

Iraq loses its treasures

What a loss to human heritage!

THE war on Iraq has left a trail of devastation, and assessing the damage caused by it is an enormous task. Most significantly, the latest reports show that not only the people of Iraq and their earthly possessions but also priceless relics of the great Babylonian civilisation may have been lost through plunder and looting.

It is a rude shock to learn that mementos and artifacts preserved at the Baghdad museum for centuries have been spirited away in a state of anarchy that followed the invasion. These are the objects of great historical interest that take us back, for example, to the days of King Hammurapi who expanded the Babylonian empire around 3,600 years ago, or the Assyrians who occupy an important place in Iraq's civilisational history.

It is one of the saddest events of modern times that such relics have been allowed to be vandalised, with the American troops silently watching the death blows being dealt to the remains of the Babylonian civilisation. The war leaders have shown a very poor sense of history little realising that the current level of human civilisation is deeply rooted and thus indebted to the best of mankind's recorded past. The indifference to the Iraqi treasures is patently indefensible. Seemingly, their penchant for a new beginning has got the better of the fact that Iraq cradled a civilisation that couldn't be left to the vagaries of looting.

Their failure to protect that museum of civilisation, as we would like to call it, as the invading power, may be evaluated by future historians in the light of the library of Baghdad being ransacked by the Mongol invader Hulagu about 800 years ago. Although in the present case it has happened by default.

We recall that Americans had used strong words to condemn the vandalism of the statues of Buddha at Bamian, Afghanistan, by Taliban zealots only a few years ago. But how will they now assess their own failure to save the priceless museum pieces in Baghdad?

Mortified as we are, we look to the UNESCO's concern for world heritage coming into play here. Sincere efforts need to be made now to save whatever is still left of the museum of civilisation. What is more to the point, however, is that some determined police work is undertaken to recover the lost treasure and restore it to the museum.

Our sympathy for the launch disaster victims

Another warning signalled for river safety precautions

THE season's first tornado onslaught has taken its toll through a river accident with at least 70 lives lost just hours before the advent of Bangla new year. While we celebrated the Nababarsha yesterday our hearts went out to their bereaved families in sympathy for their irreparable losses. On Saturday night the double-decker launch MV Sharifpur with over 200 passengers on board met with its watery grave just one kilometre off the Chamra river port in Karimganj upazila.

With 140 passengers surviving and 21 dead bodies having been recovered till the time of writing, more than 50 passengers remained unaccounted for. Actually, the passengers' manifest is hardly ever kept and the casualty figures are only fully known from the victims' relatives.

Anyway, this is the second major ferryboat disaster on the back of another one we had the misfortune of suffering in the Surma river. In the previous accident the boat collided with a barge and sank drowning 80 people. This time the apparently overloaded double-decker rivercraft was thrown off-balance when caught in a violent storm. Were its engineering design and body material fortified and reinforced enough to withstand a tornado? Were the Serang and his navigators trained people? Life buoys are usually in short supply or conspicuous by their absence. All these questions beg to be gone into and measures taken to bridge gaps, especially in view of the nor'wester season which is officially on with the Bangla new year.

The rescue or salvage operations leave much to be desired. These are invariably messed up and far too late in coming. The inescapable impression is that prompt rescue activity could have saved more lives.

Voice from the desert: Al-Jazeera



HARUN UR RASHID

VERY few people in the West would have known Al-Jazeera TV station before the September 11 attacks on the US. It created an earthquake when it beamed videotaped message of Osama Bin Laden. The whole world came face to face to its broadcasts. In terms of publicity the best thing that ever happened to Al-Jazeera when Osama Bin Laden chose to release his first videotaped message to the West via this TV channel.

Al-Jazeera suddenly found itself with a huge global profile. Overnight the TV station became the centre of a political storm with the US government effectively accusing it of being pro-Al Qaeda and other TV networks desperately trying to licence its exclusive content. Before September 11 Al-Jazeera tried to make agreements with other channels but it did not get response. However after the September

attack, many channels started calling Al-Jazeera to sign up agreements.

Al-Jazeera (literal meaning *Peninsula*, after the piece of land on which it is based in Qatar) is run by a British educated Syrian Faisal Al-Qasim. The Channel was formed in 1996 from the ashes of the BBC's cooperative agreement with the Saudi-funded Arabic satellite service, Orbit Communications, which was terminated by the

sharp contrast to the state propaganda that characterises the region's TV. Al-Qasim calls it " receive and see journalism". This kind of programming has made Al-Jazeera the most controversial TV channel in the world. Five Arab countries have reportedly withdrawn their Ambassadors from host country (Qatar) in protest, and the station has received a barrage of lawsuits and endless negative publicity from rival

age, particularly Iraqi information minister's press conference.

While Al-Jazeera has, by and large, broadcast a relentlessly negative treatment of what it described as coalition aggression against Iraq, it has balanced this by skeptical coverage of Iraq and other Arab regimes. At the same time, its confronting images of civilian casualties and coalition deaths or capture have ensured that it has

Al-Jazeera's contribution to the war in providing an alternative to established Western media for a vast Arabic-speaking audience, has been remarkable indeed. As Al-Jazeera spokesman reportedly said: "This war, unfortunate as it is, has managed to highlight to the world that the Arab media has become a major factor in shaping public opinion. This war has given Arab public opinion a legitimate place on a par with

a discredited ideology of the 1960s and 1970s." On the other hand, Daoud Kuttab, Director of the Institute of Modern Media at Al-Quds University in the West Bank said: " The Americans apply double-standard. I can see why they are angry, but it is not because Al-Jazeera is not fair. On the contrary, I think they wish for Al-Jazeera to be biased to the US."

Before the war in Iraq, Al-Jazeera which does not sell subscription in the Arab world for the obvious reason that it would require the cooperation of deeply hostile governments, had 35 million free-to air viewers among a population of 200 million. That number has skyrocketed at present. An example of the explosion of interest in Al-Jazeera's coverage in the West is that in one week at the beginning of the war, subscribers reportedly doubled from four million to eight million just in Europe where there is a sizeable population of Arabic speakers, mostly in France.

The success of Al-Jazeera provides one important lesson that a fair and balanced news broadcast is always the winner. If ratings are a guide, Fox is having a good war, so is the BBC. CNN is having a lousy war and Al-Jazeera is having a spectacular war.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

Al-Jazeera's contribution to the war in providing an alternative to established Western media for a vast Arabic-speaking audience, has been remarkable indeed...Some analysts say that Al-Jazeera does sensationalism better than anyone else, primarily because its reporters are located in the middle of the world's most volatile and pivotal region...The success of Al-Jazeera provides one important lesson that a fair and balanced news broadcast is always the winner. If ratings are a guide, Fox is having a good war, so is the BBC. CNN is having a lousy war and Al-Jazeera is having a spectacular war.

Saudis after the screening of an unpalatable documentary. The newly jobless BBC staff were snapped up by Al-Jazeera which had been given a five-year loan from the ruler of Qatar, His Highness Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, to broadcast for six hours a day to Arab and European countries.

The launch of Al-Jazeera had a seismic impact in the Arab World. As the first independent Arabic news channel, Al-Jazeera's content was in

news networks.

During war in Iraq, it has been accused of colluding with the Saddam Hussein's regime and had its office bombed by US bombers in Baghdad killing one of its journalists. Al-Jazeera was competing with CNN with its objective and neutral coverage of the war and Al-Jazeera's news bulletin became "a must" not only in the Arab world but also in other countries. BBC picked up the Al-Jazeera's news cover-

public opinion in the West". Some analysts say that Al-Jazeera does sensationalism better than anyone else, primarily because its reporters are located in the middle of the world's most volatile and pivotal region. Nawaf Obaid, author of the book *The Oil Kingdom at 100*, a work about Saudi Arabia, commented recently: "Al-Jazeera is populated with anchors and editors who cling to an extreme form of socialist Pan-Arabism,

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Consigning Saddam to eternity



