

Allow more time to inspectors

US and UK should heed world public opinion

UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix has presented a mixed report of his latest findings on the status of Iraq's compliance with UN resolution 1441 on WMD. It is a blend of positive vibes about headway made and cautionary warnings issued to Saddam Hussein for his foot-dragging in certain areas of concern. As a matter of fact, it is basically an extension of the line of approach taken by him earlier on with a consistent display of neutrality and objectivity which ought to be the hallmark of the UN system.

Blix has made two sets of points in his latest report all of which basically work out to a clarion call for avoiding war against Iraq. In the first category, he sounded positive about "a substantial measure of disarmament" taking place through Iraq's move to begin destroying al-Samoud 2 missiles. On the other hand, he has expressed dissatisfaction over the slow pace at which Iraq was making over documents to the team on prohibited chemical and biological systems. As for the US allegation that Saddam was concealing banned weapons in mobile laboratories, Blix said, "No evidence of proscribed activities has so far been found". On the nuclear concerns, ElBaradei has scotched speculations saying he has seen "no indication of nuclear related prohibited activities at any inspected site" nor any proof of any uranium import since 1990.

On balance therefore, we can say that there has been an 'acceleration of activities' by Baghdad to comply with the UN resolution. And whatever unanswered questions remained, Saddam Hussein is in no position to drag his feet on them given the bending over backwards that he has lately done.

Against this backdrop, we think, it is imperative for British Foreign secretary Jack Straw to refrain from presenting the revised draft resolution he has prepared before the UNSC giving the Iraqi leader an ultimatum to disarm by March 17 or face a war.

Since the UN inspection process is working with the Iraqi president, there is no reason why we should abandon it to let a suicidal war take place just because Bush and Tony Blair want it. So, the bottom-line is, give the inspection team more time to complete its job.

Int'Women's Day

Should we only stick to formalities?

LIKE every year, this year was also no different in observing International Women's Day all over the country. But women in Bangladesh are still fighting for their rights and against long working hours, low pay and unhealthy working conditions the core reasons for a group of women factory worker to protest almost fifty years ago in New York. Should we call it ironical or just simple failure by governments to protect the womenfolk and ensure their civil rights as equal to their male counterpart? We would say the latter. There is no doubt that the reality in Bangladesh is extremely frustrating when it comes to the female generation. They are still being subjected to widespread discrimination, violence and repression and worse still, the trend seems to be getting stronger.

The rights of women workers, especially the garment workers are still being denied to them. Though there is some awareness of the need to improve their conditions, nothing of substance has been done in this area. According to some statistics, incidence of rape and acid throwing in particular has increased in spite of severe punishment meted out to the perpetrators in some cases. The overall situation remains as unsatisfactory as ever. Risking repetition we would say that the expectation that things would improve because of the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader being women seems to have been largely belied.

There was a provision for reserved seats in our parliament for women which has fallen in disuse for lack of renewal. It's very unfortunate that neither the government nor the opposition has been taking any steps to ensure women's participation in the House. We regret the fact that they are not paying heed to the demand by the women's organisations to elect women representative through direct voting, though both the major parties had pledged to ensure it.

So, the doubt remains would observing such a special day really make any difference to the womenfolk? No more rhetoric please! We want to see action; we look for results, not empty promises anymore.

When war is about to break out...



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

President Bush, he was obviously worried over Bush's dictatorial attitude. One can never foresee the limit and direction of superpower arrogance.

The whole exercise by weapons inspectors to disarm Iraq appears meaningless as the main objective of US is not disarmament; it is regime change. This is why whenever Iraq makes a step towards disarmament, this is dismissed by Bush and Blair as another game and deception by Saddam.

Latest disarmament step taken by Iraq by agreeing to destroy Al-Samoud-2 missiles as ordered by UNMOVIC Chief Hans Blix (destructions going on) was also dismissed by Bush Administration

and British troops. As the war is about to break out, the weapons Inspectors' visits to various sensitive locations and the information gathered through U2 and drone's surveillance flights may indeed go against the legitimate security of Iraq. Bush Administration may use those information and intelligence reports for the purpose of bombing those areas. Therefore, the other members of the UNSC should seriously consider these eventualities. Because, it is no longer an issue of disarmament and second resolution, Bush Administration is buying time to complete war preparations and may order war within days regardless of what happens in the UNSC. It is time for the UNSC

ously. In any case, war preparations by Bush-Blair are not only unjustified but immoral as resolution 1441 was meant for disarmament and the UNSC's disarmament work have been going on. The Council members have also been receiving regular progress reports from UNMOVIC Chief Hans Blix. Despite all these, Bush-Blair's continued assertion of Iraqi "non-compliance" and continued massive preparations for war are nothing but their own defiance of UNSC resolution 1441.

Bush-Blair have also been defying their own political establishments and the Parliament. Blair is practically all alone in this game.

along. Unfortunately, of all persons, Collin Powell has been pushed into this dirty work. The people always thought at least he would be above such things. One of his diplomats, John Kiesling who resigned some days back from Athens Embassy of the U.S. in protest of Bush's policies, said, "Your loyalty to the President goes too far. Our fervent pursuit to war is driving us to squander the international legitimacy that has been America's most potent weapon of both offence and defence since the days of Woodrow Wilson".

Anyway, Collin Powell has not succeeded so far with Turkey. Turkey's parliament has rejected U.S. plan of stationing over 62

liametary exchanges took place between the delegates of Iraq and Kuwait. The statements are encouraging no doubt, but the positions on the ground is different. Over 250,000 US and British troops are already on the Arab soil - Kuwait, Yemen, Bahrain, and Qatar. These countries may not join the war with their own troops, but Arab soil would be used to attack an Arab country. What difference does it make whether they themselves join or not? Of course, Saddam Hussein himself is responsible for this mess and chaos in the Arab world. His attack and brief occupation of Kuwait really changed the Arab world and US and Britain have been taking advantage of this chaos and disunity. The Arabs would continue to remain divided unless the heavy weight like Saudi Arabia comes forward and try to heal the wounds inflicted on Kuwaiti people. The situation would be still worse after the Gulf War-II which is about to break out. The low level war has already begun in the "No-Fly" Zone. This is likely to be expanded into the major war as Bush-Blair do not have the possibility of the second resolution authorising war against Iraq.

The superpower arrogance coupled with inexperience of such a high office (it's not Texas Governorship) and also serious inability to grasp things properly may turn the region into an inferno. As the war plan is, missiles to be delivered within 24/48 hours of the war would exceed the total number of missiles delivered during the entire Gulf War. As Bush wants quick victory, this war will be extremely swift and devastating entailing total devastation and death of the Iraqi people. This war is not for disarmament; this is for occupation of Iraq. And it would only be the beginning; nobody knows when and where it would end. The world now desperately needs another superpower.

(This comment was filed two days back)

Muselehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South University

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

As Bush wants quick victory, this war will be extremely swift and devastating entailing total devastation and death of the Iraqi people. This war is not for disarmament; this is for occupation of Iraq. And it would only be the beginning; nobody knows when and where it would end. The world now desperately needs another superpower.

as too little, too late. Hans Blix however said, ".....this is a significant piece of real disarmament" but White House Spokesman Ari Fleischer said, "Iraq must be disarmed and Mr. Hussein must be deposed". He said, ".....both would be necessary conditions because disarmament was UN's goal and changing Iraq's government was President's". This is nothing but dictatorial attitude of the superpower President. When the entire international community was against regime change, it wanted full and complete disarmament. While Iraq is being forced to destroy missiles, US has been producing thousands of tons of bombs in the Oklahoma bomb factories. All these are intended to be dropped on Iraqi people. In the light of these, one does not see any meaningful purpose in pursuing the UNSC's efforts to disarm Iraq peacefully. France, Russia, Germany may continue to oppose US and use veto as applicable which was confirmed even in their latest press conference in Paris, but this may not affect Bush's determination to go to war to remove Saddam Hussein.

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien while discussing the issue of Iraq in Mexico some days ago expressed his own worries over President Bush's "Regime Change". He said "if you start changing regimes, where do you stop, this is the problem? Who is next? Give me the list, the priorities". Being a close neighbour of

members and particularly the permanent members to prepare for the next step i.e. what actions should these countries take in the event the war breaks out.

The order for destruction of Al-Samoud missiles which are the defensive weapons in the hands of Iraqis appears inappropriate as excess range of some 20-30 KMs could not bring any harm to the US and Britain nor to their friend Israel. However, Hans Blix probably thought that by going an extra mile in the form of ordering destruction of missiles he might help stop the war. This is understandable, but unfortunately this would make Iraq defenceless in the face of a veritable war. The question is, would the international community and particularly the permanent members like France, Russia, China and also Germany consider providing any protection to Iraqi people? If so, should it be restricted to only vetoing UNSC second resolution or should there be any military protection to Iraqi people, if not to Iraqi regime? UNSC should meet immediately and consider these issues seri-

ously. Both are destroying the very concept of democracy as they think that it is their "leadership obligation" to go to war to disarm Iraq and also remove Saddam Hussein (Blair apparently does not support regime change). Their people have not provided them with such dictatorial powers as both the US and Britain have strong democratic traditions. Therefore, their elected leaders must not act as dictators to remove another dictator. The world is full of brutal dictators; why remove only one?

