

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Baghdad bombing shocks the world

Put an immediate stop to the military action

THE indiscriminate bombing in Baghdad professedly aimed to 'administer shock and awe to the Saddam regime' has resulted in heavy civilian casualties with women and children being the worst-hit victims. When three hundred missiles are dropped in a single night on a city of five to six million people, it's a hypocritical nonsense to claim that they are being precision-guided pay-loads targeted at specific installations civilian lives would be spared. As the war rages for the fifth day, the 'shock and awe bombardment' of Baghdad comes as an outrageous violation of human rights of a hapless people and a cruel joke to the oft-repeated pious intentions of 'winning hearts of the Iraqis and liberating them'. As if all of this is not enough, sustained carpet bombing of Baghdad is hinted at being on the cards as a show of overwhelming force to ludicrously overpower a military unequal.

The humanitarian tragedy in Baghdad itself, which is being turned into a waste-land by heavy bombardment is likely to take on yet more horrendous proportions as the coalition armies press on from the south to move up to the capital city.

In this dreadfully developing scenario, we fully endorse Dhaka's call for an immediate end to US military action on Iraq and stoppage of the indiscriminate bombing in Baghdad which has drawn a universal reaction of rejection and condemnation world wide.

Pope John Paul has spoken out again and this time not against rumblings of a war but a military juggernaut already on the roll riding a roughshod of human rights to wreak massive misery and misfortune on a hapless people. The Pope's warning could not have come a day earlier: "the war threatened the whole of humanity, and that weapons could never solve mankind's problems". These are evangelical words but with a profound sense of the world around us. We recall with appreciation the Vatican's role in having sent senior cardinals to both George Bush and Saddam Hussein before the war broke out. And now we welcome his forthright criticism of the US for interrupting diplomatic efforts by launching a war against Baghdad. The Pope's moral voice should be heeded by George Bush and Tony Blair before it's too late for any kind of redemption. They must stop the war or be consigned to the footnote of history.

High Court order welcome

Mechanism needed to detect such hazardous construction

IT is welcome news that the High Court has asked the government to stop construction work at New Colony in the city's Asad Gate area. The stay order truly reflects the sentiments of the local people who have been vehemently opposing the government plan to construct 500 flats at the cost of the playground in the locality.

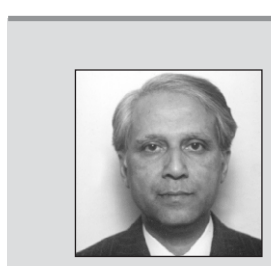
It is also a positive development that the forest and environment minister has supported the stand taken by the environmentalists on the issue. However, one gets the impression that the minister entered the scene when it became too obvious that the construction plan was being implemented to the utter dismay of the local people. The residents had to organise sit-in demonstrations to draw the attention of all concerned to the housing ministry's plan of constructing new buildings in the area.

Apparently, construction of new buildings was a routine item on the government's development agenda. But what came as a rude shock to the residents of New Colony is that construction of so many buildings would have reduced their locality into a highly congested place with no empty space. Unfortunately, what we watch with a sense of regret these days is a tendency to occupy all empty places in the city. No empty space be it a lake, a park or a playing ground is spared by the land grabbers.

However, the government planners are supposed to be aware of the environmental hazards associated with eliminating parks, water-bodies and playgrounds. But the New Colony incident is one more example of great indifference on the part of the housing ministry to the environmental needs of the city.

It is, of course, not possible for citizens to unite against every outlandish attempt to occupy empty places. The government should formulate clear guidelines to make sure that intruders and land grabbers do not get the chance to take possession of parks and playgrounds. It should also have a mechanism to detect activities on the sly leading to environmental degradation.

The travails of Iraq



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

DESPITE requests from many countries and millions of people that peace be given an opportunity to finding a solution, war started in Iraq early morning Thursday last. Valiant efforts by France, Germany, Russia, China and Syria in the Security Council did not stop the evil of war being released from its cage. France and Germany, underlined their defiance and fought for multilateral diplomacy and international legal provisions, but to no avail.

One must point out here that most will have no hesitation in agreeing with President Chirac and the French Foreign Minister that President Saddam Hussein has not been the best thing for the Iraqi people. However, the question is whether Security Council Resolution 1441 is being suitably interpreted right now in Iraq. It is also not very clear as to how a considerably low-tech Iraq could have become such an overwhelming and urgent security threat to the 'coalition of the willing'.

The few days of war that we have witnessed till now have proven without a shadow of doubt the supreme high-tech strength of the coalition. The dramatic improvement in upgraded avionics and precision bombing have been backed up in the theatre of war with combined strategy. As some analysts have pointed out, the coalition air force now 'owns the night and shall also own the day'. The use of thousands of Tomahawk cruise missiles and B-2 Stealth bombers has enabled the attacking, or as some say, liberating forces, to find numerous targets of opportunity. To this is being added the presence of radar jammers and prowler aircraft. What the world is watching is effects based warfare.

The continuing controversy over action in Iraq has also been further highlighted with the French President pointing out in the recently concluded EU Summit in Brussels that France will oppose any Security Council Resolution that attempts to legitimise the role of the belligerents in Iraq. He also recommended the future role of the United Nations in the post-war reconstruction scenario in Iraq. Held in a frosty atmosphere, a lowest common denominator, bland statement came out of the meeting. This was the result of trying to paper in gaping cracks. Russia has also come out with similar views.

One hopes that the decision to rush off to war and to disregard the continuing use of weapons monitors will be answered through the discovery of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. If that does not come about, soon to say the least, it will be proof of the refrain that it was oil after all that determined the course of action in Iraq.

Nevertheless, while leaders across the world debate on legalities, the United Nations has revealed its impotence. This has not been the first time. In recent years we have also watched its failure in the Balkans. As US Senator McCain has pointed out in an interview, it would appear

that this body is more adept in peace-keeping rather than in peace making. Despite its presence, once again, the commitments consecrated in the UN Charter to live in peace have been belied.

Analysis of the ongoing campaign identifies three elements: an air campaign of great intensity; a psychological warfare assault to convince the Iraqi military that resistance is pointless and a ground operation to

resources, which will have to be safeguarded.

Even with a US led coalition victory, critics have pointed out that frayed ties across the Atlantic could persist for a long time, undermining trade relations and the larger war against terrorism. USA's strike-first military strategy could embolden other powers to do likewise. Russia might now use pre-emption to justify tracking down Chechen rebels in the Republic of Georgia. Radical

the Iraq war in shaping a common foreign and security policy within the European Union. The success reflected in the Balkans, spearheaded on a supranational basis has now been obscured by the effective taking of sides on the approach towards war in Iraq.

In recent days we have already seen the problem acquiring additional dimension with the alleged entry of Turkish troops into Northern Iraq. The Kurdish population that live in this part of Iraq have their own ambitions. The Kurdish people inhabiting sections of Turkey and Iran also have their own dream. The only constant factor in this imbroglio would be continuing unrest and disorder. Bringing calm out of this chaos will be difficult. We have already seen how the Balkans disintegrated and created a serious problem for years in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Another factor is also bound to play its own role within the unfolding drama. Big oil interests will now try to regain influence over the great Middle East oilfields, from which Western companies were expelled four decades ago. March 24 issue of 'Newsweek' has pointed out that 'the jockeying has already begun', and has suggested that while restoring oil production facilities, oil companies will try to change the terms of their involvement in the region. They will, as in the past, seek to regain ownership control of the commodity. Analysts believe that a new government, backed by the USA and Britain, desperate for cash to rebuild, will likely opt for production sharing contracts. This in turn will give them an ownership stake that can be booked as an asset on their balance sheet, thereby also pushing up their stock prices. One is sure that such changes would create their own dynamics and instability within the region.

Last, but not the least will be the question of looking after the welfare and rehabilitation of the millions of internally displaced persons and the hundreds of thousands of people who will be refugees as a consequence of the war. I repeat here some sentences from my earlier column, published in this page on 8 February last under the title "Look before you leap": "Whatever the final decision, it is paramount that the US as well as the United Nations very carefully work out a road map for post war Iraq (in case it is required), in terms of immediate, mid-term and long-term needs. Recent experience has shown that pledging conferences are fashionable, but take time to convene. Implementation of agreed strategies need an even longer time lag given the problems of putting together a post-war governance system. Powers that be, should not plead at that time their inability to find adequate funds for the rehabilitation of a people who have already suffered enough."

I can only hope that this quest for 'liberating' the people of Iraq will end soon and that the relevant provisions of the United Nations will be used to guarantee peace, ensure reconstruction and make certain that stability returns to the war-affected people of Iraq. It will be important that the role of the members of the coalition in future Iraq be identified soonest. The on-going war in Iraq is not going to be easy, but the road to post-war peace in Iraq will be even more difficult.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

'Say you! Is this the way of the mighty?'



FARUQ CHOUDHURY

MR Bush! I am fully aware that neither the question posed in the quote above, nor what I am going to say will ever catch your attention. But then the points I raise have been made to you from all corners of the globe by many in many a manner and in many a language. You are neither deaf nor are you blind: your problem lies in the lack of comprehension expected of the mighty head of the world's sole superpower. This is indeed your bad luck, just as it is ours and just as it is of the entire generation of today. The human civilization having set its foot in the twenty-first century seems to have tarried and fallen back to the primitive and ferocious days of an age devoid of all principles. And for this you must take full responsibility.

