

Transfer of landport to private hands

A legal framework should precede it

THE decision to involve the private sector in the development of some 12 landports and their cargo operations is wise on two counts. First, the government would be spared the time and money needed to equip these with proper facilities. Second, withdrawal of state control would induce competition in the cargo handling sphere. As private operators strive to excel each other, overall quality of cargo handling is likely to go up, and with it, the volume of trade. Besides, in their business interest, the private sector would seek a clamp-down on smuggling, which again would translate into increased cross-border trade.

There is something to be guarded against, though. The private sector is essentially market-oriented and as such may tend to be manipulative at times at the expense of the users. This is where the question of monitoring the services comes up. The government, according to the shipping minister, is to retain a regulatory control which could be useful as long as there is a well-defined set of rules and regulations in this behalf. Absence of clear-cut guidelines will encourage corruption, as has been the case with some previous privatisation initiatives. On the other hand, the private sector should be structurally and operationally required to adhere to certain norms. All of this means that we should have a legal framework in hand before we transfer land-port management to the private sector.

Basically, transparency needs to be maintained through the entire tendering and transitional processes. The government must clearly specify the requirements in terms of financial strength, technical capabilities, business record, so on and so forth in the tender notices. Experience in cargo operations could be a tough task, as the government should realise land-port management will be an uncharted territory for most local private sector investors. It could also invite joint venture, whereby not only foreign investment but also operational technology and experience could be injected into land-port management. At all events, stringent criteria should be applied in selecting parties for the lease agreement.

One more area of concern is law and order. Unless the government ensures an environment free of crime and insecurity, investors would simply shy away.

NAM summit

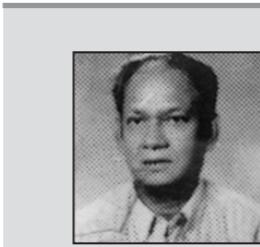
Its collective will should be a force to reckon with

THERE has been a clear revival of interest in the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) of the world's developing nations, which had undoubtedly lost its original appeal at the beginning of the post-detente era. It has bounced back with a new-found relevance due to the controversy raging amongst world powers over the much-touted war option against Iraq by the USA and UK. We believe that NAM can wield sobering influence both on the hard-liner western powers as well as on Iraq, Iran and North Korea, which are its members. The Arab bloc-Israel juxtaposition could also be addressed from this forum. The NAM has already thrashed out a resolution rejecting a US-led attack on Iraq without the go-ahead from the United Nations, ahead of the summit. While welcoming this we also appreciate the solidarity it has expressed with the on-going diplomatic efforts designed to avert a military strike against Iraq.

We want the primacy and centrality of UN role to be the core position of the NAM at the current summit. That a multilateral approach in preference to the unilateral action the United States and its allies are hell-bent on taking is indispensable for resolving the crisis centred on Iraq must be driven home to the latter. The need to assert its collective will to defuse the tension should be the summit's focal point of attention. The NAM with its 114 member-nations from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America has the potential to bring the unsettled world into some kind of an order. If the countries close their ranks and do it, then NAM will surely and truly get rejuvenated as the largest organisation of states outside the United Nations.

However, the issue of fighting terrorism should not get obscured and overlooked. Let us also address the pressing economic agenda of the developing countries in the context of globalisation by adopting complementary positions on the WTO issues.

Media terror



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

THE crisis over Iraq, which is more than a year old has one astonishing aspect and that is Media Terror. We the TV viewers have been steadily bombarded by the CNN and BBC. Day in and day out we have been subjected to brain washing of the works kind. It is not certain when we shall be able to extricate ourselves.

After cleaning up the mess in Afghanistan, the US targeted Iraq. Until then the US singularly had made terrorism, the sole target. The terrible wounds of 11 September were still fresh. How and why the US suddenly targeted Iraq is not very clear. Iraq had been mauled a decade ago by the father of the present President George Bush. It would be not very far fetched to surmise that President Bush was persuaded to believe that Iraq, which had been trised by the father President, would be small potato.

This is where everything started going wrong. I have witnessed the crisis unfold from my vantage position in Istanbul. We have to remember that this was a repeat of 1991 when President George Bush built up a formidable coalition against Iraq and Saddam lay prostrate. The coalition began with Turkey and

Saudi Arabia. Turkey had a most pro-American President Turgut Ozal, who readily joined hands with the US. So did Saudi Arabia for the US was vacating the aggression by Iraq against another Arab neighbour - little Kuwait. Turkey and Saudi Arabia snapped oil pipelines going through their territories, thereby administering a crippling blow on Iraq.

This time around I observed from Istanbul the virtual daily comings of very senior officials of the Bush administration and the British

time inspite of heavy pressure from the US Turkey has refused to commit to fight beside the US army. The US has involved NATO and unseemly wrangling has taken place.

The US-Saudi relations, which were many faceted and excellent have nosedived since 11 September 2001. There is no question of Saudis opening their bases or supplying troops to the US proposed attack against Iraq.

The US is thus left with her faithful ally Britain. Indeed Tony Blair

ence or statements. We viewers faced with the situation that in order to keep ourselves informed we have no choice but to open one of the two channels.

There is of course BTV. The less said about it is better. It cannot be a credible source of information. There are a number of Indian channels. They lack in depth and objectivity. The channels of the subcontinent are woefully short of resources, manpower and professionalism. Of the foreign channels I open the French, since I know the

Villepin, Foreign Minister of France stated "no one can assert today that the path of war will be shorter than that of the inspections. No one can claim either that it might lead to a safer, more just and more stable world. For war is always the sanction of failure." The outcome of the long deliberations within the Security Council is simply that of the five permanent members. US and Britain can count on no other member for support.

Indeed whereas the operation Desert Storm by senior Bush a

made a telling point while thousands of Australians demonstrated in Australian cities. Indeed these massive demonstrations are snowballing all over the globe. They are creating a huge divide between the leaders and the masses. Thus for the first time we see the popularity rating of that golden boy of British Labour Politics Tony Blair plummet. The popularity of John Howard has touched an all time pack, must pass restless nights as his presidency enters the home stretch.

The entire world has been turned into a stage and players big and small are playing their assigned parts. The biggest player, the US, who lost her sole superpower status on 11 September 2001, appears to be going through convulsions. Rather than allowing her to be carried away by the tide of events, it seems she needs to take a step back and pause. What started off as a crusade against President Saddam Hussein of Iraq has turned into a full blown world crisis, whose denouement is very uncertain indeed. The US has been unable to find Osama Bin Laden, although US and allied troops pretty much combed Afghanistan. There is even less chance of the inspectors finding any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

The upshot of the Iraq crisis is that as the power of that giant US wanes Europe takes halting steps towards self assertion. The world is truly in a profound state of turmoil. Meanwhile the giant creation like CNN and BBC continue to lose credibility and a news hungry world looks around for credible information.

Arshad-Uz Zaman is a former Ambassador.

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

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administration led by Tony Blair. A furious arm twisting of the Turks was in progress. There was, however, no Ozal to help the US. There was a newly elected government of the pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP). On top of the pyramid was the former Chief Justice Ahmed Necdet Sezer along with his national Security Council, where the top brass of the powerful Turkish armed forces have a commanding voice. We may recall that when a decade ago President Turgut Ozal was pressurizing his military to join forces with the allied troops, the Chief of the Turkish Armed forces General Turumtay resigned rather than send troops to fight against the Iraqi forces. This

has outdone Margaret Thatcher of the eighties, when she would appear dutifully beside President Ronald Regan. The US has another tiny ally, Israel, who compensates her size and resources by her remarkable clout in the media. Throughout the world the Jews have a tremendous hold on the media.

For a year now world is subjected to a shouting match limited to CNN and BBC. The world has long past saturation point such has been the cacophony of CNN and BBC. It is impossible to open these channels and escape bombardment on the question of Iraq and harangues by President Bush or Prime Minister Blair. Often the two channels would run for hours the same press confer-

ence or statements. We viewers faced with the situation that in order to keep ourselves informed we have no choice but to open one of the two channels.

A battle royal has been fought within the Security Council of the UN and the result is less than satisfactory for George Bush and Tony Blair. In a stirring address to the 15-nation Body Monsieur Dominique de

decade ago was a success story, the US and her lone ally Britain look hopelessly isolated on the world stage. Talking in front of the Senate the US Senator Robert Byrd has described the US position "in a box" and "the challenge is to find a graceful way out".

This amazing crisis surrounding Iraq continues to snowball and takes daily new twists and turns. On the one hand Bush continues to threaten war and world community does not want to hear of it. Now along with Britain has joined John Howard. This may very well be to prove the point that Australia, which to begin with was populated by people of British extraction is more British than Britain. In any case it

War for Iraq, peace for Israel, headache for America

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED
writes from Princeton

NOTWITHSTANDING last week's worldwide demonstrations for peace, the war train has left the station and is not coming back. By now it is clear that the Bush administration had decided to wage war against Iraq long time ago. The UN deliberations, weapons inspectors in Iraq, and consultations with allies are diplomatic niceties that were not going to derail the war train. Otherwise how can one explain the fact that BEFORE a UN resolution authorizing war, America has ringed Iraq with troops and war material?

For a democracy, it is astonishing how intolerant the Bush administration is of dissent. Opponents of the war are routinely branded as unpatriotic, if not outright traitors! The poster child for bellicosity, Secretary of Defence (or is he the Secretary of Offence?) Donald Rumsfeld has dismissed war opponents France and Germany as "old Europe." As though the Europe that really matters now is Romania and Bulgaria! Rumsfeld branded France, Germany and Belgium's attempt to prevent NATO from shipping war equipment to Turkey before NATO authorized war, as "disgraceful." In the war hysteria prevailing in the US, some restaurants have renamed "French Fries" as "Freedom Fries." Television commentators are blasting the French: "We saved their butts during World War II. Why are they so ungrateful?" Well, wasn't it France that helped America gain its independence from (Tony Blair's Britain)? It was the French who bore the brunt of casualties during World War I. It was France and Germany who provided Europe with stability after World War II, so that America could contain the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and benefit enormously from trading with prosperous France and Germany.

"Hardball" Chris Matthews got it right: "The British will always be with us; when the French are with us, we know we are right!" Robert Kagan has summarised the cultural differences between America, which has never been invaded, and Europe, which has endured too many wars: "On major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus."

Realising that Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld have little credibility in the world, the Bush administration has made Colin Powell their point man. Powell's presentation to the UN linking Al Qaeda with Saddam Hussein, like Tony Blair's infamous "dossier," was more wishful thinking than proof. They showed so much contempt for the rest of the world's intelligence that both the speeches

plagiarised sections from a well-known Ph.D. thesis! America trusts their beloved Powell, only because one always overlooks the shortcomings of the person he or she loves. The rest of the world, which realises that Powell and Condoleezza Rice are merely fig leaves, remains unmoved. One cannot help but feel sorry for Britain. Under Bush's "poodle" Blair, Britain's only relevance in the modern world is how quickly it can say "Yes" to America. If America says, "Let's go to bed," Britain's only response is, "can't wait!" Tony Blair is so unpopular even within his own party that if he goes to war without UN authorisation, a la Margaret Thatcher of 1990, before the first Gulf War, there may be a regime change, in London!

America is both using and abusing the UN. While Bush warns the UN of irrelevance if it does not do his bidding, at the same time he asks the UN to solve the crisis with North Korea, the possessor of real weap-

Supporters of the President accuse last weekend's 10 million protestors of bailing out Saddam Hussein. But the President must realise that when America is right, the world eagerly lends its support. The whole world rallied behind America in 1991 when it kicked Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. After September 11, the whole world supported America as it went after Al Qaeda and their host, the Taliban, in Afghanistan. Yes, Saddam is a brutal dictator, and Iraq and the rest of the world will be better off without him. But the fallacy starts with the US's claim that Iraq is a danger to the US. (If Iraq is also a threat to Britain, as Tony Blair has claimed, then we might as well say that Iraq is also a threat to Bangladesh!). The fact is, despicable, as Saddam Hussein may be, he is fully contained and is not a threat to anybody. De-fanged, sanctioned, ravaged Iraq military is five times weaker than it was in 1991, whereas US is five times stronger. Over the

an odd juxtaposition that raises a disconcerting theological question: What is it about the President's religious faith that makes him so jaunty as he faces the most fateful decision a President can make?" Put simply, the moral certitude of a President going into an unnecessary war, in which God's children will get killed, is profoundly disturbing. The real people of God, from Pope John Paul II and South Africa's Nobel Peace Prize winning Bishop Desmond Tutu on down to priests and Imams, are all against the war. The other day Bishop Tutu was telling the Americans on television: "When we asked for help against apartheid regime, we asked for economic sanctions and boycotts. We did not ask America to bomb us into democracy!"

But the President marches to a different beat. Only two blocks of the American society backs him to the hilt, the neoconservative Evangelical Christians and the Jews. The Evangelicals, represented by

Andrea Mitchell, print journalists Daniel Pipes, Charles Krauthammer, William Safire and Tom Friedman, and even film maker Steven Spielberg. (Barbra Streisand opposes the war). This is distressing because historically Jewish Americans have been the most progressive among white Americans. When it comes to the interests of Israel, like a chameleon, they all change their colour. As though death of Iraqi children is fine as long as it helps Israel! Why do the Jews support war against Iraq? According to Joe Klein: "Stronger Israel is very much embedded in the rationale for war...peace on Israeli terms...collapse of the wobbly Hashemite monarchy in Jordan and the establishment of a Palestinian state on that nation's East Bank." One may disagree with President Bush, but knows that he does what he believes to be in America's interest, although a more foresighted President will have realised that America's long-term interests

inian professor arrested! Zionist Mr. Steve Emerson has done more to harm the Muslim American community than anyone else.

America's war strategy is to "shock and awe" the Iraqis by sending 400 cruise missiles within the first 48 hours. What is left unsaid is that hundreds of thousands of Iraqis will be killed. During the first Gulf war, 100,000 Iraqis died. Within the next two years another 150,000 Iraqi men, women and children were dead because of sanctions. Combined, that is more than one per cent of Iraq's 22 million people. It is like three million Americans dying! Recently, we all grieved for the seven Columbia astronauts and their families. Such scenes will be repeated all across Iraq hundreds of thousands of times! The war protesters know this; that is why they protest. The war mongers want to hide it from the American public, knowing full well that Americans are decent people, and if they were told of the horror war would inflict on Iraqi civilians, they would be vehemently opposed to it.

America is being led by hawks such as Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz who never saw combat. All share President Bush's "let's smoke 'em" cowboy bravado, which frightens the Europeans. If the quartet were in power, they would probably have invaded Cuba in 1962 and Iran in 1979. As Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson observed, it is easy to get into a war, but much harder to extricate. Decorated war hero and a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, President John Kennedy withstood the military's intense pressure to invade Cuba in 1962. He even emphasised with the average Cuban's and the Soviet's aspirations. Mr. Bush's foreign policy myopia starts with his having visited very few foreign countries on his own. (One of the reasons why Bush is so pro-Israel is that when he was the Governor of Texas, the Israelis, as they do for every up and coming American politician, sponsored his trip to Israel and treated him royally!) President Bush would do well to read some history. He will then realise that no nation is an embodiment of all virtue or all vice. Instead of considering that America too can make mistakes, which should be corrected, President Bush appears to be unable to resist going, with guns blazing, with his knee jerk reaction!

LETTER FROM AMERICA

President Bush would do well to read some history. He will then realise that no nation is an embodiment of all virtue or all vice. Instead of considering that America too can make mistakes, which should be corrected, President Bush appears to be unable to resist going, with guns blazing, with his knee jerk reaction!

ons of mass destruction, peacefully. How can the UN be irrelevant when the sole premise for Bush's demand for war authorisation is Iraq's non-compliance with UN resolutions? While on the subject of non-compliance, Israel remains the country that has flouted UN resolutions the most. When is Mr. Bush going to attack Israel? How many times only the US and Israel has opposed UN resolutions supported by the rest of the world? Too many times to count! Is the US and Israel always right and the rest of the world always wrong? On Iraq, Mr. Bush is not interested in persuading the UN the merit of his case; with ferocity unbecoming of a President he is only interested in pressuring the UN to accede to his demands. Eminent statesmen, such as Nobel Peace Prize winners Nelson Mandela and former President Jimmy Carter, have warned Mr. Bush that the doctrine of preemptive strikes is untenable under international law. Preemptive strikes are Israel's forte (Israel destroyed Iraq's "nuclear installations" through an unprovoked aerial attack in May 1981); this is not the way America has historically conducted its foreign policy. Unfortunately, instead of making Israel behave like America, Mr. Bush is bent on making America behave like Israel!

last twelve years, the US and Britain have been flying planes over, and bombing Iraqi targets at will. With US satellites flying over Iraq 24 hours a day, the US has scoured every inch of Iraqi territory. Yet, it has failed to produce any evidence of Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" or links to Al Qaeda. That is why in countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy, whose governments support the war, the overwhelming majority of the people are against it. It appears as though Mr. Bush, having failed in his promise to get Bin Laden "dead or alive," wants to change the subject now, and attack Iraq instead because victory over Iraq appears to be so easy. Mr. Bush's motto seems to be, "Let's declare war and party!" According to American news agencies, even before war has been declared, UN Special Forces are already operating inside Iraq. Is that not a violation of the UN Charter?

According to TIME magazine's Joe Klein: "George W. Bush lives at the intersection of faith and inexperience. That is not a reassuring address, especially in a time of trouble. His public utterances are often measured and elegant, but there are frequent and often glaring lapses too. There is a tendency to ricochet between piety and puerility,

Reverends Jerry Falwell, Franklin Graham and Pat Robertson, not only support one of their own (President Bush is an Evangelical Christian), they are the ones who have been badmouthing Islam and its holy prophet, and see this as a golden opportunity to arrest the spread of Islam. They promote and work for the perpetuation of Israel, because Israel's creation within Muslim Middle East represents the Muslim world's ultimate failure. According to Press reports, in one of the recent conferences of the Evangelical Christians, the most popular slogan was, "No Muslims, no problem!" implying that to get rid of terrorism, one has to get rid of all Muslims!

Not all politicians are for the war. Senator Edward Kennedy, who opposes war, has warned that America under Bush is in danger of becoming a rogue superpower that needs to be contained. Distressingly, all the prominent Jewish Americans are aggressively for the war. They include Deputy Defence Secretary Dr. Paul Wolfowitz (the architect of the Iraq war), Dr. Henry Kissinger, former assistant Secretary of State Frank Gaffney, US Senators Joseph Lieberman, Chuck Schumer, Arlen Specter and Diane Feinstein, television journalists Steve Emerson, Aaron Brown and

lie with the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, and not with six million Jewish usurpers in Israel. The monolithic support of the American Jews for the war implies that they are more interested in what the war can do for Israel than for America.

