fection needs to be averted in the

interest of the war affected citizens of

Another thread of anxiety has risen

DHAKA SATURDAY APRIL 5, 2003

Iraq war destruction

Humanitarian crisis deepening

S the Iraq war is entering its critical phase, people around the world continue to express their grave **_** concern over the humanitarian crisis, which is assuming unmanageable proportions.

With a handful of people working on behalf of international organisations engaged in rescue operations and the quantity of relief materials pouring into Iraq being hopelessly inadequate, the civilians are facing threats of starvation and scarcity of water, besides the devastating war itself.

Both the American and British governments are giving a detailed account of the reconstruction plan, though they do not quite seem to agree on how the job should be done. While the British insist on leaving the matter to the people of Iraq, the Americans want the coalition forces to have a dominant role in the interim administration. This might again undermine the position of the UN as the body designed for peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Nevertheless, the UN should continue its efforts to bring the hostilities to an end as soon as possible. And the countries shocked by the attack on Iraq have to take the lead in

Minimising civilian casualties is high on the agenda of all the nations opposed to the war. But the coalition leaders are unruffled by the wave of protests. It is a harsh truth that they seem greatly concerned about the reconstruction of Iraq but are paying little attention to the sufferings of people now caught in a desperate situation. The question of reconstruction will arise only after the war is over, but the disaster the Iraqi people are facing is already a stark reality. The coalition strategists are trying to win the hearts and minds of Iraqi people, but it is not clear how they can do so when Iragis have been subjected to unbearable suffering.

A number of charges have been levelled against the invading troops. They are using cluster bombs, a deadly weapon which are causing havoc. Then the attackers have targeted vehicles carrying innocent people and even hospitals. A large number of children have already been killed, and experts have predicted that nearly half a million of them will need treatment after the war to recover from its trauma. So there is little evidence that the American and British troops are trying to avoid civilian casualties.

The coalition leaders still have the time to stop the war and save the lives of innocent Iraqi people.

Police atrocity in front of parliament

We demand immediate action against those responsible

HE news of a man being beaten up by some policemen in front of hundreds of people including his wife and two year old child in broad daylight makes us wonder whether the law enforcers are really there to protect us or make us scared of them. What was the man's crime? Well he tried to save two other young men already being harrassed by the same policemen who suspected them to be muggers! How ridiculous! The saddest part of the whole unfortunate incident was that it took place at the premises of the Parliament House.

First of all, according to the newspaper report, the policemen were not in their uniform, so we can assume that they were not on duty. Secondly, there is no proof that the two young men posed any threat to other visitors at the premises nor there were any complaints against them lodged with the police. So how could they just start suspecting someone of being a criminal and begin to terrorise others around as well with their batons? And they didn't stop there -- someone else who tried to rescue the young men from their clutches ended up being 'savagely beaten' by the police. Even the on duty police inspector overlooked when the man tried to draw his attention.

We are glad that the Speaker of the House took the matter seriously and we hope he would take stern action against those found guilty of illegal action and improper behaviour. But we wonder why the police department itself did not make investigation into the matter. This could be a wake up call for the authorities for cleaning up the premises of the Parliament, one of the very few open spaces in the city visited by hundreds of people. It has been alleged many many times in the past that the premises had become safe havens for the petty criminals, pimps etc. with the help of some corrupt policemen who simply put a blind eye to all that were happening. Since the Speaker has taken up the issue, we hope from now on visitors would be able to roam around the premises freely and without any fear

Anxieties over Iraq



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

controversy is the only constant factor. The unease over the war appears to have spread all over the world

My attention has been drawn particularly to comments made by Professor Des Ball of Canberra's Australian National University. A specialist in intelligence and defence studies at the ANU's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, he has pointed out that it did not seem likely that coalition forces would find any substantial quantities of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. In this context, however, he has made a rather controversial suggestion. He indicated that "even if chemical weapons are used in the defence of Baghdad that will be seen...as a more legitimate means of last-ditch self-defence rather than evidence of any offensive capabilities of being any worse than coalition air and missile bombardments". AFP has also reported that the Professor has stressed that "the Coalition faces defeat in the sense that it is likely to emerge from this war with its global interests more threatened, its strategic standing in the world more challenged and its security... ultimately diminished". These comments will touch the raw nerve in many of us.

