

We condemn violence in the street

Party leaders should reprimand perpetrators

THAT a genuine public cause can be marred by deliberate acts of unbridled street violence was proved to the hilt by Kendrio Juba Sangram Parishad activists on Tuesday. They ran amok and let loose a reign of terror centring around their PDB office siege programme demanding uninterrupted supply of power. Nothing wrong with the cause; in fact, it would have commanded highest public support and sympathy had it passed off as a peaceful exercise of a right to protest.

No, that was not to be. They were apparently angered by police resistance, but who can condone the fact that the most vicious and overwhelming part of their wrath fell on the people at large, commuters and passersby on their daily routine. Fifty private and public vehicles were smashed as panic spread and traffic across a large part of the city came to a dead stop. Parents and guardians were stranded with their school-going children, those needing immediate medical attention found themselves at sea and many people had to walk long distances -- the acute hardship was as unprecedented as the state of anarchy and chaos.

A line must be drawn here and now between political protest and vandalism which is totally repugnant to the feelings and sentiments of their compatriots.

Without going into the argument of who did what to whom, the organisers and patrons of all such political protest marches must realise that incidents like these are not helping their cause; on the contrary, these may completely defeat the very objective by creating a mistrust between the parties involved and the public at large. The country is already passing through one of its most difficult periods of existence, and to this downhill trend we are now adding the scourge of resolving rightful public grievances through senseless vandalism.

The onus is on the party leaders to rein in the rabid form of violent activism among their following. They must begin by admonishing the perpetrators.

A word about the students of Dhaka University reacting to the accident one of their fellow students had met with. We are in sympathy with the victim. But given their prestige as students of the premier university of the country which is supposed to set examples to other institutions, was the vehicle bashing spree any befitting conduct on their part? Was it dignified? Things to ponder for them.

Saarcpol is a good idea

The challenge is to make it work

IT is a development clearly worthy of felicitation. The Saarc police chiefs at their conference in Dhaka have taken a set of forward-looking decisions.

They have shown signs of breaking loose from the clutch of prejudices and distrust that cast a shadow over prospects for cooperation at the operational levels between their law and order forces. There is no doubt terrorism, trafficking of drugs, arms and human beings and other related crimes require robust cooperation within the region to be effectively contained.

The very expression of intent that police forces of the seven Saarc countries will cooperate with each other would itself have been newsy. But what is even more significant is that a decision has been taken to establish Saarcpol modeled on the famous international police agencies like Interpol and Europol.

That we are thinking of launching a nodal police agency across South Asia augurs extremely well. The simple reason for this is, it will provide an institutional basis for cooperation, something the countries have been lacking.

Terrorism, drugs and arms trafficking, human trafficking and money laundering are not merely cross-border crimes they are also intertwined in many respects. These can not be successfully combated by any single country, or even on a bilateral basis, however powerful. This is a proven fact. Such menaces will have to be tackled by means of unfettered professional and technological cooperation between forces of the region.

The emphasis would obviously be optimal exchange of information on investigation, prosecution, control and, above all, preemption, of crimes. The ultimate test of the resolve for cooperation will be in signing up to extradition treaties to facilitate handover of terrorists and criminals.

Managing our borders



It would be no exaggeration to say that the Indo-Bangladesh border has remained tension-ridden for some years. And it was disappointing to see that the highest level meeting between the heads of the two border security forces of the two countries scheduled to be held in the first week of May in Dhaka has been postponed.

Needless to say, such meetings are a part of confidence building measures that are stipulated in the Guidelines For Border Authorities of 1975 concerning matters related to border management. The bi-yearly meetings are eagerly awaited events, as much for the symbolism they hold as for the very substantive issues that are put across the table by both the countries and the contribution they make in addressing the prickly matters arising on the borders from time to time.

Some of the proposals like simultaneous patrolling have come into operations and one would hope there would be more

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

It would be a mistake to consider the Indo-Bangladesh border as merely a strip of land joining the border pillars that demarcate the political division. Neither is it a lifeless line joining various points on the map. It is in fact a line that has divided families and cut across hearths, broken up homes, and separated homestead from the farmland that belonged to it. Thus a more humane approach to some of the border issues is required of those manning our borders.

joint efforts in the actions of the two border forces, more intense than those resorted to by the people involved in trans-border criminal activities. One hopes that the DG level meeting will take place sooner rather than later.

While talking about managing the borders there is one important aspect that most of us tend to overlook. While Mr. Radcliff may have in the most arbitrary way drawn the lines in making his land boundary award in 1947, by our failure to see the realities on the ground, we compound the matter even further.

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ral interactions between people on the border that had existed for centuries were disrupted very literally with one stroke of the pen. Thus a more humane approach to some of the border issues is required of those manning our borders.

Indeed there are several border problems that must be tackled head on and resolved once and for all. One wonders why after thirty-five years the matters are still lingering? One cannot but get the impression of an attitude of skirting the issues, hoping that time might help their resolution. Time may be a great healer but it certainly does little to help solve issues that have per se not resisted resolution, but have not been resolved owing to lack of acuity on the part of the concerned persons.

There are a few issues that are creating tensions on the borders but space precludes one from touching upon all of those even most perfunctorily. What I shall attempt is to highlight only two

issues that India and Bangladesh consider are impediments to efficient management of the borders.

The two issues that India feels militate against keeping the border peaceful are the issues of "illegal migration" and "insurgent camps in Bangladesh."

Without going into semantics, the validity of the term "illegal migration" is contested by some on the grounds that, since there is no regime of legal migration between the two countries, the question of illegality is a misnomer. Be that as it may, there is very little ground to dispute that there are cross border movements of people, exactly because of the very nature of the borders areas.

The compulsions for crossings are many and the cross border movements are not from one direction only. This is where the two countries need to take a more humane approach basing on the realities that exist on the ground. There is, however, enough

ground to dispute the allegation that large-scale migration from Bangladesh has distorted the demographic content of some of the Indian states bordering Bangladesh, disturbing the equilibrium.

However, one cannot, overlook the human trafficking that occurs through the border, something that an alert border force can anticipate, as was seen done by the BDR recently.

As for providing Indian insurgents shelter inside Bangladesh territory, nothing that Bangladesh has said so far to refute the Indian claims have convinced India that we are not into the hurt-thy-neighbour game. One feels that Bangladesh should offer to take the Indian delegation to any location that the Indians allege are miscreant sanctuaries, to dispel their doubts.

However, some portions of the border, apart from being porous, are indeed not being overseen by either of the two border forces because of inaccessibility. And it is no secret that we are quite a bit short of the optimum strength to look after a border area of almost 4,100 km. And no one can put it past the miscreants' capability to use our terrain to transit through to other parts of their country.

The issue of border management, Bangladesh feels, has been greatly impaired by the fact that the Land Boundary Agreement of 1974 has not yet been ratified by the Indian government as yet, on the ground that the 6.5 km area

still remains undemarcated.

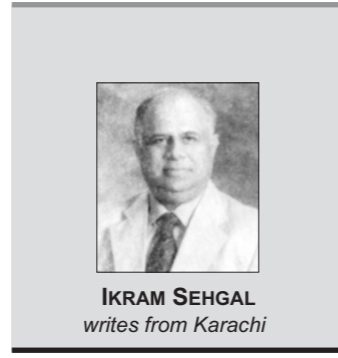
Why this state should continue 35 years after the signing of the agreement and why the status of the border, which was determined finally, through the Noon-Nehru Agreement of 1959, and formally put into force by a constitutional amendment by India in 1960, should remain undetermined, is vexing.

Furthermore, one fails to comprehend why so many people are victims of BSF firing. Why is it that many of the victims have been farmers tilling their lands? Even some Indian nationals have died from BSF firings after being mistaken as a Bangladeshi. If some Bangladeshis do stray into the Indian territory, for one reason or another, can't they be apprehended without being shot?

There are several other issues that I shall address next week, but for the time being let me end by echoing the sentiments of an Indian scholar who says that borders in the subcontinent need not necessarily remain political barriers but can be transformed into areas of economic cooperation.

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The "second" cold war



THE fall of the Berlin wall marked the end of the "first" cold war, heralding the demise of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the "iron curtain" the communist colossus had thrown around East Europe. With the US emerging as the only Superpower in a unipolar world over the last 15 years or so, almost all former Warsaw Pact countries, freed of the Soviet yoke, have been lining up to join NATO and/or the European Union (EU). On the other hand, long-term allies of the US have increasingly lost the capacity, accentuated by the attitude of the neons in the Bush administration and Britain's blind support for all US initiatives, for the positive consultation once respected by the US. Bugged down in Iraq after its go-it-alone strategy, the US has been trying to obtain consensus from its traditional allies for further pre-emptive actions, impatient with those not immediately supportive. Under Angela Merkel Germany is expected to fall in line, till (and if) conservative Sarkozy comes to power the French will probably still exercise some independence. With Russia in economic and military shambles over the last two decades, the only credible opposition of sorts was left to the Chinese, and even the Chinese tread carefully given the military and economic

AS I SEE IT

During the "first" cold war, the US (and the west) exercised great advantage: the socialist economies were no match for the free economies. This time around a public-private sector mix and the presence of oil and gas in abundance in Russia should make the East-West confrontation evenly balanced and thus, much more interesting. Since "every journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step," the tough Russian reaction may be in fact the first shot in the "second" cold war, the first major confrontation of the 21st century.

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With the delicate balance of power between the Superpowers gone, the right of pre-emptive strike (John Locke's "Second Treatise") became the new buzzword in the US lexicon. The modern version of "gunboat diplomacy" states "you are either with us or against us," the US using the threat of force (and force itself) to impose its will. For Afghanistan and (later for) Iraq the US patched together a coalition, though not on the scale they had for Gulf War-I. Even though NATO has assumed responsibility in Afghanistan, France and Germany have balked at anything to do in Iraq other than training, and that also not within but outside Iraq.

In the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russia faced a number of problems within the homeland, most prominently in Chechnya where a full-blown revolution threatened to go out of control and engulf neighboring Provinces in the Caucasus, Ingushetia, Dagestan. For Russia 9/11 was God-sent, from strongly condemning Russia's brutal suppression of Chechnyans, the US made a U-turn on human rights and declared the Chechnyan movement as "terrorist," a clear signal for Russia to go all out to stamp out the revolt. This Russians seem to have tempo-

rarily achieved. With revenues from vast oil and gas reserves kicking in, and with oil prices at an all-time high, Russia chose to flex its economic muscle to bring Ukraine to heel, unilaterally raising the price of gas many times over, and then showing Ukraine's vulnerability (and dependence on Russia) by suspending gas supplies during the height of winter. The action was more political than economic.

After an elongated neglect and upheaval after the disasters of the Afghan War and the first Chechnyan campaign, the Russian military has seemingly recovered the operational efficiency that it once used to have. A leaner, volunteer core is giving Russia the military muscle it once had as the vaunted Soviet Union. Russia's nuclear arsenal remains very much a potent force, one that may not be superior to the US but as an adequate nuclear deterrent, far exceeding that of China.

Even without the necessary UN resolution authorizing the use of force, the US chose to ignore the qualms of Russia, China and even its own allies France, Germany in going after suspected "Weapons of Mass Destruction" (WMDs) in March 2003. After a blitzkrieg "shock and awe" campaign that took Iraq by storm in record time, US President Bush proclaimed,

"mission over" in May 2003. Three years later the US is still badly bogged down in a ground war in Iraq in "woe and sustained shock," and without an exit strategy. To add to the Iraqi quagmire, the Taliban have shown signs of resurgence in Afghanistan, controlling large tracts in the Pakhtun-provinces. While NATO forces are gradually assuming greater responsibilities, it is still to be seen what is the pain-threshold of NATO forces, what casualties they can bear before it becomes politically too hot for them to handle.

While Iran has categorically stated that it is not developing nuclear weapons, the type of uranium being enriched cannot be used as fuel for nuclear reactors, and as such there is a grave international suspicion about its nuclear aims and objectives. By enriching "weapons-grade" uranium Iran is in technical violation of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that it has signed. Iran President Ahmedinejad has not helped by making statements about "wiping Israel from the face of this Earth." Measuring the Iranian President's statement for "casus belli," the danger is that Israel will convince itself that their existence is threatened and unilaterally go in for a pre-emptive strike, forcing the US hand into a

simultaneous surgical operation to ensure all of Iran's nuclear sites are taken out at one go. On the other hand, Iran is in backdoor diplomacy, facilitated mainly by Russia, to find some solution for the nuclear impasse. A few days ago the Iranian President wrote a letter to US President Bush, the first high-level contact in 27 years. While the content, tone and tenor of the missive remains unclear, the White House reaction has been dismissive about the Iranian initiative.

Both Russia and China have recovered from the economic albatross of a socialist economy; in both cases there is a reasonable public sector-private sector mix. In Russia's case it's coffers are rapidly multiplying because of vast amounts of oil and gas reserves. China has major trade surplus with the US and EU countries, enough for it to search for sizeable investment opportunities abroad, particularly in oil and gas to shore up its energy demands in the future. Less than 30 days ago, it seemed that Russia and China would have to fall in line with the US in sanctioning Iran. However 30 days is now a lot of time in modern geo-politics.

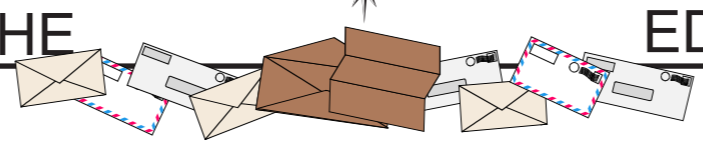
A very confident Russia is increasingly consulting with China to get a comprehensive dialogue with Iran going. While Russia does not have the same compulsions it did a few years ago about toeing the US line, China's policies are force-multiplied by its energy needs and it would be extremely reluctant to take any step that jeopardizes its crucial long-term energy supplies from Iran. Russia and China have confirmed in the UN they would oppose the draft American-backed anti-Iran Resolution being tabled, particularly the reference to Chapter 7 which authorizes military action if sanctions by economic means fail. A stage is

therefore set where Russia and China will not support a UN Resolution unless it has been watered down to ensure that military action does not automatically follow non-compliance by Iran.

Presently on a whistle-stop tour of former Warsaw Pact countries, encouraging those who have not joined already to join NATO, US Vice President Dick Cheney on May 4, 2006 made a frontal assault on Russia on freedom and human rights violation, Russia reacted strongly to Dick Cheney's remarks. On Russia's doorsteps this amounts to a grave provocation. Earlier the US had voiced its frustration on Russia's ties with Iran, exhorting Russia not to go ahead with TOR tactical surface-to-air missiles sales to Iran and take a tougher line on Tehran's nuclear plans. During the "first" cold war, the US (and the west) exercised great advantage with the socialist economies were no match for the free economies, this time around a public-private sector mix and the presence of oil and gas in abundance in Russia should make the East-West confrontation evenly balanced and thus, much more interesting. Since "every journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step," the tough Russian reaction may be in fact the first shot in the "second" cold war, the first major confrontation of the 21st century.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



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.

Deforestation and ecological imbalance

Random felling of trees by people is wiping the green off the landscape in Bangladesh. Apart from the forestation activities by our forest department we put either very little effort or none at all to help protect our environment. What we have been doing in this regard is rather appalling -- we are chopping down trees arbitrarily. We do it for our petty interest undermining the fact that this act does create awesome imbalance in nature. Unfortunately, we do not appear to be cautious about the fact that we have to plant trees for a better and healthy environment. Ecological imbalance is taking a chilling shape across the globe. It is quite frightening and people of Bangladesh ought to be more aware and act accordingly.

motivate people in general to a better understanding in this regard.
Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Adulterated ghee

I am dismayed at the sight of adulterated ghee being dumped into a manhole in Dhaka (DS front page, May 4, 2006). This ghee is probably made of vegetable oil and other ingredients, which will eventually end up in the sewage processing plant and has to be cleaned. It may also end up untreated in the Buriganga. It is hard to believe that the magistrate on duty did not know this. What was he thinking when he allowed this atrocity to happen?
Siraj Haque
Houston, Texas, USA

Biman "staffs"?

Your staff reporter in his report on the subject (DS: 4 May) has used "staffs" wrongly as a plural noun. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary states as follows: Staff (Usually singular): all the workers

employed in an organisation considered as a group.

In this case he refers to Biman staff. Possibly a better and grammatically appropriate heading would have been "Biman staff urge gov. not to off load airline's shares". I believe accepting our weakness in English, the moral duty is to inculcate correct and appropriate usage of English. This will naturally improve the standard of English of many of your readers.

In this case not only the staff reporter concerned but the overseeing editorial staff too are unfortunately at fault! Finally it is their responsibility to ensure proper English usage.
S. A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

Causes of poverty in Bangladesh

In reference to a recent letter to the editor on poverty, I want to make one point. I cannot remember exactly where or who stated it, but it was indicated that if all the well to do Muslims had done

their due share of paying zakaat at the rate 2.5 per cent on their net savings, most of world's hunger especially which prevails in Africa and other Third World poor nations including Bangladesh would essentially be eradicated. This 2.5 per cent of wealth distribution by everyone else who can afford it, is really the best way to equitably distribute wealth, that is so disproportionately concentrated in the hands of a few in countries like Bangladesh. This amount in no way will be a burden on those who are reasonably well off.

As the saying goes: If everyone does a little, no one has to do a lot. This so naturally with the adage that little drops make an ocean.
Khan Kabir
New York, USA

Voter list

Living in an independent house of my own in a decent residential area, if I could be excluded from the voter list I can imagine what has happened to the fates of

millions of others. But I must give credit to them that, although they have excluded me from the voter list, they have registered my driver and the maid! Thank you, Election Commission for the splendid job.
Syed Noor Hossain
Former Secretary

Kansat and after

Abdul Bayes' observation (DS: May 9) presents a more or less factual reflection of events at Kansat and Demra; all the reactions to acute power and hence water paucity! Power supply would stumble on for, who knows, how long! The new rule of the game will be power rationing! How effective the powers to be can ration this vitally needed facility is another issue. Permits and rationing, under the prevailing situation, will naturally lead to corruption and money changing hands under or around the table. As such logically more rationing implies more income for the powers to be. Additional power generation has remained stalled, some allege, because of paucity of "percentage"

-- another form of money changing hands! Till that is not solved, additional generation capacity will remain an illusive dream. Only the skid mounted units may have helped "percentage" wise!

Meanwhile the BNP lawmakers, guns and goons, as stated in the write up, will hone their skills. Today they are succeeding partially if not totally to foil the legitimate grievance or demand for power. This foiling is another important trial in election manoeuvrings; if only we can see deeper!

Mr. Bayes may have missed the underlying cause, because 'money, goons and guns' used here and there are key tools for the coming election modus operandi! With skills practiced and perfected and lessons learnt, the party mechanism will be well prepared and trained to lead the 'appropriate voters' to the ballot box, or more appropriately, to fill the ballot boxes with closely monitored recycled votes! Others will be kept at bay, so as not to mar the sure success election party!

Perhaps many more exercises of Kansat, Demra need to be per-

formed to perfect the technique of recycled voting! This highly confidential plan, however, has not been perceived by most of us.

Analyst
On-a-mail

Power crisis: Dhaka v Delhi

Report on May 6 says, the Delhi government has drafted new guidelines to save electricity. Under the new rules, government offices must switch off air-conditioners after 6:30 PM and shopping malls across the city will have to shut at 5:30 PM. The government is also considering asking all shops to shut an extra day a week and residents are being advised not to use their air-conditioners until 9:00 PM.

For the last couple of weeks some of the city areas of Delhi have had to go without power for as much as 5 to 6 hours at a stretch. The Supreme Court of India has also intervened in the matter. It has asked the state -- as well as the federal government -- to explain what they are doing to

deal with the power crisis.

The report also says, according to officials, individuals hooking up cables to transmission lines steal 35 per cent of the total power generated in Delhi.

In Dhaka, government has not taken any power saving scheme for its offices and a little has been taken for the private and domestic consumption. In Bangladesh, no court of law rules on this issue, perhaps no citizen might have been sued against power authority. But painful losses of lives in Kansat, Nilphamari and damages of properties in Demra, Motijheel, Dhaka have occurred in a span of few weeks.

In one case the two capitals are reacting alike. The stealing of power in both the countries resemble the same pattern. None of the governments is administer anything in this matter. Do they fear of losing populist vote for the next election?

Safuddin Ahmad
North Badda, Dhaka