

UN resolution on Iraq

Full sovereignty still far away

THE UN Security Council has in a unanimous vote endorsed the US-UK sponsored resolution outlining the terms of the end of the formal occupation of Iraq and the transfer of sovereignty to an interim government on June 30 of this year. To the extent that the US-UK axis now appears to have understood that it must act through the UN in order to gain legitimacy, and that consensus was reached, this was a welcome event.

It has long been this newspaper's position that the occupation of Iraq by the US-led coalition is contrary to international law and that the sooner that full sovereignty is returned to the Iraqi people, the better. The question which now remains is to what extent the transfer of power to the interim government contemplated by the UN resolution will accomplish this transfer of sovereignty and whether full sovereignty for the Iraqi people will ensue.

The sticking point in negotiations over the wording of the resolution was whether the interim government would retain veto rights over the use of foreign troops in Iraq. The resolution stopped short of granting the interim government veto power, but makes clear that foreign troops can only remain in Iraq at the behest of the government, and that the foreign forces must act only in full partnership and consultation with the Iraqi authorities.

There is a long way to go. The interim government is by no means representative, and it remains to be seen how smoothly the transition from a hand-picked government of appointees to a national assembly to a democratically elected government proceeds. Only when a democratically elected Iraqi government is in power and foreign troops leave its soil will Iraqis truly be able to boast of having attained full sovereignty.

In the meantime, the UN resolution is a good indicator, but it is still too early to tell whether there is light at the end of the tunnel. Whether Iraqis will accept the authority of the interim government, whether the June 30 hand-over will lead smoothly to full democracy, and how differences between the interim government and the US authorities will be resolved in practice, are all questions that remain unanswered.

Combating crime

It should have nothing to with politics

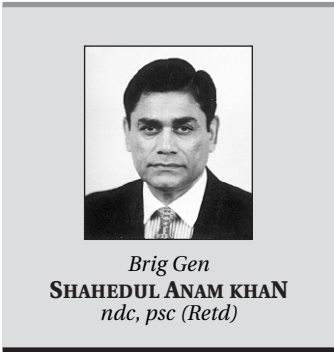
THE crime situation in the city, which is going from bad to worse, certainly calls for some drastic action on the part of the law enforcers. Viewed from that angle, it is good news that 22 teams of undercover policemen will be deployed in the metropolis in order to combat serious crime. There is, however, an adjunct to the plan that might give it a political overtone of a dubious kind: the teams will also "keep an eye on the opposition."

There is no doubt that people are expecting the law enforcers to make their presence felt. The latest crime wave has had a disruptive influence on trade and commerce and people are obviously feeling helpless. So they will welcome any attempt at dislodging the well-entrenched crime syndicates, which pose a grave threat to society as a whole. But what is not so clear is why the same law enforcers will keep a watchful eye on the opposition. Criminality and opposition activities cannot of course be treated as something alike. The basic premise is flawed.

The pitfall associated with mixing up crime with politics is that it may politicise the anti-crime drives, which are supposed to retain a strictly non-political character. The credibility of such operations will always be questioned if opposition activists occupy a special place in the law enforcers' list of suspects. Even if it is conceded, for the sake of argument, that police will only "watch" the opposition activists, the government will be hard-pressed to explain what this mission will achieve. It will only further distance the opposition from the ruling alliance.

The plan has little clarity of purpose. The crime situation has turned critical enough for the law enforcers to concentrate on it without being influenced by extraneous factors like opposition activities. Lawlessness is a matter of public concern that has to be addressed by the government with the support of all well-meaning citizens, including the opposition adherents. So there is little point -- and even less sound thinking -- in the idea of equating opposition activities in general with culpable crimes.

US war on terror and Rumsfeld's visit to Bangladesh



R. Rumsfeld has been and back, to and from Bangladesh. The media was rife with speculation about the possible motive of the visit. Not surprisingly so, since the defense secretary of the world's only super power chose to pay a visit to Bangladesh, brief though it was, at a time when events are heating up on all fronts.

In Iraq, things are getting from bad to worse. The recent resolution on Iraq, adopted by the Security Council on June 8, is an indication of the exit strategy from Iraq of the two coalition partners. The US, with its unflinching ally Britain, had been hard put to allay the misgivings of the other members of the Security Council on the resolution, through various amendments to it. The resolution, the fourth version of it, has been passed despite the reservations of some of

the Security Council members, and despite the many ambiguities that still remain.

