

# Gulf crisis used to target Third World

by Mary M. Burdman

Former Iranian President Abolhassan Banisadr warned, in an interview in the Aug. 19 Milan daily *Avvenire*, that the current Persian Gulf crisis is initiating a new era of wars by the United States and allied nations against the populations of the Third World. "I would like Bush to speak openly, since he, too, like Saddam [Hussein], speaks in an ambiguous way. I do not know whether he represents the American political tendency which contemplates the 'necessity' of imposing war on the Third World, to exterminate populations which have become too cumbersome," Banisadr said. "It is the theory which says: Now the East-West conflict has ended, we must begin the North-South confrontation. It is the theory of Zbigniew Brzezinski and of many others."

This warning was echoed by former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark in an interview with the same paper on Aug. 22, and is the Anglo-American intentions behind the British-manipulated Gulf crisis.

Economic war against the Third World is *already happening* in the Iraq crisis. The blockade by the United States and Britain includes food and medicine. In addition to the 17 million people of Iraq and the 800,000 of Kuwait, there are around 3 million people in Iraq and Kuwait, most of them "imported labor" from Egypt, Palestine, and the nations of the Indian subcontinent, threatened with starvation and sickness by the blockade.

This use of the "food weapon" is part of 20 years of Anglo-American policy toward the developing sector. Commodity prices have collapsed and debt has ballooned since the 1970s. The rise in oil prices will be disastrous for the indebted nations of the Third World, but the devastation wrought by the Gulf blockade will not end there. These impoverished nations, unable to survive their debt burdens and energy import costs by exporting commodities, have become more dependent on the export of human labor. Since the late 1960s, and especially since the oil crisis of 1973, the nations of the Third World have been exporting tens of thousands of workers—men and women—to Kuwait and other oil-producing nations and have become increasingly dependent on the remittances from these workers for foreign exchange to survive.

These nations cannot afford to airlift their workers out of the Gulf. Egypt is sending buses, and India ships, but this will take weeks. Indian and Pakistani workers who have fled report that those left are in a desperate situation, facing an acute lack of food and water. As one British national who

escaped Kuwait explained, Westerners were generally well off and had the means to store food in their homes, most of the Asians did not. Since the invasion came on Aug. 2, many have not been paid since last month. One report said 3,000 Pakistanis were stranded on the Kuwait-Saudi border and could starve if not helped.

Many workers are employed in the oilfields or on construction projects, but thousands more are women working as maids, secretaries, and at other "service" jobs for a pittance. Conditions were so bad for Sri Lankan women working as domestics in Kuwait, that the government in Colombo had banned more women workers from going there. But almost 80,000 are already in Kuwait, and now are stranded without food or money. Many were just left behind by Kuwaiti employers who fled to Saudi Arabia.

## The Anglo-American food weapon

There is an outcry against the use of the food weapon against these people. The London-based Palestinian daily *al-Quds al-Arabi* wrote the week of Aug. 20, "Those shedding tears over the Western citizens—and they include Arabs, unfortunately—forget or ignore the fact that there are more than 17 million Iraqi Arabs and 3 million other Arabs and foreigners who are exposed to the rise of death from starvation or illness in the current battle." Cairo's semi-official daily *al-Gumhuriyah* wrote, "Starving a population is a crime against humanity however one tries to conceal it behind a veil of international law. To punish populations for the mistakes of their rulers is rejected in principle by all covenants."

Sri Lanka is an example of the plight of these nations. In Colombo, Sri Lanka Aug. 9, Ranjan Wijeratne, Minister of Plantation Industries, rejected the U.N. Security Council resolution for mandatory sanctions against Iraq. Desperately poor Sri Lanka cannot afford to stop exporting tea to Iraq, which normally buys 20% of its crop, its biggest source of foreign exchange. "If the United Nations gives foreign exchange for our tea we will stop selling," Wijeratne stated. "We are a poor country. Sanctions are for the rich." A Sri Lankan embassy spokesman in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia announced that Sri Lanka is dependent upon remittances from its workers in the Gulf for 40% of its foreign exchange income. Repatriating its nationals, even if this civil war-devastated country could afford the transport, would hurt what remains of its economy. Labor Minister G.M. Premachandra was in the region Aug. 18, seeking help for the workers.

Egypt is also being hit hard. Some 150,000 Egyptians were in Kuwait and 800,000 in Iraq at the time of the invasion Aug. 2. Most of the 70,000 refugees who have crossed into Jordan from Iraq are Egyptians, and their presence in Jordan is already causing an acute crisis. Disturbances are reported among the stranded Egyptian workers; Cairo is totally unable to cope with the crisis. The fate of the Palestinians—300,000 in Iraq and 170,000 in Kuwait—will be far worse if the food war continues.

The U.S. arrogance toward the Third World is shown by its demand that India, which is trying to air- and sea-lift emergency supplies to its 185,000 nationals stranded in the Gulf, "guarantee" that the supplies do not fall into Iraqi hands. The U.S. is believed to have agreed "in principle" to the shipments, the British daily *Guardian* reported Aug. 22, after talks between Indian Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral and U.S. Secretary of State James Baker in Washington. Indian officials called the U.S. demand for guarantees "totally unreasonable."

Indians who fled to Jordan report that if no help arrives in a week, their compatriots still in Kuwait could starve. India asserted that the plight of its citizens is so bad in the Gulf that the U.S. simply could not block attempts to assist them. India is reportedly readying an evacuation fleet of military and commercial vessels, but the evacuation would still take weeks.

### **Demands for U.N. aid**

India, which gets about 40% of its oil from Iraq and could lose 5-5.5 million tons of crude oil supplies due to the sanctions, has already asked for U.N. aid. On Aug. 3, India's foreign exchange reserves fell below the level allowed by the Finance Ministry of 500 million rupees, the *Hindustan Times* reported Aug. 11. The Petroleum Ministry has determined that India will need an additional 310 million rupees to tide it over during the Gulf crisis.

Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Hari Kishore Singh on Aug. 10 called on U.N. Secretary General Pérez de Cuellar to help developing sector nations get through the current economic crisis with the help of the U.N.'s lending institutions. Singh pointed out that provision for aid in the case of economic deprivation resulting from U.N.-ordered sanctions is provided for in the U.N. Charter. "Many projects, particularly construction projects in Iraq, will be delayed or suspended. Exports to Iraq have to be suspended. India, like many other countries, is going to be affected. The U.N. has an obligation to help these countries," he said.

Philippines President Corazon Aquino has "reserved the right" to apply U.N. sanctions against Iraq with "our own national interest" in mind. "Our first concern is the safety and well-being of the hundreds of thousands of Filipinos who are working in the Middle East and who are, by doing so, helping our economy here," Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus said Aug. 20. There are 350,000 workers from the Philippines in Saudi Arabia, about 5,000 in Iraq, and 90,000 in Kuwait—half of them women.

Remittances from these workers is vital for the Philippines, which owes \$26 billion in debt. About \$1.3 billion a year is deposited in banks, but total about \$3 billion. On Aug. 17, National Economic Development Authority Director General Cayetano Paderanga announced that the Philippines had cut its GNP growth estimate by a full point—to 3.8%—due to the oil price increases.

## **Asian leaders not keen on Mideast war**

by Lydia Cherry

British and U.S. efforts to pull Asian leaders along with their war buildup in the Persian Gulf have not been a big success. Reticence has been the rule, regardless of whether the country in question stands to gain financially from the crisis, such as Indonesia and possibly Malaysia, because of their oil reserves, or to lose, as is the case of the vast majority of Asian countries.

India and Indonesia, the two largest Muslim countries in the world, refused to have their troops embroiled in the war effort, and India has been adamant about its opposition to unilateral armed action. India's opposition Congress Party is on record saying that the moves of the U.S. and its allies could well "plunge the world into catastrophe," Delhi Domestic Service reported Aug. 18.

Indonesia initially said it would continue trading with Iraq despite the U.N. embargo, but by Aug. 12, Indonesia's leaders apparently became convinced that they had no choice but to "comply with the U.N. resolution, and for this Indonesia has to bear the risk," as Mines and Energy Minister Gi-nanjar explained. President Suharto has still not condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Malaysia responded similarly that it would not send troops. "We do not side with any country. Our position is that we are with Islam," said a spokesman. He noted that Iraq and Iran had also requested Malaysia's support when they were at war. "Malaysia will not support these wars between Muslims."

### **Pressure on Japan and Korea**

British and U.S. policymakers are incensed that Japan and South Korea are refusing to play the roles assigned to them. "The Japanese government, which claims so often to want to take a leadership role in world affairs, continues to dither over how to handle the Gulf crisis, even though most other industrial nations have already made substantial commitments of men and money to the effort," wrote Britain's *Financial Times* Aug. 23. Former U.S. Defense Secretary Harold Brown was quoted by the *Wall Street Journal*, that talk is increasing in Washington, D.C. "about simply charging Tokyo for the U.S. military services." President Bush had to telephone Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu twice "just to get Japan to announce its support of the U.N. trade embargo against Iraq," the *Washington Times* reported.

Japan was the country most involved in rebuilding Iraq's