

## The Malaysian Call

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's visit to Malaysia, with a potentially bridge-building team of private sector businessmen and entrepreneurs has proved useful. The outcome is not instantly measurable in concrete terms; but it augurs well for future bilateral cooperation between Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur.

What is needed now is an unrelenting follow-up on the same at the government and private levels, and in that order. For, however much the private sector may be enthusiastic about more trade and investment, it alone cannot make any difference in the situation should the government ministries fail to fit the bill. The stress here is on removal of any impediment in the way of utilising the positive response the visit has generated among the Malaysian investors and entrepreneurs to come forward. We understand they would also like to be associated with our services sector — roads and highways in particular. Needless to say, Malaysian involvement in other infrastructural programmes, such as those that relate to power generation and telecommunications would be welcome.

Investment and trade are the two major pillars of the economic cooperation edifice joined atop by a common roof. Therefore, we are inclined to deal with trade and investment as a whole, not in straight-jackets. This holistic approach can be applied by Malaysia and Dhaka rather ideally with a long-range vision, developed not in isolation from but in association with the actual state of affairs in the fields of trade and investment. The annual trade imbalance against Bangladesh is in the ratio of 6 to 50 million US dollar.

This cannot be wished away overnight. Special access to the Malaysian market, commensurate with the tariff reductions Bangladesh has brought about could be some help. But only joint venture projects hold an adequate answer to this problem. Even quite apart from this, Malaysia can earn a lot of foreign exchange in repatriable profits alongside their Bangladeshi partners, should she come in a big way here. Their investment in the Machine Tools Factory at Gazipur which is proposed to be elevated as an EPZ, exclusively for them, could be mutually beneficial. We have plenty of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled but trainable manpower to offer them for labour-intensive ventures here. As it is, more than one lakh Bangladeshi workers have found employment in Malaysia and, in a latest agreement with us, she is to increase the intake by 50 thousand new pairs of hands from this country every year. All this goes to bring out a certain complementarity between our economies. While we would like to keep the technical manpower we need for our own sake, a mutually advantageous strategy of a mixed type — exporting some of our surplus specialised manpower and absorbing others in collaboration projects in Bangladesh — can hopefully be worked out by the two fraternal countries. Let Malaysia, whose articulate Prime Minister Mahathir Bin Mohamad is a staunch upholder of self-esteem for a Third World country, develop a strong economic stake in friendly Bangladesh.

The Malaysian leader has thoughtfully told his Bangladeshi counterpart that it is imperative for both the countries to fully mobilise the resources of their private sectors for enhancing economic cooperation between them. Mahathir responded remarkably positively to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's overture, as the SAARC Chairperson, to forge an institutional link between the two regional economic groupings — the SAARC and the ASEAN. SAPTA, in an extended form, could perhaps give a start in inter-regional cooperation.

## Vanished Athletes

No fewer than 15 athletes of different nationalities from the Asian Games village in Hiroshima have deserted their camps within a week. A far greater number tried to enter Japan, posing to be athletes through production of fake documents. By the time the 12th Asian Games comes to a close, nobody knows how many more athletes and other participants will have disappeared in the lucrative labour market of Japan.

Until recently Bangladesh had no record of defection from among its teams participating in international meets. That record was pulled down by a boxer who went to Canada to compete in the Commonwealth meet. This time three more have followed suit in Hiroshima. But there is a difference too in the style of desertions. While the boxer, a medal winner at the last South Asian Federation Games, sought asylum in Canada, the deserters at Hiroshima could not do so because of strict Japanese immigration laws. At best they can stay in Japan as illegal workers.

So Bangladesh's unenviable record in the international sports has been further dented by this new off-field trend of defection and desertion. That athletes from other countries have joined the bandwagon is no consolation for us. The fact remains that even sportsmen and sportswomen, who represent a country, bring honours for it and are expected to be better-off compared with many in their own society, are getting more inclined now to make compromise with the high ideal and the dignity they so prized once. In a way it is a case of under-development.

There is however nothing wrong for anyone to look for newer pastures. In fact, man has been doing this since the dawn of civilization. The history of mankind is a history of mass migration. But with the development of the concept of statehood, nations also have learnt to respect some internationally recognised rules, and laws. Normally people in desperation and with compromising nature attempt to breach such laws or skirt them to have better opportunities.

