DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 27, 2003

The war taking a dangerous turn

An all-out effort must be made to stop it

S the war in Iraq is blowing into a humanitarian disaster of an appalling magnitude, people across the globe are giving vent to their sense of anguish in every possible way. Theirs is a natural response to an absolutely uncalled for attack on a country's sovereignty.

Against this backdrop, the leading intellectuals of the country have urged the government to a take a strong, clear stand against the US-led war. The war, they believe, is cause for great concern as it poses a major challenge to the international system and law which are 'safeguards' for smaller nations. If the norms and principles guiding international relations are allowed to be ripped into shreds by a country hell-bent on liquidating a much smaller and weaker adversary, then there will soon be no place for the nations having little military might.

The appeal made to the two major political parties --BNP and Awami League -- to take a unified stand against the war is welcome. They are condemning the war but do not appear to be ready to commit themselves beyond that position. If they really believe that the war is a clear manifestation of undermining the majority will of the world, they should speak against it in louder, unequivocal terms. If they speak with one voice it will reflect powerfully on our

In the outside world, there have been some developments worth taking note of. The UNSC is in an emergency meeting to discuss the Iraq situation. We believe the UN should renew its efforts for bringing the war to an end as soon as possible, just the same way it worked, albeit unsuccessfully, to avert the use of force in Iraq. The Arab League, for its part, should also activate itself, casting aside the divisions within the Arab nations, in order to put pressure on the United States and pave the way for a cease-

Obviously, mere condemnation of the hostilities is not going to help the Iraqi people now on the brink of being squeezed to death. Residents of the southern city of Basra are already desperately short of life-sustaining materials and services like food, water, electricity and medical support. The situation is critical; and the international community should act before it is too late.

The EU stand on the war has been rather clear and consistent. With France and Germany not budging from their position that the war was not legitimate, people around the world are rallying behind the cause of peace and justice; now it is up to the governments to tell the warmongers that what they are doing can only put the world into an irredeemable jeopardy.

Defiant digging at New Colony

How can it happen after a court order?

FTER an initial jolt, contractors hired by the Department of Housing (DOH) to constract flats in the open spaces and playground of the Asad Gate New Colony are back to work with vengeance. Thanks to Housing Minister Mirza Abbas's determination to go ahead with the project, protests from local residents and environmentalists, environment minister's reassuring words to them and the spirit of a High Court stay order have been virtually overlooked. Apparently as a token of compliance with the HC stay order, the contractors stopped digging the western part of the playground but they are excavating other parts of the open spaces at the colony. The attempted circumvention of the HC directive is an affront to law, to say nothing of committing a violation of environmental norms pertaining to mandatory breathing spaces between buildings. And how much useful it will be to save the playground for the children of the housing colony.

We fully endorse the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA)'s plans to seek a prime ministerial intervention for the cancellation of the housing project through a memorandum submitted to her with signatures obtained from

A word of appreciation for the legal backup that the Bangladesh Environment Lawyers' Association has promised to provide to the protest movement by Paribesh Andolon.

The earth-work is topped off by an indiscriminate chopping of trees on the sly in the darkness of night. Both the excavation and tree felling must be immediately stopped. That at the Monday's inter-ministerial meeting the unpopular project was not dropped is a sad commentary on the level of environmental anxiety we have. Perhaps it is time a cabinet meeting is held to formulate a clear-cut policy for the preservation of open spaces, parklands and

The genie is out



K.A.S. MURSHID

can almost hear Mr. Bush's agonising questions directed at Mr. Rumsfeld: "Where's that welcome we were promised in Basra? I thought you said that ordinary Iraqis would rise up against Saddam once we began the Awe and Shock Act? And why aren't we getting the mass surrenders you sure those surrender leaflets have been properly translated?" I cannot imagine what Mr. Rumsfeld is saying in response to these pertinent questions but whatever his response, the President is unlikely to find it amusing. After Day 4 of the Invasion of Iraq (and notwithstanding the efforts of the pro-war media) it is becoming increasingly clear that things are NOT proceeding to plan. Remember that famous adage -- whatever can go wrong will go wrong? Well, things are going wrong in the land of the Tigris and Euphrates. And if one thought that the Iraqis were going to be a pushover -- well, there is still

time to reconsider that particular

The coalition has already suffered huge casualties. No, I am not alluding to planes shot down -patriotically or otherwise. Nor am I referring to helicopter crashes or to injuries and death sustained by OUR forces at Nassariyah or Omm Qussr -- these are relatively minor losses compared to the loss in credibility both at home and

cities. As the battle for Iraq intensifies and casualties mount, these demonstrations will get even louder and bigger. In the meantime, Messrs Bush and Blair will continue to patiently await the surrender of the Iraqi Army. They will continue to await the popular uprising against Saddam. A thought does enter my mind: what if they have got it wrong and there are no surrenders, and worst still, no uprising? No, let us not even hope we are not in it. Are we?

spectacular. There is little question though that most Bangladeshis view the war with great suspicion, to put it mildly. Our official position appears to be anti-war while the treatment meted out to the Iraqi diplomat may well have been designed to appease our friends in the Coalition. Incidentally, I do not have the list of the 40 nations that are supposed to be part of the Coalition of the Willing -- I just

backed up by its military might. Everybody and everything must ultimately be subservient to US economic interests. Under these circumstances, should we be farsighted and try to carve out a niche in the heart of Mr. Bush?

pose of world domination -- princi-

pally economic domination

In a recent TV interview, a prominent local businessman spoke of taking part in the recon-

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

Dare one hope that the rest of us -- the French, Germans, Russians, Chinese, Indians and Bangladeshis along with ALL those dissenters within the coalition countries, can rid ourselves of the REAL threat to world peace? Dare one hope that we are able to get rid of the real WMD with the likes of Mr. Bush rather than the non-existent ones with minor tyrants? I believe it can be done...The genie, however, is already out of the bottle and it will be a while before we can persuade it to go back in again.

abroad. Coalition display of information and disinformation has been ingenuous. First we say we've got HIM and then we say we don't! We tell the world we have Basra only to later acknowledge that we don't -- ditto with Omm Qussr and Nassariyah. Who do you suppose we are kidding? Wish we knew.

In the meantime, the anti-war rallies continue to grow louder and larger. Hundreds of thousands are marching in London, San Francisco and New York, not to mention numerous other European

contemplate such a situation. After all OUR intelligence agencies are the best in the world and we have spent a hell of a lot of resources on them. And if they say there will be a mass uprising, then there will be a mass uprising, even if the surrender part fails to come through on

Just as there have been massive demos in the West there have been similar, although noisier demos in the East, especially in the Middle East. Here at home, the demos have been smaller and much less

Actually, there is this other notion I have been toying around with for a little while. I mean Mr. Blair does have a point. Here is a golden opportunity to endear yourself into the good books of the Boss and thereby ensure your rightful place under the setting sun (as well as a share of the pie). Is there any possibility that perhaps we too could similarly endear ourselves? Consider the unfolding scenario: multilateralism is dead. The US and its allies will now abrogate for itself the right to rule the entire world with the single pur-

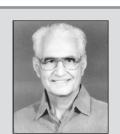
struction of Iraq after the war and the need for adopting a strategic position right away with that end in view. It wasn't clear to me what strategic position we could adopt: Sign up in the coalition and declare ourselves willing? Send in some units of the army (expenses to be recovered later from sale of Iraqi oil)? Close down the Iraqi Embassy in Dhaka? The only problem with the 'far-sighted' approach is how far-sighted is it? I for one cannot imagine a quick return to normalcy in the region, let alone in Iraq. I fear we may need to wait a very long

time before we get anywhere near those construction contracts, or those oil deals. Are you with me Mr. Blair? And at any rate it is too late to attempt being Mr. Bush's poodle that job has already been taken. You could of course ask Mr. Blair if he wanted one.

