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Can the Iraq crisis be resolved?

As Iraq's elected legislature is trying to bring about a largely Shiite-led government which will be acceptable to the Sunni and the Kurdish minorities, a look at Iraq's ethnic conflict may be in order.

It is said that Saddam Hussein had been working under impression that he had one asset: Iraq's vast oil reserves and two liabilities: the Shiite Arab majority and non-Arab Kurdish minority. From the day one of his rule, he set out to destroy or counter these two liabilities. Although in 1970, it was Saddam who negotiated the so-called 'March Manifesto' that granted the Kurds considerable autonomy as a way to ending their

in their own country.

The wheel of fate turned against Iraq's Shiites in the fall of 1980, when Saddam Hussein, just self-appointed president of Iraq, invaded Iran. He was motivated by both fear and aspiration. He feared that Iran's Shiite revolution might spill over to Iraq, emboldening the Iraqi Shiites to revolt against his minority Sunni rule. Saddam had also his eyes on a bigger prize: Iran's south western province of Khuzestan, populated by mostly ethnic Arabs, containing the bulk of Iran's oil reserves. The Iraqi invasion was one of the most inept military operations in recent times and it failed to occupy the

simply crushed the Shiites, killing thousands of them.

However, the situation changed dramatically after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Long oppressed Shiites, freed from the Sunni domination, swept the subsequent elections and are now in a position to form a majority government. Of course, this was totally unacceptable to the once-dominant Sunni minority who launched a terror campaign against the Shiites. The Sunni-led insurgents bombed Shiite mosques filled with worshippers. They also attacked the largely-Shiite security forces and Shiite officials in a bid to trigger a civil

with the Shiite majority, there can be no end to the conflict. The Shiite majority will not accept any Sunni domination which may be preferable to the Americans because of their concerns about Iran. As Prof. Vali Nasr, of Naval Postgraduate School in California, recently wrote: "Shiites see American policy as unduly influenced by Sunni rulers in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, who have been aggressively lobbying Washington for a greater Sunni role in running Iraq. This has led many Shiites to talk of a 'second betrayal' by the United States, a sequel to what occurred in 1991 when the Shiites rose up against Saddam Hussein only to be butchered as American forces refused to intervene. ... This American desire to placate the Sunnis could hurt US regional ambitions"

Unless the Sunni minority give up their desire to dominate once again the Shiite majority, there will be no peace in Iraq. However, the Shiite majority will have to convince the Sunni and the Kurds have a say in the government. This will be most difficult task in a country where the minority Sunnis ruled with iron hand and the Shiites majority might think they have a historical opportunity to give the Sunnis a taste of their own medicine. The Americans cannot act as an honest broker as they have lost the trust of both the Shiites and the Sunnis. In fact, the Americans have become a victim of their own success in Iraq. A Shiite-dominated Iraq will inevitably move closer to the Shiite Iran and if the Sunni extremists and Saddam loyalists can somehow able to re-assert their authority (which is highly unlikely), Iraq might become a hostile state like Afghanistan under the Taliban. Both outcomes will be most undesirable for the Americans. They can only hope that something in-between will emerge in an otherwise quagmire of Iraq.

Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada



PHOTO: AFP

guerrilla war against Baghdad, he unilaterally decided to renege on it in 1973 and attacked the Kurds triggering renewed Kurdish resistance.

But it was the Shiites who were his main target. As a member of the Sunni Arab minority, which represented only 20 per cent of Iraq's population, Saddam Hussein was well aware of his precarious hold on power. Before Saddam, the ruling Sunni minority and the Shiite majority co-existed in a tenuous but largely peaceful environment. But when Saddam took over power in 1979, he decided to rule Iraq with an iron hand and the Shiites were virtually disenfranchised

(under-defended) Iranian oil fields. For next eight years, the Iraqis and the Iraqis fought a largely stalemated war in which more than a million Iraqis and Iraqis perished.

The Iraq-Iran war added to the plight of the Shiites who are increasingly seen as a surrogate of Shiite Iran. Repression of the Shiites increased and many Iraqi Shiite leaders sought refuge in Iran. But after Saddam's defeat at the hands of American-led coalition forces in 1991, the Shiites rose in revolt hoping that the Americans would support their uprising. But the United States refused to intervene and Saddam's Republican Guards

war in which they think they can prevail because of better organisation and military hardware. The bombing of the Golden Mosque, one of Shiites' holiest shrines finally trigger a civil war and the Shiites retaliated by bombing Sunni mosques and killing Sunni clerics. The Shia-Sunni civil war has finally arrived.

In this war of the sects, the American forces have become only armed bystanders. They are completely powerless to determine the course of war between long-oppressed Shiites and now-deposed Sunnis. As long as the Sunnis refused to accept to share power



PHOTO: AFP

Nepal wins

DEMOCRACY

"Government of the people, by the people and for the people" said the pathfinder of democracy, Abraham Lincoln. That is, in a democratic country power is centred around people. We saw how people were struggling for democracy in Nepal. This movement has taken some lives. It has caused bloodshed, but the people of Nepal have won democracy. The king's authority was very much under pressure.

Actually, Nepalese people have proved that people are the main source of power. This turmoil has established the foundation of democracy in Nepal.

Abu Bakar
Rupnagar R/A, Mirpur, Dhaka

Sabre rattling on Iran

Seymour Hersh reported in New Yorker magazine in April that the Bush administration was planning a massive bombing campaign including the use of bunker busting nuclear weapon against Iran to destroy the suspected key Iranian facility.

People will die in millions, oil prices will shoot up, but Americans cannot expect to dominate the whole world on this or that pretext.

Roney
On e-mail

Thoughts on Eid-ul-Azha

Qurban Eid is celebrated all around the country with sacrifice of animals. The existing arrangements of 'Qurbanir hut' and 'Hashih' collection are not at all related to religion, but are more of a process of organising the market for selling animals. This process has been modernised quite a lot by the municipal corporations. Also, to utilise the skins effectively, various skin separation and preservation methods have been developed which is a good initiative. But, after purchasing the animal, the process of slaughtering it and processing the meat is mostly left to the persons sacrificing the animal, who then complete the process either by themselves (with the help of friends and relatives) or by hiring some non-professionals. These processes can be modernised too. It has been observed that many young and under-aged madrasah students are carrying out the slaughtering of such big animals and lots of kids are exposed to those scenes.

Time has come to review and reorganise these animal slaughtering, meat processing and garbage disposal processes. The whole issue needs to be looked at from a scientific angle by setting up temporary slaughter houses in every locality; local governments and communities can efficiently manage this affair. Senior madrasah students and mullahs can be employed by these temporary slaughter houses to carry out the job following appropriate religious instructions. These temporary slaughter houses should be allowed to employ adult semi-professionals and professionals only, who have to be well trained in operating electric meat cutting machines, which is nothing but a motorised (electric) power saw on a steel bench/table with safety switches. The use of these meat-cutting machines should be the precondition for permitting those proposed temporary slaughter houses. The meat cutting machine

will play a vital role in making the whole operation efficient, manageable and cost effective. If the cost effectiveness of those slaughter houses is considered, at present animal owners are already paying 10% of their purchase price for slaughtering and processing of the meat and they are paying it to inefficient people.

The decision-makers should look into the matter.
Ekrumulah Chowdhury
On e-mail

A response to fair elections

This is in response to M. Inamul Haque's piece of April 21, "Fair election and caretaker gov't." I feel that your comments that 'Bangladesh has not yet reached a point in its 'democracy'...' is short-sighted in assuming that other countries, whether relatively developed or otherwise, have reached a point in democracy where they can trust each other in handling the election process. In the United States, for example, in the 2000 elections where George W. Bush was elected on a recount had gross involvement of his brother, a Republican and governor of Florida, in the Florida recounts (which was the state that decided the winner of the presidential elections). Not to mention that the lady who was in charge of the Election Commission was a self-declared Democrat who right after joining the Commission became a Republican. Additionally, it is common knowledge that voting districts in cities and counties in states such as Texas are demarcated and broken up in a way that the percentage of Democrats is controlled or limited to ensure that the overall vote of the district goes to the Republicans. Such politics and practices are clearly not fair. I'm not defending election practices in Bangladesh, but I'm saying it is a flawed perspective to think that truly free and fair elections exist anywhere in the world.

Ashfaque Siddiqui
On e-mail

Voter list

Every citizen of Bangladesh, above 18 years of age, has the right to be a voter. If he or she has no mental sickness, no one can ever deny his/her right of being so. In the last five years, lots of citizens became eligible for enlistment. Lots of people have left this world. It is time for making a new list.

Survey report on voter list, conducted by Americans (published in one of the Bengali newspapers), indicated that there are about 8%

fake voters in the list, which was made in the year 2001.

Obviously, it was done during the tenure of the previous government. So when the question of preparing a new voter list by the present government was raised, the opposition party started saying that a new voter list was unacceptable and that the BNP was making a fake list. So opposition parties are turning this simple voter list into a controversial issue.

How long will this country have a fake list of voters? Bangladesh has 14 crore people. Won't there be enough voters from them to exercise democracy? We know many voters are still not enlisted. No political party made a call to encourage general public to register their names. In their meetings no political leader has ever asked their supporters to become voters or check his name in the list.

There is no hope unless our politicians come up with real solutions. Foreign donor countries are willing to help us solve our problem.

But it is basically our duty to address the issue.

Engr. Azizul Huq
Green Road, Dhaka

Enjoying cricket

I enjoy cricket more than I can say. I have kept myself engaged in enjoying cricket for the last 46 years.

In 1970 / 71, when we all were engaged in fighting for independent Bangladesh, I did dream of an independent Bangladesh and wished I could listen to cricket commentary for Bangladesh playing in a Test match! So the biggest desire ever I had in my mind has been fulfilled by the grace of Him.

Having seen & enjoyed the 2nd Test match played between Bangladesh & Australia at Chittagong, I can say for sure that our boys playing cricket have skill, potential & ability to come very close to drawing the match, if not winning. But the way our boys ended the play tells us a different story, which needs to be seriously addressed for

improvement.

Well, if I have a team consisting of talented players like ours in order to play a Test match, I will be telling my boys the following -

There is no other match / matches called "Test Match". This nomenclature evolved from the very concept of testing each other or in other words, bowlers test the batsmen & batsmen test bowlers. In view of this concept there is no scope for a batsman to chase the score rather the score (runs) should chase the batsman. The prime job of the batsman is to remain in occupation of the crease. He should play to the merit of the ball & not to the emotion of the crowd or the size of the scoreboard. While playing a batsman must know that his target is to either win or draw the match but not to lose by making wild shots and throwing away his wicket.

A Test player deserves huge applause if he gets out for a duck facing an unplayable ball, but should not get applause if he gets out even after making a big score by making a wild

shot or repeating a mistake.

My player selection criteria would mainly be based on an "Analytical Report" showing how a player got out in his past matches / innings and whether he repeated the same mistake more than once and so on. And if a player was found to be consistent in getting out through making the same mistake, it would mean that he was unable to improve & needs to be sidelined.

I would like to say that my team members would need to clearly and separately understand the concept of both Test & ODI cricket in order to have the right frame of mind, because 80% of cricket is played in the mind!

M.A. Nasir
Uttara, Dhaka

Role of police

In a growing democratic country like Bangladesh, police should help the development process of democracy. Therefore they have to work independently and impartially. In the context of Bangladesh, the situation is just opposite. Here police depart-

ment has been used for political interest. It has been totally dominated by the ruling party.

Our police department is engaged in destructive activities, rather than doing anything constructive. So we should reform this department as early as possible.

Kazi Abubakar Siddique
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Eighth wonder!

The finance minister has rightly said that it is the eighth wonder of the world that 150 million people are living within 55,000 square-miles. It comes down to about 10,000 square-feet or a meagre 100 feet by 100 feet for each individual in which to perform all functions from cradle to grave, to "accommodate" so many types of landscape and for us people to build and to pave!

Please correct me if I am wrong.

CNR
Chittagong

Strikes

The opposition AL-backed Progressive Student Alliance called a student strike in the public institutions across the country a few days ago. The newly elected president and general secretary of the BCL, student front of AL, could not attach due importance to the interest of the students in general.

Unfortunately, the young and progressive student leaders could not come out of the traditional mould of student politics.

They would be identified as non-progressive student leaders if they fail to uphold the cause of the general students.

MAH Nazim
University of Dhaka

Dealing with Pakistani collaborators

During the 9 months between March and December The Bengalees of then East Pakistan were victims of a genocide and everything that comes with such "scorched earth policy" - unleashed by Tikka Khan (rightfully known as the butcher). It is reasonably expected that the Bengalees would be outraged by the events of 1971.

I do believe that the Bengalees are innately less violent than many other people. It can be a function of the abundance of nature - that we are blessed with. However, this possibly is a salient undercurrent upon which other extra-mural factors acted rather powerfully:

1. We must remember that the Pakistani military in then-East Pakistan surrendered to the Indian

Good luck, Ashraful

Ashraful, the wonder boy of our cricket, who made us proud on several occasions, is clearly going through a bad patch! But that does not diminish his class as a player, rather it creates a pressure on him to live up to our expectations. After all, he is still young to cope up with this pressure of high hopes surrounding him.

Now he is going to play in England in Liverpool league joining the Rain Hill Club. I hope it would help him to escape from the overpowering pressure. For the first time he is going to play outside the country for a long period without team players and even his family won't be there. Hope this opportunity will give enough time to him to work out his drawbacks and problems and eliminate them.

S. Reza Shosme
Dhaka University

