

MIDDLE EAST

# Ariel Sharon - an affront to peace

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

HERE happened to be a dramatic change apparently in the attitude of Bush administration with regard to Palestinian-Israeli conflict when the administration sided with the Norwegian sponsored resolution adopted in the Security Council on 29 March calling on Israel for withdrawal of its troops from Ramallah. The resolution also called on both sides for an immediate cease-fires. This was for the first time the US administration did not cast veto power to block resolution to show that America's support has not been one sided. But the speech by George Bush on 30 March supporting Israeli action to defend itself certainly encourages Ariel Sharon to continue aggression.

It was really heartening that US Secretary General Kofi Annan finally blasted Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in a letter on 12 March. He accused Israel for waging all out war against Palestinian civilians, ambulances and schools. Possibly the attack on UN office killing a UN guard might have contributed to the displeasure of UN Secretary General who outright rejected Israeli official statement that ambulance may have been used to smuggle Palestinian militants and weapons.

His strongest ever letter to Ariel Sharon coincided with the visit of Dick Cheney, who had been there to sound out the opinions of US allies about US proposed target plan against Iraq. Dick Cheney's stand in favour of Israel and denial to meet Yasser Arafat in his sojourn to the Middle East in March reflects top-sided approach by Bush administration.

The aggression by Israeli army in the Palestinian areas in the West Bank and Gaza and its continued occupation of the Palestinian areas despite UN Security Council resolution demonstrates the chauvinist policy adopted by Ariel Sharon, a hawk and hardliner rightist politician of Likud Party.

No resolution by UNSC or Mitchell peace plan or George Tenet's security cooperation will be implemented if Ariel Sharon, the

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incumbent Prime Minister of Israel, remains in power. He has launched a war against the Palestinian people and its leader Yasser Arafat. By now everybody knows Israel has achieved neither peace nor security under one year rule of Ariel Sharon. In fact, Ariel Sharon rushed to destroy every peace effort with a reign of terror against the Palestinians and against the will of his own cabinet. According to one Israeli commentator, it is Ariel Sharon and his Generals, who are making all the decisions, not the government. As have many others, this source pointed to the way Sharon sabotaged the cease-fire initiative proposed by President Katzav, as indicative of the scorn Sharon displays against anyone who dares to oppose his hard-line policies. Indeed, this notion against the Israeli President should turn Sharon into the pariah he deserves to be. Katzav had proposed to address the Palestinian Parliament, an initiative suggested to Katzav by former Knesset member Abel Wahab, an Israeli Arab, and which had the support of Palestinian authority President Yasser Arafat and the Egyptian government. The peace process would have opened a new chapter by arranging a cease-fire between Israel and the Palestinians. Israeli President Katzav was surprised not only by the fact that Sharon vetoed the idea and called it a dangerous initiative, but also by the harsh way Sharon made the decision without even consulting the President.

This is not the first feeler that Sharon and his war mongers have quashed, and Israeli institutions from the centre, left and, now, even from within the Likud itself, are beginning to turn on the Prime Minister, who is reportedly created

the worst economic situation in 50 years as has been reflected in Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz. While overtly blocking peace initiative Sharon's government has secretly invested billions of dollars into the war effort to stall the Oslo accord and million more into the illegal right wing settlements in the occupied territories. Since the announcement in November 2001 by US Secretary of State Colin Powell about the co-existence of the State of Israel and Palestinian State in peace, every obstacle to peace negotiation has come from Sharon. On 4 December 2001 Ariel Sharon at a cabinet meeting provocatively declared the Palestinian authority a terrorist-supporting entity which evoked sharp reaction from within the coalition government as Labour Party Cabinet Ministers walked out of the meeting. For all practical purpose the voice of Shimon Peres, Foreign Minister in the coalition government of Ariel Sharon, who is a liberal politician, has been shut. It has been increasingly clear that Sharon is bent upon to destroy Yasser Arafat. Sharon's recent call to European nations and the United States to cut off relations with Yasser Arafat was, however, rebuffed. The present Israeli action in the Palestinian areas confining Yasser Arafat to one room without electricity and water is tantamount to barbarity.

According to Economist of 6 October, 2001 America's support

has been one sided and excessive. America has succoured Israel financially, armed it to the hilt, encouraged its expansion and turned a blind eye to the pleas of its downtrodden victims especially the Palestinians. President Bush met with Ariel Sharon, the Prime Minister of Israel, on three occasions while he ignored Yasser Arafat since becoming President. This provides practically green signal to Ariel Sharon to do whatever he thinks fit to fulfil his mission to keep Palestinians under his subjugation. Sharon's ability to get away with murder under the label of 'anti-terrorism' must be brought to an end by the international community.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain is a former diplomat.



Israeli soldiers in occupied Bethlehem

PHOTO: AFP

# Kofi Annan's good advice

JIM HOAGLAND

IT would take an optimist to think that we have hit rock bottom in the Middle East, the normally cool and unruffled Kofi Annan said with exasperation after a long round of telephone calls to Washington and other world capitals on Monday. And the U.N. secretary general is right -- as far as he goes.

Even bloodier days lie ahead unless Palestinians and Israelis can seize the slim remaining chance for a cease-fire, a pullback of Israeli troops and meaningful political talks. That is the package Annan has tirelessly and fruitlessly promoted to Arabs, Israelis, Americans and Europeans since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon launched the re-invasion of the West Bank last Friday.

The immediate conflict and the

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forces that have produced it are destabilizing the region's archaic political and economic structures and threaten to sweep them away. Such turmoil is anathema to Annan, a man of peace by profession and temperament.

But a broader war that could

force Arab political leaders into making painful choices about their own stunted societies, Iraq's enduring criminality and the sickening commercialization and glorification of Palestinian suicide bombers is not the worst outcome available. The fire next time threatens to become the only way out of the current untenable predicament for the United States and the nations that support its war on global terrorism.

"Both sides must understand that there can be no security without peace and no peace without security," Annan told me. Earlier in the day, diplomats said, he had urged the Bush administration to broaden Gen. Anthony Zinni's modest mediation effort to include discussion of "a political horizon" as well as the immediate cease-fire that Sharon demands.

Even more dramatic action is needed now. Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who has taken on a leadership role on peace with Israel, should issue a sharp condemnation of suicide bombing and call for Palestinians to cease taking their own lives by this barbaric practice immediately. Saudi Arabia's financial, political and religious muscle gives that appeal its best chance of success.

In return, the Bush administration would have to squeeze Sharon into a pledge to Abdullah to put the dismantling of isolated and intrusive Israeli settlements in Gaza and the West Bank on the negotiating table. That quid pro quo would establish a new dynamic for ending the current round of atrocities.

It is a long shot for many reasons. But unless the Bush administration puts all its weight behind that or some similar effort, Washington will be left with military force and homeland security as its only readily available tools to deal with

the spreading rage against the U.S. government and "friendly" Arab leaders that the Sharon offensive is fueling.

Military force does not produce perfect solutions to political problems. The aftermath of the Gulf War underlines that reality: Saddam Hussein was left to accumulate weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and to bankroll Palestinian movements that send out naive young suicide bombers.

The current crisis shows that there can be no stabilization of the Middle East as long as a major Arab regime employs subversion and murder as its chief policy levers. Iraq dragged the Palestinians into its 1991 war to annex Kuwait. Now the Palestinians are dragging Iraq back into American bomb sights, by making this version of the Arab-Israeli struggle one of state-supported terror vs. military force.

The conventional wisdom is that an escalating Palestinian-Israeli conflict will complicate and inhibit U.S. military action against Baghdad. That is a misreading of history and of this White House. Establishing fear and respect among those who would indiscriminately harm Americans -- for whatever cause -- is and must remain a fundamental part of the Bush war on global terrorism.

The broader war option exists as a calculated choice to at least temporarily contain mass murderers. To get a glimpse of the thinking behind this option, seek out the Pentagon's Internet Web site, www.defenselink.mil, and read Defense Secretary Don Rumsfeld's remarks at his April 1 news conference. Extending the war into Iraq and perhaps elsewhere to enforce President Bush's pledge to punish those who are "with" terrorism is clearly an idea that is on Rumsfeld's screen.

Annan ended his speech to the Arab summit in Beirut a week ago by asking the Arab leaders "to take steps within your own societies to confront the menace of extremism, hatred and intolerance, and to ensure that they find no place in your school curricula, or in the minds of your young people."

Brave words. Good advice. And a prophetic warning from a man working hard to prevent the fire of war from spreading to scorch the entire region.

Courtesy: The Washington Post

## JAPAN

# World Cup ignites Hokkaido's soccer boom

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

IN 1981 Japan's northernmost island prefecture Hokkaido had only 831 registered football teams with a total number of registered players of 20,750. Ten years later, when Japan's professional J-League football was launched, the number of registered football teams at the prefecture jumped to 1,333 with a total number of 37,000 registered players. A decade later as the World Cup 2002 draws nearer; Hokkaido had seen a further surge of both team numbers as well as registered players, which in 2001 stood at 1,757 and 46,646 respectively. This enthusiasm surrounding football is mostly attributed to the preparation for co-hosting in Japan the World Cup 2002 with South Korea. Hokkaido's main city Sapporo has been chosen as one of the ten Japanese venues where games will be played during the month long competition that kicks off about two months from now.

Among the Japanese venues for the FIFA World Cup, only Sapporo has hosted the Olympics. Other international events that the city hosted include 1st and 2nd Asian Winter Games and the Winter Universiade. Successful organization of such large scale sporting events in the past boosted confidence of the officials of Sapporo branch of the Japan Organizing Committee for the 2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan (JAWOC), and they are hopeful that the three matches that are going to take place in Sapporo in June, including the first round encounter between England and Argentina, are going to be smooth sailings. Moreover, the city has a total number of 214 hotels and inns with the capacity accommodation for 43,512 persons, enough to provide accommodation facilities to expected visitors from overseas and other places of Japan during World Cup games. The New Chitose Airport, situated at less than an hour's traveling distance from Sapporo city center by bus or commuter train, handles direct flights from Seoul, as well as from China, America and Europe the main destinations where from most of the overseas spectators and supporters are expected to arrive during the World Cup games.

For the World Cup 2002 Sapporo has also built a brand new stadium with state of the art high-tech facilities. 'Sapporo Dome', which in Japanese has been nicknamed as 'Hiroba', meaning an open space, was completed in June 2001. 'Hiroba', situated at the outskirts of Sapporo, is a dual arena comprising of one closed indoor sporting arena

and one hovering outdoor soccer stage. The stadium is fitted with world's first air hovering mobile system that can take the whole outdoor field inside the covered stadium.

The natural-turf football field prepared in the open arena can be moved inside the all-weather closed arena, making it possible to provide the best field conditions to players throughout the year. The Dome has a moving wall that gives a huge 90-meter wide opening, through which the hovering soccer stage is moved between the two arenas. The gigantic natural-turf soccer stage, measuring 120 meter by 85 meter and weighing 8,300 ton, slowly moves into the closed arena through the opened moving wall at a speed of 4 meters per minute by 34 wheels, hovering 7.5 cm by air pressure. As the Hovering Soccer Stage starts to move, the bank of revolving soccer seats also begin moving in parallel with the soccer stage. After the stage arrives inside the closed arena, it rotates 90 degrees along with the revolving seats making the stadium perfectly fitted for soccer games.

Sapporo Dome has a fixed seating capacity of 42,831, which can be extended up to 53,845 seats. Twenty-four art works by Japanese and foreign artists are displayed at the site of Sapporo Dome. It has already become a popular tourist spot and groups of tourists regularly come to see this combination of artistic beauty and technological excellence paying extra money.

Sapporo city municipal government has built this new stadium with a total cost of 53.7 billion yen, of which 73 percent constitute loans taken by the city. As only three World Cup games are to be played in Sapporo, the construction of the new stadium was initiated with the idea of using the venue for different sporting events. Consadole Sapporo, Hokkaido's only football team playing in Japan's J-League premiere division, has been given franchise of the stadium for football. The team is already using the stadium as its home ground. With a growing number of football fans throughout Hokkaido, both Consadole Sapporo and the Sapporo Dome Company Ltd., the private sector company in charge of operation and management of the stadium, are hoping that the Dome would continue to attract spectators long after the World Cup 2002 is over, making it easier for the city administration to pay back the huge amount of debt incurred for its construction.

## CHINA

# Chinese lifestyle goes Western

C. RAJA MOHAN

BEIJING, MARCH 31. Who says Communist-led cities have to be dull? Go, take a walk on Sanlitun in Central Beijing on weekend nights. Sanlitun radiates the youthful vigour of the new Beijing. Littered with an unending row of bars and pubs, Sanlitun draws in hordes of upwardly mobile Chinese youth and the Western expatriates in a resounding endorsement of China's drive to globalise. At the Poacher's, one of the many bars with British sounding names, there is no standing room. If you manage to take a step through the door into the bar, a blast of secondary smoke hits you. But no one is complaining; for the music, drinks and clean fun are too good to miss.

If you are too old to stand all night at the Poacher's, there are any number of other picks that offer Chinese singers doling out Western music from the 1960s and 1970s. And there are Jazz bars too! Unlike the major metros of India, where Western executives complain of the lack of places offering normal fun, Beijing and other cities in China appear more integrated with the Western and now international lifestyle.

What about the morning after Sanlitun? You join the hordes of Chinese and foreign tourists in the

national pastime of shopping. When you enter Xiujie Lu or the Silk Alley, be prepared for a touch of claustrophobia.

The nearly mile-long Silk Alley is less than 10 feet wide, with shops and aggressive saleswomen pushing every possible garment from clothing for infants to mackintoshes for men. Every designer label you know of is at prices that make you swoon. It is nearly impossible to stand still in the middle or move across to the other side; for the stream of customers can just push you down. Bargaining is an art in the Silk Alley and hordes of other shopping areas in Beijing. One good rule of the thumb, resident Indians here say, is to start by offering to pay one-fifth of the salesgirl's first quote. But that is just the beginning an initial throwaway line.

The real bargaining begins when you start walking away from the shop, and are called back. And communication is no real problem. Most salesgirls do speak a smattering of English; but since when has language come in between those who want to buy and sell?

Before they are satisfied, the buyer and seller must go through the full charade of quoting the "best price" the two sides have to offer many times over. In the end, the smart customer gets products at unbelievably low prices and the salesgirl is happy, if unconsciously demonstrating China's current

incredible dominance in manufacturing reasonable quality goods at low cost.

The Chinese Government has once again shown its ability to take quick decisions. The very day the first direct flight from New Delhi landed here, Beijing announced that India would now be among the list of preferred destinations for Chinese tourists.

That should let tour operators in China bring large numbers of newly prosperous Chinese to India. Chinese tourists and Indian shoppers might indeed from a new bridge between the two societies.

In his meeting with the External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, the Chinese Premier, Zhu Rongji, talked about promoting "comprehensive understanding" between the two societies. Tourism is certainly one way of doing it. But New Delhi and Beijing should look beyond shopping expeditions and tourist flights to encouraging systematic studies of the other society.

Here India is way behind China. As the subcontinent's profile rises on China's radar screen, Beijing has set up two new South Asia Study Centres one in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province that lies so close to eastern India and another in Beijing under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. India needs to get its own academic act on China together.

It is also time to think of setting up an India-China foundation with resources from the Government and the private sector to promote Chinese studies in India and encourage young Indian scholars to spend quality time in China.