Recent articles in the British newspapers have also increased our anxi-

An article this week in The Independent raised some important questions. The report has highlighted how the "obfuscation over the cause of war continues" even though the war started some time ago. In this context, the correspondent has noted that ...before the war began the reasons for the conflict shifted constantly. One day

the objective was to remove the weapons of mass destruction, the next it was regime change and the day after that it was a 'war of liberation'. An old PhD thesis was paraded as evidence that Saddam was a threat to the world and had to be dealt with by war. The 'UN route' was followed, but only so long as the UN agreed with the US and Britain. When the UN 'failed to agree', Britain and the US blamed the UN. Each time President Bush or Tony Blair were questioned about a pervasively

to such succour?

To this has also been added the query raised by the former Iraqi Oil Minister Essam Shalabi, who has pointed out that potential buyers of Iraqi oil have to bear in mind that from a legal standpoint Iraqi oil is the property of the current regime. In this context, he has asserted that "no major company, British and American included, would put its reputation at risk, by loading oil without an appropriate contract". Talking to the New York-based Energy Intelligence Group

Cross. This was required in view of the parallel track efforts to receive back more than twelve million Bangladeshis who had sought sanctuary across the border and were now returning to their homes. In addition there were also millions of people who had become internally displaced. It was this joint effort that enabled Bangladesh to find its feet after total devastation. The politics of mistrust was kept at bay through the presence of neutral associates

In Iraq, after the hostilities cease,

ing any future administration in UN hands. The confusion is further compounded by the fact that the rest of the world considers that any post-war Iraq scenario should be controlled by the United Nations.

many others in the UN, is apprehensive that the Coalition will try to go around the UN or give it reduced responsibility in terms of status. Such a possible situation has already preempted UNDP to express its disquiet. In a report, datelined 28 March, the

British newspaper, The Guardian, has

pointed out that the United Nations

will refuse to play a 'subservient' role

or act as a 'subcontractor' to the

United States in the reconstruction of

Iraq. Commenting on the future role of

the United Nations, Mr. Mark Malloch

Brown, the Administrator of the

United Nations Development

Programme has stated that rebuilding

contracts already announced by the

Bush administration were only 'a

band-aid on services knocked out in

the conflict', and not 'a sustainable

formula' for the long-term reconstruc-

tion of the country. In this context, he

has also frankly added that 'if they

want the UN in there -- the UN role in

civil administration, in the political

processes, managing the transition

then, "we can't go in there playing

are a subcontractor to the US-led

effort." Continuing on this aspect, Mr.

has noted," there may be many people

in Washington who may think this is a

war they run, and they should run the

some subordinate role to a US redevel-

in the past few days over the treatment to be accorded to the thousands of Iraqi prisoners in coalition hands Roundups are being carried out of 'suspicious' Iraqi male citizens as part of a shift to a strategy of unconventional warfare. It is understood that military lawyers are drafting new criteria intended to guide frontline troops on when to take into custody Iragi men and even women if they are suspected to be part of militia groups. New rules of engagement will consequently follow. It is also being reported that suspects are being segregated from 'enemy prisoners of war' and that they might be treated like POWs, but

without official status, until a hearing

is held under Article 5 of the Geneva

Conventions. The judicial process

being envisaged in this regard is still

very fluid. This lack of clarity does not

Fear is the winner in any war. Destabilisation, despair and destruction follow in its wake. We need to be careful that the human cost does not transcend barriers so that in the long run it provides the breeding ground for future terrorism. The coalition is now realising that airplanes do not hold territory. Prolonged bombing will also not win the war of hearts and minds. The distressing pictures coming out of Baghdad, unsanitized, depicting grim reality indicate significant civilian casualties. Watching such pictures is oad enough. To be informed that such damage might have been caused by Iraqi missiles gone awry, is even worse Frauma needs to be acknowledged through candid admission. Credibility s then restored and the ostrich syndrome avoided. Wave after wave of intensive, indiscriminate bombing will not lead to civilians inside Iraq considering the coalition soldiers as liberators. Sensitivity is being mauled at the

shame.

