

US wants sanctions on Iraq lifted

Putting the cart before the horse

In a hasty but not an unsurprising move the US administration has called upon the UN to lift the trade sanctions imposed on Iraq in the wake of 1991 Gulf War. So simplistic seems to be the idea that Washington could even say that it would soon put a suitable resolution before the UN Security Council seeking withdrawal of economic sanctions on Iraq. They are obviously taking things for granted as far as the likely reactions of other important members of the UNSC can be to the move.

That the sanctions which emasculated Iraq's economy and its people for the last more than a decade are to go cannot be in doubt. In fact, what lends a greater urgency to the task of doing away with the longstanding paralytic fetters is that a war has come on top of it devastating the residual economic, marketing and service infrastructures of Iraq.

Thus sooner the sanctions are lifted the better. But the questions are: when, how and by whom? What good will come off the withdrawal of sanctions on Iraqis when the fundamentals of new equations are yet to be worked out against the backdrop of an invasion and occupation of a UN member state.

Moreover, the paramount task before the international community now is humanitarian and security-centred; it is certainly not one of free trade and distribution of contracts. From that standpoint, the US initiative sounds premature, self-willed and unilateral smacking of the approach with which the war had been originally waged against Iraq.

There are several technical and substantive implications to the US move. First, the sanctions were slapped on Saddam's regime on the premise that he was building weapons of mass destruction. So, he had to be barred from using his oil revenues with a cap put on trade in general. The US-British forces have not found any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq after nearly four weeks of a walk-over invasion of that country. This seems to demolish the basic assumption of the coalition forces' contention about Iraq's culpability.

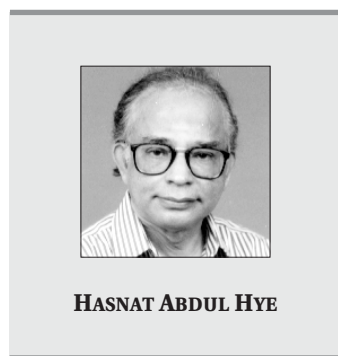
Technically, the coalition forces would have to say that they have discovered no WMD so that the deck is cleared for an annulment of the resolution on sanctions. Will they eat the humble pie? In the essence, however, Secretary General Kofi Annan and also other members of the Security Council would have to be convinced through the mechanism of the UN weapons inspection that no WMD exist in the 'hidden' arsenals of Iraq. Already the UN has insisted on completing the Blix-cum-Baradei mission by way of upholding its role mandated under UN resolution 1441. Kofi Annan had to withdraw the UN inspectors from Iraq because of the unilateral war by the coalition forces. So completion of the inspection process is not only a technical or symbolic necessity but also an imperative in that a UN certification on Iraq's status as to possession of WMD can only close the matter with a seal of authenticity.

But a litmus test of the UN Secretary General's authority lies in the food-for-oil programme which he alone was mandated to implement, a prerogative he will now have to forego if the American plan materialises. France, Russia and Germany were signatories to the UNSC resolution whereby Kofi Annan was authorised to spend Iraq's oil money for food supply to 60 per cent of the population of that bedevilled country. By proposing to free up trade and commerce ostensibly for Iraq, without getting the basics right about UN involvement in the reconstruction and political evolution of the country, the coalition powers sound like advancing their claim to a dominant role in post-war Iraq.

The EU summit in Athens is on to bridge the gaps between pro- and anti-war leaders within the fold as they face the stupendous task of getting Iraq back to its feet. Kofi Annan was present at the venue conveying UN's concern for the plight of Iraqis as well as over the divisions within the EU which needed to be reconciled for a peaceful world order.

Let's hope they make a common cause of helping the Iraqis out of their worst crisis in history and save the world from any domino effect of the war.

Fall of Baghdad



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

THE fall of Baghdad was a foregone conclusion, just as there was no doubt about the outcome of the war. It was, from the very outset, a question of time and number of casualties. Against the awesome military juggernaut of the invaders and their long preparation, the Iraqis' rusted war machine was no match. But the resistance and fierce fight in the southern cities by ill-equipped paramilitary forces took the invaders by surprise. It seemed that they would be bogged down in the south for quite a while and Baghdad would remain tantalisingly near and yet beyond the grubby grab.

