



IRAQ INVASION

DAY
3

16
The Daily Star
DHAKA WEDNESDAY APRIL 2, 2003

Asian Muslim govts walk on tightrope

REUTERS, Jakarta

The war against Iraq has three Muslim-majority countries in Asia tiptoeing down a tightrope to stay friends with Washington while scrambling to identify with popular opposition and prevent anger from boiling into violence. If they fail, Washington could find itself having won a war in the Middle East at the price of creating fresh problems in Asia, where Indonesia, Pakistan and Malaysia have all earned praise from the United States for their efforts against terrorism. The three have economic and strategic reasons to want to stay in Washington's good graces. But their governments and elites also cannot afford to be out of step with their Muslim publics on an issue where demonstrations, polls and media comment show most view the US-led attack as aggression.

"It is in our own long-term interests to have good relations with the United States, but in this regard, we just disagree completely," said Amien Rais, the leader of Indonesia's most powerful legislative body and a prominent moderate Muslim. In Pakistan which, like Indonesia, has seen big anti-war protests, "the position of government and the position of people at large appear to be coming closer," said Tanveer Ahmed Khan, political analyst and former foreign secretary. "Pakistan began by saying it is opposed to war in Iraq and now it says at the highest level that hostilities should be stopped. Now there is a more visible bridge between the public opinion and the government policies." In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, the government has been saying for months that a

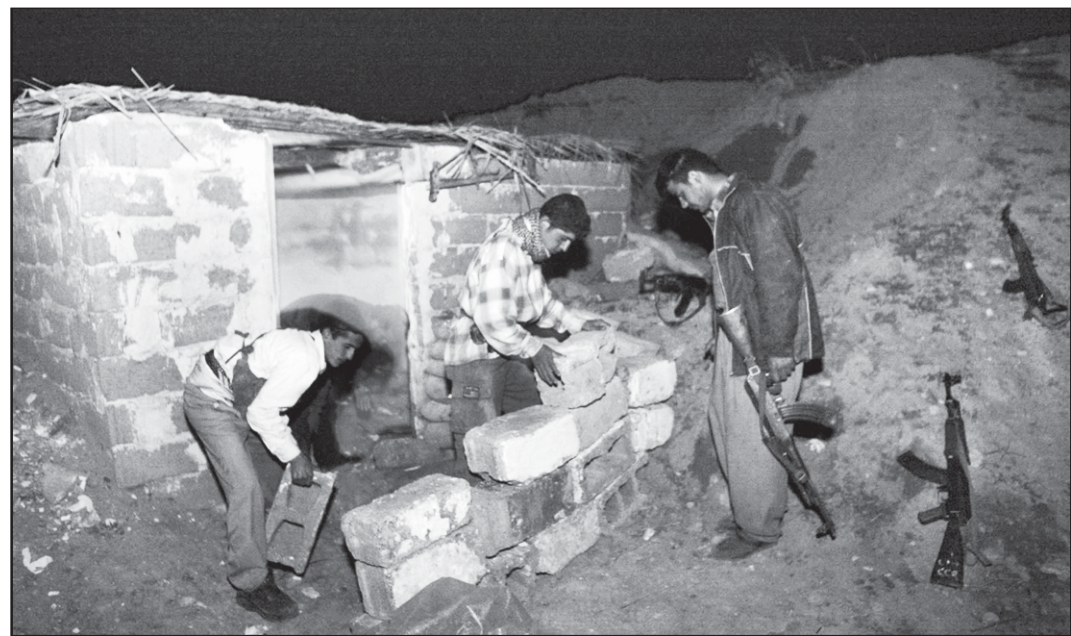
peaceful approach was the best way to resolve the Iraq crisis. Immediately after the US-led invasion began, President Megawati Sukarnoputri said: "Indonesia strongly denounces the unilateral attack on Iraq" and the country began a campaign for the UN Security Council to call for a halt to the war. At the same time, in a country where the populace is 85 percent Muslim, the government, the political and intellectual elite and moderate Muslim leaders have consistently said anti-war protests must be peaceful and stressed the US action should not be seen as directed against Islam. That common approach is no coincidence, according to foreign minister Hassan Wirajuda. Referring to the success so far in keeping demonstrations, some numbering more than 100,000, largely

peaceful, he said: "This is the understanding that the government and the leaders in our society have...we do not want to see that small groups of radicals hijack this Iraqi crisis." "You may have noticed that when small groups with radical leanings go to the street they are immediately outnumbered by the moderate groups, and this was deliberately done to save the (protest) process" and keep it orderly, he told Reuters. The government is "very much on top of this," a Western diplomatic source told Reuters. He said the government learned from less well-handled anti-US protests in 2001 that hurt its image and economy, and was now following a conscious strategy of working with moderate Muslim leaders and key groups to manage the situation.



British Royal Marines in Abu al Khasib, a southern suburb of Basra on March 31 where 40 Commando Royal Marines fought a pitched battle with Iraqi forces.

PHOTO: AFP



Peshmerga fighters from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) set up a trench on March 31 at a position they occupied after Iraqi troops abandoned it in a suburb of the Kurdish garrison town of Qarah Anjir, some 25 km east of the Iraqi government-held northern city of Kirkuk.

PHOTO: AFP

British soldiers sent home for refusing to fight

AFP, London

Two British soldiers have been sent home from Iraq for refusing to fight in the US-led war and could now face a court martial, a spokesman for their lawyers said on Monday. The spokesman said the two soldiers had told their commanding officers they did not want to fight in a war "involving the death of innocent civilians." The defence ministry in London would not confirm the spokesman's comments. Meanwhile, the lawyer did not wish to be named for fear of identifying his clients. According to reports in the British press, the two returning soldiers belong to the 16 Air Assault Brigade, currently involved in operations in southern Iraq.

Humanitarian catastrophe can be avoided: UN

AFP, Geneva

A humanitarian catastrophe in Iraq could be avoided if all sides cooperate, though the potential for disaster is there, a top UN humanitarian affairs official said here Monday. "If we can have the cooperation of all involved, a humanitarian disaster is not inevitable. The mechanisms exist for that to be averted," said Ross Mountain, deputy chief of the UN office for coordination of humanitarian affairs. "This does not need to be a humanitarian disaster if the resources can be made available quickly, if all parties to the conflict will cooperate in ensuring access to those in need and ensuring

that politics is kept to a minimum in terms of having access to populations who do have very real needs," Mountain told a press conference: "To categorise this as a humanitarian catastrophe would be frankly premature at this stage," he cautioned. But he also warned: "The potential for a humanitarian catastrophe is certainly there." Mountain noted there were 44,000 aid distribution points in Iraq which had been well managed by Iraqi staff as part of the UN "oil for food" programme. Asked about the possibility of setting up humanitarian corridors as suggested by the World Health Organisation (WHO), Mountain said:

"The issues of access are among the options that are being reviewed now in New York." In terms of priorities, whether there should be an air corridor, road connections or port facilities, "negotiations have to be undertaken with the military concerned to ensure that there is full understanding of humanitarian imperatives and needs," he said. "Again this is something we did in Afghanistan, we have done in other places, in the Balkans and so on... we have in fact a mechanism called the 'joint logistic center' which is led by the World Food Program, which specifically takes on this kind of issue."

Sacked US reporter joins UK daily

AFP, London

Award-winning news correspondent Peter Arnett, sacked by American TV network NBC after suggesting on Iraqi television that the US war plan had failed, has joined the Daily Mirror -- the British newspaper most opposed to the conflict. "Fired by America for telling the truth... Hired by Daily Mirror to carry on telling it," read the headline on the tabloid's front page Tuesday. "I report the truth of what is happening here in Baghdad and will not apologise for it," Arnett told the daily. "I have always admired your newspaper and am proud to be working for it."

Resistance will not end with this regime

SEUMAS MILNE, The Guardian

The Anglo-American war now being fought in the Middle East is without question the most flagrant act of aggression carried out by a British government in modern times. The assault on Iraq which began more than a week ago, in the teeth of global and national opinion, was launched without even the flimsiest Iraqi provocation or threat to Britain or the US, in breach of the UN charter and international law, and in defiance of the majority of states represented on the UN security council. It is necessary to descend deep into the mire of the colonial era to find some sort of precedent or parallel for this piratical onslaught. However wrong or unnecessary, every previous British war for the past 80 years or more has been fought in response to some invasion, rebellion, civil war or emergency. Even

in the most crudely rapacious case of Suez, there was at least a challenge in the form of the nationalisation of the canal. Not so with Iraq, where the regime was actually destroying missiles with which it might have hoped to defend itself only a couple of days before the start of the US-led attack. But there is little reflection of this reality, or of Anglo-American isolation in the world over the war, in either the bulk of the British media coverage or the response from most politicians and public figures. Little is now heard of the original pretext for war, Iraq's much-vaunted weapons of mass destruction, and regime change - that lodestar of the US hawks which Tony Blair struggled to dissociate himself from for so long - is now the uncontested mission of the campaign. Having lost the public debate on the war, Blair has demanded that a divided nation rally round British troops

carrying out his policy of aggression in the Gulf. And under a barrage of war propaganda, the soft centre of public opinion has dutifully shifted ground - in the wake of those MPs who put their careers before constituents and conscience once Blair had failed to secure UN authorisation. Many balk at criticising the war when British soldiers are in action, but it's hardly a position that can be defended as moral or principled when the action they are taking part in arguably constitutes a war crime. And whether public support holds up under the pressure of events in Iraq - such as yesterday's civilian carnage in a Baghdad market - remains to be seen. Events have, of course, signally failed to follow their expected course. The pre-invasion spin couldn't have been clearer. The Iraqis would not fight, we were told, but would welcome US and British invaders with open arms. The

