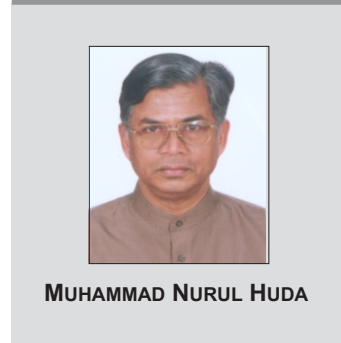


The bigots and the sentinels in slumber land



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE sensational disclosures made by the terror supremos and other religious extremists in course of interrogation by the intelligence agencies must have surprised both the non-believers and the naive in our society where until recently not much note was taken of their activities. The fact that there is a discontinuance of the deadly doings of such elements may not be a comforting scenario because their unhealthy growth and harmful rise in our body-politic too was not known to the general public. Therefore, the concerned citizens may only keep guessing as to the nature and dimension of the diabolical mischief of the bigots in the days to come.

What may or may not be done to counterail the malevolence of the extremists concerns every right-thinking Bangladeshi but equally, if not more significant, is what kept the state apparatus in a deep slumber while the bigots carried on virtually undisturbed. There is a creeping suspicion that there never was a dispassionate appreciation of the real threat scenario. In other words, was there no effort to pinpoint the threats posed to our democratic polity and by extension to our independent national existence? These questions should bother us because patriotic citizens of the People's Republic of Bangladesh must know that.

National interest and threat perception

Without doubt, our constitution narrates eloquently our national interests. It says that the aim of the state is to realise the democratic process in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social, will be secured for all citizens. It further affirms that it is our sacred duty to safeguard, protect and defend this constitution and to maintain its supremacy as the embodiment of the will of the people of Bangladesh. It categorically states that the con-

STRAIGHT LINE

We have to admit that we are not really at peace with the so-called religious extremists because they have declared war on our system of government and life. The reality is that we are faced with a closed, conspiratorial and scheming enemy. We cannot hope to maintain our position securely if our opponents are confident that they can attack us at the time and place of their choosing and without any forewarning.

stitution is, as the solemn expression of the will of the people, the supreme law of the Republic. The above constitutional stipulations have been highlighted because apparently the mission and strategy of our crime fighting and intelligence organisations had not been stable at least in so far as the domestic threat scenario is concerned. It is felt that those who have invariably substantially altered with the change of a political government. One may not be far from the reality to say that it has been our unfortunate experience to witness the differing political agendas often clouding the pragmatic understanding and appreciation of our real national interests.

If we delve into the past we will be confronted with shamefully unpleasant facts. In the yester-years, we had the unpalatable experience of witnessing a very sensitive intelligence organisation working principally for the whims and caprices of a virtual dictator and using public funds for creating and destabilising political parties, political horse-trading and shadowing people on personal and flimsy grounds. No wonder in such a scenario the professional efficiency was sacrificed and public servants turned into personal servants with the attendant ignominy.

The organisational culture

Ensuring internal security is closely associated with the task of collecting and collating intelligence in the interest of the state. In reality, in our situation, the interests of the state often get diluted and mixed up with the interests of the government of the day. The situation is marked by an unfortunate lack of understanding and appreciation of the requirements of the state and the government in a democratic and journalist society like ours. The unpleasant truth is that intelligence agencies maintain file and shadow the leaders and workers of pronouncedly constitutional politics-oriented parties belonging to the opposition

who are recognised partners in the business of politics. At some point of time when such opposition party comes to power, there is an uneasy relationship between the political bosses and the agencies. In such a scenario, professionalism becomes the worst casualty, sense of direction is lost, and the organisation dips into a lackadaisical environment and interests of the state take a back seat surrendering greater space to partisan considerations. It is needless to say that the values of a democratic polity are universal and as such demand unconditional adherence to it.

The reaction and inaction

Like the responses to other socio-economic issues of our national life, we have been disappointingly reactive in responding to the threats of national security. The whole approach appears to be ad-hoc and on a case to case basis. Somehow, the establishment wishes to assure itself by imagining that a hydra-headed monster has surfaced all on a sudden and will wither soon to the relief of a concerned population. The phenomenon of setting a time limit of two to three months to completely root out the extremist problem gives rise to more questions than it answers. Such utterances do not really create optimism and establish credibility of institutional competence and political sagacity. Similarly, enforcement officials prematurely ruling out any link of extremist activities to foreign sources also betray a pathetic lack of discretion and judgement.

One will not be far from truth to say that posture wise we were not so conspicuously religious in pre-1971 times under Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Many of us have not realised that in post-1975 Bangladesh, particularly during the last 25 years there has been a phenomenal growth of 'Madrasha' throughout the length and breadth of the country. At the same time many mosques have been built by individuals and organisations about

whose credentials much is not known. A question obviously arises in such a scenario. That is, was moral rearmament or spiritual renaissance the predominant factor behind such unusual growth of religious institutions and places of worship?

However, doubts would creep in as we do not see any corresponding healthy rise in public or private morality. So the reasonable suspicion is that while the establishment, the civil society and other activists have remained indifferent to the programmes and designs of the obscurantist elements, the so-called religious extremists have grown in strength and spread their tentacles taking advantage of the ignorance and inertia.

Intelligence and our freedom

Bangladesh polity is now challenged by hostile groups that profess a philosophy of life and of government inimical to our own. In fact, we are now facing an adversary who are armed enough to commit widespread violence. In our free society while our defences and deterrents are largely prepared in open fashion, our new antagonists have succeeded in building a formidable wall of secrecy and security. So, to bridge the gap and warn ourselves in time, we have to rely more and more upon our intelligence operations. There is a need to break through the shield of secrecy of the bigots. The special techniques which are unique to secret intelligence operations are needed to penetrate the security barriers of the extremist outfits.

Our preparation to combat the extremists cannot wait for evidences of the likelihood of further hostile acts against us. We should, therefore, be forewarned and forearmed. The act of forewarning could itself constitute one of the most effective deterrents to the bigot's appetite for attack. Intelligence should not be a tabooed subject. What we are striving to achieve

should be an advertised fact.

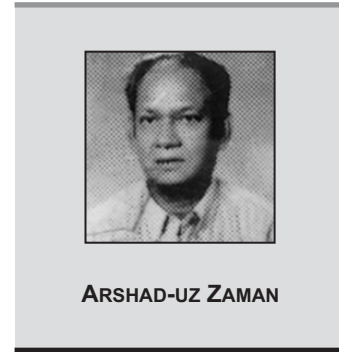
The most serious occupational hazard in the intelligence field is prejudice. While we are all creatures of prejudice, we must be able to avoid bending of facts obtained through intelligence to suit or defeat a particular political viewpoint.

We have to admit that we are not really at peace with the so-called religious extremists because they have declared war on our system of government and life. The reality is that we are faced with a closed, conspiratorial and scheming enemy. We cannot hope to maintain our position securely if our opponents are confident that they can attack us at the time and place of their choosing and without any forewarning.

In the last analysis the most important safeguards lie in the character and self discipline of the leadership of the intelligence service and of the people who work for it -- on the kind of men and women on the job, their integrity and their respect for the democratic processes and their sense of duty and devotion in carrying out their important and delicate tasks.

Our intelligence organisation needs to work under pragmatic political leadership and if properly and professionally steered, it does not threaten our liberties. If we operate by the book, we will be adequately informed of the perils which face us. If we do not know the designs of the so-called religious extremists, then we could well be isolated and our liberties, too, could be in jeopardy. Therefore, we must be ready to deal with all aspects of the not-very-visible war of the bigots with all its ramifications and fronts, supported by external resources. The last thing we can afford to do now is to put our intelligence in chains. Its protective and informative role is indispensable in time of unique and continuing violence in the name of religion.

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ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

THE crisis in France, if anything, seems to become more and more profound. The Republic established by that towering personality Charles de Gaulle in the late fifties is faced with the most severe test yet.

As usual it is the restive French youth, who are in the forefront of the current crisis. It has been triggered by the hurried decision of French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin that allows the government to sack young recruits without giving them an opportunity to find alternative employment. Indeed deep down there is the worry among the youth of lack of jobs as the job market gets tighter.

