

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.

ARMS CACHE

It was a huge weapon haul in Chittagong, the port city of Bangladesh. We are extremely scared at this recovery. The seizure dwarfs any arms recovery in our country since 1971. It is an ominous sign. The weapons found in Chittagong are very sophisticated. Certainly, it is a threat to public safety. A few months back, police seized arms in Bogra, Dhaka and Khagrachhari, but politicisation stymied the probe procedure. And the situation has turned critical. National politics is in a total pandemonium. Threats and counter-threats are the order of the day. The state minister for home termed the arms haul as part of a machination. To head off such kind of peril, we should halt blaming each other and delve deep into the matter.

I think Bangladesh might have become a suitable transit route for arms supply used by a global arms syndicate. The government should keep the intelligence agencies and coast guards on a state of maximum alert. I hope a fair and thorough investigation into the matter will unearth the mystery behind it.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Dept of English, University of Dhaka

The size of the recent arms haul in Chittagong was really awe-some. When I saw the news bar of a TV channel, I thought it to be a typing mistake. But the news bulletins that followed transformed my disbelief to awe and surprise. Ten truckloads of sophisticated arms and ammunition are a hell of a lot of thing to be taken lightly. The state minister in charge of home affairs made some cautious remarks and referred to the impending investigation. All the intelligence agencies and other experts must be already at work to find out the real culprits and their plan. Although this is the biggest ever arms haul, many earlier haul mysteries still remain unsolved. The Bogra, Cox's bazaar and even the Badda haul investigation could not make any headway.

As the men behind the highly profitable arms trade remain out of reach, smuggling must be going on unabated. The arms cache may be just the tip of the iceberg. It should be understood that the volume of arms and ammo gives definite indications about the involvement of highly organised international gangs in the deal. Earlier investigations by our local police and other agencies proved futile.

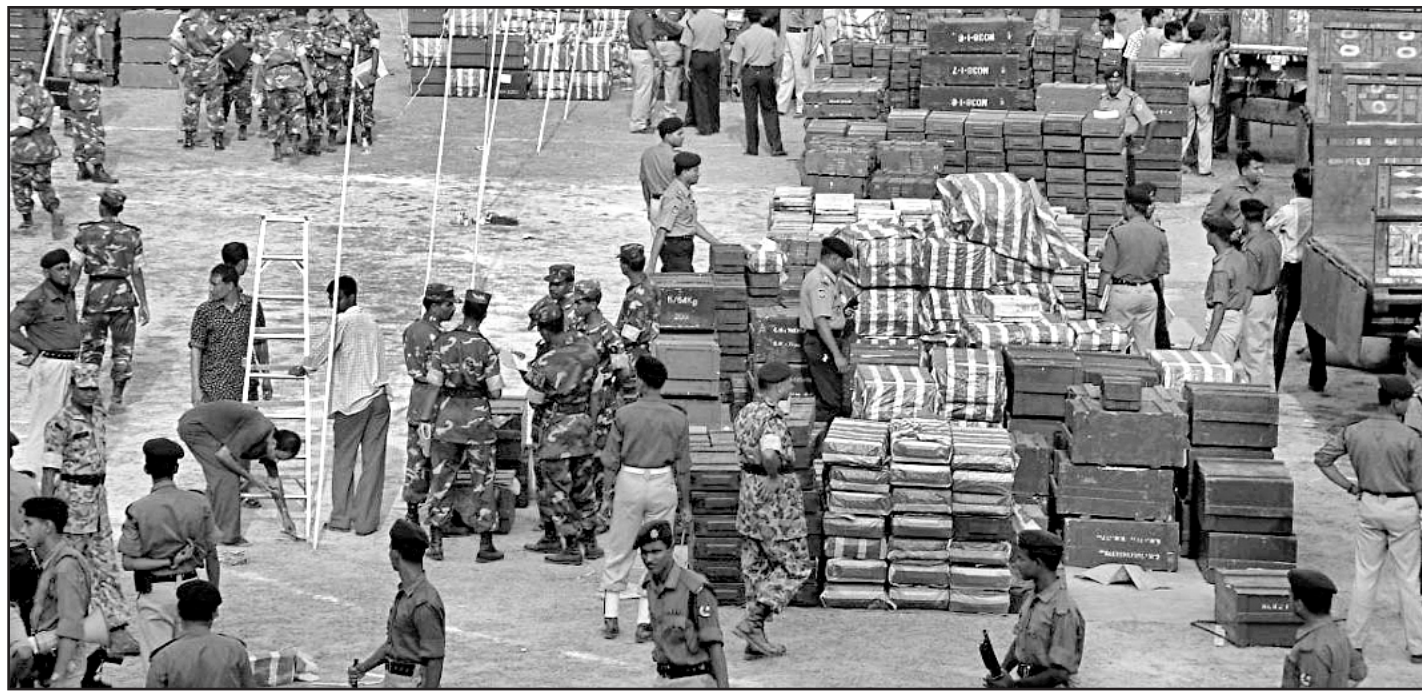
Routinely, some locals were nabbed, remanded and interrogated and ultimately the case was put in the cold storage. Some political allegations and counter allegations put spices in the ensuing media coverage. And that's the end to the incident.

So far we have not seen large-scale use of such sophisticated arms in Bangladesh, but possibilities run quite high. Why don't we hire some reputable international investigation agency to unearth the whole thing, including the suppliers, carriers and the end users. In these days of international war against terror, we can definitely elicit active cooperation from the developed countries and international agencies. We don't want to see another case of 'missed

opportunity'. It is becoming increasingly dangerous to our awestricken society.

M Sanaul Huq
Uttara, Dhaka

I read the lead news with awe but no surprise. Being an ordinary citizen, I understand one thing. In any trade, stakeholders look for the safest way to play the game. Bangladesh at present, with the given law and order and governance situation, may be considered a safe route as well as a safe haven for criminals who may like to use



Row over WMD

The BBC had a bitter row with Prime Minister Tony Blair's government over Iraq's WMD issue. Weapons expert David Kelly, the source of the controversial BBC report, decided to take his own life. The BBC became the fall guy. The much-awaited Lord Hutton inquiry report was also vitriolic about the BBC and gave leeway to Tony Blair. Gavyn Davies, the former chairman of the BBC, resigned. Now we know that Tony Blair's government did "sex up" the document about the Iraqi smoking guns in the run-up to the war, and the BBC report was true.

Much is said about the infringement of freedom of press in the third world countries and Western media watchdogs enjoy the authority of certifying how independent the media of these countries are. Maybe it is high time that they looked in their backyard before commenting on others. It is a shame that Gavyn Davies got virtually sacked for telling the truth in a 'civilised' society, which claims to be the custodian of freedom of press and civil rights.

Now Michael Grade is here to be in the hot seat of the BBC. Unlike his predecessors, he is armed with the experience of public broadcasting.

So it will be interesting to see how

seen during the past two decades. I am sorry to say that we, Bangladeshis (or Bangalees? Even our nationality is disputed!), do not seem to be able to govern ourselves at all.

Chowdhury Naim Rahman
Khulshi
Chittagong

Getting a British visa

After 9/11, students of our country have become interested in studying in the UK, as getting a US visa is almost impossible for most of them. But the visa refusal cases are very high even in the British High Commission. Why? They give reasons such as 'the candidate might not come back to his/her country', 'does not have enough money in the bank to study', and what not! These reasons may sound logical to the British High Commission, but for us the refusal is no less than a shattering of our dream of studying abroad.

We have not forgotten yet that the British ruled us for 200 years. Was it legal? Now will it be irrational if our students want to study in the UK and even stay there permanently if they want to as compensation for the colonial rule that we were once subjected to? Will you, the 'civilised nations', please look at the issue

other emergency projects having fire for decades!

As a resident of the metropolis since my school days (over 60 years), my query for the mayor is how he chooses the priorities in three main areas: operation, maintenance, and new projects. He hardly talks on the first two items.

The Dhaka City Corporation does not easily get the benefit of the doubt on most issues, and in tackling the day to day problems. There is a growing impression that most of the time construction projects are sought for inclusion while planning development schemes, some of which are not ESSENTIAL; while some have lower priority. There is easy money on the side in construction projects, whereas the life of a completed project is deliberately made short due to poor OC and other systems losses, for re-tendering at a later date. All regimes neglect operation and maintenance and concentrate on foundation stones and opening ceremonies for an overdose of subjective publicity. The O&M system losses are never announced with concrete data (in percentage); and the new projects die out soon after completion; viz: the under and over passes, road

projects are rather slow to help in the drafting of the master plans in different areas needed for running a modern city, when the urban migration rate is too fast in the developing countries. Without decentralisation, there is no point in going for modernisation. The ball is ultimately in the court of the political masters, who have other hidden agendas in skinning the opponents.

Long live dead Dhaka!

A Mawaz
Dhaka

A teacher's appeal

It has been reported that the teachers of non-govt high schools, madrasahs and colleges, who have retired since the year 2000, will be donated a handsome retirement lump grant. I was a teacher from the very first day of my professional life in 1953 till the day of my retirement in 1997. With firm conviction, and recollecting the past events, I earnestly state that we served the nation with a sense of dedication and commitment. We had no books and other necessary teaching appliances and good school buildings. My service began with a monthly salary of 45.00+5.00 Tk DA

Asst. Headmaster (Rtd)
Salaga Islami High School
Serajganj

PO boxes not developing!

For more than five years, I have been trying to hire a new Post office Box at one of the POs in Dhaka city; but each time I am told none was available (no vacancy). How many years more I have to wait for this precious jewel which money cannot hire?

Like other development projects (the population is not static!), the number of post boxes at each existing PO may be increased at roughly ten per cent per annum or every two years, depending on the demand monitoring. The capital and recurring costs are not high, hence the peculiar attitude of the postal authorities is not clear.

It is rather strange that this issue has to be brought to public attention. It appears we have to live with a 'relaxed' bureaucracy.

Md Abad
Dhaka

Yankee accent!

The local broadcasting media has been invaded (as usual!) by the drawing American accent in the English news broadcasts a message of the new millennium, propagated so vigorously by President Bush.

Then classical British Oxbridge accent deserted the Commonwealth countries after the end of the British Raj in South Asia. British premier Blair can hardly blare about this Western switch; and he has obviously taken refuge across the Atlantic waters. The name of the "Company" has changed from the "East India Company" to the "West India Company". Business as usual!

The harsh artificial Yankee accent sounds uncomfortable to the elder generation still surviving from the British India days. The clipped accent and the understatement are gone, confirming the brinkmanship of pre-emptive philosophy.

Alas, I have no wish to wait and see the divine pre-emptive strike.

AZ
Dhaka

City streets

It is nothing but looking back in anger. Many conscious people have written about city streets. The streets of Dhaka city have not been improved to the desired level.

The Dhaka city Corporation has taken some steps in this regard. But there are lots of streets which still remain unrepaired creating intolerable sufferings to the pedestrians. The road running from Madhya Badda is in such bad shape that even a young energetic person may fall from a rickshaw while travelling; the pullers are also the victims of this broken road.

Moreover, the street is very dirty and dusty. There are a govt primary school, a girls school and some educational institutions beside this road. The students of these schools use the dusty street and enter the class bathed in dust, which is very disgusting. There are hundreds of such broken roads in and around Dhaka city. These roads require immediate repair for the convenience of the city dwellers.

Dr Rabiul Islam
On mail

Asurfeit of leaders!

It is a general feeling that while you were sitting on the saddle (gaddi, power), the going was good. Not so, judging from the successive regimes in Dhaka who have been non-performing since the beginning

of the decade of the 1990s.

The major political parties combined in a mass movement to topple the autocratic regimes operating in the new nation since 1975. Concentrated power has to be properly insulated against leakage. It is dangerous when the feedback system becomes insensitive. This is the state of the nation today.

Now in April 2004, the materialistically disgruntled politicians (and some capable outsiders) are hoping to upsurge such a coup again together, or separately.

The April 30 deadline may not be an April Fool gimmick, but the time is pregnant with high expectations. Too many abortions in the past, but bad politics survives to taste the vicious backlash, now overdue. We are in tune with Nature in this deltaic region our politics is full of silt, and

the weapons here. It is reported that the arms and ammunition were all brand new and of Chinese origin. Though it is worth noting that neither the police nor the intelligence agencies could say where the arms shipment was heading for, our state minister for home, who flew to Chittagong the same afternoon, did not hesitate to pronounce the solution, immediately pointing his finger to the main opposition political party. This is unfortunate because his remarks will point the investigation to a definite direction, which may provide the needed opportunity to the real culprits to cover themselves up. However, this is not new in our country.

We have seen how in the past so many incidents went without finding the culprits worth naming. Investigations into many cases did not yield any results during the tenures of both the major parties. I apprehend that like the arms haul in Bogra, this will also suffer the same fate. The actors of bomb blasts at Udichi and Ramna, it now appears, will never be identified and punished. Big parties, while in power, always cover the goons and when any incident comes to the knowledge of the public, they mislead the investigation.

Muhammad Ali
On e-mail

While fully agreeing with your editorial (National security at stake - Seek international help now, The Daily Star, 4th April '04) that the Interpol or some other internationally known investigating agency should be engaged for enquiring into the recent arms haul at Chittagong, I would also request the authorities to get in touch with people like Alex Perry of the Time magazine of the USA. Anyone interested in knowing what is happening in this country should read the article 'Deadly Cargo' at Chittagong, by Alex Perry, October 21, 2002/Vol. 160.No.15 of the Time Magazine. As far as I know the government prohibited the entry of that edition of the Time Magazine at that time. But it was available in the Internet.

AZM Abdul Ali, Uttara, Dhaka

weaknesses, which are holding us for more than one generation. Perhaps the new generation would unite for clearing the way towards the national goals.

That needs the right type of catalyst, but the procurement and setting up of this 'catalyst project' is not taking off. This fissiparous tendency needs identification and analysis, otherwise the future is doomed if we cannot get out of the vicious circle created by the haves and have-nots. The cementing bond is missing, due to economic disparity and living below poverty line. First look at the roots, then climb on to the branches.

This disparity is artificial and the brainchild of devious politicians. Here the game of politics is played like a game of musical chairs, where democratic outsiders are not

Alif Zabr
On mail

Corruption and Bangladesh

I had an opportunity to read an article written by Mr AKN Ahmed which was published in your paper on the 31st March/2004 titled- "Corruption all over the world: where Bangladesh stands."

After a long discussion on world affairs, he has limited the task on the banking sector. He has pointed out the role of ethics, which means the moral character of the Chief Executive of the institution. In every sector, if ethics or morality is corrected, we can set the right goal. Majority people are innocent but a few creates and dominate the role. So, this should be looked upon prop-

Talking about roundabouts

We are in a state of uncertainty. Today's islands may be destroyed tomorrow, trees uprooted and towed away without any trace. People are braving and marching ahead for the sake of a better future. Push and pulls, nudges, cuts and drives, hops and scotches and what not, and we still end up at the silly point. Going round and round looking for a safe round-about.

I am trying to expose the present situation of Dhaka streets. Crazy things are happening for so long. The profile of

the city street line is changing along with the tide changes. I saw those things but never thought of writing or addressing the issue publicly.

I really got depressed when the water fountain at Shahbag was wiped out. For me, at the age of forty plus, it has been a synonym for the city I grew up in. I conceptualise it as Dhaka fountain. I assume this slaughter came to many of us as uprooting the origins.

We should absorb changes that will bring betterment in the long run. But when we see

havoc around city roundabouts (the demised ones) we know some sort of insanity has crawled into our reasoning. How long will we go through this and why should we suffer?

This is for you, all the policy-makers, the lawmakers, the donors and obviously the politicians. Give us a better today, because tomorrow's dream has been elusive for such a long period that we cannot just keep faith upon your wisdom.

A couple of years back a huge tree at a posh club in Dhaka had to be cut because it was

sick and decaying. The club members planted another sapling to replace the tree for the next generation. Why cannot our city fathers long for such gracious deeds?

The funds allocated for the streets and roads of Dhaka city and its beautification must be a handsome figure. Why cannot we plan a new settlement and an organised living abode using a portion of that fund?

The nation will realise that our policy-makers are wise, after all.

Ashfaqe Ahmed
On e-mail



he proceeds.

AKM Saifuddin, On-e mail

How to govern?

I refer to the letter of Mr. Nur Hossain (under the heading "Simply silly") in the DS of 03-April where he raised the issue of governance of this country. From all that I have

from the historical perspective?

Md. Shahedur Rahman
Asian University
Dhaka

Beautiful Dhaka!

DCC is full of original ideas. The latest is the proposed beautification project of the DU campus zone a top priority item brushing aside all

dividers, traffic control, unauthorised vehicles and drivers, and third class conservancy services; not to speak of water supply, mosquito control and occupied footpaths.

The management of city corporations needs updating urgently for reforms and implementation in places. The UN foreign donor agen-

in Chandaikona High School under Serajganj district.

I appeal to the honourable prime minister to kindly look into our case and make us eligible for the special grants that the government is going to offer to the teachers who retired after 2000.

Md. Abdul Aziz Miah,