

War on Iraq a no-win option

Backlash may defy comprehension

RESIDENT Saddam Hussein may have had a use of prevarications to put a balm on his humiliations but there is little doubt in any one's mind that he finds himself inexorably on a climb-down course insofar as the UN arms inspection dynamics in his country go. Under tremendous international pressure as he is, Saddam has no option but to acquiesce in a full implementation of the UNSC resolution for onsite investigations into his status on possession of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

The latest news on the subject sounds rather ominous, though. Iraq having made a 12,000-page declaration of arsenals, as warranted by the tough November 8 UNSC resolution, the US has accused Baghdad of withholding information about its caches of illegal weapons. Thus Saddam being 'in material breach' of UN Security Council resolutions, the US is said to have moved 'a step closer to war against Iraq.' Yes, UN inspectors have themselves spoken of material omissions but what we would like to emphasise here is: why not investigate whatever arsenal disclosures Saddam Hussein has made to determine the actual degree of his concealment. The oversized document 'designed to confuse' need not be taken at the face value; the UN mandate for investigation is absolute and must be fully made use of. The services of Iraqi scientists should be available in pursuance of the UNSC resolution to reveal full facts about Iraq's alleged stocking of illegal weapons.

Under a question-mark are left to be Iraq's activities since the UN inspectors had left Baghdad in December 1998. But a new set of UN inspectors is in place with the toughest UN resolution conceivable. Should that not make any difference now? Blix, the executive director of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, has indeed spoken of some missing data. But in the same breath he has also challenged governments like the United States 'to give him evidence to disprove Iraq's contention it no longer had any weapons of mass destruction.' If disarming Iraq is all that is aimed at, the existing level of international commitment to the agenda should be the best guarantee for attaining that objective.

Yet, the US seems hell-bent on waging a war on Baghdad. War, for sure, will create problems and unleash dangerous new forces that the existing fragile global order will be hard-put to contain. In specific terms, it will exacerbate the already declining trust between the West, the US in particular, and the Muslim world. It will raise such a psychological barrier between them that the balance between religions and cultures may be irreparably upset. An opinion like this from Bangladesh may not be trifled with, because essentially it echoes the mainstream thinking on the subject in the world today.

Back to square-one at JS premises?

Find other sites for residences of Speaker and Deputy Speaker

HAVING new houses for the Speaker and Deputy Speaker cannot be a national priority but running the parliament is. Apparently, the order of priorities seems blurred here. Strangely enough, the issue, which can by no means be a national priority, has been taken up with an uncharacteristic urge to work with great speed and energy by the departments concerned.

The news that the construction work of the two houses -- that will be allotted to the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad as their official residences -- has begun, may not appear to carry, superficially speaking, any special meaning. A closer look into the matter will, however, reveal a lot many things that may cause great discomfort to the people caring for the environment laws.

The houses are being built on the premises of the JS, which is one of the very few places in the city which is still unaffected by our version of urban expansion. The entire area has been developed according to a design authored by world famous architect Louis Kahn, and nothing would perhaps be more inappropriate than adding some concrete structures to it. This will surely spoil the beauty and serenity of the location. Though the construction work of the project was stopped on November 29, following press reports giving an account of the environmental problems associated with it, the bureaucrats and contractors have managed to get it going again.

But we strongly feel that the environmental and legal aspects of the issue should not get buried under the weight of bureaucratic thinking or the wishes of any individual. Unfortunately, numerous examples can be cited to prove that in this society collective interests do not always take precedence over the priorities of individuals. The city has almost been denuded of its greenery, as gardens and parks often become the targets of "development" plans. We would also like to point out that there is a law, which prohibits filling up of water-bodies and destruction of green patches for the purpose of raising concrete structures.

The government should act before it is too late, and stop the construction work immediately. The onus of proving that their commitment to the environment is a real one now rests with the decision-makers.

Fundamentalism and terrorism

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

OF late some words have gained universal currency far more than the originators of the "terms" had possibly thought of when these were being coined. The term "fundamentalism" is readily understood and, perhaps, as easily connected by many people with a particular faith despite the fallacy and inequity of such connection between the term and the faith. Thanks to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaida which has spawned multiple groups using religious differentiation from the majority population in any given country, the term "terrorism" is also used exhaustively every day. Carnage of nine-eleven epitomising the quintessence of terrorism has turned into insignificance many past and current terrorist acts, and has given birth to both bilateral and multilateral doctoring and resolution to eliminate this menace. That terrorism in all its forms and its practitioners should be totally eliminated is not debated even by schizophrenics as every one, either directly or indirectly, has been adversely affected by terrorist acts wherever these were committed.

