

Mounting violence in Iraq

The centrality of UN role can't go by default anymore

THE daily spurts of violence in Iraq, centring around US occupation of the country, are a clear indication of the American forces losing control over the situation.

The growing civil resistance -- which the Bush administration still refuses to call or recognise as a movement to free Iraq of foreign occupation -- leaves the US president with only two options. First, he can deploy more troops, a stock response which will amount to admitting that even the huge presence of American troops in the occupied country is not enough to counter the guerilla warfare launched by Iraqis. Second, it is not too late for the US to realise that the most pragmatic alternative to dragging on the unjust war is to allow the Iraqis full control of their own country.

There are certain points to consider. People of a civilised and historically proud society do not acquiesce in foreign occupation -- an elementary lesson the US does not yet acknowledge, far less pays heed to. It went to the war riding a lie about the WMD in the first place, and the lie is steadily stripping away whatever justification they pretended to have while pouncing on Iraq.

Now the chorus is heard loud and clear from the comity of nations that occupation of a country is repugnant to the sensibilities of its citizens. But it is a great deal more difficult for President Bush to ignore the call now, as his Iraq mission is showing all the signs of getting stuck, far short of the goals envisaged by him and his advisers.

It is pointless to term the attacks on US soldiers and other installations as the misdeeds of Saddam's followers as long as the new Iraq administration is seen as a puppet in the hands of the occupying power.

Washington should waste no more time in accepting the global demand that the UN be given the central role in the reconstruction of the war-ravaged country, restoration of its sovereignty and evolution of a political system that will lead to democratic governance. Only then can the Bush administration hope to get support of Iraqi people. It will also help end the war which has so far proved very costly in terms of both men and material.

Sky-rocketing prices

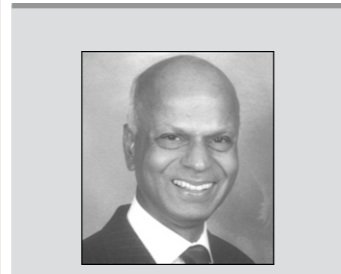
Still in search of culprits!

WE have been witnessing a certain rueful trading of charges even within the ruling party over the continual failure to arrest the rising trend in prices. We can hear concerns voiced and consternation expressed over the phenomenon across the board. Some are blaming the commerce minister, for losing grip of the market, others are blaming speculators, hoarders and black marketeers. The wholesalers are criticising the retailers and vice-versa. The government measures to strengthen the supply side like withdrawal of letter of credit margin on import of selected goods and duty waivers have failed to make the desired dent in the situation.

By all indications, it has been more a matter of market manipulation than a phenomenon of demand and supply. Disturbingly, it's been revealed that market manipulation could have been the handiwork of a powerful business coterie linked to the ruling party. The whole thing is like a scam to siphon off windfall profits taking advantage of Ramadan. There was also an intelligence report on a game to be played around onion prices. If that be so, then the government's failure in protecting consumer interests would be proportional to the free play that a segment of ruling party businessmen indulged in to make enormous profits.

The price hike at this phase of the holy month of Ramadan is unusual by past standards. Instead of playing a blame game or chasing 'culprits', imagined or real, the government would do well to work out a clear-cut policy in order to put a halt to the rapidly increasing prices. Trading offences against each other within the government or transferring responsibilities to someone else wouldn't make matters any better. We are still awaiting a coherent official policy statement on the matter. We hope the government will take note of this and spell out a strategy to alleviate the plight of common people who have been hit the hardest by the price hike.

APEC, the United States and free trade



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM
writes from Madrid

THIS year's Asian and Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) summit, attended by the leaders of its member nations has just come to an end in Bangkok, Thailand. It was presided over by Thaksin Shinawatra, the Thai prime minister. Although APEC was set up primarily to promote free trade, as usual, this year's meeting was also dominated by issues, which according to the US agenda were the hot international issues of the day. The economic issues played only a secondary role.

The Asian and Pacific Economic Co-operation forum (APEC) was founded in 1989 with more or less the same objectives as those of the WTO, i.e., to promote free trade. It came into being as a result of the long-felt desire of the Pacific Rim countries to have a forum in which all the Pacific states could "advance common interests and attempt to resolve conflicts". At present APEC has got 21 members, some of whom are very powerful while others are not. Canada, Japan, the United States, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Chile and other members constitute some 2.5 billion people and account for approximately half of world's economic production and trade. Although its primary objective is to promote regional free trade, it is also committed to reducing trade barriers with other countries so that world is not divided into hostile trading blocs. The permanent offices of the organisation are located in Singapore. APEC holds an annual meeting of the heads of government of member nations.

The American president George W. Bush came to this year's APEC

meeting with a set agenda, which was dominated more by security concerns than by economic issues. Since APEC was constituted as an economic co-operation forum, the American stance on terrorism created conflicts and deep divisions among the member nations. Bush tried hard to rally APEC members to do more to help him on his global crusade against so-called Islamic terrorism. As expected, Australia's prime minister John Howard, who has often been dubbed in the international media as Bush's deputy

proliferation of weapons of mass destruction" and to "dismantle fully and without delay transnational terrorist groups that threaten the APEC economies". While the summit was in progress, Israeli army's American-supplied F-16 jetfighters and Apache helicopters were busy killing innocent civilians and even medical staff -- who were trying to cure the injured -- in the refugee camps of the occupied territories of Palestine. Of course, no mention was made of these continuous acts of state terrorism. No wonder

was economic. He wanted APEC to put pressure on China to re-value its currency because according to some American economists hundreds of thousands of jobs had been lost in the US because of the low value of the Chinese currency. The APEC members refused to be bullied by Bush to put pressure on China. In this context it should be mentioned that before coming to Bangkok, Bush visited Tokyo to persuade Japan to let the yen rise, when Prime Minister Koizumi himself is fighting for his own political

although Bush wanted his Asian colleagues to give further market access for US products, he was more sympathetic to the grievances put forward by the developing countries. His team was perfectly aware that US and EU domestic subsidies to agriculture were primarily responsible for the failure of last month's talks, held under the auspices of WTO in Cancun. The US Secretary of State Colin Powell signalled a change in the US policy on farm subsidies by indicating that the US might be willing to make

agricultural products and low-tech manufactured products like textiles. The APEC leaders did make a firm statement on agricultural subsidies, "We agreed to work toward the abolition of all forms of agricultural export subsidies, unjustifiable export prohibitions and restrictions".

The next meeting of World Trade Organisation (WTO) will be held in Geneva on or before December 15, 2003. Its primary objective will be to heal the wounds and overcome the sense of frustration created by the sudden collapse of last month's talks in Cancun between the industrialised North and developing South, whose economies are based primarily on agriculture. Now that the original G-23 has been reduced to G-12, the US may expect less resistance from the developing countries on the issue of agricultural subsidies in the industrialised North. But in my opinion, since important countries like Brazil, China, India, South Africa are still members of this alliance and these countries have not relented, the United States will not have an easy ride at the December WTO meeting in Geneva. On the contrary, in the recently signed "Buenos Aires Consensus", Brazil and Argentina pledged "to resist efforts by the United States to undermine their unity in regional and global trade talks." If the United States wants the negotiations to move forward, in other words, if it wants the Doha Round to be successful, it will have no other alternative but to put emphasis on the Doha Round's central objective, i.e. development. In order to achieve this objective, it will gradually have to dismantle unfair trade practices such as farm subsidies and high tariffs on low-tech manufactured products from the developing countries. It must realise that this shameful policy of giving billions of dollars of agricultural subsidies to wealthy domestic farmers (which inevitably leads to dumping on the international markets) destroys the livelihood of millions of poor farmers in the developing countries of the South.

LETTER FROM EUROPE

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sheriff, wholeheartedly supported Bush's strategy to tackle terrorism by military means alone. (According to some reports, negotiations are well under way to establish new American bases in Australia, Vietnam and other south-east Asian countries. It is difficult for me to understand how the leaders of these countries can be so naive as to allow the establishment of American bases on their countries' soil, given the fact that Bush's America insists on the doctrine of pre-emptive strikes and regime changes in the conduct of its foreign policy.) There were others who recognised that there was indeed a problem but it had to be dealt with by addressing the root causes of terrorism, such as poverty and the West's double standards.

Malaysia's prime minister Mahathir bin Mohamad flatly refused to be dragged into this controversy. "We do not agree with taking away economic matters into security, military or politics, which are not really for APEC", he said. Mexico also sided with Malaysia in this controversy. But once again the final communiqué reflected the hegemonic position of the US in the world, which clearly dominated the agenda. The summit urged the members to "eliminate the severe and growing danger posed by the

American prestige is so low and anti-Americanism is so high all across the Muslim world.

Bush was not so successful on the North Korean issue. He had come to the meeting to persuade the APEC leaders to support him in imposing economic sanctions on North Korea and even in taking military action against this country if it did not dismantle its nuclear programme. Instead, the summit insisted on a peaceful solution through multilateral talks. No specific mention was made of the perceived North Korean nuclear threat nor of any sanctions.

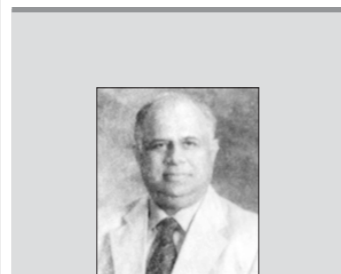
The next item on Bush's agenda

survival. Currently Japan is trying to come out of a deflationary situation and its economy is basically an export-oriented one. In both cases (Japan and China) Bush was told that the US domestic economic policies like enormous tax-cuts and reckless spending were more responsible for its economic woes like rising unemployment, runaway trade and budget deficits and rising debt burdens (Bush should thank his lucky stars that his country's ballooning foreign debt is in its own currency, i.e., the US dollar.) than the low Chinese and Japanese currencies.

On the issue of freer trade,



Muslim unity



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

and in different beliefs. There are terrorists who kill innocent people because they do not believe in God and these are terrorists who kill in the name of God, whether they be Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists etc. There are countries that practice 'state terrorism' as a matter of national policy.

Even though his speech was conciliatory, his remarks were taken out of context and made controversial, no mention was made about the Malaysian PM strongly deploring 'suicide bombings' against

ans on each other defies both human imagination and belief.

Incongruities will never cease, there was Russian President Putin on the OIC podium, invited to address the OIC Summit as an observer. In the past few years, most innocents killed in the world have been Muslim, mainly in Bosnia and Chechnya, far exceeding in Kashmir and Palestine in that order. Chechnya remains an active 'killing ground' for Russian Federal troops. One wonders what pragmatism had the Muslim leadership consider

'resume talks to restore civil aviation links, including over-flight rights.' This is perhaps the most important issue for the Indians who have about 10 times more aviation flights affected per day than Pakistan. Since they are a victim of their own intransigence, why should we bail them out? India has twice unilaterally imposed bans, in 1971 and in 2002. Pakistan has rightfully asked for guarantees that India would not again impose an overflight ban out of the blue for real or unimagined transgressions by Pakistan. India

in cities outside the two countries' national capitals, to shorten travel.' An excellent suggestion. We can give permission on reciprocal basis for the same number of cities that the Indians give us, giving priority to Mumbai, Lucknow and Patna. The next Indian proposal is self-explanatory, 'permit individuals aged at least 65 to cross into India by foot. Previously only groups could walk across, while individuals had to be on a bus.' No difference of opinion here, the physical constraint because of age must be recognised.

gift horse in the mouth? The next one is practical, 'have India and Pakistan increase the staff of each nation's Embassy', Pakistan has been suggesting this for some time. Then India wants us to 'consider ferry service between Mumbai and Karachi'. Not a bad idea, this will also increase trade activity. In the end they exhort us to 'start new bus services, one between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad. The other would be a bus or rail link between Khokrapar in Sindh and Munaba in India's Rajasthan state.' The bus or rail link between Sindh and Rajasthan is not a bad idea but the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad link is a clever gambit by the Indians to have the Line of Control (LoC) become a de-facto international border because of the use of passports, entry and exit formalities, etc. The bottom line to the Indian proposal is caution, one can consider all the proposals positively except (1) the overflights ban unless there are adequate guarantees and (2) the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus proposal only if the Kashmiris can travel to and from Indian-held Kashmir without travel documents.

A most satisfying sequel of the OIC was the immediate visit of the Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah direct from the OIC Summit at Putrajaya. The reciprocal love and warmth was spontaneous, the Crown Prince is very much loved in Pakistan. Saudi Arabia has been a good ally to us, always generous and always supportive. The visit underscores the fact that whereas we must always strive for Muslim unity, bilateral relationship is far more meaningful and important.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

A most satisfying sequel of the OIC was the immediate visit of the Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah direct from the OIC Summit at Putrajaya. The reciprocal love and warmth was spontaneous, the Crown Prince is very much loved in Pakistan... The visit underscores the fact that whereas we must always strive for Muslim unity, bilateral relationship is far more meaningful and important.

Israel. Mahathir clarified that he was not calling the Muslim to arms against Jews, that he was only asking the Muslims to look at the situation objectively to resort to 'strategic retreat' rather than engage in confrontation. However, being specific about one religion he laid himself open to charges of 'anti-semitism'. This is rather ironic, Europe practiced the worst of anti-semitism pre-World War II and this directly contributed to a targeted pogrom by the German Nazis, the holocaust led to the elimination of more than six million Jews of Europe during World War II. Not condonable by any means, the inherent and calculated brutality is a slur on the concept of humanity. A close and honoured friend of mine of Hungarian origin lost both his parents in the Nazi concentration camps; this abomination by Europe-

Russians for membership of the OIC? If things go on this way we may yet see L.Advani (or Narendra Modi) at an OIC Summit with India a full-fledged member in the foreseeable future, Ayodhya and Gujarat notwithstanding. To his credit, Musharraf had effectively blocked the move earlier for India to become a full-fledged OIC member.

Fresh from signing the Phalcon Radar System agreement, an offensive force-multiplier meant to overwhelm Pakistan's defences and using their Consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad to foment trouble among tribals on both sides of the Durand Line, India announced 12 'initiatives' or 'concessions' to normalise Indo-Pak relations. Interesting in laying out the 'confidence building measures' (CBMs), Yashwant Sinha, the Foreign Minister, wants India and Pakistan to first

refuses to give any guarantees to us. Their loss may be financial, there are also geo-political reasons for India to try and get over-flight bans removed, it is cut off from Afghanistan and Central Asia, US and European flights are made more costly by half. India proposes to then 'discuss a resumption of rail link, following aviation talks.' One may well ask India why should 'rail links' follow 'aviation talks', why not restore rail links now?

India then wants us to 'resume bilateral sporting encounters, including cricket.' This has been a demand in India and Pakistan for some time, one must also commend the Indian Cricket Board that kept supporting the idea, Kapil Dev's venom notwithstanding. If we can play hockey and volleyball, why not cricket? The fourth proposal would have India and Pakistan 'issue visas

The next point is, viz 'run more buses on the New Delhi to Lahore route that now operates.' And why not? The traffic can increase manifold and it would be beneficial for the poor and the middle class who cannot afford air tickets. The next two suggestions are actually one in practice, 'establish links between the two countries' coast guards, before and after fishing season', and also have 'India and Pakistan stop arresting each other's fishermen within certain sea areas.' Both are excellent suggestions, why not remove this major irritant along the maritime border?

The next Indian proposal wants India to 'provide free medical treatment to 20 Pakistani children', this is largely a symbolic media gesture as Pakistani children have as adequate measures for medical cover as Indians. However why look at a

Warning: Arms sales are harmful to world peace

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

THE age-old adage of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds is perhaps nearest in meaning to our Bangla proverb: *chorke bole chadhni kortey ar ghora-karteke bole shabdhan holey* (rough English translation: to ask the thief to commit theft and to advise the householder to be vigilant). The proverb may sound contradictory, but today contradiction is what rules the world and is what has been accepted as the order of the day.

Hence there appears to be nothing wrong when the UN-designated international peace day was observed world wide by the UN member states around the same time Europe's biggest weapons bazar -- a *meenabazar* of sorts -- was held in London without a peep from any of the world's leaders, regardless of the fact that these leaders regularly lecture the rest of us on the fragility of world peace and the need for a global war against terrorism. At the very least, it would be better

for the weapons manufacturers to put a special tag on their merchandise -- side by side with the price tag -- stating that the use of weapons is harmful to world peace, just as cigarette packs carry a warning that smoking is harmful to health. This would perhaps demonstrate the weapons manufacturers' and merchants' love for world peace and at the same time a modicum of honesty.

Europe's biggest arms fair The *meenabazar* was billed as Europe's biggest arms fair and organised by an international weapons organisation known as the Defence Systems and Equipment International (DSEI). It was a high profile display of sophisticated weapons from several world famous arms manufacturers that attracted lots of potential buyers. The DSEI is regarded as the show-case for all aspects of land, sea and air weapons and equipment. But the question remains: when such a huge arms sales bazar was held with so much fan-fare to attract thousands of buyers, why did not a single word

The UN Secretary General should immediately recommend measures to stop the grotesque arms sales displays that are held from time to time by a well-known group of manufacturers and exporters of such mass-killing weaponry, with the blessings of their "godfathers" occupying strategic government positions. When the UN is ostensibly striving hard to bring about disarmament and make the world weapons-free, it is farcical for it to sit on the fence and look the other way while the arms trade rages out of control.

leader, including the UN Secretary General, raise an eye-brow, let alone his voice, in protest? Is the message from world leaders that we should accept that such weapons sales promotion campaigns are an unremarkable part of modern life and that the trading in public of mass-killing weapons has been authorised and approved by the UN and the world community?

Arms sales show in Abu Dhabi It may be recalled here that earlier in the 1990s, a similar arms sales bazar was held in Abu Dhabi immediately after Gulf-War I, but on a much larger scale. Hundreds of

international weapons dealers and sellers assembled in Abu Dhabi to display their latest stock of war merchandise. The grand five-day show was considered the world's largest arms bazar and was organised by the International Defence Exhibition (IDEX). Perhaps Abu Dhabi was chosen by the organisers of the weapons bazar as the Middle East was then something of a flash-point following Gulf-War I. The kettle was boiling for those who made the best use of it by timely organising the arms sales show. According to media reports, more than 350 companies from 34 countries specialising in manufacturing mass-killing weapons attended the show

which reportedly raised on-the-spot sales of billions of dollars. The weapons bazar was attended, among others by four leading weapons manufacturing and exporting countries, namely, the US, the UK, France and Russia. Of the four leading weapons trading countries, the US is the largest arms seller with \$10 billion worth of sales annually, followed by the UK with \$4 billion worth of sales and Russia with \$3.5 billion worth of sales.

The hypocrisy of these countries lecturing the rest of us on world peace is clear. It is the same set of people who create trouble in the first place by organising arms sales fairs who are coming forward as angels

of peace. These arms traders are the most dangerous enemies of world peace. However no action seems to be even thought of against such free-for-all war weapons merchants. It is for the UN, which is responsible for the maintenance of world peace and security, to take punitive action against the arms merchants who openly hold sales promotion *meenabazars* for weapons. Is the sale of such weapons not counter to the principles of the UN Charter?

New Dr Jekylls and Mr Hydes

These modern-day Dr Jekylls and Mr Hydes have already shown

enough of their ability to bring disaster to certain areas of the world. Today they have turned the whole of Africa into a seething cauldron by mouthing various slogans, pitting one tribe against the other, inciting civil war, and encouraging rebel groups -- thus making Africa a killing field by encouraging the local warlords to purchase arms and ammunition from them.

After Africa, the most fertile ground for the arms traders has been the Middle East which is now infested with so many trouble-spots. That's why the world's biggest arms sales show was organised in Abu Dhabi immediately after Gulf War I. Thanks to Anglo-US operations, it seems that the Middle East will continue to be fertile ground for their much-coveted trouble-spots in Asia where troubles are brewing between India-Pakistan, China-Taiwan, and with North Korea.

So the two sides of the coin are the same although apparently they look different -- one side shows the peace angels and the other side portrays the arms merchants. But

there are unseen hands that pull the strings from behind the stage. It won't be surprising at all if one day it comes out that the countries that were so keen to help a government in its fight against rebel forces were also deeply involved in supplying the rebels with all the necessary weapons to fight against government forces.

The bottom-line is that the UN Secretary General should immediately bring it to the attention of the Security Council and recommend measures to stop the grotesque arms sales displays that are held from time to time by a well-known group of manufacturers and exporters of such mass-killing weaponry, with the blessings of their "godfathers" occupying strategic government positions. When the UN is ostensibly striving hard to bring about disarmament and make the world weapons-free, it is farcical for it to sit on the fence and look the other way while the arms trade rages out of control.

AMM Shahabuddin is a retired UN official.