

Resist Bush's 'New World Order'

by Chanchal Sarkar
Special to The Daily Star

NEW DELHI: That Iraq had accepted Resolution 660 of the Security Council was flashed within minutes in a friend's phone call from Hong Kong; the world's radio networks were still reviewing soccer, boxing and golf. Quite simply it means that the world's politics has reached a watershed. Will John Wayne prevail or Mother Teresa? America's New World Order to carve up the map and the resources of the Middle East to its imperial hectoring and advantage must be resisted to the last breath by the same world.

Who should be the ones to resist? The permanent members of the Security Council like the Soviet Union (on which much rests though, alas, it has given many hostages to the United States and is sorely embroiled in its internal troubles) and China. And France, if it has any pretensions to preserve its independent stance in world affairs. Britain will be the craven campfollower of Rambo — a United States which has pulverised one of the oldest regions of the world

and, the cradle of civilisations to rubble, whose President and Secretary of State have put it about that they would like Saddam Hussein to be liquidated — as an English King once said about Thomas Becket. The others who must resist the United States tooth and nail are those not so obviously beholden to that wealthy power. Spain, maybe, and Italy, the non-permanent members of the Security Council including India, Yemen, Cuba and other compassionate nations.

We are at a nodal point in our planet's affairs. The world has chance to claw, as of old, for oil power and hypocritical democracy speeded with electronic war or go for peace by negotiation. The United States has a President who has conducted an illegal and unequal war and reduced the United Nations and its Secretary General (oh, for a Dag Hammarskjold from the Castle of Uppsala) to a puppet and a puppy. Either the non-American world must square up to Bush or the Middle East, divided and bribed, will feel Texan jackboots on its neck

for the foreseeable future and oil will again become the private property of a few fundamentalist and autocratic chieftains who will bank the profits in the West and pay Western contractors for "rebuilding" Kuwait and Iraq!

The other malign force that must be resisted by the world with its last ounce of strength is the escalating arrogance and cruelty of the adopted child and heir of the United States — Israel, the hero of the West Bank and so many other detention camps of the Palestinians. The Arabs have never been able to join forces to meet the death-dealing power of Israel which has donned the mantle of the holocaust which once descended on it and which has become the staunch ally of South Africa. What a fall! America's Security Council votes in favour of Israel, followed faithfully by Britain, delegation. Once again the US will scream against 'linkage' but

the world knows that the linkage exists and has done so for years. The American disapproval of the monstrosities of the recent months in the West Bank and of the so-called "outrageous behaviour" of the Israeli Ambassador in Washington, are carefully contrived playacting. The world expects no change of heart from the United States over Israel and so it must unite to force America into a corner where its moral duplicity and double standards are exposed.

And what of India? It now has a chance to prove what its great figures have pronounced throughout history long before the present prophets, L. K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi. Chandra Shekhar before the TV cameras, stumbling and mumbling over a statement obviously drafted for him about Iraq and Resolution 660, was no great credit to this country's diplomacy. V. C. Shukla's toothy smile is no substitute

for knowledge of foreign affairs and of the forces that mould and threaten the Middle East. The civilised world must jettison the United States to a warlike civilisation. Iraq, the invader, has at last stepped down from its self-erected pedestal; must its face be ground into the dust as was that of the Germans in that fateful railway coach at Compiègne in 1918? Winston Churchill was as far as one could be from a weakling and he said: "In war defiance, in victory magnanimity." The Americans have won no victory, but will they be as cussed now as they were with the Vietnamese to whom they lost?

With so much to do Bush's time must be very limited but he might just take time off to read what was said by a United States Congressman some years ago. It went:

"Allow the President to invade a neighbouring country whenever he shall deem it necessary to repel an invasion and you allow him to do so whenever he may choose to say he deems it necessary for such purpose — and you allow him

to make war at pleasure. Study to see if you can fix any limit to his power in this respect, after you have given him so much. The provision of the Constitution giving the war-making power to Congress, was dictated, as I understand it, by the following reason. Kings had always been involving and impoverishing their people in wars, pretending generally, if not always, that the good of the people was the object. This our Convention understood to be the most oppressive of all king's oppressions."

That Congressman was I'll of Abraham Lincoln. Chandra Shekhar too might take a little time off from his TV appearance to read a paragraph or two from Narendra Dev and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The world wants peace, not superpower bullying. And the world want the United Nations to rouse itself from its invertebrate stupor. Javier Perez de Cuellar is fond of saying that he is from the Third World. Let him prove it.

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Need to Share Water

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman's call at the 47th annual session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) for multilateral cooperation to develop the region's water resources, is a welcome one. Such a move, encompassing the establishment of a regional water transport centre in Dhaka, would benefit not only deltaic Bangladesh, but also upper riparian countries such as India and Nepal. Setting up of such a centre has been on ESCAP agenda for several years, but nothing concrete has come out of the discussion due to lack of consensus.