President Jacques Chirac backed up his Prime Minister to the hilt and signed the bill into law. He then went before nation wide audience and in a TV address defended the action of the prime minister. For he also said that he would bring about important changes in the new law. That was for the ears of the thousands of demonstrators, who were pouring into the streets of Paris and throughout France. It was evident that the highest authority in France was suffering from indecision.

It is well known that Dominique de Villepin is the "dauphin" (chosen successor) of Jacques Chirac, whose term expires in about a year.

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

From what looked like an innocent beginning of some unemployed youth demonstrating in the Place de la Republique, after nearly a month the crisis has gone on growing larger and larger. Although some labour unrest has been reported from neighbours of France, the current crisis seems to be a purely French affair.

Tugging at the heels of Chirac is the Interior Minister Nicholas Sarkozy and the relations between Chirac and Sarkozy are frosty. Faced with the youth and the labour unrest, Sarkozy has fallen in line with Chirac-Villepin.

The way the drama is unfolding in Paris it is clear that the twilight has come to the Elysee before time. This is reminiscent of 1968 when barricades were erected in Paris by the student community, which ultimately led to the downfall of the regime of Charles de Gaulle. Of course nobody would wish to compare De Gaulle with his successors. Indeed personalities like De Gaulle leave no successor. We need not go far to find a similar situation. After the assassination of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family, the Bangalee Nation has been floundering for the last 33 years.

Yet thanks to the forceful personality of De Gaulle that the political system that he built tailor made for him has survived nearly half a century. We may recall that before De Gaulle took charge of his beloved France, there used to be veritable musical chairs and governments came and went, unmoored, unsung.

The sixth Republic of De Gaulle, has it run its course? This thought cannot be put aside as the current

crisis continues to unfold. The highest trade union (CGT) has thrown in a challenge to President Chirac that it will compel the government to cancel the new First Employment Contract. From the unemployed students the movement has been virtually taken over by the powerful Labour Union. They are planning a massive strike through which they plan to paralyze rail, air and virtually all modes of transport.

From what looked like an innocent beginning of some unemployed youth demonstrating in the Place de la Republique, after nearly a month the crisis has gone on growing larger and larger. Although some labour unrest has been reported from neighbours of France, the current crisis seems to be a purely French affair. People of France offered the world the Grand Revolution in 1789 triggering a transformation of the map of Europe.

Once again the French are out in the streets. It would be unwise to characterise this as jockeying for the Elysee Palace.

Arshad-Uz-Zaman is a former Ambassador.

Illegal immigration and broken borders

INSIDE AMERICA

George Bush, Jr. supports a foreign guest worker programme that would put millions of illegal immigrants on track towards permanent residency and US citizenship. The problem is that congressional guest worker plans differ radically on such issues as who should they cover, whether the workers must return to their home countries and when and whether they should be put on a path towards US citizenship.

RON CHEPESIUK

IT was remarkable to watch the event unfold on American television. Last April 1, thousands of immigrants, legal and otherwise, marched in a mile long line across the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City. Some of the marchers waved Mexican, Nicaraguan and other foreign flags. All were angry. They were demonstrating against some of the immigration reform proposals in Congress. The scene was replicated in other cities nationwide.

Forget the weapons of mass destruction and the mess in Iraq, Bush's domestic spying program, Bush administration incompetence and the coming the hurricane season, former spy Valerie Plame and Bush administration dirty tricks or even the mountains of debt the country has accumulated during the Bush administration. America's hot button issues right now are the twin problems of illegal immigration and broken borders and what to do about them.

Last March 30, the Senate began to debate the issues. It's about time. The US has an illegal immigrant population that could be as high as 12 million, a number that, if correct, would give the US an immigrant population the size of the state of Ohio. The US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimates that 500,000 immigrants cross into the US illegally every year and that about 78,000 of them come from countries of special concern in the War on Terrorism.

The big question is how many of them are terrorists of the al Qaeda mold? Nobody knows, making the US control of its border a joke that can have serious consequences.

Several sources noted that the terrorists have many ways to enter the US, such as getting across the equally porous US-Canada border and even speed boating to shore off the US coast, as Colombian drug traffickers liked to do in Florida in the 1980s. But they acknowledged no smuggling route has as many human trafficking possibilities with an Islamic terrorist potential as does the US-Mexico border. "It's a hopeless situation," one DOJ official admitted candidly. It's like trying to keep people out of your backyard without putting a fence around it.

ADEA official agreed. "We hear a lot about Mexican nationals dying in the desert trying to get into the US," he explained. "But in some places you can actually walk across the US-Mexican border. Every day I see truckloads of illegals being transported back to the Mexican side, and all we hearing from our politicians in Washington is a lot of



An immigrant cab driver in USA.

tough talk."

Are any of the illegals who manage to evade capture and deportation Islamic terrorists? Law enforcement officials admit that they have no clue.

Most of the people who sneak across the US border illegally do not bad people with bad intentions. Most do so because of economic reasons. They want to use the "land of opportunity" to create better life for themselves and their families. Still, many foreigners don't want to break the law and are willing to play by the rules and patiently wait in line to enter the country legally, even though the line has gotten longer and longer since 9-11.

An American would have to be a total recluse not to encounter illegal immigrants in his daily life. They are the ones that take many of the jobs that Americans find don't pay enough or are beneath them. I know several illegals, including one who has been in the US for eight years, and has a nice family and a good job managing a restaurant.

The supporters of illegal immigrants say that, in addition to meeting the labour needs of the US economy, they pay billions in taxes and support the economy as consumers. But there is a downside, too. Illegals also drain the country's resources, especially in the areas of education and health care. Also, when an illegal commits a crime, it's often impossible to find them, let alone punish them.

Even with the sound and the fury on Capitol Hill, no real consensus exists about how to reform the immigration and broken border issues. Options proposed include a guest worker program, amnesty for those illegal immigrants already here and building a wall along the US-Mexican border, for starters. A house bill passed last December would even make it a felony to be an

illegal immigrant. It's a stupid measure. Thanks, to our equally stupid and draconian drug laws, we already have the world's highest prison population.

Not much is being said or proposed about punishing Big Business, which uses and often exploits illegal immigration, and, which by doing so, is helping to drive down the wages of working class Americans. Big business's powerful lobby is hard at work on Capitol Hill to get the immigration law "reformed" so it can use the changes for their economic gain.

George Bush, Jr. supports a foreign guest worker programme that would put millions of illegal immigrants on track towards permanent residency and US citizenship. The problem is that congressional guest worker plans differ radically on such issues as who should they cover, whether the workers must return to their home countries and when and whether they should be put on a path towards US citizenship. Moreover, some proposed guest worker plans are incompatible, and a lot of politicking will be necessary to get a satisfactory compromise passed in Congress.

But, in reality, a guest worker plan would do little, if anything, to fix the country's broken borders. It will not include everyone, so people will not suddenly stop entering the country illegally. Border security will remain a joke, although we America won't be laughing.

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Working together for health

Focus on the health workforce

Yesterday, April 7, was World Health Day. It is the annual flagship event of the World Health Organisation. Since 1950, it has been observed each year to raise awareness of specific global health issues. This year's theme -- Working together for health -- highlights the challenging and often inspiring work carried out by health care workers.

DR MD IQBAL KABIR

HEALTH workers save lives. Without them, advances in health care cannot reach those most in need. Preventing and treating diseases require assessment, delivery and monitoring by health workers. Despite this, national health systems worldwide are finding it increasingly difficult to train, support and retain their health workers. These problems are directly threatening global efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to deal with dire health threats such as pandemic human influenza, epidemics of chronic disease, and disasters. In addition, shortages of health educators and trainers, support staff and managers, and the wasting of available resources are making a critical situation even worse.

There can be no doubt that there is a growing health workforce crisis in many parts of the world. The global population is rising, but the number of health workers is stagnating or even falling in ratio.

WHO estimates the current global health workforce to be around 59 million women and men. There are 39.5 million health service providers and over 19.5 million management and support workers. It is estimated that there is a global shortage of more than four million doctors, midwives, nurses, pharmacists, dentists and support workers. Decades of cost cutting and under-investment in health have also resulted in truly terrible working conditions for many in the health workforce. The morale and performance of overburdened, underpaid and unsupported health workers have sharply declined. As a result, many health workers feel they can no longer continue under these conditions. This has led to loss of health workers, deterioration of health services and erosion of public trust in the health system.

Solutions to these problems do exist, and new ones are being actively sought. Innovative and effective ways to educate, support and manage the health workforce, and encourage private-public partnerships are already reaping

benefits. In recent years, WHO and its partners have moved health workforce issues up the political agenda. To give further momentum to efforts in this area, World Health Day 2006, the world health report 2006, have all been aligned around the key theme of Working together for health. The hope is that this will encourage all stakeholders -- policy makers, international donors, politicians, health professionals, academia, civil society, faith-based organisations, media -- to unite and work together to strengthen the health workforce.

The four priorities for action encompass educating and training health workers; supporting and protecting them; enhancing their effectiveness; and tackling health imbalances and inequities.

Educating and training health workers
What can we do to educate and train health workers? All countries, poor or rich, should develop updated comprehensive national plans to identify health workforce shortages and bottlenecks, and develop a consensus for joint action. Plans should respond to health needs and personnel requirements, as well as the changing nature of labour markets and the new skills mixes required. In all these areas, rational and innovative new approaches will be needed. Approaches that have already yielded good results in many countries include:

- adapting education and training curricula to fit national health priorities;
- improving coordination and planning between the health, education and finance sectors;
- continued training and support for health professionals;
- diversifying the roles of health workers; and
- creating new health worker categories, along with new education programmes.

Supporting and protecting the health worker community
What can we do to support and

protect health workers? Supporting and protecting health workers requires competitive salaries and other benefits, good working conditions (including flexible working hours) and a workplace safe from the risks of infection, injury and violence.

In addition to the risks associated with infection and workplace accidents, health workers face the added threat of violence. A shift towards a "zero-tolerance" approach to violence against health workers and its systematic reporting is one of the most important issues in protecting health workers, and one that needs to be addressed now.

Successfully mobilising support from both the public and private sectors will also be a key part of retaining health workers. Building up the capacity for ongoing training, encouraging career advancement, and providing managerial support are all urgent priorities. Not all strategies for supporting and protecting health workers require large-scale financial investment or infrastructure.

Enhancing the effectiveness of the health workforce
What can we do to enhance health workforce effectiveness? Strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the health workforce must initially focus on existing staff because of the time lag in training new health workers. In the short-term, one challenge will be improving health worker performance and impact by matching skills to health needs while maintaining professional standards and codes of conduct. In the longer term, sustained improvements are only likely if they are accompanied by improved working conditions, salaries and management as well as workplace policies that support life-long learning.

A team approach to patient care should be encouraged. Innovative approaches to turn individual health workers into members of health teams, backed by effective and supportive supervision, should be implemented. Recognising the contribution of all health workers and finding efficient ways for them to

contribute will be vital if significant gains are to be made.

But it is not just the formal workforce that can be better managed for improved performance. For example, in Thai village health volunteers perform primary health care and disseminate health information in their communities. In return they receive non-financial incentives, such as social recognition and continuous training. Such innovative and cost-effective ideas can enable informal health workers worldwide to carry out basic yet life-saving functions such as drug distribution, health surveillance and outreach programmes.

If implementing these and other approaches is to be successful, it will be vital to gain trust. Without trust, health systems cannot be fully effective. Fighting corruption in all its guises must therefore be a priority if trust in state health systems is to be regained.

Tackling imbalances and inequities
 The global shortage of health workers is currently estimated at 4.25 million. The world health report 2006 has shown that in general, countries with fewer than 2.3 doctors, nurses and midwives per 1000 people fail to achieve an 80 percent coverage rate for measles immunisation, or the presence of skilled birth attendants during childbirth. This has a demonstrable impact on people's lives and deaths. Fifty-seven countries fall below this minimum threshold, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

What can we do to tackle imbalances and inequities? Strategies must be developed to manage internal and international migration, and make health work a safer and more attractive occupation. Where appropriate, the statutory age of retirement should be re-considered and made more responsive to an era of ageing workforces. Whatever approaches are adopted there should be a focus on protecting health in the poorest countries while ensuring individual freedom of movement.

Countries must work both individually and together to find solutions. Governments should invest in their health systems, particularly the workforce, in order to attract and retain sufficient health personnel to meet the health needs of their populations.

In order to manage international migration and minimize inequities,

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