

## The Counter to Iraqi Build-up

Things by Saturday evening had a disquieting look and continued to slide to a truly bad situation by the hour. But it is hard to say where. Both the White House and the White Hall reacted sharply to a reported Iraqi deployment of elite divisions on its border with Kuwait. And at the UN the US ambassador had harsh words to warn Iraq against a repetition of past mistakes — the same phrase coming handy to President Clinton who pledged meeting such mistakes with the same resolve as before. And warships were sent to the Persian Gulf, US troops and Patriot batteries moved to Kuwait. One only hopes that the situation is not indeed as bad as it is looking.

In Kuwait itself, however, the situation was far from panicky. The general perception among the ordinary Kuwaiti citizen as also some responsible diplomats was that Iraqi troops movement towards south was true but it certainly did not appear like armour on the warpath. Iraq has categorically denied any plan to invade Kuwait and political analysts were convinced of there being compelling domestic reasons for Saddam to embark on such suspicious-looking military action at a time Iraq was lobbying hard for the lifting of UN sanctions against Baghdad. The whole exercise so far on the part of the west boils down to as if Washington and London were not taking any chances.

As it would be inconceivably foolish for the deployment to shape into a regular invasion and invite retribution harsher than before a 'repetition of past mistakes' is highly improbable. On the other hand, the west is being deliberately cruel on the whole Iraqi nation by prolonging the sanctions and using these as a lever to get Baghdad eat the dust and be quick about accepting Kuwaiti sovereignty and decent about monitoring the curbing of Saddam's military might. A more cynical and hardly covert side to the sanctions is that these aim at pushing the Iraqi people to a state of desperation leading to their rejection of Saddam. Many see in the troops movement Saddam's attempt to contain exactly such eruptions. And after all southern Iraq has the Shi'ite Muslims in the majority — a community not holding a sunni Saddam particularly in love and esteem. If it is in the interest of the nations that Saddam doesn't anymore embark on precipitate action, it is equally, if not more, necessary for the good of all that the sanctions go. The 'invasion' is something as yet to materialise and the suffering of the Iraqi people is already there for years.

The Mideast scenario has since the Gulf War undergone a sea change. The emergence of a virtual Palestine state headed by PLO is having all kinds of fall-out including Jordan coming to terms with Israel and Syria taking up a rather subdued posture. The west had never had it so good in the region. These developments have seriously reduced the options open to Saddam — if he still harbours the dream of forging a pan-Arab nationalism with himself at its head, that is. In the circumstances the west would be well-advised to weigh the possible consequences of having an Iraq all anarchic and battered in the mind as a result of an assassinated or otherwise removed Saddam rather than limiting itself to muscle-flexing in reaction to internal Iraqi military action. The present state of tension to which the west has worked itself up to is all hopefully directed to Baghdad, for effect. It will be dangerous if this reaction should represent all of the west's ideas on the Iraqi-Kuwaiti-Saudi question. If you have peace and the good of the nations in your heart, pray do not push Iraq to desperation. Allow them some way out of the hell they have created for themselves.

## Banarasi's Bright Prospect

A seven-day Banarasi saree display is currently being held at the Shilpakala Academy art gallery. The choice of the venue — generally reserved for painting show — itself is a proof of an elevated recognition accorded to this until-recently neglected traditional cottage industrial product. Not that the artisans have suddenly learnt some special skills and added a new-found magical touch to their craft. They have, on the other hand, perfected the skill through generations and are bringing out an array of fine-textured sarees with beautiful — albeit complicated — stitch works. What was conspicuous by its absence in the sector was the concerned authority's patronage.

In the clamorous call for industrialisation and modernisation, the traditional productive sectors with tremendous potentials have been either deliberately ignored or allowed to disappear out of the focus. But with a most envious record to their credit, the weavers are sure to recover from the crisis. Signs are clear that at least for some of them shiny days are ahead. The local handloom industry as a whole may not be equally lucky and this is because of the wrong policies followed by governments for years together. But the reality is that the indigenous handlooms still contribute as much as 70 crore metres of clothes to the total requirement of 120 crore metres.

As for the 991 weaver families producing Banarasi things now seem to be looking good. A Banarasi village of 900 plots on 42 acres of land has been planned and the weavers will be given allotment there from next December. Reduction of duties on a number of raw materials required for Banarasi production and exhibitions of these sarees planned to be held in at least five African countries soon show a growing interest of the government in this area. The recent Banarasi exhibition in Calcutta has proved to be a crowning success and this might have provided the added impetus for the commodity's promotion abroad.

