

A fable for Dhaka

Once upon a time there was a large city with a big population: Unfortunately the citizens of that city were all fools except for two wise men. One of them was in charge of supplying water to the citizens and draining out rain water from the roads and the other persons was responsible keeping the city clean and mosquito free.

During the rainy season, when mild or heavy rain fell, the roads became inundated because the drains were clogged with rubbish. The wise man in charge used to explain that the size and capacity of the drains were insufficient to drain out water quickly.

During the dry season the mosquitoes were breeding gleefully and biting citizens more often than they could bear and the wise man responsible came up with a good excuse, that in a large city, eradication of the mosquito menace was impossible.

The poor citizens thought the wise men must be right. Sometimes however, they wondered that if the roads were swept every day and the rubbish was removed from the roads regularly, so that the drains did not become clogged, would not the rain water flow faster through the drains? If the garbage was cleaned more frequently and the open drains and the stagnant water pools, lakes and ponds were cleaned during the dry season, would not the mosquito breeding be reduced?

Of course, the stupid citizens were not very conscious either. They would litter the garbage here and there making the whole city look like a garbage yard, clogging the drains and creating suitable mosquito breeding centres.

But the citizens were stupid anyway and the wise men never bothered to educate them.

Slowly the city became a large heap of garbage and even a mild shower would inundate roads and houses. One day the city perished under the heaps of its own garbage and so did its stupid and foolish citizens who had failed to find two follow stupid citizens to replace those two wise men. And the two wise men? No, they did not perish with the city. They are still here with us, repeating history.

A stupid citizen
Rayer Bazar, Dhaka

This is the sad but true story of a neighbourhood in North Dhanmandi. Here, DESA has added to its load shedding by doing maintenance work. This means life is hell for most residents of the areas, all except Bashiruddin Road where the prime minister's political adviser's private residence is located. No matter how much residents suffer, the political advisor's house and a handful others are always spared. Wonder why there is such a bizarre discrimination all the time!

When the innocent taxpayers feel the sting of being without electricity, why should a powerful person be spared from feeling this inhuman state in this 'democratic' setting? He should feel the heat of public sentiment on this, along with the heat from above!

DESAs should do justice to its clients and minimise its so-called maintenance or BMRE jobs. DESA used to do a better job in the old days with its rugged, much-disciplined power system compared to the modern day state-of-the-art gadgets that bring us so much misery.

A sufferer
Dhaka, on e-mail

No good mothers!

Some women claim that housewives are a mass of women engaged in house-keeping; washing dishes, cleaning, cooking, looking after the children and many, many more tasks that are unpaid.

They also proclaim that as housewives they are also the sex paid



bed-partners of the opposite sex, as though the whole affair is just one-sided. They wish to declare every man a rapist!

Today quite a number of children are going astray because some working mothers are neglectful of social and moral duties, specially at home.

Besides, there are some women who seem to be the enemies of young girls and women.

educated women (of whom, we presently have a great number) were so doing their bit, how is it that most children need tutoring by others?

No wonder, Napoleon had said, "Give me a good mother and I will give you a good nation."

Mujibul Haque
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

Sharier's cartoons

Zayadul Ahsan's seven-part report on "Chittagong the Arms Port" should be an eye-opener for all.

It is the responsibility of the government, the opposition, the intelligentsia and the citizens to raise their voice against terrorism and the dark politics which this unfortunate nation is being subjected to.

However, Sharier's cartoons are totally unsuitable for the articles. The reports deal with a serious subject but the cartoons which



Shocking crime

We are very dismayed at the photograph on your front page (May 25) showing relatives of victims who were murdered in Dhaka. It has become commonplace to see pictures like this one and read about daily killings. The Daily Star report stated that no less than seven gruesome murders had taken place in a span of only 32 hours. Babar Mia was shot dead at his shop at Nawabpur. Hasan Mainuddin, 42, an employee of Qatar Airlines was gunned down near his residence at Sutrapur. Iqbal Hossain, 35, a tea stall owner, was stabbed to death at Teigaon. Ekramul Hasan was shot dead in Nawabpur Road. Shamsun Nahar, 40, and her mother Noor Jahan Begum, 62, were strangled at Maniknagar and a new born baby was killed at Mirpur Zoo.

It is horrible to think what kind of a society we are living in. Why is the government or the law enforcing agencies not taking steps against criminals? Our country is independent and we are an independent nation and we are living in a civilised age. But it is very shameful that in spite of the repeated directives from our prime minister that no criminal should be allowed to escape, the law enforcing agencies are failing to control these heinous crimes one after another. Can we claim ourselves to be a civilised nation?

