

A Message for Saddam

If Baghdad was asking for a response from Washington to its repeated violations of Gulf war ceasefire terms and its claims on Kuwait, it got it on Wednesday when US and allied warplanes carried out air raids on Iraq. At the time of writing, the raids are over, with Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations saying that his country is ready to comply with "some of the conditions" of the Allied demands. In the unfolding scenario, the two sides may have reached a breathing time or a stalemate, with the US and its allies, including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, remaining on the offensive.

In this stalemate, the US determination to maintain its initiative is as strong as a false sense of bravado on the part of Saddam Hussein calling upon his confused people to be ready to "win another great victory." The fact that the Iraqi representative to the UN is already talking in a language different from that of his maverick president may not be easily grasped by Iraqis and perhaps a sections of Muslims who saw the Wednesday's air raids as a Christian assault on an Islamic country. When the reality will dawn on these people remains to be seen.

The question now is, what is it that prompted Baghdad to provoke Washington into launching the air raids? One popular theory, advanced by analysts in Washington, is that Saddam has been exploring for any weakness in the United States as it changes administrations. On this score, the Iraqi leader must have been sorely disappointed. In the first place, George Bush, with only a week to go to complete his term in office, has demonstrated his firmness in dealing with the situation, knowing well in advance that his military move would have the support of President-elect Bill Clinton. This support has been now publicly expressed by the Democrat leader.

True, the US and allies air raids have sent a strong signal to Baghdad, a signal that Saddam may find hard to ignore, at least for the time being. However, one must not assume that all is lost for Iraq. It could have been the intention of Iraqi leader to provoke Washington into a kind of military action that might suffer from lack of immediate UN sanction or, for that matter, adequate international legal cover. He might have also hoped that a US assault on Iraq would divide the Muslim world again and important UN members would call for more talks rather than more military action. In these calculations, Hossein has not been proved entirely wrong. China, a permanent member of the Security Council with a power of veto, has already called for negotiation; Pakistan has asked for a meeting of the world body; and Palestinians have condemned the air raids. What's more, President-elect Clinton has indicated that he would be ready for a "fresh start" with Saddam Hussein, as the New York Times put it on Thursday.

Maybe this is precisely what the Iraqi leader has been looking for, not another war with the United States and its allies which he can never win but a round of negotiation where he is accepted as a legitimate participant. Clinton's readiness for a "fresh start" may just offer him this hope.

At this stage, Washington must weigh all its options carefully. With another war likely to do incalculable damage to the region, the next step should be towards negotiation, but not on Baghdad's terms but on conditions laid down by the United States and two of its allies in the region, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and, of course, the United Nations. Baghdad must get this message, loud and clear, before it starts to have new illusions.

Plastic Surgery Hospital

The news that a 150-bed plastic surgery and burn hospital will be set up in the country is most welcome. Costing Tk 35 crore, the project will be the first of its kind here. Italian Ambassador Claudio Pacifico has expressed his country's willingness to help set up the proposed hospital. Italy considers this a humanitarian assistance and will be ready to extend more such help in the health sector in particular. Given the condition of our health system, Italy's assistance will be of immense help. That there are, in total, seven plastic surgeons in the country should be an ample reflection of our medical facilities in this area.

Maybe, our lack of emphasis on plastic surgery owes to the fact that we are more concerned with diseases so common and acute and wrongly consider the skin grafting not so much of a treatment but beautification that goes with affluence. But ours is a country with an abnormally high incidence of burn injuries. The acute pain caused by burning — not to mention the after-effects — needs urgent medical attention for relief. The other benefit of this is the possibility of much less disfigurement in case of timely care. But our facilities for treatment of burnt patients are dismally poor. Apart from a large number of accidental fires all across the country every year, the high incidence of acid throwing during the past few years called for skin grafting facilities.

An advanced country in this respect, Italy is surely going to fulfil a long-felt need of Bangladesh. People in the West can afford the luxury of plastic surgery to heighten their look and improve shape. In our country, only a few people are in a position to bear the high expenses of plastic surgery. But no doubt, there are a large number of people in desperate need of this treatment. This brings to the important question how the proposed hospital will be run. If the treatment is equally costly for all segments of people, many will be unable to avail of the opportunity.

We, therefore, suggest that the hospital take a cue from the recently established Heart Foundation which has opened its door to treat the poor patients free of charge. The rich will have to pay the charge which in all likelihood is going to be cheaper than that of abroad. At this point, what counts most is the quality of treatment and the standard maintained at the hospital. We have every reason to believe that Italian medical expertise will be the last to compromise on the question of quality. The local people who will be responsible for the day-to-day management, again, have a significant role to play in this respect. Often the tone set by foreign experts are gradually down-graded by our local management. Let us hope, this will not be the case here.

Is there any other country where things can go so terribly wrong, where so many people die so wretchedly in the glare of global TV, that the world's big powers have reason enough to intervene?

No other country seems close to matching Somalia's agony. And no other state has fallen so deep into the pit of anarchy that all governmental authority has vanished, leaving a vacuum that the United Nations says it must fill.

But the world is not short of famine hotspots. Mozambique, which itself is just emerging from a long and destructive civil war, "may be next", warns Peter Newhouse, the chief of the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) famine early warning system.

FAO's latest Food Outlook report says the food supply situation is "especially critical in southern Sudan with deaths from starvation reported in several towns". In Ethiopia, harvests are expected to be good this year, but the situation of vulnerable communities in the Ogaden is said to be "extremely serious".

Many say so long as there are poor people, there shall always be the threat of starvation even in a world that has more than enough food to feed itself.

FOOD

Will there be Other Somalias?

Starving, skeletal human beings could be a common sight in an economically imbalanced world torn by strife. Ramon Isberto of IPS reports, from Rome.

As their debt burdens grow heavier, developing countries are using more of their land for cash crops for export instead of the production of food for domestic consumption.

But their agricultural exports are barely surviving themselves in the world market, as the prices of government-subsidised goods from the North beat them pound for pound.

"For a limited number of agents in a position to call most of the shots, food is nothing more than a series of commodities on which money can be made (even occasionally lost) exactly like rubber or gold," writes Susan George in her book *How the Other Half Dies*.

As multi-national military troops led by the US armed forces carry out their 'rescue mission' in Somalia, the possibility of another food emergency is being debated.

Agency inviting United Nations intervention breaking out has driven the heated debate between developed and developing countries over food aid.

At the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) held here recently, southern states resisted attempts to write provisions into the documents that in any way suggested food aid could be forcibly delivered, Somalia-style, to a famine-struck country.

The developing countries won the round. The final conference declaration was purged of provisions that open the possibility that national sovereignty could be set aside for "exceptional humanitarian situations".

Instead, the declaration says that food aid should be sent to those in need "in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations" which requires that national sovereignty be respected and aid be given only at the request of the country concerned.

But this is not likely to end the debate. The failure of the international community to act earlier has cost the Somalis hundreds of thousands of lives. Governments may be more sensitive to future calls for action to save starving civilians.

FAO experts reject criticisms that Somalia's slide into mass starvation took them by surprise. The first famine alert on Somalia was raised by the FAO as far back early 1991.

The January-February 1991 edition of the *Foodcrops and Shortages*, an FAO publication

regularly sent to donor governments, agencies and relief NGOs, reported that because of "civil disturbances in December and January (1990).... marketing channels have been seriously disrupted and severe food shortages (were) now being reported."

In May 1991, the FAO reported that the country's cereal crop had failed and that "without an improvement on the security situation", large parts of the population would suffer from hunger and malnutrition.

In September 1991, the FAO warned that 4.5 million people were at serious risk of starvation.

By then, various UN agencies through the World Food Programme (WFP) and relief NGOs were in the thick of the crisis, vainly trying to deliver desperately-needed food stocks.

But as FAO reports through-out 1991 and 1992, fighting between warlords and gang-

sterism kept supplies from getting where they were needed.

In July 1991, when the first reports of deaths from starvation came, the FAO reported that only "limited supplies" of WFP relief food was getting through. Three months later, it reported that "without a rapid improvement in the security situation," the famine would quickly spread.

Governments which support the UN Security Council resolution authorising the deployment of a US-led multinational military force now stress that Somalia should not be taken as a precedent.

But there are already nasty civil wars threatening to create famines of Somalia-like proportions.

In Liberia, fighting between competing factions is keeping humanitarian assistance out. In Sudan, the people in the southern regions are suffering the consequences of from what some critics call a genocidal policy of the Khartoum government.

