

If you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

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THAT is a biblical truth which no man can sunder from reality. The havoc being wreaked in Ukraine is the consequence of the wind that the West has sown since the end of the Cold War. The whirlwind is blowing over the continent of Europe, for the first time, one might add, in the 21st century (Georgia was a short-lived 12-day war, with fewer casualties and less destruction than what the invasion of Ukraine has caused so far). So much for a civilised and regulated world order that the powerful countries abashedly flaunt at the deviant and less powerful "third world" countries. The expressed horror of the Western world has been so far much more pronounced in the case of an aggression against a "civilised" country, predominantly "Christian and White," in the heart of Europe, than had been their reaction on attacks and brutality in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, or Libya, which are "just any third world country."

No one can deny that what we are seeing in Ukraine is a blatant disregard for the territorial integrity of a sovereign country, and whatever Russia's geopolitical compulsions may be, it is an aggression by any definition of international law. It was commenced without the need to extend the courtesy of an ultimatum, or a diplomatic demarche. But was it unprovoked? That is the million-dollar question.

Certainly, there was no apparent physical threat from Ukraine. The alleged Ukrainian bombing of the breakaway Donbas region was the ostensible excuse for Russia to violate international law and disregard the sovereignty of an independent country. Putin has raised the stakes by putting his nuclear facility on alert. Several major Ukrainian cities have been shelled and civilians have been made targets. A major nuclear power station, Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest in Europe, has been captured by Russia, and so has been the infamous Chernobyl plant. Though it is difficult to verify the claims of casualties, several thousands have been killed and a similar number injured. But these are only statistics. The facts behind the statistics are what we must seek.

The reaction of the Western world has been as if the Russian invasion of Ukraine is one of its kind in recent history. As if this is for the first time that international law has been breached by launching a military invasion into a sovereign country. The West's response has been quick and predictable. Neither ready, nor willing to fight Ukraine's war, the only other option was to slap sanctions on Russia. Apart from the economic sanctions, a sports boycott has also been applied on Russia. But that is not to say that these steps are out of order or inappropriate. Every action that Russia has taken so far against Ukraine violates all international legal norms. And everything that needs to be done for Russia to stop its senseless and bloody invasion of Ukraine must be done.

Diplomacy has lost to the logic of national interest and raw power, as it always does, and international norms have been thrown to the winds, as happens in such cases.

But Russia is taking the lead from the US. If it is for the strong to do what it wills, and for the weak to suffer what it must, then Russia's "will" so far has been so much less than what the US has "willed" since the end of the last great war. But let us move from the ostensible to what is

really behind the Russian dictator's mind.

The Russian invasion has several parallels in recent history, and that includes the one in which it suffered a most bloody and humiliating defeat. In fact, every illegal invasion since then has had disastrous conclusion for the invader, not to speak of the unparalleled and unmitigated havoc it inflicted on the local

beginning of fulfilment of what one sees as the irredentist aspirations of Vladimir Putin. He sees himself as a Russian reincarnation of Garibaldi, Mazzini and Cavour—three in one, or a modern-day Bismarck—and wants to restore the original borders of the Soviet Union. Ukraine is the first of the many salami

his political objective. Putin's conditions are hard for Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to accept. He wants the Zelenskyy government to resign, have a new parliament elected that would write a new constitution, bar Ukraine from becoming a member of any military alliance, and de-weaponise the country. In other words, Putin wants a quiescent



population.

Take the illegal invasion of Iraq for example. More than 90 excuses were conjured up by the Bush regime to engender popular consent and rile up their psyche. It was a war where the worst form of deceit and lies were resorted to, and evidence manufactured to support falsehood. Iraq was projected as the most grave and immediate threat to the US and the West, and the report that Saddam Hussein was about to build a bomb was used as a subterfuge to bypass the United Nations (UN). The compulsion to uphold national interest was used by the two main protagonists, Bush and his genuflecting acolyte Blair, to occupy another country that is 10,000 kilometres away. The illegality of that war was not in doubt, and none other than the then UN secretary-general had stated that in September 2004, "I have indicated it was not in conformity with the UN charter. From our point of view and the UN Charter point of view, it was illegal."

By invading Ukraine, Russia, if anything, has taken a leaf out of the US war book. It has used the same argument—that its national interest was at stake, with Ukraine's likelihood of joining Nato—and invoked the same principle of preemptive attack, as was done by the US in invading Iraq. Putin's worry is justified and predictable—his actions, not. One wonders how the world would have reacted had the Cuban missile crisis had eventuated in a conflagration between the US and Soviet Union. The same concerns that motivated John F Kennedy to reach the precipice of war agitates Putin's mind, too. And I say this at the risk of sounding like a Putin apologist. The US felt threatened by a military base in its backyard separated by a 90-mile-wide gulf; the same argument has been used by Putin in relation to Ukraine, which shares a common border with Russia, to invade and destroy Ukraine. But Ukraine is perhaps only the

▲ **A Ukrainian civilian trains to throw Molotov cocktails in Zhytomyr on March 1, 2022—as Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues.**

PHOTO: REUTERS

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slices that Putin wants to make.

We are not sure what Putin's military objective is. Reportedly, his military operations are not going as per plans. He would be a fool to think that the entire Ukraine can be occupied. Apparently, Putin's strategy is to lay siege to nodal points, deny provisions and bring the country to submission. But Putin and his army are in for a hard grind. The world should brace for a prolonged urban war in all the major conurbations in Ukraine, and its dismal consequence: the unpredictable civilian casualties.

But no one should be in doubt about

to establish a pliant government. That would be possible and credible only if the capital is under his control. That seems to be quite far off at the moment. And the world should brace for more Ukraine-like adventures under the patina of national security and national interest. Predictably, the West is reaping what it sowed. Putin is using the West's argument for aggressing on other countries to launch his own aggressive agenda. Unfortunately, to quote Gramsci, "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Get prices down

Every year before the month of Ramadan comes around, we see a rise in the prices of essential food items. This year is no different, and greedy traders have the excuse of a war in Europe on their side, even in cases of non-imported goods. But will our authorities simply accept this hike in prices as the norm? Especially when the job market is still recovering from the effects of pandemic-induced lockdowns, do citizens not deserve some empathy? Instead, the price hike for food only seems to be getting worse. This cannot be acceptable and authorities must stamp down

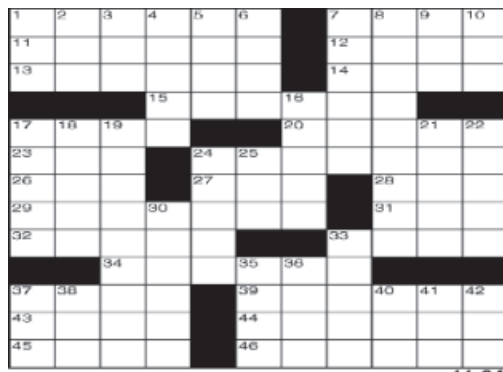


on traders who are merely taking advantage of the situation.

Sayem Ahmed, Dhaka

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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