bulk of the regular army would capitulate as soon as they saw the glint on the columns of American armour. The war might even only last six days, Donald Rumsfeld suggested, in a condescending evocation of the Arabs' humiliation in the Six Day war of 1967. His hard right Republican allies insisted it would be a "cakewalk". British ministers, as ever, took their cue from across the Atlantic, while the intelligence agencies and US-financed Iraqi opposition groups reinforced their arrogant assumptions. But Rumsfeld's six days have been and gone and resistance to the most powerful military machine in history continues to be fierce across Iraq - in and around the very Shi'ite-dominated towns and cities, such as Najaf and Nasiriyah, that the US and Britain expected to be least willing to fight. Nor has the Iraqi army yet collapsed or

surrendered in large numbers, while regular units are harrying US and British forces along with loyalist militias. One senior US commander told the New York Times yesterday, "we did not put enough credence in their abilities," while another conceded that "we did not expect them to attack". The International Herald Tribune recorded dolefully that "the people greeting American troops have been much cooler than many had hoped". There was little public preparation for the resistance that is now taking place. Third World peoples have after all been allocated a largely passive role in the security arrangements of the new world order - the best they can hope for is to be "liberated" and be grateful for it.

Iraqi men leave Jordan on free trip to Baghdad

AFP, Amman

A first free bus to Baghdad left the Jordanian capital Monday, courtesy of one of Saddam Hussein's sons, with 50 Iraqi men onboard determined to fight for their embattled country against US and British invaders. "It was too expensive for me to leave before, but now the trip is free and I am going back to fight for my country," said Samir, a 35-year-old construction worker. The man said he was going back to Basra, the main southern Iraqi city partially controlled by the coalition forces and where pockets of Iraqi resistance still remain. "I am not afraid to travel from Baghdad to Basra, the Americans say they control part of Iraq but it's all lies, they only got the port of Umm Qasr," he defiantly added. An Iraqi spokesman for the Dalla bus

company, which people here say is owned by Saddam Hussein's son Uday, said it was the first free bus bound to Baghdad since the US-led war began on March 20. "A one-way trip costs 12 dinars (17 dollars), but today for the first time the trip is free," he said on condition of anonymity, adding that similar buses were also leaving from Syria. "Everybody can go back, there are absolutely no restrictions," he said. Men waiting to board the bus said some had been granted a pardon by the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's regime and issued a new passport. But they declined to produce a copy of the document, reportedly stamped with Saddam's pardon at the Iraqi embassy in Amman. "People who did not go back for their compulsory military service, people whose passports or whose Jordanian

working permits expired were issued papers on the spot in order to leave," said the company spokesman. Iraqi worker Adnan said he felt compelled to go back to Iraq after six months in Jordan: "It's matter of national pride and dignity," he said. "I can't bear to see my country occupied by foreign troops, I believe we can kick them out. They may have incredible weaponry but the will of God is stronger," he said angrily. Meanwhile, Umm Abdallah, her husband and three young children, were heartbroken when they could not find seats on the bus. "They told us to come back tomorrow because the bus is full," she said. Her husband, an electrical engineer who had worked in Amman for the past six months, broke down in tears when asked why he was taking his family back to Baghdad at such dangerous times.

War puts US press strategy on test

AFP, Washington

During the first major bombings of Baghdad, Fleischer had depicted a president with little interests in the TV coverage. "I don't think he needs to watch TV to know what was about to unfold," Fleischer said. Betts had a different take. "He is just totally immersed," Betts said of the president, adding that Bush immediately discussed each new development with national security adviser Condoleezza Rice. Bush started laughing when a television correspondent accurately reported the White House's official message, that president was not watching TV while at Camp David. That story forced Fleischer into a convoluted attempt at explaining away the discrepancy on Monday morning, when the spokesman said he called Betts "because I wanted to know if everything that he said was quoted accurately. He said it was."

The latest misstep was over presidential TV-viewing habits, which it turns out are not exactly what spokesman Ari Fleischer made them out to be. The White House communications team had carefully cultivated a profile of President George W. Bush as an executive who leaves the daily war planning to his generals, while avoiding the saturation television coverage of the war. But friends say Bush is glued to his television, discussing breaking developments with his aides. Roland Betts, a New York real estate developer and long-time Bush friend, told the New York Times how the president spent the first weekend of the war in front of the television at his Camp David retreat.



Student protestors with painted faces carry placards bearing anti-war slogans during a march on the US embassy in Manila, 1 April 2003. Security remains tight at the embassy and in other installations in Manila to thwart possible sympathy attacks.

PHOTO: AFP