

Killed mediamen

Their security was not high on coalition agenda

THE war on Iraq, which has been a humanitarian disaster in every sense of the term, has also proven costly in terms of the lives of journalists. So far at least 12 journalists covering the war have been killed. Never in the past so many mediamen lost their lives while covering a war in such a short time.

But the biggest embarrassment coming in the US administration's way was the shelling of a Baghdad hotel, which left a Reuters cameraman and a Spanish television journalist dead. The shelling, claims the Pentagon, was a counter-attack after the US troops came under sniper attacks. The US general commenting on the sad incident made a point of mentioning that the soldiers had the right to defend themselves when they were attacked. He also tried to give a picture of the battlefield where the general rules are often nullified by the heat and fury of fierce encounters.

But the real questions regarding the security of journalists have not been answered. Nor do the circumstantial evidences corroborate the claim that it was absolutely unavoidable for the troops to send a huge shell into the 15th floor of a hotel -- where most of the foreign journalists were staying -- to counter sniper fire. The hotel staff have not supported the sniper fire theory, and the BBC correspondent in Baghdad also holds similar views on the incident. That lends credence to the apprehension that it might have been a deliberate attack on the journalists or a blunder of the unpardonable kind.

The attack on Al-Jazeera television's Baghdad station, which killed one journalist, is an even more agonising example of what the journalists, except those embeds, have been subjected to. Al-Jazeera has certainly emerged as a credible alternative to BBC and CNN in giving the 'other side' of the story. But its footage on the coalition PoWs caused much consternation and a mood of disagreement in the countries like the United States. So the fear that they could make an attempt to settle scores with the television channel was not altogether unfounded.

Most of the journalists killed in the war were professionals of the highest standard and some of them had the experience of covering six to twelve conflicts in the past. So their deaths must have been a terrible blow to the organisations that they belonged to, and an even greater setback to the cause of truth that they stood for.

Mosquitoes get the last laugh

Mayor indecisive as ever

EVEN as he grows old on his job, Sadeque Hossain Khoka's anti-mosquito campaign has the strange newness of being still a non-starter. In fact, it has remained confined to words, with no sign of deeds, let alone effectiveness, readable into it.

Khoka clinched his mayorship on an agenda for change necessitated by the lackadaisical performance of the former mayor. The areas in which Dhakaites looked for a difference were garbage disposal and control of the mosquito menace, one inextricably linked with the other. He started from a vantage point -- in having a government run by his own party, this initially fostering public confidence in his ability to deliver on top of the perception from before of his being a dynamic person.

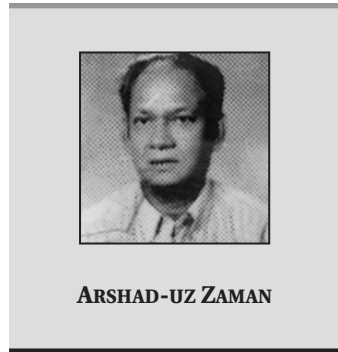
The mayor knows that his litmus test lay in relieving the city of the ubiquitous mosquito, something he had actually promised to do to the denizens when campaigning for vote, and later, when assuming the office. But after more than a year on the job all he could let us have is the droning mosquito all around as the sun sets.

In the first series of surprises we heard of poor quality spray material, appliances being out of order and scarcities of larvae in the mosquito breeding season.

As if this was not enough of a disappointment, we now see another massive controversy raging over the question of aerial spray to eliminate mosquito breeding grounds. By the mayor's own admission, some money has been already spent on the project; but, thank God, he is prepared to reconsider the decision in the light of concerns being voiced by the environmentalists. Spraying insecticide from helicopters, expensive as it must be, can also have a telling effect on human health as proven in countries resorting to it years ago but have since discontinued the same.

The bottomline is: let's do it the way other countries in similar conditions have done to rid themselves of the menace without placing public health on the harm's way.

Invasion of Iraq: Probable upshot



ARSHAD-UZ-ZAMAN

THE war in Iraq was started three weeks ago by the leader of the most important power in the world, the USA, President George W. Bush brushed aside every single opinion challenging his decision and has plunged headlong into a bloody war.

