

## Minors in jail

### Height of child rights abuse

IN a society where glaring incongruities are overlooked, there are perhaps not many who bother about the children growing up in jail. But this does raise some unpleasant questions.

The truth of the matter is that children or infants forced to stay with their detained or convicted mothers suffer worse than the adult prisoners. They grow up in the dark, squalid conditions, deprived of the basic needs of life. There is nobody to look after those innocent boys and girls who are in jail for no fault of theirs.

The presence of those children in jail is particularly unacceptable when the nation is committed to establishing their rights as a matter of priority. Scores of seminars and discussion meetings are held to build awareness among the masses on the issue. Child rights advocates are constantly hammering on the oppression and discrimination that children are subjected to. But here is a very well defined area of concern in which children are identifiably staying with their imprisoned mothers in jail to be saved from such dangerous upbringing. And, yet nothing is being done about it.

The jail code permits female prisoners to keep a child with her for up to four years and the time can be extended by another two years by the jail authorities. If their stay is codified then why not give proper space for their living along with some facilities for literacy. After all they are not convicted prisoners.

The thought that should be uppermost in the minds of the advocates of jail reform and restructuring is that babies born in jail or accompanying their mothers to it are as lovable and innocent as any other children. The state should be obliged to look after them. The issue should not be linked to long term jail reforms. It can be addressed right now.

## Private airlines to go international

### A step in the right direction

BY one broad stroke coming somewhat belatedly, the state sector's monopoly-hold on aviation business is being voluntarily relaxed by the government. In the basic structural sense, if anything signals coming of age by a country in the highly competitive world of air travel, then it certainly is private sector participation.

We were heartened by the Cabinet decision in principle earlier on to allow private airlines to operate on international routes. What makes us happier is the fact that following the government approval of a draft framework for deregulation seven private airlines have expressed their interest to come forward. Already in the domestic business, they are looking to be licensed to fly beyond the borders of the country. Some of these airlines -- GMG in particular -- have established credentials on the domestic routes receiving a performance rating which compares favourably with that of private sector airlines in the neighbouring countries. The competition between them on the one hand, and between the Biman and themselves on the other, have had a lift-pump effect on customer relations and services in the domestic arena.

To take the private airlines onboard internationally, the basic thing we need to do is to make a fuller use of the agreements we have with countries like India and Thailand whereby more than one airlines from our country are entitled to operate. Biman is the lone flier now. Besides, even the slots provided to Biman are not fully utilised by her. The idle slots to India and Doha in particular could be allocated to the private airlines. It seems Biman had put on shoes larger than its feet.

At this stage, however, the national airlines is not likely to part with the most popular routes in the Middle East sector for reasons of survival. In the immediate term, therefore, Kolkata and Kathmandu may be opened to the private sector. But, in time, with their hands-on customer service policies, competitive flair and creative performances, they should be able to strengthen their capital base and thus expand their franchise.

Basically, we are for open competition on all routes among our airlines, the national flag carrier and the rest, as well as with airlines from other countries. Why not? The vital step forward has to be taken now. The issue is not so much money, not even high tech; it is one of management. It's primarily a matter of doing the best with what we have in a sector that demands passenger safety and efficient service delivery.

The bottom-line is: in selecting airlines for the international routes, nothing but merit should be the criterion.

# Whither United Nations under Kofi Annan?

M. AFSARUL QADER

THE United Nations, without any doubt, is at crossroads today. Never in the history of its 57 years of existence has the world body embodying the cherished ideals and hopes of humanity, in particular the desire "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" seen itself side-tracked, ignored and even over-ruled from performing its core duty "to maintain international peace and security." The recent invasion of Iraq, an original member state of the UN, by the USA and U.K., two permanent members of the UN Security Council on whom along with three other powers rests the duty of global peace and security primarily, has exposed the organization's "embedded" weakness and that of its Secretariat led by Nobel Prize winner Mr. Kofi Annan.

In the architecture of the UN, its Charter and in the creation of organs the primary concern of the founders and the international community was woven around the concepts of peace and security, followed by other related and dependent concepts. A casual look at the very first Article of the Charter will confirm these fundamentals and priorities. It was only natural to place them in that order in the light of thousands of years of human experience, inter-state relations and behaviours accentuated by the deadly, destructive and inhuman conduct witnessed in the course of the Second World War. Since then nothing in human behaviour has changed so dramatically as to modify or ignore the Charter prescribed order.