Along with Banarasi, Jamdani and Tangali varieties have a bright future. They have proved their competitiveness by virtue of their superior quality and cheaper production costs compared with Indian sarees — our main competitor. So there is a good prospect for some weavers to turn around and capture the market — both local and foreign. In today's competitive world no product can survive without the dual virtues of competitiveness and promotional activity. The weavers have done their part and now is the turn for the government to make their good work known all across the globe.

HERE is no last word in politics, they say. But then, why confine the precept to politics alone? As the latest saga of trade dispute between the United States and Japan amply demonstrates, the maxim applies equally well to commerce also. An accord which averted the immediate possibility of US trade sanctions against Japan was reached between the two countries in the early hours of Saturday, October 1. The agreement came at the end of a final 20-hour marathon session, lasting beyond the September 30 midnight deadline set by the United States. Yet, on the same Saturday that the pact was signed in Washington, the United States announced at noon that it was initiating a process under its trade laws that could bring sanctions against Japan in a matter of one year or so! Trade dispute between the two countries has only entered a new phase. No last word has been spoken yet.

The latest round of US-Japan trade talks owes its origin to the so-called framework agreement, concluded between the two countries in July last year in Tokyo. The two sides were there on the occasion of the annual summit of the Group of Seven leading industrial nations. The framework agreement was primarily designed to establish a mechanism for reducing Japan's trade surplus with the United States. The accord called for negotiations for enlarging the access of US goods in the Japanese market. It sought to establish negotiating ground rules for resolving the differences in approach that have characterised the fractious US-Japan trade relations for over two decades.

More to the point, the framework accord spoke of setting objective criteria for gauging the progress made in

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the opening of the Japanese market and for assessing the results of measures adopted to reduce the US trade deficit. Since then, the two sides had been arguing about what they had precisely agreed upon in Tokyo last year. Specifically, the term 'objective criteria' defied definition. Each side put up its own interpretation without seeming to agree what these objective criteria would precisely be. Analysts say that even after 15 months of off-and-on negotiations, leading up to the October 1 Washington accord, this area still remains vague and ambiguous.

The United States had all along insisted on a result-oriented approach in dealing with the trade issues. For achieving measurable results in reducing its trade deficit and in selling more of its goods on the Japanese market, it talked about numerical targets. In other words, Japan's trade surplus should be scaled down every year by a certain percentage of its GNP and so policy measure in this area would be designed to attain this result. Likewise, exports of specified US goods to Japan every year would have to increase by an agreed percentage and a mechanism would be put in place to strike the mark.

To go by the Japanese official utterances as could be gleaned from media reports, the idea of linking the movement of trade surplus to GNP was not totally unacceptable. However, regulating the volume of external trade in specified items, so as to increase their imports from a targeted source, was a different matter altogether. Such a measure, it was argued, would entail governmental control on the mar-

ket. Traders would have to be told to increase their imports of a specified item from a particular country or reduce export of another listed merchandise to the same destination. This would amount to practicing managed trade, it was said, a concept which clearly violated principles of open economy.

The upshot was, trade talks between the two countries broke off in February this year. There followed an interregnum of nearly three months of acrimonious trans-Pacific debate, spiced with aggressive posturing by both sides. But

government concerned. The process could last up to 18 months but if at the end of it all, the offending trading partner country does not come to terms, the United States could impose retaliatory measures unilaterally under its own trade laws.

Revival of Super 301 which had lapsed in 1990, drew adverse notice both from Europe and Asia. The US move came at a time when, after more than seven years of arduous and often acrimonious negotiations, the Uruguay Round global trade pact reached under the aegis of the General

Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was due to be signed in April. The signal for aggressive unilateralism, coming from the United States at this juncture, caused widespread concern if not consternation. There were talks of Japan taking its case to the GATT if the United States initiated trade retaliatory measures unilaterally.

Talks of trade war also upset the global financial market. The currency market seems to be headed for a new phase of volatility, particularly in respect of conversion rates between the US dollar and the Japanese yen. The market perception seemed to be that the dollar would be allowed to slide down continuously against the yen. A weak dollar would make American goods cheaper and hence more com-

petitive on the global market and in Japan. At the same time, a strong yen would cost importers of the Japanese goods more and thus erode Japan's export competitiveness. The dollar did fall to lowest post-World War II levels against the yen, sliding below 100 yens to a dollar. The trend, if it continued, could trigger widespread movements of global funds, destabilizing financial markets the world over.

Anyway, trade talks between the United States and Japan were resumed in May but again got stalled. Japan had been arguing that its import market was not really closed. It was pointed out that Japan's imports of \$241 billion of goods in 1993 made it the second largest importing nation in the world on a per capita basis, excluding intra-regional trade, after Germany. It was also argued that Japan's average tariff rate on manufactured and mining products was 2.2 per cent, compared to 5.4 per cent in the United States and 5.7 per cent for the European Union. The other side was not impressed and talked of non-tariff barriers and Japan's unique system of which has the effect of limiting imports. Japan also spoke, albeit rather vaguely, of introducing long-term tax cuts to encourage the Japanese consumers buy more foreign products with their higher disposable incomes — the market thus increasing imports on its own. The other side refused to be swayed by such promises, still insisting on measurable market-opening actions within a given time frame. Meanwhile, the final deadline of September 30 was approaching fast. This deadline

emanates from the revived Super 301 requirement that the so-called priority country be named by September 30, 1994.

The trade pact that was signed after 15 months of strenuous efforts, is now being regarded as only a partial accord. The agreement aims at opening three sectors of the Japanese market — government procurement of telecommunications and medical equipment, insurance and flat glass. Mentionably, it does not cover autos and auto parts which account for 59 per cent of the \$60 billion US annual trade deficit with Japan. On the question of setting down criteria for measuring results, analysts generally say that the terms of the accord remain ambiguous — leaving both sides to claim victory. By all accounts, numerical targets will not be there. All the same, a variety of objective criteria would be used to measure improvements in market opening. These include such yardsticks as trends in sales, market shares in government procurement, processing time for according permission for introducing new insurance products. Results will not be predetermined but progress will be monitored closely.

As noted at the outset, the United States has initiated proceedings under its trade laws in one sector already which could end up in retaliatory action against Japan.

Understandably, the sector chosen for this action is auto parts. It is reported that Japan has since been put on a trade watch list for possible retaliatory measures if it does not open its wood and paper markets further. Implementation of the accord signed earlier will also give rise to differing interpretations. All in all, more fireworks are perhaps in the offing.

## ALONG MY WAY

S B Chaudhuri

mostly from the Americans. Talks of US trade sanctions against Japan were very much in the air. United States revived the lapsed so-called Super 301 provision of its trade laws in March. Super 301 is generally seen as a powerful tool to aid the pursuit of an aggressive policy to open foreign markets for American goods. It enables the US administration to cite 'priority countries' indulging in, what it regards as unfair trade practices, the elimination of which held the most significant potential for increasing American exports. Such a priority country would be named by a specified date and then would follow an investigation which would include fact-finding, consultation with domestic industries which have been hurt and also talks with the foreign

government concerned. The process could last up to 18 months but if at the end of it all, the offending trading partner country does not come to terms, the United States could impose retaliatory measures unilaterally under its own trade laws.

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# Fresh Offensive Feared in the Heart of Caucasus

Andrew Boyd writes from Stepanakert, Nagorno Karabakh

For six years, war has been raging between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the enclave of Nagorno Karabakh, broken only by a four-month ceasefire punctuated by cross-border shelling. Peace talks are continuing in Europe. But now there are warnings that other countries could be drawn into the conflict.

THE fragile ceasefire in Nagorno Karabakh, a disputed region deep in the heart of the Caucasus, may not hold any longer as fears grow of an imminent attack from Azerbaijan.

The fertile, mountainous region close to Iran is just 165km by 65km and home to a mere 150,000 people. It was here that the term ethnic cleansing was coined, a phrase more commonly associated with Bosnia. And like Bosnia, conflict in Karabakh is a legacy of the Soviet leader Stalin and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Since 1988, Nagorno Karabakh — a Christian enclave within predominantly Muslim Azerbaijan — has been caught up in a war of self-determination against the government in the capital, Baku. If Karabakh's survival is threatened, neighbouring Armenia — also Christian — warns it will send troops.

There are indications that Turkey is supplying military help to Azerbaijan. Some observers fear its long-term aim could be to revive Turkish influence across the region. Other countries view the potential flashpoint with dismay.

Iran has a sizeable Turkish minority and is understandably concerned. Russia has offered to send in peacekeeping troops. The deal has yet to be agreed. There are fears that the conflict could become an international one.



This is a particularly critical one that could mushroom, warns United States Congressman Frank Wolf, who recently visited the region. An uneasy ceasefire was called after Karabakh managed to drive Azeri troops from its borders and take the hinter-

land which separated it from Armenia.

It was a dramatic turnaround. Two years ago Azeri troops overran 40 per cent of Karabakh, bringing the death toll to an estimated one-tenth of the population. Today, by keeping a buffer zone between

itself and Azeri forces, Karabakh is able to keep its villages beyond range of missile and artillery attack. The conflict has created up to a million refugees, and accusations of atrocities have been levelled against both sides. Armenia says it will return occupied territories and let the refugees come back if a deal is struck to let Russian peacekeeping troops come in.

Politicians are at pains to say that this is not a religious war. Even so, on the frontline sit some 2,000 Mujahedin mercenaries from Afghanistan; Turkey is maintaining a five-year blockade of Armenia, and there are allegations that the conflict is being partially funded by Saudi Arabia.

"Of course there are some political forces in Muslim countries who are trying to change the character of this war to make it a religious one," claims Karabakh MP Zori Balayan, "but Armenians have lived together with Muslims as neighbours for centuries and we exclude the idea that it is a religious war."

So who does history say owns Karabakh? Until the fifth century it belonged to greater

Armenia. It was partitioned by the Romans and ruled by a succession of empires until falling under Russian domination.

In the 1920s, the Communist Party declared that Karabakh belonged to Armenia. But Stalin, pursuing his policy of divide and rule, retained it in Azerbaijan.

In 1988, the enclave voted to secede, but the Kremlin hauled it firmly back under Azeri rule. Thousands of Armenians were driven out of Azerbaijan. Thousands of Azeris were forced to flee Armenia. Ethnic cleansing — on both sides — had begun.

In 1991, the Azeris began Operation Rings, a policy of ethnic cleansing in northern Karabakh. Widespread human rights abuses were reported by the Russian Andrei Sakharov Memorial Congress. In Maraghar, villagers had their heads sawn off. Western human rights observers, on the scene within 36 hours, saw exhumed bodies lying on the ground.

A referendum in Karabakh again called for independence. And as Soviet forces withdrew in 1992, the Azeris took over

the Red Army positions and launched an attack.

The people of Karabakh were surrounded. Farmers with hunting rifles confronted tanks and armoured personnel carriers, but with little success, Karabakh was falling.

Galia Saoukhanian, 29, was among the refugees driven from the village of Nakhichevanik: "Can I forget the scene when I saw the children without arms, without legs? For months my children were crying without stopping."

Then the tide began to turn. The lightly armed Karabakh captured the fortress city of Shushi by driving their few vehicles around it at night revving their engines to bursting point. The Azeris were tricked into believing a major counter-offensive was on the way and they fled along a corridor left open by the Armenians. Shushi was secured and missile attacks on the capital of Stepanakert were halted.

But now Karabakh intelligence claims Azerbaijan is marshalling its forces for a fresh offensive. Says State Minister for Defence, Vasgen Sarkisian: "I am sure now that if in two or three months Azerbaijan doesn't come to negotiation, they will try to make another attack, if not in autumn, perhaps at the beginning of spring."

— GEMINI NEWS

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## To the Editor...

### The forgotten cricketer

Sir, Khawja Ahtar, son of late Khawja Adel of the Dhaka Nawab family, was among the few promising cricketers of this soil, who were unfortunately, deprived of a test cap to represent the then Pakistan eleven, Khawja Ahtar was an outstanding top quality cricketer of the 1950s, known for his deadly accurate fast leg cutters and fast leg breaks. A rare type of a bowler indeed!

Khawja Ahtar was contemporary to the great Fazal Mahmud. During the MCC tour to Pakistan sometime in the early fifties, Ahtar was called in to the nets for the test match in Dhaka, but unfortunately, he was deprived of a test debut barely few hours before the commencement of the test match. He was unjustly replaced by Mahmud Hossain of Lahore. This step-motherly attitude of the colonial masters struck a painful blow, that gradually led him to quit cricket.

However, Khawja Ahtar had the distinction of representing EPSF eleven, where he had all ways performed well. To recall some of the best moments of his career, he created a sensation by bowling out Manjrekar, Mankad and Mantree of the visiting Indian national side, in a three-day unofficial match in Chittagong in 1954. Since then, he was the local talked about hero, but yet this great feat was ignored and could not impress the selectors!

Khawja Ahtar, who was once

compared to Fazal Mahmud and a victim of deprivation of sure test cap, left us on the fateful morning of 27th September, 1994. He was suffering from protracted illness. He was 63. He was buried at his family graveyard in Dikusha, Dhaka, the very birth place of the promising but a forgotten cricketer. With the cruel course of nature, his mortal remains will slowly perish into dust, but his dream to win a test cap will remain. I wish among our promising cricketers.

Khawja Viqar Mohtuiddin Dhaka.

### Balance of payment

Sir, Very often we come across in newspapers reports regarding the widening gap of balance of payments between India-Bangladesh trade as our import is several times more than exports to India. It is evident from Dhaka roadside newspaper stands that a good quantity of Bengali magazines leaving aside the question of Bengali books and other textbooks, are of West Bengal origin. The notable 'Puja' issue of Bengali magazines are selling at Tk 100.00 only and it contains at least 500 pages while the paper is of good quality, the printing is superb and advertisements so attractive. Our 'Eid' issues are simply of no match anywhere. I am not at all concerned with the contents of West Bengal puja issues or similar issues of magazines. I am tempted to know when we shall be able to publish

such magazines in quality papers along with quality printing in Bangladesh at such a comparatively low price.

The industries minister has made a lot of baulla-ballo on the success of producing paper from green jute plants and let us hope that good quality papers will be produced and thus good books and magazines will be published locally. Thus a portion of balance of payments with India would be probably narrowed down in future. Let us pray sincerely!

Sadiq Alee Maghbazar, Dhaka-1217.

### Dhanmondi needs two culverts

Sir, Residential though by name only Dhanmondi has lost its residential character long ago. Apart from the shopping centres, it now houses a large number of coaching centres, schools, colleges, universities, a museum, a newspaper office, art galleries, drawing and music schools, UN and foreign mission offices, NGO offices, beauty parlours, Chinese restaurants, private clinics, community centres, consultancy and construction firms. In the morning and at noon the area is as busy and noisy as any other commercial part of the city.

It's a fact that Dhanmondi is a well-planned area with sufficient number of roads. But due to its recently assumed commercial character, traffic jam has become an unavoidable phenomenon in the area due

mainly to the two old and narrow links on Road 8 and Road 32 connecting the two sides of the Dhanmondi lake. Whatever be the means of transport one has to spend a considerable amount of time in these two necks every day.

The sufferings of the commuters of this area can largely be eased if the two culverts are widened or two more culverts are constructed along the side of the existing ones. We draw the attention of the appropriate authorities in this matter.

Ali Reza Bakhtier Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### NEMAP

Sir, I refer to Dr Zahir Sadeque's article (DS 27 September) on the 'National Environmental Management Action Plan (NEMAP)'.

I found Dr Sadeque's article as a timely move to unearth many hidden facts prior to finalisation of the report. My humble observations are as follows: a) It is true that the NEMAP is project-biased. When we are looking for interventions and actions, NEMAP has come up with further projects proposal, 37 or how many? b) Like in most of the government projects, concerned officials of the MOEF were found to be unconcerned and less enthusiastic. MOEF's professional guidance during the NEMAP process was terribly missing. c) On the other hand, the UNDP appeared to be a promoter and employer of

consultants and selected NGOs without looking into details of the NEMAP document. What a mess of taxpayers' money, apparently! d) Question arises, what is called 'people's participation'? Can we term mere representation by a few selected NGOs, as people's participation? Do findings of many workshops reflect sentiment of common people?

Before we continue the debate further, we earnestly request the MOEF to kindly circulate the NEMAP document in order to solicit public opinion. The document may be finalised after incorporating people's sentiments and views.

Md Rafiqul Islam 8/16, Sir Syed Road Mohammadpur, Dhaka

### Sylhet Division

Sir, The people of greater Sylhet district burst into cheers, applaud, joy and merriment when Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia consistent with the wishes of the people of the district declared Sylhet as country's new administrative division.

The long felt demand of the people of Sylhet has now been met. It is a great victory for them. We congratulate the people of Sylhet and wish them all the success.

The people of Mymensingh, Bogra, Rangpur, Noakhali, Faridpur and Dinajpur have also been demanding for the creation of their own separate administrative divisions for a long time. When would their

dream be fulfilled?

At the time of independence of our country we had only nineteen districts. Today we have sixtyfour districts. The number of division has also increased from four to six including Sylhet. What is to follow next? The creation of more and more new divisions? And then demand for upgrading the division to province? Nothing unlikely.

We feel that the more we have administrative districts, upazilas or divisions the more we delegate and surrender our powers to our government servants and we increasingly spend money for them from our public exchequer.

When a sub-division becomes a upazila or a district or a district becomes a division the thicket house of a poor man of the district or the division does not turn into a brick-built house or that he travels comfortably in a public bus or a motor launch. On the contrary, costly buildings are built and expensive cars are purchased for government officials of the district or the division.

We, therefore, suggest that we should have a 'Zila Program' elected directly by people's vote instead of 'Zila Proshasak' (Deputy Commissioner) for a smooth, efficient, accountable and people-oriented administration in each district. This would help us establish a 'government of the people, by the people and for the people' in our country.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203