

Islam: The crisis within

ISHFAQ ILAHI CHOUDHURY

The Islamic world must come up with an ideological alternative that successfully challenges the extremist world view. Unfortunately, I do not see that happening in the short term. If we do not wake up to the challenge, we may soon be knocked out.

THE Islamic world today is faced with extreme violence and conflict that is a danger to global peace and harmony. Countries such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen are topping the list of states most likely to fail. Absence of governance in many Muslim countries has provided a fertile ground for the rise of religious extremists who in their purported desire to establish an Islamic state have unleashed a reign of terror. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, Taliban forces are fighting to establish what they call an Islamic Caliphate. There is a long running conflict within Pakistan between the Shias and Sunnis and both sides have armed cadres engaged in brutal killing of each other. In Yemen, the government is facing dual onslaught, one from the Sunni hardliners close to the al-Qaeda, and the other from the Shia tribes who want a return of the Shia Imamate. In Iraq and Syria, the news of the civil war is dominated by the rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) that now calls itself simply as Islamic State (IS). Their declaration of the so-called Islamic Caliphate in the region has given a boost to Islamist forces who for years were calling for the return of the Caliphate. IS has been branded by the world community, including the UN, as a terrorist outfit that uses extreme violence, torture, mass conversion, rape and plunder to coerce obedience from the people living in its area of control.

Islamic extremists flourished not only in the countries where democratic pluralism was absent, but they made inroads also into open, democratic, multi-cultural societies in the West. In fact, extremists used the openness of the society and its democratic order to operate freely, and induct new recruits into their fold. Thus, we see a rush of new recruits from the West joining the global jihad. Besides the children of Muslim migrants of Afro-Asian origin, newly-converted white young men, and even women, are joining the jihad.

Despite their avowed goal of carrying out jihad against the infidels, they are actually operating in Muslim majority countries, killing ordinary Muslims and trying to destabilise the existing governments. Although they claim to be fighting against Zionist and Crusader forces of the West, they have not been able to launch any attack on western or Israeli targets for nearly a decade. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of fellow Muslims have been killed, their properties destroyed and their women violated -- all in the name of jihad. While the vast majority of Muslims had remained passive onlookers, a miniscule group of religious extremists have occupied the centre stage. As a result, Islam is becoming synonymous with violence and terror to the non-Muslims around the world. "Islam is a religion of peace" is a cliché to many.

The violence within the Islamic world can be traced back to the increasingly exclusive and literal interpretation of the Quran by the Wahabi School in Saudi Arabia. In South Asia, we have the Deobandi School emanating from Dar-ul-Ulum Madrasa in Deoband, India whose interpretation of Islamic traditions closely follows the Wahabi school. These schools, both rooted in Sunni traditions, declared most of the Shia traditions as heretic, thus triggering large-scale violence in countries such as Pakistan, Iraq or Syria, where there are mixed Muslim population.

While Muslims are falling behind others in the field of science and technology, the extremist forces target whatever is left of modern educational institutions in their countries. They bomb and destroy schools, kill or kidnap the students, especially female students. The only schools allowed by them are the Madrasas that teach as per their doctrine. We saw their anti-school operations in Pakistan. Boko Haram, a Sunni extremist outfit in Nigeria, have systematically destroyed schools, killed, kidnapped, raped and sold into slavery hundreds of female students, mostly Christians. All these have resulted in millions

of young Muslims growing up uneducated or ill-educated, unable to find jobs in a highly competitive world. They end up in a state of hopelessness and become target of jihadi recruiters. Thus, the Islamic world is caught in a spiraling crisis from where getting out is becoming increasingly difficult.

What is the way out then? Fareed Zakaria, an internationally renowned journalist, pointed out that Islam has a problem, for now. The longer we live in a state of denial, more the cancer of extremism spread inside us. The majority must take action to free Islam from the grip of the hijackers. The IS, al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, al-Shahab, LeT, Taliban and other terrorist organisations are dragging the Islamic community into the heart of darkness. The prime need of the hour is to join forces to fight extremists wherever they may be.

Now that we have a UN Resolution against IS, countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh can join forces with others to attack and destroy the evil forces. Similarly, we need to address the Taliban issue after the US withdrawal. Pakistan and Afghanistan must recognise that there is a common enemy, the Taliban, waiting outside the gate. Only a joint, coordinated military effort can destroy the Taliban. Any one side trying to use the Taliban to destabilise the other will, in the end, be the loser. While security operation is essential to stop the advance of the extremist forces, a long-term social, political and economic programme is needed to deny the extremists space to grow and take roots. Education that produces technically proficient, socially adaptable and morally sound world citizens is the best antidote. In the end, the Islamic world must come up with an ideological alternative that successfully challenges the extremist world view. Unfortunately, I do not see that happening in the short term. If we do not wake up to the challenge, we may soon be knocked out.

The writer is Registrar, East West University.

Inspiring innovation to meet development challenges

NICHOLAS ROSELLINI

IT is not so unusual to hear citizens across the world complain about their local government. How little things, such as fixing broken street lights or clearing garbage, can get neglected. So how do you create a more responsive government?

One small island, Fonadhoo, in the Maldives, is testing an idea that is connecting the dots to generate dialogue between residents and their municipality.

The concept is called *Make-My-Island*. It draws inspiration from two ideas.

The first is the UK-based site *Fix-My-Street*, which connects communities to their council through mobile technology and the web. The site helps link residents, who have needs and concerns regarding the state of their town's infrastructure, to local politicians, who have the decision-making authority to address the issues.

The second inspiration comes from the fact that there are over 600,000 mobile phone subscriptions in the Maldives, twice the national population. UNDP's goal was to capitalise on this high mobile subscriber base to connect islanders to their municipal authorities through mobile technology. A mobile application and website allows residents to flag municipal issues directly to the island council.

For instance, if a local fisherman notices that people are discarding garbage in an area not designated as a dump, he can immediately send a text message from his mobile phone to the council, identifying the location of the problem. The complaint is recorded on the website and mapped digitally.

As more community members raise concerns about illegal dumping of garbage and other issues, the number of complaints recorded about an issue allows the council to quickly ascertain which concerns should be designated as a priority, and thus respond accordingly and efficiently.

Make-My-Island demonstrates how UNDP is increasingly looking to innovative approaches that focus on looking for solutions across the spectrum, and reaching out to non-traditional partners. Our approach is to put an emphasis on rapid prototyping and testing of ideas to come up with the most innovative and efficient solutions.

In the Maldives project, *Fix-My-Street*, partnered with UNDP to tailor a cost free solution for the island's residents. The prototype places the users at the centre of the design: they identified the issues and are championing the testing phase.

Since the testing began a few weeks ago, residents have reported a more engaged local council that is responding to their concerns. This effort will hopefully lead to improved local services in Fonadhoo, and become an example of what is possible for other remote islands of the Maldives.

For UNDP, this solution goes against the popular misnomer that innovation is all about technology. Along our innovation journey, we have found that the key contributing factors to innovation are iterative design thinking, understanding behavioural insights, rethinking the way we approach challenges, and pushing beyond our comfort zones.

For several years, UNDP has been driving for innovation in the development arena. We recognise that in an increasingly complex world where development challenges are continuously emerging and changing, there is an urgent need to move away from business as usual, to provide more agile solutions.

Early this year, we instituted an innovation fund to allow our staff in countries across Asia and the Pacific to be creative and experiment with new ways to tackle complex development issues in a 'safe to fail' space. We also encouraged them to reach beyond our traditional networks and partner with like-minded innovation champions.

By fostering innovation, the practical experience we gain will equip us to become better advisors to governments, on the next generation of services.

Our approach has led to innovative projects across several countries:

- In Nepal, a UNDP project is using games and social media to question gender stereotypes;
- In Sri Lanka, we're crowd sourcing youth engagement to aid in policy making;
- In Bangladesh, UNDP is gathering behavioural insights to address traffic problems in mega cities like Dhaka;
- In Malaysia, we are crowd funding citizen contributions to help with biodiversity conservation;
- In Papua New Guinea, we are using mobile technology to monitor corruption.

These projects are the vanguard of UNDP's drive for innovation in the development arena. This year UNDP was named a global leader in transparency, our next objective is to be global leaders in innovation. In keeping with that commitment, UNDP's Asia Pacific Hub is hosting a two-day Innovation Summit in Bangkok, at the end of this month. It will explore how we can inject innovation in all the work we do.

By encouraging innovation and partnering with thinkers and innovators UNDP hopes to spark conversations and collaborations that can lead to transformative solutions that address the complex development challenges we face across the world.

The writer is Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, UNDP, and Director of the Bangkok Regional Hub.

Moving from a living wage to a dignity wage

CHAUMTOLI HUQ

A great deal of the worldwide advocacy around wages focuses on either increasing the minimum wage or pushing for a living wage. These foci rest primarily on economic considerations as to how much a worker needs to meet her/his basic expenses. Labour advocates will argue that the minimum wage is not sufficient to support a worker's family. This is true whether the worker is in the United States or Bangladesh. Living wage movements respond to this critique by arguing for a wage that is based on current economic considerations to meet basic expenses such as housing and food. Employers generally oppose increasing the minimum wage because it increases labour costs, and makes them less competitive in the market.

There is no question that living wage advocacy is an improvement from seeking only minimum wage. We should continue to push for living wage laws.

Where living wage advocacy falls short is in asking is there a wage that allows workers to live in dignity, not a wage by which they can simply meet their basic expenses? Dignity wage reframes the wage debate to a human rights issue whereas living wage remains tethered and subject to economic rationale. It may be that the actual wage is the same, but the way in how the wage issue is framed makes a difference in how labour is respected. This reframing also requires employers and businesses to rethink their relationships with their employees.

Recently, while conducting interviews with garment workers in Bangladesh, I asked them how much wage they would need to meet their expenses. They mentioned a monthly rate from Tk. 7,000 to Tk. 9,000 (roughly \$100). This is still lower than the \$177 demanded by Cambodian activists. The minimum wage in Bangladesh, which increased in 2013, is Tk. 5,300 taka. When I asked what amount they would need to live in dignity, the answer ranged from Tk. 8,000 to Tk. 12,000. The higher amounts were from workers who had children or financially supported elderly parents. In response to my question, cynics said that workers would demand an astronomical amount.



Unsurprisingly, their demands were modest. There were near overlaps in some cases between living and a dignity wage, in particular among younger workers without children. In the context of the export oriented industry, living or dignity wage may need to be shouldered by buyers by paying more as cost price.

When asked what they thought a dignity wage meant to them, one husband said it was not only to meet housing expenses, but also to buy healthy and nutritious food, to have money for their children's education, and to experience simple joys, such as buying his wife lipstick. These do not seem like unreasonable demands.

It may seem difficult to move towards a framing of wages around dignity because of some notion that it is an unquantifiable concept; but that is not the case. They have legislated a dignity wage in Ecuador. They have a minimum wage. The dignity wage is when companies pay shareholder dividends, then they are required to pay labourers additional wages. It may incentivise workers to raise productivity if they know increased profit will benefit them. This approach counters the argument that increasing wages hinders economic

growth. Once a framework is adopted, there are many innovative ways to actualise the dignity wage. Owners can make workers allies around profit and productivity if they can show that workers can reap some of these gains. There are many other ways in which a dignity wage can be provided. Buyers can offer to pay more if a portion of the costs goes towards wages, so they know that they are not paying more just to owners. In an era where brand reputation matters, this arrangement can be something that brands and owners can boast of as a best practice. The resistance will not be in how to implement a law around a dignity wage, but in acknowledging that companies and society have a moral and ethical responsibility to provide a wage that is respectful of one's labour. Dignity wage changes the nature of the relationship between the worker, owner and brand.

Of course, even if we adopt the concept of a dignity wage, it would not erase an inherent capitalist tension between businesses to make profit and to reduce labour costs, or workers' desire for increased wages. Perhaps calling it "dignity wage" would mask the often gross inequities of global capitalism. However,

tying the wage debate to that same system without exploring how to transform the relationship between an employer and worker will only provide wages that the employer wants to give rather than the wage we as a civil society require.

With the recent focus on corporate social responsibility, a dignity wage is the best practice for companies that want to do good for their employees and to stand out at a time when sophisticated and conscientious consumers are seeking fair trade products. As a consumer, if I know that a product was made by a worker who was paid a dignity wage, I am more likely to purchase that product. Whatever cost the brand pays at the outset will be recouped from consumers who are more aware of the sourcing of what they buy. It can provide a meaningful way to demonstrate best corporate practices. Otherwise, most CSR becomes marginalised public relations gimmick.

This shift from an economic-based mode of framing wages to a human rights one is sorely needed, especially in Bangladesh and throughout Asia as well in the United States, where workers are fighting for increased wages.

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QUOTABLE Quote

The more you like yourself, the less you are like anyone else, which makes you unique.

Walt Disney

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

1 Biblical kingdom

6 Cuff site

11 Writer's work

12 Belly-button type

13 Top players

14 Different

15 Black-and-white critters

17 Belief

18 Suffer

19 Slices of life

22 Attempt

23 "Seward's Folly"

24 Sports figures

25 Swindle

27 Serve perfectly

30 Less cloudy

31 "East of Eden" brother

32 Muffin choice

33 Made finer

35 Art inspirers

38 Occur

39 Geometry measure

40 Burton of "Roots"

41 Impassive

DOWN

1 Be curt with

2 Bombast

3 Fifty-fifty

4 Necklace part

5 Home-coming destination

6 Court

7 Deep groove

8 Opinion opener

9 Middy break

10 Contract makeup

16 Comforts

20 Fabrics

21 Scrollwork shape

24 Tar's place

25 Show shamelessly

26 "Get a move on!"

27 On the go

28 Senate victim

29 Town leaders

30 Deep sleeps

34 Liberate

36 Peyton's brother

37 Jiffy

CRYPTOQUOTE 9-5

IL OIQ PQLT'S R DQTL ICT OCRT QWLE XLERGCS RICSBT IGT SQ OCRT RQ DQTL. -B.L.DLITCSB

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE STRENGTH OR WEAKNESS OF OUR CONVICTION DEPENDS MORE ON OUR COURAGE THAN ON OUR INTELLIGENCE. - LUC DE CLAPIERS

Yesterday's answer

PILED REPRO AMINO ALLEN CANDO TEASE EUROANTS WRAP ANNE HAR STOOGES ICAME TREAT MELANIE OSU GUTS GMEN SPED MARE PABLO MOTEL ACRID PUREE STAND STYLE

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

REMEMBER WHEN WE WERE HERE BEFORE, THE PORTIONS WERE HUGE! ...LET'S JUST SPLIT THE HOUSE SALAD

YOU DON'T GET THE WHOLE IDEA OF WHY WE'RE HERE AGAIN

HENRY by Don Trachte

PUT 'EM UP, BALDY!

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