

## Exchanges of fire at the border

Force cannot resolve issues

It is shocking that the two neighbours would be locked in exchange of fire for more than half a day, causing serious disruption to the lives and damage to public property in the area, as we saw done at the Zakiganj border in Sylhet. We are surprised not only at the magnitude of the incident, what is appalling is that something like this, totally unwarranted, should have happened at all.

Unprovoked firing by the BSF, which included indirect weapons like mortar and artillery too, is beyond one's comprehension. These weapons are indirect fire weapons that lack precision unlike that of a direct fire weapon, and being area weapons can cause severe damage to human lives.

The issue has stemmed from BSF's attempt to secure control of a piece of land under, what is known as, 'adverse possession.' It needs reminding that one of the three border issues that remains to be resolved between Bangladesh and India is the exchange of territory under adverse possession (the other two being the demarcation of about 6.5km of borders and exchange of enclaves). The Land Boundary Agreement of 1974 between the two countries has clearly stated that both parties should maintain the status quo in respect of these areas till such time as these are exchanged, and that no attempt to change the status quo by force should be resorted to. Under these conditions, one wonders why the BSF had to resort to force to try to take hold of an area that had been under Bangladesh's possession all throughout, and change the status quo.

The two countries share the longest border in South Asia, and a proper management of the borders entails adherence to the existing guidelines in respect of border issues.

Tension still prevails in the area. We would hope that the two sides would resolve the issue through discussion at the relevant levels. Whatever may be the bone of contention, force cannot be the arbiter, temporary or permanent, of any disagreement between neighbours.

## Massive projects of little use

Waterlogging continues in Southwestern districts

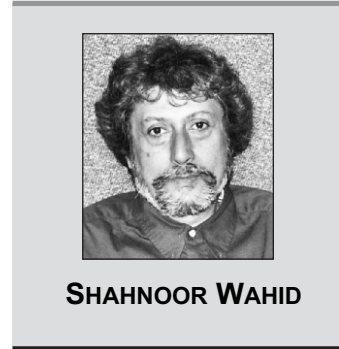
DESPITE undertaking some massive projects, Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) has not been able to end waterlogging in vast areas in South West region of the country that has made living an ordeal for over half a million people. These government undertakings, especially the Tk 272 crore Khulna-Jessore Drainage Rehabilitation Project that was implemented between 1995 and 2004 with dredging, construction of regulators, dams and embankments in the area, reportedly worsened the situation instead of improving it. The marooned people are now forced to live in sub-human condition with stale water all around.

What is alarming to learn is that not only has the project worsened the drainage situation; it has also contributed to the choking of some rivers in the area. It is worth taking note here that BWDB authorities had not taken the suggestion of the local people for addressing the waterlogging problem through adopting indigenous water management practices. Instead they went for the massive and expensive project apparently to the peril of a large number of people of the three districts.

Waterlogging is an endemic problem in many parts of the country, which denies the local people regular cultivation opportunity to earn their livelihood. Research findings show that people suffer from acute health problems, as they have to live in areas submerged in water. The problem can be solved by undertaking pragmatic projects and not ones that only benefit the construction firms and the elements who get them approved by the government.

We wonder what prompted the authorities to go ahead with the project when it was destined to be a failure. It would be interesting to know the comments of the water management experts who had done the preliminary survey and recommended the project. Will the experts explain why it did not improve the situation as per the plan?

## Tale of borrowed fangs and claws



SHAHNOOR WAHID

WHEN a tiger tastes human blood for the first time, it keeps coming back to the localities where people live. It becomes more ferocious than before and kills with wanton desire. But at a certain point the man-eater gets beaten with bamboo poles by the villagers. It then limps back to its den to lick its wounds.

In human society, too, when people of insignificant antecedents somehow get the taste of power they often become dishahara, meaning dazed and confused, in exercising their faculty of judgement. They fail to perceive the limits of their newly-gotten and sometimes ill-gotten power, and they never understand how comical they appear when they try to look intimidating, wearing borrowed fangs and claws.

They rehearse acts of ferocity in the company of sycophants with the illusion that their enemies out in the real world would just shrink in fear. Apparently funny, but such behaviour has a far-reaching impact on society -- at least the civil part of it. Citizens dwelling on this side of the divide are not used to seeing midgets arm-wrestling with giants. But in the uncivil parts it's a dog-eat-dog-game, which no one minds, maybe.

For these power-wielding people, wise men had said decades ago: "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." How assiduously this maxim gets translated into action in Bangladesh! The hunger for power and the utmost desire to apply it once it is in their possession makes some of them look for some prey, like the tiger with the acquired taste for blood. But in their pursuit they sometimes make the mistake of chasing big prey,

little realizing that they may not be able to chew what they have bitten. This unwholesome desire to go for big game stems from the inbuilt complex of being small, and wearing borrowed claws and fangs. And this falsehood easily falls off once janata (people) pull them down.

But, it is also true, as long as these powerful midgets remain in power, they remain a potential threat to those who believe in and practise sanity. As a result, the number of real enemies and perceived enemies of the midgets run into thousands and in between they have no real friends. History is replete with stories of such men. If one would study history books a bit deeply, one would find that there is a comical touch in the exit of people who misused authority in their short-lived honeymoon with absolute power.

In the last scene of the drama,

these people walked up the gallows with their once ruthless and blood-soaked hands tied behind. They placed their once proud and arrogant heads under the guillotine. They got thrown into the dungeon dressed only in hessian clothes. The feasts, the fiesta, the orgies, the carnivals, the bows and the parades became things of the past. The end of such men has always been the same.

Since independence, Bangladesh has also seen the unheralded entry and comical exit of a good number of midgets wielding ill-gotten power. But, unfortunately, none of these power-drunk people took lessons from history. They went on doing the same things for which their distant cousins had met ignoble ends. They always seemed to have been predisposed to exit through the back door.

Strange bed-fellows

Politics is the only profession/occupation where one easily agrees to have a strange person as a bed-fellow. At times of dire need, politicians go out in the dark alleys looking for willing persons to take home and to bed. Can anyone think of any other profession/occupation where such needs arise, or where one would agree to have strange fellows sharing the bed? Such unwholesome needs are now becoming conspicuously evident in Bangladesh with politicians frequenting dark alleys for partners.

Then some politicians have started to visit graveyards to resurrect skeletons of people who had once rendered politics trivial in this country. These people have been sent to the dungeons of infamy by the same politicians who are now trying to dig out the skeletons and add flesh to them. They want to use the resurrected people in the next elections, that are scheduled to be held next year.

Politics in Bangladesh has entered such a pitiable phase that it now resembles an asylum of mentally deranged people. One can find the mindless actions and words of politicians amply reflected in those trapped within the bounds of Pabna Mental Hospital. Most of the major politi-

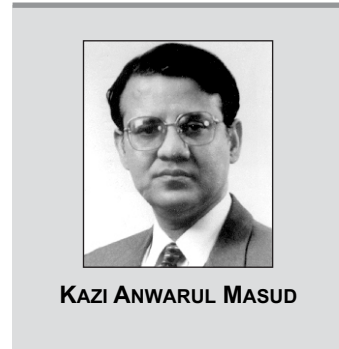
cal parties remind one of a ragtag army, not looking smart and disciplined. The slogans are stale, the programs are rather annoying than inspiring, manifesto is old wine in new bottle, vision is myopic, antecedents are not spectacular.

These politicians have no earthshaking plans for overall development, no intention of leading the nation on the path of progress harnessing the hidden potential, especially that related to technological advancement. Their sole aim is to go to power jenetenopokare, meaning "at any cost" in Bengali. Development can happen later. And development to these people means building new roads, culverts and bridges. But isn't that the development plan of the fifties? Who cares?

It's a pity indeed that when other South Asian countries are already thinking in terms of facing the challenges of the next century; thinking about reclaiming land from the sea or setting up space stations and so on, our politicians fight gun battles over tenders for culverts and plunder public money in the name of cutting grass! If we only had some trace of shame left in us!

Shahnoor Wahid is Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

## Time for Bush to start listening



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

FOR the umpteenth time, the Bush administration's almost totally blind support of Israel was demonstrated at President Bush's August 7 press conference on the Middle East crisis. He identified the root cause of the tragedy in Lebanon unfolded daily by Israel's relentless brutalities inflicted on Lebanon, not in Israeli contempt of the UN Charter, violation of international human rights law and the 4th Geneva Convention, but in "a state within a state. Hezbollah, an armed movement that provoked the crisis." He spoke of the UNSC resolutions in the making which would require Hezbollah to immediately stop all attacks and Israel to stop all offensive military operations (not withdrawal from Lebanese territory) to establish an enduring cease-fire supported by an international force to "prevent armed militia like Hezbollah and its Iranian and Syrian supporters from sparking another crisis."

Both President Bush and Condoleezza Rice were at pains to paint Hezbollah as the real culprit, a terrorist organization that like other terrorists "try to stop the advance of democracy, spread their Jihadist message, a message totalitarian in nature, Islamic radicalism, Islamic fascism."

If the Israeli aim was to convey a message to the Lebanese people that Israel would continue to inflict murder and mayhem till the Lebanese people rejected Hezbollah, then surely the strat-

## GOING DEEPER

In sum, the primacy of force over international law and the UN Charter, if Israeli aggression against Lebanon is allowed to stand, will only help the al-Qaedaists to recruit frustrated Muslim youth into their ranks who see their corrupt and oppressive rulers presiding over stagnant economies as impotent and establishment of a liberal order a distant dream. However unwarranted, the Bush administration would be well advised to listen to the European counsel for moderation and acknowledge that the men from Venus are indeed more adept in the art of compromise and conciliation than the men from Mars.

egy has failed.

In a recent survey Hezbollah, born out of 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, albeit inspired by the Islamic Revolution of Iran, has registered increased support not only among the Shiites, but also among the Sunnis, the Christians, and other groups who see Hezbollah as the defender of Lebanese sovereignty.

Middle East affairs expert Shibley Telhami notes the growing support for Hezbollah throughout the Arab world. The Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, one of the strongest Sunni organizations in the Arab world, has rejected a fatwa given by a Saudi religious authority prohibiting help to the Hezbollah. The Sunni head of the Arab Lawyers Union expressed his total solidarity with Hezbollah's defense of Lebanon against Israeli.

Even Sunei al-Qaeda, that previously used to express disdain for Hezbollah for practicing a "heretical form of Islam," has called upon all Muslims to unite against Israeli injustice. "What was especially telling in Zawahir's [recent] speech," writes Telhami, "was that religious Puritanism and sectarianism were no longer topics."

Hamas's victory in Palestinian elections, Muslim Brotherhood parliamentary gains in Egypt, Hezbollah's defense of Lebanon against Israeli disproportionate

use of force on Lebanese civilians and infrastructure to secure the release of the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by the Hezbollah have been lumped together by the Bush administration as reflective of "Islamic radicalism."

In the process of displaying unstinted support for Israel, the Bush administration has totally ignored the OIC Summit's Putrajaya Declaration of August 3 and the Arab League's full support of the Lebanese government's 7-point plan calling for immediate cease-fire, withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon, greater UN international force in south Lebanon, and help rebuild the shattered Lebanese economy.

The Bush administration's reluctance to admit that the root cause of the turbulence in the Middle East is its refusal to pressurize Israel for an equitable solution of the Palestinian problem is putting the moderate rulers in the Islamic world on a confrontational course with their citizens.

This difficulty faced by many Arab governments, recently voiced by King Abdullah of Jordan, where governments with failed political and economic policies are treading on razor's edge to find a common ground between those clamouring for Western model of liberal democracy and market economy and those refusing modernity and

trying to take the society back to its pristine sixth century roots.

While this struggle for the soul of Islam is raging in the Islamic world, the Bush administration has taken the lead for the atonement of Western guilt complex for the holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis and centuries of injustice meted out to the Jews by the Christians by giving Israel a free hand in Palestine and now in Lebanon.

Consequently, writes columnist Roger Cohen, "whatever vestigial standing the US had as an honest broker in the Middle East has disappeared with the Bush administration's embrace of Israel's sustained use of force in response to Hezbollah's murder of July 12 cross border raid. Hezbollah equals terrorism, terrorism must be crushed, ruthlessness is the only way forward, and damn the consequences."

In the same vein, UN Deputy Secretary General Mark Brown also reportedly feels that given the discouraging US track record in the Middle East where the US is regarded as the second greatest enemy after Israel, US efforts to get through a resolution in the UNSC on the current Lebanese situation is unlikely to bear fruit.

Even Tony Blair has told the World Affairs Council at Los Angeles recently that the West is unlikely to win the battle against "global extremism" unless the

war on terror is fought "at the level of values as much as force, unless we show we are even handed, fair and just in our application of those values to the world."

Basically Tony Blair has come around to Harvard Professor Joseph Nye's advocacy of "smart power" which is defined as a combination of hard power (military power and economic power) and soft power (culture, political values, and having moral authority) for resolution of conflicts. Nye explains that soft power rests on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preference of the others. Though in the present day world of US nuclear primacy and her uncontestable military might it may sound academic, yet the argument advanced by Richard Nixon in the 1970s, that the only time in history the world had seen extended period of peace was when there was a balance of power, is profoundly meaningful.

"It is when one nation becomes infinitely more powerful," Nixon added "in relation to its potential competitor that the danger of war arises." After the Second World War, President Truman could have created a great Roman empire (intervening in another polity without actually governing it) but preferred to establish the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions.

Fifty years later, another US administration, armed with the doctrine of pre-emption, is asking the international community to subordinate to its hard power the principles of the UN Charter (Article 1: Section 4, Article 2: Section 4, Articles 41, 42 and 51), principles VI and VII of the Nuremberg Tribunal, and Article VI of the US Constitution itself, all of which in spirit and letter hold the doctrine of pre-emption as a flagrant and unconscionable violation of law.

Despite its demonization by the Western media, Hezbollah is

more Lebanese and nationalist now than at any time before. Hezbollah's leader Hasan Nasrallah has publicly announced his acceptance of stationing of a large number of Lebanese soldiers in southern Lebanon bordering Israel.

Now if the UNSC, particularly the US, were to ignore the Arab League and OIC demand that the proposed resolution should call for immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, then one could argue that such a resolution, albeit not fully, is a repetition of Neville Chamberlain's 1938 Munich Pact acquiescing Adolph Hitler's annexation of the Sudetanland.

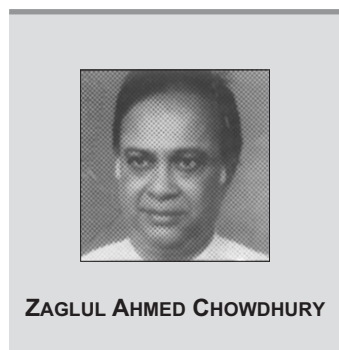
In sum, the primacy of force over international law and the UN Charter, if Israeli aggression against Lebanon is allowed to stand, will only help the al-Qaedaists to recruit frustrated Muslim youth into their ranks who see their corrupt and oppressive rulers presiding over stagnant economies as impotent and establishment of a liberal order a distant dream.

More than any other thing, Americans by nature being happy in their isolation from global affairs, the shock defeat of Joe Lieberman in the Senatorial primary should wake up the Bush administration to the fact that the American electorates' honeymoon with the Bush administration Iraq policy is over and the administration's unqualified support to Israel on Lebanon may rouse the "irate moderates" to protest the futility of the pursuit of such a policy.

However unwarranted, the Bush administration would be well advised to listen to the European counsel for moderation and acknowledge that the men from Venus are indeed more adept in the art of compromise and conciliation than the men from Mars.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## Belligerence back with ferocity in Sri Lanka



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

CLEARLY, a full-blown conflict has returned to the South Asian island state of Sri Lanka even though a fragile truce remains in force. Neither the government nor the Tamil militants are keen to officially declare that the truce has totally collapsed. The ceasefire was violated frequently earlier, but the ferocity with which both sides are facing their opponents for the last several

## MATTERS AROUND US

However, the bottom line is that peace prospects have not been exhausted. Peace can be salvaged if the government and the militants demonstrate some degree of flexibility in their respective stances. In Sri Lanka only domestic players are responsible for the crisis while the international community is working for a settlement. Would the Lankan parties heed the calls for dialogue? The solution lies in their hands.

days is the simple grim reminder of the civil war that persisted in Sri Lanka till 2002. Back then a truce was agreed upon in a bid to find a negotiated settlement of the two-decade long conflict stemming from Tamil militants' demand for a separate homeland in the north of the country.

What is more worrying is the ruthlessness that is being witnessed in the battle. Fifteen aid workers of a French organization

lost their lives in the battlefield. They were engaged in providing relief to the victims of the tsunami disaster that battered coastal line areas of the country earlier. The severity of the fighting can also be gauged from the fact that the army, the navy and the air force have been forced into the combat by the government. The militants, on the other hand, essentially a guerrilla outfit, are locked in battle with the navy.

The Lankan imbroglio more than ever before needs a settlement through negotiations. Earlier this year, talks resumed between the two sides in Geneva. But whatever optimism the dialogue had generated evaporated in quick time and things again were back to square one. Later, their contacts in Oslo to break the impasse did little to improve the hostile attitude that exists on both sides. The media-

tors themselves, like the government of Norway, are not pinning much hopes on the prospects of a negotiated settlement among the contending parties. A special peace envoy John Hansen has reached Colombo to make a difficult attempt to salvage the situation. But the chances of him succeeding seem to be very thin.

Both the government and the Tamil militants came under intense pressure from the international community for eschewing the path of confrontation. But, unfortunately warring sides choose to stick to their own positions. Even powerful donors and mediators are now losing hope. Still, they can not afford to slacken their efforts.

Reverting to the conflict has led many to believe that the tenuous truce has virtually broken down and the nation is heading towards intensified civil war.

This was least expected because the resumption of the dialogue in Geneva in February generated new hopes. The next round of talks could not take place, much to the dismay of those who want to see an end to the trouble. But strained ties between the parties led to postponement of the dialogue.

The gravity of the situation can be gauged from the fact that several major incidents have taken place in recent times like air strikes in rebel strongholds in the north-east of the country. On the militants' side, there has been the daring feat of suicide by a woman that left ten troops killed and many injured, including the army chief himself. But later another senior army general could not escape death. All these mark the toughening of stance of both parties. President Mahinda Rajapakse and the Tamil rebel

Vellupillai Prabhakaran are speaking about the need for peace, but reality is neither side is sparing the other.

As things stand now, the truce remains only on paper. Both sides need to be patient and realistic. The ceasefire must be observed by both sides. All pleas from saner sections of humanity both inside and outside Sri Lanka are clearly falling into deaf ears. Can they be really oblivious to the colossal destruction all around them?

However, the bottom line is that peace prospects have not been exhausted. Peace can be salvaged if the government and the militants demonstrate some degree of flexibility in their respective stances.

The Middle East crisis triggered by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon has pushed the Sri Lanka civil war somewhat into

the background despite increasing belligerence in the island state. Understandably, the Middle East situation is fraught with dangers, having international repercussions. However, the two crises are qualitatively different. The Middle East crisis is largely dominated by foreign powers, who all have stakes in the Lebanon crisis in varying degrees. Consequently, the situation is turning intractable despite flagrant violations of human rights and international laws by Tel Aviv.

By stark contrast, in Sri Lanka only domestic players are responsible for the crisis while the international community is working for a settlement. Would the Lankan parties heed the calls for dialogue? The solution lies in their hands.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is Foreign Editor of BSS.