the real damage is not the ruins outside.

it is the scream in the night,

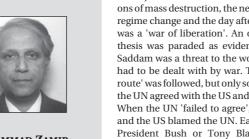
it is the wall of silence,

the vacant stare, the debris within

Such differences do not harbinger

opment which somehow suggests we Plagued by fear, suspicion and Brown has further stressed the gap that in war. exists today with regard US actions. He

Mahammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassa



ORE than eight thousand bombs later, into the third week of the Iraq campaign

leclared objective or statement, which

POST BREAKFAST

Fear is the winner in any war. Destabilisation, despair and destruction follow in its wake. We need to be careful that the human cost does not transcend barriers so that in the long run it provides the breeding ground for future terrorism... Prolonged bombing will also not win the war of hearts and minds. The distressing pictures coming out of Baghdad... indicate significant civilian casualties. To be informed that such damage might have been caused by Iraqi missiles gone awry, is even worse. Trauma needs to be acknowledged through candid admission.

had since changed, they appeared irritated or bewildered." The tenor of this report tends to suggest that although the means to achieve the goals have evolved with the passage of time, the ultimate aim for the Coalition has remained the same. The above criticism probably denotes that a decision had been taken quite some time ago to go to war. What happened later were efforts to find out reasons for taking such a step. At least, this is what is being claimed by the millions in the

This war is inching forward and attrition has become the important word in this conflict. In such a situation, one wonders if the policy planners are giving thought to how the war will end and what will happen in the immediate aftermath. It is important that this is done from now. Anxiety continues about the prospect of a humanitarian disaster amidst the billowing smoke that surrounds the horizons over most cities in Iraq. A massive civilian population, overwhelmingly urban, awaits in limbo, caught up in alleged 'pockets of resistance'. One continues to hear of resumption of 'oil for food programmes, but one cannot understand how such food can be transported and made available for suffering civilian populations. How will they gain access of publications, he has also underlined that "any attempts to restart Iraq oil operations now are illegal while the oilfields are under an occupying force." Such observations will not reduce the anxiety of those responsible for creating a humanitarian relief infrastructure.

We cannot overlook the fact that millions of Iragi lives will be changed for ever because of this war. The conse quences will cast their shadow directly not only on those who would have lost a member of their family but will also affect immediately tens of thousands of families who would have a member either seriously injured or incapacitated due to loss of a limb. In addition to this category, there will also be millions of displaced people who would have either lost their homes or their sources of livelihood. How will their needs be tackled? It will not be enough to just say that humanitarian packages of rice, beans and clean drinking water will be available. How much is enough?

To overcome a post-war crisis, it might be useful for the coalition to take a leaf out of what happened in 1972 in our war ravaged country. Bangladesh supplemented its efforts with help from the United Nations, the ICRC, the UNHCR and the International Red

many. One honestly does not see a scenario both in the short and medium term, of anger, frustration, bitterness and lack of psychological trust being washed away between the contending sides. Today, we hear phrases that Baath party members are being targeted by Coalition forces. They are being described as die-hard supporters of Saddam. Yes, but how do you eliminate six million members of the party? At least, that is the figure quoted by the Iraqi regime. Then what about those related to Baath Party members. To this must be added the so-called tens of thousands who are related as tribes-people from Tikrit, the region from where Saddam comes. To these categories can be added the Turkoman speaking non-Kurdish people of the north-west. What you have is a nightmare in terms of finding answers. Given this climate of suspicion and

whenever it does, the real face of war

will emerge. The problems will be

antagonism, measures and steps to provide much-needed relief equitably to those most in need will face serious challenges. Humanitarian tasks might then suffer from perceived political connotations.

