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Shia-Sunni violence

Since the "surge" of US troops four months ago, Shia-Sunni bloodlettings in Iraq seem to have gone beyond control. Recently, the UN delivered a dismal report on the status of the US-led efforts to quell violence in Iraq by putting tens of thousands of additional troops in Baghdad and neighbouring areas.

The UN said the troops "surge" had failed in its goal to protect the civilians, rein in militants or stem sectarian warfare. Increasing rocket and mortar attacks on the heavily fortified Green Zone, where the US embassy, Iraqi parliament and many government offices are based, were cited as signs of how things are worsening. And Sunnis and Shiites are now more than ever determined to exterminate each other. In the parliament, the Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani, a Sunni, was ousted by the

largely Shia-led parliamentarians after he slapped a Shiite member of the parliament. And Shia-Sunni conflict seem to have taken an ominous turn with the reports that Shiite soldiers in the Iraqi army are joining the Shiite militias to kill the Sunnis while the Sunnis are raiding Shiite areas, kidnapping, torturing and killing the Shiites. North of Baghdad, in Diyala province, Sunni insurgents blew up a strategic bridge linking provincial capital, Baquba. In another attack, the Sunni insurgents killed a number of police recruits, mostly Shiites.

This never-ending bloodletting between the Sunnis and the Shiites in Iraq has led many analysts to believe that the sectarian war cannot be stopped, unless another brutal dictator like Saddam Hussein emerges. When Saddam Hussein and the Sunni minority

ruled Iraq, they brutalized the Shiite majority into submission, turning the Shiites into second-class citizens with no rights. And when the Shiite majority rose in revolt after the First Gulf War in 1991, Saddam's Republican Guards slaughtered them in thousands. As long as Saddam ruled, the Shiites had little chance to live like free Iraqi citizens.

After the US-led ouster of Saddam Hussein, the Shiite majority is flexing their muscle. But the once-dominant Sunni minority is now carrying out a violent anti-Shiite campaign, hoping to trigger a civil war which will bring other Sunni countries into a regional Shia-Sunni sectarian war. Now the Shia-Sunni conflict seems to have entered a cataclysmic phase and the dream of having a democratic and federal Iraq, where rights of both the sects will be protected, seems to be as distant as ever.

Edward Wong, a Chinese-American and a New York Times correspondent in Baghdad, points to the Iraqi notion of sahel at the root of the conflict. Sahel means, "to utterly defeat and humiliate anyone opposing you." This is a tribal idea that power must not be shared with anyone who doesn't share your values.

This implies that the American goal of establishing democracy in Iraq is doomed. It is doomed because Iraqis don't want it. The US is likely to fail in Iraq regardless of how long it stays or how much money it spends or how much blood it sheds. Most Iraqis are waiting for the Americans to leave and when they do, the long and real blood-bath will begin.

**Mahmood Elahi, Iris Street
Ottawa, Canada**

number of admitted unconscious patients. The DMCH has been receiving eight to ten victims every day who were found unconscious on the streets, after being drugged by unidentified assailants. The victims are usually drugged through food items such as green coconuts, pickles, soft drinks, juice or biscuits. The muggers use soporific tablets and other chemicals that are seriously injurious to health to make their victims unconscious for hours and even days.

Although the victims usually tend to regain consciousness within 12 to 24 hours after they are drugged, some of the victims are reported to have died.

Chemicals used to drug the victims could not be identified as the authorities lack necessary equipment. The chemical used is a substance known as 'Rohypnol' or 'roofies'. This drug is known to be easily found in the markets around the Mitford Hospital. According to experts, this chemical contains more alcohol than most other drugs and can be easily added to the food items without the victim being aware of it. If applied in large doses, this drug can even lead to loss of memory. After regaining consciousness, the victims don't appear to be interested in filing a case with the police.

Disguised as fellow pedestrians, food vendors, or even fellow passengers, these muggers try to be friendly with their targets. People should remain alert!

**Sharmin Rashid Nice
Uttara, Dhaka**

Human rights

The government cannot gain the confidence and trust of the people unless they have discipline and order in their own house. We do not want to see torture, mysterious deaths, kangaroo courts and threats as ways of life in our democratic Bangladesh; our forefathers fought too hard for their freedom for it all to be lost like this.

**Harun
Dhaka**

Language

Everyone knows that the role of language in communication is very important, especially when communicating with the public. If a person communicates with clarity he would be understood and estimated accordingly. In our TV serials on Bangladeshi channels, the way writers as well as dramatists present the young generation and their style of conversing with one another is really appreciable. By presenting the message of life in an easily understood language through dramas they are becoming popular.

I wish they could contribute more in the field of communicative arts.

**Rubab Abdullah
Dhaka Cantonment
Dhaka**

Arrests

I don't think I would be in the minority if I were to say that I was quite skeptical when the first batch of arrests was made in February. Just like most of the ordinary citizens, I felt as if we were witnessing yet another eyewitness before things are returned to status-quo. And please correct me if I am wrong, the arrestees probably felt the same way too. They appeared larger than life coming out of the police vans, flashing the "V" sign, walking like the braggarts they are and I am sure they were confident that the courts they created would set them free and they would eventually emerge from the prison as heroes. I would like to believe that it is not the case anymore.

The recent arrestees' don't appear as braggadocios as their earlier counterparts. The erstwhile home minister appeared rather scared and depressed in a picture of him sitting on a chair in the middle of a prison van. Oh! How the mighty have fallen.

**Anwar Babar
Dallas, Texas**

Hasina and her foreign tours

Sheikh Hasina goes overseas every now and then. Even if you travel like a commoner, the minimum you have to spend per trip is half a million in our currency for a seven-day stay.

During the last five years, she made numerous visits and spent crores!

**Anonymous
One e-mail**

An English medium school

As I look up from my desk in my Head's office, I see my girls having their Song and Dance classes. The songs and dances are, of course, Bengali, and the standard is extremely good. BIT has some music and dance staff who have been with us for many a long year and the quality of performances, when we give them, is stunning. If any young lady forgets her book, or her nupur, she gets glared at by me and my customary lecture on respecting her culture.

Bengali is, of course, one of the



Chittagong scene

The rains, water-logging and mudslide made Chittagong a place unfit for human habitation. It is the most cataclysmic rainfall and landslide in the history of Chittagong. People are homeless and helpless.

A large city like Chittagong was running without proper supply of electricity, gas and drinking water. The government must come forward to rescue the people of Chittagong from the unbearable miseries as soon as possible. Expressing sympathies and delivering long messages in the daily newspapers

will not lessen the woes of the people. Rather, finding out the best ways of mitigating their sufferings and working on them can bring smiles to the distressed very soon.

The bigwigs of Chittagong responsible for razing of hills must be identified and given due punishment.

**Mohammad Shafiqul Islam
Lecturer
Department of English
Metropolitan University**

No garbage disposal!

Nearly three million people live in Agargaon and Taltola. So the quantity of the household garbage collected each day from this area is easily imaginable. But there is no garbage disposal and collection mechanism in the area.

People of the locality complained several times to the City Corporation, but nothing has been done so far to set things right.

**Khandaker Azizur Rahman
West Agargaon
Dhaka**

Voter ID to contain corruption

As we know that the present government is serious about rooting out corruption from society, I would like to suggest the following steps:

a. While preparing the voter ID card, the information of the individual should be recorded in the database. This information, if possible, can be connected with a network across the country. This will prevent double-entry by any individual.

b. The voter card should have a magnetic swap strip like ATM card or should have barcode by which the voter can be checked and identified from anywhere.

c. The database may include the name of the applicant, names of parents and spouse, date of birth, address, occupation, income range, income source and some more material things. This information can be used by the NBR, police and the ACC. This will help the government to fight corruption.

d. We have lots of young students, skilled unemployed people, whom we can utilise to prepare the database software, computer networking around the country. I agree it may not be possible to get the network around the villages but at least up to the thana level we can do it.

If we don't use the computer and information technology, we can't succeed.

**Mohammad Mahub Alam
Student, MBA in Operations and**

Logistics Management

ID card project

If the government steps back from its earlier decision to implement the ID card project, it will be the first major sign of its weakness and will send a wrong message to the people who are waiting for a chance to come back.

Maybe this would be the beginning of the end!

**Fatema Chowdhury
One e-mail**

Taxes on textile machinery

Bangladesh, unfortunately, manufactures low-value goods. We have not been able to coordinate our education system and policies so that one day we might move into higher value added goods, such as electronics and motor manufacturing.

In the meantime, the textile sector is the only avenue in this country that offers mass employment. I can say from personal experience that an agricultural land of 7-10 acres offers employment to 5-10 workers, but an industry on the same area of land can employ 500 to 5,000 workers. In this situation it is unfortunate that the caretaker government has imposed a tax on production machinery for the textile sector.

We, unfortunately, do not produce textile machines. We also do not manufacture the fax machine, but we have to import this piece of technology. Even the World Bank admits that in the improvement of the South-East Asian economies such as Malaysia, allowing technology imports duty-free, such as capital machinery, had a big role to play.

Since, we do not have a domestic infant industry to protect (and even then taxation would not be a good argument), I do not understand who the government is trying to protect?

The factories and mills in the textile sector are competing with each other for a matter of 1 dollar, 10

cents etc. In any other country the government creates a better environment, so that the local industries can compete internationally.

We do not expect our government to carry out such policies in support of the domestic industrial sector, but the least we expect is no interference in its development. Moreover, production machinery is an essential item, not a luxury one.

Shouldn't the government try to protect the textile industry, which is competing with the big players in the market such as China, with subsidies and incentives?

**Khurru Siddique
Uttara, Dhaka**

Lost canals

Heavy rain has destroyed the sewerage system. Dhaka City Corporation has decided that they will change the system and its water extraction plan. They told us that they could not solve this problem without changing the entire design. What a joke! What have they done since the year began?

They rent public footpath to party men, thieves and local criminals by changing footpath designs. Everybody knows that sewerage water and rainwater pass over to the rivers through those canals. The city's big canals are narrowing day by day. Some have disappeared altogether if we look at Dhaka's old map. The corporation's failure to handle things properly is responsible for such a state of affairs.

The present caretaker government has also failed to recover those canals from them (developers and real estate groups).

**Sumon Dutta
One e-mail**

Poor Dhaka!

I'm presently residing in Sudbury On, Canada. I am a regular reader of your newspaper. I am a management professional. I want to share some views and ideas with you.

We know what's going on in our country. It's so sad and degrading that there is no excuse or reason for

the politicians and lawmakers to defend themselves. They have pushed the country to such a state that it will need another 30 years to recover. The leaders are not educated, and even if they are, none of them has any sense of civilized approach towards their job and responsibility.

The new caretaker govt. is taking some positive actions. It's a long journey for them. But still things are happening the old way. Like city development work during the monsoon!

Is this lack of planning or just ignorance?

Dhaka City Corporation is very poorly managed. The reason I say that is till date we don't have a proper garbage disposal system in the city. The city is flooded for various reasons, like poor drainage system, clogged water ways, garbage etc. But nothing is being done to address the problem.

Being in management, I have learned lots of things and always try to make my job effective and result oriented.

As a Bangladeshi, I think we all can make a difference for our country provided you have the right kind of people working. The city needs to change and prepare for the worst.

**Nizam Ahmed
One e-mail**

Mugging

Incidents of mugging by drugging commuters or pedestrians have been rising sharply in the city. The muggers in the guise of food vendors or fellow commuters sell drugged food or lure their victims into sniffing soporifics. As their victims turn unconscious, the muggers rob them of their belongings and disappear.

Though this technique of mugging is not entirely new to the city residents, the sudden spate of such shrewd and innovative techniques adopted by the muggers is a matter of great worry to citizens.

Over 100 people fell victim during the past week. City hospitals also saw a sharp increase in the

Agriculture subsidy



It is often complained that the subsidy to the agriculture sector given by the government does not reach the farmers. I think the main cause is the long chain of middlemen who do not supply timely the subsidised fertilisers, seeds, pesticides and other agri-inputs to the farmers.

They spend time to push the prices up and exploit the situation. In the recent past, the country experienced a severe artificial fertiliser crisis that even sparked a movement and cost valuable lives.

Saif Tinku, On e-mail

National ID card

Collecting necessary information for the National ID card is a time consuming task.

National ID card is applicable for the youngest child and the oldest person who are valid citizens of the country. So, collecting pictures and other information requires a huge manpower support. To do this job, we can employ the honest and expert human resources of our postal department.

To make this job of collecting information a little easier, the following measures can be taken:

Each house owner may be supplied a model format of information that will be required for the ID card. The house owner will collect information of every member of the family according to the provided model format as well as the pictures of the family members who are citizens of the country. The house owner will make two copies of the collected information and submit one copy to the representative person of his/her local post office and the second copy will be signed and sealed by the post office authorities and will be returned to the house owner as proof of submitting information. If the house has one or more renter, then, information for all the renters may be collected by the house owner following the same way.

Our armed forces will directly coordinate this job. When all the post offices have their information ready, this information will be supplied to the army. Members of the armed forces will verify the provided information.

If we can use the aforesaid method, then this huge job can probably be completed in a short span of time.

**Md. Akhter Hazi
Dhaka**