Civilization accords primacy to security in a lawful way. Its importance is no different in national life. "Only if survival is assured can states safely seek such other goals as tranquility, profit and power." Here it must be emphasized that the concept of survival should not be mixed up with that of personal or national "interest" which has a very low threshold. On the wide spectrum of interests nations can and have in their history come to a modus vivendi without threatening their own survival but not otherwise. Therefore, preserving a certain way of life of a country or elements of its foreign policy could never be a basis for threatening much less occupying another nation. An action like the present Anglo-US invasion and occupation of Iraq is by any standard a repeat of what Saddam did to Kuwait in 1991 with the only difference that for the present there is nobody like Mr. G. Bush Sr. who can organize and drive out the illegal intruders from their fruits of illegal invasion.

The response of the principal organs of the UN, namely the Security Council and the General Assembly, together with that of the Secretary General of the UN to the events leading up to the Anglo-

American invasion and occupation of one of its members who in the face of an inevitable war was apparently fulfilling all the demands of the UN do require a lot of introspection. Both the organs have, so far, failed to rise to the occasion to meet the grave challenge created by the war on Iraq. We intend to discuss their role in details in a later article. For today, we will keep our focus confined to the role played by Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the UN and co-recipient of Nobel Peace Prize, on the crucial matter of identifying threats to the maintenance of international peace and security, a solemn duty

its occupation of neighbouring Kuwait.

On the following day after observing extensive and unprecedented No-War protests of millions the world over his comment was: "The people in the streets, the governments, everybody is insisting on disarmament and that is why the public mood must not be misled by the Iraq authorities." Even the most pro-war media the Fox News could not have done better in putting this kind of twist to the genuine anti-war outpourings of the millions of peoples from different countries. There was no recognition of no-war feelings nor any word of recognition on the role

inability to be independent and impartial in his assessment of evolving developments which too he is oath bound to do under Article 100 of the UN Charter. His timing of comments on behaviour to POWs and other forms of response by Iraqis during the war were mostly directed against the victims. He was prompt in characterizing the incident of a "suicide soldier" in which only combatants lost their lives as "terroristic" but never made any comments on the jumpy reactions of the US soldiers subsequent to that incident which saw innocent women, children and civilians being moved down again

construct to cover and meet the threat given by US and others from the Azores. But pointedly, it blamed the Security Council and of course, the burden of proof remained on the victim despite lack of evidence in support of that by the UN inspectors operating there for years. The UN prescription under him appears to be "run while the country burns and rush in when the fire is extinguished."

Thus, he is ever prepared to meet humanitarian challenges faced by the Iraqi people who in his language faced "yet another ordeal" while remaining silent under whom and for what reasons. He is asking for a UN role in the

issues of human rights and human wrongs, mass illiteracy and massive displacement of people."

This revolutionary prescription for the change of the Charter laid-out role of the UN and its derogation to the level of a super-duper NGO rings a very sympathetic bell in the ears of neo-cons of American politics who have been advocating for such a subservient role of the UN for the USA for long and who are now implementing their vision into action. Mr. Richard Perle, a neo-con guru wrote in the Guardian UK, the day after the assault on Iraq began, the following lines:

"Saddam Hossain's reign of terror is about to end. He will go quickly, but not alone: in a parting irony, he will take the UN down with him. Well, not the whole UN. The 'good works' part will survive, the 'good works' part will survive, the chattering on the Hudson will continue to bleat. What will die is the fantasy of the UN as the foundation of a new world order. As we sift the debris, it will be important to preserve, the better to understand, the intellectual wreckage of the liberal conceit of safety through international law administered by international institutions"

Whatever may be Mr. Annan's vision of the coming world and the role that the UN should perform in this dispensation it is clearly against the prescribed role and duties of the Secretary General under Chapter XV of the UN Charter. The people of Asia who had foregone their turn to have him re-elected to that august and crucial position have every reason to feel deeply betrayed and hurt by his performance on the present crisis affecting a fellow Asian country. The UN, particularly, the General Assembly must learn from this very tragic and undesirable course of events and rise up to the occasion unless they too want to abdicate their legitimate role in the world affairs. The peace-loving masses of the world including the saner and sober thinking millions in the USA and UK have already signalled firmly of their intentions. Temporary setbacks aside they would not like to see the UN abandon its historic role in favour of anarchic and hegemonic order for no country in the world can single-handedly guide the destiny of mankind in a fair and equitable manner. If the likes of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt shrunk from such a responsibility when it was almost available to them it would be an impossible task for the others who have no regard for law, civilized norms and basic rules of evidence to win over the hearts and minds of the affected billions.

