

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 25, 2009

**BOMB SQUAD**

# Religious extremism: A threat to democratic polity

AIR CDRE (RETD) ISHFAQ ILAHI CHOUDHURY

WITH the advent of 2009, Bangladesh has entered into a new era of democratic order. In the general election held on December 29, 2008, the people of Bangladesh gave a clear verdict in favour of a peaceful, progressive and democratic political order. The people voted to power a government that promised positive changes in the society. The Awami League (AL) that won sweeping victory promised, among other things, to fight religious extremism, to counter those who exploit religion for political ends and to promote a non-communal social order in the country. The election resulted in total debacle for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its ally the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). The fall of JI was particularly striking in view of their much-vaunted claim to represent the Islamic forces in Bangladesh. In a 300-seat parliament, the JI got only two seats; half dozen other Islamist parties got none. People unequivocally rejected the Islamist politics. It was a peaceful a revolution through ballots, more powerful than bullets. Despite popular verdict, people are worried once again as the law enforcing agencies keep unearthing huge caches of weapons and explosives, books and pamphlets, and arresting militants planning to carry out terrorist activities. It was clear that despite a nation-wide rejection of Islamist ideology, the hard-core

among them remains active and organised. The aim of the militants continues to be the establishment of a theocratic state in Bangladesh, by violent means, if necessary.

Today, the threat of Islamic militancy is the top-most security concern of the state. Since mid-1990, the militants, in the name of Islam, have killed hundreds of innocent people and maimed many more. It had cast its long shadow on the national image. Bangladesh was being viewed as a state sliding into the chaos of militant activities. This was quite in contrary to our age-old liberal traditions. Politics in Bangladesh was essentially democratic, secular and non-communal. The spirit of the Nation was epitomised in the Constitution (1972) that adopted secularism as a state principle and prohibited the use to religion as a tool of political expediency. The Constitution declared that the state could not declare any religion as state religion. However, it all changed after the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and many of the top-ranking political leaders in 1975. Those who seized power at the time found the Islamists as their political ally and started Islamising the society and the state. They revived Islamist parties and declared Islam as the state religion.

Over the next three decades, the Islamists made deep inroads into different spheres of our life. The power elites established thousands of madrassas that produced religiously indoctrinated youths who

*We have a multi-cultural, multi-religious society based on tolerance and pluralism. In fact, the people reacted to the militant threat to cultural traditions by even greater participation in those events. For example, since the bombing of the Bangla New Year Celebration on April 14, 2001, there has been a far greater participation of people in the celebrations every year. This was people's answer to the militant threat. Bangladesh represents a vibrant nation poised to take the challenges of the future.*

would be the front-line activists for Islamic movements. Madrassa students, especially of the Quomi (traditional) varieties, had extremely limited job prospect. Thus, a huge pool of youth was available who had no job and no skill worth selling. Either as an armed wing or as a splinter group of an Islamist party, these youth groups joined the so-called Jihadi cadre. The organisations such as Harkatul Jihad Al-Islam (HUJI) or Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) were born during the 1990s. Members of these organisations believe that the government of countries such as Bangladesh are fashioned in western (Christian) model and that a Taliban-style government must replace these ones.

Despite warning from many quarters, the government at the time adopted a policy of denial on the question of religious extremism and militancy. Starting from 1999 to 2005, the militants targeted temples, churches, political rallies, cultural functions, cinema halls etc. In fact, they carried out bomb attacks on anything that in their interpretation of Islam was un-Islamic. The BNP-JI coalition government kept on blaming the opposition for those attacks. Even when grenade attacks were made on the AL rally in Dhaka on August 22, 2004 killing 22 people and injuring AL chief Sheikh Hasina, the government came up with a sordid explanation that AL bombed itself to draw public sympathy. The series bombing on August 17, 2005 finally broke the governmental stupor. In 2006-07, we saw a series of arrests, prosecution and handing down of sentences, including death sentences, on some of the terror foot soldiers as well as kingpins.

From 2007 onward, the governmental efforts against the militants were limited to police action and court proceedings. Many terrorist cells were broken up, large caches of weapons and explosives were found, and much Jihadi literature seized. However, it was apparent that new terror cells were emerging all the time. They had no shortage of manpower; money and weapons were easily available, too. Money was available from internal donations and external assistance; weapons could be procured from the clandestine arms bazaar. While our law enforcing agencies had been successful in pre-empting the terrorists before they could actually launch their attacks, they have often not been able to find the underlying supply lines -- where the weapons are traded, bombs are made and the books and pamphlets are printed. We may well remember seizure of a truckload of ammunition in Bogra on June 27, 2003 or capture of 10-truck load of sophisticated weapons in Chittagong on April 2, 2004. Both cases remained

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# The challenge of fundamentalism and imperialism

TAJ HASHMI Comments on Tarek Fatah's Lecture

**T**HE inherent optimism in Fatah's writings about secular/liberal Muslims uniting to fight Western hegemony without compromising with the Islamists in the long run is noteworthy. One may cite his path breaking book, Chasing a Mirage: The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State (Wiley, Toronto 2008), in this regard. His stern warning against supporting the Islamists who in the name of fighting the West (which has been both hypocritical and opportunistic) want to establish fascism in the name of religion is very well-timed and laudable. Most definitely, Tarek Fatah is the voice of "liberal Islam" for Muslim regeneration, enlightenment, progress and above all, "peace within and peace without", the cardinal principle of Islam. --highlight

This is a review of Tarek Fatah's recent lecture on January 11, 2009 at the Family of Hearts convention in Toronto. Fatah is a renowned Canadian Muslim author and founder of the Muslim Canadian Congress (MCC), a platform of liberal secular Muslims in Canada. I have simply good things to say and write about this exceptionally inspiring and dazzling lecture because of the intrinsic value of this piece for secular/liberal as well as orthodox/conservative Muslims who despise imperialism and Islamist obscurantism,

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*The inherent optimism in Fatah's writings about secular/liberal Muslims uniting to fight Western hegemony without compromising with the Islamists in the long run is noteworthy.*

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militancy and terror. As renowned Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have endorsed Fatah's moderate and conciliatory views as expressed in his book on the mythical "Islamic State", so are they full of praise for this lecture. Among many others, renowned Indian historian Professor Harbans Mukhia thinks that "this is brilliant, absolutely outstanding piece.... I will circulate it to all my friends."

As Fatah has stipulated in the lecture, it is time Muslims across the board realise that as Western imperialism is baneful to human progress and global peace so is the dogma of hate and intolerance that invokes Muslims to hate everything the West represents through democratic and secular

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# Threat to democratic polity

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unsolved, with the perpetrators going unpunished.

At this stage, it would be worthwhile reflecting on the type of Islamic state that the militants envisage. Although the militants are organised under different banners, their ideology tends to be those espoused by Syed Qutub of Egypt or Maulana Maududi of Pakistan, i.e. the establishment of an Islamic state based on the strict interpretation of Sharia laws. In their view, an Islamic state was best represented by the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan or what the Pakistani Taliban is now setting up in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). It envisages that an Emir-ul-Mumenin (Commander of the Faithful), chosen by a council of religious leaders, would rule over the Islamic state. There would be no place for political party or political dissent in such a state. There would be no music, no dance, no poetry and no drama. All females must wear Burqa and all men must grow beard. Modern science, and technology, medicine or philosophy would be banned. Females need no education other than learning to read the Quran and should be married off by the time they are nine. While sports such as horse riding or archery would be allowed, playing football, cricket etc would be punishable offences. Even such entertainment as kite flying would be considered evil and punishable under the law. Quixotic as it might sound, to the militants these are ideals high enough to fight and die for.

Obviously, such archaic ideology found no favour with the people of Bangladesh. Threats from a fringe group of religious fanatics would make no dent on their faith and value system. Muslims of Bengal have long accepted music, poetry, dance and drama as a part of their culture and traditions. We have a multi-cultural, multi-religious society based on tolerance and pluralism. In fact, the people reacted to the militant threat

*Islamic militancy is a global problem that must be fought globally. An ideology needs to be confronted on ideological level. We have to recognise that Islam today is facing a crisis from within Muslims who wants to move ahead with the rest of the world versus those who want to push the clock back to the medieval age. There is a need for urgent social reform within the Islamic society worldwide. We need to address urgently the problem of poverty, ignorance and backwardness. As mentioned before, democratisation of the society is an insurance against extremist ideology.*

must be responsive to people's desire. We need to impart modern education to our youth that can prepare them to face the challenges of a fast changing world.

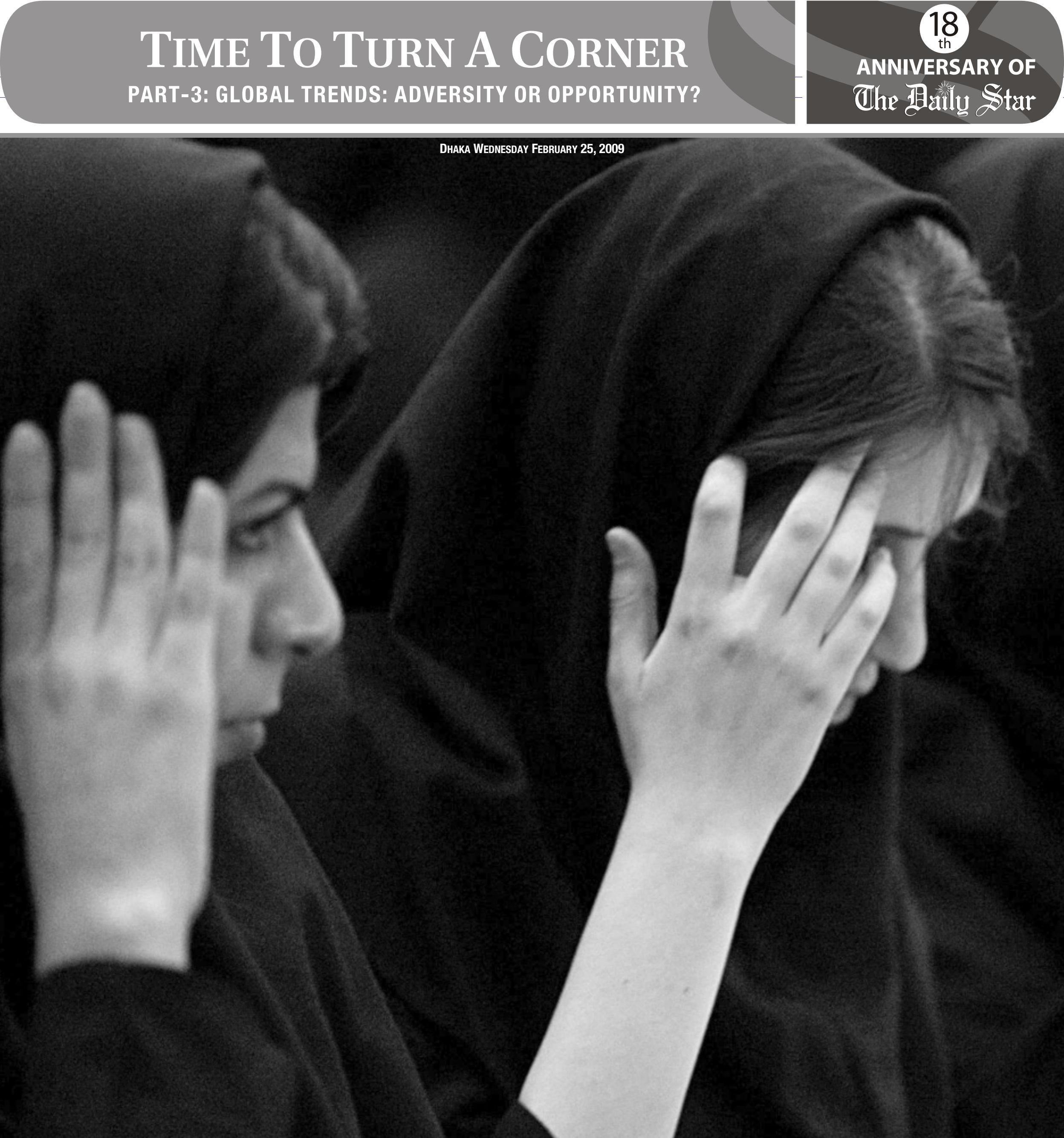
A thorough overhaul of madrassa education in our country is long overdue. The present multi-track education system with Bangla medium, English medium, Aliya and Quomi Madrassa systems should be merged to represent only one stream at least up to SSC (10 years) level. We need an education system that produce people with high ethical standards, a system that encourages free-thinking rather than rote-learning. All academic programmes must be scrutinised to rid those of communal contents. Government must legislate to strengthen multi-cultural, multi-religious, non-communal nature of our society. Use of religion to gain political mileage must not be permitted. The economic policy should ensure prosperity with social justice and equity. Along with socio-economic reforms, security operations must continue against the militants with renewed vigour. Our police and intelligence services need to be modernised; the investigative agencies must work without fear or favour, and the judiciary must dispense justice at the earliest. Prime Minister's recent call to form a South Asian Regional Coordination Centre for monitoring the activities of the terrorists is indeed the way forward.

However, we have our weaknesses too, weaknesses that gave birth to the militancy in the first place. Endemic poverty, high illiteracy, and unemployment provide a fertile ground for breeding militancy. The growing rich-poor divide in the society is a source of discontentment that the militants exploit. External forces can exploit our poverty to pump in money to fund militant ideology. Weak and indecisive governments, in the past, found it hard to resist external pressure. The militants do not need majority on their side; even a small segment of population motivated in extremist ideology would be enough. Socio-political structure in Bangladesh offers such a platform for the militants. Despite popular rejection of religion-based politics, it would be worthwhile remembering that the JI secured about 4 per cent of the total votes cast in the last general election. Minuscule as that may be, it could provide the nursery for future militant recruits. Bangladesh also faces the threat of militancy imported from abroad. Militants from abroad could try to use Bangladesh territory to launch attack against a third country, thus jeopardising our own security and national standing. Our 3000 Km-long porous border with India provides an ideal setting for cross-border militant activities. It is, therefore, important that we take the threat of militancy seriously and draw out a comprehensive multi-dimensional strategy to fight this menace.

Islamic militancy is a global problem that must be fought globally. An ideology needs to be confronted on ideological level. We have to recognise that Islam today is facing a crisis from within Muslims who wants to move ahead with the rest of the world versus those who want to push the clock back to the medieval age. There is a need for urgent social reform within the Islamic society worldwide. We need to address urgently the problem of poverty, ignorance and backwardness. As mentioned before, democratisation of the society is an insurance against extremist ideology. We, therefore, need to practise democratic values in our national life; we need to create space for dissent in the society. We need to establish the rule of law and provide access to justice for the poor and downtrodden. The government

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## Fundamentalism and imperialism

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values. Most importantly, Tarek's razor-sharp critique of some leftist intellectuals condoning Taliban atrocities and portraying them as merely "Pushtoon nationalists" is very timely and insightful. He has aptly cited the yawning gap between the "indigenous" and "foreign" secular/liberal/leftist Muslim perceptions of the so-called Global Jihad. While the former group of Muslim intellectuals, due to their first-hand experience of Islamist terror and intolerance in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other Muslim-majority countries consider the Islamists as backward-looking monsters, their secular/liberal counterparts mostly living in the West, romanticize the Islamists simply as "friends" out of sheer lopsided logic and understanding. He has rightly singled out Pervez Hoodbhoy and Tariq Ali as representatives of the "indigenous" and "foreign" Muslim secular/liberal intellectuals, respectively.

Considering all enemies of your enemy as friends could at most be cynical, at worst counterproductive and dangerous, so goes the main

thrust of Fatah's argument. As innocent victims of Western imperialism in Iran and Afghanistan have been suffering today for preferring Islamists as lesser evils to the pro-Western Shah and pro-Soviet communists respectively, Tarek's warning is very pertinent and timely, especially for the secular/liberal Muslims in countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh. He has appropriately congratulated Pakistani and Bangladeshi (Muslim) voters for their en masse rejection of mullahs as their representatives. What he wants to see in the Muslim secular/liberal camps is solidarity against all forms of imperialism, intolerance and terror, Western and Islamist.

Registering his contempt for many Westernised bourgeoisie in Pakistan, who in his inimitable style, are "infatuated by the Islamists, romanticising them in the same way a yuppie drives a BMW while wearing a Che T-shirt", Fatah has provided an eye-opener for us all. His citing Hoodbhoy to warn the unaware is incisive: "A Taliban victory would transport us into the

darkest of dark ages. These fanatics dream of transforming the country [Pakistan] into a religious state where they will be the law. They stone women to death, cut off limbs, kill doctors for administering polio shots, force girl-children into burqa, threaten beard-shaving barbers with death.... Even flying kites is a life-threatening sin."

**One could not agree more with his insightful syllogism drawn from the lessons of history**

Thus when Japan attacked the US, its anti-American stance could not be and was never understood to be driven by an anti-imperialist doctrine. Similarly, when Hitler's panzer divisions fought advancing American and British troops in Western Europe, only a fool would have placed Nazi Germany into the camp of anti-imperialism.

Today, just because the Taliban or Hezbollah or Iran attack Americans or blow up their embassies and fly planes into the New York Towers, does not mean their anti-Americanism translates into anti-

imperialism [italics mine].

Tarek Fatah has demolished the Trotskyist Tariq Ali's position that Islamist Iran could be considered as "anti-imperialist" while the country practices "unbridled capitalism", where even the sea ports are privatized and trade unions banned. He has appropriately cited Mark Twain as an example of anti-imperialist intellectual in 19th century America, lamenting the fact that there are not that many Mark Twains [let alone a Bertrand Russell or a Noam Chomsky] in the Muslim World; and hardly any voice among Arab Muslims to speak out against "the occupation by Arab countries of Kurdistan, Western Sahara and dare I say, Darfur." He is also critical of Pakistan's sixty-year old military operations in Baluchistan.

His "maverick" (from the conservative Muslim view point) albeit constructive ideas for a rapprochement between the Western and Muslim worlds are timely and commendable. His bridge-building ideas are noteworthy: "The Western tradition is not Western in any essential sense, but only through an

accident of geography and history. Indeed, Islamic learning provided an important resource for both the Renaissance and the development of science [in the West]. The ideas we call 'Western' are in fact universal, laying the basis for greater human flourishing."

The inherent optimism in Fatah's writings about secular/liberal Muslims uniting to fight Western hegemony without compromising with the Islamists in the long run is noteworthy. One may cite his path breaking book, *Chasing a Mirage: The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State* (Wiley, Toronto 2008), in this regard. His stern warning against supporting the Islamists who in the name of fighting the West (which has been both hypocritical and opportunistic) want to establish fascism in the name of religion is very well-timed and laudable. Most definitely, Tarek Fatah is the voice of "liberal Islam" for Muslim regeneration, enlightenment, progress and above all, "peace within and peace without", the cardinal principle of Islam.

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A THROW-FORWARD ON GLOBAL ECONOMIC MELTDOWN

# Baboon's blood, and other remedies



SYED NASIM MANZUR

**O**N 26th January, 2009 at the 39th World Economic Forum at Davos whose theme this year was "Shaping the Post Crisis World", WEF delegate Richard Olivier hosted a seminar titled "Leadership lessons from Macbeth" for Davos delegates that included Russian PM Putin, NewsCorp CEO Rupert Murdoch and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.

"Cool it with a baboon's blood", he advised, quoting from the witches' immortal incantation to the troubled Thane of Cawdor. Other discussions included comparison of sorcery and banking and Madoff and Houdini. Incredible as all this may sound, if one year ago one had suggested that the US government would have to bail out Citi Bank and Bank of America, Americans would shop less and less, and tens of millions of unemployed Chinese workers would return from closed factories to the countryside, it would have sounded equally unbelievable. But today this is the reality we are faced with and most of the world's economy is convinced that the year(s) ahead will be much worse than the year past.

The most serious repercussion of the global economic crisis is the spectre of unemployment that is now looming across the world. From 11 million unemployed Americans to 14.4% unemployment in Spain to 500,000 Indian textile workers laid off in a week in Bangalore, 20,000 casual jute workers in Bangladesh, 20,000 layoffs at Nissan, this loss of jobs is both an outcome and a driver of crisis. Unemployment especially in the developed world dampens demand for exports from the developing economies and to a lesser extent demand for capital goods from the western economies.

So other than baboon's blood remedies what else have governments been

*Don't shoot the messenger. Policy makers must not discourage bad news in their attempts to show target attainment and look good. The preferred management style of the past the ostrich (bury your head in the sand and it will go away) is simply not going to work this time. The fallacy that exporters and industry can generate nonstop high growth must also be broken. Banks must be willing to take a long term realistic view and not panic at the first sign of a downturn.*

trying?

November 10, 2008: China announced a \$586 billion stimulus package with investments in infrastructure and public spending. Followed by major cuts in interest rates, real estate rates and taxes, and hiking up tax rebates to exporters. On November 17th Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security urged states to postpone raising the minimum wage.

November 24, 2008: Indian Government readied 50,000 Crores Indian Rupees for Infrastructure projects. The Indian central bank reduced repo and reverse repo rates, and government cut fuel prices and pumped more money into the Small Industries Dev Bank to increase loan flows to SMEs.

November 24th 2008: Confederation of British Industries (CBI) recommended a 10 step plan to their government that included incentives for small firms to employ apprentices as well as support for export firms. UK government cut VAT by 2.5% to 15% and the Bank of England has recently reduced the bank rate to 1%.

December 2008: Japanese government announced US\$253 billion stimulus package and is already considering an extra economic stimulus if the economy deteriorates further.

called the Green New Deal.

January 2009: US House of Representatives passed USD 819 billion economic stimulus package which includes a "Buy American" clause that mandates public projects financed by this package to buy US made iron, steel and manufactured goods.

January 13th 2009: Thailand's stimulus package of US\$3.3bn includes cash handouts for low earners, tax and interest rate cuts and subsidies for transport and utilities.

January 18th 2009: 91% of the eligible 22.7 million Taiwanese citizens had collected their NT\$3600 (USD107) worth of shopping vouchers, part of an NT\$ 85.7 economic stimulus package.

February 6th 2009: Italy announced 1500 Euros incentive to exchange their old cars to buy a new one and 500 Euros for a new motorcycle as part of a USD 2.56 billion stimulus package to encourage customers to buy cars and appliances and furniture.

February 9th, 2009: Malaysia announced cuts in electricity rates by 5-10% by end of February 2009 and job losses of 400,000 by end of the year.

So as nations scramble to salvage, revive and protect their economies through an array of actions such as stimulus packages, tax breaks, deval-

uation, handing out shopping vouchers, protectionist measures and interest rate cuts, what has Bangladesh been doing?

Bangladesh has announced that a task force to counter the fallout is being formed and will meet for the first time in end February or early March 2009.

In order to try and be part of the solution rather than the problem I would like to propose some actions maybe Bangladesh could take as well as some actions definitely to avoid, in the face of this global crisis.

#### DO'S:

Do accept that we will be affected and move on from there. More than half of the GDP of Bangladesh is connected to the global economy. Developed economies buy 85% of our total exports and sell us about 60% of our total imports. If we add India and China to this equation the percentages are even higher. Today almost all the western economies are grappling with collapsing demand, rising unemployment, a financial system in disarray, failing banks and tightening credit.

China is spending hundreds of billions of dollars to stimulate local demand and also to try and provide jobs for tens of millions of displaced workers returning to the countryside.

India is faced with shrinking demand for its goods and services and revising its growth targets downwards. Do we really believe we can escape unscathed?

Do use this opportunity to realize the importance and potential of the local market for goods and services. For too long our policies have prioritized only exports and our entrepreneurs have chosen trading over manufacturing. We need to foster and encourage industrialisation as a means to create jobs and new consumers. Prioritizing ADP projects with maximum multiplier effects and ensuring implementation will also help boost local demand.

Do identify areas and sectors that need help and provide targeted help to deliver the growth we need. Frozen foods and jute goods are two such export sectors that are already facing a downturn in demand. Increased pre and post shipment financing, setting up internationally accredited testing facilities and working with our development partners to promote eco friendly jute abroad could be such actions. There is no one size fits all solution so it is essential that there is continuous dialogue with the stakeholders to best understand their needs.

Do diversify export base and markets with a long term view. Pharmaceuticals and IT as new products, Japan for our garments and Taiwan as a new destination for our manpower are just a few examples.

Do reduce the effective Bank interest rates and charges which in Bangladesh still continue to be very high especially when compared with our competitors in the region. The high deposit rates that are being maintained in the interests of pensioners and few others can be replaced by "special savings bonds" to help bring down the cost of capital for banks. As interest rates come down all over the world we must find ways to allow our banks to do

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# What has come of global war on terror?



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN, ndc,  
psc (Retd)

**T**HE US was not the first country whose people were victims of cruel terror attacks... but only in the US was a terror attack answered not by a call for justice but by declaration of war. In the rest of the world reactions to terrorist attacks remain very different" (Phillis Bennis, ' Global war on Terror'- in 'War With No End' - 2007)

The war, launched by the Bush regime in October 2001 with the senseless and inhuman bombing of Afghanistan that cost more than 1000 lives, and which came to be known as the global war on terror (GWOT), has gone on longer than WW-II. And ever since, the civilised world has been wondering whether the 'war' has been able to combat global terrorism successfully, or it has actually spawned terrorism and provided the terrorist groups the much needed scope to project their 'cause' to the world, and whether or not that, in turn, has helped swell the ranks of the terrorists.

This question has become even more relevant following George Bush's "Operation Iraqi Freedom" where the Iraqis are not sure what freedom actually is, being delivered from the devil (Saddam) only to be cast into the deep sea (what Iraq is now, under US occupation). And the elusive freedom has cost the lives of about 655,000 Iraqi civilians up to

*Speaking to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York in May 2007 this is what John Edwards, then the Chairman Democratic Party had to say about GWOT. 'The core of this presidency has been a political doctrine that George Bush calls the "Global War on Terror." He has used this doctrine like a sledgehammer to justify the worst abuses and biggest mistakes of his administration, from Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, to the war in Iraq. The worst thing about the Global War on Terror approach is that it has backfired - our military has been strained to the breaking point and the threat from terrorism has grown.'*

autumn of 2006, a very large percentage of which are children. This, notwithstanding the national and regional polls in that country, and the promise of President Barack Obama to withdraw US forces from Iraq in the next two years, has laid open a very ominous prospect of internal dissensions which terrorist groups will be only too happy to exploit. Where there was no terrorist nor Al Qaeda influence at all, leave alone links, Iraq is now a country that lends itself to exploitation by extremist groups of different ethnic denominations; it is a veritable tinderbox waiting to explode.

What is more interesting is that the most acquiescent of the US allies, Great Britain, which, under its pliant Prime Minister Tony Blair was prepared to follow Bush to the end of the world, has now come out very

strongly against the so-called war on terror. The most severe indictment to be delivered, and that too by the staunchest of its 'war on terror' policy ally, has come in the form of denunciation of the US policy by none other than the British Foreign Secretary David Miliband himself. And it came less than a week before Barack Obama was sworn in.

It is not difficult to say why the U-turn in approach. It is perhaps a suitable expedient for one ally to trash the policy of the departing administration of its friend, and associate with the new, more so when the two polices vary on their broad premise. However, what one is surprised to note, but happily nevertheless, is the British Government's acknowledgement that it was an errant bad idea, and to quote Miliband, "For a couple of

years now the British government has used neither the idea nor the phrase 'war on terror' since the concept of a "war on terror" was "mistaken." There cannot be a more credible report card of the Bush anti-terror policy, a policy, which has failed because it was propped up by lies, misinformation, half-truths and disingenuous double standards. However, one hopes that the new British position is not an afterthought but one that is the result of honest reappraisal of reality.

Even the Bush administration did not feel it convenient to continue to term its anti-terror operations as 'war' as evident from the US Secretary of State's statement in Oct 2006 to the Wall Street Journal that, "I don't think that this is a battle, if you will, or a struggle..." Notice the change in the characterisation of

"war" against terror that had by then transformed into "battle," or a "struggle." But that notwithstanding, some see this as 'an actual war not a war on terror but a worldwide war waged for power and control of resources.' (Phillis Bennis)

Speaking to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York in May 2007 this is what John Edwards, Then the Chairman Democratic Party had to say about GWOT. 'The core of this presidency has been a political doctrine that George Bush calls the "Global War on Terror." He has used this doctrine like a sledgehammer to justify the worst abuses and biggest mistakes of his administration, from Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, to the war in Iraq. The worst thing about the Global War on Terror approach is that it has backfired - our military has been strained to the breaking point and the threat from terrorism has grown.'

However, the neocons and the rightists in the US would like to see the war differently. Their common refrain, one that echoes the opinion of the erstwhile administration, is that the eight-year old 'war on terror' has been successful; the measure of which is that there has been no attack on the US mainland since 9/11, or that the US casualties in Iraq have decreased, particularly after the 'surge' in 2007. And this is where the narrow focus of the protagonists of the war prevents them from grasping the overall picture globally.

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## Baboon's blood

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the same and then ensure that their profits are not at the expense of our competitiveness. Otherwise the only industry that will remain is the banking industry.

Do ensure we have a competitive exchange rate regime that will also take into account our growing exports in Euros. The effects of devaluation of the Indian Rupee in the last few months on our export competitiveness have already been widely reported. The Bangladesh Bank needs to ensure spreads between buying and selling rate are competitive and also issue a specific guideline to banks and exporters clarifying that exporters are NOT bound to sell their export bills to their financing bank. This will promote interbank competition for export bills and improve the bargaining power of the exporters.

Do ensure credit availability to productive sectors of the economy with special emphasis on helping exporters face longer payment terms abroad as well as more credit risk on foreign debt-

*In order for us to have even a fighting chance of success, the government must try and create consensus amongst all stakeholders on the severity of the problems that we are facing as well as the best ways to move forward. It is imperative that the government occupy the moral higher ground and adopt a very conciliatory and magnanimous stance to ensure that the democratic process is re-established. Given their overwhelming majority in parliament it is hoped that the government will do whatever it takes to ensure that the opposition is actively encouraged and allowed to play its positive role in parliament.*

ors. In India the US\$1 million per annum automotive components export sector came under threat recently when banks stopped providing pre shipment finance for orders from General Motors, Chrysler and Ford. The Government stepped in and back stopped finance for the exporters

as insurer of last resort.

#### DON'T's

Don't shoot the messenger. Policy makers must not discourage bad news in their attempts to show target attainment and look good. The preferred management style of the past

the ostrich (bury your head in the sand and it will go away) is simply not going to work this time. The fallacy that exporters and industry can generate nonstop high growth must also be broken. Banks must be willing to take a long term realistic view and not panic at the first sign of a downturn. The recent announcement by the Finance Minister to set up a high powered task force that will include business people as well as bureaucrats and academics is a very important step to ensuring that we get the right information on time.

Don't live in denial by waiting for the crisis to worsen too much in Bangladesh before acting. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. For example GOB must proactively monitor the remittances flow and situation in our major source countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Malaysia and UK. The reduction of flights by Saudia recently as well as cancellation of some low cost Gulf carriers due to insufficient loads could be useful leading indicators.

Don't crowd out credit flow to the private sector through over ambitious ADP projects that remain unutilized. Already in the first half of fiscal 2008-2009 the government has exceed Bangladesh Bank borrowing targets. Government must resist the pressure for "pork barrel" projects from its own lawmakers. Public spending has to be targeted with measureable outcomes that also have a wider economic and/or social footprint.

Don't increase the cost of doing business. The decision of the

Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission to impose annual license fees on captive power generators for industry by April 30th is a perfect example of adding insult to injury. Government has failed to provide power to the private sector, who, have been compelled to invest millions of dollars in buying and operating these generators as a solution to the problem. And today BERC is trying to force industry to pay millions of takas in fees for having found a way to keep their factories running.

Don't "create" issues that can lead to political instability and a return to strikes and social unrest in this time of crisis.

In order for us to have even a fighting chance of success, the government must try and create consensus amongst all stakeholders on the severity of the problems that we are facing as well as the best ways to move forward. It is imperative that the government occupy the moral higher ground and adopt a very conciliatory and magnanimous stance to ensure that the democratic process is re-established. Given their overwhelming majority in parliament it is hoped that the government will do whatever it takes to ensure that the opposition is actively encouraged and allowed to play its positive role in parliament.

The opposition party must also own up to its responsibility of being the honest broker in parliament and ensuring that the government is held accountable to the people. The political parties must be able to build consensus and common positions on key economic issues to ensure maximum public support and buy in. Otherwise we run the risk of these actions or policies being mis-represented for political capital as has happened in the past. We need good governance, above all.

These are truly historic times. Industrial giants such as GSK, P&G, Kraft Foods and Unilever have recently announced that they have removed all financial targets, such as the volatility in the business environment! The invisible hand has proven to be fallible so Bangladesh needs now more visible direction and leadership.

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Don't increase the cost of doing business. The decision of the



## Global war on terror

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The so-called war on terror is being fought not only in Iraq or Afghanistan, but in its effort to take the war outside its frontiers the US is now also involved in Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Libya, North Korea, Indonesia, and Europe, where its involvement includes intelligence and diplomatic operations in pursuit of GWOT. Thus, while the fact, that no more attack has been conducted on the mainland US since 9/11, is flaunted as an index of success of US anti-terror policy, what is overlooked are the attacks that have been conducted on US allies or its interest outside its borders. Moreover, many US analysts see little correlation between the claimed success of Bush policy and the fact that there has been no further attack on US mainland since the Twin Towers assault, because it may well be that no new attack on the mainland have been attempted as it was not felt necessary to do so by the anti-US terrorist groups.

The causes of failure of the so-called global war on terror lay in its very philosophical concept. And this has been very aptly encapsulated by Keith Spence of the University of Leicester in, "World Risk Society and War Against Terror", where he states, "Despite its global character, war against terror is constructed through outmoded vocabularies of national security and sovereignty, within which the reasoned negotiation of risk is marginalised. This exclusion contributes to the intensification rather than reduction of terror and terrorism. In so doing the moment of violence inscribed within the concept of the political resurfaces in the constitution of war against terror, Homeland Security, and the identities and anxieties that they reproduce."

Even the 2007 national intelligence estimate (NIE) was bad news for the Bush administration, and indeed for those that wanted to see an end to the spate of terror-driven violence one is witnessing in many parts of the world today. The estimate contradicted the

optimism of the administration that the war in Iraq would reduce terrorism. As the NIE states, terrorism has intensified since the occupation of Iraq by the US and its coalition of the willing, and Iraq has become the leading inspiration for new Islamic extremist networks and cells that are united by little more than an anti-Western agenda.

Assessing the success of GWOT is neither a matter of speculation nor of perception but of acknowledging the existing reality. While much had been made by the Bush administration of the fact that two-thirds of al Qaeda's leadership had been caught, the mastermind, Bin Laden, a US sponsored intelligence asset, created and sustained by the CIA, remains at large, with no indication that the terrorist organisation's capability has been reduced.

For South Asia the disturbing consequence of the Bush policy is that the so-called war that is being fought in its doorstep, will certainly increase in intensity now with the focus under Obama turning from Iraq to Afghanistan. Pakistan has already become inextricably a part of the GWOT, with very little prospects of the situation stabilising.

The onus of concluding the so-called war on terror has now fallen on the lot of the Obama presidency, as most had predicted. The inevitability was also acknowledged by the erstwhile administration when the US Secretary of State, in the same statement in Oct 2006 to the Wall Street Journal had said that the battle would not be won on George Bush's watch. One would like to think that Obama would live up to its pledge to reject Bush Doctrine by showing its readiness to commit to international law and institutions and declaring its readiness to shun unilateralism and accept multilateralism and respect for other's sovereignty.

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