

Satchhari arms haul

Ringing wake-up call

THE discovery by Rab on Tuesday of a huge cache of arms and ammunition stashed inside a concrete bunker at Satchhari reserve forest close to Bangladesh-India border in Habiganj is deeply unsettling. It is commendable that the special crime fighting force Rab has been able to home in on this secret arms depot.

Considering the size of the stockpile and massive network of concrete tunnels built to store it, it appears that those behind this sinister scheme had perhaps been working at it over a long period of time.

The kinds of arms found which include rocket launcher chargers and anti-tank rocket shells evidently point to the nature, capacity and organizational strength of their purveyors and users. At the same time, it also exposes the porosity of our border areas as well as the weakness of our border guards in terms of their manpower, logistics and intelligence surveillance.

It is worthwhile to note that investigators of the Bogra ammunition haul of 2003 found that the ammunition was bound for this Satchhari forest. Moreover, they discovered its link to the Indian insurgent groups National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). So, one is led to suggest that similar insurgent groups may have been engaged in this huge build-up of weaponry.

The Satchhari arms haul should be a wake up call for the government. While the government must mount massive search to find out the sinister network responsible for this arms stockpile, it must also enhance the oversight capacity of the border guards with better logistics, increased manpower and greater mobility.

World environment day

Time for action not words

EVERY year on the 5th of June, Bangladesh joins the rest of the world to commemorate World Environment Day (WED). Observation of the day is aimed at encouraging global awareness on environment and providing a worldwide platform to reach out to the citizens of the world. The day is observed in some 100 countries and this year, the theme is on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) which will revolve around the broader context of climate change. Small island states in many ways are bound to face the brunt of the increased melting of glaciers and the rising of the world's oceans. Yet it is not only SIDS that are facing the threat of global warming and environmental degradation.

Our actions are causing irreparable damage to the ecology and overall environment of individual countries. Bangladesh is no exception. Irresponsible behaviour in the name of development is destroying our wetlands and polluting our rivers, destroying not only marine life but also sowing the seeds of destruction of many of our cities as rivers lay dying. Wholesale clearing of natural forest lands to make way for infrastructure such as housing is paving the way for floods to swamp agriculture lands destroying the livelihoods of the poor and fuelling an uncontrolled migration from the villages to urban areas. A process that is both unplanned and unsustainable.

We should take the opportunity on this day to learn how communities all over the world are finding innovative ways to combat environmental degradation. Every small step goes a big way.

"My family and other animals"

AHMAD IBRAHIM

THE implications of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's defence of Shamim Osman are far-reaching. The premier went to bat for the ruling Narayanganj MP in her press briefing on the 31st of May asking if it was a crime for him to ask Nur Hossain to surrender. She reiterated her stance again in parliament on Tuesday when she hinted at 'conspirators' trying to besmirch the Osman family name. According to the Prime Minister, there are very few people in Bangladesh who have been involved in politics who have a completely pristine record. That statement in itself is a shocking indictment which stands to label majority of our politicians as some form of criminal. The pertinent question is whether good governance has become such an elusive entity that it is not difficult to admit that those tasked with upholding the constitutional laws are themselves indulging in illicit activities? Is the political landscape now ridden with so many potholes that corruption has become more of an inevitability than something to fight against? It is also for idle minds to wonder, once the dust has settled on yet another boisterous session of rhetoric from the premier, who are the people that the Prime Minister had in mind when she made that comment. Surely it wasn't an open admission of the long apparent fact that there is rampant corruption inside the cog work of the Awami League?

Continuing in the vein of dynastic-mentality, the Premier said that there have been several instances where 'vested quarters' have tried time and again to attack the good name of a family to further their own interests. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that the Osman family has had a big contribution to our politics. Starting from Khan Shaheb Osman, one of the founders of the Awami League to Nasim Osman, the recently deceased Jatiya Party lawmaker. But again, it puts into stark relief the realization that democracy is not being practiced the way it is meant to be. A democracy is comprised of individuals, not dynasties. Any one with alleged involvement in criminal activity must be brought to book regardless of his lineage. When the premier decided to defend Shamim Osman by bringing up his family's political affiliation she condemned one of the most fundamental democratic ideals. It gives off the idea that perhaps the long arm of the law stops short in front of families with political heritage and clout. The sensible thing would have been to stay mum until Shamim Osman's involvement had been thoroughly investigated. But it is becoming increasingly apparent that foresight is fast becoming a rare commodity. A quick glance through recent rhetoric is evidence enough for that.

The writer is Editorial Assistant, *The Daily Star*.

Put Rab back in the rabbit

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING


 Brig Gen
 SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
 ndc, psc (Retd)

The PM has made her government's position clear on the future of the elite force. And no one should take issue with her when she says that the force cannot be disbanded. However, one is not sure if she has mentioned anything about the future task and task-org of the force. Certainly, Rab has gone beyond the remit enumerated in its seven tasks which includes maintaining internal security (internal security is a very broad subject and can be made to mean anything under the sun). And that Rab has decided to do nothing beyond the 'seven labours' is admission of the fact. However, if the crossed the line most of the time it could not have been without the orders of the political masters.

That Rab had been indulging in illegal activities has been also acknowledged by the PM through her statement to the media last Saturday when she was responding to a question related to the future of Rab. And that merits repeating. She said: "Didn't the Rab kill more than 1,000 people in a year after its formation in 2004? But no criticism was made then. Everyone praised them then. But we've put them on trial whenever they've committed crimes." So nothing was done during the present government's tenure to remodel the force and put it inside the groove. Instead, they have been used in the same vein.

Unfortunately, the force has to bear the brunt of invectives for the gross misuse and mishandling of the force. Encounter killings and crossfire are but euphemisms for political elimination, which could not have been done without a green signal from the political authority.

So what should the present government do with the force if it cannot be disbanded?

THE recent discovery of huge cache of small arms in national park in Habiganj district by Rab may help resurrect some of its lost image but it still remains in the spotlight, more so after what we have come to know from media reports about the participation of all the three Rab officials in the gruesome killing in Narayanganj. And they may not be the only Rab officers involved in the seven murders.

However, if the government really wants a special force like as in many of our neighbouring countries then its organisation and terms of reference should be rewritten.

And normal police job should not be one of those.

Firstly, a special force must do special jobs not routine police work. Admittedly, it was set up to supplement the police. The non-state actors had really become better equipped than the police and had outsmarted our law enforcing agencies from time to time. If Rab was the need of the time, instead of supplementing the police it actually supplanted them, much to the annoyance of the police, although Rab was under the authority of the IGP. I believe that the police is quite capable of doing the seven tasks of Rab, if it is invested with the manpower and logistical support that Rab has, equally well. And time has come to look seriously at police reorganisation including the matter of passing the Draft Police Act 2007 and implementing it quickly.

The undertone of dissension between the police and Rab may not have been apparent but was enough to induce a show of one-upmanship or soft-pedaling on issues from time to time. And one reason for this state of things was the predominance of military personnel in the organisation, particularly at the level of officers. To add to that the manning of the force had been so blatantly politicised that it lost its character. There are reasons to believe that postings are dictated on the service headquarters on considerations where merit, integrity and professionalism do not feature as selection criteria; and where ERE appointments have fixed tenure, some of the officers have been retained in the force well beyond that.

There are perhaps two options open to the government regarding Rab. One, make it into a really elite force worth the name, and two, keep it as it is with its seven tasks.

If it is to remain as it is, then the first action of the government is reversion of all the military personnel to the military, in phases but in quick time. It is not a soldier's occupation to engage in day to day police job. They are not psychologically attuned for it. If not, we will have to suffer severe consequences of contamination. And I feel that every one on reversion must be thoroughly screened before absorption in their respective services.

However, if the government really wants a special force like as in many of our neighbouring countries then its organisation and terms of reference should be rewritten. And normal police job should not be one of those.

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Creating a learning society

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fluctuations.

The Nobel laureate economist Robert Solow noted some 60 years ago that rising incomes should largely be attributed not to capital accumulation, but to technological progress -- to learning how to do things better. While some of the productivity increase reflects the impact of dramatic discoveries, much of it has been due to small, incremental changes. And, if that is the case, it makes sense to focus attention on how societies learn, and what can be done to promote learning -- including learning how to learn.

A century ago, the economist and political scientist Joseph Schumpeter argued that the central virtue of a market economy was its capacity to innovate. He contended that economists' traditional focus on competitive markets was misplaced; what mattered was competition for the market, not competition in the market. Competition for the market drove innovation. A succession of monopolists would lead, in this view, to higher standards of living in the long run.

Schumpeter's conclusions have not gone unchallenged. Monopolists and dominant firms, like Microsoft, can actually suppress innovation. Unless checked by anti-trust authorities, they can engage in anti-competitive behavior that reinforces their monopoly power.

Moreover, markets may not be efficient in either the level or direction of investments in research and learning. Private incentives are not well aligned with social returns: firms can gain from innovations that increase their market power, enable them to circumvent regulations, or channel rents that would otherwise accrue to others.

But one of Schumpeter's fundamental insights has held up well: Conventional policies focusing on short-run efficiency may not be desirable, once one takes a long-run innovation/learning perspective. This is especially true for developing countries and emerging markets.

Industrial policies -- in which governments intervene in the allocation of resources among sectors or favor some technologies over others -- can help "infant economies" learn. Learning may be more marked in some sectors (such as industrial manufacturing) than in others, and the benefits of that learning, including the institutional development required for success, may spill over to other economic activities.

Such policies, when adopted, have been frequent targets of criticism. Government, it is often said, should not be engaged in picking winners. The market is far better in making such judgments.

But the evidence on that is not as compelling as free-market advocates claim. America's private sector was notoriously bad in allocating capital and managing risk in the years before the global financial crisis, while studies show that average returns to the economy from government research projects are actually higher than those from pri-

vate-sector projects -- especially because the government invests more heavily in important basic research. One only needs to think of the social benefits traceable to the research that led to the development of the Internet or the discovery of DNA.

But, putting such successes aside, the point of industrial policy is not to pick winners at all. Rather, successful industrial policies identify sources of positive externalities -- sectors where learning might generate benefits elsewhere in the economy.

Viewing economic policies through the lens of learning provides a different perspective on many issues. The great economist Kenneth Arrow emphasised the importance of learning by doing. The only way to learn what is required for industrial growth, for example, is to have industry. And that may require either ensuring that one's exchange rate is competitive or that certain industries have privileged access to credit -- as a number of East Asian countries did as part of their remarkably successful development strategies.

There is a compelling infant economy argument for industrial protection. Moreover, financial-market liberalisation may undermine countries' ability to learn another set of skills that are essential for development: how to allocate resources and manage risk.

Likewise, intellectual property, if not designed properly, can be a two-edged sword when viewed from a learning perspective. While it may enhance incentives to invest in



research, it may also enhance incentives for secrecy -- impeding the flow of knowledge that is essential to learning while encouraging firms to maximise what they draw from the pool of collective knowledge and to minimise what they contribute. In this scenario, the pace of innovation is actually reduced.

More broadly, many of the policies (especially those associated with the neoliberal "Washington Consensus") foisted on developing countries with the noble objective of promoting the efficiency of resource allocation today actually impede learning, and thus lead to lower standards of living in the long run.

Virtually every government policy, intentionally or not, for better or for worse, has direct and indirect effects on learning. Developing countries where policymakers are cognisant of these effects are more likely to close the knowledge gap that separates them from the more developed countries. Developed countries, meanwhile, have an opportunity to narrow the gap between average and best practices, and to avoid the danger of secular stagnation.

The writer, a Nobel laureate in economics, is University Professor at Columbia University. His most recent book, co-authored with Bruce Greenwald, is *Creating a Learning Society: A New Approach to Growth, Development, and Social Progress*.Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2014. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Tampered gold crests

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a press conference at Gono Bhaban on 1st June said, "It is not important how much gold was there (in the crest), it is important to honour the foreign friends and we did it."

Yes, Honourable PM, it does not matter how much gold there was but it does matter how much we received them. The thing that our PM missed is that people who were in charge of upholding the spirit of Liberation had severely undermined it. What our PM has said will not only encourage those people who were involved in stealing gold but it will also diminish whatever the chances of punishment were there. It is noteworthy to mention that instead of 22.3 gm of gold, BSTI found only 2.3 gm of gold in each crest given to our foreign friends who helped us during our Liberation War.

Dr. Kamrul Hassan
 Professor
 Department of Physics
 Dhaka University

Drivers should be qualified, well-paid

Recently I have read an article by a Bangladeshi who visited Korea and was very impressed by the separate lane for buses there which eases traffic congestion. The problem here in Dhaka is that bus drivers don't even stop at designated bus stops, let alone use the separate bus lanes. In developed countries like Korea, bus driving is a well-paid profession. They even have to be in uniform while on duty. A bus driver is required to be educated, have sufficient experience before he is given certificate to drive a bus. Here in Bangladesh, most drivers are uneducated who have no knowledge of or regard for traffic rules and are prone to violate those. For instance, they may even drive on the wrong side of the road.

I urge the government to declare bus driving a career with attractive pay package and benefits. A bus driver must be educated and have basic sense of responsibility.

Amainur Rahim
 New DOHS, Mohakhali
 Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Hasina for good ties with India," published on May 29, 2014

Mortuza Huq

People of Bangladesh also want good ties with India. However, does Hasina have the legitimate mandate to ask for it? There must be a free and fair inclusive election and whoever is elected by the people as the PM should ask for it on behalf of the people.

Nazmul Haq

Off course we need better relationship with India. That will benefit both the countries, especially in reducing poverty, black money created through smuggling, etc. But I also agree that this government has legitimacy issue. Because of that India may or may not be very keen to put all the outstanding problems on the table.

Raihan Al-Beruni

Initiate free trade agreement with Japan. Allow Japanese company build offshore container terminal and port. Allow the Japanese to manage Chittagong Port. Japan is a proven partner of BD. Allowing Japan build offshore terminal will boost economy.

PlainSpeaker

Can you afford anything else? Say something else that we don't know, madam.

Monju Huq

Thank you, PM, for a very nice press conference highlighting Bangladesh's stand. Hope Bangladesh follows the course you briefly described. Let us not defeat anybody but achieve a win-win status for all.

"Ershad biggest beneficiary" (June 2, 2014)

Citizen

Justice delayed is justice denied. It's sad to see that we still have not been able to close the subject.

MH Khan

History does not forgive any wrongdoing; punishments or awards come in due time. History takes its own time to do it.

Hardreality

After killing all those army officers to grab power, he does not even deserve to live, let alone lead. Had all the people known his past atrocious crimes, they would have renounced him. Unfortunately, this story will reach only a section of the people. As a result, some people will support him, not seeing the devil behind the mask.

Molla A. Latif

If killing begets killing, then it was right for Zia. But how could Ershad escape this rule is a mystery, if his alleged involvement in killing so many officers is true.