DHAKA SATURDAY JANUARY 8, 2005

Yet another arms seizure

How long before we get to the bottom?

TE have been always prompt in praising our civil armed forces, the BDR, or the army whenever they hogged news headlines by hauling arms and ammunition from criminal dens, other clandestine places, or simply en route to some unknown destination. Consistent with the tenor of our treatment of news in this category, the latest seizure of a huge cache of fire arms at Naikkhongchhari in Bandarban, is appreciated for what it is worth. Indeed, the BDR's efficiency in getting to the arms den having been apparently duly aided by a tip-off that did signify a healthy public cooperation in security matters, merits a round of applause for both.

Let's not forget that in the last one and a half months alone, quite a few arms seizures have taken place, and significantly, in the same upazila which is close to the Myanmar border. If anything, the trend is bound to spawn speculations and theories of all kinds fuelled by the lack of successful investigations leading to identification of sources, the buyers or recipients of the weapons, the smuggler-dons, the destinations these were consigned to, and the specific purposes behind the underworld operations. It is absolutely necessary that rackets and networks clearly working to sabotage national security and peace, apart from the small time operators, are apprehended and fully neutralised. There is a strong suspicion that Bangladesh is proving vulnerable as a conduit for arms smuggling. This is not to suggest though, that the weapons are all for exter-nal use, quite some might well be for internal use for militant or destabilisation purposes.

It was quite sometime back that the Chittagong arms

haul, the biggest to-date in the country, took place; one would have thought that the security forces hugely alerted by it had made the territory safe, by now, from arms smuggling or proliferation of caches in the hideouts of criminals and gun-runners with ulterior motives.

Pending probes have a way of encumbering any newlylaunched investigation. That's why, we have to clear the backlog investigations based on a few known hypotheses so as to be able to achieve the best result with any new investigative challenge. It is understood that US arms experts had visited Naikkhonchhari, but were apparently intrigued by the erasing of the brand names and the names of the manufacturing countries from the seized weapons. To our mind, there is an obvious networking behind the clandestine operations, which may be regional or international in nature so that it's highly imperative that regional and international cooperation is actively solicited by us to stem the trafficking of fire arms.

Community clinic management

Government-NGO partnership should yield positive results

HE health ministry's decision to run 12,000 community clinics at the union level through NGOs and local community groups is indeed a solid step towards giving the people and organisations working for community development a greater role in the primary healthcare delivery system.

The move has surely been prompted by the lacklustre performance of the health sector in the rural areas, despite the fact that our community healthcare structure could be a role model for any developing country. But management of the community clinics, which could have served as the nucleus of primary healthcare, has been far from satisfactory. Many of the clinics have been reduced to sign-board

It seems the plan is to infuse life into primary healthcare through bringing in NGOs and other community groups as management partners in running the clinics. The issue is a much talked-about one but was never acted upon in the past. The logic behind inviting NGOs to run the clinics is a sound one, since these are organisations having a working familiarity with the needs and problems of rural peo-

The plan also fits into the scheme of decentralisation and people's participation in important areas of public concern. The government will retain its position as provider of logistic and manpower support for the clinics. But one important aspect envisaged in the new plan is that special incentives will be given to the doctors by the managements of clinics. The doctors who now face charges of playing truant will find their assignments in clinics more lucrative. The new idea also opens up a wide array of other possibilities that can be explored to raise the quality of healthcare at the lowest level.

The investment that was made to build the primary healthcare structure was acclaimed by all concerned, but it failed to attain its main objective of providing regular and reliable healthcare to the masses. The idea that is being tried here might open new vistas for cooperation and interaction between the government and NGOs in

All concerned should make sure that the new plan is implemented properly and that the people get the services they badly needed.

ME peace process: The way ahead



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

HE Middle East conflict continues to be one of the major problems in international relations. It is likely to remain so for years to come, in an area of

The current scenario requires that the international community works with both sides in promoting peace and democracy in the region The recent US elections, the Pales-tinian presidential elections scheduled for tomorrow, and the possible withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza have juxtaposed to open a window of hope." They have rekindled the process aimed at achieving stability and lasting peace in the

Any discussion of this issue will have to take into account three agreed factors that are inter-woven closely together. The first relates to the existing roadmap. It is probably the best way forward, with disengagement on the Israeli side, an important first step. The second refers to the economic situation in the region, particularly for Palestinians. This is worrisome. Fighting has to end before this issue can be tackled in a holistic manner and rehabilitation achieved. Lastly, understanding that the international community and regional partners have a particular responsibility to assist Palestinians, in their quest to preserve stability ahead of the presidential elections scheduled for January 2005.

In this context, it also needs to be particularly appreciated that recent changes have impacted on chances for renewed peace efforts between Israelis and Palestinians. These

include security reform, a peaceful and democratic hand-over of power in Palestine and the implementation of a three-year plan to lead from crisis to recovery in the Palestinian

However, one aspect will remain crucial for any chance of success --Israel refraining from any interference in the forthcoming voting process and allowing fair elections to go forward. This is important, given the fact that the presidential election is expected to be the first of tinian Authority. A peaceful transition after Chairman Arafat requires both political and financial support by Palestine's neighbours and its international partners.

The four members of the Quartet (EU, US, Russia and the United Nations) have to spell out how disengagement can be initiated as an integral part of the roadmap. Israel also has to be held responsible to its promises, particularly in the implementation of the roadmap on the ground. This is basic and funda- | nity has to address this aspect with

for any success is the political and public endorsement of such a setup. This could serve as a catalyst for negotiations on further substantive issues, based on the roadmap.

We have to remember that offering people in the region a horizon is fundamental to achieving progress.

The situation on the ground will require not only political will, but also (on a priority basis) reduced impediments to trade and commerce. The international commuinside Israel. This needs to be done to ensure a degree for stability Otherwise, even if Israel states that it is willing to fulfil its roadmap commitments, such assertion might be of just face value. It will definitely curtail that Government's willingness to proceed. It will also reduce that Government's ability to assist in the revival of the Palestinian economy. That in turn will hamper the

viability of the future Palestinian

At the same time, the Quartet will

POST BREAKFAST

Mere holding of an election now will not resolve radical feelings. If Hamas indeed boycotts the electoral process, achieving a provisional ceasefire would be questionable. What is required is a strong transatlantic vision for the region and collaboration with the international community. It has to be accepted by the Quartet that the parameters of a solution for Israel's secure borders indirectly depends on the final status of Palestine.

a series of elections to be held in the near future, including municipal and parliamentary elections.

The economic situation in the Palestinian territories is very delicate. Four years of closure has caused the worst recession in its history. Checkpoints and other physical impediments to trade and the free movement of goods, have led to poverty creeping into the

It is now estimated that half the Palestinian population live under 2 dollars a day, with 26 per cent of them unemployed. This figure is projected to rise to 34 per cent by the end of 2006. Such a scenario is expected to impact on the general population. European economists are already warning that the percentage of population living under poverty might eventually rise to 54 per cent in three years. The problem is further com-

pounded by the fact that thousands of Palestinians have lost their homes in Israeli raids. This in turn has created tens of thousands of addi-

tional Palestinian refugees. Today, the ball is no longer confined to the resource starved Pales-

mental and related to the time frame for the negotiation of permanent status for Palestine. This is also interconnected with a full Israeli settlement freeze and an upholding of the 2000 agreement on a bilateral ceasefire to enable viable political stability to be achieved.

One aspect needs to the understood by the Ouartet. A two-state solution will be that much more difficult, if Israel continues to build both settlements and the wall. Similarly, continued military action against Palestinians by the Israelis can only further endanger the peace process. Such steps will further erode chances of guaranteeing and end to violent attacks by Palestinian

bringing about stability need to act from now. A strategy has to be drawn up anticipating the "day-after" scenario that might follow Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. The Quartet should agreed and develop a detailed plan, by which, a monitoring scheme will eventually enable both sides to fulfil their agreed requirements.

seriousness. This will have to be undertaken not only to bolster the job market but also to develop a long-term macroeconomic plan for reconstruction, employment and the future direction of existing industrial zones. These are the only measures that can attract outside investment.

It needs to be also appreciated by the Quartet that the election of a fresh President will not resolve the problem. Negotiating in the face of ongoing violence will be practically impossible. In the long run, neither a unilateral nor an imposed solution can resolve this conflict.

At the same time, one needs to take cognizance of the fact that chances for a peaceful conclusion have been affected by the obdurate policies pertaining to unilateral disengagement. The orthodox extreme right elements in the Israeli administration have left very little flexibility. They need to be per-suaded by the United States (the only country they will listen to) that their unyielding approach can be to Israel's disadvantage in the long run.

Consequently, the Quartet will have to address domestic politics have to assist the new Palestinian Authority in the key challenge of maintaining unity and achieving a smooth and democratic transition

This is an extremely significant juncture in Palestinian history. The reestablishment of contacts between the US and Palestinians and the willingness of the EU and the US to help Palestinians in dealing with the ongoing transition will be of importance in the coming months of this "stabilisation phase. They have to seize this opportunity. Abu Mazen is a leader with vision. He is genuinely respected internationally and is considered "a man of just and lasting peace." One hopes that he will be able to build on his past experience in leadership.

Both the international community and the wider Arab world will have to support the Palestinians in this difficult time and help create the minimum conditions for necessary cohesion. This process can be facilitated by Israel withdrawing to the September 2000 agreed lines, increasing their financial transfers to Palestinian territories and ending their reprisal killings. These factors

will strengthen the hands of the new Palestinian leadership and enable them to restore law and order and also bring back their security forces under the control of the govern-

It also needs to be recognised that the mere holding of an election now will not resolve radical feelings. If Hamas indeed boycotts the electoral process, achieving a provisional ceasefire would be

questionable.

What is required is a strong transatlantic vision for the region and collaboration with the internaaccepted by the Quartet that the parameters of a solution for Israel's secure borders indirectly depends on the final status of Palestine. There is no longer any time to sit back and let the situation deteriorate further. The EU in particular has to understand this. The possible future enlargement of the EU to include Turkey, would give it a directly shared border with the

The Quartet has to move beyond their limited matrix. Innovative solutions need to be brought in. The European Neighbourhood Policy might be a functional tool in this regard. This could be the carrot for Israel's withdrawal from occupied territories. On the other hand, the Quartet could mould Palestinian public opinion on the streets by offering assistance and financial aid to the Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons as a basic tenet of their future development policy. Such a step will strengthen the functional abilities of the moderate Palestinian Authority and enhance chances of stable democracy and free markets.

A viable Palestinian state cannot exist within Gaza only -- if only for economic reasons. Both sides have to be clear about what's at the end of the road. This has to include both states living in security. They face common challenges that need pragmatic solutions.

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the compensation for service should

be comparable with private sector

and international compensations as

a reasonable step. We are in favour of

lump salary in place of prevailing

"part-cash" and "part in-kind

salary for adjustment of compensa-

The central question of any ser-

vice is the compensation (salary)

that is paid for that service. In Ban-

gladesh, co-existence of three pay

scales prevails. One such pay scale

mainly relates to top positions in foreign companies, donor agencies,

international organisations, foreign

NGO's etc. It is not possible to

ensure an equilibrium of the top

civil servants' compensation with

such international compensations.

The private sector generally pays

less than the international scale but

more than the government service

scale. This disequilibrium is the

actual financial strain in govern-

ment service. Can Bangladesh come

out of such a disequilibrium of pay

scale in order to stop brain-drain

and thereby to increase the nation's

tion with inflation.

Functioning of democracy

Office of Ombudsman and equilibrium in pay scales can go a long way

ABDUL KHALEQUE

N a democracy, the government and leaves other matters to the community with direction and regulatory rules, emphasising national needs and policies. An effective functioning of democracy with emphasis on transparency and accountability has been largely regarded as a key factor in good In reviewing the functioning of

democracy in Bangladesh, we may sadly observe that the parliament is not the hub of all political activities. It has badly suffered from boycott, walk-out at the slightest pretext as a routine affair of major parties. The quality of parliamentary discussions and political debates lacks homework; discussions and debates usually centre round political personalities and not issues. The constitutional provision (Article 70) that forces and MP to toe the party line has made democracy fairly unreal in the parliament and outside. The MP cannot exercise his personal conscience and interest. The parliament is to an extent occupied by exbureaucrats and ex-military officers and business tycoons, and not be professional politicians, high calibre intellectuals, eminent educationists, doctors, engineers, lawyers and such other personages who do not have enough to enter the votemarket. Nobody cares for the ceiling of election expenditure set by the Election Commission. Clandestine expenditure to influence voters is alleged in elections.

Bangladesh has a long list of laws and procedures enacted or imposed by native and foreign rulers and military regimes. The appropriateness of such laws and procedures along with the laws known as black laws enacted in independent Bangladesh is a big question mark now in the context of human rights and constitutional liberty. By and large, there is pronounced disregard for law in the country. Improper and inadequate law enforcement and absence of its professional sense and sanity are household themes.

For thoughtful and insightful lawmaking, it is sometimes suggested that Bangladesh should have a bicameral legislature in which outstanding lawyer and religious, ethnic professional, vocational, peasant, doctor, engineer, scientific and technological groups etc. would find representation in order to improve the process of law-making in the light of their experience, knowledge and prudence. There has been struggle of women organisations for adequate reserved representation in the elective process of the parliament, in all self-governing institutions and everywhere else in the government of the country

services as a whole. In Bangladesh, magistrate of the colonial days is still engaged in lower criminal justice ministrative Service" occupy posts of each and every ministry as a matter of right. In order to put an end to such a situation it seems feasible that the 29 cadres should be fixed as far as possible in terms of their ministries concerned for a full career, with a general cadre left to man miscellaneous non-cadre jobs. Recruitment, training, promotion prospect etc. should be made on the basis of the needs of the ministry concerned, so that no cadre can enter another laterally or vertically.

tional Anti-Corruption Commis-The appointment of "Ombuds-

man" with necessary authority to deal with "certain types of complaints" with independence against Members of Parliament, Ministers and statutory bodies and top bureaucrats (civil and non-civil) will be another step to alleviate delinquency and also corruption. The report of the Ombudsman will go to every session of the Parliament for direction for further action. The Ombudsman will generally monitor the functioning and performance of government offices, courts, autonomous and semi-government instituinternational sector in economic development, the importance of administrative reform has lems faced by Bangladesh economy now is the burden of bad loans of the government-owned financial institutions given to private sectors without proper assessment of their recovery prospects. In spite of good works done by the NGO's, it has been felt the NGO's need national supervision so that their works may serve cohesive national interest. The essential supervision in respect of NGO project calls for permanent and capable civil service authority in the administration. With respect to

The central question of any service is the compensation (salary) that is paid for that service. In Bangladesh, co-

existence of three pay scales prevails. One such pay scale mainly relates to top positions in foreign companies, donor agencies, international organisations, foreign NGO's etc. The private sector generally pays less than the international scale but more than the government service scale. Can Bangladesh come out of such a disequilibrium of pay scale in order to stop brain-drain and thereby to increase the nation's capability to safeguard its national interest?

including the judicial and the defence services and various com-

Enormous amount of details are to be worked out for a concrete blueprint of administrative reform. We have just barely presented the salient problems of such reform. To start with, we must mention that neutrality is the essence of public service and that a one hundred percent honesty is the minimum qualification for a public servant who is required only to serve and not to rule. The word "Administrator" begets arrogance and it must be dropped from democratic vocabulary. Arrogance of power is usually cited as the hall-mark of Bangladesh public officials (bureaucrats). Political control over bureaucracy is conspicuously absent. In our opinion, civil services must not have a

'defence flavour" in any tier. Inter-relationship among 29 cadre services is now bitter to the extreme. The over-bearing attitude of some cadres over others has jeopardised the efficiency of public

There should be code of civil service conduct approved by the parliament for each and every cadre. The disciplinary rules and the punishment procedures and practices now prevailing should be thoroughly examined by a competent political committee for parliamentary approval in order to ensure quick and rational punishment for any delinquency which should include, among other things, misdemeanor also. In our bureaucracy, industry, mills and factories and educational institutions there is no work culture worth the name at any level. Lack of punctuality and responsiveness to public need have been a standing calumny in public services of the Republic.

To deal with corruption of various grades of public and private services, corporations and of autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies including speed- money, hundi and share in miscellaneous contracts, distributions and purchases there is need for a permanent "Constitu-

For economic and social uplift Bangladesh needs thorough administrative reform. According to management experts, governmentowned enterprises are overstaffed, that is, too many persons are employed for the amount of work that is actually done, Any attempt at reduction of the staff as a reform measure becomes extremely risky proposition in view of political and trade union opposition and the civil servents' protest which may paralyse the administration.

The concept of national capability to deal with such risk is critically important. The concept of golden handshake is helpful in the nation's overall interest. One important component of national capability is the efficiency and steadfastness with which the national government can defend the national interest in face of domestic, private and international pressures.

With the increase in the role of the private sector, the NGO's and the with various foreign and multinational authorities in matters of contracts it is necessary that the permanent civil servants undertake responsibility on behalf of the government to protect national interest and resist pressure or lure of private

In fact, Bangladesh needs an efficient civil administration capable of guarding her national interest in the aid dependence of her economy. It is the responsibility of the civil service together with the political leadership to ensure that the foreign aid actually serves national interest. In project selection, designing and execution, the role of the permanent technocrat service can hardly be over-emphasised. Bangladesh by all means needs a civil and technological and technocrat administration of high quality and integrity to mobilize and utilise domestic resources and undertake project for effective completion.

capability to safeguard its national the negotiations of the government

For high quality public service,

interest? We think, Bangladesh Bangladesh civil service pay scale is not strictly related to any standard which can satisfy an employee. With

a basic pay and its gradual increments are added house-rent, dearness allowance, medical benefit, gratuity, pension etc. Some of these are determined by percentage of the basic pay, others are related to different bases. In kind also compensation is paid. For example, government housing, transportation facilities, allotment of government plots for house building etc. It is an economic principle followed in many countries that lump sum cash payment of the total market value of compensation is always welfareenhancing for the recipient, compared to part of it in kind. This means that lump sum cash payment enhances welfare without requiring any budgetary increase in expenditure. This may sometimes lead to budgetary savings also.

Abdul Khaleque is a former IG of Police.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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. unleashed by the rich Western indus-Grab the USD 10

trialised countries. The Islamic world

is handicapped with huge communi-

cation and economic gaps; and a Western power is dictating terms in

the Middle East and Muslim coun-

tries. There is a need for a second international currency to reduce the supremacy of the USD. We dissipate too much national energy internally, to be of assistance to others at the regional and global levels. The footprints of our national

need the entrepreneurial initiative to tap new markets, as the natural leaders are too small; therefore bounties are generous in Banglafreedom of expression is rather desh, the country of water and fertile cramped. The inward look is a personal and private exercise, to enhance public exposure. land, with huge human resources. Joint ventures with investment from Muslim countries would The export market is changing, and strengthen the limping OIC. This aspect needs handling at urgent we are caught napping.

billion export market

The Malaysian trade delegation which visited Dhaka recently indi-

cated that the global halal meat

export market was worth around US Dollars 100 billion, and Bangladesh

could grab 10 percent of the market.

We are too nostalgic and senti-

mental about traditional exports

(RMG, jute, shrimp), whereas we

priority due to adverse propaganda

Pedestrians' woes

The number of pedestrians killed or wounded in road accidents while crossing roads and streets in Dhakais increasing at an alarming rate day

The DCC and the DMP tell us to use foot overbridges, zebra crossings or underpasses while crossing roads and streets in the city. But may we ask the authorities concerned how many and where do we have Zebra Crossings, underpasses or foot overbridges in crowded and ever busy roads and streets in Motijheel Commercial Area, Elephant Road, Eskaton Road, Airport Road, North-South Road, Mirpur Road, Folder Street-Jaikali Mandir-Outer Circular Road, Malibagh

Road, Nazimuddin Road, Tipu Sultan Road, Gulshan Road, Baridhara Road and so and so forth?

Running buses, cars, taxis, autos, trucks and rickshaws never stop even for a single minute in front of any Zebra Crossing. No matter whether there is any Zebra Crossing or no Zebra Crossing all the times the pedestrians are compelled to cross a road/street from one side to another hurriedly in the midst of running vehicles or traffic jammed roads/streets at the great risk of their lives.

It is highly regretted that DCC and DMP always turn a blind eye to the risky and dangerous crossing of roads and streets by the pedestrians, young or old, man or woman or school children.

We strongly demand of the DCC to earmark and set up Zebra Crossings on crowded roads and streets where schools, colleges, bazaars, shops, cinema halls, offices, hospitals, bus stops and bus terminals etc. are situated and to take effective and efficient steps to control road traffic for the safety and security of valuable lives of the pedestrians of **OH Kabir**

Post-harvest technology and SAU With economic development, people's dietary preference is changing. During the last few years, the demand

our country about 40 to 50 per cent of fruits and vegetables produced suffer from post-harvest losses. Now time has arrived when we should pay serious attention to the development of post-harvest knowledge and technology. Fruits and vegetables are not only important from the dietary stand point but this is a profitable economic sector. If managed scientifically, the country can earn a huge amount of foreign exchange from fruits and

To cultivate and to perpetuate post harvest knowledge, the agri-cultural universities of the country have to come forward. Considering its great importance, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University (SAU) has for fruits and vegetables has increased introduced a new discipline under

the name of 'Post-harvest Technology' in the Horticulture Department and it has already started its instructional and research activi-

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Application of Biotechnology to develop new varieties of fruits and vegetables to meet prolong storage requirements can add great value to post-harvest management. With a view to bringing crop improvement and developing new varieties, the SAU has also opened a new Department of Biotechnology which is yet to start its function.

It is to be mentioned here that the SAU is trying its best to contribute effectively in the development of country's agriculture and to enhance food production. But as ill luck would have it, these activities are

being constrained due to lack of necessary funds. In fact, to procure modern scientific equipment and to develop infrastructure, a develop ment scheme of SAU is awaiting final approval of the ECNEC.

To speak frankly, in spite of very many criticisms, the SAU is destined to bring changes in Bangladesh agriculture through modernisation and commercialisation of agricul ture. So, we sincerely hope that the government would approve the development project of SAU at the earliest with a view to assisting SAU to attain its goal towards economic emancipation of the country. Professor M Zahidul Haque

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