

A conduit for arms trafficking?

Let's not draw politics into the investigation

THE massive seizure of modern arms at Karnaphuli coast in Chittagong should jolt us into realising how vulnerable we have become to subversive activities of arms dealers. Witness accounts gathered by our correspondent have helped explode the 'tip-off' myth to the story. That the local police were 'present' at the scene of the massive unloading of lethal contrabands at the jetty is an eye opener to a collusive security lapse.

The location of our territory adjacent to insurgency-laden neighbourhoods makes for our vulnerability as an arms conduit in the region. But perhaps more to the point is this: our low alert and surveillance status coupled with perhaps a 'buyable' immunity might have made us into a favourite transit route for arms trafficking.

Military and strategic experts have a clear and convincing convergence of views on the subject. The caches of weapons are so large and of such sophistication that these could only be meant for combat operations against regular or state armies. None of the country's clandestine outfits has the training and skill to use those arms. Illegal weapons come in piecemeal not in one huge go. The country's outlawed organisations do not have the absorption capacity in real estate terms to ingest, store and distribute such an enormous consignment of clandestine weapons within the country.

So, in all likelihood, these were headed for the North-East insurgents or the Maoist rebel groups in Nepal.

But the government seems to have already taken a position. The state minister for home affairs has remarked that these modern weapons were intended to run subversive activities in Bangladesh. Obliquely it has even been linked to the opposition's prophecy for the government's downfall by April 30.

Given such an opaque governmental approach to the investigation, we think it is pivotal to the discovery of truth that a non-politicised probe takes place. Furthermore, we must be globally connected and have the Interpol assist us in uncovering the mystery. We should not bury our head in the sand to believe that terrorism and arms smuggling are not an international phenomenon. They very much are so and must be dealt with accordingly.

Mixed signal in Sri Lanka

Leaders must rise to the occasion for sustainable peace

SRI Lanka seems set for another stretch of coalition rule. At least that's the indication from the early poll results. President Chandrika Kumaratunga's party is reportedly preparing itself to form the next government, but it probably would have to seek allies in parliament if it wants to form a sustainable government. And thus the power struggle between the two large political parties is likely to continue.

It could be argued that the president's sudden move to call early elections after accusing Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe of making too many concessions in peace talks with the Tamil Tiger rebels has paid off in her favour; early results could be interpreted as an endorsement of Chandrika's condemnation of Wickramasinghe's handling of the peace process. But the voters also seemed to be in confusion as they have not given a clear-mandate to her either.

Though a sizable proportion of votes is yet to be counted and final results have been delayed because of reports of irregularities; yet from the trend of results, one reads a mixed electoral signal to the parties. The election has basically given no direction. The results are a picture of a much more divided Sri Lanka. While the majority Sinhalese community appears lukewarm about the peace process, Tamil National Alliance, a party backed by the rebels, in the north and east of Sri Lanka and an all-clergy party of Buddhist monks have gained a significant footing.

We urge the two top leaders of Sri Lanka to rise to the occasion and give a clear direction to the nation. When it comes to negotiating with the minorities and deciding on their fate, the party in power should always appeal to the nationalist sentiments of the majority. Not just in its own interest, but also for the sake of national good, it must arouse sentiments in favour of peace and settlement. At the same time, we request Chandrika not to take voters' verdict as a conclusive support to her policies. The leaders must take steps so that state doesn't get weakened; society doesn't become more vulnerable to trouble.

Chittagong arms haul : Some queries

BRIG GEN (RETD) SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

THE arms recovery on the night of 1st-2nd of April was perhaps the largest single consignment seized by the police ever, in the history of Bangladesh. The point (CUFL), rather than the area (Chittagong) of recovery of these huge quantity of arms and ammunitions, is what raises the query. Chittagong has been the most suitable, easy and convenient location for the egress and ingress of anything clandestine and dubious. In the 70's it was 'Menharu Mian' and his 'stalwarts' plying the smuggling trade rather smugly, and with complete impunity, for many years. The high priced smuggled goods have given way to AK-47s, rocket launchers and grenades, as the items of trade. This area had been left unprotected and to the device of the smugglers, gunrunners and other lumpen elements in the past. Latest incident indicates no change in the situation.

But even more disconcerting is the fact that the CUFL jetty was being used as the offloading point, under the nose of the police, if the press reports are to be believed. The fact that these people chose to use a government facility, and that too a key point installation (KPI), to unload such a huge quantity of arms and ammunition, points to some collusive arrangements. Such a large operation cannot be undertaken without a 'guarantee' of

immunity. Given the fact that the operation did not involve only the unloading of this consignment but also an equally risky task of delivering it to the 'consignee,' was possible only with a guarantee of sorts.

This incident also underpins the allegation that Bangladesh is a transit route for illicit weapons, whatever are its destinations. For many years this issue has come up repeatedly as a point for discussion

and suppliers of illicit weapons, in all likelihood have 'sourced' these weapons from multiple sources, and the 'delivery orders' must have been processed through several layers, in order to keep the identity of the source secret. But there are many indicators and telltale signs, which should be able to provide us some clues as to where it was packed, of the place or port of origin etc. These

produced weapons; delivered in the manner these were produced, clandestinely.

The next point that begs the question is, who are these huge quantities of weapons and ammunition meant for? There are two plausible scenarios in this regard. It could have been brought in for use in country or for transit to a third country. It is too difficult and serious a question to be addressed perfunctorily.

argument that it was for in-house use, because we are not aware of the existence of such a well manned and well-trained underground set up, capable of not only absorbing the quantum of the materiel brought in, but also proficient in the use and handling of the weapons that were seized. Even the Bangladesh armed forces do not possess some of the types of the weapons seized in Chittagong. The types of military

tional dealers in illicit weapons is a certain. This phenomenon (trade in illicit weapons) has both 'demand and supply' dynamics, which must be meticulously addressed. Without determining what or who are generating the need for these weapons, tackling the supply side will be meaningless.

We must also not take comfort in the fact that these items were not meant to be used in Bangladesh, given that the arguments proffered above are held true. These weapons are capable of creating havoc anywhere. An exacerbation of the ongoing turmoil in our neighbourhood would have consequences that might be difficult for us to deal with in future.

Our law enforcing and intelligence agencies do not possess the necessary data bank or the expertise to analyse the information and generate actionable intelligence from these facts or clues. We should not hesitate to seek the help of international agencies such as the INTERPOL, who have the expertise and wherewithal to unravel much of the mystery. The sooner we get the answers to 'for whom, by whom and from whom' of the seized weapons, the better it will be for our overall security.

Brig Gen (Retd) Shahedul Anam Khan is former Director-General, BISS, Dhaka

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in many fora. We were loathed to acknowledge the fact much less accept the reality of this phenomenon.

There are at least three questions that should agitate our minds which are 'from, for and by' whom these weapons. We must delve deeply into these because of the serious ramifications these have for our overall security.

The first question is the origin of the seized consignment. Admittedly, it is always a difficult proposition to trace the source or the origin of clandestine, illicit weapons and equipments, although the country of origin may not be difficult to determine. The gunrunners

could be two likely sources of these weapons. One, these are illicitly produced arms and ammunition, which have been clandestinely transferred to illicit arms dealers subsequently. It is difficult for a third country, under the present UN control regime in respect of small arms and light weapons, if not impossible, to siphon off genuinely traded weapons to clandestine groups, because all records of transfer have to be communicated to the relevant UN agency in New York, where records of all transfers are maintained in an arms transfer 'register.' The second possibility is that these were clandestinely

riely. I would like to believe, in spite of what have been articulated by some very responsible government functionaries, that these were destined for a third country. I shall situate my arguments on the following rationale. First, were it meant for use in Bangladesh, the consignments would have been brought in smaller quantities rather than in bulk, unlike the way it was done. Second, the logistics involved in transportation, storage and eventual redistribution would involve planning, expertise, real estate and manpower, of huge proportion. I am not aware of any subterranean group capable of such undertakings. Thirdly, the quantity of the seized hardware negates the

hardware also suggest that whoever it was meant for is well organized and trained to indulge in open hostility, i.e. taking on the government forces through conventional combat or classical military operations. We are not aware of any such groups operating in Bangladesh at this moment either.

The last but by no means the least is, who are the persons involved in this illegal trade. One wishes one had the answer. This is a difficult question which one should not even attempt to answer without going into the details. However, that there is a well-organized group in Bangladesh, playing a part in a team of interna-

How not to fight terror: Lessons from West Asia



PROF. PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

Israel, quite simply, plans to annihilate whoever it regards as an enemy and a threat. This is in full conformity with a clinical definition of state terrorism. If governments were to resort to such methods, the world would become a cauldron of lawlessness, brigandage and bloody chaos.

Most countries have condemned the Israeli action. Even the United States—which has long indulged Israel—has finally come

terrorists, they morally sink even lower. Physically, they can be infinitely more brutal.

The assassination will provoke unspeakably horrible revenge attacks by Hamas. The newly appointed top Hamas leader in Gaza, Abdal-Aziz Ranteesi, has vowed to 'make the earth tremble under the feet of the Zionists'.

Mr Sharon's plan to assassinate Yassin was opposed by his interior minister, and the head of the Israeli

has succeeded in isolating the secularists. It has now given Hamas the martyr it was looking for. It's as if Hamas and the Sharon cabinet had become partners or allies in murder. Both practise an identical politics of revenge.

However, Mr Sharon is not just being devilishly cynical. He seems to have three larger objectives. First, he wants to send out the message that Israel is pulling out from Gaza from a position of

could then be increasingly equated with mere vermin, or beasts unworthy of elementary decency or lawful treatment—"barbarians who want to take our lives".

Third, Mr Sharon wants to create conditions for extraordinary measures like mass expulsions or virtual siege of a whole territory like Gaza.

Hardcore Zionists don't want to trade land for peace. They want to subdue the Palestinians so they

of a profoundly mistaken approach to security and terrorism. It fails to see the connections between historic injustices, unaddressed grievances, social discontent, more grievances, and resort to violence.

Mr Bush is himself in the dock for fomenting terrorism. As former White House security chief Richard Clark says, Mr Bush has "undermined the war on terrorism" by invading Iraq. Iraq is churning up enormous discontent in the Middle East. The Arab world is appalled at the "original lie" behind the war and Iraq's occupation.

There's a lesson in this. You cannot fight terror with terror. Draconian measures will only victimise innocent people, create injustices, and further aggravate the problem. That's been India's POTA experience too.

And yet, our government remains fixated on a force-driven approach to terrorism. That's why it didn't call off last week's meeting of the India-Israel Joint Working Group on terrorism in Jerusalem.

There, Israel and India pledged to cooperate in fighting terrorism by forging "international alliances". India is looking to Israel's help in (gulp!) "counter-terrorism training". The two have become close allies.

This bodes ill for any rational approach to terrorism. The government policies on West Asia and on terrorism must change.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

Regrettably, no major powers are able and willing to restrain Mr Sharon. The Europeans are unhappy but won't put pressure on him. The US can. But it's a prisoner of a profoundly mistaken approach to security and terrorism... You cannot fight terror with terror. Draconian measures will only victimise innocent people, create injustices, and further aggravate the problem. That's been India's POTA experience too.

around to deploring the assassination. European Union Commissioner Chris Patten has compared it to dealing with a fire by pouring gasoline on the flames. Even India, which has developed a close strategic relationship with Israel, called the Israeli action "appalling".

To condemn it is not to condone Hamas. It is a fundamentalist group which indiscriminately kills civilians. But the thousands upon thousands of Palestinians who poured out in the streets, above all in Israeli cities like Nazareth, weren't condoning Hamas.

They were appalled at Israel's outrageous conduct. When states take revenge by imitating sub-state

security service—men who cannot be accused of being "soft on terrorism".

The Sharon government has acted as if it willed retaliatory attacks. It's inconceivable that it acted without calculating the likelihood of terrorist strikes.

So Mr Sharon does not mind sacrificing the lives of hundreds of Israeli civilians. Such diabolical cynicism has been integral to Israeli policy. Hamas is itself its creation. Israel's General Yitzhak Sager has revealed that its agencies funded Sheikh Yassin to divert the Palestinian movement from its PLO-centred secular mainstream.

Over the past three years, Israel

strength. This will help Israel keep about half of the West Bank, which belongs to Palestine, indeed is its main contiguous territory.

Second, he calculates that counter-violence will legitimise extremist solutions. A climate of insecurity and fear will impel many Israelis to approve of measures like the Apartheid Wall, 650-km long (or 4 times longer than the Berlin Wall), which will tear up Palestinian territory and perpetuate illegal Israeli settlements.

A terrorised population can be manipulated to support the suppression of elementary human rights—and dehumanise and demonise the Palestinians. They

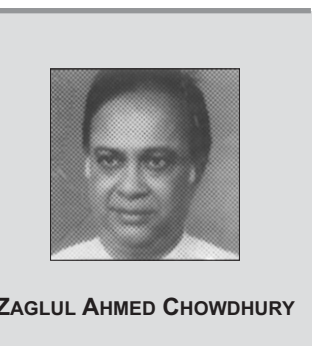
can keep some of their land. Mass expulsions were indispensable to Israel's very creation and may be necessary to ensure its survival. For Zionists, the Palestinians "will always pose a threat and ... must therefore be controlled and caged in".

This is a recipe for catastrophic bloodletting through the imposition of gross injustice upon a dispossessed people. It is morally perverse and won't work. But it can do a lot of damage in the short run.

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South Asians in North America

Bangladesh's ties with Canada



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

WHEN Canada's foreign minister William Graham says that his country is attaching greater importance to ties with the South Asia and South East Asian countries, he is possibly talking the right thing since Ottawa's links are increasing in recent times with Bangladesh and other nations of the region. Undoubtedly, September 11 incidents in the United States have changed the scenario to some extent for many countries as far as their multi-faceted relations with the United States are concerned. People from several countries particularly the Muslims have come under pressure in the US in the aftermath of the 9/11, the repercussions of which are still being felt by many countries. South Asian nations are among those suffered from this situation and

certainly Bangladesh is one of those bearing the brunt in some ways or other of the changing scenario in the North America. The foreign minister says his country spares no effort to promote unity in diversity. He also expresses satisfaction at the level of cooperation between Dhaka and Ottawa which has remarkably developed in recent times.

North America mainly encompasses the United States and Canada, both the countries have strong links with South Asia. A large number of people from the world's most densely populated region have descended on the land of Columbus over at least a century. The process is continuing as North America undeniably remains an attractive place. People throng there for livelihood, education and better professional excellence. Many return home but most seem to stay back obviously for better living and other attractions and later seek to take their dear and near ones as immigrants through existing rules. There is hardly any denying that many also take recourse to illegal stay as much. Even people from developed countries like Spain and Ireland still find North America a place of choice for living, let alone the developing or least developed countries like those in our region.

Certain reactions to the developments in the United States following

9/11 definitely caused ripples of uneasiness and consternation among Muslims from different countries and a sense of insecurity on part of many forced them to look for a new destination in the same region and the automatic choice was America's vast neighbour Canada. Not that the uncomfortable conditions for many in the US did not

their feelings which have received some degree of vulnerability after the 9/11 developments.

Ottawa boasts of its multiculturalism approach as a strong binding factor for developing a homogenous society based on non-discrimination and ever-increasing diversity — ethnic, racial, cultural and religious. Officials say that this approach has

treatment compared to other immigrants, removal of discriminations if any and last but not the least to educate and make the new entrants accustomed with the laws and conditions of the land so that they can take advantage of the existing opportunities. Admittedly, many are unaware of different issues related to the immigrants and consequently

regional plane", say the activists of the organisation who all come from different South Asian nations like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. These organisations take up with authorities issues that seem to affect their interests. "Why should not a qualified doctor from our countries get a job of his profession here?," asks one activist and says

social links are expanding with more and more people engaging themselves in economic activities. Favourable offers from Canada are encouraging investment which also helps gain the facility of permanent residence. Students also find Canada cheaper. However, the potentials of cooperation with South Asia remain largely unexploited in various fields since Canada is also a nation that has achieved economic development at a faster rate as a member of the advanced nations group.

As for Bangladesh, the links are increasing and there have been several decisions that have helped closer cooperation in recent times. The facility given to readymade garments sector and the ever increasing CIDA programme are the testimony of greater interactions. It is plausible that new areas can also be explored. For instance, Radarsat International in Vancouver is a technologically advanced institution specialised in various fields and Bangladesh can derive the facilities particularly in the fields of increased agricultural production and minimising the effects of natural disasters. Students can be encouraged to seize cheaper educational facilities. A visit to the University of British Columbia (UBC) shows that the number of our students is far too less compared to other even smaller

regional countries.

Bangladesh immigrants are mostly concentrated in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Vancouver. They are generally happy over the development of the bilateral ties in the recent times. However, they feel that steps can be taken for favourable mechanism for remittances, keeping them posted about the investment and other facilities both at home and the host country since many are not aware of such things, and better treatment on return home. Many feel the necessity of consular services in heavily concentrated Toronto and far away Vancouver. Three Bangla weeklies are brought out from Toronto — the main being "Deshe Bideshe", followed "Bangla Kagaj" and "Bangla Report". The culture of Bangla language is being nurtured. However, Canadian radio does not run Bengali programmes like that of the BBC, VOA or the German Radio. It is expected that Canadian authorities will consider this idea which will serve the purpose of promoting bilateral understanding.

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MATTERS AROUND US

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have any adverse reactions in the other Western nations particularly one like neighbour Canada but these remained to limited scale. There were some incidents like harassing Muslim women in some places in Canada as well but authorities made quick moves to take the culprits to the book and consequently things never exacerbated. The Muslims make up the largest religious community after the Christians numbering six lakhs in the total three crore population. Authorities there take special care to assuage

helped the country by building an all inclusive society which values differences and fosters a sense of belonging. True, this attitude has largely helped the immigrants making the country their home even though there may be some sense of deprivation or specific complaints among different communities.

South Asians are obviously a big community in North America and several organisations have sprung up over the years to look after the problems of people coming from the region like their job opportunities,

take too much of time to get themselves used to the rules and norms. "The council of Agencies serving the South Asians" is one such organisation which offers various services to help the immigrants coming from the region lead a better life by acquainting and adjusting with the conditions of Canada.

"We have formed such forums by developing cohesion cutting across political and other differences in South Asia since many of our problems are common and we feel happy to identify ourselves on a

such matters are among the concerns of the organisation. He says promotion of professionalism along with security and other matters of the south Asians occupy priority when taken up with the authorities on a regular basis for settlement of different matters. But they all agree that relatively the laws and conditions there are friendly to the immigrants and there is strong basis of Ottawa's claim that its multiculturalism approach is helping create a decent society.

They also feel that economic and