peace. And for us, so be it." It will not be an easy task. The United States from published reports appear to be reluctant about entrust-

good tidings for the war devastated Iraqi population. This growing disaf-

Prince of Denmark," but none can

once that there was no cause for which

he was prepared to kill, although there

were causes for which he was ready to

Hope for the time of peace

E all inhabit -- and function in -- the real world, the one that we have and not a world that we should have or would like to have. The overwhelming majority of humankind was in no doubt that war, at this stage, in Iraq, without exhausting all pacific means of resolving outstanding issues and differences, would be premature, grossly and morally wrong. Given the norrors of war, most people, one would imagine -- super-patriots of the armchair variety excepted -- would not happily or readily endorse any war that can be avoided. But as I said, it is a real would that we inhabit, to which we must adapt and, howsoever regrettable and avoidable, the battle has been joined. All counsel for restraint, moderation, and commonsense has come to naught. Where does the world go from here?

US and British advocacy of an early and apparently punitive war was anything but convincing, and this despite the respect and esteem these countries enjoy, as democracies and even more so as staunch upholders of cherished universal norms and values. In the ranks of "peace-mongers" were the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, France, Germany, China, Russia, India, the NAM, the OIC, Robin Cook, Claire Short, Hans Blix, Al Baradei, Kofi Annan, innumerable peoples of Europe and America and a host of others. A respectable and representative cross-section of humanity, one would agree. Is it conceivable that all were united in a freemasonry, the object of which was to subvert the US and surreptitiously arm Saddam Hussein with weapons of mass destruction? It is equally incredible that the elected -- or adjudicated it may be leader of a mighty nation and a great people is mentally challenged, and thus tends to irrational and erratic behaviour at times. Yet another thesis that strains credulity is that the political leader of a country, that once ruled the waves and a vast empire, has found fulfilment in a role that affords a measure of vicarious power and pomp - that of Sancho Panza to a modern day Don Quixote. It would be just as

facile to hold with those who would give familiar human names to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Why then this divide? Why then this war at this time at such human cost? These are questions that seem to have no

ready or rational answers. Before the shooting started, when every sign, however, suggested that humankind was advancing inexorably along the path to yet another war, I happened to meet an old friend after a long time. His interests have always been far removed from matters literary or political. He must therefore have been very exercised to have quoted from Schiller during our discussions: "Against stupidity the

Themselves contend in vain.

sundry that the world's mightiest nation will pull no punches, will suffer no constraints, will reserve full freedom to do as it pleases? A wake-up call to the world to be on the winning side on this and every other issue or else? It will be a sad day for humanity, if fear and avarice were indeed to become its principal motivations

One cannot, of course, commen constructively on mere conjecture. On the basis of what is public knowledge, however, there can be but one conclusion: this was an avoidable war at this time and thus a wrong war. The people of Iraq, after over two decades of repressive rule, deserve better than a rain of death, destruction and devastation from the skies. Talk and intent of

productive though, if the response is such as to alarm friends and allies as well. The US has far more friends than foes, for reasons that are obvious and cogent. Ideological antagonisms are a thing of the past. The US today is the exemplar of high achievement that so many others seek to emulate, and for this cooperation and friendship is essential. In other words for reasons of national interest above everything else and also for the ideals and values that peoples of the world associate with the US, they would seek nothing but friendship with that country.

Are we then approaching a post-Sept 11 world order of Pax Americana, with the UN system of collective security rendered almost nugatory? In

conceive of Hamlet with only the Prince of Denmark in it. Even in any Pax Americana, there will be countries other than the US in the world, whose legitimate concerns, needs and views cannot be altogether ignored, stifled or wished away but must be addressed. The UN has for long been the forum for this. It is far from perfect; nothing contrived by human hands or minds can be. In 1954 there were some who felt that collective security without collective sovereignty could not endure for long. The UN was, however, as strong an organization as its member-states at the time of its creation were prepared to accept. It has evolved and grown since then, in form,

die. He objected to violence even when it appeared to do good, because the good was only temporary but the evil permanent, Albert Einstein would have been another peacenik today. He explained his pacifism and aversion to war with scientific precision. "My pacifism is not based on any intellectual theory but on a deep antipathy to every form of cruelty and hatred." War, he felt, was an assault on the natural laws of the universe. Few will disagree that one could fall among worse company than these two. It is almost a surreal sensation to see ladies, elegantly coiffed and attired, on cable news channels talking as casually about "taking out the Iraqi leadership as they would about a take-out order of bardecued spare ribs. The outcome of the war may not be of great moment on the scales of time; how it may affect the soul and psyche of the US is another matter History books tell us that Genghis

Khan (4860000 sq. miles) -- Alexander the Great, 2180000 sq. miles, Taimur, 2145000 sq. miles -- and Cyprus the Great, 2090000 sq. miles, conquered more territory than anyone else in all of recorded history. President Bush perhaps possesses the wherewithal to surpass all of them if he so chooses. Times and values, however, have changed since the days of Taimur and for a compassionate conservative, as President Bush prefers to describe himself, a more challenging and

worthy goal would be to conquer

minds and hearts of people; to address

the problems of hunger, want, deprivation and disease that still stalk large The Old Testament assures us that:

The Old Testament assures us that: "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die; ... A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to love, and a time to hate; ... a time of war, and a time of peace." We must hope that the time of peace is not too far off. Hope is precious for man and it is good to have hopes even if they are not always realised.

He did not explain and I did not ask if this cri de coeur reflected simply his own sense of frustration at events or if it was pointed to one or more of the

protagonists involved. The judgment, whether of an individual or a nation, cannot be better than the information on which it is based. It may be that peaceniks -who span the globe -- are not privy to certain information that is available and restricted to the principal belligerents. Or it may be that the latter have an agenda about which they are at this time reticent. There has been speculation aplenty though in the world media. Is it a war about disarming Iraq in compliance with Security Council resolutions? About geopolitics, security and democracy? About oil and oil companies of the likes of Halliburton, Schlumberger and the Bechtel Group? About lucrative postwar reconstruction contracts, all funded, of course, from Iraqi oil revenues? Is it also a signal to all and

Iraq may offer a hint of hope and solace. History would suggest though, that while the form and facade of an effective polity may be imported and imposed from without, its spirit and substance must have indigenous roots, must emerge and evolve from within. And incidentally if this war is about upholding the authority of the UN, it is only relevant to mention that the word "democracy" does not appear anywhere in the UN Charter.

It would be a misnomer or under statement to talk of the US as the only super-power in the world today -- it is the only super-power the ever was. No other country has ever possessed in such overwhelming measure all the requisites that make for a super-power - requisites that extend well beyond the purely military dimension. American pre-eminence is circumscribed only by America and Americans and their imagination. The US has every right and reason to respond robustly to Sept 11. It can only be counterbeen, far more often than not, an effective expedient of US foreign policy. The absence of the US and the UK from the Security Council meeting, which was convened as a last-ditch effort to avert war, was conspicuous and suggestive. If member-states were to lose faith in the collective security of the UN, would it not merely add to international uncertainty and unease. tempt states to seek separate -- perhaps unstable -- security arrangements, impinge on global peace and security and possibly also adversely impact the most widely adhered to treaty on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, the NPT, which has contributed significantly to international security? International uncertainty can only create conditions that spawn terror, not help to contain or combat it.

