

What is the Point?

A US military attack, evidently higher tech. than the 1989-vintage, seems demagogically imminent on Iraq for the latter's defiant refusal to submit to further UN weapons inspections.

As if to reinforce that horrifying choice for Iraq we have this latest bombshell from the Lyod Assurance giant that it was seriously thinking of withdrawing any insurance cover from ships carrying the UN food-for-oil cargo into the ill-fated country.

Circumspect military experts and media analysts in the West have openly expressed doubt that any specific purpose will be served by the US airstrikes.

Prominent US Republican Senator Dick Lugar has floated the idea that killing President Saddam Hossain could be the only way to stop Iraq from threatening its neighbours with weapons of mass destruction.

All we want is a time-table for withdrawal of economic sanctions against the Iraqi people. And Saddam will certainly have reaped as he had sown.

Investigating Crime

The Law Commission's attempt to look for ways to reform the system of criminal justice appears to have produced some tangible results.

The observations made by the experts, at the request of the Law Commission which aims to hold a workshop later this month to finalise reform programmes, have not come as a surprise to anyone remotely conversant with criminal justice in Bangladesh.

The first step of this reform process should be to set up a specialised criminal investigation agency, with its own, highly-trained manpower and access to adequate resources to procure the technology necessary to carry out effective investigations.

Brutality in Jakarta

We are flabbergasted and horrified by the degree of force which the Indonesian military applied on pro-reform demonstrators in the streets of Jakarta on Friday, the fifth day of their attempted protest march on the parliament.

They are for radical reforms, both political and economic and would not settle for anything short of a complete demolition of corruption and cronyism of the previous era.

The mayhem in the streets of Jakarta on Friday having scant regard for the consequences to follow lends itself to two interpretations. First, it could be a temperamental outburst of any particular segment in the army which is seen as factionalised.

The Iraq Crisis Flares up Again

Instead of resorting to new bombings, the United States along with the other Security Council members should try to convince Hussein that, if he cooperates, the UN would lift the economic sanctions that have crippled the Iraqi economy.

Their decision to seriously consider launching air strikes is also prompted by recent reports that Iraq is getting ready to station some of its surface-to-air missiles around the country.

Several recent developments have allowed the US administration to consider a far more sustained and punishing attack against Iraq than had been expected.

The US and Iraq have sparred in recent months over various issues. For instance, during the last stand-off, Iraq denied the UN weapons inspection team access to so-called 'sensitive sites' including many palaces

belonging to Saddam Hussein. Iraq argued that such inspection violates its sovereignty.

During another stand-off in late 1997, Saddam Hussein expelled Americans from the UN inspection team. Diplomacy by Russia persuaded Hussein to take the Americans back.

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Second, any new military action is opposed by most of the world, including the Arab nations. US air strikes would magnify their dissatisfaction with the double standard in US foreign policy.

Third, it has been clear from previous bombings that a military campaign may not destroy all of Hussein's chemical and biological weapons, which are easy to conceal and move.

President Clinton, on the other hand, is eagerly looking for an issue to divert the attention of the American people. In recent months, he has been besieged by scandals, one after

another. Although the latest election results has bolstered his stand with the American people, the House of Representatives is scheduled to start the impeachment hearing against him next week.

Who can forget the atrocities of the Gulf war alliance and weaken the Security Council.

First, the people of Iraq have already suffered immensely, both due to Saddam's autocratic regime as well as the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations.

Although US warnings to Iraq have become increasingly harsh, one thing has not changed: the serious drawbacks to any US military action. It is difficult to see what would be achieved by a new bombing campaign.

It would not enhance the prospects of a permanent solution to the ongoing crisis in the region but would only add to the misery and suffering of the common people of Iraq, destroy

site would release biological agents. The exact consequences of such an attack and the collateral damages that it can inflict in terms of human lives and environmental pollution are hard to imagine!

Finally, an attack would also give Hussein another excuse to break off negotiations and contacts with the United Nations.

From Iraq's perspective, there is no light at the end of the tunnel. They believe, with some truth, that no matter how much they comply with the UN directives, economic sanctions will not be lifted in any time soon.

They only way United Nations can make Saddam comply would be by explicitly linking Iraqi compliance with the lifting of the economic embargo against Iraq.

Instead of resorting to new bombings, the United States along with the other Security Council members should try to convince Hussein that, if he cooperates, the UN would lift the economic sanctions that have crippled the Iraqi economy.

The solution to the current crisis will arise not from new air strikes but from new initiatives to withdraw the economic sanctions.



Dr. A. R. Choudhury

From Lahore to Delhi, and Back Again

While some progress has been made in the field of trade and commerce, a major achievement at the talks is obviously the completion of most of the formalities on the proposed trans-border bus service linking New Delhi and Lahore.

THE trans-border bus service between India and Pakistan — agreed upon by the traditional rivals for the first time — appears one of the major areas of convergence of views during the week-long 'composite talks' held in New Delhi.

Clinton and his military advisors, in weighing their narrowing options, believe that in the absence of UN inspections, massive air strikes against Iraq would help to degrade Saddam's capability of manufacturing the weapons of mass destruction or the means of delivering them.

It was the second meeting between the two heads of government since May, this year, when their bitter ties further worsened following explosions of several nuclear devices by India in the first part of the month and a riposte coming from Pakistan in the second half of that month.

The 'bus service' between India and Pakistan is necessary because a large number of people travel to meet their estranged relatives and friends, and visit religious sites, or just take the trip for emotional reasons.

prime ministers decided they could be put on the backburner and progress should be made in some innocuous areas such as the 'bus service'.

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Two months ago, I was on a journalist delegation was on four of some European countries at the invitation of the European Union and the European Journalists Council.

The Indo-Pakistan agreement on 'bus service' comes as a good piece of news when all we hear is their troops exchanging fire and the high-ups exchanging provocative statements on nuclear and other issues.

Certainly, it is a good development in the direction of 'people-to-people' contact for which the SAARC is committed.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts.

Politics

Sir, There is nothing wrong in the caption above. Second class politics can be tolerated to some extent, and first class political behaviour is not expected immediately — we voters have that much tolerance!

I strongly support in principle the gist of the DS editorial of Oct 22 on the despicable culture and standard of current political stances in Bangladesh today, based on party first, country later.

As a voter for several decades, I'd like to appeal to my fellow voters not to vote for 'leaders' who cannot deliver the goods, and who believe in the present state of negative politics.

Now political opponents are treated as anti-national, and the Parliament is not working, while sermons on democracy are over-flooding the egos of the have-not leaders.

Deliver, or get thrown out during the next elections. This is not a seditious statement, and the fear of the SPA should not be dangled before strong

personal and individual opinions. Already there have been too many arrests in too short a period, which is suspicious. There is no method in the madness of several parties.

Both AL and BNP should start some heart-searching exercises inside their central citadels to serve the public in an acceptable way, and not block the way to the fast development of the country.

The politicians have developed a bad image for themselves and it is up to them to remove it; not by haranguing the people, but by changing the approach to political activity.

The CHT and Farakka accords are examples of hurried, immature agreements without national consensus, and the nation is paying the price for the impractical as well as the delays, despite flawless promises, assurances, and mud-slinging

(we have plenty of mud for millions of leaders!).

Consensus has to come back at the national level, simply because it is not there, and the leaders have made no effort to reach the same (workable formula). The country does not belong to one single political party, despite all its contributions recorded in history.

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

Stolen cars and car parts

Sir, In Calcutta we were astonished to see private cars, motor bikes etc., all parked on the roads, openly, all through the night. This surprised us a lot, for this is unimaginable in our country or in the city of Dhaka.

You come out of the bank or a shop, reach for your car parked in a busy road, not in a deserted or quiet lane, and are dismayed to find the rear-view mirrors or the rubber lining of the wind screen or the wheel plates etc., gone.

At night their expertise is incredible, for they silently and

stealthily enter the compound and soundlessly remove as big a part as the whole dashboard of the car with steering and the whole control panel! How they do that, so quickly and then carry away such a huge part of the car is unbelievable.

Another interesting aspect of this car parts stealing business is, when you are victimised the only thing that you can do is to replace the stolen part as soon as possible. It is not much use lodging a FIR etc., in this country of ours.

Now going back to the original puzzle, how come car parts are not stolen in Calcutta, which is like Dhaka in so many other ways? Why this amazing difference in car parts theft case? I couldn't help but ask a taxi driver this question.

What an ingenious idea! That it worked like magic we could see for ourselves. Why didn't our government ever think of that or still doesn't? It is always in such a malaise where citizens' welfare is concerned that even if you have an idea, it will never act or react timely.

Just our bad luck, alas! Dr. Sabrina Q. Rashid, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Post-flood help

Sir, Through an earlier communication (Daily Star, 19/10/98), we identified the important areas requiring serious attention of those involved in post-flood rehabilitation (PER).

Prof. Dr. S S M A Khorasani House 16B, Road 23, Banani, Dhaka-1213.

Rickshaw drive at night

Sir, Almost everyday roads and streets of the metropolitan city of Dhaka are plunged into darkness due to loadshedding. In such a horrible and dangerous situation thousands of rickshaws are plying on the public thoroughfares unmindfully and recklessly without any light or signal light fitted with them.

We are surprised and shocked that our authorities concerned are doing? Would the DCC, DMP and Ministry of Home Affairs kindly pay attention to the serious offence and matter and make the rickshaw-pullers use light on the rick-

shaws while driving the vehicle at night for safety and security of the members of the public and maintenance of traffic rules?

O. H. Kabir W. Hare Street, Dhaka-1203

"At any cost"

Sir, Personalities stationed in higher echelons of our society, very often bless us with their address, harangues and sermons on various facets of our corporate life.

While passing through miles of slums emitting nauseating stench, such a high-up usually avows, "We are determined to eradicate slums." On another occasion when question papers or fiscal policies are leaked long before they are due to be published, the big-boss of education or finance sector usually express a determination like "the culprits must be brought to book".

Now the question is how many names can one use the same thing? Iftekhar Hamid 29, Navabpur Dhaka