Any sensible political leader would have taken serious note of the "Anti-War" demonstrations all over the world, but, as it seems, Bush may not bother much about such world reactions. He has one track mind. He must go to war and finish the job left unfinished by his father. Earlier he said, "you are either with us or with the terrorists". Now Bush Administration says, "you are either with us or with France". Is it that France is now replacing "Terrorists"? The whole world is against war, but Bush Administration has been bribing several countries to bring them

thousand troops and war machines in Turkey though Turkey's government -- seriously divided within itself -- recommended such a proposal because of \$16 billion aid package provided by Bush Administration. This is simple political bribing in the form of economic package. The people of Turkey have indeed largely rejected war and consequently the aid package. So, the government should not think in terms of resubmitting the proposal to the Parliament as this will damage the reputation of the Justice Party itself. Turkish Parliament appears politically wiser as it has fully considered the people's reaction against war and the obvious Kurdish rebellion in case Turkey joins the war marches into Kurdish region. If Turkey can maintain its refusal to support US's war, this may improve Turkey's chance of joining European Union.

The disunited Arab League ultimately succeeded in coming up with a statement opposing war against an Arab country. Same happened in the latest OIC meeting at Doha, Qatar, though unpar-

War should be the last resort

MEGASTHENES

SADDAM Hussein would be a most improbable candidate for a popularity contest anywhere in the world. In all the years that he has held political office, there are only three things that I have heard or read that goes in his favour.

When Saddam succeeded the ailing Bakr as President, it was perhaps the only instance of regime change in Iraq in recent decades that was not accompanied by violence or did not involve the unceremonious ouster of the previous regime. To be sure, Saddam was the de facto source and repository of executive authority, for some time, even before Bakr formally relinquished office.

His other two "plus points" are more subjective: opinions of an earnest young man I came across in London when Kuwait was under Iraqi occupation. The venue was a reputed college where the youth was busily handing out pro-Saddam brochures to any and all who would accept them. Out of curiosity I asked if he believed Saddam to be a person of virtue and merit. He was emphatic in his response; no Saddam was not a good man. Noting my quizzical look, he explained further. There were too many bad leaders and rulers in Muslim countries.

Saddam had reduced this number

by one, by removing from power the Emir of Kuwait and so deserved commendation! It was sufficiently intrigued to ask if he also endorsed Saddam's unprovoked aggression against a small sovereign neighbour. It was his turn to be perplexed. What aggression? What invasion? There should be no boundaries between Muslim nations and Saddam had merely removed one such frontier which should never have been there! So Saddam, though not a good person himself, had performed two worthy deeds for which credit was due to him. His sense of reasoning seemed somewhat perverted but it did afford an insight into the minds of some people who support Saddam but are not admirers of the man.

By his dilatory tactics and non-compliance with Security Council resolutions that stipulate the disarmament of Iraq, Saddam has precipitated yet another international crisis. The US and Britain are convinced that force is the only option left to ensure Iraq's compliance with relevant Council resolutions.

Not all countries share the US and British assessment of the situation or enthusiasm for war as the solution. Other Permanent

countries, anxious that he should not lose. The strangest part was that the UN could not or did not, even if I recall correctly, unequivocally identify the aggressor let alone condemn the aggression. Insult was added to injury when the Iraqi candidate was elected President of the 36th General Assembly in 1981 -- the nominee of a country that was at war and in flagrant breach of the UN Charter. It was irony upon insult that the defeated candidate was the nominee of Bangladesh! Small wonder Saddam persuaded himself that he could invade and annex Kuwait with impunity.

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"It is well that war is so terrible, or we should grow too fond of it": General Robert E. Lee, West Point Class of 1829, Commander of the Confederate Forces.

General William T. Sherman, West Point Class of 1840, second in renown only to General Grant in the Union Army was even more emphatic: "You cannot qualify war

in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it". And again, "War is at best barbarism... its glory is moonshine. It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, more vengeance, more desolation. War is hell".

Much earlier, Benjamin Franklin, in his time the wisest of Americans, had written: "There never was a good war or a bad peace".

And centuries before Franklin, Cicero had expressed very similar

sentiments: "I cease not to advocate peace; even though unjust it is better than the most just war".

There are clearly cogent enough reasons for so many nations and peoples to feel that it is premature to simply "Cry Havoc" and let slip the dogs of war".

The case for early war, without exhausting peaceful alternatives, made by the US and Britain is less than compelling to most peoples and countries, even if all the arguments and contentions in its favour are accepted at face value without qualification or question. Britain and the US carry great credibility and clout but in a situation such as this, with conflict all imminent and vital national interests and prestige involved, can any advocacy be accepted without scrutiny? Some observations of distinguished personalities of the past, mainly from the US and the UK, are revealing.

"The first casualty when war comes is truth": Senator Hiram Johnson, 1917.

"In wartime truth is so precious that she should always be attended

our side of the front is truth and righteousness, the cause of humanity and a crusade for peace. Is it necessary for us at the height of our power to stoop to such self-deceiving nonsense?": Walter Lippmann, 1966.

Edward Said wrote recently on the Iraq situation; his concern was obvious. He contends that in the US administration President Bush, Vice President Cheney and Messrs Wolfowitz and Perle strongly favour forceful action. He recalls that more than three decades back all were equally staunch in support of the Vietnam war. They were younger then but old enough to serve in the military. None enlisted to fight; all received deferments. A touch of the paradoxical? Some may even be tempted to recall the crushing comment of Philip Caputo in *NYT* magazine in 1991: "In wartime, the degree of patriotism is directly proportional to distance from the front"!

The US today represents the acme of human achievement and endeavour. It predominates in a manner that no other country has done in all of recorded history. In

President Bush, the US has a president with an impeccable political lineage -- perhaps more so than any of his predecessors. His father, the former President, had an extraordinary grasp of and sensitivity to foreign policy issues, in part due to the interest he took and also because he had held important diplomatic assignments and headed the CIA. His grandfather, Senator Prescott Bush of Connecticut, was an individual of great political courage. He was among the early few -- placing him in the select company of the likes of Herbert Lehman, Adlai Stevenson, JW Fulbright and IF Stone -- to recognise McCarthyism for what it was -- a grotesque aberration from core and cherished American values -- and to speak his mind about it.

In the late 1950s, Allen Drury wrote a best-selling political novel inspired perhaps by the Alger Hiss-Whittaker Chambers affair. The book "Advise and Consent" won the Pulitzer and was made into a film. Drury went on to write three sequels, the first of which was set in NY at the UN. At the end of the story, the leader of the US delegation to the UN General Assembly, who has been diagnosed with a fatal affliction, makes an impassioned plea for peace in a speech to the Assembly, extracts of which I quote below:

"How does mankind stand in this awful hour? Where does it find, in all its pomp and pride and power, the answer to its own fatal division? ... Who will save us, if we do not save ourselves? ... We are wedded to one another, it may be to our death, we cannot escape one another, however hard we try... This is the human condition -- that we cannot flee from one another... We try to remain apart: we fail... I beg of you here in this body of which men have hoped so much and for which they have already done so much. Let us love one another! Let us love one another! It is all we have left!"

Sentimental and simplistic? Certainly. Perhaps even cloying and idealistic, but also so germane, apropos and topical for all nations and peoples, especially so today.

LIGHTEN UP

Not all countries share the US and British assessment of the situation or enthusiasm for war as the solution. Other Permanent Members of the Security Council, Germany, the Holy See, the NAM and the OIC feel that disarming of Iraq can be achieved without recourse to war, through a stringent regime of weapons inspection; that war should be the last resort... There are clearly cogent enough reasons for so many nations and peoples to feel that it is premature to simply "Cry Havoc" and let slip the dogs of war".

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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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.

Open your eyes and face the reality

"Open your eyes and face reality" - this is the only thing that I would like to request our pro-war lobbyists. I believe that they have just been influenced by the recent souped up propaganda by the British and the Americans against Saddam Hussein. Neither the Americans nor the British have been able to present the world a shred of credible evidence to show that Saddam Hussein has weapons

of mass destruction. The British Dossier that was aimed to sway world opinion ended up being copied mostly from a ten-year-old thesis of an American PhD student. Then Collin Powell's speech to the UN Security Council failed to provide any further evidence except a few satellite photos that can be manipulated by even a grade school computer student. And now on 6th of March, President Bush goes out of the way and gives a desperate speech blaming Saddam Hussein for the US

which is the only thing he has been doing for months now. He has just committed himself too far to regime change in Iraq that all the talk about Iraq possessing these weapons are nothing but a makeover.

Even the presentation of the second UN resolution is nothing more than a cosmetic make-up to ease the pressure on the British and Spanish facing a huge political backlash back at home. If Saddam Hussein really had any weapons of mass destruction the US would

have never dared to build up forces in the Gulf. Doesn't all these show very clearly that this war has no valid reason but only a motive that no citizen in the world should support.

Mohammad Arbaaz Nayem
Mastermind School, Dhaka

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