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Proof for the invisible hand [1]

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Anyone doubting the existence of the Invisible Hand should pull up a chair on the street terrace of the Star Ice Cream Parlour on Iskan Street here in Erbil, the capital of Iraq?s autonomous region of Kurdistan. What else can explain the sights, sounds and smells that soon prevail?

Just 20 years ago, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, fresh from his genocide of untold thousands of Kurds. Fifteen years ago, the Kurds were mired in their own mindless civil war. Ten years ago, George Bush was drifting towards the presidency even as al-Qaeda was plotting 9/11. Five years ago, post-invasion Iraq was ablaze in vicious sectarian violence.

Today, it?s just gone 7:30 pm and Iskan Street will soon be bursting at the seams from heaving crowds eating, chattering, laughing, ambling, driving or shopping with no apparent need unfulfilled. The sun has set, the temperature has retreated from the 45c earlier and the Imam from the nearby mosque has given the all-clear to resume eating and drinking during this Ramadan period of day-time fasting.

Within minutes, the street comes alive. Fancy SUVs, Mercs, Beemers, Corollas, Meganes, even a Hummer jam the street. Every second or third business along has a dozen chickens roasting or kebabs grilling, the smells tantalizing the fasters. Tea houses fill the pavements with loud chatter. Merchants? wares spill from bursting counters. Arrays of baklava beckon. Mobile phones ring to connect friends and family.

Where did all this stuff come from? How did it get here? The quantity, the variety, the affordability, the availability - all seem completely natural and expected.

Unless you think about it for a bit. There was no Ministry of Planning that decided how many Toyota Land Cruisers in white or black were needed. No Ministry of Agriculture that methodically allocated chickens to each kebab joint. No Ministry of Communications handed out mobile phones.

No, it was the Invisible Hand ? a miracle.

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