

Youngsters Speak up

At a seminar on Tuesday students and young professionals in their twenties were called upon to talk about their vision of the days to come and the picture Bangladesh should make up as part of the humanity's march into the third millennium.

Thanks to our quirky national politics, this nation has been reduced to one without dreams. That straightaway means it doesn't have its own bearings and that a sense of direction is still wanting.

This plea of the young hearts for a timely infusion of tolerance and mutual respect into our overt political conduct and a generous helping of logic and better grasp and understanding of facts to the underlying things that decide the courses — has to be heeded by the parties.

And then there are the fascistic communal parties rising on a professed plank of communal intolerance going up to challenging the birth of this nation and doing all this with a hardly hidden scimitar used in profusion in '71 and not at all given up till now.

We expect national politics to come round to a healthy role of national development and interest the young minds to dream for the nation — effectively.

With Patience, Please

The Jessore Central Jail has been under control of convicts and under-trial detainees for all of two days and more. No news of any improvement in the volatile situation was received till late evening yesterday.

And this is precisely what must not be allowed to happen. Authority must regain hold but with patience and through peaceful negotiations. In the absence of any kind of jail reforms materialising in the past decades any kind of jail rebellion can at once be blamed on that.

The Jessore prisoners, led possibly by detained political elements charged with violent crime, had no immediate and pressing reasons to mount such an action — all their demands being very general in nature.

Well done

Well done, security forces. Indeed, through the rescue of a Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO) and seven others abducted on October 3 and November 29 by Shantibahinimen, patience has been rewarded handsomely.

Now the nature of abduction of the TNO of Thanchi thana looks more like an anti-social crime than an organised one as part of the general scheme of insurgency. This is because of the ransom demanded by the captors of the TNO and others for the captives' release.

In fact, the Shantibahini has little political influence left. The problem is with the arms and ammunition its members still have in their possession. The prop enjoyed by the Shantibahini on foreign soil seems to have been removed.

Does Resumption of Oil-flow Signify More than it Shows?

The decision of the Security Council last week to lift the UN ban on the export of Iraqi crude to the international market has finally come through, following protracted negotiations over the years

IRAQ, the erstwhile Mesopotamia, the land that has been the abode of more ancient civilisations than any other country can boast of, has again been the focus of international observers recently.

The decision of the Security Council last week to lift the UN ban on the export of Iraqi crude to the international market has finally come through, following protracted negotiations over the years.

The Kuwaiti war, as is known in common parlance, was, in fact, the war waged by the international community against Iraq following latter's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

equipped with the most sophisticated weapons, pushed the Iraqi forces back into its territory, swiftly occupied the southern half of the invading country within a few days and threatened the capital Baghdad itself.

The question here lies whether the enigmatic hero or the villain of Iraq, depending upon the eyes of the beholder, Saddam Hussein got a new lease of life and would be in a position to carry forward his plan of action to realise his vision.

As stated earlier, the land that is known as Iraq at present, constitutes the most fertile territory, the fertile crescent, located between the mighty Euphrates and the Tigris.

monarchs and potentates of this region used to command territories much bigger than those which exist at present. Even much later, the writs of the Abbasid dynasty in the middle ages used to hold good over territories as in ancient times.

Saddam Hussein to embark upon his ambitious plans of misadventure first against the historical arch-rival Iran and then against the tiny and militarily weak Kuwait.

Having done what he did, in terms of immense and avoidable loss of men, material and resources, Saddam Hussein survived, even thrived. He has been endowed with a cat's nine lives, if not more, if one takes into account the number of attempts on his life and international plots against his rule had been thwarted.

The people of Iraq have been living a miserable life, in

varying degrees, since the commencement of war with its mighty neighbour, Iran in the early eighties. Continuing depletion of economic and financial resources then gradually rendered the life of ordinary people difficult.

How could a man who had taken the nation to two wars in

ray, Saddam embarked on his misadventure the final outcome of which became disastrous. Again, with the miscalculation of general impotency and prostration of the international community, his attempt to achieve a fait accompli by swiftly occupying Kuwait resulted in a total fiasco and caused him practically not only to lose his land but also his head.

The answer lies in his ability as 'Jais' or leader to stir up the feelings of masses to motivate strongly for his cause and to organise a very efficient, merciless and all-pervading security system. Nowhere in the world, except perhaps in North Korea, I have personally witnessed an ever-tight, comprehensive and almost full-proof security apparatus and methodology of operation.



Currents and Crosscurrents by M M Rezaul Karim

one decade against his neighbours only to suffer ignominious defeats and who has brought the nation untold human misery and degradation could survive and continue to rule? This is a question that naturally arises in one's mind.

THE MIDDLE EAST NEWSLETTER

GCC Summit Ends with Cautionary Note to Iraq

Saifur Rahman writes from Dubai

The summit has taken place at a crucial time when the United Nations had sanctioned the limited sale of Iraqi oil in its oil-for-food programme through which Iraq will be allowed to sell oil worth of \$2 billion within the next six months.

THE 17th GCC summit which ended in Doha, Qatar recently with a routine cautionary note to Iraq for its failure to comply with UN resolution, was itself embroiled in a series of disputes due to one of which its founding members, Bahrain boycotted the summit.

Bahrain's boycott itself is a big blow to the six-nation regional group, which has been trying to strengthen the existing ties among its member nations and improve the region's defence strategy.

With Bahrain's boycott, it was once again proved that reality is far from what appears on plain papers and joint communiqués. Bahrain's boycott was prompted by Qatar's raising the issue of a border dispute to the international forums.

Qatar took a global approach to solve the problem — and the GCC apparently failed to play its due role in resolving the conflict.

Qatar's foreign minister accused Bahrain of backing a coup attempt against his government at the end of the GCC summit — which obviously Bahrain denied. This practically brought their relation open to public.

This also questions the strength of the bond among the member-countries. A similar problem between Qatar and Saudi Arabia almost jeopardised the organisation when a shooting broke out between the Saudi Arabian and Qatari border security forces in which two died. This prompted Qatar's boycott of the GCC summit later.

The 17th annual GCC summit will be significant for at least one more aspect — Saudi Arabia's proposal of setting up a common market among the GCC countries which will eliminate taxation among the member-countries. The proposal initially might benefit the emerging Saudi business empire in the Gulf and affect the other industrial bases of its smaller neighbours, but in the long run will help these Gulf economies.

Yemen's application for membership and its probable entry to the GCC in the near future will definitely help the regional group to strengthen its defence lines as Yemen is regarded as one of the toughest and strongest nations in the region. But it also has its share of territorial disputes with Saudi Arabia which is currently under negotiations.

But whatever goals they want to achieve, the members of the GCC must eliminate territorial disputes among themselves which often shake up the Council and exposes the strength of the existing bonds among themselves.

Iraq Begins Oil Supply

Iraq finally opened its oil pipeline for selling them in the international market in a UN-brokered oil-for-food programme which will fetch food and medicine worth of \$2 billion to the Iraqi people who have been suffering very badly due to the sanctions imposed by the UN for the last six years.

opening ceremony in Kirkuk, north of Baghdad.

According to the actual plan, Taha Yassine Ramadan, Iraq's Vice President and a long-term trustee of Saddam Hussein was supposed to open the pipeline. But instead, a much more stronger-looking Saddam Hussein emerged from the motorcade and opened the tap. This, once again proved his grip on Iraq and the level of control he still enjoys.

It's a matter of time when he'll begin touring the entire Middle East to strengthen ties with other countries. And needless to say — it's a matter of one or two years when those countries which ordered the de-

struction of Iraqi chemical weapons only recently, will begin to negotiate with Saddam Hussein the sale of more advanced weapons and missile systems to Iraq so that the history can once again be repeated, thanks to the governments and the leaders of the Western countries who have, in effect become de facto arms dealers.

