

## Sad day for the world

We protest against this war

**B**Y the time this editorial is published, war in Iraq may have already started, if not, it is likely to begin within hours. We totally oppose any military action against Iraq. We have repeatedly voiced our opinion in favour of a diplomatic solution to a military one. We reject all the arguments that have been put forward by the United States and its allies in support of their inclination towards war. We think those arguments are not persuasive, simply because neither the US nor its close allies like Britain have been able to prove that Iraq does possess weapons of mass destruction or its supposed links with al-Qaeda.

What is even more worrying is the damn care attitude by the lone super power of the world. Sidelining the United Nations Security Council is a prime example of that. Not allowing the UN arms inspectors to continue with their duties only shows that may be US never intended those so called weapons of mass destruction to be discovered. Waging a war against Iraq was probably in their mind all along. Otherwise why would they mass up thousands of troops in the Gulf long before a second resolution was even drawn up and placed in the Security Council. It's another matter that they decided to withdraw it at the last minute after failing to garner majority support from the members.

The US and Britain have been saying that the war would be over within a short time, all efforts would be taken to minimise the loss of human lives and properties. President Bush himself said to the Iraqi people in his latest speech that 'the military action would be directed only against the lawless men in the country, not against common people'. We take his words for it, but can he really ensure that civilians would be killed in the operation? How would they justify the killing of innocent people and destroying their properties for simply ousting Saddam Hussein from power? Why should they pay such a heavy price for no fault of theirs? We echo the comments by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that it is indeed a very sad day for world.

## City polls

Political parties should exert a sobering influence

**T**HE popular expectation is that the city corporation polls will be held peacefully in Barisal and Sylhet today. The polls are an important exercise as far as democratisation of local government bodies are concerned.

However, the experience of the UP polls should have convinced the government that sterner steps might be needed to counter violence in city polls. The UP polls violence could not be dismissed lightly when at least 80 people were killed across the country.

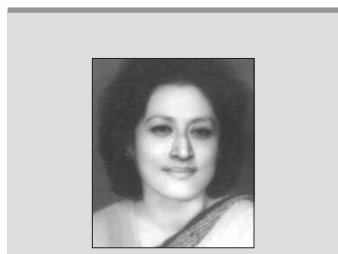
Now, it seems the stakes are much higher in the city polls truth confirmed by the way the major political parties have thrown their weight behind their candidates. This is where things appear to be crossing the limits set for the political parties. The parties are not supposed to have any direct role in the election to a local government organisation. But reports from Barisal says that no fewer than three ministers were seen campaigning for the candidate backed by the ruling party. The home minister himself was among the campaigners. The ruling party leaders have claimed that the ministers joined the meeting and rallies as leaders of the BNP, and not as ministers, but those on the sidelines might not be happy with the explanation. It is not clear why ministers should enter the fray in violation of all norms and traditions.

Then the city polls are being held against the backdrop of intense lobbying and bickering within the major political parties, the ruling party in particular, for nomination, though the polls are supposed to have a non-political character. The result of the lobbying is that too many rebel candidates have emerged, and tension is running high.

Some of the candidates also demanded deployment of the army for smooth holding of polls. Without question, law and order is an area where the government could ill afford to slacken its grip.

Finally, we strongly feel that for the proper growth and consolidation of our local government institutions, the political parties have to exert a sobering influence, instead of judging everything from the party point of view. The parties should set elimination of election violence as their immediate goal, and if they succeed they will be doing a great service to the nation.

# America goes to war: A sad day for the world community



DILARA CHOUDHURY

**T**HE war against Iraq is about to begin any time now as President Bush announced his final ultimatum to Saddam Hossain either to leave Iraq voluntarily within 48 hours, or face the military actions of the US and its allies. A somber President, in his television address Tuesday night to the American people, attempted to make a case of the impending Iraq war. After painstakingly explaining the diplomatic efforts undertaken by his administration to avert the war, he announced that the war is necessary for compelling reasons: first, to protect America's security, and second, for the higher and loftier goal of preserving world peace and stability. But wait, there is more. He went on to say that America needs to invade Iraq, again not only to disarm it and ensure regime change but also to occupy it for an uncertain period of time in order to endow 'democracy, peace and prosperity' to the Iraqi people. Are these reasons acceptable or plausible to the world community to justify the war, which may have serious consequences regionally and internationally?

The world community does not

think so. First, there are questions about Washington's commitments with regard to peaceful resolution of the Iraq crisis through multilateral diplomacy. It is felt that the Bush administration wanted the war with Iraq all along, but decided to work within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as long as it assumed that the world body was seeing its points of view, and thereby giving UN seal of approval for its intended use of force in Iraq. That is evident from the fact that Washington did not hesitate to undermine the world body by

was thinking of proposing to allow three months for Saddam to voluntarily disarm. Could this not be resolved through diplomacy and within the UN Charter? But the United States sensed its diplomatic predicament in the UN and in the end only gave lip-service, especially during Azores Summit that many analysts thought was not a diplomatic exercise but a war strategy session, declared the formal end of diplomacy and withdrew the second UN resolution. Its decision to take unilateral action lacks both moral and legal

which there was a UN mandate) to regime change in Iraq (which is out of purview of UN resolution 1441) and then raised the issue of democracy and human rights violations in Iraq and its link with al-Qaeda (though there is no proof of Iraq-al Qaeda links but Bush talked about al-Qaeda networks in Iraq nine times in a recent press conference to make his case with American people). Skepticism has further deepened by the way the Bush administration is treating the al-Qaeda issue according to its pick and choose policy. If Washington

pen all over the Middle East. But Bush's promise of ending Middle East with democracy and peace does not hold water in the context that the US President has not mentioned in his speech even once the Palestine-Israeli conflicts, the root cause behind bloodbaths in the region. As such, the likely reasons for Iraq invasion are oil, security for Israel and changing the contours of Middle Eastern countries with pro-Arab Islamic regimes. How can then the war ensure regional and world peace and stability?

tion of Iraq, which would be long and messy, is bound to have spill-over effects in countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan creating disorder, instability and anger in the region and thereby giving further impetus to extremist Islamic groups like al-Qaeda. But the US President's obsession with war went so far that he even ignored the warnings from UN intelligence in this regard. How can then the US action in Iraq enhance America's and world security? One wonders.

Now the tragedy is about to unfold. Millions of people fearing the consequences of the war in terms of human lives and security have rallied and demonstrated -- only to be ignored by the US President. Such utter indifference to public opinion has never been seen before. It is sad that the leader of the oldest democracy in the world did not have time to listen to the voices of the people. He turned his back to any opposing views including the ones who worried about consequences of transatlantic split and open flouting of international laws by the US. It seems that Bush needs the war so badly that he has no qualms about undermining the world body like the UN, the importance of its European allies, evolving Track-II diplomacy and the global community at large. It is a sad day for us around the globe that a country like America, known for its democratic values, principles and sense of justice that have been a beacon for the rest of the world, is about to embark on a war which can hardly be justified.

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## PANORAMA

Washington has so far been unable to prove that Iraq does possess weapons of mass destruction or it poses a threat to American security with its outdated 200- km-range Scud missiles. Neither pre-emptive nor preventive war, in case of Iraq can, thus, be justified.

formally declaring the end of diplomacy and withdrawing the UK-US-Spain proposed second resolution on Iraq that sought UN authorisation of use of force by setting a deadline of March 17, as soon as it realised that it would not get the 9 votes out of 15 at the UNSC, besides the veto threat was dangling over its head. The battle raged over the issue of time limit within which Iraq was to act according to the UN resolution 1441. The second resolution sought, as mentioned earlier, March 17 as the deadline. The six non-permanent members i.e. the 'swing voters' proposed a time limit of three weeks, which was rejected by the US whereas France

underpinnings, and thereby has severely undermined the United Nations. This is a serious blow to multilateralism that was painstakingly formulated, especially in post-cold era, and which was still evolving. President Bush accuses the UN for not living up to its responsibilities but one wonders why diplomacy was not given more time by the US for the sake of world peace and stability.

Second, no matter how lofty Bush may have tried to sound to make a case for Iraq war the world community has remained largely skeptical about its real intents in Iraq. And there are reasons for such skepticism. First, Washington shifted from disarmament (for

was serious about al-Qaeda link with any country, then Saudi Arabia should have been at the top of the suspect list since fifteen (15) out of the nineteen (19) 9/11 suicide terrorists were of Saudi origin. In effect, the war is needed for other reasons and one is able to discern those reasons from Washington's planned post-war Iraq occupation proposition. It is also well known that the occupation was planned long before the diplomatic battles began at the UNSC. According to the proposition, it is not occupation but a war of liberation, and together with the removal of Saddam and American presence in Iraq miraculous things like flowering democracy would hap-

pen. Third, the war is not justified even under its September 2002 National Security Strategy, which allows Washington to have its pre-empt doctrines. Washington has so far been unable to prove that Iraq does possess weapons of mass destruction or it poses a threat to American security with its outdated 200- km-range Scud missiles. Neither pre-emptive nor preventive war, in case of Iraq can, thus, be justified.