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for him under the Article 99 of the Charter. To the best of our knowledge he has never made such recommendation to the Security Council during the entire run up of events leading to the US attack on Iraq and even when the SC was given an ultimatum by the USA, UK and Spain from the island of Azores on 16th March 2003. Instead, to many it would appear that he facilitated the threat to peace and the war manoeuvres of the coalition partners by withdrawing the UNMOVIC inspectors from Iraq and the UN Observers from the UN sanctioned sacrosanct Iraq-Kuwait border. It was the place through which bulk of the invading force with their armada moved into Iraq three days later. In most of his statements issued before the war he leaned heavily against the weaker target Iraq. On 10th March he said, "the determination of the Security Council to disarm Iraq of such [WMDs] weapons is the most urgent issue -- because Iraq has actually used such weapons in the past, and because it has twice committed aggression against its neighbours." He then went on to say, "on this critical question there are no divisions, no ground for doubt, dispute or delay." He was factually wrong here.

Iraq, thanks to the support received from powerful quarters, was never denounced as an aggressor in case of its aggression on Iran despite many attempts by the latter to have such a condemnation from the UN. On the contrary Saddam was rewarded as his representative to the UN Mr. Ismet Kittani was elected President of the General Assembly during his war with Iran. Such was the extent of support enjoyed by the now discredited regime in the UN at that time. Iraq, however, was termed aggressor in

demanded by the international public opinion by their supposed "conscious keeper" and "human rights" champion. Mr. Annan during his long tenure as a senior UN functionary and the Secretary General has been found to comfortably lean on the weak and the helpless. His dealings with the governments of Kampuchea, Indonesia, Palestine and particularly Rwanda are just a few real-politik examples of his style of performance. In fact, his senior officials have barred display of any kind of war protest inside the hallowed premises of the UN building. Even someone wearing a small no-war badge is not allowed entry there.

In contrast, he never categorically disapproved of or criticized many highly provocative remarks coming from responsible US and UK leaders on the very role of the UN on Iraq crisis even when they were clearly anti-Charter. By doing so, he singularly betrayed his

and again. His only strong comment before the war on US attitude in response to a pointed question from a journalist was: "If the US and others were to go outside the Council and take military action, it would not be in conformity with the Charter." After the war began he was found expressing concern on the fate of the Iraqi civilians with no reference to the quarters responsible for these hasty and unilateral acts which ignored role of diplomacy and the UN.

His withdrawal of UN inspectors and observers were against the position he took a month earlier. In a joint press briefing with Italian Prime Minister on 17th February he categorically refused to withdraw them unless SC decided so. Yet, when the crunch came he did so without batting an eye lid. "The failure of efforts to achieve united action in the Security Council in ridding the country [Iraq] of WMDs" was cited as the ground for withdrawal. This was a convenient

reconstruction and relief efforts to be undertaken in post-war Iraq after the failure of the UN and himself in averting the tribulations of the Iraqi people. He launched no diplomatic initiative such as to meet the top protagonists of war and undertake other institutional or personal efforts to prevent this terrible ordeal becoming a reality in the first place. Whether it is a belief in his officials' ability to face this kind of humanitarian situation better than anybody else or the fact that the world cannot find a better medium of compromise in such a situation or a cynical exercise of power by an unaccountable person to the international community the world will never know unless a whistle-blower comes along in due time.

The fact remains before the member states came to decide what kind of role the UN would play in Iraq or in the post-war Iraq 2003 world order Mr. Kofi Annan had decided much earlier that UN would not in future play a preventive role on peace and security but opt for humanitarian and like kind of exercises arising out of such failures of security and peace world over. His alter-ego Mr. Shashi Tharoor writing in International Herald Tribune (IHT) on February 14, 2003 said:

"The world is told that the relevance of the UN depends on its conduct on one issue alone. Iraq. No doubt what happens in the Security Council on Iraq is of key importance to the UN's role in maintenance of peace and security. But when the Iraq crisis has passed, the world will still be facing innumerable problems, including spread of weapons of mass destruction, degradation of the global environment, contagious disease and chronic starvation,

M.Afsarul Qader is a former Ambassador

## The afterpiece

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

WELL, the Iraq war is over at last -- or so claim the coalition partners. Announcing the end of major combat operations in that country, President George Bush said: "The liberation of Iraq is a crucial advance in the campaign against terror." News about the war is being steadily relegated from the front pages of broadsheets and tabloids to the inside pages, with both the print and the electronic media beginning to give precedence to other things that are happening in the world, like North Korea's offer of a new peace deal or suicide bombers holding British passports and posing as peace activists killing and wounding dozens in Tel Aviv, and of course, SARS, the deadly epidemic that is claiming new victims almost every day. The Iraq war is not quite forgotten though -- it's early days yet for that -- and it is still making the headlines every now and then, like highlighting the shooting of Iraqi demonstrators by American troops in Falluja and the capture or surrender of high-profile members of Saddam Hussein's regime. On the home front, the Labour Government has managed to survive the Iraq war, although the Prime Minister appears to be wearing -- as seen on TV at least -- a somewhat haunted look, and speculation is rife that his party may not fare so well in the next general elections, especially as it is almost certain that Mr Blair's decision to side with President Bush is going to make the Labour party lose a sizeable proportion of ethnic votes.

