

Terrorism and drug trafficking

The impact on state security

RON CHEPESIUK

INTERNATIONAL drug trafficking is the world's second most profitable illicit business after arms trafficking, taking in earnings estimated to be between \$400 and \$500 billion annually. The UN estimates that at least 104 countries are involved in some way in the drug trade -- production, distribution, or laundering of the illicit profits.

Bangladesh's geographic location puts it in the midst of major drug producing and exporting countries, making the country a transit point for trafficking organisations. The U.S. State Department in its 2002 assessment of global drug trafficking concluded that "while unconfirmed reports of opium cultivation along the border with Burma exist, no evidence exists that the Bangladesh is a significant producer or exporter of narcotics."

Globally, drug trafficking's toll on society has been enormous. Each year, thousands of unfortunate people of all races, colours, ages and classes die or have their lives wrecked or derailed because of internal drug trafficking. The United Nations Drug Control Programme estimates that the U.S. population of more than 260 million consumes about 45 percent of the total amount of illicit drugs trafficked. Illicit drugs, moreover, claim an estimated 40,000 lives in the United States and the country's public health system spends \$75 billion annually in dealing with drug-related health problems.

Government and media reports in Bangladesh indicate that the country has a growing drug problem. Facts and figures are hard to find, but according to the U.S. State Department's assessment, Bangladesh experienced a quadrupling of the number of addicts in the past few years. Bangladesh may be a transit point for the movement of illegal drugs, but the traffickers still like to dump some of their product on the local market. The fact that the heroin being consumed in Bangladesh is of low quality has helped keep the price low, which means more people in the poor country can be potential consumers. The U.S. State Department noted that the 'Bangladesh authorities lack training, equipment and other resources to detect and interdict the flow of drugs in and through the country.'

The power and wealth of drug traffickers pose a threat to the stability and social fabric of Bangladesh and other countries all over the world, but it has only been with the end of the Cold War that international drug trafficking has become a national security concern. The Soviet Union's threat to the West ended, so today there is considerably less concern about and focus on such issues as nuclear deterrence, strategic arms control, European security and the importance of NATO and super power competition in the Third World.

International drug trafficking was one of the national security issues that existed for years, but it was relegated to second tier status in light of the balance of power concerns relating to the Cold War. In those days, the world was bi-polar: democracy and capitalism versus communism and state control of the economy, and issues like internal drug trafficking were multi polar, transnational and complex in nature. So at the time, governments concluded that it was a practical impossibility of

dealing with them on global scale.

With the Cold War's end, however, the U.S. and other industrialised countries has broadened the definition of national security from the narrow military-strategic focused realm to encompass the protection of vital economic and political interests that affect the fundamental state values and are vital to its well being. This change has been in tune with the relentless advance of the most dynamic trend of the 21st century -- globalisation, a trend that has become increasingly evident in travel, economics, communications and the mass media. In today's free trade world where the borders are porous and the volume of goods moved so great, it has been difficult to stem the flow of illegal products such as illegal drugs. Reports in U.S. and Europe of huge drug busts are regular features on the TV news programs, but the authorities concede that only 10 to 15 percent of illegal drugs are ever confiscated.

International drug trafficking has been a topic of diplomacy and international law at least since the Opium Wars between China and Great Britain in 1839 and 1858. Historically, drug trafficking has been a controversial issue because governments of certain countries have used drug trafficking to further their foreign policy and national security agendas.

For instance, the colonial government of India under Great Britain in the 19th century, the French government in Indo China during the same period and the Japanese in

Meanwhile, some groups in the U.S. are now trying to broaden the U.S.'s War on Terrorism to include the War on Drugs.

So how does international drug trafficking threaten national security? Plenty of examples can be given to show that the threat is political, economic and social in nature. Indeed, drug traffickers in some countries have become so powerful that they have been able to take over democratically elected governments. The term used to describe this development is known as "narco democracy."

History has plenty of examples, but let me cite two. In 1980, Bolivia's drug traffickers were so concerned by the impending election of a candidate who threatened to get tough on drug trafficking that they paid a general to stage a coup, which fortunately, lasted only until 1981.

In 1995 the Cali Cartel gave \$6.2 million to Ernesto Samper's financially-strapped presidential campaign. Samper did become president, but the payment was exposed and he was forced to get tough on the Cali Cartel.

Some drug source countries may not have become narco democracies, but drug money and the traffickers' powerful influence has helped to damage their political institutions, which in turn has threatened their stability.

For instance, drug traffickers are believed to hold office in Uzbekistan, while alleged drug traffickers have sat in Pakistan's cabinet and

new term in the political lexicon: "narco terrorism", that is terrorism designed to instill fear and committed to furthering the aims of drug traffickers. It can include assassination, extortion, high jacking, kidnapping directed against judges, prosecutors, elected officials, even heads of state, and military and law enforcement officers in an attempt to destabilise the state and divert attention from the illegal activities of drug traffickers..

After the mega events of September 11, 2001, 9-11, the definition of "narco terrorist" has been broadened to include not only drug traffickers, but also insurgents, guerrillas and terrorists who are believed involved in the drug trade. The Federal Court of Canada has even ruled that "narco terrorism" is a crime against humanity and those who engage in it can be deported to their homelands.

The ruling involved the case of a Sri Lankan drug dealer named Velupillai Pushpanathan who was convinced of selling heroin in Toronto, ostensibly to raise money for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam organisation (the so-called LTTE). The dealer was actually arrested in 1997, convicted and sentenced to eight years in prison. Then upon his release in 1991, Pushpanathan applied for refugee status in a bid to block his extradition to Sri Lanka. Federal immigration authorities built an unprecedented narco terrorism case against him, and in October 2002, the Federal Court agreed, ruling that Pushpanathan could be deported.

In the U.S., authorities have been quick to seize on drug busts that have connections to groups labeled as "terrorist". In January 2002, for instance, several men of Middle East descent were arrested and indicted on drug trafficking charges. Officials said the men were smuggling large quantities of the chemical pseudoephedrine, which is used in making the illegal drug methamphetamine, from Canada into the Midwest U.S.

"There is increasing intelligence information from the investigation that for the first time alleged drug sales in the United States are going in part to support terrorist organisations in the Middle East," DEA Administrator Asa Hutchinson told the press.

As the War on Terrorism continues, the Bush administration has made a concerted effort to establish a strong link between drugs and terrorism, a move that is blurring the distinction between the War on Drugs and the War on Terrorism. Beginning in December 2001, the U.S. government ran for several months a controversial campaign suggesting that if American consumers use drugs, they were supporting terrorism. "Where do terrorists get their money? One ad asked. The answer: 'If you buy drugs, some of it might come from you.'"

Critics rightly point out that drug laws and drug interdiction have been more effective in putting the profit into the drug trade than law enforcement has been in taking it out. Drug prohibition has been the cause of international drug trade. Why smuggle a legal profit to get the small profits legal sellers do when you can go into an illegal trade and traffic a product for which there is tremendous demand and gamers huge profits?"

That's why, despite the U.S.'s best drug interdiction efforts, the price of illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroin has fallen, not risen, during the past few decades. The supply of illegal drugs has gone up, not down, in kind and quantity in the past few decades. So one can ask: Is the move to bolster the drug trafficking-terrorist link more to do with bolstering an unpopular war and the huge drug fighting bureaucracy that it does with the War on Terrorism?

Still the momentum to cement the link continues in the U.S. In May 2002 the National Federation of Women Legislators kicked off a national campaign to expand the War on Terrorism to include the illegal drug trade. The Federation said doing so is vital to protect homeland security. Alvaro Uribe, Colombia's president, has said that the narco terrorism in his country posed a bigger threat than that of Iraq and suggested a response similar to what the U.S. and its allies was making against Saddam should be made in his country. Uribe was echoing what the U.S. had been saying and thinking. One month after 9-11, Francis Taylor, the State Department anti-terrorism coordinator, said that "the U.S. would fight Colombian terrorism with the all the resources in our power, (including) where appropriate, as we had in Afghanistan, the use of military force."

The big question, of course, is whether making the War on Terrorism and the War on Drugs one big battle can be effective in curbing drug trafficking on one hand and deterring the reach and bad intentions of terrorists on the other.

I say, no, because all that linking the War on Drugs and War on Terrorism will do is to repeat the failures of the past, put money down the drain and in the pockets of drug traffickers, bloat government bureaucracies, curtail more civil liberties and deflect our attention from the real war against terrorism.

Yes, international drug trafficking poses a threat to national and international security, but let's work to take the profit out of the drug trade and out of the pockets of terrorists by de-emphasising our prohibition approach to illegal drugs. That's the best way to ensure state security. We can't afford to have our anti-terrorist efforts fail as they have in the U.S. on Drugs.

Ron Chespiuk, a Rock Hill, South Carolina based journalist, is a Visiting Professor of Journalism at Chattanooga University, a former Fulbright Scholar to Bangladesh and a Research Associate with the National Defence College.

His dream still awaits fruition

A M M SHAHABUDDIN

THAT legendary demagogue who had once spat fire on the US Administration for their policy of racial discrimination and at the same time had kindled new hopes and aspirations in the minds of the down-trodden poor black Americans (now called African Americans), is no more there. But his historic speech, "I have a dream..." delivered some forty years ago, on 28 August 1963, in Washington at the Lincoln Memorial, is still echoing, reminding the US government of what still remains to be done of that noble 'dream' of a black champion of human rights and social equality.

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. made history by that memorable 'one sentence' which now serves as a truth for all 'lovers of human rights'. And the Americans, both white and black, would be observing his birth-anniversary today (19 January).

To commemorate that historical 28 August, thousands of people, irrespective of colour and creed, gather every year at the foot of Abraham Lincoln Memorial, to renew their pledge to fulfil Martin Luther's dream and also to pay respect to the leader who had laid down his life in their cause at the hands of an assassin. It may be mentioned in this context that President Abraham Lincoln, a staunch crusader against slavery and racial discrimination, became the first martyr in the hands of an assassin in Washington in 1865, at the end of the American Civil War. I will come to it later.

Still a lot to be done

Undoubtedly, a lot has been achieved by the black Americans since the abolition of slavery in 1965, particularly since Martin Luther had begun his struggle for the rights of the blacks, still there is a lot to be done, as Martin Luther's son, Martin Luther King III had declared at the Washington rally last year. It is true that hundreds of thousands of the black Americas have been rescued from the dark catacomb of slavery where they were treated like dumb driven cattle by their white masters. There was a time when in public places the blacks were kept 'out of bound' by bold signs saying, "Dogs and Blacks not allowed." But those hellish days are long gone, no doubt. They now know their identity as equal citizens and part of the American society, thanks to the great sacrifice made by Martin Luther.

Road-blocks ahead

But there are still many road-blocks to be removed for making a smooth sailing for the black Americans to enjoy truly equal rights in their lives, both political and economic. Even to-day in the world's richest country there are innumerable black Americans who live miserable lives in wretched slums, far away from proper education, health-care and decent homes. They still receive their proverbial 'ice' in winter only and not in summer along with the well-off whites. The very existence of impoverished black slums not only in New York but also in many parts of that dream-land America, speak much louder than what is hidden behind the dazzling economic boom and prosperity. Mr Jonathon Kozol, a leading US authority on education, commenting on the horrific poverty situation in the black-inhabited slums, had said

Time has come for soul-searching and stock-taking. If a Black American can become a most successful Foreign Minister and a redoubtable C-in-C, then why not a President? Is it not a mockery for the world's largest democracy that when the black American athletes become world champions in the field of sport and bring the most coveted laurels for the country, they are worshipped as national heroes, but when the question of Presidentship comes they get the 'smell' of the blacks?



Martin Luther King Jr: "I have a dream..."

that the black children still suffer from "poor health-care, schools and homes in New York's impoverished South Bronx," adding that "these kids are innocent; their only crime is being poor in a rich society at a cruel moment in history." Mr Kozol also pointed out that "a five percent tax on the wealth of the Wall Street's 100 richest men would lift them out of poverty." What a revealing contrast shocking poverty growing in the dark backyard of America, while spending billions of dollars every month for maintaining US marines in Iraq! This is a clear indication that Martin Luther's 'dream' is still far from its fruition.

And the leaders and groups that organised last year's celebration of Martin Luther's historic 1963 speech were conscious of this. That is why a broad coalition of more than one hundred organisations, representing the socialists, the communists, opponents of US policy on Cuba, Iran and Iraq, as well as people asking for a better US education policy, assembled to raise a united voice for fulfilling Martin Luther's dream. Moreover, the event also kicked off a 15-month campaign to highlight their concerns about racial, environmental and economic issues and, above all, Bush Administration's much-hyped "war on terror." Undoubtedly, Martin Luther's historic speech, delivered forty years ago, was a "defining moment" for the American civil rights movement.

Now let us have a glimpse of the history of US civil war (1861-1865) waged during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln who had played a dominant role not only to abolish Negro Slavery from the US constitution, but also had heroically

saved America from disintegration into two warring blocks of pro-and-anti slavery of the northern and southern areas.

Victory in civil war: A turning point

The US civil war was a straight fight between two opposite camps -- one representing the northern farm lands who were known as 'anti-slavery north' and the other representing the 'cotton-growing south', which wanted the continuation of Negro slavery to work in their plantations. With the emergence of Abraham Lincoln, as the President the pro-slavery southerners were increasingly scared by the growing popular anti-slavery movement. And as first step towards secession from the Union, they had already formed the 'confederated States of America', and adopted a constitution upholding the 'institution of Negro Slavery'. But the anti-slavery crusade declared by Lincoln turned the apple cart down of the southern rebels, when after long four-year war from 1861 to 1865, the great victory was achieved by Lincoln in 1865 on 9 April, with the surrender of the pro-slavery rebels, thus putting an end to their 'Confederacy' dream. And to their 'Confederacy' dream as one united country. It opened a new bright chapter in US history, bringing for the first time the black and white Americans at par, at least constitutionally. But the tragedy is that the architect of this great achievement, President Lincoln couldn't carry on his mission as he was assassinated on 14 April, 1865.

It took about a century to start anew the race from where Lincoln had left it. And that was the 'dream' that that Martin Luther King Jr. had

boldly announced on 28 August 1963 at the foot of that great martyr Abraham Lincoln's Memorial.

Why not a black US President?

Unfortunately, to-day's America, after traversing over almost one and half century since the martyrdom of Abraham Lincoln, cannot claim to be a land of milk and honey for the African Americans. America is still suffering from the legacy of the old disease of racial discrimination because some are still being haunted by the 'ghost' of slavery. Otherwise, how come not a single black American had been elected President of America during the last one and half century since the abolition of slavery in 1865? Are the blacks of less calibre and efficiency than the white Presidential candidates? How is it that neither the Democrats, nor the Republicans are yet ready to put up a Black candidate? Why this apathy in the world's most popular democratic country, a world champion of human rights?

Time has come for their soul-searching and stock-taking. If a Black American can become a most successful Foreign Minister and a redoubtable C-in-C, then why not a President? It is a pity that even a charismatic personality like Jesse Jackson or Colin Powell couldn't find their way into the Presidency. If this is not a race prejudice, then what is it? Is it not a mockery for the world's largest democracy that when the black American athletes become world champions in field of sport and bring the most coveted laurels for the country, they are worshipped as national heroes, but when the question of Presidentship comes they get the 'smell' of the blacks?

That is why a Canadian columnist in the daily Toronto Star had aptly said sometime back that "the racial inequality is a central and not a peripheral feature of American life. ... The deep structural inequalities that affect every aspect of American life begin with the institution of slavery which made the African-Americans a permanent 'other' in the American life." Hence, the earlier America can get rid of these remnants of the social inequality, the better for them.

Voting right for more blacks

Now the American leadership, particularly the present all-powerful Bush Administration, should be bold enough to call a spade, a spade and put an end, for good, to the old 'psyche' of 'slavery' in the American society. Let the up-coming Presidential election for which Bush would definitely fight again as a powerful Republican candidate for his second-term in the White House, be a trial ground, at least, by further extending the universal right to vote to all eligible black Americans to participate in the election in greater number. Let, President Bush first put his own house in order, before rushing for ensuring democratic rights of the just 'liberated' Iraqis and spending billions of dollars every month for deployment of thousands of US marines there for 'maintaining peace and security.' Let us wait and see which way the US political wind blows before the up-coming Presidential election and how much of Martin Luther's dream gets fulfilled.

AMM Shahabuddin is a retired UN official.



All health information to keep you up to date

Gastro-Oesophageal Reflux

The misunderstood disease

After consuming huge, oily meal or a full packet of spicy 'chanachur' you often experience a burning pain in your chest and sometimes in the throat. We usually call this 'heartburn'. According to most doctors, thousands of Bangladeshis specially living in the cities suffer from this Gastro-Oesophageal Reflux Disease, (GERD). Some often misdiagnose GERD as peptic ulcer or simple acid related situation rather than disorder; or, some also term it as a 'gas problem' in our villages. For the majority, it's a short-term trouble, activated by something like highly spiced food or even fizzy drinks in empty stomach. For some, reflux causes hours of extreme pain every day and makes sleep more or less difficult.

The commonest symptoms of reflux are heartburn and regurgitation. Regurgitation means acid or bitter tasting fluid coming up and into the mouth. The stomach naturally produces acid, which helps to sterilise and digest the food we eat. Reflux occurs when acid from the stomach flows back up into the oesophagus. Normally a muscle at the base of the oesophagus shuts like a gate once food has moved to the stomach. For people with reflux, the muscle remains open, allowing acid to escape and make painful contact with the lining of the oesophagus. The main types of acid related disorders are reflux and peptic ulcer.

Many lived with reflux for ages. One can get rid of this disease if he wishes. First of all, it is important to change life style. Life style change means modifying eating habits (which includes regular timing) and diet, taking a variety of drugs and changing sleeping patterns. It seems that lying down flat is the worst position for reflux sufferers.

The most frequently used drugs for reflux disease are antacid tablets and mixtures, which reduce the damaging effects of stomach acid. In the western world 'Gaviscon' is mostly used instead of antacids. This drug is a combination of antacids and 'alginate' and 'gastrocote', which form a protective coating over the lining of the lower oesophagus and upper part of the stomach. In severe cases where heartburn is not easily relieved, ranitidine, omeprazole, lansoprazole type of drugs are chosen to reduce acid production in the stomach. Other drugs like cispripide, metoclopramide or sucralfate are also used; some also use 'Helicobacter treatment strategy' to treat reflux.

Here are some simple steps to help avoid heartburn:

- * Avoid food with a high acid content, like tomato sauce.
- * Three Cs - Cigarettes, Coffee and Chocolates are contributors to reflux.
- * Being overweight increases the chances of heartburn.
- * Don't eat for at least three hours before going to bed.
- * Use pillows to elevate your head during sleep.
- * Avoid tight clothing; it puts extra pressure on your abdomen, increasing heartburn symptoms.
- * Try to avoid stress which increases sensitivity to stomach acid.
- * Many drugs like aspirin, Ibuprofen, naproxen irritate the stomach lining. So, do not forget to ask your doctor about side effects of a prescribed drug.