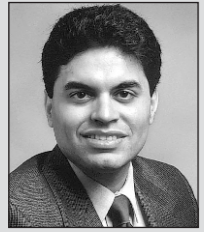


## Separating fact from fantasy

American policy hopes to build support in all communities, including the Sunnis, by rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure and spurring economic development. But if you fear a future in which you will be rounded up, tortured or slaughtered, a new school and a few more hours of electricity are not going to win you over. Security will always trump everything else. Biddle argues that a national power-sharing arrangement should be given precedence over creating the Iraqi military.



FAREED ZAKARIA  
writes from Washington

WATCHING what's happening in Iraq right now, with Shias and Sunnis polarized, hostile and increasingly violent, it is easy to conclude that this is all a product of ancient hatreds and that Iraq will inevitably descend into a bloody civil war. In fact, for a society with many different communities in it, Iraq has had a strikingly peaceful, even harmonious history unlike India or Nigeria or the Balkans. Current events are the product of recent forces, some set in motion by Saddam Hussein, others by the American occupation. Perhaps they can be reversed even at this stage, but it will take a more full-scale and aggressive reversal of American policy.

The administration's first, massive misstep was to occupy a country of 25 million people with only 140,000 troops. When security is scarce, people retreat to their ethnic, religious or tribal groups. They begin to mistrust anyone outside the clan. If the government

remains weak, they start providing for their own security, creating or expanding militias. This pattern has repeated itself in dozens of examples, including the Balkans and now, of course, Iraq.

The second mistake has been a broader one. Washington tended to see Iraq through a prism of fantasy rather than reality. It imagined Iraq as a secular, educated society rather than one composed of three distinct communities. To see the facts on the ground, look at any poll that breaks up the results for Iraq's three regions. When asked, for example, whether Saddam's removal was a good thing, Kurds responded positively by 91 percent, Shias by 98 percent and Sunnis by 13 percent.

When the insurgency began, most administration officials saw it as representing a small band of dead-enders, supported by vast numbers of foreigners, rather than what it was, a movement largely based in Iraq's Sunni population (though of course representing a minority within it). When the US disbanded the Army and "de-Baathified" the government, Washington believed that it was dismantling the apparatus of totalitarianism. But the Sunnis saw it as a mass purge directed against them.

We see our actions in Iraq as neutral and almost technocratic in nature, rather than what they are intensely political. The most significant example of this has been our "Iraqification" policy.

Having decided to create a new Iraqi Army and police and fast the US military took what volunteers it could. In a few months, Washington forced the rapid acceleration of the training schedule, which meant putting badly trained forces in the field and, more significantly, recruiting members of the existing Shia and Kurdish militias.

In the current issue of Foreign Affairs, the military-affairs scholar Stephen Biddle has written a powerful and persuasive critique of administration policy that centers on Iraqification. "Iraq's Sunnis," he writes, "perceive the 'national' army and police force as a Shiite-Kurdish militia on steroids. The more threatened the Sunnis feel, the more likely they are to fight back even harder. The bigger, stronger, better trained, and better equipped the Iraqi forces become, the worse the communal tensions that underlie the whole conflict will get." Biddle's argument is that the central plank of current administration policy "standing up" an Iraqi Army is not just unhelpful but actively producing the negative spiral we are watching.

Biddle points out correctly that American policy hopes to build support in all communities, including the Sunnis, by rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure and spurring economic development. But if you fear a future in which you will be rounded up, tortured or slaughtered, a new school and a few more hours of electricity are not going to win you over. Security will always

trump everything else. Biddle argues that a national power-sharing arrangement should be given precedence over creating the Iraqi military.

The US ambassador in Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, is aware of this intensely political reality in Iraq and has been trying to forge just such a national compact, often by undoing many of the bad decisions that were made before he got there. But other aspects of administration policy proceed apace, often undermining his efforts. Biddle argues that the United States will have to get much more aggressive in negotiating with the three major communities, making clear to them that it will stop supporting them if they do not compromise to forge a new deal. That probably translates to mean that the president will need to get personally involved in these talks, and the military will have to reorient its strategy to support them.

