

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 do 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.



Brig Gen
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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-

here at all? Was it to thank our government for its support for the US 'war on terror'? Was it merely a convenient stopover for the US head of defence, before embarking on more arduous sojourns? Or, was it something that we do not know anything about? In fact, one could conjure up in one's mind many scenarios with regard to this issue. But let us consider only two.

It could be that there is a pressing need for UN mandated troops for Iraq, post June 30, and Bangla-

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.

Apprehensions have been very clearly expressed in Mr. Rumsfeld's remarks at a recent conference of defence ministers on security in Singapore. It is only an intelligent guess that this issue was also discussed, perhaps in more than a casual manner.

Bangladesh's response to request for troops, which might have come up in no more than a casual manner, to quote our foreign minister, is appropriate, and the rationale behind it is sound.

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.

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Indeed, why was Mr. Rumsfeld

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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

Bangladesh cannot participate in a mission where the forces invested consist of anything other than the one composed of the 'Blue Berets' under UN flag and commanded by a UN designated commander. Anything short of that would be legitimising an unjust war, prosecuted under a very subjective and nebulous concept of 'war on terror.' The resolution on Iraq, in so far as it relates to the establishment of a Multinational Force, seeks to do exactly that.

lost the elections they did not exist. Events, dear boy, events.

The decisive events on the political calendar are of course the Assembly elections. More often than not, the partners in Delhi will be in competition, creating its own set of tensions. One of the most relevant observations made by Mr Mukherjee in the interview was that the central party in a ruling alliance needs at least 200 seats for comfortable governance. That is the circle that must be squared, or the square that must be circled. This is manifestly obvious. It links with Mrs Sonia Gandhi's point that an effective mandate for the Congress is 250 seats, not 145 seats. That is the circle that must be squared, or the square that must be circled. A timetable for the future will start to get formulated after the first of the Assembly elections, in Maharashtra in September. The advantage of the ruling alliance is that the partners are not in conflict there. The Congress and the NCP have worked out their equations, and Sharad Pawar, wisely, will get his way if he wants it. There is a perceptible Congress bounce, which could swing the undecided vote towards the Congress alliance. Maharashtra could offer the opportunity to build on a national level. Mrs Sonia Gandhi's own reputation is high. Her mission statement is Caesarian: Twice was I offered the crown, twice I refused it. That sort of thing gets votes. Mrs Gandhi is also in a position to preserve most of the alliance. Even though the Left will engage in friendly, or not so friendly, fire in the states, its support at the Centre is certain. Similarly, Maharashtra is sorted out; and there is no reason why the DMK should change sides. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the Congress has begun to reassess itself. That is how the stage is set. But will there be any drama?

Old Macmillan had the answer. Events, dear boy, events.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

M 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

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