In an illustration of how deviously Zionists operate, the other day Dore Gold, the recent Israeli Ambassador to the UN, made an appearance on the TV talk show "Press and Buchanan." Gold was touting his new book, "Kingdom of Hatred," on how Saudi Arabia "supports terrorists." Here was a Zionist right-winger slandering Saudi Arabia, because of its support for the Palestinian cause, yet neither Press nor Buchanan questioned Gold's ulterior motives. Gold's book criticizing Saudi Arabia is like a fox writing a book criticizing chickens! Yet, as if on cue, a couple of days later, Attorney General John Ashcroft indicted seven Palestinian Americans, not for links to Al Qaeda, but for being members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, "which killed over a hundred Israelis." If the accused are guilty, they should be punished to the full extent of American law. In the American jurisprudence, they are presumed innocent till proven guilty. Yet on his talk show, former Florida Congressman Joe Scarborough congratulated Mr. Steve Emerson for getting a Pal-

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

NAM Summit
Time has come when NAM member countries have to settle their disputes and work together for more meaningful solutions.
Kuldip Mishra
Sweden

tioned how easy it would be to forge a Bangladeshi passport. The particulars in the passport are hand-written and the photo of the bearer is protected by a simple sheet of lamination.

Several countries, including Sierra Leone, have issued Machine Readable Passports to their citizens. These passports have added security features such as scanned photos and particulars embedded into a code to prevent fraud.

Bangladeshi citizens often face harassment when they travel starting with a passport check prior to the immigration counter at ZIA. Isn't it

about time Bangladesh met ICAO standards and started issuing Machine Readable Passports?
Rashid Chowdhury
Fairfax, Virginia, USA

"Purbachal deal with the expatriates"

This is in reference to the letter "Purbachal deal with the expatriates" by Mr. M. S. Rahman (February 21). I fully agree with Mr. Rahman on what he says.

I came to know about the allotment from my relatives in Dhaka and from the RAJUK website. I have never

received any 'official' letter from RAJUK confirming the allotment. According to the website posting, all the allottees are asked to send appropriate amount of foreign currency. However, the posting neither mentions the total price for the individual plots, nor the number and amount of instalment required for the plots, nor the timeline to pay all the dues. In fact, there is no way of knowing what to do in case an allottee's current address changes. There is a contact e-mail posted on the website. However, I have not received any replies so far after posing these questions a month

ago. I truly believe that someone has to be fortunate enough to be able to own a RAJUK property. However, buying a property is a serious financial decision and one has to do some financial planning to come up with the numbers. I hope RAJUK understands the concerns of its clients and addresses these issues.
Rashed Hasan
MI, USA

Bangladesh Cricket

I don't want to repeat how frustrated I was after watching the South

Africa-Bangladesh match. Time and again we have said that we don't want our team to win any match but can't we expect a standard performance from them?
Sonia Rahman
Dhaka

Canada in their very first appearance in the World Cup has attracted many people's attention by their outstandingly good performance. Just think about Davison's excellent innings (111 off just 67 balls)!

And just think about our performance!
Mostafiz Khan

Dhaka Zilhaj not Jilhaj
In your daily the Islamic month Zilhaj is being spelt as Jilhaj. I believe it is spelt and pronounced as ZILHAJ.
FM
On e-mail

"Valentine's Day"

As an afterthought to my previous message regarding Valentine's Day, I must also mention that *Pahela Falgun* is around that time.

If the women in yellow sarees and flowers are replaced by candies

and cards, it would be a sad event indeed.

I do not object to anyone celebrating the February 14 as Valentine's Day. On the contrary, it would be infringing on someone's personal sphere, a violation of freedom of expression.

I would however, pay more attention to *Pahela Falgun* myself. Being here in the US is no fun time in the month of February. To all who visit the DU campus, *Boi Mella* and *Provat Feri* on the 21st, count your blessings!

Yahya
USA