The fall of Baghdad, when it came, without a fight and a modicum of resistance, was the true anti-climax of the Iraq war. Very few imagined that Baghdad would be an open city, as it eventually did. Though bombed relentlessly for weeks, Baghdad had girded up its loins, so to speak, to face the invading army with whatever arms it had. Knowing that in terms of conventional war it stood no chance against the murderously mighty enemy the Iraqi strategists had reportedly opted for urban warfare. In the event, a hocus pocus took place. The Republican Guard in the outer perimeter suddenly disappeared leaving everyone clueless and puzzled. The invading army had a cakewalk, triumphantly entering Baghdad at their sweet will. Only a few skirmishes by diehard paramilitary force and ill-organised volunteers punctuated the final assault. The pathetic defence of the fabled city of a thousand and one nights was epitomised by the suicide

attack by a lone pregnant woman. It was loaded with symbolism but the invaders would not understand such nuanced acts. Even these sporadic pinpricks sent the invaders into a frenzy, which led them to pummel the civilian population with bursts of artillery and tank shells, ratcheting up the toll in casualties. The biased western media were busy showing the victors and their tanks in their triumphant march and avoided the wanton carnage that went on viciously. In cahoots with the media, the invaders

There is little to gloat about easily won computerised victory.

But even with arms superiority the invaders did not want to take any chance and so they used, the rumour goes, the most potent of all weapons, almighty dollar. Long before the war started, America had reportedly won over a large number of army top brass and Iraqi politicians with money and promises of clemency. They had appointed a number of hit men to decapitate Iraqi leadership (Is this allowed under Geneva Convention?).

perfidious way this became true, it raised the uncomfortable question about the whereabouts of the army and its mass surrender. Where have the Iraqi Republican Guards and their Generals gone? According to the public relation of the occupation army the Iraqi army have gone home to their villages. If that is the case, then it also must be a part of the 'contract' in which permission for 'home leave' to surrendering army was thoughtfully inserted!

Once inside Baghdad the invaders

spare shops owned by the middle class who surely do not belong to the hated elite. The occupying force has thus successfully 'liberated' Iraqis, the criminals and anti-social elements among them, giving a blank cheque to take home whatever they could carry. It resurrected the memory of the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in the fourteenth century. Rumsfeld in his usual tongue-in-cheek manner, described this as 'some untidiness inevitable during transition'. That is some untidiness!

National Archive and Library also have been ransacked and put to torch destroying thousand years' old documents and records. America cannot shrug its shoulders off feigning ignorance or take refuge behind war priority. The 1954 Hague convention mandates protection of cultural property during conflict. Leading American archeologists met Pentagon officials several times before the war and requested that archeological sites and the museum should be protected. Why was no measure taken to prevent this colossal loss to human civilization? Surprisingly, the Oil Ministry building has been spared the carnage, having been under tight US marine protection.

Perhaps there is no mystery or surprise. If an invading army has the intention of occupying a country for long without much resistance the easiest way is to make them helpless and destitute so that they are dependent on the invaders. What better way to achieve this than to systematically decimate public buildings and social and economic infrastructures, like banks, water supply system, hospitals and schools? One does not have to suffer from paranoia to think that this is the hidden agenda. Besides, those who are so jubilant at being 'liberated' and are spontaneous in welcoming the 'liberators' have to be given some indulgence. It all makes sense, in a perverse way that is.

As for the destruction and looting of the National Museum and library, there may be a sinister motive. Gabriel Marquez wrote in One Hundred Years of Solitude: God takes away the memory of those whom He wants to destroy. A people without a sense of the past have no self-respect and no pride. They can be easily manipulated. In their stratagem to enslave the Iraqis the invaders may be playing god and want to make them forget their glorious past as the bearers of human civilization so that they would never think of catching up with the west in science and technology. Who knows.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

The looting and vandalism reached its unthinkable height when Baghdad National Museum was ransacked comprehensively. Artefacts reaching back to ten thousand years were destroyed and broken into pieces, with smaller pieces stolen. Some of these are likely to find their way to the black-market for antiques in Europe, just as icons from Russian churches surfaced there after the fall of communism. But these artefacts are not just icons. These constituted a leading collection of a continuous history of mankind.

were able to demonstrate to the world that it was through 'bravery' and 'skill' that they had overpowered the enemy and captured 'the jewel in the crown, Baghdad'.

While bravery against an almost unarmed enemy is a joke, about the 'skill' that was brought to bear on the war, there was not a shadow of doubt. The invaders used the latest hi-tech weapons to destroy places out of recognition irrespective of their military significance and to kill people including children and women. With a formidable arsenal of death and destruction at their disposal and given the miserably shabby state of Iraqi defence after years of sanction, there was no doubt about who would win in this unequal combat. It was going to be a victory for state-of-the-art technology perfected by the merchants of death. Human bravery has little to do when war becomes as easy as a kid's play, like video games. Only suicide bombers and the ill equipped Fedayeen preserved the vanishing quality of bravery in the battlefields.

This 'skill' stood them in good stead when they approached the gate of Baghdad like the barbarians of the old. According to rumours going the rounds in many capitals, the Iraqi generals and others in charge of the urban war betrayed as per 'contract'. They just evaporated into thin air, leaving a few stragglers foolhardy enough to face the enemy. No artillery or missile was fired and no attempt was made to defend the airport or the bridges over Euphrates. It was too neat to be anything but pre planned and methodically programmed. American 'skill' used with almighty dollar had paid off at the end. This is one conspiracy theory that would be hard to dispel or brush aside, because it sounds so plausible.

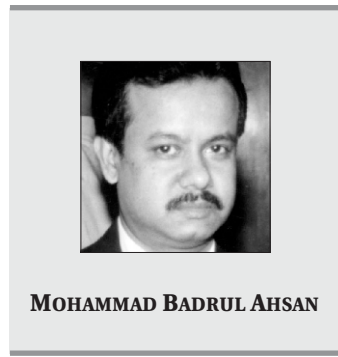
Bribing and winning over the army top brass succeeded in avoiding a bloody and uncertain urban war. The stratagem also helped vindicate the forecast that once war was unleashed Iraqi resolve to fight would disintegrate and they would surrender in droves. Though in a convoluted and

basket in the 'rousing reception' given to them by Baghdadis and were duly impressed by their jubilation in public. But who were those jubilant people welcoming them? Widespread looting and vandalising that soon followed and continued for days left no doubt as to their background and professions. They were mostly garden variety criminals looking the first opportunity to steal, rob and commit acts of arson just out of sheer greed, malevolence and delinquency. It would be far fetched to say that the looters were giving vent to their pent up feelings of anger and hatred against the fallen regime, as the invaders' spokesmen tried to explain. Some of them might be actually on a revenge binge but looking at the manner and scope of looting there was no doubt that the majority did this out of sheer criminality. Otherwise why would they target hospitals, UN building and Embassies? One has to be fiendish and diabolical to destroy hospitals at a time like this when badly injured are fighting for their lives. The looters did not even

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Like the National Museum the

Painting over the cracks



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

AS the war in Iraq is winding down, the coalition forces are beefing up confidence. They have many tasks ahead of them and many people to take to task. The 55 Iraqis, the 7000 POWs, the Germans, the French and the Syrians, those who were against the war, those who questioned its legitimacy and those who dared to think it could become America's quagmire.

Syria must be next. George Bush has already hinted that it has weapons of mass destruction and the most wanted Iraqis are hiding there. British Foreign Minister Jack Straw denies that Syria is on the hit list, but believes that it has "important questions to answer." The message is clear. Shape up Syria, or shape out like Saddam.

But the rest of the world thought it was going to ask some "important questions" to George Bush and Tony Blair. What did they find in Iraq? Where are Saddam's weapons of mass destruction? Where is the evidence that Saddam Hussein was connected with Al-Qaeda? What happened to Saddam's evil empire, which was believed to be a manufactory of wicked plots and deadly weapons?

So far the coalition forces have

given us guided tour of Saddam's palaces and the palatial houses owned by his cronies. They have argued that these leaders of Iraq have squandered its enviable wealth in conspicuous consumption, while the ordinary citizens lived in poverty. It depends.

Nearly 80 per cent of America's property is in the hands of 10 per cent people. About 13000 richest families possessed of a net worth equivalent to the assets owned by the country's 20 million poorest families. Its 10 most

Its hospitals are filled with the wounded and gravesites are filled with the dead. Were the Iraqis that desperate for democracy? Did they ask for their country to be thrown into chaos without food, water and safety? If anything, the military conquest named after the freedom of Iraqi people have actually taken them from autocracy to anarchy. Some Iraqis suffered under Saddam, now all Iraqis will suffer under Bush.

Let us say Saddam was a dictator.

believe that 300,000 soldiers, 70 billion dollars and several thousand dead Iraqis and Americans were only because George Bush wanted to install a democratic government and walk out of Iraq. It is hard to believe that the Americans came for the love of the Iraqi people. It is even harder to believe they haven't come for oil and control of the Middle East.

