

Najaf massacre

Threat of civil war could make occupiers' job more difficult

THE powerful car bomb that blew off Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer and over 80 others in the Iraqi City of Najaf might have dealt a body-blow to inter-communal harmony in Iraq. The attack was a barbaric act by any count and the immensity of its destructiveness reminds one of the marine barracks blast in Beirut in 1983 in which 241 US marines were killed.

Ayatollah Baqer headed the Iran-backed Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI). He is also a nephew of Syed Mohammad Said al-Hakim, the grand Ayatollah of Iraq's 15 million Shiite adherents who constitute a majority among the Iraqi people. The grand Ayatollah too narrowly escaped an attempt on his life last week.

The observable things in this unfolding scenario are: (a) The Shiite leadership of Iraq is the target of systematic assassination attempts, (b) Iran's backing of Iraq's Shiite leadership is under severe threat, (c) outbreak of internecine warfare between the majority Shiite and minority Sunni may help reduce the incidence of terrorist attacks on the occupation forces. A dissection of these hypotheses may reveal something else as well.

First of all, every crime carries with it a profound motive and the killing of Ayatollah Baqer must be put into perspective before the intent of the assailants and the political consequence of such an unprovoked massacre are unearthed. The US has long been warning Iran not to interfere in Iraq's affairs. Given that Iraq's Shiite leadership receives moral backing from Iran, any US-backed faction becomes a suspect.

Conversely, if a heinous act of this magnitude can be passed as an act of Saddam loyalists, Iraq's majority Shiite would no longer support Saddam whose forces are still creating havoc against the Anglo-US occupation forces. There is yet another theory: the Ayatollah struck a deal with the occupation forces and the Iraqi freedom fighters -- irrespective of their loyalty to Saddam -- decided to neutralise this threat by killing Baqer and many others to warn the Shiite community of the consequence of any future collaboration with the occupation forces.

Whatever motive or mission might have stirred this mayhem, its ramifications will transcend the ethno-religious boundary and might delay the arrival of peace in Iraq in the near future. That in itself maybe tantamount to a moral defeat for the occupation forces due to their promise to the world to make Iraq a better place after Saddam's removal.

Is it a clinic or mercenary outfit?

Emergency treatment has become a plaything

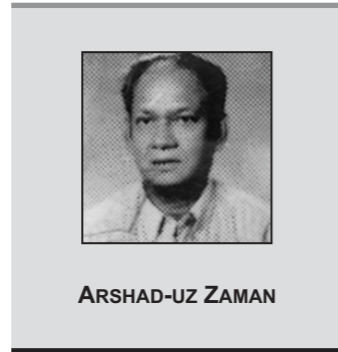
DAY labourer Mofiz Uddin's wife Rashida Begum had been in comatose for three weeks before the medical authorities took note responding to a complaint by her husband. Through a news item emanating from Rajshahi and published in our paper on Saturday, we come to know of the details which are nerve-wracking, to say the least.

Rashida was down with acute pain in her lower abdomen. Her husband accompanying her she is ushered into a clinic allegedly by a broker. Mofiz is told by the clinic authorities that his wife had a tumour in her ovary which needed to be removed by operation. Accordingly, they take her to the operation theatre and apply anaesthesia on her. Half an hour later, she is wheeled out of the OT as the 'doctor hadn't turned up.' Then carted back on to the operation table, she is again put under anaesthesia. A medical officer of Paba Upazila Health and Family Welfare Centre then operates upon her.

A probe conducted by a three-member body led by Rajshahi civil surgeon has revealed the following: no laboratory tests were carried out before the operation; somebody 'not specialised in surgery' operated upon her; the patient developed 'cerebral hypocriria' due to anaesthesia applied twice within a short interval; and last but not least, the clinic was an unregistered one. It is worthwhile to note that the inquest revealing as it has proved though, took place after a complaint was lodged by the aggrieved husband. In other words, there is no mechanism whereby such gross violation of professional ethic and duty would be automatically noted and remedial action taken in good time. It turned out to be a dangerous medical condition for the patient under the apparent care of a government doctor without anybody in authority knowing it.

Rashida's plight is a ringing indictment on the mushrooming spurious clinics playing foul with medical ethics and human lives without any supervisory authority making sure that such acts are punished and the unregistered clinics put out of business. The government must ensure that the family is compensated for this heinous medical disservice to a citizen.

Palestinian-Israeli conflict reaching a point of no return?



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

AS the impasse in the Iraq conflict deepens, so does the Palestine conflict gives every sign of reaching a point of no return. The Road Map and the Peace Process has come to a grinding halt.

Although the Iraq war and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have apparently no organic link that there has been an undeclared feeling that the two were tied together. The feeling gets stronger when the behind-the-scenes role of Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon is analysed. Immediately after the election of George W. Bush to the White House, Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon became a very frequent visitor and it is easy to speculate that the topic, attack on Iraq was discussed. After the elimination of Egypt as a possible challenger following the Camp David Peace Accord, the one really important Arab power in the field was Iraq. The elimination of Iraq would clear the field for Israel, who would thus assume the role of policeman of the Middle East on behalf of its master the United States of America.

Britain of Tony Blair has brought powerful support to the idea of redrawing the map of the Middle

East. The reasons for Britain's enthusiasm in the US attack against Afghanistan and committing troops and going all the way in the US war on Iraq, are unclear. The only reason appears to be some sort of megalomania coupled with nostalgia for the 19th century Britain, when sun never set on the Empire.

or Russia are participating in the Anglo-American effort in Iraq. Turkey, the longtime ally of the US in all probability will not join hands with the US.

Both President Bush and Prime Minister Blair have become embroiled in the high profile debate on the question of Weapons of Mass

destruction (WMD), which Saddam Hussein is supposed to hide and which were never found out. Loom-

ing before the two leaders is elections in the near future. There can be no doubt that the Iraq misadventure is going to figure prominently in the campaign.

In Britain, Prime Minister Blair is grappling with the enquiry into the death of one of its top intelligence bureaucrats, who is supposed to

held before the Enquiry Commission but has refused to admit guilt. In the case of President, his election is barely 16 months away. His Iraq policy is coming under sharp scrutiny. Although in the US there is the tradition of bipartisan foreign policy, it is an open question if under the strain of the campaign this is going

cases of President Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton. In any case the first signs of the Presidential election campaign is in the air. To compound President Bush's troubles news from the economic front is not particularly encouraging. The management of the US economy by President Clinton was brilliant and the health of the economy was robust. It did play a very important part in extricating him from the danger of impeachment carefully planned by his Republican rivals.

While launching on his Iraqi misadventure President Bush could not imagine the chain of events that he was starting. There are reports of daily deaths of US soldiers in the media. The figure has now crossed the total since 1 May, when President Bush announced the end of the conflict. Thus more US soldiers have died in hostile Iraqi hands than during the war.

The war in Iraq has been so encompassing that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, inspite of high level involvement by Anglo-American leadership, has been relegated to the background. It is becoming evident that the Arabs and the Israelis will have to find new leaders to tackle this seemingly intractable problem. This has been half a century of bloodshed and violence and destruction on an unimaginable scale. Yet it would be foolish to imagine that a solution is within sight.

Arshad-uz-Zaman is a former Ambassador.

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

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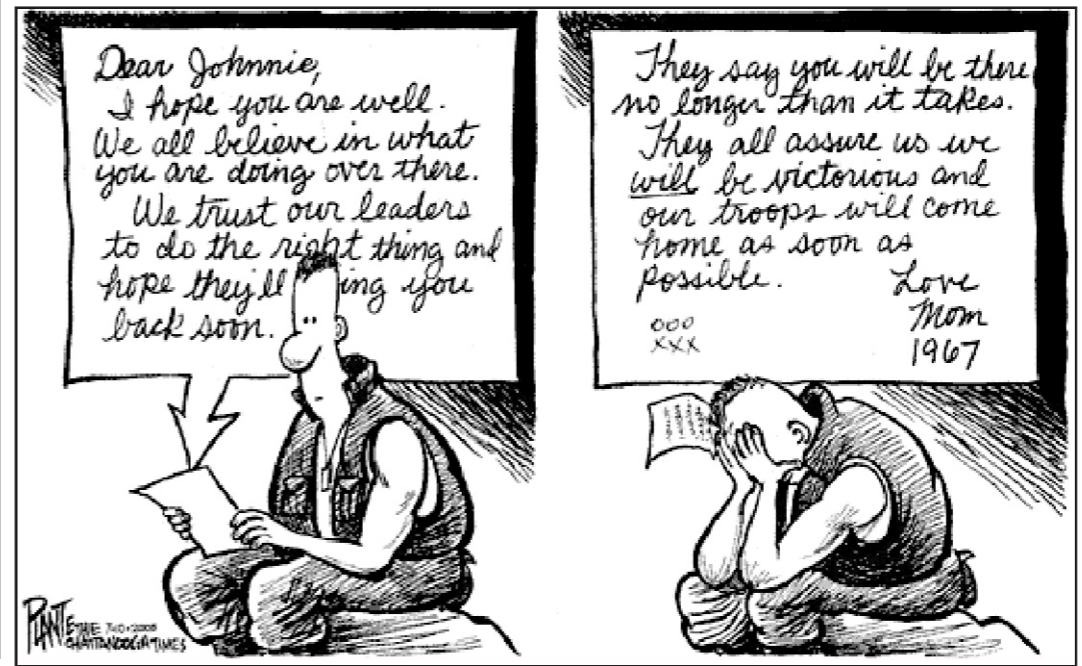
Thus whereas President Bush was happy to smash Iraq of President Saddam Hussein, Prime Minister Blair was content to extract from his friend Bush, a Road Map for the Middle East. Prime Minister Sharon extracted from President Bush the promise that Chairman Arafat would have no further role to play and his handpicked Prime Minister would now handle the negotiations. Minus President Bush all his top level colleagues have been to the area and met Prime Minister Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon. Cease fire was negotiated between the parties but under the pressure of events have fallen apart. The situation is -- it is back to square one.

Sustained efforts by President Bush strongly supported by Prime Minister Blair to get important countries to participate in the pacification effort in Iraq have not met with any degree of success. For instance, outside of Britain no other Permanent members of the Security Council like France, China

have supplied to the BBC high level intelligence information. British Defence Secretary Hoon has testi-

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Four major world religions must have veto powers in UNSC

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

REGARDLESS of where the atrocities are committed, Baghdad, Jerusalem or Mumbai, the wanton killings of civilians are despicable acts, which no cause justifies. While the perpetrators of the Mumbai massacre remain officially unidentified as of this writing, one is tempted to lump the other two bombings together, as President Bush has, as the manifestation of the same evil, terrorism. As *The Washington Post's* Richard Cohen points out, that is not the case.

Says Cohen: "The Baghdad bombing of the U.N. headquarters proved beyond a shadow of doubt that the internationalising the occupation of Iraq is not, by itself, going to do the trick. The United Nations, it is often said, has no enemies -- yet its headquarters were blown up and at least 23 people were killed. They were in Iraq simply to do good. But inevitably, the United Nations was helping to do the work of the United States."

"The differences between Israel and Iraq are palpable. The Islamic militants who are suspected in the UN bombing are mostly coming from elsewhere. They do not represent a national movement, like the Viet Cong or, for that matter, the various Palestinian liberation movements. There is always the possibility that these militants will make matters so nasty that we will give up and, as with Vietnam, leave."

"Israel, on the other hand, is in a different position. It unmistakably squats on land that was once Palestinian -- never mind its international right to do so. That grievance, particularly when it comes to the West Bank, is not likely to be mollified by turning on lights or giving everyone a food blender. The Palestinian grievance is both real and ongoing, exacerbated by Israel's persistent encroachment on West Bank territory. The two brands of terrorists are not the same. The Palestinian ones are

dead peacekeeping than war-making, with a policy of selective punishment for the Muslims, and tax cuts that will dispatch America 500 billions of dollars into deficit this year alone, Americans do not realise the harm this man is doing to America's future!

Mr. Richard Cohen is right about the UN; it does a lot of "good." The UN wears different hats. Almost all of its branches, WHO, UNICEF to name a few, do good. That is why it was excruciatingly painful to see Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and 22

eye as India refuses to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir as was mandated by the Security Council. On the other hand, the Security Council-enacted sanctions were responsible for millions of civilian deaths in Iraq. Iraq's so-called violation of the Security Council resolutions was trumpeted as one of the reasons for invading it. While nations like Israel go scot-free for scornfully ignoring Security Council resolutions, the Security Council has become the primary instrument for punishing the Muslim

ests and that of their friends, such as Israel, at the expense of other members. Since President Bush is successfully dividing the world into religious groups, one has to wonder why four out of the five permanent seats in the Security Council belong to Christian nations (US, Britain, France and Russia). Where is the permanent seat for the world's second largest religion, Islam, practiced by 1.3 billions? What about a seat for the Hindus? For the UN to have any legitimacy, the smaller nations must demand that the hegemony of the Christian/western former colonial powers in the Security Council ends. If dictatorship is to continue in the United Nations, that dictatorship has to represent the world's four largest religions: one seat only for the Christians, one seat for the Muslims, one seat for the Buddhists/Confucians, and one seat for the Hindus. If the Muslims do not get a seat as a veto-wielding permanent member of the UN Security Council to protect their interests, they will be stupid not to leave the UN en masse. They will have to remain docile, servile and gluttons for punishment to stay in the UN under the current partisan and repressive format. Switzerland is not a member of the United Nations. The last time I checked, they are doing great!

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Since President Bush is successfully dividing the world into religious groups, one has to wonder why four out of the five permanent seats in the Security Council belong to Christian nations (US, Britain, France and Russia). Where is the permanent seat for the world's second largest religion, Islam, practiced by 1.3 billions? What about a seat for the Hindus? For the UN to have any legitimacy, the smaller nations must demand that the hegemony of the Christian/western former colonial powers in the Security Council ends.

indigenous, may be funded by others, but coming from the very communities that Israel occupies. What's more, some of the suicide bombers are not religious militants, but merely people, who in their own way are saying they can't take it any longer. The trick for Israel is, as always, to pull out of the territories, build its defensive fence -- and wait for a generation to accept the status quo."

Now contrast the truth spoken by a Mr. Richard Cohen, a Jew, with the white lies in President Bush's speech in St. Louis on

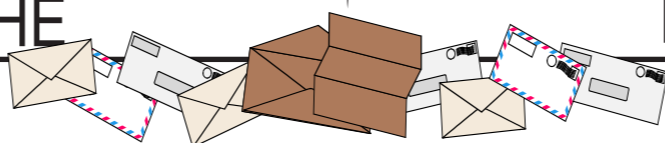
ties from sending humanitarian aid to the Palestinian civilians. Echoing the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, President Bush not only wants the Palestinians disarmed, he wants them starving as well! In his speech, the President also said something as incendiary as his "crusade" speech. Bringing the explosive issue of religion into the fray, he said that the Islamic militants hate "the Christians and the Jews." (Good news for Hindus and Buddhists; according President Bush, Muslim militants don't hate them!). With more soldiers in Iraq

of his decent humanitarian colleagues perish in the Baghdad blast. There is one branch of the United Nations, however, that does not always do good; it is the Security Council. Quoting Richard Cohen again, it does the "work of the United States." And the West! It is the Security Council that sanctioned the birth of the State of Israel on Palestinian lands. It is the Security Council that does nothing to punish the number one violator of the UN Security Council resolutions, Israel. The Security Council continues to turn a blind

nations. While President Bush and the West preach democracy as the panacea cure for all, in the Security Council they ruthlessly practice the dictatorship, in the form of a resolution-destroying veto.

It is astonishing that all the ordinary members of the United Nations accept the dictatorial powers of the five permanent members, the US, Britain, France, Russia and China. As has been demonstrated repeatedly, all the permanent members protect and promote their own inter-

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.

Magnetic train

I fully agree with the views expressed in the letters column dated 18th August by Mr. H.M. Fazle Awal.

A country whose rail roads are in deplorable condition and whose government has failed to improve the tracks by replacing the buckled light rail does not have the money even to buy ballast and sleeper and have no track grammar, dare talk about Magnetic Levitation Train for passengers! It will cost each one of them around Tk 5,000 for a one-way journey.

Let the CEO of American Maglev Inc. say why they failed to introduce the system in their own country or elsewhere in the world. We want to know why the German Maglev Technology will cost USD 60 million per KM, that is, USD 18 billion for Dhaka-Chittagong section while the American Maglev Inc. offers of USD 10 million per KM, that is, 3 billion for Dhaka-Chittagong. And many our development programmes have to be suspended for the sake of this project for long 18 years. His argument of creation of job is nothing but a joke.

Let the government invite American Maglev Inc. to invest the total amount for the project including the infrastructure and maintenance, and then plough back the investment, within a fixed period, with interest. Our government should in no way be connected to the investment and guarantee anything other than the land for the project for an agreed period as mentioned above.

Belal Pasha
Goran Banashree, Dhaka

School teachers

We are living in the age of technology and to face the challenge, the developed nations have emphasised on education. Education is the backbone of a nation. If so, then primary/high school education is the backbone of education of any country. This is an axiom. No building can stand still without a strong foundation, as no one can be educated indispensibly without proper school education. Most of the schoolteachers are too adroit to conduct classes. They only try to prepare the students for the board exams and nothing else. On the other hand the good students do not feel to take school teaching as a

profession.

Today's school students are the nation builders of tomorrow. The government should take an effective scheme and come forward to encourage the bright students in this connection.

A citizen, Dhaka

Communicative English

Despite the sincerity of the government and the professional expertise of the top echelons assigned with the responsibility, communicative English, as the term has been used to mean academic proficiency in spoken English, has fallen short of its desired target. I would like to pinpoint a few defects which have stalled the onward journey of English, which started with so much enthusiasm.

First, majority of the students have a very backward social educational background. It's not to say that they have little or no knowledge of English words, grammar, syntax or pronunciation, what is appalling is that these students, in most cases, cannot express their thought or views properly in Bengali even. This

is because our education system so far has never encouraged students to think freely. The students are always encouraged to memorise. And a bleak, non-creative mind having no quality to reflect finds it impossible to react with the instructions of the book, more so when the subject matter is English. After all learning a language is more a psychological factor.

Second, the existing limited facilities in schools and colleges do not allow the teachers to explore the potentialities in the students.

Third, the students' mindset being completely obsessed with the utilitarian approach to learning provoke a self-imposed limitation of knowledge boundary. Unconcerned with the finer points of language and literature they, like the frogs of the pond, spend up a great deal of their lifetime reading and memorising. These boys have do not know that books selected for a particular class are not all meant for getting a high score in the examination. A book has a wider and deeper meaning within a very short space it provides as much knowledge and information as one requires to encounter the challenging world. In a social eco-

nomic system where the whole gamut of educational curriculum is intended for getting the examinees a better score and a brilliant career on the basis of the result, the aesthetic sense of life just does not appeal to the students' mind. Hence, two third of a book always remains unread, even untouched. Under such a truncated educational policy, the syllabus might be covered within a stipulated time but the need of time can never be satisfied.

Finally, the teachers, a great majority of them, are wobbling in the backwater of outdated and out of fashion method of grammar based English without appreciating that language is like a flowing river, has a tendency to overpower the tentacles of grammar, syntactic rules etc.

Politics and promotions

Promotions in government services have become totally political under the present government. This not anything new, we heard such rumors and had noticed similar

indirect indications during the previous regimes too. But the difference is now a days it has become open. This is not a secret anymore. This is definitely throwing our bureaucracy into total destruction. The party in power is implementing this policy of cleansing and politicising with the intention to get political leverage in the coming election. In the process they are destroying the administrative and judicial system. The process started in the police department where a big number of experienced officers were axed as soon as the present government came to power. Many senior officers were superseded and a retired officer was posted to the highest office of police. The present state of law and order amply shows the futility of such maneuver. States of affairs in other departments are no better.

This suppression technique not only demoralises the victims, it makes them hostile to the system. The beneficiaries enjoying the unearned benefit also become morally weak. They remain in the constant nightmare of regime change. The whole process is counteractive, fruitless and unpro-

ductive. How an administration can run when hundreds of disgruntled superseded officers, humiliated in the society as well as in the family carry on their responsibilities? The idea itself is demoralising and self defeating.

The resistance to such ruination should come from all walks of life. Many of our retired bureaucrats are involved in active politics and many of them are policy makers. They should come forward to save the system. The serving officers have also their responsibilities to the nation. Only for petty personal gains they also should not sell their souls. There are examples in bureaucracy where many refused to accept superior responsibilities superseding their seniors. A self awakening in the system may reverse the decaying process.

Sonia
Uttara, Dhaka

HSC English syllabus

The new English syllabus of HSC was redesigned for better results. It is also to enhance the ability of creative writing. The new look of the book is worthy of appreciation and

hopefully it will make the students capable of using English in their day to day life. But one considerable drawback of the syllabus is that, the literature part is totally omitted from the book. The previous syllabus was totally literature oriented but now it is completely over looked.

Some may argue that, to learn English it is not necessary to study literature. But I think the primary knowledge of literature is necessary, otherwise the new generations would hardly get the chance to develop their literary test. Moreover, if they don't have preconceptions about English literature, the group of students who would enrol in English Literature after their HSC, would have to enter in to a new world with no considerable knowledge (of course there will always be some exceptions). The most important thing is that literature's contribution to civilisation is simply tremendous and we can't deny it though we never think of it. Therefore, I think the new syllabus would be a perfect one if some tint of literature is mixed with the present one.

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