

Is Bangladesh fighting over fencing?

PM's counsel to Imams

It strikes a responsive chord

PRIME Minister Khaleda Zia has exhorted the Imams and religious leaders to play an emphatic role in projecting Bangladesh as a liberal, non-communal and democratic country.

The PM's call couldn't have come a day later, addressed as she has an issue of a great bearing on society's progress, cohesion and wellbeing. Religious leaders can indeed give a sense of direction to the people by correctly interpreting the teachings of Islam. The mass of the people look up to them for guidance and they have an unquestionable acceptability in society. Their involvement in fighting militancy has become all the more relevant as a section of misguided elements is now engaged in exploiting religion to serve their own agenda that has got nothing to do with religion as such. The situation has reached a stage where the Imams shouldn't remain silent any longer. For example, the arrested JMB chief said recently that he had ordered the slaying of the two judges in Jhalakathi under a divine decree. This is anything but Islamic, because religion doesn't sanction killing on any pretext. Who can assert it more powerfully than Imams?

Actually, the zealots are giving their own interpretation of Islam which could only mislead the gullible among the youth including madrassah students in particular. It is precisely here that the Imams as social leaders should come forward and put an end to indoctrination of militancy in the name of Islam. The damage that the fanatics are causing is great. They are scarring the image of not only the country but also that of Islam itself.

The fanatics are a minuscule minority but while they make themselves felt by their vicious acts, the genuinely pious people are a silent majority. It is by inculcating the true spirit of Islam among the silent majority that they can be transformed into a force that is powerfully resistive to obscurantism.

As the country grapples with an unforeseen and ominous wave of religious militancy, it is the religious leaders who have to shoulder the responsibility of foiling the machinations of the extremists. It is thus that the Imams can strengthen the liberal and moderate image of the country.

Unheard in aviation history

Nothing can make up for the US blunder

IN an earlier editorial on the subject of US Federal Aviation Authority's debarring a Biman aircraft from landing in New York, we had put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the management of the national airliner, on the basis of information available at that point in time. Now, we have no hesitation in admitting that our judgement was hasty, and that we have wronged Biman. It was unlawful of the US authorities to deny Biman permission to land. Now, the perspective in which the unprecedented thing happened, is clear and Biman's stand on this point is vindicated.

It is incomprehensible as to how such a blunder could be made by world's one of the most sophisticated aviation authorities. Due to this totally unwarranted incident, as many as 257 passengers suffered indescribably. It has damaged the reputation of Biman alongside causing considerable financial loss. One also has to take into account the possible high risk to life that the DC-10 passengers were exposed to while hovering the skies listlessly for some critical moments. Things indeed could have been disastrous had the Canadian authorities denied the aircraft's landing in Montreal.

We therefore strongly endorse the foreign ministry's move to seek further clarification from the US authorities for the denial of landing and also the national airliner's plan for legal steps to obtain compensation for the costly debacle. Is it not giving a short shift to an aircraft from a non-rich country? One wonders. It is heartening to learn though, that no restriction has been imposed on Biman flights to New York.

For our part, we should do everything in our power to upgrade Biman's onboard security equipment and its overall safety standards. Biman has its own long list of problems, but one hardly expects of a high-tech port of call as JFK airport to be making such an irresponsible mistake, even though the admission of the mistake is a good gesture.



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

WELL, that is what some Indian scholars would have us believe. Before proceeding further let us put certain matters in context, particularly about the Indian Northeast, which lends a different character to the border areas in this region. The unique configuration of the north-eastern states of India, and the political situations therein, which is one of the main reasons for India's concern, should be kept in mind, while expounding on Indo-Bangladesh border issues.

All the Seven Sister states share international borders, and four of the five Indian states that border Bangladesh are fighting the center, either for separation or complete autonomy. Partition has rendered a distinct geo-political entity to the Northeast, starting beyond the Siliguri neck, with an external perimeter ninety-eight percent international and two percent Indian, according to one renowned Indian scholar.

He goes on to suggest that, historically, what constitutes the Indian Northeast today had never been a part of India, politically, culturally, or ethnically, and that is why, India's northeastern border lands are in turmoil; revolutionary "liberation fronts" are cheaper by

the dozen and crises of identity have spawned militant ethnic groups, according to another Indian scholar.

