

Raging war

The biggest concern is the safety of Iraqi people

WITH the US-led war on Iraq sending mind-boggling images of deaths and destruction, the demonstrations against it continue across the world.

The collective conscience of people took a terrible hammering when President Bush ordered the coalition forces to begin military operations against Iraq. The worldwide opposition to his campaign is now manifest everywhere-- the Arab countries, Europe and even the United States. Demonstrators protested violently against the war as the European Union summit was in progress in Brussels. Reports from the Middle Eastern capitals indicate that Bush's war plan has been totally rejected by Arabs.

However, it is not enough to disagree with the warmongers. The EU divided on the use of war option is wholly committed to giving humanitarian aid to Iraq. However, the prime concern at the moment is to minimise civilian casualties in the beleaguered country. The western media is covering almost all developments in the battlefields, but the extent of civilian casualties is yet to be reported in detail. A huge number of Iraqis might have been trapped as Baghdad is coming under heavy missile fire and the American and British troops are forcing their way towards the southern city of Basra and some other strategic points. Even if they want to take shelter in the neighbouring countries, they will need some sort of cover to leave Iraq.

Countries like France, Germany, Russia and China which did not bow to the US pressure for endorsing its military strike on Baghdad, should now work together of course with the support of the vast majority of other countries to end the hostilities. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan may initiate a process to convene an emergency meeting of the UNSC to review the situation and create conditions for a cease-fire, even though the United States and Britain have acted in utter disregard of the world body so far. Similarly, the Arab League and the NAM should treat the war as a direct threat to world peace and get their act together with a view to further mobilising world opinion against the war. Time, they must not forget, is an important factor because one extra day of hostilities could mean more death and destruction.

President Bush should once again ask himself why the dissenting countries in the EU think that the war is absolutely uncalled for and 'illegal'. It is, of course, for the people of Iraq to decide what type of government they would have and how they would run their country. His theory of 'liberating Iraq' has found, for understandable reasons, very few takers even in his own country or in the countries that he claims to be on his side in this unequal, unjust and outrageous war against an already subdued power.

Welcome move to diversify relations

Concrete steps awaited

WE welcome the impetus provided to bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar during Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to Yangon. Both sides have agreed to follow up on the understanding reached on construction of Bangladesh-Myanmar road network during Myanmar PM's visit to Dhaka some time ago. Undoubtedly, the road-link would play an immensely positive role in building up a more co-operative trade environment between Dhaka and Yangon. Apart from the bright prospect of linking the proposed road network with the planned Asian Highway, the road-link could effectively put a stop to cross-border smuggling. It is worthwhile to note that trade balance is tilted towards Yangon.

It is not for the first time, that the government of four-party alliance led by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has shown keen interest in developing close ties with a neighbour in the eastern region. Not so long ago, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia visited China and Thailand, with a view to boosting business and investment cooperation with the two countries. Thailand has already shown interest in developing road networks while China has agreed to help in developing other infrastructures. Such a policy taken by the government would no doubt be welcomed if it brings dividends. Instead of restricting trade cooperation with a few countries, the government seems to have decided to expand the horizon. But here steps should be taken in a way that those with whom we have had close trade ties, do not feel neglected.

But sadly even in the latest meeting between the heads of government of Bangladesh and Myanmar no headway could be made in resolving the question of repatriation of the last batch of 20,000 Rohingya refugees camped in Cox's Bazar. They have been waiting for years with the hope that their government would agree to take them back but to no avail. We earnestly hope the repatriation process would be expedited so that the refugees could be relieved from years of miseries in camps.

The war against Saddam is not about Iraqi people

DR FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

THAT is the opinion of Wayne Slater and James Moore, the authors of the best seller, "Bush's Brain." The "Brain" refers to Mr. Bush's political strategist, Karl Rove, who has masterminded Bush's rise from an obscure owner of a professional baseball team, The Texas Rangers (early 1990s), to the Governorship of Texas (1994), and the Presidency of the US (2000). It was Karl Rove who formulated the winning Republican strategy of focusing entirely on war and terrorism (and never mentioning the sinking economy) in last year's mid-term elections. It is Karl Rove who has decided that the best way for Bush to win reelection next year is to grab Iraq's 200 billion barrels of oil on the pretext of removing Saddam, disarm Iraq so that the Israelis are happy, thus securing the votes of the Evangelical Christians and Jews, both whom are passionate supporters of Israel. As in Afghanistan, the evangelical Christians would also like to see some proselytizing (conversion of Muslims to Christianity) in Iraq. They would also like the Muslims to renounce a part of the Qur'an so that it is more palatable to the Jews and the Christians. According to the authors, even if Saddam Hussein were to somehow meet the US's impossible demands, the President's response would be: "This is another example of Iraq's deception!"

Tom Friedman, *The New York Times*' three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist, who supports the war, made some interesting observations on Tim Russert's television programme on March 8. "America is going to war on the wings of a lie," Friedman said. The lie, according to Friedman, is that Saddam and Al Qaeda are linked. He went on to say that Al Qaeda is an Islamic fundamentalist terrorist group, and Saddam Hussein is a secular thug. As the last Bin Laden tape clearly demonstrated, Saddam and Osama hate each other's guts, and have never coop-

erated. Friedman said that he had travelled around the country and found that 99 per cent of Americans are against the war. Fifty percent, however, feel obliged to support the President, regardless of how they feel. "This is an elitist driven war," Friedman said. The war had its genesis in July of last year when Bush gathered his rightwing confidants, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and National Security Chief Condoleezza Rice at his Crawford, Texas ranch and decided to send troops to Kuwait to attack Iraq. Secretary of State Colin Powell was not invited.

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LETTER FROM AMERICA

Why the rush to war? Because it was getting hotter and the sandstorms were getting fiercer in Iraq. Because it would take exactly two days for Bush to destroy the possessor of the "weapons of mass destruction!" After the victory will come the accolades; after all, everyone likes a winner. The cost? With Kuwait and Saudi Arabia not bankrolling Gulf War II, Iraq's oil is going to foot the bill this time. Doubly lucky Iraqis! They get to pay for the destruction of their country, and for its reconstruction!

Suddenly the nation was told that Saddam was a mortal danger to America, and that several thousand troops were already in Kuwait to depose him. After presenting the war as a *fait accompli*, Congressional approval for the use of force was sought. Petrified of being labeled unpatriotic, US Congressmen and Congresswomen, as well as US Senators essentially gave the President a blank cheque to declare war, thus forfeiting to the President the Congress's own mandate to declare war. Without waiting for the UN to authorise war, the administration relentlessly built up troops, which approached quarter of a million. Once again, the war was presented as a *fait accompli* to the American public, who risked being called unpatriotic if they oppose it. The war was also presented as *fait*

Therefore, Karl Rove, the master tactician, suddenly "discovered" close ties between Saddam and Osama! Of course, he convinced only of the converted. Lately, Mr. Bush has taken to accusing Saddam of ties to "Al Qaeda-type" organisations. The Bush administration is full of unilateralist, narrowly focused rightwing ideologues who want to use America's unchallenged power to crush potential enemies (such as Iraq), reward friends (such as Israel) while remaining the world in their image. September 11 offered them the perfect excuse.

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In any conflict, greater State control is the true victor

SIMON JENKINS

THE world has been cancelled. There is a war on.

I normally consume news by the hour, almost the minute. Yesterday I had to turn it off. For much of the day, there was no news, merely the fallout of a bungled assassination attempt on President Saddam Hussein. There was just hours of waiting for news. Yet nothing else had a look-in. Only the ultimate anaesthetic, football, was permitted to supplant bombs as fit subject for public interest.

The American senator, Hiram Johnson, declared that the first casualty of war is truth. He was wrong. The first casualty is news. Sooner or later truth finds its voice. News is always relative. Yesterday Britain suddenly had no worries over Europe's constitution, the NHS, London's transport, the Olympics or the Budget. Instead the nation waited breathless for tales of bombing and heroism. When "all the youth of England are on fire", cried Shakespeare, and the "silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies". Tolerance and humility must give way to "hard-favour'd rage".

During the Falklands conflict the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Geoffrey Howe, commented that he might as well shut up shop for the duration. All he could do was sign blank cheques. British government was on autopilot. Two weeks ago Gordon Brown made a similar remark, inconceivable from him at any other time. Repeating Lord Howe of Aberavon, he said that the Ministry of Defence could have unlimited access to Treasury funds. He gave the most notoriously wasteful department in

Whitehall a golden key to the Exchequer. Drugs clinics, the elderly, Aids in Africa, the war on poverty could all eat their budgetary hearts out. War excused everything. Politics was in abeyance.

I have tried over the past month to argue my way through this wretched war. Debate is now overtaken by action. Democrats must accept collective responsibility for decisions taken by government when validated by Parliament. This decision has been so validated, despite Downing Street's disinclination at first to risk it. Iraq may not be a legal war, but for Britain it is a constitutional one.

If news is the first casualty of war, the first victor is government. It is ironic that every war fought by Britain in the past century, justly in the cause of freedom, has led directly to a curtailment of freedom in favour of state control. The history of war runs in tandem with that of higher taxes, greater regulation and more government.

Income tax was invented to pay for hostilities against Napoleon. It rose above a shilling in the pound to pay for Crimea. It went up higher, to 30 per cent and "super-tax", to pay for the Great War. It hit a top rate of 90 per cent to pay for the Second World War. These rises

ran their own hospitals, social services, poor homes and prisons. After it ran the home. The welfare state was introduced not through socialism but on the back of a wartime economy. The trains were nationalised not out of conviction but out of military need. State control of universities goes back to 1919 and the Army's demand for more scientific research. The statist Utopia that passes for some British cities was made possible only by the bombs of war.

War offers an opportunity for repressive legislation that would never be tolerated in peace. The Great World War saw the xenopho-

The present Labour Government promised to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act. It did, cynically introducing one ten times as long and far more draconian. Under the cover of "9/11" the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, brought in his Anti-Terrorism Act, the most extensive restriction of civil liberties in Britain in peacetime. It included indefinite internment of "suspects", expulsion of foreigners and the right of the Home Secretary to take any further measures "by decree" without oversight. Only the House of Lords, to its credit, demanded the dilution of his more extreme police-state proposals.

ments of civil liberty than she can have imagined possible when she wrote her book. That is ambition for you. Ms Hewitt is another Clare Short.

Such offences against personal freedom are bitterly fought in the United States, where courts and politicians regard the championing of liberty as a sacred duty, not an Opposition hobby. In Britain infringement seems immune to party and to argument. Labour and Conservative ministers alike fall in love with emergency powers. From Roy Jenkins to David Blunkett, ministers once dusted with the glitter of office brag eagerly at the chance to exploit war's "hardfavour'd rage".

Nor are they its only beneficiaries. Hard-favour'd rage is now gathering a multitude of demons into its embrace. Pro and anti-war advocates pollute politics with mindless name-calling in the press. On Monday Labour whips blighted the careers of MPs for treating war as a matter of conscience, a contempt of Parliament which would be illegal if committed by outsiders. Other MPs who support the war are threatened with deselection. Universities have become cockpits of intolerance. Football matches have become cauldrons of xenophobia. Germans and French are excoriated for taking a view of the war no different from that which Britain took a year ago.

Leviathan has all the best tunes, with full orchestral backing when nations go to war. That is why war is the hardest time to plead the case for free speech, fair trial, due process and personal liberty. And that in turn is precisely the point. Wars fought for freedom bring in their train freedom's greatest foes. They need hawk-eyed scrutiny.

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.

Why this hartal?

It is surprising that a political party who claim themselves to be pro "mehonati manush" (laborious-people) called yet another hartal. The Left parties called this hartal protesting the US led attack on Iraq and also due to Bangladesh Govt's "suspicious attitude" towards the war.

When many anti-war movements and processions are being held in Bangladesh protesting the seizure of Iraq by the US, it is very much unjustified to seize our people by calling hartal. Moreover, the hartal is called on a day when a foot march and grand rally is scheduled to be held at the Dhaka University (DU) campus and DU Vice-chancellor, teachers and officers are expected to participate in it. Doesn't the Left parties' attitude seem to be 'suspicious' as well?

A Teacher
Dhaka University

"How I will fight Bush"

This letter is in support to Masood Rahman and Arild Klokherhaug ("How I will fight Bush", (March 20 and 21). In order for this "fight" to be effective, we need to do more than just boycotting the US products. We need to stop trade with the US and start sending every-

thing to Germany and France. We also should not forget that countries like UK, Japan, Spain, Portugal, Australia, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait are also morally supporting the US by either sending soldiers or saying that the US is right in attacking Iraq. So, we should immediately stop all import and export with all these countries because after all people who support evil are also evil. By the way we should immediately bring back all Bangladeshi workers from countries like Kuwait and Qatar remember Qatar just spend more than \$1 billion to build the largest airstrip for the US airforce and giving unconditional support to the US army. We should not take any aid or help from these countries either, because then we would lose our moral right to protest.

Along with boycotting the US products, we should also boycott companies like Singer, American Express, the oil companies etc? We should make lists of everything and anything that is remotely related to the US and abandon them until they learn their lesson.

Mahmud Zaman
Uttara, Dhaka

While you all are at it (boycotting American stuff) make sure you also

pray hard so that the Americans do not start playing the same game. Because that would definitely put in danger the economy of a large number of developing countries and hundreds of millions of people who need American business not to watch American movies or drink American drinks but to buy food and clothing.

Shuja
Canada

Catastrophe @ to die for.com

The moment of truth and no more truce have indeed arrived and President Bush has made it clear to the world and his fellow Americans that all out war is possible defying all rules of deterrence. Eye again the world is betting peace with anarchy, crude politics at its best. And who is to suffer? It's you and me and the entire human race.

President Bush's statement, "the opening scene of a long concerted attack" means all the more excruciating pain for us. This has opened the gates for Saddam Hussein to resort to EWMD weapons. Ethus creating anarchy and we again re-enter the E-days of the barbarians. This E-holy war (as Saddam describes it) is going

to impinge on mankind and instead of boldly venturing the future we go reverse. EE

We today are facing an identity crisis as to who to trust and being stuck around the vicious circle of this instability paradox we will be mere spectators of the event-taking place. When eventually peace is resumed spectators will chant Ecritiques that this was a crime and politics again, will be as crude as usual.

Aziz
Uttara, Dhaka

Beware of the media!

It will be wise for everyone following the Iraq crisis to be circumspect about the Western media. The BBC and the CNN are the major networks covering the war and telecasting the war to our part of the world. The news is heavily tainted and is largely influenced by the coalition forces. If, for instance, 10 coalition forces' soldier die during the invasion, the CNN will invariably deny the report in the first place and then later confirm that 2 soldiers are killed rather than the original ten. The BBC will predictably support that same report. Here, we must be careful not to follow everything that is being covered by these two net-

works. It is sad when the BBC carries out video montages every hour, containing injured children with some dramatic background music. The BBC has churned out old archive videos of atrocities of Saddam



Hussein. This whole coverage is merely propaganda targeted to influence the Muslim sentiments to support George W. Bush and his allied forces.

I do not support this attack on Iraq simply because innocent civilians

are going to be killed. And all this just for having material gains is sick and the one's supporting the US are surely bought by the President of the United States.

Haji Mohammad Isam
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

War in Iraq

I found the editorial in March 20 issue about the war in Iraq quite amusing. The editorial says that this paper has been totally opposed to the war from and has found none of the arguments

persuasive. Of course it didn't find the arguments persuasive, it never looked at them.

With the exception of a few letters absolutely no space was given to any editorials supporting the war. This paper deliberately gave the impression of there being a united international front against the war while in reality quite a lot of people and many governments support this war. Already Britain, Spain, Italy, Denmark and Australia have started giving active support.

The Letter's Page has been a bit fairer than the Editorial one but not by much. While open letters from fringe American activists were printed prominently ones from mainstream commentators weren't.

The war has started and despite the doomsayers will hopefully result in a free and prosperous Iraq. In the future I would hope *The Daily Star* presents both sides of the story and not just one, often extremist, view.

Azad
Dhaka

Two for the price of one

This is a great opportunity for the war criminal Sharon. With all our attention diverted to Iraq, Sharon

will have a golden-chance to achieve his final goal; the destruction of Palestine. In fact, the Israeli IDF terrorists are already in position to storm into action as soon as the mass murder starts in Iraq. There is a good chance that, at the end of the Iraqi war, we will also have the end of Palestine. However, you are unlikely to see a single shot of the killing in Palestine as your screen will be bombarded with all sorts of statistics, interviews and clever analysis about Iraq. After all, who wants to see some low-budget actions in Palestine, when you can have real-time actions in full-colour, with stereosound and added special effects, brought to you by the newly created "embedded" reporters from Iraqi deserts?

As always, we will have our Muslim leaders hitting each other with sledge. However, the good thing is, with the miserably Palestinian losers gone, our leaders can finally concentrate on more important matters e.g. buying luxury cars or building homes for their families with the latest innovations from our Western "friends".
Azad Miah
Oldham, UK