

Unprecedented banking fraud

Lessons learnt must be acted upon

BANGLADESH Bank in their scrutiny of the Oriental Bank operations has reported siphoning of Tk 596 crore of the bank's money by a number of its influential shareholders. Illegal drawing of bank's money by shareholders including directors of private banks is nothing new. Bangladesh Bank through regular investigations in the past did bring to light a number of such incidents in private commercial banks.

The incident of defrauding at the Oriental Bank as revealed in the Bangladesh Bank's report is however the worst-case scenario. It is further alarming to find, as pointed out by a senior executive of another bank that defrauding and siphoning of funds were continuing at the bank even when the scrutiny of the central bank was in progress. A senior official of the Ministry of Finance has further said that some politically blessed shareholders are trying to take over the bank before the expiry of the present government's tenure. We are alarmed at the prospect.

We would like to question the necessity and purpose of holding any scrutiny into the corrupt practices when the findings are not made use of. To date we have only seen suspension or removal of a managing director. We are yet to see any comprehensive and stern legal and criminal procedures instituted across the board against those identified as being involved in such fraudulent acts. It also leads us to believe that influential quarters both within and outside the government are actively engaged in blocking the implementation of BB's findings and recommendations.

This incident also tells us that alongside curative measures we should consider preventive measures that would close all avenues of recurrence of defrauding acts in the future. We feel that one way to prevent such possible fraud could be for the government to carefully and comprehensively scrutinize the application for operation of private banks before it is finally given the go ahead. It may be worthwhile to look into the possibility of having some statutory provisions like discouraging people to be on the board of management who have dubious credentials in terms of honesty and integrity. One has to ensure that people at the helm of affairs of a bank are thoroughly professional.

Furthermore, monitoring of private banks' operations has to be made more vigorous and regular so that the interests of the account holders are duly protected.

Speaker's strange ruling

Issues of 2004 are too old but those of 1970's are not!

SPEAKER Jamiruddin Sircar's perception of the timeliness of the issues raised during a JS sitting on Tuesday caused a good deal of grumbling among the opposition MPs.

He was apparently not interested in any discussion on the August 21, 2004 grenade attacks on an AL rally and the assassination of AL leader SAMS Kibria, which he termed as old issues, but he was ready to entertain the BNP tirade against the formation of Rakkhi Bahini and the BAKSAL during the AL rule after 1971. It is not clear why the speaker took such a stand when his sole duty was to maintain neutrality and objectivity.

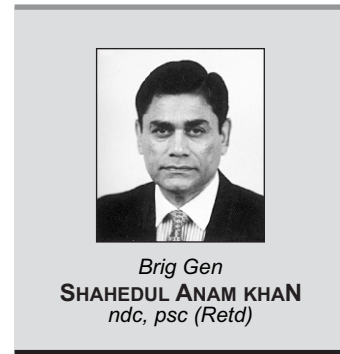
Similarly, the issue of the police attack on the country's leading shooters only two days back couldn't stimulate discussion when the speaker was presiding over the session. One wonders what could be more relevant than focusing on barbaric police action against an ace shooter. One AL lawmaker's microphone was switched off during the proceedings and the result was great disappointment among the opposition MPs about the speaker's overall handling of the matter.

That brings us back to the opposition's complaint that they are not given sufficient space or time during the parliamentary sessions. No fewer than 169 motions put up by the opposition lawmakers were rejected. And if they are not allowed to speak on point of order either, what is the justification for their presence in parliament? The point that is getting lost amid inexplicable exercise of powers by the Speaker is that if discussion on important issues is forsaken it would be a disservice to the cause of governance.

The opposition lawmakers' position that they are not allowed to speak in parliament or raise issues of their concern is somewhat vindicated by the Speaker's repeated interruptions which, regrettably, come only their way, while the ruling party MPs deliver their speeches more or less unobstructed. Even if it is said for the sake of argument that the Speaker can and should regulate the discussions, the topicality of most of the issues raised at the JS sessions should not be lost sight of.

Finally, the JS session cannot be vibrant, lively and productive if the opposition's voice becomes inaudible.

US National Intelligence Estimate and trends in global terrorism



THE only judgment that one can make of the five years of the US war against terror, culling from the key judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), issued in April 2006 but declassified last week by the White House, is that there is very little chance of its ending very soon. The NIE was deliberately leaked, according to some commentators, so that President Bush could, among the many negative remarks, exploit one sentence to support his case for remaining in Iraq.

Terrorism and its spectre continues to grow, fanned by those that have very little political aim but are motivated by their "misanthropic cloaked in a Islamic robe" as one author so starkly and appropriately characterises the present Islamic radicals. The NIE is bad news for the Bush administration, and indeed for those that want to see an end to the spate of terror-driven violence one witnesses in some parts of the world. This has intensified since the occupation of Iraq by the US and its Coalition of the Willing, and, as the NIE states, Iraq has become

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

And since these are structures whose rise is germane to the local environment, even though the ideological motivations are drawn centrally, there will be need to examine to what extent a common strategy would be appropriate to combat the local cells, and to what extent do we need to cooperate regionally and internationally, particularly for a country like Bangladesh, that has seen the sudden appearance of a form of Islamic radicals who seek refuge in religion to justify their vile acts. A more important issue that should occupy our thoughts is: What should our strategy be to fight these elements at home?

the leading inspiration for new Islamic extremist networks and cells that are united by little more than an anti-Western agenda.

We are yet to hear of any changes in the US strategy on Iraq, although a new national strategy, for combating terror, of which the US has made Iraq the focal point, has been formulated which was made public in September, motivated, one assumes, greatly by the major comments in the NIE which emphasises the need to shift reliance on raw power and really go for the hearts and minds of the terrorists and would-be terrorists, in view of what the estimate has forecast about the direction that international terrorism is moving towards.

What is disquietingly noticeable in recent times is the acknowledgement of defeat by the US administration, albeit implicitly, in the comments of its secretary of state: "I don't think that this is a battle, if you will, or a struggle that's going to be won on George W Bush's watch," that she

made in a recent interview with the Wall Street Journal, commenting on the war on terror. Also of significance is the change in the characterisation of the "war" against terror that has now transformed into a "battle," or a "struggle" that is going on.

NIE assessment is bad news for several reasons, but most of all because it has belied the Bush administration's assertion that reducing Saddam to submission would see the end of international terrorism, a wrong strategy to start with. On the contrary, not only has Iraq spawned terrorism, it has also become the rallying point of Islamic terrorist to hit most directly at US forces. There is very little credit in pointing fingers at Syria and Iraq and accusing them of being the sponsors of international terrorism when the US itself stands culpable of similar offense by creating the cause celebre, that has provided the justification to the terrorist outfits to recruit gullible Muslim youths against the US and its allies. That, and also the fact that its actions, now and in

the past, in various regions of the world, have been equated by many commentators with state terrorism, going by the definition of the term that is available in official US literature.

US calling others states "terrorist" reminds one of the story related by St. Augustine, of the pirate and Alexander the Great, recounted in Chomsky's *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New*. A pirate captured by Alexander, who asked him: "How dare you molest the sea?" replied: "How dare you molest the world? Because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief; you, doing it with a great navy, are called an Emperor."

St. Augustine calls it an excellent and elegant reply. And very few would contest Chomsky's view that the story is an accurate reflection of the relations between the US and various minor actors on the stage of international terrorism, and illustrates the meaning of the concept of international terrorism in contemporary Western usage, where these incidents are being used as a

cover for Western violence. Said well before the second phase of the US global war on terror, these assertions have stood the test of time.

There would perhaps be very few dissents against the contention that the US had any strategy at all for the situation that evolved after the invasion of Iraq. The war on terror that was designed to actually bring al-Qaeda and its allies the Taliban to book has paid very little dividends with the major thrust that ought to have remained on Afghanistan diverted to Iraq.

And what has Iraq delivered? Precious little by way of the security it was supposed to afford the US. As the NIE has concluded: "The war in Iraq has become a primary recruitment vehicle for violent Islamic extremists, motivating a new generation of potential terrorists around the world whose numbers may be increasing faster than the United States and its allies can reduce the threat." Indeed a very ominous forecast by the US intelligence community.

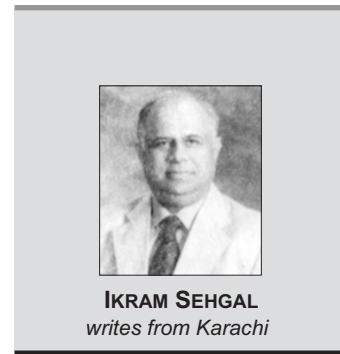
NIE reports are not always trustworthy, though. NIE drawn up by the National Intelligence Council in the past had their estimates proved wrong, as was the 2002 report that concluded that Iraq had "continued its weapons of mass destruction programs," "possessed stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons," and "probably will have a nuclear weapon during this decade," all of those conclusions, used to prop up the rationale for invasion of Iraq, turned out to be false.

However, an important feature of the current intelligence estimate, although disquieting, but not surprising, is worth taking into account, which is that many new terror cells have grown up independently without any link to any central structure. They restrict their communications to their own members only and derive their ideological and tactical inspiration from the many Islamic web sites.

This is important because it will have to be factored into any plans to combat terrorism at the global level. And since these are structures whose rise is germane to the local environment, even though the ideological motivations are drawn centrally, there will be need to examine to what extent a common strategy would be appropriate to combat the local cells, and to what extent do we need to cooperate regionally and internationally, particularly for a country like Bangladesh, that has seen the sudden appearance of a form of Islamic radicals who seek refuge in religion to justify their vile acts. A more important issue that should occupy our thoughts is: What should our strategy be to fight these elements at home?

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Collateral damage



PAKISTAN stands adjacent to the ground zero of terrorism. Any book by Pervez Musharraf, written well or otherwise, would be an outstanding source for much of the facts since before 9/11. A hot selling item, with or without publicity.

With Humayun Gauhar, having about the best English among Pakistani columnists at this time, helping Musharraf write his autobiography, the book should not suffer from want of lucidity and/or expression. The stating of facts is a different proposition, and there are always many sides to a story. Once in print, its credibility can be called into question depending upon the facts themselves, and/or the motivation of the beholder. Given that those coming out second best in the book will have no love lost for him, the autobiography is bound to be extremely controversial.

The publishers did not leave anything to chance, choreographing the timing and venue of

AS I SEE IT

Musharraf has been put in the cross-hairs of the most dangerous weapon in the world, the spoken and written word, character assassination with or without motivation. This is a vulnerability that Pakistan, the Pakistan army, and the ISI could have done without at this time. One only hopes that motivated advice was not done deliberately to put him on the spot as a "loose cannon." Is somebody looking to replace him?

the launch in brilliant fashion. Such overkill is commercially acceptable given that any publisher would like to ensure a good return on investment by maximum publicity and the widest distribution in the first few days of the book coming into print.

Whetting the appetite of potential buyers of the book is standard business practice in business circles, creating titillating controversy being always part of the game plan. Musharraf's personality helps by being tailor-made to evoke controversy. His refusal to answer a question about the "US threat to bomb Pakistan" after 9/11, during the joint press conference with US President Bush, on the grounds that it would infringe the confidentiality agreement with his publisher prior to the launch was carefully scripted. This could be worth \$10-15 million, or more, of advertising on prime time world electronic media.

Every person in the world has an inherent freedom of expression. Those in positions of power

have every right to lay out the facts as they have lived it, it is also a moral responsibility to do so. The important guideline to remember is that the facts must be credible. One has to choose carefully what can be aired (and when), and the damage control thereof has to be war-gamed, because we cannot afford to give ammunition to our detractors. While Musharraf is a past-master in taking calculated risks, the government should have been prepared to deal with well-orchestrated negative propaganda in the international media, and the ensuing "collateral damage" to the national interest should have been assessed.

Within the bounds of the Official Secrets Act, and the legal parameters of the two offices Musharraf occupies, the material must have been vetted by the intelligence agencies with due care also taken for legal go-ahead by the Judge Advocate General (JAG) of the Pakistan army and from the Ministry of Law. It then becomes their responsibility if anything violates

the secrecy and legal parameters of the office of the president and the army chief of staff, unless, of course, their advice is ignored. The moral restraint was for Musharraf to exercise, not only as a citizen of Pakistan and a soldier of the Pakistan army, but also as the head of the state.

Collateral damage is generally meant to denote civilian casualties and damage to property that unintentionally came in the line of firing, shelling, bombing, etc. The term "collateral damage" is now also widely used by writers to describe damage not intended, even in matters other than military. For example, while Pervez Musharraf strongly defends the role of the ISI in apprehending and/or killing al-Qaeda operatives, the collection of reward money makes Pakistanis out to be "bounty hunters" whose crass motivation is commercial rather than the higher moral cause of fighting terrorism.

Supporters of Musharraf will see the book as a consolidated vindication of the many controversies that surround his person and Pakistan, while his detractors

(and that of Pakistan) will raise doubts about his motivation and the facts stated in the book. Not having read the book, one can only hope that the facts printed therein are without colouring or prejudice. We live in out-of-the-ordinary circumstances, and both Musharraf and the country (and by extension the Pakistan army) will now face extraordinary pressure from the world media as all the people, countries, or institutions affected by the contents of the books take up cudgels to defend their credibility, as is their right.

Neither our decision-makers nor media handlers took into account (or even have an idea of) what is about to hit us. The motivated will try to defame Musharraf and the institutions of the country, to destroy their very existence. The ISI is already under concentric attack! Those whose duty it is to calculate possible collateral damage, and damage control thereof, do not seem to be ready to meet this extraordinary challenge to our existence.

Failure to assess the possible downside amounts to criminal neglect. Those who create euphoria ("the feel good") for our leaders to bask in should have catered for the possible erosion of the foundations of the state, as well the downside to their four-star client. The book will sell, but it will be at the cost of Musharraf's future in history, and at even greater cost to the state.

Those friends and colleagues of Pervez Musharraf who encour-

aged him to go into print did not take into account the "collateral damage" to the state and its institutions, particularly the Pakistan army and the ISI. He has now made them, along with himself, a target for anyone who can speak and write.

Musharraf has been put in the cross-hairs of the most dangerous weapon in the world, the spoken and written word, character assassination with or without motivation. This is a vulnerability that Pakistan, the Pakistan army, and the ISI could have done without at this time. One only hopes that motivated advice was not done deliberately to put him on the spot as a "loose cannon." Is somebody looking to replace him?

What has been done has been done! Instead of relying upon inexperienced and lightweight PR artists, it is time for the president's men to cobble together an "A-Team" that will limit the "collateral damage" by reacting with logic and facts to each and every criticism that tends to erode Musharraf's credibility as an individual, and our credibility as a nation. And watch out for your friends, Mr. President, sometimes they can be more dangerous than enemies!

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WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Needed qualified teachers for quality education

M.A. BARI

TODAY is World Teachers' Day, when more than 150 countries of the world celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of the joint UNESCO/ILO recommendation by the special inter-governmental conference on the "Status of Teachers," held in Paris. The recommendation approved on October 5, 1966 by governments and social partners was an historic occasion. The original documentation with 146 recommendations was signed by Jean Thomas, the Director General of the United Nations educational, scientific and cultural organization and Rene Matheu, legal adviser of UNESCO.

Since 1966, UNESCO and ILO jointly organised a world-wide survey in about 120 countries to see the status of teachers. The reports reflected that the profession had reached an intolerably low point. In many places salaries have fallen, specially in comparison with other

professions. Teachers in some parts earned, in 1992 and 1993, less than half the salary they would have received in 1979-80. Unqualified and untrained teachers often replace the qualified teachers who leave for better paid jobs. Student/teacher ratios and teachers' hours have increased while training has been reduced.

In industrial countries violence in schools was taking place in alarming numbers. The situation was exacerbated by the increasing demands made on teachers as a result of educational reforms due to technological advances, social environments and problems caused by poverty, drugs and AIDS. Meanwhile, the high expectations of parents and communities made teachers vulnerable to criticism.

At that juncture UNESCO and ILO started to think that a positive new approach to teachers should be taken, and one day should be dedicated to the world's 50 million teachers. Accordingly, October 5 was proclaimed as the 'world teach-

ers' day' in 1994 at the close of an international conference on education in Geneva to commemorate the signing of the UNESCO/ILO recommendation concerning the status of teachers on October 5, 1966.

UNESCO & ILO, in that meeting, recommended the following five measures for governments to ensure immediately:

- Give teachers the moral and material recognition they need and deserve, appropriate to their qualifications and responsibilities.
 - Ensure that they have proper working conditions, including basic tools for their tasks.
 - Pay them a salary comparable with other professions.
 - Involve teachers and their professional organisations in the formation of educational policies.
 - Provide good teacher education as well as training on the job.
- In a joint message on the occasion of World Teachers' Day, 2006 UNESCO, ILO, UNICEF & UNDP

pinpointed to producing more trained and better qualified teachers for achieving excellence in teaching and learning. They emphasised professional support for the teachers for boosting their determination and motivation through providing decent employment and working conditions and adequate remuneration. Social dialogue should be started to ensure that teachers' opinions are being integrated into basic education reforms.

They called on governments, civil society, development partners, the private sector, teachers' unions, teachers' organisations, parents and individual teachers themselves to combine their efforts to give new life to the principles of the recommendations concerning the status of teachers for advancement towards quality education for all. The message was signed by Koichiro Matsuura, Director General, UNESCO, Juan Somavia, Director General, ILO, Kemal Dervis, Administrator, UNDP and Ann M Veneman, Executive Director,

UNICEF.

Teachers are the curators of yesterday, and architects of tomorrow. They constantly strive to release students from the bondage of ignorance. Quality education has got an indispensable relation with qualified teachers. Teachers need the appropriate knowledge and skills. A good teacher learns throughout his life in order to teach.

One of the major rewards for a teacher is the joy of seeing students get turned on to learning. Teaching today, in a changing world, is more demanding and challenging. They are to work in a world characterised by rapidly shifting social values, major technological advances and a never ending barrage of educational reforms in a climate of stress, poverty and violence.

In the prevailing circumstances there is a valid question -- who should teach? The answer was given by Lindley J. Stiles of the University of Wisconsin a few years

ago: "the best should teach." UNESCO & ILO, in their joint message on the World Teachers' Day-2006, also highlighted the theme by saying: "quality teachers for quality education."

There are about 7.5 lakh people in the teaching profession in Bangladesh. About one lac thirty thousand teach in madrasahs. They work with dissimilar salaries and benefits. This year they came out to the streets with their demands several times. The non-government teachers of secondary and higher secondary class, who teach about 95% students of the country, were getting 90% of basic salary. House rent and medical allowances are very poor. A big difference between govt. and private schools and colleges in respect of benefits and salary structure is prevailing.

During the 2001 national election the ruling and opposition political parties, in their election manifestoes, committed to provide the rest 10% basic from the public

coffer. Teachers of non-govt. institutions started demonstrations in the month of July finding no provision of providing the rest 10% of salaries even in the last budget of the present govt. Teachers under the banner of Shikhhak Karmachari Oikya Parishad, Oikya Front and Oikya Jote came out of the classrooms and carried out stern programmes on the streets throughout the country. On July 15, police baton charged a procession of Oikya Parishad at Mukhtang leaving several teachers injured. Civil society and general people of the country condemned the police action and demanded punishment for the policemen responsible. After that the agitation took a different shape.

After a one-month strike in the educational institutions Education Minister Dr. Osman Faruk, on August 6, declared in a press conference that the govt. would pay cent percent basic salary. Prompt action by the govt. could avoid an unwanted situation.

We have a proud history of creating renowned scholars and teachers in this soil. Mahathir Shil Bhadra, of 6th century, of Samatat (Comilla, Chandina) and Atish Dipankar of Bikrampur were the chancellors of Nalanda University. Many scholars and researchers of today are working in different renowned universities of the world. Many wanted to stay in teaching in the country, but extremely low wages and lack of facilities forced them to go abroad. Thus we failed to stop the brain drain. Still it is not late to think over the matter emphatically. Government, civil society, development partners, politicians, parents and teachers themselves should ponder over the issue. It is the demand of the time.

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