The disappeared athletes have chosen between an honourable but perhaps less paying career and one that is inglorious, fugitive but more paying. There is however no reason to think that they took the decision to desert their camps all on a sudden. Far from that; they had most likely schemed it long before their arrival in Japan. They have taken the nation for a ride. Or, may be the athletes were lured by the collectors of illegal workers? One other factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the lack of knowledge of the athletes about the strict immigration laws in Japan. Whether the team members were briefed on the issue is in doubt. Now the deserters run the risk of even landing in the Japanese jail. A more careful criterion should be applied for selecting athletes in the future.

# Sir Ninian's Mission: Hoping for the Best

by M M Rezaul Karim

THE arrival of Sir Ninian Stephen, the emissary of the Commonwealth Secretary General, in Dhaka ushers in a ray of hope for the increasingly disillusioned populace of a politically deadlocked nation. The special envoy of Chief Emeke Anyaoku brings in his train a long and distinguished judicial and political career adroit in the skill of negotiations, as was seen on the Irish issue. His tenure as the Governor General of Australia provided him at times with an opportunity to resolve political issues in the largest island continent of the world.

The Commonwealth at its inception in 1926, constituted with a few British dominions was but a so-called white men's club. With the upsurge of the spirit of nationalism and successful liberation movements in the aftermath of the Second World War, the complexion of the Commonwealth underwent a drastic transformation by induction of former colonies of Asia and Africa. It formed into a free association of a truly multi-racial as well as ethnically and culturally diverse

community of peoples. The principal binding force of the Commonwealth, besides a similar background and English language as the lingua franca, is the free association and will of peoples to be and to work together for common purposes at their own volition, with the British monarch as the symbolic Head.

Despite its handicap of not having abundant resources to dispense with, the Commonwealth has proved to be a unique institution whose unity is forged through diversity and strength through voluntary cooperation. Every second year, the Commonwealth has consistently provided a platform to as many as 45 Heads of Government to meet and discuss common issues of hope and despair. Raising of bilateral disputes, which is taboo in official discussions, has more often than not found its way, by chance or design into parleys of willing adversaries, specially during what is called their exclusive retreats in such meetings.

The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, the Commonwealth youth and edu-

cation programmes are among notable functions of the Commonwealth that have imparted worthwhile benefits to member nations. The Commonwealth observer teams have also creditably monitored general elections in several countries including ours in 1991.

The recent visit of Secretary General Chief Emeke Anyaoku, a former career diplomat and erstwhile Foreign Minister of Nigeria who dedicated a major part of his life to the cause of Commonwealth, was a long awaited official visit in response to the invitations extended by successive governments of Bangladesh since the time eight years ago. His interest and effort in contributing to a possible breaking of the current political impasse in Bangladesh were heightened on his arrival in Dhaka last month when he found both the leaders of the government and the combined opposition had lent him receptive ears. His three-point proposal for a dialogue emanated, in fact, from

the positive reaction he had received from them in favour of using his good offices to resolve the crisis amicably.

Sir Ninian was emphatic in his assertion that he is not a mediator but only a facilitator entrusted with the task of arranging a dialogue between the two leaders towards arriving at a consensus. The Secretary General was prudent to avoid the use of the term mediation per se between the two opposing parties. His well chosen representative has an exceedingly hard task to accomplish. All are well aware of that.

On the other hand, the two leaders of Bangladesh have shown due sincerity and deep interest in resolving the crisis by accepting, if not welcoming, the help or good offices of the Secretary General. The climate for a compromise is now ripe, but, one must tread on the path with utmost caution and a good deal of patience and fortitude. Both sides have to sustain and improve the congenial atmosphere conducive to establishing a meaningful dialogue with a view to making a break-

through. They must shun making statements and utterances vilifying each other which would vitiate the atmosphere. Even the oft repeated stand on major contented issues should not be pressed publicly by the two sides, as far as possible, if the present efforts are to make a headway. The restrictions should be voluntary and spontaneous, self-imposed by all the parties concerned.

The two leaders, both being arch patriots, would earn the nation's gratitude by making one more sincere attempt by subordinating party interests and other considerations to the supreme national interests. This warrants manifestation of a commendable spirit of compromise by way of accommodating each other's views, in the best manner possible, about legitimate rights, genuine concerns and commonly accepted aspirations. The general mass of people expect, hope and pray for this ultimate to take place.

Notwithstanding Prime Minister's public expression of optimism, the people, to admit frankly but not to dishearten the respected envoy, are by

and large reluctant to share the same hope about the outcome of the Commonwealth mission. The holding of a dialogue between the two leaders may perhaps be achieved. The dialogue to be successful would no doubt be too much to expect, given the upswerving rock-like opposing stand held assiduously by either side.

If in this highly uphill task, the mission of Sir Ninian attains the desired goal, he would almost accomplish a miracle. But miracle does happen though on a rare occasion. If it does, this would be the best gift the Commonwealth could bestow on the people of Bangladesh and facilitate their continuing and much desired march along the path of democracy, peace and development.

The writer was the last High Commissioner of Bangladesh in the United Kingdom and attended five Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings as a delegate of Pakistan and later, Bangladesh. He is a member of the Council of Advisers of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. The above are his personal viewpoints.

WORLD Food Day (October 16) is being marked by a warning that it is not food that is in danger of running out, but water.

Water is being misused, says the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and is becoming increasingly scarce.

Water is a finite natural resource, of which 97 per cent is salt water and 1.76 per cent is frozen in icecaps, permafrost and glaciers.

That leaves only 0.74 per cent of freshwater for human consumption. Still, that is enough to provide 1800 cubic metres of water a year for everyone in the world, according to FAO statistics, while average water consumption is only 800 cubic metres. But although globally water is still sufficient, regionally there are areas which are running dry.

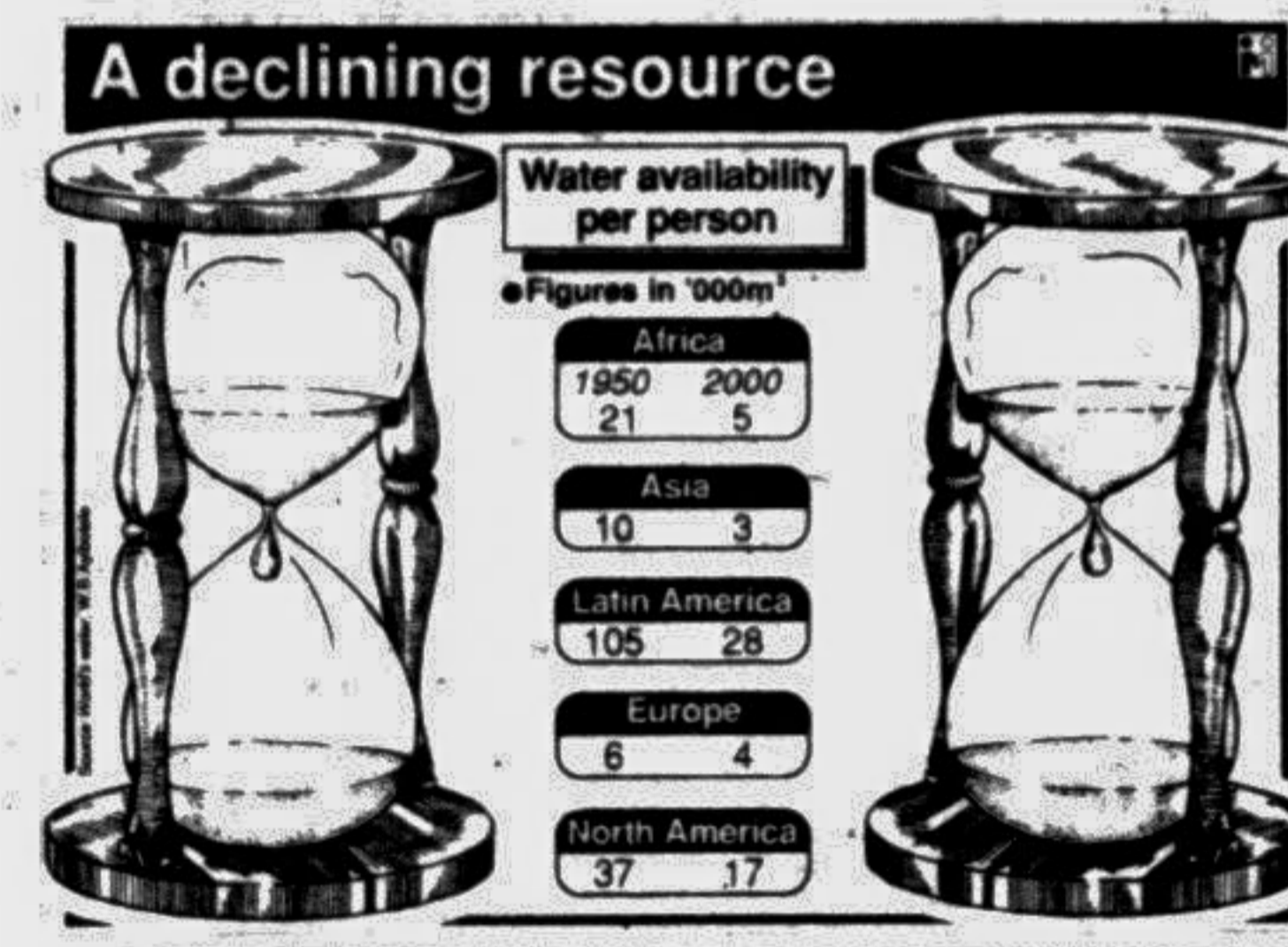
Apart from climate variations, human action is the prime cause of scarcity.

Says FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf: "We use water very wastefully. We spill huge quantities in our attempts to grow food and supply our cities — as much as 60 per cent of the water used in irrigation is wasted. We pollute rivers and

## The Danger is Water, Not Food, Says the UN

Harmonie Toros writes from Paris

Water is a precious resource that is in dangerous decline, says the UN in a World Food Day warning. And the Food and Agriculture Organization says that Africa and Asia are at greatest risk.



lakes, undermining the value and utility of these vital sources of supply for home, agriculture and industry.

An FAO study says that the

natural purifying action of the hydrological cycle can no longer cope with pollution. Land degradation through deforestation and overgrazing is

also reducing both the quantity and quality of water.

And since water is a finite resource, every time the population doubles, its availability per head of population halves.

The availability of freshwater for each person in Africa, for example, has fallen from 20.6 cubic metres in 1950 to 5.1 cubic metres; availability per head in Asia has decreased from 9.6 cubic metres to 3.3 cubic metres.

With the world population growing by 80 million a year, says the FAO, there may not be enough water for all.

The FAO's grim projections show Africa as being hardest hit, with water scarcity, poverty and a high population growth forming a tragic combination.

In 1990, says the organisation, 26 countries including most of north, east and southern Africa, were suffering from

water scarcity. "At present some 300 million people are affected but this number is projected to increase tenfold by 2025."

Even by the year 2000, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Mauritania, Yemen, Israel, Tunisia, Syria, Kenya, Burundi, Algeria, Rwanda, Botswana, Malawi, Oman, Sudan, Morocco, Somalia, Hungary, Barbados, Cape Verde, Djibouti, Malta, Qatar and Singapore are all predicted to be water-scarce.

Where there is scarcity, politics follow. "As the populations expand and economies grow, competition for limited supplies will intensify in many countries," warns the FAO.

That raises the possibility of conflict. Rivers and lakes do not respect international frontiers, and 12 of the world's most important rivers are

shared between 90 countries. There are few treaties or agreements regulating the use of water, and the downstream countries often depend on the goodwill of those upstream.

In its possible solutions to the water scarcity problem, FAO places greatest emphasis on agriculture, which in 1990 used 65 per cent of global water.

Irrigated agriculture is gradually replacing rainfed agriculture; for it is twice as productive. However, water in most irrigation systems is lost at every stage between the source and the crop. FAO's first appeal is for the improvement of irrigation efficiency.

Recycling waste water for irrigation is another suggestion. This is already done in China, Egypt, Jordan and Israel and is proving cost-effective.

In 1987, Israel returned to the land all the sewage that was previously discharged in the Mediterranean, and about 30 per cent of its urban waste water was re-used for irrigation.

— GEMINI NEWS

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## Indonesia, Malaysia Move to Make Malacca Strait Safer

Joe Fernandez writes from Kuala Lumpur

The Strait of Malacca is among the busiest and most vital — but also most dangerous — of the world's waterways

ANOTHER survey of the Strait of Malacca, in the hope of enhancing safety in one of the world's busiest waterways, is being considered by the Malaysia-Indonesia Joint Commission (MIJC).

Expected to be undertaken with financial assistance from Japan, the survey will hopefully lead to new safety measures to minimize accidents along the Strait, one of the most vital waterways in the world.

"We need to step up safety measures to avoid accidents along the Strait of Malacca. This is one of the busiest waterways in the world," said Ahmad Kamil Jaafar, secretary-general of Malaysia's Foreign Affairs Ministry. "We need a second survey as the last one was carried out years ago."

But shipping industry people doubt that a second survey alone will offer solutions to the Strait's navigational problems. "It will take more than a second survey to unravel and manage myriad problems along the Strait of Malacca," according to one industry source.

The Strait of Malacca — 220 nautical miles at its widest and eight miles at its narrowest — is also considered to be one of the world's most dangerous considering the nature of its cargo. Between 300 and 500 merchant ships, warships and

fishing vessels pass through this narrow waterway between Indonesia and Malaysia daily. Traffic has been increasing at an average of 7.6 per cent per annum since the 44,000 vessels recorded in 1982.

With such heavy traffic, statistics associated with the Strait have been rather grim. Malaysia's Marine Department recorded 73 shipping casualties in the past 15 years including 23 collisions, nine groundings, 13 floundering, and eight cases of fire and explosions. The three worst accidents happened in 1992 involving six ships.

Indonesian officials recorded 126 accidents in the Strait of Malacca between 1981 and 1992. Singapore handled an average five accidents per annum between 1985 and 1990, 10 in 1991 and nine the following year.

Former Indonesian Foreign Minister, Professor Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, has suggested that ships plying the Strait be diverted through the Lombok and Sunda Straits in Indonesia. However, it has been estimated that a 300,000-tonne tanker diverted through Lombok would travel three more days and incur an additional 6.2 per cent in costs. The Strait of Malacca remains the shortest, easiest, cheapest and most preferred route be-

tween the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Both Malaysia and Indonesia "share sovereignty" over the Strait via two bilateral agreements which cover boundaries, territorial seas, and the continental shelf. In addition, they issued a joint statement in 1971 on the Strait of Malacca and Singapore. The joint statement declared that both Straits "are not international straits, while fully recognizing their use for international shipping in accordance with the principle of innocent passage." Singapore's inclusion when the city state took note of the joint statement made it a tripartite agreement.

Mr Kusumaatmadja, who also formulated Indonesia's Archipelagic Doctrine, was one of the main architects behind the tripartite agreement.

"Our stand has been vindicated. Who would be concerned about issues like pollution if not the riparian states," he asked in Kuala Lumpur recently as a guest of the Malaysian Institute of Maritime Affairs.

Mr Kusumaatmadja evidently envisaged the extent of pollution in the Strait of Malacca with the steady increase in tanker capacities and the birth of the super-tankers. Disaster on a huge magnitude first struck in 1975 when the 244,000-deadweight tonnage (dwt) Japanese supertanker, Showa Maru, ran aground in Indonesian waters in the Strait, Indonesia. Malaysia and Singapore claimed damages of US\$24 million, US\$9.5 million and US\$1.4 million, respectively, for the oil spill.

However, accidents are not the only reasons for pollution in the strait. Others include violations like ballast discharges and tank washing.

Still, it appears that since the third International conference on the Law of the Sea (Unclos) in 1982, both Indonesia and Malaysia have agreed that the Strait of Malacca falls under the regime of international navigation. Both nations sponsored an interpretative statement at Unclos '82 which touched on

## To the Editor...

### Sincerity at workplace

Sir, "A bad workman quarrels with his tools" — the proverb is a valuable guide in our practical life. A lazy and incompetent person is always found to grumble in his work.

He finds nothing to his liking. He has less inclination to do any work, and always seeks better condition and ideal atmosphere for work. But a good workman takes everything in a good humour. He understands and realises that he cannot expect anything and everything to his liking readily, and at the same time feels that the work entrusted to him should not be allowed to suffer. He finds difficulty in doing the work, he accepts the challenge and sets himself to the task of removing the hurdles in the way. Such a man wins the heart of others and is voluntarily helped and assisted in his work, when he finds the job not equal to his capacity or capability. He regards grumbling as bad manners and something not at all helpful in doing the job. A good workman instead of finding fault with his tools or available

working conditions, sets and follows a policy of mending them. Everything is possible in life for a good, honest and sincere worker.

