

## Bank robbery

*Criminals looking for new pastures*

THE city has witnessed at least five incidents of robbery in less than a week's time, the latest being the looting of a Pubali Bank branch in a busy area.

The incidents are cause for concern. The way the robbers have been carrying out their plans and getting away with the booty does suggest that they are committing the crimes in a very planned and organised manner.

That they have committed crimes of more or less the same type over the past one month or so is something that the law enforcers need to analyse critically to have a better understanding of what is going on. Maybe, the violent public reaction to mugging, which led to quite a few incidents of lynching, has forced the professional criminals to look for new pastures. So far they have achieved success with their plan of pouncing on financial institutions or offices of business concerns. Clearly, they had to gather detailed information before committing such crimes. So it is obvious that the intelligence network of the law enforcers failed to counter the plans. Since the pattern of crime in the city is apparently changing, the law enforcers also have to change their plans. It is essentially a question of thinking ahead of the criminals.

The situation, however, cannot improve if the criminals enjoy an edge over the police in firepower and logistic support. The robbers are reported to be using sophisticated weapons and making the best use of the communication devices at their disposal. Again, the law enforcers have to correctly assess the strength of the criminals and prepare themselves accordingly. This is not an area where stern or drastic measures can be postponed without keeping people exposed to organised crime. What must not be forgotten is that people will feel increasingly insecure if police fail to make a quick dent in the crime situation.

The task of the law enforcers must have been made less complicated since reports indicate that the politically influential patrons and godfathers have withdrawn their support, at least to some extent, for the goons. But crimes like robbery, murder, acid throwing and abduction are still being committed on a regular basis. So the onus of proving that they are doing enough to contain the latest wave of crime now rests with the law enforcers themselves.

## Vibes from G-8 summit

*Very little for developing countries*

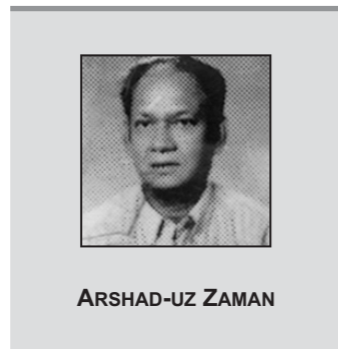
A PART from the extraordinary Iraq war hang-ups, there were some 'firsts' to the G-8 summit convened in Evian early last week. For the first time in the history of the grouping some leading developing countries were invited to the inaugural. And, in keeping with that novelty, the African focus was also a maiden thing. A laudable sensitivity was shown to a continent reeling under the most burdensome set of health and developmental problems conceivable.

But such initial vibes would get lost down the road -- in the whirlwind of other most 'pressing considerations' exclusive to the Group of Eight. To that extent, it sounded exclusionary. Their final statement paid little attention to the developing countries, especially Africa, by way of pledging to lift them from the morass of poverty.

On the political side of the summit, they more or less agreed on two points: first, the bitter divisions on the Iraq war notwithstanding, they signalled a certain readiness to work together not only on reconstructing Iraq but a host of other problems as well. Secondly, they have put on notice North Korea and Iran to comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. As for Iran, differences exist between the US and other G-8 countries over how far they are willing to pressure Tehran. On North Korea, Bush administration's position has been basically reflected, the summiteers having agreed to support the regional approach, especially that of China, to prod Pyongyang to comply with its past commitments on nuclear non-proliferation.

In the essence, a reassuring signal has been sent to the apprehensive financial markets: "we are ready to work cooperatively to give a boost to the sluggish global economy." This is elaborated by another statement saying, "We are confident in the growth potential of our economies."

# St. Petersburg, Evian and Jordan



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

THE world has become so full of summiteers that it is becoming difficult to keep track. An attempt will be made to make a sense of it all.

First it is the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Petersburg, birthplace of the current occupant of Kremlin. A very select group of leaders of countries, powerful and not so powerful, assembled under the glittering chandeliers of the city, that used to be the capital of the powerful Czars of Russia. Amidst champagne in beautiful crystal glasses and beautifully illuminated stage the long legged Ballerina of Russia performed. Behind all this spectacular festivity, serious diplomatic activity was in progress. Thus host Vladimir Putin put up a brilliant show of fence mending with his special guest George Bush President of the USA. Their strain due to Iraq appeared to be a thing of the past and Putin nodded agreement when President Bush invited him to the USA.

For Vladimir Putin the question that overrides everything else is to gain equal status with his powerful rival, the US, with whom Soviet

Union shared the world stage on an equal basis.

Thus among the guests at the festivities were present the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). These are nearly a dozen Turkic states who emerged as Independent states following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. This was a severe blow to the Soviet Union as she saw a large chunk of her empire slip away. The Soviet Union was not like another state. It was based on a distinct ideology and had a world wide reach. To this day Russia is trying to come to terms with this excruciating experience.

Russia has been trying her utmost to build a special relationship with CIS. It is therefore no wonder that at the festivities in St. Petersburg these CIS states received special treatment.

On the world stage Russia continues to maintain the posture of special relationship with the US by virtue of her size, resources and particularly her military might. Of course the passage from command economy to market economy is a very painful one. In the meantime

## THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

Under President Bush's leadership Mahmud Abbas, the newly appointed Prime Minister of Palestine and Ariel Sharon, the Prime Minister of Israel would try their hand at finding a solution to their long festering dispute. With Bill Clinton there was more than a glimmer of hope. Clinton had succeeded for the first time to be perfectly evenhanded towards the Palestinians and the Israelis. The antipathy of President Bush towards the Palestinians and sympathy towards the Israelis are well known. How he can mediate is the big question.

The US continues to treat Russia with silken gloves. In any case both Russia and the US have buried the hatchet growing out of the war in Iraq. Given the size of the two giants, they have no other choice.

The other major encounter in St. Petersburg was between President Bush and President Jacques Chirac of France. During the debate within

the Security Council President Bush was deeply angered by the French threat to veto the Security Council resolution to attack Iraq. Since then much water has flown down the Tigris. The leaders of the US and France met and the media spent a lot of time about the length of the handshake and if there had been eye contact or not. Since the leaders

have to deal with the realities of the moment, they prefer to let bygones be bygones.

The relation between France and the US is on a different level. Whereas the US continues with the trappings of a Superpower, France can be no match. Yet the truth is that France speaks in the name of the emerging powerhouse, European Union (EU). We live in a world where everything is in a state of flux. Since 11 September 2001, US has lost her superpower status and there is a great power void throughout the world. Thus US continues to live under the illusion that she is the sole superpower, whereas it is really a multipolar world. The pushing and shoving that we have witnessed in the recent past is a manifestation of this phenomenon.

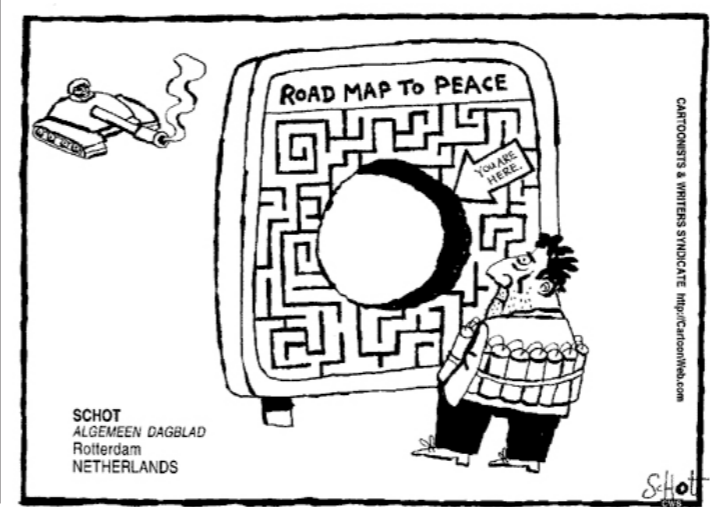
At Evian in France, where G8 has just met, it is an altogether different G8. Along with the eight highly industrialized countries of the world have been present countries from Asia and Africa. France, a former colonial power in Africa, has been cultivating for long establishment of influence in the African continent. Thus we saw a large number of

African leaders. All this demonstrates that multipolarism is the order of the day. In all this hullabaloo, we are apt to forget that it was Iraq, her huge oil reserve and her stand against Israel, that triggered the crisis in which the world finds itself. It is perfectly possible that the big powers will hand over this matter to the UN. The US-British attempt to set up a credible administration has not met with much success so far.

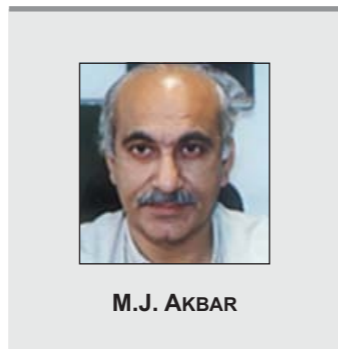
From Evian President Bush proceeds to Egypt followed by a trip to Jordan, where he would play the role of peacemaker between Palestine and Israel. Under President Bush's leadership Mahmud Abbas the newly appointed Prime Minister of Palestine and Ariel Sharon, the Prime Minister of Israel would try their hand at finding a solution to their long festering dispute. With Bill Clinton there was more than a glimmer of hope. Clinton had succeeded for the first time to be perfectly evenhanded towards the Palestinians and the Israelis. The antipathy of President Bush towards the Palestinians and sympathy towards the Israelis are well known. How he can mediate is the big question.

When President Bush sits down at his Camp David retreat, he will have time to reflect on the gains and losses of this trip. Hopefully sooner rather than later, he will have to accept that the Unipolar world is gone for ever.

Arshad-uz-Zaman is a former Ambassador.



## Checkpoint Berlin



M.J. AKBAR

IT was an awesome display of German efficiency. I have no idea how long they took to roll out the red carpet for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at the Berlin-Tegel airport, but I am eyewitness to the reverse process. He had barely stepped off the hallowed wool when, out of some mysterious space in the air, three spirits materialised. Incidentally or coincidentally, they were clad in brilliant red sweaters and jogging trousers. They took position at the top of the carpet. An order crackled in the thin rain, like a gunshot at the start of a race. On the further edge a woman sprinted, tearing the wide tape that has secured the red carpet to the black tarmac. The other two, man and a woman, caught the carpet on the roll as it were, as it was being released from the tape, and whirled it up at running pace till it vanished into a thick circle.

VIPs come and go. The tarmac stays black for ever.

Berlin begins at the gate of the airport. There is no pause for a highway. You hit a traffic jam on the first turn. Perhaps Berliners felt safer within walking distance of their lifeline to the west when the Cold War froze their lives. This was the frontier city of this war, isolated and disputed in the middle of East Germany. It was the prize that the Soviet Union and the West nearly blew up the world for. There was nothing left to blow up in Berlin itself, because American and British bombers had

already done that in the last year of the Second World War. Some stark symbols have been preserved from a century of blood-river politics. In front of our hotel, at the top of Kudamstrasse, the street that has been host to both cabaret and spies, stands a cathedral without a spire, its jagged top cutting the air, its sculptured walls gaping with bombed craters. This is what the cathedral looked like when Berlin fell to the Allies in 1945, and this is what they have left it as: a memory of pain sublimated by faith. This cathedral without a cause has only one thing that works, golden clocks that tell the time, accurately and inexorably.

A thin wall sounds like an oxymoron. The Berlin wall was the first modern wall. It was thin and it was

standing to nourish memory with architecture that has become the art of shards.

If a wall can ever be said to have a heart, then Checkpoint Charlie was the heart of the Berlin wall. This was the very American name of the gate in the US sector through which official -- and, more deliciously, unofficial -- traffic passed. Desolate sandbags and a fluttering Stars and Stripes mark the crossroads of superpower games played with spies, economists, armies and nuclear missiles. Spies, fortunately, generated far more literature than the rest put together. Berlin was the theatre of all the great spy stories.

Windblown scraps of paper still litter the approach to Checkpoint Charlie. You walk across what was once deathly no-man's-land

tags collected by the winning side in the Cold War. The only smile on the windowscape of the museum is toothless and familiar. A picture of Mahatma Gandhi dominates the entrance. Gandhi is the messenger and the message amid the historical debris of so much war. Non-violence.

The first bit of graffiti that I saw as we drove out of the airport into the traffic jam said, simply: "F -- k War!" Chancellor Schroeder won re-election last year because he did precisely that. My little quarrel with the suggestion is actually a self-question. Why do newspapers continue to place two blanks in that four-letter word when every English-speaker whose age is in double digits has heard the word in the movies and knows what it means?

through a jungle. There is public art everywhere, on streets and open spaces, impressively comforting. The new government buildings in Berlin are light, sunny and minimalist, in deliberate contrast to the Gothic, columned, high and dense structures of an aggressive past. The future is going to be fashioned out of a minimalist present. The past is over. One of Hitler's offices, I am informed by a friend who is an exile from Dhaka, has now become an Indian restaurant owned by a Bangladeshi. If Hitler had been accorded a grave, he would be churning in it.

Munich, capital of Bavaria in the south of Germany, was the political capital of the Nazi movement. It was in Bavaria that Hitler first tried to seize power, in 1923, but was

regional holiday to celebrate the ascension of the Virgin Mary to heaven. This province on the border of Italy is Catholic country and takes religion seriously. The ruling party is known as the Christian Social Union and wins office with ease. Truth to tell, the whole of Germany takes religion more seriously than the rest of Europe. Every citizen has to indicate on his tax form whether he is a believer or not. Every Christian believer has to pay a 'church tax' of two and a half per cent over and above the 40 per cent tax payable by high income groups. This seems a Christian variation of the Islamic zakat, by which two and a half per cent of your wealth must be donated to charity every year. The Church Tax pays the salaries of priests and renovates church buildings of both Catholic and Protestant alike. In return, the church provides society not only with food for divine thought, but also crèches for babies. This is an important service in a society where all women work and state schools care for the child after class one.

Martin Luther was a German, but after more than half a millennium the Protestant zeal seems to have diminished. There is a growing desire to return to a single, perhaps non-denominational, church. The Catholics have however neither forgotten nor forgiven. The Vatican recently reminded its followers that they could not take communion from any priest except that of the Catholic Church.

Unnecessary Fact of the Week: The much-married Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder does not dye his hair. Why is this news? Because he almost lost the election after a magazine alleged that he secretly dyed his hair. Schroeder sued and the controversy dyed a natural death. I can confirm that when we saw the Chancellor for about half an hour in Berlin, the grey had begun to show.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

## BYLINE

It is a bleak square mile, appropriately sparse, stark and unrelieved by either the green of the earth or the sunshine in the sky. Even the museum at Checkpoint Charlie is sombre, despite being full of victory tags collected by the winning side in the Cold War. The only smile on the windowscape of the museum is toothless and familiar. A picture of Mahatma Gandhi dominates the entrance. Gandhi is the messenger and the message amid the historical debris of so much war. Non-violence.

low. The age of battering rams and sieges was over. The wall was a paradox. It was not designed to keep the invader out. It was erected to imprison its own citizens, to prevent their escape to a better life.

To partition a country is a tragedy. To divide a city is obscene. The Communists needed thin concrete, cutting wire, searching lights and cocked guns to protect their paradise. They separated neighbours with fear. Berlin held its breath and waited thirty years before an edifice cracked in Russia and emotions were released with volcanic fury in Germany. Berliners brought the wall down, slab by joyous slab. Like the cathedral they have left parts of it

towards occasional remnants of the wall. An ornate, heavy and archaic building looms up. This used to be Goebbels' office. In front, adjacent to a park, is a narrow quarry of concrete boxes some six feet below ground level. This is one of the concentration camps in which the fascist Nazis sent Jews, gypsies and other untouchables to slave or die. The gas pumps that administered the final solution have also been preserved. Let us forget.

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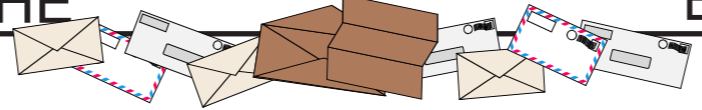
Only those whose age is in three digits don't know what it means anymore.

To recreate the past is stupid, said a bureaucrat who was building the future. Devastated by the warm war and distorted by the cold one, Berlin became an invitation to an idea when it was restored as the capital of reunified Germany. The new Germany sought to soften its image of a harsh, war-hungry past through a marvellous resurrection of nature. Berlin, like other German cities, is alive with greenery, trees and parks and occasionally even dense foliage. A river like Isar in Munich, actually just an adult canal, sometimes seems to be speeding

stopped. Hitler's first mass demonstrations took place here, in a city whose name means 'a monk's place'. Munich was given its first trading and currency rights by Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa, who took the most powerful Crusader army ever assembled towards Jerusalem. He might have changed that wayward course of history if he had not drowned in a stream on his way to Damascus. Hitler named his invasion of the Soviet Union, which changed the course of his history, Operation Barbarossa. Would that Hitler had drowned on the way.

We reached the Free State of Bavaria (which lost its independence only in 1933) on 29 May, a

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

## Tinkering with education?

It was published in your newspaper a few days ago about the selection of many books on Zia and Khaleda Zia for primary and secondary level students. What are we trying to do -- create personality cults like that in Saddam's Iraq and North Korea? It is a good thing that the government has dropped those books, or at least some of them. However, the matter does not end there. Questions still remain.

Robert Tarik  
On e-mail

## Not anti-Americanism

Recently I have noticed a debate on anti-Americanism in your Letters Page. I could not help but wonder how can criticism of Iraq war and George Bush's predisposed foreign policy be interpreted as anti-Americanism. Opposing a war that has been based on fabricated intelligence reports and USA's violation of UN resolution and international law is not anti-Americanism, it is the conscious understanding of any neutral world citizen. However, supporting the Iraq war, claiming that the Super Power has every right to intervene in the domestic

affairs of any nation in the name of liberating its population, and calling George W. Bush 'a man with vision' is definitely pro-American. As far as criticism of the Iraq war is being labelled as a religious obligation and/or inclination it is utterly superficial. Millions of people around the world (including America) protested the war regardless of their religion. So, it is not the moral responsibility of a Muslim but that of a world citizen that makes a person critical of a war that has caused so many civilian casualties, without the capture of the actual target terrorists. Incidentally, both the 'terrorists' that America seeks to find are Frankenstein created by America itself.

And as for George Bush being 'a man of vision' let us recap his 'visionary acts'. For a man who came to White House through a controversial Supreme Court verdict George Bush in his 'fight against terrorism' and also to divert the American attention from a downward economic condition waged a rushed war in Afghanistan, established a puppet government in Kabul, killed so many civilians in Iraq and captured their oil fields. Now since this war has caused America billions, contracts in Iraq are being generously handed over to American companies. Well, Bush

is visionary indeed, for these companies then relieves him of worrying about the expenses of his electoral campaign!

Farah Tasneem  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

This is in reply to Mr Elahi (June 03). It is not anti-American to oppose Mr Bush. In fact, it is a core American value to criticise and express dissent. Americans themselves have expressed their outrage at the actions carried out by their own government. If Mr Elahi had not noticed, the bigger anti-war rallies were held in America. People put their lives on the line in protesting the unjust war. I admit that many opponents of the war have used a knee-jerk anti-Americanism in their arguments (?). However, Mr Elahi should not confuse those with the rest of us. We oppose Bush, we love Americans and the values of freedom that America stands for.

A useful piece of information: the day anti-war rallies were held all over the world, number of protesters in Tel Aviv: 3,000; in Cairo: 600. So much for the Arab/Muslim solidarity!

Yahya  
USA

## Reasons realised

The Awami League chief and the

leader of the largest opposition party in the 8<sup>th</sup> Parliament has opened a new chapter of complaint against her party's defeat in the October 1, 2001 election. She realised and accepted in her public meeting at Paltan Maidan on 28.10.2001 that the defeat was due to her refusal to export gas.

At the early stage of election on 01.10.2001 and up to the date - 27.10.2001 before her public meeting on 28.10.2001 she discovered only one exclusive reason of her defeat that was "crude rigging". But in her public meeting on 28.10.2001 she deviated from the reason of defeat from crude rigging to refusal of gas export. Perhaps after some days, she will further realise to accept that the defeat was due to her open language and lack of leadership quality. Better, if the realisation comes sooner.

Nur Hossain  
Bangshal Road, Dhaka

## Extremists on both sides must be reined in

I am writing with reference to "Two-state solution of the Palestinian problem," by Muhammed Zamir

(may 31). Muhammed Zamir touched only a part of the obstacle facing the "road map" when he writes: "Israel, through various ways might create provocation and try to distract the peace process and derail this initiative. Palestine, particularly its radical elements, should avoid these baits however difficult it might be. They must understand that the last thing that Israeli extremist elements want is an independent Palestine State and they will resort to all means to thwart such an end."

In fact, extremists on both sides may be trying to sabotage the peace process. For the Palestinian hard-liners, suicide bombings may be the final salvo in a long war to dislodge the Jewish State. These hard-liners must be thinking that if the bombing can be continued, it can break the will of the Israeli people. For the Palestinian extremists, a Jewish state is an aberration in the Arab Middle East, and if the Palestinians are prepared to endure and continue their violent uprising, most Israelis would one day pack up and leave and Israel would unravel from within.

Israeli hard-liners may be thinking in a similar fashion. A few years ago, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (then a general) declared that a Palestinian state already exists and

its name is Jordan. Though he later said he changed his mind, without convincing anyone of his sincerity. However, many Israeli hard-liners may have concluded that they could progressively take over the West Bank, if the Palestinians could be persuaded to leave through the twin pressures of expanding Israeli settlements and military action. Any peace process will have to contain these extremists on both sides.

Mahmood Elahi  
Ottawa, Canada

## Pronunciation problem

The advent of private channels has done wonder in Bangladesh and you can see variety of shows in different channels. But the reporters and the newscasters fail perform up to the standard. Their pronunciation is worse than an average educated Bangladeshi and I am not counting English in it. Their Bengali pronunciation is so weak that it has become a subject of cracking jokes in places. But no body seems to bother about it instead the number of these so-called reporters and newscasters is increasing day by day. Television is the number one media in the world and if we have people who cannot pronounce even his/her

mother tongue properly that will not only tarnish the reputation of the respective channels but will also lose viewers.

I hope any channel before recruiting any reporter or newscaster would take a reading test and then employ them.

Badal Hasib  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

## Immature generalisation and premature commendation!

This is in response to Mahmood Elahi's letter (June 2). Criticising the US foreign policy does not automatically make a person anti-American, nor can/should it be generalised that condemning the US foreign policy is identical to condemning everything associated with America. Many people all over the world who spoke against the war on Iraq do acknowledge and appreciate the good things America has to offer to the world. If you are under the impression that when it comes to liking a country, there can be only two options (liking the country as a whole or vice versa), you are grossly mistaken. I have a few American friends who know that I strongly oppose America's foreign policy because I believe it's unilat-

eral to the extreme and often deceitful and immoral. They never claimed that they would stop being my friend just because I don't approve of America's foreign policy or I don't necessarily agree with them. They also never demanded that I give up my own opinions for the sake of ridiculous mumbo-jumbo like "tradition of respectful partnership with our worthy neighbour." On the contrary, they acknowledge that people outside America should also have the same rights and privileges that they have (such as the right to disagree and differ and the right to express one's opinions without the fear of any retribution).

As for quoting other people, subjective opinions are not adequate to validate a stance on a matter, nor can they replace the need for facts and evidence which are objective in nature. Please make note of that before you jot down another letter to paint everyone criticising America's foreign policy with the same broad brush or laud America's victory in Iraq contrary to the old adage "don't count your chickens before they hatch!"

Omar Sharif  
Simon Fraser University,  
Canada