But proponents of intervention need to remember that Somalia's misfortune was witness at least partly the product of past superpower intervention gone dreadfully wrong.

Poverty Alleviation

Population Control should form an Overall Strategy

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

THE terminology 'poverty alleviation' has been gaining currency in recent days particularly after Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Harare in October, 1991 and sixth SAARC Summit in Colombo in December, 1991. The sixth SAARC Summit empowered an Independent South Asian Commission formed with eminent personalities and economists of its member countries to examine experiences made in each SAARC country and prescribe policy measures for poverty alleviation.

While looking at the key human development components in an overall poverty alleviation strategy the Independent Commission of SAARC has examined how to ensure a minimum nutritional entitlement approach for the South Asian poor keeping in mind the concept of 'Dal Bhaat' of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Begum Khaleda Zia.

In fact all the member countries of SAARC, with the exception of Bhutan and Maldives whose per capita incomes are on the high side with less pressure of population on land, have adopted multifarious programmes to meet the needs of the people of their areas. If we look at

their statistics, we will see that the people in most of these countries are living in object poverty.

	Literate	GNP per adult	Daily calorie supply as on 1986	People below poverty line
Bangladesh	42.0	\$ 206	83%	100.0 Million
Bhutan	0.6	\$ 415	No figure available	
India	280.0	\$ 310	94%	410.0
Maldives	8.2	\$ 470	No figure available	
Nepal	8.2	\$ 160	94%	11.6
Pakistan	43.5	\$ 430	92%	36.7
Sri Lanka	1.3	\$ 510	106%	No figure available

Source: Asiaweek, 16 October, 1992 and Human Development Report, UNDP, 1992.

From the above table, it can be seen that percentage of illiterate people is also high in the member countries of SAARC with the exception of Sri Lanka. This is the real picture of our societies which represent one fourth of the population of the planet.

Therefore, the concern of our leaders in the SAARC countries over growing poverty was expressed at their last summit and their determination to alleviate poverty was reflected in the establishment of an Independent Commission which plan to submit recommendations before the seventh SAARC Summit to be held in Dhaka. Their proposed recommendation will cover the

following:
a) A framework of a plan for growth rate of the population in SAARC countries.

	Population in Million	Rate of Growth	Projected Population by 2000
Bangladesh	117.7	2.7%	150.6
Bhutan	1.5	2.3%	1.9
India	860.1	2.1%	1,041.5
Maldives	0.2	3.4%	No figure available
Nepal	19.9	2.3%	24.1
Pakistan	121.0	2.9%	162.4
Sri Lanka	17.5	1.3%	19.4

Source: Asiaweek, 30 October, 1992 and Human Development Report, UNDP, 1992.

Except Sri Lanka, the increase in the growth of population poses an alarming situation. Programmes for planned families have not yet shown effective results in spite of investment in the areas of family planning. Whatever might have been achieved in economic term by member countries of SAARC in the last one decade has been eaten up by the inexorable rise of population.

Viewed against this backdrop governments in SAARC countries have emphasised on a growth oriented strategy which includes increase in national income through expanding agriculture and industries. In Sri Lanka, emphasis is laid on improvement of income level after achieving high level

of literacy and health status of the people. Meanwhile, a number of non-governmental organisa-

tions in SAARC countries have been pursuing programmes designed to alleviate poverty. A few projects in these countries have received worldwide acclamation of these, Grameen Bank and BRAC in Bangladesh and the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, Gilgit in Pakistan and the Janasakthi Bank Society in Sri Lanka deserve special mention as these projects involved poor peoples in generating income and contributing to the growth of the economy. Apart from these, integrated Child Development Services programme, Rural Wage Employment programmes and Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra in India, Food Stamp Scheme in

Sri Lanka which supplies food at subsidised rate covering half of the population whose monthly income does not exceed Rupees 700, a Toll Development programme in Maldives, the SFDP in Nepal and a Health programme in Bhutan are doing good job in alleviating poverty.

Poverty originates from rural areas which are uncared for generally and women in rural areas are living in disadvantaged position. As women comprise more than 40% of the population, importance should be attached to their participation in income generating projects and planned family programmes. Reduction of population growth should form overall strategy for poverty alleviation.