In his State of the Union address in January, President Bush took a swipe at critics. "Hindsight alone is not wisdom," he said. In fact, the tragedy of Iraq is that most of these critiques were made by several people at the time the policies were announced, often before. It's the president who needs to look back and learn from his mistakes. Hindsight may not be the only wisdom, but it is a lot better than operating in the dark.

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Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.

## Disclosure of wealth

The people of Bangladesh share a common belief that an unrestrained competition to accumulate wealth through all sorts of dubious means by the persons in power is going on in the country in the absence of watchdog institutions. Given the country's championship record in corruption over the past five years, the government should have been sincere for disclosure of wealth of ministers and MPs in accordance with its election pledges.



ANM NURUL HAQUE

THE government has taken no initiative aimed at the disclosure of wealth by ministers and lawmakers though it was one of the major pre-election commitments of the ruling BNP and its allies. Collecting accounts of assets of the prime minister, ministers, members of parliament and influential people in the government, and disclosure of it to eliminate corruption was a core pledge, among scores of others, outlined in the BNP 2001 election manifesto and its "views and vision" published before the last general election.

None of the ministers including the prime minister, members of parliament and influential people in the government have yet disclosed the details of their financial standing or any other source of wealth.

The parliament witnessed an unpleasant exchange in its last session as the legislators of both the treasury bench and the opposition Awami League traded blame regarding embezzling public wealth. Even Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and opposition leader Sheikh Hasina

accused each other's families of misappropriating public wealth through corruption.

According to a Daily Star report, the deputy leader of the opposition Abdul Hamid proposed formation of either a parliamentary body or a judicial commission to probe the "wealth accumulated through corruption" by the family members of the incumbent prime minister as well as former premier Sheikh Hasina. But the speaker did not respond to the deputy opposition leader's suggestion.

According to the Government Servants Conduct Rules, 1979, every government servant, at the time of entering government service, is required to make a declaration to the government, through the usual channel, of all immoveable and movable properties, including shares, certificates, securities, insurance policies and jewellery having a total value of Tk10,000 or more, belonging to, or held by, him or a member of his family.

Every government servant is also required to submit to the government, through usual channel, an annual return of assets in the month of December showing any increase or decrease in property as shown in the declaration submitted at the time of entering the service. This rule should also be made applicable for the ministers and MPs to eliminate corruption from the government functionaries.

The High Court in a milestone judgment passed on May 24, 2005 directed the election commission (EC) to make it mandatory for the candidates seeking election to parliament, to submit the eight-point information with the nomination form

including the statement of assets and liabilities and particulars of loan taken from banks or financial institutions. The High Court should also take similar move for promulgation of a mandatory regulation as per the Representation of the People's Order, 1972 for disclosure of wealth by ministers including the prime minister and MPs, before taking oath.

Some of our ministers and MPs have been accused of corruption. None other than the Danish Ambassador in Bangladesh brought the charge of corruption against the shipping minister, and the government was also threatened with suspension of all development assistance from Denmark.

A parliamentary body on March 8 also criticised the shipping minister for a "mysterious" increase in price for building an ocean-going ship and misuse of funds for construction of a new container terminal in Chittagong. The parliamentary standing committee for shipping ministry termed the 43 percent price increase, compared to the price on the first project, as "mysterious and dubious."

Two MPs from the ruling BNP also brought charge of corruption against the communication minister. But nothing concrete has yet been heard about the inquiry made by the parliamentary standing committee on the CNG import scam in which the communication minister was alleged to be involved.

The minister was also blamed for involvement in corruption in allotment of land for setting up CNG stations. The government, however, was prompt in taking action against the state minister for energy Mossaraf Hossain for accepting a

car from Niko, allegedly in a bid to manage him in dealing with the damage compensation demand for Tengratia gas field blow-out.

We should learn some lessons from India who recently proved to the world the greatness of its system of parliamentary democracy. Two TV channels aired secretly taped video footage of members of the Indian parliament taking bribes for asking questions in the House and taking percentages of development budgets of their constituencies. The TV cameras caught a total of eleven legislators belonging to almost all major parties (but majority from the BJP) and strong action was taken against those corrupt MPs.

A US lawmaker, Republican Randy Cunningham, has been jailed for seven years for taking \$2.4 million in bribes from a defence contractor. Cunningham accepted cash and gifts including a Rolls Royce car for awarding contracts. Such instances of corruption are not rare in our country, but instances of punishment are.

The people of Bangladesh share a common belief that an unrestrained competition to accumulate wealth through all sorts of dubious means by the persons in power is going on in the country in the absence of watchdog institutions. Given the country's championship record in corruption over the past five years, the government should have been sincere for disclosure of wealth of ministers and MPs in accordance with its election pledges.

ANM Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.

## Young Bangladeshis: The soldiers of fortune

Some human traffickers are taking young people from Bangladesh to Nepal with the promise of reaching Malaysia. They are also taking some young people to China with the same promise. What's the way to get to Malaysia from Nepal or China? Where do these duped young people end up?

FARUQUE HASAN

IT was in the middle of the 1980s. I met a young Bangladeshi in Brussels, the capital of Belgium. He was lean and thin, at best 5 feet 2 inches in height. It seemed to me that he did not even complete his secondary education.

When I met him, he had left home ten years before that time. In his first leg, with a tourist visa, he entered India, and worked in Mumbai for two years in a cloth shop. From Mumbai he went to Pakistan, crossing the international border between the two countries without visa, and stationed himself in Karachi. There he spent about three years, earning his livelihood as a fruit vendor. From Pakistan he went to Iran, once again crossing the border illegally. He spent one year in Tehran. From Iran he went to Iraq.

In Baghdad he worked in night-clubs. According to him, the night-clubs in Brussels are far smaller in comparison with the size of the nightclubs in Baghdad. From Iraq he went to Syria, here he worked as a farm labourer. His next stop was in Italy as he reached that country by crossing the Mediterranean Sea in a cargo vessel. From Italy through France he turned up in Belgium and sought political asylum, but he had no intention to live in that country. He told me, he had left Bangladesh ten years back with the goal to reach America, one day.

A few months after his entry to Belgium, one day I found he was nowhere. None of his acquaintances could tell me his whereabouts. From Brussels I went to London three months after the "vanishing into thin air" of that young man. One evening, in London, I was

watching BBC news. The newscaster said a Canadian Coast Guard ship had rescued a lifeboat with a few people on it, drifting in the Atlantic a few kilometres from the Canadian coastline. Then a picture came up on the TV screen, showing the rescued people were disembarking from the Coast Guard ship in a queue. To my surprise I could recognise in the queue that young Bangladeshi who had disappeared from Brussels a few months back. A small bag was hanging across his shoulder, and I could notice, I did not know whether other viewers could, a faint smile on his face. It became clear to me, when he could reach Canada, he would be able to reach his final destination, America, soon, very soon.

In the 1980s it was not that tough, as it is now, to enter one country from another, crossing the border illegally.

The borders of the European countries have become almost impenetrable these days for the people who want to cross those borders illegally. But the young fortune seekers of Bangladesh are not willing to pay heed to this reality.

A few days back I met a young man; he paid five hundred thousand taka to a human trafficker. First, he would be taken to Egypt and from there he would go to Italy by boat crossing the Mediterranean Sea. I asked him: "Do you have any idea how far is Italy from Egypt and how the vast is the Mediterranean Sea?" He answered: "No idea." I gave him the idea, and implored him not to embark on this venture, citing a newspaper report that a few months ago a boat with a number of dead Bangladeshi young people were found, drifting in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. My pleas fell on deaf ears. I told him another recent newspaper report that a group of Bangladeshis was rescued from the Sahara Desert in Mali on the verge of perishing in that scorching heat.

The young man told me that he had read that news, but he wanted to try his luck. It is clear that there is no way to prevent this section of the young men of Bangladesh who are

desperate to leave the country to seek a better life abroad.

During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, many people from different countries of Europe migrated to America to flee poverty and religious persecution at home. In the eighteenth century vagabonds and beggars living on the footpaths of London were forced to embark on ships to be taken to America to work there as labourers. In the 18th and 19th centuries, many European young men came to the East including Bangladesh, the most favoured destination at that time, to earn their livelihood. Now the human tide is flowing in the opposite direction.

Till 1975, few people of Bangladesh were willing to leave their country to settle down in a new land. They were satisfied with their lives at home. But when the people of Bangladesh have started feeling the strong desire to migrate to some other countries to bring change in their economic life, the opportunity for international migration has started declining fast.

What can the young people of Bangladesh do? Due to our high annual population growth rate, every year more than twenty five

lakh new employment seekers enter the job market. It is impossible for the country to create every year even twenty percent of that many new jobs needed. So what the unemployed young people will do? How long can they remain dependent on their parents? Some of them may join criminal gangs, not all of them. A part of them take the risk of their lives to migrate to other countries.

Once a great part of the booming population of Europe could migrate and settle down in new found lands like the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand. Where will we get extra lands for our ever-increasing population? We are going to get about 44,000 square kilometres of land from the Bay of Bengal in the next three to four decades. But when those lands will be ready for the human settlement? Again a threat is looming large that one-third of Bangladesh may get inundated by the rising of seawater due to global warming.

Some human traffickers are taking young people from Bangladesh to Nepal with the promise of reaching Malaysia. They are also taking some young people to China with the same promise.

What's the way to get to Malaysia from Nepal or China? Where do these duped young people end up? What the immigration people are doing at Zia International Airport? These fortune seekers cross the barrier of the immigration at the airport with tourist visa, but their appearance and behaviour does not conform with that of a tourist. Should we doubt that a nexus has grown up between the human traffickers and a section of immigration officials?

At the end, another true story. It was in the beginning of the 1980s. Three young men came to a lawyer in Dhaka to sue a human trafficker, who was the president of a small political party, and who tagged the title "Maulana" to his name. The Maulana took a group of young people, in exchange of a fat amount of money, to Thailand to take them to Malaysia. An agent of the Maulana took the young people to a forest in the remote part of Thailand, at night he surreptitiously abandoned them with the intention that these people would never find their way back to human habitat, and ultimately die there of hunger or at least of snakebite.

But those "fortunate" boys were able to reach a Thai village after

walking three days and nights. In that village they went to a school.

The schoolteacher arranged some food for the hungry lot. Then she collected donation from the children of the school to buy train tickets for the Bangladeshi boys that they could reach Bangkok and seek help from the Bangladesh embassy there to return to Bangladesh.

How many Bangladeshi young people who are being taken by human traffickers to Nepal, China, Egypt, or Mali with the promise of take them to a land of milk and honey will be so "fortunate"?

Faruque Hasan is a freelance contributor of The Daily Star.

## If bird flu hits

At least until October, when migratory birds return, the best bet is to prevent bird flu by stopping the import of Indian poultry. In spite of the government's instructions to the Bangladesh Rifles to monitor the borders carefully, there are still rumours of chicks being smuggled in from India, particularly at Burichang in Comilla district (on the Tripura border). These rumours need to be investigated. Bangladesh's ban on Indian imports may have saved us for the time being.

ZESHAN HASAN

BIRD flu continues its international march; now Pakistan, Sweden and Germany have reported infections. India's only confirmed outbreak was the widely-reported one along the Maharashtra/Gujrat border last week. That prompted a scare in several states, including West Bengal and Tripura; however, neither state has had a single bird flu infection confirmed by laboratory analysis. However, the prospect of bird flu in either of these states next door to us would make an outbreak almost inevitable in Bangladesh.

The very good news is that H5N1 bird flu virus responsible for all the current outbreaks has not mutated to a form which can easily infect humans. So humans generally are not in danger, unless they are in continuous close contact with poultry (for example, poultry farm workers and shopkeepers selling live chickens). Bird flu is still primarily a disease of chickens, not humans. But we cannot be complacent. Even if it only infects chick-

ens and does not affect a single human, the disease certainly has the ability to wreck Bangladesh's poultry industry. This will impact on the millions of people directly or indirectly supported by chicken farming across Bangladesh.

The government needs to implement an outbreak management plan. Such a plan has been written, but little implementation is visible and practically nothing has been publicized. The first requirement of a bird flu action plan is monitoring for infections; supposedly this is already being done by BRAC in cooperation with the government. Apparently BRAC has already gathered thousands of samples for testing. The results of all these tests are not being announced, however, apparently because everyone is afraid of a panic at the news that bird flu tests are even being conducted. However, this is the wrong approach. The best way to avoid a panic is to reassure the public that the government has a bird flu action plan and is implementing it properly. The relevant government departments should be updating

the public regularly as to how many samples are being collected and tested.

In case of a confirmed H5N1 infection in a poultry farm, the standard practice to contain the outbreak is to cull all poultry (including household chickens and ducks) within 3 km, and vaccinate and intensively monitor the birds within the next 7 km. One problem with this is that the government still has no stocks of vaccines, and is unlikely to get them anytime soon. Also, in India the government apparently decided that they could not effectively vaccinate and monitor such a large area, and so culled all birds within 10 km. This strategy seems to have been effective, as the Indian outbreaks seem to have been controlled. So we should also consider culling in a radius of 10 km, particularly until the government acquires sufficient stocks of vaccines. Given the current international demand, it will probably be weeks or months before sufficient vaccines are acquired.

Culling birds during an outbreak raises the bigger problem of farmer compensation; farmers generally

won't agree to hand over their chickens unless compensated for them. So the government had previously suggested that donors give it enough funds to compensate Tk 200 per chicken. However, Tk 200 is a lot to pay per chicken, especially when lakhs of them will in all likelihood have to be culled. A more rational compensation rule needs to be arrived at, depending on the type and age of the chicken.

The first sort of farmed chicken in Bangladesh are broilers (which produce meat). The cost of each broiler to a farmer is between Tk 30 (for a young bird) and Tk 80 (for a mature one). As the bird gets older, it consumes more feed and becomes more valuable. Given that any culling will involve a large number of broiler flocks of various ages, an average compensation of around Tk 55 could be considered. Alternatively, the government could fix two prices; a lower one of about Tk 45 for smaller birds (less than 750 g), and another of about Tk 70 for larger ones. Some farmers with older flocks will still lose some money, but the loss will not be much; once an outbreak happens, chicken prices will plummet and the market value of a grown broiler will probably be much less than Tk 55.

The second sort of farmed chickens are layers (which produce eggs). They can usually be easily distinguished from broilers as they are raised in cages. These are worth about Tk 30 for young birds and about Tk 160 at 17 weeks,

after which they start repaying in the form of eggs. So the maximum investment in a layer is Tk 160, and this is the maximum compensation which can be considered. So the for layers the simplest compensation scheme could provide an average compensation of (30+160)/2 = Tk 95. However, this pays too much to farmers with young flocks. A better solution is to pay only about Tk 45 for small birds and perhaps Tk 120 for larger ones. Again, farmers with older flocks and more money invested will lose some money; but some loss is inevitable in a bird flu situation.

There is one final type of farmed chicken, namely breeders. These are owned by hatcheries, and lay fertilized eggs which are hatched into chicks. Breeders are basically extremely valuable layers; typically, each one would typically be worth about Tk 350 by the time it started laying. Probably the reason for the government's proposal of Tk 200 compensation per chicken was based on an average value which included breeders, layers and broilers. However, breeder farms raise chickens in closed sheds under conditions of tight bio-security; as a result, they practically never experience bird flu infections.

Across the world, practically all outbreaks have been in broiler and layer sheds, which are open to the outside and easily infected. Also, breeder farms are run by large hatcheries who have enough funds and access to bank loans to manage

their own flock culling losses. The government should save its compensation funds for the small farmers who really need it.

At least until October, when migratory birds return, the best bet is to prevent bird flu by stopping the import of Indian poultry. In spite of the government's instructions to the Bangladesh Rifles to monitor the borders carefully, there are still rumours of chicks being smuggled in from India, particularly at Burichang in Comilla district (on the Tripura border). These rumours need to be investigated. Venkateshwara Hatcheries Limited, the largest poultry company in India, has been served a show-cause notice in Maharashtra for covering up knowledge of the outbreak there and selling chickens which it knew might be infected. If they were desperate enough to sell such poultry in India, where the authorities have the power and jurisdiction to punish them, then it is frightening to think of what they would have exported to us. Bangladesh's ban on Indian imports may have saved us for the time being.

Zeshan Hasan is director of one of the largest poultry hatcheries in Bangladesh.

