

## Another newsman assaulted

Who cares for press freedom?

FORGET higher ideals, even routine journalistic news gathering and dissemination are being scowled at by some local tyrants donning ruling party cap. After all, those having dirty linens have to sweep these under the carpet. But more than that concern for a public image vulnerability, it is their incorrigible arrogance of power, fed on ruling party indulgence and muted police response to their acts of crime, that invariably manifests itself whenever anything unsavory about them is revealed in the press. May be it was all a matter of public knowledge; yet the very fact that a newsman has formally revealed it exposes the latter to the affected supremo's vendetta which in the end is exacted by his hirelings. When routine presentation of news is thus frowned at, investigative journalism, the most coveted element of journalistic commitment to people, is bound to be a far cry.

Feni seems to be the happy hunting ground for savagery against newsmen, and as if to challenge it, there hasn't been any dearth of courageous journalists in that township under a prolonged siege by one man. Only on January 25 this year UNB correspondent Tipu Sultan had been tortured, attacked, grievously wounded and left for dead causing a huge public consternation. Just three and a half months on, we now hear the news of the dastardly physical assault on Shahidul Alam Imran, Dagonbhuiyan correspondent of the daily *Manabjamin* and news editor of the weekly *Autaeb* of Feni. His fault apparently lay in a report he published under the title "Subscription of Hazarika (a weekly owned by ruling party MP Joynal Hazari) Compulsory in Dagonbhuiyan." A gang of eight swooped on Alam, and like in the case of Tipu, beat him blue breaking one of his limbs.

How many more journalists we would have to see killed or physically retarded before our right to discharge of professional duties is recognised and protected by the state? We urge Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to live up to the assurance she gave at a public rally only four days ago that 'those who launched attack on newspapers would be punished.' Yes, the law enforcer have tightened their noose around Jubo Dal leader and Ward Commissioner Mamunur Rashid who was sued under the Public Safety Act following his assault on two senior journalists at the Purbokone office in Chittagong. But there are so many more Mamuns to catch up with.

## BTTB's high charges

Service too poor to justify them

THE outrageously high fee for a telephone connection in this country is an affront to people's rights. BTTB's current rate, at Taka 18,300, is pegged at a level unheard of, anywhere in the world. Compare our fee to the Taka 810 levied in Bhutan, Taka 1,026 in India, or Taka 9,990 in Sri Lanka and it is obvious that no service provider in this region exacts as high a fee as BTTB. Even lowering the fee to Taka 13,000, as is being proposed by the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, would provide only a marginal relief to people's pockets.

And what do consumers get in return for the exorbitant charges? They have to suffer a level of service that is inefficient, prone to underhand dealings and grudgingly given. Complaints fall on deaf ears until 'special' compensation is made, while ghost billing continues to haunt innocent consumers. Although the system has progressed from analogue to digital, facilities such as call waiting, redirecting calls and other tools of convenience are still not offered to subscribers.

A waiting list of at least 165,000 applicants, is another blight on BTTB. Why are so many consumers still waiting for a connection? Thousands more, in dire need of telephones, are deterred by the high fee, the underhand dealings, the unsympathetic and even hostile attitude of this public utility body.

Ignoring the rights of consumers and also of market realities, BTTB's failures are holding back a sector that is critical to this nation's development. It is time we opened it up to private enterprise. A policy change is necessary and must be undertaken at the earliest to provide for a more competitive environment so that an essential tool of communication, the telephone, can come within reach of a much greater cross section in this country.

## More than just border



BRIG (RTD) M ABDUL HAFIZ

TO avert a last minute deadlock in their partition plan both Nehru and Jinnah agreed to constituting a boundary commission for the vivisection of two of India's great provinces Bengal and Punjab. Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a brilliant lawyer, was pulled out of his law chamber at Lincoln's Inn to preside over the commission. Radcliffe who never set his feet earlier in the subcontinent and was thus qualified for the job to ensure neutrality flew into Delhi in early July 1947 to commence his works on boundary demarcation in a great haste so that the transfer of power could be effected only little over a month later.

Sequestered in a solitary bungalow within the Viceregal compound in Delhi Radcliffe almost immediately began to trace out the boundary line on a sheet of map prepared by Army's Royal Engineer Corps. In Bengal the boundary was essentially a pencil line drawn on a map

with all the heart break it implied on the ground. The meagre tools he used for the purpose were only maps, population tables and a few other statistics. Never could Radcliffe go on the ground either before or after the painful surgery of the entity called Bengal to see for himself the effect of how his pencil would mutilate or had mutilated the rich farmlands of Bengal, its sonnenet cluster of hamlets and meagre communication network sowing the seeds of perpetual irredentism.

with minimum of incidences given the extent of its complexities and the state of relationship between India and Pakistan. At independence Sheikh Mujibur Rahman wanted to make it a 'border of eternal peace'. Our foreign office mandarins expansively call it the 'bridge of peace'. Inspite of such aphorism the last month witnessed the most violent border skirmishes that resembled warlike situation. Not only has it inflicted a severe blow to our bilateral relationship it has opened up

an oversimplification of the crisis that has shaken the edifice of our relationships. The question aptly arises why the problems relating to border were allowed to pile up to a point of explosion? After all, why the portion of border was not demarcated, the outstanding bilateral issues were not settled and even the border agreement signed in 1974 is still not ratified by Indian parliament? Why did it take 20 years for India to give us Tinbigha corridor in lieu of Berubari enclave which was

something happens to India's discomfiture as it has happened now in Borabari where 16 BSF men were killed the mood in India is that of blustering while we are obliged to remain apologetic. It is reported that more than 400 Bangladeshi civilians and BDR men were killed by BSF men in last three decades.

It is not much the border, enclaves and even the military acracy along the border that cause conflict between the nations. It is rather the politics the nations pursue

population and power potential it looms large over the neighbours reducing them to insignificance. It is in the interest of India's neighbours to accept this fact with grace and accordingly fashion their relationship with her. At the same time, India in conformity with her bigness, must also be magnanimous to the neighbours whose destiny is permanently bound to that of her by the dictates of geography, history and a common past. Or else the defiance is only what would be the neighbours' response to her arrogant big brotherly attitude. The record of the last half a century of interstate relations in South Asia stands testimony to this fact.

Once the politics of relationship is set right on the basis of mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and national interest it would spontaneously remove border tension, promote cooperation and understanding and resolve outstanding issues whether it is of land border or maritime delineation with a sense of urgency.

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## PERSPECTIVES

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Almost nowhere in numerous swamps, marshes and lowlying fields Radcliffe lamented later could he find a point of reference, straight running river or a line of hills to serve as the boundary marking feature. That's how today's Indo-Bangladesh border came into being.

Yet, such a precarious border worked. The present border also had to work because the people on either side of the divide knew well that they could not possibly tamper with what geography had permanently imposed on them. It served as strictly regarded formal international border during Pakistan period

old ugly wounds and brought back historical suspicion and fears. Our perception of each other as reflected in numerous viewpoints expressed in both electronic and print media points to a deep divide that still exists between us.

Most observers and analysts tend to attribute this worst-ever Indo-Bangladesh conflict in which nineteen of their borderguards lost lives, to undemarcated and unsettled border, adverse possession of territories, unexchanged enclaves and electoral politics in both the countries. There are truths in them but holding only border and ensuing election responsible for it is certainly

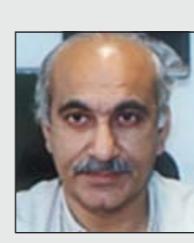
transferred to India immediately after the agreement? These dragging on can only be the function of certain attitude and a wired mindset.

It is not only in relation to the border that a lack of progress towards suitable resolution persisted. In every other matter of bilateral relationship a poor priority, benign neglect and a tendency of taking us for granted had been too obvious to be missed. It seemed India's privilege to delay or defer the resolution of issues adversely affecting us and at times even denying us our dues. And yet the onus of circumspection in maintaining good neighbourliness lay with us. If

in maintaining relationship with their neighbours. In case of India the dynamics of this politics emanates from her bigness. It is the same dynamics that drove India to preside over her failed peace mission in Sri Lanka, dispatch airborne troops to quell an internal rebellion in Maldives, block the transit points to a landlocked Nepal, refuse to extend the memorandum of understanding for sharing water with Bangladesh at Farakka barrage till 1996. India's neighbours including Bangladesh watched these developments nervously over the years.

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## A tide in the affairs of women



M.J. AKBAR

THE fortunes of the three dominant women in Indian politics are on test in the May Assembly elections. All three are out of power. All three are hungry for power.

The easiest fate to predict is that of Jayalalitha, the Revolutionary Leader. You don't have to be an astrologer. You don't even have to go to Tamil Nadu. You can sense the chemistry building up that will change a government. The DMK ensured her return to office by putting her in jail. For the electorate that was tantamount to atonement for whatever sins she may have committed in office. The authorities ensured her victory by denying her a nomination from four Assembly segments. This is just the kind of decision that infuriates an electorate, particularly when it is already angry against a ruling party. Mrs Indira Gandhi's return to power became certain when a foolish Janata government removed her from Parliament; the Janata MPs forgot that the people had the right to remove a whole Parliament from Parliament. The intricacies of the DMK's case, if it has any, will be lost in the roar of protest in Tamil Nadu. You can already hear that roar building up, even in the early stages of the campaign. The DMK has heard it, and the depression is visible on the faces of the DMK leaders. Nor can absence from the Assembly prevent Jayalalitha from being sworn in if she wins the elections. The technicalities are on her side. She can be sworn in without being elected, as UP's Rajnath Singh was, and remain chief minister for six months. If she wants to drive the system crazy (the system has driven her crazy, so why should she not return the compliment?) she can resign one day before her six-

month term gets over, and then get reelected by her party and re-sworn in by the governor. It has not been done before but Indian democracy is dotted with things that have not been done before. Has Mamata Banerjee, the Revolutionary Bleeder, peaked before the start of play? The wind has been in her favour for years; but is the last breeze before 10 May changing direction?

There is a delicious irony in the Bengal situation. The most committed support to the Communists is coming from the industrialists of the state, or at least from the few that are left there and still consider Kolkata their home. They are terrified at the prospect of chaos if the Marxists lose. Part of the reason is implicit blackmail. No one wants the return of the kind of militant and violent trade unionism that drove industry out in the first place. Over the years the owners have made their peace with the unions on varying terms and they have no desire for fresh negotiations. But there is more than the threat from CITU that worries Mamata Banerjee has pitched her politics at too high a decibel-level. While this may have been necessary in Opposition, the pitch is unsuitable for governance. The non-Leftists (you can't call anyone in Bengal a Rightist) have not helped their cause by indiscipline. Ajit Panja is distraught at losing the comforts of Delhi for the variable pleasures of Kolkata. And our old friend Barkat Ghani Khan Choudhary merely has to open his mouth for controversy to float out. Has Bengal simply got accustomed to a Marxist face? The relationship between the CPI(M) and Bengal is a bit like an old marriage now. Squabbles and fights break out at the first opportunity, and there are always the temptations of bit on the side, but divorce is simply not the Bengali thing to do.

The CPI(M) has also been intelligent enough to appreciate that the operational word is "could". Not will. Buddhababu Bhattacharjee should have become chief minister even earlier, and given time to stir the layers of still life in Writers' Building with the energy of at least one or two new ideas. All he has on offer are promises. A promise is an uncertain crutch after nearly twenty-five years in power. The word is that the Marxists are considering ideas like the creation of special economic zones without existing labour laws, safe from orthodox attack because the model is Chinese. The Marxists of course can do what they would never allow any other government to do.

Then there is Sonia Gandhi, the Evolutionary Pleader. She is always pleading for something or the other.

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made for her to win; it is impossible to believe how or why the Congress could lose anywhere. The anti-incumbency mood is so strong now that it has buffeted even the Centre. Kerala is the old cakewalk for the biggest enemy of any relationship is boredom. After more than two decades in power Jyoti Basu had stalled in the job. It is now certain that Jyoti Basu would have lost the election to Mamata Banerjee; that impressive cult figure of Bengal politics had simply lost interest in his job, as he was the first admit privately. His party understood these facts and introduced Buddhababu Bhattacharjee at the right moment. The party changed the chief minister before the people changed the chief minister. Since Indian politics is run by leaders who treat their political parties as fiefdoms, this is unfamiliar. You cannot imagine a Sonia Gandhi or a Laloo Yadav or a Mulayam Singh Yadav or a Jayalalitha or, yes, a Mamata Banerjee placing their party's interests above their own; in fact, they would be unable to distinguish the difference. The CPI(M)'s political integrity could be its saving grace.

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Congress-led alliance; the Malayali is a fair voter, and believes in giving both sides a chance. This year it is A.K. Antony's turn.

Assam should have been as easy for the Congress as Tamil Nadu is for Jayalalitha. There is unprecedented voter discontent against the AGP. The Congress could put up the traditional lamposts as candidates and win. Except that it did one better. The Congress party sold tickets. Literally. Money was paid and tickets

were handed out. There were bidders because a Congress ticket is considered a passport to the Assembly. The AICC became a pathetic bazaar in which the party symbol was sold to highest bidders. The anger in Guwahati at this brazen corruption and mismanagement has already been reported, but the party leaders could not care less since they do believe that this is going to be a lampost election. The Congress may yet win because of the anger against the AGP, but the

size of its victory will be significantly diminished. And although Congress leaders will never find the courage to say anything against any president publicly, they have no defence or explanation. Discuss Assam and find an embarrassed Congressman. The opportunity is there. The BJP government in Delhi has lost its élan; the BJP is going to be hampered wherever it is contesting. But the Congress is unable to occupy the space being vacated by the BJP because it is bridled by uncertain leadership and tainted by venality.

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## BYLINE

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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 submitted will not be returned.



Mounting materials

Sand, bricks and garbage are kept piled on the sidewalk of Gulistan area in the name of construction work. Though it is a common site throughout the city, only the pedestrians know how troublesome it is to walk through these mounting materials. Construction work doesn't mean encroaching on the road and creating hindrance for the public. When will the authorities wake up to the fact that citizens' rights are being violated?

STAR PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

## Ungrateful nation?

The photograph of an Indian soldier carried away like a Royal Bengal Tiger and the Bangladeshi rejoicing over it speaks for itself about the Bangladeshi character.

It is time to call our Bangladesh account a dead investment and try to look towards Burma to the north-east to the sea. It is surprising that India has not raised a voice against ethnic cleansing of Chakmas and Hindus in general from Bangladesh. In fact, an independent Chakmaland/Chittagong would be a much better partner for us. While Pakistan has succeeded in eliminating Hindus entirely, Bangladesh is on its way to become a Hindu-free country.

My history lessons tell me that Bangladesh was created when Yahya Khan, to solve his own internal problems invaded India much in the same way as the bravado of the BDR at a time of internal crisis.

Speaking about the very existence of the nation itself, it is a total myth that Bangladesh would have existed without the 3000 Indian soldiers who died in the Indo-Pak war.

I do not think a single mausoleum exists in Bangladesh for these deceased Indian soldiers who helped Bangladesh become inde-

pendent.

This erasing of history is nothing new in this subcontinent. I am quite sure that in future the Pakistani soldiers would be considered as ghazis by the Bangladeshis.

An Indian Bengali  
India

## Gratitude to India

We are grateful to India for helping us putting an end to the Pakistani military atrocities within a year; we have expressed these feelings in the past and will remember their help forever. However, it will be naive to think that the Indian government helped us entirely out of generosity. Our brothers and sisters across the border were genuinely distressed by our suffering, and urged their government to help us, but this also gave some Indian politicians a golden opportunity to achieve their long cherished goal of dismembering their arch enemy.

As for the kindness component of the Indian help, there can be no tangible payment; we can just be grateful for it for as long as we live. I hope that our Indian brothers and sisters will understand us.

Here in Wellington, thousands of

for the sacrifices that India made in helping us – in terms of putting up with things like India's prolonged failure to ratify the Indira-Mujib Treaty, frequent border incursions and killings by the BSF, severe trade imbalance resulting from lack of free access to their markets while ours is free to them– then they should consider themselves well-paid in all these 30 years by reflecting on the strategic savings made by India by not having to face a hostile Pakistani army day in and day out.

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About five and a half decades ago, our narrow-minded politicians, egged on by religious zealots and extremists, failed to accommodate the sensibilities and anxieties of the various communities and thereby tore apart a great country. Now at the dawn of the 21st century, let's not give such politicians and extremists any opportunity to pre-

vent us from joining hands as sovereign nations to promote the best interests of the subcontinent.

Dr M Khaled  
Wellington, New Zealand