

## A Bad Border Situation

India has reportedly massed huge troops, two divisions according to some, on top of alerted BSF personnel in the Chengrabandha area opposite our riverport Burimari in Lalmonirhat. Tension has been mounting there for some time and in an attempt to defuse that BDR battalion commander Major Emran had sat in a flag meeting with counterpart Kamaleshwar Singh of the BSF on Saturday but with no result. The failure has been underscored by the fact of the two sides not meeting on Sunday in spite of things escalating to a critical state.

The genesis of the present uneasy development is flimsy if not altogether silly. Our Water Development Board people were on a loop cutting operation on the right side of the Dharala River — this being necessitated to protect the Burimari port from erosion. BSF objected to this. When Water Board people resumed work after a break, there was no move to stop it — but BSF started building bunkers within 50 yards of the border — something not permitted by the border agreement of 1974 with India. By Sunday, the build up on the other side accompanied with loudspeaker warnings to the local people to move away from the border area had created a very panicky situation on our side of the border. Some newspapers have reported BDR as responding to the development by building their own bunkers.

Things could not possibly be more ludicrous with the Indian chief of army staff now in Dhaka on a six-day goodwill visit and most newspapers publishing the news of both the bad border situation and the good friendship visit almost alongside. We value our friendship with our big neighbour and go out sincerely to welcome General Bipin Chandra Joshi among us. And we also believe that because of historical and cultural reasons India would continue to extend us her best hands of friendship into the future exactly as it had done in the past.

How then are we to take the Burimari developments? Or the frequent border skirmishes always ending in the death of innocent uninvolved people? Obviously, these are very localised situations created not necessarily after appropriate signals from the high-ups. But our two friendly nations should by now have known better than allowing border forces to react on their own, specially if the other side is Bangladesh, or India.

If there is any substance in the report of an army build up across the Dharala, the thing becomes such as warrants very serious consideration by our government. It should, of necessity, be impressed upon New Delhi that our comparative smallness as a nation tends to increase our sensitivity as a sovereign nation in an inverse proportion to that — and this is both natural and healthy for us and, in fact, for all of us in the region. It must be categorically understood that unless there is serious deterioration of relationship at the apex, between our two nations, there is no scope for involving army in the border zones.

What is happening in Burimari-Chengrabandha can be a very foolish thing. We hope this to subside very soon in an amicable manner. The sooner our good neighbour acts to dissipate the tension on that border as well as the panic among the people there the better for the forging of still better friendship with her.

## New Dawn in S Africa

South Africa is poised to make history. With the voting starting today to continue for two more days for the country's first multi-racial election, the nation is set to leave behind a most bizarre history. After centuries of an inhuman and loathsome system of racial discrimination and apartheid which has been responsible for denying the black people the dignity and respect they deserved as men and women, S Africa is all intent to make a new beginning.

However, the country's road to this new destiny has so far not been smooth nor is it going to be so in the coming days. The threat of violence still looms large on the election days. Just three days before, three election workers of the African National Congress (ANC) were killed at the time of campaigning in the stronghold of Zulu Chief Mongosuthu Buthelezi. The question now is: even if the Zulu chief has decided to take part in the election in the final weeks, can the election be held without violence? The issue of a free and fair election perhaps comes next.

Despite the highly respected 16-member Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and its 10,000 monitors' sincere attempts, the shadow of the recent incidents of violence will pale the euphoria that has been marking the country's transition to democracy. ANC leader Nelson Mandela has been saintly in his approach to the hostility that is still encumbering the whole process. He has time and again appealed for calm, peace and forgiveness, but his appeal has not always found receptive ears. Zulu king Goodwill Zwelithini had to be appeased before Inkatha chief Buthelezi made his mind to contest the polls.

After years of killing, hatred, bitterness, humiliation, suffering and sacrifice, the black people have got the chance of their lifetime to correct a wrong they have been a victim to, thanks to black leaders' unflapping commitment to the cause. They have earned for their people a respect they were denied and this is why it will be more painful if any quarters opposing the new mould of S Africa can succeed to frustrate in any way the transition process. We hope any groups harbouring such ill motives will not be allowed to carry on their design.

It is good to know that on the basis of which the compromise formula for the election has been worked out is in effect a way to reaching a consensus. There is provision for accommodating groups and parties of divergent interests, shades and colours. A minimum five per cent of the total votes polled will ensure for a party a cabinet post in a government of national unity. The top post is for Mandela to grab, but others will not be totally ignored. The spirit is what really matters. The dissenters ought to see merits in this provision and co-operate with Mandela to take S Africa to a new and happy dawn of history.

# Teachers on Strike: Minister on the Defensive

*There is one danger in accepting the demand for raising the level of salary support to the level of government pay-scale. This will be a short step away from the inevitable and unavoidable next step of fully nationalising the private schools ... There is no scope, either, for the beleaguered Education Minister to turn his face away from the commitments claimed to have been made by him or his chief...*

past to be visited upon. He is so confused, so innocent about the nature and origin of the problem that he cannot even put up a defence which will stand to reason. He simply says that he cannot meet the demands because these are beyond the resources of the government. He cannot quote any principle — because there is none — which negates the demands of the striking teachers. A minister is entitled to his innocence, but only at the beginning. His Ministry is supposed to be knowledgeable and his top officials are expected to equip him with all that he needs to know. If they have done so, correctly and fully, then he is to blame for what appears to be his reluctance to face the issue fairly and squarely. •

The striking teachers don't demand nationalisation of private schools and colleges; they want the benefits, salary, allowances etc, without the constraints which nationalisation will entail. May be, some will jump at the suggestion, but I suppose only the weakest in financial terms. But there are a considerable number of schools and colleges, financially prosperous, that would rather reject the offer. They can enrol any number of students, and charge tuition fees several times more than what is charged at government institutions. Teachers serving in

these institutions are generally better off than their opposite numbers in government schools and colleges. This will be borne out if an enquiry is made into the financial status and practices of these teachers. Why they too have joined the bandwagon is the big question today.

Both the principles — that of nationalisation and of salary support — call for a close

scrutiny. The two are interrelated, the one followed the other. In the early years of independence we had the policy of provincialisation, of private schools and colleges. From 1972 onwards it was nationalisation, the same thing under a more dignified name. In the early years, under Pakistan, the government adopted the schools (and colleges) least in the need of help, not the ones that really needed it. I question the soundness of the policy. Most thriving private institutions were taken over, without their asking for it, by the government. In the process they all lost their identity, their dignity, and all possibility of their future growth, of forming in due course of time, a strong private sector in education, at the secondary and

tertiary levels. That would have given us a situation resembling or duplicating the situation prevailing in many countries of the world: two parallel sectors of education, one state-supported fully, and the other, generally more prosperous and creative, the private sector.

The government here, unable to go on adopting the sick and the limping institutions, because the financial involve-

ment would be too high, came up with the idea of providing financial support to the private institutions. It took the form of salary support, which was gradually raised to 70 per cent of the salary a teacher would have drawn as a government school teacher. I do not claim full knowledge of the detailed planning of this scheme of salary support but I know that this is something that goes beyond the recommendations of two successive Education Commissions.

I would now draw attention to the two chapters in the two Reports dealing with the issue of providing finance for education. These are Ch 35, para 20, page 287 of the Education Commission Report of 1974, and Ch 22, para 22 (13), page 359 of the Education

Commission Report of 1988.

The first Report made a precise recommendation of half, 50 per cent of the expenses of secondary school and college-level education to be borne by the recipients, through tuition fees, while the remaining half of the expenses were to come from other sources including government grant-in-aid. There was clear suggestion of fresh taxation and endowments from the affluent section of the community, to meet the deficit.

The 1988 Report is but an endorsement of the same idea, almost repeating word for word part of the recommendation.

No where do I find the faintest suggestion that, beyond the all-important free, compulsory, eight-year-long primary education, the government can or should play more than a supportive role at these two levels of education we are talking about.

The 70 per cent salary support, if it is irrespective of the financial status of a school, needs a thorough scrutiny. There are schools that do not need any support whatever, and these should be kept outside the pale of the scheme. There are others who would be happy with a 25 per cent, yet others, with 50 per cent salary support. There must be a considerable number, mostly in depressed rural areas, fully jus-

wants to persuade people that laying down arms is a better route, and that the election can be the first step towards building something better, then the people of Natal and KwaZulu will need some iron-clad guarantees that go far deeper than political ideologies, guarantees that personal safety and justice can be secured without taking matters into your own hands.

JOHN PERLMAN is on the staff of 'Weekly Mail' in Johannesburg.

## South Africa Bites the Ballot — II

# Emergency may Secure the Election, but Not the Peace

John Perlman writes from Cape Town

*The causes of conflict are varied and deep throughout the province of Natal and will not be solved by the state of emergency imposed in the final weeks of the election campaign. Gemini News Service reports from an area certain to pose problems for the new government.*

THE State of Emergency imposed in the troubled Natal-KwaZulu region may be sufficient to secure a reasonably successful election, but securing peace thereafter will not be achieved by security measures alone.

The Emergency has focused on ensuring a visible security-force presence. The new government, almost certain to be led by the African National Congress (ANC), will not be able to avoid what many believe should have been the first step: cutting off weapon supplies, arresting the gun-runners, detaining the warlords and hitting security measures alone.

Names of key warmongers on both sides are generally known. And in announcing the Emergency, President F W De Klerk said he was acting on detailed intelligence reports.

An ANC government taking such steps would fundamentally shift the nature of the conflict between itself and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).

There will be other shifts as well. The IFP is certain to lose its grip on the key state resources it has been able to wield through the KwaZulu government. The loyalty to the IFP of civil servants, chiefs and even the KwaZulu police is going to be strained when the purse strings are suddenly in different hands.

That and other realities may allow an ANC-led government to assert some degree of control over the region. But control will not necessarily mean peace because the Natal war has always been far more complex than ANC versus IFP.

For a start, bloody conflict has a way of developing its own vengeance-fuelled momentum. And every major clash, like the battle in the streets of Johannesburg which left 53 IFP supporters dead, produces fresh bitterness.

Says Sipho Mlaba, an IFP leader in Mpumalanga township, known as Natal's one island of peace: "One young boy came to me yesterday and said 'Are you still saying to us there is peace when our people are dying like this in the Transvaal?'

ANC followers with roots in the rural areas readily concede this kind of brashness has caused unnecessary trouble.

Similarly, you do not often hear people criticising their opponents for their policies.

Instead, ANC followers talk of the IFP as ignorant, uneducated, misguided.

"Buthelezi is just using these people who are not clever enough," said one official.

IFP supporters, in turn,

caricature the ANC as destruc-

tive, disruptive and dominated by unruly youth.

Perhaps the bitterest conflict of all is over the Zulu king, where ANC supporters angrily insist that Goodwill Zwelithini is their King too.

A senior ANC commander commented: "He can say anything, swear at us, but he is our King. I could never point a gun against him because he is our King."

Both sides agree that neither will back off from a fight because "that thing is in us. We grew up in rural areas, where we would take our sticks and fight until one surrenders," says Meshack Radebe, ANC leader in Mpumalanga. "Even now, if I go back to Greytown, I will take my sticks and just fight someone I know to see if I can still beat him."

Says Phindi Duma, an ANC Women's League member in KwaMashu: "We said we want women and children and the sick who can't fight and defend their houses. The men must stay behind. That is what is expected of them."

One KawMashu woman, whose 17-year-old son was in the township helping to hold the line, did not see it like that: "I'm not proud. I am afraid," she said.

She, like many others, feels she is caught in a storm. "I've never been safe," says Sibonginkosi Mzimela, principal of a high school in Mpumalanga, with a rueful smile. "The Left say I belong to the Right, the Right say I belong to the Left."

Both sides share a deep-rooted belief that the best way to end the conflict is to pound the enemy into submission.

"People are saying, 'Let's drive them out once and for all,'" says one ANC leader. "The IFP are saying the same thing."

But perhaps the biggest problem facing a post-election settlement is that many people

in Natal have a hard-nosed view of justice and an even tougher attitude to security.

"When people do get arrested they are outside the next day," said one young man.

As for disarming people as a first step towards peace, one

young combatant in Bhambayi, a squatter settlement near Durban, put the prevailing view quite simply: "It is not OK to take our weapons because I am likely to be attacked at any time."

If anyone from outside

## OPINION

### Magura By-election and Democracy

by T Hussain

tion in making an unofficial declaration of the Magura by-election result.

In Mirpur by-election held some time ago, the same Chief Election Commissioner ordered a recounting of votes; but in Magura by-election, he was not obviously satisfied that there was any genuine reason to hold a fresh poll.

The Awami League and Jatiya Party were both losers in the Magura by-election. Allegations of rigging on their part cannot be accepted as credit-worthy, unless supported by information from independent sources.

The writer, Mr. Imran took it for granted that there was politicisation of bureaucracy by the ruling party by way of large promotions to officials in 1992, which is open to question. This shows that the writer is already biased and his comments are not objective. Even so, the argument of politicisation is too far-fetched and in dependent on the actual truth. Electoral law and rules provide for redress in cases of alleged rigging or "vote-dacoity" as it is loosely called. If there is any specific case or cases of this nature, the Election Commission must be allowed to apply its judicial mind in deciding such cases, filed in a proper manner and under relevant law/rules.

Otherwise, the Commission cannot be coerced into cancelling an election held in a proper way in their eyes. It is equally absurd that for each by-election there will be a so-called "caretaker government" to arrange it.

In the last analysis, all patriotic citizens of Bangladesh would like to see that the newly achieved democracy works without any hindrance. A democratically elected Parliament must function in the normal way. Differences of opinion will, of course, be always there. These must be thrashed on the floor of the House. Opposition parties which value national interest above party considerations are expected to behave in a way conducive to the cause of democracy and its practices. If the democratic institutions are destroyed in achieving party interests, the party at fault will be accountable to the nation. We must have patience to learn by experience. This is how democracy has taken roots in our neighbouring country.

Lossing a by-election cannot be an issue to boycott the democratically elected parliament and resort to street agitation and give call for rallies, hartals and sieges. By doing this, one will be threatening the stability of the country and thereby ruining the national economy and blocking industrial development, foreign investment channel and other avenues of national growth. Certainly, no patriotic citizen of the country would be a party to this kind of agitational poli-

## To the Editor...

*Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.*

### Fragile peace in Bosnia

Sir. Forgive me if I cannot see eye to eye with Mr O H Kabir who was quick to point an accusing finger at China for not sending troops to Bosnia.

Well, the US didn't either. Yet it is the de facto superpower with all the pretensions of Big Brother, World Policeman. Did the Chinese ever lay such claims? They just don't want a Chinese soldier to die in foreign soil for that may taint him to be an agent of occupation. The Chinese believe that a soldier's job is to defend his own country, not to build empires abroad. Wouldn't you allow them that national pride?

So, the UN didn't do all they could or still can. But they

did some. What did the OIC do? Shed crocodile tears once in a while and go into comfortable hibernation of inaction and responsibility transfer.

The whole world should hold the Bosnians in admiration and do everything possible to bring succour to this to this heroic people. Beleaguered, outnumbered, and their hands tied behind their backs, they are fighting on with an indomitable spirit that should be an example for all times to come. And all for "liberate, equalise and fraternise". Lincoln could not be wrong in his conviction: "..... government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish...."

Bilal Nikary

Dhaka

### Dhaka-Khulna communication

Sir. Forty years from now or earlier one could travel between Dhaka and Khulna by paying Rs 60/- to PIA Helicopter service and it used to take 55 to 60 minutes only.

Billions of Taka have been spent since liberation towards the improvement of communications, but, unfortunately, today it takes at least 3½ hours by Biman via Jessor, 7½ hours by bus or minibus, 24-28 hours by train or steamer service. Yet Biman Bangladesh continues to advertise through catchy slogans like "world is becoming smaller!"

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Sadiq Alee

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