

Stop the launch strike

Passengers receiving a raw deal

THE sunken launches have not only taken a heavy toll of human lives, but also appear to have left the decision-makers and launch owners in some sort of quandary. This has definitely had an extremely unsavoury fallout for the hundreds and thousands of people who need to travel by river.

The government felt that something had to be done by readjusting ferry time-tables to keep out of the sting of twisters and nor'westers that have already accounted for four vessels meeting their watery grave this year. As a short-term measure, a restriction on plying of launches from 3:00-8:00 pm has been imposed. It might well be interpreted as a feeble and inadequate attempt to deal with a problem that has struck deep roots over time. People may not be wholly convinced that strong winds blow only during the five hours in the evening.

But if it smacked of adhocism on the part of government and suffered from a failure to adopt strict measures to ward off inherent risk factors, the launch owners' response to it has been entirely misplaced and injudicious. They have gone for a strike as a means of putting pressure on the government to get the restriction lifted, showing little sensitivity to the suffering caused to people thereby. Besides, the owners have not said anything about how they are planning to enhance the safety of passengers -- a question that they are morally and professionally bound to answer. If their argument is that the government move has had an inhibitory effect on the mobility of the people, then how are they helping public movement anyway by resorting to the strike?

It is really surprising to see the owners staging a wholesale stoppage of launch service which amounts to punishing the public for no fault of theirs, and on whose goodwill their business depends.

They should eschew the outlandish strike call and resume operation of the vessels immediately so that the thousands of people who are stranded at the ghats now can travel. Meanwhile, they can negotiate with the government on the moratorium hours putting forward their arguments as they beef up the safety precautions in response to the crisis. They have the right to do that but none whatsoever to hold the public ransom to their whims.

SARS epidemic rolling on

Suspension of flights is okay, but not enough

IT seems that the killer disease Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) has taken an epidemic proportion, especially in Beijing. More than 4000 people are quarantined in their homes while 1831 have landed on hospitals in the Chinese capital. Shanghai, the largest Chinese city, could see a jump in the number of new SARS cases. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has issued travel advisories for the cities including Toronto in Canada. Reports of infected people are coming from other countries.

Against this backdrop, the meeting among health officials and experts of East Asian countries held in Kuala Lumpur on how to tackle the crisis has been a welcome piece of news. We hope several measures that were discussed at the meeting to generate a coordinated response would be finalised at the forthcoming special summit of ASEAN and China.

We note that the Civil Aviation Authority has suspended flights to Hong Kong. Undoubtedly it was a very timely decision. Especially at a time when at least four people are known to have died from the disease in neighbouring India. But just suspending flights to and from one country can't make us feel safe and secure since we have flights to other countries where the malady might have spread or could occur. So we must get our antenna high.

The best way for us to combat the potential threat would be by setting up emergency screening and quarantine facilities at the airport. We hope there is no more 'sneaking out of any suspected case' from the ZIA. There was also the disturbing news of the space earmarked for a medical clinic at the airport having been taken over by an engineering division of Biman. Hopefully, the authorities have taken adequate steps to manage any suspected SARS case on arrival before being moved to a specialised hospital should the need arise. We have said it before and we are saying it again -- if special attention is not paid to the problem at this stage in a planned way, then the possibility of facing a bigger crisis is probably staring us in the face.

To whom the new century belongs?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

IN June 1997 an assembly of some distinguished Americans started a Project for the New American Century. In its statement of principles the organisation vowed to (a) rally support for American global leadership; (b) establish the United States as the world's pre-eminent power; and (c) pledged to stop cuts in foreign affairs and defence spending, give more attention to the tools of state craft, and provide constant leadership to sustain American influence around the world. The organisation, if it can be so called, reminded the Americans of the essential elements of Reagan administration's success in having a military that was strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promoted American principles abroad; and national leadership that accepted the global responsibilities of the US. They arrogated upon themselves the vital role, which rightfully was that of the UNSC, of maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia and Middle East. Their declared aims were: (a) to increase defence spending significantly and modernise armed forces for the future; (b) challenge regimes hostile to American interests and values; (c) promote the causes of political and economic freedom abroad; and (d) America has a unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to her security, prosperity and principles.