Most of them have already chalked out their plans how and when to begin arms sales to Iraq. Iraq's entry in the arms race is a must — in order to keep the arms industries in the West alive Iraq's entry will also prompt its other neighbours to buy similar weapons — which would in fact boost the worldwide arms production and sale.

But to make Iraq buy arms, the West has to lift sanctions on Iraq which needs regular inflow of cash, without which it cannot buy arms. So the West's crocodile tears have nothing to do with the sufferings of the poor Iraqi people. The single reason behind the lifting of sanctions or limited sales of oil-for-food is to ensure thousands of jobs in the arms industry in the West.

Why Crisis has been Met by Caution

Calls for an African "Crisis Response Force" following the humanitarian emergency in Zaire have put the spotlight on South Africa's potentially crucial role. In a special article for Gemini News Service, the director of the Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism argues that the developments raise questions about Pretoria's entire foreign policy. Prof William Gutteridge writes from London

IN light of the high expectations about South Africa's economic and military role in Africa, the Government's prudent approach to the Zaire-Rwanda crisis has been seen by many outsiders as over-cautious.

However, President Nelson Mandela's reluctance to commit a substantial body of troops to eastern Zaire in support of the humanitarian relief operation mirrors that of many other countries including Britain — which has been helping integrate his armed forces and, implicitly, begun to train them for peacekeeping.

Clarity over the role of any international intervention force is a matter of proper concern, but for Pretoria, practicality and effectiveness are not the only issues. After two-and-a-half years in power, Mandela's charismatic leadership has yet to be applied to the development of an integrated foreign policy.

The legacies of South Africa's previous special relationships with, for example, Taiwan and Israel, and of links the ruling African National Congress has had with Libya and Cuba, continue to generate dilemmas.

In short, South Africa is finding it difficult to establish a coherent pattern of foreign relations. A clear consensus on what constitutes the national interest and on the necessary diplomatic objectives has yet to emerge within the ANC.

On sensitive matters such as defence sales, policy is being

made ad hoc by such bodies as the National Conventional Arms Control Committee. The Defence White Paper approved by parliament earlier this year allows for peacekeeping commitments, but, naturally, does not give precise guidance on the circumstances in which commitments may be approved.

A comprehensive defence review is in progress and is likely to recommend a radical reduction in the permanent force. Separate discussions on next year's budget are likely to cut defence spending to a record low.

These are potent factors affecting South Africa's ability and willingness to commit resources to central Africa.

In the first two years of its existence, the Government limited itself to diplomacy and crisis management in the immediate southern African region — in Lesotho, Mozambique and Angola. In 1994, during the genocide in Rwanda, some technical and medical assistance was provided. Only a few weeks ago, a \$50 million rand contract was signed to supply South African arms and armoured personnel carriers to the Rwandan Government, apparently justified by the belief

that this would help prevent another genocide.

This was a matter of considerable controversy in South African government circles and was overtaken by the involvement of Tutsi rebels in eastern Zaire.

As fears mounted that South African arms would filter from the Rwandan army across the border to the rebels, the South African authorities came under pressure to suspend the deal "pending normalisation". But armoured personnel carriers had already been delivered by the time the Government got around to postponing the deal on 6 November.

In the long run, a peace force may well be the best hope for Africa's future. But there are good reasons for African states, especially South Africa, to treat the United States offer to support a sub-Saharan "Crisis Response Force" with caution.

I was in South Africa during the recent visit by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and discussed the issue with key South Africans.

Already, there is a tendency on the part of other states in the region to regard South Africa as the potential US agent on the continent. For this and a variety of other reasons, the country's leadership will resist the role of US surrogate.

The suggestion that Washington would fund a separate force outside the authority of the United Nations, while at the same time being in arrears with its contributions to the world body, was not well-received, especially in light of Washington's veto of a second term for "Africa's candidate" for UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Because of the restrictions on the South African defence budget, the US proposal was financially tempting, but South Africa would clearly prefer

broader-based support for building on its own initiatives for conflict anticipation and prevention within the Southern African Development Community and the recently-formed, security-oriented Association of Southern African States (ASAS). It would also prefer any action to be under the general authority of the UN.

Given the Commonwealth connections of ASAS members, and the peacekeeping experience of Commonwealth armies, there would be scope for collective Commonwealth participation. This has been canvassed as a possibility in some South African quarters.

As the year 1996 has tilted toward the end, the Bengali Christians must have already started to contemplate elaborately to celebrate X-mas — "Birth of Jesus Christ" — on 25th December 1996. With this in mind, a Bengali Christian does not so happily visualise the BTV programme on Christmas, because so far most of the programmes were monotonous, drab and often mis-representation of the community except a little exception in 1995.

OPINION Christmas on BTV

Jerome Sarkar performing troupe. Talents were ignored. It is alleged that the programmes had been completed/organised by a handful of people for the last 25 years as such it lacked merit, diversity, participation of everybody. The scripts were written by the same person year after year. It is further reported that the person writes same script every year. A change is therefore needed for improvement. One must not miss the point that the community is more important than an individual.

The Christians in Bangladesh have undergone inculturation in 'Deshiokaran'. They pray in Bangla. Their rites and rituals have distinct manifestation of ubiquitous Bangla culture. People want to see presentation of such things. The shabby dramatisation of the same Biblical events over the years has embarrassed the Christians. The virtues like humility, forgiveness, truthfulness and other moral spiritual teachings of Christ should have reflected in the programmes.

The bottomline is that there is enough room left unexplored for improvement. The Christian community here has no dearth of talents. If the pro-

grammes were properly organised, there were many to enrich. That would give a picture of the psyche of the community.

I intend to voice a suggestion. A venture usually succeeds in right time by a right kind of people to the right direction. Towards that end, I would propose that a central committee be formed to organise the programme instead of any individual. The programme should be completed by a person who has reputation for the same, the lyrics should be composed by the people who have flair for it. Music may be composed by several persons for the sake of creativity and diversity. Recitations should be done by the persons expert in that. Scripts must be written by the regular writers. The theatrical performance must be done by the regular actors and actresses.

We look forward to witnessing a better Christmas-1996 Programme on BTV without interference of any ghost hands. Under the government which is secular in spirit, the action may be expected that the BTV being free of all shackles as is declared, will present a more attractive and enjoyable programme this year barring and slaughtering all bias.

To the Editor...

Drug addiction Sir, A lot of young people are using drugs in the city. They are totally reckless. Some are frustrated and homeless, and some are lonely and deprived of light. The rest are silent.

This is the tragedy of our society that we still cannot provide them with life and rescue them from this danger.

Authority concerned should take care of these problems.

Mostafa Sohel Banani, Dhaka-1213.

Biman's dilemma

Sir, From time to time we come across a number of complaints about irregularities and negligence of duties, reportedly, committed by some staff of

Biman. But most of the time the authorities concerned prefer to keep mum and they show their apathy to the relevant matters.

Recently Biman has published an advertisement in various national dailies announcing a reward of Taka 25,000 for providing specific information regarding the whereabouts of an absconding person who allegedly misappropriated some Biman tickets worth more than 11 crore taka.

We wonder why the reward is so paltry amount of Taka 25,000 — for the recovery of a colossal amount of over 11 crore taka? Moreover, what is the amount of money Biman is incurring on issuing the press advertisement for the whereabouts of the absconder?

11 crore is not a matter of a day or two. Why the sales and marketing department and the administration of Biman have been sleeping for so long? Does it not prove the lack of supervision and control, and inefficiency of upper-most class and grade of Biman and Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism officials?

We demand that not only the absconder but also all the officials concerned who show negligence in duty may be brought to book and given exemplary punishment and I think this is the only way our national flag-carrier can be saved from incurring financial losses every year.

OH Kabir, 6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1203.