The case for a regional approach to development of water resources with financial, technical and managerial assistance from the United Nations, is a particularly strong one for the eastern region of the Indian subcontinent where two mighty river systems, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, flow through several countries. The issue is a crucial one for Bangladesh where water (or the lack of it) can make or break people's lives.

The Mekong Regional Development programme involving four countries of South East Asia, is an example of how a joint approach could work for the benefit of all.

In the context of the subcontinent, one of the main objections, raised by India, to the idea of a water transport centre is based on the lack of data. However, that is perhaps the reason why such a centre has become an urgent necessity. At present, hardly any mechanism exists to manage rivers and utilise water for development purposes. The lack of research has left all affected countries, and not just Bangladesh, without any information on which to base future plans. It is vital, as ESCAP has recognised time and again in the past, to build institutions with the objective of research into and development of water resources.

Studies commissioned by ESCAP also show that if located in Bangladesh, the proposed centre would be able to meet all its objectives. Under the circumstances, it is not conducive to the interests of any country to delay commissioning of the centre.

This multilateralist approach need not be at the expense of any bilateral cooperation or negotiation pursued by countries of the region. The two approaches are quite compatible and can proceed simultaneously. The role of the UN or its affiliated bodies is important because of the technical help and vital information the world body could provide.

Furthermore, the centre is not envisaged to be a political body; it will primarily be a vehicle for regional development with no secondary role. Because of the multi-national character of rivers, a regional approach would be an efficient one, and beneficial to all states concerned.

The Choice of System

It seems Bangladesh may not be only country engaged in a heated debate over its choice of the political system: Should it stick to its present presidential form, switch back to the parliamentary set-up or develop a new one that combines the best of the two forms?

A report from Seoul says that an influential section of opinion-makers in South Korea have made a case for the country's existing presidential system being changed in favour of a parliamentary form. They may well have come to the conclusion, like many Bangladeshis, that the presidential system produces dictators, like Rhee, Park and Chun who play havoc with the political destiny, especially the fundamental rights, of the people. Perhaps this should be a good enough reason for Seoul to look fondly at the parliamentary form. Yes, but that's not the only reason. Just now, South Korea is said to be experiencing some kind of a Japanese cultural invasion, mainly through the satellite transmission of Tokyo's TV network, NHK. It is reported that hundreds of thousands of Korean households have installed special dish antennas to watch programmes beamed from Japan. One result: An increasing number of South Koreans support all kinds of Japanese models, including the political system. Hence this new euphoria sweeping South Korea for the parliamentary system as practised in Japan.

The debate over what system suits a nation best has been going on in other countries as well. Britain's Prince Charles has caused waves by talking openly — and that's breaking a taboo — in favour of proportional representation. And in India, the current parliamentary crisis is said to have brought about an increase in the number of experts supporting a presidential system for the country. Writing for a regional journal, one such expert mentions a fascinating anecdote. It is said that when India gained independence in 1947, a suggestion from the then British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee that New Delhi might consider adopting the presidential system, was treated with a mild contempt. "It seemed", said Lord Attlee later, "that I had offered India margarine, instead of butter."

In the final analysis, it is all a question of giving a country a good popular representative government. When this is not done, it matters little whether one is eaten up by the devil or drowned in a deep sea.

EIGHT commercial banks in Sri Lanka are to operate Swiss-style numbered bank accounts.

This is yet another innovation in Sri Lanka's commercial banking system to attract foreign money into the country and make Colombo an International Financial Centre.

Sri Lanka is probably the first country in the East to introduce numbered — or secret — bank accounts.

Announcing this, the Governor of the Central Bank, Dr Neville Karunatilake, said: "We will not accept money if it is known that it is obtained as a result of illegal operations. But the laundries are not in this country, and the laundering is done overseas. Only clean linen will be brought here."

Dr. Karunatilake was responding to fears voiced in Parliament by some members who felt numbered accounts would help foreign exchange earned in dubious ways. Others thought it was a sellout to foreigners and would affect the moral well-being of the country. It would give cover to black money and encourage black money, critics said.

However, many in the business community feel it would help attract foreign investment and is another step in the process initiated in 1977 to liberalise and open the economy. They point out that if it works it may help the country ease some of its economic problems.

The Monetary Board of the Central Bank here has given banks the absolute discretion in the opening of these ac-

counts. The Banks have the freedom of designing and devising their own operational details. They can pay interest or charge the customer a fee for maintaining an account.

The banks are permitted to open numbered accounts only for foreigners or Sri Lankans who are non-residents. A Sri Lankan is deemed to be non-resident if he or she has been abroad for a continuous and unbroken period of 12 months.

The facilities offered under this scheme are current accounts, deposit accounts and savings accounts. Deposits are accepted in eight foreign currencies — US dollars, Sterling Pounds, Deutsche Marks, Swiss Francs, Japanese Yen, Australian dollar, Singapore dollars and French Francs.

The minimum deposit to open an account is US\$1,000 or its equivalent in any of the authorised currencies.

Divulging the identity of the owner of the numbered account or divulging any related information is absolutely prohibited. Exceptions are when

the depositor permits it; legal proceedings are instituted by or against the owner; this information has to be divulged in accordance with a provision of law giving effect to an international convention on narcotics or hijacking; or by an order of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka on the ground that the account is being used for terrorist purposes.

Banks operating numbered accounts are expected to handpick the staff to maintain stringent secrecy requirements. Banking sources say they have to ferret out likely customers and personally convince them of the efficacy of the numbered accounts.

The same sources say the banks are very likely to take a hard look at the identity of potential customers to avoid any problems later on. They would profit by the experience of banks already operating such accounts and would always safeguard the integrity of their banks.

Experienced bankers are emphatic it will not be easy to sell this business. Customers already having numbered accounts in sophisticated banking centres are not likely to move away. Some foreign commercial banks operating here already have numbered accounts in their centres overseas and may not come into the scheme.

Customers also have to be convinced of the stability of the economy and the political situation. They must have confidence in the local banking system, above all, they must be confident the bank would protect their interests against all odds, even in court.

The same sources feel the big foreign commercial banks operating here would be better equipped to convince customers on these points. They are already known to customers worldwide as sound bankers.

These sources feel there could be interest in these ac-

Colombo Offers Secret Banking

Harold Pieris writes from Colombo

Sri Lanka is probably the first Asian country to introduce numbered — or secret — bank accounts

zones and other business organisations.

Limited offshore banking activities were introduced in 1979 which was considered a significant step to expand banking services.

Several other innovations have also been introduced, like the Non-Resident Foreign currency Accounts to attract investments from Sri Lankans earning abroad. Merchant banking commenced in 1980 and the development of the Financial Market became an ongoing process.

New customer services like electronic teller machines have been installed with 24-hour facilities. Accelerated cheque clearing through an Automated Clearing House commenced in 1988 and a variety of credit cards are now in vogue.

With the removal of the prohibitive 100 per cent tax on the purchase of shares by foreigners and the liberal concessions granted to these investors, several foreign companies have intervened to purchase stock in Colombo's Stock Exchange and have helped boost share market activities.

All these measures are quietly transforming Colombo's banking and financial activities into a competitive, sophisticated and innovative financial centre. — *Dephneus Asia*

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Role of Govt. and Opposition

Sir, Our heartfelt congratulations to BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia on her assumption of the office of Prime Minister and to AL chief Sheikh Hasina on her getting recognition as Leader of the Opposition in Parliament.

We have numerous problems but only a limited resources to contain them. Hence, it is not possible even on the part of a good government to change the poverty-stricken image of Bangladesh overnight. What a good government can do is, re-set the disarranged systems and run the country's administration honestly ensuring maximum utilization of the available resources including man and money. There are always some cunning characters to destroy the goodwill and honesty of a government. It is imperative on the part of an active government to guard against invasion by these unscrupulous characters. A people's govt. entertains constructive criticism by the opposition, press and individuals and rectifies its lapses accordingly. A dedicated government regularly clarifies its stand.

On the other hand, a good and strong Opposition can play a crucial role in keeping the government on the right track. The Opposition, through their

constructive criticism and sincere cooperation can make the govt. run as per the will of the people and ensure greater welfare. It is, however, irrational and impractical on the part of the Opposition to criticize only for the sake of criticism. Such act will only jeopardize the united effort to improve the lot of the masses.

Meanwhile, we sincerely wish overall success of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina within the framework of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

M. Zahidul Haque, Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka-1207.

Which price to pay?

Sir, You must be astonished to discover the difference between the price advertised and the price charged for a certain washing soap. If you wish to have a piece of 'Nirala' soap you are to pay Tk. 5.50 as written thereon while Tk. 4.25 is shown as the price in TV advertisement for one of same size with same label. Doesn't it attract attention of the relevant Govt. officials? It's a harassment of simple consumers and a crime no less than cheating.

Md. Akkas Ali Miah, Shahjahanpur, Dhaka.

Hazard on road and Shishu Park

Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the concerned authority to the road just off to the main entrance of Shishu Park. We, the mothers of the children of Dhaka city have noticed with grave concern that this road is main route of local, mini, BRTC, double-decker buses and trucks.

We cannot comprehend why and how this foute came into being. Not only does this rush of traffic endanger the lives of our children, to whom the Shishu Park is one of the very few places of fun and entertainment, but also the lives of the parents and guardians who come along. It is all the more bewildering because the very busy Diabetic Hospital is quite nearby where there is always a rush of patients and specially old people. The same case is near the P.G. Hospital and the very popular Ramna Park and Suhrawardy Uddyan where a lot of people come for morning and evening strolls.

Besides the constant fear of being run down by a truck or bus, all these people, specially children, old people, patients and those who come for fitness purpose not only have a tensed experience in getting around or across the road but also virtually have their longevity decreased by inhaling all the pollution that the hectic traffic creates. I would hope, on behalf of my own children and all these people, that the concerned authority would give this problem a fruitful thought.

A Concerned Mother.

Eid Sales

Sir, While in the Western countries one enjoys the Christmas, Easter and Mother's Day sales, apart from lowering of prices during the summer and winter, and various clearance sales, prices rocket sky high even as regards rickshaw fares weeks before Eid here.

Why can we not, in the same way, have lowering of prices although one understands that when the demand is high the prices shoot up too?

Would it not be wonderful if you could buy the slippers for your children and the 'Kurta' for the husband at a lower price when there is so much to spend over during Eid such as entertainment of relatives and friends.

It is bad enough that prices rocket sky high during Ramzan but the Eid market is a place where you can easily get fleeced. The other day I bought a material with a large hole in the middle just because of my inexperience and naively dealing with Eid shopping.

The lowering of prices might induce people to buy more, as it happens in the West. Must the shopkeepers be greedy and out for the quick buck only? Eid is a religious occasion. Why cannot they go in for a streak of generosity and humanity? Can the shopkeepers not have a change of heart and keep the interest of the poor consumer in mind?

F. Dela Harpe, Dhanmandi, Dhaka.

OPINION

The Image of the Politician

This is sort of an open letter to our politicians from a citizen-voter, for establishing a dialogue between the two arms of democracy. No excuse is offered for choosing this medium, as the voters cannot address the political leaders by organising public meetings, with the politicians at the listening end.

For years the politicians have been thundering at us in a one way communication — mostly non-communication. That might be one of the reasons why they were ousted from their professional stage, and military juntas and autocrats took over the game for several decades. The recent people's movement have brought the politicians back to the stage. So it is the right time for some feedback.

It is trite point out that communication is a two-way channel, and public meetings are a one-way system. "Some feedback" is not enough. There must be a well established, permanent feedback system, so that the political leaders (who are always busy and not easily accessible) get to know first-hand the reactions of the people who have something to say, above the mundane comments of daily life and events.

There is a reason for the above observations, at least from this writer's angle. One serious shortcoming observed in the speeches is that the speakers seem to forget that there are different levels of listeners. In fact there are two (or three) levels of listeners (or readers): the inferiors, and the equals or superiors. What we find is that usual sermons are targeted at one level only; leaving the other levels frustrated and starving.

The speakers would be more communicative if they do not talk down from above, but speak as equals. We know the speakers have to explain ideas at basic level due to disparities in our society; but at selective audiences, the level of the talk should match the level of the listeners (we do not expect Bush one-liners on world-policies). That is the reason most of the addresses are found to be boring by those whose opinions and reactions count. They speak a lot, but

have nothing much to say. Verbosity and quantitative and emotional outpourings do not attract qualitative judgement. Appeals are directed to the heart, and not to the head. Noise, sound, volume, and body movements are carriers, not contents. These are effects, not information.

Now to the main purpose of this commentary. It is hoped that the voters would not be considered impertinent to offer suggestions to our respected leaders, whom we have chosen and raised on pedestals. The recent free elections were held in the spring. Hence the next step is spring cleaning. The politicians have to clean up and change their eroded public image. Due to the absence of parliamentary proceedings for several decades, our politicians have become rusted. They have just come out of hibernation. So they need oiling and cleaning and have to go through elaborate maintenance and operational routines via various checklists (of parameters and tolerance factors).

What is wrong with the image of the politician is well known, and need not be elaborated here. Ask any man in the street, or raise the topic in the drawing rooms: the responses are similar, and mostly negative. We have to share the blame to a large extent, as what we tolerated (so generously) go against us.

Currently, there is one difference, compared to our public consciousness has now skyrocketed, and sensitivity is very high. These will act as checks and balances; as also the strong Opposition in the parliament.

It would be a good idea to have a national consensus on rebuilding the correct image of the politician. Some 'do's' and 'don't's' have to be strictly enforced — self-imposed. Play the game as per rules, or leave the field; that is the sportsman's motto. We are not yet a sporting nation — even in non-sport matters. Cricket, the English tell us, is a gentleman's game, and therefore the game of life.

A. Mawaz Dhaka