

Women taking role in terrorism

A new horrific dimension to terror culture

WITHIN 48 hours of arresting Kushtia town Mohila Awami League general secretary Taslima Khan Ankhi and her accomplice Rani, police on Thursday held Nahid Parvin Champa, a suspected woman cadre of outlawed Gano Mukti Fouz (GMF). They are all linked to the clandestine organisation.

Ankhi was arrested with fire arms and ammunition on a clear suspicion of being a patron and purveyor of weapons for an underground armed group (GMF) operating in southwestern part of the country. This has helped roll out the GMF connections. In fact, police have referred to sources as saying that at least 25-35 women using veil are active in the outlawed parties' network in Kushtia.

All that we have known so far by way of any association of woman's name with terrorism has been incidental; she would have confessed to knowing her husband or brother having been involved in terrorist activities. That's all. But now they are being seen in a leading frontal role serving as terrorists' outfit or in an amazon role.

It was only to be expected that the Kushtia Awami League promptly took a disciplinary action against Ankhi. But the very pertinent question is how could she have thrown dusts into the eyes of her AL colleagues and operate with a second clandestine identity hiding behind the façade of a designated local Awami League leader. Besides, she had also been arrested in 2006 in connection with the murder of a Jubo League leader in front of her house but was later released on bail.

Actually, the police say they tend to suspect that a good number of women involved in outlawed activities might either have been members of mainstream political parties or maintained relations with influential political leaders. If this turns out to be true, then there is cause for serious concern which must be addressed.

The startling revelations about women playing direct and frontal roles in extremist and subversive activities adds a whole new dimension to terrorism. That hard-headed organisers of terrorist and outlawed outfits may one day employ women in harder jobs in a social milieu where they are least expected in tougher roles -- so they are likely to be less noticed -- should not have been remote from the law enforcers' thinking. Now since there are signs that this is happening, the political parties, the community, local leadership and the law and order forces should be on guard against this and strive to nip it in the bud.

Remittance on growth path

Reduced migrant outflow notwithstanding

IN spite of being arrayed against adversities, remittance flows into the country have been on the growth path. It is the rate of increase that has been subject to fluctuations but not growth as such. On top of this, we now have a definitively positive piece of news in that the WB's projections of a reduced remittance growth for the current fiscal are already being assailed if the figure for the first four months of the current fiscal is any guide. The growth of inflow stood at 21.23 percent during July to October and there is cautious optimism about outlook for economic recovery in the host countries possibly brightening up in the remainder of the year.

The figures speak for themselves as Bangladesh recorded remittance inflow of \$3.61 billion between July and October, 2009 compared with \$2.98 billion in the same period last year. The forex reserve has crossed \$9 billion in August compared with \$7.74 billion in July.

On the flip-side and this is also a very substantive factor as far as the effects of world-wide recession go, the outflow of migrant workers from Bangladesh has been on a sharp decline. It came down by 47 percent in the second half of fiscal 2009, slightly better than 57 percent in July last year. One particular statistic says it all: the number of employed abroad this year is 650,000 compared to 969,000 the year before.

How is the increase in remittance inflows to be accounted for then? The apparent variability in the known pattern of cause-and-effect sequence merits deeper analysis and well-founded interpretations. We are awaiting this from experts. However by available explanations, a dollar hike in oil prices increases annual remittance by nearly \$15 million, depreciation in foreign exchange rate by one taka increases annual remittance by \$18 million and, overall, remittances are higher in times of low economic growth. It appears that in times of recession our workers abroad save more and send more money home for future safety and out of a concern for their near and dear ones at home. The other reasons cited are more recourse to organised channels for remittance and remittance from blue colour expatriate job holders who are perhaps, we would like to think, building stake at home.

Given the untiring contributions of ordinary Bangladeshi workers abroad to the national coffers conferring a respectability on, it is time we reciprocated their gesture.

Consolidating democracy through institutional approach

We have to understand that globalisation is a reality and that economic, political and strategic challenges are no longer confined within borders. Consequently, there is a need for states and the wider civil society to act in cross-regional cooperation to face them. We have to remember that stability and security within processes of democratic change allow for democracy to take root.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

SWEDEN, as the current president of the European Council, organised the fourth European Development Days program in Stockholm in the fourth week of October. Many important dignitaries from the international arena participated including several heads of state and heads of government such as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. I was also there as adviser to International IDEA, a Swedish NGO associated with democracy-building and good governance.

It was interesting to watch the representatives of European states, heads of financial institutions (the IMF, the World Bank, Grameen Bank, the Ebrd) and regional intergovernmental organisations discuss measures and explore ways and means for regional organisations to incrementally build a shared global agenda for democracy and development as mutually supportive processes. The forum turned out to be a venue for the exchange of experiences and for identification of the potential for practical cooperation in an environment of mutual support between peers. It also assumed special significance because of its examination of the various aspects that still remain unresolved before the world can enter into an agreement during the Climate Change Summit that is being convened in Copenhagen, Denmark in December this year.

Democracy is a complicated issue but democracy building is even more difficult. We have been witness to this phenomenon especially in Bangladesh. We have seen how despite a fair and credible parliamentary election, governance can face jeopardy because of obstinacy on the part of the parties belonging to the opposition. Such situations in Bangladesh and elsewhere have led many in development assistance

circles to remark that while democracy commands strong popular support worldwide, concerns are growing about the state of democracy in many regions and countries. Some speakers also identified the causes of such concern as the failure to properly deliver impartial non-politicised social and economic development. Others referred to the challenges being faced with regard to capacity and resources.

One important truism is that democracy is not only an end in itself but also an important means to other ends. From that point of view the recent efforts by IDEA to carefully examine the nexus between democracy and development, and how it can contribute towards effective partnership between the European Union and the rest of the world, deserves special mention. The 'Final Report' that has emerged from this exercise has assumed special importance because it was the result of intensive and in-depth dialogue with partners in Latin America, the Arab world, South Asia and Southeast Asia.

To many, the European Union has become synonymous with equality in terms of access and opportunity. This thesis is accepted in general because of the EU's concern with democratic political values, guaranteeing of human rights and the delivery of social and economic development. From that point of view, it is also acknowledged that the democratic process is vital for addressing the political aspect of poverty.

Accountability to citizens enables democratic governments to chart a political course supported by its people where ability exists to effect change when needed. This potential is enhanced when we are able to bring together a broader understanding of democracy through the juxtaposition of the procedural and institutional aspects with the delivery element.

Two factors have emerged, in particular, in this regard -- the on-going international

financial crisis that has affected large swathes of population in different countries of the developing world and the very question of the ability of democracy to delivery on citizens' needs and expectations. Development partners all over the world are now consequently re-examining their experiences over the past decade.

The dialogue in Stockholm was instrumental in re-affirming the consensus that development is not only a general improvement of the 'quality of life' through GDP growth for the majority of the population but also includes the effective fulfillment of human rights, including civic and political rights. It also reiterated that democracy is a value that needs to be pursued not only for its own sake but also as a system of governance expected to deliver better opportunities so that citizens can attain a higher standard of living without large disparities in income distribution. The meeting also reiterated quite correctly that if care is not taken in this regard, it might seriously affect the credibility of democratic institutions, including that of parliaments and political parties. We in Bangladesh need to pay special attention to this assumption.

In this context, as a stakeholder in the democratic process, I believe that the time has come for us in Bangladesh to facilitate the awareness that we must invest in developing long-term visions. It would also be important for the EU to help create the institutions to translate such long-term

visions into reality, support them and then follow-up.

One factor that could contribute towards this outcome could be the capacity to build consensus on democratic and development goals among the various sectors and components of a society. It will require pro-democratic engagement and hands-on interaction through the use of a participatory institutional approach.

We have to understand that globalisation is a reality and that economic, political and strategic challenges are no longer confined within borders. Consequently, there is a need for states and the wider civil society to act in cross-regional cooperation to face them. This could, then, form the basis for achievable policies and efficient action and lead to 'a realist, zero-sum approach to a positive-sum paradigm.' We have to remember that stability and security within processes of democratic change (i.e. elections, political representation, institutional building) allow for democracy to take root. Coherence and synergy between policies in support of democracy and other policies implemented by international and regional actors also strengthen this process. This is so because effective democracy support requires coherence and synergy between different actors and policies.

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Arresting decline in teaching and learning of English

The purpose of teaching English in our schools is to prepare a basic background for the students that will enable them to express their thoughts and feelings correctly in that language. The considered view of many concerned with the decline of the English language teaching and learning is that wrong information and message and rules of grammar at the beginning of a student's career can cause tremendous harm.

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

WHILE a debate has been going on about the new education policy, its different objectives and process of implementation, no attention has been given to taking measures in regard to raising the standard of English teaching and learning in our schools. People wonder whether this country, with such a vulnerable economy, can afford the colossal expenditure (Tk.31 thousand crore) for extending the primary level up to class eight in about 80 thousand primary and 19 thousand secondary level schools that are almost in a shambles.

The decline in the standard of English language teaching and learning in the post liberation years has been very steep. People are wondering whether, by reintroducing English at the primary stage, the situation can be improved without making any attempt to augment the basics as well as selecting proper textbooks and recruiting competent and qualified teachers.

If one systematically analyses the causes of such decline, it will be quite evident that the course-content of English textbook and grammar leaves much to be desired. Along with this the fact that causes dissonance is the alarming deterioration in the capability of teaching English at the primary stage.

The reality is that people worry about their kids and the nation worries about the next generation. The people want their children to learn better and be able to hold good jobs. The idea of gaining first-rate knowledge has seized the citizenry with no exception. The failure of the primary and secondary schools has driven many of our city-based parents, and even a good number of affluent parents in the district towns, to send their wards to kindergartens and English medium schools that have sprouted in these areas.

The fees that these institutions are charge-

ing for admission and as regular tuition fees are just not only incredible but also unaffordable even for many affluent parents. Nobody can deny that these institutions have become a commercial venture, a first rate business to earn money with utter disregard towards creating a sound and uniform base for education for all.

Without mincing words, it can be said that, other than creating a cultural elitist class, the success in teaching English in these schools, which stress mostly on vocabulary with little effort on language skills and shorn of actual knowledge of grammar, has been far from satisfactory.

The post-liberation days saw an upsurge of ultra-nationalistic sentiment, driving people crazy about our national language Bangla, which, too, our students did not learn properly. Promoting English in schools at the expense of Bangla sometimes confronts a host of cultural values. Side by side, exclusion of English from our curriculum for the last 30 plus years has invited a plethora of ills that seems to choke up societal growth and general improvement in education. The ills have accumulated to such a pathetic proportion that raising the standard of English without regard to the overall quality of education is an impossible proposition. There is something awfully wrong in the preparation of the English syllabus, its teaching methodology and in recruiting teachers from the primary stage to secondary level.

Today, Bangladeshis can take pride in the enormous strides they have made in different aspects of national activities, but not in the education sector. With the government set to launch its new education policy, it must restructure the English syllabus from the primary to degree level. Learning the English language has received a serious setback and loss of direction. There has been a lack of systematic planning and failure to

maintain minimum standards, borne out by the high percentage of failure at the SSC and HSC levels in English.

The dismal state of textbooks and abysmal standard of teaching are clearly manifest in the pattern of questions set by a certain board in the second paper of English (compulsory) in the last HSC examination. For instance, one sentence in the question paper reads: "Sometimes they give cash money and kinds for their wards." How can examinees understand and answer such flawed and puzzling questions.

One might also question the right of the paper setter to invoke religion in the domain of learning with a proposition that reads: "Parents shuttle to mazzars and temples (monasteries and churches excluded in the question paper) and --- for the examinees." The examinees are expected to fill up the blank space by choosing a word like "pray" amongst a host of words given for selection above the passage. Such statements might hurt the sentiments of other sections of the populace. Another sentence in question no 13 in the second paper reads: "Once the house of a rich man was infested with 'rates,' not rats. Despite the fact that the examinees are able to make out what the paper setter wanted to mean, there should not be any such mistake in a final examination paper when it has passed through many expert hands and proper scrutiny before it was handed over to the examinees.

In this context, a glance at the English textbooks prescribed from the Primary to SSC to HSC levels would reveal a gloomy picture. In a word, these books, content-wise and language-wise, are bad selections. They also show poor judgment in selecting the topics. A young learner has to be encouraged to become something great in life and has to be taught to aim high. Topics concerning the lives and achievements of eminent personalities, great ideals and ideologies, important scientific discoveries, all challenging human activities leading to the expansion of the frontiers of knowledge should find a place in the young learner's textbook to inspire him, enliven and illuminate his horizon and enkindle his passion for a life ennobling in all aspects. These texts influence the young learner's mind indirectly and tend to bring about a resurgence of moral values, which are at such a low ebb in recent times. They must be inspired to aspire after a life illustrious and glorifying in all respects.

We may quote Disraeli: "The youth who does not look up will look down, and the spirit that does not soar is destined perhaps to grovel." We can't fathom why prose pieces like "Character" by Samuel Smiles, "Islam in Spain" by Syed Amir Ali, and poems like "The Daffodils" by William Wordsworth and "Ode to a Skylark" by P.B. Shelley were withdrawn from the textbooks in the SSC and HSC levels? These poems, like Rabindranath Tagore's poems, with their eternal appeal and lyrical symphony still ring out in the mind of the readers, transcending the barriers of nationality, religion and race.

The purpose of teaching English in our schools is to prepare a basic background for the students that will enable them to express their thoughts and feelings correctly in that language. That will need an infusion and appreciation of the rules of grammar at every stage from class 5 to class 10. We need hardly to emphasise that the objective in any language is to have an exalted style and a moving description of the scenario and facts tinged with some amount of literary grace, which is totally missing in the books prescribed these days. The considered view of many concerned with the decline of the English language teaching and learning is that wrong information and message and rules of grammar at the beginning of a student's career can cause tremendous harm.

Unquestionably true, it is at the secondary level that our students can build a strong base in English, and that objective can hardly be achieved if they are provided with a textbook that is mediocre and often full of mistakes. It is an almost absurd proposition to raise the standard of English in our traditional schools without making any attempt to improve the overall quality of education, which definitely calls for massive infrastructural development and strong logistical support.

Most of the schools, barring a few in the cities and towns, are lacking in basic minimum facilities, not to speak of enough qualified teachers on English. It is because of this festering malaise and inherent weaknesses that the past 30 plus years could not deliver any good in this arena of education. The present government, determined to launch a new education policy must make some dent in this area by restructuring the infrastructural facilities for learning English.

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