

## Arms haul once again

*Increase vigilance along the border*

THE law enforcing agencies and the paramilitary forces, particularly the BDR must be commended for unearthing another cache of arms and ammo, this time in the border region of Halaughat. This was a part of their ongoing operations against Indian dissidents. Some people with alleged links to Indian dissidents have also been arrested.

We believe that the arrests and discovery of large quantity of weapons and ammunition reconfirm what we have stated before, that our territory, because of the porosity of our borders has become a safe transit route of dissident elements of neighbouring countries. And further more, because of the lack of oversight of the border areas, either because of paucity of border troops or because of the nature of the terrain, some of these areas have become a safe haven for these elements for hiding illegal arms and weapons. The worrisome aspect of the matter is the seizure of large amount of small arms ammunition. Small arms ammunition is most difficult to come by because while small calibre weapons can be replicated crudely and comparatively cheaply, the production of ammo cannot be possible without refined technology.

Although this cache is suspected to be for the use of Indian insurgent elements presumably in their own territory, the fact that such large quantity of arms were deposited in our territory is something that should be a cause for our concern. We feel that it is not very important as to who we think have acquired these weapons, and the possible circumstances of their use, that these can proliferate in our country through sale to the underground as well as other radical elements in exchange for cash, and could very well be used to destabilise the country, is what we should focus on.

Thus we must increase the vigil over of our borders, and the sensitive areas on our borders must also be reinforced by the BDR and its oversight increased so that the transit of illicit weapons, and cross border movement of dissidents, can be curbed and ultimately totally stopped, if possible.

This operation and also those that have led to the capture of large quantities of weapons and ammunition, we hope, would allay apprehensions of our neighbours that Bangladesh will not brook activities of hostile elements belonging to their countries.

## Wanton Israeli aggression

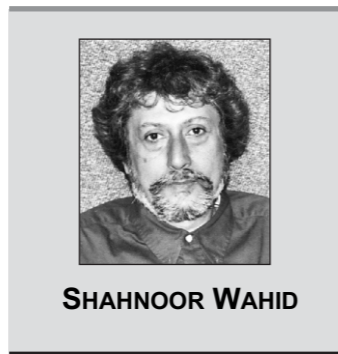
*Diplomacy must get a chance to avert full-scale war*

ISRAELI overland incursion into Gaza since Wednesday assumed a lethal character two days down the line by her 30 air raids on Hamas installations along the strip. In a blatant violation of international law, one-third of the Hamas cabinet along with 20 lawmakers were hauled up and literally abducted. To top it off, the Jerusalem residency rights of a minister and three MPs were revoked threatening their expulsion from the holy city. As the lives of innocent civilians are direly threatened, electricity and water supplies have been snapped foreshadowing a humanitarian disaster.

On the face of it, the abduction of Israeli soldier 19-year old Gilad Shalit by the Palestinian triggered the violent phase of Israeli aggression, but in truth the Israelis seem to have decided to finish off Hamas on the pretext of the kidnapping incident. The reasons why we say this is because: (a) Hamas has conveyed through Egypt its assurances of securing the release of Shalit; and (b) it is said to be aligning with that faction of Al-Fatah which recognises Israel. The reason why Israel treated the Hamas as a pariah is because the latter refuses to accept the existence of Israel as a state. Since such positive signals from Hamas are being overlooked by Tel Aviv, we are constrained to conclude that all that Israel wants is to annihilate Hamas. But the latter has been voted into power by the majority of the Palestinians and in running the government the last thing they can afford is to behave like a terrorist organisation.

Tel Aviv is bent on solving what is basically a political issue through military means. It is not even prepared to give diplomacy a chance in the matter of securing release of captive Israeli soldier Shalit, let alone seeking a political solution to the problem of co-existence between the Israelis and the Palestinians. If Israel doesn't stop showing off its military might courtesy the United States, the region may well be drawn into the vortex of another Middle Eastern war. Let the big powers din the right sense into the ears of Israeli leadership.

# Strange indeed is this land ...



SHAHNOOR WAHID

ALEXANDER the Great allegedly uttered the words: "Strange indeed is this land, Selucus," while observing the behaviour of the people of the land called Bengal. What the historians could not record for posterity was his next line: "Let's get out of here fast before we get drawn into their politics."

That is why he never ventured into the hinterlands of Bengal. And that decision perhaps saved the great conqueror from an ignoble inevitability. However, historians remain divided on the issue of whether Alexander at all said anything about Bengal. Well, let them remain engaged in hot debate and discourse on the subject, but we know for sure what we are, what we are up to, and why we are up to whatever we are

## SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

We foam at the mouth proclaiming ourselves progressive and democratic but underneath the heavy face make-up we are authoritarian to the core. This authoritarian character is reflected in our day-to-day interaction with our family members, domestic help, office subordinates, party followers, and people who earn their living by doing menial work. We are the "little sahibs" left behind by the colonial British.

upto.

First of all, we foam at the mouth proclaiming ourselves progressive and democratic but underneath the heavy face make-up we are authoritarian to the core. This authoritarian character is reflected in our day-to-day interaction with our family members, domestic help, office subordinates, party followers, and people who earn their living by doing menial work.

We are the "little sahibs" left behind by the colonial British. We never say: "Do not call me sahib," to a rickshawpuller or a vegetable vendor. We expect them to call us so. To us they are the lesser mortals. Socially and economically they are inferior to us. They must keep their heads bowed before us. They must not sit before us. And all the while we are the ones who will go on talking about jus-

ice, equality, human dignity, and human rights. We shall bring out processions and rallies on behalf of the downtrodden but we would not like to walk shoulder to shoulder with them. That's us, the members of the civil society.

Then we have this special breed of people who go about doing the "business" of politics, as they are not good at anything else. Strangely enough, these self-proclaimed people's leaders, or "netas" in Bengali, are always asking for people's blood! They goad others to lay down their lives so that they may go to power and buy brand new duty-free jeeps!

So, are they any different? No. Most of these people are also endowed with this classic attribute of authoritarianism even though they may be peddling everything packed as "democracy." These highly "progressive"

and "democratic" people simply love to treat the country as their estate and the people their tenants. They still have that streak of "Your Lordship" stuck somewhere in their mind and they meet the commoners only before the elections when they go begging door to door for their votes.

Then there is this unique nexus of politicians and bureaucrats. Though these politicians and bureaucrats talk all the time of accountability and transparency, yet they like to operate from behind the veil of deceit and deception. And when such politicians and bureaucrats join hands to form a nexus, it's "Twelve O'Clock" for the nation (meaning total disaster).

The Election Commission of the country at the moment has become a role model of non-transparency and authoritarian-

ism. People feel that a marriage of bureaucracy and politics is working just fine there and no amount of public pressure can do any damage to this matrimony. It has been flowing against the tide since the famous trio took hold of the helm there. They prefer to live inside a cocoon and do their work.

As a result, the more people write about their "karmakando" (work) the more reclusive they become. Presently the EC resembles the isolated monasteries on top of the Greek mountains. Only difference is the dwellers of the EC are not anywhere near the ascetics of those monasteries.

But a much greater miasma of confusion has pervaded society in recent times. Very unfortunately, it concerns the president of the country. Cynics are of the opinion that there is politics involved here. We are not good at politics and we had this notion that the president of the country was to be kept above politics. We the people are worried and confused and we like our president very much.

There is only one president and that is good enough for us. We don't want "one and a half presidents" because then our confusion would multiply. So, we hope it would not be asking too much if we want to know about the state of our president's physical and

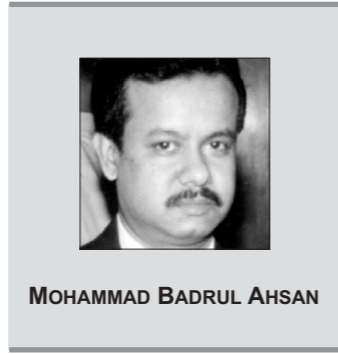
mental health and if we also want to meet him personally; just the way he meets us personally on Eid or Puja days. If we are allowed, we want to reciprocate the courtesousness of that institution.

Lastly, we want to talk about the "ghost readership" of newspapers in the country. It is because of these ethereal beings that the circulation of newspapers is going up every day. No, mortals in this country do not read newspapers, as these only write "fabricated tales." Our very own prime minister has said so.

They have rejected such "Poetic" tales of bizarre and stopped reading them. Therefore, it can be deduced that ghosts are behind the rise in circulation. Well, this is possibly the reason why many ruling-party supporters are also trying to bring out newspapers these days. They will also sell their papers to the innumerable "ghosts," just as the current publishers do. So, good luck to the future publishers of newspapers.

Shahnoor Wahid is Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

## Colour of the world



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

AT least five times in the last three weeks I have been told that the world is gray. Black and white are the primary colours of the moral universe, but the world is primarily a blend. False is real, truth is surreal. Honesty is of appearance, dishonesty is of essence. Right is preached, wrong is practiced. Nothing is ever what it seems. Black is wrong. White is right. The colour changes otherwise. Gray is when wrong is right, crooked is straight.

I was not convinced. But then people who argued offered proofs. George Bush went to Iraq on false pretense. Anything is fair in love and war. Politicians never tell the truth. Businessmen never disclose their incomes. People do what is convenient for them. Intellectuals are in connivance with the rest. Banks take money from customer accounts. Black money gets white in the budget. Nothing is pure. All is lure. Day nor night, we are in the Twilight Zone.

But I argued that character is a moral function of life. Black stands in its place, so does white. Gray is nothing but a smudge when both colours bleed and smear the moral space. That is when bad gets mixed up with good, immoral with moral, until our minds can no longer register the difference between hues. A fourteenth-century Japanese essayist named Kenko withdrew from the imperial court at Kyoto and spent his life as a Buddhist monk. One of the many things which irked him was how life around him had lost its character. He resented that the Japanese officials had even forgotten how to properly hang a

## CROSS TALK

I have been told that gray is at once necessary and sufficient. It is not enough to know black from white unless the mind learns to appreciate that what indeed matters is gray. I have been told that East or West, gray is the best. Everywhere it is the staple of success, the raw material which produces astute men who are deft actors on the stage. Gray gives the flexibility one needs, and saves the qualms of conscience from all misdeeds.

criminal.

What is surprising about the gray is not that it is improper, but that it is deemed as being proper. It is like going to a magic show and becoming deluded that illusion is real, that the magician's sleight of hand is what pushes the world. It is possible that some of us are colourblind, unable to tell black from white or even to notice that gray is a lighter shade of black or darker shade of white.

Gray is often a confusion, a moral dilemma created by error in judgment, which, again, is a by-product of misguided perception. We are unable to comprehend certain things as sight plays trick on the eyes, smell on the olfactory, touch on the skin, sound on the ears and taste on the taste buds. It is possible to view the world as it is not, when sense behaves like nonsense.

Not to say, the gray exists amongst us, all of us, like distortions are reflected even in the finest mirror. It is the moment of transference when light changes into dark, black into white or other way around. We encounter the moments of gray at the break of dawn or nightfall. Likewise, the moments of gray come when the mind is not sufficiently matured or goes over the hill in clarity and strength.

So, the world is not necessarily gray as some of us would like to think. Instead that is where lies the source of all moral deviations and depravities as we try to force the unreal on the real, falsehood on truth, shadow on light, thus creating the muddy water where we can fish. In fact, gray is used as a smokescreen to hide ulterior motives, the hideous, devious

elements of our thoughts and schemes.

And that is the gruesome fact of the world being gray. Corruption, squalor, dirt, filth, lechery and sordidness of men are swept under the rug. It is like drowning odour under a cloud of fragrance, a clever short-cut to get away from guilt and blame. Gray is when people live beyond their means, when people get jobs incongruous with their qualifications, when people are unfair, improper, biased, obscene and unabashedly deviant in their moral convictions.

Slavery is gray, prostitution is gray, and hypocrisy is gray. Politics is gray, diplomacy is gray, and affluence is gray. Any wrong that is committed in the guise of right is gray. Any ill intention in the guise of benevolence is gray. Anything done contrary to its appearance is also gray. Pimping is gray, promiscuity is gray, and profiteering is gray. Any attempt to dupe others, however intelligent, is obviously gray.

I have been told that gray is at once necessary and sufficient. It is not enough to know black from white unless the mind learns to appreciate that what indeed matters is gray. I have been told that East or West, gray is the best. Everywhere it is the staple of success, the raw material which produces astute men who are deft actors on the stage. Gray gives the flexibility one needs, and saves the qualms of conscience from all misdeeds.

But does it really absolve us from the guilt? Colours may degenerate, black fading and white shading, but does it really justify the loss of original shades?

Shall we accept that loss in the birth of our children? Shall we accept it in the loyalty of our spouses? Shall we allow gray in our right to property? Shall we accept confusion in our own identity?

If the answer to these questions is no, then how could it ever be yes? Gray is illegitimacy, gray is infidelity, gray is insincerity, and gray is inconsistency. It is, by and large, the mother of degeneration, debauchery, depravity and disillusionment. Natural gray exists as a hiatus in the colour scheme, a half-way house between black and white that confirms the two extremes.

Concocted gray is a different story. It is created to compound black and white so that we can not tell which exists. This gray is a holiday resort for the compromising minds, sipping on the drinks of ecstasy in the beachfront of corruption. This gray is drunken revelry of aroused minds, looking for more drinks on the excuse to get sober.

Gray is gray like black is black, or white is white. We need it to understand, not misunderstand, the other two colours. The world has as many shades as colours. If we believe that the world is gray, we lose sight of other colours.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## Parallel paradigms

NOUSHI RAHMAN

LONG-term acute financial hardship permanently affects our thinking patterns. Even among the wealthiest, memories of financial hardship live large. Admittedly, unyielding desire to overcome hardship and immense hard work have led to financial and social upward mobility for some. Notwithstanding, whether one is well off or not, many become trapped in either of two cognitive paradigms. Let us call these "working to live" and "living to work" paradigms.

### Working to live

From the extreme poor to the lower-middle class, most people work (or seek work) to earn money for sustenance. When one works to merely live, the nature of the work is seldom of concern. Rather, money becomes the primary object of interest. Not surprisingly, people belonging to the "working to live" paradigm often measure themselves and others in terms of their financial worth. People belonging to this paradigm really do not have the option to not work, for work is what enables them to meet fundamental needs of food and shelter. As these people work to merely survive, they dream to live better (i.e., moving beyond basic sustenance). However, most often the expanse of their poverty-stricken kinship is so vast that they seldom escape the stronghold of this paradigm within one lifetime.

For people who work to live, a few accept this condition as fate, while many try tirelessly to "work" their way out of this vicious paradigm. Since most of them lack any capital and business experience, they shun entrepreneurial ventures and opt for the slow-paced route of escape through work. Surely, among the many who work throughout their lives, some successfully free themselves from the stronghold of the "working to live" paradigm. Their indefatigable work spirit and their conviction for work usually reach uncharted heights. This, however, leads them to a new paradigm of "living to work."

### Living to work

The "living to work" paradigm takes

form from the Calvinistic perspective, which views work as worship. Many successful people of our poverty stricken country have had to work so hard for so long that they have been institutionalized to work. Generations of acute hardship may have even had its mark in their genetic code. These people immerse themselves so much to their work that their job-related existence becomes their only real existence. A deep-rooted sense of loyalty toward the job brews in their soul, for they credit the work of the profession with their escape from the "working to live" paradigm.

Let it be clear that "living to work" leaves little room for "living" per se. Most aspects of life --family, relationships, and social ties -- are hindered when people belong to this paradigm. Instead of using money as the benchmark (as is the case for people of the "working to live" paradigm), people trapped in the "living to work" paradigm measure themselves and others in terms of positional status and affiliation. They are psychologically uncomfortable when retirement nears and they are often prone to take on multiple new responsibilities, especially post-retirement.

In a hyper-competitive world, everybody is striving to excel. Unfortunately, for people struggling for generations to make ends meet, excelling beyond basic sustenance is akin to chasing the rainbow to find the treasure-chest. At times when they do succeed in life, the momentum of their hard work prevents them from relishing life's softer and finer elements.

Instead of working to live "better," they start to live for their work itself. Clearly, in either paradigm, people subconsciously neglect the importance of core human qualities. Surely, honesty and integrity are mentioned here and there as important. However, much softer and finer elements of life, such as care, compassion, love, and respect are hardly ever taken into conscious consideration by these struggling people who keep searching for that elusive place in between the two parallel paradigms.

Dr. Noushi Rahman is Assistant Professor of Management, Lubin School of Business, Pace University, New York.

# China's growing influence in Latin America

In view of China's expansion and modernisation of existing industries, it needs more oil and gas. Similarly, Latin American countries need to expand their market. Therefore, the cooperation between China and Latin American countries is complementary, not competitive. According to latest statistics, 40 percent growth in oil demand comes from China since China's consumption of oil has increased rapidly. Presently, China is consuming 12.8 million barrels a day.

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

WHILE Rome was burning, Nero was playing his fiddle. That is exactly what has been happening in Latin America these days. While President Bush remains engaged with the unjust wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, communist China, an emerging tiger in Asia, has been slowly and steadily penetrating Latin America, a close neighbour of USA. In the past, USA was the most influential nation for Latin America. In this connection, I would like to quote President James Monroe of the United

States, who said that no foreign power would have more influence there than the United States itself. The Monroe doctrine was in use during the cold war as well when the Latin American countries from Chile to Nicaragua experienced some form of intervention from the United States.

In the view of the unilateral and pre-emptive doctrine and high-handed policy of the Bush administration in dealing with the countries in Latin America, some leaders in the region are distinctly distancing themselves from the influence of the United States. Recently, the request of

the United States to join as an observer in the South-South dialogue between Latin American and the Middle Eastern countries was turned down.

The Helms and Burton act of the United States, which aimed to increase pressure on Cuba, has caused dispute amongst its allies in Latin America. Although this act is a restatement of existing economic sanctions imposed by President Kennedy in 1962, it received unequivocal condemnation from the Organization of American States at its meeting held in Panama, June 1996.

According to New York Times, March 1, 2005, "from Brazil to

Argentina to Ecuador and Venezuela, while demonstrating important differences in style and substance, these new leaders are united in their conviction that the free market reforms of the 1990's have failed and by a renewed focus on egalitarianism and social welfare, but not to the point where it breaks the bank." Three quarters of the region's 355 million people are now ruled by leftist-leaning leaders, which is another interesting development in the region.

In spite of economic sanctions against Cuba, many countries in Latin America are still maintaining relations with Cuba. Due to the apathetic and big brotherly attitude of the Bush administration, in particular his wrangling with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Latin American countries are looking for counterweight in China. According to the Washington Times, "US-Venezuelan relations have been on a downward spiral since the

United States endorsed a failed coup attempt in Caracas in April, 2002." Apart from this, Latin American countries have been receiving low priority in the foreign policy of Bush administration. The entire region is full of oil, gas and other mineral resources. All these factors inspired the present leadership in China to develop relationship with Latin American countries.

In view of China's expansion and modernisation of existing industries, it needs more oil and gas. Similarly, Latin American countries need to expand their market. Therefore, the cooperation between China and Latin American countries is complementary, not competitive.

According to latest statistics, 40 percent growth in oil demand comes from China since China's consumption of oil has increased rapidly. Presently, China is consuming 12.8 million barrels a day.

Venezuela is one of the first

countries in Latin America, which has opened its door to China. Relations between China and Venezuela have been expanding since President Chavez's visit to Beijing in December 2004. Venezuelan administration signed a contract to sell China an average of 100,000 barrels of oil a day. It is understood that Venezuela, exporting 60 percent of its crude oil to the United States, has the largest oil reserve outside the Middle East region. Venezuelan President Chavez and Chinese Vice-President Zeng Qinghong at Caracas, Venezuela in January 2005 signed 19 cooperation agreements, particularly in the field of oil and gas. China began operating two oil fields in Venezuela. It will develop 15 declining oil fields and build a plant to produce boiler fuel used in Chinese power plants. China has already been invited to explore for oil in the Orinoco belt and for offshore natural gas.

China and Brazil have been engaged in studying viability of joint operation in refinement, pipelines and exploration in the two countries. In this connection, Brazil signed an agreement with Chinese company, Sinopec, to construct a gas pipeline, which will cross Brazil. The flurry of China-Brazil business began less than two years ago following the exchange of visits between Brazilian President Luiz Inacio and Chinese President Hu Jintao. Brazil's mining company signed a deal recently with China's biggest steel company, Baosteel Shanghai group.

China has also extended its hands in cooperation with Bolivia, Peru and Columbia. Most of the exploration of oil and gas constitute a major thrust in these countries. Mining appears to be a top priority for China, whether it is gas in Bolivia, tin in Chile or oil in Venezuela.

Apart from Chavez of Venezuela, Argentina President

Nestor and Brazilian President Luis Inacio Lula de Silva visited Beijing lately to strengthen bilateral relations with China.

I would like to quote from BBC news analysis of June 7, which said, "While US has been fighting its war on terror, a new political idea has begun to punch through which such weight that alarm bells have begun ringing loudly in Washington."

It seems that China has been aggressively exploiting the region, which is an untapped market, to meet its growing needs of oil and gas for economic development. As appears from the activities, China has embarked on a more pragmatic and forward-looking economic policy and has been focusing primarily on exports, investment and technology.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain, a former diplomat, writes from Virginia.