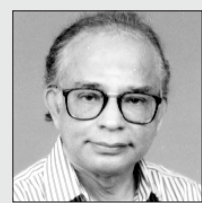


Thief of Baghdad



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

THE famous Indian artist M. F. Hussain has an uncanny instinct for timing. Many of his art works are infused with a sense of history and are contemporaneous to a fault. Events of the day, whether religious or political, national or international, hardly escape his brush and palette. It is not, therefore, surprising that he should have risen to the occasion and portray the destruction and pillaging of Baghdad in canvas. Being a film buff and a former painter of film posters he has given the new series a name that is vintage Hollywood of yesteryears: Thief of Baghdad.

Douglas Fairbanks was a swash-buckling and chivalrous hero in the eponymous film. He was a stary-eyed romantic, too, with a heart full of human milk and kindness. M. F. Hussain has naturally made a caricature of this character, showing the degradation of the soul, from the pristine nobility of the past to the macabre demonisation of the present. The events that unfolded in TV, even after the spin doctoring by the biased media network of the west, exposed the depth of depravity and the ruthless cruelty of the modern day Thief of Baghdad, which is the subject of Hussain's latest artworks. In its present day incarnation, the thief is obviously America and Baghdad is the metaphor for Iraq. The irony involved in the change of character and the theme can hardly be missed.

The ransacking and looting of priceless artefacts of antiquity going back an astonishing 10,000 years to the very dawn of civilisation shocked the entire world. Hundreds of thousands of objects that had survived wars and successive invasions are now missing or have been destroyed. It was all the more shocking because Pentagon was warned well in advance about the almost certain attempt for theft and vandalism. Prof. Gibson of University of Chicago is on record having alerted the Pentagon about

the possibility of looting. When asked about why US forces had not prevented the ransacking, the ever cranky Rumsfeld pointed out that the coalition carefully avoided bombing the Museum and 'what-ever damage was done was done from the ground'. He sounded very matter of fact and tried to convey the message that the invading force that had gone to 'liberate' the Iraqis had no obligation to protect their national treasures from depredations 'on the ground'. He either

assets in gold and cash. Apart from showing a few items to denigrate Saddam's decadent taste, no complete inventory has been made of all the items found in the palaces. This omission, together with the occupation of the palaces by the occupation force, has been deliberate, so that Iraqis and the world are kept in the dark about the looting made by the modern day thief of Baghdad. Inspired news is being circulated to convince Iraqis that Saddam's wealth is yet unconv-

Even before the fall of Baghdad, contracts were given by the State Department to American firms for the rehabilitation of oil wells. This is the area where rich pickings are to be made and which served as one of the strong motivation to wage war against Iraq. In giving contract Washington has done away with irritating practices like tendering and avoidance of conflict of interest. Even Britain, the faithful ally, has been sidelined in these lucrative contracts and the

can contractors engaged to rehabilitate oil and other infrastructures wantonly destroyed by herself. In addition, it will also exact a share of the revenue to pay for its war expenditure under different guises. This will mean forgoing any significant share of revenue from their own natural resource by Iraqis for many years to come. Even in the worst phase of colonialism no country so unashamedly and thoroughly exploited a colonised people.

them and the unflinching respect for international law so assiduously upheld before the war, will appear as sham. Tempted by the spoils of war, or crumbs thrown, they will have the same standing as the Thief of Baghdad in the eyes of their admirers. The whole world (that part which was against the war) is waiting with bated breath to see which way the wind is going to blow.

The most important object of theft that the Thief of Baghdad has in mind is not immediately visible and is not measurable in ordinary terms. It is nothing less than the future of Iraq as a modern and technologically advanced country. The most important consideration why America went to war against Iraq in the face of widespread opposition throughout the world was its fear of Iraq emerging as a economic and military force in the Middle East to reckon with. Left to develop even under handicaps, it would one day challenge the over-powering military might of its most trusted ally in the Middle East, Israel. Only Iraq, of all Arab countries, had the financial muscle because of oil and the experienced scientific establishment to forge ahead within a short period to be a mighty military power. It was a nightmare and an anathema to the Israelis and to Bush administration. It was not the presence of WMD but the possibility of Iraq becoming militarily powerful once again, that prompted the decision on war.

Having launched and won the war America will see to it that Iraq's capability to become a military and economic power is curtailed, forever, to an ordinary and mediocre level. To this purpose all scientific training and research will be nipped in the bud through drastic changes in educational and scientific spheres. The low priority to be attached to education is demonstrated by occupation of schools by occupation force, which triggered protest in Felluja this week and was followed by shooting of unarmed civilians. It is the theft of the future of Iraqis and their scientific and technological progress that requires a long stay of two years. The Thief of Baghdad has his priorities and strategy right. Villains win if they are wily and ruthless. But, they too, have their comeuppance sooner or later.

