

Administration demoralised

Norms broken at will

In two weeks' time seven secretaries to the government have received transfer orders in a top echelon administrative reshuffle. The sweeping changes were ordained, so it is learnt, at the wish of a high government functionary who is also a close relative of the Prime Minister. In fact, arbitrary transfers and postings at high levels of the administration are spawning controversy and resentment among the bureaucracy. Under whatever veneer of logic or pretext these changes are being brought about they smack of a certain move to ensure prior to the polls that functionaries at the top are pliant.

The sudden transfers have not merely been off-putting for the officials under orders to move but these must have had a demoralising effect on the rest of the administrative top-brass. Uncertain, panicky and apprehensive as they must be feeling in the wake of such arbitrary transfers and postings, they cannot be focused on their jobs with any degree of equanimity.

Besides, this has a percolatory effect right down the ladder. As it is, DCs, SPs, OCs have been swept back and forth through transfer and posting orders scripted on the basis of so-called 'fit-lists' prepared from time-to-time with an undisguised partisan bias. So, the morale is bound to be low horizontally as well.

Governance during the AL rule has suffered a good deal from attempts to politicise the administration and make it partisan but now with the elections drawing nearer its search for loyalists has seemingly acquired a hectic pace, so much so that the norms of administration have been thrown to the four winds.

The quest for a pliant bureaucracy is being stretched beyond a critical point; for, at this fag-end of its tenure the AL government must be seen to be promoting a neutral atmosphere for the sake of free and fair polls.

Genuinely talented, neutral and committed people in the bureaucracy have reasons to feel sidelined at a time when their services should be in high demand. It is a situation that neither bodes well for governance nor for elections.

Deepening water crisis

WASA must wake up

The list of daily challenges that confront Dhaka's teeming inhabitants is bad enough already. Now, in addition to power shortages, traffic jams, pollution, road obstructions and open piles of rubbish, comes another excruciating obstacle: a water crisis.

With the heat of summer upon us, large sections of the city are being hit by depleted or even non-existent water supply. As reported in our daily yesterday, the worst affected areas just do not get any water at all. Some manage to receive a trickle, but that too sporadically.

The reasons for the crisis are not a mystery. Even when operating at full capacity, WASA's 359 pumps cannot meet the maximum daily demand of 150 crore litres of water. At best WASA can supply the minimum, around 120 crore litres. That leaves a shortfall of 30 crore litres daily. Why has WASA allowed such a significant gap to emerge between supply and demand? On some days, such as last Monday, the deficit was 10 crore litres below the minimum. Yet, officials have been shrugging off the crisis, claiming that only a 'few' parts of the city faced a water hardship.

A major cause of the problem is the illegal installation of powerful pumps by high rise apartment blocks. These suck away the already meagre output, leaving legitimate consumers literally high and dry. We find it deplorable that although WASA is fully aware of this constant pilferage, its only course of action is to issue warnings to offenders after a complaint has been made. Why has WASA been sitting back and allowing illegal pumps to be installed? Dhaka's expanding urban landscape is obvious. It should have introduced a mechanism to monitor the situation and stop the pilferage. It should also have been more efficient in replacing and maintaining old lines that hinder the flow of water and pollute it with an unhealthy odour.

We urge WASA to take up a contingency plan to reduce the water crisis without being too futuristic with their hopes for a Syedabad Surface Water Treatment Plant to ease it off some day.

Putting the record straight



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

SKIRMISHES along our four thousand-kilometre border with India is not new. However undesirable, these take place from time to time at various points when tensions arise locally. What sets the recent clashes in Sylhet and Roumari fronts of the border apart is the number of casualties. In no other single incident on the border as many as 19 men in uniform have died. That sixteen of them belonged to Indian BSF is another distinction. Tension along the border and vitriolic bluster from within the government in India rose sharply, most probably, because of the huge casualty on their side. Even before the dust settled and the facts on the ground became adequately clear fingers of accusation were pointed at Bangladesh accompanied by demand for enquiry and punishment of the offenders. It became obvious from the angry reaction that so far India was concerned Bangladesh was at fault, with the BDR as the offending party. The facts filtering from ground zero that it was BSF who had provoked the incident and the clash though illegal construction of a road and large-scale intrusion into Bangladesh territory did not weigh at all in their consideration. The Indian authorities seem to have been more embarrassed by the number of casualties than being wrong-footed.

From Bangladesh side the response to the incident as well as to the unbridled fulmination from senior level politicians in India has been one of extraordinary restraint and cautious confidence building.

Preferring not to indulge in fault-finding and engaging in acrimonious statement Bangladesh activated the diplomatic channel with great urgency to defuse tension along the border. There was no mistake or falter in addressing the topmost priority of the moment. Though on the basis of facts available from the border and the incidents of violation of both our land and air space lodging of protest to India would have been justified this was either postponed or set aside in the greater interest of bringing back normalcy

ered it prudent not to open another front on blind impulse. Be that as it may, the Bangladesh Prime Minister has now put the record straight pointing out to her Indian counterpart that BDR opened fire in self-defence when they were under attack in Roumari by the intruding BSF. The fact of their intrusion into Bangladesh territory is well established by the large number of dead bodies of BSF lying well within Bangladesh territories for long 36 hours leading to mutilating

when facing attack make the formality of the expression of regret amply clear. Absolving BDR from any charge of illegal action or offence makes the regret even more hollow. On the other hand, tough talk and blistering remonstrations by India in the context of BSF's proven illegal construction in Padua and intrusion into Bangladesh territory in Roumari cannot but make it appear as hysterical and lacking in moral strength to face the fact. If for domestic politics the Indian leader-

personnel lost their lives in border clash during last year along with three killed in the latest clash in Roumari. The number of casualties among civilians is even higher. But apart from loss of lives, civilians living along the border with disputed territory suffer from perennial insecurity and tension. Every time there is a clash the villagers have to leave their hearths and homes for fear of life. On return they find their homes fully gutted and their belongings completely looted.

other enclaves is still hanging in balance, as is the case with thousands of acres of land under adverse possession. At least in the case of one, Padua attempts were made by the Indian side to make the possession permanent by constructing a road in violation of international law and bi-lateral agreement. Though they lost control over Padua for a while and it became a part of Bangladesh under the law as well as by possession it has now gone back to Indian control again following the temporary agreement to revert to status quo ante. Its final fate is slated to be decided by the two countries in future. It seems to be a long haul, if at all.

Bangladesh ratified the Mujib-India Agreement in 1974 but the Indian Lok Sabha has not yet ratified it. In every bilateral meeting held at official level Bangladesh participants emphasize on the need to implement the Mujib-India Agreement to resolve the outstanding disputes once for all. Each time the stock reply given by the Indian officials is that the Agreement needs to be ratified by the Lok Sabha first before any action can be taken on the ground. This is not only a dilatory tactic but also a clear indication that these disputes do not receive any priority from the Indian policy makers confirming the feeling that they are not serious about the implementation of the 1974 agreement. The Indian authorities may also be nursing the idea that with the passage of time issues like adverse possession will become fait accompli and status quo will become a reality. But as the event in Padua showed adverse possession cannot lapse into final absorption either by design or accident. A return to status quo ante in present may be a palliative but is no guarantee for restoration of genuine normalcy. It is time that India abandoned its ostrich like attitude towards the border disputes. Like the proverbial stitch in time, early resolution of the outstanding disputes may save many unfortunate and undesirable clashes in future. Death in the prime of life is not only tragic it is also an irrational wastage when the cause is avoidable.

IN MY VIEW

A return to status quo ante at present may be a palliative but is no guarantee for restoration of genuine normalcy. It is time that India abandoned its ostrich like attitude towards the border disputes. Like the proverbial stitch in time, early resolution of the outstanding disputes may save many unfortunate and undesirable clashes in future.

in the situation. There may be various reasons for this conciliatory and compromising attitude. Bangladesh is a peace loving country and sincerely believes in maintaining good relations with neighbours. On several occasions in the past bloody clashes on major scales with Myanmar were averted through display of restraint and use of diplomacy. But in addition to this national policy of pursuing peace and harmony the present government of Bangladesh may also have been hamstrung politically in taking a polite but firm stand immediately after the clashes and in tandem with the broadsides from Indian politicians. The political weakness arises mainly from the non-performing parliamentary democracy. With a fully functioning parliament the border clashes could be discussed by all members irrespective of parties, as has been the case in India. This would have strengthened the hands of the government in taking an appropriate stand quite early on. The third reason may be, preoccupied with severe deterioration of the law and order situation inside the country, the government consid-

decomposition. The large number of casualties among BSF compare to BDR also proves that the former were in offensive position while BDR was defending themselves in their bunkers. That BDR cannot be accused of embarking on any kind of misadventure or aggression has also been established beyond any shadow of doubt by highlighting the fact that in Padua, where the first confrontation took place, BDR did not resort to firing. Thus politely but firmly, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh has turned the table on the Indians. The onus of proving that Indian BSF is not at fault and guilty of misadventure is now on the Indian authorities. Some in Bangladesh may think that we should not have expressed regrets since prima facie we are not the offending party. But it should not be difficult to construe that this regret is not an admission of guilt but is an expression of courtesy and a gesture of good will. The explanation of the developments leading to the peaceful encirclement by BDR in Padua after BSF started construction of a road illegally and firing in Roumari

ship cannot admit of truth and turn xenophobic her foreign policy will continue to cause more harm than good to relation with neighbours. In contrast, though a small neighbour and the aggrieved party in this instance, Bangladesh has shown statesmanship of exemplary nature and a diplomacy of great maturity, which should further strengthen our credentials as a peace loving country. By all indications we may have left the latest border crisis behind. All is now quiet along Bangladesh-India border. But that idyll is not going to be of long duration. As long as the outstanding border disputes remain unresolved tensions are going to mount and clashes are likely to take place in the various flash points along the border time and again. According to the Daily Sangbad during the past year 75 persons lost their lives in clashes between BDR and BSF along the border. The Daily Ittefaq in one of its recent editorials mentioned that there were 51 clashes along the border during the last 16 months. According to BDR sources quoted in the Daily Sangbad a total of 49 BDR

Life for them is a nightmare without an end. The main causes behind the tension and clashes are the absence of demarcated border at certain areas, territory in adverse possession and access to the enclaves. These are long-standing problems mostly originating from the border left ill-defined in 1947 at the time of partition. In 1958 the first agreement was signed between India and Pakistan for exchange of enclaves and was known as Noon-Nehru Pact. But it remained on paper till the independence of Bangladesh without any of its provision being implemented. In 1974 under Mujib-India agreement issues like the exchange of enclaves, demarcation of disputed border and access to enclaves were to be addressed for their resolution without further delay. Though Bangladesh handed over Berubari enclave soon afterwards, it took more than two decades for India to agree on access to Angorpota enclave through Tin Bigha. Even this belated settlement is working in a desultory manner much to the inconvenience of the residents of the enclave. The fate of

Our healthcare system is a nightmare



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THIS time I am writing under influence. My friend, one who is a suspected heart patient and another, who is a cardiologist from the USA, believe that our healthcare system is in shambles. As a matter of fact, the doc doesn't think we have a healthcare system at all. What we have, according to him, is an organised medical practice, which falls between quackery and robbery.

The friend, who has all the symptoms of unstable angina of the heart, narrated his experience. He woke up in the middle of a night with excruciating pain in his chest, which slowly radiated into his arm, giving a choking sensation in the throat. The doctor he went to plucked six to seven tables under his tongue, sprayed nitro in his mouth, pushed pethidine injection, did ECG and everything else except the enzyme test. My friend the doc was quick to retort that the most crucial test was missed, and without it everything else was a waste.

Even if one believes that the doc from the USA was a bit prudish, one must sympathise with my friend the patient, who, with his deadly symptoms, is going from pillar to post. We may not feel his pain, but the haunting fear of the elephant that wants to step on his chest is real. He told us how he has been living every moment of his life with the fact of his own death, disabled from time to time by the thought of it. He restlessly cooks his ears inward as if to hear the footsteps of a ruthless killer, which has broken into his heart and

shouting at servants with so much vulnerability in his body. My friend feels cheated and angry, because nobody cared if he died or lived.

So his disease has become his headache. My friend is going around asking people, which doctor or hospital could give him an honest treatment. He is saying he has lost faith in doctors in the country, who didn't even know that the enzyme test was the sufficient condition for diagnosing heart disease. Recently, he sulked and agreed to go to India, but he also looked hurt and con-

patients, and compromise the honour of the Hippocratic oath in the commercial transaction that elapses between them.

My friend the doctor and my friend the patient both wondered how the doctors coped with the guilt of neglecting their duties. How could they separate their profession from its ethics, yet live in the shelter of conscience? Do they realise that sickness is the saddest time of life, second only to death? If it is wrong not to give water to the thirsty or food to the hungry, how is it right not

Some believe in the law of large numbers, the more drugs they prescribe, the more chance a patient has for cure. But the worst thing is the cash-based mentality, which operates in the centre of the psychology of many who become doctors.

These days the story of harassment by the doctors is common. You will hear how one doctor contradicts another, and how people get the final verdict from doctors in the country and then go abroad to find it was totally wrong. You will also hear

is despicable when people take bribes for doing what come under their job descriptions. Still nothing is loathsome like the depravity of a noble profession, which, instead of elevating the virtue of mitigating human sufferings, rips off patients in their helpless condition.

Charles Lamb writes, "How sickness enlarges the dimensions of a man's self to himself." My friend has been engrossed in his sickness, and right now he sees nothing beyond the perceived threat of his own extinction. He is sad and angry because the body of his youth has taken a treacherous turn, because his best companion has turned against its own existence. But he is also hurt by the cruelty of the world, which doesn't care that he hangs in the balance between life and death. My friend the doctor tells us that such cruelty doesn't exist in his part of the world, where doctors take care of their patients, partly because it is human decency to help others in sickness, and partly because law is strict on those doctors who neglect their patients.

I am writing under the influence of both friends. I am worried I might get the same treatment should I fall sick. Again, I am also hopeful that by then doctors will be made accountable for how they treat their patients. It is punishable by law to steal or rob. Doctors, who mistreat patients, are guilty of greater offence. They steal from the patients, and rob them of their mental peace. Alone, each is enough to undermine our healthcare system. Right now they are working together to make it a nightmare.

CROSS TALK

Healthcare is now like a fast moving product with an aggressive network of distribution channels: You may buy it anywhere you want, but it may not be always good because the date has expired. Many doctors don't update themselves with the latest knowledge in medical science. Some believe in the law of large numbers, the more drugs they prescribe, the more chance a patient has for cure.

is now walking around in its dark basement. If there is a spasm of pain, the slightest heaviness or discomfort in his chest, he fears that the killer is mounting the steps with a knife in his hand and wants to attack him.

Any disease is a debilitating human condition. My friend is now going through bouts of depression because nobody tells him what is wrong. His doctor showed no concern over the fact that he was walking with a ticking bomb, that he was going to work, climbing stairs, or

fused. Why couldn't doctors in his own country show a little concern for him in this aggravating condition?

It is perhaps one question that ricochets in the minds of millions across this country. The doctors hardly spend time with their patients between prescription and payment in the systematic rush of a treadmill. They grow impatient if the patients ask questions, seldom taking time to explain what is a matter of life and death to their

to give care to the sick?

While the increasing numbers of doctors, diagnostic centres, hospitals, and clinics have increased the facilities of medical treatment, that care seems to have declined. Healthcare is now like a fast moving product with an aggressive network of distribution channels. You may buy it anywhere you want, but it may not be always good because the date has expired. Many doctors don't update themselves with the latest knowledge in medical science.

how doctors behave like government servants and treat people according to who has referred them. You will even hear that doctors write certificates for money, thereby subverting the last bastion of humanity to greed.

In the last analysis, you will hear nothing about doctors that you will not hear about other professionals. But neglect of patients by the doctors is a particularly sad episode in the dislocation of human characters. It is deplorable when people shirk their job responsibilities and it

Please see 'To the Editor' section on page 7.

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.



Who cares?

People walk by as a destitute woman lies on the road near Ramna Park. We often come across many such hapless and sick people lying on the road and other public places and all we do to get rid of the pang of our conscience is throw a coin at them. But do we ever stop to think that they are also human beings, need to be rehabilitated and taken care of? It is about time we listen to our heart and do something for the needy.

PHOTO: TAREQ HADI, FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER, DHAKA

ABDUL HANNAN

THANKS to the prudence, political maturity and vision of leadership of both Bangladesh and India, the escalating tension and violence along the Indo-Bangladesh borders in Sylhet and Kurigram, over the reclamation by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) of Padua outpost along with its 230-acre village of Bangladesh territory under occupation of India for last 30 years and subsequent counter action by Border Security Forces (BSF) of India on Borairbari outpost of BDR at Roumari border in Kurigram resulting in the killing of 16 BSF and 2 BDR soldiers, has been contained and diffused for now. The contending BDR and BSF troops have returned to positions of status quo ante. There is uneasy clam through along the disputed borders with the reported BSF troops build-up.

By all indications and for all intents and purposes, it was an instant decision of the local BDR commanders on the ground to take over Padua by overpowering the BSF camp, inspired by patriotic zeal and fervour at the immediate provocation of construction of a pucca road by BSF in the neighbourhood of Padua within 30 yards of no man's land in violation of border regulations agreed to by the two countries in 1975 that no such construction

can be done within 150 yards of international boundary. The speculation by some Indian media to attribute the cause of Padua incident to internal politics of Bangladesh is an attempt to push the real issue under the rug. The point at issue is the unresolved question of occupation of Padua by India for last 30 years.

Nevertheless, the action at Padua was a dangerous gamble fraught with serious consequences. Knowing, as every body does, the prevarication, foot dragging and reluctance by India to ratify and implement the Mujib-India border accord to resolve the outstanding border demarcation disputes and the question of transfer of enclaves under adverse possession despite dozens of ministerial level and hundreds of official and commander level meetings during the last 30 years, it was naive to believe that BSF would take it lying down without retaliation. As the subsequent events including BSF offensive at Borairbari outpost resulting in the casualties of BSF and BDR soldiers, bitter and sharp reaction in India and strong protest to Bangladesh unfolded, the situation could very well spiral out of control. But thanks to the deft handling of the situation by the leadership of both the countries, it was not allowed to deteriorate.

Yet, what was unpredictable was that the BSF would launch a full

OPINION

Withdrawal from Padua: Triumph of prudence and good sense

scale armed attack on a new front at Roumari border to capture Borairbari BDR outpost, ostensibly as a retaliatory counter action. The response by BSF by all accounts, was disproportionate to the take over of Padua by the BDR. While BDR reclaimed Padua without firing a single shot or any violence, BSF troops of nearly half a battalion strength intruded into Bangladesh territory at dawn armed with mortars and heavy weapons and launched an all-out attack to overrun and capture the Borairbari BDR camp. In the encounter that ensued, 16 BSF and 2 BDR soldiers were killed. This was most unfortunate viewed against the existing friendly relation between the two countries. Yet, as Prime Minister Hasina has aptly said that the loss of lives was "unnecessary and avoidable". The casualties could be avoided if BSF opted for a recourse to peaceful solution of the dispute through diplomatic intervention without resorting to violent armed attack. The BSF can't help bearing a fair share of the blame for their disgraceful debacle. It was a despicable act of cowardice by BSF to have led to safety leaving behind their killed comrades in the paddy fields to rot for about two days under the scorching sun of summer and then to shift the blame to BDR by concocting stories of mutilation of those bodies by the BDR.

photos of BDR soldiers vacating and walking away from Padua spoke of their unhappiness and low morale". But there is no cause for their frustration and anguish. They gave a valiant account of their performance both at Padua and Borairbari. A handful of 16 BDR soldiers at the Borairbari outpost put up a heroic resistance to 300-strong BSF attack which was contained and repulsed successfully. The reclamation of Padua by the BDR from Indian occupation was a vindication of the righteousness of the cause. Their withdrawal from Padua was not a military retreat or defeat but a triumph of good sense, prudence and magnanimity in the interest of good neighbourliness with India. If the bloody encounter between BDR and BSF troops has sent any reassuring message for us, it is that while none of us in his wildest dream would think of taking on India, a Goliath of a major military power in the region, let alone a big neighbour, there is no doubting that on the question of defending the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country, the resolve, courage and strength of the sentinels of our frontiers are unassailable and will never falter.

Any critical appraisal of Padua and Borairbari episodes will remain incomplete without mentioning the critical role played by our diplomacy to help diffuse an escalating crisis. Our foreign office rose to the occasion and engaged itself in preventing diplomacy for conflict resolution with consummate skill and maturity. Apparently, it advised the government to exercise discretion, patience and wisdom to come to grips with the situation. The decision to withdraw from Padua was a necessary measure to take the wind out of the sails of anti-Bangladesh hatred campaign whipped up in India by the death of 16 BSF soldiers. Prime Minister Hasina's call to prime minister Vajpayee reiterating traditional and existing "time tested" and binding ties of friendly relation with India and the importance of urgently implementing India-Mujib land boundary accord of 1974 to prevent border incidents in future was a constructive initiative at confidence building and contributing to better understanding and appreciation of Bangladesh position by India. As the nation was caught by misinformation and anxiety, the daily press briefings by the Foreign Secretary, Syed Muazzem Ali was an excellent public relations exercise to put across government views about the correct situation on the ground, at home and abroad. As shown by the Television footage, the Foreign Secretary performed his crucial job with remarkable tact, dignity and firmness.

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