The American invasion of Iraq has been riddled with double standards. George Bush and his backroom boys

Congress authorised a war that has killed and maimed many innocent people in Iraq. It would have been less painful for the Iraqi people if Saddam were removed by a military coup or by assassination. Perhaps that wasn't an option for a different reason. Perhaps the Americans couldn't find anyone in Iraq who was willing to do the job. Fear wasn't the only reason. The Iraqis must have loved Saddam as well.

More double standards. Remember the Talibans, those tur-

method, where each contradiction must be contradicted to arrive at a new contradiction.

It is a new contradiction that rings through the growing confidence of the coalition forces, as they talk tough to Syria. The Iraqis don't have any complaint against the Syrians, yet their liberators are intimidating their friends and neighbours. It will convince the Iraqis even more that the coalition forces have their own agenda, that they actually came to hug the baby to fondle the mother.

But then vaunted success created its own crack and Hitler vanished through its opening. So did the conquerors and invaders before him. History repeats itself and there is no reason why it should not be repeated for George Bush. He wants Syria. He might get it and the next country after that. Until he arrives at the crack, which will suck him.

If anybody has carefully watched, the first sign of that crack appeared in the Firdous Square of Baghdad. An American soldier climbed up to put a noose around the neck of Saddam's statue and draped its face with the American flag. The crowd was sullen and silent. When the Old Glory was replaced with an Iraqi flag, only then the crowd erupted in cheers.

So far the United States opened cracks and painted them over. As the war in Iraq begins to end, that confidence resonates in the voice of its leaders. They will go after enemies, expand their dominion, try the POWs, capture some of the most wanted Iraqis and warn the Germans, the French and the Russians. Until they stand on the brink of that crack, which cannot be painted over.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

So far the United States opened cracks and painted them over. As the war in Iraq begins to end, that confidence resonates in the voice of its leaders. They will go after enemies, expand their dominion, try the POWs, capture some of the most wanted Iraqis and warn the Germans, the French and the Russians. Until they stand on the brink of that crack, which cannot be painted over.

highly paid CEOs earn an average of \$154 million a year as opposed to \$3.5 million in 1981. What is the difference? Had Iraqis occupied the United States, their television would have blared these statistics, while showing the ruins of palatial houses in Beverly Hills, Palm Beach and other U.S. cities.

That is what victory does. It turns the table on the vanquished as the victor sets his terms. Just imagine how the coalition forces have ransacked a country and brutalized its people, all on unfounded assumptions. And what happened to that universal principle of justice that no one is guilty until proven? Where is the proof that Saddam is a monster, which America had set out to slaughter? None.

Yet Iraq has been reduced to ruins. What does it mean? A dictator is a ruler who dictates his rule without consideration for his people. If Saddam did so, how is George Bush doing it differently? He is asking the Iraqis to eat democracy out of his hand. He is even worse than Saddam; he is dictating his rule to those who aren't even his people. In Afghanistan, he brought back an ailing monarch to head the foundation of democracy. In Iraq he has brought back a crook, who is a fugitive of the Jordanian law.

May be that is what George Bush means by democracy. But for the rest of us, there is no democracy if others have to choose your ruler, if others have to kill your kinfolk and destroy your homes to bring you the blessing that hurts like curse. It is hard to

have called this a preemptive war, which means they wanted to remove Saddam because he was a threat to the future of the United States. The same United States cried human rights violation when the army was rounding up criminals in Bangladesh, because the government thought they were threat to the country's stability. How many innocent people died during the interrogation of those criminals, forty, fifty, may be hundred? How the Americans have done any better? They went after only one criminal and killed thousands of innocent people.

To speak of double standard, take another example. The United States, The Congress has passed a resolution that forbids the assassination of foreign leaders by the CIA. Yet the same

baned creatures, who were once the friends of the USA? The whole world knows that it was the CIA, which gave a helping hand to the opium lords who took over Afghanistan. These opium lords brought the Taliban to power and helped create Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda network.

