

**A truly festive and unifying occasion**

*Let's live upto its message*

PAHELA Baishakh has truly become a symbol of our great cultural heritage. It is the day that heralds the beginning of Bangla new year in a mood of festivity and celebration.

People, particularly in rural areas, have been celebrating Pahela Baishakh with much enthusiasm for centuries as it marks the beginning of a year of hope. Farmers look forward to a good harvest and traders, brisk business.

The day has figured very prominently in the works of great poets and composers. Tagore himself wrote the famous song "Esho Hey Baishakh, Esho Esho." That is the typical Bengali way of welcoming an auspicious occasion. Pahela Baishakh is no doubt one of such occasions. Tagore saw the day as one when we must leave behind the memories of the past and look forward to a happy beginning of the new year. Baishakh is also seen as having the tempestuous quality of sweeping everything stale and worn out.

But times have changed and so has the appeal of the day. In an urban setting, with little scope for enjoying the bounties of nature, people have discovered their own ways of making the most out of the day. There is no dearth of fun and delight as women, clad in yellow sarees and colourfully dressed children add to the festivity of the day.

Life in villages has also changed, but the gifts of nature are still manifest in many ways, as they have always been. The 'Halkhata' marks the drawing of a balance sheet on the year gone by and the opening of an account book for the new year.

A very striking aspect of Pahela Baishakh is that its appeal is not confined to the members of any particular community. It is a day for celebration for all the people in this country where homogeneity exists in many respects.

Unfortunately, there are fanatics who have failed to realise the social, cultural and economic significance of Pahela Baishakh. They have made attempts to take the fun out of the lives of citizens by resorting to barbaric means. We hope the forces of intolerance will be defeated and our cultural heritage will retain its strength. Pahela Baishakh is not to be confused with politics or any other mundane calling which fails to take into account its role in the lives of people in this part of the world.

*Shuvo Nababarsha* to our readers.

**Water crisis aggravating**  
*A recurrent seasonal woe*

WITH the onset of the summer water table has fallen. This has created difficulty for the pump houses to draw water from the subterranean and distribute it through the WASA network. On top of this, the power generation capacity has been reduced with the result that there is frequent load-shedding or disruption in the supply of electricity to the pump houses. In other words, the whole water distribution network in the city is not receiving its daily quota of pumped water. How do the inhabitants of the city get piped water then? Just to illustrate the disconnect between electric supply and water availability, 36 MW of load-shedding as on Saturday created acute water scarcity in 19 city areas. The irony is that summer increases the demand for water and electricity and that is the season when we are caught napping in mitigating the suffering of the people on both counts. Year after year with relentless ferocity the twin problem of water and electricity sends civic life reeling in hardship.

It is a sad commentary on our rudimentary infrastructure planning that we have kept very little provision for operating the pump houses with generators in the event of power cuts which occur with routine regularity. Out of 406 power pumps, 164 cannot fall back on generators because they have none whatsoever. This inadequacy is inexplicable when we realise that, as against 209 crore litres of water needed per day in summer, Dhaka WASA is able to supply only 152 crore litres. But is it? After all, 32 crore litres are wasted through faulty pipelines. The supply network is largely 1943 to 1973-vintage. The situation is compounded by a plethora of illegal connections taken out by medley of house-owners and shanty-dwellers in collusion with unscrupulous WASA employees. Trade unionism has had a hand in it. Successive governments have failed to do anything about the unauthorised connections and the dilapidated network despite their umpteenth expression of resolve to turn a corner there.

On the short term, we should provide power generators to more water pumps and install some new pumps where we can, as we went about setting up the planned surface water treatment plants on the longer term.

**The fall of Baghdad and beyond**



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

EVEN as the guns are yet to fall fully silent in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq the squabble over the spoils of the war is already in the offing and the greedy fingers are briskly moving towards Iraq pie. The Anglo-American invaders, true to their character -- democratic at home and imperial abroad -- are about to grab it for it were they who invested the most in operation -- Iraqi freedom enterprise. Even the Atlantic alliances' European dissidents have changed tack and joined the scramble. That they clashed with their Anglo-American allies earlier is more a matter in the fraternity. Strangely, those spoils come under the rubric of pious intention of the reconstruction of the war-ravaged country involving, however, lucrative contracts and supplies as well as the political and economic control of the country. Also an oil bonanza gleams in the horizon. This is a kind of war economy the hawks in Washington sought to create in the wake of invasion in Iraq to lessen the current economic stringency in the US exactly the way the allies found a similar economy handy with the outbreak of Second World War in 1939 to overcome the great recession of the thirties during the last century.

The UN which, in fact, paved the way for the invaders by withdrawing its weapon inspectors and staff from Baghdad has now, after its mysterious

inaction in ending the war during its most critical days, suddenly been awakened to the need for a humanitarian aid in Iraq although it had been a silent spectator to the pulverisation of the country and brutalisation of its people by the allied forces.

The belated concerns of the UN Secretary-General on this count are viewed as an attempt to legitimise the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq as a consequence of which the question for humanitarian assistance has arisen. When Iraq is still under invaders' illegal occupation the UN's priority for humanitarian aid without asking them to vacate the aggression will only lead

the simple arithmetic of the relative strength arrayed against each other and the advantages enjoyed by either in terms of fire power, mobility, logistics, terrain, technology and many more impponderables of the war. As for the invaders, whenever the going got tough the Americans simply called in their Airforce while the defenders could only present themselves as sitting ducks. Moreover, Saddam was no angel; neither was he an embodiment of all virtues, nor could he be infallible. After all, he ruled Iraq for long and had to go one day. Only the future is able to take stock of the man and determine how he will be identi-

while rest of the world just stood by and did nothing. The aberration in the course of history was inexorable overpowering human conscience and ingenuity. Most of the governments around the world watched the ominous developments passively while a few condemned only equivocally. The UN played no role to stop the onslaughts; neither did it make an effort to end the conflict as the invaders went on rampage through Iraq in the name of 'liberation'. "The sheer brazenness of American behaviour has forced upon the global public's consciousness the recognition as never before that the US is an emperor with-

convincing that the last century's major international agreements have been virtually the embodiment of American values -- from the League of Nations to the United Nations. For two decades after the second world war it had taken the lead in evolving a new international order from the ruins of the war-shattered world. During the course of twentieth century one US President after another proclaimed that America had no selfish interest and that its principal international goal was universal peace and progress. Echoing this spirit Truman in the inaugural address of his presidency committed his country to the objective

has been the regime of Saddam Hussein plunging the fabled city in anarchy and chaos. The coalition troops turn a blind eye to the prevailing plunderers and lawlessness presumably to create grounds to prolong the occupation.

Stalked by the predators Baghdad is burning and bleeding. It is the classic replay of its massacre in 1258. The Mongol hordes of Halaku Khan left after their orgy of death and destruction. Baghdad again rose like a Phoenix from its ashes. The Americans do not seem to have such intention. General Garner is already in Kuwait to head the interim government as and when the green signal is received from Baghdad, still considered 'the most dangerous place'. Ahmed Chalabi, a darling of the Pentagon and the prime minister-designate has also been flown in. The man convicted in absentia by a Jordanian court for embezzlement is tipped to be the head of future Iraqi government! There are shades of grey in figuring out as to what will happen after the planned regime change in Iraq. Will the Americans succeed where the British and French failed after the First World War? Imperialism always chose the gospel of liberation as its decay as has also been done by the US. The 'white man's burden' is now in the clasp of George Bush who cannot be held back from its intoxication, even if his country stands virtually alone in the comity of nations, forsaken by most of its erstwhile friends and allies.

