sheets be dead bent on the dissemination of bigotry and all kinds of perfidy that would harm and sunder the society into pieces. Let all readers be able to take their pick and manifest their rejection or preference through going for some and shunning the others. In that should lie the reward and punishment of a newspaper.

We take this occasion also to deplore — why, register our sense of shock over, the deliberate suppression of the phenomenal happening that put an extra ring of aura of respectance around the day, namely the Gano-Adalat and its verdict. What purpose does it serve other than eating vital parts out of the credibility of the electronic media? And put it on the same footing as autocracy's main endlessly lie-disgorging machine? This act of suppression of national events of pith and moment didn't help Ershad. It is not going to help the present government either.

Reporting Gano-Adalat and the great concourse of lakhs on the occasion on radio and television does not anyhow amount to awarding any kind of acceptance to it. TV and radio are there, the people provides for them to be there exactly to report whatever is in the interest of the people to know — and the people are the final arbiter of deciding on where their interest lies. Any government that stands in the way of people's right to information only helps to create problems for its own credibility.

SINCE 1945, the Third World has been the locus of 125 wars, with tens of millions dead; three-quarters of them non-combatants with the Serbo-Croat butchery the latest in one more macabre sequel. Wars fought with conventional weapons bartered and bought from two main antagonistic suppliers: the advanced capitalist and admino-command economies. In the 1980s, global arms spending rocketed to about \$ 1 trillion yearly, \$ 2 million a minute. A grand celebration, indeed, of an exiguous profitariat of mega corporations, and their nomenclaturist clones in the barrack-room economies.

The magnitudes have slightly tapered off in 1991, but what augurs to be a qualitative mutation has been the exit of the ex-Soviet Union, one of the paramount international death merchants (IDMs). Its place will be taken by others: it already has with the USA the grand trafficker leading the pack. The lost market share of Reagan's 'Evil Empire' is also likely to repercuss adversely on France and Germany who have always been the privileged jackals at the international arms banquet.

In the Third World, the Middle East has become, in large part due to its huge petroleum resources and the inherent conflictual proclivities of their autocracies abetted by external promoters, the focal point of the traffic of the IDMs in the Third World. Ineluctably, a regional cauldron of the bloodiest of Third World convulsions.

In Bush's 100-hour war, 85,000 sorties with 90,000 tons of non-nuclear conventional weapons drenched Iraq and Kuwait. In a flash, the Pentagon's spurious distinction between low and high intensity conflicts was blown to smithereens. Unrestrained de-

ployment of these engines of death spawned, as Michael Klare reminds us, a destructiveness equivalent of five Hiroshimas.

The glories of Bush's coalition depicted with such panache by CNN and its emulators brought into the living rooms of millions the sheer violence of military muscle that had become all too familiar: Tomahawk missiles, laser-guided bombs, mega air-explosive bombs so fat that they could not even be fitted into the super bellies of the super B-52s. As one of the celebrants of New York's victory parade exclaimed: Man, man it's all victory. Hallelujah. Quite so, for the nature of war in the Middle East would never be the same again; it signalled the end of an era for a new Terminator had burst forth who henceforth would brook no challenge to his marketing skills, prowess and supremacy.

This will not be another Vietnam, 'Bush exulted on 30 November 1990. If one soldier has to go into battle, that soldier will have enough force behind him to win... I will never, ever, agree to a halfway effort. The 135,000 dead proved his point that he would not be another Lyndon Johnson, and that Schwarzkopf would not be another Westmoreland. The Vietnam syndrome had been excised: a lesson taught ostensibly never to be forgotten.

There was the other side of the coin: 'Nothing that we had seen or read quite prepared us for the particular form of dev-

astation which has now befallen Iraq,' lugubriously commented the United Nations observer team on 21 March 1991. The recent conflict has wrought near apocalyptic results on the infrastructure of what had been, until January 1991, a rather highly urbanised mechanised society... Now, most of modern life support has been destroyed or rendered tenuous.