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

IN MY VIEW

Having launched and won the war America will see to it that Iraq's capability to become a military and economic power is curtailed, forever, to an ordinary and mediocre level. To this purpose all scientific training and research will be nipped in the bud through drastic changes in educational and scientific spheres. The low priority to be attached to education is demonstrated by occupation of schools by occupation force, which triggered protest in Felluja this week and was followed by shooting of unarmed civilians.

forgot or did not care to acknowledge that the artefacts from the mind-boggling sweep of time were not just Iraq's national treasures; they belong to the whole human race, past, present and future.

The methodical and large scale ransacking of museums and libraries and looting were not confined to Baghdad. The University of Mosul's important rare book and manuscript collection was also ransacked and the University of Basra's museum and library suffered a similar fate. So did the museum in Kirkuk. For an invading army that had planned everything so meticulously and anticipated all possible scenarios down to the last detail, the large-scale destruction and looting could not have been a surprise. Their inaction and failure to intervene to stop the looters point to only one conclusion: they connived with the ransacking and pillaging. Part of this may be due to contempt for ancient culture and civilisation, which the American's don't have, part of this may be explained by sharing in the spoils of war. It is an old tradition for victorious army to garner spoils of war and there may not be an exception to this even when the goal is so called 'liberation' of an oppressed and impoverished people!

Again, only motive for theft can explain why the American occupying force and their generals have set up offices in Saddam's opulent palaces. These palaces contained valuable furniture, furnishings and

ered, he having squirrelled it long ago. May be so, but he was not living in a flophouse on the skid row. Where has all the palace wealth gone?

The thief of Baghdad, however, deserves credit for candour and transparency in one aspect of the daylight robbery that is going on.

rules of WTO have been thrown overboard. The fate of Russia's old contracts is uncertain, while France has been brusquely told to be off, from the oil sector because of its dare to challenge America before the war.

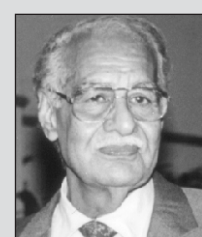
It is almost certain that America will use oil revenue to pay to Ameri-

But there is a small snag in this apparently transparent game of grand larceny. Before oil revenue starts pouring into the coffers of the invaders and illegal regime, the existing UN sanction has to be lifted. This in turn, has to be preceded by a declaration by UN about disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Such a declaration cannot be made unless UN inspection resumes and produces a satisfactory report about non-existence or destruction of all WMD. But America does not want to have UN to complete this task. It has fielded 1000 of its own inspectors defying the UN. As certain as morning follows the night, these inspectors will soon come up with discovery of enough WMD to prove the allegations made by America so passionately, albeit fraudulently. They will duly destroy these WMD, with great fanfare and razzmatazz, paving the way for the lifting of the sanction.

The Security Council members, excluding Britain, will face the greatest challenge to their integrity when the new resolution to abrogate the existing resolution on sanction is tabled. They cannot legitimise an action regarding WMD where UN inspection had no role. If the permanent members, who opposed the war, now agree to lifting of sanction without UN inspection it will be apparent to the world community that they, too, want to have a piece of the 'cake'. The high moral ground taken by



The ministry of fear



KULDEEP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

EVERY country has its troubles. And they come in cycles. India's troubles come every 25-30 years. It was after 28 years of independence in August 1947 that the nation lost its liberty and the right to speak. The emergency imposed in 1975 lasted almost two years. Twenty-eight years after the emergency, the climate is beginning to be like that. Violence is in the air. Once again the governance has a question mark against it. Political parties are taking such confrontational postures -- the general election is due in September 2004 -- that the country's fabric may get ripped. Governments, both at the centre and in the states, are building up an atmosphere of lawlessness so that they are not answerable for their miserable performance.

There is the same old effort to debase public life. And once again, with a general erosion of democratic values, effective dissent has been smothered. Highhanded and arbitrary actions are carried out with impunity. Tyrants have sprouted at all levels -- tyrants whose claim to authority is largely based on their proximity to the seats of power. As the bureaucracy caved in even before the

emergency was imposed, most public servants have become rubber stamps. The ethical considerations inherent in public behaviour have become dim and in many cases beyond the mental grasp of many of the public functionaries.

After the emergency, a number of public servants at various levels admitted that the desire for self-preservation had become the sole motivation for their official actions and behaviour. Anxiety to survive at any cost formed the keynote of approach to the problems that came before many of them. The behaviour today is similar. The fear

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad's insistence on the distribution of *trishul* (trident) has brought Laloo Prasad Yadav from Bihar to flourish the lathi. Terrorism is common in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. The RSS, as expected, has supported the Bhindranwale-like Pravin Tagodia, who violates weapon laws. Apparently, the *trishul* is the new mascot of Hindutva after the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy has got stuck at the Allahabad High Court.

The tepid response of Hindus to Gujarat's Narendra Modi in the Himachal Pradesh election has

The state has never known such corruption. Knowing that the BJP-ruled centre cannot dare to displease her, Mayawati

has slapped more than 300 cases against her opponent Mulayam Singh Yadav. New Delhi does not realise that the Mayawati style may become a pattern of governance in other states like Bihar.

Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalalitha is already hauling the DMK and its leader Karunanidhi over the coals. The government has changed its affidavit in the Supreme Court to support Vaiko, a supporter

untold sufferings.

POTA has not daunted terrorists but has created a scare in the minds of political opponents. Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani defends POTA on the ground that the misuse by the state is not the centre's fault. If the centre puts a weapon in the hands of autocratic chief ministers, who else is to blame?

Personal vendetta has also distorted public life. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has done little for the state because all his time and energy are devoted to weak vengeance on Parkash Singh Badal, his predecessor or dissi-

But they have at least fathomed the layers of politics more than their main opponent Congress. They are realistic and realise that only a coalition would give them power, particularly at the centre. Their entire activity is concentrated on coalescing political parties in such a way

that they have a working majority after the 2004 elections. In UP even Mayawati is acceptable and in West Bengal the ever-changing Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress. The BJP knows its main achievement is that Vajpayee has been able to head a 24-party government and work it in a manner where the party's own agenda of Hindutva has gone apace. Once again Vajpayee looks like leading at the polls. The party does not have any other popular face.

The Congress, on the other hand, shuns the politics of coalition. It would prefer to give support from outside as it is doing in Bihar. Maharashtra, where the Congress has a coalition, is an exception because it is allied to the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) of old Congressmen. The Congress has to get out of the belief that it can win a majority in the Lok Sabha on its own. It has to declare that it proposes to have a coalition at the centre. Not only that, it should begin working for it. Even otherwise, the Congress should realise that a coalition represents the consensus -- something desirable in a pluralistic country.

Still, all this does not explain the debasement in public life. When the means cease to matter, the ends are bound to be vitiated. It is a tragedy how the India of Mahatma Gandhi has become a playground of racketeers and criminals.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

When debasement of politics takes place, voters have their own way of expressing anger. Mrs Gandhi lost even her own seat in the elections held after the emergency. Mayawati, Jayalalitha, Laloo Yadav or Amarinder Singh reflects the type of politics which is personal in content and devoid of values... Still, all this does not explain the debasement in public life. When the means cease to matter, the ends are bound to be vitiated. It is a tragedy how the India of Mahatma Gandhi has become a playground of racketeers and criminals.

generated by ministers and their tools through mere threats, without even the actual use of power has become so pervasive that the general run of public servants are now willing tools of tyranny.

The Supreme Court had done away with the rule to get government's prior permission before moving against officers of the rank of joint secretary and above. The centre, supported by the states, has restored to the practice of permission. The musclemen in different political parties increasingly threaten the public. They are organising themselves into groups,

disappointed the BJP. Still it has only the Hindu card to play. It is again banking on Modi and Tagodia to contaminate the atmosphere in Rajasthan where the state elections are due this November. Delhi, which goes to the polls at the same time, will probably witness the same religious militancy.

When the end is power, the means do not matter. With an eye on the support

of dalits during the general elections, UP chief minister Mayawati has been allowed to do whatever she wants. She is literally making the BJP dance to her tune.

member in the Lok Sabha. The BJP itself is to blame because it went to the extent of having a joint session of parliament to pass the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA). This has come in handy to the states to fix both critics and opponents. Mayawati has put behind bars as many as 45 people in Sanchhadra district in UP. There was no evidence against them; 29 had to be released during the investigation stage itself. The centre has set up a review committee. But by the time the excesses come to its notice, those detained because of personal pique would have undergone

dents within the Congress. So wide is the disenchantment against the Congress that if there were elections today, the Akalis would sweep the polls.

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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.

We are to blame as well

Since the war in Iraq had started, I've been reading articles talking about boycotting American and British goods. I fail to realise why people never talk about boycotting Saudi Arabian goods. Didn't they indirectly support war too? Wasn't their airbase and airspace used to bomb Iraq? All the answers to these questions are undoubtedly a "yes".

As Muslims we have the tendency only to blame the Americans, we never see ourselves, our corrupt regime. Wasn't Saddam an anti-Islamic non-democratic leader? Didn't he mass murder his own people? We are the ones who are leading our own religion towards destruction.

At the same time we as Bangladeshis aren't less hypocrite. As politicians we'll talk big, but at

the end of the day have our houses in the USA, make our children study in America, go there for holidays and what not. We as students don't have any option either. The condition of Dhaka University is nothing but pathetic.

Can't we learn the good things from America? Their civil administration, the way their police operate, the way their economy operates, the superior condition of their universities! The politics and terrorism free environment at their universities! It's high time we realised what is going on around us, look at ourselves individually before we blatantly blame America. I'm not an American, neither am I supporting them, I just want people to know that blaming or boycotting America will neither help us in any ways, nor make us progress nor have any effect on America's economy.

Sunaina

Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Free Iraq?

Reminiscent of the Nazis, the unarmed civilians are being massacred almost daily for expressing their "freedom" of opinion in the post-Saddam era against the presence and conduct of the US forces. It was natural for the civilians to demonstrate since they were led to believe that they were being "liberated" by the allied forces. The pro-war camp amongst us should now understand that when the US means a "free" Iraq, it has a hidden clause attached to it, "free as long as the values and interests of the US are upheld". Hence it is "freedom and peace" by the barrel of the US guns and bombs.

Will the "objective" mass media now create another excuse, which somehow puts Saddam as the reason for these massacres? Will the "Journalists" of CNN, Sky and

Fox TV take note that, if targeting US civilians is an act of terrorism, then so is the targeting the civilians in Baghdad, West Bank or Kabul?
Yamin Zakaria
UK, London

"ZIA and Arabic"

Mr. Ahmad, in his May 1 letter about international economic opportunities. If languages are the key to opportunities, we Bengalis should learn English properly, rather than trying to add Arabic to our syllabus.

Many of my Indian friends in New York are involved in businesses that bring work back to India. Computer programming, back-office-processing and training nurses to send to the US are three growth sectors. In all these areas, fluency in English is essential. In this regard, the average Indian

(lower-middle class included) is far ahead of the average Bengali. In Bangladesh, English fluency is limited to the elite and the middle-class.

In the last few years, many telephone call-centres have been relocated from America to India (especially Bangalore). Now, when you call American Express, Palm Pilot and other companies' help desk, your call is often re-routed to India. Entrepreneurial Indian call centre operators are even being taught "slang" English so that American callers will feel "at home".

On my latest trip to Dhaka, I discussed the possibility of setting up call-centres here. My *Dhaka-Bashi* friends' reaction was to the point. "Where will you find thousands of people, who speak English well, to operate the phones? That's where India is far ahead of us!"

Whether it is to bring overseas

business to Bangladesh, or to send Bangladeshis abroad, our first priority should be to improve the state of English education available to middle and lower-middle class students (the elite is well taken care of). The debate over the ZIA signs is symbolic-it is really about our national priorities. Instead of adding Arabic as a third language, we need to properly teach English as a second language for the sake of economic development.

Naeem Mohaiemen
New York, USA

If the Government think that by putting neon-sign in Arabic at the ZIA it will please and impress the Arabs, so that millions and millions of Rials and Dinars will be poured into the country as aid, then I will say that the government is living in a fool's paradise.

The Arab rulers and their people never considered us as their

friends, let alone Muslims brothers. The bottom line is that to the Arab rulers and their people the white-skinned American and European people are more near and dear ones than the non-Arab Muslims. So I request the government not to do anything out of emotion, accept the reality and think prudent.

Iqbal Ahmed
Dhaka

Immortalising yourself?

Saddam spent billions building statues, palaces, writing poems, painting his pictures and he even tempered with ancient monuments and inscribed his name on them. He thought he was going to immortalise himself by putting his photographs on everything. He stole Iraqi people's money, their resources and he forced them to do

things they didn't want to. They praised him and sang good songs about him all because of fear, not for love. It has taken less than three weeks to eradicate all his pictures, palaces and his false history. His decades of hard works have now gone in the sewage, all because of a very 'small' mistake. The mistake is that, he wrote his name on everything but he forgot to write his name in the hearts of Iraqi people!

Our leaders who spend public money and resources to indulge themselves, need to watch Saddam very carefully and learn from what is now happening in Iraq. The time is overdue for our leaders to come clean. If you want to immortalise yourselves, there is one, and only one way. Stop deceiving our poor and hungry people with your "promises".

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK