

THE FUSS ABOUT ISIS

and what we need to do

Why food crisis in Thanchi?

Rush relief on emergency basis

THE report in this paper, carrying the news of a large number of families in near starving condition in Thanchi upazilla of Bandarban is grim as well as shocking. That in these days of enhanced capacity of physical mobility people would be going without food for days, even if it were in the remotest part of the country, is unthinkable and unacceptable.

Reportedly, these people have been facing severe food shortage for days, and have been foraging the jungle for eatables like wild potatoes for sustenance. This situation has been prevailing for more than a month in that area covering several unions and affecting several thousand people. This has been brought about by the failure of the locals to cultivate jhoom crops adequately due to incessant rain last year compounded by vermin attacks on whatever little that was harvested; this year has been even worse. Regrettably, the upazilla agricultural officers had not visited the area at all to take a stock of the situation.

Apparently, the crop situation and the consequence of it were not addressed seriously, if at all, by the administration last year, nor has the food situation monitored this year. Had it been so, the circumstances would not have been so grim. Understandably, the communication link to those areas is tortuous and that is all the more reason for the local administration to have sought emergency support from the government to reach food to the affected people rather than waiting for the food, allotted only a couple of days ago, to reach them overland. It may also be worth considering building up small buffer stocks at nodal points all over the CHT region to meet such emergency situation.

People can't just go 'missing'!

Disappearances should be answered for

WHEN nine people mysteriously go "missing" from two villages of the same upazila in less than a month, including three members of the same family, and when the authorities claim they know nothing about it – even though, as per eyewitnesses, they were picked up by men alleging to be Rab officials – what recourse is available to the families of the missing? What remains of a community's sense of safety and security?

According to villagers in Faridpur Upazila of Pabna, the incidents occurred over the killing of local Jubo Dal leader Saiful Islam Liton on February 3. Of the nine, three were accused in the Liton murder case. If the allegation of the victims' involvement in the murder is true the matter should be investigated and the accused tried under the legal system following proper criminal procedures, not made to disappear.

If it was not the Rab who picked them up, as the agency would like us to believe, doesn't the onus fall upon them to go after the alleged impostors and rescue the victims? In the last four months alone, at least 25 more people have been abducted, as per human rights watchdog, Ain O Salish Kendra. In barely any of the cases has any progress been made or the fate of the missing persons determined.

Such disappearances infuse fear in the minds of the citizens. The administration have to provide satisfactory account of what happened to the victims and probe into allegations to determine the facts.



STRAIGHT LINE
 MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE murders of bloggers, intellectuals, priests, academicians, rights activists, and also persons of ordinary vocations committed by allegedly extremist groups owing allegiance to ISIS

have given rise to a heated controversy regarding the organisational existence of such an outfit in Bangladesh. Every time an incident even remotely carrying the hallmarks of religiously motivated extremist groups occurs, there is instant attribution by some western quarters to ISIS. The government, on the other hand, loses no time in firmly denying its existence in Bangladesh.

The denial mode about the organisational existence of ISIS gives rise to uneasiness. In the past, it was the persistent denial of the then establishment of there being any JMB or its Bangla Bhai and his depredations in northern areas of the country. The then authorities grappled with the reality only when the ground conditions and mounting international pressure compelled them to confront the religious extremists. As a result, extremist dens were busted, criminal cases were registered and finally capital punishment was handed down to at least six notorious terrorists.

One could reasonably ask as to what is significant in the continuous attribution to ISIS hands behind every suspected extremist attack. The government of the day, despite its denial of the organisational existence of ISIS, has commenced appropriate legal actions. That is only desirable because in the penal lexicon all the suspected extremist attacks constitute criminal offenses and as such statutory actions have to follow.

Are some quarters venturing to make us and the world at large believe that the Bangladeshi polity is prone to extremist ideas and that the bigoted elements can have a field day on account of slack governance? How does the admission of the organisational existence of an extra-territorial network help us in adequately confronting the menace? The blunt reality may be that misguided elements in our midst stand ready to carry out the implementation of ISIS objectives for their so-called religious beliefs. However,



PHOTO: DALLAS NEWS

that cannot detract the resolve of the mainstream to confront such religious extremism.

ISIS would naturally prefer to work through secretive or banned organisations. Such organisations cannot operate openly and thus one may not be definitive about their organisational existence. In Bangladesh, banned organisations like JMB or HUJI or the relatively recent Ansarullah Bangla Team have suspected elements within its fold who are ready to work as foot soldiers of ISIS without any extra-territorial promptings.

The presence of operatives of international terrorist groups is not an essential precondition for terrorist occurrences within the country. Ideas of extremism to identification of targets can well be coordinated from distant lands.

External connections of militants in Bangladesh cannot be viewed as an entirely new development. Given the history, effective links would require very little effort. Individual acquaintances may not take much time to turn into organisational ties. Therefore, denial of external connections should not be a strategy. It is time to act proactively.

What needs to be done is to note that the militant's focus is on the use of power in pursuit of policy. Some sections of the public have been converted to this approach. Incidentally, the liberal current of opinion was significantly de-legitimised. The goal, therefore, should be denial of space for the radicalised and the militant. The extremists shall not be allowed to develop vital stakes in the political system.

While eradicating or controlling

militancy it should occur to us that in Bangladesh the advocates of the extreme path are more determined than the liberals. Liberal forces hardly work with intense dedication, much less with a sense of mission. One has to remember that in Bangladesh secularism as state ideology finds it difficult to compete with a language of belonging saturated with religion.

One has to recognise the socio-economic reality of Bangladesh where gross poverty co-exists with democracy, a liberal constitution and disorder with functioning polity; the religious and traditional beliefs are far more tenacious than the liberals imagine. The State has, at times, been involved in the business of defining religion. Significantly, the compulsions of the traditional obligations of the ruler to protect State religion have to be kept in view.

The militants' strategy consists of efforts to win the trust and confidence of the majority population based on the role of extremists serving as arbitrators of individual and community disputes and financiers of education and livelihoods. Therefore, specific economic issues should be addressed on an urgent basis.

The area of action to counter militancy is a battle of ideas, challenging the ideological motivations that extremists believe justify the use of violence. Successful prosecution in the courts, based on gathering of necessary evidence and apprehending those involved in planning acts of terrorism before committing of mischief should be one of the principal approaches of countering militant activity.

The inescapable fact is that the ultimate responsibility of breeding a violent culture and its multiple social ramifications shall fall on state agencies that fail to see the ominous signals of religious extremism and perhaps willy-nilly nurture and protect the so-called jihadi groups.

There is a causal relationship between policy and violence on the social level within the country and on the personal level within the household. The state has to accept responsibility for the overall propensity for violence in the public and private places. Respect for religious difference, and racial, sexual and ethnic freedom needs to be recognised by the state first before it is recognised by everyone else.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

How the West was lost



CARL BILD

RECENT political discourse on both sides of the Atlantic has raised a disturbing question that is becoming increasingly difficult to dismiss: Are the United States and Europe turning away from the policies of openness that have historically driven their economic success?

In the US, Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for president, is waging verbal war against virtually every trade agreement his country has ever struck. He has threatened to tear up the highly successful North American Free Trade Agreement and pledged to block any attempt to move forward with the recently concluded Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Should Trump's views become part of the Republican Party's platform, the shift will redraw the political landscape regarding free trade. After all, the Republicans have traditionally been the standard-bearers of free trade in the US – in contrast to the Democratic Party, which has had to contend with skeptical voices from the trade unions that make up part of its constituency.

Meanwhile, Trump's likely opponent in the general election, Hillary Clinton, seems to have folded the flag and adopted at least part of the anti-trade tirades of Trump and her left-wing primary opponent, Bernie Sanders. Suddenly, she has turned against the TPP agreement, despite having supported it previously. She is opposing US President Barack Obama's tentative plan to have it ratified by Congress immediately after the November election.

This behavior is without precedent. Never before have the leading contenders for the US presidency fueled fears that free trade will undermine America's prosperity. Whichever candidate prevails in November, the consequences are likely to be serious.

In Europe, the situation is only marginally better. Austria's entire political spectrum has come out firmly against the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the US and the European Union. And public opinion seems to be undergoing a similar shift in Germany, a country that owes its affluence to its success in global markets. Even in the Netherlands, which used to have free trade in its

all, is also to open up minds.

Similarly, in the decades since the end of World War II, the security of the West has been built first and foremost on the economic success of the US, Western Europe, and Japan – success that was driven by integration, trade, and innovation. According to nearly every indicator one can think of, the remarkable growth in trade during the past quarter-century has given mankind some of its best decades ever.

That is why it's impossible to imagine achieving ambitious global development goals without placing free trade and globalization at the center of the strategy. If the West, losing faith in itself, turns away from the very practices that made it successful, where does that leave poor and developing countries?

Fortunately, all is not yet lost. But rescuing the West's trade agenda will require exceptional leadership and perseverance. This will be a decisive year. The trade agreements involving the US, Asia, and Europe are important not just in terms of traditional goods, but also in terms of the free flow of data. While trade in physical goods is showing signs of stagnation, data flows have increased by a factor of 45 during the last decade.

If Obama can ensure the ratification of the TPP and bring the TTIP negotiations to a conclusion, he will have laid the groundwork for future progress. If he falls short on either task – or, catastrophically, fails on both – the world will face a far more uncertain future.

Political leaders who still believe in the West must dedicate themselves to the defense of free trade and the construction of an ever more open world. They must do everything they can to prevent the introduction of protectionist measures and the erection of barriers to globalization.

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DNA (and would hardly exist without it), vocal campaigners are threatening to hold a referendum to reject any trans-Atlantic trade deal.

Given the history of the West, these are perplexing developments. Europe's rise began when its ships started to explore the world for new markets and opportunities. This underpinned not only rising wealth, but also innovation. To open up markets, after

The writer was Sweden's foreign minister from 2006 to October 2014 and Prime Minister from 1991 to 1994, when he negotiated Sweden's EU accession.
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(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

COMMENTS

"Roanu leaves thousands homeless"
 (May 24, 2016)

Afiz Sattar

The government should make sure that the aid goes to the victims and not into the hands of local influential people.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Sunflower Solar Pump

Due to the negative impacts of urbanisation, water for agricultural irrigation is getting scarcer day by day. To encounter this challenge, various strategies and technologies have been developed to practice smart-agriculture.

It is encouraging to learn that the USAID's Kenya Smallholder Solar Irrigation Project, funded by Feed the Future, has developed a solar water pump kit which they named as Sunflower Solar Pump. It is capable of drawing water from a variety of sources including groundwater and lakes for irrigation. As the pump is powered by solar

energy, the kit is environment friendly. Kenyan farmers have started benefitting by using Sunflower Solar Pump. The farmers have been provided with loan on easy installments to purchase the kit. The USAID and Feed the Future deserves appreciation for innovating the pump and disseminating the technology among the farmers of Kenya. I think the technology can also be adopted by the farmers in Bangladesh for drawing water from various sources at a cheaper price.

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Congress' debacle

Founded in 1885, the Indian National Congress which has a glorious past in India's struggle for freedom from the British rule has been reduced to rubble after the recent round of assembly elections. The party once associated with Mahatma Gandhi is now surviving only in a handful of states of North, South and NE India. The culture of dynastic politics has been a detrimental force for this fall. Poor management and leadership within inner ranks of the party and allegations of corruptions have caused the party to lose the most important gift of democracy: support of ordinary

citizens. The few small states in the NE India will be soon under BJP and/or NDA influence with their landslide victory in the recent Assam assembly elections. Unless serious attempts are made by Congress to reach the ordinary citizens, counter the alleged corruption and build a new and credible leadership, it will have hard time in keeping some of its legislators and parliamentarians from switching party for their personal benefits as demonstrated in Assam, Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh.
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