

Confidence-building needed

Tension should be nipped in the bud

It is inexplicable why tension should be mounting at several points along our borders with India so soon after heading off the sudden burst of crises at Padua and Roumari. That such a change of outlook has occurred closely on the heels of the trouble-shooting exercise carried out successfully in our north-eastern frontier with India is not just a surprise but also indicative of a somewhat mercurial approach to sensitivities on the other side.

Has there been any communication gap or miscommunication somewhere along the line either in India or as between Dhaka and New Delhi that apparently such a massing of BSF troops is taking place along the border. The build-up has been reported from Barua Bazar in Comilla, Muhurir Char in Feni, Mollarhat and Agram in Lalmonirhat and Batrigachi and Kismat Batrigachi enclaves bordering Lalmonirhat again.

On the other hand, the Inspector General of BSF has expressed his worries over what he termed massive build-up of BDR soldiers and movement of Army troops from our side along the borders with Assam, Tripura and Mizoram states. For our part we have dismissed such apprehensions out of hand saying nothing like that was happening. Hopefully, this would help remove any mis-giving that might have crept in.

Recently at a meeting of the border security chiefs it was decided that both sides would dismantle bunkers as a peaceable gesture to avert any eyeball to eyeball situation.

The BDR is under clear instructions not to fire a single shot unless there is provocation on the other side.

With the political and diplomatic channels between both the countries remaining alert and open to communication, the chiefs of BDR and BSF should constantly keep in touch with each other. We must have flag meetings and sector commander level meetings as and when the situation demands.

Confidence-building measures will have to be taken at all levels so that no impulsive action is taken afield spurred on by misunderstanding of any sort.

Journalists under attack

Take a strong stand now

PROTECT journalists. This is the vehement message that we would like to send to the authorities. The toll is increasing, day by day. In the first four months of this year, one journalist was killed and 35 injured. Last year, two journalists had been killed and 45 injured. In the last six years, nine journalists have been killed in the south west alone. Journalists have been assaulted, threatened and their homes and offices vandalised.

The outrage is compounded by the abject callousness of the authorities. Not only have they failed to take a strong stand to catch and punish the criminals, but also, it is the police themselves who have often indulged in acts of brutality against journalists.

In several cases, such as the savage assault in January on UNB Feni correspondent Tipu Sultan, the local police have continued to protect the mastermind, a ruling party MP notorious for his defiance of law and order. Similar incidents have been reported from across the country.

The audacity of these violations, combined with the dubious role played by the police, have created a deep and pervasive sense of insecurity among journalists. How can we hope to develop a healthy media if the basic security of life and limb cannot be given to the working journalist? What kind of relationship does the government expect to build with the media if it continues to ignore repeated assaults on its members?

Attacks on journalists are not random acts of lawlessness but targeted reprisal assaults and killings, to muzzle the free press. By failing to take a strong stand against offenders, the government is acquiring a most unsavoury notoriety of complicity and negligence. We urge the authorities to clean up a tarnished record. Take steps to prevent any quarters whatsoever from undermining the vitality of the fourth estate. Ensure a climate of security for an institution that is critical to the survival of democracy.

Land boundary accord key to border peace



S H I M A M

LACID waters of the Indo-Bangla bilateral world have been stirred violently by the border incidents at Padua and Roumari. The news almost instantly hogging international media headlines, people overseas came to know of the developments at the same time that we in these parts did. The overall seriousness with which the news was treated in the global information network, especially at the emanation stages, and broadcast world-wide, tended to heighten its overall impact on the audience or the listeners.

Something out of the ordinary had happened on the sideline of the customary Indo-Bangla relations to awaken India from its Rip Van Winkle's sleep over the pending border issues Bangladesh has had with her for years on end.

Reactions in India to the sudden bursts of news about the BDR's re-establishing control over Padua and the deaths of 16 Indian BSF men at Baraimari in Roumari have been predictably sharp and palpably

JUST ANOTHER VIEW

The ceasefire and 'the return to status quo ante' at the disputed spots are not something to rest our oars on. These routine steps for defusion of tension can not be of enduring value so long as they are not followed up by further confidence-building measures, and linked to the overriding concern for resolving the whole range of outstanding border problems made the more pressing after the deaths of so many frontier guardsmen.

anguished. On the whole, these were a mirror-image of India's pluralistic national psyche with an essentially common thread of interpretation and analysis weaving through it all.

The initial Indian official reaction was one of disbelief. Then it ranged from being measured and nuanced ('it was local adventurism and not a reflection of government of Bangladesh's policy') to being hurt and indignant demanding punishment to the perpetrators of the 'defilement of men in uniform' with the BDR obviously drawing the flak there.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's telephonic conversation with her Indian counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee must have helped clear the air gone rather thick with misgivings at the Indian end. In Padua BDR encircled the Indian camp as it was seen trying to construct a pucca road from the no man's land to the Indian territory. In Baraimari they acted in self-defence on being attacked by the BSF troops, our PM elaborated to the Indian Prime Minister. The BDR is 'mandated' to take on-the-spot

decision, clarified foreign secretary Moazzem Hossain in reply to a journalist's question as to whether any action was unilaterally taken by the BDR chief.

The media in India reflecting informed public opinion waxed critical of the successive Indian governments' failure to appreciate the importance of resolving the long-standing border problems with Bangladesh, hopefully forcing thereby, an introspection in the government circles. The attitudes taken to the questions of exchanging enclaves and ending adverse possessions were found to be unhelpful standing in contrast to the attention India had otherwise paid to her border problems with other neighbouring Pakistan and China.

One Calcutta daily was pungent in its criticism saying in so many words that the Indian approach was indefensible in the light of Dhaka's constant reminders of unfinished border demarcation tasks to India, which fell on deaf ears, adding that completion of those could have placed the bilateral relations on a

much stronger footing as Bangladesh had assured.

The weekly Outlook magazine even quoted a high Indian functionary to say that there was an apprehension of trouble brewing as some Bangladeshis thought that the Indian border security forces' patrolling was getting a bit too overbearing for comfort. Kidp Nayar's view that early wake-up calls were ignored ruling out timely political intervention to head off the crisis in a way confirmatory of the above premonition.

The Inspector General of Shillong regarded the incidents 'as part of a bigger design to undermine the existing friendly relations between Bangladesh and India'.

There hasn't been any dearth of highly speculative theories being set afloat about Bangladesh PM's attempt to work off her India-friendly image through the latest developments at the border in the prelude to the forthcoming elections. A section of the Indian media obliquely referred to traces of opposition leader Begum Zia's nationalist party's pamphlets being discovered at some border point. Even an ISI

connection was suspected on Tehelka website. Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee stalked by defence purchase scandals may have fortuitously got a diversion from the border incidents with Bangladesh, some wild guesses would have us believe that, too.

The ceasefire and 'the return to status quo ante' at the disputed spots are not something to rest our oars on. These routine steps for defusion of tension can not be of enduring value so long as they are not followed up by further confidence-building measures, and linked to the overriding concern for resolving the whole range of outstanding border problems made the more pressing after the deaths of so many frontier guardsmen. By hindsight, as the seeds of discord have been allowed to fester along the borderline in the last five years alone we have had 130 incidents with 50 Bangladeshis having been killed in a matter of some months recently at the border.

All that is needed now is political will from India. Bangladesh posted its own in the very year that the Mujib-Indira land boundary accord

had come into existence i.e. 1974 by ratifying it through her Jaijai Sangsad and adopting the same as the Third Constitutional Amendment Act. India's failure to ratify the accord through her parliament, even to this day, virtually deals a body-blow to it in that Article 5 of the agreement is rounded off with the clause reading, 'The Agreement shall take effect from the date of the exchange of the Instruments of Ratification'.

The proposed joint committee's work towards implementation of the land boundary agreement can only bear fruit, on a durable basis, if the Indian leadership musters the required political will to have the accord ratified through the Lok Sabha abandoning the adhoc and tentative approaches taken by her so far.

As against 3000 acres of our land in adverse possession of India the latter has 3500 acres of her land in adverse possession of Bangladesh. As for the enclaves India has 111 in Bangladesh measuring 1700 acres and Bangladesh has 51 in India but with nearly six times the acreage protruding into India. The Indira-Mujib accord lays down the basic principles, and even modalities to have those unfinished tasks fulfilled, what with the change in river-courses, appearance of shoals and the re-location of pillars hither and thither.

While India must have signed the accord with the intent to ratify through the Lok Sabha, much the same way as she has consummated treaties with other countries, one wonders what is holding her from doing it in relation to Bangladesh?

The crumbling edifice



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

PARLIAMENT sessions have not been easy for many years. The politics of coalition has made them shadowy. Even otherwise, the awe or the esteem the institution would radiate has paled into cynicism or ridicule. The temple of democracy has lost many of its devotees.

People can hardly make out which of the incidents or statements will stop or disrupt the proceedings of one house and then spill over to the other and to what purpose. That political parties or their leaders have become edgy is no answer to the state of parliament. It cannot be the insecurity of tenure either. Noise or disruption gives particular members media attention. It may indicate their sense of boredom. But what do people do when they want something positive to emerge from the institution?

What is missing is members' involvement. Individuals show some interest; even a few groups do. But parliament as a whole is not involved. The general approach is trivial and seldom without politics. Members are distant even when the country's most important subject is under discussion. It is not only the opposition which is casual in its attitude, the government is no better.

'Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind,' said British poet John Donne. That kind of pain or concern is lacking in both houses of parliament. Members may be upset, shocked and even horrified. But they do not give the impression of being so involved that they will work out a solution. The effort to seek or reach a consensus is rare. It is always 'they and us'.

The Rajya Sabha, where I expected a mature and objective attitude, is as much steeped in rhetoric on the party lines as is the Lok Sabha. Seldom do members rise above the tutored approach. I do not find, as I did when I covered parliament 35 years ago, a HN Kunzru or a

BETWEEN THE LINES

The real point of concern is that political parties and people are drifting apart speedily. Parties are interested only in power politics while people's minds are focused on the country's development so as to improve their lives. It may be a cliché that politicians and bureaucrats have scotched the aspirations of the people. But there is no doubt that that they are the main culprits.

Bhupesh Gupta in the Upper House, nor a Nath Pai or a Feroze Gandhi in the Lower House. They were the conscience keepers of parliament. Even Atal Behari Vajpayee spoke differently those days.

It appears as if the parties have lost their ethos. They seem primarily engaged in retaining power or in usurping those in power. No principle is involved. Idealism, if any, is smouldering on the back burner. Still it is the dream which relieves a nation's pain. But parliament is too absorbed in too many petty things. Members may have the satisfaction of running down the opponents but, in reality, they are bringing down the institution from the pedestal it once occupied.

Had it been the loss of parliament's privilege or that of members who, constituting the situation would have been manageable. But it is lessening the nation and in the process it is telling upon the credibility of other institutions. People's faith in the system where parliament is the pivot is taking a big knock. First they were confused and then disappointed. But now they feel helpless as if they are caught between ineffective parliament and deficient members. They feel let down by the acts of omission and commission of the elected members.

Yet parliament is the only body which can make them realise their dreams. They find the present system too slow and too laborious. Still they are wedded to free vote. But they have begun to wonder whether the presidential way of governance would speed up things. It is as if they are looking for a deliverer.

The ball is now in parliament's court. It is up to its members to retrieve its image. Non-functioning of parliament has posed questions on its very functioning and even unity. The Congress stretched the boycott of the house far too long. By stalling the discussion on the Tehelka expose, the Congress hit the headlines. But it damaged its own stock and that of parliament. It does not behove a responsible party, first

to pooh-pooh the proposal for a joint parliamentary committee (IPC) when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was on its knees and then make the same demand when a judicial commission has begun its sittings.

The NDA too has been silly in its response. After losing the initiative by not placing all its cards on the table, its action first against Sonia Gandhi's secretary V. George and then a preliminary CBI inquiry against Sonia Gandhi herself is childish. The government has only fuelled the fire when it was losing its

This spectacle has infuriated people because, whatever their frustrations, they still believe that parliament epitomises the nation's expectations. The public may be angry and disappointed but it feels in heart of its heart that MPs will one day fulfil at least some of the promises they made at the time of their election.

I wonder if their hopes would ever be realised. After a stint of three years in the Rajya Sabha, I feel that the proper atmosphere for constructive thinking and amicable solutions is missing in parliament. There are members who are serious about using the institution to effect changes for quick development. But their number is limited and they have little influence in their own parties.

Some three years ago, P.A. Sangma, the then Lok Sabha Speaker, tried to restore parliament's image. A unanimous resolution was passed after one week's discussion that members would not disturb the house and rise above party and political squabbles to transact business honestly and effectively.

But the resolution was violated as soon as the treasury and opposition benches found something which they thought would give them political mileage. This has not stopped since. What the BJP did, the Congress has copied and what the Congress is doing will be copied by

the BJP. The real point of concern is that political parties and people are drifting apart speedily. Parties are interested only in power politics while people's minds are focused on the country's development so as to improve their lives. It may be a cliché that politicians and bureaucrats have scotched the aspirations of the people. But there is no doubt that that they are the main culprits.

I feel still sadder when I find that

the country's energy is being wasted over things which will only divide the nation. The ultimatum by the ISS, the BJP's mentor, to the government to clear by next March the hurdles in the way of construction of the Ram temple at the disputed site is nothing except an incitement to religious feelings. Such was the beginning of the Rath Yatra which led to riots and destruction of the Babri Mosque.

RSS chief Sudarshan is not inter-

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



Jam-packed

On a week day and that too after a 72-hour hartal, an unbearable traffic jam is predictable. The city fathers may say that congestion is a common characteristic of a metropolitan city but what is frustrating is that there is none to rule the unruly traffic. Only sufferers know how it feels to sweat in the scorching heat waiting for the uncontrolled traffic to be controlled. Repeating our million times repeated request, we urge the authorities to do something about this unbridled traffic.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Border tension

This is a reply to the letter 'Border tension' by 'A True Indian' (April 23). India has lost in the last 30 years what it has earned in the year 1971, the goodwill of the people of Bangladesh. Helping us during our independence war does not mean that Bangladesh has to agree on everything with India. The way India is ripping off Bangladesh from a fair share of Ganges waters, is enough to turn the western part of Bangladesh into a desert. Which one is more painful? Millions of people suffering from scarcity of water or loss of 18 BSF soldiers in a sudden clash without any government order?

In 1971, we did not just change our name from Pakistan to Bangladesh. The casual comment proves the writer's ignorance about the sub-continent history. Bangladesh is a Muslim country. But it's not a fundamentalist country run by a religiously fundamentalist government.

About the killing of Sheikh Mujib, this kind of political violence is not atypical of India too. I agree with the writer in the same way he/she wrote, we should have known the Indian character when they mercilessly killed all their great leaders—Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Rajib

Gandhi—just to name a few. The writer thinks that anyone who begs/steals in India and also speaks in Bangla is a Bangladeshi. West Bengal is not a very wealthy state of India. Please check the statistics before making such insulting comments about a nation. The writer may be a true Indian, but he/she does not have any respect for others who are not Indian.

Syed Masum Emaran
Chicago, USA

I was really annoyed and grieved after reading the letter by 'A True Indian'. The writer made some irresponsible comments about our country and nation. The comments were biased and full of misinformation. According to the writer, BDR is solely responsible for the recent incident on the border. Bangladesh and India are two friendly countries and India helped a lot during our independence war. But later on, we could not find friendly behaviour of India in any events. Rather we observed their big-brotherly attitude always and everywhere. During the last few years, BSF used to cross the border, kill and kidnap our citizens and plunder our cattle and wealth. As far as we know, on that particular day BSF entered

Bangladesh territory and the subsequent resistance of BDR resulted in that painful incident.

I request the 'True Indian' to be patient and logical before commenting on our character. I wonder how he could compare us to Pakistanis. We don't like Pakistan but it doesn't mean that we would tolerate all Indian big-brotherly attitudes.

I would also like to remind my Indian friend that their past is not very clean. They killed their great leader Gandhi and also Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

'Millions of Bangladeshis are infiltrating India and they are all beggars and thieves'. Such type of irresponsible and emotional comments cannot tighten the friendship rather slack it. I request all the Indians to be patient and logical and come forward to resolve all disputes amicably.

Dr Sultan Ahmed
Dhaka

This is in reference to the letter by 'A True Indian'. The writer, in fact, wrote just like a true Indian, revealing India's attitude towards Bangladesh. In the liberation war India had helped us, as a neighbour should

help on humanitarian grounds. We were grateful for it. But now we have to think otherwise. The writer made some very insulting remarks about Bangladeshis. He wrote 'we should have known Bangladeshi character when they mercilessly killed their great leader Sheikh Mujib'. But is he/she ignorant of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi were murdered by their own people? In another place it was written, 'Today despite the millions of Bangladeshis infiltrating our country who essentially are involved in begging, stealing, etc., we have never considered the Bangladeshis people as our enemies.' These remarks are most objectionable and we think that they prefer to look down on us with haughty arrogance.

Nurjahan
Chittagong

My attention has been drawn to the letter 'A True Indian'. The reaction of the so-called 'true' Indian is rather un-Indian and the adjective 'true' causes further suspicion. In my limited contact with modern day Indians, I find them civilised and restrained in their expression and having forward-looking out-

look. But this 'True Indian' seems, very much, the opposite. The border incident is most unfortunate and the loss of life has been condemned by all fair-minded Bangladeshis. The press also came up with very positive criticism and reaction. The Indian government's reaction is also quite becoming. However, after reading this particular letter it seems that some foreign agents engineered the incident and having failed to cause a break up between the two neighbouring countries, have started hate campaigns. I hope I am wrong.

A Bangladesh
Dhaka

I am not the 'True Indian', however, I do not agree with the hatred shown towards the writer of the letter 'Border tension'. BSF may have and probably did wander, by accident, into Bangladeshi territory. But did they have to die for that? If killing of BSF soldiers was in self-defence, then why were, at least, eight of them killed at 'point blank' range? Why were their bodies desecrated and mutilated? It is worse enough that they died. Couldn't BDR have left it at that? I don't accuse Bangladeshis as a whole for this border crisis. I believe they are kind

hearted people. They are not Pakistanis, they are Bangladeshis. I, also don't profess to know more than anyone else of the incident, but were any of those who wrote the letters showing hatred towards the 'True India' actually present at the scene? I don't think so.

An Indian
India

I protest the derogatory statement of 'A True Indian'. We believe in friendship to all and malice to none but his statement created an adverse effect. He/she talked about our internal affair. Without any autopsy from the Indian side, he/she has talked about the brutality shown by the BDR personnel. But what about those BDR personnel who were killed during the last 30 years protecting our border? Finally, about the begging and stealing by Bangladeshis in India, does the 'True Indian' have enough evidence to prove it?

Saddot
Uttara, Dhaka

I am frankly astonished at the low opinion that the 'True Indian' has of our country and people. Does

he/she think that Bangladeshis are the chattels of India? We are proud to be Bangladeshi and no country on earth can subjugate us. Sure India is a powerful country and can put pressure on us but they will never be able to win our soul.

What does this 'Indian' mean by 'Bangladeshi character'? Since when did India set standards for being Bengali and Bangladeshi? It is high time that India realises that Bangladesh is no longer a 'pet project' of theirs. The writer should also remember that friends help each other and not devour each other.

The nature of this letter was extremely racist and objectionable. The sooner India realises that Bangladesh is a sovereign state and does not belong to it, it will be able to reason with its own complexities. The letter of the 'Indian' wrote is in itself proof of failure on all counts of India's arrogant foreign policy towards our country.

AKM Haider
Tajganj

I am agast to go through the letter written by 'A True Indian'. The slanderous and uncouth language used about a country speaks of a

fanatical character. The writer should know that the border dispute originated in Padua could have been limited and settled there. Instead, BSF without any provocation intruded into territory of Bangladesh at Raumarri and carried out armed attack on BDR and innocent villagers. And what BDR did afterwards, they did in self-defence. India has committed such violation of International Laws a number of times along the borders killing innocent villagers and carry away cattle, demonstrating its antagonistic character.

The 'True Indian' should know that Indian character is no different from ours. Rather, they are a step forward in killing a great leader like Mahatma Gandhi. Not only that, they have killed leaders like Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Besides, the 'Hanjaris' of India are in constant fear of persecution by upper caste Hindus.

When check posts along the border are there, how could millions of Bangladeshis infiltrate India? Moreover, India's economic condition is no better than Bangladesh. The Indians too are engaged in begging and stealing and they are no angel.

GM Rob
Dhaka