Thus the state of politics in the Indian northeastern states casts a direct influence on the state of the border in this region. Therefore the Indian concern over the insurgent movement across the borders and its fencing program, which is aimed primarily to prevent cross-border movements of anti-Indian elements.

But before going into the issue of fencing, let us touch briefly upon several other issues that are the causes of border tension.

A tormenting issue is the inclination of the border forces to resort to firing at each other. This is far from an acceptable situation. If one were to take a stock of the instances of exchange of fire on the Indo-Pak border and ours, particularly in the last three years, the former would come a very poor second. To start with, proclivity to resort to firing at each other must be curbed. One does not fire at friends. And one can hardly foresee a situation where firing has to be the first resort and that too as an immediate measure for resolution of a problem on the border.

Firing and its reciprocity stem from various developments on the

border that graduates over time and cannot occur in the blink of an eye. The potential of a situation graduating to a state where resorting to fire becomes inevitable, should be foreseen by the commanders on the spot, and appropriate measures taken to nip it in the bud. And this is where the officers at the lowest level must be given more latitude to address the matter by employing local initiatives. And this is where a close liaison between commanders on both sides of the border to preempt a situation from degenerating beyond control is essential.

One fails to understand why a border force has to resort to firing of indirect weapons at all. Apart from the fact that long-range mortars are highly inaccurate unless directed, which is not at all possible under the circumstances, its use poses risk to civilians living in the border areas.

Fencing of its border by India is a cause of tension on the borders. It was in the early eighties that India decided to fence its entire length of land border with Bangladesh to deal with some of the border problems, but primarily to check smuggling and trafficking. As of now, approximately almost two-thirds of the 3,976 km of land border have been fenced while work on the rest is on-

going. There is a psychological aspect to border fencing itself. Perhaps it demonstrates a country's feeling of vulnerability, and also of distrust of its neighbours, and nobody can fault a country for devising means and ways to ensure its security. But that it creates a psychological barrier between states that the fence divides, there is no doubt. And it may also be true that the height of the fence is directly proportional to the degree of distrust of the neighbour. What in effect has happened is that instead of fencing the neighbours out, India has fenced itself in.

While opinion may vary on the concept of fencing itself, and while many may question the usefulness of the instrument in putting a stop to all that is designed to stop, Bangladesh has no objection to India's fencing program, as long as that is as per the border guidelines of 1975 i.e. beyond the 150 meter mark from the zero line.

In principle, BDR has objected to erection of fence within 150 meters of the zero line, the fence being a defense structure and falling within the caveat of the border guidelines. But even when a ground situation



demands that the guidelines be circumvented one does not feel that BDR would be inflexible. What is needed is to agree on a modality of addressing the issue.

While many may disagree with me, as for Bangladesh, I believe that the idea of fencing is a good thing.

Firstly, one would hope that it becomes effective in checking border transgressions and crime. And since the keys to the point of entry and exit would be with the BSF, Bangladesh would at least be spared the accusation of large-scale influx or migration into India. Second, and perhaps equally important, is the potential impact on illegal border trade.

By some accounts, the volume of smuggling amounts to two or three times that of the current trade imbalance of a billion plus dollar in favour of India. One hopes that our economy would greatly benefit if informal trade could be brought to zero level. However, smuggling has a dynamic of its own, with many factors driving it and many different characters helping it to thrive. One wonders

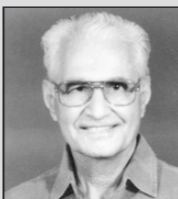
whether it would be at all possible for the fence to deter the whole system of smuggling.

Similarly, the practice of push-in by India must be stopped. There are other and perhaps more acceptable ways of handing over border transgressors, following which will not only prevent undue sufferings to those being pushed in, it will also prevent misunderstanding between the two border forces.

Uneasy the Indo-Bangladesh border need not be, if we are prepared to react a little more humanely to the situations.

The author is Editor, Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Halt, who is sneaking in?



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

WE now know what was implied in being a non-NATO ally of America. It includes not only NATO troops in Afghanistan, but also NATO offices inside Pakistan. Pakistan is an active ally in NATO's new role outside Europe. NATO has clarified: it is not setting up an office but only an office for liaison with the press. Does this explanation render irrelevant the points one intends making? When did Pakistanis debate the implications of being unsigned NATO member? There is however no ambiguity about who took the decision, national debates on crucial issues being thought unnecessary.

