

## The Daily Star

Founder-Editor : Late S. M. Ali

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## For a Border of Peace

BDR says that between January and August of this year alone, 24 border incidents took place with India. Sixteen Bangladeshi citizens died while 38 military and civilian people were injured on our side. We are sure the BSF will have their version of casualty figures. The standard reaction to such incidents has been to not only term them as 'localised happenings' but also to treat them as such. An impromptu flag meeting would be held at a border checkpost between the BDR and BSF with the effect that the tension will be temporarily defused. But it will flare up again because the root cause of the trouble which lay in the non-implementation of the Indira-Mujib Land Boundary Agreement signed in 1974 has been by-passed as usual.

According to the standard practice, we have had a flag meeting at a border check-point near Sylhet on Tuesday and today another flag meeting is set to take place near Feni on the Muhurirchar dispute. The reported list of agenda for the first flag meeting included recent border incidents, the worst being at Belonia, terrorism, smuggling, child and woman trafficking, arms and drugs trafficking and the like. The very fact that a flag meeting has been held and another is on the cards today augurs well but only in a superficial sense; for these flag meetings cannot by definition take us any nearer to a solution of our border problems than we were before.

To comprehend this one has to only recall the 42 barren flag meetings that have taken place so far between the BDR and the BSF following 19 major shoot-outs that occurred centring around the Muhurirchar dispute in the Feni river. The sandbar rising in the winter becomes a live bone of contention every year. Several JRC meetings had also been held on the question, but to no avail.

Muhurirchar is just a tip of the iceberg if one were to take into account the magnitude of the unresolved border demarcation problems including the transfer of enclaves that jut into each other's territory. If the question of enclaves is settled Bangladesh will get 111 of them from India covering 17,258 acres while India receive 51 enclaves from Bangladesh measuring 10,174 acres. In addition, 3,024 acres of Indian land is said to be under Bangladesh's possession compared with 3,006 acres of Bangladesh's land being under India's possession.

To our understanding, it is the physically undemarcated frontiers at many places that are giving rise not just to problems of incursion, skirmish and tension but also those of terrorism and trafficking of women, children and drugs. When on top of the porous borders we have such gaping holes along them the field-day that recalcitrant people have can be easily imagined.

More importantly, it is a matter of concern for the sanctity of national borders.

The ball has been in the Indian court insofar as the implementation of the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement goes. Bangladesh took the earliest opportunity of ratifying it through her Parliament but ironically it is India with her almost an unbroken democratic tradition that has dithered on it for long 24 years.

In terms of an Indian Supreme Court ruling she does not have to take recourse to a Constitutional amendment to put the Land Boundary Agreement into operation. For the sake of durable good neighbourly relations we urge India to expedite delimitation of borders with us in the light of an international agreement she had entered upon a quarter century ago.

## Friday Mailbox

## Traffic jam in Dhaka

Sir, Allow me to focus on the unbearable traffic problem in Dhaka city.

We have been hearing from time to time about several schemes to improve the traffic system but so far there has been no improvement worth mentioning. We must admit that traffic jam has become a daily occurrence in Dhaka mostly because of the enormous increase in the number of rickshaws, scooters, cars etc. Besides there has been frequent road digging by the utility service-providing agencies i.e. WASA, DESA, T&T, and also unauthorised piling of building materials and encroachment by hawkers. We should pay attention to another important cause of traffic jam — almost everyday long processions are brought out which obstruct the traffic and put the people to much harassment. Such long processions in the city especially in office hours should be banned, while the number of vehicles should be kept under certain control until roads are made worthy as such.

If the authorities really want to make a better and safer transport and traffic system in Dhaka, they should also turn some prominent roads to one-way traffic during office hours, and withdraw the slow-moving vehicles (rickshaw, van etc) from the busiest parts of the city. Moreover, there should be strict enforcement of traffic rules with severe penal measures for the law-breakers in order to contain the perennial problem of traffic jam in Dhaka.

Mozibur Rahman  
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## Remembering General Osmani

Sir, It was a sad day — the 81st birth anniversary of the late General Osmani as nobody seemed to remember him. The only notable national personality who said something notable was our President. It appears that there is a political divide on assessing Osmani; but there should be no qualms in appreciating a notable character and personality who believed in the principle of country's interest first, and then the views of other leaders irrespective of political affiliation.

Why politics comes in between the living and the dead? There can always be difference of opinion (mainly in the approach to an issue) between any two strong personalities; but it does not mean that one of them is unacceptable as a person (unless his professional beliefs are unethical). Politicians fight on principle, and also cross floors on principle; hence they are always under severe public scrutiny. General Osmani's track record appears to be transparent.

Why a good person cannot be on the other side of the fence? This is a question directed at our arrogant and egoistic political leaders, who have no appreciation for the good points in opposing camps. It is the unintentional and offhand black-out on Osmani is formally removed through awareness campaign in the formation of public opinion. Sometimes some leaders are economical with the truth, but sometimes it is necessary to call a spade a

A Husnain  
Dhaka

## Political ghatas

Sir, When problems come, it pours from the cracked roof (quoting a local proverb). Awami League, in power, is creating ghatas after ghatas. The latest is the alleged continued high-handedness of a spirited banker who is a party MP. The banking sector had been living on the edge, what with the loan defaulter culture involving more than 1000 crore, and the earlier collapse of the stock exchange (from 3500 to 500). The NCBs cannot compete with the service-oriented private banks, and are facing liquidity problems.

Earlier the eviction issues hogged the lime-light. Before that the transhipment 'principle' of Indian goods has made the political waters muddy. Some parties like to live from crisis to crisis. The tendency is encouraged as the five-year elected period comes closer. The opposition is following an imitated version which is

Moral: The Bangladeshi are suffering from a chronic sickness otherwise known as the overdose of political poisoning. It is a type of slow poisoning like arsenic pollution. The question is when the non-politicians, i.e. the citizens, can gain the freedom from needless entanglement in politics in everyday life?

AZ  
Dhaka

## Indonesia in Transition: Troubled Times Ahead?

Coming days leading to the presidential elections will see a lot of horse trading among the Indonesian politicians. The Supreme Advisory Council will also have to ratify the results of the East Timor referendum and grant it independence. In the meantime the situation there has to be kept under control.



## Frankly Speaking...

by Faruq Choudhury

ing agencies? The frightening answer is that the latter may indeed be the case. We have seen from our own experience in this country that military rule leaves behind more problems than it ever solves; because, negotiation, accommodation and reconciliation are unknown to it. During the Suharto era, whenever socio-political problems erupted in a segment of the society, or troubles brewed in any region of the country, oppression followed by more oppression used to be the pet answer. As a result, with Suharto's fall, problems, both ethnic and regional, are erupting all over the country, with a government, provisional in nature, not knowing what to do.

However, watching television news even in this cruel, chaotic and unforgiving city of Dhaka, one finds it impossible to condone the barbarity that one sees being committed on the innocent people of East Timor, whose only crime seems to have been their overwhelming desire for political freedom, so tellingly expressed in the recent referendum there. One does feel tempted here to express the view that the quality of Indonesia's existence as an independent nation, hinges a great deal, not only on the final outcome of the recent general elections in the country, but also on its handling of the post referendum crisis in East Timor. President Habibie showed considerable political courage and foresight in allowing referendum in East Timor, but then in state craft, as we have found out in Bangladesh over and over again, mere demonstration of courage and expressions of wise and endearing words are not enough. What is needed is political will transformed into action through just, objective and effective management. With the risk of sounding dramatic, one has to say that the mettle of Indonesia is indeed being tested on the blood-soaked soil of East Timor. And East Timor may not be the end of the sordid story. Depending on how the Indonesian State deals with the situation in the provinces of Aceh and West Irian, as well as in some other far-flung areas of that sprawling country, this may well be only the beginning.

A point comes to mind here. Why have the Indonesian authorities failed to effectively deploy its armed forces in that troubled region? Is it the lack of genuine will or the lack of civilian authority on the law enforcement

dared raise the flag of independence West Irian, on the parliament building in Wasema, the capital of the province. They soon found out that they were wrong. Calling the rising of the flag "an act of treachery", the Indonesian forces came down heavily on the people. The independence movement of West Irian also lacks strength because both the neighbouring Papua New Guinea and nearby Australia, in deference to Indonesia's sensitivity, keep out of trouble's way, by not encouraging the rebels. This did not quite work, for the rebels continued with their activities in support of the majority, making the rebels, Indonesia might find it

decade or so, remained in a permanent state of revolt that waxes and wanes from time to time. A few years ago the condition there got so bad that the Indonesian authorities declared it as a special combat zone, thereby further alienating the people there. At the time of Suharto's resignation last year, the Indonesian authorities in Aceh, being in a 'no-win' situation there, decided to recall the army from the province in a desperate attempt to placate the rebels. This did not quite work, for the rebels continued with their activities in support of the majority, making the rebels, Indonesia might find it

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The Indonesian authorities have so far fared very poorly in dealing with the ugly post referendum situation in East Timor, thereby losing their credibility. Even the recent imposition of martial law does not create much hope. This is not likely to help them at all in dealing with discontent elsewhere. Hope is now pinned on the election of the next President and the emergence of a democracy there.

In that context the question that first comes to mind is the likely position of the armed forces in the future setup. Even after Suharto's departure, the armed forces have constitutionally retained a political role for themselves. They used to have 75 reserved seats in a 500-member parliament during Suharto's days. They now retain 38 seats in the new parliament and in the coalition situation that exists in Indonesia, this could turn out to be vital. In Indonesia, the President is elected by the Supreme Advisory Council of 700 members that includes the 500 members of the parliament. The parliamentary election is over in which Megawati Sukarnoputri's PDIP has emerged as the largest party with 153 seats, with President Habibie's Golkar coming second with 120. Two Islamic parties, PKB and PPP have secured 58 and 51 seats respectively. The armed forces with their 38 seats in fact form the fifth largest party in the parliament. The formation of this Supreme Advisory Council or MPR is however not yet complete as the 200 additional members comprising 130 repre-

senting the 26 Provincial Assemblies (5 from each province) and 70 representing recognized professional groups, are yet to be elected. In these elections, Golkar, with its money and muscle power and with the influence of the incumbent President Habibie, is expected to do well. President Habibie may still call the shots in the presidential elections by aligning himself with the major and minor Islamic parties and the military. In that event he may even offer General Wiranto, the armed forces chief, the vice-presidential slot to ensure the military support. This is not a far-fetched situation, and in that event the military, powerful as it is, will more or less retain its old position in the overall set up of the state machinery. This is likely to be regarded by the rebels in Aceh and West Irian as old wine in a new bottle.

There are of course other permutations and combinations that may lead to the magic number of 351 (out of a total of 700), the most likely one being with Megawati as the presidential candidate. A combination headed by Megawati may wear a more secular look than the one headed by Habibie and may be better placed to deal with the ethnic situations. But that may not help in dealing with the situation in Aceh.

Coming days leading to the presidential elections will see a lot of horse trading among the Indonesian politicians. The Supreme Advisory Council will also have to ratify the results of the East Timor referendum and grant it independence. In the meantime the situation there has to be kept under control.

Then there is the challenge of managing the country's fragile economy. Indeed Indonesia's problems have come in droves — problems that may well shake the country's foundation. "Unity in diversity" has been the country's motto, inscribed on its crest. Whether the country can live up to it will be tested in the coming months.

## Is this Nation Happy?

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

According to a survey conducted by the London School of Economics, Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries on earth, is the happiest nation in the world! And hearken what is even more interesting! Affluent nations such as USA ranked way below in the 46th position, with UK, Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Japan trailing closely ahead or behind. Neighbouring India ranked 5th in terms of happiness in dead heat competition with countries like Ghana, Latvia, Armenia and the Dominican Republic.

Resolve not to be poor: whatever you have, spend less. Poverty is a great enemy to human happiness; it certainly destroys liberty, and it makes some virtues impracticable, and others extremely difficult.

Samuel Johnson (1709-84)  
English poet, critic and lexicographer

T HOMAS Jefferson enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence that the preservation of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness are amongst the inherent and inalienable rights of men. If that is true then poverty must be the antithesis of happiness because nothing diminishes life like the absence of means to sustain it.

But hard facts are often stranger than hypothesis. According to a survey conducted by the London School of Economics, Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries on earth, is the happiest nation in the world! And hearken what is even more interesting! Affluent nations such as USA ranked way below in the 46th position, with UK, Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Japan trailing closely ahead or behind. Neighbouring India ranked 5th in terms of happiness in dead heat competition with countries like Ghana, Latvia, Armenia and the Dominican Republic.

Richard Cohen, a columnist of The Washington Post, encompassed this view when he said that happiness was "wanting what you have, not having what you want". The members of the Roman aristocracy used to cram and then disgorge so

hubris that characterized our victory against Pakistan in the World Cup cricket! Aristotle cautioned that a brief period of happiness did not make a man supremely blessed and happy. Then why did we ignore the blessings of "supreme" happiness of being the happiest nation and indulge in its ephemeral collection of winning one game in a tournament?

The most lifting thing about the LSE survey is to know that material dearth doesn't spoil spiritual mirth. More than two centuries ago, Samuel Johnson had contended that no two persons could be equally happy, because happiness consisted in the multiplicity of agreeable consciousness. A philosopher and a peasant could be equally satisfied, but not equally happy. Again, one could not be happy without being satisfied first. After all happiness is the expression of a content soul as much as the fragrance of flower enunciates its blossom. That is where we must have scored higher than other nations in the happiness survey. We could be happy with our one victory against Pakistan, while others wouldn't settle for anything less than the Cup!

The deadliest mix is when conceit and contentment come together in the convoluted of a compulsive mind. It turns happiness into a desperate showdown between identity and ego, its pursuit aggravated into an elusive hum.

Plato explained in the Republic that there are three parts to a human soul: desire, reason and thymos. Desire induces men to seek things outside themselves, while reason shows

the best way to get them. But thymos is self-esteem, the sense of men's own worth which they want to be recognised by other men. If that recognition falls short of their expectation, they experience emotion of anger. They feel shame when they do not live up to their own sense of worth, and pride when others recognise that worth in them.

Nietzsche's Zarathustra talks about the last man or victorious slave whose desire and reason emphasise upon his self-interest: his happiness unfazed if others do not recognise his self-esteem because he has no sense of shame. This is a man who is spiritually happy with his material satisfaction. More than two hundred years ago, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had cautioned in The Social Contract that a democratic society, which didn't beware luxury, would encourage moral compromise for material comfort.

When that happens, the pursuit of happiness is a deplorable trade-off between well-being and human being when selfish souls, content within the rigors of their complacency, compromise considerations of collective good.

Thus happiness is often the ecstasy state of estranged minds. The loan defaulters are happy so long as they don't have to refund bank loans and the corrupt officials would like their vices to be overlooked. For the same reason, addicts would be thankful if government in-

duced welfare on drugs and the muggers would want their victims to give valuables on demand. Needles to say, a rapist will not mind getting a little compensation from his prey.

Is that how we are the happiest nation on earth where mischievous minds revel in the condoning climate of connections and cash? Did the LSE survey actually reflect the condescending culture of our condescending times where convenience dictates the contents of character? Is it convenient to hire a killer to eliminate a rival instead of a face-off? Is it convenient to throw acid on a young girl than to live with the pain of her rejection? Is it convenient to borrow money from the banks and then not to repay until there is an exemption of interest payment.

Happiness is meant to be something else, the beatitude of exalted souls. The Pareto optimality of human relations requires that one's exaltation wouldn't infringe upon the exaltation of another. If that happens, it is cruelty: happiness gone on hypocrisy. Perhaps we are the happiest nation because we most enjoy our cruelties both in commitment and convenience, or at least don't feel guilty about them. After all there are two ways one can be happy: getting what one wants or wanting what one gets. While some of us enjoy happiness in cruelty, others don't mind cruelty in happiness.

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## New Bridges over the Meghna and the Kushyara: A Perspective View

by Imamuddin Ahmad Chowdhury

W ITH the completion of Bangabandhu Bridge over Jamuna, the Railways has at long last brought BG line upto east side of the Jamuna. A dual gauge BG-cum-MG line being constructed from Parbatipur (in Dinajpur) to Joydevpur (in Dhaka). Another project to convert the existing MG line from Joydevpur to Dhaka into BG-cum-MG dual line is also under active consideration. The extension of existing MG double line from Tongi to Bairab with provision of dual gauge under German assistance is also being considered. Thus the process of extending BG railway line to Dhaka and then to port city of Chittagong seems to have opened a new era in our railway communication.

A railway system can only be viable with long distance traffic. In a small country like Bangladesh, its railway system can only be viable with extension of traffic to our neighbouring countries like India, Nepal, Burma etc. At present Bangladesh Railway has through traffic to India and also Nepal through Indian Railway MG system. Indian Railway is presently converting its MG lines to BG in a large scale and very soon we will have no long distance traffic with India and Nepal. This decision of Indian Railway is mainly due to

fact that their BG system, although forming 67 per cent of total route, generated 96.7 per cent of their total freight output and 91 per cent of their total passenger output. On the other hand, their MG system, covering 27 per cent of total route, generated 3.2 per cent of total freight output and 9 per cent of total passenger output.

Now if Bangladesh Railway transforms its main system into BG standard, we can, in future, see traffic on Trans-Asian Railway system like that of Trans-European Railway network.

Against this background, then Pakistan Eastern Railway initiated various projects to gradually convert its vital routes to BG. While executing Chittagong-Dhaka double line project, the embankment, bridges and other structures in the new second Chittagong-Dhaka line have already been constructed on BG standard. Side-by-side Ishurdi-Nagarbari, Dhaka-Aricha BG projects were initiated. The construction work was also started on these two projects in 1973 but later on suspended.

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