

## Latest arms hauls

Indicative of both effective counter offensive and a lurking threat

WITHIN eight days of each other, at the same site in Sherpur, namely, Bakakura village in Jhenaigati upazila bordering India, two dens of clandestine elements have been successfully cleared. Their abandoned arms caches of substantive quantities were hauled up by our border security forces and the police. We commend them for their successful operations which, to our mind, bear a significance beyond just the busting of dens.

First of all, police alert, and especially, human intelligence has contributed a large part to the success, something that needs to be built up on and advanced. For, without the vigil of the local people and their cooperation, no surveillance or policing can prove to be ultimately effective. Secondly, it may be assumed that because of the proactive role of the security and law enforcement agencies the recalcitrant may have been on the run.

Yet, the concern for internal security and consequently the need for greater surveillance grows in the apprehension that from hideouts of small arms these may spill into the interior of the country.

It is a sensitive border area and given the seizure of huge quantities of hand written documents in different languages, finger of suspicion gets pointed to an insurgent group like ULFA, according to a preliminary assessment.

One caveat to the success story however, according to some experts, is the question mark as to how the arms and ammunition could sneak through the border fences? This calls for greater cooperation between the security forces of the two countries.

While arms hauls are taking place in border areas, these are also happening somewhat away from the border raising a security threat of an ideological militant variety. Police busted a den of outlawed Jamait-e-Mujahedeen, Bangladesh (JMB) at Hathazari in Chittagong arresting a militant and lifting a big quantity of explosives along with some Jihadi literature. A local commander of JMB with ten followers were living in a rented house, only half a kilometre off a police station.

The vestigial presence of outlawed JMB in various forms and disguises and their continuing dissemination of extremist messages need to be vigorously addressed. Merely a law enforcement approach cannot contain the threat, it has to be fought off at the intellectual and community level with energetic emphasis laid on the true spirit of religion which is avowedly opposed to violence and intolerance of any kind whatsoever.

## Settling land disputes in CHT

Early addressing of unresolved issues key to sustainable peace

THE reported suspension of the hearings by the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Land Dispute Resolution Committee (LDRC) to settle the local indigenous population's long unresolved land ownership issue is disconcerting. The seemingly differing views of the LDRC's chairman that the disputes could be resolved through the existing Land Commission's laws, while the agitating tribal people's demand that those have to be amended including their additional demand seeking resignation of the LDRC chairman has further complicated the situation.

The question that naturally arises is were not those in charge aware of this stance of the tribal people vis-à-vis that of their own before preparing for the inaugural occasion to hold the hearing? No doubt the suspension of the hearings by the government is reflective of the lack of its contact with the ground realities obtaining in the region. And unless those in the CHT Peace Accord Implementation Committee (PAIC) and the representatives of the tribal people are earnest in reaching an understanding to remove the newly emerged roadblocks before starting the hearings, peace in the CHT will remain elusive. And it is not only the peace in the region; the desired development of the area is also getting inordinately delayed due to the non-resolution of the land disputes.

But why is it that the peace accord is coming up against no end of hurdles in resolving all the disputes towards establishing lasting peace in the region? For there is no question that the peace accord signed about a decade and a quarter back had successfully put an end to the two decades long insurgency in the CHT and brought back the dislodged indigenous people to their ancestral home. So, after so many years of inking of the accord, the wind of peace, reconstruction and development should have by now started to blow in full strength. In fact, it is only after the resolution of the land-related disputes that the government and the international development partners could start to invest in the reconstruction and economic growth of the region. So, it is not only the government, the indigenous people of CHT have also a huge stake in seeing an early settlement of the disputes. But the recent developments have only put a damper on the prospect.

Whoever is to bear the responsibility for the ongoing stalemate, the indefinite delay in the process of settlement will serve no one's purpose. The land commission's laws, which the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) leader Shantu

Larma and other tribal leaders claimed to have contained some disputed provisions have meanwhile been largely resolved through discussions with the government. So, after resolving the remaining issues like holding of regional polls and demarcation of lands, other lesser irritants should be addressed amicably without further delay through consultation between the government and representatives of the indigenous people. Otherwise, if these problems are allowed to fester, that would be a grave blow to the prospect of peace in the entire region.



