

Another arms seizure

Track down the operators

ONCE again congratulations are in order for the seizure by a joint Rab and BDR team of a cache of 20AK-47 rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition in the remote forested area of Naikhangchhbari in Bandarban on Thursday. The fact that the contraband was hidden deep in the forested hillside underlines the efficiency with which the seizure was carried out.

This is not the first such seizure in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in recent times, and all indications are that it will not be the last either. The area is at the junction of three countries -- Bangladesh, India, and Myanmar -- and is highly inaccessible, resulting in it having turned into a virtual den of smugglers, drug traffickers, and criminals of all shade and stripe.

Even more ominous, the adjoining forbidding terrain, far away from prying eyes, is suspected to be the staging area for insurgents and other anti-social elements. The region can be described as a clandestine world, providing cover to a large and varied cast of undesirables. Imposing order on such a region is an extremely difficult task, and to the extent that they have had periodic success, the authorities and armed forces in the region deserve praise.

However, periodic seizures of weapons caches are not enough. In the first place, it is unavoidable to suspect that even as weapons are seized that many more remain undetected. But more importantly, as often as arms are seized, there has been very little progress in bringing the criminals and shady characters believed to be operating in the region to justice. As long as those who are behind the arms are not brought to book then the root problem not being addressed adequately.

The recent nationwide bomb blasts have brought home to us just how important it is to maintain national security and to spare no expense in pursuing those who are involved in efforts to destabilise the state or to merely profit from the limitations of central authority in remote areas.

The time is long overdue for the government to ensure that its writ runs in the hill tracts. In the current explosive political situation, to permit armed gangs to ply their trade -- be it drugs or guns or insurgency -- more or less freely can only contribute to the growing sense of anxiety.

Unlocking new possibilities

Investment from Abu Dhabi

THE Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that the Board of Investment has signed with Abu Dhabi Group -- which will invest \$1 billion in Bangladesh -- is a significant development for a host of reasons.

The quantum of the first major investment in Bangladesh by a Middle Eastern country may not be that big, but the very approach of the Group to investment in Bangladesh is noteworthy. They have been robustly appreciative of our investment climate and the incentives that Bangladesh is providing to prospective foreign entrepreneurs have proved to be a clincher. Tata India has serious plans to invest massively in Bangladesh, and now comes the Abu Dhabi group -- one thing leading to another.

The Abu Dhabi investors have proposed to invest in areas like telecom, hospitality and pharmaceuticals. We have a booming telecom market. They have shown keen interest in the energy sector as well. It is obvious that over all their plans are quite in keeping with our needs.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has appealed to the UAE investors to come in a big way to Bangladesh. The example set by Abu Dhabi Group should inspire other major investors in the Middle East to come forward.

Already, there are proposals from foreign investors in many areas including development of tourism where local equity participation is possible.

The arrival of Abu Dhabi Group for business is a clear proof of the fact that despite occasional negative publicity that Bangladesh is subject to, the advantages of investing in the country are numerous. It has a vast reservoir of cheap labour, internal market and a reasonable export accessibility overseas. However, it is incumbent on us to make sure that the country offers what the investors are looking forward to: a stable socio-political situation coupled with a dependable and viable infrastructure.

Will Iraq survive as a nation state?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THE Iraqi draft constitution, to be placed for referendum in mid-October over the rejection by the minority Sunni Arabs, raises some troubling questions. The important objections raised by the Sunnis to the draft constitution revolve round the federal character of Iraq; preservation of Iraq's Arab identity as more than eighty percent of the population are Arabs; Sunni objection to the mention of de-Batification in the constitution as they fear it can open the door for witch hunting of the former Batists; Sunnis want that civil law should be the basis of legal norms affecting citizens and ethnic groups; Sunnis oppose concentration of executive authority in the hands of any one group; and that decision on the future of autonomous provinces and regions should be decided by the national assembly to be elected in the December. Sunnis opposition to the creation of autonomous federal states in the Kurdish north and the Shiite south is based on their fear that the Sunnis will be cut off from the Iraqi oil resources. Some even see in this a conspiracy by the Israeli intelligence to divide Iraq along ethnic and cultural lines.

Sunni rejection of the draft constitution does not mean their withdrawal from the political process. On the contrary, they have vowed to defeat the proposed constitution in the October referendum and to take part in the elections later this year. Though the Sunnis are a minority (about 17-20 percent of the total population), they have enough votes to defeat the constitution in the referendum. The document needs to be approved by 16 of Iraq's 18 provinces. If two thirds of the votes in any three provinces reject the constitution, then Iraq will have to hold new parliamentary elections and start drafting a new constitution from the scratch. There are three Kurdish and three Sunni Arab governors. Even if the Kurdish leaders accept the Shia dictated constitution, Kurds could still reject

it. Equally the Sunni Arabs could torpedo the draft constitution.

Predictably, President Bush expressed optimism about Iraq's future and downplayed the importance of rejection by the Sunnis of the draft constitution. He drew a parallel with the Philadelphia Convention (1787) in which some delegations refused to sign the draft which was vigorously debated in every state, and the final outcome was not certain till all the votes were counted. Clearly the example of Philadelphia Convention underlying lack of unanimity and consequent debate being intrinsic to the democratic process

on earth except that of the Imam. Till the arrival of Imam Mehdi, the twelfth Imam, no human sovereign has total legitimacy. The question, therefore, arises if a Shia dominated society would have a natural tendency to establish a theocratic state.

In Iraq, where Shias constitute sixty percent of the population, the real power in Shiite Iraq rest with two religious parties: Abdul Aziz al-Hakim's Supreme Council of Religious Revolution in Iraq (Sciri) and Dawa of Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafar. Both want Iraq to be an Islamic state, make Islam the principal source of law, would like

prophets' missions in the world has been to establish the Kingdom of God on earth and to enforce the system of life received from Him." Power and authority are thus prerequisites to enforce Islam. It is important to remember that in Pakistan, as in some other Muslim countries, madrasas and mosques are the basis of religious activism and politics.

In the case of Iran defying western predictions, theocracy continues to survive. Besides, the fact that the overwhelming majority of Iranians were born after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and have little spiritual affinity with theocratic rule,

of assets. They enjoy monopoly status and benefit from a closed and isolated society, and engage in a range of activities including trade, commerce, manufacturing, social services, and political and religious propaganda. It would, therefore, appear that theocracy, be it of Shiite or Sunni variety, actively promotes religious schools producing large number of people erudite in theocratic scholarship, but of little use in a manufacturing world geared to serve a global consumer society.

Bush administration woes are further compounded by (a) the desire expressed by the two Shiite

Whether one goes by the conditions to facilitate democratic transition laid down by Francis Fukuyama, Cato Institute's Patrick Basham, or of Council on Foreign Relation's Richard Haas (level of development, culture, neighbourhood effect, idea, political trust, social tolerance, recognition of the importance of basic political liberties, popular support for gender equality), one cannot but agree with the assessment of Larry Diamond who briefly served Paul Bremer that: "Iraq lacks virtually every precondition for democracy."

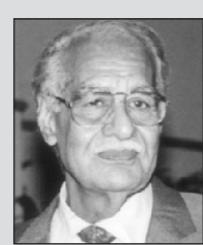
Understandably, the Bush administration, faced with the increasing ferocity of Sunni Arab insurgency, is perhaps exiting from its state of denial. The US, reports Washington Post, no longer expects to see a model democracy or a society in which a majority of people are free from serious security or economic challenges. The Bush administration which set out to establish democracy in Iraq to enthuse other Arabs to follow suit may very well end up with an Islamic Republic. Additionally, shorn of its Arab identity, a fragmented Iraq surrounded by Sunni Arab neighbours may find itself in difficulty as many conservative Sunnis regard the Shias as apostates.

In short, the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq may have liberated the Iraqis from the clutches of a tyrant, but has not given much to the Iraqis, either in terms of security or economic benefit. In the ultimate analysis, however much the Bush-Blair Iraq venture has been a mistake, the world has at least been warned of religious terrorism and Islamic extremism which does not distinguish between the rich and the poor, the developed and the underdeveloped societies, combatants and non-combatants, civilian men, women and children. These are the people we should be on the lookout for. These are the people who have to be apprehended and destroyed.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

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Politicians' writ or police raj

KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

HAT police is meant to maintain law and order still holds good in the West, although the 9/11 attacks have drastically changed its meaning. But in our part of the world, particularly in the subcontinent, the concept of law and order has got politicised. The force has become an instrument in the hands of the rulers, who use it for their own ends without any hesitation.

Despite its inadequacies, the Nanavati Commission's report on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots took note of this and made a pertinent recommendation: "There should be an independent police force which is free from political influence." It went unnoticed. Now that the din over the commission has died down, and people are looking for remedies, it is time to pursue the suggestion. The politicised police is the bane of India or, for that matter, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

Law and order is a state subject in India. The Centre can do little to interfere. Even the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), and the Border Security Force (BSF) have an assigned role in a

state. They cannot meddle in its internal affairs. Pakistan follows more or less the same pattern. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are different because both are unitary governments and control police directly.

The idea behind giving the states in India the charge of law and order was to let people feel that they enjoyed autonomy in their internal affairs. It was also feared that if a central police force to maintain law

followers in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat. Congressmen are "free" in the states where the party is in power. The DMK is under disadvantage in Tamil Nadu because the AIADMK sits in the chair of the chief minister. The ruling Biju Janata Dal uses police to back even multinationals against poor adivasis. Police is its own master in Punjab.

It is no different in Pakistan, although the armed forces have the

with the police standing at the place of incidents. In fact, all the 28 commissions of inquiry on communal riots since independence have blamed police for conniving at the violence against minorities. It is generally said that a riot between Hindus and Muslims ultimately becomes a confrontation between police and Muslims. Lately, caste riots have been holding center stage. Caste has largely stalled communalism.

Strikers are damaging central property. Many a time New Delhi has utilized the services of IPS officers whenever the state government is hostile. Since IPS is controlled by the Personnel Department at the Centre, this informal arrangement has worked at times.

Not long ago, the then Home Minister, L.K. Advani, broached the idea of a federal force to handle crimes like discrimination or atrocities against the dalits to meet the states'

at the grassroots. The specific proposal to have a federal force for specific purposes may find support in the states. In a federal structure that India is, there is a case for an all-India force to protect minorities, dalits, and the backwards. Had there been a federal force it could have gone to Gujarat to stop the genocide of Muslims. It is possible that the state and central police forces, under different masters, may come to a clash. But that will ultimately settle as they have in the US, both sides accepting certain norms.

The real problem, however, will be how to insulate the federal police against political influence. One way could be to put the force under the National Human Rights Commission until the apparatus of Lokpal (ombudsman) takes some shape. However, the present arrangement to employ the armed forces to curb domestic troubles has reduced the states' autonomy to a farce, apart from making the armed forces dictatorial in their way. Our experience in the northeast should have made us think of some other arrangement. The failure to find an alternative has resulted in the status quo: the armed forces remaining in control and operating under a 50-year-old law which gives them immunity to kill on suspicion. A democratic structure depending on the army to ensure that the Centre's writ runs will make the country porous and too weak to resist any wayward force or situation.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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and order, rulers at New Delhi might be tempted to take over the country. It nearly happened in 1975 when Indira Gandhi imposed the emergency. But people defeated her at the polls when they got the chance. Earlier, after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, then Home Secretary Vishwanathan had the CRPF stage a flag march on the streets of New Delhi to "nip the mischief in the bud," as he put it.

None imagined that a state would some day use police for its own ends to chastise the critics or coddle the supporters. Comrades in West Bengal have more or less immunity as have the RSS-BJP

last word. Only in Waziristan did the military take the initiative. Otherwise, it is all left to the state rulers. The governments in Baluchistan and the NWFP have police engaged in the pro-fundamentalist activities because they are dyed in extremism themselves. In contrast, chief ministers in Punjab and Sind have put police to curb fanaticism. Consequently, police plays havoc in both the countries since the force has reduced itself to the role of errand boys. Chief Minister Narendra Modi could use it for the systematic killing of Muslims as the Congress government did in 1984 at Delhi where 3,000 Sikhs were killed

Still the role of police has not changed. They continue to act at the instance of chief ministers. Parochialism has also contaminated the force. It looks to the other side if the victim is from a different caste or state. Even the word, foreigner, is thrown at him if he ever goes to a police station to file the first information report (FIR). The poor are the worst sufferers because they have no clout, political or economic.

A piquant situation has arisen because New Delhi is dependent on the state for use of police. Even when the Centre wants to protect its property at the time of local strikes, the state force does little if protesters or

caste bias. America has a federal force which it has used in some southern states to fight for the rights of the blacks against the Ku Klux Klan. Admission to a school or a seat in a bus was dictated by colour considerations. Washington was able to demolish the segregation wall by using the federal police. New Delhi can do the same by having a union force.

New Delhi's proposal to have internal security on the Concurrent List of the constitution is too sweeping. The states will consider it as central interference in their domestic affairs. It will negate the states' autonomy which strengthens democracy

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

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.

Intolerant

A man took the initiative to stop the Kirtan (religious song) festival of the Hindus in Keshobpur. This news made me wonder what could have been the reason for taking such a drastic step beside what he claimed. Does he fear that we the Muslim community will be enticed by the Kirtan and convert ourselves to Hinduism? Well, I can assure him of my "belief". And does he realise that he has acted against the directive of the Almighty Allah who has forbidden any malicious act against any religious sect? We as believers should have more faith in Allah's strength - and also should not judge anything from our narrow perspective.

The entire earth's population beside the universe is supposed to be Allah's creation and there is a distinct directive to love all his

creation.
Sazzad Hossain
On e-mail

Small economies

Many problems lie within small economies; that is why they are small. However small could be well managed. A very small example: if a small economy has a £1,000,000 stake to manage, it has to have industries generating at least the equal amount to maintain. To be precise only meeting the expenditures alone is not enough because it has to have development plans as well as allowance for contingencies.

Now if it has units of industries earning £1,000,000 only, it would need as many as 1,000 units of business to accumulate just enough funds to maintain the economy. This was a very simple example;

needs much more than just a few millions of pounds. On the other hand though many units could be earning much more than a few thousands of pounds, the units of business have their own expenditure to meet as well. One hundred percent of the earning does not go back to the development funds of the government.

Going back to the original point, paradoxically it is the big business solution that I along with others prescribe to follow. In the historical Bangladesh and also in the early history of independent Bangladesh it was the pursuit, I believe. Here I do not give any credit or discredit to any particular party or person. One of such examples was Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory. The problem was not the size. The problem with them was structure and management; mostly stemming from lack of previous experience.

The answer to the question, who would develop or who has the capacity to develop such big businesses based on indigenous knowledge, key resources and strategies, mission and vision, I believe, still is the government either with its own initiative or with public-private partnership. Private sector in Bangladesh may have the skill but certainly does not have the enormous capacity to develop big businesses such as a national motor industry or similar others pooling resources and key knowledge.

Abdullah Al Mahmud
Luton, UK

Habiganj-Hila road

We, the inhabitants of the low-lying areas of Habiganj district, have been facing an acute problem due to the absence of communication from Habiganj to Hila. The helpless

people of the bhati areas of Habiganj have been suffering as there is no road and electricity, though the areas of Hila, Shahapur, Ikrak, Kabilpur and Makrampur are situated within 3 to 5 kilometers from the district HQ. It is unimaginable to think that even in this modern age of development, people of this low lying areas have to carry patients to Habiganj Sadar Hospital on their shoulders.

So we would like to appeal to the Project Director, LGED, and the minister concerned to take immediate steps to construct the Habiganj-Hila road which is now at half done stage. Otherwise, the money invested in the project so far will turn out to be a total wastage.

Peerzada Syed Rofiqul Hussain
Hila Shaheb Bari, Habiganj

Child abuse

The Daily Star published two recent stories of child abuse. The first one

was on a 12-year-old girl, Aklima, who had been sent to prison as she was accused of stealing goods from her employer's house. She was beaten severely and forced to confess to stealing the goods, though she was innocent. The second one, Murseda, an eight year old was beaten by her landlord as she was trying to get a guava, later she was being given treatment in a hospital. Such incidents are being reported regularly by the press.

So I would request all conscious people to come forward to save the innocent children and helpless domestic aides.

Muhammad Bin Abdullah
Cox's Bazar

Sugar free products

I would like to reply to AA of Dhaka's letter headed "Carcinogenic sweetener". AA may also be interested to know that doubts have been expressed too about another sweetener much more widely used in many thousands of "sugar free" products called Aspartame. The industry that produces Aspartame has for a long time poured scorn on critics and yet very recently an Italian Study has concluded that it causes leukaemia.

This website is useful - <http://www.dorway.com/badnews.html>. It seems that always people making large money do not want to hear the truth about their products.