In order to go back at the roots of this war, we have to go back at the time of the election of President Bush a little over two years ago. In the land of democracy, which prides itself in exporting this unique 'commodity' worldwide, the election was more than flawed. There was a bitter contest between Bush and his Democrat rival Al-Gore and the results of the state of Florida, where the brother of President Bush, Jeb Bush, was the Governor left a bad taste in the mouth.

George W. Bush's presidency had an inauspicious start. The presidency limped along until 11 September 2001, when in the heart of America in New York and Washington D.C. terrorists with four hijacked planes slammed against the Twin Towers, the economic powerhouse of the USA, and Pentagon, the military muscle of the US establishment. As the Twin Towers melted in front of the whole world, the immediate reaction of President Bush was to seek shelter away from the White House, since one of the hijacked planes

was reported to be heading in that direction.

To get even, President Bush had to strike back. He picked up as his target the regime of Taliban in Afghanistan. By its crazy activities in the name of Islam, Taliban regime had been ostracised from the world community and it proved to be an easy target. To strike at Taliban, Pakistan's support became necessary. Pakistan's intelligence outfit the ISI, the creator of the Taliban, was easily manipulated, for the

field and cannot be classified among the rich Middle Eastern Sheikhdoms nor one out with a beggar's bowl. President Saddam Hussein, who came to power following the overthrow of King Faisal in the early sixties, has ruled the country with an iron grip. Whereas President Saddam has managed to lift the country from backwardness, his policy towards his neighbours has been full of adventure of a perilous kind.

In 1975 he signed in Algiers with the

In 1990 Saddam ended in a misadventure which cost him dearly and he continues to pay a heavy price. He invaded the tiny oil rich Kuwait and gobbled it up. President George Bush, the father of the current US President built up a coalition against Saddam's Iraq, and many others including Turkey enthusiastically joined. Saddam was left all alone to fight the coalition forces and was soundly defeated. The UN under the leadership of the US imposed draconian sanctions

get adopted another resolution, which would authorize them to attack Iraq. Three other permanent members of the Security Council namely France, Russia and China, with the insistence of France, refused to go along with US-Britain.

Paying scant heed to the opinion of the world unanimously reflected through the stand within the Security Council, President Bush and Prime Minister Blair launched an all out military strike against tiny Iraq. If there

come to an end yet. There was news that volunteers were rushing to the battlefield in order to fight beside the Iraqi soldiers. But must amaze the whole world is the fact that the Iraqis have withstood the US bombing onslaught so long and the pounding by the US tanks and artillery of the most modern kind. And when for more than a decade Iraq has been divested of virtually all weapons. Condition forces are now moving to Kirkuk and Mosul, two huge oilfields in the north of Iraq. The two Kurdish leaders Barzani and Talabani are playing second fiddle to the US effort. Again and again US has assured her ally Turkey that it has no intention to set up Kurdistan in northern Iraq. Turkey has a sizeable force in the region and can only eye developments warily. There can be no doubt that establishment of a Kurdish state would be casus belli for Turkey.

Through his thoughtless action President Bush has succeeded in alienating her solid allies like France and Germany and caused severe strain on NATO. Secretary of State Colin Powell has been on a fence mending mission. The bald fact is that since 11 September 2001, the US has lost her superpower status. The challenge coming from across the Atlantic, from France and Germany, is a vivid demonstration of this fact. It is also noteworthy that a loyal ally Turkey, through her Parliament used her sovereign right to vote down a proposal to station US troops on the soil of Turkey.

The upshot of all this appears to be that George W. Bush, President of the US, may have landed his country into a mess from which it would be difficult to extricate. Redrawing the map of the Middle East, where dear little Israel would become the policeman of the region, may end up as a video game.

Arshad-uz-Zaman is a former Ambassador.

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

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regime of Gen. Pervez Musharraf felt isolated because it had come to power through a military coup. The Taliban had an ally Osama Bin Laden, a Saudi billionaire who had declared crusade against the US. In spite of strenuous efforts by the US, Bin Laden continues to be a fugitive. The US declared war on terrorism worldwide and found willing allies like Russia and India, both suffering due to 'terrorist' attacks.

