

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Industrial unrest in Ashulia

No room for short circuiting

WE are hopeful that the statement made by state minister for labour and industry can deliver on the promise to have factories in the troubled Ashulia industrial humming again after Saturday next. The BGMEA and BKMEA ordered all factories to shut down on June 11 for an indefinite period until the government took constructive steps to ensure the security in the industrial zone and bring those responsible for vandalism in some industrial units to book. Needless to say that the estimated \$10million lost every day by the readymade garments (RMG) factories and tens of thousands of workers being unemployed in the area is not at all welcome news. Though the legality of the shutdown by owners has been challenged in the high court, there is no guarantee that violence will not flare up again once factories resume operations.

No matter how many voices are raised about outside 'miscreants' inciting unrest so that Bangladesh loses its position in the world market as a serious player in apparel export, the ground realities for most workers is that apart from skyrocketing expenses, they have no way to make their voices heard to the management. Since labour unions are nonexistent in most industrial units, many workers feel disenfranchised and vent their anger through vandalism. Hence, this is not merely a law-and-order situation which can readily be remedied by taking a tough stance on those who created havoc in the industrial belt.

The problems associated with double-digit inflation and galloping house rent in the area have been addressed by this paper before. What has not however been addressed is the basic reality of expenditure far outstripping income. So, beefing up security by means of deploying more law enforcers and installing close circuit cameras in the sprawling industrial state may give RMG factories a brief respite only but no durable peace. As earnings from RMG sector constitutes nearly 70 percent of Bangladesh's \$26 billion annual export basket, the government, with financial help from industry, may start thinking about making available low-cost housing for the tens of thousands of workers working in the sector which would go a long way to redress workers' grievances.

Pak crisis deepens

Let its leaders measure up to the challenge

PAKISTAN has entered another phase of crisis as its highest court has finally disqualified the incumbent prime minister Yousuf Raja Gilani from holding his office.

Leading the coalition government of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and its alliance partners, Gilani from the inception has been dogged by a conflict with the higher judiciary. This centred around the court asking the premier to have Swiss court reopen an old graft case against the president Asif Ali Zardari. The premier did not comply with the court's directive arguing that the head of state enjoyed constitutional immunity from prosecution. Consequently, the Pak court brought contempt charge against him culminating in his dismissal from office on Tuesday.

Tussle between the executive and the judiciary is nothing new in Pakistan, but what is remarkable is pressing the contempt charges and disqualifying the PM from holding his post as well as losing his parliament membership.

Amidst the gathering cloud a silvering is visible in that President Zardari has been engaged in intensive parleys with coalition partners as well as holding talks within PPP to nominate a consensus candidate for premiership.

Reports suggested that Makhdoom Shahabuddin could succeed Gilani as prime minister subject to endorsement by parliament. There is thus a reason to hope that the embattled government will be able to maintain political continuity and complete its tenure.

Seemingly Gilani has bowed to the court order avoiding precipitating a deeper crisis by involving the parliament and the ruling party into it.

He has shown respect to the court and upheld democratic norms.

As a member of the South Asian regional bloc SAARC, it is in the greater interest of the region that Pakistan overcame its present crisis keeping its democracy and stability intact.



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

THE Rohingyas are literally in the deep sea. How else could one describe the plight of a group of people trying to escape discrimination at home and seeking

succor in the neighbouring country, only to be turned back from the shores they are seeking shelter in. One perhaps had not heard before our foreign minister being more forceful on any other bilateral issues that involved our security and national interest, than when vehemently refusing to allow the Rohingyas refuge in Bangladesh.

Technically, Rohingyas are not refugees according to the definitions of the international covenant on the matter. To qualify as a refugee one has to face state persecution and since, according to official sources, there is no indication that the Rohingyas have, in this instance, faced such a situation, as in the other past instances, they do not qualify as refugees and therefore cannot seek sanctuary in another country.

However, humane behaviour is not dictated by international agreements alone, and although Bangladesh is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, it is obligated by the customary international law and the principle of nonrefoulement not to reject asylum seekers at its border when they are fleeing from threats

to their lives and liberty. And if one talks of protocols and agreements, could one ask as to under what protocol a Bangladesh citizen was handed over to the FBI in 2006? And we know of no agreement between Bangladesh and India under which several Indian insurgent were handed over to that country last year.

Absence of agreements cannot mean absence of compassion. Of course, as per the statement of our foreign minister and pictures in the media, these refugees are being fed and treated well by our border agencies and are turned back only after having their boats fully replenished with provisions. It is a mocking gesture, to say the least, to one that faces persecution and even death on the other shore. Food and water are little comfort when the prospect of insecurity to life looms so large to the Rohingyas. Why else should they have risked their lives to leave their homes?

It is true that our experience with the refugees from across our eastern border has not been very pleasant. They, being so closely akin ethnically to the Bengalis, have merged with the local population and have exploited the lax oversight mechanisms made even worse by the rent

seeking members of those agencies entrusted to maintain oversight on these people. It is therefore no wonder that many Rohingyas have managed to enroll in the voter list, acquire Bangladeshi passport and seek employment abroad as Bangladeshis.

And of course given the state of the Rohingya refugees they are vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation by the political parties, and reportedly, they have been used for partisan politics. But that, regrettably, is the result of our failure to ensure the strictest of vigilance on the refugees who are always ready to exploit our loopholes to ensure their safety, and at least having the pleasure of "belonging to state," they being stateless at this point in time in Myanmar.

However, the argument that it is a sectarian issue and that the government is in control of the situation, having declared martial law in the region, is perhaps not entirely accurate. As per reports of human rights group of two days ago: "Sectarian violence which mostly took place in Sittwe and Maungdaw has now calmed down even though the situation on the ground remains tense. But since Friday afternoon in Maungdaw area, just across Bangladesh, the deployed army and

the NaSaKa (border security forces) have started rounding up and arresting young Rohingya men in various villages. Until today, about 200 young men were arrested and taken away by the forces. This is no longer sectarian violence but abuses by security agencies. As a result, young Rohingya males fearing arbitrary arrest started fleeing from Maungdaw to Bangladesh just across the Naf River." If that be true does it remain a purely sectarian matter? Isn't it a repetition of what happened to the Rohingyas in the late seventies and nineties?

We would go wrong if we acted on the premise that it was Myanmar's problem alone, and it is exactly because we are its neighbour that our stake is so much more in the issue. What happens in Myanmar impacts on our security and we should be more concerned to see that the situation is not exacerbated.

Needless to say, the role of the international organisations should have been more forceful. One would have hoped that these organisations would have been more vocal and had brought to bear more pressure on the Myanmar government to address the root cause of the problem.

It is Bangladesh that should initiate the diplomatic moves directly with Myanmar, the signs of which we have not seen yet. However, we on our part, by refusing to accept the Rohingyas, have given the wrong signal to Myanmar. It would leave the Rohingyas at the mercy of the majority and literally having to choose between the devil and the

We on our part, by refusing to accept the Rohingyas, have given the wrong signal to Myanmar. It would leave the Rohingyas at the mercy of the majority and literally having to choose between the devil and the deep sea.

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

How drones help al-Qaeda

IBRAHIM MOTHANA

"DEAR Obama, when a US drone missile kills a child in Yemen, the father will go to war with you, guaranteed. Nothing to do with al-Qaeda," a Yemeni lawyer warned on Twitter last month. President Obama should keep this message in mind before ordering more drone strikes like Wednesday's, which local officials say killed 27 people, or the May 15 strike that killed at least eight Yemeni civilians.

Drone strikes are causing more and more Yemenis to hate America and join radical militants; they are not driven by ideology but rather by a sense of revenge and despair. Robert Grenier, the former head of the CIA's counterterrorism centre, has warned that the American drone programme in Yemen risks turning the country into a safe haven for al-Qaeda like the tribal areas of Pakistan -- "the Arabian equivalent of Waziristan."

Anti-Americanism is far less prevalent in Yemen than in Pakistan. But rather than winning the hearts and minds of Yemeni civilians, America is alienating them by killing their relatives and friends. Indeed, the drone programme is leading to the Talibanisation of vast tribal areas and the radicalisation of people who could otherwise be America's allies in the fight against terrorism in Yemen.

The first known drone strike in Yemen to be authorised by Obama, in late 2009, left 14 women and 21 children dead in the southern town of al-Majala, according to a parliamentary report. Only one of the dozens killed was identified as having strong Qaeda connections. Misleading intelligence has also

led to disastrous strikes with major political and economic consequences. An American drone strike in May 2010 killed Jabir al-Shabwani, a prominent sheik and the deputy governor of Marib Province. The strike had dire repercussions for Yemen's economy. The slain sheik's tribe attacked the country's main pipeline in revenge. With 70% of the country's budget dependent on oil exports, Yemen lost over \$1 billion. This strike also erased years of progress and trust-building with tribes who considered it a betrayal given their role in fighting al-Qaeda in their areas.

Yemeni tribes are generally quite pragmatic and are by no means a default option for radical religious groups seeking a safe haven. However, the increasing civilian toll of drone strikes is turning the apathy of tribal factions into anger.

The strikes have created an opportunity for terrorist groups like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Ansar al-Sharia to recruit fighters from tribes who have suffered casualties, especially in Yemen's south, where mounting grievances since the 1994 civil war have driven a strong secessionist movement.

Unlike al-Qaeda in Iraq, A.Q.A.P. has worked on gaining the support

of local communities by compromising on some of their strict religious laws and offering basic services, electricity and gas to villagers in the areas they control. Furthermore, Iran has seized this chance to gain more influence among the disgruntled population in Yemen's south.

And the situation is quite likely to get worse now that Washington has broadened its rules of engagement to allow so-called signature strikes, when surveillance data suggest a terrorist leader may be nearby but the identities of all others targeted is not known. Such loose rules risk redefining "militants" as any military-age males seen in a strike zone.

Certainly, there may be short-term military gains from killing militant leaders in these strikes, but they are minuscule compared with the long-term damage the drone programme is causing. A new generation of leaders is spontaneously emerging in furious retaliation to attacks on their territories and tribes.

This is why A.Q.A.P. is much stronger in Yemen today than it was a few years ago. In 2009, A.Q.A.P.

had only a few hundred members and controlled no territory; today it has, along with Ansar al-Sharia, at least 1,000 members and controls substantial amounts of territory.

Yemenis are the ones who suffer the most from the presence of al-Qaeda, and getting rid of this plague is a priority for the majority of Yemen's population. But there is no shortcut in dealing with it. Overlooking the real drivers of extremism and focusing solely on tackling their security symptoms with brutal force will make the situation worse.

Only a long-term approach based on building relations with local communities, dealing with the economic and social drivers of extremism, and cooperating with tribes and Yemen's army will eradicate the threat of Islamic radicalism.

Unfortunately, liberal voices in the United States are largely ignoring, if not condoning, civilian deaths and extrajudicial killings in Yemen -- including the assassination of three American citizens in September 2011, including a 16-year-old. During George W. Bush's presidency, the rage would have been tremendous. But today there is little outcry, even though what is happening is in many ways an escalation of Bush's policies.

Defenders of human rights must speak out. America's counterterrorism policy here is not only making Yemen less safe by strengthening support for A.Q.A.P., but it could also ultimately endanger the United States and the entire world.

Ibrahim Mothana, a writer and activist, is a co-founder of the Watan Party.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

June 21

1824 Greek War of Independence: Egyptian forces capture Psara in the Aegean Sea.

1826 Maniots defeat Egyptians under Ibrahim Pasha in the Battle of Vergas.

1900 Boxer Rebellion. China formally declared war on the United States, Britain, Germany, France and Japan, as an edict issued from the Dowager Empress Cixi.

1940 France signs an armistice with Germany at Compiègne.

1982 John Hinckley is found not guilty by reason of insanity for the attempted assassination of U.S. President Ronald Reagan.

2001 A federal grand jury in Alexandria, Virginia, indicts 13 Saudis and a Lebanese in the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 American servicemen.