A bad workman is always after seeking excuses to put off the work and to find flimsy grounds to run away from the job, that he has either no appropriate tools for the work or the existing working conditions are not good enough. An honest and willing worker by his continued efforts finds ways and means to get a congenial way of doing things.

The proverb therefore, should make us understand the reasons of our failure and teaches us not to seek or find fault with others. In our day to day work we often come across people who offer various pleas to avoid doing a work. The practice is rampant more in government offices, than other places of work.

In any non-Government or private organisation, a staff, when approached, readily takes up the work, while in many government offices, where there are sufficient workers doing little work and gossiping and whiling away

time idly, will not carry out a work on different pleas. People at the helm of affairs should not only carry out their responsibilities, but also see that those below them do their part sincerely.

N Rahman  
Laibag, Dhaka

### Agri-graduates

Sir, We have been observing with great concern that many government and non-government organizations are putting ads in the newspapers inviting applications from agriculture graduates for job in lower pay-scale and status. As per the existing norms an agri-graduate is equal to other technical graduates and equivalent to a Master degree holder of a university. On first appointment, an agri-graduate is entitled to get the pay and status of a Class-I officer of the government.

Meanwhile, it has been communicated by certain government organizations that they are constrained to give the genuine pay and status to the agri-graduates because there is no general order from

the Ministry of Establishment to the effect that agri-graduates are technical graduates and their four years' course is equivalent to the general Masters Degree. It may be mentioned here that through various media we have already drawn the attention of the relevant ministries to this anomaly. Recently Dr Lutfar Rahman, Professor, Dept of Genetics and Plant Breeding, Bangladesh Agricultural University told us that he and his colleagues moved a proposal for issuing an order declaring the actual status of agri-graduates to the Ministry of Establishment. Javed Iqbal, Secretary General, Krishibid Institution, Bangladesh (KIB) has also issued a number of letters on behalf of KIB on this matter to different authorities.

We sincerely hope that the Ministry of Establishment will soon issue necessary order/circular mentioning the minimum pay and status of the agri-graduates on first appointment.

M Zahidul Haque  
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BAI Teachers Association  
Dhaka

## Joint Statement on Russian-Iraqi Relations

On October 13, 1994 President Saddam Hussein of Iraq received Mr Andrei Kozyrev, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, who had arrived in Iraq on an assignment from President Boris N. Eltsyn of the Russian Federation.

During the meeting the situation in the Gulf as well as the current state of the Russian-Iraqi relations were analysed by the two sides.

Russia advocated the adoption of resolute steps in order to prevent escalation of tension and to bring the situation back into the framework of political and diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving eventually security and reliable stability in the region, having sanctions against Iraq lifted and establishing good-neighbourly relations between it and Kuwait.

Some specific confidence-building measures to be taken between the states of the region, which could remove mutual suspiciousness and establish atmosphere of trust between them, were discussed.

Iraq officially declared that on October 12, 1994 at 21:00 it had completed the withdrawal of its troops to rear positions. Russia highly appreciated this step of the Iraqi side.

Iraq assured of its readiness

to positively solve the question of the recognition of Kuwait's sovereignty and its borders as defined in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution No. 833.

Upon official recognition of Kuwait's sovereignty and borders by Iraq, Russia will support formally of launching the longterm monitoring in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution No. 715 while simultaneously starting a limited in time "check-up" period, which, in Russia's view, should not exceed six months, for the purposes of verifying the effectiveness of that monitoring, after which the UN Security Council will decide on the implementation of para 22 of the resolution No. 687 in full and without extra conditions advanced.

Russia confirms that as Iraq keeps fulfilling the appropriate UNSC resolutions, it will come out in favour of lifting other sanctions.

Iraq reaffirmed its readiness to continue its interaction with the International Red Cross Committee in order to trace missing Kuwaiti subjects. Mr Kozyrev pointed out that Russia places special emphasis upon this humanitarian issue.

(Issued by the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Bangladesh)