Coming on the heels of a senior functionary of the US State Department, Christina Rocca, it appears implausible that Mr. Rumsfeld would choose to visit Bangladesh merely to exchange pleasantries.

No one can fault the media for speculating about the US motives behind the visit. I dare say the speculations were perhaps accu-

rate and intelligent. The media, though, was mildly upbraided, if one can use the term, by the Bangladesh foreign minister as well as the US ambassador to Bangladesh, for speculating about issues that, according to them, "did not come up in the talks at all." The press conference did nothing to stem the tide of speculation, and the answer to the question of US request for troops from Bangladesh was also not definitive.

Indeed, why was Mr. Rumsfeld

desh's credentials as a dependable participant in UN peacekeeping missions are very well established. But Bangladesh's record as a prime contributor to UN peacekeeping operations may not have been the only factor.

A peacekeeping force, in the existing security scenario in Iraq, made up of their co-religionists, would perhaps help assuage the feelings of the Iraqis, which are at present highly bruised, to say the least. No wonder then that troops from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and

Malaysia feature so prominently as part of the so-called Multinational Force (MNF), in the US reckoning.

That the US would tap Bangladesh for troops for Iraq should therefore not come as a surprise to anyone. And, in spite of what the officials from both sides chose to say, and in this case, not to say, the fact is that the prime focus of the defence secretary was to get Bangladesh to agree to participate in the MNF.

It could also be that the recent happenings in Bangladesh and the activities here of the various indigenous elements with religious leanings, going about in their own ways, with the law enforcing agencies quite unconcerned about these, may not have escaped the Americans' notice. They are, in their own way, quite concerned about the rise of radical and militant elements, and the role of the religious schools in fomenting such groups, not only in Bangladesh, but also in the region. These

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It is understandable that a new government should seek some change of course in as sensitive a matter as Indo-Pak relations. The new men in charge of foreign policy also believe that they were preceded by a bunch of amateurs who did not know the difference between policy and diplomacy. The simpler fact is that the peace initiative with Pakistan had gathered substantial popular support, and any disruption will become one of those negatives that begin to add up. Three constituencies are beginning to get affected: those voters who do not want to see accused politicians in office; investors in stocks and shares, whose volatility is making them queasy; and the much larger peace-constituency which wants to build on the joy of the cricket series in Pakistan. Either singly or together, they are not yet sufficient to disturb the equanimity of the government; but the point is that when the NDA

quence to Laloo's resignation, if it comes to that. It might not be dramatic, and it might not be immediate, but it is certain.

The Indo-Pak peace process lies in the category of imponderables. I think it was Winston Churchill who once described consistency as the virtue of an ass. Well, foreign minister Natwar Singh is no fool. He tossed out an idea from the standard reference book of hard hats when he suggested that the Indo-Pak dialogue should proceed on the Sino-Indian model. For the uninitiated, this means, essentially, that core differences should not disrupt improvement on other fronts. Translated further, it means that differences over Kashmir should not prevent growth in trade and other items on India's wish-list. Former foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal made precisely this point when he got an opportunity to ask President Pervez Musharraf a question during the *India Today* conclave a few weeks ago, and was applauded by many in the audience. The Pakistan President, not

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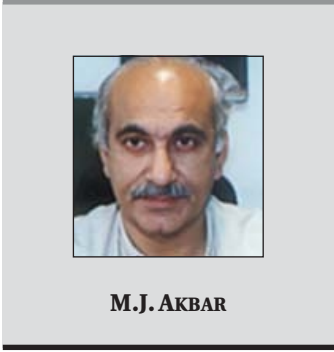
Apart from going by popular will, and the willingness of the host country to accept our participation, Bangladesh must also assess the progress of the so-called US war on terror and its efficacy, to determine whether it should continue to support something that has proved counterproductive. While one may not contest the lofty ideals behind the concept of the 'war on terror,' one has difficulty in accepting the way it has been conducted. In fact, the so-called US war on terror has exacerbated rather than arrested the phenomenon that it sought to curb.

