

# Ten Years after the Gulf War

By Harun ur Rashid

**Ten years after the Gulf War, the region remains in discord and volatile. The UN inspection team cannot undertake its work in Iraq since December 1998. The UN Security Council does not know what to do with Iraq. Iraqi leader is seen firmly seated in power in Baghdad. Many European and Arab countries have re-opened their bilateral contacts with Iraq. This is a situation that some members of the Security Council hardly imagined to occur in Iraq after a decade.**

TEN years have passed since the first missile of the Gulf War was launched on Iraq on January 17, 1991. Former US President George Bush, Sr. was able to form a coalition of 29 countries including many Arab countries (Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, the UAE, and Kuwait) to expel Iraq from Kuwait.

Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and on August 8, it declared the annexation of Kuwait as Iraq's 19th province. Egypt called upon Iraq to withdraw its forces from Kuwait and the 'Arab solution for an Arab problem' advocated by Egypt failed because of the differences of opinion among Arab countries on Iraq's invasion to Kuwait.

After the establishment of the UN in 1945 following the Second World War, Iraqi invasion appears to be the first instance where a member of the UN attacked and occupied another member of the UN. Under the UN Charter the attack was considered as illegal and the UN Security Council was deeply involved how to address the situation. If it was allowed to pass, the UN's credibility was to be lost for good as its predecessor the League of Nations 'died' while it remained silent when Italy attacked Ethiopia in 1936.

The US-led coalition forces continued to conduct air strikes for several weeks on Iraqi positions before the ground forces crossed the Saudi border on February 24 and advanced rapidly into Kuwait. On February 26, Iraq ordered its forces to withdraw from Kuwait. On 27 February President Bush, Sr. declared that Kuwait had been liberated and announced cease-fire on February 28. The people of Kuwait had their sovereignty returned to them.

There is a view that the US-led coalition did not press its advantage to topple the Iraqi leader from power in 1991 because of the wider ramifications it might spawn on the region. A view prevails that the if Iraq was destabilised without any credible leader then the whole region, specially the neighbouring countries, could undergo unpredictable political change. Furthermore the UN Security Council had a limited purpose and authorised US-led coalition forces to expel Iraq from Kuwait and not to topple the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

After the cease-fire the UN Security Council had adopted resolutions to which Iraq had to agree. The resolutions required Iraq to remove all weapons of mass destruction -biological, chemical and nuclear. The UN inspection team continued its inspections in Iraq and many sites of weapons of mass-destruction had been reportedly destroyed. But not all of them had been demolished, according to

Agency Hans Blix (a former Swedish lawyer and Foreign Minister). Iraq's case appears to be simple. It has complied with the UN resolutions and there is no need for UN inspectors in Iraq and economic sanctions should be withdrawn.

The Security Council permanent members of the UN appear to be divided sharply in their views as to whether the economic sanctions on Iraq should continue or not

chronic hunger, massive unemployment and wide spread human suffering. The middle class of Iraq has reportedly disappeared from the society. Two UN humanitarian co-ordinators under the oil-for-food programme (Denis Halliday and Hans Von Sponeck) resigned in protest at the adverse effects of the sanctions on the Iraqi people.

The UN Security Council is in a dilemma. Firstly the UN sanctions

power.

Media reports indicated that there had been several coup attempts against the Iraqi leader and the Iraqi opposition reportedly financed by the US remained divisive and ineffective. The Iraqi regime continued its public works programme and re-built the infrastructures in the country. The display of its arms and weapons on 17 January 2001 in Baghdad by



Oil wells of Kuwait in 1991

the then inspection team leader.

When an Australian diplomat Richard Butler took over as the Chief of the UN Special Commission in 1997 from his Swedish colleague (he was appointed as Swedish Ambassador to Washington), his relations with Iraqi government fell through and Iraq refused to allow the UN inspectors to visit the site. Iraq alleged that Butler (Iraq called him a mad dog) was acting on behalf of the US and not representing the UN as Iraq alleged that many of the UN inspectors were found to be "spies" of the US. In December 1998, Britain and the US bombed Iraq for its refusal of the entry of the UN team in Iraq.

Since then the UN inspectors could not enter Iraq, although Butler is gone and under its new terms the UN appointed the former head of the United Nations International Atomic Energy

(sanctions were first imposed on Iraq in August 1990 by the UN Security Council). The US and Britain are reported to be of the view that unless Iraq allows the UN inspection team to visit the suspected sites of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in terms of the UN resolution, the sanctions will continue. While China and Russia are reported not to endorse this position. France appears to be in the middle.

Meanwhile the economic sanctions on Iraq continue to bring misery and deprivation to the Iraqi people. The innumerable deaths of the children in Iraq because of lack of medicine and nutritious food appear to continue to shock the international community. The World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reported that the sanctions had virtually paralysed the whole economy and generated persistent



Saddam addressing the nation on TV in 1991

have created a negative image and are not hurting the ruling Iraqi elite. Secondly, some of the European countries are keen to enter into commercial business with Iraq. Thirdly, in an environment of oil shortage Iraq's oil appears to be of great interest to the West. Russian and French planes had landed into Iraq with humanitarian goods. A few Arab countries seem to be interested to bring back Iraq into its fold and Iraq attended for the first time the meeting of the Arab League recently.

Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein claims to his people that Iraq had won the Gulf War. It is argued to his people that his contemporary heads of state/government have all disappeared from the political scene (Bush Sr., Margaret Thatcher, Mikhail Gorbachev). Bush's successor President Clinton has also gone after 8 eight years in the White House but he remains in

President Saddam Hussein is a show of strength and demonstrates that it had recouped substantially its loss from the war.

The new US administration which appears to be committed to military intervention only where US interests are involved now has 68 conflicts to choose from according to the US National Defence Council Foundation - a non-partisan think-tank created in 1978. It appears that the new US Secretary of State General Colin Powell will be directing his attention to Iraq. After all he was responsible for the strategy that defeated the Iraqi army in the Gulf War. He said last December soon after his nomination that he would work to "re-energise" sanctions against Baghdad and was prepared to "confront him". In the new environment of global politics as reflected in the Security Council, how far he will be successful is a

matter of conjecture.

There is a view that while Israel has reportedly been in possession of nuclear weapons and until Palestine issue is resolved in the Middle East, perfunctory sanctions against Iraq are expected to fail. Some of the countries in West Asia wish to match Israel in weapons of mass destruction. Until the West balances its disarmament policy between Israel and the Arabs, the imposition of UN sanctions is likely to face a credibility gap in the international community.

Furthermore, the Security Council resolution 687 of 1991 (paragraph 14) did not refer only to Iraq's disarmament but to the goal of establishing a Middle East zone free from weapons of mass destruction. The Security Council should look into why and how the sanctions do not work in Iraq and how can they establish the region free from weapons of mass destruction including in Iraq and Israel.

Past experience illustrates that slamming of sanctions, unless co-ordinated and imposed by all countries, do not work. The Secretary General of the UN reportedly was doubtful of the efficacy of the present regime of UN sanctions. It seems that it is an appropriate time to change the direction of UN economic sanctions to be effective.

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One can perhaps lay blame on the shortsighted policy on Iraq pursued by some of the permanent members of the Security Council. It appears that they are in neglect of achieving the goal pursuant to 687 of the Security Council resolution, i.e. disarmament of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and not in Iraq only.

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## Yeltsin Strives to be Remembered

**Unlike Gorbachev, whom he clearly despises, Yeltsin has created no political movement or foundation. But neither did he need to, for he never had intellectual pretensions so much as political instincts. As if to prove the continued power of those instincts Yeltsin can draw some personal reassurances from the fact that last year, the Russian parliament had confirmed a law which guarantees his immunity from prosecution.**

BORIS Yeltsin's presidency came to an end, for all practical purposes, on the tarmac of an airport in Tashkent in early October, 1998. That was the day Yeltsin stumbled as he stood watching a guard of honour. His head slumped to his chest, and for a moment, he seemed to lose consciousness. Only the supporting hand of Islam Karimov, the Uzbek president, saved Yeltsin from falling to the ground. Suddenly, his physical frailty became apparent to the entire world. Even almost a year after his surprise resignation in early 2000, many people in Russia have hardly noticed a change in the profile of Yeltsin. They became used to a leader who was out of the public eye for long periods, emerging only occasionally to announce a dramatic shake-up of ministers or shift in policy.

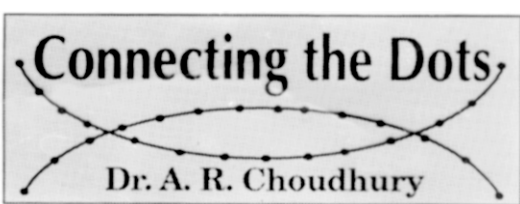
While in office, he was often euphemistically "working with documents" at his government country house outside Moscow as he struggled with illness and fatigue. I suspect that the most commonly held view of Boris Yeltsin by the outside world is that he is something of a buffoon - an amiable, well-meaning, sometimes drunken and often laughable character who just happened to also be the president of Russia.

Many have a darker and what might be called a "more nuanced" view of Yeltsin: as a reckless, dangerous leader whose fits of rage slowed and sometimes stopped the pace of economic and political reform in Russia. He is recalled as a man who, in the last stages of his career, became something of a self-parody. And still others, remember the August,

1991 Yeltsin, the man who stood atop a tank in Moscow and through the force of his personality and convictions, stared down those who had arrested Gorbachev and sought to capture power in Russia. Meet yet another Boris Yeltsin: Yeltsin the family man, the earnest, dutiful public servant who did his best, in spite of pests, fools and villains, to keep his country on the straight path and who, despite repeated provocations, refused to punish his enemies. Meet another Yeltsin, who loves sports, has difficulties in coping with new technology, and gets pleasure in listening to the music of Andrew Lloyd Webber.

This latest version of Yeltsin is a self-portrait, drawn in the pages of a diary he wrote in the late night hours when, suffering from insomnia, he retreated to his study to write his thoughts. The outcome of this midnight scribbling, "Midnight Diaries," provides yet another window on the personality and career of one of the most colourful characters on the world scene in recent years. Much of the early part of 2000 was taken up by Yeltsin's completion of his third volume of memoirs "Presidential Marathon".

The first two volumes - Against the Grain and The Struggle for Russia - brought the reader up to date with Yeltsin's life until 1993. The third volume, Midnight Diaries, is the story of Yeltsin's second term of office, beginning in 1996



and ending in early 2000, after the election of Vladimir Putin, Yeltsin's designated successor and Russia's current leader.

The book adds little of great insight to his thinking during his second presidential term. But it does represent a desire by Yeltsin and his advisers to try to influence how he would like to go down in history. There is a good-natured, folksy tone in this book. It reads very much as though the author was determined to correct an impression that he was a super-serious, solitary, unfeeling, vindictive and even ascetic character.

The book also portrays the Russian president's attempts to deal with serious problems, such as a coal miners' strike in 1998. The workers went on strike because they hadn't been paid in months. But, in spite of that, they dutifully reported for work every morning. This willingness and ability to suffer deprivations and torments - what George Kennan calls "the almost pathetic patience of the common people of Russia" - must surprise many of us. But their patience finally broke, and Yeltsin was forced to confront the

problem. He portrays his efforts candidly and without apology and self-pity. There are also portraits, brief or full, of the many political actors who walked across the stage of Russian history and crossed paths with Yeltsin during his tenure: Gorbachev, of course; Alexander Korzhakov, Yeltsin's personal bodyguard who acquired enormous influence on government until he was finally fired; Boris Berezovsky, the powerful communications tycoon; Tatyana Dyachenko, Yeltsin's daughter, confidante and adviser; Alexander Lebed, the tough-talking Russian soldier-turned-politician, and many others.

This memoir, like all memoirs

and autobiographies, is the author's version of history and therefore presents only a partial and one-sided view. It's also a conspicuously self-serving account.

Yeltsin acknowledges his drinking problem. But he expresses little remorse for the damage his drinking did on the reputation of the office he held. He insists that he resisted serious temptations to punish Gorbachev for his repeated provocations, but never fully acknowledges Gorbachev's contributions to Russia's continuing evolution to democracy.

Unlike Gorbachev, whom he clearly despises, Yeltsin has created no political movement or foundation. But neither did he need to, for he never had intellectual pretensions so much as political instincts.

As if to prove the continued power of those instincts Yeltsin can draw some personal reassurances from the fact that last year, the Russian parliament had confirmed a law which guarantees his



immunity from prosecution. Virtually all human beings have personalities that are contradictory and mysterious. That is why human beings are so interesting - and perhaps why some of them go to psychoanalysts. But the peaks and valleys of Yeltsin's personality are much higher and deeper than those of most people. He is just like the rest of us - only more so. And that is what gives this memoir an impact that others do not have.

## To the Editor ...

### Dhaleswari Drying Up!

Sir, It is alarming that the River Dhaleswari is drying up. Dhaka is situated on the north bank of the River Buriganga which has upstream connections both to the Dhaleswari and the Bangshi rivers. Both these rivers are tributaries of the mighty Jamuna arising from the latter in Tangail District. If the Dhaleswari dries, the Buriganga would not be safe. The Dhaleswari had a tributary upstream, also named Dhaleswari, that was closed to make the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (JMB) safe from eastern water currents. It is very likely that the main Dhaleswari has been getting less water since its tributary was closed.

Before the construction of the Meghna Bridge, the Kaliganga Bridge over the Dhaleswari River at Manikganj District was the longest Highway Bridge of the country. The proper authorities should dredge the entire Dhaleswari from its inception from the Jamuna in Tangail to its falling into the Meghna at Munshiganj during the lean period.

Environmentalists, planners and the Government should realize that a belated "Save the Buriganga"

movement will not be enough to rescue the capital and the country as a whole from environmental degradation. A concerted effort should be made to decentralize everything from Dhaka by stopping its extension beyond the bordering rivers, namely Turag, Buriganga, Balu, Sitalakkhya and Dhaleswari as early as possible.

M A S Molla  
Member, BAAS, Dhaka.

### Ease Dhaka's Parking Problem

Sir, To ease the serious parking problem and traffic congestion in Dhaka, we need more parking facilities. The lack of adequate parking spaces at markets and commercial institutions creates havoc on the streets. Markets like Rapa Plaza and Eastern Plaza have parking facilities, but vehicles have increased in volume and these spaces are inadequate. Schools do not have any parking spaces at all. This is mainly why we face traffic congestion during school hours. Some of Rajuk's approved commercial complexes do not have large parking facilities. Most hospitals have parking facilities for their own cars, but not for the public. When talking about parking places, we do

not think of facilities for the rickshaws and the taxis and that is our biggest mistake. If we survey the city roads, we would notice that we face unnecessary traffic jams in the city due to the lack of parking spaces for these vehicles.

Thousands of illegal rickshaws ply the city roads without any rules or regulations. Most of the rickshaws pullers park their vehicles on the roads as if that part of the road belongs to them. These rickshaws and the taxis simply add to the jam, which has been already caused by the increase in private cars. To ease the traffic we have to create parking facilities for these vehicles. Creating and constructing roads will definitely not solve the problem, even in the next 10 years, unless the government ensures proper parking facilities. It is high time that the government took serious steps regarding parking facilities in our city. Without this, in a few years' time, plying vehicles on the streets will be dangerously difficult.

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## The Rivers of Discontent

by A Mawaz

THE recent tragedy due to collision of launches during foggy weather (DS editorial, January 3) is a symbol of a national symptom of negligence of regulatory functions and indifferent routine maintenance by government agencies, and absence of a healthy code of conduct by the operators in different areas of public activities.

In a riverine region dominated by a huge and complex internal waterways transport network, it is unbelievable to read in the papers that the government has only five inspectors to inspect several thousand vessels. The callousness and inefficiency is indirectly due to inadequate recurring budgets in the relevant departments of the regulatory and monitoring agencies.

The issue has to be probed at the central planning stage, when the projects (including the BMRE aspects) are approved by the NEC and other processing bodies. The escalation in the operational budgets year by year have to be recognised and provision made for proper management of bigger administrative responsibilities. The other psychological aspect is the lack of interest by the elected politicians (the MPs) to ensure that the maintenance routines do not go below a certain accepted level in the public services.

The same sickness can be observed in the failure to regulate the city traffic, running the airport, the mess in the passport office and at the public transport terminals, the way the government hospitals are run and maintained, the slow output of the secretariat, and in the fire and other hazards in the garment factories. The national output

level is low, generally speaking, and it is reflected from time to time in the press reports when some tragedy or mishap occurs.

Many examples could be cited by untrained observers and clients, but it is obvious that the solution lies in an integrated approach to operational efficiency in government service. This aspect of awareness of the day-to-day routine responsibilities is neglected by the higher ups (treated in a routine way!), hence the staff below them dare to be callous; especially in the absence of routine disciplinary action. The government as facilitator has to provide the minimum level of administrative infrastructure to ensure proper safety and efficiency levels in the public services.

Nothing much can be expected from the political representatives, due to the poor prevailing political culture, but the civil service has to be tuned up from time to time by the elected regimes. This exercise is being constantly neglected, for reasons better known to the authorities.

At the end, it is the flywheel effect of a system which counts while evaluating the ratings. The metropolis is notorious for mismanagement and administrative tardiness, and the environment will not improve unless attention is paid to reward and punishment aspects in each office in the public sector. If the governance can be maintained within a tight tolerance factor, the private sector will have to toe the line.

More appointment of probing committees will not solve recurring problems. Changes in the old systems (modernisation) of working

procedures have to be introduced to keep pace with the development trends. The processing time has to be reduced in each specific case (note the huge backlog of pending cases in the judiciary wing; and the poor efficiency of services by the nationalised banks).

The political focus is always on new development projects, and not on routine efficiency. The bureaucracy has to self-regulate itself, but it needs constant pressure from the top. The O&M division in the secretariat may like to publicise some of its activities to enhance public opinion on how the government tries to run the offices efficiently. The reward and punishment system may be made public for better awareness.

News and comments about systems loss are now a regular feature in the press. This loss in the civil service is much higher in the public sector, as the government is not much bothered to make profits! In short, the mental approach to the nagging problems in the public services has to be revised. The clerical file- and paper-work approach has to be replaced with standardised forms and quicker processing, with more power to the field staff and less use of discretion. Nowadays the filing of database is no problem, with the increasing computerisation of the government offices. The personnel must be in tune with the system, and vice versa. If the government cannot govern itself, how the outsiders will follow suit?