**The Arms Bazaar**  
In the mid-1960s, global military outlays approximated \$ 570 billion; by 1990 it hit \$ 950 billion; a rise of 70% over the last quarter of a century. These official numbers are underestimates given the prevalence of colossal grey and black markets (witness the Serbo-Croatian arms deals) and the blatant dissimulation of arms expenditures and research in all countries.

Apart from these statistical considerations, the rate of increase of the arms traffic is best exhibited over a 60-year time span. Based on League of Nations data, the arms bazaar totalled \$ 4.5 billion in the 1930s (or around \$ 50-60 billion in today's money); but the world now officially spends close to \$ 950 billion; a 15-fold boost.

There is no evidence that the erosion of the Cold War has been translated into any appreciable cutbacks in arms output and trade which means that the highly touted peace dividend has been pushed to the Greek calendars. Of the \$ 1 trillion spent on arms in the 1980s, around \$ 860 billion

was by the advanced capitalist countries and the command economies; and \$ 140 billion by the Third World which, as the graph indicates, is the prime international market (55%). Hitherto dominated by the two superpowers that grabbed two-thirds (1983-1990) of the Third World export market, the arms bazaar is a concentrated market on both the supply and demand sides. Arms sales (1983-1990) to the Third World accounted for over 50% of the official traffic. A number that can be further decomposed: Saudi Arabia (\$57.3 billion) and Iraq (\$30.4 billion) alone were recipients of one-third of Third World purchases.

The Middle East has become the pivot of the international arms trade — both covert and overt, a commerce in which the US is now the unquestioned market leader. US policy has contributed massively (and not only in Israel with its 300 nuclear warheads) to the militarisation of the Middle East. The time has come, said Baker recently on 6 February 1991 before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, to try to change the destructive pattern of military competition in the Middle East, and reduce the arms flow into an area that is already overmilitarised.

These unctuous pieties on the overmilitarisation of the Middle East is one thing, but the profit imperatives of the IDMs are another. In the very months that baker spoke, the

Pentagon informed the Senate that US arms sales (1991) would hit an all-time record of \$33 billion, with over half earmarked for the Middle East. In March, Richard Cheney, Defense Secretary, flatly declared that the US would be selling more arms to the Middle East and the Third World, not fewer. Given these marketing plans, why then should China, which has already entered the first circle of the IDMs, relinquish its sales to Iran?

It's a twist on the logic of GM's Charlie Wilson all over again: what's good for the Pentagon is not necessarily good for the rest of the world. There are no rules of restraint on matters of arms sales that are binding on the US — or for that matter on anyone else — irrespective of the platitudes of the July 1991 talks in Paris.

Ten countries accounted for almost 85-90% of exports: the USA, France, the UK, FRG, China, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Italy and Switzerland with the preponderance of the Big Five. Conversely, seven of the 15 major Third World countries absorbed the bulk of arms imports: seven in the Middle East, and three (India, Afghanistan and Pakistan) in the Indian sub-continent.

### The USSR

In the arms traffic (see graph) the leading IDMs were running neck-to-neck in 1983, but from then on the USSR spurred ahead; a trend drastically reversed from the end of that year. Although the

post-2 August events gave a vigorous thrust to US arms sales, enhancement of US market share in the Third World and the Middle East was discernible prior to that date. There was nothing fortuitous in this: it has become an explicit marketing objective of the Pentagon. Henceforth, the marginalisation of the ex-Soviet Union will be exacerbated by the migration of thousands of its high grade technologists and scientists in the arms sector in quest of greener pastures. The table portrays the altered configuration of power.

It appears highly improbable that Yeltsin's Russia — even on the fragile assumption that it retains its internal cohesion — will ever be able to recoup anything near the lost market share of the ex-USSR. And in that interval of time, new predators, significant structural changes will have made themselves felt.

The structural adjustment processes confronting an economy that is on the verge of collapse saddled with an inflation rate of 250% yearly will be agonisingly painful, but of the essence is that it has made the first step. There is a positive side to all this. The demolition of its great power status, which apart from its hypertrophied military complex, was largely an empty shell, opens to the ex-USSR in its current or other incarnations new vistas of growth and development akin possibly to German and Japan in the immediate post-war decades. Thus, the Soviet implosion and its eviction from the IDMs ranks puts it, paradoxical as it may seem, an historical step ahead of the USA.

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# Containing Population Explosion

by ANM Jahed

FAMILY planning on voluntary basis was no doubt started for the first time here in 1954 through the auspices of the voluntary organisation East Pakistan Family Planning Association (now Bangladesh F P Association). It was augmented in the early part of 60's by government intervention for the first time through mobilisation of paid field staff for motivation of couples and supply of services to them but it failed to reduce the high birth rate to any appreciable extent and population explosion was the result. In 1976, being alarmed by it the then government of late President Ziaur Rahman declared it National Problem No 1 and started engaging thousands of field workers (mostly female) to motivate and supply services at the doors of the couples, offering incentives in cash and kind to those undertaking sterilisation and cash incentives to surgeons and attendants. Although thousands of NGOs mushroomed in the meantime to augment the government efforts and the government has spent, since then, hundreds of crores of Taka, it has become now a national crisis due to rise of population in a geometric progression raising the density of population to the unparalleled 2100 persons/sq mile.

Causes of failure are many but the root cause appears to be the too much dependence on the voluntary participation of couples as seen in practice

in Europe and America as a result, perhaps, of the industrial revolution they came through. Maybe without having any industrial revolution that is a far cry yet. And without taking into consideration our traditional and habitual temperament of depending on fate, irresponsibility and indifference in this regard of our people and the absence of the socio-economic pressure as created in those countries by the industrial revolution not only compelling the women folk to seek outside jobs but also making available sufficient jobs for them — our efforts may not achieve any success.

At the time when Europe was going through the industrial revolution, the density of population there was no doubt less than one hundredth of that of the present day Bangladesh. Although they took 150 years, as per UNO report to reach the present day very low birth rate maintaining family planning practices on a voluntary basis, they did not face any population problem either. In absence of the socio-economic pressure of the industrial revolution and availability of sufficient outside jobs for women, how many times the present alarming density of population would rise while we are to follow the policy of depending on the voluntary participation of couples, is any body's guess. The other causes

of failure can be traced to the corruption, insincerity and indolence of the field staff; absence of the right programme to compel the field staff to work diligently and ensure supervision, assigning the responsibility for the success of the programme on doctors; lack of arrangement for motivation of husbands and bridegrooms, inability of wives in our male dominated society to persuade husbands to adopt family planning even if the wives are fully motivated and supplied with services by female field staff (who can work in the day time only when the husbands remain out); lack of system to monitor couples; absence of an alternative arrangement (choice) to fulfil the craving of husbands for male child. In short we have failed to adopt such measures as are called for in the exceptional conditions in Bangladesh.

We have so long did not give due importance to the density of population and tried to lower the birth rate i.e. the growth rate only. If we had the same density of population as was in those countries before the industrial revolution or even the current density as in the USA the present birth rate i.e. the growth rate would not have posed any problem not to speak of any alarm. In compar-

ison to USA, presently having 70 persons/sq mile, our population should have been only 40 lakh but we have about 12 crore. If we treat 4 crore as unskilled unemployed manpower out of our about 12 crore people, then it would take nearly 20 years to train them up at the rate 25 lakh per year which is itself a baffling task with our present resources and by which time another 5 crore unskilled unemployed people would come up and it would be an unending affair. Five years spacing of birth by couples voluntarily, as the Government has so long propagated, would not yield any result. If we have 2 crore 25 lakh fertile couples and if they are equally divided into five groups and if each group gives birth every five years then taking the birth rate as 4/2% there would be 45 lakh births as against 42 lakh births now. So there shall not be any change in birth rate by voluntarily spacing of birth even by five years. Then what is the remedy, one might ask.