## Of cars, sardines and ingenuity

It is folly for us to refer to the progress made by other nations as long as we do not tackle our own realities here at home. Which takes us back to this matter of what we should be doing with our cars after this ministerial exhortation. The simplest of answers is: we stay put.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

FINANCE Minister A.M.A. Muhith has just given us some most intriguing advice. He thinks it will help ease road traffic conditions if privately owned cars are packed to capacity instead of carrying one or two passengers, which is what we see being done these days. The minister has been generous enough to remind us that in countries in our neighbourhood, that is how things are done.

Before we move on to a discussion of what we should do about the cars that many of us happen to own, let us spend sometime on what other people in other countries do abroad and whether or not we can emulate them here in this sad country that we inhabit, that we love in full measure.

The finance minister speaks to us of the ways in which traffic is managed abroad. That is all very fine. But do we have, by way of a credible transport system, what all those good people have in their countries? They have wide roads, they have buses and other vehicles whose drivers stand ready to take people to their destinations, however far and diverse those destinations might be.

In those countries, the road network, embracing as it does a wide expanse of flyovers and highways, gives you the feeling that you will not lose your precious hours stranded on the road in a traffic mess only the Almighty can straighten out.

In those countries, you have professionally qualified and experienced traffic policemen who do not melt into the crowds every time there is congestion on the streets. And, of course, in countries away from ours, it is generally a disciplined citizenry we come across. No fake licences, no overtaking, no violation of rules.

So now we have a question for the minister: before we are told that we must use our cars in the way the government would like us to, can the government be part of reassurance us that all the circumstances we have spoken of can be replicated in our own land? The point here is not what people and governments do in other countries. It is one of how we have been faring in our country in all this time since we liberated the country nearly four decades ago from Pakistan.

You do not have to be an extremely wise individual to know how far behind other nations we have fallen, how full of holes our

entire socio-political fabric happens to be, how we have turned into a mediocrity at the hands of a political class that refuses to lift itself out of mediocrity. The truth is out there for all of us to go through again. But, yes, you can, if you wish, flip through some incisive reports that Transparency International Bangladesh has come up with of late. Our worries find confirmation with TIB.

The lesson ought to be clear. It is folly for us to refer to the progress made by other nations as long as we do not tackle our own realities here at home. Which takes us back to this matter of what we should be doing with our cars after this ministerial exhortation. The simplest of answers is: we stay put.

But since life has never been a matter of simplicity, we must now seriously consider what we should be doing when we awaken from our fitful sleep at dawn. You inaugurate the day through invocations to the Creator of the universe or through a dew-dappled foray into music. That is as it should be.

But that wonderful moment might not last longer, for now your day must begin with worries about how many people you can collect in your vehicle on your way to work. Besides your chauffeur, it is just you in that car. And you mean to be at your workplace when you are expected to be. But you cannot unless your car looks like a can of sardines, for those traffic constables, with a sergeant or two thrown in, will flag you down, ask you all sorts of humiliating questions and will not let you drive on unless you can manage three or four other individuals to accompany you to work.

Now, the difficulty with good people is that they are generally never good at managing bad people, or implementing bad measures. So you might end up in a heated argument with the police. It's your car, it's your office you are headed for and it's your business whether or not your vehicle has other people in the car before you can move on. Try as you might, you will likely not win that argument. Logic has little place in third world politics.

You just might see your car impounded, your chauffeur's licence taken away and you compelled to walk all the way to your office or wherever it is you are going. Now imagine a young mother on her way to pick up her child from school. She could run into big trouble with the police because, apart from the chauffeur, she is the only person in the car. She will lose time arguing with the constable; and back at that school, that little child will be weeping copious tears because her mother will have gone missing.

Absurdity in governance always gets on people's nerves. Not long ago, a police official cheerfully let his imagination roll. If cars on the streets of the capital moved according to their licence plates --- ka, kha, ga --- on particular days (ka on Sunday, kha on Monday and so on), all this traffic chaos could be brought to an end. That was what he said. You call that ingenuity?

The problem, minister, is not in our cars hitting the roads. It is in not having enlightened governance in the country.

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## India-Russia strategic ties

India at the same time wants to demonstrate that it has the ability to balance its relations with both US and Russia, and provide a signal to US that it can afford to run an independent foreign policy as an emerging global power.

HARUN UR RASHID

RUSSIAN President Dmitry Medvedev's two-day visit to India began on December 21 on the heels of the Chinese prime minister's trip on December 15. Medvedev's first official visit to India took place in 2008.

The Russian president's trip comes at the end of a year which has seen visits by top leaders of all the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council Britain, the United States, France and China.

This year British Prime Minister David Cameron visited India in July, followed by President Obama, French President Sarkozy and China's prime minister. Each of them was accompanied by a large business delegation and each went home with billions of dollars of trade deals with India, the second-fastest growing economy in the world.

Indian ties with the Russian Federation are historic, close and uniquely enduring. During the Cold War era, India and Soviet Union were linked through the Friendship Treaty of August 1971, although India professed non-alignment as a component of its foreign policy. These ties are based on a strong national consensus in both

countries that has cut across ideologies or political conditions.

India's ties with Russia, however, "have always stood apart," India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesman Vishnu Prakash said. "We have a very special strategic partnership with Russia, which has stood the test of time over the last half a century," he added.

The bilateral relationship had been re-energised with the declaration of a Strategic Partnership between the two countries during the visit to India in 2000 by the then President Putin. He visited again in India in 2007.

Since then, partnership has diversified enormously, and today the relationship is a uniquely strong and expanding one, particularly in the fields of defence, civil nuclear energy, hydrocarbons, pharmaceutical industry, biotechnology, space research and science and technology.

During the visit in March this year, Prime Minister Putin reportedly said: "Cooperation in hi-tech is the priority for us. The Russian government is ready to directly support this activity with the help of additional financial assistance, if need be." In the space realm, Russia agreed to put two Indian astronauts into space in 2013.

Indian leaders reciprocated the visits. Beginning with the state visit of President Patil in September 2009, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh paid a three-day visit to Russia on December 6, 2009. Several senior Indian ministers also visited Russia in 2009.

During this visit of the Russian president, nearly a dozen agreements were signed in such areas as energy, technology, chemical, defence and nuclear matters.

Russian-Indian agreement on the joint production of a so-called fifth generation warplane shows that India now expects not just to buy weapons from Russia but also share in the technology of their production. Estimated at around \$30 billion dollars, Russia and India plan to develop together aircraft at least as advanced as the US-made F-22 Raptor, PTI news agency reported.

On the nuclear front, Russia agreed to provide another two 1,000-megawatt reactors to Tamil Nadu state, where it is already setting up two reactors. The first unit (at Kudankulam) will go critical soon, followed by the second unit.

India is one of the world's biggest markets for nuclear technology and the reactor deal is a triumph for Russia's state atomic agency Rosatom, which faces stiff competition from French and US rivals. India plans to expand its energy capacity to 63,000MW by 2032.

India's state-run oil company ONGC is taking part in the Sakhalin-I oil and gas project in Russia's far east. Russia and India are also due to build a titanium dioxide plant in the Orissa.

The two countries aim to set a two-way

trade target of \$20 billion dollars by 2015, up from the around \$10 billion expected in 2010. Both sides recognise that trade is not commensurate with the potential because Russia's trade with China for the first 10 months of 2010 was \$47.5 billion.

Russia has reiterated Moscow's support for New Delhi's permanent seat at the UN Security Council. So, before 2010 comes to an end, India has received unequivocal endorsements of its UNSC aspirations from the leaders of four (UK, US, France and Russia) as well as a tacit support from the leader of China all are five permanent members of the Security Council.

It is reported Medvedev invited India to be a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, seen as a counterweight to North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation, in Central Asia.

The visit of the Russian president has moved bilateral relations to a completely new level, which can be called a favoured strategic relationship.

One major factor for Russia is that, geopolitically, India sees Russia as a counterweight to China and a potential ally in Afghanistan. India wishes to make it clear that Russia's presence in India will continue despite close relationship between India and US.

India at the same time wants to demonstrate that it has the ability to balance its relations with both US and Russia, and provide a signal to US that it can afford to run an independent foreign policy as an emerging global power.

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