We urge the authorities concerned, for the sake of the people's well-being and their safety and for the sake of the next generation, please take necessary steps to punish criminals, save the unfortunate victims' family members from their rivals' threats and oppression and ensure justice. Save people's life and property. Stop crime.

Saghir Ahmed
Azampur, Dhaka

Letting AL off the hook

I have gone through your report ("Chittagong the Arms Port", May 23) on procurement of arms by Shibir activists financed by a BNP MP. To me the report seems biased.

In the last five years, some heinous crimes have been committed in Rajshahi and all by the Awami League activists. Awami League workers have been seen openly carrying illegal arms collected from unknown sources. But this was not the case during the BNP rule.

During the Awami League rule, the law and order situation has deteriorated alarmingly not only in Rajshahi but throughout the country. The Awami League is responsible for the anarchy prevailing in the country. When you claim that Shibir activists and the BNP are collecting arms from the Chittagong Port, it seems that you are letting the Awami League off the hook.

Manir
Rajshahi, on e-mail

AVIP lives here!

appeared on May 21, 22 and 23 turned the issue into a farce. Newspaper cartoons, on the front page particularly, are a different ball game altogether and I am afraid Sharier does not fit the bill.

Shaukat Islam
Dhaka, on e-mail

The mobile phobia

Cellular phones have had a tremendous impact on the transaction of business by shortening time and accelerating speed. The immense benefits of this tool of communication can hardly be measured in one go. However, this luxury turned necessity of life has perverted effects that may cause fatal consequences.

Passengers on aircraft are advised not to use mobile phones while on board because this might interrupt the aerial communication of the aircraft with the control tower and this could have tragic consequences. Some passengers, in their desire to show off, do not give a fig to safety instructions and keep on using their mobile sets.

These upstarts have little knowledge of the consequences of their foolish behaviour. They may have the right to annihilate themselves, but should not be allowed to do so at the cost of other lives. The aircraft authorities have to be more vigilant against violations of safety by mobile users in order to ensure the safety of all passengers.

Mohsin
Shegun Bagicha, Dhaka.

School for scandal?

Amidst all odds, the North South University has earned the reputation of a good academic institution. But in reality it is the very opposite. The absence of trust as well as of a civil attitude from the trustees of the university have forced many good and competent staff to leave this institution.

Recently the Pro-Vice Chancellor, who is one of architects of the institute, resigned, reportedly after being severely abused and insulted by the trustees. This was not an isolated incident. This set of trustees has abused the faculties, staff and even students on many occasions. If one attends a trustee meeting it will be clear how uncivilised the trustees are. How would these people assure quality education to the young?

Most of the trustees are corrupt but powerful citizens. They have amassed a huge amount of wealth in illegal ways and the university is nothing but a new investment for them. Very recently, one of the trustees was forced to resign from the Chamber of Commerce as a loan defaulter and a corrupt official. As the university has earned a positive reputation, the trustees are gradually removing those who are protesting their actions and the recent case of the Pro VC is just another example.

The trustees are misusing the name of the university in various ways, buying furniture for the classrooms, buying land for the campus and so on. Each trustee receives a large amount for attending each meeting. They are even allegations that they accept money from the students to arrange admission for them. This type of malpractice has become a real concern for the guardians. Shouldn't there be some statute by which the role of the trustee, faculty, staff and student is defined? Is there any such instrument? Shouldn't UGC protect the university from these corrupt trustees?

A concerned guardian
Dhaka, on e-mail

Soldiers are not the solution

The army is being called upon increasingly to do the work of the traffic police. As a Bangla weekly has said, "lean and thin" soldiers are doing the work of "fat" policemen holding walkie talkies.

The army can always be called in to aid the civil administration. But this is normally done when the civil administration cannot deal with a grave emergency situation resulting from a natural calamity, epidemic or a serious internal law and order situation. One fails to understand what is the emergency on the roads of Dhaka that troops have to be called in?

A traffic jam is not at all an emergency. If the traffic police on duty have the willingness and ability to do it, they can prevent traffic jams by disciplining the traffic. They have all the legal power and authority to do the job. Soldiers, however, do not have the legal power or authority to discipline traffic. In performing traffic duties their only weapon is the goodwill of the people towards them.

I am afraid, if the present practice continues, a stage will soon come when recalcitrant drivers will not listen to the soldiers. If that happens the sol-

diery will feel greatly humiliated for no fault of theirs and their morale will be hard hit. The traffic constables might feel happy to see the soldiers being subjected to the same sense of being ineffectual that the constables have been experiencing, but traffic jams will continue unabated.

The solution lies not in employing troops but in creating the willingness and the ability among the members of the police force to do the job for which they are being paid by the tax payers.

And it is no use blaming a poor constable or an ASI of police. The top brass of the police must take the responsibility for the failure of those under their command. It is their sacred duty to inculcate in their forces a sense of willingness by motivating them, and to give them the ability to do the job by training them.

If these senior police officers cannot do this, then let their jobs also be taken over by officers from the defence services!

Vox Populi
Dhaka, on e-mail
(Name and address withheld at writer's request)



India-Bangladesh border clash

Editor's Note: As we have received an unprecedented number of letters on the India Bangladesh border clash we are devoting a section on this page to this topic. We welcome letters from our readers and hope that they will continue to share their opinions with The Daily Star and its readers. However, this correspondence is now closed.

Indian ire

This refers to Ramaswamy R. Iyer's article ("India and Bangladesh" May 22), in which he was critical of Mahfuz Anam's point of view on the India-Bangladesh border clash. Let me say this with the strongest confirmation that Mahfuz Anam is, as Iyer says, "a decent, civilised, urbane and friendly a person as [he] has ever come across" and "well disposed towards India" and that is why he has expressed his feelings on the recent border skirmish vis-à-vis India's attitude towards Bangladesh.

India's big brother attitude has been widely accentuated since Bangladesh came into being. It is now 27 years in the running and the Mujib-Indira treaty is still in cold storage. Iyer's mention of legal complexities, intricacies etc are sheer baloney. As regards hegemony, India's long range strategy is a corridor towards its 'seven sisters', in Assam and other states in its proximity.

Mr Iyer writes that there was "a bit of adventurism by the BDR" in Paddua. Well, if this was the case, the Indians could have just asked the BDR to withdraw and maintain status quo. But no, the BSF troops were specifically instructed by the higher authorities in Delhi to teach the BDR a lesson by encroaching the inside Bangladesh territory with heavy armaments and with a strength of 300 personnel.

It is said that if you come inside a bear's den you are liable to be scratched. And that's what happened to the 16 BSF soldiers. In the process, however, the bears were also slightly scratched.

In his concluding paragraph Mr Iyer refers to the kind of relationship he expects between Bangladesh, Nepal and India. I would ask Mr Iyer to pay heed to Mahfuz Anam's thoughts in his brilliant commentary on this matter.

M. Ahmad
Uttara, Dhaka, on e-mail

India is a 'big brother'

I refer to the arguments by Rama Murty in these columns ("Wrong Perspectives", May 16) about Bangladesh and India. It is a generally held view that India has shown its big brotherly attitude in all aspects towards Bangladesh since our independence. By size and population there is no doubt that India is a big country. In fact to be a big country and to act like a big brother are two different aspects. In Bangladesh, we condemn this attitude of India as a whole.

Mr Murty has said that if India had any ill motive it could have easily retained a part of Bangladesh after the war of 1971. This sort of thinking surely reflects the big brother attitude. We strongly believe that this is a wrong conception among Indians.

Perhaps they have forgotten that this nation fought against Pakistan (one of the most modern and strong armies of the world) for nine long months and sacrificed as much as 3 million lives in this cause. India had a supportive role in our war of liberation. If India had tried to retain a part of Bangladesh, a proud nation would have resisted it, till the last man was alive.

However we are certainly grateful and remember the sacrifices of Indians during the war of liberation and we will remain grateful to them forever. That does not mean that the national interest will be ignored, whatever the cause may be. The people of Bangladesh want a respectful and friendly relationship with India.

This relationship could grow in

different ways. For example, business between the two countries could be expanded on the basis of mutual interests. At present the business is one-sided i.e. in favour of India.

And other interests have been ignored by the big brother. As we know, there is a lot of scope for Bangladesh to do business with India. But unfortunately the Indian government has created many obstacles for Bangladeshi products to penetrate the Indian market, even though the free market concept is widely used all over the world.

Besides this, there are a lot of other factors that have created ill-will. These include, the issue of the Farakka Barrage which creates enormous problems for Bangladesh; obstacles by India to the operation of a land route for business between Nepal and Bangladesh; the bad behaviour of the Indian Security Forces at the border against Bangladeshi nationals; non-implementation of the Mujib-Indira accord for 30 years, and its non-ratification by the Indian parliament as yet.

All these activities are not the role of a friendly country. Keeping these issues unresolved and hanging is the act of a hostile country.

We cannot hope for positive results by blaming others. The misconceptions of both the countries can be settled and resolved if both governments have the will to do so. Being a big country both in size and population India should take the initiative and play an active role in resolving the crisis.

