

## Bush must listen to world public opinion

Give weapons inspectors more time

**T**HE 'awful majesty' of global public opinion is now a felt reality. Its elusive dream status has evaporated for the first time in human history. Thanks to unprecedented anti-war rallies breaking into a crescendo across 600 cities in the world, peoples are united in their resolve to reject the warpath against Iraq.

The beating of war-drums by the USA often resorting to prevarication of a threat perception against an unequal must now drown in the thunder of the collective repudiation of the defeatist bellicose approach. The powerful demonstrations for peace cutting across cultures, religions and racial backgrounds have been a big gain to the new millennium by way of shaping its ethos, what if rather belatedly in the day.

The note of dissent delivered by a majority of UNSC members, the righteous concerns of the Arab world centring around the Palestine question, obsession with Iraq despite the defecive North Korean rejection of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and palming off of direct threats to the USA and the timely application of brake within the NATO have each played its role in bringing the peace option to the centre-stage of public discourse. In other words, it is crystallised world public opinion placing rule of law over 'might is right', in its widest possible manifestation, that has emerged triumphant. Such a robust expression of the people's anti-war sentiments has strengthened our faith in the humanity's unstoppable craving for peace to preserve what it has and build up on it.

Bush must now listen to world public opinion beginning with an open admission of the fact that anti-war demonstrations within his own country have been as intense as in other parts of the world. In spite of the powerful media resources, Bush has not had a sell-point with the public. At a time when the onus lay on the US and UK to justify their policy of forcing the pace against Saddam they have failed to make their point with convincing proofs.

However, Collin Powell's latest reiteration that war ought to be the 'last resort' perhaps signals a tapering of the desperation syndrome! British Prime Minister Tony Blair faces opposition within his own Labour Party on the war question, let alone the adverse British public opinion across the board. He, too, appears to be relenting before the force of reason.

Bush and Blair can only court isolation to their own peril -- they know it too well! Still, we urge them to come out of their cocoons and, by paying heed to world public opinion, give the UN inspectors more time to complete their job in Iraq. They are capable of doing it effectively. All they need is an enabling environment to clinch it. Abandoning the UN route will be simply suicidal.

## Arsenic in food chain

What is delaying a comprehensive mitigation strategy?

**E**STIMATES of Bangladeshis exposed to high levels of arsenic vary from a low of 28-35 million to a high of 77 million, more than half the country's population. The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes arsenic contamination of groundwater as "the largest mass poisoning of a population in history" and the World Bank, as "one of the world's primary environmental challenges". The development partners have pumped millions of dollars into different arsenic mitigation projects since dangerous levels of the poison were detected in deep tube well water in 1993. The government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have undertaken separate projects to raise awareness of arsenic contamination, mark out the affected tube wells, develop test kits and, to a limited scale, treat patients of arsenicosis. Still, a huge majority in the affected areas drinks the poisoned water. They have little choice.

While the mitigation efforts wobble along and the government struggles to come up with a comprehensive strategy, the arsenic crisis spreads its wings. Speakers at a recent international seminar have warned increased arsenic in soil and water may sneak into the food chain. What's more, naturally-occurring arsenic and arsenic-rich wastes, generated from a wide range of removal systems, which are often unsafe, pose a serious threat to public health. The speakers hit the nail on the head when they said although considerable work has been done on arsenic removal from contaminated groundwater and alternative water supply options, presence of arsenic in irrigation water has not received due attention.

Such a limited outlook on the arsenic crisis boils down to absence of a comprehensive national strategy. The government has to initiate more research on arsenic contamination, both direct and indirect. Alongside detection of arsenic-contaminated deep tube wells, development of test kits and filters and treatment of arsenicosis patients, it should sponsor research into the possibility of the silent killer sneaking into the food chain. In a paper, scheduled to appear this year in the Water Resources Research publication of the American Geophysical Union, the authors have concluded that replacing the most tainted wells with deeper wells will eliminate about 70 per cent of the illness, assuming arsenic levels remain low in the deep wells. However, the possibility of arsenic percolation into the food chain points to another scary aspect of the crisis. It's time the government shored up its arsenic combat strategy.

## Gulf-war II: Delayed or dropped?



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country layer by layer through Anglo-American bombardment that began in the Gulf War of 1991 and never actually ended. The bombardment of Iraq lasted longer than US war on Vietnam, indeed longer than combined duration of the two world wars. So much so that a UN mission in March 1991 described the allied bombing of Iraq as near 'apocalyptic' pushing a rather highly urbanised and mechanised society to pre-industrial age. Iraq suffered 145,000 dead in war and the subsequent sanctions were estimated to have killed more than half a million Iraqi children. These are apart from the

'arbiter' faces a host of difficulties to face up to these facts. More so, when the world opinion is hostile and there is a lack of consensus among the allies. But the US' other methods for a regime change also did not meet with any success. The US' officials own up at least seven coup attempts that they instigated to remove Saddam. The failure of these attempts convinced the Americans that nothing short of a full-scale invasion would work.

All of Iraq initially and much of it subsequently was declared a 'no-fly zone' deliberately not to allow the country to fly its own aircraft in flagrant violation of Iraq's

1997. The US designs ended in fiasco when Chalabi fled to Britain while many of his followers were killed in battle with Iraqi troops.

After having tried several such stratagems, it was not without reason that Americans finally opted for an all-out invasion of Iraq not knowing that they would face opposition to their gameplan from within the fraternity itself -- the transatlantic alliance. Although Iraq is accused of possessing WMD now after years of rigorous inspection it is no more a secret that Iraq was targeted for an invasion as back as in October 2001. As revealed by *International Herald Tribune*,

of South Iraq have all been repulsive to US' European friends. The NATO has broken its rank for the first time in last five decades over the question of providing air-defence to Turkey who as a member of the alliance invoked article 4 of NATO charter to be defended in the event of war breaking in its southern flank. France, Belgium and Germany, refused, in defiance of US' wish, to send air-defence contingent to Turkey. All permanent members of Security Council except the US and Britain are planning to block the latter's second resolution to authorise military action by counter-tabling resolution to give the

as the US' closest ally across the Atlantic. With the SPD coming to power under the aegis of Gerhard Schroeder it markedly distanced itself from the US in its policy particularly with regard to Middle East. During the recent visit to Berlin of Ronald Rumsfeld, Germany's leaders minced no words about their antipathetic stance. The American allies in the Middle East region who vacillated between refusing to support war against another Arab country and again sheepishly agreeing to provide their bases and facilities -- perhaps under intimidation or on delivery of handsome largesse -- had rather been easier to handle. But it has been found much more difficult to manage their key-allies in Europe. Before embarking on a major war against a third world country it is undoubtedly a damper.

These behind-the-scene developments might have caused delay in Bush's much-touted war of regime change in Iraq, but can they altogether stop the war from breaking out? No, unless some miracle takes place. Because the Americans are so intoxicated with the war hysteria that they would go for it bypassing the NATO and even United Nations... That the US means it is proved by the fact that US' patriot missiles have started arriving in Turkey even without a consensus in the NATO. In the meantime President Bush has started addressing the troops in their bases and the diplomats are asked to leave the region -- all pointing to the possibility of a looming war.

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A few days ago, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin warned that his nation would delay or might even veto efforts by the Bush administration to strong-arm the Security Council into a rushed war vote against Iraq. Germany, China and Russia backed France. The Americans expect their allies to be obedient and take orders from Washington. French initiative in adopting an alternative course to resolve Iraqi crisis appear to them downright insubordination. But eversince General De Gaulle Paris has refused to be a junior ally of the US and always tried to promote multilateralism.

Germany, Europe's largest country had once been the US' traditionally ally and in post-war years it was about to take Britain's place

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Large-scale illegal immigration cannot take place without corruption in India's dealings with neighbours. Take Bangladesh. Mr L.K. Advani claims it has become an ISI "hub" and "infiltrated" 15 million migrants into India. He wants to detect and deport them -- as in Coochbehar, where 213 "snake-charmers" were brutalised for six days.

An over-hecting US -- its monopolising and editing of Iraqi dossier, its pre-judgements, its failure to publish evidence to support its claim of 'violations' and 'secret weapons', its highhanded treatment of other council members, its pressurising of Hans Blix who was, in any case, doing the US' bidding and its continued bombing

our embassies' duty to protect these vulnerable people. We don't want them humiliated and deported. But we parade different positions on Bangladeshis.

Such double standards spring from arrogance. Many Indians imagine "we" -- not its people's struggles -- created Bangladesh.

It's also absurd to think that Dhaka encourages migration into India. Such allegations produce resentment against "Big Brother". Former Foreign Secretary Mukund Dubey warns that India's anti-immigrant rhetoric is widely seen as "an attempt" to "tarnish Bangladesh's image". Bangladeshis, says Mr Dubey, "are particularly resentful of the allegation that their country has become the hotbed of ISI activities" -- after liberating itself from Pakistan.

Like its Pakistan policy, India's Bangladesh policy is largely determined by domestic-political considerations: the BJP wants to whip up xenophobia and raise the communal temperature to electoral ends... The Vajpayee government must abandon this approach. It must upgrade India-Pakistan missions and open negotiations with Bangladesh on joint border-patrols and work permits... "Beggar Thy Neighbour" is a bankrupt approach. A precondition for a country's security is good relations with its neighbours. Can we conceive of a happy India within an insecure, miserable neighbourhood?

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