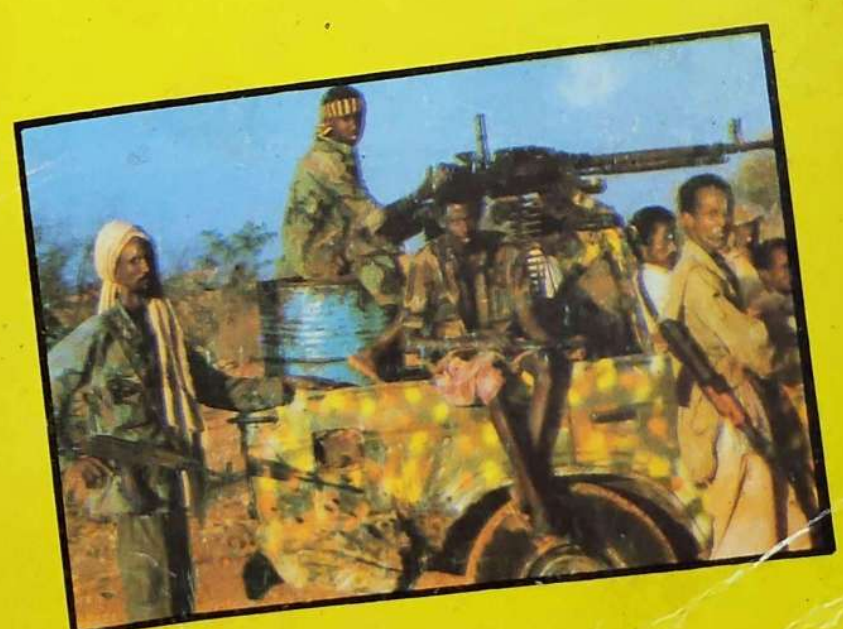
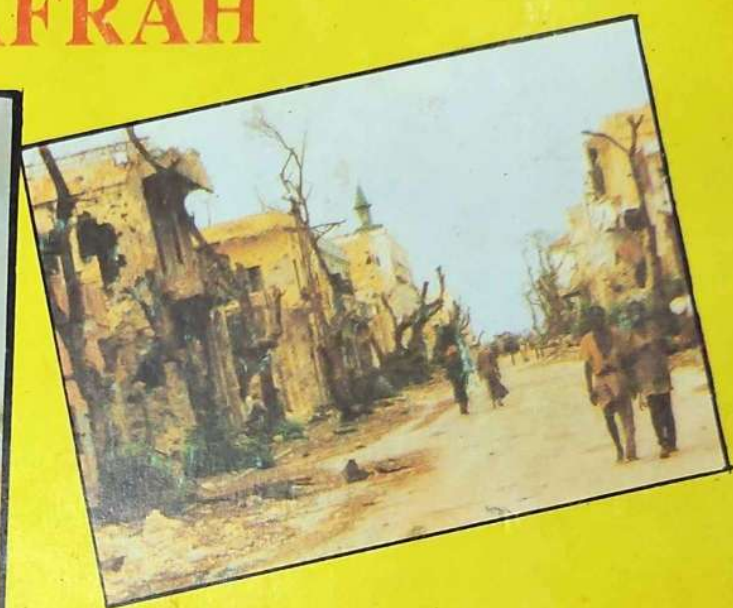
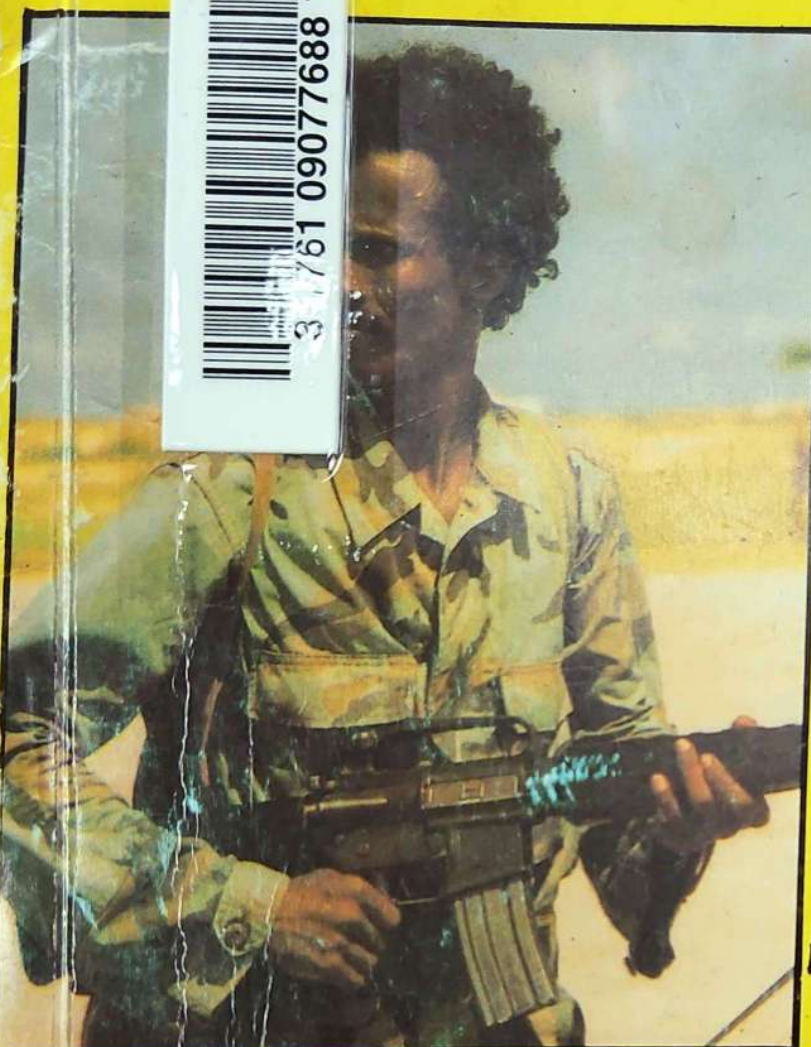


MOGADISHU: A HELL ON EARTH M. M. AFRAH



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ary about
Mogadishu.

To MR. Norman Morgan
With Compliments by
the Author,


NORRIS 7/6/85

MOHAMOUD M. AFRAH

**MOGADISHU:
A HELL ON EARTH**



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TO MY SON ABDULKADIR

Thanks also to Helena Gachuri and Florence Mbuti.

"I will lay waste the land. I will scatter you among the nations. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins".

LEVITICUS

"All the business of war, and indeed all the business of life, is to endeavour to find out what you don't know by what you do"

**Arthur Wellesley
1st Duke of Wellington**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This diary was possible because of the tireless and diligent work of Tami and Steve Cooper of Taylor University, Upland, Indiana, U. S. A.; who assisted in every step - re-writting the manuscript and correcting the mis-judgements and spelling. Their friendship and sense of judgement guided this diary to the final touch; the diary is as much thiers as mine. The couple spent weeks reading the manuscript and advising me as to the best way to put the message across to readers who are not familiar with the scenario in Somalia, in particular, and Africa in general.

I also acknowledge the editors and reporters of the HILIN newspaper for their articles that added "spice" to this Diary.

Simon Sossion of the Kenya Literature Bureau, is like the best of book people, someone concerned with truth and accurancy. His reviews of my first book **TARGET: VILLA SOMALIA** received wide acclaim in Kenya dailies and weeklies, such as The Kenya Weekly Review, and The Sunday Times and The Nation. He is a true collaborator and has the backbone and Stamina of a team of editors.

Jonathan Clayton, Nairobi Bureau Chief of Reuters news agency and his Secretary Margaret Wainaina (a born-again Christian) are thanked for their continued moral and material support when I really needed them for my survival in war-torn Somalia and later in Kenya. Thanks are also due to my wife, Mana, who endured my daily grumblings and repeated requests for more patience and understandings.

M. M. Afrah.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

While writing a diary about the civil war in Somalia, a number of problems have presented themselves. Most of them concerned with whether I would be alive to see it published, and whether it would raise the consciousness of the readers who may have never experienced the calamitous events such as those of 1991/92 in Somalia, which the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has described as "the world's greatest human tragedy today".

With respect to characters, I wish to state as plainly as possible, for the safety of those still living in Mogadishu, that, although the events described in the diary are true, the names of the characters do not reflect the names of any real persons, living or dead. The only exceptions are the names of the OAU, Arab League, and United Nations officials who tried, at a very late date, to contain the carnage in Somalia.

The diary continues and concludes the story of the popular uprising which ousted former Somali President, Major General Mohamed Siyad Barre, recounted in my previous book, *Target: Villa Somalia*.

Doubtless, a number of Somali clan leaders on both sides of the conflict will disagree with Ali Dhuhul's stance regarding the factional fighting in Mogadishu; some will feel that he is too hard on one faction and too soft on another. I hope these criticisms will cancel each other out. For the record, both sides used, with abundance, all the 'arsenals that were left behind by ousted President Barre after his army was defeated by the guerrillas of the United Somali Congress (USC), and in the process they destroyed the Somali capital beyond recognition. An estimated 45,000 non-combatants have been killed or maimed in the senseless, six-month-long fighting, and more than 4.5 million Somalis have been displaced by the fighting.

With respect to geography, I have divided Mogadishu into two factional strongholds. Only those who know the Somalis well will understand why I did this.

Foreign correspondents returning to Somalia for their second and third visits still shudder uncontrollably at the memories that return to their minds: bloated bodies of civilians, their eyes wide open, their teeth bared and their brains scattered all over. The city have names that lay a quick, chilly touch on my bones: Bermuda Triangle (which Reuters News Agency says is, "as dangerous as its namesake"), Yaqshid, K4, Sinai, Bakaaraha, Shan-

gani, Kaaraan, Yoobsan, ... every night I had envisioned myself dead in one of those places.

I know that one day there will be people from both sides of the warring factions sitting together in the places mentioned in the diary, talking about the "bad old days," and that many of them will remember and say, "Yes, we were all wrong, fighting for no reason".

Finally, there may be some who consider the contents of the diary to be a fanciful tale. To them, I say that I have been very careful to ensure that all of the events mentioned are accurate and to the point.

M.M. Afrah
Nairobi, Kenya

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Thanks are also due to the Staff and Management of **Copos Ltd.** for producing the Diary in record time.

M. M. Afrah.

ACRONYMS OF MAJOR SOMALI GUERRILLA ORGANISATIONS

SNM	Somali National Movement
USC	United Somali Congress
SSDF	Somali Salvation Democratic Front
SPM	Somali Patriotic Movement
SDM	Somali Democratic Movement
SNF	Somali National Front
SDA	Somali Democratic Alliance

Chapter One

Living in no man's Land

ONE

SEPTEMBER 2, 1991

- The situation in Mogadishu is very tense as the struggle for power among the top officials of the guerrilla organisation, the United Somali Congress (USC) is beginning to intensify. Some say that General Kayse had a falling out with his rival, General Robleh, over the question of funding the USC forces after the overthrow of former dictator, Major-General Mohamed Siyad Barre, in January this year. This ill-conceived, irrational war could destroy the people's aspirations for a better life, the very aspirations that prompted them to rise up against the dictator.

The Qurac forces' advance had halted General Kayse's push toward the centre of the city. They had then dug in at the Godka, where they are having a final stand. The casualties have been astronomical as General Robleh's supporters are out-gunned by never less than eight to one.

We are all suffering from delayed shock. The city has been devastated by carpet shellings.

SEPTEMBER 3,

- Horror and disgust! It has been a costly war. Thousands have been killed or maimed and homes destroyed beyond recognition, as both sides are using heavy artillery and anti-aircraft guns, training them on residential areas of the city. I ran for my life as my own home came under heavy rocket attacks today.

Afterward, I questioned the ethics of factional fighting. Could any clan be justified in sending the flower of their youth to endure such hell in the name of the clan? The carnage is sickening and there seems to be no end to it. Hospitals are filled with shreds of broken humanity. In one instance I saw a man's intestines fall onto the tarmac after he was hit by shell fire. I saw men and women with eyeless sockets, without noses, with shell splinters sticking out of their skulls. I listened to men screaming like tortured animals. I watched them coughing up their lungs as they gasped for air.

Heaps of dirt and rubble lay everywhere.

SEPTEMBER 4,

- People say that peace, until lost, is seldom valued. Coming so soon after the overthrow of the former dictator, the factional fighting in Mogadishu cannot be justified. Apparently some remnants of his supporters are bent on rocking the boat for ulterior motives. Death has become too commonplace to matter. The two greatest products in Mogadishu these days are shooting and rumours: from morning to night they manufacture rumours, from night to morning they manufacture shootings. Not only the soldiers are dying, but civilians are being killed at an outrageous rate. It is a case of being damned if you do and damned if you don't.

The chatter of machine guns rises in a crescendo over our heads. We can hear the whine of the bullets as they pass over us.

SEPTEMBER 5,

- Uncertainty is still the name of the game here, even simple people can sense how volatile things have become. The worst of all is that every time I begin to fall asleep, I wake up with a start and the bitter taste of fear in my mouth. Shells come whistling over our houses in great arcs, dispatched from invisible batteries to strike targets close to our homes.

From my window I can see houses set ablaze by shell fire during the night, now burning fiercely. Wherever I look, fiery red and yellow flashes split the darkness of the night, marking clearly the deadly path of the armoured attack.

A new sound mingles with the tank shells. It is the hollow, whining howl of Stalin Organs. They fall not far from us, and the holes they make are tremendous. The blast sometimes deafens me for hours. More explosions roar, thunder, and crash. Some of the windows in my house tinkled to bits.

A tank in front of my house just swung out and rumbled thunderously after mounted jeeps, leaving dozens of spent shells and geysers of smoke and dust. Several bodies lay spread-eagle on the dirt road, some of them still gripping AK-47s in one hand.

I have been deaf for several hours following the shelling, and I am now suffering from shell shock.

12:30 p.m. - Several shells just exploded across the road behind my house with a deafening crash. Machine guns have been rattling viciously, but are now silent. My roof collapsed under the impact of the shells. I was covered with debris from head to toe.

I can hear the heavy thudding of distant shell fire. In between the blasts, the

sharper crack of tank shells can be heard. Our neighbour began to scream.

"Let's get out of here," my elder son said. "General Kayse's boys will be here before we know it".

"You can't run about in the middle of an attack," I told him. A rain of bullets struck the walls of our house, almost tearing the door off its hinges.

Our neighbour intensified his scream. One of the walls of his house had been cut open by a piece of shrapnel. The scream died away in a few small, final grunts.

My son stood behind the window. He withdrew his Italian made tommy-gun from its hiding place in the kitchen.

"Not with that! We can't do anything with it, these boys are using heavy stuff," I warned him nervously.

"I know," he answered, stretching his arms upward at an angle with the tommy-gun clutched in his hand, "I'll just let the boys know we're ready and awake".

Suddenly, everything was still. The fighting was over just as it began, and a waiting, threatening silence fell over the ruined section of the city where we lived. The silence lasted for two hours, only to be interrupted by a 37 mm anti-aircraft gun striking and ricocheting off a nearby wall with a howl, doing no damage.

On the dirt road behind the mosque lay the carcasses of cows, blown up like balloons, with their legs jutting stiffly upwards.

10:30 p.m. - Fighting resumed again after a few hours' lull. From the street came the screams of women and children who were caught in crossfire as they tried to flee the city.

"The mounted jeeps and tanks are all over the streets out there," a man carrying a six-month-old baby told me. Just then, a carpet of artillery was laid over our quarters and I threw myself flat to the ground. A huge shell fell behind us, and another burning house crashed in on itself. More screams from our neighbours could be heard. The impact of the explosion partly destroyed the roof over my bathroom. Bullets were flying again. We counted spraying bullets from fifteen machine guns.

Immediately after the rain of bullets, I jumped to my feet and rushed straight across the dirt road, trying to join the stream of people growing there, but my son stopped me, saying that it was better to die in our own house than to die in the crossfire. I agreed with him, confused with fear.

Today they used everything in their arsenals: field guns, howitzers, mortars, tanks, infantry weapons and even anti-aircraft guns. The Stalin Organs, known here as BM42s are the worst. We lay flat under the bed making ourselves as small as possible. It seemed an eternity before life began to flow slowly into me again.

Then came the mounted jeeps. They parked right in front of our door. Several men could be clearly seen sitting behind the huge 104 mm guns, yelling at each other for no apparent reason. Two men carrying AK 47 assault rifles burst into our house, demanding to know which clan we belonged to. I told them that I am a journalist working for the Reuters news agency, and showed them my press card. The card probably saved our lives. The men seemed very touchy and trigger-happy; they were probably under the influence of Khat, a local drug.

The field guns went off, and it felt as if my head was about to burst open. A T55 tank gun followed. The force of the explosion is impossible to describe. A tank gun is the devil's own invention.

Ten minutes later, the engine howled and the T55 began to move slowly forward, the earth shaking under its steel tracks, throwing stones and clumps of earth high into the air. Several corrugated iron sheets flew from our neighbour's house and went twisting over the house-tops like pieces of paper in the wind.

4:30 a.m. - The battle still rages in the Stadium area. It is very easy to tell the sharp crack of tank guns from the heavy booms of the field artillery. In between comes the characteristic sound of a bazooka, and when the heavy guns pause for a moment, the hysterical hammering of machine gun fire follows.

These gunmen stopped using their brains long ago.

6:15 p.m. - Fighting stopped abruptly. The muezzin called the faithful for the evening prayers as if nothing was happening! There was a lull in the fighting during the night, apart from a few gunshots in the neighbourhood.

SEPTEMBER 6,

- **6:30 a.m.** - As if by clockwork, artillery bombardment started. We came under fire and I dove for cover. No one knows who is holding the upper hand. But it seems that General Kayse's faction has been forced to retreat to the South-west of the city, judging from the sound of their guns - a big sigh of relief.

Perhaps because we'd had three days of non-stop fighting, with the threat of more to come, the brief golden break lifted my heart and sent a singing happiness through me. But there can be no aftermath without a storm ...

SEPTEMBER 7,

- The continuing uncertainty as to when the next attack will come is the thing that most worries us. It seems that the peace talks between the clans have failed.

A six inch shell exploded again in front of my door. I suffered only a mild concussion, but it left me with a high-pitched singing sound in my ears - soft, but persistent, refusing to go away. It is driving me mad.

At twelve noon I went to the city for the first time in several weeks to examine what damage had been caused during the fighting. The city looked as if it was suffering from some particularly unpleasant wasting disease. Gun-men seemed to be everywhere. Everything was in ruins. Broken tree stumps, burnt out cars, and shallow graves were everywhere. The sight haunted me for many days. That night I slept with my eyes open because everyone around me was carrying a gun or hand grenades, any one of which could go off at any time, making it so that it wouldn't matter whether it had been an accident or not.

To attempt to relay on official news is to court disaster. We must rely mostly on rumours, as little verifiable news is available. The people want to see action and not empty talks. It is one thing to lead a popular uprising, but quite another to run a country. Officials from both sides of the warring factions allege that some unnamed elements are trying to derail the objectives of the uprising. Who are these people?

We are war-weary, and no smooth talk can restore our confidence.

SEPTEMBER 8,

- Weapons, weapons everywhere and bursts of machine gun shots are common that we no longer raise an eyebrow. If the new "rulers" are serious, they should disarm the civilians. Reports say that some 250,000 weapons of all types are in circulation in the capital alone. Guns, ammo, landmines, and anti-tank rockets are openly on sale in the markets. An Ak-47 assault rifle costs as little as 35 US dollars. Even boys aged between 10 and 12 carry guns and hand grenades.

SEPTEMBER 9,

- Elders and religious leaders are unable to curb the endemic violence in the capital because everyone is armed to the teeth and no one listens to their words of wisdom. There is talk of organising a huge security operation but skeptics say that the various armed groups would never bend to any attempt to disarm them. They cite several attempts in the past which were doomed to failure. Apparently an intense struggle for power is going on between Kayse and Robleh, which could

spark off another round of bloody factional fighting in the capital. But for now there is an uneasy lull.

The situation is very tense, however. Observers predict another round of fighting, more serious and brutal than the one we have just witnessed. The hospitals, which like other institutions were looted and reduced to ruins at the height of the fighting, are overcrowded with patients, mostly women, children, and elderly people, who have lost limbs.

Tents are set up at all hospital compounds, in the corridors, and under trees. Doctors told me that many of their colleagues have fled the war. Others lost their lives. Trucks carrying desperately needed drugs are commandeered by armed gangs to the blackmarket and are sold back to the patients at exorbitant prices.

The majority of the male patients keep their assault rifles and hand-grenades under their hospital beds. A doctor told me that there are patients who arrived at the beginning of the civil war and now refuse to leave the relative safety of the hospital. They say that they do not know where to go.

If such a patient finally decides to leave, he takes the bed and the mattress with him or he puts one of his own clansmen in his place before he departs.

Doctors are worried that cholera may sweep through the city and decimate those who survived the slaughter.

A neutral clan is sponsoring a fragile ceasefire and is trying to coax the Qansax and Qurac clans to the table. But the clans are using the lull in the fighting to reinforce.

"Apparently each side is stockpiling food and weapons to have another go for the final victory- ceasefire or no ceasefire," my neighbour told me after returning from the city this morning.

The month of October was uneventful, but we are all holding our breath.

NOVEMBER 17

- The most intense fighting broke out today. Continuous shellings and non-stop gunshots have once again become a common feature. The city was hostage to a

barrage of shells and bullets of every size, speed, and calibre; rockets and rocket-propelled grenades, all types of mortars and artillery, Stalin Organs and howitzers, including the 85mm, 156mm, and 105mm, personnel carriers, tanks, anti-tank grenades and anti-aircraft pieces such as the 37mm and ZAW types were continuously used with abandon from dusk to dawn. Even aircraft-carried-bombs have been modified to be mounted on light trucks and used as artillery.

All these weapons beat tom-toms of doom, death, and destruction in Mogadishu. They mowed down or showered the bewildered people cowering behind flimsy walls under previously bullet-perforated corrugated iron roofs.

Amid the clatter of exploding missiles and mortars, the wails of bereaved parents, moans of mortally wounded victims, and above all, the alternating pleas and imprecations of a despairing, horrified population rose to a crescendo only to be broken off intermittently or silenced with finality by instruments of death.

NOVEMBER 18 - 24,

- They have now resorted to night fighting. Rocket-fire and bursts of heavy machine guns continue all night without respite. The underlying irony is that General Kayse declared a military coup d'etat; this could be interpreted as a clan coup because there is no military in the country. It disintegrated soon after the ousting of the former dictator. The fighting is gathering momentum with both sides trying to get the upper-hand.

The overall situation and the absolute power of weapons in Mogadishu arouses just one desire in many people - to own more guns, preferably the much favoured AK-47 or M-16 assault rifles. When describing a person, Somalis often use the expression, "he is well equipped," which means that such a person has several guns. Where the weapons come from is not, as a rule, of interest to anybody. Most Somalis encourage any method of getting weapons.

NOVEMBER 25,

- Rumours have been seeping through that General Kayse has been wounded by shrapnel as he tried to lead his forces. Nothing has been heard of him since November 24, which substantiates the veracity of this rumour.

The Generals in Somalia are no longer popular among the people. There are all kinds of anecdotes, jokes and rumours about them. Like the former dictator, General Barre, they scream about peace while their forces destroy the city, killing innocent people with their rockets and tanks.

It seems that the current outbreak of fighting is being conducted by bird-

brained planners, as evidenced by the senseless destruction and the massacre of innocent civilians.

Religious leaders, intellectuals and politicians all over the world are completely ignoring the carnage in Mogandishu. Even the World Muslim Conference, currently taking place in Dakar, Senegal, is ignorant of the desperate situation in Somalia, particularly in the capital. It seems to be a conspiracy of silence by the world community. Apparently the Western powers, the United States in particular, are no longer interested in Somalia simply because it does not have mineral resources and is no longer strategically important to Washington.

DECEMBER 25,

- Today, people in the West celebrate Christmas. Today, Somalis celebrate the twenty-fourth day of continuous and savage war, several hundred times worse than the September conflict. There is no end in sight despite an appeal by the Red Cross to cease fire. No one pays heed to this call.

The entire city is in a state of turmoil. People are recalling the days of Barre, saying that while Barre did not completely destroy the city, these scoundrels are aiming to finish the job, carpet-bombing crowded residential areas and killing anyone with whom they come into contact.

DECEMBER 26,

- This morning a number of mortars fell close to my house and the impact shook the walls and what was left of the windows. But general Kayse seemed to have difficulties in achieving his much-taunted "quick victory" against his opponents because the war has dragged on for more than twenty-five days without tangible achievements in the battlefields by either side. Each warring faction adopted theories and dogmas of human destruction, characterized by such phrases as "better death than to be dominated by the other side". For this reason alone a longer war is not ruled out, despite depletion of ammunition and war weariness on the part of the combatants.

Daily screams of women and children signal direct hits by artillery shells and mortars. Hundreds of people have lost their lives in this manner. Another neighbour's house received a direct hit and a woman by the name of Hajiya Habiba, a small child, and her watchmen were killed instantly. Her two daughters received injury from shrapnel. That is how I lost my son last week. No one can replace him. The number of people who lost their lives cannot be calculated. This is a savage war without precedence in the annals of history.

DECEMBER 27,

- The war has now become a routine affair. Shooting starts early in the morning and continues without lull until 6.30 pm., just like clockwork. Looters are having a field day. They loot the houses whose owners have fled to the countryside. Sometimes they even try to ransack a house right under the noses of the owners. No one can stop them because they are so heavily armed. I exchanged fire with some of these looters this morning when they tried to loot a neighbour's house. They dropped everything and escaped, leaving their shoes behind. It was the first time I had fired a gun in more than thirty years.

DECEMBER 28,

- The food situation in the city remains extremely serious. There is much hunger and starvation. Street hold-ups, burglaries, and murders are frequent. The markets are completely deserted and there is nothing one can buy to survive. On one street corner people have to queue for camel meat amidst the bombardments. It later transpired that the camel was hit by an incoming artillery shell. In ordinary times, Somalis, as devout Muslims, do not eat flesh of animals that have not been slaughtered in the Muslim tradition of wholesomeness. But these are not normal times.

The rumour mills say that the fate of the war will be decided today one way or the other. They say that the forces loyal to General Kayse are coming to the end of their tether, despite superiority in heavy military hardware. In their retreat last night, they started to level what parts of the city were left with howitzers and long-range artillery guns. I am writing this entry under heavy bombardment. My dining table is my only cover, at least against the flying shrapnel, if not the shells and mortars. It is reinforced with mattresses and a large carpet, and I feel a bit safer under it by making myself smaller. I counted more than thirty Shilka bullets as they fell through the roof of my house.

The forces loyal to General Robleh had been on the defensive until now, but today they are on the offensive which could change the conditions of the war in their favour because of their numerical strength --they outnumber their opponents eight to one. General Kayse has now realized that he is dealing with strong adversaries and his earlier claim that he would destroy the forces loyal to General Robleh in two days has been proven false.

A thin, high - pitched scream made me drop to the floor; there was a loud bang just outside of my window and shrapnel pattered against the walls of my next-door neighbour's house. I waited for number two -- they always come in twos. This time it was much closer, just below the window. The blast made my windows

rattle furiously and the walls took another peppering.

A large chunk of jagged metal lay in the middle of the sitting room. It must have flown in through the shattered window, sliced its way through the partition, and dropped tamely into the sitting room, only slightly chipping one of the chairs. It was still warm.

As I tried to snatch a few minutes of sleep under my makeshift shelter, I heard the renewed thump of mortars exploding across the sandy road. It seems as if the Robleh forces are making a final attack.

Until now they were not a warrior clan, and they haven't many big guns apart from the odd AK-47 and M-16 rifles. On the other hand, General Kayse's forces have the heavy weapons, including tanks, APCs, Stalin Organs, and howitzers completely under his thumbs, and that was the key to the situation until a few days ago when supporters of General Robleh managed to reassemble a few field guns.

DECEMBER 29,

- General Kayse intends to run the place if he wins the war. In fact, he already does run it, at least the area he controls. He seized the only radio station in the city and said that he had set up committees to run what he described as "the affairs of state" and to replace "the corrupt officials of General Robleh". He invited journalists for what he said was an important press conference. A colleague from the Italian news agency, ANSA, and glambered onto a badly damaged Land Rover, expropriated from the World Bank office in Mogadishu, and drove to General Kayse's stronghold, breaking all known world records.

Journalists, cards usually received a courteous onward wave before the factional fighting broke out, but when we tried to cross the line which now divides the city, after surviving several close encounters with death along the way, an elderly guerrilla leader in charge of several armed teenagers signalled to one of the boys to detain us on charges of spying for the other side. There is a widely held misconception that Somali nationals working for foreign news media are "agents carrying on the dirty work of imperialist governments." Crossing the line proved to be very dangerous and time-consuming.

As we were interrogated, several rockets burst through the southern wall of the building in which we were held. Everybody tried to scramble under the staircase, as there are very few buildings in Mogandishu with basements. A whole section of the building received direct hits from the twelve-barrelled Katyushas.

I had been shot at on numerous occasions during the first days of the civil war, but usually there had been something to hide behind. But when it comes to the

Katyushas (the Stalin Organs) there was no where to hide. The only solution was to lie down and hope for the best.

As soon as there was lull, we boarded the commandeered World Bank vehicle with four heavily-armed escorts and arrived home only to discover that my house was now completely demolished, and the whole neighbourhood deserted, save for dozens of dead bodies laying on the sides of streets and in ditches.

There wasn't a day when some militia man didn't ask me what I was doing in a demolished house in a deserted village. Sometimes a local guerrilla leader would ask me whether I was spying for the other side.

"What are you planning to do? Cover the war? Write a book?" he'd ask.

I'd get so nervous that I would start laughing. I told him that I wasn't planning to leave my house, and that nothing was going to happen to me.

Even then, they kept coming. Sometimes they talked as if killing women and children who belonged to the wrong clan was merely a pass-time. A whole family compound, with its occupants, could disappear in an afternoon.

Once, two hardened militia came to me, taunting me with death:

"Too bad you weren't with us yesterday when we killed so many of them, you would be tired counting them, "they would boast.

"How can you shoot women and children?" I asked.

"They belong to the other clan".

At that point, the two militia pointed their loaded AK-47s at my heart. When I made signs for them to put up their guns, one of them started laughing and said, "This here reporter wants me to put my gun up". After taunting me for a while, they finally left me alone.

Thousands of feuding militia men equipped with automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenades, and mounted vehicles, known here as "technicals," roam through the streets. Most of them are boys - aged between ten to fourteen out to prove their manhood. At that tender age, they have seen rape, death and destruction all around them; it would be very difficult to rehabilitate them.

4:30 p.m. - One shell landed in the middle of a pile of bodies, making a mess that no one wanted to clean up. Another rocket landed on grave-diggers, killing all four of them instantly.

Once beautiful and peaceful, Mogadishu looked like the final reel of "The Day After," a deserted city whose streets held nothing but refuse, bloated bodies, wind-

blown papers, burnt-out cars, and spent shells. The trees along the roads looked as if they had been struck by lightning. An epidemic of plague was feared, but nobody seemed to care.

DECEMBER 30,

- The war continues unabated. Despite General Kayse's attempt to generate a feeling of normalcy, the frightened people who remained in the devastated city were staying at home. The "bush telegraph" told everyone about the progress of the war. The radio station controlled by General Kayse said that an official of the International Committee of the Red Cross was killed at De Martini Hospital. The radio station said that the official and a Somali colleague were sprayed with a machine gun by a certain tribal chief. No further details were given.

DECEMBER 31,

- As the year ends, the fighting spirit of both sides is somewhat slackening, due perhaps to exhaustion and war-weariness. Shots, for example, are no longer fired indiscriminately, but sparingly.

One thing is certain: the tanks have run out of shells and are reportedly sitting idle near the old Parliament Square. Nobody seems to know what to do with them. Some enterprising fellows are pumping the fuel out of them and are laughing all the way to the fuel market at Sinai. Due to acute shortage of fuel in Mogadishu, the price has sky-rocketed.

Another T-55 tank plunged into the sea behind the old Secondo Lido. The entire crew was killed instantly. I saw an abandoned APC. It was undamaged. Apparently it had run out of fuel and ammo.

As a result, the militia men resorted to mortars and sniping. There was a single sniper with a G-3 long-range rifle who shot every moving thing from a tiny hole in the Chinese-built Mogadishu stadium. During the day he fired at everything that moved, including stray dogs and cats. When General Robleh's militia men fired on his position with mortars and recoilless rifles he would disappear into the concrete hole and wait. "Technicals" fired the 105 mm field guns at him, and when they were through, he would come up again and fire. Finally, the Katyushas were called in, and for ten minutes the air above the stadium was black and orange from the strike. When all of it cleared, the sniper popped up and fired off several rounds in the air, and everyone cheered and laughed and left him alone!

JANUARY 1, 1992

- It is New Year's Day, and in the morning the usual dawn battle started with

small fire-arms, until four in the afternoon, when it gathered momentum.

I try to snatch a few hours of sleep at night, usually from eight in the evening to five in the morning, when I literally crawl to the bathroom. Food and water are becoming more and more scarce every day.

It is ironic that the Muezzin continues to call the faithful to prayers even amid the heavy bombardments. I wonder who dares to go to the mosque under these tough conditions.

Today, as in previous days, there is no change in the way the war is progressing. Same weapons, same offensive and counter-offensive, and no one seems to be holding the upper hand so far.

The only impetus in the fighting is that General Kayse is appealing to the smaller clans to help him stem the tide. Several smaller clans have been backing his war efforts, but it seems he is unable to break down the Qansax sub-clan.

4:30 p.m. - The fighting has become intense, with both sides using long-range artillery. It is deafening. The fire is very close again. The pattern is the same: a few sharp exchanges, bullets and shells droning over the house, then a pause.

There were several explosions with deafening staccato bursts and smoke drifted from the houses across the road. They had received direct hits. The war is a nightmare with no prospect of ending.

JANUARY 2,

- General Kayse today claims that his offers for a ceasefire have been ignored. This claim took everybody by surprise, because nobody had heard him offer a ceasefire since the war started. Perhaps the General is trying to find a way out of the mess he created and is trying to fool everybody by claiming that the other side was ignoring his offer. The General is afraid to admit his reverses at the battlefield.

This afternoon, when a neighbour and I returned from scavenging for food and drinking water, we found the five-day old corpse of a militia man stretched in my backyard. The corpse was the worst thing we had ever seen, utterly mutilated, the skin on his face drawn back tightly like stretched leather, so that all his teeth showed. We were outraged that he had not been buried or at least covered.

3:30 p.m. - An unconfirmed report said that supporters of General Robleh have stormed the former Presidential Palace, Villa Somalia. The report also indicated that General Kayse's forces have evacuated many other strategic positions that they had held since the ousting of the former dictator eleven months

ago. If confirmed, this report would indicate a great loss for General Kayse. The Palace is on a hill overlooking the city and anyone holding it will have ample choice of targets.

This is a senseless and brutal war. Men kill without compunction. Each clan, with hatred in their eyes, is calling the others terrorists and war-mongers when all - without exception - indulge in killing, rape, and looting. The pain of their victims means nothing. Blind madness! Someone must have taught these killers how to exercise each execution without mercy. No one is immune. Even the few still remaining foreigners (mostly Arabs from Yemen) are murdered in cold blood, their homes looted, their wives and daughters raped. Mogadishu is a veritable hell on earth.

6:15 p.m. - The evening prayers of Maghreb were over. Darkness descended and the shootings could be heard in the distance. But the rest of the night was relatively quiet. As usual, I slept with my eyes open.

Then I heard an AK-47 on full automatic starting to go through clips: one second to fire, three to plug in a fresh clip. I peered through the opening of my damaged window and saw the gunman on the steps of my front door. Every round was like a tiny concentration of high-velocity wind. When he finished he walked by my window with a smile on his face. Later I tried to investigate his targets, but there was nothing to be seen for miles. An elderly militia man later told me that the man was doped to the eyeballs - most of the militia men chew the drug Khat which makes them crazy.

He also told me about militia men who used civilians as shields. He said they would chain themselves to their machine guns and die on the spot rather than fail the clan.

Yesterday's rumours that the Palace was stormed by General Robleh's forces were contradicted convincingly. It now appears that there was a last minute hitch and the storming was postponed.

The rapid gunfire from General Kayse's faction created the illusion that they were much larger and more hysterical than they actually were.

Fighting is reportedly taking place at the Police Headquarters, not far from the Palace and the radio station. The Police Headquarters is a four-story concrete building, and General Robleh's supporters (mainly from the Bermuda Triangle) will have a difficult time in dislodging General Kayse's men, numbering about two hundred well-armed and battle-hardened guerrillas.

JANUARY 3,

- Something strange happened in the heat of this summer morning. The sun was bright at dawn and continued to shine all day. The early morning skies were blue, brilliant blue. It was the first time since the conflict started that anyone saw a clean sky, and instead of bending to walk or crawl, we began to walk upright. There was almost no shelling. We knew this would not last long. For those few hours our residential area had the atmosphere of a reprieve. On the road I met the Muezzin by the name of Sheikh Abdi, who, like myself had refused to leave. Seeing his incredible pleasure at the miracle of this morning, I bade him "Nabad" (Peace) to which he replied, "Waa Nabab".

The area did not seem like the same place that had inspired so much fear the night before, and all the days and night before, and all the days and nights before that. In the early morning light, the place looked sharp and tranquil, like the perfect day to take a book and lie under the trees for the afternoon.

"It seems as if they have run out of steam," I said. Sheikh Abdi just laughed.

"Don't pay any attention to the brief lull," he said. His voice sounded very plaintive and lonely.

"I hope it will last long enough to enable us to scrounge for food from the rear areas".

We continued to talk as we walked on together. He told me about his mosque, and the names of some of the faithfuls who had been killed. I listened in silence.

At every street corner and intersection there were ragtag squads of killers, following the orders given them by their clan leaders. They were chewing Khat. The weight of their weapons was dragging their arms and shoulders down. Other gunners with .50 - calibre machine guns stretched out flat on their stomachs, peering over the edge of the ditch. None of them would relax their weapons until the other side resumed shooting. Then they let go. One stroll among these gunmen was enough to bend your nerves for days.

JANUARY 4,

- Yesterday's lull lasted a record twelve hours. As more artillery shells fell not far from the mosque, whirlwinds of smoke enveloped the houses as a cascade of rubble fell around the flimsy dwellings, muting the screams of victims. I am expecting a shell to land on my flimsy shelter any moment.

Again the night was relatively calm, except for a few salvos from the notorious 105 mm field gun, which forced me to retreat to my makeshift shelter under the

Chinese dining table.

Millions of rounds of ammunition and tens of thousands of artillery shells, mortars and rockets are fired daily, but the result is the same. No side has the upper hand so far.

Three mortar rounds came in at three-second intervals, all landing in a cluster two hundred meters down the road. The noise from the artillery guns drowned out the noise of the rounds, but I could see from my window the balls of white smoke blowing away from the sandy road in the wind. Two militia men carried empty litter containers and disappeared around the corner at a run. The empty containers were returned loaded with two figures covered with blood.

The silence of the night vanished with the first rays of the sun, and the manic bombardments erupted with bursts of automatic machine guns from the opposing sides.

You could be in the most protected space in Mogadishu, in a steel and concrete building, and still know that your safety was temporary. Early death, the loss of legs or arms, or blindness could easily befall anyone in a mortar rocket attack, no matter the hiding place. As time went on, I began to think that I must have been insane to have refused to leave when I had the chance. But I am still grateful that my life has thus far been spared. Many of my neighbours and friends who tried to escape the inferno were killed in the cross-fire or hit by stray bullets as they tried to escape on their hands and knees.

At 12:30 p.m., - there was intensive exchange of artillery fire near the area surrounding the old Presidential Palace, Villa Somalia. But for the first time in weeks, the fighting is taking place quite a distance from my area, judging from the sound of the big guns and automatic rifles. I breathed a big sigh of relief. Now I can snatch a catnap undisturbed by artillery fire.

JANUARY 5,

- The world is watching Somalis kill each other, blowing themselves and everything else up in the name of a clan. Maybe the world has decided to leave us alone and let us massacre each other.

This morning I watched three youngsters, not more than twelve years old, having a difficult time in dislodging a single sniper on a three-storey building. They were indiscriminately firing their AK-47s at the sniper and the man was returning their fire with a deadly G-3 rifle. Two more boys joined in and after two hours of gun battle, they succeeded in dislodging the sniper, who finally disappeared into the bush, leaving behind boxes of ammo and explosives. Instead of

pursuing the sniper, the boys began to ransack the building, whose owners had fled to the countryside soon after the eruption of the fighting.

At 11:30 a.m. howitzers began falling from the sky. Ironically, most of them hit a spot that they had hit numerous times before - the middle of a sandy road, making the impact fairly harmless, although their fragments travel far.

Military discipline is frequently violated, because the majority of the men are cut-throat criminals with little or no military training, despite the fact that each fighting force is led by experienced army officers, usually with colonels and generals at the top of the ladder.

More mortars are falling around me with deafening explosions. I will be very lucky if I survive this time.

Tracer bullets zig-zag in the night sky over possible targets several kilometers away, and all night long the mounted jeeps and tanks move while I try to sleep with my eyes open.

JANUARY 6,

- Today, forces loyal to General Robleh are firing long-range artillery guns against positions held by General Kayse's forces, with the aim of dislodging them from their strategic positions southwest of the city. Their main targets are said to be the television station and the industrial area where General Kayse's forces have been entrenched. Fighting around Villa Somalia and the Police Headquarters has subsided after weeks of fierce battles, with each side trying to occupy this strategically important palace on the hill. It is not clear which side now occupies it.

Beirut was a child's play compared to what is taking place in Mogadishu. Tens of thousands of people must have died during the past four weeks of continuous bloody fighting. We will all have nightmares about the atrocities for the rest of our lives. The city is burning, and law and order have completely broken down. There is no police force, or judge's court still in operation. After the ousting of the former dictator there had been a number of volunteers working to keep the peace; but they have all either been killed or have joined in the brawling, thus becoming as corrupt as everyone else.

JANUARY 7,

- Today had been quiet, but at any minute the shelling could start. I am not sure what the soldiers are up to, but I must face it, whatever it is. We are too often reminded that intensive fighting follows after such a brief lull. We can all be naive. This is the theatre of the absurd.

Despite the fears and traumas of the past weeks, and the distant noises of what seems to be a receding half-hearted war, I decided to go out to scavenge for food and water. Perhaps, if I am lucky, I will get half a bath - if Sheikh Abdi, the Muezzin, can spare the water.

I went into the deserted mosque, the only place that a few drops of water are still available. I caught the Sheikh unawares, sitting at the remains of a breakfast of flattened maize cake and tea, reading the Holy Qur'an. He seemed awkward in the half-bombed mosque, on the edge of the war zone, counting the shells.

His expression changed and he smiled, as we exchanged Salaams before lapsing into the latest war stories. One thing that we both have in common is our decision to remain in the area, rather than join the stream of refugees. We are both rare creatures.

"It was the Russians and the Americans who armed the Somalis at different times, and now they are watching us slaughter each other with those weapons," Sheikh Abdi said, expressing his frustration.

I told him that since there is nothing to gain from the barren, scorched lands of this haunted country, there is no reason for a superpower to undertake any expensive operation to save those who are dying the most agonizing death invented by man or nature. I also reminded him of such things as commercial interests and oil markets. "Unlike Kuwait," I said, "Somalia has no oil".

"So who can end the bloodshed? Can the United Nations take up the challenge?"

"Not unless the rich and powerful nations of the world decide to provide the required leadership, for it is they who run and control the UN, not the sweet Peres de Cueller".

The Sheikh just nodded and said nothing. I glanced at him to make sure that he was alright. He was taking it all in, but he did not show any anger at what I had just said.

After we had sat for a while, I dug a few notes out of my pocket. Gone were the days of small coins, due to the raging inflation. I assured him that I would pay him another visit if the shelling would permit. My gesture seemed to help, as he responded by fetching for me a bucket full of water and a cake of soap-rare commodities in Mogandishu.

5.45 p.m. - The forces loyal to General Robleh began to pound the television station with 105 mm field guns. The shelling lasted forty-five minutes. It is not clear what impact the pounding had on their adversaries, but there followed an

erie of silence, broken only by the Muezzin's call to prayers.

The Muezzin, Sheikh Abdi, had mentioned during our discussion that only four elderly people turn up for the early morning prayers. In normal times, the mosque was always filled beyond capacity. Later I discovered that the muezzin itself is pre-recorded. The caretaker, Sheikh Abdi, switches on the recording machine during heavy bombardments and dives for cover!

JANUARY 8,

- Today I went to see Sheikh Abdi again, as he is the only other living soul in the entire area. I greeted him, "Salaam Aleikum".

He smiled, showing broken and discoloured teeth and responded, "Waa Aleikum Salaam". He looked tired and fragile. "Come in, sit down, and wait while I dress".

Dressing for what, I wondered. Perhaps he was going out and wanted me to accompany him. It wasn't a bad idea. It hadn't been an easy night.

Half an hour later, we were on our way to areas we had not been to visit for a long time. It was good to see that the shelling had stopped for the time being. As we walked, we took interest in each other's words as we talked as we talked about the war. He said that the United States could not lift its little finger to help because Somalia was a Muslim nation.

"But why should rich countries care for the poor, Muslim or non-Muslim?" I asked him.

"Much of the world, like myself, has accepted the United States as the world's leader. It is a pity that Mr. Bush has refused to accept this greatest honour that the world can offer to any country," Sheikh Abdi said as we crossed a bomb-scarred intersection.

We inched forward.

The militia men at the checkpoint, seeing the sheikh with his white robe and long prayer beads, waved us through from their makeshift shelter. Sheikh Abdi was breathing heavily and reading verses from the Holy Qur'an, and I pretended to be his assistant. In this manner, we reached the final checkpoint, manned by General Robleh's men.

Sheikh Abdi spoke again. "Watch and listen, and never put your hands in your pockets. Just keep going". It wasn't hard to obey. I tried to keep myself calm. It was not easy.

Crossing one checkpoint to another by foot on a hot, humid day, and waiting for the crack of the sniper's rifle could be the world's most awesome experience. It is the place where militias face each other shoot at any moving object. Indeed, for many civilians, life ends here. It is a God-forsaken place, decorated with the flotsam of smoking cars, broken windows, shapeless corpses, spent cartridges, and pitted buildings. The roads are crated beyond repair. I could hear Sheikh Abdi still reading verses from the Holy Quran. He whispered, "Allah be with us".

He'd better be, I thought. There was no shouting, no firing, and we walked rapidly along the crated road, trying to avoid the corpses, the rubbish, the holes, and the burning cars. Neither of us looked back.

We came to the corner of the old Sinai Market, and General Kayse's first checkpoint was visible a few yards away. We were out of the no-man's land. We could hear our footsteps as we walked slowly along the edge of the road. There was not a single soul in the whole area, and I felt fairly certain that we were trapped between the opposing armies.

Then I made a mistake. I turned around to look at the bombed-out buildings. The silhouette of a man's head and shoulders was visible in the shattered window, and as I watched, the barrel of a gun was pushed through the window, pointed directly at us.

"Just look ahead. Don't catch their eyes," the Sheikh said but the man with the gun was already coming towards us. He was dressed in a filthy army fatigue, and was smoking and chewing khat.

"Who are you?"

We raised our arms in the accepted manner to let the militia know that we were not armed. We told him we were non-combatants trying to scavenge for food and for water. I could hear Sheikh Abdi still chanting more verses from the Holy Qur'an. I tried to keep my voice calm. There's not much point of panicking.

The man seemed to be uneasy with us. He went through our pockets and consulted someone in the dark recesses of the building, perhaps his superior, before he gave us permission to go on.

"But be very careful," he advised.

We crossed the once-busy Sinai Market, surrounded by dirt and bomb craters, and continued uphill. The trick is to avoid heavily damaged streets and streets where there is sub-clan territorial dispute. Death comes quickly in the crossfire.

"Did you notice that the militia man at the checkpoint did not ask which clan

we belong to?"

Sheikh Abdi shook his head. "You know these young men at the checkpoints are fresh from the countryside. That man may have been thinking about his favourite camel. Besides, nomads never ask religious leaders which clan they belong to".

He continued his tirade against the militia. "Although the Somalis claim to be one hundred per cent Muslim, they are not and never have been true Muslims. For in the Holy Qur'an it is strictly forbidden to shed the blood of a fellow Muslim, or to rape or loot". He was tired and drawn, but he seemed to be doing his best to hide his fatigue.

Someone with a machine gun let loose a string of bullets from the next corner as if to mock the Sheikh's words. My stomach began to turn.

After a particularly loud bang, shrapnel of some sort cluttered the tarmac not far from where we stood.

"Mortars!"

We dove for cover in a half-demolished building nearby. We simultaneously hit the bare floor which was sagging in a great fluid collapse, and laid there without movement, listening. A cautious examination showed that there had been a renewed exchange of fire. Then silence seemed to reign. As we watched through a hole in the wall, a lorry full of militia, guns at the ready, came driving past our hideout. They left a trail of blazing buildings in their wake.

After closer examination, we found that we were not alone in the building. We walked slowly to the next room. The door was partially open, and a woman was cooking something on a charcoal stove. Noticing us, she stood up. She was apparently in her late fifties, dressed in a yellow shapeless gown, known as "Dira".