What makes the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) significant is the list of signatories to the statement of principles which included Florida Governor Jeb Bush (the President's brother), Vice President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, US envoy to Iraq (for the time being) Zalmay Khalilzad, political scientist Francis Fukuyama (of *End of Civilization* fame), heavyweights Elliot Cohen, Donald Kagan and former vice president Dan Quayle. Most of them are close advisors of President Bush and many exercise considerable power and influence in US decision-making process. This cabal of eminent people has in their hands perhaps the blue print of the future international order.

In May 1998 responding to Indian nuclear tests the PNAC advocated stringent economic sanctions which would hurt India to the extent that "the current government gives way to fresh leadership willing to work with Pakistan and forswear the next strategic weapons step -- further missile deployment" (After the Indian Tests: Sanctions for India and China, Gary Schmitt, May 20, 1998). The memorandum also mentioned Pakistan, North Korea and Iraq as possible truant states because American efforts to be pragmatic and

selective about proliferation were not workable. The PNAC memorandum's significance lies in Iraq war five years down the line and its reference to "fresh leadership", though referring to India, the world has seen in the case of Palestine where the publication of the Quartet prepared road map for a possible solution of the Middle East crisis has been made contingent upon the appointment of an effective Prime Minister in Palestine thus clipping the wings of Yasser Arafat. The world has also witnessed in the case of Iraq change in the US policy from disarmament to

also demanded that Iraqi oil embargo should not be lifted till a government of, by and for the Iraqis has been established. Does these then establish the thesis that domestic dictator is preferable to foreign liberator or are these early manifestations of distrust of American intent behind crusade against Saddam Hussein had less to do with the welfare of the Iraqis and more to control the second largest known deposit of oil in the world? Contracts awarded to Bechtel (once presided over by Reagan Secretary of State George Schultz) and to another US company till recently

security are surfacing; old doctrines are of limited value... the reality is that sovereignty is neither absolute nor unconditional".

Though Haas admits that the Westphalian concept of sovereignty has served the world well over two centuries, the sovereign is now being challenged from both within and without resulting in the collapse of sovereign states and facilitating their entry into the ranks of "failed states". In such situations sovereignty is not a blank cheque and sovereign status is contingent upon fulfillment by each state of certain

refusal to accept responsibility for their misdeeds; accordingly in the present laissez-faire universe of the rich and the powerful Sartre's philosophy may find acute applicability where the hegemon is both unable and unwilling to explain the legality and legitimacy of his actions. At this point of time one may tend to agree with political thinker Ziauddin Sardar (Developments and Locations of Eurocentrism) that the real power of the west does not lie in its might or technology but in its power to define what is, for example, freedom, progress, and civil behaviour, law, tradition etc. What is

tion lest it treads upon the fine prints of the doctrine of preemption and/or prevention. It is not to justify the acquisition of WMD but to question the rationale of denying a sovereign country its right to defend itself because it feels threatened by a so-called rogue state.

One would loathe to believe that the ghosts of Joseph Arthur Gobieneu or that of Houston Stewart Chamberlain whose philosophy inspired the rise of fascism and Nazism have put their Draculan footprints through the PNAC. Absence of democratic society or democratic values is ushered in when inherent characteristic of a society is ignored. "Honor killing" would be murder in any western society but is practiced and tolerated in many tribal societies. Polygamy is illegal in the west but is allowed by some religions. One must therefore acknowledge the differences, which exist between peoples and races; and that Orwellian satiric vision of the world in which life is constantly being put under the surveillance of the "Big Brother" is fearsome indeed.

Though many among the fiercely conservative Americans regarded Bill Clinton's foreign policy as "fuzzy minded multinational", loathed Madeleine Albright's "assertive multilateralism" and Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot's globalist vision, yet they felt that if the US defined its interests too narrowly, it ceded its claim to moral leadership. Such a definition would also embolden other countries to define their interests in the same way which would restrict American power and reduce American opportunities. Even some among the conservatives urged the Bush administration to embrace the principles "that tie us to our liberal democratic allies" (Allies in American National Interest, The New York Times, August 5, 2001) Therefore it is not necessary nor is it possible that all countries hold same values and practise similar system of governance. Granted that the turbulence caused by tension between dynamics of globalisation and the opposing forces of fragmentation, localisation, and individualisation have to be fought against. The post-westphalian logic implies that the nation-state have lost much of its usefulness and that solutions to problems of security and welfare must therefore be found in transnational structures (Bjorn Hettne -- *The International Political Economy of Transformation*). But the world already has one United Nations born out of the ashes of the Second World War. Universal endeavour should be to strengthen it so that no political earthquake can irreparably damage its foundation.

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regime change. One therefore has to ponder PNAC's stated principle "to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values". Definition of interests and values has been kept vague perhaps PNAC assumption of America's "unique role in preserving and extending an international order" friendly to American interests and security has subsumed the definition of these terms.

But the non-commonality of the security interests and values with those of the Europeans was demonstrated by the great divide in UNSC, NATO and EU-US differences relating to the Iraq war. Jacques Chirac's refusal to endorse the US request to bolster Turkish defence before the start of the Iraq war on the ground that such a move would send a wrong signal to then yet uninvaded Iraq was a case in point. France, Germany, Russia and China's refusal to endorse a second UNSC resolution including automaticity in attacking Iraq was a principled decision because they felt the UN inspectors had not yet exhausted all avenues to disarm Iraq. One is then left wondering whose blueprint is being implemented first in the name of "disarming" Iraq, then "changing regime" which was felt to be essential for Iraq's disarmament, and finally to "liberating" Iraqis from the tyrannical rule of Saddam Hussein.

The so-called liberated Iraqis are now demonstrating on the streets of Baghdad and other major cities calling upon the Anglo-US forces to leave Iraq. It is difficult to believe that the Baath Party which is in total disarray and whose leaders are on the run is organising these demonstrations. The call by the Iraqis have been echoed by their neighbours Turkey, Iran Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Bahrain in their recent meeting at Riyadh who have

headed by Dick Cheney for Iraqi reconstruction smacks of centuries old tradition of distributing the spoils of the war.

Indeed if the point driven home by C. Rice and Richard Armitage of American blood shed and treasure expended is any indication of the immediate future of things then Athens EU Summit's call for a central role for the UN in post-Saddam Iraq is likely to be ignored by

fundamental obligations not only towards its own citizens but also to the international community as well without which they risk forfeiting their sovereign rights including immunity from armed intervention. Haas found appropriateness of Czech President Vaclav Havel's pronouncement at the Prague NATO summit that "human life, human freedom and human dignity represent higher values than state

real and what it means to be human. The non-western world, he says, has simply to accept these definitions or be defined out of existence. Such fatalistic interpretation of the future of the developing world in the face of devastation wrought upon Iraq (to take as an example) is not inevitable.

The discordant note struck by Iraq's neighbours in Riyadh against American adventurism is a glaring testimony to the fact that Gulf War II is quite distinct from the earlier one when all had banded together to deny Saddam Hussein his conquest of Kuwait. Many of these countries must be very happy to see the end of Saddam but the dissimulative base of his rule, not sanctioned by popular consent and mostly relying on purchased loyalty and fearful of dialectic and forensic investigation into their being where they are, they would not like the US to promote the cause of political and economic freedom in their region.

Is the world then reverting to the laws of the jungle where might is right; where great powers of yesterday are unable to check the bull in the proverbial china shop; where fifty years old organisation like the UN and NATO are ignored to the point of extinction; and where an expanded EU is already showing signs of inconstancy? Indeed as Vincent Tucker wrote (*The Myth of Development: A Critique of Euro-centric Discourse*) that for one society to claim universal desirability to the exclusion of all others is not only cultural elitism but cultural racism. The present vacuum in the international order created by brute force poses not only a cultural threat but dictates the need and extent of security for other states. It is incredible that justification is being sought for the thesis that no one can acquire weapons of mass destruc-



the Bush administration as it had done in side-tracking the UN on earlier occasions. Bush administration would like the world to lend ear to Richard Haas's articulation to the audience at Georgetown University (January 2003) that "today, as in late fifties, the United States finds itself at the apex of global power (and) new threats to US national

sovereignty". Kofi Annan warned rogue states (September 1999) that frontiers were not an absolute defence if massive and systematic violation of human rights took place. Unfortunately as Jean Paul Sartre (Being and Nothingness Theory 1943) spoke of human capacity to fall constantly into "bad faith" and

America should examine its leadership

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

THE day after September 11, France's left-leaning daily *Le Monde* proclaimed in a front-page banner headline, "Today, we are all Americans!" Does anyone remember which foreign leader was the first to visit New York City's ground zero to pay respects to America's dead? Was it Tony Blair? No! Australia's John Howard? No! Spain's, Bulgaria's or Micronesia's Prime Minister? No! It was the French President Jacques Chirac! France fought in the first Gulf War under George Bush senior. President Chirac wholeheartedly supported Bill Clinton-led war against the Serbs in Bosnia and Kosovo. Yet, it is the same France and Chirac who are now talking of an anti-American alliance with Germany and Russia! Are the French simply "perfidious," or is there something fundamentally wrong in America's current foreign policy?

Fifty years from now, America and the world will recall with horror the mortal blow that an "unelected" President dealt to the United States. After September 11, the world gave America a blank cheque, and sent it bouquet of flowers. George W. Bush smashed the flowers, shook his fist at the world and told the world, "we don't need your sympathy or cooperation!" He would have easily gotten the UN and NATO's approval for the justified attack against Afghanistan's Taliban, the host of the Al Qaeda terrorists who perpetrated the attack on America. Instead, Bush decided to go it alone, taking only the subservient Tony Blair along. Welcome to the world of unilateralism!

For over a hundred years, America has been the world's hegemonial superpower. But it did not make the world feel that way. It always exercised its super power through alliances, giving smaller nations credit. Alliances are important because it gives the weak the feeling of reigning in the power of

the mighty. It was American power that won World War I, yet, America gave credit to the "Allies." It was American power that rid the world of Hitler and militant Japan, yet America acted as though it were one of the many "Allies," making sure to give credit to smaller nations and their military leaders, such as Britain's Field Marshall Montgomery. A disabled and sick President Franklin Roosevelt did not have to make the gruelling trips to Teheran (1943) and Yalta (1945) during World War II. As the head of the victorious superpower, Roosevelt could easily have sent deputies such as Vice Presi-

DNA to make them functioning democracies, and most important, LEFT! That is why the world is always willing to give America the benefit of doubt. Regardless of the flawed logic for attacking Iraq a second time, the UN would have given America its blessing for the above reasons, if the US had persisted in the UN. But multilateralism is not what Bushism is about. Bush is all about unilateralism. Bush kicked off his UN campaign by threatening that America did not need anyone's permission to attack Iraq. That was deliberate. The Bushies wanted to make the point that unilateralism is going to be the US's

sanctions, to expect to be treated as friends and liberators of the Iraqi people is foolhardy at best. The Zionist architects of the war, such as Richard Perle and Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, promised democracy in Iraq and then in the rest of the Arab world, which if Germany and Japan were any guide, would require years of American civilian occupation. In the last two weeks, that goal seems to have changed. Faced with defiant Iraqis asking the Americans to leave, America is now talking of handing over power quickly to the Iraqis, as long as the Americans have a military base in Iraq

break them. His "road map" for the Middle East peace will most likely have more roadblocks for the Palestinian victims and more green lights for the Israeli perpetrators. By unilaterally withdrawing from the ABM treaty, international criminal court and the Kyoto treaty, Bush is making the world a more dangerous and unhealthy place. And by systematically dismantling international institutions such as the UN, which the US itself had painstakingly built over so many years, Bush is making the world a better place for the outlaws. The Bushies view international organisations, international

The Press hardly ever mentioned, and never mourned thousands and thousands of Iraqi civilians, men, women and children who were killed or maimed. Perhaps, George Bush's God cares only about American lives! Through hastily enacted and cleverly labelled Patriot (it's an acronym) Act, the right-wingers got all their wish list for curbing civil liberties. The proposed Patriot Act II is the right-wingers' wildest dream fulfilled. If enacted, this Act will allow the Attorney General to imprison and strip of US citizenship any one who contributed money to an organisation found to have sent money to terrorist groups, even if the donor is unaware of such links! This Act is clearly aimed at Muslims who donate money for Zakat. Is it not the responsibility of the law enforcement agencies to find out where charities operating in the US send their money? How can individual donors have the where-withal to find out where charities are sending their money?

If one were hoping that President Bush would have some kind of conversion, that was dashed last week. If America really finds WMD in Iraq, will anyone believe them? Last week, the UN proposed to send the weapons inspectors back to Iraq. The US said, "No thanks! We will do it ourselves!" They still don't get it, do they? America will reverse its suicidal course only with the election of a new President.

dent Harry Truman or General Dwight Eisenhower. But Roosevelt understood the enormous significance of symbolism, humility, magnanimity and respect for the allies. Only days after returning from Yalta, President Roosevelt died. During the cold war, America led the free world against the communist world, until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. All the Presidents of the United States, from Theodore Roosevelt to Bill Clinton, were leaders of the world as well as of America. America's current President, George W. Bush, has told the world to go to hell, and has decided to be the leader of the United States only.

America's track record as a victor is excellent. After defeating Germany and Japan, America rebuilt those two countries, rearranged their national

dogma from now on, and that any restraint on US's military power will not be tolerated, and that the world better get used to it! For his humility, Clinton got Chirac's support; for his arrogance, Bush got (the threat of) Chirac's veto! What the Bushies seemed to have ignored is that the US can win any war on its own, but it can never win any peace on its own.

Bush's America alienated the world by giving fictitious reasons for invading Iraq (WMD, Al Qaeda connection, democratisation) when the world knew that the real reason for invasion was for, Iraqi oil, and the destruction of Iraq to enhance Israel's security. For a nation which is the number one backer of Israel, which has invaded Iraq twice, killing hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, and many more through economic

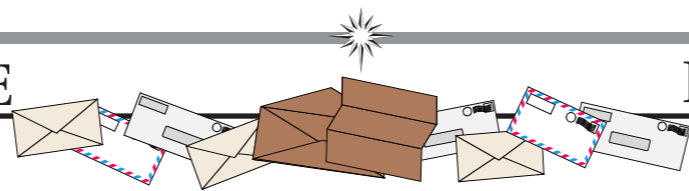
and are in control of the Iraqi oil fields. This is because the US acted alone over the expressed opposition of the rest of the world. If the Americans were part of a truly UN-sanctioned coalition, perhaps the Iraqis would have been less resentful of occupation.

Never once has the Bush administration publicly admitted that American policy may have been wrong and unfair towards the Muslims and the Palestinians, and may have contributed to the creation of the likes of Al Qaeda. Its gut instinct is to stifle criticism with implied threats of force, such as, "France and Turkey will be sorry!" Bush has come to embody not America's best, but America's worst. He wants to win over the world not with moral force, but with brute force. Instead of forging alliances, he wants to

treaties and international alliances as hindrances to the exercise of America's absolute power.

Another casualty of Bushism has been the civil liberty at home, and the American media. By agreeing to be embedded within the military units, the US Press proved to be shamelessly pliant, and has lost its credibility. It reported only the official version of the war. Any errant reporter, such as Fox News's Geraldo Rivera, was expelled. American public saw only the sanitised version of the war. American television showed only the thousands of bombs raining on Baghdad. It never showed the devastations and deaths caused by those bombs. The media rightly mourned the 100 or so American deaths and covered live many of their funerals.

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.

Storm-struck Biman

I am shocked and awed to learn that five Biman aircraft has been damaged in the storm! Wasn't there any way of tethering the smaller aircraft that rammed into the bigger ones? Seems like a case of gross negligence but will any heads at Biman roll over this incident? Most likely none. The storm may have been an act of nature but Biman authorities owe the public an explanation.
Dilkash Ahmed
Gulshan, Dhaka

ZIA and Arabic signage

The opinion by Mahfuzur Rahman "While secularists slumber" (April 25) hits the proverbial bulls eye. Symbols, while often intangible, carry weighty meaning. The sudden appearance of the Arabic sign on the concourse side of Biman roll over this incident? It is but a continuation of the senseless, relentless, and state-sponsored drive to equate things Arab with things Islamic since Bangladesh's first participation in the 1974 OIC conference. Such an attitude reminds me of the dry wit of my

father who spent more than a few years in the Middle East. In sarcastically humorous moments he would advise his three sons to marry Arab women so that even when the daughters-in-law said the nastiest things to the respected parents-in-law, the latter could blissfully assume that the words were perhaps ayats of the Holy Book.

My father's remarks were meant as a joke. The creeping symbols of Arab cultural imperialism, however, are no joke. For those who suffer from an inferiority complex of not being born

Arab, I suggest they move to an Arab country and taste their hospitality. As far as the rest of us are concerned, we are proud to be the inheritors of a culture, a language, and a heritage that predates the Arabic alphabet.
Bangladesh is not Saudi Arabia. Three million perished to prove that point. Let us keep it that way.
Esam Sohall
USA

Mr. Nazmul Karim's letter (April 23) on neon sign at ZIA is deceptive. Did he really mean that ZIA should have a

fourth neon sign in Urdu or he was trying to make a mockery of Urdu as a language? Why of all languages on earth he has chosen Urdu for the fourth neon sign?

Whatever his intentions are, I sincerely hope his observations do not originate a new unnecessary debate like the one he initiated on Rabindra Shangeet, probably the longest in *The Daily Star*.
Sabreena Chowdhury
North South University, Dhaka
Lame horse summits

The honourable PM refused to hold the NAM summit in Dhaka calling it a lame horse organisation, although she later joined the summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Given that brilliant piece of logic, Bangladesh should also refuse to host meetings at all levels for SAARC, OIC and the United Nations of any form in Bangladesh, after all there is no doubting that given recent international events that these are all more or less ineffective organisations. This would

save the country tens of millions of dollars of foreign exchange reserves. We would not of course dare ask Khaleeda Zia to deprive herself of the privilege of travelling to attend the meetings of any of these organisations in other countries, after all her party has earned the right to pillage the country's wealth for at least the next five years. After which it will be somebody else's turn.
Faria C
Baridhara, Dhaka

Wrong spelling of names

Judge Zinat Ara, who was appointed as an assistant judge in the Supreme Court yesterday is my mother, and her name is published in April 25 issue of *The Daily Star* as Begum Jinat Ara. This type of mistake is not expected from *The Daily Star*. I would appreciate it if you take necessary steps to correct the mistake.
Zia
University of Melbourne