

Saddam's Choice

Good sense, it seems, has prevailed upon Saddam Hussein. He has offered a ceasefire. But one never knows what President Saddam's next move will be. Clearly, he has not learnt from the earlier reversal in the war he alone invited. Bolstered by a false sense of military strength, he underestimated the overwhelming superiority of the Allied fire power. Even after his invasion of Kuwait, Saddam was given the choice of retreating without making the US, the UK and France his adversaries. He made the most wrong choice possible to his country's and his own peril. A defeated despot, Saddam still was lucky to get the best bargain under the circumstances. Not only was the war not taken to its expected culmination in which Saddam had to go, but also there was no internal pressure for his immediate ouster.

Saddam might once again have received the wrong signal in that he considered he had weathered tremendous odds with credits. Such a reasoning might be responsible for continual defiance of the UN resolutions by the Iraqi strongman. The latest row over the deployment of anti-aircraft missile system in the no-fly zone has led to the US and then Allied missile attacks and bombing on Iraq. Again Saddam could avoid this military offensive if he could demonstrate enough political savvy. Instead, he gave the impression that his intransigence called for such a military action. His offer for ceasefire however has little bearing on the developments in the Gulf now. It is the US and its Allies who are going to dictate the terms. Saddam might do well if recognised his position of weakness in the first place. He did not do so and the acrimonious confrontation has once again taken place.

Once more, it is none other than Saddam who has been the loser. He will have to agree to the terms — perhaps more humiliating — laid down by the forces on the offensive. The fact is that Saddam has refused to recognise the obtaining reality. His disadvantages are many and various. Even where he is right, Saddam is beaten by Western media propaganda. The Bush administration in particular was bent on depicting all his moves in contravention with the UN resolutions. The recent US attacks have been justifiably questioned if they were carried out with the UN sanction. The world was however given to understand that the attacks were so sanctioned but the issue will ever remain debatable. There is none in today's world to stand by Iraq and to bring the point into focus. Russia has mildly raised the question of Allied attacks and legitimately demanded for discussion of the issue in the UN Security Council before further offensive. But Russia cannot expect to be heard like the Soviet Union used to be.

There lies the crux of the problem. With the end of cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the US enjoys unilateral right to rebuke any nation it considers on the wrong side. Now the most important question is: if with the change in command at the White House, things will be looking up for nations known not for their particularly good relations with America. Iraq has already indicated it will look forward to an improved relationship with the new leadership at the White House. Bill Clinton has so far supported Bush's military offensive against Iraq but has at the same time reciprocated Saddam's wish for a new beginning. Notwithstanding his support, Clinton will hopefully be different in his approach to the Gulf problem. The new US president can ill afford to drag on a debilitating military exercise, specially when he has inherited almost insurmountable problems including the huge US foreign debt. Saddam must be made to behave, but this cannot be the only reason for concentrating all the energy there because there are more pressing problems asking for immediate solution.

Terroristic Spree

The anti-terrorism law enacted recently tends to diminish some of fundamental rights. And yet the government felt it was something that the national situation warranted and very urgently too. Too much store was placed on this controversial law — it was projected to be an all-in answer to terrorism of all conceivable kind.

The murder of two important political leaders on consecutive days at Chittagong — the city went on a complete halt to demonstrate its repugnance to the acts — gives a defiant lie to the thought of that law having any deterring effect. The Shibir rampage at Rajshahi University campus on Saturday night speaks eloquently of the massive failure of that seemingly harsh law. And what can beat the communal elements involving demolition of temples and burning of villages making thousands live under a chilly winter sky — in making a farce of that law? As if something was still left of it to be brought down to ignominy — personnel from the government's sanctum sanctorum of coercive power — the naval wing of the armed forces threw suburban villages of Chittagong into nightmarish carnage — taking potshots at dozens and dozens of people and putting village after village to the torch and sparing none that came their way.

Medieval-style stoning of a woman in pursuance of a fatwa which has no legal force ran a current of shock down the nation's spine the other day. How is anti-terrorism law taking care of it? If it has failed to prevent it, how is it going to cure it?

Road and river dacoities, violent clashes between groups of people always leading to some deaths are on the increase as if in proportion with the casualties of the so-called traffic accidents.

Where shall we place the performance of our capital city in this? From January 1, we had eight murders in the city in 18 days. Dacoities of a horrific nature over the same period of time were nine. And mugging exceeding half a century. In almost all the cases of those hijacking, fire arms were used to make women give up their jewellery.

Things have deteriorated in so many diverse ways. Could anyone think of a bomb explosion in the Gazi, that Rocket Service giant vessel. Some passenger was carrying the bomb and reportedly it went off inadvertently. The law and order situation has come to this.

The anti-terrorism law looks so silly! But that is no comfort for us. Why is the social situation taking such a plunge? Hasn't the government anything to stop it? Any positive step towards that would for the government be to presage it by an open admission of the situation rather than blaming everything on conspiracies and the handwork of the opposition.

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MADNESS of Saddam Hussein is well known but it is not necessary for anyone to compete with him on this. He was rightly and thoroughly punished for his adventure in Kuwait. One should, however, admit that some of the conditions of the Gulf War ceasefire agreement were not only heavy, these were unjust too. These indeed sowed the seeds of future conflict and hence the present crisis. The UN team for destruction of Iraq's mass killing weapons have long been ploughing Iraq's soil and with it Iraq's sovereignty. The process is still continuing though some experts of the team reportedly said the team had already accomplished its task.

The Iraq-Kuwait border demarcation commission completed its work without Iraqi cooperation. Iraq has obviously rejected its decisions. The problems that existed before are still there. It seems that the UN Commissions went ahead with their work — drawing lines on the sand as the colonial powers did as if it would not bother anybody. Iraq continues to claim Kuwait as a part of its territory. It has been doing this for decades; it did not create any serious problem before but why suddenly it came to a head? The reasons seemed more economic than political. Gulf War has, however, given serious political dimension to it. Last week's border incursions by some Iraqis to recover some of the weapons they left in the pre-

AFTER a decade of fighting a proxy war for the superpowers in which a million Afghans were killed and five million became refugees, Afghanistan has been left to fend for itself.

The war-ravaged nation is counting heavily on outside support to rehabilitate itself. But response for emergency aid has been tepid, even from those nations that once supported the mujahideen guerrillas against the Soviet-backed government of then President Mohammed Najibullah.

As early as June last year, United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali had issued an appeal for emergency humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan.

He reminded the international community of its "obligation" to see that Afghans "be provided an opportunity to live in conditions of relative dignity and security."

But until the end of October, only US\$80 million have been pledged by donor countries — US\$100 million short of what Boutros-Ghali had said the land-locked nation desperately needs.

The United States, which channeled nine billion dollars worth of covert weapons for the mujahideen in Afghanistan, pledged a mere US\$50 million for the country's rehabilitation.

Earlier, Washington had "advised" the Afghan government against calling a pledging conference in New York, under the United Nations' auspices, to ask for bilateral-level commitment.

Others that raked in huge profits from selling arms to the Afghan mujahideen are now adopting a "hands-off"

To the Editor...

Dangerous controversies

Sir, I was indeed delighted to go through the commentary "Dangerous Fascination in Controversies" by Mahfuz Anam published in your daily in 12th January. I wonder what prompts the hon'ble minister to make such comments. I fail to conceive what difference it makes whether Sheikh Mujib in the history-making gathering on 7 March, 1971 concluded his speech by "Joy Bangla" or "Joy Pakistan". Will it elevate the late President Ziaur Rahman by iota of an inch? Or will Sheikh Mujib be stripped of "Banga Bandhu" title? Will his contributions go down the drain, unnoticed, dishonoured?

It is a mystery why there exists a tendency in some people to make comparisons between Sheikh Mujib and Ziaur Rahman. Both occupy distinct honourable positions in our national history. Role of Sheikh Mujib in rousing the people against brute Pakistani rulers cannot be obliterated from the pages of history. We hold both these personalities in highest esteem.

Major Zia's call over radio inspired Bengali uniformed men to revolt. "Major Zia" and "Capt Bhuiyan" were two names repeatedly aired from Kalurghat. These announcements were additional igniters and real boosters. It is really utter stupidity if one attempts to compare Sheikh Mujib and Ziaur Rahman. Every human

It's Madness in the Middle East

Saddam was indeed playing with the US in the last days of Bush administration. His missile batteries posed hardly any serious threat to US and allied aircraft. But there seemed to be a personality clash. As it seems, George Bush was determined to have another go at Saddam before leaving the White House and at the same time create enough trouble for Bill Clinton who denied him another term in the White House.

sent disputed areas were undoubtedly violations of ceasefire terms but Iraq said it had permission from UN officials stationed there. In any case once UN condemned this, Iraq agreed to stop incursions. It was necessary to wait and see whether further incursions took place.

Gulf war and its ceasefire terms have virtually crippled Iraq both politically and economically. It is one thing to punish its leader for his destructive adventures but completely a different thing to deny the entire nation of its livelihood and also its sovereign rights. Iraq's northern no-fly zone cut off 36th parallel stands cut off from Iraq under UN ceasefire terms; justification given is Saddam oppresses Kurdish people. True, but such oppressions are taking place in many parts of the world. Can UN or US stop them? Let us not bring in Serbs' rape and torture of Bosnian women here as it is a slur not only on the UN and, for that matter, on other Western allies, but also on the entire civilisation. While such abominable things have been happening in Bosnia, US and Western allies imposed "no-fly zone" on southern Iraq to protect Shiites even without any specific UN authorisation. It was apparently done through extended interpretation of Gulf War ceasefire terms. These two no-fly zones at the north and south virtually divided Iraq into three parts. In its own territory Iraq is branded as an enemy and it can not fly its own aircraft! Iraq stationed in its own territory, in and around 32nd parallel, some anti-aircraft missile batteries —

probably useless ones compared to sophisticated US equipment, but US and allies demanded their removal. They say these posed threat to US and allied planes which patrol southern Iraq sky. Saddam reportedly removed them but probably not far enough. The US did acknowledge that the missiles were moved out of the original threatening positions but they were not sure about the locations due to poor visibility. Saddam was indeed playing with the US in the last days of Bush administration. His missile batteries posed

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

hardly any serious threat to US and allied aircraft. But there seemed to be a personality clash. As it seems, George Bush was determined to have another go at Saddam before leaving the White House and at the same time create enough trouble for Bill Clinton who denied him another term in the White House.

Allied war planes—about 100-started attacking Iraqi missile sites and other military targets on January 13. Accordingly to the Pentagon, about half of the targets were destroyed. No allied war plane was hit by Iraqi missiles. This only proved how ineffective the Iraqi missiles are. The US and allied attacks have been continuing. Again Iraqi civilian targets including residential hotel were hit killing scores of civilians. The questions is — were the Iraqi provocations

serious enough to justify allied bombings? The Arab world and also many other countries have either condemned or seriously criticised allied bombings on Iraq.

If one looks at the events it seems clear that Saddam's games posed no serious threat to US and allied positions in Iraq. There was no emergency at all. Even the White House spokesman specifically mentioned about Saddam's "cheat and retreat" game. But apparently, Bush became intolerant. Despite apparent initial hesitations from Britain and France,

material breach of UN Security Council resolutions." This was hardly any justification for a superpower to move militarily against another UN member. Mr Boutros Ghali is the Chief Executive of the UN and his statements, however correct they be, can not be the basis for a war. Any materials breach of UN Security Council resolutions must be considered by the Council itself for suitable actions and not by anybody else.

President Bush's action has not only created serious tension in the Middle East but also put new US administration into a difficult situation. Bill Clinton's entry into White House can not be a peaceful one. Clinton did show his support for Bush's actions but he have any alternative? None. As there was hardly any emergency, George Bush could have left the matter to Bill Clinton for a final assessment of the situation and necessary action. Bill Clinton is no novice; his considered decision, even if it led to bombing, could have avoided present diplomatic and political embarrassment. Bush's action will, in fact, increase radicalism in the Middle East and put US into further disadvantage.

President Saddam, as he is, goes by his own instinct — no matter what happens to his people and what rest of the world thinks about him. But enough is enough. It is high time for him to accept reality and modify his behaviour and tactics. Bill Clinton would probably largely follow the present US foreign policy. He already reportedly said, "there is no difference between my pol-

icy and the policy of the present administration." Here he apparently referred to US policy in Iraq. But with changed circumstances he might go for major policy changes. He apparently indicated this in one of his interviews. He said he was not "obsessed" with Mr Saddam. "I am going to judge you by your behaviour. I am not going to sit around trying to figure out what is motivating you." On questions of ouster of Saddam, Bill Clinton's approach seems somewhat different from George Bush. He said, "certainly based on evidence we have, the people of Iraq would be better off if they had a different ruler. But my job is not to pick their rulers for them." Thus Saddam stands a good chance to look for a working relationship with the US and consequently with the allies. He has done well by declaring unilateral ceasefire which was apparently received well by Clinton administration though it also insisted on full compliance of the UN resolutions. Saddam may continue to pursue the path of reconciliation and tell Bill Clinton on the day of his assumption of the US Presidency that in order to honour him he will abide by the resolutions of the UN provided the US and allies reconsider the clauses of the resolutions that infringe on the sovereignty and unity of Iraq. However, he has to be ready to pay high prices for his wrong deeds but this seems to be the only way to save his country and his people. The new administration might respond positively as it is also highly concerned about Iran's role in the Gulf and its apparently expansionist policies in the wake of the dissolution of Soviet Union.

Let President Bill Clinton who has just entered the White House reassess the entire situation in the Gulf, allow passions to cool down and take decisions that would help stop madness in the region.

Afghanistan: No Help to Rebuild

Aid to rebuild Afghanistan, once the battlefield for a showdown between the superpowers, has been very slow in coming. Nasim Zehra reports from Islamabad.

policy toward the country. The Italians, whose companies made big business out of selling land-mines to the guerrillas, are even wary of providing substantial support for de-mining efforts.

This has prompted one UN official to tell an Italian diplomat: "Let some of those war-time profits that your companies made be ploughed back into clearing these death traps."

After 14 years of civil war, mujahideen guerrillas succeeded in finally overthrowing Najibullah in May. A coalition government formed by the different mujahideen factions has been in place since, and Afghan refugees from nearby Iran and Pakistan have begun returning home.

But land-mines have killed many of the returning refugees. Hundreds have also been killed after the coalition began to crack along tribal lines and the radical Hezb-Islami group launched attacks on the capital, Kabul.

As winter sets in, humanitarian organisations are worried that many areas in Afghanistan will be cut off from food and medical supplies. Many aid convoys are already having difficulty reaching their destinations as tribal factions set up blockades.

"Western donors have argued that substantive support for reconstruction should come only after Afghanistan gains political stability and peace. Said one Western diplomat: "Who do we send aid to when Afghans are fighting among themselves?"

German foreign minister Klaus Kinkel told reporters in Islamabad last month that while there is a lot of aid for Afghan reconstruction in the pipeline, these will not be released until there is a stable government in Kabul.

But the Afghans have counter-argued that recent fighting has been restricted to Kabul while the rest of the country is tranquil. They have also pointed out that people have remained determined to rebuild their homes as refugees come back in droves.

Outside the capital, traditional administrative networks have begun functioning once more as life returns to normal.

Experts say Afghanistan's rehabilitation needs are twofold: Immediate needs include essentials to get refugees back on track such as basic water supply and seed and fertiliser to grow crops.

For the long-term, they country needs to do major road repairs and build com-



munication networks and irrigation channels.

But a huge chunk of donors' pledges are aimed at the refugee repatriation efforts. Only 1.71 percent of the funds

are for the agricultural sector while 1.22 percent is to be used in rehabilitating the education system of Afghanistan.

As the country waits for aid to arrive, international organi-

sations are trying to fill in the gaps. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for instance, has contributed one million dollars, to be used in a comprehensive review and technical appraisal of Afghanistan's rehabilitation needs.

The Office for Coordination of the UN Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programme is also putting together efforts of various UN agencies in getting international donations of food, fuel, medical supplies and shelter material.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's neighbours have proved more forthcoming than the West in providing aid. Pakistan has donated 10 million dollars plus 50 tonnes of wheat to the new government.

Iran has also extended it an export credit facility of one million dollars while Saudi Arabia has provided the country with 25,000 tonnes of fuel.

India has opted to help on a 'swap' basis. In exchange for tea provided by India to Kazakhstan, Alma Ata will supply 50,000 tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan.

OPINION

New Jamdani Designs and Larger Issues

Nancy Wong's story (Star, Jan 14), on the breakthrough in new designs of Jamdani textiles is the type of news features the readers would like to read about.

Ironically speaking, this story should have appeared 20 or 40 years ago, but our unstable and disintegrating politics always came in the way, as it continues to do so even today: the nation's energies are diverted into internal political bickering, and the professionals and administrators are not allowed to devote their attention to their specific daily jobs. In short, bringing the daily activities to normal routine level, which is saying a lot.

Thus, in the Govt sector, the working mode is always ad hoc this and that, according to the whims of the changing political masters, who stay for a short while, and the exercises start all over again, with new promises and policies. If the political masters stay long, they become corrupt, and the political agitation starts all over again — and hang the new jamdani designs, and the export of the native chocolate known as khejur gur (solid molasses made from the juice of date trees), or the Dhaka cheese (world's only) not to speak of garments, jute, tea, crockeries and king prawns.

The other side of the picture is that the Opposition get a whip to create discontent and disruption, and divert attention from development work, always finding fault with the new rulers, and suavely promising a better government; which is theoretically not possible, as the efficiency curve will not shoot up suddenly as if by magic (the opposition is fully aware of this fallacy or deception). It is a vicious cycle which we have not been able to stop even now.

To come to the point, research and development work at the lowest or rural level is not an ad hoc activity depend-

A Mawaz

dent on mere public announcements from time to time by the elected representatives of the people (popularity propaganda stunts). Our chameleon politicians forget that ninety per cent of serious work is invisible at the initial stage: the result of planting a sapling will bear fruit after several years. Our leaders should not oversell the "instant" philosophy, and should stop misguiding our innocent chasht-bhais.

Coming back to Jamdani textiles, there are still no National Awards for traditional Jamdani, Muslin, and Nakshi Kantha handicraft designs/works, as we have in the case of art and literature (the latter flourish only in the urban areas?). It is a pity that only top-level patronisation can revive an art (Jatra is a recent example). Which is the best (scientifically) rickshaw design of 1991, for example, or the best fruit juice of Bangladesh (over 90 per cent are adulterated, as are the edible oils)?

Where is the BASE planning in every sector? In the news reports, the statistics revealed at the CPA (C wealth Pharmaceuticals Society) meeting in Dhaka, attended by the Prime Minister, make dismal reading: The severe shortage of qualified pharmaceutical staff at key points in the public and private sectors — no posts, or vacant posts — and we are shouting ourselves hoarse at the malpractices of a few medicine manufacturers.

A vital lapse is the low efficiency (and corruption) of the Inspection wing of the Regulating agencies in all the sectors, who are not carrying out their normal duties properly and conscientiously. No system can have an infinite number of layers or tiers of Supervisors and super-Supervisors. This tendency has become a disease in the soci-

ety (power, telecom sectors, smuggling, permit-hunting, evasion of income tax, power brokers, nepotism).

We have to face some basic questions: Where politics ends and administration starts? How to spot political interference or influence not covered by policy decision (nepotism, graft)? How far is good management allowed to work professionally? How bad management is controlled? Why "popular policies (e.g. more factories and tertiary educational institutions when the existing ones cannot be run efficiently; pampering surplus staff and unproductive units) should not be accorded low priorities?

As a citizen, I have the same message (we can also sermoneise) for the two political groups, those in power, and those in the opposition: Stop politics and do some work we all can see. We are not interested in (your) politics — we are busy with our own professions. We work quietly, and expect the same from the other professionals. What hurts us is that the politicians (hopefully professionals) think that their audiences are dumb-headed.

Tell us how to bring LDC-level research and development work (like this Jamdani example) down to routine level. We have been repeatedly told that everything done so far is wrong and only a certain political party can deliver the goods. It is not a question of patriotism or differences in political ideologies; it is pure and simple transparent and non-technical honesty. There is no shortage of skilled workers at all levels, and we have an unlimited supply of unskilled workers. What is it that the politicians are looking for that is mysterious and we do not understand? A time might come when we might lose faith in politics, if we have not already done so.