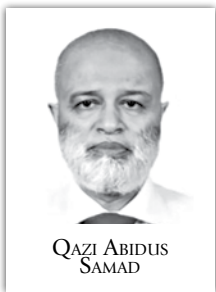


BSF must deliver on its promise of zero border killing



THE killing of innocent Bangladeshis at the hands of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) is an issue that brings shock, dismay and humiliation to us as a nation. There had been numerous talks and assurances of “zero deaths” but to no avail. Recently, this has been discussed at the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs indicating the government’s concern in this regard. Various national and international human rights forums and organisations also voiced their disquiet at the continuity of deaths at the Bangladesh-India border.

Perhaps there is no other border as deadly during peacetime as the India-Bangladesh border. From 1972 onwards, the annual figures for border killing have been in double digits. This year, already 29 people were killed in the first seven months, according to a September 11 report of this daily citing data from the rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). In most cases of border killing, people were shot without any justification. They were innocent civilians carrying no weapons, thereby posing no threat to security.

This is happening because of BSF’s shoot-on-sight policy. The BSF, of course, claims that they only shoot at those who are criminals and those who attack them. But there has been

no reported instance where BSF guards were fired upon or victims were carrying any firearm.

It is pertinent to recall the incident of the Felani murder, one of the most shocking cases where this young girl was killed by BSF on January 7, 2011. The grisly picture of her lifeless body hanging on the border fence was picked up by the international media provoking widespread criticism. Ultimately, the killer was acquitted for lack of “sufficient and conclusive evidence”. But Felani’s memory remains etched in our minds as a symbol of BSF brutality.

It’s not just killing, however. There are instances of torture of all kinds including uprooting nails, pouring in petrol, merciless beating and unlawful detention. How can we continue to digest this inhuman behaviour meted out to our fellow citizens?

It is high time we urged upon the authorities concerned to educate, sensitise and rein in the “trigger happy” BSF jawans to respect human life, protect the sanctity of the relationship between the two friendly countries, and refrain from taking lives at will.

The Indian public and decision makers must be convinced that it is not only Bangladesh that is dependent on India, rather India too relies on Bangladesh for a host of vital socio-economic exchanges. Bangladesh is India’s fourth highest remittance earning source. There are more than two million Indians who work in Bangladesh, documented or undocumented. Hence, the onus of maintaining a cordial relationship is on both sides.



File photo of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldiers patrolling the border with Bangladesh near Fulbari.

PHOTO: AFP/DIPTENDU DUTTA

In our efforts to make the bond stronger at the borders, we have introduced border huts. There had been a ceremony called Rakhi Bandhan where female BSF members were seen tying *rakhi* (amulets) around the arms of our Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members. What a celebration of love and trust! After all these, why would BSF still kill our people?

In view of the reality, we would like to propose the following for consideration at the ongoing DG-level border conference between BGB and BSF at Pilkhana:

A one-minute silence may be observed for all those who were killed at the border by BSF. It may be a

little hard for them to accept. Hence, the approach can be modified to be agreeable to both sides. It could be “a one-minute silence to honour all citizens killed on either side of the border including BGB and BSF jawans”.

A short documentary showing the sufferings of the family members of those killed, with the background information of the innocent deceased victims, may also be presented.

A joint pledge by BGB and BSF that no force will kill innocent people unless attacked may be solemnised.

At the home front, BGB must undertake an elaborate programme to educate our people living along the border. This could be done through

national TV, social media, text messages through mobile phone, publishing leaflets and posters, and addressing people in the market places as well as social and religious gatherings. This could be done through documentaries depicting the hazard of crossing border and making people aware of the capability of BSF in watch keeping. People must be given a clear idea of the tremendous wherewithal and resources of BSF in identifying movements by IR, sonar and other gadgets. They must know that if they try to sneak in thinking they can do it undetected, they will do so at their own peril as they will be caught and overpowered and only their bullet-riddled bodies will return home.

Despite the concern over border killings, Pilkhana must put up a befitting show of cordial hospitality to our honoured guests. It may be difficult to match the traditional extravaganza of Indian hospitality in all its pomp and show. But I am sure Pilkhana will wear a very festive look with the lawns properly mowed, gardens trimmed, buildings painted, red carpets laid out and chandeliers lit. BGB officials will hopefully tie up all loose ends in preparing for the series of meetings, agenda, upkeep of banquet halls, menu for the ostensive parties, gift exchange and so on. Above everything, we want Pilkhana bugles to resonate the sombre tune of the cry of our fallen citizens who have been robbed of their right to life for no justifiable reasons.

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Where is Buru?

DSCC needs to answer for its cruel policy of randomly relocating street dogs



around the tea stalls at TSC in Dhaka University, largely cared for by the students out of their own pockets. But her status as a stray was enough to get her caught and possibly killed by the dog-catchers of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), whose official line is that “removing the dogs” will somehow raise the welfare of the residents. In a culture where dogs are ostracised, vilified and misunderstood, I suppose it mattered not that Buru was sterilised and vaccinated; all that mattered was the Mayor’s orders were followed to the T.

The topic of educating the masses about dogs is especially poignant now with the beginning of the relocation of 30,000 dogs by DSCC from areas such as Dhanmondi, Nagar Bhaban, etc. to the Matuail landfill. Citing incidents of “large rabies cases” (there were 2,000 rabies-related deaths in 2010, with the numbers falling drastically by 2015), and to “increase the comfort of residents” in the selected areas, DSCC Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh has already directed the transfer of 15 dogs to Matuail. Before we delve into the absurdity of DSCC’s actions, let us review what the law states, what the opinions of the animal welfare organisations are, and how effective the relocation plan can be.

In 2019, Bangladesh parliament passed the Animal Welfare Bill 2019, with significantly stricter penalties for cruelty to animals compared to the previous colonial-era Cruelty to Animals Act, 1920. Section 7 of the Act specifically

disallows the killing or removal of stray animals unless they are proven to be causing harm. Despite such an explicit law, why would the Mayor’s office show such defiance against the government’s policies?

The answer is less interesting than you would think. Turns out, the DSCC was not aware of the entirety of the Animal Welfare Act. When interviewed, SM Shafiqul Islam, a veterinary officer of DSCC, stated that, “I’m only aware that dog culling is not allowed; we are not culling any dogs.” It gets even worse. With the dog relocation programme starting afresh on Tuesday, the Mayor’s office was contacted for a statement. While the Mayor refused to speak on the matter, his personal secretary said, “The clause of Animal Welfare Act that prohibits relocation of animals applies to persons or organisations, but as per the Local Government Act 2009, city corporations can relocate or even cull them.”

The Mayor’s little bubble is likely to burst when he finds out that clauses in recent laws (in this case, the Animal Welfare Act of 2019) always override the old laws and that city corporations do not have separate jurisdiction. As such, they cannot just “remove” dogs at will. The DSCC now has a responsibility to come up with some really nifty answers as to their decision to break government laws.

I would suggest a period of intense self-reflection for DSCC, with the hope that they realise that they exist not only to serve the people but also the animals who reside in their neighbourhoods. As such, the responsibility to control the numbers and ensure the welfare of the stray dogs falls squarely on their shoulder. Fortunately, animal welfare organisations such as Care for Paws, Obhoyaronno, Stella, PAW Foundation, We Are Nature, and others have been on the forefront of providing vaccination and sterilisation for dogs. They were also the ones who decided to protest against

these unlawful activities.

The protest against DSCC showed a united front amongst the animal welfare organisations who formed a human chain in front of the Nagar Bhaban at DSCC in August, with placards saying: “Eliminate rabies not dogs”, “Shame on DSCC” and “Dhaka dogs belong to Dhaka”.

Along with placards, these organisations also shelled out hard facts regarding the state of the vaccination and sterilisation programme in Bangladesh. PAW Foundation Chairman, Rakibul Haq Emil, pointed out that the government has a comprehensive vaccination programme in place for dogs which has vaccinated 70 percent of the dogs in Dhaka. The Health and Family Welfare Ministry’s Communicable Diseases Control (CDC) department conducted three rounds of the vaccination programme for dogs with the help of Dhaka North and South City Corporations, World Health Organization (WHO), and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Obhoyaronno founder, Rubaiya Ahmad, has consistently spoken about the unlawfulness of the actions taken by DSCC and promoted community-led activities which would eliminate the need for such hard action. The organisation’s Facebook page recently shared the activities of the CNVR (Catch-Neuter-Vaccinate-Release) Programme undertaken by Mirpur DOHS Animal Welfare Society, which aims to sterilise 55 dogs in a week and is largely funded by donations.