You of course are aware of the real reason for your naked aggression against Iraq as equally aware is your faithful "Foreign Minister", Tony Blair (so named by Nelson Mandela), just as equally aware are the Heads of all the major countries like France, Germany, Russia and China or for that matter the people of every region of the world including your own people and including this very ordinary citizen of this poor country. Your objective, in short, is to establish your full control over Iraq's energy resources in utter disregard of the just demands and sacrifices of the Arabs, and to firmly establish the hegemony of your ally, Israel. Your cherished goal is to secure the hold of the United States, Israel and their allies over this wealth in order to ensure, in this age of technology, the preponderant position of the United States. It is with this objective that you have launched this aggression and to justify which you have put forward a cobweb of unacceptable reasoning.

Your argument is that Saddam is a dictator and as such his removal is highly desirable. But the fact remains that like the United States, Iraq is also a sovereign country. The modern state system is the result of the evolution of human civilization. According to the established norms, Saddam's acceptability as the Head of State of Iraq, therefore, lies not on you, but on the people of that country. The people of Iraq, as revealed by their media, also happen to entertain similar views about you as you do of Saddam. Should this alone be a signal for you to lay down your office? You have issued an ultimatum to Saddam and his sons to leave the country. You also happen to have a family and in fact you have been viewed by many in Iraq as a President possessing "weapons of mass destruction" far in excess of others. Mr President, should you be expected to leave your country because of that?

In justification of your invasion you have quoted chapter and verse of Security Council resolutions and have tried to confuse public opinion. Will you please answer only one question in this regard? Has there been a single resolution that has authorised the use of force against Iraq now? No, there has not been. And the point is not mine but that of the German representative as pronounced in the Security Council. If that is so, you may also be considered as one who is acting in violation of international law.

You have said that Saddam has connections with the Al Qaida, but have failed to furnish any credible supportive proof. You have stated that the Al Qaida are religious fundamentalists and are dangerous. Yes, Saddam may be dangerous, but a fundamentalist he is not. You have perhaps never been to Iraq but by now must have a clear idea of the geographical location of the country. You have never met Saddam face to face, as I have, more than once, in Baghdad. He did not appear to be particularly enthusiastic about performing religious practices and unlike autocrats of some other Muslim majority countries, has not invoked religion to secure his position. Yes, he is by all accounts power crazy but has not appeared to be a religious fundamentalist. May I say that many believe that you have put up the Al Qaida excuse only to incite your troops to go after Saddam.

It has been said that Saddam possesses weapons of mass destruction. This fear of yours is shared by many, for Saddam has indeed used poisonous gas in the past. Saddam has announced that he no longer possesses such weapons. But then one could not understandably go by the word of his mouth? That is why the UN had sent Weapons Inspectors to Iraq. They devoted themselves to the task of disarming Saddam. Unauthorised missiles were destroyed with much fanfare, while the Inspectors said that they needed more time to complete their task. In the midst of all this your fear that Saddam might, all on a sudden, mount and attack against the United States seemed unreal to the world. In fact Saddam does not possess the capacity to mount against the United States the kind of attack you have launched against Iraq. Individual terrorists can of course cause harm as they did through their dastardly action in your country on September 11. They have in several parts of my country been engaged in throwing bombs for no rhyme or reason. But it is hard to find justification for your occupying Iraqi oil wealth by trying to establish Saddam's connections with the perpetrators of such acts. The fear is that with his back now against the wall in his own country, Saddam might indeed do something desperate.

There is a story I came across the other day. Your Homeland Security people stopped a bearded Muslim cyclist in New York. "Mohammad Hossain", their Commandant said, "we have got you at last, but the problem is that we cannot send you to prison for you have not apparently broken any law of the land, not even a traffic law." With great self confidence Mohammad Hossain replied, "it is because Allah is always with me." "I see, in that case you are under arrest, for according to your confession Allah is double-riding with you and double riding is forbidden within the New York city limits"! Your reasoning to get hold of Saddam is as laboured as that anecdote is.

Mr Bush, no one knows, not even you, when your aggression will come to an end. But from past experience one can say that as the intensity of your aggression subsides, fresh crises will emerge. The fear is that Iraq may turn out to be another Vietnam or yet another Palestine!

Have you carefully considered the humanitarian situation that your aggression is likely to give rise to? In that land of Karbala, Euphrates and widowed Sakina, much familiar in the annals of Muslim history, who will look after the war widows of you aggression? Will not thousands upon thousands of Iraqi children, malnourished by years of economic sanctions simply perish? Your soldiers may also have to pay the price for your aggression. Many are likely to return home in coffins and you are likely to welcome them as those who have made supreme sacrifice for the cause of freedom. But will they not be, by the objective yardstick of history, viewed as simple aggressors acting under orders?

Your bombs will destroy Iraq's infrastructure that will be rebuilt with Iraq's oil wealth by your industries at a huge profit. Will this not incur the wrath of the entire Arab world? Will not your aggression set in motion forces that may change the map of the Arab world? Your argument that with Saddam's exit and consequent irrelevance, the benign wind of democracy will blow in Iraq, seems utterly unrealistic. The United Nations has been a great achievement of the post second world war generation. By ignoring it have you not insulted our age and time? Has not a cruel dictator such as Saddam, drawn the world's sympathy because of your ill-considered action?

Mr Bush! In these early hours of your invasion I have raised a number of questions. I want to assure you that I have done so more with the desire of unburdening my distress than with any hope of your appreciating the likely consequences of your aggression.

Faruq Choudhury is former foreign secretary and a columnist.

POST BREAKFAST

Even with a US led coalition victory, critics have pointed out that frayed ties across the Atlantic could persist for a long time, undermining trade relations and the larger war against terrorism. USA's strike-first military strategy could embolden other powers to do likewise... It is anticipated that after regime change in Iraq, the USA will also be encouraged to persuade Iran to end its nuclear agenda and stop providing support for the anti-Israeli political group of Hezbollah in the Lebanon. The emerging scenario is bound to also affect the geo-strategic posture of Syria. It will have to rethink its overt and covert cooperation with the Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah in view of now being surrounded by pro-American states -- Turkey, Israel, Jordan and the new Iraq'.

encircle Baghdad.

The hope behind this strategy is that there will be only limited resistance from demoralised and isolated units. It is also being taken for granted that those who fight will face the full force of coalition combat power. It is also being expected that such steps will eventually lead to Iraqi regime collapsing from within.

It would also appear that the aim of the coalition is to discourage Iraqi soldiers from fighting and for them to dissuade their commanders from using chemical or biological weapons, if they have any. Great efforts are being made to realise this with the distribution from the air of more than two million leaflets in Arabic urging the Iraqi forces to surrender and lay down their weapons.

Varying optimistic assessments are already being made about the length of time the war will take to conclude. This has been reflected already in the gradual reduction of prices in the trading of oil futures. It is being anticipated that the bulk of the heavy US and British armour will occupy the strategic south-east and that the airborne units will leap-frog deep into Iraq. It is also being expected that within days of initiating the conflict, US forces will be in control of almost all the oilfields in the northern and south-eastern parts of Iraq. All this is possible. Given the imbalance between the two sides, the outcome of the conflict is not in doubt. However, how long it will take and the level of casualties that will come about will depend not only on the resistance from Iraqi units, particularly, the vaunted Republican Guards, but also on how well the 'coalition' can maintain the lines of logistical supplies if the advance is more rapid than expected.

Nonetheless, what continues to worry others is how the future will unfold for the people of Iraq, the consequences of war and the geo-political implications for the entire region. Added to this will be the complicated process of recreating Iraq. There will also be the question of Iraq's cultural antiquities and natural

forces in India might also be seriously tempted to advocate and justify a pre-emptive attack on nuclear rival Pakistan. China could physically assert its right over Taiwan.

In this context one is also reminded of the comments made by David Wurmuser in his book entitled "Tyanny's Ally: America's Failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein." Wurmuser, like many other Arabists agrees that bringing down Saddam will definitely destabilize both the neighbouring countries -- Syria and Iran. It has also been pointed out that a post-Saddam government that includes 'meaningful participation' by Iraq's Shi'ite majority will greatly reduce the Iranian claims of being the representative of the Shi'ite Muslims in the region. This in turn, might affect the prominent role of the clerics within the Iranian decision making hierarchy.

It is anticipated that after regime change in Iraq, the USA will also be encouraged to persuade Iran to end its nuclear agenda and stop providing support for the anti-Israeli political group of Hezbollah in the Lebanon. The emerging scenario is bound to also affect the geo-strategic posture of Syria. It will have to rethink its overt and covert cooperation with the Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah in view of now being surrounded by pro-American states -- Turkey, Israel, Jordan and the new Iraq'. This scenario will also greatly reduce the already depleted abilities of the radical Palestinians and the Palestine Authority. Their ability to obtain a favourable deal with the hostile right-wing government of Israel will be affected. Another important element in this evolving scenario will be the reduction of influence of Saudi Arabia as being the major provider of oil to the USA. The new Iraq will step in as the counterbalance in the future.