There is another road -- the road that millions of demonstrators worldwide are pointing to; the road that the rest of the world would prefer to take. This is of course the more difficult road and it isn't even clear if it exists. Dare one hope that the rest of us -- the French, Germans, Russians, Chinese, Indians and Bangladeshis along with ALL those dissenters within the coalition countries, can rid ourselves of the REAL threat to world peace? Dare one hope that we are able to get rid of the real WMD with the likes of Mr. Bush rather than the non-existent ones with minor tyrants? I believe it can be done. I believe this will happen principally because ordinary people in the USA and UK will rise up against their foolish leaders even if the Iraqis do not rise up against theirs. Indeed it must be done for the alternative doesn't even bear contemplation. The genie, however, is already out of the bottle and it will be a while before we can persuade it to go back in again.

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Careworn emperor rides on



M B Naqvi

UMANITARIAN concerns today are about the Iraqi people, Muslims and Christians, as a result of all those cruise missiles and bombs from the air. Some are fascinated by the deadly drama being enacted or others worry how long will the US take in installing its Viceroy to start reshaping Iraq. One's gaze is focused on two things: will Baghdad be bombed into rubble and how small or huge will be the number of men, women and children who will survive. Americans are surely capable of shocking and creating awe among the Iragis. The second concern is about the larger aims of George W. Bush and the war caucus around

All the world is aware that securing more and cheaper oil and removing the main thorn from the side of Israel are the immediate objective. The Emperor may only stop awhile consolidating the conquest of Iraq. Where would he turn next in the near term task of reshaping the Middle East is the second worry. Instead of speculating or forecasting, let us look at what has already happened or the price the Emperor has already paid and how much more he may be forced to pay because of the unexpectedly strong reactions in France, Germany, Belgium, China and Russia.

In PR terms, despite the formidable Anglo-American propaganda machine, Bush and Blair duo stands alone; at least 145 to 20

million citizens around the world have opposed the Bush crusade whatever it may be against or for. A huge political price has been initially paid because too many governments realise that American aims go so far as reshaping much of the world. Nobody should underestimate the bodyblow the Bush Administration has dealt to the UN system -- which, in turn, worked the security system in the post-1945 war world; it is a system that was designed by Roosevelt, Stalin

ries of its earlier Co-Prosperity Zone in Asia are still haunting it, especially after the rise of China as a potential superpower and also the Korean Nationalism that is anti-Japanese in orientation. Thus Japan may remain content to being a cog in the US juggernaut in its forward march. Insofar as the US military power is concerned it seems to be limited by one's uninformed imagination. Of its support in Asia that of South Korea is more wobbly than steady. But far defibelieves that the funding arrangements of 1991 Iraq war not being available, the US will have to go back to the hoary method of making the victim pay the costs of the aggressor. Thus all or most new contracts in oil business and for rebuilding Iraq will go to the US

American aims are widely seen to go well beyond Iraq. It is eyeing the strategic resources of oil, other minerals, markets, and the lucra-

fearful of a strong and united Europe that may yet be dominated by Germany -- as of yore. American influence may appeal to them as a benign factor.

Whatever the reasons of European states' policies the fact remains that European public opinion firmly disapproves of the US drive in Asia. The perception is that the US is not only destroying the UN and international law, they are replacing law with brute power:

Anglo-American academics are unlikely to give much of a chance to Old Europe that they perceive as stuck-in-past and moribund. Ideas of German and French experts do not substantially easily reach this quasi-English speaking country where people only infer from sketchily reported official statements. But the Germans and French are in tune with world opinion. This fact has been on display throughout the months leading up to this Second Iraq War: ordinary citizens anywhere do not want anything to do with a new Pax Americana that is sure to be totally

America-centred But the issue of contest, ab initio, concerns the orientation and indeed the unity of EU. That, in its turn, will involve the future of NATO that, with the demise of the Soviets, is robbed of a reason to exist for lack of an agreed enemy. NATO is unlikely to survive the disunity in EU. How Germany and France deal with Britain, so obviously an adjunct of American power, is the biggest questionmark facing the EU. This issue goes back in theory to de Gaulle days. But it may come to a head now and a Gaullist is the French President.

