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"A diplomat's letter"



War and UK

Mr Carter, thank you for your letter in The Daily Star (May 7).

Those of us who opposed the war on Iraq did so for many reasons; the love and admiration for Saddam was not one of them. We didn't think that removal of Saddam would make Iraq a worse place. But we thought that your ways of doing so would make the world a more dangerous one. More than ever before, we feel confident that we were right.

Before the war, Prime Minister Blair loved to say "if we fail to take action against Saddam's regime now, think of the message it would send to the dictators right across the world". It seems that the dictators of the world have got their message. North Korea has hastened its nuclear program with a small explanation: "war on Iraq has confirmed our need". As though satisfied that his pupil has finally learned the lesson, Foreign Minister Jack Straw subsequently ruled out any possible war on North Korea. I do not know a more effective way of communicating "GO-NUCLEAR-OR-WE-WILL-BE-AFTER-YOU" message.

The danger is not just sending the wrong message. Over the last few decades, no matter how vaguely, institutions of international law had started taking shape. With one monstrous action you have undone them all. Think of the number of international laws you have broken by unilateral preemptive strike, by destroying residential areas, by killing civilians and journalists, and by continued occupation without any UN mandate. All these are dangerous precedence, ready to be emulated by smaller regional powers to bully their weaker neighbours.

You invoke UNSCR's 678 and 687 to justify your action. Now, would you attack State of Israel for violating UN resolution on the issue of illegal settlement? Would you guarantee that your government would strike every time a UN resolution is broken? No, you wouldn't, because you are a nation, and nations act according to their own self-interests. Your policies to the world are marred with inconsistency and double standard, because you take action only when it serves you and keep quiet when it doesn't. This is not because you are evil, but because you are only human. This is why, even the most benevolent country in the world cannot act as 'global cop'. This is why unilateral pre-emptive strike can never be justified.

There is nothing inherently wrong with US or UK. We do not trust you to run the world for the same reason we do not trust one or two persons to run a country. To protect ourselves from arbitrary actions by a powerful individual we rely on checks and balances of democratic institutions. But who would save us from arbitrary actions by powerful nations? Again, only proper arrangements of international institutions can do that. This is time we resolve to build them. This is time we devote all our energy to nurture and save them.

Shadayen Pervez Pennsylvania State University, USA

I have little more to ask in response to "A Diplomat's Letter" by HEMr. David Carter, the British High Commissioner in Bangladesh.

He mentioned that the UK did not engage in Iraq, rather after PAINFULLY "waited 12 long years since Saddam's brutal invasion of Kuwait for him to meet his obligations to disarm". Now a rightful question arises here: How more years your country "and international community at large" should wait to see Israel to stop terrorist activities on innocent Palestinian people in their (Palestinian) own homeland defying all the UNSC resolutions for last 32 years? Will your country

pursue the UNSC to use force against Israel to stop genocide and mass killing in the Palestinian territory and in the neighbouring countries in the Middle East to bring stability and peace in that region?

At last one point to note: The essay necessarily avoided the WMD matter in Iraq. Actually those WMD were never in Iraq, and the INVADERS shall never find any such WMD in Iraq. Both the President of US and Prime Minister of the UK used WMD as the pre-text for the invasion in Iraq in a view to capture and set control over the largest oil reserve (after the KSA - which is already a puppet of theirs) on the earth.

It is nice to see that at least the UK had understood their own mistakes, and tried to support the already distressed and humiliated Iraqis after the invasion of Iraq. Hope the UK will recognise that it mistakenly joined the US led forces to invade Iraq, and shall try to repent for its actions during the "War in Iraq".

Sajjad Waheed Independent University, Dhaka

His Excellency, the British High Commissioner was looking for the balance and objectivity in your newspaper regarding the coverage of the conflict in Iraq. But why should he expect that? It's true that The Daily Star was against the war, and it is just natural that it would be more pro-peace and less pro-war. As long as there is a reasonably minimum coverage of the other side of the story, it should be considered a fair balance.

After all look at the coverage of the pro-war Western media like BBC, CNN, The Times of London or The New York Times. There was a preponderance of pro-war news and views, and just a sprinkling of the other side. Again that is but natural. I am not even mentioning Fox and its arch-conservative fundamentalist people. If there ever was a one-sided, narrow-minded people with a rabid mentality that bunch takes the cake! As a matter of fact, they are the Western equivalent of the Taliban!

The trouble is, the British Government is out of tune with the majority of their own people, as also the world. An overwhelming majority of the British people were against military action, till all avenues are exhausted and it really was the "course of last resort". It does not hold much water by saying that Saddam violated UN Resolutions one after the other for the last 12 years. Nobody in his right senses defends Saddam. But by going after Saddam and his cohorts, Iraq and the people has also being punished and devastated. That is why most of the world thinks Bush and Blair has committed crimes, by going against the UN, even though the High Commissioner mentioned UNSCR resolutions 678, 687 & 1441; otherwise why would they go to the UN for another resolution to approve what they wanted to do, then withdrawing it after not getting what they wanted, in spite of the despicable intimidation, brow-beating and coercion of the other weaker Security members? This is not Democracy!

It is heartening to note the HC mention that "we continue to give the highest priority to the Middle East peace process" and that "Tony Blair is at the centre of that key initiative". The only trouble is, it is perceived that the UK and the USA governments are not even-handed regarding the Israelis and the Palestinians. Why can't they agree to the idea of a WMD-free Middle East? Is it just to give the Zionists entity an upper hand so that the Israelis can subjugate and dehumanise the Palestinians any way they want?

Sayed A Chaudhury, Gulshan, Dhaka

Lingering reshuffle of the cabinet

I was impressed with your news item on the Reshuffle of the Cabinet (May 4). What intrigues me this time is that whilst news items are published quite elaborately on the many misdeeds of the ministers who are imbued with wrong doings of countless numbers I am yet to read the reaction or a kind of follow-up of these eye catching publications.

Your daily reported on 5th May 2003 that highly placed sources said PM Khaleda Zia received resignation letters from four cabinet ministers, 11 state ministers and one deputy minister in August last year due to unsatisfactory performance and various other allegations against them. You also reported that recently some more cabinet and state ministers might also be asked to submit resignation letters because of their reported involvement in various scandals. You further wrote that BNP policy makers and influential cabinet ministers are of the opinion that most state and deputy ministers under them have become burden since they 'create trouble' instead of easing administrative hassles.

The readers would like to see Editor Mahfuz Anam write something tangible to draw the attention of the PM who is sitting tight on the subject when it comes to any criticism of her cabinet. If she is brave enough to ask for the resignation of some members of her cabinet for their involvement in various scandals, she should be equally brave to take strong and exemplary action against these public figures who have tarnished the name of the PM and her cabinet. This will make the nation feel that the PM is sticking to her election promise that the severest of action will be taken against her people if they are found to be involved in scandals and wrongdoing.

Md. Mahmoodul Haque Gulshan, Dhaka

Zero tolerance

Anglo-US invasion force refused to give the UN Inspectors extra time as they launched a pre-emptive strike on Iraq without a mandate from the UN. We were constantly informed that credible "intelligence" existed of the alleged Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The burden of proof always is upon the Plaintiff, and never the defendant. Now the Bathist regime has fallen, there should be zero time for the invaders to come forth with the proof. The world community should demonstrate zero tolerance for any delay, whilst demanding the production of tangible evidences of WMD from the invaders. This is only fair since the invaders were not willing to give extra time to the UN inspectors, as well as their own claim of possessing credible intelligence, prior to the war.

The US administration are reluctantly admitting that Iraq most likely have destroyed its alleged WMD prior to the war, which would only confirm their innocence, as far as the pretext of WMD is concerned. Yet the senile President continues to insist that US had the right of intervention in Iraq, most likely he is not aware of his own department's stance on the issue. In the absence of any evidence the invasions is nothing less than murder. Now is the real test for the credibility of UN, if it is to be accepted as a genuine independent international organisation.

Yamin Zakaria UK, London

State sovereignty

The invasion of Iraq and ultimate dismemberment into three zones by the Americans is a pointer to the sub-continent that Greater India with three zones India, Pakistan and Bangladesh must not remain only a visual concept. Instead of indulging in internecine conflict among the three zones we must forge greater unity or else our freedom and sovereign existence is at peril.

The recent steps taken by Prime Minister Vajpayee should not remain a concept only. And Bangladesh must be included in it as well. Without non inclusion of Bangladesh, it will become nothing but a fruitless endeavour as we are one geographic entity sharing the common culture. Our Foreign Minister welcomed the Indo-Pak rapprochement and we have to play a positive role in it. Bangladesh could indeed play an important role to create a bridge between India and Pakistan as Bangladesh maintains cordial relationship with both the countries.

Al-Haj, S.M. Khalid Chowdhury Sher-E Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

Be fair in criticism

In their criticism of the U.S. military intervention in Iraq, most analysts fail to realise that the United States is actually responding to the new threat posed by terrorists to its own security and not out of any desire to impose American hegemony.

The US was attacked at a time of peace on September 11, 2001 by terrorists - sponsored by Al Qaeda and with support and sanctuary provided by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In their criticism about the failure to find any weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq, these critics also tend to forget that a small group of terrorists carried out a destructive assault on

America's heartland without any WMDs. They used something as small as box cutters to turn jetliners into veritable weapons of mass destruction.

Terrorist groups have allowed the rogue states to privatise their foreign and defence policies. With rogue states providing financial and logistic support, the terrorist groups are more than willing to carry out attacks on their common enemy-- the United States. Proliferation of WMD has added to this new threat.

Saddam's easy-to-hide biochemical weapons pose a great threat, because they can be unleashed clandestinely and perpetrators are difficult to identify. A year after the anthrax attacks, the US doesn't know who was behind those attacks. Such an unconventional attack, one that will combine Saddam's well-concealed biochemical weapons with the terrorists' skills, could be devastating. The US cannot afford to wait for another September 11 to find out Saddam's links with terrorist organisations.

Mahmoud Elahi 2240 Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

Indo-Pak accord and Bangladesh

It is heartening that leaders of India and Pakistan has realised that the sub-continent can ill afford to continue conflict of 50 years of distrust and enmity caused and left back unsolved by the British. The logical follow-up of the basis of partition of British India in 1947 was complicated by Britain by leaving the option of what to do to about the princely estates when leaving the subcontinent in a hurry. The problem of Kashmir was born then. The border of divided Bengal was so haphazardly drawn that even today after 50 years the matter still bothers us.

In the last page of The Daily Star of May 4 issue a news item appears that a regional meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint River Commission will be held on 5th May '03 at the Zakiganj border in Sylhet to discuss formulation of an action plan and a model test to dredge the river Surma and other matters. I take this opportunity to highlight a problem which has been depriving the Bangladeshi citizens living on our side of the river Surma to be able to use the river water from the point of bifurcation point off Borak river down to the point at which the river entered Bangladesh territory.

The problem cropped up because the Surma river section as described was officially a part of Cachar district of British Assam and India claimed that the entire river belonged to them. Armed conflicts erupted between India and Pakistan but before the Liberation of Bangladesh Pakistan gave up the claim of the midstream of the river to be the international boundary between the two countries and thus agreed to and implemented setting up of pillars mostly at our side of the river. Over these years the river eroded into our side of the river into our territory but India prohibits our people to use the water. Thus our people living on our bank of the river over a stretch of about 12 miles are being deprived of using Surma river water. Midstream of all international rivers are accepted as the border line between two countries and if gracefully accepted by India our people can at least use the water to be pumped up for irrigation on high land along the river bank. May I request the Joint River Commission and the respective two governments to look into the matter?

Altaf Choudhury Gulshan, Dhaka

Bin Laden and the Thief of Baghdad

This is in response to Sunaina's letter "We are to blame as well" (May 4).

The writer is right; we Muslims are to blame for our misfortune because we have strayed far away from the right path by disregarding the guidance of the Quran. But I believe we need to try to contain American aggression too, and boycotting American goods is a good place to start.

Now, I just want to point out that the Saudi airlines were not supposed to be used to bomb Iraq. In fact, Saudi Arabia did not give permission to the Americans to use those bases to strike Iraq.

It is interesting to note how the American warmongers used the media by supplying them with lies to win the world opinion. Before the start of the invasion, in their desperation to show the world that they have many allies, news briefings from Washington asserted that the Saudi Government had agreed to let them use their bases inside the Kingdom to bomb Iraq, which was immediately denied by the Saudi authorities. (The Gulf Times)

But during the US-UK led illegal invasion of Iraq, some stray missiles hit Turkey and Iran. And, in both cases it was confirmed that the missiles were fired from the American military bases located inside Saudi Arabia. Apparently the Americans lied, and although they promised the Saudis that they would not use those bases but they actually did. The situation must have been very embarrassing; now the US has decided to close down all its military establishments and air bases in the Saudi Kingdom. And that's exactly what Bin Laden

Summer in Dhaka



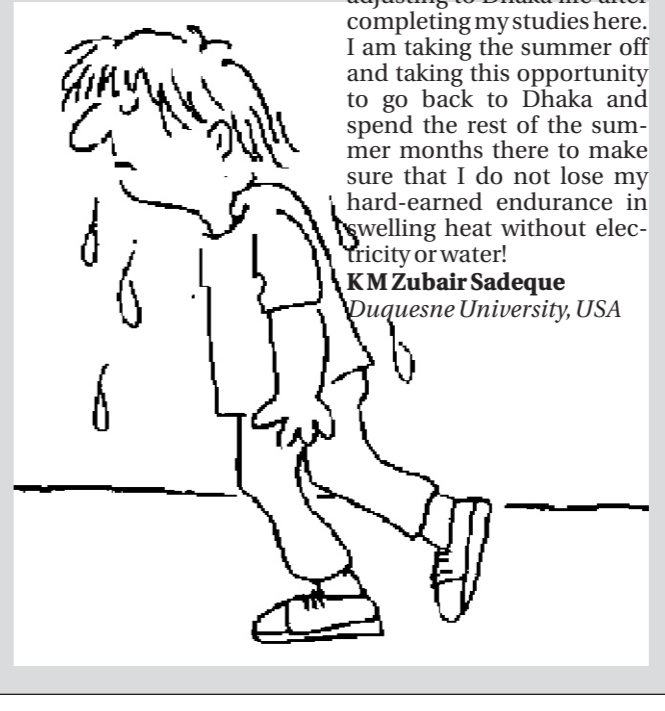
Trying to live a reasonably comfortable life in Dhaka is becoming quite a strenuous effort these days. During these hot summer days, frequent loadshedding is surely making Dhaka life unbearable. There was time when the so-called 'posh' areas like Gulshan, Banani, and Baridhara were excluded from the purview of loadshedding. But these areas are no more exclusive enough to avoid the grip of loadshedding. I believe there is a positive side to it - now the Dhakaies of all localities, irrespective of their caste, creed and economic status,

are equally subject to outrageous power outages. That speaks of our democratic values of equal treatment for all!

For someone like me who was born in Dhaka and lived there until recently, no electricity or water was a way of life. For the last few months however, I have been living in a US city for the purpose of study. Since I came here, I experienced power cut only twice, each lasted for only a few seconds after lightning struck nearby. When the first time the power went off, I felt joy thinking of the fact that even a US city faces power cut that has been so common in Dhaka. But to my utter dismay, the electricity came back the next moment. It was no exception the second time the power went off.

I made a pledge not to get used to the life here (without loadshedding, without water scarcity) so that I do not face difficulties in adjusting to Dhaka life after completing my studies here. I am taking the summer off and taking this opportunity to go back to Dhaka and spend the rest of the summer months there to make sure that I do not lose my hard-earned endurance in sweltering heat without electricity or water!

K M Zubair Sadeque Duquesne University, USA



demanding in the first place. Now the question is who is the real winner of this Operation Iraqi Freedom? Bin Laden or the thief of Baghdad?

Shukla Mirza Doha, Qatar

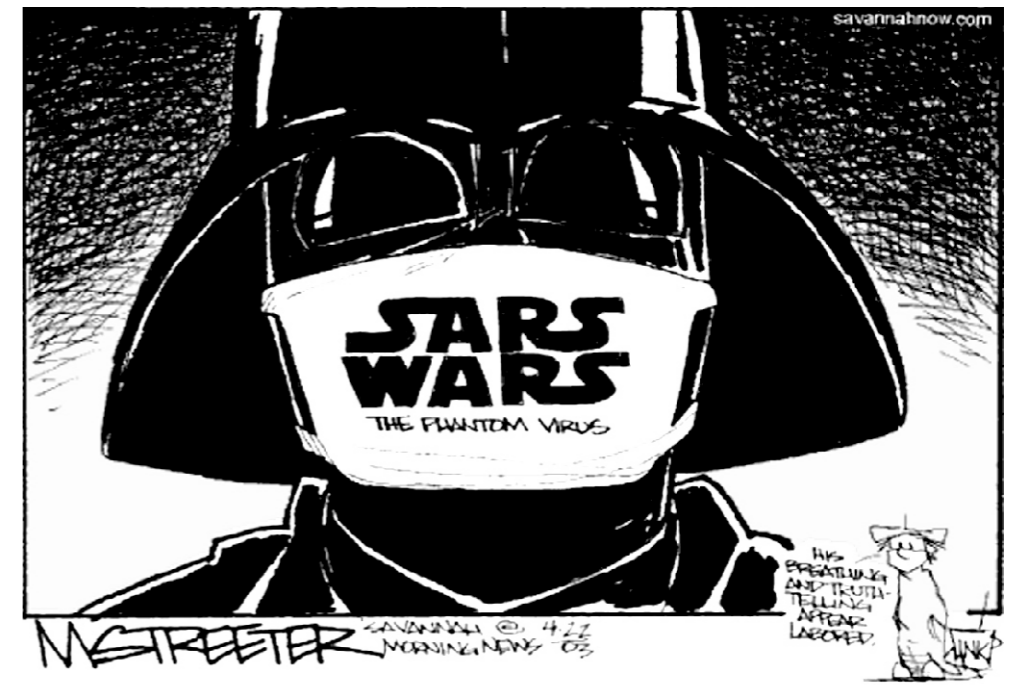
US designs on the subcontinent

The US envoy Richard Armitage is not coming to the subcontinent only for Kashmir or the gas pipeline project; though both issues are in the pipeline.

The real US agenda behind all the hyperactivity is to force a shotgun marriage between the two unwilling neighbours to disarm

both of them of their nuclear arsenal, so that there should not remain any open threat to both, from each other to justify the nuclear stock-pile in the first place. While at the same time in so many other ways, their dubious status as 'nuclear powers', does not threaten the monopoly of the super-power to deal with them according to its own over-riding interests.

It is also to ensure that they do not get into the lucrative business of exporting technology to other victimised countries, in the manner Pakistan is alleged to have managed in case of North Korea as exchange for North Korea supplying it with Long Range missiles to carry their nuclear warheads.



SARS and our government

Panic has gripped the entire world because of the widespread devastation SARS has so far caused in different countries. It is spreading like wild fire in every nook and corner of our planet. We know we will also not be spared. Most of the countries are getting ready to take the onslaught on war footing. Radio and television are carrying news and images everyday on their preparation to face this global menace.

I would appeal to our government to inform our people through mass media about this disease and how to face it properly. Though still any prescription to cure this disease is beyond any human knowledge, still our people should have some knowledge how to combat it, at least to prevent it from spreading among its vast malnourished population who normally does not have strong enough immune system to fight against this menace for too long. Moreover, most of this people live in abject poverty and unhygienic condition where the speed of the spread of this disease can get its best speed.

Unless enough is done to prepare the nation to fight against this new global menace, this dreadful disease might play havoc in Bangladesh. Government should send instructions to all places, where medical facilities are present, how to cope with the situation in worst case scenario and take steps immediately to make mask available abundantly and keep its price within the reach of the general people. This mask has been proved to be the most effective weapon to fight face the disease. Among the government activities to cope with the situation, so far we have seen some steps taken at the Zia international airport to detect the arrival of the SARS affected passengers to check its spread. We don't know whether any quarantine facility has been made available and, if so, how big it is. I want to caution our government that there is no scope for any dilly-dally in this respect, as its consequence might be very dreadful for our nation.

Mahboob-e-Gaus, Gulshan, Dhaka