"Nabad".

She smiled, showing a row of snow-white teeth. Lengthy conversation was not convenient due to the prevailing situation.

"Please sit down for a cup of tea".

Not a bad idea after what we had just been through.

"Thank you, sister. You are kind".

She peered at the flowing robes of my companion.

"You are a Sheikh?"

"My pleasure, Jaalle," Sheikh Abdi said as he continued chanting verses from the Holy Qur'an as if further proof was needed.

So for more than an hour we sat and drank cups of strong spiced Somali tea. Three small children with matchstick legs and running noses came and stared at us nervously until their mother told them to leave us alone.

We talked about the war and the food situation, and she told us that some people were trying to steal food from warehouses not far from her home, and to prove it, she showed us sacks containing rice and lentils which she had pilfered from the same places. She said she would be glad to show us the location of the warehouses, of course, only if shelling would permit.

She had lost her husband in the civil war. They used to have what she described as a mini-market in the centre of the city, but with the two clans battling all around, things had been bad for months. After losing her husband, she and the children lived in this place, "looking after" the building for a family who fled to the countryside immediately after the outbreak of the civil war.

"Hitler would be very proud of these militia," I said.

"Who is Hitler?"

We made our apologies courteously, thanking her for the tea and declining her offer to escort us to the warehouses. We said that we would be able to find them by following her directions. We then walked up to the edge of the block of ruined buildings, looking for the warehouses, jumping from doorway to doorway.

Sheikh Abdi nudged me.

"She was a very nice woman despite her raw deal in life. By the way who is Hitler?"

The warehouses had been owned by the corrupt and inefficient Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC), but now we had to file past militia men, who were chewing the inevitable khat, showing not the slightest interest in who we were. A few minutes later we wove our way through the crowd of looters, loaded with sacks of wheat and lentils. The Sheikh would, without a doubt, have failed in any weight-lifting competition, but as a cleric he was, for the first time in his life, carrying two sacks weighing fifty kilograms each!

On the way I had to explain to the Sheikh, according to the best of my knowledge, about the little Austrian corporal with the odd moustache. I could also think of a few other things that might interest him.

I put my sack down slowly, trying not to spill the life-saving grain. Sheikh

Abdi looked at me strangely. "We have men like Hitler in this country, Ali Dhuhul," he said.

I had a sudden urge to change the subject, lest we were overheard by the militia, but there was no need for me to do so, as machine gun fire began in the direction of our residential area. They were only small blasts, nothing of battlefield calibre. Probably a family dispute, or a street-fight, common feature in this area. so we took a longer route back home, that is if you could call a rubble of wood , stones, and debris a home.

There seemed to be ghosts everywhere. At length, Shiekh Abdi spoke.

"If it comes closer we must pray to Allah. By Thy mercy spare us from these infidels. Amen". He sounded like he meant it.

JANUARY 8,

- A rumour is spreading about another ceasefire to take effect today, but nothing indicates the veracity of these rumours as shootings, though scattered, still continue in my part of the city.

General Robleh's version of the ceasefire is not known, because there is no means of reaching him. The radio station is in the hands of General Kayse, which now calls itself "The Voice of the Somali people". The radio confirmed the "unconditional ceasefire" which supposedly went into effect today around noon. The voice on the radio said that the decision was reached at an emergency meeting chaired by General Kayse.

The fighting continued despite this unilateral declaration of ceasefire. The radio said that a committee chaired by a colonel Mial was set up to monitor the ceasefire and that violators will be "collectively" dealt with. It is not clear what is meant by all of this, because all the members of the committee belonged to splinter subclans who were involved in the fighting on the side of General Kayse. We must wait patiently to see if the ceasefire is real, as the whole thing appears to be one-sided and smacks of General Kayse's old tricks.

I saw an old man of about 75 carrying a musket in one hand and an axe in the other. A young militia man later told me that the old man also owns an Einfield .303 which he kept well oiled and cared for as if they were his children. I don't really know what use these ancient guns can be in a war in which the most sophisticated weaponry are used in abundance. Perhaps one day I will have a chance to talk to this old man about his ancient armoury, if we will still be alive.

Several bullets from the elusive Shilka fell into my house, coming through what was left of my roof. I ceremoniously added them to my collection.

JANUARY 9,

- The nearest fighting today was probably a mile away, but it was definitely more vigorous than it had been during our looting spree yesterday. A fairly constant cracking of small firearms, sounding like popping popcorn, can be heard, but there is no sound of the booming explosion that marks outgoing or incoming artillery shells.

I tried to sleep again, always with my eyes open, under my makeshift shelter, but sleep was out of the question. I got up to find something to occupy my mind and I found a five-week old Newsweek magazine. In it were two incongruous, but strangely connected photographs. Under the caption, "Somalia: The land God Forgot, the first colour picture shows a dying woman, her arms wasted to mere emaciated bones, staring at an empty plate lying nearby. The next column is a much larger photograph of President Bush, his healthy arms and upper body wet with rain, wiping his eyes with a cool white handkerchief. At first glance it seems that Bush had been caught crying and wiping away his tears. The explanation underneath, however, clarifies as if in haste, that there had been no such outbursts of emotion. He was just wiping the rain drops off of his eyes during a campaign for the fast approaching elections.

Like a typical non-practical romantic, I wished it was really a picture of George Bush crying for that dying Somali woman. I felt he had no right shaking hands with people, telling jokes, and driving all over the country while millions of Somalis were starving to death.

Why did I think such stupid things? Perhaps because, like Sheikh Abdi, somewhere in the back of my mind I had accepted the United States as the only country capable of providing true leadership to a crisis-ridden world. Like many others, my inflated national ego may not have liked the idea of being led, guided, or looked after by another country, yet I had accepted the proposition that if the post-cold war could tolerate a leader for some time to come, it could be none other than the United States of America.

Mr. Bush, you ain't seen nothing yet: kids with their arms blown off, flattened schools and residential areas, mass graves, and decomposed bodies. Now, over to you, Mr. Bush.

JANUARY 10,

- Radio Mogadishu, which has become a laughing stock, said last night that U.N. Secretary-General, Perez de Cuellar will send a special envoy to Mogadishu. When I informed Sheikh Abdi about the visit, he immediately began to condemn

the U.N., saying that they were too late.

"Where were they when thousands of people were slaughtered by army generals who were hungry for power?"

I snorted. "Too true. I've been thinking about that. At this rate, we will be extinct shortly and there is nothing much the U.N. can do about it, unless the Americans put their weight behind the efforts".

The Sheikh again accused the United States and its allies for not acting in Somalia with the same determination as they did in Iraq, "Only because the Somalis have no oil".

It was a good analysis, despite the cynicism, and we slipped into a brooding silence. Mere warnings of impending catastrophe never seem to spur the world to action, and according to the Newsweek article about Somalia, only doom counts. By then, it is just too late. According to the article, "One lesson from Somalia is that intervention of any kind should begin early in a crisis".

I preferred not to think about any possibility of failure by the UN, however unpalatable the situation in Somalia may be.

There are a number of priorities for the U.N., including the disarming of the various clans, and training and supervising regional Somali police forces- the first step towards building local institutions needed when the intervention forces eventually leave.

It is true that the various gunmen will not hand over their weapons without a fight, and in the words of a foreign journalist who visited Mogadishu recently, "The Somali fighter, fearless and unpredictable, is not a foe to be taken lightly," The UN cannot expect a trouble-free operation in a country where the gun rules and where law and order have broken down due to the severe shortage of food, water and medical services resulting from the combined effects of war and famine. Flooding the country with food might discourage looters who steal what little we have and the Mafia-like merchants, selling the scarce food at high prices and, who are mainly responsible for the country's present predicament. One of the clan leaders was quoted as saying that there will be unprecedented bloodshed if the UN tried to send troops to safeguard famine relief activities. It is clear that this warlord does not want to lose the resources he obtains from looting food aid, or the thousands of dollars he extorts from aid agencies as protection money.

The United Nations, the Arab League, and the Islamic Conference Organisation have the monetary power to resolve the crisis in Somalia by using force, if necessary. It is partially true that the Somalis are solely to blame for the atrocities

befalling their land, but the world community should not remain helpless spectators to the carnage. The bitter truth is that only people with AK-47s are guaranteed enough food to survive while millions of non-combatants are at risk of starvation.

JANUARY 11,

- Beyond my shattered window I could see some of last night's dead being loaded on a donkey cart and led away. Some were killed in the fighting, while others were killed in the crossfire as they tried to dodge the bullets from the ever-present snipers on the roof-tops. Most of those killed were skeletal figures who had been searching for anything edible. Many people have not eaten for weeks and are so desperate that they ignore the heavy bombardments in order to search for food and drinking water - a futile venture. The prevailing attitude is survival at all costs. For a majority of us, these sufferings will last a life-time.

The morning began with isolated skirmishes which, as usual, gathered momentum in the afternoon. Militia are building tank obstacles in front of my house. I asked one of the young militia if he was still expecting tanks, even though General Kayse was offering a ceasefire.

"We don't trust him. He is like a bedbug," he said with a grin.

4:15 p.m. - Spaced shellings have resumed against positions held by General Kayse, but they are receiving no response - unusual for the General. Sheikh Abdi paid me a short visit and told me that most probably Kayse's forces have either abandoned their stronghold, or are keeping a low profile for the moment in order to save their fast dwindling shells.

The special UN envoy, Mr. James Jonah, told the BBC that leaders of the warring factions in Mogadishu had agreed to meet him in order to discuss propositions for what he described as a peace corridor that would allow food aid and medical supplies to pass through. The meeting was to be held in Mogadishu on Friday.

The BBC later described the Somali civil war as "the Forgotten War" in which more than twenty thousand civilians had been killed or injured.

An estimated 1.5 million people who fled the fighting have settled in a patch of sand and scrub brush 20 kilometers north of Mogadishu - away from artillery ranges. They have constructed makeshift huts from the branches of thorn trees and plastic sheetings. Most of their property and dwellings in the city were either destroyed or went to thieves with automatic rifles. Defeated and near death, the people exchanged their city existence for the relative security of Mogadishu's

outskirts. Death did follow them to the countryside, however, as reports say ten to fifteen people, mostly women, children and elderly people, are buried every day due to malnutrition and diseases related to poor sanitation. An outbreak of cholera is feared. Visitors from the area told me this morning that an epidemic could sweep through the shacks, leaving very few alive.

Ironically, some are returning from the countryside to examine what was left of their homes. Many of them have been wiped out or looted. The new greetings are, "Are you still alive?" or "Happy survival". An old man across the road found his home destroyed and his two milch cows gone. Another was separated from his wife and children, and has no idea where they may be. An older woman was lamenting over all of her furniture and her highly treasured television set which had all been taken. Even the corrugated iron roofs are gone!

"But I am still alive. That is the important thing," she said.

According to the chairman of the ceasefire committee, now renamed the "Peace Committee," there will be a ceasefire today at 1800 hours. This marks the third ceasefire declaration, and it, like the previous ones, is likely to fail for obvious reasons. Even if the ceasefire does succeed, who will stop the freelance gangs, mainly hardcore convicts who escaped from the Central Prison, who kill and loot in order to feed themselves and their families. The Peace Committee can do nothing, as killing a looter could spark another round of fighting between his clan and the clan of the man responsible for the shooting.

Rule of engagement? Implementations of Chapter Seven of the UN Charter? National sovereignty? Interference with internal affairs? These are all useless phrases which mean nothing to people like Sheikh Abdi, or the babies with the matchstick legs and their skeletal mothers. The food intended to feed their babies are daily hijacked by mercenaries wielding anti-aircraft guns and AK-47s.

The solution does not lie solely in the sending of food, medicine, doctors, and tents. Well equipped troops must be sent to teach a lesson or two to these Mafia-like gangs. Please don't stop there. Change the rule of engagement and shoot at sight anyone with a gun.

The future for Somalia is grim. Many children, lucky enough to survive the carnage, will probably suffer permanent damage from malnutrition and trauma. Needless to say, there is no place on earth more in need of military intervention than Somalia.

JANUARY 12,

- I had two of the biggest shocks of my life today. The first came as a tank shell

pierced through my house and left three gaping holes. The second came as the first mortar of the day fell right inside my bathroom with a deafening roar. It wiped out everything in the bathroom, smashing the door and the only remaining window. I have been frightened all day, waiting for a second mortar to fall on my makeshift shelter. I waited in anguish, but it didn't come. I am covered in dust and perspiration, but nevertheless, I am still alive.

The international community still remains silent about the horror in Mogadishu. A few MSF (Doctors without Borders) and Red Cross officials are trying to cope with the wounded in their own ways, but the hospitals where they are stationed are being hit with artillery shells and even those organisations are threatening to withdraw from Mogadishu. What are we doing to one another? Streets strewn with bodies burned and dismembered beyond recognition, shallow graves on roadsides and homes levelled to the ground. This is the state that Mogadishu is in, and no one cares. It is just written off. No wonder so many of us are going insane.

JANUARY 13,

- **SHOCK NUMBER THREE:** Three gunmen brought to my shelter this afternoon a blindfolded man and asked if I knew which tribe he belonged to. Of course I knew his clan, the man was a personal friend of mine. He belonged to the minority clan of the former dictator, but I knew that if I told them the truth, they would shoot him in cold blood, so I lied and said that the man belonged to the Issak tribe of the relatively uninvolved Northern Region. My attempt to save him was futile. They called me a liar and shot him in front of my eyes. He had earlier told them that he belonged to another clan.

As I write this entry, my hands are shaking for the first time since the war began. The trauma has been almost too much to bear.

I am still wondering where the ammunitions are coming from. Millions of rounds and tens of thousands of shells have been fired indiscriminately during the last forty-six days, not to mention the hand grenades, the bazookas, and the howitzers. One thing is certain; the huge stockpiles left behind by Siyad Barre have already been depleted, so I have concluded that foreign and local gun-runners are at work for both sides.

Somalia was once a Cold-War pawn, a consequence of its strategic location on the mouth of the Red Sea. But superpower rivalry had ended, dictator Barre has fled, and the nation-state has shattered into clan-based chiefdoms - all loaded with arms from the United States, the former Soviet Union, several eastern European countries and China. Everybody in Mogadishu knew that this was only "the tip

of the iceberg". The issue of where the weapons came from no longer mattered. The challenge now is to wrest them from the hands of the criminals, to stop the endless killing.

In our residential area, donkey carts make rounds every morning to collect the dead. The carts truck them away to mass graves, where Sheikh Abdi reads the last rites as part of his assignment as the only clergy.

"Every day we stare at death in the eyes," Sheikh Abdi told me one bright morning after attending a mass burial.

One afternoon, as we were drinking sugarless tea he said, "The worst part is the jarring ride to the burial grounds, because I can hear the gunfire, which usually signals another round of fighting".

In Mogadishu the gunshots foretold of more dead who, if lucky, would at least be buried. After every flare up, the death toll would triple. One day, assailants sprayed mourners with automatic-rifle fire, killing many and injuring several others, including Sheikh Abdi.

Some say that when the UN envoy visits Mogadishu, there will be a political settlement in the conflict. But what sort of settlement can arise if both sides refuse to compromise? We are all waiting to see what impact the UN envoy will have. Mrs. Lynda Chalker, the British Minister for Overseas Development has described the situation in Mogadishu as tragic, and she has made a plea for a viable ceasefire.

JANUARY 14,

- A woman, using a public address system mounted on a car, is singing praises to General Robleh and exhorting his supporters to fight their enemies. She calls General Kayse, "Usurper of power and a butcher".

The shortage of military vehicles has forced the militia men to use ambulances and other commandeered vehicles as troop carriers. They cut the tops of the vehicles off, and transform them into flatbeds mounting them with heavy guns. It is difficult to distinguish between the militia and the growing number of criminals and hijackers. They too have similar trucks and guns.

Four wheel-drive vehicles race through the devastated streets of the city with gunmen in the back. Sometimes the militia and the criminals turn on each other in frustration. Civilians take much of the heat and no one knows who to turn to for succour when wounded in the crossfire. The state does not exist anymore. In its place, thousands of feuding youths equipped with all types of weapons and gunned vehicles rule the country, Mafia-style.

As I was thinking about this, and the effect that the UN envoy might have on all of it, I was interrupted by a knock at the wall (as my door is long gone).

"Who is it?"

"Ali Dhuhul, come out".

The man who was shouting my name was about the same height as Sheikh Abdi, but of a thicker build. I guessed that he was in his fifties, his beard was beginning to show white streaks at the roots, despite the red Henna. He was carrying an M-16 assault rifle and a full bandolier of ammunitions was strapped on his shoulder. He had a large scar on the left side of his face, and though I tried not to make it obvious, again and again I found myself looking at it. He introduced himself and held out his hand.

"Hassan Mumin, elder brother of Shiekh Abdi".

"I'm sorry, I don't believe we've met. Or have we?" I asked, noticing that the man's face did resemble that of the Sheikh, although his voice was different.

"No, we haven't met before, but I have heard much about you".

For a moment, I couldn't think of anything to say. Finally, the words came, "I see. Has anything happened to the Sheikh?"

"Nothing very serious. He is recovering from yesterday's shootout at the burial ground".

(Visiting people in a shell-exposed, make-shift hospital is not in my department).

Hassan began to speak after a brief silence, "The Sheikh wants me to tell you to move to the mosque for your own safety".

The idea made a lot of sense in terms of security. The mosque had a small cellar, covered with concrete slabs, and I could picture myself as the new caretaker. But, so many times I'd been squashed by falling roofs, and each time I was barely able to walk away -- many others have not been so lucky.

Of all the residential areas in Mogandishu, mine is the most damaged, with the highest casualty rates. Seventy- five percent of the dwellings have been destroyed, leveled to the ground by shell fire. The odds of survival are low.

The market place, a stone's throw from my house had been hit repeatedly. Luckily, the inhabitants had instinctually deserted long before the shelling started. For reasons unknown, the gunners have continued to pound the deserted place with long-range guns known as B-10s.

I thanked the brothers for having my personal welfare in mind, but I told Hassan that since there was no safe place in the whole area, I preferred to hang on to my makeshift shelter, come what may.

He said that he understood, and that the offer would still stand if I changed my mind. He then noticed the diary that I had been writing and typing for so long.

"If you ever get out of here, he said solemnly, "be sure to tell the world about the mass slaughter in this country".

I said I would. After exchanging a few war stories and discussing where we might find food, we went to inspect the mosque to see if everything was all right. Only one wall was damaged. We climbed up the minaret, which was still intact, save for a few bullet holes. I felt like I was displaying myself for sniper fire. From the top of the minaret, we saw the deserted dwellings with crushed metal roofs, the roofless secondary school, and the abandoned "Orientation Centre" where citizens used to sing the praise song of the former dictator. Further a field, we watched the artillery duels between the opposing forces. We then decided to climb to down before we became easy targets.

3.30 p.m. - The usual afternoon gun battle continued and by 4.35, a great number of howitzers and rockets were exchanged. After nightfall, tracer bullets criss-crossed the night sky. I am told that these are messages from militia to make their presence known. They were repeated from various directions in the city.

I jumped into my shelter as a shell landed somewhere between my house and the mosque. Many shells as well as mortars were coming in, but I didn't bother to count them.

During brief moments, when the ground around me was not rumbling, when there were no incoming or outgoing shells, and no firing from the snipers, I just sat, and listened to rats and cockroaches running across the floor. There was no light at all, and the type of debris that collects in a demolished house was everywhere. Sometimes I would step out from the shelter, all sense of passing time having left me, and find that day had turned to night. In the far side of the city, I saw a glimmer of light, but the source was not apparent. Flares and tracer bullets were dropping everywhere around the city. Smoke from smoke bombs filled the air. I watched mortar bursts, orange and grey smoking over the tops of houses, and the heavier shelling from the southwest of the city, directed against suspected enemy positions.

The UN special envoy's visit to Mogandishu was a failure. According to a BBC reporter who accompanied him, anti-aircraft fire did not allow Mr. Jonah's special aircraft to land at Mogandishu airport. It was diverted to Balli-dogleh, he

drove to Mogadishu to have talks with General Kayse. Insecurity in the city's front line did not allow him to meet with General Robleh, and he left hurriedly for Nairobi. The reporter quoted Mr. Jonah as saying he would return to Mogadishu on Sunday to meet with General Robleh.

It seems that General Kayse tricked the UN envoy into believing that there was a ceasefire in the capital, and that the city was under his full control.

More shallow graves have been dug in the neighbourhood to bury last night's victims. I counted six fresh graves, including one not more than two feet long. Reports say many people are still trapped in the rubble of their house, and young boys are digging with their bare hands to get the survivors out, if there are any.

We not only face the problems of the two USC factions now; a counter-offensive by troops loyal to the former dictator also sounded in the most recent bush telegraph.

"How incredible it is that we are facing a three sided war. There could be one hell of a free-for-all", Sheikh Abdi told me this morning after he was discharged from the Red Cross hospital.

What really angers many people is the fact that the loyalists are taking advantage of the current turmoil and that none of the warring clans will be in a position to repulse them, even if General Kayse would reunite with General Robleh, because the factional fighters are already showing weariness from war.

"You will find it hard to believe", said Sheikh Abdi, "but soldiers loyal to former dictator Barre have reached Afgoi".

Afgoi is a farming town only thirty kilometers south of Mogadishu. The Barre loyalists have also taken control of the towns of Baidoa and Bardhere. They have killed several hundred people and injured at least a hundred during their first raid of the city.

I asked Sheikh Abdi to comment about the UN envoy's visit. He thought for a while and said, "The UN and the Western community are one year too late in their reaction to the situation in Somalia".

"Where was the UN when we were caught between merciless military men with such hunger for leadership that they were willing to sacrifice the lives of millions of children, women, and elderly people?" He said that the United Nations failed to repond to our plight until it was too late.

"Ultimately, the Somalis themselves must solve the country's problems," I said.

He responded, "Clearly we are unable to do so. Our hands are full just trying to subdue each other".

The Sheikh said that the OAU, the Arab League, and the Islamic Conference Organization are now just curious observers, probably waiting for the green light from Washington -- the capital of the only superpower in the world.

As we spoke, a shell whistled overhead. We could hear its whine as it quickly descended crashing maybe a mile away. It was shortly after 9.00 p.m., and the black sky was broken by red and blue rockets bursting far to the south.

In fact, though we did not know it until the next day, the red and blue rockets had been fired by soldiers loyal to the former dictator, to announce their arrival at the outskirts of Mogadishu after taking full control of Afgoi.

Many Somalis will never forget the crimes committed by the former dictator during his more than two decades of autocratic rule, but many others say that the current generals are far worse than the former dictator and are even willing to welcome his return to power!

JANUARY 15,

- This morning General Kayse sent armoured columns to the outskirts of the city in a bid to repulse the invading army. Within hours the Barre loyalists had been crushed. Many of them, including high-ranking officers, have been taken prisoners. Hundreds died or were injured in the massive counter-offensive. A subdued sigh of relief could be heard throughout the capital. Several Hawiye sub-clans took part in the counter-offensive, taking the steam out of the Barre loyalists.

The counter-offensive left the town of Afgoi and the surrounding villages with a panorama of death and destruction. More refugees are flocking to the capital.

Mr. Jonah told a press conference in Nairobi that the obstacle to peace in Somalia was General Kayse. He said that the General had rejected the idea of UN peacekeeping forces in Mogadishu. He also said that he visited Hargeisa, Kismayu, and Bosasso. This clearly indicates that Mr. Jonah's mission was a failure. So the battle goes on. The last hope for peace has just vanished into thin air.

Months of non-stop fighting could wear out even the most hardened fighter. The BBC reported yesterday that fighting had renewed in Kismayu between the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) and the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) following the election of Colonel Ahmed Omar Jess as Chairman of the SPM. Hundreds have lost their lives, and thousands have fled to the Kenyan border.

Elsewhere, the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) said it would try to mediate between the warring factions in Mogadishu. Skeptics are saying that if the UN failed, how could the EPLF succeed.

The Arab League Secretary-General Ismat Abdel-Majid has called for an immediate ceasefire, but as usual, both sides ignore it. It has simply just come too late.

"What has he been doing all this time?". People ask.

"Was the Arab League, like the UN and EEC too busy with the situation in Yugoslavia?" an old man questioned sarcastically.

I am running out of food again. Unless the war ends quickly I will face starvation. While I was searching for drinking water, edibles, and firewood I saw a long file of men and women queueing outside a three-storey building. They seemed oblivious of the machine gun bursts, and artillery shells. Then I recognised Hassan Munin, the elder brother of the Sheikh. Like the others- he was carrying an empty sack, unmoved by the random firing. He did not see me as I made my way forward, inch by inch in the queue. It took an hour to reach the head.

"No problem, my dear journalist, "the man behind the counter said languidly "We'll provide you with a sack". He handed me a plastic shopping bag full of rice and another containing dates.

"Things are pretty bad, aren't they? I asked the man, whose name was Jabril.

"Couldn't be worse, my dear journalist," he drawled.

"Is there hope?" I still couldn't believe the words?

"None".

Jabril told me that the Generals were regrouping their forces following the counter-offensive against Barre's loyalists.

"The battle must be fought to the bitter end at all costs. The reputation of our clan is at stake". He sounded almost bitter, but I was lucky to get a ration. Then he reached behind and handed me what looked like typewritten sheets.

"Take this. The clan has gone into the newspaper business," he smiled sardonically.

All newspaper publications ceased a year ago, following the popular uprising, so I was interested in what he meant. He handed me a number of cyclostyled publications in quarto sheets with splashes consisting of the latest battlefield news with meaningless phrases which no longer register with anyone in Mogadishu.

"ENEMY LOSSES ENORMOUS CRAZY GENERAL LOSES BATTLE-FIELD GAINS".

Truth is: no change in the battlefield. Hand to hand fighting has been flaring up in many parts of the city. Battle is raging at the Stadium, another at the former headquarters of the Somali National Security Service (NSS), and another at the Bakaaraha market which contains vast stores of material, food, and fuel.

2.30 p.m. - General Robleh's forces introduced a new gun. It is called Dhashika. It has dual barrels that can reach several miles away with devastating effect. Its booming sounds are ear-shattering and I am holding my breath as I write. Mortars began falling in the neighbourhood again, close to the same spot as yesterday.

Old Sheikh Abdi repeated his offer to shelter me at his mosque. He said it is protected by Allah. I told him that I would think it over. I have been holding my breath and waiting for the next shell to fall on me. It is the greatest agony, nothing can compare.

8.00 General Kayse repeated his offer for "unconditional ceasefire" through the chairman of his so-called "Peace Committee".

He also said, adding a new element, that all political problems could be settled if his request for a ceasefire was heeded.

Elsewhere in the city the fight is raging. The death toll among the non-combatants is rising at alarming rate. The makeshift hospitals are overflowing with the wounded people and there is no medicine; neither are there enough doctors.

News from other parts of the city is sketchy and difficult to obtain, but one man who fled the fighting said that battles are taking place at several fronts, including Hamar Weyne, the commercial district; around the old Parliament Square; and Wadajir, further south. However, he could not say who was holding the upper hand.

I told him about the continuous bombardments in my area, to which he had fled.

"That's nothing. You should see what is taking place in the city. It is like the epicentre of an earthquake".

He said all the streets were completely deserted, and that men with guns were lurking behind every building, shooting at anything that moves.

A doctor from the MSF (Doctors Without Borders) said that fierce fighting had

taken place between two northern clans in the town of Burao. Many people were either killed or injured in the two-day long fight. He said that despite a ceasefire arranged by elders of the clans, fighting was continuing.

Obviously, the clan war is also spreading to the north, the self-styled "Somali-land Republic" had until now claimed to have solved all problems and claimed to be "living in peace". The BBC quoted the MSF doctors as saying that the war between the Habar Jecel and Habar Yonis erupted when the "Minister of Defence" was sacked because of corruption and nepotism.

In this war I have learned many things. I can now distinguish by sound alone an AK-47 from an M-16, an artillery shell from a tank gun, their firing position and range, and an incoming and outgoing shell. I know what it is like to be in shell shock. In fact, I am shell-shocked now. It is an everyday experience.

Another powerful mortar fell only ten feet from my hideout hissing as it fell, turning the white sand black after it hit. A girl is screaming, and a man is telling her, "it was written". Apparently she lost a close relative in the early morning bombardments.

Sheikh Abdi tells me that some enterprising businessmen are hiring diesel-powered dhows to Kuwait to buy weapons left behind by the Iraqi army during the Gulf War and are selling them to the highest bidders in Mogadishu. He said that the Kuwaitis are very happy to rid themselves of the weapons, so the market is strong. The businessmen are taking advantage of the sales without any concern for the terrible suffering.

Despite this urgent news, I had no desire to join the staggering refugee population now camped in the outskirts of the capital - not yet. I had never, until now, thought that more weapons would be needed, given the huge stockpiles of arsenal left behind by the defeated army of the former dictator, which could easily equip the armies of three African countries.

"Bloody criminals", I muttered to myself.

It cannot be easy for people who were not in Mogadishu to comprehend the bewilderment of the first three months of the war. The disasters hit us like sledgehammers, one after another. It was so devastating that we lost all interest in life. Hearing the news about the elderly businessmen, supposed to have been responsible citizens, now deliberately cashing in on our sufferings by adding more fuel to the fire just compounded our frustration and hopelessness. I said goodbye to the Sheikh. His face was crinkled with misery. I don't think either of us will survive in this desolate place.

As I made myself as small as possible in my makeshift shelter, I identified with the young Jewish girl in "The Diary of Anne Frank," hiding from the German soldiers in the Dutch attic during the Second World War. The chaos of my once strong house has stunned me. The bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen and my small library-cum-office - all had vanished, not totally, but crumbled into fragments. Some of the walls which the builders had promised would last a hundred years still stood proudly. But for the rest- it is terrible.

The verandah ceiling hangs glued to one of the wooden beams, the front was savagely torn away by the first tank shell - revealing to outsiders the pictures that were still stuck to my inner walls. Some flames, creeping along the wooden beams, had reached the front, but with the help of Sheikh Abdi, I was able to put them out, using water from the mosque and sand.

JANUARY 16,

- Today I woke early to take advantage of the early morning lull and go down to the Shibis, two kilometers away, to buy some candles and matchboxes. It was a hopeless effort, however, as everyone else had come searching for the same things. Although I did manage to get hold of a news bulletin. The main headline reads: "THE ENEMY SUFFERS HUGE LOSSES AT PARLIAMENT SQUARE". The rest of the three-page Xeroxed news bulletin consisted of news monitored from the BBC and Voice of America. The stories looked as if they were edited by a sleepy moron. Great prominence was given to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the fighting in Yugoslavia and Cambodia, while another report detailed the love affairs of Princess Diana and Prince Charles - as if we cared!

A boy was carrying a huge bundle of foreign magazines and newspapers which he had apparently looted from the homes of expatriates who departed long ago. I leafed through them. One Italian magazine has on its cover a picture of Saddam Hussein and a scud missile. At the bottom I saw a five-month-old "Reader's Digest". I had forgotten how long it had been since I had read an overseas publication. I had to pretend that I wasn't too interested in what I was reading before the boy would take what I had to offer him.

I walked home, dodging the snipers on rooftops, and dreading the mortars. It was a relief to see Sheikh Abdi standing in front of what was left of my home.

"Between you and me, Ali Dhuhul," he said, "we must evacuate while we still can. We can't go on like this any longer".

"Where?" I asked innocently.

"To the Lido Beach, where there are abandoned beach shacks. It's very, very

safe. No artillery shells, no mortars, and no snipers".

I was scared stiff. The trip to the beach involves a detour and several barricades manned by dangerous militia who were known to be so eager that they would shoot first and ask questions later. I remembered people who had tried to go to Lido Beach to escape the bombardments: wrinkled old men and women staggering under immense loads of beds, pots and pans. Children followed carrying smaller items like beddings and hurricane lamps. Many of them were caught in the crossfire. I remember a whole family of five which was killed instantly by a mortar shell as they tried to cross the tarmac road. Even for those who survived, the trip was long and treacherous.

"I'll think it over," I cut into my thoughts, "thanks for the suggestion".

All through the night and the following morning our residential area was attacked without respite. Then there was a brief silence, but the shelling resumed in the afternoon with even deadlier ferocity. On one corner of my street, a three-storey building, which had survived earlier bombardments, is in flames as it received several direct hits from the deadly 105 mm field guns.

I sat, looking at the rubble of my bedroom and listening to the rats and the cockroaches. What lay ahead? Does anyone in the outside world know where I am, what I am doing, or even if I am still alive? My news agency lost contact with me when all communications were disrupted in the wake of the factional fighting.

I tried many times to send written messages to my editor in Nairobi, to be hand-delivered by Red Cross pilots. Every time was unsuccessful because of random shootings at the tiny airstrip. If only, thousands of miles away, someone was waiting to receive my messages, just to be sure that I was still alive, it would relieve the surreal sensation I feel knowing that the rest of the world is carrying on, business as usual.

JANUARY 17,

- A blitzkrieg with all its trappings started today. General Kayse's T55 tanks and the elusive Shilkas are in action again. Through the cracks in my wall, I can see young boys carrying Milan anti-tank rockets and reactivating the tank obstacles which were set up weeks ago. Black smoke is everywhere. Nobody is taking the time to talk to anyone now. Even old Sheikh Abdi has made himself scarce. All that lets me know he is still alive is his voice on top of the minaret calling the faithful to prayers, and even his voice is muted by the booming of the artillery and tank shells.

Against this background, the Eritrean delegation is visiting the divided city to

attempt mediation. The EPLF held talks with General Robleh's officials, but the nature of their talks was not made public. Added to the mediation process, the UN announced a twelve million dollar humanitarian aid package on condition that both parties agree to a ceasefire. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will send two ships carrying food and medical supplies to Adaleh in the North and Merca in the South.

General Kayse's radio programme did not mention any of these things, nor did it mention the escalating mayhem in the city. It merely repeated the news of the war in the far away Republic of Georgia in the former Soviet Union, as well as Yugoslavia. The BBC said that the UN Security Council has just now voted an arms embargo against Somalia!

Who cares if there is an arms embargo? There are still huge stockpiles of weapons that could last another full year. Besides, the gun-runners are laughing all the way to their banks in Rome, Switzerland and Abu Dhabi. Business for them is really thriving, and the so-called arms embargo will not affect them for obvious reasons. It will probably even make their business more in demand.

JANUARY 18,

- Radio Mogadishu reported today that more than seven tons of food has been looted from the port. The report said that the food, which has been rotting in the warehouses for weeks, was looted by hungry people. It was donated to the people six months ago, but was never distributed due to lack of security. The American relief organization, CARE, was initially responsible for the distribution, but gave up after several attempts. They gave the project to the ICRC, which also failed. The looting has come only days after General Kayse appointed a committee to oversee port activities.

The resourceful Sheikh Abdi has another, somewhat disturbing, addition to the story. He told me that this morning he personally saw one of the long-term convicts, who had made his way out of the Central Prison over the weekend, pulling a truck-load of wheat-flour and milk-powder to the new makeshift black market in our neighbourhood.

The man, a well known hoodlum, told the Sheikh that General Kayse's men opened the gates of the prison and distributed guns to the prisoners instructing them to join Kayse, "to fight against those who had put them in prison". Instead of fighting, he and several prisoners decided to make a quick profit and went straight for the new port, which was close to the prison and joined the looting spree which was already in full swing.

The voice of America has said that General Kayse has rejected international

mediations, saying that the conflict is a domestic affair. General Robleh's forces are firing Stalin Organs at positions held by General Kayse about four kilometres away, but I am unable to see their impact. Until recently, General Robleh's forces have refrained from using them because of their devastating effect upon civilians. These terrible weapons were first used by the former dictator against civilian targets killing an estimated twenty thousand.

The firing of the Katyushas follows the second visit to the city by the UN special envoy. He was warmly welcomed by General Robleh and his aides, after which he was briefed about the conflict and its causes. He was also shown hundreds of war victims, including women, children and elderly people. He was then taken to see the bomb fragments and artillery shells which had devastated the city and the many homes destroyed by the big guns.

General Robleh then had a private meeting with Mr. Jonah, but the discussion and its outcome have not been released. The visit lasted more than three hours and was described as a success, despite the heavy bombardment in the background.

General Kayse has denied the BBC and the Voice of America reports that he rejected international mediation efforts and has said that he was ready to accept any proposal for unconditional ceasefire from "anybody".

The BBC quoted Red Cross officials as saying that a quarter of a million people have fled Mogadishu since the fighting started, November 17, last year. They said that many of the refugees are dying for lack of food, water and proper sanitation.

The Arab League has just awakened from its deep slumber. They said that a peace dialogue must start between the warring factions and repeated that special emergency funds had been set up to help in relief. Too late.

I have noticed that Sheikh Abdi seems to disappear regularly on mysterious errands, even at the height of a bombardment. Today he confirmed that new weapons consignments are being introduced to the battlefield by both sides. He said that a Greek vessel, which was travelling under a Somali flag of convenience, was ferrying weapons from Kuwait to both factions. He said that the three-hundred-ton freighter, the "Alamos," has just unloaded two hundred tonnes of arms and ammunition worth an estimated twenty million US dollars.

Realizing that I was going to make no comment, the Sheikh began again, this time with more force and fluency.

"This indicates that the war will drag on for some time to come and we are in for another quagmire".

I could see what this meant: more flattened building , more mass graves and more kids with their arms blown off. I just gripped my pen and said, "How did you get such detailed information at the height of a heavy bombardment?"

"Don't forget," he snorted, "this is Somalia".

I am continuing to be impressed by his intelligence - gathering operation; this man is fit to be prime minister.

JANUARY 19,

- It has become known that one of the Somali clans has been selling weapons and ammunition to both sides of the conflict. It is believed that the clan, which is nomadic, ransacked the largest ammo dump in Wajit, Southwest of Somalia and has turned from camel herding to gun-running. Another nomadic clan has been reported to be selling their own weapons to the highest bidder. They are all just adding fuel to the fire. I don't think I slept last night. I don't remember sleeping, anyway.

For the first time since I can remember, the elusive Shilka, with its four barrelled guns failed to appear in its usual battle position last night. Either it was blown up in its hideout by a commando unit, or it has run out of ammunitions and fuel. Also last night, a truck carrying weapons and ammunition to the forces of General Kayse was blown up with a bazooka. The explosions that followed lasted for two hours, many of them reaching my shelter, but causing no damage.

Small firearms have been used during the better part of the day, along with occasional mortars and B10s. The shootings are scattered, however, mostly taking place at the television station which has not been operational since it was destroyed last January during the uprising and at the stadium, both about one kilometre away; so it is relatively calm, at least for now. The brief lull is a relief to me, because it gives me time to wash my dirty clothes and to do other neglected chores, like fetching firewood from the rubble of destroyed houses in the neighbourhood and examining the latest damage caused by the mortars.

Voice of Germany broadcasts say that Somalia would be stable if the clan leaders were disciplined like little children! when I told Sheikh Abdi about this comment, he said:

"Easier said than done. It's not easy to discipline a child who has more than thirty thousand armed men under his command, most of them kids out to prove their manhood".

After a long pause, he said that politicians and diplomats talk a lot, but nobody understands what they said.

"They have their own code of conduct and ethics and one of these codes is unquestionable obedience to their proteges," I said.

"Their personal interests are more important than the national interest or that of their protege," he responded. I could see his hatred for politicians and diplomats.

"A diplomat is a person who can tell you to go to hell in such a way that you actually look forward to the trip," he added. I had heard that one before.

JANUARY 20,

- For the third day in a row, the fighting is taking place in distant areas and the neighbourhood is enjoying relative calm, except for occasional mortars which come our way - reminders that the war is still on and there is nothing to rejoice about.

I find it hard to conceive of an end to the fighting in Somalia. If only Washington would put pressure on the world community to send peace-keeping forces, with the US military playing the lead role, the harrowing situation in Mogadishu and the rest of the country would end. The fanatical, death before dishonour spirit of the clans would, of course, present enormous problems to a UN peacekeeping force. But if the US would put its weight behind it, the clans would have to yield because of the US military's superior fire power.

3:15 p.m. - Snipers are back at work again, using long-range G-3 rifles. They seem to have a three-storey building near the burnt marketplace as their registration. The buildings near were abandoned weeks ago, and the market was razed to the ground; it is a mystery to me why they continue shooting at the same targets.

5:30 p.m. - There was another big explosion outside my shelter which shook the walls to their foundations, but I could find nothing abnormal. Perhaps it was the impact from outgoing shell fire.

JANUARY 21 - 22,

- Fighting has continued without noticeable change. The pattern is constant. Tit for tat.

JANUARY 23,

- Surprise, surprise. Mr. Abdiziz Sagal, long time premier and supporter of General Robleh, has finally surfaced in Cairo after disappearing from the world scene for three months. He gave an interview to a correspondent from Cairo Radio

in Arabic, appealing to the Arab world, the UN and the OAU to do something about the tragedy in Mogadishu. It is not yet clear where he has been, but some say that he has kept a low profile in a Saudi Arabia five star hotel - paid for by the Saudi monarch. Others say he has been touring the Arab capitals, "begging for money." The truth about Mr. Sagal's absence from the country will never be known. He had kept his whereabouts secret since he left the country just weeks before the fighting erupted.

Another surprise is that General Robleh has acquired a radio station of his own and it is now easier to follow his version of the bloody war. The station, which broadcasts on the 41 meterband, shortwave, was inaugurated yesterday by General Robleh. After that, a commentator listed what he referred to as "a catalogue of crimes" which the "crazy" general (Kayse) had committed since the overthrow of his "predecessor," Major - General Mohamed Siyad Barre. He called the Somalis to "fight against the butcher of Mogadishu". Another voice announced that the station would provide "balanced and objectives reporting" of all events concerning the war.

General Kayse's radio station broadcasts parallel those with of General Robleh's. Both stations refer to themselves as "Radio Mogadishu, the Voice of the Somali People," with the same signature tunes, and the same music. If the booming guns allow, we will now have alternative listening, General Robleh's or General Kayse's recriminations, misinformation, and lies.

JANUARY 24-25,

- The Eritreans have been here for the last ten days without a breakthrough. It seems that they have had some difficulties in seeing General Kayse again, after having talks with General Robleh's officials during the week.

Because of my proximity to a gun battery, it is difficult for me to listen to both radio stations in order to monitor the progress made by the Eritreans in their efforts to bring the leaders of the warring factions to the peace table. The gun battery was moved to my doorsteps early this morning, and their - out going shells are ear-splitting. The response could be devastating. I am living in a firing base.

JANUARY 26,

- Today is the first anniversary of the overthrow of the former dictator. Both radio stations are urging us to celebrate the occasion. What is there to celebrate? Death, destruction, and famine on a scale never before heard of? And who is going to celebrate the occasion? The graves? the mutilated, and the dying? The new radio station said that intellectuals are calling for a ceasefire after a meeting

held last night to "commemorate" the anniversary. They did not, however, say on what terms or conditions the ceasefire was to be based. General Kayse also gave an emotional speech over his radio station blaming everything on "the corrupt Qansax group", led by General Robleh.

Everybody is talking about the desire for a ceasefire, but there is no ceasefire in practice. The carnage continues. Not to be outdone, General Robleh accused General Kayse of trying to usurp power at the barrel of a gun. In his first radio address, General Robleh alleged that General Kayse and his followers wanted to bring back millitary dictatorship, and that all Somalis should fight to upset such plans.

JANUARY 27,

- Despite yesterday's talk about a ceasefire by the leaders of the two clans, fighting continued this morning with the exchange of mortars and long-range artillery fire -- the usual tit-for-tat adopted by both sides.

The problem is that noboby is suggesting how the much taunted ceasefire is to be implemented. What are the conditions? Would General Robleh agree to General Kayse's proposal for broadly based government or Robleh himself is to be excluded from it? Evidently not.

The Eritreans have surfaced again. According to Robleh's station, the leader of the EPLF delegation, Mohamed Saeed, held another round of talks with Robleh. The radio said that Robleh pledged that he would do everything in his power to end the fighting. There were no details. The radio then replayed Robleh's speech marking the first anniversary of the end of the Barre regime.

The Eritreans, who are no strangers to fighting, are said to be shuttling between the strongholds of the two clan leaders amid heavy bombardment. Evidently they are being stone-walled.

Chapter Two

At The Lido Beach Home Away From Home

JANUARY 28,

- Today, after an hour of packing up and cooking lunch, the Sheikh and I were on our way to Lido Beach, about five kilometres away. As we left, a shell exploded some fifty yards from us. It was becoming a bloody afternoon.

"Let's take the long way", said the Sheikh, "it will only take an extra half hour, and it's much safer".

A machine gun blasted. It was near. If it had gotten any closer, we might have had to turn back. but we continued to walk as if nothing unusual was happening. I was able to carry only my typewriter, notebooks, diaries, and a safari bed, leaving everything else for the looters. As we walked close to the doorways we discussed what had happened during the last three months and the neighbours who had been killed as they tried to flee the inferno of Mogadishu.

Another machine gun blasted. The handful of people in the otherwise deserted streets began to disperse decisively towards the concrete building in the corner, signalling what was to come. People who are out in the open when a shooting starts have learned to rush to concrete buildings -- rare commodities in this part of the city.

"One trick is to occupy your mind with good things," the Sheikh told me.

I ducked slightly as a louder blast echoed down the street. I glanced at the old Orientation Centre, behind the secondary school. In the distance, men with guns emerged from a partially demolished warehouse.

"Time to take cover!" The Sheikh caught my glance and we both dived into the nearest building. Then all hell broke out. The gunfire had the rhythmic beat to it that I had always taken for firing into the air, not at a specific target.

"What's happening, Sheikh?"

"I don't know, Ali, I wonder if anybody does. All I know is that these are not the militia".

"It is more frightening to leave than to stay, even after all these months. I have the vain hope that we will reach the beach safely, but I don't like the looks of these thugs", I said in what seemed to be the longest speech I had ever made under these circumstances.

"Ah yes. God will protect us. You will see".

More roaring machine guns blasted.

"It must be another family dispute", he said. Then he stood up and walked straight into the fire field. I tried to stop him in vain.

"Looks like quite a little shootout, but I have to protect my position as a clergyman".

Five minutes later, the shooting stopped abruptly and the Sheikh returned smiling.

"How did you do it?"

"Simple. They were running out of steam and bullets when I stepped in". He sighed.

"What was the fight about?"

"An unseemly squabbling over the ownership of a vehicle. It was rotten".

"They ought to put a hundred-foot wall around this city and declare it a home of the incurably insane".

We pushed further and further to the beach. We could hear the rumble of artillery in the distance, by which we had learned to measure the progress of the war. It grew fainter as we put distance between the fighting and us.

Hundreds of people were camped near the beach in shacks and shanties. The peoples' faces were bleak, not comprehending the force that had shattered their homes and torn their lives and their loved ones to pieces over the last three months. The howitzers and rockets were aimed at opposition strongholds, but salvo after salvo of the inaccurate artillery shells and mortars struck their flimsy homes instead, wiping out entire families. Many tried to seek shelter in an abandoned concrete building, but a mortar exploded within a few feet of the doorway yesterday, killing several women and children as they tried to queue for water.

It is not as dangerous as my neighbourhood, but sometimes the shells are loud enough that we are all just waiting for a shell to land on us.

JANUARY 29,

AT THE LIDO BEACH SHACK

(Home Away from Home)

Black vultures circle the skies over the once beautiful beach, anxiously watching and waiting for the starving, displaced people below. Every day, weak and starved refugees die from hunger and diseases. Once a haven for anglers and swimmers, mainly expatriates and diplomats, it is now empty, a poor shadow of its former splendor. The walls of the beach cabins are crumbling. The once bustling beach, once adorned by tourists as numerous as seals, is now populated by walking skeletons, waiting for death. Ironically, some of the teenagers, and even the elderly, still brandish AK-47s in military fashion as they go about their daily chores. On a hilltop opposite the once prosperous CLUB 55, Sheikh Abdi spotted a Soviet T55 tank with its long barrel swivelling to and fro as jolly youths played on top.

"Don't worry, we shall survive", he said as we watched the vultures.

A wizened old man with bleary eyes sat cross-legged in the middle of a tripod of anti-aircraft piece mounted on a Ural truck. Although the beach had not seen war, the ominous presence of so many guns worried me. It is not until one talks with the young warriors, that their humanness comes out.

"The guns are for self-defence against intruding bandits", one of them said. There is no arguing with a teenager carrying a loaded gun. Besides, we are all tired of the spurts of rifle fire from insomniac militia men.

JANUARY 30,

- When I arrived at the beach, I didn't know a soul. But the very first day, a tall, bespectacled man stopped by my shack and introduced himself as Elmi Noor. Later I found that everyone called him "Mr. Professor" because he formerly was a law professor at the defunct National University in Mogadishu. Later that evening, he took me out to do what he called "moonlight fishing" at low tide.

Armed with spears, we waded hip-deep in water fifty yards from our shacks searching for any kind of seafood. We had been able to spear several odd-looking species, but when I saw what looked like a shark, I nearly jumped out of my skin.

Professor Elmi was a walking library, and I learned more from him about international law than I could ever learn from books. All of the inhabitants of the beach admired and respected him.

In his wisdom, he asked me to write a letter to the Red Cross officials in

Mogadishu, appealing for emergency food and medical aid. I am very impressed with my new status; as the only person who has a typewriter, I have been delegated the position of Public Letter Writer. My entry into this field was a joint venture with the former editor of the defunct "October Star" newspaper. He calls himself Heikal, after the editor of the Egyptian newspaper, "Al Ahram".

Heikal and I had a similar idea as we thought of how to keep people informed about the tragedy in Somalia. With our battery-powered transistor radio, we started monitoring the BBC, Voice of America, and Cairo Radio, transcribing the news items and commentary concerning the situation in Somalia, and distributing these pages, free of charge, to those who could read.

FEBRUARY 2,

- Today, a team of foreign journalists visited Lido Beach aboard the first Red Cross food convoys to its starving inhabitants. They were shocked by the images of famine and the ravages of war around the area. Food kitchens were set up at noon. They set off a chain reaction, a massive exodus from the city, causing a population explosion that resulted in insecurity. Now gunmen from the city outnumber the original inhabitants. There is one consolation: We are now out of range of the artillery guns, but the problem of small-arms fire and occasional hand-grenade explosions still exists.

"With the security situation on the beach deteriorating due to the exodus from the city, it would be wise to form a council of elders to oversee all aspects of life at the beach", Professor Elmi told me as we watched gunmen fighting over packets of Italian pasta, the fastest selling item in Somalia among people who still have enough money to barter.

Our idea was to set up young volunteers from the original inhabitants to protect the others from "foreign" gunmen who had set up camp at the other end of the beach. We could hear gunfire from their camp signalling another flare-up over one thing or another.

The Red Cross lost one of their vehicles to the gunmen, causing them to pull out of the beach 'temporarily'. The food kitchens are still open, however, and are run by elders and young volunteers. I talked to one of the officials before they pulled out. He promised to deliver food once a week, security permitting.

More people have become fishermen out of necessity. For cultural reasons, up-country Somalis used to shun fish-eating, but the tide of misery is ebbing, and more have found seafood palatable. People are even eating squid and lobster, which even the city people refused to eat until now. I have begun to wonder if the Somalis I have met at the beach will be the same when the war ends. Strangers

who belong to different clans now adopt each other as "blood brother", kids from different parts of the city play football on the white sand in their bare feet.

Without knowing that it had actually happened, I had become a beachcomber! The most popular sport on the beach is to collect as many pieces of driftwood and other floating things as possible. I would wake up early in the morning to scan the beach, only to find that I was not alone. Others were up doing the same.

The food kitchens, with their oil-drum stands, behind the Old Lido Night Club, still turn out rice, porridge, lentils and milk-powder twice a day. The banquet table in my shack, which I share with Professor Elmi, Heikal, and old Sheikh Abdi, consists of a Goodyear Tire sign laid across a couple of rusted jerry cans and pieces of steel bars.

To supplement our daily ration, we ate tuna and squid cooked over a driftwood fire, and seasoned with salt and pepper provided by resourceful Sheikh Abdi. The talk around the banquet table naturally turned to food and war.

"Our menu is international", the professor said, "I've brought three packets of spaghetti for tonight. Somebody should come up with the sauce".

Two nomad gunmen walked by the shack. We invited them in for some grilled tuna fish. They were repulsed at the idea of eating fish, but when they tried it, they admitted that it was delicious.

FEBRUARY 4,

- At 10.00 a.m. I walked to the beach. I found a man putting the finishing touches on a thirteen foot boat, with a single mast-head in the middle.

"I'm going to fish far out in the ocean", he said his eyes twinkling. "You wouldn't be interested in going along, would you?"

"Would I? I'd give my right arm to go!"

"Well, I'll have to go back to the shack to get my fishing gear," I answered, wondering if the man knew how to cope with the angry ocean.

Ten minutes later, I waded out to help stow the boat. Then, calmly chewing khat, the man steered up and down the breakers, looking for an opening. I didn't see how our tiny little boat could possibly get through those big, thundering waves.

Suddenly the man, whose name is Aweys, swung in a tight circle and began racing for the surf. I hung on, in my heart in my mouth, as we came closer to a fifty foot wall of ocean water. His timing was perfect. He had anticipated a lull between the waves, and we slipped through, heading into the open, rolling sea.

"That was great", I shouted at Aweys. He couldn't hear, but he grinned, shifting the khat into the other cheek.

We returned to the beach in the afternoon with a good haul of fish, including tuna, kingfish, and mackarel. The trip was one of the most fascinating experiences of my life. It was like riding a horse at a broken gallop. I was a little nervous as the bow where I sat kept slamming into the choppy waves, but the coastline was magnificent.

Finally, a crowd of people, including the Professor, waded out to help us unload the boat amid joyous shouting and clapping as if we were heroes.

"We have been monitoring your progress from the beach, and you deserve the heroes' welcome," the professor told us, as we dropped the fish on the white sand to be distributed.

Aweys, who has now become a member of our banquet table, told us how he lost his family of five in heavy bombardments, and how he had to bury them in a mass grave in front of his demolished home in Bondhere, one of the worst hit quarters of the city. He said he was out at the time of the bombardments, to scavenge for food and drinking water for the family. Everybody around the table had a terrible story to tell. I almost forgot the hardship and misery I had gone through in my old makeshift shelter. The discussion then turned to food and survival.

"Do you know that the Chinese and other Asiatic races collect salt in catch basins along the shore, and use seaweed as a condiment?" the Professor asked over an unsweetened cup of tea.

We developed many new friends, including religious leaders, lawyers, academics and university students. Professor Elmi announced that he would hold a nightly lecture on the beach.

"All are welcome".

We also sent an open letter to the leaders of the warring factions urging them to immediately end the bloodshed and senseless destruction. Many of us felt that words were not enough. How could we expect them to listen? What is the solution in a country where a man is measured by the number of guns he owns?

AN APPEAL TO END THE WAR

A cry of Despair from Displaced Persons

We the displaced persons of Mogadishu, hereby appeal to you directly to immediately end the carnage in Mogadishu and the rest of the country once and for all.

What we have now in our once beautiful city is complete anarchy caused by your militia men who have no regard for human life and property. Even the few relief workers who dared to remain in the country are being shot at, their vehicles and properties robbed at gun point. Relief food is being looted and the result is thousands of deaths every day.

We are also aware that you do not control the free-lance armed gangs roaming the city who are making their fortunes by looting food intended for the starving. This can be stopped only if you will come to the peace table to embark upon a long lasting national reconcilliation rather than minding your own selfish ends. If that is achieved, the presence of these freelancers will disappear. They will have no reason to exist anymore.

We emphasize that by removing your militia men from the city streets and forming a council of elders from all clans, the UN and other relief agencies will be able to bring food to the starving in many parts of the city and its environment.

The so-called "Green Line," a symbol of the clan hatred which wrecked our city, must go in order to enable displaced persons and refugees to return to their homes without the fear of being shot at by snipers and militia men manning barricades.

Many of us worked hard to topple the regime of the former dictator. We have been detained and tortured many times and our tormenter was never tried in court. Our intention was to introduce a democratic system to Somalia and to create a constitutional government elected by the people so that power and privileges could be shared by all, regardless of their clan affiliations.

However, it is most unforrunate that after the Barre regime was forced to flee the country by the United Somali Congress (USC), the situation has deteriorated into one of the worst examples of anarchy man has ever witnessed. No wonder many who opposed the former dictator now wish for his return.

The hope for the change which we all expected has not materialized, and the whole country is being torn apart by gangs much worse than the Barre regime.

*Signed by the spokesman
for the displaced persons of Mogadishu*

FEBRUARY 6, 1992

- Few believe that clan leaders will heed our appeal.

"I hope they will not unleash their militia men on us for daring to write the appeal," Shiekh Abdi remarked last night as we anxiously waited for any reaction from the recipients.

FEBRUARY 7,

- This morning I joined a group of visiting foreign journalists and television crew in Land Cruisers and pick-ups mounted with machine guns and recoilless rifles to attend a press conference hosted by General Robleh. The militia men escorting us declined to disclose the exact venue of the press conference "for security reasons," but the convoy is heading towards a three storey steel and concrete building locally known as the White House. As we turned a corner, several Ural trucks mounted with heavy guns squeeled across the street near a gutted building that was formerly occupied by the French Embassy.

I tried to explain to the foreign journalists what had happened during the past four months, but it was difficult with the noise coming from Robleh's stronghold. It wasn't hard to identify the noises. One of the journalists, an American working for the Associated Press wire service (AP), looked at me, eyes wide;

"Sounds like Katyushas".

"Yes, you see it's a local passtime. Sort of tit-for-tat. Localised, about four miles away. This sort of thing used to go on for months. Anyway, here we are".

There was a deafening gale of machine gun fire from the street. Our conversation stopped for a moment until it was over.

He sighed. "Now we seem to have entered another hot-spot after Nam and Liberia," he said.

"Or Beirut," I added. "Welcome to the abyss".

Several militia men guarding the perimeter of the fortified building came over with brand new AK-47 assault rifles held in both hands. I thought to myself, "At least the barrels are not pointing at our hearts".

Our escorts told them that we were journalists and that "the old man" was expecting us. They said nothing for a moment as they looked inside the vehicle and then at us. One of them spoke to me.

"You must be Somali".

"Nabad. How are you? Yes, I am a Somali, but my colleagues here are foreigners".

I felt confident that he would identify me as a bona fide journalist, rather than a spy for General Kayse's faction.

The chief militia man, who wore a Browning automatic pistol to show his rank, kept us waiting at the gate while he talked to our host on a walkie-talkie.

At length, he strolled over, followed by an elderly guerilla who looked like a Roman gladiator.

"Okay. You go straight up. This man will act as your guide". We all forced grins simultaneously, but we soon found that our new guide did not like conversation. So we remained quiet and walked behind him single file.

As soon as we wound up the staircase, two at a time, it was possible to see several gun emplacements through the French windows. We hoped that the men sitting behind the guns had their safety catches on, because the barrels were pointing straight at us.

We came to a huge steel door where we were stopped briefly by two more militia, before our guide shouted who we were. No sooner than we were allowed inside the large, beautiful, furnished chamber, were we stopped again. I stared at the lights in the chamber. I couldn't remember the last time I had seen lights. Our delay was again minimal, our guide repeated his earlier performance and we were waved through after a thorough physical search.

Our guide spoke. It was his first full sentence since we had known him. "Sit down here and wait for the Old Man".

We obeyed, sitting on the highly decorated sofas. It looked like a doctor's waiting room. Our guide left, so we all could talk.

I almost wept because of the contrast between this beautifully furnished house with its lights on, even during the daylight and the foul mess we had just left behind.

Ten minutes later, another man came into the room. He was wearing olive green army fatigues and a Baretta. He carried a swagger stick in his hand. He came to where we were sitting, staring at us with an expressionless face. Nothing was said for a full minute.

He then spoke slowly, in excellent English.

"I am the Chief of the Security Forces". It was a statement that demanded no response. Then he spoke again.

"The General will be here in ten minutes for the press conference".

Then he turned around and walked away toward the steel door, leaving us staring at his back. Throughout, the guide watched us carefully.

"We just want to get through with this damned press conference and get the hell out of here," said Jeff, the AP wire serviceman.

"A lot of guns, a lot of chaos, a lot of militia men," said Giulliano Cecchi, from RAI, the Italian state television.

"What can the world do amid such anarchy?" asked a Belgian newspaper reporter who had visited Mogadishu during the uprising.

"The future is grim," said Jeff as he stared at the steel door impatiently.

"You know, many Somalis are criticising the world community, particularly the West, for not coming quickly enough to save them from the holocaust," I said.

The steel door opened widely and a group of men walked into the huge chamber adjoining our waiting room. The leader spoke.

"Gentlemen of the press, General Robleh is now ready for the press conference. You are welcome into the chamber". He was none other than the Chief of Security Forces.

There was a stampede to the chamber. Inside, the general and his entourage were already seated, whispering to each other. One of the roughlt Italian camera crew moved to pick up his gear, only to have his hand grabbed by the guide.

"Leave them here".

"As you wish," he muttered in Italian and joined the stampede, regretting the day he accepted this assignment.

We walked into the chamber and stood sweating before the assembled officials. Someone sitting in the middle of the entourage, wearing a smart Kaunda suit, ordered us to sit down for the general briefings. He had a full smile on his face, but his eyes seemed to be very tired.

"Good afternoon," the man said in Somali, translated by a young man sitting next to him. The camera lights fell on his face and I knew we were at last in the presence of General Robleh.

"It is an honour to meet the international press and I hope that your stay in our unfortunate city will be much longer, so that you can tell the world all that is taking place here. But before I proceed with my briefings, please feel free to let me know if any of you encountered any inconveniences while here this morning".

The Italians needed no further encouragement and began immediately telling him about the guide's, manhandling of one of their cameramen.

"I'm sorry. Our people are security conscious these days, but you may now go back to the waiting room and fetch your gear". There was a slight pause, after which the Italian rushed to where he had left his cameras. I wondered if he would face another confrontation with our guide.

"Gentlemen, you may be interested to know that I did not start this war. Indeed, I made it a capital offence for more bloodshed, or the settling of old scores at gunpoint after we threw out the former dictator in January of last year. Unfortunately, General Kayse decided to grab power by force in order to reimpose dictatorship on the Somali people. The Somali people have had enough of one man rule, one family rule and one clan rule during the last two decades and are now aspiring to elect a government of their own, democratically and constitutionally. But, General Kayse and his cohorts are trying to silence the peoples' cry for a genuine democracy Anyone among you from the United States?"

I nudged Jeff to raise his hand.

"You bet. Jeff Rowlands from Texas, the Lone Star State of the USA at your service, Sir".

A brief pause.

"A government of the people, by the people for the people shall never perish from the earth I once liked Lincoln's address, but I am now at a loss to understand why the United States government remains silent about people who are fighting for a government of their own or is it that the Cold War is over and we have been written off?"

Another brief pause.

"As you might know by now, there are a dozen clans and sub-clans in Mogadishu alone and they are all trying to destroy each other for no other purpose than to rule the smaller and weaker clans. We, for our part, are doing our best to defend ourselves against a despot who is out to rule us by force, just like his predecessor, Barre".

"My men are well-equipped" he continued "and their morale is high, but on occasions, my commanding officers go too far. Today was one. One of my commanding officers attacked a section of the city with the Katyushas without my permission. Several of my commanding officers have advised me to level General Kayse's stronghold with the Katyushas once and for all. But I refused in fear for the many innocent civilians who would also perish in such a series of attacks. In

a nutshell, the war is between David and Goliath. General Kayse got all the heavy armour, including tanks and long range artillery pieces at his disposal, while we are fighting with small arms, save for a number of Katyusha rocket launchers which we are reluctant to use for the reason I just mentioned. Of course, we are numerically superior, but can you fight a tank with AK-47 or M-16 assault rifles? Despite all of these shortcomings, we have already made remarkable progress in the battlefield".

He then smiled and looked at his expensive watch.

"If you have questions, which I'm sure you do, please go ahead but be brief, because I have to attend another meeting in half an hour".

I looked at Jeff, who mouthed, "Yes, Ali Dhuhul, go ahead", at me.

"On behalf of my colleagues here, I wish to thank you, General, for offering us this rare press conference and for enlightening us about the current situation in Mogadishu as you see it, but I would like to hear from you, what are your responses to General Kayse's proposal for an unconditional ceasefire?"

I thought that he was not going to make an answer. Then he spoke so quietly that we could barely hear him. "You know, we are by nature a very peaceful clan. We have always lived in harmony with other clans for centuries. But we feel that there is something very wrong with General Kayse's much taunted ceasefire offer. For example, his continued bombardments against civilian targets, minutes after he declared his so-called ceasefire committee, whose chairman and the entirety of its members have always supported General Kayse's war efforts against us. There is no neutral clan in Somalia; they are either active participants of the war, or are sympathisers of one clan or the other".

Jeff Rowlands of the Associated Press: "General, what do you want the Western World, particularly the United States, to do to help solve the crisis in Somalia?".

The General smiled and said, "The United States, as the only superpower in the world today, should send the marines to spearhead an international force endorsed by the UN Security Council to:

- a) disarm the population,
- b) enforce ceasefire,
- c) ensure that food aid gets to the starving millions in the country,
- d) dismantle the Green Line dividing the capital to allow people to return to their homes,

e) saturate the country with food and

f) the UN should sponsor a national reconciliation conference attended by leaders of all the warring factions".

Van de Kraal of the Dutch Press: "The US Marines and the United Nations peace keeping forces failed to bring peace to Lebanon, which in many ways is similar to the situation in Somalia. Do you think that a large scale military operation would succeed in Somalia, given the thousands of teenage gunmen cruising the streets in pick-up trucks sporting .50 calibre machine guns and anti-tank rockets?"

General Robleh: "The Marines failed to bring a lasting peace in Beirut largely because the US government did not send real fire power, like tanks and helicopter gunships, to back up the Marines on the ground. As a result, more than two hundred US servicemen went home in body bags. Evidently, Beirut had a crying need for a show of strength. Here, on the other hand, the teenage gunmen that you mentioned are, like everybody else in Somalia, already war-weary and a show of superior fire power would do the trick. The marines should be allowed to fire first and ask questions later"

Giugliano Cecchi of RAI, Italian State Television: "What role do you think Italy could play in an international effort to return stability to Somalia?"

General Robleh: "Southern Somalia, a former Italian colony, expected Italy to play a leading role in assisting her in all aspects of life and had Italy come to our rescue immediately after the successful popular uprising, the situation might be different today. But for some reason, the Italian Government chose to remain a curious onlooker. However, as you Italians say, "Meglio tardi che mai" (Better late than never), you can still deliver emergency food aid to the starving population and contribute a contingent to an international peace keeping force led by the United States".

Jeff Rowlands of the AP: "Many Americans are worried that the United States will get bogged down in a guerrilla war. How would you allay such fears?"

General Robleh: "One faction that could spell trouble is General Kayse's. He is already rejecting what he describes as foreign interference in Somalias internal affairs, -- as if we have any internal affairs anymore, except death and destruction. He tells the nomads and religious fanatics that the foreigners will change our culture and will make everyone Christian. So, his faction is the only group that is likely to resist an order to disarm. A show of strength is therefore necessary. It is also important to know why he is objecting to an international peace-keeping

force and a return to order. There is one reason: he sees the end of their large-scale looting spree and extortion. It is also imperative to know who is friendly, who is hostile, and who wants a return to law and order in Somalia. Of course it is a painful process, but with the economic resources of the United States and other developed countries, it could be done".

Hassan Al-Ghindi, from the Egyptian daily, "Al Ahram", "What was the response from the Arab League, the OAU, and the Islamic Conference Organisation (ICO) to the plight of the Somali people?".

General Robleh": Nil. Unfortunately, the Arab League, the OAU and the ICO pretended as if Somalia never existed on the face of the earth.

These regional organisations, of which Somalia is a full member, should have been the first, not the last, to respond to our plight. We sent a stream of appeals for emergency aid. They have seen, on their television screens and in the press, enlarged photographs of dying babies and their skeleton-looking mothers staring at an empty space. They have seen the photographs of civilians trapped in their country and who face one of the worst human tragedies ever seen by man since World War II. Apparently, the leaders of these organisations were discouraged by the continued fighting and looting of relief supplies.

"But no organisation should expect an easy or free ride in a country where people are dying of starvation, and where law and order were broken long ago. The Arab World, particularly the oil rich countries in the Gulf, have the capability to feed the Somalis for decades. To them it is a drop in the ocean. We suspect that many of these leaders are conniving with the former dictator to return him to power.

Ali Dhuhul: "According to international press reports, over ten tonnes of toxic waste are destined for Somalia following a deal between two European firms and some clan leaders who are apparently taking advantage of the situation in Somalia. What are your reactions to these reports, and are some of your men involved in the deal?".

General Robleh: "None of my men are involved in such dangerous scheme which would have a long-term effect on our environment. Like the majority of the African countries, we fervently adhere to the Bamako Convention which demands a complete ban on the transboundary movement of hazardous waste. However, if any of my men is found involved in a garbage dump deal, he will be severely punished. Such people cannot be trusted with the leadership of the country.

Al-Ghindi of "Al-Ahram : "General Robleh, are you willing to meet General Kayse face-to-face to hammer out your problems?".

General Robleh: "That is out of the question. I will never, ever meet a war criminal whose hands are still fresh with the blood of innocent civilians".

Twenty minutes later, we were sitting in another highly decorated conference hall in General Kayse's stronghold after a bone-jarring ride, shaken by the artillery and bombing of the fighting. There is one consolation: a lull in the bombardments which have been heavy all morning. Perhaps it is for the benefit of the visiting journalists.

I heard an exclamation of satisfaction on my right. I didn't have to look to see who had made it. It was Guigliano Cecchi.

Jeff, on my left, stirred.

"Oh boy! I bet the boys have gone for a lunch break".

"There is no such thing as a lunch break in this city. They are probably holding their fire for our benefit".

"Mamma mia. That means that they will have a go at each other as soon as we leave the city".

"Yes, Giugliano, it's the biggest passtime in Mogadishu".

I must mention here that we went through the same procedures as in General Robleh's stronghold. We were asked many questions mostly having to do with who we were and what the hell we were doing there. Militia men in olive green army fatigues pointed guns at us as we were thoroughly searched by wild looking men who were chewing khat and smoking cigarettes.

"Are you a Somali?"

Yes, I am a Somali . Nabad".

"What clan do you belong to?"

"Who is the press?".

"An extinct clan".

"Do you like General Kayse?"

"I haven't met him yet, but I hear he is great".

"Yes. He is".

An order to let us through was shouted, and ten minutes later we were sitting in a great hall decorated with Persian carpets and a huge portrait of General Kayse in full regalia.

Giugliano sank into silence. The rest of the Italian team looked at me.

"Does the General speak Italian?"

"Yes, and English and Russian, too".

There was a loud rumble in the distance. "No, not artillery, not today. Thunder," I assured them.

There was a dramatic stir outside the conference hall. I suddenly noticed that everyone was staring at the door. There were faint murmurs outside, and then the door was flung open and a six-foot-tall character walked in, leading a host of official looking men. They took their places around the conference table, laughing at some joke the tall fellow had made while entering the hall. This tall gentleman turned out to be none other than General Kayse himself. His eyes moved slowly about the room, scanning each of us in turn.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen. May I introduce myself? I am General Kayse. I would like each of you to also introduce yourselves, one by one, and name the news agency you are representing".

We all did as he requested.

"Good," he said. "I will now brief you on the conditions of this war, and what caused it in the first place. But remember that time is of the essence under the present circumstances".

We chorused our agreement while producing cameras and notebooks, suggesting that we, too, were in a hurry, seeing how we had missed our lunch.

"General Robleh," Kayse began, "With the help of his corrupt faction, tried to hijack the government soon after the people of Somalia, led by the United Somali Congress, ousted the former dictator and his regime after more than twenty years of autocratic rule. The Somali people will never accept a new oppressive regime to replace the old one. This war is not, and I repeat, NOT, a war between two opposing clans, as many of you have led your media organisations to believe. It is a war between the Somali people and a regime of self-interested leaders and rich merchants, Afar Jeebleh' (literally, 'men with four pockets'). These corrupt men are doomed to fail; the people will crush them like cockroaches. As a matter of fact, some of them are in retreat even now, including General Robleh himself.

"We are now in full control of about eighty percent of the capital, and the remaining twenty percent will fall to our forces in the near future, Inshallah!" (God Willing)

The noise of heavy artillery fire resumed once again after the brief lull we had

enjoyed for the best part of the morning. The rumble was so loud I could hear nothing else. A shell exploded only twenty or so yards from the conference hall. I reached for my handkerchief to wipe my face, only to remember that I had left it drying outside my shack at the beach. More shells rolled over us with a deafening roar, a caustic reminder that General Kayse had not been truthful in saying that he controlled eighty percent of the city. General Robleh was most definitely not a man on the run for his life.

"Is everyone all right?" the General asked. There were nods and gasps as people tried to pretend that nothing had happened.

I glanced quickly at Giugliano. He seemed to be fine. I then went to put my arm around Jeff's shoulders.

"Jeff, are you okay?"

It took him a minute to respond as he tried to wipe his glasses with shaky hands.

"Thank you, Ali". He lit his first cigarette of the day, then turned to look at the General. "That was close".

The proximity of the shelling raised a number of awkward questions, and most of us felt too uneasy to ask them, but Jeff, undaunted, raised his hand.

"General, if what you have told us regarding General Robleh is true, who is attacking your stronghold?"

I held my breath, certain that Jeff would be shot by the General's bodyguards who lined the wall behind us. I peered cautiously over my shoulder and to my relief, saw that the bodyguards had not moved.

The constant bombardments were making it difficult to hear the General's response to Jeff's question.

"Boom! bandits and renegades Boom Boom! Bermuda Triangle Boom Boom! will crush them!"

Jeff gave up trying to decipher the General's answer and concentrated instead on trying to gauge the proximity of the artillery fire outside.

Another journalist was now asking a question:

"General Boom Boom! how about Boom a face to Boom Boom! face meeting with General Robleh?"

"No way Boom Boom!"

Further attempts at discussion were futile. We decided to give it up.

8. p.m. - General Kayse's radio station reported that this afternoon's shootings may have been carried out by some of his own men in their desperation for food!

Professor Elmi coughed heavily. "This is the biggest joke of the year".

"It's for the foreign journalists' consumption", Sheikh Abdi returned dryly.

FEBRUARY 8,

- General Robleh has said that he has accepted an invitation to attend a consultation conference on a ceasefire agreement, to be held in New York on February 10. The resolution was adopted by the UN Security Council "to end the bloodshed in Mogadishu which has claimed the lives of 40,000 people". It is not yet clear if General Kayse has accepted a similar invitation, which was delivered to him yesterday by Mr. Brian Wannop, the new UN representative in Somalia, a Canadian National.

2.15 p.m. - Radio Kayse announced that General Kayse has refused to attend a peace conference in New York. He will instead send a three-man delegation to represent him.

FEBRUARY 9,

- General Robleh has now refused to attend the peace conference, saying that he also will send a three-man delegation to New York.

No one was surprised by these developments. We had suffered so much already at the hands of these clan leaders that I felt like shouting my frustration from the roof-tops.

"It looks like this peace conference in New York, like all previous efforts, is doomed before it even starts," sighed Professor Elmi.

Sheikh Abdi swallowed hard, and his voice caught in his throat as he said, "Full marks, Professor. We are right back where we started".

The Professor was silent for a moment, shaking his head in disbelief. He then turned to me, speaking in quiet, yet emphatic tones. "Incredible! What sort of men are these Generals?"

I told them all I remembered of yesterday's press conference, omitting nothing. What interested them most was General Kayse's final muffled assertion, in which he vowed to "Crush the bandits and renegades defending the Bermuda Triangle", and his subsequent announcement that the attack carried out against his stronghold was in fact carried out by his own men, "who were desperate for food and money to buy drugs".

"Liar !" the Professor retorted, in a shaking voice.

We diligently monitored the BBC and "Voice of America", but there was nothing of particular interest to us except for a brief news item, broadcast over the latter, about the forthcoming peace talks in New York. The announcer said simply that the main antagonists in the Somali conflict had refused to personally attend the conference, and the names of those who would represent them were mentioned briefly.

"What kind of mentality prevails in this country?" the Sheikh wondered aloud.

"Nothing ever seems to get off the ground", I returned, and proceeded to gulp my cup of unsweetened tea.

9.45 p.m. - We all sat around the banquet table in my shack at the beach, talking in hush voices about the latest developments. It was plain what was going on. The clan leaders did not want peace, because they didn't feel it was in their own best interests. If peace came to Somalia, they both stood to lose a lot.

By the end of the night, Sheikh Abdi, the Professor and I had agreed to produce a weekly newsletter, in which we would expose the evil intentions of the generals.

The Professor wondered if the clan leaders wanted Somalia, as a nation, to become extinct. "The unarmed and the powerless would all perish", he said.

Not far from our shack, volunteers ladled out bowls of porridge and powdered milk to the inhabitants of the beach, proving that the Red Cross had not yet given up on feeding displaced persons, despite the threat of bandits wielding AK-47 assault rifles on the other end of the beach.

"Did you ask the generals if they would consider a face-to-face meeting to attempt to patch up their differences?" the Professor continued.

I shuffled through my jumbled notes.

"Yes, but both men ruled out anything of the kind".

Three

FEBRUARY 10,

- This morning, while old Sheikh Abdi sat alone, reading the Holy Qur'an, a young girl walked into our shack. She seemed breathless and very nervous, and she looked as if she hadn't slept.

"What in the world has happened to you, my little one?" asked the old Sheikh.

"My father forbade me to see the boy I love, and I desperately need your help".

"Start from the beginning".

With tears in her eyes, she related the story of two young people who had been able to find happiness where others had found only horror and despair. The two lovers were from two entirely different clans, which do not normally permit inter-marriage. The boy belonged to Somalia's "untouchables," a minority of hunters. The majority of the Somali people are nomads, who shun hunters, fishermen, blacksmiths and shoe-makers. The girl belonged to one of the much-feared warrior clans in Central Somalia. Her name was Halima Abdi.

Eighteen-year-old Halima and her family had arrived at the beach two months ago, with only a few belongings, after having fled the fighting in the city. The first time she had seen Lido Beach was when she had been only twelve. At that time, the beach had been a very peaceful and pleasant place. Now she could only stare in fascinated horror at the hundreds of shanties and the walking skeletons that inhabited the place. This was her new home! Her only consolation was that there were no bombs falling here.

One day, a very handsome youth of about nineteen moved up beside Halima and gave her a sympathetic smile. He introduced himself as Ibrahim Yonis, a former shop assistant who had since lost his father, mother and two younger sisters in the war.

"You will be safe here. There are no BMs (Katyushas) coming this way," he said, leaning close to the girl.

Halima shrank from the youth, thinking he was another bandit trying to rob her family of the few meagre belongings which they had managed to salvage from their burning home in Bondhere.

Chapter Three

Love At The Beach

But he did not look menacing, nor did he carry a gun, which was unusual for a youth of his age in Mogadishu. The girl had not yet been able to conquer her fear of teenage gunmen, even after two months on the beach, but she found that she was able to laugh in Ibrahim's presence.

"The war will end soon," she said, "and I will go back home".

Ibrahim smiled at the girl's optimism. Despite the hardship and the lack of proper nourishment, she had a healthy sparkle in her eyes and her skin was smooth.

They walked together through the shacks on the shore. The people who watched from their doorways terrified her. She could see putrid, dirty bandages, mutilated mouths and missing limbs. Some waved their good hands in greeting, shouting "Naqad!" (peace). But Halima and Ibrahim could not bring themselves to wave back.

Later, they sat in an isolated place, watching the seagulls and singing Magool's and Saada Ali's latest love songs.

"I don't think we will be here very long," Halima mused between songs. "The radio said there would be peace talks in New York".

"They have been talking about peace and ceasefire for the last two months," Ibrahim told her. "Still it is not getting any better. In fact, the fighting gets even worse when they have peace negotiations".

Since that day, the couple saw each other secretly, vowing that nothing would stand in the way of their love. Halima's father heard of their meetings, but concealed this knowledge from his daughter until he could plan how to separate the lovers.

Finally, one morning after a breakfast of Red Cross porridge and powdered milk, he confronted his daughter.

"What is it, Father?" she asked, smiling.

"Halima, you have been secretly going around with that boy, Ibrahim Yonis, for some time now".

Her smile faded. "Yes, Father," she said quietly.

"You are bringing disgrace to the whole clan and I forbid you to see him again".

"He is very fine young man," Halima retorted. "I wish you would see him as a man and look beyond his clan affiliations".

"Stop seeing him. That's all," her father said evenly and walked away. Halima stared after him, her face red with anger. She fled to find her mother, but her mother

was nowhere to be seen.

"What should I do?" she cried aloud. "If only I knew what to do".

She finally decided to pay a visit to Sheikh Abdi.

That is how Aweys and I, returning from our daily fishing expedition, came to find Halima and the Sheikh sitting together at our banquet table. Upon having the story repeated to us, all we could do was to sit and shake our heads. Only the sound of the waves and the pounding surf intruded on the silence.

"We Somalis are making things very difficult for ourselves, even in love," Aweys said.

When the Professor returned at 10 p.m. from his weekly open air lecture at the beach, we all decided to appoint ourselves as mediators and public relations officers for the young lovers. Sheikh Abdi and I were assigned the task of talking to the girl's father, while the Professor and Aweys agreed to discuss the matter with the other elders at the beach to get their consensus.

FEBRUARY 11,

- This morning we launched Operation "Elmi Bowdary," Somalia's equivalent to "Romeo and Juliet". We set out for our first consultation with Halima's father, with Halima in the lead. Her father sensed our mission as soon as he saw us coming.

After the usual greetings of "Nabad iyo Nabadino," Sheikh Abdi cut through the ice without any further formalities. My initial impulse was to turn away and hide. After all, what can be done for lovers living in hell? We began to lose heart when the man started yelling at his daughter at the top of his voice, but we tried to hold onto the old Sheikh's motto: "Stay calm in the face of the adversary". We thanked our stars that the man was not armed.

When the man finally calmed down, the resourceful Sheikh began to speak. He told the man that all the great religions of the world, including Islam, forbid us to bind large groups of people into stereotypic straight-jackets and that even though stereotypes about various ethnic groups do exist, we should try to see people as individuals rather than bunch them all into one basket.

"By dismissing young Ibrahim on stereotypic lines, you could be losing a valuable son-in-law. Each person is a unique human being, created by God, each of us differently, yet able to blend with the rest of humankind. It should be Ibrahim's personal qualities that are important, not his ethnic background".

This was the longest single speech I had ever heard the Sheikh make throughout my long acquaintance with him.

I had expected the man to jump through the roof at the end of this lecture, but he said, quietly and slowly, "I do not intend my daughter to become the wife of untouchable, come what may".

The girl's mother brought us tea and bundles of Khat. There was little she could do to help. Tradition does not allow her to sit at a men's meeting, neither is she permitted to express her views and opinions or make bodily contact, even to shake a hand, with any men other than her husband or immediate family-members. So our hopes lay with the father, who remained hostile and uncompromising.

"Think what my clan would say and do if word goes round that I married my daughter to an untouchable? War, famine and disease can cause anarchy in a country, but they can't change what people think".

I nudged the Sheikh, a signal that the mission was a failure and that we should call it a day.

"We are two-thousand-year-old men with the identity crisis of a teenager," he told me as we left Halima's family.

"It is an endless sea of problems and questions that nobody in Somalia can really answer," I said as we crossed the line where the Red Cross food kitchens were located, behind the old Lido Night Club.

9:30 p.m. - We skipped monitoring the BBC and Voice of America reports and listened instead to what the Professor and Aweys had to say about their consultations with the other beach leaders. We also listened to young Ibrahim Yonis talk about his future with Halima and the dangers that would be attached to their marriage in the absence of her father's consent.

The Professor looked straight in my eyes and said, "It is not like we thought it would be. The elders made the point that there is no hope of a normal marriage ceremony being performed here, so they suggested that Ibrahim and Halima run away and marry either in Adaleh or Warsheikh. They said that Sheikh Abdi should accompany them, with three witnesses and perform the ceremony there, if necessary".

There was an embarrassed silence in the shack. Then Aweys, my fishing companion, spoke in a loud voice that could put a radio announcer to shame. "Why can't the Sheikh perform the marriage ceremony right here, on the beach?"

Aweys point was well-taken, but Sheikh Abdi stood up to speak.

"According to traditional Islamic marriages, the marriage ceremony should be performed at least ninety kilometres from the parents residence, that is, if they're still alive"

"But that is in normal times," the Professor interrupted.

After a heated debate on the subject, we decided to put it to a vote. The Professor, Aweys and myself were all in favour of the ceremony being performed on the beach. Only the Sheikh had objected, but he was obviously outnumbered. A meeting of the beach elders was set for that night.

Everyone on the beach was now acquainted with the details of Operation "Elmi Bowdary," and our involvement in the affair. "The marriage ceremony should go ahead," the Professor declared to the elders.

The romance of the impending marriage provided juicy gossip for the entire beach!

FEBRUARY 12,

- Today, Sheikh Abdi woke me early in the morning and told me to dress quickly.

"We are going to see the boy".

"For goodness' sake, why?" I asked.

The Sheikh was terribly upset and his eyes were blood-red.

"There could be trouble at the beach," he said as we walked towards the boy's shack, some two hundred yards away. We found Ibrahim in front of the communal toilet.

"Ibrahim, my boy," the Sheikh began. "You and Halima have known each other for some time now".

"Yes, Sheikh," the boy said quietly.

"Do you and her get along well?"

"I love her," he said emphatically. "She is a very charming girl and we've agreed to marry, in spite of everything".

"My dear boy, I have something to tell you," the Sheikh said, "but please don't tell anyone else".

"What is it, Sheikh?"

"Leave the beach as soon as I have performed the wedding ceremony".

"Why?"

"Because I smell trouble".

Later this afternoon, Aweys reported to us that every single person on the beach, except of course, Halima's parents, had congratulated the lovers and that everyone was offering to help, in their modest ways, with the pleasant task of giving the couple a proper marriage.

"But there is still one formidable obstacle to overcome," Aweys told us. "The girl's parents".

FEBRUARY 13,

- Halima and Ibrahim were married today, by Sheikh Abdi, in a twenty-minute ceremony held behind the old Lido Night Club. The bride wore a Guntino and Garbasar, a wrap-around affair that is preferred by southern Somali women. The groom wore a two-piece cotton fabric, worn by nomads and a pair of camel-hide shoes. He carried a spear in one hand and a shield in the other. Somebody played "Hibo," a popular Somali wedding song. A choir of about twenty youngsters sang for the ceremony. The feast was the largest ever held in war-torn Somalia.

At 11:30 p.m. - the bride and groom left the beach for an unknown destination. Minutes later, gunmen from the girl's clan, in "technicals," arrived at the beach and started shooting indiscriminately into the air. It was too late. Love had won.

FEBRUARY 14,

- Today I received an invitation to visit Mogadishu's horrendous "Bermuda Triangle". The invitation came from Abdullahi, the son of the sole survivor of the notorious Jesira Beach Massacre, Awil Jama (detailed in "Target: Villa Somalia)". Even the name "Bermuda Triangle" is enough to inspire in people all the nightmarish fears of its namesake. There are young gun-men who have built their reputations on the fact that they had visited the Bermuda Triangle before coming to Lido Beach.

"Many people say that anyone who attempts to enter it never comes back," I commented to a young man who said he had been there.

We were sitting in front of my shack, watching the ocean and the people searching for driftwood at the shore.

"It is true," he responded. "The inhabitants kill outsiders. Even General Kayse was forced to give up after several attempts to crush them. But if you have connections there, you'll be safe".

I showed him the letter of invitation from Abdullahi.

"Why don't you go?" he asked me.

"You know that the conditions here on the beach are best.

It's impossible to starve here. We can even do a little fishing now and then if times get really tough".

"Wait a minute," he laughed. "I didn't mean you should go for good! But a brief visit to the famous Bermuda Triangle would give you the chance for a good story".

"There's nothing I'd rather do than visit the place," I admitted, "but the risks involved far outweigh any story - obligations I have to my editors".

"Nobody in the outside world knows anything about the Bermuda Triangle in Mogadishu and how its inhabitants have been defending their homes".

I tried hard not to seem interested.

"If you're worried about the problem of getting a "technical" to take us there, it doesn't cost much. We can pool our resources. How about it?"

"Well, my boy, you've found yourself a partner. I've always wanted to visit that place".

9:30 p.m. - The Professor, The Sheikh, Aweys and I were sitting around the banquet table after a hearty meal of tuna fish and rice when I decided to break the news of my impending visit to the Bermuda Triangle. I showed them my letter from Abdullahi, who was now the leader of the defenders there.

They didn't approve or disapprove. After a long silence, Sheikh Abdi spoke very loudly.

"You are risking your life in such an idiotic mission".

"But I have friends out there. Besides, I have always wanted to visit the place".

Five minutes later, our "committee" voted three to one in favour of the visit, with only Sheikh Abdi opposing it.

The Professor said as he stood up:

"I have to go to the lecture". He picked up his stack of papers and prepared to place them in his tattered briefcase. The stack was so high that he momentarily lost control and papers sprayed all over the table. I noticed the headline on the paper closest to me:

"WHY PEACE EFFORTS FAIL IN MOGADISHU"

Chapter Four

Visiting Mogadishu's Bermuda Triangle

Four

11:45 p.m. - We hired a four-wheel-drive vehicle from a clan which claimed to be neutral in the fighting. The vehicle was camouflaged and was mounted with a .50 calibre Browning machine gun. A handful of teenage gun-men were inside, keeping the engine running.

My new partner, Hassan Idleh, was waiting for me at the kerb, along with the driver, who eyed me openly. I wondered how I appeared to him. I couldn't help but notice how cool these teenagers were. Many gun-men and drivers of technicals in Mogadishu would refuse to go to the Bermuda Triangle at any price, but these teenagers seemed relaxed and cheerful at the prospect of going to the most dangerous place in Mogadishu. Perhaps the long months of street warfare had hardened them.

We bade farewell to Sheikh Abdi, The Professor and Aweys. The latter began to load the vehicle with cartons of tuna fish "for the boys in Godka" (the Bermuda Triangle). I shook hands with the members of my "committee" in a formal fashion and departed on my journey south.

Despite the cheerful atmosphere inside the vehicle, I was worried about what would happen when we attempted to cross the notorious Green Line dividing the city. In Mogadishu, there is no guarantee that you will stay alive by shouting "Press!" or "Neutral!" Recent experience had shown that people who claim neutrality do not go over well with the militia who man the barricades. One requires a string of near-miracles to survive the journey through the devastated city. There is an acute shortage of miracles in Mogadishu these days.

I could hear distant artillery fire and the chattering of small arms, but that was all. In fact, the city seemed unusually quiet. I suddenly remembered that it was the beginning of the Holy month of Remadhan, although the possibility of people fasting from dawn to dusk, or laying down their weapons, in the midst of war and famine seemed very slim.

Hassan Idheh, who was sitting next to me in the cabin, started attacking the clerics and the elders for not trying harder to mediate between the warring factions - a favourite theme of discussion in Somalia nowadays.

"Perhaps they, too, want the war to drag on for their own vested interests", I said.

"Do you think the former dictator, with the help of the Communists or the Italians, is behind the crisis in Somalia?"

Before I could answer, one of the teenagers, sporting his AK-47, interrupted. "What about the IMF, the World Bank, and the CIA?" he asked. The question was directed at no one in particular, so I started fumbling with my notebook and an old map of Mogadishu, printed by the US-AID in the seventies.

Another youth on the hood of the vehicle wanted to know what the letters IMF, CIA, and KGB stood for.

"IMF means International Ministry of Finance, "I answered him, "while KGB means Kindly Go Back, and CIA means Come In Again".

This brought on a fit of raucous laughter inside the vehicle, and I fervently wished that the boys would put their safety catches on.

The driver of the vehicle seemed to be in something of a hurry, even by Mogadishu standards, and we swerved crazily around potholes and bomb-craters. The boys were singing an old tune in the back of the vehicle. I wondered whether they were used to this sort of trip.

Eventually, I spoke up. "I am intrigued by the speed, but can you perhaps drive a little slower?"

"I'll try," came the muffled answer.

At last the vehicle stopped at the first barricade, and the noise of gunshots could be heard from somewhere in the neighbourhood. After a few seconds, the driver and the teenager on the hood of the vehicle descended and began yelling at the militia manning the barricade.

It was difficult to see because of the darkness, but suddenly my eyes were stabbed with the light of the metallic glint of a gun barrel. I sat motionless, half expecting to hear the sound of that gun and feel its bullet.

A militia man walked slowly over to me and asked me who I was, and where I was going.

"I am with the press, and I am trying to go to visit my friends on the other side of the Green line".

The puzzled voices of the militia men changed to angry intonations. Finally, the man with the gun spoke in a commanding voice.

"Go on, but don't come back here". The man clearly had rank, as well as age, on his side.

I nodded as pleasantly as I could, but the warning worried me a lot. Another young militia man moved in, pointing his gun at my heart.

"We keep an eye on people from General Robleh's stronghold in this place, especially those who claim to be journalists. We know they're really double agents".

The older man told him to leave us alone, because we were "dung heaps and sons of harlots".

Hassan Idleh looked at me and shook his head.

"Being a journalist or a neutral party is not an asset here these days. All I can say is keep your eyes and ears open. Of course we have guns, but they outnumber and outgun us. Don't say I didn't warn you".

On some other occasion, I might have told him to go to hell, and then go back to the beach, but this was neither the time nor the place. His eyes scanned the mileage on the dashboard.

"We will be there at three in the morning if everything goes well. It is my job to see us through".

He stared at me. I think he expected some delighted response, but I felt only a wave of insecurity and unease, what with gunmen sitting behind me, their fingers on the triggers.

"Look, if you don't feel like proceeding with the journey, let's call it a day and go back to Lido," I said.

"Good thinking, but we're not going back at this stage. And remember the man at the barricade told you not to come back".

I shook my head.

One of the teenage gunmen in the back of the vehicle started shooting the .50 calibre Browning machine gun.

"What's going on?" I yelled.

"My idea," Hassan Idhleh responded. "We're announcing our approach to the place. At any rate, they're expecting us. It's a sort of security clearance".

The other occupants of the vehicle nodded their approval.

Another barricade loomed ahead, and the driver switched off his lights.

"What next?"

"We must walk from here".

"Where are we?"

"Weliyow Adde", Hassan Idleh responded. "We are just crossing the line, and from now on we are in the Bermuda Triangle".

At four in the morning we were walking carefully, in single file, close to the rubble and garbage, trying to avoid General Kayse's snippers who were said to be deployed on the roof of the former people's Assembly building facing Bermuda.

The three-kilometre enclave was in the territory controlled by General Kayse, but the defenders of the Triangle supported General Robleh and were renowned for their great fighting spirit. General Kayse, using tanks, mortar, long-range artillery guns, and rocket-launchers had tried several times to over-run the enclave, but the inhabitants defended their homes fiercely. It was the most desolate place in the city. The faces of the buildings were pock-marked with holes from shell-fire and bullets.

Then I saw dark shadows, bearing automatic rifles, standing guard on the street corners while we walked past them.

"They're our reception committee," said Hassan Idleh in a hushed voice.

We continued to move through dark alleys in eerie silence. More gunmen could be seen standing in doorways and on street corners. They were bare to the waist, and wore no shoes. There was something about their attitude that attracted my attention. Unlike all the milita men I had seen before, no one here shouted orders, or even said anything; guns were not unnecessarily cocked or pointed at your heart. It seemed that every one here knows what he was doing, and that orders were not necessary.

"Welcome too Bermuda!" somebody shouted. A figure moved out from behind a damaged T-55 tank nearby. "Welcome to Bermuda", he repeated. the voice was as remarkable as I remembered it to be in the days when he and other youngsters disabled government troops in the popular uprising against Siyad Barre.

"Young Abdullahi, I presume?"

The youth moved forward, and, ignoring our greetings of "Nabad" and "Nabadinos," he immediately began telling us the situation.

"We have information that General Kayse is planning another massive attack against us, so we should get you to your bunker. It's a nice bunker, built by us, with a window facing a solid wall. You will be safe there. You may even get some sleep", he said.

It wasn't long before we were seated around a long table, bathed in the glow of candlelight, working through a meal of flattened maize cakes, goat meat, and bananas. Abdullahi ordered his men to collect our vehicle from where we had left it, some five hundred yards away. They would first unload the cargo of fish that we had brought with us from Lido Beach, and then they would park the vehicle in an underground garage.

Our conversation was dominated by talk of the war, and of friends who had been killed in action.

"Why are you reluctant to expand the boundary of Bermuda?" I asked him.

"We are not expansionists", he replied. "Our policy is to defend ourselves and our homes".

"What is the population of Bermuda?"

"About forty thousand, mostly women, children and elderly people. All clans are represented".

"How is your contact with General Robleh's stronghold?"

"Excellent", he said, with a smile of satisfaction. "We have our own secret channels. As for food and drinking water, we are self-sufficient. Of course, some people from the Red Cross and The Doctors Without Borders are trying to help us with medical supplies, and are planning to set up kitchens in several parts of our enclave".

We then talked about the war and the famine, and he revealed that everyone in Bermuda would be glad to see an immediate end to the hostilities. But some clan leaders, including General Kayse, were not interested in peace.

"We in Bermuda will fight to the last to defend our homes and families. We believe that peace will never arrive in Somalia as long as men like General Kayse are hungering for power and leadership".

"How have you managed to keep General Kayse's well-equipped forces at bay for so long?"

"We may not have big guns and tanks, but the morale of our men is very high. After all, it is not the big guns which are the deciding factor in a war; it is the fighting spirit of the men in the field. Take the Algerians and the Viet Cong, as examples".

"Would you observe a ceasefire brokered by the United Nations?" I asked.

Yes, but to sign a ceasefire agreement in New York alone is not enough. We fully support the deployment of a strong international peace-keeping force in

Somalia, with a mandate to enforce, and to shoot anyone who violates it.

"How do you see the future of Somalia?"

Abdullahi leaned back in his chair and sighed.

"I have my fears and hopes," he said. "It is a dreadful thing to say, but I believe that a strong international force, led by the U. S. army should fan out in the country and kill the thugs that snatch food from the mouths of small babies and their skeleton-like mothers. As a first priority, all factions in the country should be disarmed simultaneously, and a national reconciliation conference should be held to set up a broad-based government".

He admitted that what he had seen in the last three months had shocked him even more than the atrocities which the regime of the former dictator had committed against the people during the uprising.

FEBRUARY 15,

- I missed the biggest battle of the war so far. Reports reaching us here said that General Kayse launched a massive offensive against his enemy's stronghold yesterday at 10.00 a.m. local time. The report said that General Kayse, using all the terror weapons at his disposal, including Katyushas, tanks, APCs, and mortars unexpectedly attacked positions held by General Robleh, and the fighting was still going on.

It appeared that no one had expected the attack, because of the ongoing peace negotiations in New York. An eye-witness who fled the area confirmed that the fighting was the worst since the beginning of hostilities in November. He said that General Kayse's forces had stolen into the territory held by his rival, and kept on attacking from the surrounding areas with the intention of occupying the airstrip and General Robleh's headquarters. The Witness attributed the cause of the battle to lack of preparation on the part of the defenders, although they were fighting vigorously to fend off the invaders.

We switched on the radio station controlled by General Kayse, but only music and nationalistic songs were playing, an indication that fighting was taking place. The hope that the clan conflict would come to an end was dashed to the ground by yesterday's fresh offensive.

Abdullahi brought me a newsletter, called "The Bermuda Bay", which was published daily by a group of university students. The four-page quarto sheet's lead story said that yesterday's "unprovoked" attack by General Kayse was clearly aimed at derailing the UN-sponsored peace-talks in New York.

"..... It gives new impetus to the ousted regime. Its troops, for example, were given the chance to wage the third offensive since January. They captured the important capital of Bay region, Baidoa, last September 15. Their main objective is surely Mogadishu"

"Other forces loyal to the former dictator are expected to advance soon on Merca and Shalambood, in the lower Shabellah region, in co-ordination with Siyad Barre's other Baidoa troops' advance on Mogadishu. The renewed offensive by troops loyal to Siyad Barre is greatly encouraged by the split in the USC leadership and the fighting in Mogadishu"

"We knew quite some time ago that General Kayse was planning such an offensive, the third since January, but what we didn't know was that his main objective was General Robleh's territory," Abdullahi said, as I handed him the paper. "We should have known better".

"You thought he was planning to attack Bermuda again, and that's why you put your men on full alert?".

"All we knew was that he was up to no good".

"I believe you are going to have to make some tough decisions," I said. "Will you send reinforcements to help repulse the invaders?".

He crossed his legs and picked up his brand new M-16 assault rifle.

"No, I do not think they need reinforcements just yet, but if the worst comes to the worst, we will have no choice but to attack from the rear. Our loyalties lay with General Robleh".

I tried to imagine what was going on ten miles away, to imagine the sound that must be the most terrible in all the world --- that of Katyushas with their deafening, striking, heart-stopping roars, punching through roofs, walls and doors.

FEBRUARY 16

The fighting was continuing inside and outside the city. Here in Bermuda, we could hear the sound of the big guns. parallel to the fighting, the UN-sponsored peace-talks continued in New York.

Both sides claimed success in the battle. The radio station controlled by General Robleh announced that his forces destroyed several unspecified military hardware, including tanks and APCs, during the four-day-long encounter outside General Robleh's stronghold, while General Kayse said that he was holding the upper hand, and that his forces were now hunting the remnants of General Robleh's "corrupt" officials.

In order to back his claims, General Robleh took several journalists to the front line. They were shown several dozens of the dead bodies of the attacking force, and a T-55 tank which had been seized from the attackers and was later set on fire. They were also taken to the Red Cross hospital, which had been hit by artillery shells and completely ransacked of everything by the attacking forces. According to an eye-witness, five Red Cross doctors and one nurse had managed to escape in a diesel-powered boat, while a doctor and another nurse had been abducted by forces loyal to General Kayse.

Another report said that General Kayse's men had intended to seize the road linking General Robleh's stronghold with the airstrip, "but they were heroically repulsed" by General Robleh's forces.

At the press conference, the second since the fighting first flared up in November, General Robleh gave us details of the ongoing battle. He contradicted earlier reports that had said he was caught unaware and that he lacked intelligence information. He said that he had known in advance of General Kayse's impending offensive, and that his men had crushed the bulk of the attackers. He claimed to have seized a sizeable amount of weapons and killed an estimated eight hundred attackers.

He repudiated General Kayse's claim that his forces had captured his official residence, and he said that the journalists present should be the judges as to the veracity of General Kayse's claim. He said that the "unprovoked" attack was aimed at undermining the peace talks in New York.

Chapter Five

Strange Bedfellows

MUSA MOHAMED RAGHE:

45-year-old former secondary school teacher, married with three children. His school destroyed and his wife and three children fled to the countryside, he decided to take up arms for the first time in his life. He has single-handedly destroyed an APC with a Milan anti-tank rocket, and killed several attackers in a single week. He received shrapnel from mortar; MSF (Doctors Without Borders), removed the fragments from his left thigh, and now is back in action.

OMAR HASSAN MUDDE:

A hard-core convict who escaped from Mogadishu's central prisons, he made his way to Bermuda with another former inmate with rifles they had seized from the guards. He regularly leads a group of armed gangs to loot food from warehouses at the port and airport, to feed the inhabitants of the city.

ISSA ABDI YEBEROW:

A 50-year-old taxi driver who found himself in Bermuda when the fighting broke out, and decided to join the defenders. "In Bermuda, a complete stranger gives you food and drinking water", he said as he oiled his AK-47 automatic rifle. He made his taxi available to the defenders to be used as an ambulance.

ABDI MAHDI IBRAHIM:

A former army sergeant-major and an expert in explosives and bomb-making. He was on leave to visit his ailing mother, who lived in the area, when the civil war broke out. He disabled several tanks and APCs, and led command units to destroy ammunition dumps in the outskirts of the capital. He also trains youngsters in the use of firearms and guerrilla warfare. His mother died of natural causes, but his wife was hit by a stray bullet and died instantly.

NOOR ELMI FARAH:

A former police officer, who still wears his now tattered uniform and sports a Browning automatic pistol and an M-16 automatic rifle. He was formerly in charge of the local police-station. Recently, he led a four-man militia and ambushed a convoy ferrying General Kayse's troops. There were no survivors, he

said. He received a gun wound during an encounter at the height of the civil war

SHIRE ELMI WARSAMEH:

A 35-year old former university student who edits the Bermuda newspaper. In the months after former dictator Mohamed Siyad Barre's ousting, Shire and six of his co-workers managed to produce their paper regularly despite continuous heavy bombardments against their premises by General Kayse's fighters. He is mainly responsible for urging the Red Cross to set up soup kitchens in Bermuda. He also invited Doctors Without Borders to treat the wounded and dispense medicines. Other relief workers avoid the area.

Armed with bazookas and automatic rifles, he and his colleagues personally deliver the paper to his readers in the area on nominal fees, and often free of charge for those who have no money to part with.

MS. HALIMA ISMAIL ABDILLAH:

Supervises the orphanage and the soup kitchen in an endless sea of problems, and witnesses death or injury every day. She worked at Mogadishu's General Hospital, "Digfer", as a nurse before the civil war. "Everyone was running; nurses were killed or injured in the crossfire, but I managed to find my way to Bermuda, only to find that my home was totally destroyed", she said.

But today, in a pock-marked but well-kept compound, Halima tries to maintain an island of sanity, caring for some two hundred orphans. A lorry carrying food donated for the children by Unicef was hijacked at gunpoint, but Bermuda defenders later pursued the gunmen and salvaged the relief food, killing all the hijackers at a point miles away.

"Morale is very high here because we know that we are being defended by our people," she said.

DR. YUSUF HILOWLEH MAALIN

"I can't stand it anymore", Dr. Yusuf said. He was referring to the hundreds of injured people in his makeshift hospital in the heart of Bermuda. He was one of the few Somali doctors who stayed put. He worked as a surgeon at the De Martino Hospital before coming to this area, where he turned a school house into a hospital.

"No place in Mogadishu is a more obvious target for artillery fire than Bermuda", he said while watching as a one-year-old girl groped at the dried, milkless breasts of her wounded mother.

Last week, the hospital received several artillery shells, which killed and wounded a number of patients, Dr. Yusuf said. Dozens of fresh graves could be seen behind the hospital.

DIFFERENCES SHOULD BE SETTLED ON A NEGOTIATING TABLE

Hilin Weekly Gazzette Editor's Interview with General Robleh.

Q. What do you think was the root of the confrontation that took place in Mogadishu among the two factions of the USC?

A. As you probably know, the confrontation that occurred in Mogadishu last Thursday was not the first of its kind; it was the third. This last, however, was most unfortunate. It disturbed all Somalis everywhere, because everybody, after the overthrow of the dictator, was awaiting a better government to replace him, a government that could heal the physical and psychological wounds that had been inflicted on the Somalis.

No one expected that actions so reminiscent of the dictator could be so easily repeated. We greatly regret what happened, for it creates distrust and sorrow among our ranks.

The causes of the mishap were, if you give them close scrutiny, decidedly futile and cheap. And politics is such a strange and awkward vocation in Africa, it can pull two brothers or close friends apart. In the civilized world, political differences are usually settled on a negotiating table, and in a peaceful manner. You do not see people running to get a gun. It appears that here in Somalia we have not reached that political maturity. No misunderstanding can justify the use of guns.

Q. What arrangements have been made, politically and militarily, to counter the offensive of troops loyal to Siyad Barre, since they have already captured Baidoa, the provincial capital of Bay?

A. Siyad Barre has not acquired the ability to bring himself back to power, but he is skillfully exploiting the misunderstanding that surfaced within the USC. He is closely monitoring events in Mogadishu, particularly the mood of the USC. As a result, he has made use of the situation to launch this offensive against us.

I believe that the Somali people will rebuff all his attempts, and it will not take

much to check his advance and shatter his ill designs once and for all.

Q. But the human and property cost in every confrontation is too high to sustain, and the people are tired of more. Are other organisations who fought against the regime of the former dictator ready to send troops to fight Siyad Barre, especially now that the USC is not in shape to do so?

A. First, I should extend my condolences to all those affected by the latest sad disturbances. But as far as the fight against Siyad Barre is concerned, the six organisations agreed upon a clear-cut policy to confront the dictator's troops with force.

The organisations are ready to execute that undertaking now.

It was planned that a delegation from Mogadishu be sent to Galkayo to bring peace to warring groups, and another to Kismayu. Both delegates were temporarily halted because of the outbreak of violence in Mogadishu. As soon as the Kismayu delegation arrives, troops to fight Siyad Barre are to be mobilized.

Q. With the invasion threat posed by Siyad Barre increasing by the day, the only available troops now are those of the SDM and USC, since it will take at least some time to mobilize forces from other organisations. Will the urgency of the situation not call for the leaders to provide full logistical backing for the SDM and USC?

A. Naturally, it will be compulsory to mobilize and extend all possible logistical support to these organisations whose forces are ready to fend off the invaders. Even if there is one single organisation, we will throw all our weight behind it. We have to take into account what is at stake: the defence of a nation. We are ready to offer anything required that is now in our power. But we have to cease the current interclan warfare between the clans belonging to the USC.

Q. How do you intend to side-step the clannish setting of existing organisations in your attempt to establish a national government?

A. The Somali people have been fighting for their democratic rights, which have been denied them in the past twenty-one years. The organisations that liberated this country, no matter in what form or method they employed, overthrew the dictator, and they deserve a lot of respect from us. The government that is to be set up will be a democratic one, which will plan for and guarantees the introduction of a multi-party system, after we put our house in order. Present organisations, you are quite right, have a clannish flavour, but these would naturally develop into political parties in the future, and they are expected to outgrow their clan limitations.

Q. If your efforts to effect security in Mogadishu fails, would you request the intervention of outside forces to assist you in securing stability?

A. I sincerely hope that the need to invite in foreign forces will not arise. I hope we will be able to settle our problems by ourselves. So as to show the world that we are self-reliant and are able to solve our differences on our own. But if it becomes imperative, although I strongly dislike it, we would take any measure we see appropriate to quell the instability for the interests of peace and national unity, even if that would mean calling for outside intervention.

Q. Peace and Stability do not appear to be forthcoming in the South. Will this change your attitude towards the North's secession?

A. To me, the unity of Somalia is sacred, neither bargainable nor disputable. The insecurity, instability, and other difficulties that come our way should be dealt with separately: national unity is undebatable.

I hope our brothers in the North will understand and share with us this concern. The interest of the Somali people is in unity. All around us, people are coming together. Take the example of the Yemens, and that of Germany and the European Economic Community country-members. People are trying to stress and strengthen common factors, all those that bring them together. Nobody can accept or sympathize with a decision that will partition Somalia - a one country, one-people State. If there are certain quarters who close their eyes on Somali's plight, we understand those people are not promoting our national aspirations. I hope stability will return to the South; although I do not see the instability in the South as an adequate justification for secession.

THANK YOU.



FEBRUARY 17,

- I am reproducing in my diary the following articles from the HILIN GAZZETTE, an independent weekly published by a group of Somali intellectuals who decided to stay on in Somalia, despite the turmoil:

CITIZENS FLEE THE CAPITAL

By a Hilin reporter

The recent clashes that took place between USC factions in Mogadishu revived the looting of vehicles, burglaries and rapes. These crimes became more acute because of the arrival of a new wave of armed clan militia from the country-side. Following in the footsteps of their predecessors, they believe that it is through looting and killing that one acquires quick riches and a new social and economic prominence.

As a result of fresh harassments, rapes and looting, a wave of people of Yemeni origin are panicking and fleeing away with their lives from Mogadishu. These people, overcrowded on trucks and buses bound for Berbera (in the north), have caused a marked increase in transportation fares to the north.

This passenger boom sky-rocketed fares from 100,000 Somali Shillings to 250,000

BULLETS HIT AFRICA AIR

By a Hilin Reporter

On Sunday, Air Africa cancelled its flight to Berbera when it was hit by bullets from an unidentified gun-man at the airport.

Complications started when an SNM (a guerrilla movement which controls the Northern Region) delegation bound for Berbera arrived with heavy luggage. The delegation had missed several flights for lack of space in the preceding weeks.

Chapter Six

From The Pages of Hilin

The management of Africa Air could not provide or offer flight for the delegation and its cargo. The delegation was determined not to be left behind this time, but the realisation of this entailed leaving out passengers going to the North and their belongings.

The general confusion prevailing at the runway became ugly. Facing the long line of passengers were awkward lines of militia men holding cocked AK-47 rifles at the ready. The militia were supposedly there to prevent any breach of security but now they looked as if they were holding the people on the tarmac as hostages.

Because of the confusion, it was only a few minutes before take-off when it was discovered that the plane was damaged by unnoticed bullets.

After some inspection was made, the people were told that the plane needed to go back to Nairobi for repairs.

The plane took off with a great part of the passengers' cargo in its hold.

NO WATER FOR MOGADISHU

By a Hilin reporter

Mogadishu residents have been without water for some time now. The fuel allocated for the pumps alongside the Afgoi road, it is said, found its way to the blackmarket instead. Consequently, only a fraction, if any, of the fuel for the reservoirs reached its destination. Our sources say that when the militia was asked to leave the premises, they demanded an amount in the region of 400 million Shillings.

It is also reported that water pumps from the same wells are in the hands of other militia in town. They will only let go of the pumps if their demands for money are met in full. The water pumps were lately rehailed with the help of EEC funds. Another clan militia, guarding Radio Mogadishu's transmitters, has refused access to the transmitters unless they are paid 100 million Somali Shillings.

Of late, it has become the norm among various militia groups to resort to acts of violence and blackmail. The vital areas they guard, like the water wells, have become strong bargaining chips for these men. It is the general public which ultimately suffers.

SDA & USF PROMISE TROOPS

By a Hilin Reporter

Following the latest offensive of forces loyal to Siyad Barre and the fall of Baidoa, a leader of the USC called on all those organisations who fought against the former dictator to come up with troops to take a counteroffensive.

The official did not specify the quota of fighters and equipment each organisation is required to bring.

Up to now, only two organizations, the SDA and the USF, have expressed support to the call. They did not, however, say how many men they will contribute to the effort, when their forces can be made ready, or from where they can possibly come in time.

HILIN EDITORIAL

Somalia is saddled with a string of catastrophies. It is being pulled apart and to all sides like a morsel of meat thrown to starving wolves. Thousands of amputees, thousands more destitutes bent double by hunger and disease- and yet thousands and thousands more have fled the country to seek refuge elsewhere.

This is the end result of ten years of civil strife, crowned by the events of the last eight months. The weekend attacks by one militia group against another puts our hopes for peace in the deep freeze. Lasting stability, international aid and the reunification of dispersed families all rest on peace. The factional fighting indicates the negligence by the USC of its prime responsibility: to first bring peace to its community and then to resolve their differences in a peaceful manner. Higher USC officials place no great faith in protecting the lives and properties that are under the organisation's administration. Many believe that the leaders could have intervened with their respective followers and stopped the fighting.

If the current political and military uncertainty continues to prevail in Mogadishu, more fear will be instilled in those who still cling to life, forcing them to move further from the battlefield, which is Somalia.

Worse still, the other organisations in the country are divided into two camps: a camp that wholly supports the formation of a broad-based government and the restoration of peace; and another camp that aligns itself with the ousted Siyad Barre, preferring the gun to political stability in Somalia. This latter camp believes that the divided USC has no supporters and the division now emerging from within the SDM constitutes another factor. This rift has greatly weakened the forces that

were keeping the troops of Siyad Barre at bay.

The stark reality is:

- (1) eight out of every ten casualties died from sustained injuries;
- (2) seven out of ten people hit were civilians, who were in no way involved or even remotely instrumental to the feuding;
- (3) and for a people already enfeebled by nine months of intense bombardment and indiscriminate shootings, the ensuing shocks of political instability, severe shortage of resources with which to feed and clothe themselves, erratically operated water systems, medical inattention and lack of education and schooling have taken their toll.

Ugo Betti, the Italian playwright, once wrote: "If friction is to be stopped, the only way is to remove the cause; if disturbances are to be brought to an end, the way is to eliminate the disturber".

We in this newspaper reiterate once again that people should not hasten to take sides at the slightest provocation. To take up arms against each other should be the furthest thing from our minds.

MEDIATORY COMMITTEE

By a Hilin Reporter

Yesterday, the Communities Mediating Committee (CMC) brought out a twenty-two point document which largely dealt with the solution of the USC communities' differences.

The elders point out that if Qur'anic precepts and the respective national and USC constitutions are ushered to from the outset, violence and destructive differences can be avoided. The recommendations specifically address the clans, as they do not leave out the possibility that the two contending leaders can work together in an atmosphere free from personal antagonism. The CMC was, however, faulted in over-stretching their document to levels of national scale, which are not included in the outline of the initial duties. The CMC began its activities one day after the two USC forces clashed in Mogadishu. Its sessions will continue amid intense bombardments by both sides.

ERITREANS SHOW THEIR CONCERN

By a Hinlin Reporter

A three-man delegation led by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Eritrean Provisional Administration and the EPLF Secretary for External Affairs, Mr. Mohamed Saeed, arrived here on a special aircraft from Nairobi, and has been in Mogadishu for more than ten days.

The delegation first held talks with the United Somali Congress (USC) Executive Committee to give briefings of the objectives of their visit. Before arriving here, they had met with members of some of Somalia's organisations in Ethiopia and Kenya.

"The plight of the Somali people is a matter of concern to us. It is noteworthy to remember that Somalia was one of the few nations that supported us through our long struggle," Mr. Saeed told the Executive Committee.

The Eritrean delegation later met with General Kayse. The envoys plan to hold a discussion with General Robleh and members of the organisations in Somalia.

After leaving Mogadishu, The delegation will fly to Kismayu and then Berbera.

THE YOUNG MUJAAHID NEEDS FUTURE GUARANTEE

By A. Y. Artan

In the process of the fight against Siyad Barre, and in his final overthrow, many of our able-bodied youngsters have been drawn away from productive sectors and into Mogadishu. Now these people have not only abandoned economic sectors in which they have been useful, but their presence in the capital is causing a lot of social and security troubles.

In the future, it will be impossible for any government to absorb this young militia, as the majority have no skills of their own and are numerically too many to accomodate.

This is a problem of great proportions and one cannot simply brush it aside. What makes tackling this problem so important is the fact that there are huge arsenals in the hands of these youngsters. Both the general public and the officials of the organizations are aware that it is paramount to collect arms in order to effect any security - at least in Mogadishu.

But what many people in the top positions fail to realize is that the question of arms collection is closely linked to the issue of safety for those who overthrew the dictator, for the hundreds who have moved from the country-side, for hundreds of displaced city-dwellers, and for thousands more teenagers of school age with no schools to attend.

The possession of a gun gives people a sense of confidence. They feel that now they can defend their interests, even if in the process they violate the rights of fellow citizens. They will never relinquish arms so easily. Many sincere and responsible people will think before they hand over their weapons.

If the clan leaders are seriously considering the collection of arms, the youngsters should be given a vision of what their future lives could be like, without the "security" of arms. Some sort of guarantee of a better future must be offered to them. Without guarantees, a lot of people will mount stiff resistance. Many people feel arms collection and the reintroduction of security measures puts their future in the dark.

The problem of the thousands of youngsters who have left their families and livestock in the countryside, not to mention those who lost their lives, is not an issue to be taken lightly. Perhaps the first task of the clan leaders should be to address the Mujaahid issue.

A new armed forces might absorb a portion of the youth in Mogadishu, but the remaining greater majority must be helped, persuaded, and materially motivated to go back to their livestock and leave the gun behind.

If a new government does not come up with a resettlement and employment program for the now-armed youngsters, it will certainly fail in its cleaning-up campaigns.

CLAN OFFICIALS ASSURE ARMY

By a Hilin Reporter

There was once a Somali army that was the pride and envy of Africa. Or-so we believed.

That army, spoiled and misused by the former regime, virtually disbanded itself. Some of the troops defected to national liberation organizations. Some went home to attend to their own private family and businesses.

And yet some more used their expertise and weapons to rob and loot the very people they were drafted to protect.

The former two groups, tired of the long wait, formed a protest outside the strongholds of the two clan leaders this week, in a peaceful show of feelings. They said that:

- (1) they wished to be re-enlisted properly;
- (2) they were ready to resume their national duties;
- (3) they wished to be treated as a national body and not as a clan militia;
- (4) they wanted to be paid for their past and present services.

The clan leaders assured them that their points were well taken.

THE SOMALI DISASTER

By H.M. Jama, Hilin Columnist

Fighting of any sort brings with it nothing but woe and destruction. Armed confrontations are the worst. They engulf both instigators and bystanders alike.

It is understandable that combatants wish for each other defeat and total subjugation. But what about the millions who were standing at the sidelines as innocent spectators, who only followed the turn of events as they were given them. It is usually these citizens that suffer most. Hence, there is no victor in combats of this sort, since the actual victims - the bystanders - and the means by which they are dragged into the events, leave a permanent black mark on the consciences of both combatants.

Let us look at three recent world events. First, there is Iraq, the mightiest of the Arab nations in firepower, invading a sister Arab State, Kuwait. The Iraqi troops spare no tricks in pillaging Kuwait City and chase both its Emirs and citizens away, bare-footed and bewildered. The aggressor tells the world that it has done nothing but take back a piece of land that always belonged to it.

The people are now back in Kuwait and the Emirs are reinstated. But did anybody take the trouble to ask how the women who were raped and looted at the frontiers survived? Perhaps one should exchange confidences with those who came through the chilly, biting nights and the equally distressing, baking days of the Jordanian Desert.

Second, a score of the richest, most powerful nations in the world gang up on Iraq. The objective was said to be the ousting of Iraqi troops from Kuwaiti soil. Two other objectives came to be heard during the ensuing weeks: neutralize Iraqi nuclear capabilities and overthrow Saddam Hussein. The first was realized through thousands and thousands of air raids made on cities like Baghdad and Basra in Iraq-proper and their civilian population. We cannot, in all probability, believe that all those bombs fell on military targets. The second objective was a failure. Not even one strand of Saddam's hair was touched. The wrath and radiation of the Western countries only made unwilling victims of the Iraqi population. The wailing babies, denied their milk by the current trade embargo and those crazed by the falling bombs, have a story to tell.

The third example is how the rest of the world made inaproportionate amounts of noise and opted on an equally mad choice by practising their nuclear power arsenals on an uninvolved population. This same world kept its distance and banned its media from factually reporting and armed confrontation championed and largely masterminded by the America of George Bush. In short, the world ignored everything and everybody unless sanctioned or favoured by the U. S. and its allies in OPERATION DESERT STORM.

If my readers cannot at all picture these events for themselves, they can ask a Somali. Any man in the street will tell you of how it feels to be displaced and dispossessed; of how maddening and unfair it is to be caught in the crossfire; to be shot at, shelled, beaten and looted; of how inadequate and impotent a whole nation feels when slighted or totally exposed to a news blackout; of how one sleeps to the chatter of machine guns overhead and awakens to a cold fire. Ask to your heart's content, and I promise you will need no other authority on the subject after you've asked a Somali.

CUT OFF AND UNCARED FOR

Somalis Should Reshuffle Their Cards

By Hassan M. Jama, Hilin columnist

So much happened. Much, much more than what can be given justice in a mere outline is meant for an indifferent world. A world for whom Somalia and its troublesome Somalis remain a delible question mark. A world whose media-led policy-makers find their contraversial UNITAs runaway Balkan states, and poverty-stricken Sudans to be nothing more than weaving intrigues, to be spliced

open at will, making more engrossing and rewarding reading in their books. A world whose values rest more self gratification and muscle-flexing, as in the case of tiny Grenada, or the more recent Iraqi debacle, making naught of its much publicized concern for human betterment and individual dignity.

If recent dictionary editions have not changed the definition of "concern" to another that is more suitable for emerging superpowers, then we Somalis are more dense than what I normally would have thought. I would say we missed the writing on the wall by a long mile. The message, loud and clear, spelt out our insignificance to the global power games.

The pain of being ignored is exacerbated a thousand - fold by twenty-plus years of progress toward near-annihilation which still hasn't come to a satisfactory conclusion, even after nine post Barre months.

RE-APPRAISAL

Once we come to terms with our none-too-encouraging situation, and its equally bleak undertones, we ought to give more thought to the prerogatives that we should.

(a) Re-appraise our foreign relations, and seriously reconsider our position with the rest of the world. To do that, we have been representing our case to the international community. That our begging bowl remains empty after nine long months, and after all of us, from the people at the very top to the dazed men and women in the street, made a clamour loud enough to be heard beyond the beyond, suffices for a reply.

(b) To priorily ask for humane assistance in four basic necessities:

(1) bread and

(2) shelter for the displaced, dispossessed, and disabled

(3) a workable design for national reconciliation and the cessation of all hostilities--verbal, physical, or otherwise, and

(4) no-strings-attached material and political input that can chart us out of the Siyad-Barre-regime muddied waters.

That the most vulnerable in our midst double and quadruple by the day, to this day, is a valid proof of the futility of our feeble efforts; it is also in indication of those among us who have been misappropriating, embezzling, robbing, and hoarding what little aid has been flown or floated to our out-stretched hands.

We must look inward unto ourselves, and our inner resevoirs, for courage and

guidance to rectify our ills, multiply the gains, and face the world as equal partners. We ought to divest ourselves of the apathy and self-abasement that have handicapped and characterised us since the late 1960s. The will to take a firm step forward, no matter on whose toes we tread in the process, should supercede servility to the largely unctious, self-important Z-class politicians who hamper the developing world.

We can no longer trust leaders whose only claim to the positions they occupy is the ability to keep their respective clan-elders grinning, well-satisfied on national loot. If we stand shoulder-to shoulder, and pull strongly against the devastating troubles of a tribal Pandora's Box, we will surely overcome the current national disorientation. If by design or omission we lose the right to assert our wishes on the leadership, we will never be able to retrieve it again without sacrificing so much more than can be saved if only we act more judiciously. Unless we discard the worn-out shoes of Siyad Barre, and go to the political cobbler for a new, custom-made pair of our own, we will be piling more woes on ourselves to eternity.

MAIL BAG

To the Editor

HILIN WEEKLY GAZETTE

Mogadishu

Bravo, So far, so good!

Your presentations are both highly journalistic and informative. With the appropriate political, economic, and social environments, HILIN could be of world standard.

**S.W. Herzi
Mogadishu**

There is no doubt that the corrupt clan leaders played a major role in the destruction of the country during the past nine months. In their hasty effort to snatch power, the clan leaders applied the infamous Siyad Barre tactics of "divide and rule" to the USC file and rank. They created clan militia, headed by nomadic

clan elders, so there could never be a USC army under a single command. To set up a national army is undesirable to them.

During their rule, they did nothing to save government equipment and offices from looters; more than seventy per cent was available at the time Siyad Barre fled. The looting and destruction continue to this day, and nothing discernable is done to stop them.

These, and many other things, show that this group first served itself, and that their only goal is to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor.

I say: "Please think of what is good for this country and its people. If you can't, it is not shameful to defect and lay down your weapons.

Ismail Ahmed Noor
Mogadishu

Hurrah, Mr. Baffo! Your article on tribalism and modern politics in Somalia was quite fascinating. I never gave up hope that one day an expert would come forth who could put forth contemporary alternatives to clan-based politics. Please develop the contents to a more acceptable and applicable level which can serve as a check and balance system for government.

Elmi Mirreh
Mogadishu.

The unification of the two parts of Somalia in 1960 was voluntary. If that unity was not based on the desires of the two peoples, it would have been impossible for the political parties and regional leaders of that day to realise it.

If that unity had not taken place in 1960, it is beyond doubt that the two regions would have remained as sister states. If now those two peoples decide to stay apart, I believe there is no power in the world that can hinder it.

The responsibility to create an atmosphere whereby Somalis, wherever they are, can live together in peace and mutual respect lies solely on the shoulders of leaders and intellectuals. They can start by affording due respect to the bilateral agreements, and by the careful handling of the mass media. Insults and misinformation broadcasted through the radios or written in newspapers would serve nothing but to create more discord and greater alienation among us. One

remember that we are undergoing a difficult and very sensitive period in history.

Ibrahim H. Mohamed
Mogadishu

Congratulations for a good start! There was a real need for credible English - language newspaper like yours. Nationals, both here and abroad, who are interested in Somali affairs need factual reports from Somalia.

May we suggest that you present us with more constructive articles. We reserve our final judgement, however, 'till we see more of you in the near future.

Qassim H. A.,
Ali F. A.,
Omar A. H.
Mogadishu

In your Sunday issue, Mr. Shirwa outlined procedures that should govern the selection of a worthy administration, that would be able to rescue the people from an already sinking vessel. But he forgot a "should be" article that should have preceded this one, in order to put a fragmented USC in one jug. The USC, I believe, is the main and basic organ the new government will be based on. But since the leaders of the splinter groups are at loggerheads, I very much doubt if a viable government will be formed in the near future.

Osman Hassan
Mogadishu

I note with regret that almost all your readers concentrate of future administration and the division of cabinet posts, but none of them mentions the carnage in Mogadishu. Is it possible that they were in league with the perpetrators of death, doom and destruction in Mogadishu?

A.A. Yusuf
Dispossessed & Displaced

I support an interim government which will equitably distribute cabinet portfolios and would not give special favours to any particular organisation. But, alas, I doubt if the USC has even one powerful figure in its favour in the top five leading hawks of an interim government, while others have!

Elmi Mirreh
Mogadishu

DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE FROM NAIROBI

By Hilin reporters

Mogadishu - Unconfirmed reports reaching here claim that there are intensive meetings and consultations taking place in Nairobi, Kenya, among members of the SSDF, SPM, USPF and USP. In other words, all are of the Darood clan.

According to these reports, the parties are deeply divided on the issues that were discussed. It will be extremely difficult for them to reach a unified political strategy.

Tactical lines in the Nairobi organisations differ. They can be put into three categories:

- * Put weight behind the reconciliation conferences, cooperate with the USC and take part in an interim government;
- * Condemn the reconcilliation conferences, establish a united Darood army and wage a war against the USC and interim government; and
- * Refrain from hostilities but establish parallel local administrations: Puntland Republic in the Bari region, parts of Nugal and parts of Mudug region; and Jubland Republic in southern areas, controlled by their forces. Negotiate with them on possible federation treaties so as to share power with the Hawiye on an equal basis.

It is not yet known which of the three positions is strongest. It is expected, however, that the conference will come up with a unified strategy soon.

The reports also reveal that the other organizations are exerting pressure on USPF (Marehan) to get rid of Mohamed Siyad Barre immediately. Italy and Egypt are both said to be ready to give him asylum.

Delegations from SPM and SSDF, who were recently in Mogadishu, are

attending the Nairobi conference. A delegation led by USC officials secretly left for Nairobi to attend the conference also. The participation of the USC delegation gives national significance to what otherwise would have been a clan conference. Its outcome is therefore expected to influence the balance of power on clan politics. The consequences of this conference are, however, not easy to forecast with any true authority. That the entire Darood clan give full support to the reconciliation conference and the realisation of national stability is one option. An all-out war, more bloodshed and further instability is another option. A disagreement on a common strategy and a possible gulf among the different Darood factions is yet another option.

KENYAN REFUGEES

Find The Going Rough

By Ismail Mohamed Sheikh

Mogadishu - It is running into the second year since the inflow of Kenyan refugees into Somalia began. Unlike other refugee cases where people are forced to leave their country, the Kenyan refugees of Somali ethnic origin were not the victims of internal war. The Kenyan government did not have legitimate reasons for the expulsion of a section of the Kenyan community. The refugees themselves do not understand the actual reasons behind their expulsions and subsequent displacements. What they do know is the fact that their deportation to neighbouring Somalia was entirely illegal and unconstitutional. The so-called screening of Kenyans of Somali ethnic origin was by itself unlawful. According to the chairman of the Kenya Law Society, "It was not only unconstitutional but a very sad day for Kenyan justice and an abuse in international laws and norms".

The method used to arrest, detain and deport the refugees was extremely ugly, inhumane and brutal. Administration policemen from special tribes were engaged and their mission was carried out very secretly. Since no legal process was used, they were given a free hand to manhandle people the hard way. People were picked up from the streets, some dragged out of cars, while others were invaded in their private homes. In some cases, victims were clubbed and identification papers torn, as they were forced into a police van which carried them to a detention camp at Embakasi. Not a single person deported was charged in a court of law; none were given access to legal advice or defence. The most inhuman aspect of the deportation was that no one was allowed to contact his family members, or was guaranteed the safety of his property. It was a bonanza for both criminals and

corrupt members of the security forces.

The worst consequence of this move is the separation of families, where children remain without parents.

It is very sad that the Kenyan government never changed or corrected its mistakes.

The Kenyan refugees express their gratitude to the Somali public, but claim they have suffered heavily from the negligence and total indifference on the part of the former Somali government.

In retrospect, the refugees now believe that their deportation was a clandestine agreement between Siyad Barre and the Kenyan government. The deportees simply fell victim to the liberation war which was going on in Somalia. Their tribal affinity to those struggling to topple the Siyad Barre regime was considered as a sort of support for the war.

It is very unfortunate that the plight of the Kenyan refugees was worsened as a consequence of the Somali civil war. It is sad that those who used to care for them are themselves faced with identical economic problems and are unable to provide any assistance.

Therefore, unless immediate and timely governmental and international aid is received, the refugees have no other alternative but to learn to live in abject poverty, hunger, and lack of medical care. The dangers of a bleak future loom large over their heads. The refugees have received no humanitarian assistance worth mentioning during their stay in Somalia. All told, the relief assistance received cannot cover even twenty per cent of the refugees' needs. It should be noted that the refugee populace numbered about 16,000 people, and others were lately forced out of their country in the same way. They include a sizeable number of children, some born in Somalia, and some elderly and sick people.

ORGANISATIONS RELEASE OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

By Hilin Reporter

Mogadishu - Following the violent disturbances that entangled Mogadishu, political organisations here released statements both condolences to the effected people, and on their respective positions on inter-related issues on current Somali politics.

The first came out from SDA, USF, SSDF, SDM, and SPM. It is delivered here

in verbatim, in its original English Version:

"In a meeting held by five signatories of the Somali Reconciliation Conference, the parties had a lengthy discussion on the present security and political situation in Somalia, particularly in the capital, Mogadishu.

"In this meeting held in the wake of the recent fighting, the following resolutions were made:-

1. The above parties are deeply sorry and touched by the incidents and unexpected armed conflicts in the capital in which large number of innocent citizens, young and old were killed and injured and many others lost their properties through looting and destruction by artillery fire.

"Further to this, the parties send their condolences to the Somali people everywhere and in particular to those who lost their lives and properties, and pray God, and Almighty, to bless their souls.

2. "The parties also emphatically declare to the Somali people wherever they are to observe in full and implement the joint reconciliation agreement already reached by the six parties, namely, USF, SDM, SDA, USC, SSDF, and SPM which we believe enshrine the aspirations and unity of the Somali people.

REFUGEES IN THEIR OWN LAND

By A. Y. Artan and A. M. Shirwa, Hilin Gazzette.

In the compound of former Deputy Prime Minister, General Mohamed Abshir Musa's house, 3,500 displaced people, the majority of which belonged to his clan, the Majeerteen, sought refuge. The house is opposite Villa Baidoa. Most of these people were driven there by fear of persecution, a few weeks after Siyad Barre fled the capital. It was the beginning of an era when the fight for the liberation of the country took an ugly turn.

The majority of these people were Mogadishu residents, with their own houses, businesses, and government jobs. But there were also some from the outlying regions, who had suffered and survived similar terrors. All of these people had arrived with their lives only.

No space remains vacant over all the compound. The structures are not even worthy for sheep, let alone human beings. In fact, one can describe it as hastily patched chicken coops that can neither keep away rain, nor any other severe element. All other camps share these sorry "shelters", as a matter of record.

Mohamed Saeed Farah, 50, owned a foodstuffs store in El-gab, the centre. His store was looted and the last of his spilled grains was swept away.

"I am a hostage of circumstances here. My family managed to flee. I have not the least idea of their whereabouts or conditions", he said.

Ibado Farah, 55, said she came originally from Ethiopia along with fifteen other members of her family. They settled in the North. The war there took two of her sons away. The rest travelled here to Mogadishu. Relatives bought them a house. Once again, two more of her sons fell under the bullets of the armed struggle against Siyad Barre earlier this year. Another was wounded, but survived. Ibado herself sports two bullet wounds on her shoulder, sustained when some armed gangs attacked her compound several months ago.

"I am planning to find my way back to Ethiopia with surviving members of my family", she told us. The people in her charge include her senile mother.

Haali Gashaan, who we met in the compound, arrived from Galgaduud, with six of her children, just before the final showdown began in Mogadishu. She said that she and her kids had been compelled to move to the camp because of the scarcity of rations and the constant worries. She now lives with some distant relatives in the Medina suburb of Mogadishu.

The greatest difficulties these people face are lack of food supply and medical care. Since the General left Mogadishu a few months ago, Mohamed Sheikh Elmi, a member of the compound committee, said food became more scarce and its delivery less attended to and more difficult.

"We have not received a single kilo of food for the past couple of months," he said. "The ICRC and the Islamic Foundation (Rabidat Al Islam) were our main donors. The ICRC, for example, used to give us four kilogrammes of food grains and one litre of cooking oil per person per month," he added. He stated that out of the total compound inhabitants, only seven hundred were provided for by the charity organisations.

The people there also accuse the camp committee of mismanagement and misappropriation of what little food is allocated to the refugees. They claim that committee members sell back a good part of the food to the market for their own personal gain.

When HILIN visited the camp, there was some food in the store. People holding empty sacks, empty cooking utensils and plastic bags were crowded at the store's entrance. There was a lot of jostling and indignant shoves going on. The confusion at the entrance was multiplied by gunfire heard inside. Despite

everything, men were dragging bags of food out, obviously commandeered unfairly. Soon the women, the children, and those enfeebled by age, still clutching their empty sacks, were the only people left standing outside, shrieking their frustration and indignation.

"People from outside, whose names were not in the lists, snatched food from our mouths," a very old woman, wrinkled and bent double by malnourishment, told us outside the store.

A Toyota Hilux, loaded with bags of rice and tins of cooking oil, was parked back-to-back with the store entrance. When we enquired where the food was being taken, a man who claimed to be a committee-member told us that it was for the General's family. The people, however, say it is lie and that no such food goes to the General's house. It is the Committee, they say, that uses the General's name for their own ends.

All this time, gunfire was heard inside the food store. Out of nowhere, an armoured personnel carrier appeared and hit the store's wall. It left a gaping hole. The people were not greatly alarmed and seemed to be quite familiar with what appeared to us to be strange events.

A young mother in her mid-twenties, one of those who had been left outside to return empty-handed, confided to us that she had delivered a baby while here and she had nowhere to turn - no milk for the baby, no clothes for herself and the child and no food to keep soul and flesh together.

"It is not an overstatement if I tell you that my baby and I will die of starvation very soon," she cried. Other people, the majority of whom are old, tell us that when they can no longer tolerate the hunger and want that they are now suffering, they will be forced to throw dignity to the wind and go begging in the streets for titbits

FEBRUARY 21

Nigerian Foreign Minister, Major-General Nwachukwa, arrived here today and delivered a message from Nigerian President, Ibrahim Babangida, the current chairman of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), to General Robleh, regarding the tragic situation in Somalia.

General Nwachukwa told journalists that the OAU would welcome UN peace-keeping forces in Mogadishu, to monitor the ceasefire signed in New York. Earlier, the Nigerian Foreign Minister had met with General Kayse, but it is not known what transpired between the two men. Sources at the meeting said that General Kayse had accepted the ceasefire.

Shelling continued all night and morning, with both sides claiming victory in the battlefield.

FEBRUARY 25

A nine-man delegation from the United Nations, the OAU, the Arab League and the Islamic Conference Organisation (ICO), are expected to arrive here today to witness the signature of the ceasefire agreement.

The fighting is gaining momentum in both sections of the divided city. This morning, a ship carrying humanitarian food aid to the starving people of Mogadishu was forced to turn away after it was fired upon twice by anti-aircraft guns.

The Central Fuel Depot was set on fire. Thousands of cubic metres of fuel was either burnt or spilled into the sea, polluting the environment and endangering marine life. This act of sabotage will also severely affect the city's erratic water-supply, seeing as it depends on diesel fuel.

MARCH 3

The ceasefire sponsored by the United Nations was signed here today, but General Kayse's forces fired artillery salvos not far from where the UN, OAU, the Arab League and ICO officials were meeting with General Robleh to sign the truce. One person was killed.

MARCH 26

The fragile ceasefire is holding, and both sides agreed to jointly operate the airport and seaports to facilitate the distribution of emergency aid. The UN will send fifty peacekeeping forces to Mogadishu.

EPILOGUE

The first question everybody asks the moment they learn that I managed to escape from Mogadishu is, "How did you get out of that hell?" I've been asked this question an average of twice a week for the past eight months.

I boarded a UN chartered Tupolov aircraft with only the clothes on my back, leaving everything else behind. I sat in the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi thinking about what I had gone through. It didn't seem possible, just not possible, to have been where I was before, and to be where I was then, all in the same afternoon.

One of the correspondents from the French news agency who had been on the plane with me was sitting opposite, also by himself. We looked at each other, shook our heads, and laughed. For a moment, I thought I had gone insane as a result of what I had witnessed during the past eighteen months.

Mogadishu was a very bad place, but the airstrip in the north of the city was the worst place on earth. There was nothing random about the shelling there. There is no feeling in the world that compares with the feeling I felt as I became airborne out of Mogadishu.

This is the story about a young photographer who failed to make it. He was a tall Somali from the defunct Somali Films Agency in Mogadishu. He was probably about twenty-five, although it was not easy to guess the age of Somali people due to the effects of the savage war and the starvation, I couldn't tell the difference between a man of fifty and a boy of twelve.

The photographer was always smiling and his eyes never showed fatigue or war - weariness. He gave the usual 300 US dollars fare to the pilot of the Cessna. His passport in order, his bags packed, he was going through all of the last-minute business of "getting out," organising letters from friends to their relatives to be posted in Nairobi, exchanging addresses - "tell my son in Nairobi to send money," etc. (even though the postal services, like everything else in Mogadishu, had collapsed long ago). By noon, the goodbyes and back-slapping had ended. He picked up his hand-bags and started for the airstrip.

If the wind was right, one could hear the 37mm anti-aircraft guns starting in the South of the city whenever a plane made its approach to the airstrip. The first incoming artillery would precede the landing of the aircraft to board passengers by seconds. Anyone waiting there to be transported could do nothing, nothing at all, because there were no trenches or hiding places anywhere around the dusty airstrip.

The young photographer caught a ride in a "technical" vehicle that dropped him at the perimeter. He dropped his hand-bags and looked around, watching the Cessna as it touched down. Then the shelling started. He ran, leaping over some shrubs. He lay out flat on the ground and listened until there was nothing left to listen to. The shelling stopped as quickly as it had started.

Back in the city, there was some surprise at his return, but no one said anything. Anyone can miss a plane. They all simply slapped him on the back and wished him better luck the next time out.

The next morning, two of his friends went with him to the edge of the airstrip to see him off on his second attempt. They went back home to say that he had gotten out for sure this time. An hour later, he came up the dirt road again, smiling. He said that there had been a deadly shootout at the airstrip between two sub-clans over the ownership of a shipment of the drug Khat, imported daily from Nairobi and the Cessna had left without him.

He was still there smiling when I left the burning city. He probably made it out eventually, but you can never be sure.

Everyone in Mogadishu had the same question, "How do I get out?"

This is what Reuters news agency said about my abrupt departure from Mogadishu:-

AFRAH'S TRAGEDY

There have been countless personal tragedies during Somalia's descent into chaos, but one was closer to home than most. At the height of last year's civil war in Mogadishu, Reuters long time correspondent, Mohamoud M. Afrah saw one of his sons killed in front of him. He had to bury him on the spot.

His house destroyed, Afrah had to live in a shack on the beach. The Nairobi office got a Kenyan entry visa for him, but contact was so difficult that they were unable to pass it to him. Somehow he managed to get a flight out and he finally made it to Nairobi in June. The Bureau had heard nothing of him for five months.

Like so many Somali families, Afrah's is now scattered across the continent.

After Siad Barre's fall, Afrah had spoken with optimism about Somalia's future. He had stayed on as the only representative of an international news organisation in the country and continued until the last possible moment filing copies on a fax / satphone.

Typically, when he walked into the Nairobi office, the first thing he wanted to do was to read the file.

POSTSCRIPT

The fragile ceasefire brokered by the United Nations has been violated several times. When I left the city there were still many no-go areas. The notorious Green line was still intact, and the sporadic shootings continued allegedly by gangs of free lancers.

The mass starvation, the daily dying, and the barbarity being committed against defenseless civilians is continuing as men with guns decide who eats and who starves.

The conditions of the displaced and dispossessed persons at Lido Beach, and all other shanty towns dotted across the countryside, are getting worse by the day. There are crowds of enfeebled people, at ten every morning, waiting for the soup kitchens to open, barely able to hold up their empty bowls.

When returning to the Beach after three weeks in the Bermuda Triangle, I found twenty-five shallow graves close to the shore where I and my friends would pass the time watching sea gulls. Many of the shacks had completely collapsed, torn away by incoming artillery shells which had become heavy in this, once the safest, area of Mogadishu. All of my friends had survived, but they were unhappy about clan leaders who preached reconcilliation, and then ordered their soldiers to shoot at random in the same breath.

As always, the rumour mills at the beach have been working overtime. For example, some people say that they saw a submarine and an aircraft carrier which they swear was the USS Kitty Hawk!

One rumour, however, has been confirmed: The UN Secretary-General BoutrosBoutros-Ghali has pushed harder than any other UN official for full - fledged military intervention in Somalia than in any African country since the early 60's Katanga crisis in southern Zaire, but the world body failed to act in time to prevent the Somali crisis before it became endemic.

It is true that bandit attacks on food convoys will make it too dangerous for the proposed five hundred Pakistani troops. Relief workers in Mogadishu told me that at least twenty thousand fully equipped troops, mainly from the United States are vital in order to feed 4.5 million hungry Somalis, and that UN should sponsor a conference of national reconcilliation to resolve the Somali crisis once and for all.

Nairobi (Kenya)

* This was written before US Marines stormed Mogadishu - December 9, 1992.

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MOGADISHU: A HELL ON EARTH



M.M. AFRAH, famous for his first book **TARGET: VILLA SOMALIA** on the raise and fall of former Somali dictator Barre, now turns his attention to the bloody factional fighting in Mogadishu. Mercilessly he flays the clan leaders and reveals the greed, guilt and the wide scale massacre of tens of thousands of innocent civilians and the destruction of the once beautiful city of Mogadishu.

MOGADISHU: A HELL ON EARTH curdles the blood, because the events mentioned in the Diary are terrible and the clan gunmen ruthless who shoot first and ask questions later.

Mr. Afrah was born in the Somali capital of Mogadishu in 1933. He studied and worked in Kenya and Germany. Since 1972 he edited the nation's news agency daily bulletin, "SONNA" and doubled as Reuters correspondent in Somalia. In 1978 he has been the editor-in-chief of the English language weekly, HEEGAN (Vigilance). In 1984 he received excellent evaluations report from Reuters in London.

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