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

WHILE mopping up will continue for some time, Saddam Hussain's regime is now history, taken violently out of contention by Coalition forces. The dictator's bronze statue in Baghdad's Shaheed Square was symbolically pulled down by an American Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) lending a helping hand to a small but cheering crowd who had failed to take it out with hammer and cudgel. With sporadic fighting continuing in smaller pockets of Baghdad, the public response to the Coalition's presence is still understandably muted. Notwithstanding the ferocity of the fighting in cities like Nasiriyah, Karbala and Najaf, Baghdad crumpled like a paper tiger. Even those who have no love lost for the Saddam regime felt demeaned by the lack of resistance in the city itself by the vaunted Special Republican Guard, the Saddam Fedayeen and the myriad number of units of the security apparatus. Honourable exceptions aside, where was the Iraqi regular Army and / or the remnants of the Republican Guard? Muslim leaders die with their soldiers in a greater ratio than others, where did all the Iraqi leaders go? Subjected to a relentless and precise air assault for nearly 20 days, despite the command and control mechanism with its key command personnel being violently "degraded", the modern

high-tech term for "elimination" without distinction of human beings and/or defence material, they could have fought on as their compatriots gallantly did on the L of C, in dispersed fashion. The 10 Divisions of the Iraqi Army remaining intact in the northern sector "degraded" themselves without fighting any battles, throwing off their uniforms and disappearing from Kirkuk (and Mosul) as Kurdish fighters approached. The presence of Kurds in Kirkuk annoyed Turkey forcing the

piers" interested only in Iraqi oil wealth, how will the Coalition handle the peace? Widespread looting in Baghdad, Basra (and other cities) does not bode well for the future, the country is rapidly sliding into anarchy. Hospitals in Baghdad have been ransacked by armed gunmen. The killing of two leading Shia clerics in Najaf, including the freshly returned (from UK) Sayed Abdul Majid Al-Khoie is a serious setback. This will complicate matters by inflaming Shia-Sunni

war in the absence of an "unconditional surrender", ominously this guerilla war could be supported by neighbouring countries, already Rumsfeld has gone to town on Syria. Emergency medical aid may not be a difficult proposition because of the integral medical units with the fighting formations, the British are already in full swing in Basra. A much wider effort is required in which doctors and nurses from adjoining countries would be invaluable. Potable water is a dire

of the war, the most vociferous were those who had not heard a shot being fired in anger. These reflected the emotions of the streets rather than the cold logic of facts. This was extremely irresponsible, simply playing to the gallery it gave a wrong perception to our naïve and gullible people. Why do people not volunteer to go and fight a guerilla war in Iraq, they do not need visas? The waging of the war will always be condemned in many countries, the swift

Nasiriyah, the US favourite is Iraqi dissident Chalabi. One should be careful not to foist "adventurers" without a political base onto the Iraq population, replacing one despot with another.

The US has ruffled many feathers, rubbing the noses of the nay-sayers in the dust would be extremely counter-productive, the objectives were the same, only the mode and manner different. Widespread anti-US feeling in the Arab and Muslim world needs to be addressed with care. Scenes of jubilation in the streets of Baghdad (and other cities) will help in cooling outraged passions. A tremendous display of "public relations" under pressure by US soldiers happened in Najaf when a very vocal crowd confronted them proceeding towards the mosque with Hazrat Ali's tomb. On live primetime TV, a US Army Lt Col (2nd Battalion 101st Airborne) in full battle gear asked his soldiers to "lower weapons and smile". Slowly backing off, his last gesture before leaving the area was a Muslim "salaam", a hand held to his chest. Any hasty move or bull-headedness could have spelt a blood-bath.

Saddam Hussain may be (or was) a sadistic monster, nobody ever accused him of being a coward. One does not see him abandoning Iraq to death and destruction and escaping with his life. That would be the ultimate denouement, an insult to the self-respect of all Arabs (and Muslims), even those who hated him.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

Armchair "warriors" and closet "strategists" rendered outrageous theories and opinions across TV screens in Pakistan and abroad, ranging from extremist views on religion to politics as well as the military conduct of the war, the most vociferous were those who had not heard a shot being fired in anger. These reflected the emotions of the streets rather than the cold logic of facts. This was extremely irresponsible, simply playing to the gallery it gave a wrong perception to our naïve and gullible people...Saddam Hussain may be (or was) a sadistic monster, nobody ever accused him of being a coward. One does not see him abandoning Iraq to death and destruction and escaping with his life. That would be the ultimate denouement, an insult to the self-respect of all Arabs (and Muslims), even those who hated him.

Kurdish PUK to hand over to US troops and leave immediately. There is a lesson here for soldiers everywhere, prolonged involvement in civilian governance seriously degrades professional capability and potential. A fighting army is meant to be a lean, mean machine, it cannot afford to live off the fat of the land. Wherever, in Baghdad or in Tikrit, if Saddam Hussain has not chosen to fight and die with his soldiers, where is his repeated claim of over 30 years of being a "soldier brave"?

With ambiguity in Arab minds (as well as mass world perception) whether the US has come as "liberators" from Saddam's regime or "occu-

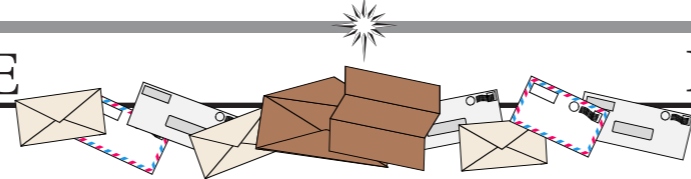
tensions, even though the incident seems to be a Shia-Shia factional fight. The priority should be to enforce the rule of law. Coalition troops policing the streets till a credible Iraqi law enforcement agency is in place, a delicate task (confirming the "occupier" theory) this is unavoidable. At last reports troops of 101st Airborne were moving in to Baghdad to reinforce US 3rd Infantry Division and 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. After being duly screened for their past record, elements of the police as well as soldiers of the former Iraqi Army could be used as a nucleus for the new police force, i.e. if these "ghosts" can be found. A small percentage would continue to wage

necessity on an emergency basis, food and other vital supplies should follow. Um Qasr in operation increases the material flow. The humanitarian aid earmarked by the UN must be trucked in from all parts of the region. This is a tremendous suo-moto opportunity for Israel to become an integral part of the world it is located in, by providing their port logistical facilities and trucking in food and water, as well as field medical teams to look after the civilians injured.

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manner of its conclusion is a remarkable military achievement. The targets were precise military or Saddam-regime specific. Some missiles and bombs did go astray but the crossfire of ground fighting accounted for most civilian casualties. When the suicide bombing started, edgy Coalition soldiers did shoot up a number of vehicles carrying women and children, these were horrific! Snipers have been very active throughout the city. Indiscriminate reaction against urban guerilla warfare will breed hatred in the streets, it has have to be controlled and specific. A dialogue between Iraqi leaders on the pattern of the Afghan "Loya Jirga" is planned for the city of

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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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.

SARS threat

We are already facing a global crisis with the war in Iraq, if that wasn't enough here we have a new threat! SARS is spreading at its maximum pace, despite all the precautionary measures taken for prevention. It is known to be contagious and the virus can survive outside the human body. Travellers around the world, who came in contact with victims of the disease, took it back to their destination. All the airports around the world are taking proper measures to tackle the crisis.

How prepare are the local authorities here? Incoming passengers, showing symptoms are supposed to be placed in isolated area. Are there proper medical scouts to look out for such possible suspects? If they do find any, are there any such place, for their temporary accommodation until further assistance can be provided? These are the basic cautionary measures, which should not be overlooked in any way. If it breaks out here, it will cause havoc to a community already tarnished by numerous crises, one after another!

Shaker
One-mail

des doesn't take precautions now, such as blocking all the visitors coming from China and Hong Kong, the disease is going to create a serious threat to our country and people. The trade loss that might be incurred by blocking these visitors probably would be negligible compared to the havoc SARS might cause. Malaysia has already taken this measure, and other Asian countries are looking into it. I appeal that my letter reaches the authorities concerned and that this issue is at least thought about. Dengue caused a lot of havoc, and we lost many lives, in the case of SARS where the mechanism of transmission of disease is not fully known yet, is going to be thousand folds worse.

It is our government's duty to take precautions against spreading of SARS in our country and I hope that this appeal reaches them.

Shahla Rahman
Colgate University, USA

"Detention under SPA not allowed after arrest on suspicion: HC"

I cannot tell you how overjoyed I am to read the decision of the Court. It is a step towards freedom and democracy. Civil rights, trampled for so long in our

country, at last found a voice through the Judiciary!

Now that the Court has set a precedent of nullifying the Draconian clauses of our Penal Code, I hope this trend continues and we get rid of all the laws that hinder freedom in this country and we move away from the police state culture. Power to the People!

Yahya
USA

The future role of the UN in Iraq

I think many of us will converge on the opinion that the hitherto functional UN's demise on March 20 will be regarded as one of the most important historic events of this planet. Some of our learned readers of *The Daily Star* have already raised questions of Kofi Annan's eligibility for the post which he is running for the second time, largely due to the favour of the US.

While the UN miserably failed to do whatsoever on the onslaught of the US-led war machinery on Iraqi nation many of us thought that he would resign. But alas to much of our surprise he did not do so.

Now the UN is standing on the queue to rebuild Iraq. Hopefully the US won't disappoint them this time also.

M.U. Chowdhury
One-mail

Inccapacity benefit

The Daily Star on 10/04/03 reported that Inccapacity Benefit will increase by

£ 19 as a result of the budget. Nobody else seems to know anything about this. As I currently receive Inccapacity Benefit I would like to know when I will get the extra money?

Acitizen
Dhaka

How to live with a monster

Small and weak countries need to think seriously how to develop new strategies to exist in today's world, a world haunted by a lone and powerful monster which does not follow international laws, which makes laws itself, imposes its own laws on others and if necessary, uses forces on others to comply with. All small countries are not necessarily militarily weak. Israel, Cuba, North Korea and Pakistan are examples of geographically small, economically weak but militarily strong countries. And this monster does not like to mess with those.

This monster haunts on weak

governments that are not elected. When a country has governments that lose contacts with its people, has natural resources, and is located in a geographically sensitive area, it will prone to be targeted.

Two countries have been recently haunted down showing reasons "war against terrorism" and "possession of weapons of mass destruction". The country, which is putting these labels on, has the largest collection of weapons of mass destruction and has a long history of using them. The standards vary; an autocracy will be tolerated if they look after western interests, but will not, if they are insubordinate.

So what should the weak and small countries do?

Hasanat Alamgir
University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Let's become united

Time has come for the Muslims of the world to become united and fight against those enemies who are hell-bent on destroying the countries, heritage, culture and even the identities of the Muslims. But I am very sorry to say that as long as the stooges and the puppet rulers remain in power in the Arab countries, the chance of unity is very slim and bleak indeed. So it is

essential for the Arab people to install democratically elected governments there.

Here I would like to heartily congratulate those brave peace-loving people of the world who have and are still protesting and demonstrating against the US invasion in Iraq and also against those warmongers whose only aim is to destroy the peace, stability and civilisation of the world and establish the rule of the barbarians.

Iqbal Ahmed
Dhaka

NBR car import policy

Has anyone wondered how the local agents of major car manufacturers of the world could shape an illogical import policy of the country only for their own profit? The last budget saw the ban of used/reconditioned cars above 1600 cc. The present import policy also stipulates that the port of shipment of new cars has to be from the country of origin. Do you know the reason why?

You are now compelled to buy brand new cars from the agents who are now the only qualifiers to import these cars by themselves and make the astronomical profit. What reason can

be there for making it mandatory for the shipment from the country of origin? Who cares from which country a car is exported? Has Bangladesh suddenly become the policeman of the world to track the movement of cars or their users? If pollution is a concern then the most our government could do was restrict the age of the used/reconditioned cars above 1600 cc up to three years and irrespective of the port of shipment. Why the ban instead of age restriction and what purpose does the port of shipment serve and whose interest are these policies serving anyway?

Ahmed Ismail Hossain
Gulshan Dhaka

Stop this futile exercise

The price of a life -especially if it belongs to a Muslim- is so cheap nowadays that, when we get bombed we have to take some Western journalists to hospitals and show them the dead bodies and prove that we are indeed dead! If no journalist are taken, then it is so eloquently reported "these claims have not been independently verified". In other words "don't believe it". The lies that Iraq had connection

with Al Qaeda was never verified independently. The propaganda that Iraq has WMD has not yet been verified by UN Inspectors independently.

For how long do we have to prove ourselves to some Western leaders who are just as ordinary as we are? Most importantly, why? Who are they and why is it that the world always has to prove to "them"? The Indians tried proving themselves to them, they never could. The Africans also tried very hard to prove that they have the same rights to live. They couldn't. The Palestinians have been trying to prove to those Zionist for the last 50 years that they have the right to live in their own country. But we know that the Zionists keep coming up with one excuse after another. Therefore, the best way for Muslims to prove themselves, is to STOP trying to prove absolutely anything to them hoodlums. We don't have to prove anything to anyone, apart from Allah Almighty.

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK