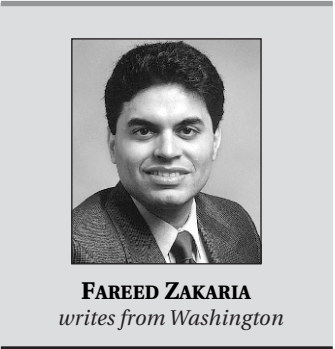


Exploit rifts in the insurgency



FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

AMID all the problems in Iraq, I see one encouraging sign. Sunnis are organising to defeat the referendum on Iraq's draft constitution. This is good news because it places the Sunnis in direct opposition to the jihadi insurgents in Iraq. The latter, headed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, have been threatening to kill anyone who votes. The vast majority of Sunni organisations in Iraq including several insurgent groups have called on Sunnis to mobilise and vote to defeat the constitution, which they view as anti-Sunni. This is the most important positive development in Iraq growing split between the radical jihadists and the other insurgents, who are mostly Baathists. It provides the United States with an opportunity, even at this late date, for some success. Drive this split wider and isolate the jihadists. Or as the British motto goes, divide and conquer.

Rifts are emerging on other issues. Recently Zarqawi urged a "total war" against the Shiites in Iraq. But five Sunni insurgent groups rejected the argument and emphasised that they do not target civilians, whether Sunni or Shia. The Association of Muslim Scholars, a Sunni group that supports the insurgency, issued a more elaborate denunciation. Days later, Zarqawi issued a correction, explaining that "not all Shiites are targets," and exempting those who opposed the occupation, such as the followers of the rebel cleric Muqtada al Sadr. This led Sadr's group to issue a statement rejecting Zarqawi's embrace and making clear that "for our movement Zarqawi is nothing but an enemy and if he falls into the hands of our militia he will be torn apart." Most recently comes news that Ayman al-Zawahiri

The next two weeks are crucial. In all likelihood, the Sunnis will not be able to defeat the constitution, which means they will be further embittered. Washington and the Iraqi government should then put forward a bold program of "national reconciliation" that includes talks with some of the insurgent groups to draw the Sunnis into the political mainstream.

sent a letter to Zarqawi telling him his goals and means were causing a loss of support for al Qaeda. For months now there have been signs that the Baathist insurgency wants to end its uprising. Last week, there was one more such signal. Saleh al Mutlak, a prominent Sunni politician whom many believe has ties to the insurgency, publicly proposed a ceasefire. "The fighting should stop," Mutlak told Reuters. "We have fought for two and a half years and the problem is, it doesn't work." Within the next week, several Sunni groups will gather to put together a formal set of proposals for the United States to consider. "We must find a political solution," he said. A ceasefire during Ramadan, which began last week, "should be a start for direct negotiations between the two sides."

Until recently, the United States has

been opposed to negotiating with the insurgents, but that line is weakening. The new US ambassador in Baghdad, Zalmay Khalilzad, has begun meeting with people who are close to the insurgents. But, according to a senior diplomat who spoke on background so as not to interfere with the negotiations, Khalilzad has not yet met the people with power, who are actually running the insurgency.

From the start, the United States has misunderstood how to handle Iraq's Sunnis, sending the signal that it viewed them all as Baathists. In fact, Saddam's regime was run by a small group of tribal Sunnis, mostly from Tikrit and adjoining areas. He displaced the secular, urban Sunnis, who were Iraq's traditional elite. Some of the latter were left in government bureaucracies and educational estab-

lishments, but with little power. Then came de-Baathification and the disbanding of the army. All of a sudden, tens of thousands of people, nominally members of the Baath Party, lost jobs as engineers, schoolteachers, and officials. The result was chaos and an embittered Sunni population.

For the last year, Washington has been trying to reverse these errors. But the Shiite-dominated government has been unwilling to make many compromises. This is understandable. The Shiites suffered greatly under Saddam and the Baath Party. But that perspective might blind them to what is in Iraq's long-term interest. Only a balance of power between the Shia, the Sunni and the Kurds will keep Iraq stable.

The next two weeks are crucial. In all likelihood, the Sunnis will not be able to defeat the constitution, which means they will be further embittered. Washington and the Iraqi government should then put forward a bold program of "national reconciliation" that includes talks with some of the insurgent groups to draw the Sunnis into the political mainstream.

Otherwise the dangers grow for Iraq, and for others as well. Iraq's Interior Minister, Bayan Jabr, said last week that while Zarqawi had been weakened in recent months, other smaller jihadi groups were getting stronger. And, he added, they were beginning to move men and arms outside of Iraq. "You will see insurgencies in other countries," he warned. There's a dark cloud forming in the Middle East, and it may burst if we don't act soon.

© 2005, Newsweek Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.

Should we go easy on the Two Ladies?

Farid Bakht

POLITICS is highly personalised here. If we cannot find a king, we look for a queen. That explains the style of governance. Presiding over affairs. Gliding through an administration, never getting a grip on matters. Strategy is an unknown word.

Why do we keep focusing on the Two Ladies? Just because they hold the title of leader does not mean they actually hold the reins of power. We don't really believe they decide our fate, do we? Even if they think they do.

A businessman-cum-politician explained to me what the game is all about. He said, Bangladesh is like a plane about to take off. Everything is in place. The seat belts are on. However, the crew cannot get the plane off the ground. Looking out of the window, they see the ladies holding on to each wing, pulling it back. Naturally, each Lady is on either side of the aircraft since they cannot possibly stand next to each other. The solution was left unsaid but the implications are clear.

I think this is a little unfair to the two ladies who have been manipulated all through their political lives. They try their best to rule autocratically, but are they ruling or are they following bad advice, whispered respectfully in their ears? How else can you explain the opposition shooting themselves in the foot with hartal general strikes? One can imagine an 'adviser' whispering in her ear: "Madam, we need to call a hartals, otherwise they will think we are weak." To which, the response is: "Yes, Let's."

Meanwhile, in the palace, another adviser will be explaining: "The newspapers all belong to the opposition. Madam, the people are with you. The newspapers are creating an artificial crisis about bombs and food prices, they are trying to ruin our image, but grambangla will vote you back in. Forget about the Tuesday/Wednesday group."

A twist in the tale

If we want to insist on sticking to personalities, especially women, I could say we have been concentrating on the wrong "two ladies." Two other ladies have a decisive role in the immediate political map of Bangladesh. Christina and Christine could come up with up with a very different

The next eighteen months may be the most crucial period in a generation. If this political class thinks it can buy the next elections and put the rest of us through another five years of dithering, incompetence, and robbery, they might want to think again. Geopolitical actors, multinational companies, and aid agencies are exasperated and getting bolder by the day. For somewhat different reasons, local industrialists, consumers, and intellectuals are fretting too. Discontent is rising on all sides.



The PM and the Leader of the Opposition: Two faces of the same coin?

state of affairs.

I have no idea why one (Rocca) has decided that a superpower can do without an ambassador who is known as a South Asian expert. It was not his command of Bangla that got him his posting -- it was his extensive experience with India and more. The transition has not been smooth. It is taking forever. Usually, one finds a replacement before one asks the incumbent to move on. If the expert really was promoted, then Bangladesh must still be seen as a backwater banana republic where no one wants our equivalent of bananas, namely our reserves of natural gas. That also does not square with the story of an imminent Islamic challenge and 500 exploding bombs.

From time to time, the Court of St. James can do without a US Ambassador or be sent a generous car dealer as a reward for hefty Republican Party donations. Ambassadors hardly matter there. Not so in far away South Asia.

Perhaps history could give us a clue. Thirty years ago, there seems to have been a disagreement between an

Ambassador and other agencies on how to bring about political change in Dacca. Then, the hawks overrode the dovish Ambassador, ensuring that the "project" was on. Chile's Allende in 1973 was followed by Bangladesh's Mujib two years later.

This is not 1975 and we have a democratically elected regime now. Still, who knows what is in the pipeline (no pun intended).

The other lady presides over the macroeconomic policy and planning of this country and is not averse to discussing the state of bad governance in public. Analysis and recommendations from the Country Director of the World Bank emailed back to Washington will be critically important in the months ahead.

Look out for the phrase: "We can (or cannot) do business with X."

The world is more complicated and is not dependent on the whims of one of two individuals, though they may hold influence. So, let us move away from focusing on two or more ladies, theirs or ours, and instead think about the underlying factors.

The next eighteen months may be the most crucial period in a generation. If this political class thinks it can buy the next elections and put the rest of us through another five years of dithering, incompetence, and robbery, they might want to think again. Geopolitical actors, multinational companies, and aid agencies are exasperated and getting bolder by the day. For somewhat different reasons, local industrialists, consumers, and intellectuals are fretting too. Discontent is rising on all sides.

Despite the *tamasha* about which practice is "best" for staging an election (if we assume there is going to be an election), it will not end there. No losing party will accept the result. The election result will have to be "enforced" if it is going to stick.

Far more important issues are in play, way above the heads of one or two individuals. I, for one, am not bothered about the name of my next queen.

The author is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

Token charity or real charity?

GIGI ASM

SINCE the traditional time for *zakat* in Bangladesh is coming up, it would be constructive to look at the Bangladeshi version of *zakat* a little bit more closely and without the rose-coloured glasses of custom, tradition, and "family values."

Zakat, the institutional form of charity in the Muslim world, is structured and shaped, like any other social institution, by the social environment and by the institution's relation to other social institutions such as family, religion, education, politics, economics, and the state. Since Bangladesh is essentially a developing country, it still retains those insular qualities of tribalism fondly called "family values" which shape the structure and eventually influence the efficacy of *zakat* in Bangladesh. Subsequently, *zakat*, which is essentially a religious institution, is shaped in Bangladesh not so much by Quranic Islam, but by the tribal values of a people who are dominated by rural values of personal contact rather than by urban values of efficiency. Since Bangladesh is a third-world country, we can ill-afford to practice token charity that costs lives in place of real charity that is geared towards alleviating poverty on a large scale.

Thus, because Bangladeshi culture is still rural based, the majority of *zakat* is given on a person-to-person level (or individual-level basis) because rural culture values personal contact. In industrially developed countries, where the concept of statehood is distinct from the concept of family, charity is given in so as to affect as many people as possible, and thus the majority of charity is given by individuals to a formal organisation which then disseminates those funds to anyone who fulfills their criteria for help. Such organisations have specialised in alleviating or eliminating poverty, and as such their every action is geared towards those same goals. But, because we in Bangladesh are living within a tribal framework, person-to-person charity is encouraged and lauded and involves having a direct relationship to every step of the charity-giving process -- from buying the items to selecting the recipients for your charity to giving the donations to those same recipients.

There is nothing wrong with person-to-person (individual-level) charity as such, but in the view of Bangladesh being a developing country, and in the context of the Quran, which demands that we give to alleviate the sufferings of others, individual charity is in great danger of becoming token charity rather than the real charity advocated by the

Charity that is mostly individual-based may be fine for a post-industrial country where the level of real poverty is low, but for a country where the population is estimated for 2005 to be approximately a little over 144 million and where 45 per cent of the population is estimated to be below the poverty line, there are at least 65 million reasons for zakat money to be spent carefully and judiciously.



Let us not forget the least among us.

Quran. Token charity or token *zakat* in Bangladesh (possibly in others countries as well, but I'm looking at my country) is a form of religious formalism to be gotten over as soon and painlessly as possible, with little concern for whether one's charitable actions are really alleviating or helping to eliminate poverty. Real charity, on the other hand, is motivated by a sincere and real desire to alleviate and eliminate poverty -- to "do good."

Charity that is mostly individual-based may be fine for a post-industrial country where the level of real poverty is low, but for a country where the population is estimated for 2005 to be approximately a little over 144 million and where 45 per cent of the population is estimated to be below the poverty line, there are at least 65 million reasons for *zakat* money to be spent carefully and judiciously.

There are various poverty studies and estimates of how many of our population is in need. The definition of need varies from study to study,

from organisation to organisation, but in spite of all the variance, an overall summary stresses that most Bangladeshis do not have access to those essential basics (such as clean water, separate sanitation, adequate housing, and a regular income) to dignify a life with. Having such amenities will reduce the death rate and raise the quality of life far more than the building of multi-crore hospitals that are a non-sustainable and completely impractical items on any poor country's shopping list.

Prof A I Mahub Uddin Ahmed's study of the socio-demographic correlates of rural poverty quoted UNDP figures that estimated 78 per cent of the Bangladeshi population is classified as income-poor, if a poverty line constructed of less than \$2 per day per person is used, and 29 per cent of the country's population can be classified as poor if the poverty line is lowered to \$1 per day per person.

With such figures cropping up annually for Bangladesh, the giving of

charity by local Bangladeshis is inexcusable if it is given carelessly or regarded as a piece of religious superfluity to be gotten out of the way as quickly as possible. Whichever way we look at it, we cannot escape one hard fact that close to half the population of Bangladesh is in dire need, and over three-quarters of the total population is in need. What the statistics essentially show us is that Bangladesh has pockets (or shall we say islands, if we think of Gulshan, Baridhara, Dhanmondi, and Uttara) of the haves surrounded by seas and oceans of the have-nots.

The reason why I feel so negatively about individual-level charity in the context of Bangladesh is because, as a third world country we cannot afford to play around with life-saving resources. We are basically Neros, fiddling while Rome burns (in the interests of accuracy and libel, I should mention that the story of the Roman emperor fiddling while his city burned is untrue) when we give the majority of our *zakat* to individual-level charity instead of to organised institutional charity. Family-centred charity, or individual-level charity is limited in efficacy and reach to the abilities and resources of the individual or the family. Such family-centred charity given on a person-to-person basis is charity that is frequently misplaced and wasted -- we end up sustaining poverty rather than helping to alleviate or eliminate it.

To illustrate how person-to-person charity is a hit-and-miss affair, with donations being distributed unevenly and inefficiently, let's look at the following. Submitting to the truism that charity begins at home, we might choose to donate food, clothing, and money in the name of charity to our household or office servants. Thus, those lucky enough to be servants in the households of the moneyed rich may get a plethora of food, clothing, and money on at least two days of the Muslim calendar. The gifts those servants receive might be further augmented by donations given by the employer's friends who might also be looking for some conveniently easy way of disposing of their *zakat* obligations. As a result, you get a lucky few getting too much on a few days of the year, who will then dispose of the non-perishable surplus to their families and poorer relations. And then of

course something similar happens with our distant relations or with our *deshbari* people. The trickle-down theory of economics is obviously coming into play here but nobody is directing the force of the trickles or where the trickles go.

Institutional charities on the other hand, and yes, we do have them in Bangladesh -- take, for example, Red Crescent, Islamiat Eye Hospital, Oxfam, etc -- stretch your money far more than individual charity does. This is because they are bureaucracies geared towards achieving certain goals, and those goals include saving lives or helping people on a mass scale. As such, all their actions are geared towards those goals. And since they are large-scale institutions, the economies of large-scale kick in. Most of these charities have accountability -- they can prove to you that a very tiny percentage of their funds is spent on administration. The bulk of it goes towards saving lives, giving sight or whatever the goal of that organisation is.

The power of the group is more efficacious than the power of one. What goes for prayer goes for charity -- the contributions of individuals make a sum that is greater than its component parts. From an Islamic perspective, when token charity is given with an eye to impressing our fellow men rather than impressing God, it not only costs lives and the quality of life, but, from an Islamic perspective, we make a mockery of *zakat* and of God Himself. God is no idiot to be fooled by fine empty gestures.

"And whatever deed ye (mankind) may be doing, We are Witnesses thereof when ye are deeply engrossed therein. Nor is hidden from thy Lord (so much as) the weight of an atom on the earth or in heaven. (Surah 10: Verse 61)."

It's interesting to note that while we all recognise the power of prayer said in a group, we are more reluctant to acknowledge the power of charity when it is given as a group. The Quran lauds the action of the individual when the individual is working as part of the Brotherhood -- why are we so willing to follow this injunction of Islam when it comes to prayer but not charity? We demand value for money when buying food, clothes and the material pleasures of life. Is *zaka* a lost cause that we don't demand value for money here?

"The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoy what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey God and His Apostle. On them will God pour his mercy: for God is Exalted in power, Wise. (Surah 9: Verse 71)."

The author is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

An uncomplicated faith

TALKING BOOKS

Martin Lings died in May this year after a long life of scholarship and devotion to academic pursuits. His passing was mourned by all those whose lives were illuminated by the insight of his written words. In these troubled times when Islam is under attack all over the world for its so-called extremism Lings' work is well worth a close study for the insight it provides into the true nature and spirit of Islam.

YASMEEN MURSHED

IT has been many months since I have put pen to paper, or more accurately, fingers to keyboard for the purpose of writing this column. But that is not to say that I have not been reading during this long hiatus. In my case, reading is as essential as life itself so it is accurate to say that "I read therefore I breathe!" My reading encompasses many topics and genres as the mood takes me, so I have read through a very wide range of books on diverse subjects in the past year and have much to share in this column; however there is no discernable pattern to my reading and since this is meant to be merely a rumination - a melancholy of mine own as the Bard would have it -- I will jump from book to book and subject to subject regardless.

By the time this column is published, we will be in the Holy month of Ramadan when physical abstinence is supposed to turn our thoughts to higher planes. How better to beguile away the torpid afternoon or the long evening and put one in a properly spiritual frame of mind than with Martin Lings' biography of the beloved and revered Prophet of Islam (pbuh) titled "Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources (pub: George Allen and Unwin 1983)."

Martin Lings was an Englishman who converted to Islam and is best remembered in the Islamic world for this biography. As interesting for someone who has not read it before as it is for those who read religious texts such as the Hadith regularly, this is an erudite yet extremely readable account that creates a vital link between the earliest writings in Islam and the life of the Prophet (pbuh). The narrative is riveting as it takes us through pre-Islamic Arabia to the final days of the Prophet (pbuh).

While a multitude of books had been written and published about the Life and Times of the Prophet (pbuh) in most languages of the world by Islamic scholars, until this book came along there was the lack of a scholarly and comprehensive account which would be considered authentic by the Western world. Lings' great contribution was that while he remained very close to the sources he cited, notably the recognized authorities on the Seerat or Life of Rasul Allah, his language is extremely

readable and idiomatic, thus making the archaic rendering of ancient Arabic understandable, lively and vivid for both layman and scholar. Based on Arabic sources of the eighth and ninth centuries, of which some important passages are translated here for the first time, it owes the freshness and directness of its approach to the words of the men and women who heard the Prophet (pbuh) speak and witnessed the events of his life.

The anecdotes and reports of the Prophet (pbuh)'s dealings with the people around him, his compassion and humaneness, both in directing their daily life and in shaping their relationship with the Creator, bring to life the quality of deep spiritual strength as well as worldly consideration which made the Prophet an Exemplar for all times. The instances of dealing with the all too human characteristics and problems of his Companions; the gift for cutting to the heart of a problem; the ability to understand human frailty and to teach us to beg for forgiveness from the Creator all this make for a deeply satisfying spiritual experience for those who take the time to read this book closely.

Just one example of the myriad instances that abound in the Life, will serve to illustrate the sensitivity and compassion which our beloved Prophet (pbuh) demonstrated time and again. In Chapter XLVII Lings writes that:

"One of the immediate acts of the Prophet upon his return from Badr had been to visit the grave of his daughter Ruqayyah, and Fatimah went with him. This was the first bereavement they had suffered within their closest family since the death of Khadija, and Fatimah was greatly distressed by the loss of her sister. The tears poured from her eyes as she sat beside her father at the edge of the grave, and he comforted her and sought to dry her tears with the corner of his cloak. He had previously spoken against lamentations for the dead but this had led to a misunderstanding, and when they returned from the cemetery the voice of Umar was heard raised in anger against the women who were weeping for the martyrs of Badr and for Ruqayyah. "Umar let them weep," he said. And then he added: "What cometh from the heart and from the eye that is from God and His Mercy, but what

cometh from the hand and from the tongue, that is from Satan." By the hand he meant the beating of the breast and the laceration of the cheeks, and by the tongue he meant the vociferous clamour in which all the women joined as a social gesture."

This simple anecdote illustrates the depth of the Prophet (pbuh)'s appreciation for human feelings and emotions even within the context of the discipline, strictures and practices imposed by an uncompromising Faith in the Almighty. Today the world often overlooks the benevolence of Islam and focuses instead on its militancy and vigour.

But Lings is worth reading because an uncomplicated faith shines forth in his writing and that is to my mind the most appealing aspect of this book. Lings has the gift of narrating with fluency and ease and he uses language with a freshness which reflects both the simplicity and the grandeur of the story. The result is something that can be read with equal enjoyment by those familiar with the Prophet's (pbuh) life, and those coming to it for the first time.

This important biography was very well received all over the world even by the more traditional schools of Islamic thought. It was awarded a prize by the government of Pakistan and was selected as the best biography of the Prophet (pbuh) in English at the National Seerat Conference held in 1983 at Islamabad. In 1990, after the book came to the attention of the clerics of the al Azhar University in Cairo, Lings was honoured and decorated by the government of Egypt. Since then the book has been published in almost all the languages of the world and is often cited as a very important source and reference for scholars.

Martin Lings died in May this year after a long life of scholarship and devotion to academic pursuits. His passing was mourned by all those whose lives were illuminated by the insight of his written words. In these troubled times when Islam is under attack all over the world for its so-called extremism Lings' work is well worth a close study for the insight it provides into the true nature and spirit of Islam.

Yasmeen Murshed is a full-time bookworm and a part-time educationist. She is also the founder of Scholastica School.