

Bombshell from the northern township

Terrorism can be the first item of agenda for building consensus

CHAPAINAWABGANJ police have done a commendable job picking up quite a few laurels in a row. It has unearthed a training camp of an Islamic militant group; arrested five suspected extremists; seized bombs and explosives from their hideout. Even though leading members of the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh outfit made good their escape getting a wind of the imminent raid, the discovery should provide valuable leads for further investigations.

On the back of a series of bomb blast incidents heightening the national concern for security recently, the police have made a breakthrough, however modest it may be. The trend should be encouraged, followed up on, and taken forward. To this end, the police must receive all kinds of support from the government: human resource, material, technical expertise and equipment. Army intelligence may be harnessed and we may not even hesitate to use internationally available forensic know-how, where necessary.

Set against a spate in bombing incidents, the implications of what has been unearthed should not get lost on us. Let's not turn a blinkered eye to the dangers of destabilisation, what if these maybe just incipient now. We live in an infinitely volatile world today needing to take guard against attempted subversion by quarters that thrive on uncertainties.

Rather than blaming each other for the bomb blasts or terrorist forays, the ruling party and the opposition must make a common cause of warding these off because of the dangers they spell for the nation. Their recrimination has only let the culprits escape and strike back. The Prime Minister in her winding up address on the eve of the prorogation of Parliament on Tuesday gave a call to the opposition for forging national consensus with her party on issues of vital importance to the country. Sometime ago, in a rare show of bipartisanship, there was a move to hold a joint debate on the US putting us on the so-called risk-list. That flicker of light should now be drawn upon and an illuminating discussion held on the subject of terrorism to formulate a set of safeguards against extremism in all its forms. Let addressing that agenda mark the beginning of a process whereby national consensus is reached on vital national issues.

Chaos at BB

Firm stance by finance minister, governor welcome

A threat to the central bank would pose a threat to the economy", so said finance and planning minister M Saifur Rahman on Tuesday more in disgust than anything else. The point has become relevant with the four officers' associations of the bank said to be pro-BNP having taken a stand that ran counter to the government's banking reform plan.

The situation at the Bangladesh Bank turned chaotic last Monday as the representatives of the employee associations put forward their five-point demand -- a brazen attempt to dictate terms at the highest level of banking. The officers decided to resist the reform plan by putting pressure on the governor and deputy governors. It's good they have not succumbed to the pressure.

Strident unionism or protectionism in government organisations often stands in the way of bringing about highly desirable changes. The forces opposed to change are usually those who benefit by gross irregularities and anomalies in an organisation. For understandable reasons, these elements want the 'decrepit status quo' to continue.

Trade unionism at the heart of the banking system viz. Bangladesh Bank against the reform agenda can set a dangerous precedent for the NCBs. We don't want to see reform measures being scuttled. So, we fully endorse the position of the finance minister and the governor to stick to the reform agenda regardless of protests from some vested quarters in the Bank.

The officers trying to organise some kind of resistance to the reform plan were actually violating service rules which do not permit the government functionaries to intervene in policy matters. The latest reports on the central bank also indicate that some officials are engaged in activities not compatible with their positions. The government should look into the matter, since politicisation of bank officials cannot portend anything good for the sector as a whole.



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

HANS Blix and El Baradei appear to be bold men. With nearly 300,000 US and British troops around Iraq waiting for the order to launch the military attack against Iraq, both diplomats sat at the Chamber of the UN Security Council and read their reports which may within a couple of days find a place only in the archives of the UN. The reports of March 7 were mixed ones with some limited soothing words for the US and the UK and the rest, the encouraging ones, for France, Germany, Russia and China. The rest of the 15 members of the Council were left to choose course on the basis of their political convenience.

Hans Blix clearly spoke of "accelerated cooperation" from Iraqi side and said his inspectors have found "no evidence of proscribed activities" as claimed by the US on the basis of satellite pictures and its intelligence reports which, very often, are far from the reality on the ground.

On the allegation from the US that Iraq has been using mobile facilities to produce chemical and biological weapons, Hans Blix said his inspectors visited those suspected sites and found "no evidence" and these sites were engaged in food and seed processing and in some cases these were normal trucks for carrying various commodities. He also stated that inspectors found no evidence of underground chemical and biological weapons production. He, however, was critical of the rate at

which the documents relating to destruction of chemical and biological weapons systems were handed over to his inspectors. Hans Blix very categorically said that Iraq's move to destroy Al-Samoud-II missiles constituted "a substantial measure of disarmament". He also spoke of Iraqi "accelerated cooperation" in the area of privately interviewing Iraqi scientists "within and outside Iraq. The last position is that the scientists who were earlier reluctant to speak without Iraqi aide finally agreed to be interviewed without aide or the tape recorder.

well and there was no need now for the proposed second resolution specifying any time table. Secretary Powell, of course, had very little to counter the positive assessments of both Blix and El-Baradei and also the points raised by Germany and Russia. He obviously had to revert to US's old story of Iraqi deceit and defiance for long 12 years and said, Iraq did not grab the opportunity to declare everything fully as per UNSC resolution. He, however, insisted that open-ended inspection cannot be allowed and Saddam must comply fully and completely and immedi-

automatic use of force". He also reiterated France's position on the regime change which, he said, was not the objective of resolution 1441 and was not democratic either. He said his country found no link between Iraq and Al-Qaida. Finally, France warned of clash of civilisations in the event of US's attack on Iraq.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said interalia that nobody in the Council was of the view that Iraq has fully and actively complied with resolution 1441. The U.S., the U.K. and Spain circulated a draft

appears determined. He said, Iraq was acting out a "wilful charade" to stop UN inspectors and he would disarm Iraq by force if it did not do so peacefully. Though Hans Blix and his inspectors found "no evidence" of any proscribed or banned weapons or mobile weapons laboratories, President Bush was insisting on their presence in Iraq. He was depending more on satellite photos and second hand intelligence reports including those given by Iraqi dissidents instead of reports given by the inspectors working on the ground in Iraq. Who on earth can make

Therefore, it seems that the world is kept engaged in useless diplomatic debates while the US and the UK are going ahead with actual war preparations. The attack may start any time after March 17, 2003 unless some miracles happen in the meantime. One does not know what France, Russia, Germany, China and others would do if full war breaks out. Would they still debate in the UNSC Chamber? When the USA can blatantly defy UN to attack another country, then would there be any more justification for the existence of UN itself?

The real intention of the sole superpower is now quite clear. As the latest reports show, Saddam would be thrown out and a former US Ambassador to Yemen, Barbara Bodine, would be named as the interim Civil Administrator in Baghdad with three US Generals to control the regions. This would complete U.S.'s occupation of Iraq. Iraq would be ruled by Bush from the White House. However, Iraq is not a White House garden with red roses; it's a different turf altogether with ferocious tribes -- Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, etc.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador to Yemen and Ambassador of North South University

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

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He termed these as 'active and indeed proactive cooperation' from Iraqi side. He, however, added that the inspection cannot continue for years signifying that the inspectors would need some months to complete their work.

IAEA Director General El-Baradei also gave full account of the work done by his inspectors and said they "found no indication of nuclear related prohibited activities at any inspected sites" and also confirmed that the allegations of import of uranium from Niger into Iraq were unfounded. There was also no revival of any proscribed nuclear activities.

Secretary Powell looked somewhat unversed after these reports were read out and German Foreign Minister Fischer and Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov spoke elaborately on these issues highlighting their countries' positions. They particularly stated that inspection works were progressing

ately. "Now is the time for the Council to tell Saddam that the clock has not been stopped by his stratagems and his machinations". Collin Powell also reminded the UNSC members of their responsibilities to face upto the threat posed by Saddam's weapons of mass destruction.

French Foreign Minister Dominique Villepin delivered a very strong statement and his mode of delivery was very powerful and convincing. He undoubtedly did a good job and undoubtedly replied to practically all the issues raised by Secretary Powell and made out a case in favour of continuation of the inspection as stipulated in UNSC resolution 1441. He suggested some definitive steps including stepping up of the inspection process and Inspectors to report back to the Council every two weeks for Council's consideration. He emphatically said, military should not dictate the UNSC and "France will not allow a resolution to pass that authorises the

resolution giving March 17 ultimatum to Iraq for full and complete compliance.

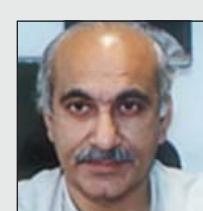
Fifteen-member UNSC now stands deeply divided. The US, UK, Spain and Bulgaria support the draft resolution, but France, Russia, Germany and China oppose any deadline and insist on giving more time to the weapons inspectors. Of the non-permanent members -- Pakistan and Chile are in favour of giving more time but are yet to take sides. French Foreign Minister Villepin was set to go to Africa to convince Guinea and some other non-permanent members of the UNSC. It is more than certain that the US and the UK will not be able to gather nine votes for the resolution to be put on the table for consideration. Over and above that the veritable threat of use of veto by France and Russia is already there against any UNSC resolution authorising war against Iraq.

However, President Bush

understand that he is on a wrong track and as the Commander-in-Chief of the only superpower he should have an open mind and flexible approach on issues that should determine peace or war. It is unfortunate that he is totally blind on such matters and goes by the advice of people who are either biased or have pre-determined ideas on them.

While the diplomatic debate is going on in the UNSC Chamber and also in the capitals, the war is practically on in the 'No-Fly Zones'. This is now more or less certain that the war would begin from the escalated incidents in the No-Fly Zones as Bush-Blair would not get any UNSC resolution supporting the war. Over 30 gaps or corridors have already been created by the US army in the electric fence separating Kuwait and Iraq so that US army could move through them as soon as the order is received. The residents and also the UN observers in the demilitarised zones (DMZ) have been asked to leave.

Barkis is willing



M.J. AKBAR

ARMAGEDDON is scheduled for next Sunday and all I can think of is the Chinese curse, condemning me to live in interesting times. This is at least partly due to some serious intellectual deficiency on my part. I cannot, for instance, understand some of the things that George Bush, President of the United States of the United World, has said and repeated.

For instance, he has called his proposed conquest of Iraq, scheduled to start with 3,000 precision guided missiles and bombs in the first 48 hours, followed by the marines, the "war of the willing". There was a chap in a Charles Dickens novel called Barkis, and his principal claim to fame was a phrase about himself: "Barkis is willing". Barkis was always willing. The trouble was that no one else was equally willing. As far as my limited information goes, three of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council with a veto, Russia, France and China, are not quite willing. Germany is not willing. I checked out the neighbourhood of Iraq. Most of it is not willing, not even faithful American allies like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt. The Arab League does not endorse this Bush war. Governments, like those of Britain, Spain and Australia, which have offered unequivocal support to George Bush are facing a backlash from voters who do not want a war they cannot understand, because of the billing.

The most flagrant case of billing was Turkey, which was promised \$15 billion in grants and loans plus a stranglehold over the future of

the Kurds. The government acquiesced but Turkey's Parliament turned the bribe down. Kuwait of course has a particular reason for anger against Saddam Hussein, but it is also looking at post-war contracts. Qatar has already been cleaning up from the American defence, or, in this case, offence, budget. Most of Asia and Africa are not willing. Prime Minister Vajipavee wonders why Bush does not attack North Korea first, and President Pervez Musharraf has pointed out that while he is loyal he

freedom for other nations in the region." War this week, democracy the week after.

I checked the region. Would regime change in Baghdad lead to regime change in Riyadh? Would democratic agent provocateurs instigate a new dawn in Damascus? And Amman? And Cairo? Would George Bush cheer from his pedestal and ask the 100,000 American troops stationed in Iraq to lend a bit of support to democracy as they had done in Iraq? Would the entrenched regimes, whether

I don't know how long the queue of Bush-believers is, but something tells me it will be a short line. And even in that queue someone is bound to ask which country in the neighbourhood has proven weapons of mass destruction, and has ignored UN Security Council resolution for decades. (Answer: Israel.)

It is possible that President Bush had got a bit tired of persuasion by the time the wretched European Hans Blix produced a second report for the United Nations

understand the law of limits, and indeed the truth of limitations. Defeat is always easier to handle than victory. Time heals the pain of defeat, and life goes on. If you are a victor, you have to find answers to the problems of the life that goes on. Victory can purchase a laurel today and create the next generation of enemies tomorrow. The most disturbing part of the American and British, steamroll towards Armageddon is that the principals have not been able to explain, convincingly, why they want war, and why they want it now. In comparison 1992 was crystal clear. That war had a moral foundation, and a military objective; which is why it had the support of the world, and succeeded.

The world also paid for that war, which it will not do this time. Since there are no certainties in war, there cannot be a budget: it will cost what it will cost. The Pentagon has variously estimated this cost to be somewhere between \$60 billion and \$200 billion; and the time for what might be called the 'pacification' of post-Saddam Iraq to be between two and ten years. Those extra eight years will be required if the three old vilayets, or provinces, into which the Ottomans very sensibly divided the land area of what is now Iraq begin to explode in different directions. The Turks kept the Shias, Sunnis and Kurds apart, which their successors, the British, did not. There will be two spirals at work: one created by the war on the region, and the second created by the war in America. Americans may be as reluctant to pay for a war and occupation that could become sticky, as the region may be to deliver on the Bush vision of a new Middle East.

Will it handle the logic of what it has begun? Will all 'odious' regimes within the 'axis of evil' have to stand in queue, awaiting execution? The militarisation around North Korea has been stepped up. So after Iraq, North Korea? Or, as the Muslim world is beginning to believe, will Iran be the next Bush war zone? Does President Bush understand the law of limits, and indeed the truth of limitations.

Nothing is certain, so pessimism may seem like bias. For the sake of peace on earth, goodwill to men, the future of mankind, and any other cliché you can think of, I hope I am wrong. Who cares if I am wrong as long as George Bush is right? God forbid that George Bush should be wrong and a mere communist proves right.

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BYLINE

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cannot stretch such loyalty so far. The UN seems to be particularly unwilling. Possibly to his shock and horror, even Dad appears a bit hesitant. Speaking to an audience at Tufts University in the last week of February, George Bush the Elder remarked that the evidence in 2003 was "a little fuzzier" than it was in 1992, when Saddam had invaded and occupied Kuwait. Bush the First also noted: "The more pressure there is, the more chance this matter will be resolved in a peaceful manner." Could Dad be a closet peacenik? He would be, in that case, the silent part of the majority. Unprecedented demonstrations across the world, and particularly in the West, have opposed this Bush war. Governments, like those of Britain, Spain and Australia, which have offered unequivocal support to George Bush are facing a backlash from voters who do not want a war they cannot understand, because of the billing.

President Bush has attempted to explain why precisely he is going to war. Want to know? Well: "A new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of

royalty or military dictatorships, in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Syria, all protected so far by the Americans, shiver and fall? Or would they protect their interests, and divert any such political tide in a different direction, one implicit with other forms of war and confrontation? Is America actually prepared for the consequences of genuine democracy in the region? It has already tasted a bit of it, in Turkey, where a genuine democratic vote seriously disrupted the American plan and forced Washington to lean on Turkey's generals, which is not very democratic. And what happens if the decision of the Turkish Parliament is now reversed under American pressure? The credibility of the moderate Islamic party now running the government collapses, and who enters this space? Not secular leftists, of that you can be sure. In any case, is democracy acceptable to America only when a democratic government agrees with America? Or is a democracy permitted to disagree as well? Democracy is unlikely to provide as many Quislings as an army regime or a royal family. I don't know all the how could one lead to the other? Would the next Iraqi government become Israel-friendly? Would the Iraqi people, who presumably will continue to live in their country, suddenly change their views on Israel just because Saddam has been removed? Even in Kuwait, the most anti-Saddam nation, 75 per cent of the people might support a Bush war, but 99 per cent would oppose America's policy on Palestine. Is Ariel Sharon going to Baghdad this summer to hug the post-Saddam leader and declare peace through a joint statement that makes Yasser Arafat weep in gratitude? Or is the President of the United World actually telling us: "Look, you guys in the Arab deserts, Gimme Saddam. I need him for all sorts of reasons, which I cannot really explain logically but believe me it will all turn to be all right, okay (aside: even if some of you end up losing your palaces in the process)." Once that evil horrible dictator is gone, the region will be full of only friendly, after shave-sprinkled dictators. That's when we'll get together and tell Sharon where to get off, won't we ha ha ha..."

noting that Saddam Hussein's Iraq was cooperating with the weapons-inspection regime. After all, as leader of the most powerful military machine ever assembled he has every right to get tired of those who refuse to share his latest world-view. President Bush had the last word on this whole business of getting a sanction from the United Nations for his war. "We really don't need anybody's permission," Mr Bush told a press conference. You can't get more specific than that. This rather proves the point made by the majority of the world, that the decision to go to war had little to do with the reasons being offered for it, but I suppose the United States can handle that.

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bomb an independent country. If the US have such proof, it should be shared with the rest of the world.

I, in no way support Saddam Hussein. He is a cruel dictator. But waging war against Iraq to uproot Saddam which would result in death of a number innocent Iraqis appears more vicious.

Sadia Khan Dhaka

Who is the biggest threat?

George Bush keeps on saying that Iraq is the biggest threat to the USA. If it is true then what about Israel and USA itself? Aren't these two countries the biggest threat to humanity?

Minhaj Ahmed Uttara, Dhaka

An American opinion on Iraq crisis

I am a regular reader of *The Daily Star* Letters Page and find the Page really interesting. But I have

24th BCS exam

The less said about our recruiting exam of government employee, the better. Every year, allegation of some sort is brought against such exams and still the government remains inactive in doing something to keep the recruitment process above controversy.

Mere appointment of a probe committee is not enough. We need to go to the roots of the problem

and take every action necessary to

keep the government jobs as clean

and as lucrative