There was a time when great causes pushed America to great heights that would not otherwise be achieved. She seems to have abdicated that position and is experiencing what Arnold Toynbee called 'the dark night of the soul.' She has chosen a path where the US with her ever widening power is a threat to the humankind. The fall of Baghdad is only symptomatic of that.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

**PERSPECTIVES**

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to the acceptance of the invaders' fait accompli in occupying another country. It is indeed a sad spectacle for the UN to be virtually turned into a relief organisation instead of a forum to address urgent political crisis arising out of a naked aggression.

The mood may be celebratory in London and Washington at the reported fall of Baghdad and with it the collapse of the regime of President Saddam Hussein. But for the rest of the world it is a non-event because such an outcome was a foregone conclusion even before Gulf War II had begun. Few disbelieved that the Iraqi resistance however much heroic had that been would crumble sooner or later given

the eastern shores of China to the doors of western Europe beyond Russia, and now to the heart of the Muslim world in Baghdad. Then, as now, the fall of Baghdad opened the way to Damascus and Syria. Then, as now, the temptation seemed irresistible. Nassir, sultan of Damascus, played for time, sending his son to Hulagu with the excuse that he could not come personally because he feared that in his absence the Crusaders would march on Damascus. Hulagu was unimpressed by the explanation. He sent Nassir a message, the essence of which was: "Know that we are God's army on earth." He, like others after him, saw his conquest as moral purpose. "Those who oppose us must flee, and we must hunt them... Resist, and

re-established the confidence of Cairo, and was now ready to face, under the leadership of a great general like BaiBERS, towards the threat from the east. Hulagu was marching not merely through territory; he was also trampling through the shifting sands of Arab politics and faith.

He got news that Mangu, the Great Khan and overlord of the Mongols, had died. He turned towards home to establish his own claim in the Ordu, a gathering where family and chiefs elected the successor by consensus. At Tabriz Hulagu learnt that his brother Kublai Khan had already been named

which defeated Hulagu on 13 January 1263. Hulagu spent his last days in Persia until he died on 8 February 1265, at the age of 48.

History, of course does not repeat itself. There may be parallels, but nothing is ever a replica. Saddam is far less than the last of the Abbasids, and the Arabs do not seem to be in any condition to find a BaiBERS, let alone a Berkai. (It would need Putin to intervene decisively in the region for the parallel to start working.)

What the Mongol intervention did was throw the Arab world once again into a cauldron, and in that great heat and churning history began to be rewritten.

It would be a mistake to romanticise

**The conflict has just begun**



M. J. AKBAR

WHEN in February 1258 the killing had stopped and the looting had paused, Hulagu, grandson of the creator of the world's prevailing superpower Chengiz Khan, and the destroyer of the 37-Caliph Abbasid dynasty, asked the Iraqi ulema, or religious heads, a simple question. "Which man is better as a sovereign? An unbeliever who is just, or a Muslim who is unjust?"

The question is not substantially different from the one posed to the people of Iraq by George Bush, son of the victor of the first Gulf war and undisputed leader of the prevailing superpower. The 13th century clerics were silent until one of the sages in their midst, Radiuddin Ali, accepted new realities and wrote down the collective answer: "The unbeliever who is just should be preferred to the unjust believer."

It would be convenient to report that this is where the matter ended. But there was more than one answer given by the Arabs, and delivered over time. Not one of these responses ever suggested that the deposed and killed last Abbasid Caliph Mustaffim be restored to the palaces of Baghdad. That era was dead, killed by its own excesses and buried by the Mongol avalanche, and the Arabs recognised it. But to reject the Abbasids was not synonymous with accepting the Mongols.

The Mongols promised that the new regime in Baghdad would be run by Iraqis, not them. They too established the difference between control and administration. The former lay with Hulagu and his generals. The latter was left to the Iraqis. Hulagu retained Ibn Alkamiya as the vizier, or the prime minister, who had served the last Caliph. Till today Arab schoolchildren

are taught the sentence: "Cursed by God be he who curses not Ibn Alkamiya."