Shakespeare's best-known play is possibly "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark." One has heard the idiomatic expression, "Hamlet without the thing patently superior can be devised, would it be constructive to render it irrelevant? Would an ineffectual UN enhance international peace and security in any manner or be a $deterrent to international \, terror is m?$

Iraq has about as much chance of resisting a US-British military onslaught as Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has of surviving one round in a boxing ring with Mike Tyson. What, however, if the conquerors after their labours and losses -- received and inflicted -- fail to discover any WMDs in Iraq? Will they be satisfied or will they, fortified by victory, swoop upon some other country on the suspicion that perhaps such weapons were

clandestinely moved there? The word peacenik may be of relatively recent coinage. Peaceniks, however, have always been among us. Whatever the precise meaning of the word, Mahatma Gandhi, I suspect, would be considered one, if he were alive today. He is said to have observed

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

tracts of the globe. 'To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die; ... A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to love, and a time to hate; .. a time of war, and a time of peace.' We must hope that the time of peace is not too far off. Hope is precious for man and it is good to have hopes even if they are not always realised.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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.

"A question of credibility"

This is a reply to Esam Sohail's letter of March 28.

I thank Mr Sohail for his clever observation. I am also baffled like him, how come instead of supporting this invasion all those Iraqi dissidents or exiles are now returning home from the neighbouring countries to fight

their "liberators"? Does it mean that the Washington based Rendon Group that got the contract before the Gulf-War to vilify Saddam Hussein is not performing well this time around? According to Norman Solomon: "the firm (Rendon Group) made a lot of money by contracting with the CIA to do media work for the Iraqi National Congress, an organisation seeking the overthrow of Saddam Hussein." [Ref: War Needs Good Public Relations by Norman

We all have heard so many bad things about President Saddam Hussein. But the dilemma is how can we believe Messrs Bush and Blair and their cronies after hearing them uttering so many lies within the last few days? Sifting through the propaganda is not an easy task. It's really 'a question of credibility'! Shukla Mirza

"Not everyone is against the war"

The letter "not everyone is against the war" (April 2) mimicked the arrogant attitude of America, which they are becoming so (in) famous for. The writer Kim says (or should I say threatened) that after the war is over, America will reward its allies and friends (do they have any left?).

All I want to say in response to that is, just as the Iragis would rather perish than be invaded by selfserving and mercenary governments, we would also rather die than support this unjust war. Not every one can be coerced or bought, you

Kim actually believes that the American government is fighting this war to "liberate" the Iraqi people! This war is not going to make the US secured from terrorism, but only serve the very opposite. And Bush administration's claim that Iraq possesses weapon of mass destruction! Then why aren't they using it to defend themselves as their soldiers and civilians are dying in tandem?

"No pictures of dead bodies please, we are civilised!"

This is a response of Azad Miah's letter. The Arab media is doing absolutely the right thing. Their broadcasting of war news have made the role of the major US and British media questionable and proved how biased these news bodies so that people throughout the world know how much brutalities and war crimes are being committed by the invading coalition in Iraq. Their satellite station was bombed and website was hacked and they were even barred from entering an office in the US where they had been serving for long. Yet they are still trying to highlight the true news of this war.

Gullive, Indira Road, Dhaka

One simple question George Bush repeatedly kept and

agencies are. They focused on dead keeps saving that in Iraq, Saddam's regime has stockpiled weapons of mass destruction which is a threat to the rest of the world Though being totally unable to prove any such allegation, the US

attacked Iraq ignoring the UN and all sorts of protests around the world. In the last two weeks, the US has air raided Iraq almost without any pause causing numerous civilian casualties, wounding hundreds of innocent children and now they are saying that they are far from the end of the war!

In the mean time, they haven't

ons of mass destruction. And the whole world has seen what the US can do with its own weapons of mass destruction at the order of Bush administration. Now my question to the rest of the world and especially to the Americans is, who do they think is a real threat to the entire world and should be removed first? Iraq and Saddam's regime or the US and Bush administration?

been able to find any trace of weap-

Natasha Sabrin Khan. College, Dhaka

Student, Vigarunnisa Noon