The question is what will be the future role of the UN Security Council, the United Nations itself and the divided European Union? Added to this will be unanswered questions pertaining to the longer term effect of

So, is the war actually upon us?

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

There is a sizeable Iraqi community in Britain, the majority concentrated in and around London. Most of them are exiles who fled Saddam Hussein's regime and many of them have lost close friends and relatives who had been eliminated by the Iraqi secret service. These people are naturally pleased that the process to get rid of Saddam has started and are hoping for its speedy conclusion so that they may once more go back to their own country. Exiles are generally never really happy even though they may have been able to find a reasonably comfortable life away from their homeland and most expatriate Iraqis are no exception. I personally know a young Iraqi who lives in my neighbourhood. He calls himself Ben -- "It is easier for the English to pronounce than my real name, you know", he says by way of explanation -- and works as a driver for a local mini-cab company. I first made his acquaintance about a couple of years ago when he drove me and my wife to Heathrow airport and we had an interesting conversation on the way. I run into him occasionally as he is driving by or picking up a passenger on my street and he always greets me with a friendly

"Hi, boss!" In his mid-20s now, he arrived in London about twelve years ago -- just as the last Gulf war was about to break -- to stay with his uncle who put him into a local school from where, at the age of seventeen, he passed his GCSE. Since found him sitting in his car parked in front of his company, looking half asleep. I tapped on his window and he looked up with a slight start. "Hi, boss!" he said with a sheepish grin and came out of the car. "What's this, Ben?" I asked him: "You're sleeping on duty?" His grin

broadened: "Didn't have a wink of sleep last night, boss," he said. "And why not?" I asked. He explained that he had spent most of Thursday night at a Iraqi cafe somewhere at the edge of Central London in the company of some of his compatriots. They were watching CNN on television till the small

hours of the morning and had seen the first news flashes of American bombs hitting Iraqi targets. He sounded quite jubilant as he spoke, his voice quickly losing the sluggishness caused by lack of sleep. "Are you glad that this is happening?" I asked him. "Of go back for a short visit, but not permanently -- no, I don't think so." Well, going back for good will certainly be difficult for Ben who has been in Britain for most of the formative years of his life. Besides, going back would almost certainly mean leaving his British girl-friend

Emergency measures

Within minutes of the beginning of the bombardment of Iraq, Britain was placed on high alert against the possible threat of retaliation by Islamist extremists. Security is being especially tightened around the so-called "symbols of capitalism" such as Canary Wharf in the Docklands area of East London which is the tallest building in Europe and various other Government buildings considered high-risk targets. Airspace above Central London continues to remain a no-fly zone for all civilian aircraft and airport security has been further tightened, especially on flights to and from the USA and the Middle East. Apart from London, cities like Manchester and Birmingham are regarded by Scotland Yard as particularly at risk from spontaneous violence from the opponents of the attack on Iraq. The police are being extra vigilant about the possibility of a suicide bomber or a chemical or biological attack, either of which could wreak havoc in a crowded area and cause mass panic, although they privately admit that there is little that can be done to forestall an outrage of this type. According to the Commissioner of Scotland Yard, Britain's special relationship with the USA makes this country highly vulnerable. "Who are the biggest allies of America?" he asks: "Which is the next biggest target? It has got to be here." Meanwhile, a new Home Office guidance issued on Wednesday, 19th March, advised every household in Britain to store a supply of ready-to-eat food, bottles of drinking water, a battery-powered or wind-up radio, a battery-powered torch and blankets so that they would be prepared to see themselves through any emergency which might cut off access to power, water and telephone. A Home Office spokesman said that they were "certainly not advising people to stockpile against the threat of terrorism", but "it is sensible to be prepared for an emergency in the home and make plans for any major disruption." The HO guidance also urged people to keep the telephone numbers of the local police, council, utility companies and close friends and relatives at hand and stressed that "if there is a major incident and you are not in the immediate area then the official advice is to stay indoors and tune to local radio or television news."

LONDON LETTER

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course I am," he replied: "and so are all the others..." "So when all this is over and Saddam is no longer there, will you go back to Iraq?" I asked. "Many of us will," he said. "But what about you -- personally?" I insisted. He was not quite sure on that point: "Perhaps -- perhaps not," he said: "May be I'll behind, which is a tough decision to make at his age. I am sure there are many others in the same position as Ben, but there must also be many more who are, at this very moment, waiting for the first chance to be able to return to where their roots really belong."