President Bush, tired of his anti-terrorist campaign, had to find a new target. That one became Iraq. The case of Iraq deserves special attention. She is a middle size state in the Middle East, has a population of nearly 25 million, has the second largest oil reserve. It has a highly educated population and according to statistics 95 per cent of her population is literate. Iraq has made great strides in the economic

late Shah of Iran a deal dividing the waterway Shatt-el Arab. In 1979 the Shah was overthrown by an Islamic Revolution led by Imam Khomeiny. Sweeping changes were installed in Iran. Taking advantage of the chaos and confusion reigning in Tehran, Saddam Hussein attacked Iran and occupied a chunk of her territory. Saddam Hussein was helped in every way by her Arab neighbours and also by USA, who wanted to get even with Iran. I had just joined the OIC as its Assistant Secretary General in charge of Political Affairs. An Islamic Summit in Makkah al-Mukarramah set up an eight-member Heads of State Committee and we made many trips to Tehran and Baghdad. This bloody war lasted nine years and it laid bare the division within the OIC. Finally with the mediation of the UN the war came to an end.

against Iraq and those sanctions are in place today more than a decade later.

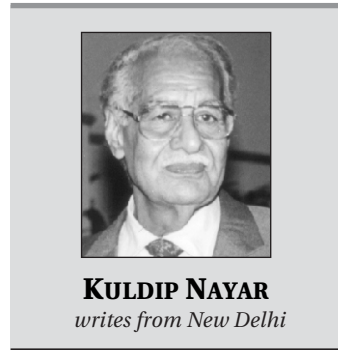
In the latest chapter of the drama US raised a great hullaballoo about weapons of mass destruction supposed to be hidden by Saddam Hussein in Iraq. There were lengthy debates within the Security Council of the UN and an unanimous resolution was adopted entrusting Hans Blix of Sweden and El-Baradei of Egypt to look for such weapons in Iraq and report back to the Security Council. They presented interim reports and stated that they had not found any such weapons. In the meantime President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain had gone ahead and positioned a formidable force near Iraq, with a view to striking that country. In the meantime these two permanent members of the Security Council had attempted to

was a case of unequal fight this is it. Iraq alone has to bear the brunt of the might of the combined military power. Death and destruction started raining on Baghdad, standing defenceless on the banks of the Tigris. The armed forces of the allies have now got it.

A sense of outrage is sweeping through the world and peace marches, notably in the US are getting longer. A demand for an end to the war is getting insistent. There is protest march in every corner of the globe. A call to end the hostilities has come from as high as a personality as the Pope, who even sent an emissary to President Bush in an attempt to avert the war.

Like in the first Gulf War, Iraq stood alone in the second Gulf War too. It is quite amusing to note that the spoils of the war are being divided among the bigwigs of the US. The war has not

'The national interest'



KULDEEP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

WHEN countries talk of their national interest nine out of 10 jettison their principles. They do not stick to the values they preach. Take the US which told us to pursue the dream of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt and other American visionaries to have a new world order dedicated to justice and freedom. The pre-emptive strike on Iraq was nothing but a grotesque expression of America's narrow national interest. I am more disappointed with my own country. It has betrayed Mahatma Gandhi who defeated a mighty empire by espousing the principle that the ends do not justify the means. When I heard the Vajpayee government taking shelter behind the national interest for not speaking out against America's aggression, I knew that the sappers and miners were out to destroy whatever had been left of India's moral stature. I wanted to know what they had in mind when they threw the slogan of national interest in the face of those who wanted America to know that India was opposed to what it had done. It was the condemnation or criticism, which really mattered. Parliament unnecessarily wasted time on choosing an appropriate word. People wanted the government to convey to the US that

the Indian nation, with its ethos of independence struggle, could not brook the bondage of another nation and that too when colonialism was a relic of the past.

The third world does not call a spade a spade when it comes to naming a powerful country. In Pakistan also, most energy was wasted whether the word used against America be *muzammam* (condemnation) or *afsose* (sorrow).

India chose a Hindi word, *nindah*,

national interest ebbs and flows in proportion to our fear of America. Surely, we could not be thinking of US economic assistance because, as Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has put it, our foreign reserves had touched the highest mark since independence. Nor could we be worrying about the import of wheat under America's PL-480 -- this was the case at one time -- since our godowns are overflowing with food-grains. Then? I think we believe that America can twist our arm on Kashmir.

told Islamabad to take steps to stop cross-border terrorism. Last week Washington pulled up India because its pro-active foreign minister Yashwant Sinha had drawn a parallel between America's pre-emptive attack on Iraq and India's right to chastise Pakistan for cross-border terrorism. "Any attempts to draw parallels between the Iraq and Kashmir situations are wrong. A State department official said: That kind of rhetoric gets more to us than to India."

off between India and Pakistan is no more a sub-continental issue.

Holding talks at America's bidding will be embarrassing. No doubt, the US will try to defend itself by saying that it is only asking the two to sit across the same table, not suggesting any solution. Even Vajpayee has asked in Parliament: how long can we refuse talking to our neighbour? New Delhi has brought this situation on itself by not sorting out the Kashmir problem on its own, as American expert Stephen

Nehru made the UK and France withdraw from the Suez in 1956. India stood for principles at that time. The world expected us to stand up and we did. We were poorer and weaker then. Why has the Vajpayee government changed that policy of moral righteousness?

New Delhi should have made efforts at the UN to have a ceasefire when the attack on Iraq had begun. We should have held consultations with the NAM countries which had met only a few days earlier to pass a resolution against the attack on Iraq. New Delhi should have been seen consulting Paris, Moscow, Berlin and Beijing -- all these powers are against America's unilateral action -- in stalling the attack on civilians who have died of bombing in thousands. Why couldn't New Delhi start the exercise

of sending an officer to the countries around Iraq eerier? India has been the hope of small, weak countries all along. It has played a role even during the cold war to keep the two blocs apart. Its voice was respected because it had the courage to raise it. Because of some imaginary gain it has fallen silent. It has failed many countries and it has damaged the NAM the most. At least New Delhi should now pick up courage and tell America that the Saddam regime has to be replaced by the Iraq's regime, not by a US military ruler however 'short' is the period. Bush seems to have got away with the gravest harm he has done to the UN by attacking a country which was supposed to be a threat to the world for possessing arms of mass destruction. Where are they? This was only a pretext to establish its hold in the region. It is unfortunate that the Vajpayee government chose the least line of resistance and stayed quiet.

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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and parliament passed the resolution. Even Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru avoided the word, condemnation, when he criticised the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia or Hungary. The

problem with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) constituents is that they are not willing to say anything categorical. They wish to hide their equivocal stand behind the phrase 'national interest' without spelling out what it means.

The government pronouncements show that New Delhi is afraid to rub America on the wrong side. To avoid such a situation is considered the 'national interest'. In other words, our

If it is so, how will our fear help us? Even if we were to be more obedient than the UK which blindly follows the US, Washington would do what it considers best in its own interest.

We have seen how President Bush pushed his agenda on Iraq unilaterally without bothering about its traditional allies or the United Nations. There is little doubt that America wants to take up Kashmir after it is through with Iraq. US Secretary of State Colin Powell has said that he would give his attention to the 'India-Pakistan dispute' after Iraq. In a joint statement both he and British Foreign Secretary Shaw have told New Delhi that it is better to start a dialogue with Islamabad, although they have

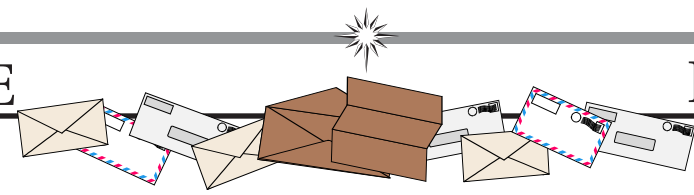
Therefore, whether New Delhi likes it or not, the talks are very much on the cards. Washington looks like pushing it.

That Pakistan should stop cross-border terrorism before asking for talks is a convincing argument. But officials and others have been meeting fondly and informally since General Zia-ul-Haq's regime when terrorism was at its height, the question the State department asking is: Why not do likewise during General Pervez Musharraf's time? Pakistan's argument that it is willing to have a dialogue anywhere at any time on Kashmir and other subjects is going down well in the world. Kashmir or, for that matter, the stand-

Cohn, who knows the mind of the Bush Administration, says. Even India's permanent membership of the Security Council has been made dependent on the solution of Kashmir. The Vajpayee government is too much lost in electoral politics. It does not realise how much it has impaired India's image by not taking the initiative on Iraq on the assumption that an unhappy America might reopen the Kashmir problem.

While addressing US Congress, Nehru, leading the non-aligned movement, said that if an aggression took place anywhere, India would not and could not be neutral. Vajpayee should have learnt from the manner in which

TO THE EDITOR 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.

The final divide?

Messrs Bush and Blair have finally been able to divide the world into two warring worlds--Muslims and the rest.

However artificial and undesirable it may seem, this divide would be well nigh impossible to bridge in the foreseeable future and would result in wanton conflagration in this already strife-torn world.

This does not augur well for the people believing in secular and non-communal values. We will, indeed, be answerable to our posterity for failing to avoid this predicament.

Aly Zaker
One-mail

Pre-emptive syndrome

It seems that the first case of the deadly

disease called "Pre-emptive Syndrome" has been detected in India! On 5th April, The Times of India reported that USA cautioned India not to start any war with Pakistan. India argues that, if USA can attack Iraq in a pre-emptive strike, then India can also attack Pakistan in a similar manner. India further argues that a pre-emptive attack would be justified since Pakistan has threatened to use WMD.

India might have launched its satellites, it might have built (or half-built) some Russian jet fighters, but there are still thousands of poor people in India starving and homeless. And in the middle of all that immediate problems, the government of Vajpayee comes up with a war plan! If the government has money to fight

wars and develop weapons, then why are they starving their citizens?

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

Doha Rounds

I always find the demonising of the Americans so strange. Take for example the issue of the Doha rounds of multilateral trade talks. The Cairns group of agricultural exporters (including Canada, Australia and Brazil) plus the Americans want the scrapping of export subsidies and big cuts in trade distorting domestic subsidies and tariffs.

On the other corner stand France and Germany. The EU, thanks to French pressure rejects the idea that export subsidies should be abolished. Chirac acknowledges that EU

export subsidies hurt poor countries. But then again his main priority is to defend Total Fina Elf oil contracts with Saddam Hussein.

Sabbyasachi Dhaka

Export slump

According to your paper, the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association fears a 15-20 per cent slump in export orders. Apparently it has occurred to our Textile barons that the US and UK are the second and fifth largest markets for our textile products and those buyers are staying away.

The esteemed bosses are asking for a government task force to look into the matter and bailout our poor tycoons before their Mercedes gets repossessed.

It might not have occurred to these businessmen, but open hostility in the media, the government and the streets against the Coalition might not be seen in a positive light? The protests in Europe are of one nature, while those protesting in Arab cities and now in the streets of Dhaka are quite another.

The war is still going on. We still have time to make amends.

Kireti Dhaka

BBC Bush-Blair Company

In order to become updated about the current and authentic war news, I usually tune to BBC world service program, available in 100FM band. But unfortunately, it doesn't cover the genuine war news, rather broadcasts

the US and allied forces' propaganda.

Most of the people throughout the world are against the Iraq War. But BBC is mostly interested in broadcasting Bush-Blair's foreign policy against Iraq. The way BBC is covering the war news, it appears that they have turned into Bush-Blair Company.

Md. Zillur Rahman
Bangabandhu Hall, DU

Shame on Coalition Forces!

It has been almost three weeks since this war started and yet the Coalition Forces have been unable to topple Saddam's regime. As far as I am concerned, Saddam Hussein is well protected but it is the innocent civilians who are suffering from the brutal aggression of USA and UK. Wasn't this

war supposed to be against Saddam and his regime and not against the general people?

If the USA consider themselves to be the superpower, they are so wrong! How come a superpower like America finding it hard to win a battle against such a weak opponent?

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

Time for self-reliance

Now that the fall of Baghdad and Saddam's regime is imminent, we are starting to see the changing colours, faces, and languages of the European leaders. What most of the world people missed is the deep diplomacy and politics involved in this US-led unjustified war against Iraq. Let's not talk of the coalition since the British government, rather a 'pet' of the

American government. No matter what the Western leaders or the media say that this war is not against the Muslims, deep inside there is a long-term plan to gradually rout out the Muslim nations which can and are able to stand against the West.

For developing countries like Bangladesh, this is the opportunity to promote self-reliance, work out strategies to improve on good governance, develop effective systems for tax collection, punish bank loan defaulters, develop and strengthen local industries and cut down on corruption so that we do not have to rely or depend on foreign aid. This will be difficult and time-consuming, no doubt, but not impossible.

S.M.A. Rashid
Nanyang Walk, Singapore