Hulagu's armies were not without Muslims in their ranks when he marched on Baghdad, although they were not too many. His few Muslim supporters were Shias, not Kurds: Kurds then had total empathy with the fellow Sunni Arabs, for the ruling dynasty of Saladin was indeed Kurdish. Some of the Muslim support for Hulagu was destroyed by guilt, as was the case of Tegel Argun who slipped away from the Mongol ranks after witnessing the destruction of Baghdad. He was later captured by the Mongols and put to deal in the marketplace of Tabriz.

Many of the regional Muslim lords

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Allepno was his last victory. Most interestingly, he was interrupted by an election.

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**BYLINE**

**Some of the omens are not good for the victors. The Pentagon has awarded, judging by American media reports, contracts worth \$7 billion stretching over the next two years to Halliburton to put out the oil fires in Iraq. Dick Cheney's old company will be making a profit of something like a million dollars a day. Who will pay the bill? Iraq. This is clearly not the way to end suicide missions.**

became submissive to the new power. Azizuddin Kavus offered Hulagu a magnificent pair of leather boots as a gift. He also had his own portrait drawn on the boots so that Hulagu could have him permanently at his feet.

Yet others tried craft. The old and wily Badruddin Lulu of Mosul, on being summoned to Hulagu's presence, promised his terrified followers that he would emerge with his honour intact. In fact, he suggested, he would not return before he had gone so far as to wreak Hulagu's ears! He lived up to his promise. He offered Hulagu a magnificent pair of rare pearls and then asked for the honour of placing them on the conqueror's ears. He was granted permission to do so. He tweaked Hulagu's ears when putting on the earrings, and glanced at his entourage while doing so to indicate that he had kept his promise.

But there were also those who responded to the deepest crisis in the history of Islam by discovering conviction, and then the courage to stand up against a power that since Chengiz Khan had never been defeated between

face annihilation. Accept, and find safety. Accept our law, so that our laws can be common... Answer quickly, or your country will be turned into a desert."

Nassir's reply was braver than the strength of his forces warranted. He said, "Resistance to you is obedience to God... If we slay you, our prayers have been answered. If you slay us, we go to Paradise."

Hulagu had no desire to come in between Nassir and Paradise. On 12 September 1259, some 19 months after the destruction of Baghdad, he marched into Syria. The story began on a familiar note, with the successive destruction of cities culminating in the annihilation of Aleppo in January 1260. Nassir, betrayed and depressed, abandoned Damascus, but remained in the field. This was sufficient, for behind him a resurrection was taking place, inspired by a Turkish slave regiment of the Egyptian armies, called the Mamelukes. This regiment had picked up the Egyptian battle standard at the point of collapse and defeat against the Crusaders, reversed the western tide,

the successor. He halted. But in that respite, equations had changed. The Mongol general he had left in charge, Kita Buga, had moved towards Palestine to take Jerusalem from the Muslims. But on 3 September 1260, at Ain Jalut, near Nablus in Palestine, the Egyptians delivered a crushing blow on the Mongols, shattering their armies and demolishing their myth of invincibility. Damascus was retaken, and the Mongols pursued and scattered from Arab territories. But the war was not over. Hulagu would not accept defeat. But neither, now, would the Arabs. The defence of El Biret in Syria in the winter of 1264 is part of the romance of Arab history: significantly, the women proved themselves more courageous than the men.

In another fascinating twist, Hulagu's brother, Berkai, leader of the Mongols in Russia, suddenly announced in an open letter that he and his four brothers had converted to Islam. He charged Hulagu with the destruction of Baghdad and in cooperation with BaiBERS, he sent an army under Nogai, through the Caucasus,

the decline and disappearance of Saddam Hussein. He was more clever than powerful. He exploited Arab anger against neo-colonialism (oil and nationalism are virtually synonymous in the Arab world). But Saddam, being a tyrant, was a problem rather than a solution. As a political force, he was far less than even the last of the Abbasids; to compare him with Saladin is a joke. He, like the last of the Abbasids, created the confusion which a foreign power could exploit.

The consequences are familiar to those who read history. A crisis has eliminated the pretender, and the future waits to see who will fill this vacuum.

The Americans want this space to be occupied by a favourite like Ahmad Chalabi. But all they will succeed in doing is setting up an administration. There is a difference between administration and control. A figurehead may sit in Baghdad, but George Bush will be in power. This was precisely the situation after the First World War, when a British-Indian army 'liberated' Iraq from the Ottomans and imposed first

direct, and then indirect rule. The British foreign secretary in 1918, Sir Arthur Balfour, was not concerned about niceties. He said: "I do not care under what system we keep the oil. But I am quite clear that it is all-important for us that this oil should be available."

Iraqi nationalism, supported by Arab anger, will also seek to fill that vacuum.

A second mistake is also being made by the victors. Attempts to divide and rule have begun. In India it was Hindus and Muslims; in Iraq it will be Shias and Sunnis and Kurds. The Kurds want this division because they have been offered the dream of independence; but a Shia-Sunni divide will not be equally simple.

The story of Sheikh Abdel Majid al-Khoei may not be definitive, but it is a marker. The 50-year-old Shia cleric, head of the London-based Khoei Foundation and well respected in his community, was despatched by the British to Najaf to generate the support for the invasion that seemed to be strangely missing in Basra and Karbala and Najaf and Umm Qasr. On Monday, April 7, Sheikh Majid called upon Shias to support the Americans and the British. On Tuesday he suggested neutrality. On Thursday he was killed in the Imam Ali mosque. Tony Blair sent a message of condolence.

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When arms speak, goes an old Roman proverb, the law falls silent. On April 11 a Pentagon official was quoted in the *Washington Post* as saying: "Every one is now seen as combatant until proven otherwise."

How many Jihadis, in how many secret cells, in how many nations across the Arab world, are saying precisely the same thing today about the Americans and the British?

The war might be over. The conflict may have just begun.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

**War in Iraq -- for whom?**

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

THE unjust war in Iraq has apparently ended with the fall of Saddam Hussein regime, but euphoria of the people in Baghdad that has been shown on western electronic media is nothing but anarchy. The saner majority of Iraq and the neighbouring countries keep a suspicious eye on the future shape of Iraq.

Both the United States and Great Britain have been responsible in large measures for the miseries and sufferings that have fallen the million of men, women and children in Iraq. The volleys of cruise missiles and bombs that struck at the infrastructures, houses, communication system, electricity and market places have caused havoc to the normal life of the people in Iraq. Initially the war has been imposed on Iraq by the coalition forces led by the United States on the pretext of disarming Saddam Hussein of weapons of mass destruction. That pretext turned out to be fictitious as propaganda campaign. Another propaganda to inspire Iraqi people,

particularly shiites to rise against Iraqi regime has failed as has been reflected at Kerbala and other places where shiites even joined hands with Iraqi forces to fight against Anglo-American invaders.

President Bush has, however, been consistently focusing attention on the weapons of mass destruction at the hands of 'rogue' regime of Saddam Hussein, which poses a 'threat' to American people. Logically one would hardly believe that Iraqi regime could pose threat to America, located several hundred thousand miles away. To some extent the state of Israel, staunchest ally of the United States in the Middle East, is a neighbour of Iraq. In the light of non-availability of so-called weapons, of mass destruction, including chemical and biological weapons in Iraq and non-use of such weapons against the invading forces, the war turns out to be simply unjust and unwarranted. Instead both American and British forces have used deadly weapons including cluster bombs and bunker busters against Iraqi civilian and military positions. The United

States said its forces have not yet found any evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

Since the war has been waged illegally and unjustly, it would be rather immoral and disastrous to endorse it through the United Nations by other permanent members of the Security Council, like Russia, France, and China, who refused to endorse second draft resolution seeking authorisation for waging war against Iraq. If these three permanent members along with Germany now make any compromise for the sake of their petty business interests, the credibility and respect earned by the leaders of these countries for their steadfast and correct stand will be questioned. In spite of worst track record of violation of human rights, this war actually made Saddam Hussein almost a hero in the eyes of the world. On the other hand, both George W Bush and Tony Blair were made most hated personalities of the world politics today. Possibly people in Israel might have considered these political leaders otherwise because Israelis consider the fall of

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Saddam Hussein will ensure safety of Israelis. Israel used to hold Saddam Hussein a threat as he was reportedly contributing to the fund of militant groups of Palestinians.

Now discussion and debate have been continuing on the reconstruction of post war Iraq and the formation of the government there. There has been a marked difference of opinion between America and its coalition partner, Great Britain on the issue of administering and reconstructing Iraq.

The United States shows little interest in Blair's stand and is more reticent about the role of the United Nations in the post war Iraq. National

Security advisor, Condoleezza Rice stated categorically that "it would only be natural to expect that having given life and blood to liberate Iraq, the coalition would have the leading role. I do not think anybody is surprised by that." Recently a British Minister Peter Han said that the United Nations must be in charge of reconstruction of Iraq after an immediate post war military administration, which appears to be slightly different from what the Prime Minister Tony Blair is reported to have aired after having meeting with President Bush at Camp David. Tony Blair was reported to have laid emphasis on the involvement in the United Nations

in administration and reconstruction of post war Iraq.

From the statements issued by American and British political leaders, it appears that they do not see eye to eye on the question of administration and reconstruction of post-war Iraq. At Belfast summit between President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair on 7-8 April, although it appeared that both the leaders agreed to administer Iraq by Iraqis, but there has been no detail given about the shape of future Iraq.

In the given changed scenario one cannot rule out the possibility of extending the war across the border in Iran. President George Bush has described the present regime in Iran as belonging to an axis of evil along with Iraq and North Korea.

Iran in fact earned wrath of Israelis in Lebanon because of Iran's link with Shiite militia in South Lebanon. As back as 1999 Israel bombed Southern Lebanon, its most severe attack on the Lebanon. In May 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak withdrew Israeli troops from Southern Lebanon after 22

years of occupation. Iran also caused annoyance to Israeli leaders when it made an attempt to unseat Israel's delegation to the General Assembly in the United Nations in the autumn of 1983. This attempt was seen by Israel as a challenge to the legitimacy of the state of Israel.

Hezbollah guerrilla groups in South Lebanon have been receiving patronage from Iran through Syria. Although Syria withdrew troops from Beirut, but its 30,000 troops remain in the countryside. These points could be construed as an eye shore for the state of Israel.

Syria has been continuing to be an adversary to the state of Israel since its inception in 1984. In the recent debate in the Security Council, Syria as a non-permanent member criticized the double standard policy of the United States on the issue of Israel-Palestinian conflict vis-a-vis Iraq issue. Syria has been accused of harbouring terrorist groups by America.

These irritant points are enough to make pre-emptive strike at Iran and Syria to make them mend their ways to recognise the state of Israel and aban-

don the policy of harbouring and financing anti-Israeli forces. Since the birth Israel the United State has been contributing a large chunk of its foreign aid to it in the form of economic and military assistance. The United States will not be able to continue to give this charity without any return. Therefore, the United States is determined to make the state of Israel a viable and powerful State in West Asia region.

With the establishment of a military government in Iraq headed by American retired General Jay Garner, who is a friend of Prime Minister of Israel Ariel Sharon, it could safely be said that peace and security will be ensured for Israelis. The war in Iraq is uneven, unwarranted and unjust but it was inevitable for the sake of Israel and economic and political interests of America. But it is the Iraqis who have suffered and will continue to suffer. However, it will be interesting to see the establishment of democracy exported through the wings of Tomahawk to Iraq.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain is a former diplomat.