

Stop this senseless, unequal war

Food adulteration concerns

Call to create a bulwark against it
 HOW unsafe is the food we eat and how fringed-touching the drives against its adulterers have been were intensely dwelt on at the BSRM-The Daily Star roundtable on Saturday. Crystallised opinions of experts formed through watching the long-standing malady were voiced in the shape of recommendations.

Considering there has been much talk but little action, preventative or remedial, excepting by way of lopsided or piecemeal crackdowns on bazaars, food factories or restaurants, the speakers called for urgent, systematic and sustained counter-action. This must address the root of the problem, ensuring an uncontaminated supply chain. It is critical, therefore, that the government controls import and use of formalin and chemicals in the first place to be able to stave off adulteration.

The recommendations fall in two categories. In the first bunch come the following: Showing political will at the highest level, enforcing law stringently, determining the extent of adulteration, monitoring imported fruits, proper food labeling and developing a fool-proof chemical-testing kit. The suggestions in this category can be implemented in the short run provided the first one regarding political will gets duly administered, ensuring coordination between the agencies involved in the process.

To counter the impunity culture severe deterrent punishment against the guilty and rewarding those who are compliant could prove effectively remedial.

The second category of suggestions such as launching social movement, promoting values of hygiene, food safety and encouraging ethical business practices are matters of social engineering. This calls for some pioneering and focused leadership.

Choking Dhaka

Projections dire, rise to the occasion
 IN the UN's recent report on urban areas around the world, Dhaka was classed as the eleventh most populous city in the world, with a prediction that it is set to become the sixth most populous by 2030, with a burgeoning population of 2.7 crore. The report should come as a major alarm-bell to the government and urban planners as the citizens are already suffering the many drawbacks of living in an over-crowded area. Long tailbacks, water logging and deprivation of basic amenities have by now become an almost routine problem for the people of the city.

We hope the authorities take this recent report as a wake-up call and seriously consider decentralising Dhaka city before the problem exacerbates. The rapid development of the city has not been equal as can be seen by the existence of many slums and squatter settlements inside Dhaka. The ghettoisation is an odd appendage to the already unplanned urban settlement. The demand for basic amenities such as water, housing etc has already outstripped the metropolis's ability to provide them. The task at hand for the government is both to start substantial urban expansion on the outskirts of the city and to create a better infrastructure for transport and communication, whereby people are encouraged to live outside the city and transit to it from work. We are in a race against time to ensure the liveability inside Dhaka.

Changes in public examination system

MASUM BILLAH
 THE government has recently formed a seven member committee to find solutions to the question paper leak menace. On the basis of their recommendations the education minister said that examinations would take place without any recess, except for public holidays. He believes that this will leave no room for question paper leak.

But there is no direct link between the leaking of question paper and the long gap in the examinations. We should remember that students are the first important component among five in teaching learning situation. We cannot penalise them for the wrong things done by others. Examination involves students' physical, psychological and mental labour. So, there must be a reasonable gap between two examinations to help them get mentally and physically prepared to face the next one.

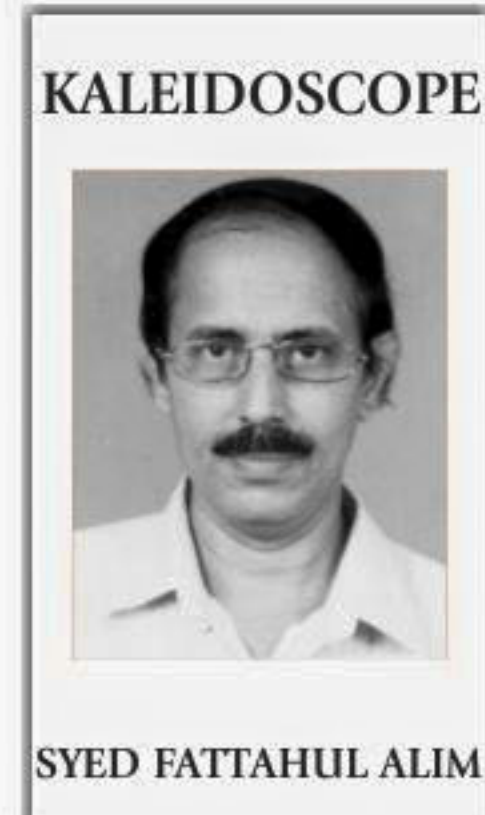
The committee members recommended setting up of a central question bank where more than one question set can be made automatically by using Artificial Intelligence (AI). It may be a good suggestion, but we should take care so that the bank does not turn into so-called question bank and students are confined to only one question bank.

The committee also suggested introducing a three-tier security measure, such as password of users, biometrics and user access card of devices to be used for the question papers. Their recommendations also include introduction of digital stamp control to ensure opening and distribution of question papers in centrally-controlled time. In this method, the questions of different sets will be sent to upazila and district administrations, and just before the beginning of the examination, orders will be passed from the central board to open a particular set and get it printed. This is also a good way, but we must be ready to face technical problems and think of their solutions. Again, proper management must be ensured to print a huge number of question papers in a short time in spite of electricity problems.

The question papers should be kept in boxes having Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) after publishing at the BG press so that only designated officials who have RFID controlled chip can open the boxes at the scheduled time. The committee also suggested avoiding BG press as it has been proved several times that it is the main source of this crime.

Another important thing should be taken into serious consideration. The committee has failed to name the people involved in leaking out questions this year. They have identified the sources but nobody wants to mention their names. Those people must be very powerful or closely linked with powerful people. This thing must be dealt with utmost care.

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SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

KALEIDOSCOPE
 AZA is Israel's punching bag. Israel can always invent a reason to launch its aggression against this strip of densely populated land hardly 141 square miles in area. Blaming it on Hamas men, who have been denying any involvement in the abduction and killing of three Israeli teenagers last June, Israel has been carrying out raids into Gaza to punish innocent Palestinians.

Though the Israeli boys' kidnapping and murder mystery could not be cracked as yet, a Palestinian boy has been kidnapped and burnt to death. What can the Palestinians in Gaza do but protest in anger against this barbaric revenge killing? But revenge against whom? And what can the Hamas, which runs the administration in Gaza, do in the face of attacks against its people by Israeli planes, artillery and missiles? They have their unguided crude rockets that they fire into Israel in response to attacks by sophisticated Israeli war machine. And with the Iron Dome anti-missile system in place to protect Israeli airspace, the Hamas rockets are nothing but ineffective pieces of metal that have no devastating impact on Israeli targets. Small wonder, during the last few days the hundreds of Hamas rockets that Israel claims to have rained down on their cities could neither hit a target nor cause a single death. But Israeli bombardments have destroyed homes, and killed more than 159 people, 77% of whom are civilians, according UN calculation.

From the recent utterances of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, it appears Israel is planning another full-scale war against the 1.8 million citizens of Gaza with the involvement of land forces. The reasons for this new incursion are not clear, at least not from the incidents of the immediate past weeks. And Israel has also not linked this invasion to the killing of its teenage boys. Though they did not admit it to have any causal connection, from the sequence of events one can still find a chain -- abduction and murder of Israeli boys, indiscriminate Israeli raids in Gaza to apprehend or punish suspected culprits among Hamas men (terrorists to the Israelis), retaliatory Hamas rockets and now fully-fledged Israeli invasion into Gaza. A valid (!) ground for a full-scale war, indeed!

Can those make a serious case for waging a war? If they are not credible reasons, then there must be one that will become clear soon. In the present scheme of Israeli war hawks, the abduction and murder of Israeli boys -- although no one still knows who did it -- provided the excuse to provoke Hamas to dare them by firing their ineffective rockets.

The Israelis are fully aware of the present predicament of Hamas. They are in a state of isolation in the aftermath

of civil wars raging in Iraq and Syria and the overthrow of the Morsi government in Egypt. The traditional sources of finance and military supply that Hamas used to receive from Syria and Iran have dwindled simply because Hamas is composed of Sunni Islamist militants. The present regime led by Abdul Fatah al-Sisi in Egypt, on the other hand, is suspicious of Hamas for his (Sisi's) predecessor Mohammed Morsi and his party Muslim Brotherhood's link with Hamas. Is it not then the opportune moment for Israel to destroy Hamas, the resistance backbone of the Palestinians in Gaza, once and for all?

But Hamas is not simply a terrorist organisation as Israel and many Western governments would like to believe. It is possible to destroy a terrorist organisation using a superior force like military. But is it true of Hamas, which enjoys widespread support among the 1.8 million Gazans? Should one then brand all these Gazans as terrorists since they voted for Hamas?

Israel has started this unnecessary war in Gaza at a moment when, for the sake of Palestinian unity (between Hamas and Fatah) and for establishing a Palestinian state within 1967 borders, this militant Palestinian organisation was even ready to improve relations with Israel and end all hostilities against it. Israeli leaders from their hawkish mindset only believe in the military way of achieving political goals. At least, right wing Likud Party chairman and present Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu believes in that kind of solution. But he and his fellow leaders must have known from history that there is no military solution to a problem that has wider ethnic, social and political dimensions. The history of the Jewish people itself bears the best testimony to it. Have they not survived despite thousands of years of persecution?

So, it won't be possible to destroy the will of the Palestinian people by any military means. Israel's carrying on a campaign in the name of destroying what it terms 'Hamas terrorists' and their capacity for producing and firing rockets is killing innocent civilians in scores and terrorising the entire population of Gaza. And this experience is nothing new with the Gazans. Does Israel mean to kill all the Palestinians in Gaza? That is a preposterous proposition.

The US and its allies in Europe have expressed concern about rising civilian casualties, including women and children, in Gaza as a result of Israeli attacks. But in the same breath, they are also being sympathetic about Israel's so-called right to defend itself. Israel defending against whom -- against the defenseless Gaza people and the rag-tag Hamas outfit?

They must prevail upon Israel to stop this senseless, unequal war and persuade it to pursue the path of constructive political engagement with the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank for lasting peace in the Middle East.

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A new Caliphate?

BERNARD HAYKEL and COLE BUNZEL

THE recent declaration of a caliphate by the militant group the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is an unprecedented event in modern times. Regardless of how it turns out, one thing is clear: violent jihadism is now an entrenched feature of the Arab political landscape.

Not since the Turkish Republic abolished the Ottoman caliphate in 1924 has any Muslim group in control of territory made such a bid. Even al-Qaeda and the Taliban have limited their demands to the creation of statelets (emirates), which they hope will eventually coalesce into a caliphate.

This hesitation can be explained, at least partly, by the fact that neither Osama bin Laden nor Mullah Omar (the Taliban's leader) could fulfill the conditions for being a caliph, one of which is proof of descent from the Prophet Muhammad's tribe, the Quraysh. The new caliph claimant, the Islamic State's emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, can.

As conceived in Islamic political thought, a caliphate, unlike a conventional nation-state, is not subject to fixed borders. Instead, it is focused on defending and expanding the dominion of the Muslim faith through jihad, or armed struggle.

The statement announcing the new caliphate, entitled "This is the Promise of Allah," was issued on the first day of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, and lays out a radical vision for reconfiguring the Arab world. First, it declares that ISIS will drop its titular reference to "Iraq and Syria" to become simply the Islamic State, implying that it has its sights set on other countries, especially Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and possibly Lebanon.

The rest of the statement is replete with religious injunctions, several of which refer to "true believers" as regents on earth, empowering them to humiliate and defeat "enemies," who now include Shia Muslims, democrats, nationalists, the Muslim Brotherhood, Jews, and Christians. These believers are now operating, the statement continues, under the banner of the Islamic State, which currently controls the territory between Aleppo in Syria and Diyala in Iraq, where it has already established the structures of a proto-state: courts, a tax system, and security and social services.

The Islamic State argues that all Muslims, including all jihadist factions, must acknowledge the caliph as their leader if they are not to live in sin. Though this notion of a collective religious obligation is largely consistent with traditional religious law, most Muslims consider such injunctions irrelevant in the modern age.

Nonetheless, with al-Baghdadi at its helm, the Islamic State is convinced that its new caliphate will -- indeed, is supposed to -- flourish. Al-Baghdadi, whose real name is

Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai, is a 40-something Iraqi from Samarra, north of Baghdad. A fairly enigmatic figure, he has a higher degree in Islamic studies, and is a gifted strategist and orator.

Al-Baghdadi has managed to strike numerous deals with the Sunni tribes of Iraq, without whom he could not have conquered so much territory so quickly. And, in the few recorded statements that have been released, he displays a mastery of classical Arabic. All of this will help him to achieve his goal of succeeding Osama bin Laden as the leader of the global jihad against the forces of nonbelief.

Whether the announcement of the new caliphate turns out to be politically significant, however, remains to be seen. Its enduring influence will depend on two factors.

The first is the Islamic State's continued military success, and its ability to maintain and consolidate its control of territory. So far, jihadist success has depended largely on the divisions within Arab countries and the weakness of their governments, particularly the five -- Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen -- that have lost control over significant portions of their territory. And these countries are showing no signs of stabilising. While it is unlikely that national borders will be redrawn, the fact that large jihadi-controlled territories are becoming the norm will only make it easier for such forces to augment their financial resources and attract new recruits.

The second factor is the Islamic State's ability to secure sufficient support. Today, jihadism is divided. Even Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's current leader, views al-Baghdadi as an extremist, and has taken steps to distance his group from the Islamic State.

But many jihadi groups and individuals, particularly young people, have signaled their support for the caliphate. The Islamic State's statement has already been viewed more than 187,000 times on YouTube, and has been posted innumerable times on Twitter and Facebook, attracting positive comments. A more ominous development is the emergence of a group called the Supporters of the Islamic State in Jerusalem.

Jihadism is clearly alive and well across the Arab world. After decades of unjust and ineffective rule, not to mention tragic foreign interventions, there is no shortage of disenfranchised and frustrated citizens for organisations like the Islamic State to recruit. Whether this new caliphate succeeds or not, religious violence in the Arab world will likely get worse before it gets better.

The writers are Professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton University and a doctoral student at Princeton University, respectively. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2014. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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It's not just Shakib's folly

I don't watch cricket so much but what I feel is Shakib Al Hasan shouldn't be banned from the national team for 6 months and from foreign leagues till December 2015. He can be persuaded to behave himself. He is the only world class cricket star of the Bangladesh cricket team. He's got severe attitude problem which is true but the team management did not talk to him initially to get him back in the right track. They just kept mum when Shakib was showing this kind of attitude. So it's not Shakib's fault only.

Jamil
 On e-mail

Will Biman ever improve?

I recently visited Bangladesh from London for business purpose. I had decided never to travel by the national airline again after receiving very poor service nearly 30 years ago. As many years have gone by, I decided to travel by Biman in the hope that perhaps things have changed.

On the flight from London to Sylhet, we had a stewardess who behaved like an uneducated rustic person. During the same flight, foods, headsets and other items were dropped on the floor because of the sheer carelessness of the flight staff. There was a tall western passenger who asked for one of the seats with extra legroom (near the exit door) but was denied, as those seats were occupied by the friends or relatives of the staff. Will the service of Bangladesh Biman ever improve?

Monohor Raja
 London, UK

Comments on news report, "Govt wants to withdraw CID," published on July 10, 2014

Jafar Iqbal

The government wants to hide the names of politicians and higher RAB officials involved in the murders. Current SP of Narayanganj is sold out.

Aasfisarwar

None of the law enforcing entity is free from government clutches. So they have to be out of the investigation to make sure that manufactured reports are presented to protect the murderers and their godfathers.

Monju Huq

A powerful independent river commission supported by proper law has been long overdue to save the lifelines of Bangladesh. Any further delay in this matter will be tantamount to betrayal to the nation.

The authorities proved themselves utterly ineffective in protecting the rivers from grabbing, filling and polluting. Let us innovate the most effective ways to protect our national resources.

"Failed company to get \$0.78b Padma job" (July 11, 2014)

Bangalee1971

And how much will the Awami Leaguers get?

Deep Purple Blue

Thanks to The Daily Star for this report. It explains why such a poor performing company is being considered for awarding the second most important component of the Padma Bridge. More surprisingly, Sahco and its owner are back into play in the Padma Bridge construction. He ruined the bridge's World Bank funding and now he is silently back in the game perhaps to ensure that the bridge never gets completed. What a shame for us!

Snr Citizen

If quality and workmanship are compromised, then all efforts will be a sham and the structure will crumble in no time. Ulterior motives are always influencing our decisions. We can never get better!

Fareed Wakil

Once a corrupt minister, always a corrupt minister!

Sara

Wonder why this particular company is being favoured!

"24 directives to DCs" (July 9, 2014)

PlainSpeaker

No DC can do all that PM asks them to do. Actually, for good governance, maintaining law and order is a must. And for overall development of the country, the local government (Union Parishad) should be empowered fully and made the only administrative unit by disbanding upazila and district administration.

Deep Purple Blue

Did the DCs ask for any rewards for successfully holding the so-called Jan 5 polls?