

Senseless carnage in Nice

Time to unite and fight back

WE condemn this horrifying and utterly mindless act of terror that has been unleashed on the citizens of France, who are still recovering from an earlier attack barely three months ago that killed some 120 people and injured many others. As families with children watched the fireworks celebrating Bastille Day in the French resort of Nice, a truck deliberately ploughed into the crowd killing at least 84 people. The police shot and killed the driver, but not before he drove for 2 km into bustling crowds. We know that the truck was carrying weapons and explosives but it is still too early to ascertain whether he acted alone or was part of a greater conspiracy.

There really are no words to express our remorse for those who lost loved ones in Nice. Condemnations have been pouring in from Capitals around the world and we join them in denouncing this horrific attack. What we do know is that the world is at war with terrorists who kill and maim with no remorse. Taking lives appear to be their motto and they do so in the name of religion. The latest attack that took place in Nice merely reinforces our resolve that world leaders need to set aside their differences and come together to face a common enemy. Terrorism today knows no borders and we have to face the realities of joining forces across nations and continents to hunt down perpetrators and organisers of terrorism – wherever they may reside.

Bonded labour in Oman?

Rethink the policy of sending women workers abroad

THE Human Rights Watch (HRW) has just released a 68-page report titled "I was sold" that outlines the near-slavery conditions for migrant domestic workers in Oman. We are concerned by the report because our female workers are amongst those who are reportedly being abused and exploited by the employers. The forms of abuse range from the lack of freedom to change jobs, underpaid for work done, physical assault and inhumane working conditions that they have to put up with. Forced labour and trafficking of workers; denial of pay and food are all part-and-parcel of female workers' existence while working as domestic workers in the Sultanate.

Some 130,000 female domestic help work in the country and although there are no exact numbers available as to how many of them are Bangladeshi, we find these conditions to be subhuman, totally illegal and unacceptable. Even if a portion of what has been mentioned in the report is true, we are looking at systematic repression of basic human rights here. Most of these workers get employment there privately or individually which makes it that much more difficult to keep track of them. And that gives rise to the problem assessing employers.

The government should firstly stop such private employment of women abroad and should rethink its policy of allowing female workers to work as domestic help in countries that do not abide by workers' safety policies. Unless we can protect our expatriate workers, especially women, such abuses will continue. We urge the government to take up the issue with the government of Oman immediately.

COMMENTS

"Dhaka at risk of mega quake"

(July 13, 2016)

Dean M. Junayed Miah

This is nothing new and the geologist knew this. The question is: what has been done to prepare for such a mega disaster?

Neha Noor

There are many buildings in Dhaka which have been constructed without meeting the safety codes. I fear to imagine what disaster could take place there.

The silent Arab majority must speak up



ISHAC DIWAN

SINCE the United Nations Development Program began work on the Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) in 2001, the situation in many Arab countries has gone from bad to worse. In fact, today the region cannot even come together to publish a new report. This is unfortunate, because finding a new shared vision for Arab people,

especially Arab youth, is a prerequisite for ever achieving peace and prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa.

The first AHDR, published in 2002, identified three major "development deficits" holding the region back: knowledge, women's empowerment, and freedom. The report, described as "written by Arabs for Arabs," had a clear influence on the regional development narrative and the way national elites talked about the problems facing their societies.

Around the time of the first AHDR, the Arab world had reasons for optimism. Israel, having withdrawn from Lebanon in 2000, withdrew from Gaza in 2005. New Arab leaders – such as Abdullah II in Jordan, Mohammed VI in Morocco, and Bashar al-Assad in Syria – were coming to power and generating hope for change. Saudi Arabia announced its first municipal elections in 2003, and held them in 2005. Egypt and Iraq also both held (mostly) democratic elections in 2005. And Algeria's attempt to quell longstanding civil strife was largely successful, thanks in part to high oil prices throughout this period.

After the Arab Spring, which began in December 2010 and gained momentum through 2011, the UNDP began the 2015 AHDR, which focused specifically on the plight of Arab youth. I was a member of the 2015 AHDR team, along with around 30 intellectuals and activists from the Arab world. The 2015 AHDR shared similar themes with its 2002 precursor, but this time we engaged more directly with influential Arab youth to compile the best data possible, and to put a spotlight on the effects of the wars engulfing the region.

The 2015 report was finalized in May 2015. But it has lain in the drawers of the UNDP Arab Bureau in New York ever since, probably in no small part due to its harsh judgment of the Arab power elite.

One finding from the 2015 report that I can speak to directly is the emergence in the Arab world of a "silent majority" with a more liberal mindset, especially among the young. This promising trend reveals itself in

generational comparisons of global opinion polls. Arab youth have more access to information from the outside world than ever before, and they are embracing values shared by other young people globally, rather than the values of their parents' generation. Specifically, Arab youth yearn for greater participation in civil society, emancipation from patriarchal hierarchies, and more space for individual creativity. While education did not emancipate as much as in the rest of the world, owing to the conservative curriculum, youth did.

Given these findings, the 2015 report advises national,

youth of the region are becoming continually more disenchanted with the ossified political power structures that marginalize them. Unless governments wake up to this blinding reality, they are going to have to deal with far more than a few extremists."

The new silent majority is the best defense against the radical and suicidal undercurrents that have filled the political vacuum created by the collapse of the old order. Reform-minded Arabs must aim to widen the center, rather than trying to bring together the fringes. And the silent majority needs to break its silence. Otherwise, revolts



PHOTO: SUSOLOGO

regional, and international progressive groups to support the forces of emancipation, which hold the key to finding homegrown solutions to the challenges of ensuring better governance, more productive economies, and more resilient societies. The only route to large-scale change in the Arab world is to unleash innovation and creativity – and that demands an unbounded civil society.

Fundamental civil rights must be established, supported by deep changes in the education system, reforms of family law, and a more open space for media and culture.

The 2015 report, which I hope will be published soon, should encourage a reasoned and constructive regional conversation. It begins with this warning: "The

against an unacceptable status quo will continue to be led by extremists, who have only grievances, not aspirations.

The early 2000s held promise for the Arab world, and in today's youth we can see it renewed. Arab civil-society reformers must be encouraged to speak up now, or risk losing that promise for another generation.

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THE US ELECTIONS

Trump's campaign slogan, "It's the Economy, Stupid" is a risky one

DR. ABDULLAH SHIBLI

ECONOMIC times in the US are not bad in comparison with the uncertainty and volatility that has gripped the rest of the world following Brexit, but ask anybody and you will always get the familiar response, "Things could have been better". Since the US is headed for a presidential election in less than four months, this feeling of general unease does not bode well for the incumbent or the Democrats. In recent memory, two sitting presidents lost their jobs because of voter concerns about the economy, Jimmy Carter in 1980 and George Bush in 1992. In 1992, during the US presidential elections, Bill Clinton was running a dogged campaign against an incumbent George H.W. Bush, also known as "Bush 41". The odds of unseating President Bush were slim, given that it only happened three times in the last 60 years, and only when the economy was in a bad shape. In 1992, the US economy was in a modest slump following the First Gulf War, and George Bush was vulnerable. So Clinton's campaign advisers, particularly a seasoned strategist named James Carville, seized the opportunity and came up with the most memorable campaign slogan in recent times, "It's the economy, stupid", and Bill Clinton was elected president.

How does all this relate to what's happening now? The current incumbent President Obama is a Democrat and has successfully pulled the US economy out of a mess. The official unemployment rate is low, but according to recent jobs reports, the average for the last three months dropped to 150,000 – pulled down by the May numbers. Economists are also considering another indicator: the percentage of 25- to 54-year olds who have jobs. In 2006, before the recent recession, it was 80 percent and then it took a dip during the 2008-2009 recession hitting the low point of 75 percent and now is higher,

but still at 78 percent.

Now, Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican candidate for President, is a shrewd campaigner, and his campaign strategists are now spending day and night poring over the forecast and data from the Federal Reserve, Congressional Budget Office, and the Council of Economic Advisers. They are also reading the tea leaves, and churning the crystal ball to guess what shape the US economy will



be in during the election campaign in the next five months. And, I will not be surprised if he turns the tables on the Clintons and proclaims, "It's the economy, stupid!"

For the off-shore observer, the news that the unemployment rate is below five percent ought to be good. But the recent uptick sent chills through the presumptive Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton's economic advisers. And then there are some other hidden weaknesses too, low inflation rate and sluggish growth in the wage rate. A robust and sustained growth in these areas would

have triggered a critically anticipated increase in the fed funds rate and send a signal to the economy that "All's well". But all that did not happen, and the Wall Street and the global financial markets were rocked by another round of price variations in the wake of Brexit.

The latest inflation rate for the United States is 1.1 percent through the 12

months that ended in April 2016, as published by the US government on May 17, 2016, and it is well below the Fed's target rate of 2 percent. The next meeting of the Federal Reserve System's Open Market Committee (OMO), the group that sets interest rate policy, is scheduled at the end of July. It is very unlikely that the Fed will raise the rate at the July or September meeting since growth in GDP is not robust and the economy is facing "headwinds" from developments overseas.

Even The New York Times, which generally touts Democratic agenda, has been blaring that the "US economy is

weak". The irony is that often the public perception is at odds with the real condition,

in other words there is a gap between what is happening and what the voters think is happening. Unfortunately, what matters is the voters' perceptions. If there is no wage growth, with the existence of tough labour market for the average guy, and jobs and business that are disappearing, then the bright sunshine that will usher in a new summer may not matter. While the unemployment rate is low, according to a very well-respected research report, during presidential elections, the unemployment rate is not correlated with the outcome of the elections.

Rumour has it that Donald Trump and the Republicans will play the economy card against Hillary Clinton, given her association with the current administration and the recent sobering news on employment growth. Of course, it is too early for him to bring the economy as the central theme of his campaign, since there are still a few unpredictable economic variables which might be game-changers: Overseas markets, impact of Brexit, and prospects of China's recovery. The US is currently negotiating seriously with China to align its exchange rate and trade policies for their mutual benefit. It will also discreetly ask China to pay heed to the recent judgment on the South China Sea islands by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague. At last month's eighth annual US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED), Secretary of State John Kerry said, "We have a chance ... to define a new relationship. We have an inescapable responsibility -- a shared duty -- to lead in the direction of stability, prosperity, and peace." Since Barack Obama can take full credit for starting this dialogue when Hillary Clinton was the Secretary of State, China's economic recovery will give the Democrats a much-needed boost.

Dr. Abdullah Shibli is an economist. His recent book, "Economics is Fun" is a collection of essays on economic policy.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Causes of extremism in Bangladesh

I read the article 'When kids become monsters' with interest published in TDS on July 5, 2016. The narration was correct and interesting. Thanks to Syed Mansur Hashim for penning an excellent piece. We would like to add the followings as to the causes of rise of terrorism in Bangladesh.

We witnessed the rise of religion based terrorism under BNP-Jamaat patronisation in 2001-06. Jamaat was calling the shots in that period. Bangla Bhai, Mufti Hannan, JMB,

more than 600 simultaneous IED blast in the country, 21st August grenade attack etc. were taking place at that time.

Wahabi influence as opposed to moderate Sufism, huge population burden specially youth, disproportionate percentage of young population with mouths and stomachs, severe level of corruption, social injustice, huge rich-poor divide, identity crisis, alienation of the young due to family, social problems, dysfunctional

families, absence of role models for the young, frustration among youths, unemployment, improper education or ill-education, intolerance, etc. have also played important roles in rising extremism in Bangladesh.

The government needs to plan and execute the solutions of this mega problem of extremism in Bangladesh ASAP.

Dr. SN Mamoon
Dhaka

PEC examination

This refers to Professor Manzoor Ahmed's write-up titled "Children's pain and mis-education to continue?" published in TDS on July 2, 2016. I endorse the views and suggestions expressed in the article. In this regard, I would like to add that the PEC examination system, in addition to having many other negative aspects, allows many teachers of primary schools to make money through coaching after

school. This is a major cause behind the deteriorating standard of teaching and learning in primary schools. The relevant authorities should come up with a rational decision regarding PEC examination without delay.

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