Mr. Rumsfeld's remarks in Singapore, regarding US plans to embark on terrorist hunting in East Asia, cannot but be viewed with some consternation, not because of the intent, which may be honest, but because of the poor record of its success, in the past two years, in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In fact, the US 'war on terror' has gone terribly awry. Two recently published reports make damning indictment of the US war on terror, especially of its failure to curb terrorism, and in particular its failure to reign in al-Qaeda. The reports merit deliberation. But, more of that next time.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Events, dear boy, events



THE first feel-gooder of modern times was Harold Macmillan, Britain's Prime Minister between the suicidal Anthony Eden and the whimsical Alec Douglas-Home. The phrase has vintage. It was first used by Macmillan to describe the Britain that was emerging from the gloom of victory in the Second World War. 'Gloom of victory' is appropriate, for the economy had paid a ruinous price for military success. Rationing, for instance, continued for years after the war. Misery was compounded by misadventure: the 1956 Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of the Suez Canal ended in humiliation when the Americans reminded the European powers that Egypt was not their colony anymore. The peace dividend became visible during Macmillan's term, Britain began to smile, and its erudite Prime Minister invented the 'feel-good' phrase. So what happened when his preferred successor led the Conservatives into a general election in 1963? The Conservatives lost. Obviously there is no single issue that determines victory and defeat in as complex an event as a general election, particularly in as complicated a nation as India. Governance is akin to a gradual accretion of negatives, until at some point of time you cross the tipping point, and the glow of victory slips almost inadvertently into the fade of retreat. The problem of 'feel-good'

as a catch-all slogan is that for every person who feels good, there are two who do not feel as good, even if they are indeed slightly better than they were before. It is a claim that invites comparison and either jealousy or anger. For every one person using a mobile, there are a thousand who don't. The only politician who rode to re-election on such a slogan was Ronald Reagan, but that was because he took a concept a step ahead with his line,

phase came when the seeds planted by Rajiv Gandhi's innovative thinking offered fruit: between 1988 and 1991 the economy grew at 7.6 per cent a year. Rajiv Gandhi therefore had every right to believe that India was finally coming into its own, and there was enough in the foreign press, which had no reason to be subjective, to confirm such a view. Ironically, Rajiv Gandhi got 191 seats in the 1989 elections, almost the same as the

NDA's 190.

Why does success become its own enemy?

When Harold Macmillan was asked what worried him most during his halcyon days in office, he answered gravely, "Events, dear boy, events."

Events are both imponderable and ponderable. You can ponder over those that can be seen ahead. The Supreme Court judgment on the criminal cases against Laloo Yadav, for instance, is visible in the near distance. While there can be no assurance of a specific date in such matters, there is general agreement that the Court cannot delay a decision much longer. Perhaps it is now only a matter of weeks. This is one reason why the Opposition is stoking up a fire beneath those newly-appointed Central ministers who have been charged with various crimes. There is Laloo Yadav himself, along with two of his nominees to ministerial positions, and there is Shibu Soren, the tribal leader from Jharkhand, who has been given the mines

Hype about reforms has obscured the fact that the Indian economy grew at exactly the same pace between 1980 and 1989 that it did in the ten years after 1991: at 5.8 per cent in the 80s and 5.9 per cent in the 90s. The best of the first

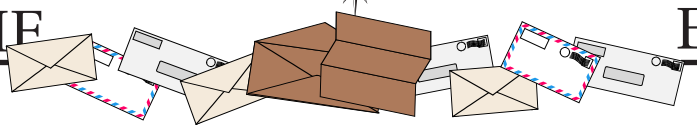
NDA's 190.

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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.

Behind marriage

Mr. Omar's letter drew my attention where he wants to establish the same-sex sexual bond as marriage. I beg to disagree with him.

He brings the reference of "birth control" under the light of religion. Here, I am afraid, some kind of misunderstanding took place. Most of the people of our country believe that birth control is illegal where "Islam" is the principal religion. Now in this age, the legality of birth control is the most controversial topic among the religious leaders of "Islam" and many of them think it is legal.

Combined family system was a kind of old social pattern. One unit family system is not condemnable under the aspect of social norms. Family bond is a good thing and society does not claim it illegal whether it is combined or single. Rather, it is a personal evaluation and matter of courage. Even an atheist's marriage is not illegal though he does not believe in religion, because he accepts the usual norm of society to legalise his sexual bond. The most confusing point is "marriage". Marriage is the legalised form of sexual bond between a man and woman which is naturally balanced. Marriage is a special kind of sexual bond where the couple seeks the acceptance of the state. Here, "legal" and "natural balance" are the most important points. The state makes a marriage

legal because it paves the way for new lives. Though many unfeeling couples fail to reach the goal, they are unlucky for their physical problem. And man-woman relationship is balanced according to the law of nature.

M R Huq
Khulna

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