

## In anticipation of war crunch

### Some belt-tightening imperative

THE mood is extremely dark because of the war on Iraq. It won't be long before the repercussions of the catastrophe send the world economy reeling in recession. The ripple-effects on smaller economies could be extremely debilitating if the war drags on. In this context, it is a bit reassuring to learn from finance minister M Saifur Rahman that (a) we have a buffer-stock of foodgrains worth 22 lakh tonnes with the *boro* harvest to be reaped in a month; and (b) the government has an oil reserve that will see us through for the next two months.

But if the war continues for weeks which it is likely to, given the outlook of things on the ground, we may be strapped for cash. The none-too-healthy forex reserve estimated to be good for covering two to three months' imports at best is likely to be under severe pressure if the military conflict in the Gulf escalates. Export has already shown a downward trend and remittances from Bangladeshis working in the Middle East particularly are bound to touch a low. On an overall basis, as the demands in our niche markets in the Western world declining in the face of war preoccupations, shipment difficulties and cost-cutting measures in the importing countries, our exports are probably in for a steep fall.

In this context, it is highly imperative that we retain whatever balance we have in terms of payment capabilities. We must not allow any balance of payment (BOP) deficit to grow. That is why we have to quickly put in place and implement an import reduction strategy so as to save enough cash to foot the bill for petroleum and food imports we might have to take recourse to in the event of an emergency. The finance minister has made it clear that depending on the course of the war, the government may go for restrictions on import of luxury items to ease the pressure on foreign currency reserve. As a matter of fact, we would have thought that the business community had already put a squeeze on such imports. As a rule, for a country like us, only the items we cannot do without should be imported; judged from that standpoint, no austerity is involved here but economic commonsense.

## World cup cricket

### Lessons to learn for the Bangladesh team

THE biggest sporting event of the year was somehow diluted by the military events taking place in the world since last week. Ever since the US started to drop bombs in Iraq, people and media alike, quite naturally turned their attention to the unfolding war giving a side-long glance at the World Cup Cricket final. But the frenzy, the euphoria surrounding the cricket festival in its initial stages had reached a very high pitch -- thanks to the two teams from South Asia reaching the semi finals. One can imagine, the pleasure the South Asian cricket lovers got when India beat Kenya to reach the final. Also, the Sri Lankan rise to the semi-final stage through a bad patch was something of a treat. Though the Indians had the best team in the tournament -- unbeaten Australia -- as their opponent, there was no harm in hoping for the best.

Unfortunately, the Indian players somehow could not live up to the expectations. Though they were beaten by Australia at the initial stages of the tournament, their performance in the games that followed was definitely praiseworthy. So hopes were raised, mainly because India hadn't reached the final since winning the trophy twenty years ago. But the bowlers seem to have let the team down, so did the batsmen. It would be right to say that the fallen wicket of Sachin Tendulkar was the prized possession of the Australian team and a big blow to the Indian team. The only saving grace was masterly Sachin deservedly getting the 'Man of the Tournament' award.

Unfortunately we don't really have any good memories from this world cup as far as the Bangladesh team is concerned. Apart from some flashes in the pans, their performance in the whole tournament was nothing to speak about. In fact, they failed in the top order batting; bowling was not also very inspiring and the less said about the fielding, the better. But there were also moments when we saw that if they put their mind into it, they could really show some sparks. After their return from South Africa, the management and the players tried to blame each other for the fiasco. We hope, instead of putting the blame on to others, both the parties would try to learn from the mistakes they committed. We don't want to lose hope, we don't mind waiting for the day when the Bangladesh team would carve a niche for themselves in world cricket.

# Iraq War: The looming disaster



M ABDUL HAFIZ

IN the face of a French threat to block it in the UNSC as a draft war resolution was withdrawn on 17 March last by its sponsors -- the US, Britain and Spain -- and the window of diplomacy practically shut against the backdrop of continuing schism both in the United Nations and transatlantic community, the countdown to war in Iraq began. With that a moment of truth also arrived for America which asserts its right to militarily intervene even without UN approval. President Bush, while addressing his nation as well as an international audience, issued a bizarre ultimatum to the Iraqi president to leave the country within 48 hours or face invasion. Prime Minister Tony Blair, his staunchest ally, met his cabinet in an emergency session before a marathon parliamentary debate where he won a vote of support for his Iraq venture although a rebellion in the ruling Labour Party continues to brew up. President Saddam, left with little choice seems to have willynilly taken up the gauntlet and is facing the world's mightiest country. Most of the foreign missions in Baghdad have closed down, the UN weapon inspectors, the foreign journalists and aid workers have already left. On the battlefield, more than a quarter of a million of troops are on

the strike. As an unusual gloom thickens up around the world capitals, an eerie quietude grips the mood in opposing camps.

The US-led coalition has unleashed, as planned, a sharp swift campaign against Iraq's ragtag defence. That an overwhelmingly superior invading force will score an easy victory is a foregone conclusion and it elicits little curiosity about its chronology. What is, however, of interest is what will follow in its aftermath.

to abdicate much of its overwhelming authority to promote the spirit of democracy. All those notions of America evaporated with a cascade of events from nine/eleven to American invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and an attack on Iraq. Hopes of a new dawn in human history after the demise of cold war was thus cruelly dashed. "Never has one nation combined so much of power and so much of arrogance and lack of responsibility, so much scientific knowledge and so much contempt for the rest

were not also identified for coercive measure as it was in Afghanistan and is going on in Iraq. Driven by its penchant for manufacturing an excuse for military intervention when she attempted to establish a link between Iraqi government and al-Qaeda the connection was so tenuous that even the Mossad was unable to assist them with credible evidence on this count. But that has not stopped the war from taking place. Because "you are guilty of the fact that I am hungry" /said the wolf to the lamb in the

Council Stated in 1953 "United States' policy is to keep the sources of oil in the Middle East in American hand".

Notwithstanding the mealy mouthed promises before the US-led coalition's war on terror in Afghanistan, the country is in a terrible mess with the revival of pre-Taliban predatory practices, poppy cultivation, bitter inter-ethnic fightings, old warlord-ism and re-construction of Afghanistan still remaining a non-starter. In

medical treatment of one sort or other. One lakh civilians would be wounded and 400,000 hit by epidemics while four-fifth of these victims would be children under five and pregnant or lactating women. Iraq is already impoverished by sanctions. As many as 16 million people depend on a monthly food-basket supplied free by the Iraqi government. This supply can no more be sustained as the banking has started and thousands will starve once again. The UN estimates that the bombing will disrupt the electric network on which pumped water supply depends, leaving millions without drinking water in an already parched land.

After the 1991 Gulf war it was estimated that 15,000 civilians died and 120,000 Iraqi soldiers laid down their lives in the defence of their homeland. With improved and more destructive weaponry now available and in use the figures will be much higher this time.

The flood of refugees fleeing the war for neighbouring countries estimated by the UN to be around a staggering 900,000 while one million persons may be displaced in Iraq itself. The destruction of homes and properties alone would result in 40 million people requiring emergency shelter with hardly anyone there to provide it.

Through these man-made disasters on the brink of which the world is standing today new enemies will be bred -- where there was none -- call them terrorist or by any other name. And with a fresh cycle of violence they will hold their creators or catalysts to ransom even many years after the war in Iraq.

Big (ret) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

The baffled global community is trying to fathom if this unnecessary catastrophe could really not be averted! Because at stake is not just the future of Iraq and its people but that of the planet itself and a balance in which it is sustained. The whole edifice of an order painstakingly built up by the world leaders through the ages is now on the verge of being torn down, international law contemptuously violated and the world body, the UN, rendered irrelevant.

Yet only years ago when the cold war ended with the collapse of Soviet Union, many argued that the triumph of liberal democracy buried the idea of the history represented by rivalry of the opposing ideologies. Many fondly believed that the United States not only had the resources to lead but also seemed to have what most others lacked -- the absence of imperialistic impulse. She was perceived as benign, principled and one ready

of the world." The result is obvious when such a nation is in the grip of powerful multinationals, the oil lobby and military-industrial complex.

It is an anti-climax to another America from where General Eisenhower (later President) led the European allies to victory. When faced with another similar situation in Egypt in 1956 he chose containment rather than invasion and forced the invaders -- France, Britain and Israel -- to retreat and resolve the crisis peacefully. President Kennedy chose to contain Cuba rather than invade it. Even President Reagan, the architect of star wars refrained from attacking Libya. Where then is the case for attacking Iraq by George W Bush? When 'regime change' citing the Iraqi government's deplorable human rights record, was given as motivation, America was unable to explain why many other countries, including several of its own allies

Russian proverb) aptly describes how America is perceived globally in its stand against Iraq.

When the Twin Towers fell in New York on nine/eleven the rubble fell on Afghanistan although there was no concrete proof of direct involvement of al-Qaeda or Taliban or bin-Laden in the 9/11 attacks. To America's misfortune its war on terrorism failed to find the war's prime target, Osama bin Laden and hence needs a new one. After two years in office Bush has nothing else to trumpet: Sharpeconomic decline, corporate skulduggery, a foreign policy marked by more broken fences. American economy is heavily dependent on oil. And thus the greed for oil, political domination of Middle East through Israeli domination of the surrounding Arab countries and the reelection of Bush at home are indeed the motivating factors behind Iraq's invasion. The US National Security

case of Iraq even those promises are not made. All that is made are grim predictions about the war's humanitarian consequences that too by the countries and agencies other than the US. Hans Blix, while giving his latest report in the UNSC remarked that use of force in Iraq will be a disaster. Although concerns are expressed by millions of peace marchers around the world about a horrendous toll of human life and destruction and sufferings that a war would bring in its wake, even the surveys of the loss conducted by the UN itself found no mention in the speeches made in the UNSC and elsewhere.

MEDACT which is an affiliate of International Physicians for prevention of nuclear war, estimates that in any new conflict in Iraq casualties would be five times higher than the first Gulf war of 1991. The UN specialist agencies have already estimated that above 500,000 people would require

# US declaration of war: Moment of truth



HARUN UR RASHID

ON 17 March, President Bush gave an ultimatum to President Saddam Hussein to go into exile within 48 hours or face war at his (Bush's) own time of choosing. Iraq rejected the demand. It is sad for international community, the UN and NATO that a second Gulf War has begun without UN authority.

It is a moment of truth for unilateralist policy of the US -- its go-it-alone approach towards Kyoto Protocol, International Criminal Court, and side tracking of the Biological Weapons Conven-

tion has now catapulted to declaration of war.

It is a moment of truth for the US, because it realised that despite being the lone superpower, international community representing in the UN Security Council did not back the US for a second UN resolution allowing military force

Assembly that the US was willing to go through the process of the UN. Now it has abandoned the UN because it could not secure nine votes for US policy despite its alleged bribery, bullying and bugging of small uncommitted six nations. It demonstrates that small nations have self-respect and

dent of the superpower had to shun people for a policy which has attracted worldwide condemnation.

This is a moment of truth for the US because the war denies moral and legal legitimacy. The UN Secretary General questioned the legality of the war against Iraq.

**Ironically September 11, 2001 was a moment when a new US could have been born, a country which could have united international community in its search for waging war against terrorism. Instead the US appears to be unnecessarily aggressive, unilateralist and is dividing the international community.**

against Iraq. Despite its military and economic power the US could not secure small countries to support its stance against Iraq. Furthermore in its own sphere of influence in Latin America, the US failed to receive support from Chile and Mexico.

This is a moment of truth for the US foreign policy. Last September President Bush told the General

national interests that money cannot buy.

It is a moment of truth for the US: It appears that the US President has been placed in such an awkward position that he could not visit any European capital for the Summit but had to select a site on a secluded Portuguese island in the mid-Atlantic, the US base, for a summit. It appears that the Presi-

This is a moment of truth for the US: Its great allies and NATO partners France and Germany and Turkey deserted the US. They deserted because war against Iraq without the UN is illegal and immoral. France, Germany and Russia wanted a second resolution to disarm peacefully. They wanted the UN inspectors to be given a chance to disarm Iraq peacefully. But the US did not agree with them.

consequences. Multilateralism to global security issues will receive a deadly blow as it is embodied in the universally recognised acceptance of the UN Charter.

It is a moment of truth for the US because it will increasingly find itself isolated from mainland Europe. The war demonstrates that Europe's "soft power" of rules and process within the framework of

the UN is opposed by the US's hard power. The Franco-German-Russian axis emerges a counterpoint to the US in international security system.

It is a moment of truth for the US because strong Atlantic ties depend upon a US commitment to multilateral cooperation. This is a critical moment of the post-Cold War era where a new world order is in jeopardy by the declaration of war. Some say that the US action may initiate "the New World Odour", that will smell even more malodorous than that of during the Cold War era.

Ironically September 11, 2001 was a moment when a new US could have been born, a country which could have united international community in its search for waging war against terrorism. Instead the US appears to be unnecessarily aggressive, unilateralist and is dividing the international community.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## BOTTOM LINE

## OPINION

# 'Halving poverty by 2015'

SHADDY writes from University of Toronto, Canada

This refers to the article by Prof Yunus published in The Daily Star on March 14. Prof Yunus mentioned that "But it can be equally plausible that a person sets up a pharmaceutical company to bring quality medicine at the lowest price possible so that even the poorest family can afford it". I fail to understand how that can be as plausible as a person setting up a company for profit motive. The fact is, the world doesn't have people who want to help the poor. Human beings are by nature self-interested. Just by introducing the concept of "social objective driven" entrepreneurs wouldn't at all result in people being that type.

Now about the behavioural pattern of social entrepreneurs. Yes, I agree that there will be investors willing to invest in "social objective driven" enterprises, but the story doesn't end there. How

will these firms cope up with the strongly profit motivated firms, who are constantly improving efficiency, cutting costs, engaging in more investments, better technology? I'm afraid the social firm will not make it in the long run. They'd have goods being produced at much higher price than these profit making firms. Prof Yunus might argue that the customers will give preference to firms that are engaging in social welfare. Yes that is true, but not at the stake of their personal loss.

"Personal profit based private sector has its own clear agenda... Economic theory has not provided us with any alternative to this familiar private sector. I argue that we can create a powerful alternative -- a social-consciousness-driven private sector, created by social entrepreneurs". This is true but the whole argument just lacks one basic reality. That is the non-existence and the improbable existence of "social entrepre-

neurs". How do you think that in the western world the private sectors like health, telephone, police force are not only making profit but also not depriving the poor of the amenities.

This is not because of the entrepreneurs, but because of the government pressure. If we hand over sectors to private firms and the government keeps a constant vigilance on these sectors then I think we'll be able to obtain what you call a "social consciousness driven private sector" but created by government, something that already exists and is successful in many parts of the world.

Then about globalisation and free trade I have to say that Prof Yunus cites examples of situations that are highly improbable. When he says that globalisation means big enterprises trading with small enterprises and that free trade should be freedom for the weakest, I think the statements are contra-

dicting themselves. Firstly, free trade is nothing but exploiting cheap labour, filling local market with excellent cheaper foreign goods, making domestic firms go out of business, resulting in more unemployment and cheaper labour.

Future of nations will be decided by wealth they have. Because it is the wealth that can help them create a quality workforce and that in turn will make them wealthier. Quality workforce doesn't just come out from the blue. They come from a country which has good educational system, good job opportunities and for all those the nation has to be rich.

Finally, going to the burning question, "Can we reduce poverty by half in 2015"? Yes, we can but the reasons are a bit different.

Remove corruption at all levels starting from corruption in government offices. Strengthen police force and legal system (the heart of

any country) and remove political bias from them.

Impose tax on foreign goods. Any student of basic economics knows that imports hurt and exports help. Keep money in the country, place a limit as to what the tourists can take out. Bring in more multinational firms rather than directly importing. Increase employment at any cost. Encourage small enterprises.

Use taxes. Progressive taxes. Canada has taxes of over 40 per cent. Place taxes of those sorts on people earning in 6 digits. Place 60 per cent on those in 7 digits. Be strict on tax collection.

Increase geographical dimension of commercial Dhaka. Encourage industries in rural areas; make Narayanganj and suburban areas of Dhaka commercial places. Divide Dhaka into 2 or 3 zones and have a responsible mayor for each zone.

Create a minimum wage rate,

improve working conditions.

Create good educational infrastructure for local students and encourage foreign students to come to Bangladesh. Good educational system is one of the major sources of income for Australia from foreign students.

Engage in social programmes and encourage people by means of media, mosques, social gatherings to help poor people.

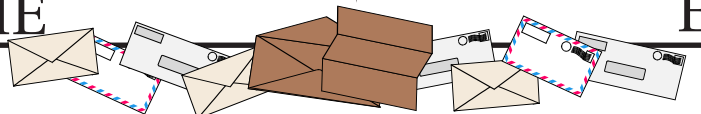
Help local industries to get more efficient and export more.

Upgrade agricultural facilities, help the farmers with loans and new instruments so that they can improve productivity.

Encourage tourism. Tourism is now a major business for Malaysia.

These small points can add up to be a lot and indeed can turn Bangladesh into an economically strong country, and thus help in alleviating poverty.

## 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.

### Anti-Americanism

I have a lot of foreign customers who come into Bangladesh for business. One in particular does millions of dollars worth of orders in Bangladesh each year. I first met him in 1983 when we had a tiny 80 machine factory employing 150 people. Now in 2003 my factory is ten times bigger and I directly employ ten times the people as well. Much of it is thanks to the continued patronage of my buyer.

He kept on doing business in Bangladesh back in '84 when we had to import even the paper cartons. He was here in '88 during the floods, he kept coming through the anti-Ershad movement, AL's civil disobedience movement during BNP's last rule didn't thwart him, he even came after 9/11.

In short this man is a true friend

not only to me and my workers but to our country. He is also a Jew and an American. But for the first time in 20 years he's scared to come to Dhaka. What should I say to him? The other while driving towards Mymensingh I saw half a dozen effigies of Bush. Our irresponsible press is drumming up this anti-war and anti-American feeling.

Can Mahfuz Anam control the possibly violent emotions that he and his fellow editors are happily fanning?

I don't own The Daily Star. I can't ask for it to be a fair and even handed paper. If it wishes to be extremist then that's its prerogative.

I just worry about what will happen to our country thanks to all this.

Kim Dhaka

The Bush game

It's been a few days since the USA has started its attack on Iraq. Every morning I wake up and turn on my TV with a fear of the worst news, where the innocent Iraqis are being the victims of US attack. I'm eagerly waiting to see the reaction of the US government and the Americans if no nuclear/Biological weapon is found in Iraq. But I'm afraid at the same time assuming that Bush will probably not hesitate to implant some evidence of nuclear weapon there just to justify his attack on Iraq. This is indeed a sad time for the world.

These days, I don't really like to watch any American or British news channel because these media have become the megaphones of Bush government. Most of the Americans at this moment are brain washed by the government. Most of them believe what they see and hear in their news channels.

Yet, there are many Americans who hold human values and spirit and feel the suffering of the Iraqis and the Palestinians. But they are helpless and the US government identifies their demonstration of truth and justice as unpatriotic.

The USA is, presently, facing an economic turmoil and the average Americans are paying for Bush's arrogance. But truth will ultimately reveal itself and the American people will soon realise what dirty game Bush is playing!

Delwar Hossain San Francisco, USA

### I support America

A lot of people ask me why I support the war so strongly.

I think the Economist magazine says it the best. Some say that the West is hypocritical: that America has WMD's and so, for example, do

Pakistan and India, so why should Iraq be singled out? The answer is that dangerous weapons are far more dangerous when in the hands of dangerous people. The other fear is that war will bring instability to the region. What, though, by contrast, are the effects of Saddam on that stability? Without him, or another hostile regime in Iraq, Iran would feel less need to pursue its own weapons programme. Israel would feel less threatened. American and British forces would no longer be need to be based so provocatively in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and elsewhere.

The other argument for war is for the 25m Iraqis themselves. For them the UN's containment that is supported by France and Russia has been a disaster. Saddam, his family and his forces have been ruling Iraq by terror, maiming, torture and killing hundreds of

thousands of people and ruining the lives of many millions more. The critics ask why Saddam should be singled out when the world is full of such human rights abusers. To which the answer, first, is that he's clearly one of the very worst; and second, why not?

If you cannot deal with all mass murderers, should you therefore deal with none of them?

Saladin Dhaka

### World Cup 2003 comes to an end

I have really enjoyed the World Cup 2003. Well I love at least those people who love the game of cricket and those people love Australia enjoyed the tournament. The tournament was pretty much on the Australian side as they were unbeaten throughout this World

Cup. Their game of cat and mouse with the ball and the bat really paid off.

They were the champion in 1999 and they are still the unbeaten champion of the cricket world. The celebration in Australia will definitely heat up in the days to follow. There is one thing I want to say to the Australian team: 'Congratulations in winning the Cup; hope 2007 will be the same'. And as for the Indian team, well no hard feelings, at the end of the game the best team won and it was all about teamwork.

Rizwan Hussain Jabbar Dhaka

### "How I will fight Bush"

I am getting rather tired of all these letters asking for boycotts of American and British products.

75 per cent of our export earnings are generated by the garments industry. Half of that is earned from exports to the US. Of the balance the majority is shipped to the UK.

Would you like the US and UK to return the favour by boycotting Bangladeshi products?

The UK and US between them make up the lion's share of the foreign aid we receive. Boycott that too?

While you're at it, boycott the English medium schools for promoting O' Levels why don't you? See how far you get in this world with a French matriculation.

Boycott also the parliamentary system, liberty, justice, fair play, the rule of law and all the other pillars of civilisation.

Masood Rana Dhaka