

## Cabinet reshuffle

Too little too late

THE government has finally downsized the cabinet, which was believed to be too big and unwieldy. But one has the feeling that the move, which has brought down the number of ministers from 60 to 53, has come too late and produced too little.

The government faced criticism when the big cabinet was formed, apparently to make room for some upcoming leaders, who would finally replace the ruling party veterans. It was a costly experiment and a burden on a poor country like ours. Nevertheless, the government might have been in a better position to defend its decision had governance shown signs of improvement. But that has not been the case and poor governance is now held responsible for the country's failure to achieve the desired goals in different sectors. So the dubious idea of expanding the cabinet beyond acceptable limits has been a clear setback for the government.

However, the adjustments in the cabinet that the government has finally decided on have made it clear that it was unwilling to go for any major change, nor was it ready to go beyond the predictable. At least two of the dropped ministers were on the verge of being redundant or overworked and something had to be done about them. For example, Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka could not perhaps continue as a minister and still concentrate fully on mayoral works. Similarly, Harun Rashid Khan Monno, who was a minister without portfolio for a long time, had to make his exit because he had no specific role to play.

Our development partners were never happy with the oversized cabinet, which, in their perception, could not serve the cause of good governance. And within the country also the widely held view was that the cabinet was too big to afford. So there was some kind of pressure on the government to reshuffle the cabinet. However, it seems the minor changes that it has opted for are likely to be interpreted as a light tap on the juggernaut than a real attempt to cut down its size.

However, if the government has finally realised that its plan of having a big cabinet has not worked well in practice, it should go for a thorough reshuffling, rather than some cosmetic changes.

## Rescued journalist in Sitakundo

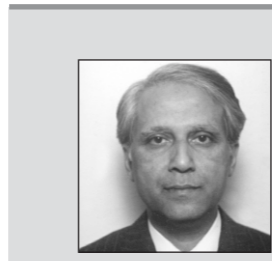
We demand proper investigation of the kidnapping

WE condemn the kidnapping and torture of Atahar Siddique Khosru, President of Sitakundo Press Club in Chittagong. At the same time, we are relieved that he has been found alive after constant doubt over his fate in the media. Mr. Khosru was allegedly kidnapped almost three weeks ago and physically tortured by his captors in an unknown place. He alleged to the police after being rescued that a local leader and some cronies of the ruling party masterminded his abduction since he had been writing about their misdeeds in the area for a while.

We are appalled to learn that his legs and hands were chained and locked when some villagers found him lying in pain by a roadside. We demand a thorough investigation into the matter, especially on the allegations made by Mr. Khosru in his statement to the police. We want to know why he was kidnapped and subjected to the pain he has complained of, on what circumstances the incident took place and the identities of the captors. We hope the real culprits will be nabbed and punished. Mr Khosru has categorically mentioned his suspicions over who could be responsible for the trauma he went through in last three weeks. We hope the police will take necessary actions sooner than later.

Here we would like to point out something, Sitakundo, the area where Mr Khosru resides and from where he was eventually rescued, has been notorious for criminal activities rampant for many years. There have been allegations that a nexus between the local police and the criminal gangs was the main obstacle in combating crimes in the area. Even in the case of Mr. Khosru, the police failed not only to rescue him, but also in catching the culprits. We wonder, if his captors didn't set him free, then whether Mr Khosru would have been rescued at all. We hope the authorities in Chittagong would take the matter seriously and try to ensure that similar incidents do not occur in the future.

# The dangers of war and peace



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

CONTRADICTIONS face the 'Coalition forces' as their troops settle into the occupation of a country bitterly divided about its future, in a region passionately attached to the hatreds of the past. As the United Nations Security Council ponders over the implications of the Resolution on Iraq, the status on the ground in Iraq and the region continues to provide contrasting signals. While terrorists commit suicide and target innocent civilians in Riyadh, American over-power is still continuing its search for the best equation to restore normalcy in the cities of a war devastated country.

The evolving scenario reminds one of the Bush administration's 2002 national-security strategy which pointed out that "America is now less threatened by conquering states than we are by failing ones." As weeks go by, it appears that Iraq, like Afghanistan, is slowly becoming a test case as to whether American power is enough not just to win wars, but to fundamentally transform societies that have become hostages to terrorists.

It is quite possible that someday, Iraq and Afghanistan, both of them, might fulfil the western vision of democracy and become democratic models for the surrounding region. However, right now, things appear to be still very awkward in Afghanistan and most difficult in Iraq.

Critics are seizing this opportunity to malign the US Administration. European analysts in particular are having a field day. They are drawing attention to the fact that the US Administration appears to be averse to taking all the necessary steps required for nation-building. American troops and peacekeeping has also become another favourite punching bag. Strains of such arguments are being based on references to Condoleezza Rice's declaration during the 2000 election campaign when she said that "the US military, as the world's stabilising force, is

meant only for war-fighting: it is lethal, it is not a civilian police force... it is not a political referee... and it is most certainly not designed to build a civilian society".

The problem is that today whether they like it or not, the US military is finding itself doing all the things that Rice said it is not meant to do.

Millions of people all over the world, not having supported a war without the clear and express consent of the UN Security Council

today are burning their midnight oil in arguing over the words 'vital' and 'central' pertaining to the proposed role of the United Nations in Iraq. Unfortunately, while this goes on, hundreds of thousands of malnourished, vulnerable Iraqi women, elderly people and children continue to suffer. Deprived of clean drinking water in the heat of summer, of proper medical care in most hospitals, their burden is indeed great.

In post-war Iraq, the difficult

stream. Multilateral help for a drawn-out political process can help instead of unilateral action.

There is no scope for disagreement as to who won the war. It is good that Saddam is gone. The thousands of remains being unearthed almost every week since the end of the war testifies to his terrible administration and many crimes against the fundamental human rights of his people. However, it is important that the Iraqi people now win the peace. We

They are against any further UN efforts within Iraq as to finding WMD. Thousands of Coalition personnel are presently trying to get the desired evidence. They believe they can do it. They might, and it could take a while.

This problem could however be surmounted if those looking for the WMDs from the Coalition were possibly associated in an interactive manner with UN personnel. Such a situation would save face for both sides. A subsequent report

of the venture. Ramiro Lopes da Silva, the United Nations' humanitarian coordinator working out of his stripped Office in the Canal Hotel in Baghdad might not be able to do very much by himself, but his Office can be the tip of the iceberg. If properly utilised, the United Nations, as in Kosovo can bolster the big picture requirement - 'rule of law' (meaning according to the UN, democratic legislation, a professional police to apply it and an independent judiciary to uphold it) and other mundane administrative functions.

It is true that many in the world believe that the United Nations' greatest drawback happens to be its 'bloated' bureaucracy. However, this is only partially true. Their expertise has grown significantly over the years. Experience has been their best teacher through their on-hand inter-action in Cambodia, Kosovo, East Timor and Mozambique. They have learnt valuable lessons there and these can be applied now in Iraq. They have learned over the last decade how to establish a secure environment, pull apart potential antagonists and provide practical measures that improve the daily lives of war-weary ordinary people. One hopes that the next few days will see a broad consensus emerging on the need of using the United Nations without further ado.

It is vital that the United States and its Coalition partners understand that the stay of their forces in Iraq should be as short as possible. An exit strategy does not appear to have been formulated as yet as ambiguous terminology is still being applied. A credible, representative Iraqi government should take over as soon as possible.

As Marwan Muasher, the Jordanian Foreign Minister has recently pointed out in an op-ed article in the *International Herald Tribune*, care should also be taken by United States policy makers to avoid calls "for rearranging the region". This is correct. Such views can also alienate countries in the area and jeopardise the efforts of genuine reformers, who cannot advocate democracy without being labelled as doing America's bidding. Right now, the Middle East is extremely volatile. All efforts need to be made most seriously to restore calm and credibility. Helping to achieve the important objectives of the newly proclaimed 'roadmap' would do just that.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## POST BREAKFAST

It is vital that the United States and its Coalition partners understand that the stay of their forces in Iraq should be as short as possible. An exit strategy does not appear to have been formulated as yet as ambiguous terminology is still being applied. A credible, representative Iraqi government should take over as soon as possible.

are today blaming the chaos in Tikrit and Al Fallujah on the inexperience of the 'Coalition forces' in handling post-war situations. Added to this is the intense psychological pressure created by the absence of discovery of weapons of mass destruction.

It is in such fluidity that one takes heart from President Bush's assertion that America would be there in Iraq for the long haul, for 'the transition from dictatorship to democracy'. If this is not done, credibility of the United States will be greatly affected. The ideology that 'we do not nation-build' needs to be forsaken. Just as the US Administration carefully watches the world, other countries also do the same with the changes taking place in the US. Such evolution send out signals. In this context, one has noticed that Defence Secretary Rumsfeld has gone ahead with his pre-9-11 plans to disband the Army College's Peacekeeping Institute, which used to train US Officers in post-conflict issues. This has its own connotations for many countries interested in the US being part of world peacekeeping operations. After all, it was their ultimate participation that granted a semblance of order in the Balkans.

Today, it is important for the 'Coalition' headed by the United States to acknowledge the need to associate the United Nations in a more meaningful manner. Diplomacy, and the art of drafting resolutions require skill. Each word denotes certain connotations. Consequently, many countries

situation is further exacerbated by other imponderables. Questions remain mostly unanswered as to how many troops are needed to restore stability and for how long. This point assumes a critical dimension when one also enquires as to whether as to whether other nations should be involved in bringing back vestiges of normalcy irrespective of whether they supported the war. I believe that now is the time for magnanimity. This is important for the road down-

should all agree on a common path that will ease and facilitate this progression.

Despite accusations by ultra-Right Wing Conservatives in the US policy-making apparatus, the United Nations is the best bet going around. It has a structure and will also endow Coalition efforts with a degree of legitimacy.

It is clear that the US leadership also wants the UN to come into Iraq, but only on its own terms.

indicating the presence or the absence of WMDs would also not suffer from credibility and would facilitate the doing away with sanctions. Those associated with this fact-finding process could then be given a limited time frame within which they would have to give their report. The Security Council could then simultaneously mandate a dual track action while such search is underway. Such a decision might provide the cover for the requisite political process -- the setting up of the Interim Authority and the resumption of the sale of oil for necessary financing of the humanitarian aspects of reconstruction.

The Coalition have to be practical. The reality is that their forces appear to lack peacekeepers trained in crowd-control techniques. They have a serious situation as far as potential administration goes. The undercurrent of sectarianism, brewing fundamentalism, absence of a largely intact bureaucracy, police and professional law and order enforcement personnel can only make things more complex. The hard politics of realpolitik requires a pragmatic response.

Those involved in the dynamics of any nation-building exercise, need to find a balance between what is sustainable and what is politically necessary. Nurturing political institutions require stable civil administrators, police experts, international jurists and economists preferably for those countries who are au fait with the particular requirements and sensitivities



## Sincerity of purpose

MEGASTHENES

THE year was 1604. Sir Henry Wotton was on his way to Venice to assume an ambassadorial assignment. En route he stopped at Augsburg to relax with a friend, Christopher Fleckamore. During his stay there he wrote in his host's album the Latin words: Legatus est vir bonus peregre missus ad mentium Reipublicae causa; the translation of which in English would be "An ambassador is an honest man, sent to lie abroad for the good of his country". Some eight years later, one Jasper Scioppius, who has been described as a "scurrilous controversialist", had this published. It was an altogether different era -- chronologically and in terms of mindset -- relative to the present. Any suggestion of levity in high matters of State was apparently not to be countenanced. King James I, himself, was not amused. Many in Europe were outraged. A thoroughly discomfited Sir Henry was profusely apologetic and explained that his was a private observation written as a "merri-merriment". The furor must eventually have died down but Sir Henry's epigram has come down from generation to generation. Centuries earlier Plato had contended that only rulers of States should have the privilege of lying, at home or abroad, for the good of the State.

In the diplomatic context, the meaning of the word "lie" should perhaps be extended, so that it may be construed not simply as a departure from the truth but also include the advocacy of a policy or

option about which one is not himself wholeheartedly convinced -- something unavoidable at times. R.A. Butler, as honourable a political personality as any in Britain, was said to have had reservations about Anthony Eden's Suez policy in 1956. And yet out of party loyalty and discipline defended it in Parliament.

A few years after, Adlai Stevenson, then ambassador to the UN, argued the US position on the

Commissioner wrote, "No one in their right mind seeks out war". No truer words could have been written. What manner of men then precipitated a wholly avoidable conflict? Specifics may not be easy to identify but a general or broad picture can be discerned. The men were taking decisions that would impinge on human lives, would result in casualties. There can thus be no doubting their sincerity of purpose. For the same or similar

reasons they must also have been absolutely certain about the righteousness of their cause. There can be problems, however, on both counts. It has been said that sincerity is not all that counts; it is more important that one has "something to be sincere about and with". People who believed that the world was flat were sincere. Those who believed in a geocentric universe were sincere. The inquisitors who threatened Galileo with the rack were sincere. Lunatics are sincere and even Attila the Hun may have been sincere. As regards certainty, no less a person than Bertrand Russell, peer of the realm, Nobel Laureate, philosopher and mathe-

matian, lamented in his autobiography: "The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent full of doubt". Bonar Law would probably not qualify for any list of great British Prime Ministers. Some years before he attained to the highest political office of his country, he said something though which would probably make people pause and ponder even today: "There is no such thing as an inevi-

Dr. Johnson put it: "When speculation has done its worst, two and two still make four".

Can something good and worthwhile emerge from the war? We can only have faith and hope so. The long suffering people of Iraq deserve no less. The path forward, however, may be less of a cakewalk than the conflict itself. In a recent article in a western magazine, the writer suggested that "passionate ideologues often do not have time for obstructive details" and described attempts "to inflict freedom and democracy by force" as "an ambitious liberal-imperial project".

And yet we cannot lose hope or faith. Faith, above all things, is what distinguishes humankind from other species. H. L. Mencken, as free and irreverent a spirit as ever lived, defined faith as "an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable". Not at all a reassuring thought, at this time especially. More edifying, charitable and perhaps germane to present times would be the following prayer penned by Robert Louis Stevenson -- better known for *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* than for writing prayers:

"Give us grace and strength to persevere. Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind. Spare to us our friends and soften us to our enemies. Give us strength to encounter that which is to come, that we may be brave in peril, constant in tribulation, temperate in wrath and in all changes in fortune, and down to the gates of death loyal and loving to one another".

## LIGHTEN UP

**"Give us grace and strength to persevere. Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind. Spare to us our friends and soften us to our enemies. Give us strength to encounter that which is to come, that we may be brave in peril, constant in tribulation, temperate in wrath and in all changes in fortune, and down to the gates of death loyal and loving to one another".**

Bay of Pigs affair before the Security Council, with characteristic verve, vigour and élan. Only Stevenson was not in the know about all aspects of the matter and was mortified -- when he learned the whole truth later -- that his credibility and effectiveness may have been indelibly tarnished.

Stevenson's was a sensitive spirit, interested in ideas as also in facts, as concerned about the future as about the present -- not perhaps an ideal combination of attributes for the rough and tumble and immediacy of politics. He is remembered by many even today with affection and respect. What Claire Boothe Luce once wrote of Wendell Willkie

only the person on the spot can provide, the role may have been enhanced though.

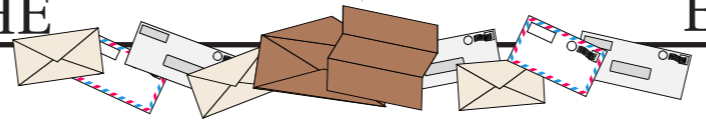
Recently the British High Commissioner, in a letter, articulated persuasively and with lucidity, his government's concerns and priorities in respect of the Iraq conflict. The letter generated interest and also some light and heat. One particular, almost self-contained, sentence of His Excellency's letter would seem to penetrate to the quiddity of the Iraq issue or for that matter, of war in general. It is an assertion to which none can be averse and no one would wish to confute. In his second para, the High

Commissioner wrote, "No one in their right mind seeks out war". No truer words could have been written. What manner of men then precipitated a wholly avoidable conflict? Specifics may not be easy to identify but a general or broad picture can be discerned. The men were taking decisions that would impinge on human lives, would result in casualties. There can thus be no doubting their sincerity of purpose. For the same or similar

table war. If war comes it will be from failure of human wisdom".

It is true, as the High Commissioner wrote, that what is done is done. It is equally true, as the latest Security Council resolution would suggest, that there is a weary acquiescence in a fait accompli. Even more true is the fact that Saddam's was a far from palatable regime. And yet in the minds and hearts of innumerable people the world over, the uncomfortable feeling persists that what happened in Iraq was not quite right in this day and age. Woodrow Wilson considered truth to be "the most robust and indestructible and formidable thing in the world". As

## 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.

### A suggestion

Although we highly appreciate and enjoy your bold writing and your provision of expressing readers' opinion by allocating one full page, I was wondering whether the authorities concerned at all read and take note of these public opinions. So maybe it won't be a bad idea, if you could allocate a portion of the Letters Page, meant only for the government and other law enforcing body. This part should not just contain the typical criticism of the government and its failure (that we usually see in most of the dailies), but instead should also state the probable realistic solutions of how to deal with each of these issues, taking into consideration the current Bangladesh context.

It is always easy to find fault with something, but seldom one will see people providing solution or

guidelines. I know even this may not work also, as our politicians may turn a deaf ear to all these and continue as they have been, but we should give it a try. The Daily Star may even have their own panel of expert opinions, as to what are the feasible solutions that the government could undertake, in dealing with issues like: women oppression, improving law and order situation, environment pollution, reducing traffic jam etc. The Daily Star could also print the feedback of the concerned government officials as to what are the obstacles in implementing these solutions. **MMJ**  
Dhaka Cantonment

### Wrong information in Bangladesha

Your kind attention is drawn to the sentence about Tripura at page 216

of volume 10 of Bangladesha. The sentence is stated as:

"Almost 84% of its international border is with Bangladesh (839 km)". The very sentence gives the idea that Tripura has more international border than it has with Bangladesh. The fact is, other than Bangladesh, Tripura has borders with other Indian states like Assam and Mizoram. Tripura's borders with Assam and Mizoram are just national borders. It has no other international border than with Bangladesh. So the sentence beginning with "Almost 84% of its international border is with Bangladesh (839 km)", is likely to give misinformation to the readers. **AKM Fazlul Haque**  
Banani, Dhaka

### The UN in action again!

In a news item the UN was shown 'active' again. Probably a revised UN draft on lifting Iraq sanctions were being discussed by the representatives of the member countries of this organisation. Suddenly I was struck by a question 'Why the US is wasting time for its resolution to be passed by the UN?' Aren't they mighty enough to start siphoning Iraqi oil and sell to appropriate customers? For the Iraqis to be capable of trading again, they need just to establish a few elementary business schools under the supervision of appropriate US experts.

Given that the might of the US was proven against Iraq who on this planet dare to oppose when the US propose. I hope everyone will feel boring and annoyed at the mockery session of the UN.

**M.U. Chowdhury**  
Dhaka

### Anti-American double standards

Every time an international crisis erupts, most critics on the left/liberal of the political spectrum come out to vilify the United States for being selfish and isolationist if it doesn't do anything or arrogant and unilateralist if it does something. Most of them criticised the US when it took a long-due military action to oust Saddam Hussein. These critics agreed at the same time that Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator and a threat and they tend to criticise the US for doing nothing in 1988 when Saddam gassed thousands of Kurds. But if they would have liked the US to intervene then, why are they opposing the war now?

Most critics also predicted massive casualties and an environmental and humanitarian disaster.

But where are the humanitarian and ecological disasters, the Stalingrad-style street fighting and Americans becoming mired in another Vietnam, the end so many doomsayers predicted? Though law and order remains a problem in the current political vacuum, Iraq is slowly moving toward normalcy which eluded it for two decades. As Saddam Hussein scurries from one rabbit hole to another if he is still alive, most Iraqis are enjoying their first taste of freedom. But the liberal/left critics will never give any credit to the US for liberating an oppressed people.

**Mahmood Elahi**  
Ottawa, Canada

### "Suicide attacks..."

I thank The Daily Star for the article "Suicide attacks: stepping back

from solution of problems" (May 20). I also thank its author for his small but timely write-up which mentions that a recent "constitutional referendum" in Chechnya gave birth of an optimism for stability and peace, and that the 12 May and 14 May terrorist suicide attacks killing at least 75 innocent people have replaced that optimism by frustration and uncertainty. The article also mentions similar suicide attacks in Saudi Arabia (13 May) and Morocco (16 May) and that all are indiscriminate violence against innocents.

Nothing good is achieved through such violence, the article asserts. Peace-loving people all over the world condemned such terrorist attacks as "against all tenets of religion, against human rights", "heinous acts", "having negative impact on peace" as well as "contradictory to Islam".

I must add the fact that the Chechen warlords use the name of Islam only as a cover of their terrorist activities. They do not have enough knowledge on Islam, do not follow the principles of Islam and the code of conduct of Islam. They continue to resist peaceful process of settlement in Chechnya. They kill the Chechen people, who are mostly Muslims, for their willingness to live in peace. They murder the Chechen leaders who want peaceful solutions.

fully agree with the author that without political initiatives permanent solution of problem is unachievable. The Chechen fighters should obviously realise this and show honour to the majority of Chechen who voted for the "constitutional referendum". **Mushfiqur Rahman**  
Dhanmanti, Dhaka