More importantly, the organisations pointed out the problems that will surely arise when these dogs are moved to another area. Matuail landfill has a local population of poverty-stricken recyclers who spend their lives working at the garbage dumps. Now insert into that mix a population of 30,000 confused and scared stray dogs, crammed into a smaller space and fighting each other over the new territory. Is the Mayor’s

office suggesting that the “comfort” of deprived residents in this part of the city is not worth considering?

Animal welfare organisations have worked consistently with Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) to harmonise the relationship between stray animals and humans. A record number of 3,500 dogs have been vaccinated and sterilised in DNCC alone, and Mayor Atiqul Islam is a staunch advocate for animal wellbeing. Perhaps, DSCC can take a leaf out of their colleagues’ book and rope in the local community and animal organisations to help with the stray population, rather than going against an already established law.

Finally, the DSCC has to stop sticking its head under the sand and just accept what experts have been saying for a long time, that relocation is a temporary, cruel and inefficient solution. Regarding the relocation, the DSCC’s SM Shafiqul Islam himself said, “I don’t think it will work. Even if dogs are kept away from localities, we suspect they will return in a few days.” This statement very aptly captures the ineptness of the DSCC. Even they realise that taking a hard line against street dogs will not pay off for them, so why not adopt more feasible, long-term solutions?

For starters, the DSCC can cooperate with animal welfare organisations and invest in programmes that will reduce the number of street dogs by encouraging the local community to chip in for vaccination and sterilisation efforts. According to Dr Sanya Tahmina, CDC Line Director, the government had already successfully reduced rabies-related deaths by 90 percent in 2015. Imagine what more can be done with the combined efforts of the community and the government.

Across Dhaka, you will find plenty of stories of local communities caring for their dogs, like the DU students who looked after Buru. A huge number of street dogs survive on the kindness of ordinary citizens who feed them



Buru, the street dog, near TSC in Dhaka University.

scraps from tea stalls and “hotels” on the streets. Even if the Mayor is not an animal lover, plenty of his constituents are, and perhaps he might take a lesson in humanity from them. Dogs are intelligent and loyal creatures for whom Dhaka is as much of a home as it is to us humans. To so callously remove them from their homes does not just reveal the inefficiency of the DSCC and its inability to formulate long-term plans for this city; it is also an act that lacks any shred of empathy and kindness.

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE
(1861-1941)
Bengali poet, short-story writer, song composer, playwright, essayist, and painter.

If you cry because the sun has gone out of your life, your tears will prevent you from seeing the stars.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Barbecue rods

6 Lincoln’s bill

10 Body of law

11 Serving perfectly

13 Tree-lined walk

14 – de Mayo

15 Singer Carly – Jepsen

16 Retina setting

18 Light brown

19 “I will go,” for example

22 Slangy denial

23 Lusty look

24 Suit

27 Parliament members

28 “What’s – for me?”

29 Cork sound

30 2007 Kentucky Derby winner

35 View

36 Brewery tub

37 Massive ref. bk.

38 Make blank

40 Full of energy

42 Houston native

43 Out of bed

44 Office div.

45 New drivers, usually

DOWN

1 Neck wrap

2 Pacific island group

3 Cove

4 Sock part

5 Treat derisively

6 Gem side

7 Here, to Henri

8 Chateau owner

9 Put in a box

12 Dead ducks

17 Evergreen shrub

20 Bring together

21 Wed in secret

24 Jacqueline of films

25 Came in

26 Aid in breaking down doors

27 Letter writing, some say

29 Sch. support group

31 Calendar entry

32 Sleep disturber

33 Middling card

34 Perfect places

39 Tree fluid

41 Tell tales

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT