

Timid attitude

I am surprised by the statement of the foreign secretary, reflecting the government's timid attitude towards the border skirmishes. It is the BSF which intruded in our territory, and a number of them were killed while exchanging fire with the BDR. Every nation has a right to defend its territory. Why did the foreign secretary not come out with a bold statement about the way the BDR defended our border? It appears by his press statement that we might have done something wrong by defending our boundary.

A diplomat, while defending the countries interest and while negotiating with others, needs to project the facts with courage. As a sovereign nation, we must talk on equal terms and not in a subservient manner or yield to any undue pressure from anyone.

We hope our foreign secretary will not forget that he is representing a nation and act accordingly while negotiating with other countries.

Golam Md Faruk
Dhaka

Proud of our boys

We are really concerned about increasing pressure from the Indian side on our border. Recently there have been several incidents of aggression by Indian border guards on our villagers. Still no serious protests have been lodged with the Indian government from our side; the reason is unknown to the nation.

It is high time the Indians stopped this nonsense, otherwise relations between the two countries will further deteriorate and more incidents like the recent Kurigram incident will occur. In this incident the lives of our BDR jawans were saved due to vigilance and by one of our villagers. His thoughtful act must be appreciated and he must be rewarded by the government.

The recent BDR action in Kurigram has clearly demonstrated the sentiments of the entire nation towards India irrespective of what our government's attitude might be.

We feel proud of our boys for their bravery and the way they have repulsed the aggression. The government must compensate those who sacrificed their lives in protecting our motherland.

A Bangladeshi
Old DOHS, Dhaka

Be constructive, please!

I have been reading your "To the Editor" section for quite some time and I am very shocked and surprised with the reactions expressed by the people of both India and Bangladesh. The whole border incident is an unwanted one and instead of blaming each other, we should be more constructive.

I am a Bangladeshi and have been living in the USA. I have come across a lot of Indians. Most of them, especially those from the West Bengal, are very sympathetic towards Bangladesh. *The Daily Star* shouldn't have published letters by racist/fundamentalist Indians like "True Indian" or "Subhobroto". These people are the minority among the educated Indian community.

Instead of creating and propagating hatred, we should look into the border issue in a methodical manner and find out how we can coexist peacefully and create something like EC in the south Asia.

Arnab
California, USA, on e-mail

The truth is out there

Almost everyone would agree that Bangladesh-India border incident shouldn't have happened. However some aspects have been conveniently glossed over in the media debate.

Our prime minister wanted to stopover in New Delhi but other preoccupations came in the way. The Indians have since taken the initiative to invite a delegation from our country and we should respond positively. If we don't, our constant grievance that the Indians are foot-dragging will appear frivolous. The time has come to leave recent aberrations in our relations behind and move forward. It is also time for sober reflection and for a bit of soul-searching about what has happened.

What really did happen in Padua? The day after BDR surrounded the BSF post there, Director General, BDR, Major General Fazlul Rahman claimed that his troops successfully evicted the Indians who had been in illegal occupation of Bangladeshi land for 30 years. Recently, our foreign minister told the press that Padua belongs to Bangladesh, but is one of many pockets in adverse possession of India, just as several such pockets of land belonging to India, are under our adverse possession. These lands have to be exchanged through friendly dialogue as provided in the Mujib-Indira treaty, which also states that status quo is to be maintained till such exchange takes place.

So where does the truth lie? We should assume that our foreign minister knows better and has spoken with responsibility. In that case, the Director General, BDR seems to have acted recklessly and foolishly in trying to unilaterally repossess one of the many adverse possessions. This needs to be thoroughly investigated.

The attempt to justify the BDR's action on the ground that the Indians were building a road on the other side seems unwise. If the BDR had not withdrawn from Padua, the Indians would most likely have used force to evict our troops. And if unilateral action of the BDR is to be considered as acceptable, then the Indians would be within their rights to react and repossess adverse possessions using force. This could have had led to action-reaction series leading to much bloodshed. There should be a thorough enquiry into why the BDR took such steps.

It is widely believed in India that the civilian establishment in Dhaka and our political leadership did not approve and did not even have advance knowledge of the planned BDR action. Considering that the Padua adventure made no sense, this assumption may be correct. If that is so, the BDR's action raises serious questions about the functioning of our democratic system.

Surely, in a democracy like ours, military officers should not be allowed to get away with an act of misadventure that can have serious consequences for our country's security and for our foreign relations.

The Indians have alleged that the bodies of the dead BSF soldiers showed evidence of torture and mutilation. The Indian press has reported that marks of injury were recorded and signed by representatives of both the BDR and the BSF. Apparently, some of the dead BSF soldiers' throats were found to be slit-open. There were several injuries not caused by bullets. Our prime minister has rightly declared that the matter needs to be fully investigated.

The widely published photograph, apparently released by the BDR, of the body of a dead Indian soldier being carried on a bamboo pole has caused revulsion around the world. As a civilised nation and a cultured society, we must raise our voice against such acts. While hoping that there will be no recurrence of such unfortunate incidents on our borders, we must engage in some serious and dispassionate introspection on these matters.

Mustafa Farooq
Dhaka

Expand the army

In the face of Indian hostility, it would only be prudent for Bangladesh to look to its defence. The size of the army should be raised to at least 15 divisions, and a National Guard of two million men must be trained and equipped, as early as possible.

This should not be too difficult for the ninth largest country in the world, with a population of 129 million. Some thought should also be spared for acquiring a nuclear capability. Better safe than sorry.

Asaf Ali Shah
Lahore, Pakistan, on e-mail

Do some soul searching

A 'True Indian' (April 23) accused Bangladesh of the recent border clash. He said that every country, every neighbour has disputes, and therefore "These things can go on." I think my 'True Indian' (!) friend has forgotten that during the last four years, the BSF has killed at least 130 innocent villagers and 40 BDR personnel, reflecting his country's antagonistic attitude towards its neighbour.



Indian special forces on border duty

The 'True Indian' also said that in his country "even animals are treated better." This statement demonstrates that in India 'animals are treated better than human beings.' That is why, there have been so many brutal massacres in Kashmir and "the paradise" has been turned into hell.

This 'True Indian' also claims that Bangladeshi character was demonstrated when Sheikh Mujib was

brutally killed by his countrymen. But what this Indian has forgotten is that Indians killed Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Not only that, they have demolished the historic Babri Mosque and killed thousands of innocent Muslims in the rioting.

The 'True Indian' alleges that millions of Bangladeshis are infiltrating into India and are illegally residing there. But what about those numerous Indians residing in Ban-

gladesh. This pain in the neck cannot be cured unless operated and removed from India's chest.

I think the 'True Indian' has done nothing wrong in reflecting his idea about our country. He has in fact echoed the subtle idea and intentions of most of the Indians.

Md Helaluddin
Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka

Ungrateful nation

LETTER OF THE WEEK

We are pleased to announce that from this week, we are introducing a special attraction, 'Letter of the Week' and will award the writer a prize. Letters must be no more than 300 words and focus on a current topic in simple language. *The Daily Star's* selection of the "Letter of the Week" will be final.

Plight of the *hijra*

Eunuchs, locally known as *hijra*, begin their life in misery and continue to suffer throughout their lives, finding hiding places in order to avoid being teased and tormented by people. Their life begins with no education due to early rejection by children in school. Neither their parents nor teachers or the community helps them to break the stigma attached to their status. They are unable to bear children but they are the offspring of a good mother and father. They bear much pain and grief till the last day of their lives.

There are several million *hijras* roaming around the capital city. They are not considered to be citizens of this country and are given no opportunity to work or contribute to the nation, though they are born in a Bangladeshi family. Eunuchs are not included in the voter list. No matter what politicians or social reformers do for others, they never do anything for these eunuchs.

Eunuchs struggle against odds all the time. No one will rent them a room or allow them to sit in a public place. People spit on them, throw stones at them and abuse them.

But eunuchs are better people than many 'normal' members of society. Many of them are married and live together in a group. They survive by doing odd jobs in disguise. They sing and dance on special occasions such as when children are born.

No government medical centre will treat these people. Many of them are suffering from venereal diseases, having been untreated for so long. Nations are fighting to endorse human rights, child rights, gender equality and freedom. But what are we

doing for the eunuchs? Can't we do something for them? At the very least, we should recognise them and give them their rights as human beings.

Dr. Md. Afzal Hossain
Research Conductor
Attitude & Behavioural Science
Dhaka

gladesh and doing business in our country?

The brutality and hatred shown by the BSF for the last 30 years is unforgivable and unforgettable. Hope the Indians realise this.

Khandker Mahmood Riyad
Darul Ihsan University, Dhaka

Why blame them?

I have noticed with surprise that many people are criticising the 'True Indian' (April 23) for his so-called adverse remarks about Bangladesh. I am not blaming the Indian for the misconception he has about our country.

If I were an Indian, I might also have nurtured a similar attitude towards Bangladesh. I would urge all to imagine themselves as an Indian citizen for a while. What do they see? A small pocket of territory called Bangladesh resting inside

So an Indian Bengali jumped to the conclusion about our characteristic from a single photograph. Well let me tell this Indian something about their character. They are arrogant, intimidating, religious fanatics and strong-headed. And I get this idea not from a single photograph but from many incidents, killing more than 300 Bangladeshi people and BDR over the last 30 years years, demolishing Babri Masjid for example.

This 'Indian Bengali' wants to call his/her Bangladeshi account a dead investment. A \$3 billion Bangladeshi market is anything but a dead investment. He/she better give this ingenious 'dead account' theory to the Indian finance minister.

How could an ignorant outsider try to poke into our internal matters and make suggestions about Chakmaland and Chittagong? I think the CPI led independent West Bengal would be a better partner for us. Now how does that feel? The 'Indian Bengali' wants Myanmar, instead of Bangladesh, as India's partner. Choosing Myanmar, infamous for its military junta who have put Nobel Peace Prize winning democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest, as an Indian partner again speaks for itself about the Indian character.

The Indians always scream that without their help we would not have achieved our independence. When the Indian army joined the war in 1971, the job was almost done by the brave Bangladeshi freedom fighters. The inclusion of the Indian army only accelerated our victory. In the past, countries more powerful than India couldn't win against mass resistance in much smaller countries than Bangladesh. Does Vietnam ring a bell? Bangladesh would have won, even without India's help, the Bangla-Pak war, not the Indo-Pak war.

Kazi Zubaidur Rahman
University of Nottingham, UK, on e-mail

Kudos to The Daily Star

I am an Indian and a regular reader of *The Daily Star*. After reading this daily for all these days, I couldn't help commending your paper for publishing the facts about the border crisis. Every day, I read the Indian newspapers and afterwards I read *The Daily Star*. I find the same news in both newspapers, unlike the Pakistani newspapers which are blatantly anti-India.

I also read the 'To the Editor' section and the editorials regularly. I am really impressed to see that Bangladeshis are so broadminded, in fact they are more broad minded than the Indians. As for the editorials, I can see that the people who write these are really knowledgeable persons, well versed in all the topics and understand the concerns of other nations.

For example, after the brutal killing of the BSF jawans, many

readers have supported Bangladesh, which is natural as patriotic citizens, but almost every one has ended saying that they are sorry for the killings and regret it. I felt so moved. And after reading the recent article by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, who politely conveyed the message that Bangladesh is an independent nation and hence doesn't want to be dictated to by India. Whatever he said is absolutely right. As an Indian, I would never like India to be dic-

the BDR, what option did they have but to open fire? Is it a crime to defend one's country and life? We would like to ask the people of India what would the BSF have done if the situation were vice-versa?

It would be wise to think rationally and refrain from blaming Bangladesh for what happened at Rourmari. The Mujib-Indira treaty has not been implemented till date. We hope that the agreement will soon be implemented and ease

and innocent villagers for the last 30 years?

We constantly read in the newspapers about the BSF intruding into our territory, taking away our cattle, helping Indians cut our crops. On a visit to Shillong in 1999 by road, I saw how the BSF possessed a war like mood in the bordering areas. On the other hand, I hardly found the BDRs on the Bangladesh side. Why is there such a lack of trust?

Anirban has called our country "minnow Bangladesh" which, I think, is another Taliban attitude. Bangladesh may be a "minnow", but it has defeated a giant fish like Pakistan in 1971. We are, of course, grateful to India for what it has done during our liberation war. But our freedom fighters made the job much easier.

The recent border skirmishes are an outburst of long pending issues which need to be resolved as early as possible. Bangladeshis and Indians should not allow the Taliban like politicians to do politics on these issues. So let us throw away the Taliban attitude for a better friendly, cooperative relation. In this regard people like a 'True Indian', 'Anirban' need to come out of their darkness and hollowness.

Kamaluddin Ahmed
Shamoly, Dhaka

Dignity and honour

During our Liberation war in 1971, India did help us, but that does not give the Indians the right to dominate or dictate to us. We are an independent and sovereign country and we want to live with dignity and honour. We are the only nation in the world which shed blood for its mother tongue. We achieved our independence by defeating the strong and far superior Pakistani army at the cost of millions of people. So we know very well the meaning of independence.

The people of Bangladesh want to live in peace and harmony with all the neighbouring countries of South Asia. But India, an imperialist country with a big brother attitude does not like it or want it. India unilaterally withdrew water from the river Ganges. It also supplied arms, ammunition and shelter to the tribal insurgents of Chittagong Hill Tracts. In the last 25 years, BSF killed 415 civilians and 20 BDR men, looted crops and cattle, kidnapped people, burned down houses, the list goes on.

A 'True Indian' castigated us for killing Sheikh Mujib and said we are beggars and thieves. I would like to ask the 'True Indian', why did they kill a great leader Mahatma Gandhi and also Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi? One should first improve one's own state and then take others to task.

Iqbal Ahmed
Dhaka, on e-mail

Our predicament

As a Bangladeshi living in the USA, I'm not surprised at the recent skirmish with India's border patrol. For the last five years, we have been taking steps that have degraded our position as a country in the eyes of our neighbour.

We have shifted our focus from

border tension.

Meanwhile the report about the BSF strengthening their position along the border points with tanks and heavy weapons in great numbers puzzle us. What could be the purpose behind it? We hope India will not belittle itself by acting unjustly with Bangladesh. We want a friendly relationship with our neighbouring countries, enmity with none.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Border skirmishes

Ever since the publication of the



BDR troops guarding the border

letter by 'A True Indian', countless letters have been pouring into your letter column everyday. This shows how concerned the people of both the countries are about friendship. But friendship without restraint is not everlasting. This restraint is missing particularly in two letters written by "A True Indian" (April 23) and "Anirban" (April 27). Certain comments made by these two writers have shattered the conscientious and freedom loving people of this country.

The provocative comments in the letters are enough to justify the attitude of most of the Indians towards us, although I do not believe they reflect the views of conscientious Indians. Immediately after the border skirmishes, the state controlled Indian media started blaming the Bangladeshis. A procession by the BJP led supporters was shown heading towards the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi. Doesn't this prove that only BJP led Shiv Sena, Sang Parivar have an anti neighbourly attitude? "Taliban" no longer belongs to Afghanistan only. It is more or less applicable for all sorts of fanaticism. And the BJP allied Shiv Sena, Sang Parivar are in one sense the Indian Taliban.

Unfortunately these Taliban are always guided by emotion and not by reason and wisdom. Haven't 'True Indian', 'Anirban' seen how the BSF have killed the BDR jawans

Southeast Asia towards India for all our policy issues. We voted for them in the UN Security Council, suggested exporting electricity and gas to them, opened bus routes and recently passed an 'enemy property' law giving most Hindus, who are now living in India and consider themselves Indians, a right to confiscate our property.

Hence, most Indians already consider Bangladesh nothing more than a province. I sincerely hope and pray that we can rectify this situation and find ways to overcome this crisis.

Nipun W. Rahman
Washington, USA, on e-mail

Friends not masters

A single letter from "A True Indian" (April 23) flared up more shock and resentment than one could imagine. We gratefully acknowledge the friendly hand that India extended to us during our Liberation War, but as a self-respecting nation, we hope India will never cross this border of friendship.

More than 35 years ago, a long-ruling infamous military dictator of this region, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, now dumped in history, angered by the western powers, published a book called "Friends not Masters".

Referring to the title of this book, should it be too much to expect that India will forever remain our friend and never become our master?

A Patriot
Dhaka, on e-mail

Forget all differences

I am disappointed by the irrational and extreme views expressed in your "To the Editor" section by the so-called patriotic people on both sides of the border. Even though we belong to different nations by a twist of fate, we have to realise that people of the subcontinent share the same culture and our future is interdependent. By insulting the other side, we are only demeaning ourselves.

The fact of the matter is that for every soldier killed on both sides of the border, someone is losing a father, a son or a husband. In these days of internationalism, let us not always blame the other party for all our misfortunes and portray ourselves to be patriotic.

I hope *The Daily Star* will select only those letters that deserve to be published. Let us move forward and worry about other constructive issues like earning bread and butter.

A subcontinental Indian
U.S.A, on e-mail

Pay back time

Being citizens of the land of Gandhi, our 'Indian' 'True-Indian' or 'Indian Bengali' friends expressed their views in such naïve and parochial way that I feel sorry for their knowledge of history. With our deep condolence for the deceased Indian forces, we request our Indian friends to ask some questions to their conscience. How could a nation show gratitude?

Did the history of Bangladesh and India start from the Padua crisis?

Barring the strategic gains to India, it is moot to ask whether the presence of Indian troops even after completion of war, the massive transfer of arms and resources from war-torn Bangladesh to India by the Indian forces, the subsequent unequal bilateral security treaty (1974), the occupation of Bangladeshi border territories and indiscriminate killing of Bangladeshi people (450 in the last ten years), were not enough to repay India for its 'role' in our War of Independence?

The recent attack by the BSF might have resulted in a new zone of Indian occupation and the death of more Bangladeshi people, had our BDR not acted promptly and boldly in self-defence.

Could they find any country in the world that has extracted so much for its positive role? How long do we have to pay for it?

I don't understand why the Indian people have been failing to perceive the response of BDR simply as an act of self-defence. It was simply a military clash between the occupier and occupied.

It is far removed from the sentimental issues of 'friendship' or 'gratefulness'.

How can a country that has lost hundreds of sons by the bullets of Indian forces become a villain after an act of self-defence? We have nothing to say if even after all this, our Indian friends suffer an ego brought on by a belief in their country's hegemonic power status, or as a big brother, as demonstrated by the USA over smaller nations.

Eyaj Rashid
Kyoto, Japan, on e-mail

Get it right

The writer of the letter signed by 'An Indian' (April 26) claims that the "BSF may have and probably did wander, by accident, into Bangladeshi territory. But did they have to die for that?"

I would request the writer to check the web page of the *Times of India* to get the correct information and also an overview of what actually happened on the night of April 18th.

Sayed
New Orleans, USA, on e-mail

Agenda for action

It is the ruling party the Awami League which is responsible for the recent border crisis.

Similarly responsible is India's big brother attitude. If we want to handle this crisis we should:

1. Boycott Indian goods in Bangladesh.
2. Remove all Indian motor vehicles, like the Ashok Leyland double-decker buses of BRTC, Indian motor-cycles, which are available all over Bangladesh, especially after imports from Japan have been discouraged.
3. Stop reading Indian newspapers, magazines and cancel their imports.
4. Strengthen our defence capabilities. Start a massive fund collection domestically, as well as from the overseas sources, from the Bangladesh community.
5. Insist on continuous government level protest against India in the international arena.

If the present government does not intend to do it, then it needs to be ousted by massive public movement.

Mukul
Surrey, UK on e-mail