

BDR, BSF fierce firefight along Zakiganj border

10,000 bullets, 400 mortar shells fired in both directions, 15,000 villagers flee home, tension runs high as both sides reinforce positions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Indian Borders Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) locked in a fierce firefight for about 14 hours until yesterday noon on Zakiganj border, exchanging around 10,000 bullets and 400 mortar shells.

The gunfight that started at 10:40pm Wednesday night left at least 16 people including six BDR men and 10 civilians wounded.

Around 15,000 inhabitants of 15 villages near the border left their homes for safer places yesterday.

Troubles began around 10:40pm on Wednesday as the BSF started firing on BDR positions at Uttarkul and Amolshid borders without any provocation, BDR officials said. The BSF used conventional artillery to cause damage way inside Bangladesh territory.

A top official of BDR requesting not to be named said the BSF dug trenches along the border in the last few days and amassed troops. They are now reinforcing troops and BDR too is making counter reinforcements.

Three of the villagers who were injured in the gunfight were admitted to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital while seven others received first aid at Zakiganj Upazila Health Complex.

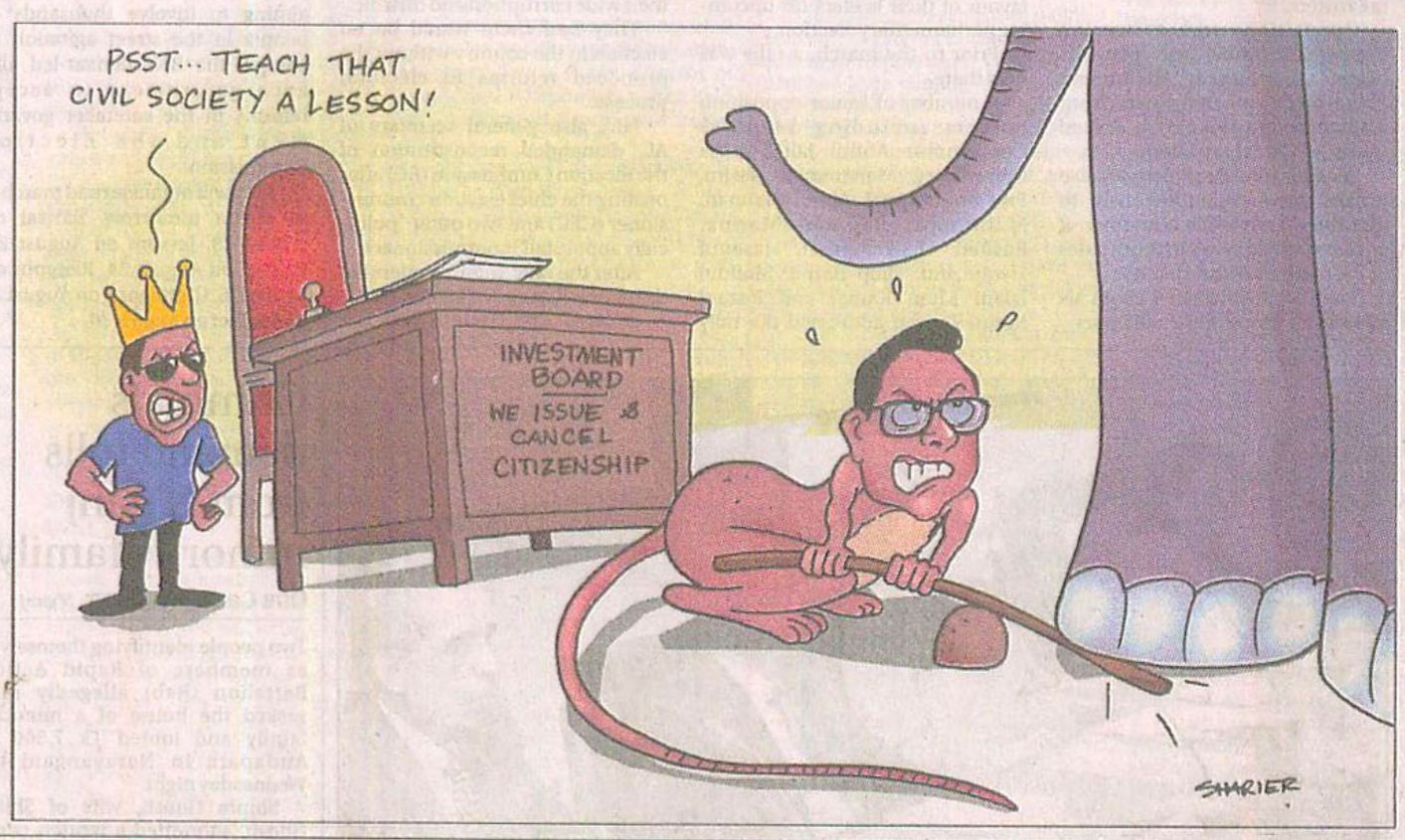
Lt Colonel Abu Tasnim, 38 Battalion Commander of BDR told The Daily Star six BDR men sustained minor injuries from mortar splinters close to Shitalong Shah's shrine near Amolshid border.

Sector Commander of BDR Colonel Abul Hossain told The Daily Star that the situation is now calm but troops on both sides of the border are on high alert. The BSF fired, machinegun bullets, mortar shells and other artileries without any provocation, he added.

A sector-commander-level meeting between the BDR and BSF on August 13 will try to resolve the issue, Colonel Hossain said. The deputy inspector general of BSF, Shillong had sent a letter to the sector commander of BDR earlier requesting the meeting to be held.

Meanwhile, two Indian nationals, Milon and Abdur Rashid, were captured at Amolshid and Salehpur yesterday on suspicion of spying for India. They were brought to the BDR sector headquarters for interrogation. A few mobile phone

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Residents of Zakiganj border area flee homes fearing more fighting between the BDR and BSF; BDR personnel on vigil at a camouflaged machinegun-nest on the border; A building with marks of splinters after an Indian mortar shell hit it.

Plot to blow up planes foiled by UK cops

21 mostly of Pakistan origin arrested; explosives planned to be put on board in luggage

REUTERS, AFP, London

British police are holding 21 people in connection with what they said was a foiled plot to blow up several passenger planes flying between Britain and the United States, police said yesterday.

Describing the plot as an attempt to cause "mass murder on an unimaginable scale," they said arrests had been made in the London area and in Britain's second city Birmingham.

British police hinted Thursday that British Islamists were behind a major terrorist plot to blow up airlines flying to the United States.

Deputy Commissioner Paul Stephenson, from London's Metropolitan Police, stressed that the plot concerned "people who might masquerade within a community behind certain faiths."

The term "community" is often used in Britain to refer to people from the country's minority faiths and ethnic groups, particularly the Muslim population.

The majority of those arrested were understood to be of Pakistani origin but most, if not all, were

5 eminent citizens get bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted an interim anticipatory bail to five prominent citizens following issuance of arrest warrants against them in a defamation suit filed by Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment (BoI) Mahmudur Rahman on Wednesday.

Upon a bail petition filed by them, a division bench of the HC also issued a rule on the government asking it to explain why regular bail should not be granted in the case. Mahmudur Rahman is also a respondent of the rule.

All the five personalities appeared before the court while their counsels moved the bail prayer for them in a jam-packed courtroom.

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VOTER LIST 10 more days given to finish updating job

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) has once again extended time for updating the voter list giving the field level staff 10 more days to complete the task.

The EC however has not fixed any specific time for displaying the updated supplementary list for public inspection and filing objections before it is printed.

The decision came yesterday as the field level staff could not complete the task of door-to-door visits within the stipulated time -- July 20 to August 10.

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Hail the Super Patriot

The new arbiter of who can or cannot be a citizen

Commentary

MAHFUZ ANAM

The BoI chief has shamed us all by his patriotism. Oh, how he loves Bangladesh. He said he will not allow anybody to harm his motherland and will resist any move to malign his beloved country even if it means taking eminent citizens to jail. Applause! Applause!

He said on television on Wednesday that he represents Bangladesh to investors abroad and that any attempt to malign him is to malign Bangladesh. (He measures up to French Emperor Louis XIV here who said "L'Etat, c'est moi" (The state is me).)

He called the CPD "Shameless, liars and traitors". On another occasion, he termed CPD Executive Director Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya "kulangar", whose dignified translation is "black sheep" and a more colloquial translation far more insulting (too undignified for us to write).

The irony is that it is the victims of his invectives who are now facing warrant of arrest and not BoI chief Mahmudur Rahman who in fact, as the TV recordings show, is the only one to make defamatory comments. But of course he is the patriot and can say anything against the "traitors and kulangars." These do not constitute anything defamatory because he is a patriot and as such he can say anything against anybody.

Let us take the latest comment of the BoI chief that the CPD executive director has lost the right to Bangladesh's citizenship because he, according to Rahman, termed Bangladesh a "bad commodity". This is a clear and, we suspect, willful

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Verdict in graft case against Ershad Aug 17

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday for the third time fixed a new date for the delivery of judgment in a corruption case against former president HM Ershad for illegal withdrawal of income tax money.

On completion of arguments from the prosecution and the defence, judge of the Special Court, Dhaka Division Malik Abdullah Al Amin fixed August 17 for the verdict. Ershad was present in the court.

Earlier, the same court fixed the date for the delivery of judgment twice.

But the court deferred the date

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Question mark hangs over credentials of some polls observers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Neutrality of some local election observers has come into question when they have yet to undertake the task of monitoring the next general election.

Despite allegations of close links with the ruling parties, an alliance of 35 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) yesterday launched a platform styled Election Working Group (EWG) to observe the upcoming election under the umbrella of The Asia Foundation.

Sources said most of the mem-

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BIDS shocked at filing of case against eminent citizens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Researchers of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) expressed their shock and dismay over the events between the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and a high-level government functionary that have led to the filing of a criminal case involving eminent researchers and citizens.

Board of Investment (BoI) Executive Chairman Mahmudur Rahman filed a defamation case against five members of the CPD board of trustees on Wednesday.

"As a research institute we feel bound to break our traditional

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