Abdullah Ismail
Motijheel, Dhaka, on e-mail

The 'true' Indian

I am an Indian and a regular reader of The Daily Star. I commended The Daily Star and Bangladeshis ("Kudos to Daily Star" May 18) but nowadays I am seeing more and more vitriol and anger against Indians in the press.

What do these people know about India? I am not saying that we are the greatest country but have we ever invaded any other country like Pakistan or China did? Have we ever occupied any territory? Leave out the 40-50 acres that are in dispute. China has occupied the whole of Tibet, why aren't Bangladeshis spewing vitriol on them?

There are so many refugees from Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet and Burma in India. Have we ever oppressed any minorities?

If one talks about Babri Masjid and all those petty things, then think about this: Kashmiri militants have destroyed hundreds of temples in Kashmir, but have we shown any hatred against the Muslims in India for those actions? When the Babri Masjid was demolished, Bangladeshis tortured Hindus and destroyed many temples. Babri Masjid is just one piece of action, leave that issue once and for all. Don't refer to that place in every letter.

If Hindus are fanatics, I can assure you that no religion is free of fanaticism in the world.

Muslims in India have a separate law which is fully under the power of Muslim leaders, which Hindus do not have. Where in the world does a minority enjoy so much power? The courts do not interfere in matters like divorce for Muslims.

And who are the fanatics? The BJP and the Shiv Sena just say many things for votes, they don't do anything against minorities in practice.

Show me any Hindu who has risen to a prominent level in Bangladesh. Except for singing Rabindranath Tagore's poems,

has Bangladesh given any freedom and power to Hindus as has been given to Muslims in India? I have invited Bangladeshis to come to India and then write about freedom of minorities, fanaticism in India.

I request The Daily Star to print this mail as this will clear some misunderstanding about India among Bangladeshis (hopefully) as we cannot afford to have another Pakistan in the east.

Kumar, on e-mail

India's version

Though the Bangladesh version of the border incident, including the question of the mutilation of BSF bodies, has been the same from the very first day, the Indian version of the story has been differing.

The chief of BSF differed from what the Ministry of External Affairs said. The Ministry of Home had another version.

The electronic media in India has lacked the guts to accept the truth openly. The TV news channels spent a lot of time and effort trying to arouse sentiments against Bangladesh. They uttered practically anything to disgrace Bangladesh in a desperate attempt to hide their own blunder.

They even dared to call Bangladesh a state living on their mercy. Some even reminded Bangladesh that India was a nuclear state, as if to imply that small neighbours must put up with India's nuclear bullying.

Interestingly, commentators openly admitted the presence of RAW agents in Bangladesh who were accused of failing to provide early warning to the Indians. In fact, a recent news paper report on a concocted story of how the BDR operation was planned at Dhaka, made reference to RAW as its source of information. This report was so absurd that any Bangladeshi who read the story clearly understood the inaccuracy of the information. If this was the standard of RAW, clearly Bangladeshis have nothing to worry about. But the damage that has been inflicted on the Bangladeshis people by the Indian media will take a long time to heal. Do the Indians care?

There are claims that there are 1.5 million to 100 million illegal Bangladeshis in India, but the government of India has been unable to produce a list of even a thousand illegal immigrants in their country till this point of time.

We accept the size of India in terms of population, resource base and the military. But independence is a precious commodity to all Bangladeshis and it was not a gift of charity given to us by anyone, rather we earned it through a bloody war sacrificing three million lives.

We remember the assistance by Indians in our freedom struggle with deep gratitude and appreciation but we will not bow to their subjugation. As a Bangladeshi I just wish that India had treated us on an equal footing based on friendship and self respect for the last 30 years. But it seems now that this was never to happen.

So what should be our approach in the future? I think we should build a national consensus in our country to attempt a change of attitude on the part of Indians. Let us extend what Mahatma Gandhi preached: a total peaceful non-co-operation with those who tend to undermine us and do not treat us with respect.

We are not a militant nation like some others in the subcontinent but we are a nation that will defend every inch of our motherland.

Let us reject all Indian goods, services and the media and all their propaganda till the big brother treats us with respect.

Nazrul,
New York, USA, on e-mail

Cool down time

The unexpected border skirmishes on April 18 locked us in war of words on these columns and this has now landed us in a war of attrition. The arrogant sentiments given vent to by the 'True Indian' and the poor estimation of us by a few other Indians were hurtful, prejudicial and hence most deplorable.

That became the cause for strong protests and insinuations from many Bangladeshis to the effect that India instead of being friendly has been always supercilious in its treatment and in some instances has bullied its friendly neighbour, Bangladesh, only because of the formers' size and might. Some also blamed India for abetting in the insurgency in the CHTs for 20 long years prior to 1998.

Thus the good neighbourly relationship that had been existing between the two nations and the two peoples has been damaged, and ill will against each other has been promoted through charges and counter charges. But nobody seems to be wary of the consequences of allowing matters to remain boiling. What resulted from the manoeuvres of BSF was incidental and out of expediency, and there is no reason for us to be ecstatic over it. We want to live in peace and amity, and cannot help but forget and feel sorry for what happened due to their misadventure.

Mr. Ashraf Ali Shah from Lahore, Pakistan in his letter ("Expand the Army" May 17) has come up with uncalled for advice. What happened is entirely our internal affair and we have reason to smell a rat in his advice.

We do not want to raise our military strength to the detriment of the country's prosperity as well as to the loss of people's right to rule the country. Our democratic polity will decide what strength of army shall we need to protect our country.

Mr. Mukul ("Agenda for Action" May 17) blamed the Awami League government for the border crisis and put forth six points to get rid of India. That all the previous governments after Sheikh Mujib have not taken up the issue with India does not give him the right to point his finger towards them. His aim seems to be to sow the seed of discord with India permanently. Such views deserve the least attention for publication. Within the framework of SAFTA and globalization, how could he propose to boycott every Indian product? We have to go a long way to achieve self-reliance in all sectors, and until then we have to depend on imported goods either from neighbourly India or a far off country like USA.

The sub-continental Indian's sentiments ("Forget all differences" May 18) are highly laudable. He spoke from a humanist outlook and this kind of attitude should be adopted both sides to foster better understanding, trust and respect.

Finally to co-exist as a sovereign nation with India like the European countries, we seek peaceful neighbourly relations, not a big brotherly attitude. Successive Indian governments have failed to implement the Indira-Mujib Accord and we see no alternative to the present Indian government to bring this accord out of cold storage and settle border disputes once and for all. The onus lies on India to remove the bitterness that ensued from the border clashes. The sooner the Indian government buckles down to it, the

better.
A.H. Dewan
Dhaka Cantonment
Dhaka

Ungrateful nation

This is in reference to the letter "Ungrateful nation" (May 7). The writer is an Indian and the points he brought up were completely baseless and horrible. Otherwise how dare he speak about an independent Chakmaland! He alleged that Bangladesh is eliminating Chakmas and Hindus. Well, the Chakmas of the Chittagong region were rebels and Bangladesh had/has the right to do anything to stop the rebellion. It is an open secret that India is helping the Chakmas to drum up their rebel activities. On the issue of eliminating Hindus, I must say that the allegation is simply baseless. Rather, India is eliminating the Muslims. It is India who razed the historic Babri Masjid. In Bangladesh the Hindus are enjoying all the common civil and religious rights. I would urge the writer to think deeply before he writes.

It is clear that the writer's history lesson is minimal. Otherwise he would not have remarked that Bangladesh was created to solve Yahya Khan's internal problems. Bangladesh would not have come into existence within a short period of time without India's help in 1971 and that is why we are a grateful nation. We recognise India's help but that does not mean that we will have to keep India always on our head and allow it to do anything it wants.

The recent border incident was a hard pill for India to digest but the attack was initiated by BSF. Our BDR simply repulsed the attack. It is an illusion to think that BDR made the attack. The allegation of a BDR attack is simply ridiculous. The main thing is that India never imagined it could lose sixteen soldiers to three at the hands of Bangladesh. But a fact is always a fact. India must realise the fact and come back to reality. It is a good lesson for India.

A Patriot
Khilgaon, Dhaka

War Crime?

State minister of foreign affairs J D Swami of India had declared that if Bangladesh did not take action against those BDR personnel who were responsible for the death of 16 BSF soldiers, India would take the matter to the International War Crime Tribunal. This statement is absurd. The minister must be aware of the provocation that prompted the BDR to fire.

By the reaction of the Indians it is clear that they do not know what happened. On 18th April in the dead of night, more than 300 Indian BSF trespassed into our territory, supported by heavy weapons. The BDR border outpost was manned by only ten BDR personnel. The BSF surrounded them menacingly, so what option did the BDR have but to open fire? Could it be termed a crime to defend one's country and one's life? We would like to ask the people of India what the BSF would have done if the situation were reversed? It would be wise to think rationally and refrain from blaming Bangladesh for what happened at Roumari.

We want a friendly relationship with our neighbouring countries, enmity with none. The agreement signed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Indira Gandhi in 1974 has not been implemented.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong.