

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Religious leaders call against militancy

Take it to the grassroots

WE are heartened by the call of as many as 100,000 well known religious leaders and alems of the country against militancy. This has been long overdue, as it should have come earlier since the long running operations of the extremists have witnessed a marked rise in the last six months. We believe that since ours is a Muslim-majority country, such calls by Islamic scholars denouncing terrorism could be an effective tool to fight the extremists.

However, we feel the call should not be limited to a one-off announcement. The conviction behind the call can fully manifest once it is transmitted to the village level. This, we are certain, will help the government to reach out to a section of the gullible youth who can be easily swayed by extremist propaganda. We strongly believe that deradicalisation efforts will not be fully successful until this message of peace and harmony is taken to the grassroots, in every nook and corner of the country.

It is now incumbent upon the government and the Alems and Ulemas to take this to the masses through Friday sermons and other religious gatherings as deemed appropriate. There should be no illusion that we are up against a big challenge, that we are facing a difficult task and the religious scholars can be a bulwark against these forces that are perpetrating attacks in the name of religion. Fighting extremism is a continuous and dynamic process, and this should be an integral part of the government's strategy to combat it.

Ruling party programme and traffic snarl up

Disconnect between idea and execution

AS it is, traffic in the late afternoons of a Ramadan day is heavy without being compounded by street programmes of political parties. Only those unfortunate ones on the roads in the scorching heat on Sunday can accurately describe the unmitigated sufferings caused to the homebound commuters that day because of the human chain programme of the ruling 14-party Alliance.

It was suddenly that the Alliance decided to go for an anti-militancy motivational programme by organising human chain at 15 points covering all the important intersections in the city. But why at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and that too in the month of Ramadan when most people make for their homes from work? And when the rally was supposed to last for an hour, the ripple effect of it lasted well past the time of Iftar which many of the unfortunate commuters missed.

The idea of motivating the public against militancy is well and good, but why does it have to be organised on the streets blocking movement of vehicles, and if at all, could such programmes not be held in the morning instead of choosing a peak traffic hour?

While we appreciate the purpose of sensitising people on national issues we are completely aghast by the way the idea was implemented. It was ill-advised on the part of the organisers to choose the time and the mode that they did. We believe that instead of drawing the attention of the public to an important issue the programme has drawn public ire at best.

COMMENTS

"Key suspect killed in a 'shootout'"
(June 20, 2016)

Sheikh Mehedi Hasan

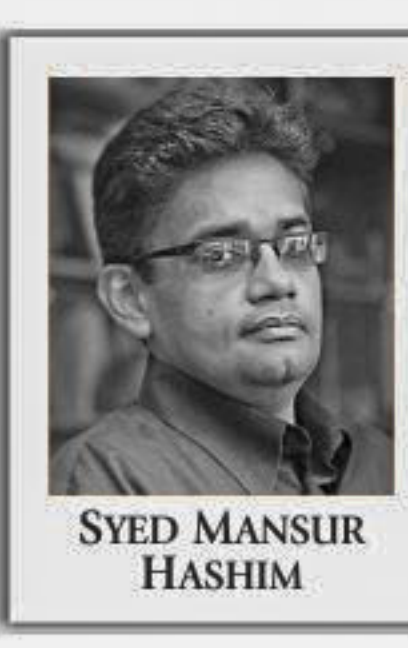
It seems like they want that the identity of the real culprits is never revealed.

"A journey by bus"
(June 16, 2016)

Toufiqur Rahman

The experience of riding a public bus in cities is hellish.

Islamic State: Foreign fighter trends



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THANKS to Edward Snowden dumping sensitive data on to the net, there now exists more accurate estimates on foreign fighters recruited by the Islamic State (IS). Indeed, going by The Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point (United States Military Academy) recently made available a report titled 'The

Caliphate's Global Workforce: An Inside Look at the Islamic State's Foreign Fighter Paper Trail' which provides data of some 4,600 foreign fighters recruited between early 2013 and 2014. This study which is a compilation of 4018 Mujahid Data forms, 2 Excel files (with 155 individuals entered), Exit records (31 files, 431 individuals) and 15 miscellaneous files provide a pattern of recruitment, which interestingly points to something rather disturbing, i.e. Europeans are signing up in alarming numbers, mostly from smaller countries like Belgium and Denmark. We are talking continental Europe here and the IS has successfully recruited from East and West and the Balkans.

What has become clear from the data presented is that the IS recruits from over 70 countries and that means the global workforce IS commands brings with them different skills and capabilities. The educational backgrounds of foreign fighters vary widely and the group has benefitted enormously as most of the fighters have received higher education. This means that the group is actively "head hunting" for more than fighters, it is recruiting "individuals with specific educational, professional, or military backgrounds that might prove useful to the group in the future." The average age of the foreign fighter is 26-27, but what should be noted here is that IS does not recruit based on age, rather on specific skills sets that these foreign citizens bring to the group. As pointed out in the report, information on 12 individuals born in the '50s (two apparently are French citizens) "demonstrated relatively significant professional experience, to include multiple engineers, teachers, business owner, and a government employee (from Saudi Arabia).

All this points to IS's efforts to recruit more than suicide bombers. We are looking at a divergent group of people who have skills linked to governance, business aptitude and technical knowhow. The IS has recruited heavily amongst people with IT background, especially those having media and communications background, which include amongst others, having knowledge in computer design and engineering, networks, programming, telecommunications, and website design. This would explain the savvy propaganda material coming out of the IS social media factory that make even the most gruesome acts of terror appealing or horrifying depending on the audience.

The IS has "facilitators" who travel widely to recruit. The data presented provides the name of top five border facilitators, viz. Abu-Muhammad al-Shimali who facilitated some 31 percent of all foreign fighter recruits (1,306) and the other four Abu-al-Bara' al Shimali, Abu-Mansur al-Maghribi, Abu-Ilyas al-Maghribi and Abu-'Ali-al-Turki combined recruiting some 637 fighters. The US government has offered a US\$5 million reward for al-Shimali who has been identified as the IS's Border Chief and following the Paris attacks is now chief accused for helping those who carried out the Paris operation to travel to France. Although IS allows for recruits to select their area of preference (suicide, frontline fighter), a mere 12 percent opted for suicide missions and that can perhaps

counter-terrorism efforts are sorely lacking. In the aftermath of the Belgian bombings in March, it took authorities four months to locate Salah Abdeslam in the neighbourhood he grew up in. Belgium's plight in combating terrorism is not unique. These nations have never faced anything as deadly as the IS which has successfully recruited fighters with prior combat experience, fighters who blend in with the local populace who are well educated and sophisticated in outward appearance.

As government agencies go back to the drawing board, whether in Europe or Asia, the message is clear. There has to be cooperation among agencies and countries. The IS apparently has mobilised some 400 operatives on the European continent. We have little



PHOTO: SNOPEX.COM

be attributed to the fact that today, IS commands significant territory. By looking at these patterns, it would appear that the Islamic State is looking into the future where the "caliphate" that can successfully be governed. Hence, the shift is away from one-way missions (suicide bomber) to a combat role that allows for greater survivability.

So where does that leave countries at the receiving end of IS's actions? IS has emerged as the first truly multi-national Islamic militant organisation that can and does strike across continents, many European countries are finding out the hard way that their

idea of its operations in the Indian subcontinent. And there lies the danger. Bangladesh has been witness to rising militancy problems. Although we are informed there is no IS presence in Bangladesh and the killings have been carried out by our own home-grown outfits, what we should remember is that IS in all respects is the world's first truly global jihadist movement with recruits from 70 nations. There is no room for complacency when it comes to our national security and it would be ill advised to sit back and relax.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

Making the budget work



FAHMIDA KHATUN

THE mid-year event of discussing the national expenditure and income, and their implications, has caught the attention of a broader section of

people over the years. The national budget, which is also supposedly the reflection of the political philosophy of the government, gives the government the right to undertake various fiscal measures for a year, through which it can collect taxes from people and undertake various development programmes for the country. Thus the budget can play a key role for economic growth and poverty reduction. Moreover, measures taken in the budget have direct impact on the day to day lives of the people. Not only are individuals' income and expenditure patterns affected through tax measures of the budget, decisions on business, trade and investment are also influenced by budgetary measures. Tax collections, government borrowing and expenditure patterns can also have an impact on these areas. This process in turn can contribute towards employment generation and economic growth. Besides, direct allocations for various social sectors and poverty reduction programmes can help eradicate poverty.

When the budget has such wide spread importance on the economy and its various sectors, it naturally deserves public scrutiny. Undoubtedly, over the years, awareness about the budget has increased, at least among the city dwellers, so have the concerns. Quite contrary to the government's objectives to do good for people by way of boosting the economy through resource mobilisation from domestic and foreign

sources and spending for development activities, people get anxious before the announcement of the year's budget. Concerns surface among the salaried people as to whether there would be new taxes and by how much the prices would go up following the budget announcement, and how they would manage with a reduced income. The business community, investors and entrepreneurs also get concerned about the taxes and tariffs on income, export, import, investment, employment generation and profit.

If this is the reaction to the budget, it is indeed a difficult task for a finance minister of a country like Bangladesh to please the broader section of people with

lack of adequate resources to undertake large development expenditures and dissatisfied by the low tax-GDP ratio, the Finance Minister has made a desperate effort to mobilise higher revenue in this year's budget, even though targets set for the National Board of Revenue (NBR) have not been fulfilled in the last few years. But a jump to the growth of 36.5 percent in fiscal year 2016-17 looks rather difficult, given the current state of affairs. In order to achieve such a growth, authorities will have to address the bigger issue, which is broadening the tax net, modernisation of the NBR, establishment of e-governance and capacity development of the concerned officials. It seems that there is an attempt

NBR is incomplete, which makes the task of tax officials very difficult. Tax evasion and avoidance are problems across various income groups and economic sectors. If appropriate taxes are to be collected from an influential and resourceful person, or a trader is to be fined for misreporting prices, officials of the NBR must have the support and protection of the higher authority. Evasion is high in the case of value added tax as well. Though disposable income of a large number of people has gone up over the years due to higher per capita income, it is not reflected in VAT collection. Decision on VAT law, which has been at a standstill for a while, needs to be taken at the earliest.

The establishment of e-governance can bring great success, not only in bringing taxable people into the net and keeping data on income and assets of people, but also on overall economic management. Many countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Tanzania have shown success in tax payments through ICT. However, political will comes to the forefront in implementing such measures. Budget is of course also about expenditures, as they are crucial for development. Much has been said about the adequacy of allocation and quality of spending. But resource mobilisation holds the key for making any expenditure. As we have to increasingly depend on domestic resource mobilisation in the coming years, there needs to be a dramatic effort towards broadening tax net and reducing tax evasion. And while carrying out the drive towards collecting more taxes, we should not lose sight of their implications for employment generation and poverty reduction.

The writer is Research Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

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allocation and fiscal measures in the budget. Displeasure is growing. The budget for the fiscal year 2016-17 has come under fire even from the business group, which traditionally would welcome it, saying that it has been business friendly. On the other hand, many suggest that the budget is increasingly becoming a routine exercise and there is no creativity in it, only a relocation and readjustment of expenditures and allocations. And in the process, a few groups have been rewarded, with the majority feeling disgruntled.

The major source of such unhappiness is, of course, the tax efforts suggested in the budget. Constrained by

to target only the low-hanging fruits - chasing those who are already in the tax loop or the easier sectors. NBR's efforts in identifying several new areas and sectors which are outside the tax net is commendable. Obviously, it has to take several unpopular steps in collecting taxes from those sectors. As more people and institutions would come under the purview of the tax department, there will be an organic increase in tax revenue.

With its current capacity, it will be difficult for the tax department to achieve its goals. Compared to the size of the population and prospective number of taxpayers, the number of officials is limited and the capacity is also inadequate. Full automation of the

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Reply to "Armenians in Dhaka"

I have read the article titled "Armenians in Dhaka" by Adnan Morshed published on June 9, 2016 in your respected newspaper.

Turkey does not deny the suffering of Armenians, along with all constituent communities of the Ottoman Empire, during the First World War. This is acknowledged in Turkey on various occasions at the highest level.

However, Armenian suffering should not be isolated from the suffering of other

communities of the Empire. The common tragedy experienced during World War by the Muslim and Armenian populations of the Ottoman Empire should be studied without politicisation or prejudice.

Indeed, the term "genocide" denotes a clearly defined crime with specific conditions of proof. It was first legally defined by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. As genocide is a crime and a very narrow legal term which is

difficult to prove, it can only be assessed and established in accordance with the rules of international criminal law and by a competent court which is internationally recognised. There is no judgment in which a competent court made such an assessment with regard to the events of 1915.

A parliament is not authorised to hand down decisions about controversial historical incidents like a court. In this vein,

the resolution adopted by the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany on June 2 2016 concerning the events of 1915 lacks legal basis. By adopting such a resolution, the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany has acted against the legally binding observations of the European Court of Human Rights, which clearly states that:

- the Armenian narrative do not reflect the absolute truth and can be discussed freely;

- the opinions questioning the Armenian narrative are under the absolute protection of the freedom of speech;

- and no parallels can be drawn between the events of 1915 and the Holocaust.

The Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany interprets history arbitrarily, without taking into account the law.

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