Lastly, the world remains unconvinced that US occupation would bring peace and stability in the Middle East and thereby a major threat to world peace would be removed. What is being felt, that in reality, the US military occupa-

## George Bush's war ultimatum speech from the Cross Hall in the White House

(Following is the unabridged speech US President George W. Bush delivered to the American people on March 18)

**M**Y fellow citizens, events in Iraq have now reached the final days of decision. For more than a decade, the United States and other nations have pursued patient and honourable efforts to disarm the Iraqi regime without war. That regime pledged to reveal and destroy all its weapons of mass destruction as a condition for ending the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

Since then, the world has engaged in 12 years of diplomacy. We have passed more than a dozen resolutions in the United Nations Security Council. We have sent hundreds of weapons inspectors to oversee the disarmament of Iraq. Our good faith has not been returned.

The Iraqi regime has used diplomacy as a ploy to gain time and advantage. It has uniformly defied Security Council resolutions demanding full disarmament. Over the years, UN weapon inspectors have been threatened by Iraqi officials, electronically bugged, and systematically deceived. Peaceful efforts to disarm the Iraqi regime have failed again and again -- because we are not dealing with peaceful men.

Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraqi regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised. This regime has already used weapons of mass destruction against Iraq's neighbours and against Iraq's people.

The regime has a history of reckless aggression in the Middle East. It has a deep hatred of America and our friends. And it has aided, trained and harbored terrorists, including operatives of al Qaeda.

The danger is clear: using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country, or any other. The United States and other nations did nothing to deserve or invite this threat. But we will do everything to defeat it. Instead of drifting along toward tragedy, we will set a course toward safety. Before the day of horror can come, before it is too late to act, this danger will be removed.

The United States of America has the sovereign authority to use

force in assuring its own national security. That duty falls to me, as Commander-in-Chief, by the oath I have sworn, by the oath I will keep.

Recognising the threat to our country, the United States Congress voted overwhelmingly last year to support the use of force against Iraq. America tried to work with the United Nations to address this threat because we wanted to resolve the issue peacefully. We believe in the mission of the United Nations. One reason the UN was founded after the second world war was to confront aggressive dictators, actively and early, before they can attack the innocent and

enforce the just demands of the world. The United Nations Security Council has not lived up to its responsibilities, so we will rise to ours.

In recent days, some governments in the Middle East have been doing their part. They have delivered public and private messages urging the dictator to leave Iraq, so that disarmament can proceed peacefully. He has thus far refused. All the decades of deceit and cruelty have now reached an end. Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our choosing. For their own

cannot live under the threat of blackmail. The terrorist threat to America and the world will be diminished the moment that Saddam Hussein is removed.

Our government is on heightened watch against these dangers. Just as we are preparing to ensure victory in Iraq, we are taking further actions to protect our homeland. In recent days, American authorities have expelled from the country certain individuals with ties to Iraqi intelligence services. Among other measures, I have directed additional security of our airports, and increased Coast Guard patrols of major seaports. The Department of Homeland

face fearful consequences.

We are now acting because the risks of inaction would be far greater. In one year, or five years, the power of Iraq to inflict harm on all free nations would be multiplied many times over. With these capabilities, Saddam Hussein and his terrorist allies could choose the moment of deadly conflict when they are strongest. We choose to meet that threat now, where it arises, before it can appear suddenly in our skies and cities.

The cause of peace requires all free nations to recognise new and undeniable realities. In the 20th century, some chose to appease murderous dictators, whose threats were allowed to grow into genocide and global war. In this century, when evil men plot chemical, biological and nuclear terror, a policy of appeasement could bring destruction of a kind never before seen on this earth.

Terrorists and terror states do not reveal these threats with fair notice, in formal declarations -- and responding to such enemies only after they have struck first is not self-defence, it is suicide. The security of the world requires disarming Saddam Hussein now.

As we enforce the just demands of the world, we will also honour the deepest commitments of our country. Unlike Saddam Hussein, we believe the Iraqi people are deserving and capable of human liberty. And when the dictator has departed, they can set an example to all the Middle East of a vital and peaceful and self-governing nation.

The United States, with other countries, will work to advance liberty and peace in that region. Our goal will not be achieved overnight, but it can come over time. The power and appeal of human liberty is felt in every life and every land. And the greatest power of freedom is to overcome hatred and violence, and turn the creative gifts of men and women to the pursuits of peace.

That is the future we choose. Free nations have a duty to defend our people by uniting against the violent. And tonight, as we have done before, America and our allies accept that responsibility.

Good night, and may God continue to bless America.

Should Saddam Hussein choose confrontation, the American people can know that every measure has been taken to avoid war, and every measure will be taken to win it. War has no certainty, except the certainty of sacrifice. ... That is the future we choose. Free nations have a duty to defend our people by uniting against the violent. And tonight, as we have done before, America and our allies accept that responsibility.

destroy the peace.

In the case of Iraq, the Security Council did act, in the early 1990s. Under Resolutions 678 and 687 -- both still in effect -- the United States and our allies are authorised to use force in ridding Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. This is not a question of authority, it is a question of will.

Last September, I went to the UN General Assembly and urged the nations of the world to unite and bring an end to this danger. On November 8, the Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1441, finding Iraq in material breach of its obligations, and vowing serious consequences if Iraq did not fully and immediately disarm.

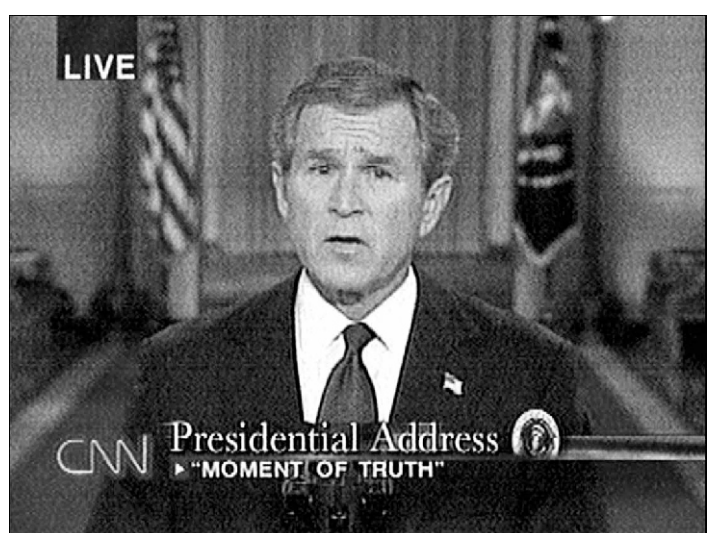
Today, no nation can possibly claim that Iraq has disarmed. And it will not disarm so long as Saddam Hussein holds power. For the last four-and-a-half months, the United States and our allies have worked within the Security Council to enforce that Council's long-standing demands. Yet, some permanent members of the Security Council have publicly announced they will veto any resolution that compels the disarmament of Iraq. These governments share our assessment of the danger, but not our resolve to meet it. Many nations, however, do have the resolve and fortitude to act against this threat to peace, and a broad coalition is now gathering to

safety, all foreign nationals -- including journalists and inspectors -- should leave Iraq immediately.

Many Iraqis can hear me tonight in a translated radio broadcast, and I have a message for them. If we must begin a military campaign, it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against you. As our coalition takes away their power, we will deliver the food and medicine you need. We will tear down the apparatus of terror and we will help you to build a new Iraq that is prosperous and free. In a free Iraq, there will be no more wars of aggression against your neighbors, no more poison factories, no more executions of dissidents, no more torture chambers and rape rooms. The tyrant will soon be gone. The day of your liberation is near.

It is too late for Saddam Hussein to remain in power. It is not too late for the Iraqi military to act with honor and protect your country by permitting the peaceful entry of coalition forces to eliminate weapons of mass destruction. Our forces will give Iraqi military units clear instructions on actions they can take to avoid being attacked and destroyed. I urge every member of the Iraqi military and intelligence services: if war comes, do not fight for a dying regime that is not worth your own life.

And all Iraqi military and civilian personnel should listen carefully to



certainty, except the certainty of sacrifice.

Yet, the only way to reduce the harm and duration of war is to apply the full force and might of our military, and we are prepared to do so. If Saddam Hussein attempts to cling to power, he will remain a deadly foe until the end. In desperation, he and terrorists groups might try to conduct terrorist operations against the American people and our friends. These attacks are not inevitable. They are, however, possible. And this very fact underscores the reason we

security is working closely with the nation's governors to increase armed security at critical facilities across America.

Should enemies strike our country, they would be attempting to shift our attention with panic and weaken our morale with fear. In this, they would fail. No act of theirs can alter the course or shake the resolve of this country. We are a peaceful people -- yet we are not a fragile people, and we will not be intimidated by thugs and killers. If our enemies dare to strike us, they and all who have aided them, will

## 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.

### Security to foreigners

As the US-Iraq war is impending, I hope the government is taking sufficient steps to protect foreigners and their property in Bangladesh.

Many will remember that during the '91 War, there were several incidents when more poor Europeans were attacked in Gulshan. And that was when most people supported the War. Now with the allies about to enter into a war which doesn't have much support internationally, we should take particular care to ensure that no untoward incidents take place.

Talib Dhaka

### The great divide

The inevitability and imminence of an unnecessary and avoidable war on Iraq led by the US is no longer in doubt. At this grim moment, a few thoughts come to

mind. Going by the recent conflicts led by the US, there is a huge gap between the technology of weaponry of the US and the technical skills of those who use those in the frontline. High mathematical skills are demanded, fine on the spot judgments are essential if unintended and unfortunate casualties are to be minimised. But the gap between the technology and skills to use it discreetly is wide. This wide gap has been conspicuous. Conspicuous by the number of "friendly fires", many misguided "smart bombs" that killed civilians by the hundreds and thousands, destroyed numerous civilian structures. Then again the so-called unfortunate "targeting errors" and "intelligence failures" are legend. These may be cynically shrugged off as "collateral" damage and being just sorry, by the Pentagon brass.

Iraq may well be bombed and flattened and this feat may well be

gloated by the warriors and the world media who we find are only too willing to do the "politically correct" reporting. But going by the established limitations during the first Gulf War, the media will dish out what is cooked and sanitised for their use by the military. Any war has its own dynamics which do not follow the predicted scenario.

Hussain Dhaka

### America on Iraq

Some 50 years ago H.S. Suhrawardy said Arab countries are zero plus zero. They are still the same and so also the Muslim world. They are helplessly watching the atrocities and injustice being carried out against the Muslims and especially the Arabs by the Americans, Israelis and their allies. The Muslims could do nothing against them.

Saddam wanted the Arab coun-

tries to control their oil resource and thus he became the enemy of America. And this is why Bush wants to replace Saddam and install a government of his choice.

We all know what happened in Afghanistan. America destroyed the country and murdered hundreds and thousands of its innocent people and is still hunting for Bin Laden. However, it has not yet been proved that there is a Bin Laden or Taliban connection with 9/11 destruction.

It is obvious that America is eager to wage a war against Iraq to control their oil resource and also to establish their authority over Middle East. When the war breaks out hundreds and thousands of people will be killed and made homeless, very much like that of Afghanistan.

But what will happen when the war is over? Will the Americans couldn't find any weapons of mass destruction?

### M. Shiblee Mohammadpur, Dhaka "Altaf flouts election rules"

I am confused. The news item "Altaf flouts election rules" (March 19) says that the Home Minister joins the election procession of a candidate for the Barisal City Corporation election. In another news it is found that BDR would maintain law and order and neutrality of the election. And BDR is under the same minister!

MAH Dhaka

### Bagerhat incident

I am surprised at the reaction of some people about the brutal killing of a person and rape of three women in Bagerhat. Everybody is stunned by the heinous nature of this crime irrespective of the identity of the victims, and condemns it with all passion. But to paint the

incident as a communal one is beyond my comprehension.

Far more severe brutalities are reported in the media not very infrequently, and everybody condemns those. But nobody tries to imply a communal nature of such brutalities. Just because the victims are from a minority community do not mean that it was a deliberate attempt on a Hindu family. Brutal crimes have become so commonplace in our country today, and everybody is worried about their own safety. The Bagerhat incident is surely a great tragedy in Bangladesh, but not a Hindu tragedy.

If 10% of the population is religious minorities, then statistically one would expect that 10% of the victims of all crimes would also be of minority community. Statistics would show that the number of victims belonging to the minority communities is actually less proportionately, proving that there is no targeted attack in the

country on them as implied by some. The communal record of our country is something that we can be proud of by any measure of standard. Sadly, it has become a habit of some people and some political quarters to mislabel regular crimes as communally motivated and use that as a political card.

Wahid Chowdhury USA

### "UN's peacekeeping operations"

This is in reference to the letter "UN's peacekeeping operations" by Abdul M. Ismail (March 14).

Bangladesh is indeed gaining a sterling reputation in relation to its armed forces rendering their services via the UN at various trouble-spots around the world. I therefore congratulate the writer Mr. Abdul M. Ismail for highlighting this who also quite correctly points out that Bangladesh has

made monetary gains.

However do not agree with him that Bangladesh should acquire SU 27 which is a long-range bomber and will go against the ethos of Bangladesh foreign and defence policy. Bangladesh Airforce is still stuck with its MiG29s whose maintenance cost is though less than SU 27s but acquiring them was a costly mistake.

Since Bangladesh has been gaining so much from the UN, it should quite rightly payback its dues by improving the quality of personnel: improvements can be realised by better management of its current resources and fielding better managers (officers).

Bangladesh does not need an arms race against any nation but instead we should concentrate our resources on education and healthcare.

Manzoor H Ashraf London, UK