

The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali
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Unfriendly Acts at the Border

We are continuously having to update the number of border incidents with India and that of deaths caused by them. The latest spurt is an unpleasant development triggered by the BSF that Government of India ought to put its feet down on in deference to historically the best patch of relations the two countries have been otherwise going through ever since the AL government came to power in 1996.

In the latest incident on Tuesday night, the 26th one since January this year, the Indian Border Security Force killed two BDR personnel and abducted another two at Sibganj border in Chapainawabganj district. According to the standard practice, Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Deb Mukharjee was summoned to the Bangladesh foreign office by the acting Foreign Secretary Mohiuddin Ahmed to lodge a protest with. Only four days back, the Indian HC had been called by our foreign office for a similar purpose after two Bangladeshi civilians had been killed by the BSF at Pargan border in Thakurgaon district on the 16th of this month. Altogether in less than nine months' time 18 Bangladeshi citizens, including the BDR personnel died and around 40 military and civilian people were injured, to say nothing of past records.

The latest sequence of incursion, killing, abduction and attempted making good on the excesses committed is a study in arrogance. A BDR patrol party on duty along the river Pagla having seized a boat, laden with copper and brass and headed for the Indian territory, a BSF contingent came on the scene aboard another boat and tried to snatch the suspected craft away. Thereupon the BDR men resisted and the BSF opened fire on them killing the two and spiriting away with another two BDR personnel. The BDR Battalion Commander's request for an immediate flag meeting with his BSF counterpart which sounded extremely compelling under those circumstances was not promptly heeded baring thereby the protens of miscommunication when communication was most needed. A belated flag meeting between the Commanders on both sides, however, led up to the return of the dead bodies, abducted BDR jawans and the injured ones to the Bangladesh side.

Despite the flag meetings and the Sector Commanders' meetings galore during the last 24 years since the signing of the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement, border incursions and skirmishes have occurred at regular intervals.

Between neighbouring countries with long inter-state borders, localised tiffs arising out of small causes cannot be entirely ruled out, but what gives a negative vibe altogether is the fierce physical involvement of border security forces in such matters which normally should have merited a positive attitude of trouble-shooting by mutually permissive methods.

In a previous editorial comment on the subject we have said that the root cause of the border problems lay in our continuing failure to delimit our territories in terms of the Land Boundary Agreement signed a quarter of a century ago. Hopefully the next government in India, which is on the avial, will attend to this hugely important unfinished agenda for enduringly positive bilateral relations.

In the meanwhile, we urge the Indian central government and the top-brass of the Indian border security force to work out a mechanism whereby the currently manifest trigger-happy and provocative reflexes of the BSF can be held in check. If border incidents reminiscent of the ones that had taken place when relationship between the two countries had touched a nadir should recur now then it would be a very unfortunate commentary on the skill of the border sentinels and the sagacity of political leadership in India. Indian External Affairs Ministry's spokesman Ramendra Jashpal when queried on the spurt in border incidents with Bangladesh said the other day in New Delhi that he was sanguine about the bilateral relationship being on such strong foundations that it could not be affected by the recent happenings at the border. True, but sustenance and furtherance of that relationship calls for avoidance of the border skirmishes as well.

Friday Mailbox

African sleeping sickness
In Bangladesh?

Sir, The Daily Star report on September 21, 1999 on finding rare parasites called Trypanosomes in the dead tigers at Dhaka Zoo is indeed alarming. Probably no case of Trypanosomiasis (human or animal) was reported in our country ever before. Trypanosomiasis can be of two types: African (causing sleeping sickness) and South American (causing Chaga's disease). The report says the type found in the tigers was the African variety.

While studying at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, earlier this year, I had the opportunity to attend lectures delivered by experts who have extensive research and clinical experience on sleeping sickness caused by African Trypanosomes. They broadly classified the pathogenic African Trypanosomes into Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense (causing an acute disease), Trypanosoma brucei gambiense (causing a chronic disease) and Trypanosoma brucei brucei (causing disease only in animals). The vector responsible for carrying the Trypanosomes are the African Tse Tse flies. The reservoir can be lion, cattle, hyena, sheep, giraffe and some other animals. Clinical course of the disease includes development of chancre at the site of Tse Tse bite, fever, lymph node enlargement (called 'Winterbottom sign' when neck glands are involved), local oedema, cardiac abnormalities and progressive nervous system involvement which may be fatal. Diagnosis can be made by looking for the parasite in blood film, lymph node aspirate, cerebrospinal fluid and by some immunological tests. Treatment includes Pentamidine (also used for prophylaxis) and Suramin in the early stage of the disease. Melarsoprol can be used in the late stage.

Thanks to The Daily Star for the timely report on this issue which needs immediate attention. The expert in IEDCR, Dhaka prudently emphasized on controlling the disease before it wipes out village after village as it did in Africa. The vector and the reservoir in Dhaka Zoo has to be found out immediately. WHO expert committee has specific control strategies for this disease which is a major health menace in certain areas of Africa. Our health authority may seek advice from WHO or other experts in this field, if necessary. We need to wake up way ahead before sleeping sickness sends us to an eternal sleep.

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have human dignity. To use the word 'sent' with a highly respectful personality of our nation, specially when he may be in the twilight years of his life, seemed to me as a lack of respect.

Buland Akhtar
Dhaka

No punishment for adulterated food!

Sir, It was surprising to learn from press reports and the DS editorial (Sept 18) that while there are several government agencies for food and other consumer goods, there is a lot of confusion on implementation of the regulations, monitoring and prosecution. No political backing please when big industrial concerns are caught and their factories sealed temporarily.

To allay public apprehension of public health issues, the government may publicize existing mechanisms as the prosecutions are hardly announced in the press. There is so much adulteration around that every month hundreds of cases may be reported. It is sad to note that the government's inspection departments are not doing their job properly and the errant officials are not punished. The cause is obvious: honesty and sense of duty starts from the top, not from the bottom!

A Husnain
Dhaka

Empowerment of Election Commission

Sir, Under the Constitution, it is the President who appoints the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners at his discretion. This creates problem of acceptance of the said commissioners by the opposition party. In order to eliminate this problem, FEMA — a civil organization set forth a proposal. They recommended that when the country is under a party government, appointment of the said commissioners should be made in consultation with the leader of the opposition and if the country is under a caretaker Government then in consultation with the leaders of the major political parties.

If this proposal is accepted, it should be really helpful for the country.

Md Rafiqul Islam
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Power crisis

Sir, For the last three to four months, inhabitants of Patharghat, Feringhee bazaar, Alkaran and other adjoining areas are experiencing acute power failure almost every weekend approximately from 8 am till 6 pm.

The authorities concerned do not even care to warn the residents about these power failures which would have enabled them to take adequate measures such as storing water etc. The most interesting part is, despite these regular power failures one receives a higher electricity bill.

Hope the authorities concerned will kindly look into this nagging problem.

Inayat Hussain
Chittagong

Of respect and words
Sir, I am drawing your attention to the news headline 'Shamsur Rahman will be sent to Singapore today in Tuesday's (21/9/99) Daily Star'. The word 'sent' appeared to me to be rather rude in this context. In my opinion, this is not a respectful enough language for the eminent personality.

A heading like 'Shamsur Rahman will be taken to ... or 'Arrangements for Shamsur Rahman's trip to ... or something similar would have been polite. I am sure people at DS can think of better headings than I do, but please do away with such word as 'be sent' with the name of such a great poet of our time. We generally send things which usually don't

How Democratic are Our Political Parties?

Both the ruling party and the opposition preach democracy, but refuse to ensure the citizens' fundamental human rights, writes Nurul Kabir

In a frenzied power struggle, the ruling Awami League and the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party are seemingly engaged in a systematic violation of the human rights of the citizens. The only difference lies in the extent.

The ruling party, by dint of administrative control over law enforcement agencies, seems oblivious of its constitutional obligations to uphold fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person'. Also, it appears indifferent to citizens' constitutional right to 'assemble and participate in public meetings and processions peacefully'...

Even worse, while carrying out government orders to repress political rivals, the police have regularly subjected people to torture and degrading treatment in direct violation of the country's Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At the other end, although a victim of such government atrocity, BNP and its allies are no better — especially when it comes to punishing those opposing their views. Outside power, they do not have the police, but they have arrogant activists to take care of those refusing to go by their agitation programmes, especially haritals.

Recently, the alliance led by the BNP enforced a country-wide 60-hour shut-down in protest against police atrocity against the opposition.

On September 12, the opposition parties staged a sit-in around the secretariat, the seat of the government. The government, as usual, banned public meetings and processions in the areas while the police put up barricades at different points to make sure that the opposition activists could not enter 'restricted areas'. The opposition parties decided to hold rallies outside the barricade. But BNP chief and leader of the opposition in parliament Khaleda Zia could not finish her speech at the rally as some still unidentified culprits exploded bombs and fired shots at the venue. The incident resulted in a two-hour pitched battle between the police and the opposition activists, leaving some 100 hundred people injured and more than one hundred arrested. Hit hard and humiliated as well, the opposition demanded resignation of the Home Minister who looks after the law enforcement agencies.

The government response was bitter.

Field level visits as well as newspaper reports showed that police imposed a reign of terror on the opposition activists on September 13, the first day of the hartal. September 14 issues of Dhaka dailies had to ran head lines like the one 'The Daily Star did Police excesses mark hartal in capital'.

Violence kills 1 in Natore, hurts 100, puts scores behind the bars.

The reports said, 'a leader of the Juba Dal, youth front of the opposition BNP, was hacked to death allegedly by ruling party activists who attacked BNP pickets at Gurudaspur in Natore on the first day of the opposition's 60-hour country-wide hartal.'

'At Dhaka University, supporters of the JCD, student wing of the BNP, were ousted from the campus at gun point by rivals.'

'Motijheel police arrested 116 people from the vicinity of the BNP's central office in the city during the first six hours of the opposition shut-down. The haul included a good number of children, juveniles and girls who work in garments and other small factories.'

'Whoever happened to be walking down the street in front of the BNP office and its vicinity found him/herself in custody. Motijheel Police forced the detained people, bundled in one rope, onto prison vans from lock-ups. Don't you see we are busy sending criminals to court,' the on-duty officer shouted when a newsman asked how many minor prisoners he had in his sardine packed lock-ups that reeked of urine and other health.'

'The reports and photographs carried by different dailies show how mercilessly the police charged batons on the opposition activists that day. Whenever asked about their atrocity, field-level police officials had ready-reply: 'We have orders from high-ups.'

'They are oblivious, if not ignorant, of article 3 of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment that says: 'An order from a superior officer or a public authority may not be invoked as a justification of torture.'

'Besides, the police actions amounted in clear violation of Article 11 of the country's Constitution that says, 'The Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed.'

However, Home Minister Mohammad Nasim seemed ecstatic at the opposition's failure to combat police in the streets.

He 'ridiculed' the opposition demand for his resignation the next day, instead of being sorry for his failure to secure a democratic environment where the country's leader of the opposition can peacefully end a peaceful rally the day before and police atrocity even on innocent minors.

Addressing a rally in the city

on September 13 afternoon, the minister bragged: 'I have not started my job as yet and you are demanding my resignation.' Besides, the senior AL leaders including Nasim himself announced their plan to flush out BNP from streets in the remainder of 60-hour hartal.'

Such comments and announcements had obvious impact on the police and the ruling party cadres: they enthusiastically took to the streets to clear the city streets of the opposition activists seemingly with a sense of impunity.

The reports and photographs carried by different dailies show that the Home Minister really started his job, of course in violation of the Constitution and international human rights instruments.

Article 37 of the Constitution says: 'Every citizen shall have the right to assemble and participate in public meetings and processions peacefully and without arms, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of public order or public health.'

The governments at times find it 'reasonable' to impose section 144 of the CrPC forbidding rallies and processions 'in the interests of public order'. In Bangladesh, such impositions have been made over the years mostly out of negative political

intentions — to suppress the voice of the opposition parties.

But in the present case, the government did not even care to take the 'legal' blanket to violate citizens' right to assemble and participate in public meetings and processions.

On September 14, there was no official restrictions for the BNP to bring out processions in the city. But the law enforcers and ruling party activists launched indiscriminate attacks on BNP processionists.

No national daily, even those politically sympathetic to the government, could ignore the police atrocity.

Reporting on the incidents, The Daily Star said on September 15: 'The ruling party plan to suppress the opposition parties, especially the BNP, apparently proved successful yesterday.'

'Home Minister and other senior AL leaders announced at a rally in the city on Monday about their plan to flush out BNP from streets in the remainder of 60-hour-hartal ending at 6:00 p.m. today.'

'Police and AL workers behaved accordingly. Pro-hartal pickets were seldom seen on the Dhaka streets, dominated mainly by anti-hartal activists of the ruling party and its affiliated bodies. ... In fact BNP workers were forced to keep off the streets. ... Police chased away the BNP processionists and picked up many.'

A report published in The Daily Star September 15 said: 'The second day of the three day hartal passed off yesterday with police allowing gatherings and processions of Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and ruling Awami League.'

The police and the ruling party activists continued their actions the next day. But this time, journalists also became the target of the police atrocity. Even Bhor Kagoj, a Bangla daily owned by a minister, complained of harassment. The September 16 issue of the daily reported: 'The police harassed journalists on duty in the city yesterday. They beat up a taxi driver carrying reporters covering the incidents. When the journalists protested such atrocities, the police abused them like anything.'

In any case, the Home Minister was very happy with the performances of his police and party activists. Addressing a party rally in the city on September 15 afternoon, an elated Nasim said: 'Khaleda Zia is yet to understand what stuff the Awami League is made of. Hope you have understood a bit during the (just-concluded) hartal. You did not find any worker on the street, not to speak of the ordinary people. In future, you will fail to get any worker even after sending letters to their mothers.'

In another development,

some still-unidentified criminals exploded a couple of bombs near the ruling party rally which, the Home Minister was addressing.

But the minister did not take a second to announce that Khaleda Zia's people had thrown the bombs. The announcement prompted a section of the ruling party supporters forcing their way into boxing stadium near where the explosion took place. They caught two young men — one of them a security guard of the nearby National Sports Council — near the stadium gate and beat them mercilessly suspecting them as bomb throwers. They reportedly ransacked offices at the boxing stadium.

Surprisingly, the Home Minister announced from the podium that the 'culprits have been caught'. How can a minister call a person culprit before in the court of law. What is more interesting is that no AL activist has so far been arrested in connection of ransacking the boxing stadium, although the government is repressing opposition activists on a regular basis in the name of protecting public lives and property. This is double standard.

On the other hand, opposition parties did not lag far behind.

A photograph carried by a Bangla daily on September 15 shows that a bank official received serious injury, as opposition activists reportedly threw a bomb on a tempo (mechanised three-wheelers) plying a city street during hartal hours.

Another Bangla daily carried a picture the next day showing a young boy on a hospital bed with severe burn injury on his back. The caption of the photograph said that opposition activists poured petrol on his body and set fire because he was riding a motor bike along the city streets during hartal hours.

These actions are also clearly ultra vires of the constitution that upholds citizens' right to life and property as well as freedom of movement. Also, such actions clearly amount to violation of the article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted more than half a century ago.

Immediately after declaring that 'every one has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association', the UDHR says: 'No one may be compelled to belong to an association.'

Neither democratic norms nor human rights convention allows political parties to punish those unwilling to accept their politics or implement their programmes.

Such recurrent incidents certainly put accent on the need for a democratic system sensitive to universally-accepted fundamental human rights.

Diplomacy: North Korean Style

The US-North Korea agreement for easing of the US sanctions as well as South Korea's positive reactions have now signalled a long and hard bargaining process in which North Korea's own recipe to use threats and brinkmanship to get concessions from the parties concerned would no doubt be used in future as well.

its practice of diplomacy, which obviously fall outside any existing diplomatic norms.

North Korea's irrationality, uncertainties and unpredictability arise from a number of factors. First, the intentions of the country, its poor and desperate economic condition; hyper-militarized defence, its nuclear and missile development capabilities and willingness to barter these deadly and sensitive technologies for ready cash (for example during the US-North Korea missile proliferation negotiations in 1996, Pyongyang demanded that Washington pay as much as those exports now earn in foreign currency or provide various commodities of comparable value). Dissatisfaction among the ruling elite as evidenced by the defections of highest-ranking North Korean diplomats to the United States in 1997, are deemed to be the sources of such internationally unacceptable behaviour. Second, they also arise from Pyongyang's difficult endeavours to tackle the problems of disasters, its economic stagnation, widespread food shortage and threats of famine in the backdrop of country's extreme isolation.

The evolution and practice of this novel diplomacy have their roots in North Korea's complex problem, dire economic situation as well as national integration. And so far it has been a success story. Its leadership have successfully drawn the attention of the countries concerned to have its twin objectives of getting economic and humanitarian assistance, and at the same time, whip up intense nationalist sentiment to hold the country together through its own diplomatic activities. The policy has also served regime's domestic agenda. Because the populace feel that the starvation, the deprivation are all justified in the face of threats to its national and territorial integrity (for which missiles need to be built at the cost of social development) from a country like South Korea backed by the United States. The trick is to keep the people cut off from the world and feed whatever information the regime needs to disseminate in order to maintain its grip on them. Again, a policy arising out of such mentality is difficult to comprehend and deal

with. However, most disruptive and unpredictable has been its weapon programmes and missile testing which again are being used for blackmail, as mentioned earlier, which was evidenced by its abandonment of covert nuclear reactor fuel into nuclear weapons in return for the assistance by the US and Japan to buy oil and build two improved nuclear reactors. This *qui pro quo* was followed after numerous breakdowns in US-North Korea bilateral talks on North Korea's nuclear and missile development programmes. As a result of North Korea's behavioural pattern, Washington and its allies have, despite mutual differences, exploited a *modus operandi* to face

