

Tipping point

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SCOTT JOHNSON

LANCE Corporal Dustin Gross lay on a Ramadi street beside his wrecked Humvee, conscious but too badly injured to get up. The crew's gunner, momentarily knocked cold, slumped in the turret above him. Huge pieces of shrapnel and broken bits of pavement rained through a haze of dust and debris. A massive blast from an improvised explosive device had just ripped into the Humvee's engine block, tossing the five-ton vehicle into the air and flinging the driver-side door, torn from its hinges, across the street. The rest of the patrol quickly checked themselves for injuries, each shouting "I'm OK!" as they raced to help Gross. They dragged him to the Humvee's sheltered side, and I followed. (A Newsweek photographer and I were embedded with the unit.) "Cover that corner!" ordered Staff Sergeant Chris Winship, scanning the street for any hint of an

ambush. He had a Marine down, a disabled vehicle and no time for badguesses. Seconds later, machine-gun fire erupted. Winship's men had spotted a group of insurgents peering out from behind a wall. One had an RPG, but as he crouched low to fire it, a Marine was quicker using his own grenade launcher, killing the insurgent instantly. With that, muzzle flashes from enemy AK-47s spouted from darkened windows and doorways up and down the street. Before the Marines could take cover, gunfire began from the south and west as well. The Marines were being surrounded. "Get into that house!" Winship yelled above the din. His men call him The Machine. He pointed to a walled compound next to where the IED had detonated. "Clear that house now! Get up on the roof! We need eyes on!"

other US forces there are pitted against a city full of adversaries, who run the gamut from al-Qaeda veterans and unreconstructed Baathists to street-corner mercenaries, happy to plant an IED for the price of an air conditioner or a generator to run it. The violence continues to frustrate the US military's hopes for a quick withdrawal from the city, or even a pullback to bases outside town, as Sunni politicians have urged for months. Marines in Ramadi are searching for ways to break what one officer calls "a standoff, like gun-slingers in the Wild West." In direct combat they still respond to their enemies as Marines always have, with overwhelming force. But officers in some parts of the city are getting hopeful results with a "softer" approach to counterinsurgency, emphasizing community relations over armed confrontation. The new methods aren't always popular with traditional-minded Marines who scorn them as "unwarriorlike." Everyone

agrees, though, with the assessment of the US commander in Ramadi, Colonel Sean MacFarland: what happens in this city could ultimately mean disaster or success in the struggle against Sunni insurgents throughout Iraq. It is, he adds, at a "tipping point." Attacks like the July 22 ambush are routine for Sergeant Winship and the men of Weapons Company 3 Bravo, who patrol the city for roadside bombs. On any given day, the number of IEDs in Ramadi's streets is between 50 and 100, by the military's estimate -- more than the troops can hope to disarm. Riding at the head of a four-Humvee convoy, Sergeant Winship was his driver's second pair of eyes. "Watch those wires," he warned Gross. "Stay to the right." The convoy, which was carrying the embedded Newsweek team, turned south onto 20th Street, creeping along a wide avenue of dun-colored houses, shuttered storefronts and withered date palms. Earlier that afternoon the Marines had watched men strolling and children playing in the street. Now everyone had disappeared. A bad sign: locals often know when an attack is coming. The Marines were braced for the worst. The Marines had barely picked themselves up from the blast when

the shooting started. It's what the military calls a "complex attack," first bombs, then guns. A dozen or more insurgents hammered the Marines from three sides. Lance Corporal Amarinder Grewal, 24, fired and ran to a fresh position. "I smoked him!" he yelled. Several of Winship's men entered the nearby home of a terrified Iraqi couple. The woman clutched a screaming infant to her chest and prayed aloud. "Inshallah! Inshallah!" she cried, over and over: As God wills. Four Marines scrambled onto the roof to cover the others who remained under fire in the street. "These a--holes really want to play today," said Private Mark Pettit, popping up from behind a roof parapet to fire his M-16. More bad news crackled over the radio: battalion had sent a tow truck to remove the mangled Humvee, but it had hit two IEDs itself. An F-18 Hornet screamed overhead, dropping flares, preparing for air support if the patrol's situation got any worse. It didn't come to that. The Marines shot their way out of the ambush after half an hour, and towed their own vehicle home. They had killed five insurgents at a cost of only one wounded Marine, thanks to the Humvee's heavy armor. When MacFarland's First Brigade Combat Team came to

town last March, the resistance was more intense -- and in some ways easier to fight. Groups of 30 or 40 insurgents mounted offensives against Marine bases and patrols, and fell in comparable numbers. Since then the big attacks have decreased, and the insurgents seem to be concentrating on the long haul. Senior US military officers say al-Qaeda has taken control of Ramadi's gas stations, imposing its own sales tax throughout the city, and tripling prices at the pump. The terrorist group uses its cash to hire unemployed young Iraqis to plant bombs and stage ambushes. "They've given themselves sustainability," says one senior Marine intelligence officer, requesting anonymity because of his assignment's sensitivity. "It's just a matter of time before they get control of Ramadi." Against that prospect, the Marines are pursuing an aggressive new strategy. Colonel MacFarland enlists the help of local sheiks, promising them development assistance in exchange for police trainees from their tribes. "One of the things I want to do is get to the point where I'm not killing so many people a day," McFarland told Newsweek. "I want to give them jobs." It's not easy. The insurgents kill every tribal cop they can, dumping their corpses in the street as a warning to anyone else who would

cooperate with the Americans, but new recruits keep coming. Along Ramadi's western edge, a different approach may be working. There Lima Company's captain, Max Barela, stopped kicking down doors months ago. Instead, he knocks and asks politely to come in. He stays for hours, sometimes into the middle of the night, just "chitchatting," he says. He recently conducted a census of the 2,000 homes in his area. "I know every family in my area," he says. Barela differentiates between enemies like al-Qaeda and "nationalist insurgents" who see themselves as fighting for Iraqi independence. "We have a policy where unless we have information that's going to put them away for a long time, we leave them alone," Barela says. "You'd be shocked at the level of frankness you can have with a nationalist insurgent." In the past three months, violent incidents have decreased more than 70 percent in Lima Company's area, MacFarland confirms. Children play on the streets past curfew, and IED attacks have virtually ceased. The rest of Ramadi lingers in a perpetual state of war. In the heart of the city, Marines from Kilo Company are besieged behind blast walls by fighters who lurk in a "dead zone" of ruined buildings just yards from their front gate at the city's heart. Only five Marines

from the company's original Third Platoon remain; the other seven have all been killed or wounded. Most Marines in the city have survived more than one IED attack. More than two dozen Marines have been killed in Ramadi since April, and more than double that number again in the surrounding areas. Marines in Ramadi prefer to patrol at night, when technology gives them the advantage. Even then it's hazardous duty. Newsweek accompanied Captain Barela and his men on a night foot patrol into the heart of the souk, or marketplace, in a neighborhood so riddled with insurgents that the Marines mostly avoid it. The night very rarely qualified as a success by local standards. Barela had a good chat with a lawyer living in a two-story house just off 17th Street, where terrorists run rampant. His men were resuming their patrol when a thunderous blast echoed across the city. Word came soon: another Marine patrol had been following Lima's path when Corporal Julian Ramon, 22, stepped on a pressure-activated mine. He died later that night. After the explosion, Barela and his men changed course. They headed west, toward the safer part of town. The night had gone on long enough.

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Prayer for a new dawn

Democracy takes time to root itself. Culture takes time to develop. Isn't democracy a culture? Isn't it a way of life? Great things do not come on ready-made silver platters. They need sacrifice and they take time to entrench. So let us give time to democracy for taking root, say another twenty years. But let us start the practice now -- from the upcoming election. In these twenty years we have to sow the seed and pray solemnly so that cleanliness, if not in our life, at least in our children's life, is ensured.

A M ZAKIR HUSSAIN

AN Indian colleague was visiting Dhaka last week when he happened to find a news item in the dailies on corruption pertaining to a certain ministry that he is well aware of. It was interesting for him to see the incorrectness of those news items. He wondered how it is that Bangladesh denigrates itself on half-cooked truths at the same time that its image has already been tarnished and damaged internationally for wrong reasons at times. He confided in me as to how Indians move in the international arena with their heads held high. "Is there much difference in fact

with regard to transparency in these two countries?" he asked. He thought that Bangladeshis forgot to be boastful of our achievements, that is so much necessary for emboldening our self-esteem, which is the basic ingredient for refraining from corruption. Whistle-blowing is necessary, but should be based only on hard found realities, otherwise the fight against corruption becomes trivialized and nobody in fact takes it seriously, rather resigning oneself to despair after some time. In the same week, while taking lunch with another friend, a Canadian, the issue of corruption in Bangladesh came up. He asked me why corruption is unbridled. Is

it easy to answer how and why corruption extends its slimy tentacles? He asked me what happens for example when a union parishad chairman indulges in corruption. People should be knowing it instantly because it is such a small administrative unit and because the rural life is so inter-connected here. Also at the national level, since the societal norms, culture, language, and to a large extent religion, are common, how come then corruption grows unabashedly he wanted to know. "Don't people start shouting and criticizing these events?" he wondered. The same night, the television news soothed us by saying that a

subsidiary of an organization, taken to task by Bangladesh Bank for some illegal activities, is sponsoring a football tournament at state level. How vividly this shows how blind we have become to the perpetrators of corruption! How decadently we have eschewed the sense of dignity that we do not hesitate to sit side by side with a censored organization in national functions with broad smiles on our shameless faces. Frankly, we have found and dished out so many allowances for committing corruption it is a matter of marvel now that not everyone has jumped onto the band-wagon yet. A few months back there was a startling revelation on the podium of the sacred national assembly (if some sanctity is still left) by one of the parliamentarians, about squandering of several thousand crore taka by a certain powerful national decision maker. The buck then stopped there. There was no more news, no more offensive or defensiveness. My Canadian friend, who has

been living in this country for some time now, asked me what happened to that revelation. He asked me why everything is quiet thereafter on the ground where a partisan battle line has already been drawn. I had to share my view that either the declaration was a political gimmick or the reveler might also have had a few hidden bones in his cupboard. Basically therefore there seems to be an understanding among the decision makers that "nobody will harm anybody" at the end, for their collective survival. They have agreed among themselves that there is room for everyone to mint money. They have also learnt about the benefit of not opposing their kind. It is safer and also more profitable either to join the existing cartels or keep quiet than to oppose them. We are living in a society where you are not supposed to shake the apparent peace and balance of power. You will be allowed, through mutual understanding, to scream to a certain extent, to create your own niche

and image so that you also can perpetuate the sin under undoubting eyes. You get the kind of king that you deserve. So if there is anything wrong nationally then it is we, the people, who are to be blamed, because we choose wrong type of kings and never learn from history. It is the people who either are not aware of the power that democracy gives them or they are fundamentally not believers in people's power and therefore do not practice the given power effectively and collectively. True, it is not easy to identify the right kind of people. Most of the good people are good unfortunately because they have not been tested and many of the so-called good people have shady pasts, that most of us are probably not aware of. We have seen many so-called good people going bad when they got power. We therefore will have to go through trial and error and learn from every mistake unfailingly, so that once we found someone to be dirty we do not opt for him twice.

Can this nation really afford to indulge in pampering the ones that have been found to be untrustworthy already? So, let one hundred percent of us through voting centers from now on, so that people's power is applied as a sacrosanct strength, so that nobody can take us for fools and snatch from us the opportunity of building our own destiny through our own hands. We need to use our voting rights as effective weapons every five years to send the tested ones or ones identified through gradual testing, to decisive positions. Because this is our own survival and happiness that is at stake. We do not get this chance every now and then and one mistake means allowing criminals to vitiate our environment to a degree that would then need much more than five years to correct. The other right type of signal that needs to be registered is not to vote if there is none suitable. Time will come that will take cognizance of this public attitude with desired effects. Frankly, there is no other alterna-

tive to rid the nation of the filth and sleaze that we are surrounded with now. Democracy takes time to root itself. Culture takes time to develop. Isn't democracy a culture? Isn't it a way of life? Great things do not come on ready-made silver platters. They need sacrifice and they take time to entrench. So let us give time to democracy for taking root, say another twenty years. But let us start the practice now -- from the upcoming election. In these twenty years we have to sow the seed and pray solemnly so that cleanliness, if not in our life, at least in our children's life, is ensured. Let us resolve that we will be strong enough not to sell our votes but use them as a counter force to eradicate the force that has darkened our horizon, that has vitiated the air that we breathe in, that has created a culture of grabbing. Twenty years is not too long a time in a national life. If we cannot have this much patience then how can we claim that we are fit for undiluted democracy, with all its virtues.

Dengue virus: once again!

The most essential step regarding the prevention of this deadly dengue is the identification of the mode of Aedes mosquito breeding and the method of spraying insecticide/larvicide at the appropriate sites. Most Aedes mosquitoes breed within houses where the reach of government investigations is limited. The participation and cooperation of the general people with government agencies is essential for Aedes control programs.

SHAKEEL AHMED IBNE MAHMOOD AND BELAL AHMED IBNE MAHMOOD

Introduction: The reemergence of the dengue virus has been very dreadful in recent times. The term "Dengue" has its origin in Zanzibar, where the disease was called 'Denga' during the 1870 epidemic as mentioned by N. Haq in an article in 2001. According to WHO, dengue fever is marked by a sudden onset of high fever, severe headache and pain behind the eyes and myalgia / arthralgia. The symptoms and signs may be very similar to other viral infections. It occurs in epidemic form in most countries of Asia and other Pacific Islands. Children below 15 years are the common susceptible victims. Dengue epidemic in developing countries is due to many reasons. The disposal of sewage, method of water purification, and most importantly nutritional status of the general population are important reasons for these viral infections. Current situation in Dhaka: Bangladesh, at the moment, is experiencing this viral infection in a most horrific manner. The number of patients detected with dengue is increasing at an alarming rate, and the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is worried that it might turn into an epidemic. According to Daily Star dated July 21, 2006, a survey report of the DCC dengue control section

revealed that around 150 government hospitals and private clinics in the capital are presently treating at least 230 dengue patients. The survey also revealed that 31 patients were admitted to different clinics and hospitals in the city on July 19 while 51 patients were admitted the previous day. It was also mentioned that around 408 patients were diagnosed with dengue as of July 22, 2006 in Dhaka. Of them, 178 have been discharged from the hospitals and clinics. There has been no report of deaths so far. This DCC report revealed that two hundred and twenty-three patients had died of dengue during 2000-2005 and 19,551 dengue patients were admitted to clinics and hospitals. Surveying several hospitals and clinics, The Daily Star has found that the number of infant dengue patients is smaller this year than in the previous years. Historical Aspects: The classical form of dengue has been known for more than a century in the tropical South East Asia, and Western Pacific Regions. EB Yunus, a dengue expert, mentioned in his article that dengue haemorrhagic fever was reported as a new disease for the first time in the Philippines in 1953. Serotypes 2, 3 and 4 were isolated in 1956. Multiple infections were followed in 1958 in Thailand, in 1970 in Myanmar and finally in India in 1963. In 1965 there was an outbreak of dengue and 'Chikungungu' virus infection called 'Dhaka fever' which was the first documented

out-break of dengue in Bangladesh. A WHO sponsored small-scale survey also detected dengue haemorrhagic fever cases in 1982. It is difficult to understand why this virus was reactivated in Bangladesh. Probably seasonal occurrences, such as monsoon-rain, are ideal for breeding. The best environmental conditions for mosquito breeding prevails during pre and post-monsoon periods in the tropical zones. Aedes eggs can survive in dry conditions for a year. WHO estimated that there might be 50 million to 100 million cases of dengue infections worldwide every year. Two fifth of the world's population are at risk of infection. In Bangladesh the last time experienced the worst dengue outbreak, with the majority of cases being in the capital. Thisyakorn U, in his article in 1993, stated that over the last 10-15 years, dengue fever and dengue haemorrhagic fever have become a leading cause of hospitalisation and death among children in South East Asian regions, followed by diarrhoeal diseases and acuterespiratory infections. Social and Environmental Aspects: In comparison to malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, filariasis, diarrhoeal

diseases, leishmaniasis, there is no significant differences with dengue infection in Bangladesh. Dengue infection involves mostly the affluent section of the society indicating that it is an urban disease. Usually there is negative correlation between the infection and the undernourished. The peculiarity of the carrier has close link with human habitation. Female Aedes mosquitoes are the carriers of the virus and are peridomestic in nature. The tropical zone of the world, between 350N and 350 S latitude, and area not over 1,000 ft. above sea level is their usual habitat. The areas are marked by monsoon-rains. The breeding of the mosquitoes is highest during pre and post-monsoon periods. Aedes breeds in clean, still and stagnant water usually found in discarded tyres, water tanks and storage appliances which are the ideal sites for breeding. Aedes is a voracious bloodsucker, which helps more virus transmission during blood meal. Biting occurs throughout the day, especially between 8:00 A.M to 13:00 P.M and between 15:00 P.M to 17:00 P.M., therefore late risers and late evening sleepers are more susceptible to mosquito bites. The mosquito sucks blood many times and, therefore, it can infect many persons. Like all carrier-borne diseases, dengue also needs some conducive predisposing conditions for endemicity and outbreaks. According to WHO, the countries of South-East Asia share common features like large populations,

rapid urbanisation, development activities and monsoon rains. Urban human populations now constitute the natural reservoir, travelers are the only disseminating factor of the viruses from one country to another. A survey in Dhaka city, by eminent entomologist MA Chowdhury in 2000, discovered that independent houses were most likely to have high densities of Aedes mosquitoes. It appears that the rooftop concrete water containers are one of the main breeding sources in independent houses. EB Yunus showed in his article in 2000, that in the city of Chittagong from September 1996 to June 1997, among 255 positive cases shows a seasonal variation in Dengue Patients (Table 1). Conclusion: The prevention of dengue fever is largely based upon the identification of risk factors and awareness. Factors responsible are over-population, uncontrolled urbanisation, and inadequate waste management. It is important to bear in mind that the Aedes mosquito is also a carrier for yellow fever. The main threat of yellow fever is the periodic invasion of the virus to densely populated urban areas where it can be transmitted by human biting species. Therefore, it can be anticipated the future impact of this tropical disease in Bangladesh. The most essential step regarding the prevention of this deadly dengue is the identification of the mode of Aedes mosquito breeding and the method of spraying insecticide/larvicide at the appropriate sites. Most Aedes mosquitoes breed within houses where the reach of government investigations is limited. The participation and cooperation of the general people with government agencies is essential for Aedes control programs.

Statement on Lebanon

We, the members of SANGAT, from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, meeting in Colombo, condemn, in the strongest possible terms, Israel's unwarranted aggression on Lebanon, which has led to large scale bloodshed, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians from their homes, and the wilful destruction of the country's infrastructure, including airports, bridges, power plants and transmission towers. Israeli air, sea and land blockades have virtually cut off Lebanon from the rest of the world; Israeli forces have systematically prevented the opening of a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid and assistance to the Lebanese. We note with concern that Lebanon is the third country in the region to have been attacked since the so-called War on Terror was launched. We are deeply concerned about the long term, and far reaching consequences of yet another war on the stability of the region. We are appalled by Israel's flagrant violation of international laws as it pursues its destructive agenda in Lebanon and in the Gaza Strip. We denounce the efforts of the United States in justifying Israel's murderous actions and in actively resisting international calls for an immediate ceasefire. We are outraged that the US has expedited arms shipments to Israel at this critical juncture. We protest the US veto, at the Security Council, of the resolution con-

demning Israeli actions. We also condemn the UN Security Council's inability to take meaningful action, in the face of Israel's relentless aerial assaults on civilian populations, to alleviate the humanitarian crisis that is escalating in Lebanon day by day. We denounce the international community, including the member states of the Organisation of Islamic Countries, for their indifference and complicity in this war. As South Asian feminists, we are also deeply concerned about the safety of migrant workers, from our region, who have been stranded in Lebanon. Some workers have already lost their lives during the bombardment. We strongly feel that it is the responsibility of all our states, and their local Embassies, to ensure the safety and retrieval of their citizens. We also demand compensation from the state of Israel for the loss of lives, and livelihoods, suffered by all those caught in the war. We demand an immediate, unilateral and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanese territory. We also express our deepest solidarity with the people of Lebanon during this dark chapter in their history. July 29 Colombo

- Sepali Kottogoda
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