

## New interim government in Iraq



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FROM dictator Saddam to dictator Bremer. "Bremer is the dictator of Iraq. He has the money, he has the signature," said UN Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi. The wrangling over who should be the members of the new Interim Government has finally ended and the new Interim Government was installed on June 1, 2004. It will hopefully get back "full sovereignty" on June 30, 2004.

Poor Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN Special Envoy for the work in Iraq had very little to say, though he has been going round different places for months. Anyway, he played a role in finding the other ministers. The whole process was against the spirit of Iraqis choosing their own representatives. Even without elections, which were apparently not feasible at this stage, the various groups such as the Shias, Sunnis, Kurds, and the sects within, could be given the choice to come up with their representatives. They would have obviously fought over and agreed on their representatives. This would have given some legitimacy to the new Interim Government. But this did not happen. It was also not known whether the UNSC ever agreed on undertaking such a task and sending a representative for the purpose. Lakhdar Brahimi, though a well-meaning individual with Arab background, was not the right man for the job as he had some fixed ideas because of his earlier work in Afghanistan where the fight is still on. Iraq is certainly different from Afghanistan.

Here also the signal is already there showing non-acceptability by the Iraqis of the Interim Government of handpicked people. Bombs killed 14 Iraqis and 5 US troops just after the announcement of the new Interim Government. But everything would depend on what role the

## SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

The realities on the ground will determine events. However, Ali Sistani has given cautious welcome to the Interim Government. This would help. Indeed, as the situation stands, Iraqis should accept the latest UN resolution, which is being negotiated as an interim arrangement, stop violence, and start working for electing a representative government early next year.

President Gazi Yavar plays and whether he can exert his authority on the coalition establishment in Baghdad and tell Iraqis that he will ask for departure of the coalition forces as soon as he can organize an alternative force that can take over effectively from the coalition forces. He should indeed ask the UNSC to include in the resolution the provision for a UN peace-keeping force to be taken mainly from friendly Arab and Muslim countries. Such a force could be acceptable to the Iraqis, and could quickly replace coalition forces.

The most important thing is to ensure security. If the Interim Government members themselves continue to worry on whether they can stay alive, they can not go for the security of their people. Therefore the immediate necessity is to work for curbing the violence. The only way to achieve this is to send the occupation forces back home quickly. Indeed, this would be good for President Bush also for his election purposes, and also for the US families, as there will not be any more loss of American lives. If the insurgents see that they do not have to fight the coalition forces any more, this will bring some sort of calm to the country. There is absolutely no other way. The Iraqis appear determined to fight the occupying forces, come what may. This reality has to be understood. Therefore, there is an immediate need to have the proposed UN peace-keeping force that can bring confidence in the minds of ordinary Iraqis. Such a friendly force may help create an acceptable environment for holding of elections at the end of the year, or very early next year, and also start building up the Iraqi forces.

While welcoming the new Interim Government in Iraq, which replaced the Provisional Governing Council on June 1, President Bush looked exhausted. His voice was

hoarse and his unusual repetition of the words like freedom, democracy, security, full sovereignty, helping Iraq, Saddam etc, showed his worries, probably not about Iraq, but about its effect on his upcoming presidential election. Therefore he wanted to justify what was done and achieved in Iraq. All these were to counter the accusations John Kerry made against Bush's handling of Iraq.

Bush categorically said he had no role in choosing the president and prime minister of Iraq. He is probably right, as he had hardly any knowledge of these people. Obviously he had to depend on the advice of Paul Bremer. It was also clear that the US did not fully support Gazi Yavar, the president designate. Paul Bremer had to go by the majority view on at least one, as he had already chosen the key man, the Prime Minister Alawi who has been in the good books of the US. Interestingly, most of the members of the Interim Government are former exiles and hence they are unlikely to be immediately acceptable to the ordinary Iraqis. The only exception appears to be President designate Yavar who has better reputation among Iraqis.

Ambassador Paul Bremer will leave and Ambassador Negroponte will replace him with some modified version of the occupation work. The US will have the biggest embassy on Earth with some 1000 people in Baghdad. So it seems to be just a form of change of the mantle of occupation, the effects remaining practically same for Iraqis.

Unilateralism is slowly and grudgingly moving towards some form of multilateralism. But it has come too late. Because of unilateral attack and resultant occupation, many lives have been lost on both sides. Fighting terrorism (the definition of terrorism has not been set by the UN yet -- freedom fighters can-

not be termed as terrorists) is a legitimate task and the world was supportive of America's initiative to fight terrorism. But Iraq attack was for different reasons. These have been amply described by Bob Woodward in his latest book Plan of Attack. Anyway, the UN did not authorize any country(s) to go and dislodge Saddam and occupy Iraq. Iraq stands shattered; its people utterly humiliated. After all this, the word freedom means very little to the Iraqis.

The latest draft resolution on transfer of sovereignty is under active consideration of the UNSC. Indeed, President Bush and Prime Minister Blair did well by agreeing to go for a new UN resolution on transfer of power. Again the process started with symbolic transfer of sovereignty, then limited sovereignty and now under international pressure, words such as full sovereignty are being mentioned. But does full sovereignty mean anything when there are over 138,000 foreign troops in the country and the chain of command goes up to the White House and not to Interim Iraqi President Gazi Yavar?

There is a somewhat vague mention of early 2006 for withdrawal of coalition forces. Countries such as France, Russia, and China have been asking for specific commitment on withdrawal of forces. The US might find it difficult to go for any of such specific commitments.

In any case, the handpicked members of the Interim Governing Council will virtually have no power even if mentioned in the UN resolution when it comes to the US interest. The realities on the ground will determine events. However, Ali Sistani, chief Shia cleric has given cautious welcome to the Interim Government. This would help. Indeed, as the situation stands, Iraqis should accept the latest UN resolution, which is being negotiated as an interim arrangement, stop violence, and start working for electing a representative government early next year.

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## THE BABARNAMA

# Sublime journal of the warrior poet

YASMEEN MURSHED

MY fondness for history extends, I believe quite naturally, to the extensive realm of Biography. In particular autobiography in its myriad forms -- memoirs, diaries, journals, letters et al -- never ceases to capture my interest. There is an immediacy to autobiography that seems to reach through the curtains of time and space to create a connection that draws the reader into the circle of thought and experience of the writer. When it is well written, no matter the era or locale, autobiography brings the minutiae of life to vivid reality which can be as compelling as a personal experience.

thriller as this daring young man rushes through his life which was eventful and dramatic from early boyhood until his death at, what is to us, the very early age of forty-seven.

"In the month of Ramadan of the year 899, and in the twelfth year of my age, I became ruler in the country of Ferghana," so begins the Journal. Babar's father, Umar Shaikh Mirza, had died the previous day in his mountain fortress of Akhsi when a landslide bore down upon his pigeon house which was built on the edge of a ravine in a corner of the castle. The entire platform slid down to the river below taking him down with it. "On the fourth day of Ramadan my father, Umar Sheikh Mirza was engaged in feeding his pigeons when the platform slipped precipitating

## TALKING BOOKS

The memoirs are as compelling as any action-packed thriller as this daring young man rushes through his life which was eventful and dramatic from early boyhood until his death at, what is to us, the very early age of forty-seven.

For a South Asian history buff the best memoir of them all is undoubtedly the journal of the first of the Great Mughals, Jalaluddin Mohammad Babar. Written in Turki, his native language and spanning almost his entire life it is the startlingly frank and acutely discerning personal reflections of a complex and cultivated man of the world who also happened to be a conquering warrior, a statesman, and a poet. The Babarnama was translated into English by John Leyden and William Erskine in 1826 and the copy I own is an abridged version with an introduction and notes by F.G. Talbot first published in 1909.

As Talbot says in his introduction "The autobiography speaks for itself. It has been said to rank with the Confessions of St. Augustine and Rousseau, and the memoirs of Gibbons and Newton. In Asia it stands alone."

What a robust, forceful, and energetic character emerges from the very first page in language that betrays a master of prose, a discerning artist, an avid nature lover, and a born poet! The memoirs are as compelling as any action-packed

him from the top of the rock so that he flew with his pigeons and their house and became a falcon," wrote Babur with the wryness that characterises his prose.

This riveting beginning then takes us through all the vicissitudes of life of this Turkish prince descended from both Timur the Great and Chenghiz Khan. He was different from his ancestors in that he was as interested in nation building as in conquest, so that when his eyes turned finally to the vast treasure land of India, he established the great Muslim dynasty that transformed South Asia into the patchwork quilt of races and religions that it is today.

It was a hard task that he set himself and a difficult process, not only to conquer India, but to hold on to it and eventually to consolidate his power. In the event, he could not complete his task and it fell not to his weak and dissolute son, Humayun but to that other fascinating Mughal, his grandson Akbar.

In the pages of the Journal we get to know the man, Babar and to understand his motivations. What made him choose to remain in India despite the strong opposition of his own men? Was the effort worth it? It seems that to Babar it was, because he had the vision to look at a time beyond his own, reaching out across history to the glory that would be his as the founder of a great empire. One of his favorite sayings was,

*Give me but fame and if I die I am contented.*

*If fame be mine, let Death claim my body.*

But the cost was high. He mentions how much he missed Kabul, certainly as much as any of his companions, and the heat and humidity of the country made him long for the mountain air and cold climate of his birth. He describes almost wistfully how the aroma of a mountain melon brought on a wave of nostalgia, but he had a mission to accomplish, and stoically he carried on.

The great charm of the Journal is its directness and simplicity and its total lack of artificiality. He writes, "In this history I have held firmly to it that the truth should be reached in every matter and that every act should be recorded precisely as it occurred. From this it flows of necessity that I have set down of good and bad whatever is known concerning father and elder brother, kinsman and stranger: of them all I have set down carefully the known virtues and defects."

Abraham Eraly in his book, The Great Mughals describes Babar as "a blessed dilettante not a driven obsessed genius. Whatever he did was a vigorous and cheerful expression of his own vigorous and cheerful self, open and spontaneous. Babar delighted in being Babar. All things fresh and new gladdened him, and he bounded around his Indian empire with the feisty enthusiasm of a tourist."

The entries in the Journal indicate that he was perhaps the first South Asian environmentalist -- his love of nature, his accurate descriptions of the fauna and flora of the lands he conquered, his interest in creating gardens with refreshing streams and beguiling vistas, and the capacity to find joy in everyday life sustained him during his years of adversity for some interest or other always occupied him no matter which way the wheel of fortune spun. For example he was ecstatic when the grapes and melons which he had introduced into the Garden at Agra began to bear fruit. "To have grapes and melons grown in this way in Hindustan filled my measure of content."

Another diversion was a love of poetry and literature. His contemporaries knew him as a discerning critic who did not hesitate to chastise even close relatives for writing bad poetry. "His verse is flat and insipid," he says about his paternal uncle, Sultan Mahmud Mirza of Badakshan and adds, "Not to compose is better than to compose verse such as his." He wrote to chide Humayun once on the elaborate and ornate style in which the young man indulged, saying sternly, "In future write unaffectedly, clearly with plain words which saves trouble to both writer and reader."

He followed his own advice in this inimitable Journal perfectly and that is the basis for the enjoyment that one derives from reading the Babarnama.

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