Accountable programmes are called for increasing the level of education, creating greater awareness about planned family, raising the age of marriage within the legal framework and mobilising the poor in rural oriented projects. Here both government and non-governmental organisations could play complementary role in planning and implementation of projects for poverty alleviation without frittering away further time and poor tax-payers' money on seminars and meetings.

Azim Haroon is a happy man.

Five years after leaving school, he has found a job although it was not the kind he expected to get. Like most Pakistani young men his age, Azim thought his future lay in government service.

But thanks to an innovative scheme, Azim not only will get a respectable living but he will actually be earning more than he would have received if he landed a government job.

Azim will be self-employed. He will soon be driving his own taxicab purchased through a bank loan.

"I am happy, very happy indeed today," the young man said as he clutched the cheque presented to him by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, at a ceremony in Islamabad, the country's capital.

Azim is only one of several young men and other beneficiaries of a project launched by

Pakistan Revamps Public Transport

Javed A. Malik writes from Islamabad

The Prime Minister, in launching the scheme, acknowledged the public transport system 'is in shambles'.

the government to deal with at least two problems — unemployment and a shortage of public transport.

The project, the "Prime Minister's Incentives Scheme to Revamp Public Transport," intends to bring into Pakistan's roads at least 20,000 public utility vehicles including taxis, buses, mini-buses and pickups within the next two years to help meet the country's public transport needs.

The innovative scheme was drawn up partly to deal with the problem of a high unemployment rate. It is estimated that Pakistan has 1.03 million unemployed people and more than 30 million underemployed. Every year one million new jobseekers enter the market, most of them rely on the government to provide employment.

But the government, given its limited resources, is unable to meet the demand. In fact, there are even plans to trim the bureaucracy as it has been found that government agencies are overstuffed. The government's decision to pursue privatisation and deregulation has further constrained its capacity to provide jobs.

Prime Minister Sharif, in launching the scheme, also acknowledged that the public transport system "is in shambles." The transport system has been the victim of neglect, remaining inefficient and un-

reliable over the years. Over-crowding of buses is a common sight. Those who can afford buy a car so that roads are now congested, particularly during rush hours. The government spends millions of rupees each year to subsidise government bus services but very little improvement has occurred so far.

With the country bent on achieving rapid industrialisation by opening up the economy, the chaotic public transport system could be a major stumbling block. Even now, strong-arm tactics have emerged in the highly competi-

tive industry. Cartels which have developed control the transport industry and block the entrance of new entrepreneurs particularly in profitable areas.

Under the Prime Minister's project interested persons, companies and firms apply for a loan with a bank for the purchase of a vehicle. Individuals are required to shoulder 30 per cent of the equity but the amount is reduced to 15 per cent if the loan applicant is unemployed and only a high school graduate.

When an application is approved, the banks issue a cheque in the name of the dealer from whom the vehicle is to be purchased.

The scheme is dubbed the "one-window operation" as applicants deal with only one office — the Director General

for Communications. Loans are repayable within five years in easy instalments at an interest rate of 15 per cent.

The government has allowed the duty-free import of vehicles to make the project feasible. This is the biggest incentive since without the tax-free condition, the cost of vehicles would have been beyond the means of applicants. Duties on imported vehicles amount to more than 100 per cent of their costs.

Within one week of launching the project, a total of 1,209 vehicles were booked for purchase. Azim was only one of 904 applicants for taxi loans. The purchase of 186 mini-buses and 57 buses was also arranged during the first week. Of the first 800 applicants, 400 earn an income of less than 3,000 rupees (US \$120) a month and 150 earn less than 5,000 rupees (US \$200) a month.

— *Depthnews Asia*

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.

Industrial prospect

Sir, Linking your editorial (Industrial Prospect) to that of the Gemini News Service's profile on the billionaire Prime Minister of Lebanon Mr. Rafic Hariri published in your esteemed daily in the same page on the same day of 9th January '93, I wonder, if in accordance with Hariri slogan 'Hope is equivalent to action' we just go on hoping for the best instead of materialising it to actions; as being expressed in our off-held seminars and workshops as that of Independent University Bangladesh (IUB) at BIRDEM, Dhaka, which generally winds up with time and paper consuming efforts to remain as such to be moth-eaten or to get recycled as grocers' packaging material? We thus may have to end up ourselves with 'hope', to be cursed by the future generation, if at all survives.

The fate of war ravaged Lebanon and anarchy ravaged Bangladesh though have a similitude in respect of politics and civil administration, the magnitude of our problems with 40 times more populace

than Lebanon are, nonetheless, terrific and tremendous to wipe-out, as Mr. Hariri has vowed to, unless democracy can be allowed to function smoothly, strongly in true sense of purpose to do away with the in-built mischiefs, inefficiency within and outside the Government machinery.

Industrial sector of the country, as considered to be the key to socio-economic development, is in abject tropy-tropy condition and presumably none concerned at the helm of the affairs realises the reasons and magnitudes of the failures being committed unabatedly. No magic can turn the table overnight. Absence of right professionals out of engineers and technologists in the field of industrial policy making decisions and apathy to develop such professionals in the country to undertake the onerous responsibility and authority to innovate and implement are the basic reasons of failures of this sector. The professionals and so-called professionals have to serve their masters as they want to be served. How then one can expect domestic

productivity and technological capability to grow, if the right scope is not given to the right people to play the right role?

A developing country like ours should obviously be aid-dependent to accelerate the pace of development and we must be capable at the same time to guarantee its proper utilisation. In fact our total failure in this respect, obviously, concerned the donor countries to link-up conditions at the cost of our sovereignty while granting aid, taking our incapability, ignorance and above all attitude of possible misuse of the fund, in consideration. After all, it is also a business for them and they are not fools to be fooled by the foolishness on our part. Absolute or excessive aid dependency is prevalent, however, is simply undesirable as it detriments industrial development, local and import substitute production, technology development as well as employment generation.

S M Nuruzzaman
Industrial consultant,
Dhaka

Police

Sir, Many a thing has been written about the administration now the press has been particularly good. Articles on corruption surfaces almost every day in the print media and it's true that the opposition has played the vital role in not letting the government achieve

what it could otherwise have.

As a citizen, what strikes me most these days is the behaviour of the police, who I think is acting as a strong catalytic agent, playing only second fiddle to the opposition. Not even a couple of months ago the atrocities of the police were highlighted in two alternative days' editorial in your newspaper; a lead banner on shameful police behavior in arresting people on false warrants was published in a vernacular daily and articles and news keep in every now and then about the police force in almost all print media.

Existing laws, the newly passed Anti-terrorism Bill or whatever? It is the police who are mainly responsible for executing them. It is they who give the final reports and it is they where people go for help. In the very first place, it is somewhat rewarding to see police officers asked questions on TV regarding their misdeeds. When a DIG of police was in the recent past interviewed on TV he categorically mentioned that there were a few corrupt officials in the force.

From beating up the journalists, ignoring armed robbery cases, showing arrogance, allegedly asking for money to enter a general diary to beating up cricketers, some of whom represent Bangladesh is just but a few examples. What do all

these lead to? It is not an uncommon practice for the media to mention very often that the real criminals are roaming freely whereas the innocent are behind bars. This way crime grows on and people lose respect, get frustrated and tend to take the law into their own hands those who can. Is this what the police in our country want — at the expense of the entire nation?

I strongly suggest, that the police department be properly screened, strained and necessary measures taken against violators. It is understood that the government cannot look into all this. But let the government take open suggestions from the general public.

Ask for written complaints with or without names (for obvious reasons) of the persons complaining. Genuineness of a complaint could easily be verified. It doesn't take a genius to do all that. There are many ways of finding out. The MPs owe it to us for our sake and for their own sake.

The police department survives with our tax. We all pay tax some way or the other. It is upon the government to start seriously looking into it. After all the government is also being sabotaged. The identified corrupt officers and staff of the police force should be given a capital punishment in public. If that is once done, many will

come to their senses.

The opposition will most likely give a big hue and cry about the whole affair. They should be totally ignored. It is high time something was done. For the sake of the entire nation. The government, owes the country some physical changes. Not in the tune of SAARC fountains and Anti-terrorism Bills, but something real that could save this country and the countrymen.

A concerned citizen

Humble request

Sir, Congratulation to Mr. Imtiaz Javed for the wonderful write up "An humble request" December 19, 1992, The Daily Star. However, some of the observations are as under.

All the leaders of the country ought to use the country-made simple clothes as it is observed in some other countries of the world. The leaders also ought to eliminate using of the luxurious items as it is clear in many countries of the world.

Any country of the world develops on the leadership of the leaders of the given country.

Andrew D Costa
Dhaka