## Means to an End : Anmaj Population Control Cycle

In the very exceptional circumstances and explosive conditions in Bangladesh the

most suitable programme for us shall be one which, by nationally synchronizing the spacing of births by couples, can create a congenial atmosphere to adopt family planning by all couples of all classes and strata. Which, as an alternative to socio-economic pressure in this male dominated society will turn the apathy of the husbands and bridegrooms into adoption of family planning thereby — instead of gradually decreasing the birth rate — bringing in a negative growth rate within 1 or 2 years to gradually reduce the population strength i.e. the density of population. Such a programme is 'Anmaj Population Control Cycle'. Out of various types of cycles we are to select the right cycle for Bangladesh which would create an alternative to much needed socio-economic pressure of industrial Revolution.

The most suitable cycle would be 3-2-3-1, and if the Government can take up with urgency in greater interest of the country, it may introduce it from last of Baisakh 1399 BS through a declaration before that date and take certain measures to ensure (1) appropriate incentives, disincentives and discipline; (2) devotion to work, sincerity, integrity, honesty of the field staff and their effective supervision; (3) an alternative arrangement to meet

the craving in general for male child; (4) participation of union parishads, municipalities, different government departments such as Education and Revenue in the family planning programmes, especially sterilisation programmes, and (5) freedom of people particularly of villages to adopt family planning by introducing such enactment as would save them from social boycott, harassment and punishment, it any, by the prejudiced village elders. Then a negative growth rate of 1% (-1%) would be ensured by 1400BS and the population as well as density of population would start decreasing @ 1% annually on an average.

Thus, as a result, by the year 2000AD the population of Bangladesh would come down below 11 crore from the present nearly 12 crore and projected 15 crore. Consequently, the density of population will come down to about 1930/sq mile, (taking the area of Bangladesh as 57,000 sq miles, as against the present more than 2100 and projected more than 2600 it is just expected that social thinkers and patriots in the government think over the matter and if necessary seek clarification and a detailed scheme. It is expected that the welfare of the country would prevail over everything now.

*The writer is a retired Deputy Secretary of the Government of Bangladesh*

## 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.

### Rohingya tragedy

Sir, The visit of the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to the United States has further strengthened the ties between Bangladesh and the United States. The visit was described as important as it was taking place in the background of changing political situation in the world, and our country, with its economy ruined by nine years misruled by an autocratic regime, facing the unbearable burden of over 2 lakh Rohingya refugees from neighbouring Burma. Their number is swelling every day. But as the PM, on her return, said that they would go back to their country, we should feel assured of a settlement. But there is a need for permanent solution, that is not only their repatriation with dignity, honour and safety but that there must not be any situation again in Burma which might force these poor souls to flee their homes and hearths.

Having been inhumanly oppressed and repressed, in flagrant violation of all norms of international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, by the ruling junta of the Burmese government, in collaboration with

anti Rohingya elements of Arakan, the Rohingyas in the region have eventually been forced to appeal to the world community to 'SAVE THE ROHINGYA MUSLIMS OF ARAKAN IN BURMA FROM EXTERMINATION AND ANNIHILATION' from their rightful motherland where they have been rooted for well over a thousand years, when even the Burmans did not enter into the history of Burma.

It is a long drawn conspiracy of Burmans and their collaborator Maghs. Today, half of the total Rohingya population of Arakan has been evicted. More than 200 thousand Rohingyas evictees have sought shelter in Bangladesh with horrifying tales of intolerable atrocities committed to them.

To change the world public opinion of Burma, the military junta of Rangoon is trying to carry out a fabricated and concocted campaign in some foreign countries to the effect that the Rohingyas Muslims of Arakan are citizens of Bangladesh. The fact rather is that, Burmans, can not be citizens of Arakan unless Rohingyas recognise them because Arakan was a separate independent state which is a

historical fact. The empire of the former Soviet Union and its 74 years rule could not suppress the Muslims in its half a dozen republics, how the Burmese junta and its collaborator Magh communists dare to drive away the Muslims from Arakan!

It is worthwhile to mention here in that the Burmese attitude in the past had proved to be dishonest and unreliable in their commitments and deeds. In 1978, more than 2.5 lac Rohingyas were pushed out by Burmese junta. The government of Bangladesh in the spirit of clear neighbourliness, solved the problem through peaceful means bilaterally. But the junta never stayed upon their words and today again has erupted a refugee exodus. The arrival of these lacs of Rohingyas in our country is causing a serious pressure on our economy. To the best of our ability, we are serving the helpless refugees on humanitarian ground.

But it is high time now. Let us all opposition parties, student fronts, social organisations, religious bodies, educationalists and professionals unite and shoulder with the government the 'responsibility' of solving the Rohingya tragedy once and for all.

N. Karnal  
Momin Road, Chittagong

### Allowances

Sir, Due to high cost of living — cost of food, medicine, conveyance, house — the ser-

vice holders/employees in general feel so much constrained. All these allowances are thus required to be increased above the rates as fixed/allowed in the pay scale of 1991.

The cost of essential items is increasing step by step every month and they just cannot cope with the situation. So a similarity in income is required to be maintained by increasing the rate of allowance at least.

We propose for further and immediate increase in rates of all allowances of Govt., Semi Govt, autonomous body employees if the prices of essentials /cost of living could not be brought down.

M A Motin Majumder  
Tejgaon, Dhaka.

### Love for country ...

Sir, In the name of love for the country or nation or nationhood. This or that section of the people, every now and then come out with programmes which create serious disturbances in the society ultimately causing great hindrance to the normal flow of life and deterring prosperity of the nation. Had they really loved this poor country they would have kept themselves away from doing such works as may be damaging to the people at large.

Love is something Godly-blessed which originates only in the holy-hearts and helps in positive manner in every sphere of life. Now-a-days, in

our country, it is regrettably observed that some people, in the name of their self-styled patriotism, are rather dividing the nation into two groups which is very much fatal for this poor country.

As one observes, impatient leadership or power-seekers are busy in creating new issues and so are coming out on the streets with their supporters and activists' only to make the life of the general people a hell. Still there is time to come to senses. If we don't, their 'so-called love for this or that' is very likely to bring untold sufferings for the whole nation.

FMA Matin  
Mitpur, Dhaka.

### Apprehend criminals

Sir, A recent report in the media says that one Fatema after leading a marital life for several years had to suffer severe acid burns by her husband Belal. Fatema having lodged a case, her husband, in order to escape legal action, put pressure on her to withdraw the case. Being failed at that, Belal with his accomplices enticed her. When at Natore bus stand Fatema raised outcries and Belal with his party having fled away, Fatema got freed and is now at her poor father's house in great panic and unsafe condition. It is also reported that due to continuous atrocity, Natore District Manabdhikar Bastabayan Sangtha has expressed its anxiety and drawn

attention of the relevant department to arrest the accused persons and met out justice to the oppressed Fatema.

It is a fact that there is appropriate law for prevention of dowry. It is equally unfortunate that due to want of proper application of the law, crimes are so much apparent in almost all parts of the country. In the present case, as per the report published the criminal and his accomplices are very much known and can well be apprehended. Law must not be a passive on looker. The accused however mighty he may be should not be allowed to escape the rule law. If the report is correct he is guilty of a number of crimes — atrocities for dowry, acid burning in a brutal wax and enticing. Justice delayed is justice denied. It is not known what success justice has still achieved. At least one such crime should be given exemplary punishment, so that the cruse of crime is not only slowing down but stops altogether.

It is desirable that this particular case is handled by top police officials by deputing a special squad to meet the enormity of the case so that whatever mighty persons may the criminals be they are not allowed to go scot-free. And let the example augur for a peaceful society for which our democratic forces have struggled so hard.

Ahmed Ali  
Maitbagh, Dhaka.