

# Reform is a must for UN now for its future



HARUN UR RASHID

Charter. Even non-members cannot violate the essential principles of the Charter (Article 2.6), i.e. conduct contrary to maintenance of peace and security in the world.

The system of veto-carrying powers of the five permanent members, although conceived at a time of unity among big powers, now paralyses the functions of the Security Council because of their differing national security interests. This power seems to

world situation. The idea that minority dictates the majority is not acceptable anymore and each nation considers itself as equal to others. Furthermore, regional alliances have become stronger and effective in many instances. Although the US is now the lone superpower, many states in Europe are reluctant to submit to a unipolar regime and France has indicated that multilateralism is the order of the day. Europe, China, and Russia are not comfortable with the unipolar regime,

& The permanent members should not be able to exercise their "veto" powers in case of restoration or maintenance of international peace and security or regarding armed conflicts or threat to peace or act of aggression. & Furthermore the UN disproportionately depends on the funds from the US and if the US Congress decides not to disburse funds to the UN, it is crippled. The UN spends annually US\$ 2 billion for its core functions and US\$ 1.1 billion for peace-keeping operations and about 25 per cent of it comes from the US. A change to the scale of assessment of financial contributions of member-states is required so as to avoid dependence on one member-state. The UN should be difficult to borrow commercially when needed. A suggestion has been made that a levy be imposed on all arms sales or a levy on international tickets so as to generate funds for the organisation. & The functions of the UN Secretariat should be divided into four categories: (i) Peace and Security, (ii) Economic and Social, (iii) Humanitarian and (iv) Administration and Management. Each division should be headed by a Deputy Secretary General who will be responsible for a particular functional area. The overall supervision will rest with the Secretary General.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is going to be a very difficult one for human beings and the UN has to meet the challenges of the century. The UN was founded in the name of the people as the Charter in its preamble says: "We the peoples of the United Nations" and not the "governments of member-states". It implies that the functions of the UN are to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of all people (over six billion) and to promote economic progress and better standards of life for all people in the world.

The UN is not a supra-national authority (like European Union). It is an inter-governmental political organisation and is subject to political manipulation. Although the UN is not perfect, it has come to stay because every nation needs it to resolve global issues. To become relevant, the UN has to undergo some essential reforms.

Unless reforms are carried out in the Charter of the UN, the effectiveness of the UN is at risk and no country wants that to happen. The core functions of the UN revolve on three themes: maintenance of peace, economic and social development and respect for human rights. These goals are equally important to rich and poor nations for maintenance of international peace and security. We must remember that the UN can only be effective as and when its members allow it to be.

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# Withdrawal syndrome in Iraq



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

EACH Sunday the BBC has an interesting programme entitled 'Foreign Correspondents'. Watching the programme last Sunday I was amazed to hear the correspondent of *The Economist* state that time had come for the US not to get more involved in Iraq but rather consider thinning out. It appeared that the serious international press was preparing the ground for the eventual withdrawal of the US occupation force from Iraq.

The British correspondent stated what is on everybody's mind and that how long can the US take this kind of loss to which she has failed to find an answer. Last Sunday to the alert of everybody in Iraq and that includes the coalition forces, the Iraqis brought down a large US helicopter. It signifies that unlike the US intelligence the Iraqi intelligence is working superbly leaves no doubt. Of course the Iraqis have the great advantage of working inside their territory. Fifteen US servicemen were killed in the attack and more than a score wounded. In one blow the Iraqis had killed the largest number of US servicemen since the beginning of the conflict. Body bags have started coming regularly to America.

US presidential elections are barely a year away. Sensing that the incumbent President George W. Bush is vulnerable, as is evident from the polls, candidates and probable ones are making quiet and sometimes not so quiet preparations. It is unlikely that a challenger will emerge from the President's Republican Party although this cannot be entirely ruled out. Everything will depend whether President Bush really appears as a weak candidate. As of now he seems to be losing

ground steadily and the situation looks irreversible.

As time passes President Bush appears to go deeper into the quicksand and does not seem to have many cards to play. Recently in a press conference he appeared on the defensive when questioned on the steady haemorrhaging that is taking place among his forces. In fact he had nothing to cheer about. He made some routine criticism of the media for failing to write about 'good' news from Iraq. It must be an excruciating decision for

administration to take USA's longtime trusted allies like France and Germany on board. In fact what Bush is being accused of is that he has divided the Alliance. In fact his zigzag policy vis-a-vis the UN is also another matter of concern for his opponents. Thus the deck appears heavily stacked against President George W. Bush.

It is now common knowledge that the person who literally pushed President Bush into this war against Iraq has been the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Sharon seems to have a patho-

logical antipathy against the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Sharon prevailed upon President Bush that he should not even shake the hand of Arafat. Thus the stage was set for Sharon to launch his killing spree in West Bank and Gaza and hound Arafat out from his home if possible. President Bush, who is supposed to play the neutral referee between the Palestinians and the Israelis, has been the most partisan President of the US. Not content with hounding Arafat, Sharon now turned his gaze on the other centre of Arab power -- Iraq, on the incredible pretext that President Saddam Hussein of Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction, while international personalities repeatedly stressed that there was no trace of dangerous weapons in the possession of President Saddam. Flouting the Security Council and taking postures of total defiance of world public opinion, President Bush and Prime Minister Blair launched a massive strike against defenceless Iraq. The forces of President Saddam Hussein vanished in thin air. President Bush declared the end of the war on 1 May. But the last six months have been one of steady mounting of strikes against US forces by Iraqi fighters. That

they had a plan of counter attack all along against the US forces is becoming clear every day.

Is Iraq President George W. Bush's Vietnam? The terrain is vastly different. The war in Indo-China by the French and the Americans lasted for nearly three decades. The countryside of Vietnam was ideal for guerilla warfare. The Vietnamese could take large casualties and destruction of their rudimentary economy. The situation in Iraq is very different. The US seems to have lost ground in the propaganda battle as it did in Vietnam. The world has changed enormously. European Union is a force to be reckoned with and the most important countries of the EU are backing action through the UN. In other words it is US withdrawal from Iraq and the vacuum to be filled by the UN.

Is the same fate awaiting President George W. Bush as it did a decade ago for his father? After his victory against President Saddam Hussein's Iraq, where his coalition forces expelled Iraq from Kuwait, he was defeated at the presidential elections. The name of the Democrat challenger is still unknown. The fact remains that the overall performance of President Bush has been so uninspiring that the chances are that he is likely to meet a similar fate as his fathers. As for his mentor Ariel Sharon, his dream of mini super power status in the Middle East is unlikely to be achieved.

Under President Bill Clinton, the US had followed an even handed policy towards the Palestinians and the Israelis. A settlement of the half-century long conflict appeared a distinct possibility. However, if the US wants to play the role of the most powerful player on the world stage she must shun her overtly pro-Israeli policies, which has already plunged the world in senseless bloodshed. Of late, the Malaysian leader Mahatir Mohamad has correctly diagnosed the malaise from which the US is suffering, namely, manipulation by Israel, and has appeared on the world stage as a big bully. For the US, which has a long humane tradition, she must be even-handed if she wants to play an effective role.

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## BOTTOM LINE

**The UN is not a supra-national authority (like European Union). It is an inter-governmental political organisation and is subject to political manipulation. Although the UN is not perfect, it has come to stay because every nation needs it to resolve global issues. To become relevant, the UN has to undergo some essential reforms.**

be one of the great flaws in the Charter. Furthermore the existing composition of the Security Council does not reflect the present reality of global power structure. Japan, the second largest economy in the world and Germany, the world's third largest and Europe's largest economy, do not represent as permanent members of the Council.

The UN had limited success in maintenance of international peace and security because of the Cold War between the two super powers, the US and former Soviet Union. About 100 conflicts took place since 1945 around the world. After the end of the Cold War, international community expected that a new international order would prevail. However that was not to be the case. Africa, Palestine, Balkans and East Timor became focus of armed conflicts in the 1990s and the Security Council was a silent spectator to these man-made disasters. Palestine-Israel conflict continues till today and Israel with the support of the US ignores all UN resolutions.

This year the major military operation took place in Iraq without the UN approval. Iraq's war shook the foundations of the principles of the UN, in particular the concept of "collective security" as enshrined in Article 51 of the Charter. The new doctrine of the Bush administration "pre-emptive" or unprovoked "armed attack" does not find any place within the UN Charter. However, at the same time, the world is different because of a new kind of threat (terrorism) that emanates from non-state actors, scattered over many countries.

The Charter that was agreed in 1945 does not seem to work in prevailing

dictated by the superpower.

The UN needs reforms to be relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Humankind has been confronted, primarily, many issues with. And if they are not addressed properly through global cooperation, some futurists predict that humankind runs the serious risk of being overwhelmed by them. The issues are: (a) human population growth, (b) scarcity of fresh water, (c) global rich-poor gap among nations, (d) global climate change, (e) globalisation of economy, (f) possibility of new deadly virus-based diseases like SARS, and (g) rising power and capacity of non-state actors to commit acts of terrorism. These were not the concerns when the UN was founded in 1945 and therefore the UN Charter needs revision and amendments to suit the needs of the day.

Some UN experts have suggested the following reforms to the UN Charter: & The composition of the Security Council should be increased from existing 15 to 25 members. & The powers of the Secretary General are now too limited and the office should be entrusted with preventive diplomacy to prevent conflicts, rather than to report conflicts to the Security Council (Article 99).

& Peace-keeping operations of the UN should be incorporated in the Charter. At present the Charter does not say anything about peace-keeping operations of the UN. It falls between the functions of Chapter VI (peaceful settlement of disputes) and Chapter VII (action with respect to threat to peace or acts of aggression) of the Charter.

# 'Sand link'--a counter to the 'River inter-linking' project

MD. ZIAUL ISLAM

BANGLADESH is a riverine country. During the rainy season, the low-lying land is inundated with floods due to the torrential rain. Flood waters cause severe damage to dwellings, roads, crops, and livestock, and cause great hardship to the people of the country. Unscrupulous businessmen take advantage of this vulnerable situation by hiking the price of essential commodities in the market. Due to the scarcity of drinking water, diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea, and typhoid break out into epidemics, causing untold suffering to the people of the affected areas. Floods can thus be seen as one of the main problems we face as a country and as a principal barrier to our sustaining self-sufficiency. Preventive measures are always better than a cure.

Implementing realistic ideas can play a key role in our future development. It may take several decades, but it is economically feasible to control flooding in both Bangladesh and India with the aid of a "sand link" project.

India is considering "river inter-linking", which is a controversial project that has the potential to turn Bangladesh into a desert. The dispute over water-sharing has poisoned the relationship between these two neighbouring countries.

Coarse or bigger grain size sand

But the "sand link" project can bridge the gap between the two countries and will provide benefits by optimizing the utilization of river water. Environmental experts are predicting that the sea-level is rising due to climate change, and UN experts say that Bangladesh and Maldives will be the worst victims of this. So we have little time to lose.

Sand lies in river-beds. More and more sand removal from river beds can increase the depth of river beds and therefore help to control flooding. The concept is simple enough. The greater the depth of the rivers, the lesser the severity of the floods during the rainy season.

Sand removal needs to be accomplished systematically from as many places as possible without impeding the flow of the river. This project would involve many years of relentless hard work.

This removed sand can be used for many other purposes.

When a building is constructed, a massive amount of soil is removed from the ground. After the building is erected, the ground can be filled up with sand that can help to absorb seismic shaking or trembling. The removed soil can be used for filling up low-lying areas to augment land elevation.

Coarse or bigger grain size sand

when mixed with the proportionate amount of cement and water and moulded into blocks can produce sand-bricks (after several days of water curing) with high compressive strength. Therefore, we can consider making hollow sand-bricks out of this recovered sand. Sand with fine grain size can be used to make solid bricks if proper water curing is done for several days. Some critics have commented that fine grain size sand is available in river-beds mixed with soil. However, cheap technology is available to filter or separate soil from fine grain size sand. The expense of plastering walls reduces significantly if sand-bricks are used to construct building walls.

We can also use the sand in infrastructure projects such as constructing roads, pavements, and bridges. The gradual increase of sand-brick production can reduce our reliance on clay-bricks. Nowadays, some well-reputed construction companies are making their own bricks with sand, cement and water. Demand for sand-bricks is very high in the market due to the low cost but the current supply is limited. Portable sand-brick fields can be set up near river-beds to further reduce the cost of producing sand-bricks.

Singapore is an island off the tip of the Malay Peninsula. Within several decades, the people of Singapore have constructed skyscrapers, hospitals,

schools, pavements, roads, and bridges with the aid of gathered sand from the surrounding water peninsula beds and are still making new ones. Now the depth of the surrounding water has reached a level that they never have to be concerned with flooding. If the people of Singapore can save themselves by virtue of constructive thinking and arduous work -- why can't we do it?

The Farakka barrage was built by India for their protection against flooding. But as illogical thinking would have it, the barrage failed to fulfill its purpose. On the contrary, during the rainy season the Farakka barrage aggravates flood devastation for both Bangladesh and India.

The increasing utilization of sand from river-beds should be a joint collaboration project of Bangladesh and India. The time has come for us to put our heads together for our mutual benefit and to leave our past differences aside to tackle the problem of flooding. An integrated approach should be undertaken with patience and perseverance. We need to make the decision before floods make the decision for us. Bangladesh and India need to take adequate measures to make the "sand link" project successful.

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# Bush, the Baath Party and Iraq

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THE Arab Baath Socialist Party was first established in Damascus in the 1940s and was one of the raggle-taggle political forces opposed to the "liberal" regimes established by the British and French colonial powers in Syria and Iraq.

The Baathist ideology was slow to take hold in Iraq -- although it did immediately attract some adherents among mostly lower middle-class young men -- partly due to powerful competition from the Iraqi communist party and partly due to the skepticism about pan-Arabism among the Shia majority.

In view of their small following and weak organisation, the Baathist leadership turned to the idea of a military coup as a suitable means to gain power. The Baathists allied themselves with a military faction and succeeded in toppling Abdel-Karim Qassem's regime in 1963. Their principal ally, Sunni officer Abdel-Salam Aref, soon undermined the Baathists and seized power for himself. This brought home the danger of depending on the military to the Baath leadership.

The Baath party strengthened itself by depending on civilians to assume leadership positions within the party and by physically removing all elements of opposition. Tribal and regional ties played a pivotal role in fortifying this leadership and the influence of Sunnis and especially Takritis became overwhelming in the upper tiers of the party.

The Baath Party was able to seize power in Iraq in 1968. By this time the Tikriti clan -- of which Saddam Hussein is a member -- had been able to consolidate their hold on power within the party, and through their control of the Baathist revolutionary leadership council, were able to extend their control into practically all aspects of civil society as well as the army, police, judiciary and government.

In 1979, Saddam Hussein became Iraq's fifth president, and took this policy to its logical conclusion, giving his family, friends and relations control

over party, army and security organisations to ensure the continuation of his hold on power.

Under Tikriti leadership, the Baath Party and the Baathist state became predominantly Sunni. Discrimination against the Shia in Iraq has prevailed since the British installed a Sunni king in the 1920s, who gathered around him Sunni elite. In 37 years of monarchy, only four Shia prime ministers came to power, as opposed to 19 Sunnis. But

lages.

With the fall of Baghdad after a long siege and heavy fighting, a comprehensive purge of the Baathists is taking place. This can be attributed to the manner Saddam was removed from power and which will have the decisive impact on the future of Iraq.

Recently, a large demonstration took place in the Iraqi city of Mosul. Violent clashes between unemployed demonstrators and security forces

erupted, underscoring the extreme social tensions that are generating increasing resistance to the US occupation. A number of those who participated in the demonstration were ex-soldiers. Washington's pro-consul in Baghdad, Paul Bremer, disbanded the 350,000 man Iraqi army without pay as one of his first acts last May. The measure swelled the ranks of the unemployed, now estimated at 60 per cent of the country's work force.

The desperate situation facing the Iraqi people six months after the US invaded and occupied Iraq was further exposed in a September report issued by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and World Food Program, which found that nearly half of the 26 million Iraqis are living in extreme poverty, unable to afford adequate nutrition. The damage and deterioration sustained by the health services, water, sanitation and electricity sectors during the recent conflict, the halting of TNP (Targeted Nutrition Program -- an Iraqi Health Ministry initiative to aid women and children) and instability and unemployment has turned postwar Iraq into a nightmare and the war has created 100,000 refugees and an internally displaced population of 200,000.

It is clear that the structure and political and administrative affair of the Baath Party cannot be disregarded in shaping Iraq's future. The party's help may be critical to the allies in maintaining order and cohesion in Iraq after the fall of the regime. The historical experience of the US in both Japan and Germany following World War II suggests the difficulties of conducting wide-ranging political purges. In view of the absence of a strong middle class and independent institutions, as well as a basic degree of mutual trust between Iraq's different populations after 35 years of oppression, there will be a need to include some Baathists in the post-Saddam system.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan recently told the 15-member Security Council that he could not accept the terms of a US draft resolution which did not incorporate his suggestions on how to handle the eventual transfer of political power in Iraq. Annan said his proposal to let Iraqis form a government first, before writing a constitution and then holding new elections, could help stem the guerrilla-style attacks against the US occupation.

But President Bush has resisted meaningful power-sharing with the UN or any faction of Iraqis -- let alone any rehabilitated Baathists -- and has insisted on going it alone. He would have done well to remember the proverb: If you scatter thorns, don't go bare-foot.

under the Baathists it was institutionalised.

Prejudice against the Shia took many forms, including the imposition of a Sunni interpretation of the history of Iraq, Arabs and Islam in schools, the restriction of Shia religious celebrations, the lack of development of the infrastructure in predominantly Shia areas, and the asphyxiation of Shia political organisations.

Nor were the other major community in Iraq -- the Kurds -- better treated by the Baathists. More than half a million Shia and Kurdish Iraqi citizens were forcibly relocated in the second half of the 1970s and more than 60,000 killed following the Gulf War. Due to their continued armed resistance, the Kurds were able to force a settlement allowing them political and cultural rights. The self-rule agreement was signed between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish Democratic Party in March 1970. The Iraqi government soon reneged on its terms once the Shah of Iran withdrew his military support to the Kurds in 1975. The Iraqi regime continued to wage war against the Kurds, killing thousands and destroying hundreds of Kurdish vil-

# Poverty reduction through access to khas land: An NGO approach

ZAHID RAHMAN

HALF of the total population of the country is deprived from income, resource, education and social security. These people are gradually becoming poor to hardcore poor in the defeating socio-political race. This race has been there due to grotesquely unequal distribution of natural resources including land, little or no access to education, medical, social facilities as well as political power structure. It is simply becoming very difficult for the poor to survive in this race. Consequently, the discrimination between the rich and the poor is gradually increasing.

But not all is dark at the end of the tunnel. The struggle for recovering government khas land from usurpers and distributing that among the landless poor for productive use is continuing in some parts of the country. Recently, quite a number of landless poor were given physical possession of 233 acres of khas land which they were legally entitled in Pangsha and Goalanda upazila of

Rajbari district through the leadership of an NGO engaged in such work. It may be mentioned that the NGO, Samata, started their struggle through organising the 'Ghughudaha Land Rights Movement' in the mid eighties in Santhia upazila of Pabna district.

The unequal distribution of resources and economic discrimination will have to be reduced and the rights of the landless poor established for a meaningful poverty reduction approach. In our present context still land is the base of our society, economy as well as culture. Land is a principal element of our socio-economic structure, source of power and means of production. So, the works of poverty reduction will have to start from land. In the light of this concept, the works of Samata may be emulated by other organisations engaged in poverty reduction programme. Over the last two decades the NGO has organised different land rights movements and till to date it has distributed 5,300 acres of khas land among the landless people in different districts of northwest Bangladesh.

In a bid to replicating its expertise and experiences

in other parts of the country it identified a huge amount of khas land, water bodies etc. in the district of Rajbari. It formed some 765 male and female groups with around 15,000 members in the four upazilas of the district. The members became aware about their rights and started claiming it from the society as well as state in different parts in the district.

On 21st October, 2003 around 1,000 organised landless male and female members went to Char Afra, Char Mirpur and Char Ramakantapur of Pangsha upazila and finally got physical possession of 170 acres of khas lands. Earlier they were given the legal entitlement by the government. Local civil society members, journalists, teachers, local government officials and local MP assisted them in the process. It may be mentioned here that these lands went under river through erosion. When accreted the local influential people and jottars illegally occupied them. The total khas land area is around 780 acres. The landless people have gained access to 170 acres, the rest is still underwater.

On the same day, around three hundred landless

male and female group members in Goalanda upazila went to Paschim Char Kasimpur under Uzanchar union and were finally given physical possession of around 63 acres of khas land which they were legally entitled before. Here also the local administration and civil society people assisted them in the process.

First the landless people applied to the government to redistribute these lands among them. In response the government distributed the whole amount of accreted khas land among the real landless people on one year lease to permanent settlement basis. It's a pity that so long the landless people did not have any access to their impliedly entitled lands.

As they are now united so it seems they have the power. They took the physical possession of these lands and started cultivation. These are the very significant incidents in the process of establishing the rights of the landless poor over public resources in the direction of poverty alleviation.

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A partial view of khas lands in Char Afra, Char Ramnagar and Char Shah Mirpur in Habashpur Union under Pangsha Upazila of Rajbari district.