Meanwhile, the results of the just-concluded Local Government elections across Britain (London

excluded) must be sending jitters down the spines of Labour leaders. The Conservative Party's successes in England have been hailed as "terrific" -- the Tories have increased the number of Council seats held by them by more than 500. In contrast, Labour has lost around 750 seats across the country, suggesting that instead of enjoying a "Baghdad bounce", Tony Blair is being punished for his role in the Iraq war, especially by Muslim voters. One solace for the Labour Party is that it has managed

by courtesy of a friend of mine who is a book-reviewer for a leading London daily. My friend has naturally read the book thoroughly, and what he told me about its contents and what I could glean from a quick scan of the various chapters, made me conclude -- although not happily -- that the end of the world as we know it is perhaps not just far-fetched, pessimistic speculation. Professor Rees is an internationally respected astrophysicist, best known for his work on black holes,

chaos has become relatively easy these days, and somebody capable of doing that may one day be able to create a genetically modified virus that could cause thousands of fatalities. Artificial intelligence is another of the Professor's worries. He is virtually sure that one day in the not-too-distant future we will be able to make robots that are smarter than human beings and our own creations may ultimately decide that the human race is redundant. Inserting micro-chips in human bodies as a form of

in this country are required to wait for one year after their marriage to British citizens before they can officially apply for it. But from the middle of 2003, they will be required to wait two years and prove their eligibility through a series of multi-level tests designed to discourage fraudulent use of the relevant immigration rules. During a recent review of about half-a-dozen divorce petitions filed before the High Court, the judges found that a large number of such petitions were being submitted as

petitions as soon as they were granted residency. Apart from imposing a two-year waiting period after marriage, the new rules will now require a married couple to produce documents proving that they are living together as husband and wife before a solicitor every two months during these two years and obtain a certificate; the couple must have a joint bank account and provide proof that their regular living costs are being met from that account; and the authorities will seek to interview members of the couple's respective families if they live in this country as well as their neighbours in order to ascertain that they are a genuine married couple. Any allegations of forced marriage will also be looked into. After either party of a married couple has been granted permanent residency at the end of the two-year waiting period, if they file a divorce petition and processing of the petition reveals any irregularity, the permission to reside indefinitely in Britain will be summarily withdrawn, the concerned party deported and enquiries mounted against the British spouse in order to find out whether the marriage has taken place in exchange of money or something else. If that happens to be the case, the British spouse will face strict punishment. The Home Office has of course assured any would-be applicants that genuinely married couples have nothing to fear as each case will be dealt with on its merit.

## LONDON LETTER

to win a working majority in the Welsh Assembly elections. But the scariest thing about the poll results is that the ultra-racist British National Party (BNP) has bagged five new seats in a Lancashire town to become the second largest political group on the Borough Council, although BNP leader Nick Griffin failed in his bid to win a seat in Oldham, the venue of serious racial riots a couple of years ago. All in all, however, the scenario is getting back to "normal", if that's the right word to use.

### Are we really an endangered species?

That's a question raised by no less a personage than Professor Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal, in his latest book "Our Final Century: Will the Human Race Survive the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?" The book has not hit the shelves in bookstores yet, it is to be formally launched later this month, but I have recently had the privilege of having a pre-view of it

Cosmic evolution and the six numbers that define the universe. But his new book is almost entirely free of technical jargon and written in a language that a layman like me can follow, and reflects the thoughts of a man deeply worried about the fate of his own species. In it he has voiced his fears about the abuse of technology, particularly about the nuclear arms race, and some even more dangerous risks.

As he puts forward his theories, there are some technologies which are socially and environmentally benign, but the way some other technologies are being used is -- to quote from the Preface of the book -- "inevitably empowering more people with the potentiality to harm on an ever-growing scale." To illustrate his point Professor Rees says that it takes a huge and complex facility to make a nuclear weapon, whereas anyone experimenting with biotech using simple instruments can create a new virus. Creating computer viruses that can cause widespread

medical treatment is a growing practice and the day is perhaps not too far away when we will start inserting them into our brains to make ourselves smarter and fitter and ultimately end up more computer than human.

Well, I did not have the chance to read Professor Rees' book as thoroughly as I would have liked to -- I mean to do that when I can procure a copy after it becomes publicly available -- neither am I qualified to comment on his theories. But ever since I came across it I have not been able to get rid of this nagging feeling that the back of my mind that perhaps we -- the human race -- are really facing an apocalyptic future.

### Residency through matrimony

Obtaining permission to reside permanently in Britain by marrying a British citizen is being made much more difficult than before. Until now, persons wishing to gain permanent resident status

soon as the statutory one year waiting period was up, in most cases as soon as the husband or the wife was granted permission to reside legally in Britain. A follow-up of the review revealed that out of a total of 27,000 applicants granted residency through matrimony last year, nearly a third filed divorce petition within days of acquiring legal status. Requested by the High Court, the immigration authorities made discreet enquiries into a number of cases and discovered that the marriages of many applicants for divorce were never consummated and the concerned parties had gone through the motions of getting married with the sole purpose of gaining permission to reside indefinitely in Britain. According to Home Office sources, about half of last year's 27,000 successful applicants were from the Indian sub-continent and many of them either never lived together as husband and wife or started living separately soon after their marriage and filed divorce

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



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.

**Kashmir crisis**  
The boxed news "Last in my life, an emotional Vajpayee says" (May 5) attracted my attention. Since the independence of India and Pakistan destruction, conflict and war have been the name of the game between the two countries. "How long India and Pakistan will continue to fight? Will this bloodbath that has been going on for 50 years ever come to an end?" The answer to the Indian PM's query is a big NO. There will be no end of this crisis unless both the countries give up their claim over Kashmir and allow the people of Kashmir to

decide their own fate.  
No body seems to consider that Kashmir could be an independent territory. It seems that the feeling of both Pakistan and India is if the territory or state of Kashmir cannot be retained the existence of their own state would be in jeopardy. But this not to be the case. On the contrary if Kashmir becomes an independent state through mutual understanding of India and Pakistan, relationship between the two neighbours would strengthen. As well as resources could be utilised towards the development of not only of the people of the two coun-

tries but also of the sub-continent.  
**Fazlul Huq**  
BLAST, Dhaka  
**Stealing oil!**  
The news about an American running the occupied Iraqi Oil Ministry is of no great surprise. The Americans and the British were all along conspiring to steal Iraqi oil. That's what Gulf War II was all about not WMD. But what surprises me is that this great American nation producing such great stalwarts like Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Thomas

Jefferson only to name a few is today being unfortunately run by a group of incompetent people who grabbed state power through default or some loopholes in their constitution. They are creating great disorder in the world politics by proving that Might is Right.  
**Mohammad Sohail**  
One-mail  
**Re-building Iraq**  
Indeed America should re-build Iraq alone, as it wants to. Since it destroyed it at its own sweet will. And it should do so with its own

money only. Then only it will know the pains of destruction and reconstruction and think twice before destroying another country at its will.  
**Dr. Sabrina Rashid**  
DOHS, Dhaka  
**CAB report on price hike**  
Prices of daily necessities are climbing up putting the fixed income people under an unbearable stress. Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) has already expressed their anguish over the

situation. It has been reported by CAB's recent survey that prices of rice have been increased 27.75 times, Dal 28.33 times, oil 57.49 times and spices 74.75 times in last 12 years. House rent alone has gone up by 197.58 times by the same period. According to CAB report daily necessities are being sold in retail markets at 33.52 times higher than that of the wholesale markets. Traders opined that prices of essentials are increasing due to price hike of gas, electricity etc.  
The above-cited statistics are really worrisome for the general

public especially for the fixed income people and government employees. The income of general people or public servants are not increasing comparing to that of the daily necessities. So, there is always a gap in between income and expenses.  
**MHBari**  
Khulna  
**Top ten lessons from Iraq War**  
Nazma Ahmed Kona's thoughtful expression about the Iraq War allured me to move one step ahead.

I would love to add a couple of buds in the garland she wove...  
(1) History says Iraq faced fourteen great wars including the recent one. Nobody showed their will to destroy the Iraq Museum(s) except the US-UK joint forces in 2003!  
(2) If the so-called most developed nations (US & UK) are so cautious about Human Rights then why did not they arrange to shift the innocent Iraqi children as well as women to other neighbouring countries when they invaded Iraq?  
**Ifekhar Ahmed**  
Basic Bank Ltd, Khulna