

Why the threats against Syria?

Talk of sanctions has already begun

THE Bush administration has virtually taken no time to be fixated on Syria after the military operations in Iraq attained the primary objective of occupying the country.

Already, Damascus has a difficult task on its hands as charges, which smack of Washington's readiness to go to any length to clinch the issue in its favour, are strikingly similar to those brought against Iraq.

Second, chemical weapons do fall in the category of weapons of mass destruction. The coalition troops have not found them in Iraq, but they have not yet given up the hope of discovering the weapons, that would give President Bush's Iraq mission an aura of legality, which it sadly lacks.

Third, the United States believes Syria has helped leaders of Saddam's regime flee Iraq and given them shelter. This is an unpardonable crime to Pentagon as its plan of liquidating all the enemies might have been disrupted if it were true that some Iraqi leaders of the fallen regime did manage to cross over to Syria.

But western analysts seem to believe that the pressure being put on Syria might be part of the US plan to reduce its bargaining capability, since there most probably won't be any mention of Golan Heights in the latest US roadmap on the future of the Middle East.

The signs are ominous. The talk of some economic or diplomatic sanctions on Syria has already begun. Will the squeaky voice of British foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, who has promised that there will be no strike on Syria, remain audible amid the intimidating rumbblings coming from Colin Powell or Donald Rumsfeld?

First case of SARS?

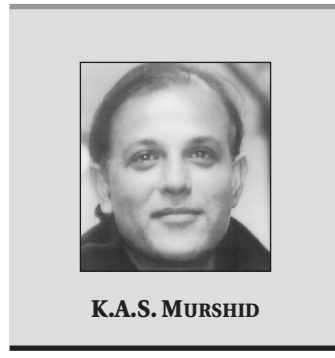
More awareness and efficiency needed to tackle the issue

WE are concerned about the first suspected case of the killer disease called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in the country. The airport authorities seemed to have been on alert when they spotted a businessman arriving from Hong Kong with suspected SARS symptoms and wanted to put him on quarantine. So far so good. But we fail to understand how the gentleman managed to disappear from the scene almost in no time.

We note that the suspected SARS patient first went to a private hospital. Later, his relatives took him to the infectious diseases hospital at Mohakhali. A medical officer of the private clinic reportedly said, '90 per cent of the symptoms he had matched with the killer disease'. So, there is cause for concern simply because it's the first suspected case we are having to deal with.

In these circumstances, awareness among the people who may have been exposed to the disease abroad is of utmost importance. We would appeal to all of them to come forward and report to the doctors for test or treatment if they show any obvious symptoms of the disease. It is imperative for the authorities to keep an eye on the sensitive travel sector and have a mechanism in readiness, especially at the airport, to deal with any eventuality. It's time for all concerned to be on alert for two reasons: one, this has been the first reported suspected case; and two, the experts are yet to find an antidote for this killer disease, although a new light has been shed on its epidemiology linking it to the cold syndrome.

Esho hey Baisakh...



K.A.S. MURSHID

Imagine that during classical times the Bangla New Year celebrations received Royal blessing and were altogether a grand and festive occasion for all -- rich and poor, young and old, men and women.

that we continue to see even today much greater enthusiasm about baisakhi celebrations amongst Hindus, Buddhists and tribal peoples than among Muslims.

Actually, I am no longer certain that what I have just written is entirely correct. Urban Bengali Muslims, at any rate, appear to have taken to Pahela

that we are witnessing the evolution of a truly secular festival -- one in which everyone can participate as equals, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, gender, creed, caste or class.

OK with me. The problem however is that these friends of ours insist on knowing what is good for ALL of us. And they seem to have decided that secular celebrations point vigorously to the road to hell.

that the event would be madly popular -- even if free batashas were to be handed out.

Pahela Baisakh in the region As many of you are aware, we Bengalis are not the only ones who celebrate Pahela Baisakh or Chaitra Sangkranti. In fact this is one of the most important

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

Actually, I am enormously excited by the prospect of a secular festival whose trappings continue to develop and evolve as we grope for new symbols and reinvent older ones. Most importantly, while we know that there are religious roots to every celebration, this need not cause us to lose any sleep.

Baisakh as fish to water and in the process have succeeded in reinterpreting the Bangla New Year in modern, secular terms, devoid of religious significance but rich in potent cultural and even political symbols.

Dangers ahead Clearly there are dangers ahead. Some of our friends think it is improper to have 'secular' fun -- that kind of thing should be left for the life beyond. These spoil sports (and hopefully their numbers are very few) dislike celebrations of any kind, especially if these are of a non-religious character.

hardcore types who will never change their minds. The others will have to be, as they say these days, 'engaged' proactively and incorporated within the secular fold.

of festivals throughout Southeast Asia, including Thailand, Cambodia and Laos -- even if baishakh is pronounced as pisakh in Cambodia and Sangkranti is referred to as Songkranti in Thailand.

Now the scramble for spoils of victory

ABDUL HANNAN

EVERN as the last act of the tragedy of violent assault and mutilation of Iraq is being played out and the final curtain drawn, there is a mad scramble for spoils of victory by the winners. France, Russia, Germany and many others want a 'central role' of the United Nations in post war Iraq administration and governance for rebuilding, reconstruction and humanitarian work.

