

Human trafficking

No denying that government needs to do more to combat it

THE US on Monday listed Bangladesh as one of ten countries who are failing to adequately fight the trafficking of women and children, presaging economic sanctions if the situation has not improved demonstrably by October.

According to the US State Department report, Bangladesh is a significant country of origin and transit for trafficked women and children, and has been included on the list of offending countries, because it has not made significant efforts to prosecute traffickers and has not addressed the complicity of government officials in the trafficking. Local NGOs, many of whom have been working tirelessly to stem the flow of human trafficking, have said as much for years, but to little avail.

The real problem, and what should be motivating our leaders, is not the threat of sanctions. It is the fact that women and children are trafficked from and through Bangladesh in the thousands every year. The government's job is to protect its citizens. These trafficked women and children are being consigned to a life of untold misery, abuse, and degradation. It should shame us all that our fellow countrymen and women are subjected to this suffering.

Their distress should be reason enough for the government to take measures to stem the trade. We shouldn't need the US State Department to tell us this. There seems to be a pattern here that when NGOs or civil society or the media point to a problem, the government denies that there is anything wrong and refuses to act. Only when a foreign government makes the same claim and threatens remedial action, is the government jolted out of its apathy. This is far from ideal. But let us not let our dislike of being told what to do distract us from the real issue.

The real issue is the misery of the trafficked women and children, and there can be no argument that the government has neglected its duty to take steps to curb this terrible trade. The government can and must do more. Misery should not be an export item.

Attack on Bikalpa procession

Those out to subvert free poll must be booked

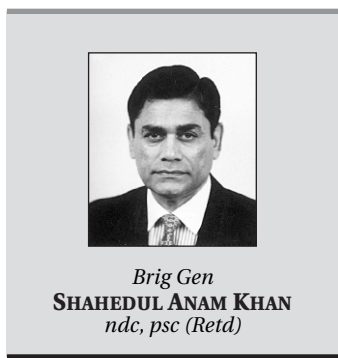
A Bikalpa Dhara procession -- brought out as part of the party's by-election campaign -- came under attack twice in the city on Tuesday. At least 20 persons, ten of them women, were injured in the violent act allegedly perpetrated by supporters of a ward commissioner chanting 'paddy sheaf' slogan for the ruling party candidate in the fray. It seems Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) is still reeling in pangs of an 'obstructed birth' even after several weeks of its churning.

After so many incidents of obstructionist activism against the party, which raised fresh questions about the ruling alliance's intolerance of dissent, one would have expected that no further incidents of the same kind would take place. We have been proved wrong. Even the fact that a court verdict gave the BDB candidate 'kula' as his election symbol has apparently failed to chasten the campaigners on the adversarial side. It is extremely worrying that the police intervened only during the second attack, which goes to imply that the first assault was allowed to happen. However, we note that both Mannan and Mahi rushed into the police headquarters where they felt safe.

All such incidents of intimidation and musclemanny will have to be averted at this phase of the run-up to the by-election by means of effective police vigil and preemptive action. We say this because of our apprehension that if the trend of resistance against Mannan continues, it might hinder, even foil, fair and free conduct of the by-election.

We reemphasise the imperative necessity for an assertive Election Commission role to ensure that all candidates are given equal electioneering opportunities.

How long will the 'job' last?



IN a recent statement, soon after the adoption of the latest resolution on Iraq, Mr. Bush said that the US troops would stay in Iraq for as long as it took to 'finish the job'. The natural riposte is, how long will the job last?

The recent Security Council resolution might have given a veneer of legitimacy to the US actions in Iraq, but contrary to what Mr. Bush thinks, it is not an endorsement, but an exit strategy that the UN has offered to him. Unfortunately, Mr. Bush's affirmation of the US military's continued presence in Iraq betrays his utter failure to read between the lines.

It would, therefore, not be presumptuous to ask as to what, after all, is the job that Mr. Bush wants to get done in Iraq, and how long will it take to be completed? The question is a natural upshot of the constant shift in rationales and arguments used to justify US actions and continued presence in

Iraq. Even after fourteen months of occupation, it is difficult to comprehend the central US argument for its presence in Iraq.

So variegated have been the shifts and so many reasons proffered during the run up to and after the occupation, that one could be forgiven for losing track of the matter. In fact, William Raspberry, writing in the Washington Post on May 30, 2004, quotes an Illinois high school researcher as turning

the distant hills of Afghanistan can prompt a country to occupy another which had, by the US administration's own admission, no hand in the Twin Towers attack.

Now that the Iraqi occupation has been legitimised through the latest Security Council resolution, it may be quite possible for the world to forget the main reasons for the US occupation of Iraq. One feels obliged to recall the expressed reasons of Messrs. Bush and Blair,

information manufactured and exaggerated to motivate public opinion and the pliant press to prepare the grounds for US invasion of Iraq.

Suddenly too, the Coalition partners found a link between Al-Qaeda and Saddam, and reinvented another rationale for war, which was that Iraq was the central front in the war against terror, and that the Iraq operation would help arrest the growth of international

It is no longer for the US to solve the Iraq imbroglio, for it itself is the cause of the imbroglio. It takes no Clausewitz to pronounce that Mr. Bush has all but lost his war in Iraq. He will willy-nilly lose the peace unless he sees the realities on the ground and allows those that can retrieve the situation to take charge, belated though it might be. There is no 'job' that Bush needs to do in Iraq.

up no fewer than twenty-three such 'rationales' that the Bush administration has offered from time to time for invading and occupying Iraq.

It will not come as a surprise to many to know that 9/11 had nothing to do with 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'. According to many analysts, the planning for the invasion of Iraq predated the attack on the Twin Towers. The underlying motivations were quite different from the expressed intentions, which to most were mere excuses to attack Iraq.

As Michael Kinsley, writing in the Washington Post recently said, one is hard put to rationalise how the acts of a terrorist group based in

if only to highlight the fact that, the invasion of Iraq had nothing to do with moral or national security compulsions.

First, it was Iraq's refusal to abide by UN resolutions that was touted as an excuse to invade Iraq. If the intention was to chastise errant UN members that were in breach of UN resolutions, the US was rather selective in its choice of targets, by conveniently forgetting that it was Israel that was, and still is, in violation of more than sixty UN resolutions since 1948.

Second, it was the WMDs that Iraq was supposed to be in possession of, access to which was denied to the UN inspectors. Intelligence was fabricated and doctored and

terrorism.

Having occupied Iraq, but having failed to find WMDs (at one time there was reportedly a twelve hundred strong Defense Intelligence Agency team trundling around the Iraqi countryside), the liberation of Iraq and deliverance of the Iraqi people from Saddam became the raison d'être of the invasion.

The world is now only too aware of the 'freedom' that the Iraqis are now enjoying and the Iraqis have been made painfully aware of the meaning of liberation and liberation.

According to Bush, the US military is doing a 'job' which they

must complete before they can leave Iraq. And what have this 'job' achieved so far in Iraq, and what has it given the Iraqis and the world?

Two recently published reports have put paid to the US-British propaganda on Iraq and the so-called war on terror. Amnesty International has accused the US of transforming the world into a more dangerous place with continued erosion of human rights, and

found refuge in many other countries, thus putting these countries at great risk. Its leadership has become more decentralised, with an invisible presence in more than sixty countries, the IISS report says.

If the current state of affairs in Iraq, militarily and politically, is an index of the 'success' of the 'job' that the US military is involved with, in Iraq, even the US policy planners in their hearts must concede defeat on both counts.

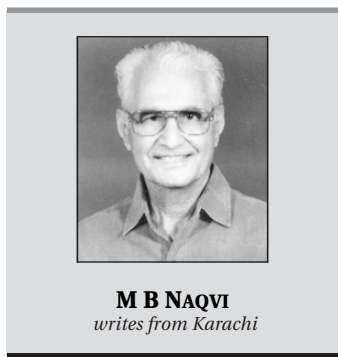
Except for regime change, an objective that was not initially articulated, the coalition has very little success to show in Iraq. NATO's reluctance to provide troops for Iraq indicates the allies' unwillingness to participate in a losing war. According to Jim Hoagland of the Washington Post, it is the view in Paris and Moscow that Bush has failed to deliver on his promises regarding Iraq, and that the stated objectives are no longer attainable under Bush's policies.

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There is no 'job' that Bush needs to do in Iraq.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

The factor X?



TO no one's surprise, one fine evening, Sindh Chief Minister Ali Muhammad Mehar, decided to resign while the Sindh Assembly had said not a word about any lack of trust in him earlier. Presumably he still commanded a majority, and yet he felt compelled to resign. Another similar large landowner, Arbab Ghulam Rahim, has won the leadership of the Sindh Assembly without much hassle. The same parties that reposed confidence in Mehar have, without much discussion, chosen Arbab Ghulam Rahim. The how of this change is an open secret: President Musharraf decided that the time for Mehar was up, and that Rahim was next.

Rumours in this country are stronger than its media. Even the press is forced to report on the basis of rumours, the origins of which remain obscure, and far too frequently events have confirmed the truth of persistent rumours. This is strange. For, it is true to a large extent -- though not 100 per cent -- that the media, particularly the press, are free. They do frequently criticise the general-President. The question frequently arises why can't the media find actual news, the source of which they know, rather than to rely on rumours that anyone can pick up in Islamabad or Lahore.

Rumours have been persistent regarding Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali. His chair is visibly wobbly. Why? because the rumours say that the President is unhappy with him and thinks he ought to go. It is certainly true that placed as Jamali was, his could

only be a non-government. Anyone could see that on all matters of importance, it is the President who co-chairs the meeting with Mr. Jamali. There is no simpleton in Pakistan who cannot see where the buck stops and who really counts.

There is no doubt that the President has reasons to be dissatisfied with the working of the system he laboriously built over three years. As systems built by military rulers to perpetuate

all spheres of governance. This is the direct cause of the perception. No Prime Minister can make any difference, no matter how resourceful he is or strong in personality he may be.

The context in which the people look at the system is important. In these days of information explosion, the example next door, India, has made a deep impact on Pakistan. Look at the Pakistani electronic media or the press. They have been full of gushing

many observers and it is not only the doctoring of elections to produce 'positive results' that they are accused of. The constitutional changes wrought by one man for a see-through purpose sealed the fate of the system. The new misbegotten constitution is perceived to serve its boss. Then, look at how was the ruling party manufactured and who did it? All the leading lights of the Q League were in 1999 members of the PML(N). After the takeover of Gen. Pervez

the information now available plentifully from various sources, as well as the example of India. No Pakistani is ready to regard himself as inferior to Indians. If the Indians can run a democracy and throw out a government when the people become disenchanted with it, why can't they? The Indian example is now a Factor X in Pakistani politics.

Say what you will, the Indians may have made any amount of mess, but they have made a suc-

ues to tom-tom its economic achievements. We all know the litany, beginning with over \$12 billion monetary reserves, over 6 per cent GDP growth rate, and ideal conditions for foreign investment. But there are other facts: by any count, poverty has leaped up in the last four years while it had been growing at a slower but steadier enough pace in earlier phases. Many do not get much money; prices of foodstuffs, clothes and of other facilities like schools, hospitals, and women's health centers have a way of their own to influence his judgement.

Hold a true election after a period of free politicking and see the results: how many of the big and great in the PML (Q) or MMA will return, while most of the PPP, ANP, PML(N) and other parties -- a mixed lot no doubt -- will surely return. Not that PPP and PML(N) have not been tested. But these are among the few parties that have stayed in the political field and have kept on talking about popular welfare, despite many distortions and many of their legislators having the same social characteristics as the official lot. No Eldorado can be created overnight by a genuine democracy. But it can provide solace and satisfaction to the people that their rulers will go on making efforts. It brings stability to the nation. Absence of free polls means that our MPs are not capable of demanding an explanation of where have \$35 to \$37 billion loans during the last 20 years gone. There were about \$8 billion in grants and about \$35 to \$40 billion have been received in remittances. What have the governments to show for this massive inflow of funds? Where is this money? Is any of it invested? Such questions were needed to be asked more persistently but were not. Why? But they will be attended to in a democracy, though not in today's system.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Those wretched beings

A few days ago, I was returning home getting into a bus from Chankharpoil bus stand. When the bus moved a bit, a tragic scene came into my sight. Three shabby and haggard persons including a woman were injecting themselves and undoubtedly they were pushing "Pathedine". Beside them, there was a dingy drain. The place could be a suitable one for dogs but certainly not for the best creation. There were some patrols on duty just a few feet away. I marvelled how such an incident could take place in broad daylight at the patrols' fingers' end, or is it such a normal activity that can be endured without any anxiety? At that moment some questions were arising in my mind: Is it a sign of a normal and civilised atmosphere? Weren't these worthless fellows born in this

world being as much spotless and innocent as the intellectuals and the celebrities were at the time of their being one of this world? Couldn't they have also been a scientist like Newton or literary figures like Shakespeare or Tagore? I concede the reality they had to carry out ..but don't we have anything to do for these ill-fated fellows?

Should we let them go to the land of death without any endeavour to bring them back to light, that is the enlightened life? Just think about it that they also had three pairs of hands which could be transformed to some constructive elements by which the nation would be benefited. Everybody knows that thousands of people perish this way, bit by bit, and are leading the nation to an unknown, horrified destination.

Finally, I would request the government, the concerned

authorities and all the people of the country to give a more sympathetic hearing to the issue.

Md. Saiful Islam Khan
Dogormora,
Savar, Dhaka

Stop mudslinging

What is going on in our political field? Whenever any dreadful incident takes place the government blames it on the opposition and the opposition blames it on the government. On May 7, when Ahsanullah Master was assassinated, the government claimed that it was the result of some internal feud. On the other hand, the opposition maintained that the crime was committed by the BNP activists.

When will this mudslinging come to an end?

Abdul Malek Shikder
Amur Ekushey Hall
DU

An appeal from a disgruntled reader

The night before the opposition sponsored hartal on 5-6-2004, an arson attack on a double-decker bus of the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation in front of Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, left at least nine persons, including an infant and two women burnt alive and more than 25 injured. The gruesome attack was part of a well-orchestrated plan. The brutes allegedly poured gunpowder on both decks of the bus before setting it on fire. Family members and friends watched helplessly their near and dear ones burning alive, but could not do anything.

Passengers from the upper deck had to jump for their life as the narrow staircase was blocked by crowd.

This kind of 'warm up' bomb attack before the hartal day has become a culture. The opposition

seems to have become desperate after the April deadline debacle. It has to get to power by any means, by manslaughter and homicide, by killing minors.

We all know that the perpetrators will go unpunished as usual. Can't we do something about it? Are we just going to send letters to newspapers while two-year-old girls will be burnt alive? Many readers of this newspaper have called for a total ban on hartal. Can't we work together and push to make a law. Or will we just sit back and wait for our sister/daughter/ niece to be burnt alive?

Saif
Dhaka

Pick-up under NU

The National University vide its memo, 01(2165) Jabi/Admn/94/95/2003/1/6571 dated 31.3.2004 informed the Ministry of Education in answer to

the latter's memo. Sha.15/11/Jabi 2/2002/ 734 dated 04.12.03 that there is no scope to apply the pick-up method on the results of the improvement examinees of 1994 and 1995.

If the BSc (Hons) results of one candidate (bearing roll 5578/1993 under DU and improvement 1996 NU) who appeared at the improvement examinations, 1996 (held in 1999) could be revised in 2002, why the results of improvement examinees of 1994/1995 could not be revised as per the pick-up method? The education authorities should look into the matter.

The principals of all the honours level colleges under the NU are requested to take interest in the matter for the welfare of their students.

M Sadeq
Chairman, Department of
Management, Tejgaon College,
Farmgate, Dhaka

Why blame America?

For the last few months, there is a rush of letters blaming America for its hellish act on Iraq and other acts around the whole world, including its role in Israel-Palestine conflict. However, an important point those letters avoided is why America not other countries are doing this. Because America has the power to do this, the other countries don't have. We don't know what Russia, the United Kingdom or France would do if they had the power like America. So we should not blame America only. We should unite against all the superpowers. When the USSR had the same power like America its role in keeping the world peaceful was not quite satisfactory, rather it tried to capture Afghanistan. I think it would act the same way as the US if it had that power. Maybe, it would try to establish Communism instead of capitalism. No difference. Even I think if Bangladesh had the power like the US, then we would not be much better than them. You can disagree but I don't think our politicians are very peaceful. Only having power can prove whether

we are peaceful or not. You can compare it with being corrupt. You can prove someone corrupt if he has the chance to be so. A secretary can be a corrupt man, not a farmer. So why blame America? It is doing what any country would do. Alexander the Great tried to capture the whole world because he had the power to do it, Napoleon and Hitler overestimated their power. Time has changed and superpowers still want to capture the world. Instead of arms and soldiers, their present weapons are now free world, globalisation and technology. And technology is mostly abused in the media, you know already.

Some of you in your letters tried to establish that the Muslim world is good and others are bad. I don't think that is true. So don't blame America alone, blame the uncivilised world we live in and try to make it civilised.

Ayon
Finance & Banking
DU