When the Talibans destroyed Buddhist statues in the mountains of Afghanistan in 2002, they were termed as zealots who had no respect for archeological treasures. Yet when the coalition forces invaded Iraq, they allowed its National Museum to be looted, its archaeological treasures stolen by the thieves of Baghdad. The Americans have a tendency to create many contradictions. Perhaps they believe in some kind of dialectic

Japan's official Iraq position fails to get European endorsement

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

THROUGHOUT the post World War II period Japan has always been seen lacking its own policy standing on vital international issues. Despite the existence of strong counter currents in the form of widespread and vocal public protest, the government of Japan always failed to show that it has a position of its own that not always conforms to that of Washington. The Iraq issue came as no exception. Throughout the period of preparation by the US government of its naked assault against Iraq, the public opinion in Japan ran high against the war. Not only protest rallies and meetings were held throughout the country, a significant number of Japanese headed towards Iraq to serve as human shields, and a number of local governments in Japan adopted resolutions calling for maintaining peace and order in the Middle East and condemning the attitude of warmon-

gers. But contrary to such existing public opinion, the official line followed by the government of Japan on Iraq issue ironically reflected a desire on part of the administration to show its strong commitment to pursue a policy that Washington would consider desirable from a trusted friend.

Now that the war is coming to an end with a sweeping victory of the mightiest of all imperial powers in human history, the government of Japan felt an urge to convince European nations of the need to work together to restore order in occupied Iraq and with that aim dispatched country's foreign minister to a three-nation European tour last week. But on completion of her European trip, the Foreign Minister of Japan Yoriko Kawaguchi learned first hand how difficult it is going to be to generate international cooperation for the reconstruction of Iraq.

Kawaguchi's trip to France, Germany and Britain was part of

The victors have already made it clear that they would like UN to play an 'appropriate' role, which in their dictionary probably indicates something similar to humanitarian effort like the role being played by the International Red Cross and numerous non-governmental organisations throughout the world. It is not clear yet if Japan would also eventually like to see the UN relegated to that level...

Japanese government's effort to heal the rift over the US decision to invade Iraq without a UN endorsement. Foreign ministry officials in Japan earlier made it clear that Japan intended to encourage members of the United Nations Security Council to adopt a resolution on rebuilding Iraq after the war and the foreign minister hoped to help close the rift between the US-British alliance and anti-war lobby consisting of France, Russia, China and Germany.

The Japanese government also disclosed earlier its five principles for Iraq reconstruction that among other

principles included the provisions of maintaining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq, and giving the UN a major role in the reconstruction process. While the three foreign ministers that Kawaguchi met during her trip all went along with Japan's five principles, there was a greater difference of opinion over a new UN Security Council resolution on Iraq.

At her first stopover in Berlin, Kawaguchi met her German counterpart, Joschka Fischer, and the two foreign ministers discussed the Iraq issue in detail. Later at a press conference they said efforts should be made to

pass a UN resolution to allow for smoother international cooperation in support of the reconstruction effort. However, the German Foreign Minister had to clarify a reporter's question about the agreement between Japan and Germany on seeking a Security Council resolution by saying that the two countries would not be seeking a resolution in tandem. He made it clear that both sides agreed on the viewpoint that it was worth considering such a path if it would bring the international community together.

France, on the other hand, was more cautious in her standing concern-

ing a new UN resolution. French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin said during talks with his Japanese counterpart that France wants to determine the role Washington expects the United Nations to play in Iraq reconstruction before seeking any new resolution on rebuilding the shattered nation. The French foreign minister also made it clear that determining the UN role in Iraq was more important than debating the wording used to describe that role, which was a clear signal that France was not ready even to discuss the possibility of a new UN resolution.

In London too, the Japanese foreign minister found it difficult to convince the most trusted of all US allies of the importance of a new UN resolution on Iraq reconstruction. While thanking Kawaguchi warmly for Japan's clear support for the "coalition of the willing", British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw had to admit that it would require a great deal of time to reach a consensus within the security council on a new Iraq resolution.

There is no doubt that France and Germany would not like to see their initiatives being dashed again by the arrogant attitude of world's only superpower. Having failed to stop the US from invading Iraq, the two leading European nations do not want to rush in with a new UN resolution that they suspect would only legitimise the expected US desire to lead any reconstruction effort in Iraq. Britain, on the other hand, does not want to see the repetition of the disastrous scenario of having to retract a proposed resolution

due to strong opposition from the majority members of the Security Council.

This eventually leaves Japan alone in her effort to get a new resolution approved by the UN Security Council on reconstruction of the occupied country. But being outside of the Security Council herself, the only option that now remains open to Japan is probably to pursue Washington to come up with such an idea. But the victors have already made it clear that they would like UN to play an 'appropriate' role, which in their dictionary probably indicates something similar to humanitarian effort like the role being played by the International Red Cross and numerous non-governmental organisations throughout the world. It is not clear yet if Japan would also eventually like to see the UN relegated to that level if Tokyo fails to convince her closest ally too of the importance of a new UN resolution.