One can be accused of straining at the gnat after swallowing the camel. The FBI is all over the place. Each Pakistani while leaving Pakistan or coming back is photographed and the fact recorded -- where? In FBI's database, of course. Pakistanis are under watch just as Americans' communications with outsiders are under microscope, collated and analysed by super computers. George Orwell's Big Brother is here -- in the US and Pakistan.

Consider the role US required Pakistan to play in Afghanistan, and by extension in most of the regions around, as a non-NATO ad hoc ally. Being a non-NATO ally means that while Pakistan will strive to achieve US security objectives, the US will have no reciprocal obligations. It means Pakistan implementing the American and NATO designs. What are these designs? Superficially, it is fighting terrorism, held up as an international threat to western capitalist democracies.

NATO has reminded Pakistanis of their duties in, and vis-à-vis, Afghanistan. The Polish Vice Foreign Minister, Witold Waszczykowski, had informed of the large role that the 'expanded NATO' has in fighting terrorism. Logically it would be hard to restrict this role to Asia or anywhere. Capabilities of NATO and the US would be the only limiting factor, if indeed there are any limits to them. Well, Pakistan is in it. The first priority is to record one's own dissent from accepting such a role.

The issue must be discussed on merits, although being post factum, it would be futile. What is being fought against is an ideology and political conduct (terrorism). The Polish official graciously conceded that military option should be the last; other options come first. But NATO being NATO, its role is strictly military and NATO is not concerned with political or ideological remedies. What is being witnessed is the spectacle of strongest military powers proclaiming their resolve to fight Islamic extremism. That it dangerously looks like a new version of Medieval Crusades goes without saying. How can Bush

administration and NATO hide the fact that they are only fighting terrorism by Islamicists? They must have chosen the best means of achieving victory over them. Rulers of Pakistan have to answer a question: have you thought through what you were getting into and what will Pakistan get out of it?

The problem has also a domestic dimension. The rise of Taliban in the two Waziristans, Balochistan and other areas of NWFP is a fact of life. There are supporters of al-Qaeda and other Islamic movements aiming at, in differing versions, forming a uniquely Islamic dispensation in, and of, Muslim countries. Some call for a worldwide Caliphate.

This is certainly a problem that Pakistan has to face and face courageously. By courage one does not imply being trigger happy. What is intended is free rational and democratic debate: No one's ideas are, ab initio or per se, to be assumed good or bad. Pakistanis have to rationally decide whether they want a Caliphate in Pakistan? A sort of uniformed Caliphate is already in place. Which is not vastly different from Mulla Omar's Caliphate in

Afghanistan: In both cases the decision-making on important matters is, and was, by one man. Only, President Musharraf does not pretend to be the religious head of the country or even of Muslims. But he regards himself as the Sipah-e-Salar of an Islamic Army.

Don't forget, calling anything Islamic does not make it sacred or divine. A Caliphate too will be the result of political struggles by some politicians; it can only be a human construct, liable to be faulty. Look around. Reality underneath Afghanistan Caliphate was a one-man dictatorship, assisted by an extremist and intolerant party, with mind-sets steeped in ancient Afghan prejudices masquerading as Islamic. What happened in Sudan was a controversial mullah-general dictatorship. In Iran a clerics' group rules, keeping commoners out and some Mullahs suppressed. Caliphate can only be a dictatorship of this or that Maulvi or a Zia-like General.

The discussion should centre around whether Pakistanis will be better off in a simple democratic dispensation, devoting energies to improving material living conditions

of common people, or in organising a personal dictatorship of some pious-seeming Muslim (male) whose abilities may not include a grasp on world affairs, economic matters or a deference to democratic values. This debate has to be organised argumentation and if the majority of Pakistanis do opt for a Caliphate by an MMA leader, so be it, though one would disapprove.

But consider the role US required Pakistan to play in Afghanistan, and by extension in most of the regions around, as a non-NATO ad hoc ally. Being a non-NATO ally means that while Pakistan will strive to achieve US security objectives, the US will have no reciprocal obligations. It means Pakistan implementing the American and NATO designs. What are these designs? Superficially, it is fighting terrorism, held up as an international threat to western capitalist democracies. But it will help promote what America calls democracy. What considering the American conduct in areas around Afghanistan, Iraq or what the US may do vis-à-vis Iran, it would not so much be tackling terrorism as promoting American strategic interests.

America is not an obscure phenomenon. The American system is quite open and everything is discussed there -- to its credit. The Neo-Conservatives have moulded American thought to such an extent that it is hard to see whether a succeeding Democrat President would be able to seriously depart from their script. A Democrat President may emphasise a few social problems of the American society while a Republican one would still strive to make this an American Century. On security matters both parties tend to share

the same overarching thinking -- the difference between them on security matters is one of tweedledum and tweedledee.

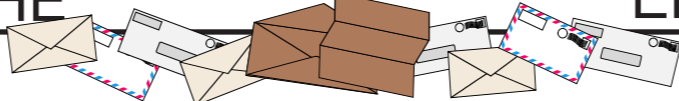
But one remark can be made off the cuff regarding general American thinking on fighting terrorism. Their actions in Afghanistan and Iraq have hitherto proved that the American cure is worse than the disease; so far they have caused more recruits offering themselves to terrorist outfits than before the American exertions, including those in Pakistan.

To repeat, what does Pakistan government expect from becoming foot soldier for the American cause? True, the regime fervently believes in the American cause; it is convinced that without American aid and support Pakistan can not be run; Pakistan economy requires constant aid from IFIs for which Americans support is necessary. Even day-to-day running of the state requires American support and aid. That seems to be the reason why Islamabad prefers being foot soldiers of America. But is there no other option for Pakistan?

Can the 152 million Pakistanis not freely decide to rebuild the country themselves in a self-reliant way into a place where the people's interests are supreme and where the hitherto supreme elites can be sidelined, left to enjoy their leisure and money. Only, they should be driven out of the decision-making positions. Aren't there people who favour such ideas?

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

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.

Power crisis looms large

Power crisis is a burning issue across the country. The present situation of blackout which we face everyday with hellish discomfort is nothing but a narrowing tale of an unfortunate nation.

Power crisis has already led our government to an unwanted and unexpected situation when people were being killed at Kansat due to a movement demanding uninterrupted supply of power. It is well-known that a modern society cannot pass even a single day without electricity. So power crisis hampers our booming economy. As an agricultural country our Irrigation and boro production is completely dependent on water. But without electricity we can't have irrigation facilities and thus power crisis poses a threat to our agricultural development.

On the other hand, power crisis is a great blow to our industrial sector, especially the garment industry. The blackout has already triggered a storm of anger. **Al Hassan Mahmud Savar, Dhaka**

Hazardous traffic

About one fourteenth of the 14 crore people of our country live in the small and congested areas of the capital.

The roads, streets and lanes of Dhaka are narrow, criss-cross with thousands of road junctions, road squares and road crossings. As a result, movement of vehicles and pedestrians is always obstructed and they are stranded here and there very frequently for a long time and their sufferings know no bounds.

Our authorities concerned have taken a number of steps to mitigate the sufferings of the people by constructing many foot overbridges, several big underpasses and a few giant flyovers. One way traffic has been introduced on many roads and now a mammoth flyover is being constructed from Jatrabari to Gulistan.

We have found that construction of foot overbridges has been proved useless, the construction of giant underpasses has also been a failure for various cogent reasons. Further, we observe that construction of mammoth flyovers also does not help solve the acute and erratic traffic problems in the city. We strongly feel that instead of

giant underpasses we may build several underpasses of small size in every busy and crowded road. Side by side with mammoth flyovers we may also construct single storied, double storied overbridges (small flyovers) for 24-hour movement of vehicles in important and busy places like Farm Gate, Asad Gate, Bangla Motors, Malibagh, Hotel Sheraton, Topkhana, High Court, Purana Paltan, Govt. Now Market Azimpur, Shapla Chatter, GPO, Nawabpur-English Road, Mirpur, Shabagh etc.

Unless and until we consider and implement the above pragmatic and practical steps the acute and hazardous road traffic problems of Dhaka city would never be solved. **OH Kabir Dhaka**

The struggle continues

Watching Kolkata TV, sitting in our Dhaka drawing room, evokes ideas in self analysis on the growth and maturity of young Bangladesh, only 34 years old.

The TV programmes from Kolkata are different in approach, tone and presentation in that society has settled down to normal.

Political activities have receded into the background, while in Dhaka, the politics and the politicians dominate every aspect of Daily Life.

When would normalcy return to our life? One generation has suffered - what will happen to the next generation?

Our natural tree is not growing normally. The natural human feedback is not working in our society.

We are still seeking change. What change? There is no consensus, and the leadership in the different facets of the society is engaged in passionate debates.

Much ado about nothing? Have we evolved the sense of direction after three decades? The chawpawa equation is still baffling us. What is this "human" discontent? Look at S. America and Africa. Disturbed lives. India's mega dimension has made the nation stable (stability in two much diversity). **A. M. Dhaka**

Not amazing!

If you think profoundly you will be able to realise the implications of the incident that took place in Sathkira on 21 April. It was not amazing. Organised women staged demon-

stration against drug abuse. It brought into light the failure of the authorities. The reason that instigated them to come on to street was to save the young generation from drug abuse. At Kansat we saw women coming out to protest police atrocities.

This anti-drug campaign organised by women should not be evaluated from gender bias. As women are an indispensable part of society like men, they must be viewed as equal human beings. **Md. Nobuiul Islam University of Chittagong**

Date expired medicines

Thank you very much for your news item (5.4.06 page 1) "Date Expired Fluid used for Kidney Dialysis Seized." Hospital is not a business as usual. People go to hospital with a hope to live. Using date expired medicines is a serious threat to patients. It is a matter of great concern.

The report clearly exposed the quality of health care services of the country. It is negligence from procurement to infusion into body. During procurement nobody examined the expiry date in the central store or the hospital. Supervision

systems are also not operating. Finally it is a rule of thumb that the doctor and nurse must examine the expiry date. It was not done. All concerned proved that they are not capable of performing their duties. **Dr. M. Chowdhury Banani, Dhaka**

Electro medical equipment

Modern electro medical devices are critical for proper diagnostic function in healthcare service. These equipment provide the needed diagnostic information and clue for the effective treatment of diseases. A US study reveals the proliferation of electro medical equipment in modern hospital practice. From an average of four devices per bed in the early 1980s today the level has reached close to fifteen devices per bed! A four fold plus growth recorded in about a quarter century! The trend is still growing and will keep on growing in future. However, in comparison the Bangladesh hospital scenario particularly in the ICU and CCU levels may average around four electro medical devices per bed; possibly reflecting our development level in the sector.

Along with the benefits that these devices provide; they bring new areas of problems and issues that need to be addressed. With more electro medical devices in use, there is greater possibility of (EMI) electro magnetic interferences. These are invisible waves and pulses, that move through space, interfering with the electrical and emission function of the devices. EMI problems usually tend to be difficult to identify, and are generally transient in nature. Some of the common potential sources causing EMI problems are the following: Radio transmitters, paging units, walkie-talkie units used in hospitals.

Television receivers and equipment video monitors. Analogue and digital cellular and wireless telephone.

Microprocessor based patient monitoring devices like electrocardiographs, BP monitors, hypothermic machines and security detectors.

Radiating equipment like fixed and mobile x-ray and electro surgery equipment. Unfortunately, there is no record or report of such events in Bangladesh as our awareness on the subject is not widespread. The undersigned had the

opportunity to go round a CT, X-Ray and Radio Imaging section of a hospital in Bangkok. He was shown the protective and corrective electrical and electronic devices installed; and was told that the cost of the protecting and power filtering devices represented over forty percent of the cost of the total set up of the electro medical equipment!

This is a somewhat new area for our growing electro medical facilities, which directly affects the reliability of the outputs from electro magnetic diagnostic equipment, due to its high sensitivity to the quality of power available. This is beyond voltage fluctuation, high and low voltage surges and flickers which are normally noticeable and visible even to the eye. I believe that this awareness and the solutions to overcome it should be available at our hospitals and clinics and the physicians and relevant staff involved in the use of these facilities should be imparted required knowledge on the subject. **S.A. Mansoor Director Engineering, Partex Group, Dhaka**