Powell spoke in the same vein. The Belfast statement was deliberately vague, fuzzy and ambiguous to mean that the UN's role will be confined to fund raising and management of humanitarian relief only.

The rebuilding may represent a pot of gold which according to UNDP amounts to 30 billion dollars over the next three years. Vice President Cheney's former company Halliburton has received the 7 billion dollar contract for fire fighting of burning Iraqi oil wells.

the White House for the second term.

done what the empire builders of the past have all along done to use the military might in order to have political and economic hegemony. The intoxication of power knows no boundaries.

This century has inherited a world containing a superpower with no competitor. It can literally do what it wants and now it is just doing that openly and brutally. Now it is Iraq. Who is next? According to Israeli newspaper Haaretz in February last the US undersecretary of state, John Bolton told Israeli officials that after Iraq US will deal with Iran, Syria and North Korea. Syria is already hearing increasingly angry voices from Washington which has accused Syria of possessing weapons of mass destruction, supply of arms to Iraq during the conflict, providing safe haven to fleeing Iraqi leaders and supporting Hizbullah terrorists in Lebanon.

President Bush and prime minister Blair after their meeting in Belfast said that the UN will have a 'vital role' in post war Iraq. But what was behind the semantics of 'vital role' was made clear later by Vice President Dick Cheney when he said that the UN was not adequately equipped to take up the task and America will have to play a leading role.

ing Patriot and Arrow missiles to Israel when he was employed in the Space and Defence Command and Sy Coleman, a defence contractor firm. British Major General Tim is tipped as his Deputy. Others in Garner's team include James Woolsey, a former CIA Director known for his Israel sympathies and Michael Mobbs a Pentagon lawyer known for his hawkish views on national security and human rights for supporting imprisonment of US citizens suspected of terror links without trial.

destruction has now been reduced to ruins and rubble in a 'liberated' Iraq. The Television footage about draping of statue of Saddam Hussain with the American flag by an American soldier may be symbolic of American occupation for a long haul.

Jews vice president Dick Cheney and defence secretary Rumsfeld support Ariel Sharon and the extreme right in Israel and some of them have worked under Benyameen Netanyahu, the former Israeli prime minister. But this is first and foremost a war for American interests. However, Bush and Sharon believe that American and Israeli interests are practically identical.

both the region and much of the world by intimidation. It is also the first step in a multi-level assault aimed at demonstrating the military might of America. It is the proverbial 'shot across the bow' to other major powers including France, Germany, Russia and China to send them the message to behave and toe the US line without raising dissident voices.

Which country next? Is it Iran or Syria or North Korea?...Peoples of the world and governments have to ponder this question, and how to free the Iraqi people and nation from the clutches of this greedy, hypocritical and self-serving foreign occupation.

Prime Minister Tony Blair talked about Iraq possessing weapons of mass-destruction (WMD). Hundreds of weapons inspectors led by Hans Blix and El-Baradei searched every nook and cranny of Iraq for more than three months. These UN Inspectors are no ordinary folks; they are experts in their own fields. They found no evidence of WMD. Finally, in a queer inversion of logic, US and UK authorities asked Iraq to prove that it didn't have such WMD.

fearful of a fundamentalist Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini whose Islamic Revolution was considered to be a threat to US interests in the area. It is similar to the US and CIA helping Osama bin Laden with weapons and money as long he played their game and fought Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The tables then turned! Bush, Blair and their military want to 'liberate' (they already have, in fact, by invading) the Iraqi people and bestow democracy on them.

their lust for Iraq's wealth, they have forgotten that democracy does not descend from the wings of B52 bombers, it cannot be planted on the deserts of Iraq by bunker-buster bombs. Whatever may be the fault of Saddam Hussein, not withstanding his tyranny and oppression, he will remain a hero in Arab legend, he had the guts to challenge the ruthless Anglo-American military machine when most other Arab rulers were cowering in fright. For the rest of the world the aggression has brought into sharp focus the nature of the new imperialism, its devious and diabolic means and its insatiable appetite for other peoples' resources.

President Bush told Europe to take a hike on global warming. He told Russia to forget ICBM treaty. He pulled out of International criminal court. All in 2 years. Signs are that the old Europe sans Britain may not tolerate insults and humiliation inflicted on it by America over the Iraq crisis any more but forge unity by a combination of a

sprayed highly toxic agent orange as a defoliant to destroy Vietnam's dense, tropical forests. The US now used cluster bombs in Iraq which has killed many unsuspecting civilians, women and children included. One of the earliest users of WMD was the British military. When the hapless Iraqis were revolting and rising up against the British who were occupying Iraq in the 1920s and 1930s in the guise of a so-called mandate given to Britain by the now-defunct League of Nations, the Royal air Force used toxic mustard gas. The Anglo-American leadership's new love for "clean" bombs has to be judged in much historical context. The reason now given by Bush and Blair and company for justifying attack is that they would remove the oppressive dictatorship of Saddam Hussein's regime and "liberate" the Iraqi people and shower democracy on them. If they care to look back only 20-30 years, the US government played the major part in building Saddam Hussein and supplying him WMD which he used against the Iranian forces during the Iran-Iraq War. The US patted him in the back because Americans were

ally temples and Wats are overflowing with people on the day in much of the region.

I suspect that in SE Asia what started out in ancient times as a religious festival slowly began to take on a secular complexion. Today, Songkranti in Thailand is basically billed as a cultural event, appropriately packaged for the tourist industry and virtually devoid of any religious content. In Cambodia, the packaging is missing. While the religious element remains strong and vibrant, there is clear evidence that the 'cultural' aspects are on the ascendancy, marked by boat races, floats, musical events and dances.

Looking to the future

Actually, I am enormously excited by the prospect of a secular festival whose trappings continue to develop and evolve as we grope for new symbols and reinvent older ones. Most importantly, while we know that there are religious roots to every celebration, this need not cause us to lose any sleep. Bengali Muslims have enough common sense not to deny any part of their history and culture and sufficient genius to be able to get away with it, despite a few bombs here and there and some raised eyebrows.

Subho Nabo Barsho!

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European balance of power as a counter weight to America. The conference at St. Petersburg by an alliance of France, Germany and Russia may be a step in that direction.

This century has inherited a world containing a superpower with no competitor. It can literally do what it wants and now it is just doing that openly and brutally. Now it is Iraq. Who is next? According to Israeli newspaper Haaretz in February last the US undersecretary of state, John Bolton told Israeli officials that after Iraq US will deal with Iran, Syria and North Korea. Syria is already hearing increasingly angry voices from Washington which has accused Syria of possessing weapons of mass destruction, supply of arms to Iraq during the conflict, providing safe haven to fleeing Iraqi leaders and supporting Hizbullah terrorists in Lebanon. These are straws in the wind raising worry in Syria of a gathering storm. What about Pakistan? Colin Powell has said that he will take up Indo-Pakistan issue as "part of a broad agenda" after the Iraq war is over. Is the "broad agenda" to persuade Pakistan to get rid of the bomb(nuclear)? America may brook no nuclear weapon or nuclear facility in Pakistan suspected to be a haven for run away Al Qaida terrorists from Afghanistan, notwithstanding Pakistan's current expedient US appeasement policy. Is there no hope for the weaker states? The only hope is if the other major powers form a strong 'axis of restraint' to provide them protection and security.

I am sorry, I cannot adequately account for the motive of Tony Blair joining the Bush war. May be, the psychiatrists have an answer. I am, however, reminded of the motiveless malignity of Iago who goaded Othello to murder his innocent wife Desdemona in sleep in Shakespeare's tragedy.

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Invasion of Iraq: Some questions

ABDULLAH HAROON PASHA

ONE would have imagined that such things happened in the 18th and 19th centuries when European powers were in a mad rush to occupy territories in Asia, Africa, Latin America; one would have thought that direct military intervention and occupation of an underdeveloped country was a passing phase of history. Not that the former colonial powers have suddenly become pure and holy and developed altruistic motives of helping their former colonies; they have taken to more subtle and clever ways of exploiting the resources of poor countries by foisting autocratic rulers, by restructuring the international system that suits their interests, a kind of neocolonialism developed since the second world war.

But the unthinkable is happening in these early years of the 21st century. Virtually before the very eyes of the people of the world, courtesy information technology, the Anglo-American invading forces pounced on Iraq on trumped up charges. Initially US President George Bush and British

Prime Minister Tony Blair talked about Iraq possessing weapons of mass-destruction (WMD). Hundreds of weapons inspectors led by Hans Blix and El-Baradei searched every nook and cranny of Iraq for more than three months. These UN Inspectors are no ordinary folks; they are experts in their own fields. They found no evidence of WMD. Finally, in a queer inversion of logic, US and UK authorities asked Iraq to prove that it didn't have such WMD. Now other the invasion the Anglo-American forces and their political masters are desperate to find such WMDs. They have not discovered any. And imagine the utter hypocrisy of the Anglo-American desire! The country that possesses the largest collection of WMDs in the world is frantically searching for WMD in Iraq. They think that this will give them the fig-leaf of moral justification for launching this attack. The country that dropped atomic bombs on civilian targets is US (Remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki that killed thousand and thousands of innocent Japanese when Japan, in any case, was on the verge of defeat). US forces used napalm bombs and

navy. The half-armed Iraqi forces and people fought heroically. Tragically they fail, but their resistance will be part of Arab folklore, part of Arab regard and the world's admiration. It will make the Arab nations proud. They can stand up to the mightiest and ruthless war machine. But which country next? Is it Iran or Syria or North Korea? Next year the American elections are coming. President Bush and his men would like to attack another Third World country on some pretext, claim victory and ensure his second term which Bush senior failed. Peoples of the world and governments have to ponder this question, and how to free the Iraqi people and nation from the clutches of this greedy, hypocritical and self-serving foreign occupation. The people of this ancient land deserve a honourable and peaceful life and a truly representative and democratic government chosen by them.

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