

Arms haul in deep forest

Once again seizure but no arrest

IT is certainly good news that BDR was able to seize a large cache of arms and ammunition in Naikkhongchhari of Bandarban district on Monday, and kudos must go to the troops of the 40 Naikkhongchhari Battalion who were able to accomplish the capture. Indeed, raids in the CHT region have uncovered a significant amount of weaponry in the past year and a half, and the rate at which the caches have been discovered and seized must be considered a testament to the ability and diligence of those involved.

No one, however, was arrested in connection with the raid, and it once again remains unclear where the weapons came from and for whom they were intended. BDR sources suggest that the arms and ammunition were being stored temporarily in the forest hide-out prior to their being sent out to different parts of the country. It is also possible that the arms are connected to the unrest that continues in the CHT region. One downside of not apprehending anyone in connection with the seizure is that speculation will run rampant.

But one thing which is clear is that we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there are too many unauthorised weapons in the country. The authorities seem adept enough at finding arms caches every once in a while, but not at either preventing the smuggling in of the weapons in the first place, or of apprehending those involved in the clandestine trade.

Many questions remain unanswered about this latest haul, as is the case with all the major hauls of the last few years, including the mammoth arms seizure last April in Chittagong. It has been reported that in the latest case, the criminals could not be nabbed due to lack of coordination between the army, BDR, and police, and it seems as though the first step which needs to be taken might be better coordination between these entities.

This latest seizure reminds us that we still have not got to the bottom of the April arms haul and that when weapons are seized like this, invariably no one is held accountable. We hope that this latest incident impresses on the authorities the urgent need to redouble their efforts to apprehend those who are behind the arms trade and those who are the recipients of the arms. This is a serious problem which cannot be swept under the carpet.

'Amrao Pari' gives us a leap of the mind

Hats off to the young filmmakers

'AMRAO Pari', a documentary film created by some Bangladeshi teenagers, has done us proud by winning the 32nd Emmy Awards given jointly by the International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and the UNICEF. The award giving ceremony in New York was indeed a rare, shining moment for not only the cast and crew of the film, but also for all film lovers and connoisseurs. It is no mean achievement that the documentary was adjudged the very best among 100 films from 30 countries. The laurel is a true recognition of the ability of the new generation of filmmakers, who have already produced many good films. The films like 'Matir Moina' or 'Chaka' are good examples of imagination, artistry, and technical perfection.

'Amrao Pari' is the story of a little boy responding with great alacrity and presence of mind to an impending disaster. The train, as it were, is a symbol of humans travelling towards an uncertain future, where misfortune lies in wait and the little boy is the saviour. A child, usually looked upon as having no role in shaping the destiny of mankind, demonstrates that he is fully capable of handling a critical situation. Fellow feeling is the overriding factor that prompts the lad to react with extraordinary courage, nobility of purpose and sense of responsibility. This is an episode which will have universal appeal, particularly because it happened in a Third World country with a nondescript boy as its prime figure.

The documentary should be a source of inspiration to all and sundry. It is a silver lining in the cloud of our precarious existence. It has brightened the image of a country about which good things are rarely said.

The documentary has a message for the pessimists among us. Despite all that we are passing through, including the moral decay, there is still hope kept alive by the youths ready to serve humanity with a sense of commitment. The slogan 'We shall overcome' will really be translated into reality if we succeed in creating conditions in which the children and youths can bring their potential into full play. The makers of 'Amrao Pari' deserve a special round of applause for giving us a moment of rare glory.



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

THE comments appearing in The Daily Star on November 19 regarding the "winds of change" over Kashmir couldn't have been more relevant. Sages counsel against too much optimism on issues related to India and Pakistan, and the cautionary note, expressed therein, of over-optimism was very appropriate also. As it is, predictions on strategic issues are more likely to prove wrong, more so when it has to do with the two countries with the longest running hostility since the Second World War.

President Musharraf had displayed a great deal of courage and indeed put his own future at risk when he deviated from the long standing Pakistan position on Kashmir by propounding what has come to be known as the "Musharraf formula." Consequently, he evoked criticism at home for his stance and all manners of motivations were attributed to his new position on Kashmir.

The Pakistan president has proposed a three-stage formula to bring about a "change of status" for Kashmir. He also said Pakistan would consider dropping its demand for a UN plebiscite on the region's future. "Change in status could be inde-

pendent status, condominium, which includes joint control, it can be UN mandate also," he said. "I strongly believe there are options and there is a solution. For the first time we see light at the end of the tunnel."

To international observers it seemed that the Pakistan president had stolen the thunder, for he had broached solutions to the longest running international dispute that has the prospect of Pakistan losing on tactical and strategic grounds if it

exhausted capability? Has the military establishment come to realise, at long last, that in accommodation rather than confrontation lies the solution to the Kashmir problem?

Or is it because Pakistan is coming under increasing pressure from the United States to disassociate from the current insurgent activity in Jammu and Kashmir that is primarily waged from the territory of Pakistan held Kashmir?

Or is it, as some critics aver, only to divert attention from internal

formulations deserve a second look.

In fact, one was heartened by the fact that even the guarded initial response to the proposal that emanated from the Indian official channel gave one the impression that India was not about to discard the latest Pakistani idea out of hand. The Indian State Minister for Home Affairs (J&K Affairs) expressed India's readiness to discuss the formula if formally presented, although asserting at the same time India's preference for the LoC for-

was concerned, Pakistan stood at its original position of the UN resolutions passed in 1948, unless India showed some flexibility and moved forward from its present stance. And at the time of going to press nothing more than the restatement of both sides of their commitment to dialogue over the troubled region of Kashmir has become known. But reports prior to the arrival of the Pakistani Prime Minister from India had suggested that the Musharraf proposal was likely to be shot down

a blueprint in this regard for serious discussions with Pakistan as part of the composite dialogue which is underway between the two countries."

The opposition in India and the hawks in the Congress party are loathe to entertain any suggestion that seeks to "redraw" the map of Jammu and Kashmir. Some in India also take recourse to the resolution passed in the Indian Parliament on Kashmir, according to which the J&K is the *aboot ang* (integral part) of India, in rejecting the Musharraf formula.

The Indian preference of the LoC as the permanent border does not find favour with Pakistan; at least that is the official position in Pakistan. However, there are mixed responses to the LoC formula among the various Kashmiri factions.

Shift in Pakistan position is noticeable. And by India's own admission there has been a reduction in separatists' activities in the valley. No doubt there are new signals on Kashmir. The positive indications emanating from both sides must be exploited. This is only possible through boldness and statesmanship on the part of the leadership of both the countries.

Any solution of Kashmir dispute would require purging the long-held positions of the parties. Fixation to old position will continue to hurt more than help the peoples of the two countries.

We would like to believe that it is the winds of change rather than false dawn that will suffice the skies over Kashmir.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Time to stand on principle

A response to Mr. Kibria

S M ABDUR RAHMAN

MR. Shah AMS Kibria seems to have stretched his power of argument a bit too much as he tried to make the case for reforming the caretaker government law in an article published in The Daily Star on November 23. Mr. Kibria is seeking redress of a problem the creation of which he and his party had a lot to do with.

The efficacy of the caretaker government came under strident criticism of the Awami League very soon after its dismal show in the last general election. Of late the matter has been whipped up again by the Awami League and like-minded parties, particularly after another political blunder, that of the April 30 deadline that turned out to be near fare.

No system is entirely foolproof and beyond manipulation by those with ill motives and bent upon doing so. The system of caretaker government is unique in that nowhere in a democratic dispensation does the system repose the task of conducting a democratic election on an unelected group or individual. This in itself is a slur on our polity and political system, on our credibility as a democratic nation, and it has exposed the inability of the incumbent to hold elections that will appear to be free and fair to other parties. And the whole system evolved only because the

Awami League did not trust the BNP, the incumbent party, to conduct a fair and free election in 1996.

Mr. Kibria writes: "However, in enacting the law on the subject, she (Begum Zia) did not consult the Awami League. In fact, as far as I can recall, she passed the law in the Parliament hurriedly without any prior discussion or consultation with political parties,

election in June 1996. The flaws in the law and loopholes were detected even at that time."

This is what begs the question. If the flaws were detected at that time, may I ask who was in power following the 1996 elections? Pray tell us Mr. Kibria why did your party not take any measure to rectify the mistakes that you were prudent enough to identify but did not do anything about. Was it diffidence or

that Justice Latifur Rahman was chosen to head the caretaker government during the Awami League's term in power. It seems that anything that is not to Awami League's liking is branded as being ulterior motivated or to a "particular party's interests."

This is exactly where his argument of a pool of individuals wherefrom one would be chosen to head the interim arrangement falls

between "both sides" has merits, but I cannot but take issue with him when he assumes in his "both sides" that there are only two parties in the country that need to be taken cognizance of. He forgets that there are other parties that have notched up a significant number of seats in the parliament.

One cannot argue with the suggestions that there are loopholes in the current legislation that can be

as to the timing and motivation of the new age limit cannot be ruled out.

I am certain the BNP is also aware of the loopholes in the current law related to the caretaker government. And one cannot put it past the BNP or for that matter any political party in Bangladesh, not to exploit the loopholes to its advantage.

It would be wise for the political parties to address the lacunae and rectify them, not with any parochial motives, but to make the system foolproof and effective. On that count one does not understand the reluctance of the BNP to discuss the issue with other political parties.

It is high time the political parties worked on principles, something that is missing from their lexicon, rather than on petty party interest and blatant expediency.

As for the Awami League, it would do well for it to prepare for the next elections instead of crying hoarse on issues which appear to most as being motivated by petty parochial interests.

S M Abdur Rahman is a researcher.

The Daily Star invites its readers to write in and share their views on this vital national issue.

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lawyers or members of the civil society."

I am not aware of any instance of the Awami League exchanging ideas with the BNP or civil society on a new legislation while it was in power. As for giving the BNP a free go at that time, much of the blame must lie at the door of the Awami League. That it did not participate in the February 1996 elections provided the BNP with the opportunity to indulge in shenanigans related to the enactment of the caretaker government law.

Mr. Kibria writes: "As a result, although the main concept of a caretaker government was accepted, the law remained defective and incomplete. The first caretaker government was established for the

sheer opportunism that made you turn a blind eye to the system that was, according to your definition, full of loopholes? Was it that the Awami League had won the election and thought that it would win the future ones also?"

The call for reforming the caretaker government law, coming as it does, in the wake of the Awami League's electoral debacle of 2001, gives one the impression of the Awami League being a bad loser. For it, no system is good enough unless it is one that can ensure the party's victory in the election.

Mr. Kibria has excoriated the chief of the last caretaker government Mr. Latifur Rahman for serving, according to him, a "particular party's interests." Let us not forget

flat. What if that particular person does not do Awami League's bidding after being selected on the basis of consensus? Would he then be termed a "traitor" quite like the appellant that Justice Latifur Rahman was invested with by the Awami League leadership after the 2000 election, or would the Awami League again suggest new reforms to the laws? How can one be sure that the individual so selected would not be biased to one or the other party? How can one truly, as Mr. Kibria wants to, "reassure the political parties that the chief advisor and his colleagues are truly neutral?"

Mr. Kibria's suggestion that the head of the caretaker government be selected on the basis of discussions

woven into a net. The division of power in particular was done with motives that cannot be termed as entirely virtuous. But such loopholes had existed while the Awami League was in power. Granted that it did not have the required majority in the parliament to effect changes in the laws, but it did not exhibit its honest intention either by even broaching the subject of change in the said legislation.

The BNP on its part has given enough grounds to question its intentions insofar as the selection of the next head of the caretaker government is concerned. There is no harm in increasing the age limit of judges of the Supreme Court, but the criticism of the Awami League

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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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.

Power and telecom

BITB, in an unholy policy, monopolised the high demand line telephone network and deliberately kept supply below demand. Result, the open market mobile cell tel boomed to 2m growth in a couple of years. Now that the fixed line tel sys has been made open to private sector, the newspapers are full of advertisements from new companies to recruit new execs and staff. BTRC has to keep a close watch on this coming boom and be strict with regs for public convenience.

We went gaga on natural gas discoveries and forgot about using huge coal reserves for two decades, haunted by the false Greenhouse theories imposed by the industrialised countries on the DCs. We still do not have gas pipe network in the North, and foreign investment response is poor due to amateurish long term policies. Now Tata is opening our eyes for doing BIG business! Soon the dole queue will be seen as witnessed in the recent mobile telemela.

AA
Dhaka

Bacteria resistant to antibiotics!

The World Health Organization (WHO) and US medical experts recently warned that the increasing ability of bacteria to resist antibiotics threatens the existing arsenal of drugs against dangerous infectious diseases. The experts attending the Inter-science Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy (ICAAC) called for an urgent and coordinated world-wide response to the potential crisis.

In our country, it has also been seen that many antibiotics are getting inactive or less active against certain types of bacteria.

In this situation, a coordinated action-research programme should be undertaken to get the world free of the risk of facing a return to the age when there was no reliable drug for treating infectious diseases.

In my opinion, the rich countries of the world including the United States should sanction special funds for conducting a coordinated research on antibiotics and to

develop their new generations.
Prof. M. Zahidul Haque
Chairman
Dept. of Language
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Exchanging SMS

Short message is an excellent service, for the educated people as well as for the students. SMS can play an important role by sending sensitive and emergency news and information. Besides, sending any short document and note, message on any occasion, instruction, address, phone, mobile and any number is more convenient through SMS.

Nevertheless, in our country SMS is not going from one network service provider to another. The cell phone providers should think about creating this possibility.

Tariq Shahriar
Chittagong

RAB operations

Much has been written about the RAB for its formation, implementa-

tion and ultimate results in the Letters to the Editor column. Some have denounced the idea, whereas the majority of people have acclaimed its formation and activities for the improvement of law and order situation in the country.

As a peace loving citizen, after watching the law and order situation prevailing in the country, I am of the opinion that the government has taken the right decision. Incidence of crime came down significantly during the Durga Puja, Ramadan and Dipawali.

I congratulate the government for the introduction of the RAB and hail the opposition parties for not seriously opposing the move. But unfortunately some vested quarters, instead of appreciating the noble intention and right actions of the RAB, are using different tactics to undermine its activities. People should think more about the positive sides of RAB operations.

Sami Ahmed, Patuati, Dhaka

Debased political culture

Who says one has to go the filthy rich industrialised countries in the West to witness topless shows openly (no prosecution). There are many such shows in Dhaka, offered free of charge to the masses with light pockets.

One top example: our politics is topless! No need to define 'topless'. The brains of most of the top leaders have been hijacked or abducted by ... (you know by whom). Our country is like a bottomless basket. What remains of whatever is left? Monga skeletons, and half clad beggars!

It means lack of public institutions for regulatory outputs. Bangladesh is lacking the meat for sustenance (good governance). But there are too many cannibals around craving for any type of meaty morsels.

The rules and rags are for the weak and the meek and those who obey the laws of the country. Those who are visible are detained and

harassed, not the hidden godfathers; because the political parties would be weakened. The party is greater and more important than the country or nation, and charisma has become a political cult. There is an evil pattern in debased political cultures globally (even the superpower cannot be excluded).

The voting machine has become a gambling outlet as in Las Vegas. Imagine billiard lounges in air-conditioned shopping complexes, and the standard of our cricket in the field of reality. The politicians cannot handle the cue, and the political googlies have arm actions which are suspect. When a political worker (as a contractor for some official project) has to manhandle the offer who is to approve and pass the bill (DS report Nov 10), there is no point in having a 'civil service'!

There is an alternative to being topless: open your heart and be genuine in your concern for the people (men only) Sacrifice a part of the black wealth for political

'kurbani' (not for buying a saree worth taka one and a half lakh).
AZ, Dhaka

Biman still limping

When we talk about competition, it is imperative to think of better service at a better price. The one who can provide this eventually survives and overcomes the hostility of competition. Better price does not necessarily mean cheap price. The price should be worth the services or products being provided. Competition always benefits the customers. It does not only give them bigger arrays of choice but also they are being supplied or educated with the information about the facilities they may get from what they spend. This makes the customers more demanding and difficult to attract. The airline industry is not an exception. Over the last decade, airlines have gone through tough competition and many big airlines where forced to shut down. To beat the heat of competition many

airlines formed alliances and enhanced the quality of their services tremendously.

Biman neither formed any alliances nor improved their services; rather they have substantially reduced their quality and facility to provide cheap fare to face the competition. It has chosen an old age method, totally ignoring the trend and demand of international travellers. It seems that the basis of their policy was fully based on carrying workers in and out of the country. And by doing so it became a substandard airline at the expense of poor taxpayers.

As a national carrier carrying passengers or making money should not be its sole objective. It is a symbol of national prestige. Wherever it goes it carries the flag of Bangladesh. Its policies and decisions should be made keeping in mind the national issue. I believe so far Biman has created a very negative image of Bangladesh wherever it has flown.
Syed Fyaz Husyn
Mohammadpur, Dhaka