Fundamentalism, conservative movement among the Protestants based its absolute belief in: (a) infallibility of the Bible; (b) virgin birth and divinity of Jesus Christ; (c) sacrifice by Jesus Christ on the cross to atone for the sins of mankind and (d) physical resurrection and the second coming of the Jesus Christ. Fundamentalists strongly objected to the historical-literary study of the Bible; attempts to reconcile traditional Christian belief and doctrine with contemporary; and acceptance of the scientific view of the world, in

particular the theory of evolution. The Fundamentalist movement began to flourish in early twentieth century but gradually lost ground with increasing number of people's acceptance of modern scientific theories and liberal religious doctrines. Some US states passed legislation forbidding the teaching of the Theory of Evolution in the school which in 1968 was declared by the US Supreme Court as unconstitutional. Religious fundamentalism invariably has been intolerant not only of other faiths but also of "deviants" of its own creed. Spanish inquisition, like Robespierre's Reign of Terror would always be known for its notoriety. Apologists for Robespierre would say that Louis the XVI and Marie Antoinette had to be guillotined as the Marxists would claim Czar Nicholas and his entire family had to perish to secure the "rights" of the common people; in case of inquisition (which included burning at stake) it is not always easy to comprehend why in the name of divinity inquisitors had to resort to inhuman treatment of human beings.

Reference to Christian fundamentalism is only to stress the point that the Muslim world till recently was not fully acquainted with this doctrine. John Esposito of Georgetown University felt that the use of the term "fundamentalism" originating in Christianity can be misleading when used to describe Islam or Muslim countries. He would rather describe the "extremist" movement in Islam as its resurgence which in some measure the Western powers bear responsibility (e.g. US support for Iran's Reza Shah Pahlvi and its pro-Israel policy) for.

British Foreign Secretary Jack

Straw in his Lord Mayor's lecture (13.11.02) referring to religious fundamentalism said, "It is patently clear that many people in the Muslim world feel that Western values and secularism threaten their faith and their way of life. One of the most important challenges today is to overcome this mistrust and promote the idea that our values are not inimical to any nation or religion." On another occasion Jack Straw observed that alongside Islamic fundamentalism, the West must recognise the existence of Christian and Jewish fundamentalism and of Sikh fundamentalists who seized the Golden Temple of Amritsar and Hindu fundamentalists who demolished the Babri mosque. One of his deputies, Denis McShane felt that the inclusion of Turkey in the EU (accession negotiation will start in 2004) would allow Europe to build bridges east to the Muslim world and that major nations of EU should be encouraged to bring European Muslims into mainstream politics. It is not easily understood why the Washington Institute, a US based think-tank, had to be reassured by a former US ambassador to Turkey that the resounding victory of AK Party in the recent elections was not an "Islamist" victory as the party was not regarded by the Turks as Islamist and that its leader Recep Erdogan (who cannot become prime minister without constitutional change) was not a Muslim fundamentalist. But the possibility of almost certain victory of Ariel Sharon and his deputy Benjamin Netanyahu does not get equally critical analysis in the West. Arrogance and belief in infallibility in one's belief breeds unbalance and is a kind of fundamentalism. One is,

however, reassured by Tony Blair's promise to reach out to the Arabs and Muslim world and of the need for the only viable solution in the Middle East -- an Israeli state recognised by all and a viable Palestinian state.

Because of the horrific events of nine-eleven caused by Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaida, in the unformed minds the term "terrorism" has become synonymous with Islam. Terrorism has been amply defined in various UNSC resolutions particularly resolution 1373 (2001). In simplistic language terrorism, use of violence or threat of violence, to create a climate of fear in a given population can be traced back to 1st century when the Zealots, a Jewish religious sect, fought against the Roman occupation. In the 12th century Iran the Assassins acquired notoriety. In the Middle East Stern gang and Irgun, Jewish extremists carried out a campaign of terror against the British in the late 1940s. Unfortunately the Israelis who had been victims of one of the worst genocides in world history are resorting to similar terrorism against unarmed Palestinians, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (on 23rd September 2002) regretting Israeli excesses said: "A policy based on forcing the other side to capitulate is a bankrupt policy... The so-called sequential approach which insists on full security as a precondition for progress on the political, humanitarian and institutional front has clearly failed. Israel needs to understand that there will be no lasting security without a political settlement."

In Europe in the backdrop of rapid and traumatic transition from autocracy to democracy extremist groups inspired by Marxist and Maoist

teachings were born. Examples were the Baader-Minhoff gang in West Germany (co-conspirator in the murder of Israeli athletes in Munich Olympic and hijacking of an Air France plane to Entebbe) and of Red Brigade whose most infamous act was the kidnapping and murder of former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro. In the US in early 20th century labour leader William Dudley openly advocated a philosophy of revolutionary violence and destruction of governmental power. US involvement in the Vietnam War prompted violence in several university campuses. For about ten years Harvard educated Theodore Kaczynski also known as Unabomber continued his campaign of terror till he was apprehended in 1996. Terrorist acts of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, members of "Patriot Movement" advocating resistance to national laws and political institutions, are of recent memory.

In the Muslim world both Islamic fundamentalism and political Islam, erroneously considered synonymous, have filled the vacuum created by the end of the Cold War. Islamic fundamentalism encapsulates the emotional, spiritual and political response of the Muslims resultant of the fear of wholesale "Westernisation" of Islamic culture. Political Islam is associated with the goal and related political programme aimed at establishing worldwide Islamic order (*Islamic Fundamentalism and Political Islam* -- Anoushiravan Ehtesami, University of Durham, 1997). Contrary to common Western belief, he argues, Muslim world can be broadly divided into: (a) traditional monarchical Muslim states, (b) modern Muslim

states, (c) revolutionary Muslim states, and (d) secular Muslim states. Diversity in economic standard among the Muslim states is no less significant. Therefore, rise of Islamic fundamentalism could have been due to the Middle East crisis, a clash of civilisations between Dar-ul-Islam and Judaeo-Christian civilisation and also a conflict about the "humanist" agenda favoured by the West but resisted by a section of Muslims who find it difficult to accept the idea that in state-society relationship sovereignty lies with the people and not with Allah. Added to it is the resistance to trans-culturalisation -- the Coca Cola cultural syndrome.

In the ultimate analysis one has to accept that there will always be differences but that the important thing, as British FCO Minister Mike O'Brien suggested (on 21-11-02 Militant Islam in Asia), is to enter into an open dialogue based on equality and respect for differences. While the West would not like to tell the Muslims how to run their affairs nor impose upon them Western values, it would urge promotion of democracy and good governance. As opposed to the United States, Europe appears to be more understanding of the Islamic world perhaps, because Europe had centuries old interactions -- political, economic and cultural; and colonial ties and now has within its fold millions of Muslims. Without trying to diminish the terrorist threat intensity the US would be well-advised to be deferential to European counsel which would moderate the views and action of the hawkish elements in the Bush administration.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a retired secretary to Bangladesh government and former ambassador.

The dream connection

FERDAUS AHMAD QUARISHI

OPENING of the air link between Chittagong and Chiang Mai is perhaps a little more than mere aviation. That the Thai Prime Minister came up to the Chittagong Airport to escort our Prime Minister to his country is not only a unique gesture of hospitality, but also an indication of the mindset of the present Thai leadership. This may certainly lead many to think that at least Bangladesh may have arrived at the threshold of having developed a genuine friendly relation with a close neighbour.

Chiang Mai is the home constituency of Mr Thaksin. But that may not be the only reason for choosing this city for the grand rendezvous. Apart from being the second largest Thai city, Chiang Mai is situated at the northernmost region of the country, nearer to Bangladesh. On the other hand Chittagong is also the second largest city of Bangladesh situated at her southern region nearer to Thailand. There could not be a better choice.

One may consider this to be the most spectacular achievement of the present government so far. It has been reported that the spirit behind this move is Prime Minister Thaksin himself. But that his counterpart has been able to seize the opening with equal enthusiasm must also be reckoned and admired. The two Chittagonians -- Foreign Minister M. M. Khandaker and the young and energetic Commerce Minister Amir Khoshru Mahmood Chowdhury have been noticeably keen in this matter from the beginning. Is it because this gives their home city a better edge? May be. But the ultimate winner is certainly the nation at large, if we comprehend the wider dimension and ramifications of this aerial hop and cultivate the potentials.

In a welcome coincidence the three-day visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister to Thailand has been followed by another historic event. We have had the Prime Minister of Myanmar paying us a two-day visit with a large delegation. This was the first high profile visit from the present Myanmar leadership to Bangladesh. A number of bilateral agreements, including one on road link have been signed.

My enthusiasm, however, is not on the strength of such immediate economic gains, although it is no less important. I am looking to this incident as a move towards a direction that we should have started long ago, from the very first days of our existence as a new nation. To 'look to the East'.

This slogan is nothing new. Not that our leaders never used it before. But perhaps we never really believed in it and there was never any serious move towards closing the gaps with our southern neighbours. Our obsession with the West was, and still is, so strong that we can not think of our existence without it.

Looking for a 'Geo-Political Code'

Since our independence our leaders could never come to any consensus on the common issues that a Nation-State must address squarely for its continued existence an advancement. So the basic tenets of our geopolitical code remains still largely undefined. We are witnessing change of guards at periodic intervals that brings U-turn in almost all spheres of our national life. The entire population has been polarised into two divergent political segments through the intense politicking of the two major parties and their allies. National interest is sidetracked by political exigencies and thereby hardly leaving any room for consensus. No Nation can move forward in such a situation. It is high time that we move a bit away from such divisive and counterproductive mutual attrition at our political apex and arrive at a consensus at least on major national goals.

Bangladesh attracted sympathy of the world community during her inception. That was necessary and also quite natural. War ravaged Europe required Marshal Plan to get itself back to track. But this could not be a permanent feature. Projecting ourselves as "poor and underdeveloped" in order to attract sympathy and assistance from the rich and advanced countries appears to have gone deep into our political psyche. So deep that not only in the economic matters, we look for external assistance in almost every sphere, be it technology, culture or intellectual pursuit. Even in sports!

Can we come out of this *Westophilia* for a while and look straight to ourselves, to our own geopolitical reality? Can we pause a little and make an assessment of our own strength and weakness and try to work out a logical work plan for our future, based on our own assets (and liabilities), both on medium and long term?

Textbooks on Political Geography defines *geo-political code* as the 'set of strategic assumptions that a government makes about other states in forming its foreign policy'. It involves 'evaluation of places beyond the State's boundaries in terms of their strategic importance

or, potential threats'. It is largely based on the 'image-plans' of a country, a particular State's world view. This is bound to be highly biased, even ethnocentric, which is understandable. Every country, however small, must have its geopolitical code, formulated at different levels -- local, regional and global. It is high time that we have our own and make it the permanent core of our national policy, irrespective of the composition of the government.

Let this be only a beginning

The air link between Chittagong and Chiang Mai will certainly add a new dimension to our communication with Thailand. But let this be only symbolic of a new beginning. The natural follow up to this exercise should be development of land routes, both rail and road, along the same line.

Over the last one decade I have tried to focus on the importance of proper routing of the Asian Highway and the Trans Asian Railway, urging our concerned leadership to look into the matter seriously in order to safeguard our national interest. (e.g. 'On Routes: Tracking the Asian Highway' and 'Nodal Primacy of Bangladesh', Holiday, 24 January and 31 January, '97; 'Asian Highway: Bhurajnoitik Bastobota obong Bangladesh Shartho', The Daily Dinkal, 13 November, '98; 'Asian Highway evong Trans Asian Railway: Route nirdharonev Bhurajnoitik Chalbaji', The Daily Ittefaq, 14 July, '99; etc). It is needless to repeat those arguments here.

A highway and a railway connecting South Asia and South East Asia will certainly change the socio-economic and geo-political scenario of the two region in a dramatic way. From any logical point of view that should go through the south of Bangladesh via the Chittagong-Teknaf-Sittwe (Akyab)-Thaton-Chiang Mai-Bangkok and then down to KL-Singapore convergence.



But, ESCAP has been pressing hard from the beginning to build the Asian Highway and the Trans Asian Railway proposing a route that would enter Bangladesh from a point in West Bengal and go through Sylhet -- Tamabeel towards the Indian border town of Moreh in Manipur and then to the Myanmar border town of Kalewa on the other side. There after it will go all the way down the highlands of Myanmar to Thaton west of Yangon and enter Thailand through Mayawadi covering an additional distance of more than 1000 miles.

Evidently, this route suggested by ESCAP, if implemented, shall deprive Bangladesh from having direct access to the South East. This will make Moreh in Manipur the route focus between the South and South East Asia, depriving Teknaf, the natural candidate for the same. This will be an irreversible system distortion making Bangladesh a mere corridor for transit and transshipment. Her geopolitical nodality in the regional setting shall be damaged for all time to come.

However, necessity of communication links between the north eastern region of India and the South East Asia, or South China should not be ignored either. That is

also an absolute necessity in order to remove the present geographical isolation of that region. That purpose may be served by extending the local and regional road and rail networks in that area. The existing rail and road link between this region and other parts of India through Silguri may easily be extended into Myanmar and China, which may be an alternative route connecting the North East of India with the South East, without involving Bangladesh.

In reality already there has been a significant development towards that end. At a meeting of the foreign ministers of the three countries, India, Myanmar and Thailand held in Yangon on April 7, early this year, agreement had already been reached to develop a 1600 km road over Myanmar linking Moreh of India and Mae Sot of Thailand. As a part of that Thailand has agreed to provide a low-interest long term loan towards construction of a 238 km stretch of the road in eastern Myanmar. On the other hand the road link between Moreh and Kalewa has already been developed, funded by India.

Ironically, it was during the last BNP government that ESCAP officials obtained some sort of green signal from Bangladesh government for their suggested route through Sylhet-Manipur. It appears, our policy makers have of late opened their eyes and at least some of them appear to be serious about mending the damage that has already been done by the negligence or incompetence of their predecessors.

Bangladesh as a part of South East Asia

For Bangladesh it is now time that she really looks to the East. Nay, the slogan should now be re-coined: "MOVE TO THE EAST". This, however, does not preclude her being a part of the South Asia, at the same time. The very location of Bangladesh made her a shatterbelt between the three great land masses, the South Asia subcontinent, the South East Asia and China and she had been the demographic melting pot for streams of different ethnic traits coming from all sides for several millennium. But this unique location gives her also the advantage of being the tri-junction of the three landmass mentioned above.

Over last two thousand years Bangladesh has been somewhat or other closely linked with South Asia subcontinent, most of the time through external invasion and imperial or colonial domination. But, looking to her geo-political reality and the ethno-demographic setting one may wonder whether she is more a part of South East Asia.

Historical heritage in trade links and demographic exchanges with her southern neighbours starting from Myanmar to Thailand (Syam) to Malay to Singapore up to Indonesia and beyond, is well recorded. Bengal has always been the link between the South Asia and The South East Asia especially during the golden age of Buddhism, after it was almost exterminated from the mainland India, Bangladesh or the erstwhile Bengal was the Mecca of world Buddhism for almost 1000 years.

We have so far ignored this gold mine of our national heritage. A closer and fraternal relation with Myanmar and Thailand, the two awowedly Buddhist countries, may help salvage that treasure. And this will automatically restore our lost links further South, especially with Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the pacific rim countries.

Protagonists of the Sylhet-Manipur route for the Asian Highway used to tell us that building road connection via Teknaf is not possible because of, what they maintained, the inaccessible mountain range standing on its way. We were also told that Myanmar was not interested in this route.

Belying all those assertions Myanmar has already developed the road link between Yangon and Sittwe (Akyab) and is said to be looking for funds upgrade it. If the tangle over the Asian Highway is not resolved immediately Bangladesh should stand by Myanmar in this regard with all her available resources. Building a bridge over the river Naaf should get precedence over any other similar project inside the country.

The dream connection

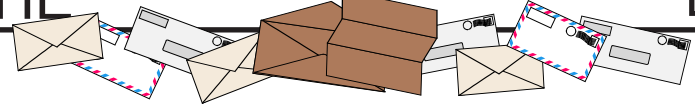
Our communication Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda has recently mooted a proposition to build a super-fast railway track between Dhaka and Chittagong. Super-fast railway links in Japan, Europe and US, with trains running at speeds from 120km/hr to 300 km/hr, have connected far away cities forming a sort of urban conglomerates, allowing people to reach from one end to the other in hours. Mr. Huda may study those city systems and extend his vision beyond Chittagong.

A direct drive from Bangladesh to Singapore, through Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia is no more a Dream Connection. A super-fast train with a modest speed of 150km may cover the distance between Dhaka and Singapore in a day. That should be enough. And achievable.

It may take decades. Let us move towards that.

F.A. Quarishi is a columnist

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

"Death penalty"

This letter is in response to Yahya (December 19) on "Death penalty". Let me first assert that I am one hundred percent pro-death penalty through some state-sponsored judicial process be it the electric chair, death by lethal injection or hung until death.

Imagine a hypothetical scenario where a person has intense animosity towards another human being. This animosity is so strong that the first individual contemplates murder. If this potential murderer knows that he/she will spend about ten or so years in prison (bail in life imprisonment not uncommon), then what is stopping this person from going through with the crime?

The fear of ending one's own life can be the biggest deterrent in

ending some other. The 'medieval tradition of "an-eye-for-an-eye" do work. Murderers end their moral standing in society the second they wilfully end another person's life. Morality and murder are mutually exclusive and so should be morality and death penalty. This form of punishment is not any more cruel than the original premeditated crime and so, should be continued with due caution in Bangladesh.

AA, California, USA

Isn't it fitting to put to death a blatant freak like John Allen Muhammad, the sniper who travelled a few thousand miles to the proximity of Washington DC and systematically finished off in cold-blood quite a few peaceful men and women whom he even didn't know? Spell out Mr

Yaha, what punishment should fit this maniac? Virginia state officials are rightly seeking Death Penalty for this monster.

Death penalty has been prescribed in the Holy Qur'an for some specific crimes including murder and it can be found in the Bible too. So what right do we have to abolish death penalty?

Zamal Abuhena, Ohio, USA

What do we accomplish by sentencing someone to death? We accomplish justice. Justice means equal, equivalent, and fitting. If someone kills an innocent person, what is more equal than killing him in the same way? If we say that it is wrong for the government to kill him, we are saying it is wrong to be equal and just. Thus we can see that those

who clamour against the death penalty are clamouring against justice.

Are you willing to pay for the murderers in prison? I am not. I would rather like to see my tax money going to the poor children.

By the way, on another letter "Screaming for rights" (Dec. 14) Mr Yaha wrote, "Only the Judiciary should have the prerogative to determine whether society can condemn someone to death or not."

Rousseau, New York, USA

Who will save the Iraqi people?

Mr Elahi seems to be totally convinced that it is only the Americans who can save Iraq (December 19). He even used Afghanistan as an

example. Example of what, success or failure? Remember what happened after Soviet was defeated? The good old America just dumped the Afghans! As for success, there still remains many warlords in Afghanistan and the Opium business is still going smooth!

What strikes me however; why is it now that Saddam is as bad as Hitler? Mr Elahi wrote Saddam used WMD against his own people, killing 5,000 Kurds. If killing the Kurds is a crime now, then surely it was a crime when it actually happened! But America didn't bomb Saddam back then. In fact they stood 'shoulder to shoulder' with Saddam and financed him! Why? Let me guess; is it because Saddam was America's "ally" back then? The same thing happened with Mr Musharraf. When he took power in a coup,

Britain and America were making "noise", saying they can't do business with a dictator. They also imposed sanction against Pakistan when it tested its Nukes. But as soon as Musharraf let them use Pakistan in the war against Taliban, suddenly Musharraf became the good guy. Remember Mr Putin? Well, when he took over, again London and Washington protested, saying they can't do business with a spy. Mr Putin was a KGB spy and so he was a criminal according to those "good guys"! But Mr Elahi, look what's happening now.

And finally, who do you think trained, armed and financed Mr Bin Laden? It seems to me that you can commit any crime and even get paid for it - as Israel does - as long as you are the "ally"! America has recently agreed (The Guardian, 10th Dec) to

sell weapons to Algeria (a poor country with unstable government) to fight Islamic terrorists. How does America know that these weapons are only going to be used to kill the bad guys? America is now giving aid to Pakistan and at the same time American Boeing and British BAE are selling Fighter Jets to India, making billions. You see Mr Elahi, supplying weapons to "both" sides is the biggest export business of our beloved Uncle Sam! If killing 5 thousand Kurds is bad (which it is), what about two hundred thousand Japanese, who were incinerated by -not one- but two disgusting American Nukes?

Azad Miah Oldham, U.K

This is in response to Mr Mahmood

Elahi. It looks like Mr Elahi doesn't know fully what is happening around the world, especially in the Muslim world. Living in Canada (also in the US) people are spoon fed through media and even the President of USA. The statements made by Mr Elahi are exactly what the media are saying about Saddam. It is an excuse made for the American public to support the US warmongering. Everyone in the world except the US people know the real reasons for this hasty, irrational war on Iraq.

Does the American public know that Iraq's own people and its neighbours protest that Saddam is not threat to them?

Mohammed On e-mail