

## Go by sense of history

President spells the message

PRESIDENT Shahabuddin Ahmed, a veteran witness to political turmoil and often approached for his good offices as the last resort of a sane and conscionable voice to help end intractable deadlocks in national life, has once again spoken out with characteristic insight. Sharing his latest thoughts on the political stand-off marked by a refusal from both the ruling and opposition parties to give each other any space for mutual accommodation, the President has made a comment of striking relevance to the present context. He said at a book launching ceremony on Friday that our not learning the lessons of history has been at the root of recurrent political tragedies in the country.

When the AL had slammed shut the doors to maintaining minimum working relations with the BNP government in the first half of nineties and burnt all boats to negotiate settlement of any blinding crisis they did so without the slightest concern for what might happen to them when they would be in power. Now, they are facing the consequences of their earlier devices as the BNP makes an overuse of its turn in the opposition to put the AL government through the same ordeals it had been subjected to by the opposition AL between 1991 and early 1996. The table is likely to be turned on BNP, if and when the latter came to power.

Both sides knew this to be a dangerous indulgence in the politics of dead-end and yet they pursued it in a frenzied embrace of self-destructive politics with senseless disrespect for history.

They can only stop eating into the vitals of democracy by devoting their energy to the paramount cause of holding the next general election in the best-possible manner as a filtering process for a healthy democracy to emerge. Let the government step back forthwith from persecuting the opposition as the latter publicly abandons its belligerent programme to force the government on its knees, ludicrously when its tenure is into the closing months. As both sides see the wisdom of doing so and endearing themselves to people at home and abroad they can fully count on civil society leaders, media and the institutions for making the elections a success all of us will be proud of.

## 'Say Yes for Children'

Let's keep to the pledge

OUR non-partisan launch of the global campaign 'Say Yes for Children' is a breath of fresh air. Bringing the cause of children to the forefront with public pledges being affirmed by the President, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, albeit separately, was in the right spirit. It would bode extremely well for this nation if a similar non-partisan approach could be instilled in the pursuit of other national causes.

We wholeheartedly endorse the aims of this campaign, spearheaded by Unicef and assisted by BRAC, Save the Children, Plan International and our sister publication, Prothom Alo.

The hopeful note struck at the launch of this campaign contrasts sharply with ground realities. That is why the need to live up to the 'yes' pledge in letter and spirit. Children are the most neglected members of the community, the most vulnerable to poverty, illiteracy, conflict and disease. Discriminatory conduct, torture and exploitation of children, especially of the girl child, have not been thwarted in any significant manner. Children are still subjected to human rights abuses, rape and physical assault and deprived of their right to education, safety and security both within their homes and in the outside world. Infant mortality and childhood disease continue to sap their healthy development, as do exposure to HIV/AIDS, kidnapping and forced labour.

Political strife and depressed economic conditions exact the heaviest price from the young, often rendered homeless or caught in the crossfire of civic unrest. Unless adults become worthy role models, the exhortation that children must always tell the truth and follow the advice of their elders would be hollow indeed.

To bring about tangible improvements, we must act on the pledge that has been taken. We sincerely hope that the high aims of this noteworthy campaign will filter into the psyche of our nation and serve to bring about enduring changes in the circumstances of our next and new generations.

# One step forward, two steps backward



DR. A. R. CHOUDHURY

NOW that the United States and China have succeeded in defusing the tension arising out of the stand-off on the spy plane issue, it would be a good time to analyse the role of the United States in the global arena under the new Bush administration. In recent weeks, some changes in US attitude has become evident in at least two areas. While one may be considered a step forward, the other would inevitably turn back the clock of international co-operation. After years of wrangling, the US has finally made some concrete progress in repaying its back dues to the United Nations.

The United States is the world's only superpower, and United Nations officials complain - with good reason - that it also is the world's biggest debtor. But help may finally be on its way, mainly due to the persistent diplomacy of Richard Holbrooke and the generosity of CNN founder Ted Turner. Holbrooke has spent most of his tenure as US ambassador to the United Nations

trying to figure out a way to get the US to pay its overdue bills to the world body, and recently he got an agreement: Washington would cough up what it owed on condition that its share of the UN's peacekeeping and operating budgets would be reduced.

It was outrageous that the US should have held up its dues payment to force these changes; anyone who joins an organisation has an obligation to obey that organisation's rules and meet its financial obligation. In fact, the dues boycott probably weakened America's influence at the UN and delayed the reforms it was intended to produce; people don't like deadbeats, and they don't listen to them. This unconscionable shakedown strategy was the brainchild of conservative Republican Senator Jesse Helms, the powerful chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. When Helms reluctantly endorsed Holbrooke's deal, the US Senate voted to pay America's 926 million dollar debt in instalments. This deal couldn't have been achieved without some help from CNN founder Ted Turner. The cut in

the US share of the UN's operating budget squeezed other countries that were unwilling to make up the difference. Ted Turner stepped in with a 34-million-dollar gift to help them out.

The Senate vote is an acknowledgement that the US needs United Nations and that it deserves support. Now the bill is waiting for the US House of Representatives to give its assent to this long-overdue measure. America has finally committed

move as irresponsible while leaders of Japan, Germany and France have made clear their concerns.

Japan's decision to publicly criticise the US position highlights its disappointment with Bush's decision. Japan has devoted considerable resources to the Kyoto protocol and made its success one of its primary foreign policy aims. The United States pledged at the Kyoto conference in 1997 that it would reduce carbon emissions by 7 per-

The notion that global warming is caused by greenhouse gas emissions is supported by most experts on this subject. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an advisory group established by the United Nations, has provided growing credibility to the global warming theory. In fact, earlier this year, the IPCC reported its findings that most of the global warming observed in the second half of the last century can be attributed to human activities. Moreover, they predicted that in this century the planet would heat up at a rate that would be significantly faster than at any point over the last 10,000 years. The consequence of this temperature increase would be serious for many regions, including spreading deserts and a fall in agricultural production, floods, droughts, and water shortages.

As an excuse for rejecting the Kyoto protocol, Bush suggested that the US economy cannot afford the emission cuts imposed under the Kyoto treaty, and that the treaty does not require the developing countries to make commitments to curb greenhouse gas emissions. But any suggestion that the developing

countries should take a share of the burden of cutting emissions would undoubtedly be rejected by this group. Washington simply doesn't understand the feelings and reactions of many developing countries in this regard. What these countries are basically saying can be summed up as follows: "You created the problem. So you must now show us you are serious by taking action to try and solve it." The US produces 15 times more carbon dioxide emission than China, or more than the whole of the European Union.

The question that necessarily comes to mind is: why did the Bush administration reverse the environmental policy of the Clinton administration? The answer is simple. This decision is an alarming manifestation of the Bush administration's priorities: big business over the environment, the unfettered market over sensible regulation; America's insatiable appetite for immediate consumption over the interests of the international community.

This rejection of an internationally negotiated framework of government-imposed controls on business captures the essence of Bush's governing ideology - anti-regulatory at home, unilateralist overseas. This is no where more clear than in foreign policy, where Bush has assembled a deeply conservative team whose defining characteristic seems to be a commitment to a unilateralist foreign policy. Policy reversal on the Kyoto treaty is only the first of a series of similar back tracks that we can expect to see in the coming months.

## CONNECTING THE DOTS

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itself to do something that should have been done years earlier. The positive development in this area is in sharp contrast to the reversal in US position on an environmental issue. The Bush administration's abandonment of the Kyoto protocol on climate change comes as little surprise to environmentalists around the world. Bush's decision not to sign the Kyoto protocol, which would have obliged the US to cut greenhouse gas emissions, has unleashed widespread condemnation of his position. The European Union has launched a diplomatic offensive to persuade the Bush administration not to abandon Kyoto. China has described the

cent by 2010. But it later became clear that this commitment was based partly on a fudge. To soften the impact on its own industry, the US intended to meet the target by "buying in" reductions from Russia and to count the absorption effect of its forests as credits against pollution. Without the implementation of the Kyoto protocol, Russia also stands to lose millions of dollars in revenues and foreign direct investment. Russia emits 25 percent less carbon dioxide today than a decade ago because of the decline of its heavy industry and more efficient energy use. This 25 percent "credit" in gas emission has secured the country a position that it can sell to western countries.

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# Border skirmishes: An eye-opener to loose ends

EKRAM KABIR

THE decision by both Bangladesh and India to quell tension at border outposts and address the issue diplomatically was certainly a wise one. The clash at a Kurigram outpost between Bangladesh Rifles and Indian Border Security Force, that left 16 BSF and three BDR personnel dead, was one of the most unfortunate events affecting the relations between these two friendly countries. The two governments regretted the loss of lives in this unfortunate incident and have agreed that utmost restraint be exercised to prevent recurrence of such incidents on the border in future.

However, this clash was the severest between the border guards of the two countries in last 30 years. Low-key clashes between Indian and Bangladesh border forces are common; and if history is any guide, it is Bangladesh which always counted casualties along its borders. According to a BBC report in July last year, 42 Bangladeshis had been killed along its border in the first half of the year 2000.

The Kurigram clash should serve as an eye-opener for both countries and prompt them in addressing the border disputes with renewed earnestness, because the entire stretch is a problem area for Bangladesh-India ties, no matter how courteous their relations apparently seem. Therefore, Bangladesh and India should not underplay it. The border problems, and many others, need immediate attention.

It would seem to be over or so the two governments would like us to believe within a very short time after extensive diplomacy between the two. But there are too many Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and too many Bangladeshi enclaves in India involving considerable land areas and populations. The issue needs to be addressed with all sincerity by both the governments.

Apart from occasional unease along the borders, Bangladesh and India have also other issues not much less important, yet unresolved. Despite many efforts, relations between these two neighbours have not been that smooth as many would like to conclude. The two thorny issues of sharing of the Gan-

New Delhi should start the process of demarcation of the 6.5-km border with Bangladesh as a robust signal to put the entire gamut of Indo-Bangla relations on an even keel. The delay in doing so may mean furtherance of unhappiness on either side of the line.

ges water and the alleged illegal entry of Bangladeshis into India continued and yet continue to queer the pitch of good neighbourliness. Economic and other compulsions in both the countries have stood in the way of an amicable settlement of many problems.

Bangladesh has always been very appreciative of and thankful to India for what the latter did during the former's war of liberation. New Delhi, perhaps, expected that Dhaka would always be as grateful as to accommodate Indian interests without raising any question. But the euphoria of 1971 soon died down following the August coup of 1975. Contentious issues between the two countries started surfacing and hit newer heights. Even after resolving the long-standing Ganges water-sharing and Chittagong Hill Tracts (involving refugees sheltered in India) problems by signing treaties, these two neighbours and wartime allies don't feel totally comfortable in their relations.

The implementation of Mujib-Indira Border Agreement is being neglected due to New Delhi's foot-dragging to ratify it. If the resolution of the undemarcated border and matters related to exchange of enclaves, adverse possessions and corridors are not settled then border-related problems such as smuggling, trafficking of women and children and alleged hiding and passage of insurgents cannot be effectively handled.

Some of the old issues like the status of Talpatty and demarcation of maritime border have not yet been taken up and resolved.

There's another disappointing matter - Indo-Bangla trade and commerce. No lasting foundation of cooperation has yet been laid between Dhaka and New Delhi for a mutually beneficial trade relation. The trade imbalance between Dhaka and New Delhi is huge; and the efforts from Bangladesh side to reduce this gap have not met with

much success. Bangladesh, being keenly aware of its geo-strategic location and economic situation, has been doing its best to make things work through South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) but to little effect.

Indian allegation of illegal migration from Bangladesh adds another dilemma in the state of both security and relations between the two countries. It is alleged that Indian politicians for whom such people represent vote banks have exacerbated this illegal immigration. A large number of Bangladeshis are alleged to possess Indian voter identity cards and cross over to vote in Indian elections and then return home. Reportedly there are gangs in the Indian side of the border who orchestrate this migration to suit the electoral purposes of the political parties.

Also, in India, the *sangh parivar* has been whipping up an anti-Bangladesh frenzy by spreading rumours of Bangladeshi Muslim preponderance in the border districts of India. In fact its demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya had alienated a considerable section of people in Bangladesh who tend to identify India as a Hindu chauvinist state with an ambition to impose political and cultural hegemony over its neighbours. On the other hand, in otherwise largely secular Bangladesh, this has provided the religious extremists with an opportunity to rehabilitate themselves by rallying the people on a religious platform. In such perspectives, India becomes a major factor in the domestic politics of her neighbours. The Hritikh Roshan episode in Nepal last December proves the point. As regards Sri Lanka, the India factor has a long, unsavoury history, with the IPKF period representing the bitter climax.

Again, India has reportedly drawn up a massive scheme for construction of barbed wire fencing along the 4,096-km-long Indo-Bangladesh border in West Bengal.

Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. This scheme is meant to prevent the alleged influx of illegal migrants, entry and escape of trained militants and also disguised Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence agents from Bangladesh into India. Now, barbed wire fences do not help to establish friendly relations. And Bangladesh has always denied such infiltration through its border.

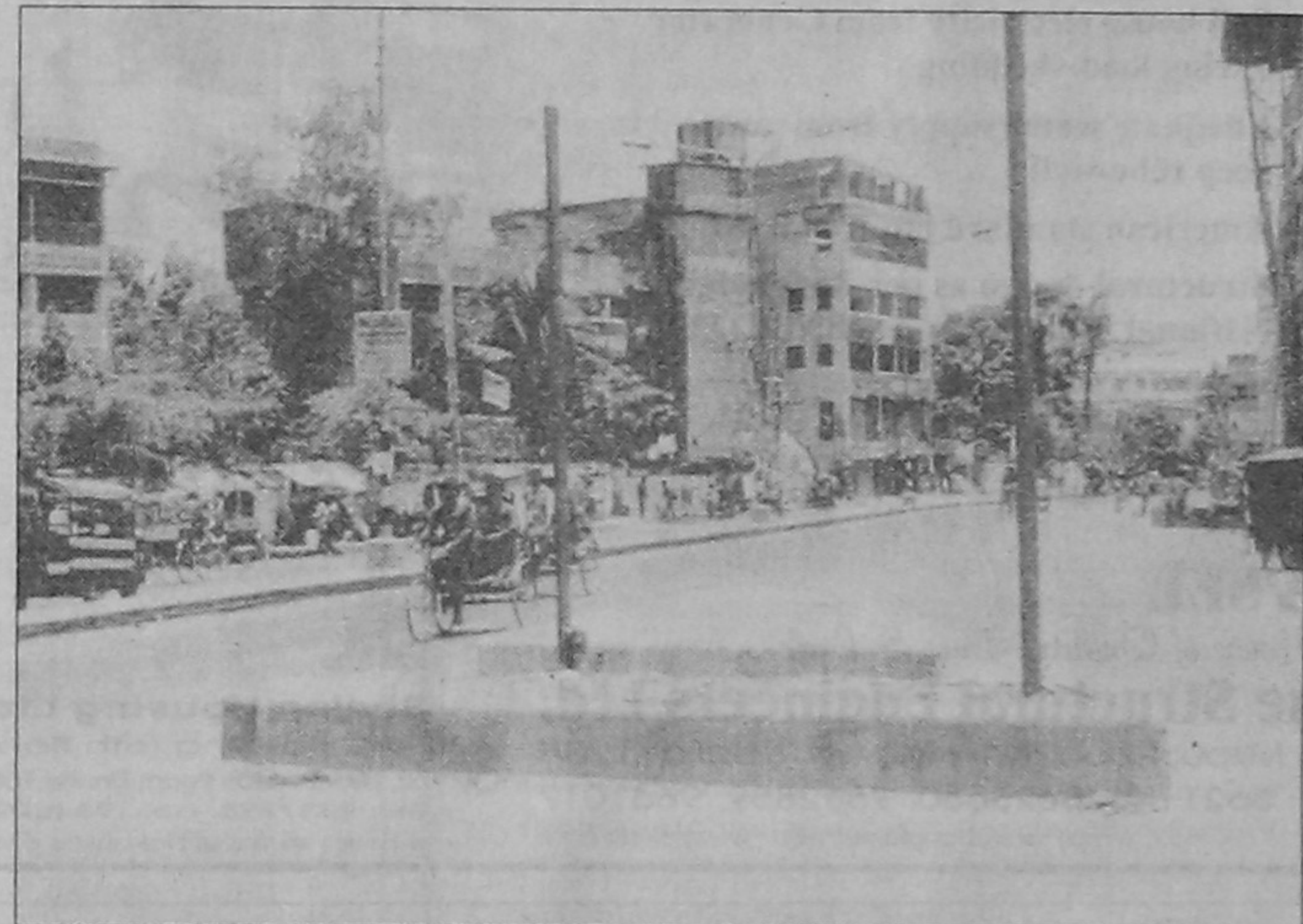
Sensitivity in Dhaka over India's repeated efforts to fence the borders runs high. The perception is that barbed wires are a manifestation of unfriendly relations as if the two neighbours were locked in hostility. Barbed wire has reportedly been used by India on the Pakistan side of the border.

India should understand its geographical reality, for it cannot

afford to establish itself as a benevolent regional power by allowing its neighbours' discontents to continue. And in the circumstances, there is the call for India to play a more responsible role in its relations with Bangladesh. It must come forward to lessen Bangladesh's sense of insecurity which is arising out of some policies of New Delhi which should discard its tendency of shelving rather than resolving the pending problems. It should start the process of demarcation of the 6.5-km border with Bangladesh as a robust signal to put the entire gamut of Indo-Bangla relations on an even keel. The delay in doing so may mean furtherance of unhappiness on either side of the line.

## 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.



STAR PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

### Ridiculous road islands

On the Panthapath-Mirpur Road, a number of weird shaped road islands are being built. These peculiar shaped islands create serious hindrance to smooth traffic and also mar the beauty of the road. In a metropolitan city where traffic jam is considered one of the most irritating and painful problems, erecting odd shaped road islands and narrowing the streets instead of widening and ensuring smooth traffic should be regarded as a crime. Don't the city fathers ever come across these road islands and resultant traffic jam?

## TO THE

## EDITOR

### Border tension

Reading all the comments on the border clash between Bangladesh and India, I was surprised to find so many cool headed comments from both sides. Being a citizen of Nepal, I can understand the feelings of a small neighbour of a powerful country. But people have to realise that there are many vested quarters on both sides who want to exploit public sentiments.

I don't think BDR did anything wrong in defending its land or killing the intruder. But what appalled me was the mutilation and torture of those BSF troops who were only following their orders. The characteristic of a democratic nation and its army is not only in showing bravery in defending itself but also having discipline and respect for the rules of engagement. Looking at the photographs of dead BSFmen that I do not see anywhere in Bangladeshi newspapers, no person with sound logic would say that the mutilation was due to heat or decomposition. Being a democratic nation Bangladesh should

accept what is fair and investigate thematter.

If my territorial integrity was threatened, I would not only have killed 18 but hundreds of enemy troops. But knowing the army of my country I can assure that not one body would be shot in the eye or allowed to be mutilated and each and every dead body would be returned with full military honours. I'm sure proper investigations will reveal who was to blame and corrective action would be taken on both sides.

But by being euphoric and too enthusiastic about this border tension, people of both the countries are doing exactly what the mastermind of this conflict wanted. Both the Indians and the Bangladeshis should remember that there are more friends than enemies on both sides.

Vinaya Chaturvedi  
San Francisco, USA

Bangladesh and India engaged in unnecessary bloodshed on their border. The BDR troops were under

attack by the BSF and had to open fire in self-defence. The long impending border problems with India paved the way to this clash. After this incident, the Indian government and Indian press started blaming BDR. They failed to accept the fact that it was BSF which attacked BDR first. Their accusation of disfiguring the BSR dead bodies, according to the report of *The Daily Star*, April 24, is baseless.

We hope both sides will soon come forward to resolve this crisis and those who are responsible for this incident will be brought to book after proper investigation.

Khaled Iqbal Chowdhury  
Moulvibazar

In his letter (April 27), Anirban, an Indian Bengali, writes, "Much has been said about Indian *dadagiri* and Indian *imperialism*. But you haven't seen enough of *dadagiri*." This should not be treated as an idle threat. The Indian government has tempered its reaction because of the impending elections in Bangladesh.

Once the elections are over, Bangladesh will experience Indian *dadagiri* in full measure.

Just as the sentiments of an Indian Bengali are pro-India, our sentiments in Pakistan are pro-Bangladesh. I wish our Bangladeshi brethren prosperity, strength and independence.

Asaf Ali Shah  
Lahore, Pakistan

After the "True Indian" (April 23), now we have "Anirban", an Indian Bengali (April 27) who threatens us by saying, "But you haven't seen enough of *dadagiri*!"

Well, may I ask: What's new in Indian *dadagiri*? The last time it tried its *dadagiri* with another minnow Sri Lanka during late Rajiv Gandhi's premiership, the Indian Prime Minister got clubbed on the neck by rifle butt from a freedom loving Sri Lankan in Colombo during a guard of honour in the presence of thousands of spectators and millions of TV viewers all over the world. Later, the Indian troops that were forced upon Sri Lanka had to

beat a hasty retreat.

I would suggest to the Indians to give up the pipe-dream of *dadagiri* with smaller neighbours and respect their sovereignty. Why is it that India is the only country in the world which does not have good relations with a single smaller neighbour? Food for thought?

Ashfaq Chowdhury  
Dhaka

Reading the Indian newspapers on the internet about the recent border tension, I find that according to some of them, if not all, people of Bangladesh are either pro-India or pro-Pakistan. They also keep talking about their role in our liberation war. We respect India for its contribution in our much needed time and remember those 3200 Indian soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the noble cause along with our 30 lakh martyrs.

These newspapers also show much dissatisfaction on the gas export issue, the security treaty and the migrants issue. According to the

HindustanTimes of April 21,

"Bangladesh is becoming a second Nepal for India, with it allowing itself as a conduit for smuggling of drugs and exporting terrorism." The Indians better realise their own faults and try to overcome them. They should also keep it in mind that Bangladesh is an independent country and remaining independent is our first ever goal.

Ruchira  
Dhaka

### Wrong usage

In the April 22 issue, an article "Will Benazir be let go off the hook?" What is this "go" doing here? It should have been: "Will Benazir be let off the hook?"

The persons concerned may like to look up the Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary, should they feel the need for some corroborating authority.

Shahed Quaderi  
Dhaka

### ZIA incident

I am appalled at the incident that took place at ZIA where a Bangladeshi-born British citizen was assaulted on board a Biman flight and also illegally confined by some Biman officials. The fault of the victim was, he asked about the delay of the flight he boarded from Bangkok to Dhaka. The Biman officials assaulted him upon landing at ZIA. They even tried to frame him as a drug carrier.

This really takes the biscuit! How can this happen in a civilised country? I don't know how arrogantly the passenger, Mr Hasnat behaved with the Biman official, or if at all he misbehaved, but is it reason enough to harass him that way? Moreover, I am sure the cabin crew is trained to handle situations like this as these things happen all over the world. As a matter of fact, it was in the local newspapers a few days ago that a woman was behaving rudely on a flight from Florida to Manchester with the flight attendants. However,

the flight attendants were able to resolve the matter amiably. So why should Biman be any different? Obviously they were the ones at fault. As a frequent flyer, I know how flight delays can be quite irritating. People lose their patience and why not? You are paying a lot of money and you expect decent service!

This whole incident is a perfect example of abuse of power and this has tarnished the already tarnished image of Biman. The First Officer should be severely reprimanded and be taught that no one can get away with such misconduct. It is quite frightening that people have to think twice before demanding to know why a flight has been delayed and must remain in fear of the airlines officials.

I urge the concerned authorities to take immediate steps to ensure that such an incident is never repeated.

Ariful Islam  
University of London, UK