That may mean drama soon. All eyes are on how this cold wa develops, especially what new economic programme would Europe evolve to amend or replace the US-mandated Globalisation of the WTO. On what basis would Old Europe want to win the affections of the third world? The issue may not be immediate because third world is not really a factor on the plane of power. But in a battle for the hearts and minds in Europe, an alternative economic programme and vision involving a growing part of the third world will be a factor. That will give greater weight and might strengthen Europeans, if they can produce a new

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PLAIN WORDS

American aims are widely seen to go well beyond Iraq. It is eyeing the strategic resources of oil, other minerals, markets, and the lucrative military contracts for modernisation of armed forces -- in the milieu of ethnic rivalries in Central Asia -- are also sure to be cornered by America. Not only the Russian and Chinese influence and role in Central Asia is being pushed out, the Europe sees itself preempted.

and Churchill. It now lies shattered. Efficacy and prestige of the UN stand destroyed. Blair as well as the Old Europe are thinking about a 'new' security systems that may incorporate many of the technical agencies or even the overall look of the old UN. What are the chances? This is not a venture to be deter-

mined by legal experts; it has to be based on hard facts of power, on the one hand, and popular yearnings for peace, on the other. It has to be a compromise between these two requirements. The circumstances today do not correspond to those of 1945. The emergent reality is that a new power grouping with its core comprising Germany, France and Belgium, is the Old Europe. Whether it can coalesce with Russia and China and work in unison with them is hard to say. May be the Sino-Russian enterprise of Shanghai Six will regroup and resurge as an independent pole in a new world order that may on occasion cooperate with the Old Europe. That will depend upon situations.

Japan seems to remain attached to coat tails of America; its memonite are the support of Australia, India and some South East Asian

Why has Europe broken with

the US and shown an unparalleled defiance of American wishes? That is open split. Its reason for resisting this great US enterprise can only be its fear of the real or ultimate US purposes. Europe is sufficiently aware of US military prowess. The $retaliation\,that\,the\,US\,is\,now\,intent$ on reshaping the world's entire security arrangements unilaterally and without regard for anyone else's interests is what fuel the rebellion. Europe now resents being marginalised and now that the US is obviously establishing its own domination over much of Asia, especially to control the key resources of ME and Central Asia, it has stirred -- in a politically active

Moreover, the sizeable investments made by France and Russia in Iraq depended upon the continuance of Saddam Hussein regime. The new America-imposed military administration in what might remain of Baghdad is going to begin anew. The rest of the world

tive military contracts for modernisation of armed forces -- in the milieu of ethnic rivalries in Central Asia -- are also sure to be cornered by America. Not only the Russian and Chinese influence and role in Central Asia is being pushed out, the Europe sees itself preempted. This is what American unilateralism means.

In Europe too, the US' infrastructure of leadership -- Britain's special relationship with America, the Atlantic Alliance (with NATO) and the way France has been belittled in the UN over Iraq -- has put an impossible strain on the unity of European Union. There may be concrete French interests in Iraq but the revolt against US overlordship comes from mainly the public opinion in all of Europe but far more especially in Germany. Germans wisely remain wedded to Europe, to the deepening of the EU, and mean to take as much of Europe along as would come. But some Europeans, especially in East Europe, remain fascinated with the US, expecting good and great things from it. Also some suspect these East Europeans to be more

ever the American ultranationalistic hawks fancy. The Europeans' perception is that the US is out to establish what can be called a new Imperium that will eventually cover much of the globe, as the Holy Roman Empire did the known world centuries ago. The only difference will be that it will involve no colonisation but will confer the influence over the policies of virtually vassal states. This can, in turn, mean America's ability to turn the tap of key resources of whoever incurs its wrath.

their might justifies doing what-

On the road to this New Ierusalem, reshaping of Europe in accordance with the American wishes will also be vital. This is realised. Hence the Americans may have to quell this Franco-German rebellion. Doubtless American diplomacy will move heaven and earth with its cheque books to defeat the rebels. That inexorably is likely to intensify this nascent cold war that is hopefully likely to remain cold, not hot. Anyway, it is likely to remain confined to a fight for the hearts and minds of the people around the globe.

Programme for Survival.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

Bravo! Bush and Blair Administrations

It tickles me, and it surprises me that people like President Bush and Mr Rumsfeld still talk about international laws like Geneva Conventions regarding POW. It is rather fitting for them to talk about invading foreign land without any provocation, killing its people, destroying its establishments, and making fool of indigenous and international communities and sponging upon them.

What treatment they meted out to the POW in Afghanistan? What human respect they showed to Afghan POW? Violating UN rules and regulations and upsetting the sensible people around the globe, Anglo-American imperialists have attacked a vulnerable country. Is it consistent with them to refer to any principles of international laws? Or is the international law for shielding the Anglo-American interests? The world knows that 20 March 2003 was the official death of UN. Referring to Geneva Conventions looks like an attempt to give life to the dead body of UN and it seems necessary because now the Americans themselves are POW.

My urge to Iraqi Government is to show the POW human respect because the Anglo-American troops themselves are victims of US-UK neo-colonial adventure. A

grenade attack by an American oldier on his colleagues is a glaring example of this truth. My request to Bush and Blair administrations: you are mighty enough to bomb and kill poor people without resorting to falsehood. Pursuing falsehood simply doubles your Abu Zeleikhah

Portsmouth, UK

<u>"War on Iraq"</u>

By commencing an armed conflict with a weak and impoverished nation based on hearsay and innuendoes, the US has earned the distinction of being an aggressor and invader. By raising the US flag at Um Qasr, the US has bolstered its image as a conqueror rather than a liberator. By giving one billion dollars of contracts to vicepresident Dick Cheneys company -Haliburton, to rebuild Iraq with future Iraqi oil revenues, the US as sealed its image as a coloniser.

No amount of rhetoric will change the horror and ruthlessness that lurks in the shadows of US foreign policy. What was hidden in the propaganda of their media is now in the open. However, as history has shown in Vietnam and Afghanistan, and as will show in this war, you cannot bomb a country into accepting democracy. Shomit Chowdhury

Dhanmondi, Dhaka

New Colony playground

We the residents of New Colony, Lalmatia seeking immediate action from the government otherwise the only remaining open space, playground, prayer ground for both Eids will be turned into highrise buildings! When the New Colony was built in 1950s, each building had a playground in front for the children to play and the elders to walk. Couple of years ago some corrupt officials of the New Colony Housing Department with the assistance of mastans constructed building on those playounds in a very unplanned way.

On March 18, the whole community was shocked to see their only remaining open space also being destroyed!

On March 19, the representative from different organisations such as BELA, Paribesh Adhidoptar, journalists from different dailies, prominent personality and environment activist Mr. Abdullah Abu Sayed attended a protest organised by the people of Lalmatia.

We the residents of Lalmatia quest the Prime Minister and Mirza Abbas, Minister of Housing to save this piece of land and take immediate action against the

people who are all ready to ruin it. Iftekhar Ahmed

Dhaka

Bangladesh's image and conspiracy theory!

This is in response to Mr Mak Khan (Mar18).

The rhetoric of the Cabinet regarding the presence of terrorists in the country sounds exactly like the Soviet Politburo: tongue in the cheek and flat out lies. Yahya

"Ban on women visiting Shatgombuj Masjid"

Based on my personal experience, many Muslims, out of ignorance believe that women should pray at home. The basis of their argument is commonly misunderstood hadith where the Holy Prophet (pbuh) is said to have said that it is better for women to pray in their inner chambers. However, what they fail to consider is that the hadith cannot refer to all prayers. If it does, the hadith must be rejected as a fabrication because it contradicts the Holy Ouran and the Sunnah [practice] of the Holy Prophet. Islam provides equal

access to men and women in places of worship.

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.

The Holy Quran says (62:9): O you who believe (in Allah)! When the call is sounded for prayer on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off traffic. This is better for you, if you know. It is clear here that no distinction is made between male or female in the worship of Allah.

From this ayat in can be inferred that the male and female are equal on a spiritual level. Therefore, why should one be cloistered during prayers and not the other?

This is supported by many other Hadiths and the Ayat's in the Ouran.

Therefore, the banning of women from mosques in Bangladesh and the Shatgombuj Mosque n particular, cannot be based on Islamic principles. It is a shameful manifestation and continuation of our collective failure as a society to protect Islam from being hijacked y ignorance and bias. Shomit Chowdhury Dhanmondi.Dhaka

Widening of road dividers

After a long period the city roads are being repaired. Along with this good sign there is also an alarming one. City Corporation has started

to widen the road dividers. Widening of road dividers will only reduce precious road space. My question to the authorities concerned is what is the need of squeezing the road space, (road safety? beautification?), when you know you can never increase it in future?

Streamlining traffic should include something beyond realignment, redesigning of physical structures only **Fahad Saleh**

Baramoghbazar, Dhaka

Golam Mustafa the artist and the man

With Golam Mustafa's death, the country's cultural arena will certainly face a great void and probably that cannot be filled up for quite a long time. The performing artist, Golam Mustafa, has left his marks in the fields of cinema, radio and television, recitation and play reading. He had a certain style, charisma and a pronounced mannerism which made him different from the other contemporary

A very impressive man with great learning and literary talent Golam Mustafa will always be remembered by the people who knew him from far and near. Adib Reza

Paribagh, Dhaka

"UN peacekeeping operations"

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

I thank Mr. Ismail (March 23) for introducing financial strand to the equation in support of his argument that Bangladesh Airforce should acquire SU 27 and a suitable carrier for future UN duties.

I am afraid such argument is very hollow since the UN does not provide funds specifically to buy arms and it would be unwise for a peacekeeping force to be armed to the teeth. And in any case the US and other Western powers have ample aircraft to assist in such circumstances.

SU 27 Aircraft are dearer than MIG 29s and on top Mr. Ismail suggest a carrier to be procured by Bangladesh. Just imagine at present Bangladesh Airforce does not have enough funds to buy jet fuel for its fleet of MIG 29s and its struggling to keep them airworthy. I am afraid procuring SU 27s would be like exchanging one mill stone with a heavier one!

Bangladesh Airforce is trying to offload its MIG 29s at a price closer to what it had paid but BAF, DGDP and Government of Bangladesh should realise that the price that Bangladesh paid for them probably included 30-40% silent commission, and the price its seeking is not realistic. Its task of finding buyers will be difficult when there are

several dozen almost new MIG 29s like the ones we have are being offered at around USD 3 Millions each by former Russian Republics and member of Warsaw Pact coun-

So in light of the above, BAF should really stick with the MIG 29s and perhaps buy more of the same, perhaps add two more squadrons which could be easily procured for less than USD 50 M provided its done via government to government. And those people who also like the SU 27s to complement the MIG 29s then these are also available at give away prices.

Moreover its unethical to be making a business case out of our countries involvement with the UN. We should be very proud of the fact that other countries accept our soldiers more readily than those provided by other nations partly because our soldiers are from a poor country and well mannered. Procuring Aircraft Carriers by such a poor nation as ours would send a wrong signal to the world commu-

Manzoor H Ashraf Kensingtion, UK