

Unemployment crisis gets severer

Capacity-building in formal and informal sectors is imperative

THE employment situation in the country is a matter of serious concern with 2.72 crore of its 6.83 crore strong labour force being either jobless or underemployed. Already out of control, the crisis is likely to worsen further in future as the formal employment sectors can absorb only one-third of the new job seekers every year. Joblessness among such a huge chunk of the population is responsible to a great extent for a multitude of socio-economic ills plaguing us.

The causes behind the poor absorption capacity of the sectors generating new jobs are well known, and so are the remedial measures suggested by the experts from time to time. But in spite of a plethora of policy decisions by successive governments and the steps taken so far to create new jobs, the job market remains too small for the huge number of new entrants to it. We believe matters must improve substantially in two key areas. First, rural unemployment has to be addressed by increasing the number of agro-projects with a focus around opening avenues for self-employment based on optimum utilisation of micro-credit facilities. These, in some measure, have already injected a measure of life into the rural economy; but a lot more needs to be done considering the population growth and the corresponding rise in the number of the unemployed.

Simultaneously, the manufacturing sector, now chiefly concentrated on the garment industry, needs to be diversified. The flow of FDI and other forms of investment continues to stagnate at an unsatisfactory level. To increase the flows of investment, poor law and order situation, infrastructural inadequacies, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and above all, factors of political confrontation must be overcome.

The economists have also identified the essential feature of our manufacturing sector like scarcity of capital in contrast to abundance of labour. We are still nowhere near overcoming the disadvantage and making the best use of the vast labour force. The drawback lies in its rather unskilled nature, but it is the economic planners' first and foremost task to find ways of upgrading it into a skilled force that can be a big asset.

The unusually high number of the unemployed among the uneducated youth is a great concern as it has a direct bearing on the growth of terrorism and anarchy. It is a ticking time bomb. The problem has to be addressed urgently, and effectively too, before its snowfalls into an unmanageable proportion.

Militancy in South Asia

Regional approach is indispensable

SPeAKING at a seminar jointly organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (Biiss) and the French and German embassies in Dhaka, former chief justice and chief of caretaker government Latifur Rahman called for a coordinated effort to counter militancy in the South Asia region. We agree wholeheartedly that such an initiative is long overdue, and believe that a lasting solution to the problem of militancy in the region cannot be achieved unless the threat is addressed at a regional level.

The simple and unavoidable fact of the matter is that all nations in South Asia suffer from militancy of some form or another and that the extent of the threat faced by each nation is not confined within its borders.

In the context of Bangladesh, the militants who are targeting democracy have clearly brought in their deadly weaponry from abroad and it is difficult to believe that all funding for anti-democratic elements in Bangladesh originates from inside the country. In addition, when Bangladesh is the locus of massive and to date unexplained hauls of deadly arms that come from abroad, it is clear that what we have on our hands is not merely an internal problem, but one that has a transnational dimension.

Not only this, the internal security concerns of any one country in the region spill over to negatively affect the security situation in neighbouring countries, which gives us a very real stake in the reduction of tension or militancy outside of Bangladesh. The same is true for all the countries in the region. Furthermore, militancy is also often connected to other issues of transnational significance which require a transnational solution.

In this day and age it is not possible for a country to fully address its own security concerns solely at the national level without cooperation and intelligence from its neighbours. There is no doubt that greater cooperation on all matters of multilateral economic concern is the prized agenda in South Asia, but when it comes to questions of security even though a realisation exists that taking a regional approach to checking militancy is the only solution, it remains to be translated into reality. The governments in the region must put aside their mutual mistrust and recognise that it is only through cooperation and coordination that the threat of militancy in South Asia can be defeated.

Religious militancy and our security



Brig Gen
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ndc, psc (Retd)

THE Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (Biiss) must be lauded for organising a seminar on the subject of religious militancy and its impact on South Asia. Militancy, more so if it is prefixed with the word "religious" touches very a very sensitive chord in Bangladesh.

Although the focus was religious militancy, the topics discussed covered a very wide spectrum of issues that impact the security profile of the region.

The seminar was much enriched by the participation of a number of very erudite scholars, not only from the region, but also from France and Germany as well, the co-sponsors of the seminar.

The main topic for consideration was "Religious Militancy and Security in South Asia." One would take it to mean that the phenomenon of militancy is predicated upon scriptural motivations or the misuse of the scripture by the protagonist of these movements, in furthering their aims and objectives, and the pur-

pose of the academic exercise, as one understood from the background papers, was to reflect on the entire gamut of religious militancy, not exclusively as it manifests itself in our region, but also those that are in vogue outside it, and its impact on our region.

However some participants were averse to the use of the phrase "religious militancy" and felt that "militancy in the name of religion" might have been more appropriate. This view stemmed perhaps from

foremost is a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative," but one cannot rule out the existence of groups or individuals that are naturally predisposed to violence and seek legitimacy of their acts in religion and the scriptures. Examples of use and indeed misuse of religion for the sake of so-called pious deeds are many, not only in the region, but also all over the world. Therefore, one need not have

Hoffman, an authority on terrorism, there is etymological association with many of the words that are in vogue in the English language, derivative of the activities of religious groups many centuries ago. For example "zealot" is associated with a millenarian Jewish sect who fought against the Roman occupation of what is now Israel between 66-73 A.D. The Zealots waged a ruthless campaign of both individual assassination and wholesale slaughter, employing a primitive

tional motivation. This ethos of self-sacrifice is evident in some Muslim terrorist movements today.

Closer to home, the term "thug" comes from an Indian religious gang of professional robbers and murderers who, for almost six hundred years, made victims of wayfarers by sacrificing them at the pedestal of Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction. Estimates of the number of persons murdered by the Thugs during their six hundred-year existence put the death

ern, international terrorism) could be classified as religious."

However, in recent times, notwithstanding the age-old symbiosis between terrorism and religion, ethnic and nationalist-separatist ideologically motivated terrorism has overtaken religiously motivated militancy.

Also, one felt inclined to think that the word militancy was being used as a euphemism for terrorism. Admittedly, terrorism has come to acquire a sensitive connotation, and any attempt by scholars to associate terrorism with religion is fraught with difficulty. While there is a very subtle difference between terrorism and militancy, the methods and means to stem the fulfilment of the phenomenon and its negative impact is perhaps not different at all.

It must be remembered that religion in South Asia plays a very important role in the lives of the people of the region. However, poor governance and the resultant weakness of the state is exploited and religion is used by some to motivate the less empowered but more gullible section of the population by seeking legitimacy in religion for their acts.

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

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any reservation about the phrase "religious militancy" perse.

The seminar provided a unique opportunity to trash out the issue and come to some sort of a conclusion as to the exact character of militancy in the region and on that count one would have liked to see a more comprehensive treatment of the main topic, particularly on the causal link, if any, between militancy and religion in South Asia.

Insofar as the matter of scripture influencing militancy is concerned, it may surprise those that refuse to see the connection, but history shows an elemental link between the two. According to Bruce

form of chemical warfare: poisoning wells and granaries used by the Romans and even sabotaging Jerusalem's water supply.

Similarly the word "assassin" is linked to the word hashish and associated with a radical Shi'a branch who, between 1090-1272 A.D, fought the Christian Crusaders attempting to conquer present-day Syria and Iran. The assassin, meaning hashish-eater, would ritually consume hashish before committing murder, an act obligated, they believed by religion, something that would hasten the new millennium. Of course, the attraction of martyrdom that would get them to heaven was an addi-

toll between five hundred thousand and a million.

In fact, some experts and scholars of the subject assert that until the nineteenth century and the advent of nationalism, anarchism, and Marxist ideology, "religion provided the only acceptable justifications for terror. Researchers contend that today, "at least twenty percent of the approximately fifty or so known terrorist groups active throughout the world can be described as having a dominant religious component or motivation whereas none of the 13 identifiable terrorist groups active in 1968 (the year credited with having marked the advent of mod-

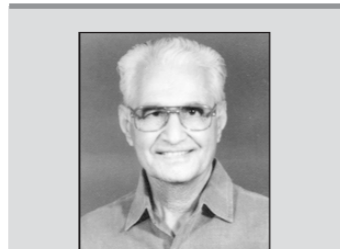
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Unabated murder and mayhem



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

IRAQI SITUATION shows signs of deteriorating: Ambushes, suicide bombings, sabotage, lawlessness and full-throated popular protests abound on a daily basis. Another kind of violence, and a massive one, is the punitive mini but highly destructive wars imposed by American Army frequently on Sunni Falluja, Shia Najaf and Samarra and Sadr City in Baghdad and some also in the northern Kurd areas. These are too frequent. Iraqi casualties are horrendous -- estimates vary from 20000 to 25000 overall, while Americans' death toll had crawled above the 1000 mark some weeks ago. World media regularly project the lost American lives while simply adding the number of Iraqis' lost lives, as a minor detail. However, everyone wants to know when will this murder and mayhem end.

It does appear that America opened a Pandora's box when the US, by degrading the UN and ignoring the opposition by several prominent European governments, started the war on Iraq. Why did the US feel so strongly about Saddam Hussain as to start a war -- the man whom another Republican government had supported for eight long years in his Iran war and sold arms and chemical WMD to him a decade ago? The stated purpose was that he possessed nuclear WMD capacity and thus he was a dangerous man. Later they said he was, in some way, responsible for 9/11 and Dick Cheney now says he had links with al-Qaeda.

The whole world knows these were, and are, just untrue excuses. There is not a shred of evidence that

Saddam possessed any WMD in 2003 or 2002. Instead, inquiry after inquiry has confirmed the view of Dr. Hans Blix, the Chief UN Arms Inspector, that Iraq had no WMDs. As for Saddam having been in cahoots with al-Qaeda, it is too irrational to merit serious inquiry. The basic nature of Baath Party regime run by Saddam was secular Arab Nationalism -- an antithesis of what various Islamic extremist groups stand for. Of necessity this American venture has to be judged as a premeditated war of aggres-

there is near consensus on three objectives: first, there is the oil, getting control over the second largest reservoir of oil would be extremely useful to the hyper power -- in future when things quieten down. The second is Israel; an Anglo American-sponsored pro-west regime in Baghdad that will enhance Israel's security no end. The third reason can only be related to America's strategic purposes -- both in ME region and for larger aims in Asia. The American assumptions could only have been

enough indicators that quite a few disparate forces have come together to fight American occupation forces for their separate purposes. Suicide car bombing carries the signature tune of al Qaeda and like-minded other smaller groups. Their goal can only be a theocratic Islamic State of Sunni persuasion. Then there are the Shias. Muqtada al Sadr's militia and other Shia leaders like Sistani want free and fair elections to a democratic Assembly at an early date. Kurds in the north want autonomy

sectarian prejudice. The Baath under Saddam Hussain, for all his oppression, ran a thoroughly secular regime. Its genuineness and success was shown in the eight-year war with Shia Iran: Shias in the Iraqi army did not desert in all those years. Saddam had Shia generals. There were also many Shia Baathists.

A telltale circumstance is that all those western experts who talked so much about the brittleness of Iraq and that its being prone to a civil war, only wanted to justify indefinite

of postponing the economy's revival. It has already derailed the American roadmap of what was expected to happen when and in what stages.

A hard question must be asked: Can the Americans kill or maim this Resistance in sufficient numbers to allow their political schedule of events to succeed over a somewhat longer stretch of time? So far there is every indication that this Iraqi Resistance is resilient enough to withstand what America can do. It seems the Americans are unlikely to prevent the growing chaos and lawlessness from becoming endemic. Americans might have to call it a day sooner rather than later. The other option is to go on holding Iraq in the way Israel is holding West Bank and Gaza Strip. Are the Americans tough enough to do so? One may be wrong but one does think that before too long American public opinion will force either Bush or Kerry to bring home the boys.

What of Iraq, then? Iraqis, if they persevere in this Resistance, will suffer horrible casualties, to be sure. Economic hardship too may become more intense. Frankly, one had not thought, way back in April last year, that Iraqis will show so much unity and so much grit as they have. There is no indication yet of Iraq splitting three ways along sectarian and ethnic lines. Not that Iraqi Sunnis have become less Sunni or Shias have ceased to give importance to their beliefs and rituals. But there seems to be common understanding among all Iraqis that they are Arabs and individual beliefs are individual's business. In that lies much promise. Already it seems, the Iraqis are mentally prepared for democracy. If this assessment is true, there is light at the end of the long, long tunnel. Other matters like social justice will have to wait for democracy to take root.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

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sion for attaining American objectives, as the UN Secretary General has confirmed.

The next question inevitably arises about American objectives of this aggression. Regime change has also been cited as a reason because Saddam was an extremely oppressive dictator. This should be laughed out of court. One mentioned the record of Bush Senior having supported him in Iraq-Iran war with war material, including chemical WMDs. The US love of democracy may be genuine. But it seems not to go beyond American borders. The US has always flirted with despots, kings or dictators; Americans have propped up most dictatorships in every continent. Pakistanis know only too well how the US has underwritten every local dictator down to his day, even if they have forgotten the high international intrigue in early 1950s against democracy in this country. Regime change cannot be accepted even by Americans as the reason for expending American treasure and lives.

Unavoidably most observers have had to speculate over the likely reasons for starting this war. So far

that overcoming Iraqi Army would require only a week's campaigning. After that a people freed from an oppressive dictatorship would gratefully accept American advice on most matters.

Anyway, where do we go from here? is the question. The present rate at which the Iraqis are being killed both by Americans and the Iraqis, both insurgents and fledgling Iraqi Army cannot be allowed to continue. It is horrible. It is, however, not easy to suppose that this phase will soon be over. There are signs that politically aware Iraqis have started what can only be called Resistance to American presence and its schemes of governing the occupied country through American puppets of Iraqi descent. Make no mistake, it is a proper Resistance. Hired men do not mount suicide attacks. This can only be done by the highly committed. What then is the chief philosophy and purpose of the Resistance?

The purpose is not in doubt: it is to see the back of Americans, no matter what happens after their departure. But philosophy or ideology of the Resisters is not easy to determine. For one thing, there are

for now, they do not seem to be too bitterly opposed to Americans. But sabotage and ambushes do happen there. It would be odd if all the Kurds were of one view. Apparently elements from amongst these may be conducting their own campaign, joined in by other Iraqis who might be believing in their areas.

Sunnis, hitherto the dominant element in the public life, living in the middle latitudes of the country, are the most fierce opponents of American intruders. But most of them, by several accounts, are secular-minded and are still influenced by Baath ideology. They are the solid core of Resistance. If so, then where do the al Qaeda come from? To answer this is easy: they come from outside. How do they find local hosts? To answer that is more difficult. For all anyone knows both Shias and Sunnis may be their hosts.

For all the massive talk of demographic faultlines in Iraq along sectarian lines, no one should forget the intellectual legacy of original leaders of Baath, mostly Christians, as well as Nasserites; their emphasis was on Arabness. Both major schools decried religiosity and

American presence in Iraq. Reports were that Israeli Mossad was straining to cause serious rifts among the Iraqis along both sectarian and ethnic lines. Iraqis are still mainly Arabs and Iraqis first and anything else later. There is also evidence of cooperation between Shias of the south -- and in Baghdad -- with Sunnis of the middle strip. At any rate, it is clear that Resistance is constantly waging a war with a view to preventing the interim government of Iyad Allawi from consolidating itself and holding an orderly election under the shadow of American bayonets. In this they seem to be succeeding despite American propaganda to the contrary. The UN representative for Iraq has certified that prospects for elections in January are dim.

What happens if the Americans go on indefinitely occupying Iraq, hoping that they can cause the birth of a US-friendly 'democracy' one of these days so that it will be happy to host them? On present indications, the Resistance is growing tougher. It aims at the sabotage of economic and political kind to prevent the Iyad regime from achieving the American objective. It may attain the objective

TO THE EDITOR 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.

Brand business

I appreciate Mr. Asif Ahmed's article about 'National branding' published in The Daily Star on Oct 10, 2004. It is interesting how he related the concept between building a national brand and export promotion.

I can reflect from my present experience in the field of corporate branding that Bangladesh has an immense opportunity to leverage its export by implementing a proper brand portfolio or house of brands management framework. Since the country is looking to diversify its export into different categories, it needs to have a framework for building brand equity in each of the category which will be consistent with the national brand building effort.

Mr. Asif reflects a 20 years timeframe for building national brand for Bangladesh. I predict that even if individual exporting companies/firms start to invest in brand building effort in their respective category, brand investment at

individual level can be a vital source of equity for building a positive national brand in a much shorter time period. However, an effective national brand can only be built when the government and other stakeholders involved consider brand marketing as an investment rather than expenditure.

Ahmed Sharif Ferdous
Queensland, Australia

What more from him?

Since getting the Test status, four years back, Bangladesh still have not got a Test victory for which many commentators are throwing their javelin of flacks to our cricket team. For a staggering victory, BCB has shuffled many coaches so far. Dev Whatmore is the latest one who was appointed as the chief coach with two other associates, more than eight months ago in the hope that he would establish Bangladesh as an emerging Tiger. After that, we did see some signs of its appearance, even they were on the verge

of a Test victory. This competitive attitude prevailed for the next two or three months. Since then, the so called upliftment was going downward and the whole team could not function together, but for some sporadic upsets. Seemingly, they go to the wicket only to scamper away from it. Their performance leaves much to be desired.

ABM Shafiqul Islam
Dept. of English
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AL programmes

We are agghast and feeling deeply upset by Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil's warning that they would resort to a non-stop hartal if the government does not stop arresting the leaders and workers. He claimed that many leaders and workers of the AL were arrested to foil their grand rally in Dhaka. He also claimed that people across the country were ready to join it with the slogan "cholo Dhaka cholo".

But he is mistaken, people do not like this sort of agitation programmes; no one was ready to join it except Awami League activists. The opposition has done much harm to the country by 'destructive' politics. It seems that they don't care for the country or its people, they do not hesitate to destroy public property. When the newly built Chittagong railway station and Biman office were set on fire, our hearts broke in anguish. People do not like the politics of "Bhangchur and jalao-porao".

Recently, the Awami League activists set on fire Subarno Express, the inter-city train and compelled 600 passengers to get down at Bhairab. Their sufferings must have known no bounds and a railway guard was burnt to death. What was their fault? The activists also destroyed innumerable vehicles and many shops. What an inhuman act, we strongly object to this sort of actions.

So, how could they expect that people are waiting eagerly to see

them in power?

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Turkey and EU

Why Turkey is so keen to join the EU, when the latter is facing sunset years, and there are no signs of recovery in this century? In fact, the decline of Western civilisation is by now an open secret. Except for Uncle Sam far away across the Atlantic and Pacific (what an isolation), which western nation is able to take the initiative in providing leadership in international affairs? The industrialised members have maimed even the UN system, making the mighty Secretary General a sort of non-entity. The veto system in the UNSC is an old joke.

Perhaps a powerful minority in Turkey is trying to escape into the European fold. What EU has to offer, when the empathy is not there from the fossilised European citizens, now a curious mixture of sociological hotch-potch? As the forefathers of

secularism in a post-Ottoman Muslim-majority under-developed country under Kemal Ataturk, the rapid progress of the new Turkish nation drew admirable attention from other countries. It is time for a review. What has been the role of the OIC? The latter has to come up with some definite definitions of the existence of OIC, otherwise it is facing the same fate as the current UN.

The context is changed today. Any experienced tourist can get the feeling that modern Turkey reminds one more of Asia and me than the white civilisation further West.

There are two tug-of-wars going on at present: one inside Turkey, and the other inside EU. The choice is not difficult, once the cultural base is chosen for good.

Alfa Ahmad
Dhaka

Pricey eggs

Eggs are selling at more than Tk 4 each; and the farm chickens are more pricey, although the economy

is flooded with dairy and poultry farms. The production of eggs and chicks have boomeranged.

It is the marketing bug--the distribution system (starting with the cottages in the villages) is poor, and controlled by minority manipulators. Public shopping centres have been tried before, but the government cannot run its own show, not to speak of minding others' eggs and poultry.

I skip the morning breakfast egg frequently, and omelette are more economical than single fried. We don't know how to egg on the sarkar. Poor voting ability. Cannot read the signs.

AZ, Dhaka

Ban on fox hunting

Recently, the British House of Commons has adopted a legislation to ban fox hunting in England and Wales. Meanwhile, thousands of fox hunt supporters protested the decision outside the Parliament amid police barricade.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II was reportedly not amused by the impending ban on fox hunting and she said so to Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Fox hunting is a traditional English sport in which foxes are hunted by specially trained dogs and by people on horses. It's a favourite pastime to many in Great Britain.

In my view, before passing the law the British government should review the situation thoroughly. Some particular areas may be marked for foxes' safe home as protected zones, while other areas may be kept open to people interested in fox hunting.

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