

## 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 Mujahedeen 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.

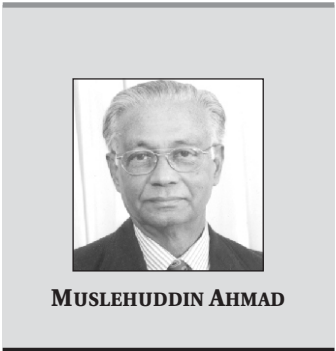
The situation at the Bangladesh Bank turned chaotic last Monday as the representatives of the employee associations put forward their five-point demand -- a brazen attempt to dictate terms at the highest level of banking. The officers decided to resist the reform plan by putting pressure on the governor 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.

# War, fragmented Iraq and thereafter



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 U.S. 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 latest 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-Quida. 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

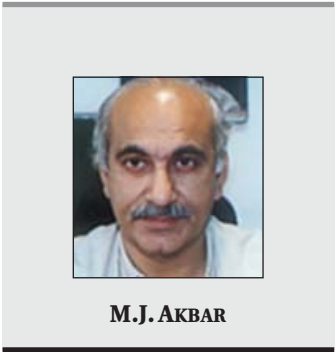
appears determined. He said, Iraq was acting out a 'wilful charade' to stop UN inspectors and he would disarm Iraq by force if it did not do so peacefully. Though Hans Blix and his inspectors found "no evidence" of any proscribed or banned weapons or mobile weapons laboratories, President Bush was insisting 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 mean time. 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. A known dictator would be replaced by an unknown (to Iraqis) and unpredictable one. US-Israel and US friendly Arabs would then be in the joint management of the Arab world and also of the region (Blair may not be around to enjoy the pleasure of joint management as he might lose his job because of the rebellion in Labour Party including resignation of some Ministers and overwhelming opposition to war without the UN mandate). Kuwait already stands occupied; this time not by Saddam but by someone more implacable. Iran and Syria may be the next targets -- more, still better. Not only the region, the world and particularly the U.S. would then be a safer place! No more terrorism -- a great and safe future indeed to be presented by Bush and his company!

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

# Barkis is willing



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. Iran might be willing, but not for reasons that would go down very well with the State Department. Those who are willing, are willing 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 Vajpayee wonders why Bush does not attack North Korea first, and President Pervez Musharraf has pointed out that while he is loyal to

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

answers. I told you my mental faculties had weakened under the strain of contemplating Armageddon. But I am sure George Bush has all the answers.

Bush the Junior continues his persuasive arguments. "Success in Iraq could also begin a new stage for Middle Eastern peace, and set in motion progress toward a truly democratic Palestine state." Well, at least he used 'could'. Anything more certain would have shaken my confidence in the word of the United States beyond repair. But

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.

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 columnist proves right.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

## 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.

### The Bagerhat incident

We used to be so proud that we have never witnessed any kind of communal attacks or rioting in this country though such incidents are quite common in one of our neighbouring countries. But the Bagerhat incident makes me think twice.

We have lived in peace and harmony with other religious communities for many decades. But recently we have heard news of many such barbaric incidents and noticed with frustration the Government's apathetic attitude in bringing the culprits to book. But enough is enough. The government must probe into all these incidents in the interest of our national integrity and shore up the confidence of all minority and ethnic groups.

Faridur Reja, Green Road, Dhaka

I have always been proud of being a citizen of a secular, democratic country. But after reading the news of Bagerhat incident I have become speechless. My sense of shame has no words.

As a Bangladeshi, I am depicted as a citizen of a country, where such barbarous and discriminatory act is allowed to take place and enough punitive actions are not being taken to put a swift end to these atrocities.

Zerin Zubaida, Banani, Dhaka

"Bangladesh's eastern strategy is excellent"

I have read with interest the letters in protest of Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed's column of March 5 ("Bangladesh's eastern strategy is excellent") and fully agree with the letter writers. On more than one occasion I have found Dr Ahmed making negative comments about our

neighbouring country without providing much basis of his argument. But in the column of March 5, he gets a bit carried away.

I have never heard of the Indian soldiers taking away the military equipment left by the Pakistan army. This is a serious allegation and would like to know where did the columnist get this information. Though I was a teenager in 1971, I have read almost all the books on our Independence War and also my father was a freedom fighter. From no where had I learnt about the Indian soldiers stealing the Pakistani arms.

Anisul Haq, Purana Paltan, 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

become really frustrated to notice those countless letters criticising the US when we are about to liberate Iraq from a cruel dictator.

Of all the country, Bangladesh is protesting war against Iraq! I thought at least the Bangladeshis would realise how it feels to be ruled by a President who have no respect for democracy and give a damn about the plight of his people. Bangladesh was also under the rule of such a dictator and it was the Bangladeshis who took to streets in the '90s and sacrificed number of lives to restore democracy. And what about your Independence War? Didn't you take the help of the Indian Government to free your country from the oppression of the then Pakistan Government? That time America didn't support you and we feel much repented about it. But do you want us to make the same mistake regarding Iraq?

Erin Hanks, California, USA

### 24<sup>th</sup> 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.

More 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 as possible. If the government servants enter the profession by adopting immoral procedure then God help us from being branded as the most corrupt nation over and over again!

Samia Rahman, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### War and humanity

It is indeed a good news that in America itself, even in New York Times Square, as in much of the rest of the world people are voicing their sentiments against the US war against Iraq. That is definitely a source of hope and encouragement to those who are powerless yet to be counted.

For the Iraqi child whose parents were killed or the woman whose children perished their pain and distress are so intense and unbearable that I don't think the Americans would ever be able to understand it. 12 years of sanction wasn't enough, now they are threatening to wage a war against them!

Jahir Husain, Dhaka

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The US campaign against Iraq seems clueless; the objectives are changing all the time; however, the targets are clear-- killing innocent Iraqi civilians and controlling their

oil resource.

Habiba, Dhaka

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Imagine how would we feel as a nation if some developed nation came to our rescue and waged a war against BNP and Awami League. Would we have welcomed them?

No matter how cruel the dictatorship of Saddam might be, it is an internal matter of Iraq. And none but the Iraqis have the right to uproot Saddam. Why doesn't the Bush-Blair Co. realise this simple fact?

Mahmud, one-e-mail

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The US Government claims that they have overwhelming evidence of Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction and consider Iraq as the biggest threat to democracy. But that cannot be an excuse to

bomb an independent country. If the US has 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