

Tension along the border

Bilateral agreement must be honoured

WE cannot but be concerned at the recent incidents along the Indo-Bangladesh border. The situation stems from attempts by the Indian BSF to build fences along the border that is in gross violation of the Indo-Bangladesh Boundary Agreements of 1974, and also from attempts to push in Bangla speaking Indians, again a patently illegal act.

The tension along a number of points of the Indo-Bangla border has been serious enough to necessitate declaration of red alert by the BDR and reportedly the BSF has arrayed several thousand troops following exchange of fire. Regrettably it has caused displacement of several thousand local Bangladeshis who were forced to flee their hearths and homes for fear of their lives, in Lalmonirhat sector.

The boundary accord between our two countries prohibits construction of any kind within 150 yards of the no man's land. Yet we see the Indian BSF, resorting to the construction of fences within the no man's land time and again.

There are appropriate mechanisms open to both the countries to address such situations along the border. We regret to note that the Indian response has been less than helpful. We find the Indian refusal to sit for talks at the local levels to diffuse the tension at the first instance against the spirit of good neighbourly relations.

There are also agreed specifics that guide the handling of illegals in each other's country, and forcibly pushing suspected illegal migrants across the border is certainly not one of them.

The matter of fencing is a policy issue which one would have thought couldn't have been undertaken without the green signal from the top, and so it is with the 'push-in bids'. We are at a loss to understand how the Indian authority can allow such acts.

In spite of the understanding that was reached at the home secretary level meeting of the two countries last year in Dhaka that all possible steps shall be taken to prevent untoward incidents at the borders, such incidents have occurred from time to time. We would hope that the upcoming senior officers' level meetings of the BDR and the BSF would iron out the issues, and that such incidents would not be repeated in future.

Perennial power shortage

No more words, action needed

LOAD-shedding is here again. And this time, the situation is looking even grimmer. We get frustrated, angry at frequent power cuts as soon as the summer arrives. No sign of respite from this terrible seasonal ordeal can be seen. Government after government have assured us of improvement in the power sector, but nothing concrete has happened so far.

The BNP-led government on assumption of power in 2001 had blamed the former AL government for its failure to add any extra megawatt to the national grid. But we want to ask the present government, what have they done to turn the situation around, after more than three years in power? What has gone wrong with a government having had a strong two-thirds majority mandate that it could not fulfil a simple pledge for steady the supply of electricity all the year round.

As it is, our consumption of electricity is among the lowest in the world. We are hard put to meet the current demand of power computed at a lower threshold, but if we are to visualise the projected requirement keeping in view the millennium goal for halving poverty by 2015, the frustration becomes overwhelming.

Energy is a fundamental infrastructure that cannot be trifled with except to the peril of our national development efforts. We never tire of bragging about the investment climate in the country and the incentives offered by us to attract FDIs. Not so long ago, the World Bank had cited, not corruption and other hurdles but erratic power supply as the chief obstacle to investment in Bangladesh. We do not want explanations for the current situation, we are interested in results only.

Desperation, despondency and deliverance

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

WE may have to admit that the Bangladeshi polity as of now is experiencing fearsome desperation and mind-boggling despondency with very little hope of welcome deliverance. Admittedly, the educated class suffers from cynicism and apathy. They do not dispel the gloom and are sadly losing faith in the future of the country. The country expects the intelligentsia to adopt a clear-cut stand on issues of national importance and to fight for them. The educated are expected to face all odds with equanimity and not to compromise. The most remarkable fact of political life in Bangladesh is the absence of public response to the gradual collapse of order in the society. The pathetic acceptance of the many indignities and excesses inflicted upon citizens by arrogant power-wielders is a blight for which the entire intelligentsia — lawyers, journalists, educationists, professionals, and all thinking people bear responsibility. They think a 'messiah' will fix all the troubles and forget that their feudal mindset is the root cause of many problems.

Our state structures have been autocratic, exploitative and repressive but we have failed to exert enough pressure for reforms and restructuring. Religious fanaticism, bigotry and militancy are on the increase and while the writ of the government may not run in some areas, our institutions are still strong, the present chaos and consequently remained unattended thereby giving rise to cynicism. As a result, we now have a situation where desperate acts of an apparently illegal dimension are not protested and condemned as vocally as it should be in a democratic polity. The worrisome question is: are we incapable of operating through the law?

Such worries assume significance when we see that the assistance of RAB is sought to control the prices of essential consumer items and is demanded to help realise

resources of the country without any compensation. But the big question is: from where will we bring such a leader? Nobody knows the answer.

The ominous desperation

Lack of proper action at the appropriate time and mismanagement in the socioeconomic sphere have led us to a desperate situation where we have been compelled to extol the virtues of action whose legacy is subject to question. The reference is to the activities of RAB (Rapid Action Battalion) with regard to deaths of suspects and accused persons in custody. The elite outfit has been created through legal

utility bills of service bodies and licence fees of corporate body. In such an eventuality it would appear that ad hocism will reign supreme and that the public service is incapable of any long-term planning. In this scenario, as one goes down to district and local level one may find that the government hardly exists.

The desperation in the law enforcement can be countered in several ways. One such way is major reforms in police force. Control has to be established over its activities. It must not be used by government to harass and victimise its opponents. Recruitments, transfers and posting must not be done

militants and the informal sector operators. Whatever may be the case, we have to know the true nature of our crisis. Is it crisis of the people or of the state? Why are a majority of our people poor? Have we been able to attack the heartland of mass poverty? A large part of our population is still living below the poverty line. Therefore, should not we evolve a strategy for sustainable development based on indigenous resources? Some say that dependence on easy money has destroyed our initiative for innovation and creativity.

There are many examples which show lack of vision on the part of our

ever practice the frugality, simplicity and integrity enjoined by religion. The idealists have vanished from our society and politics has turned into a game of power, self and privilege. We need committed and selfless people who are ready to take up causes. We need physicians who are willing to see what is happening outside their clinics, teachers who take classes in right earnest, writers and journalists who are not desirous of instant recognition, lawyers who are not oblivious of the litigant's misery and brilliant engineers and architects who are conscious of the deteriorating condition of the megapolis.

No society can make progress without idealists and dreamers. In desperation, we have started looking for people for whom money is not everything. We have reached a stage where without a fundamental change in the nature of political power, mode of governance and the very basis and direction of the state itself our socio-economic crisis can not be overcome. We need institutional decision-making which can respond to objective economic logic and accept the urgency for reactivity and innovation.

For that the establishment has to take bold decisions.

In order to do that we do not need heroes any more nor do we need charismatic leaders.

Bangladeshis are a very patient people. They do not have high aspirations nor do they make heavy demands on their leaders. They want only reasonably honest and down-to-earth leadership. They do not even demand high moral standards from their leaders. They are broad-minded enough to put up with their leaders' idiosyncrasies and weaknesses, provided they deliver. The need of the hour is a management system and a team of good managers in every walk of life.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is former Inspector General of Police and Secretary to the government.

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e n a c t m e n t but it has not operated in a strictly legal manner. The desperate acts of such outfit have been appreciated by citizens because the normal enforcement machinery could not assuage the fears of residents by timely action.

The complaints of the victims about the depredations of the criminals over the years, it would appear, fell on deaf ears and consequently remained unattended thereby giving rise to cynicism. As a result, we now have a situation where desperate acts of an apparently illegal dimension are not protested and condemned as vocally as it should be in a democratic polity. The worrisome question is: are we incapable of operating through the law?

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on political grounds. The role of police has to be redefined, its size rationalised and many of its functions assigned to private agencies. Laws giving unlimited powers to the police need to be re-examined because some of them may be irrelevant today. In places citizens' committees may be appointed to oversee the working of police.

Debilitating despondency

Many of us have perhaps unwittingly become the harbingers of a culture of despair which, over period of time, has become all-pervasive. This culture is marked by striking features of continuous squandering of resources and opportunities by the elite thereby forcing us to slide back into a poor, corrupt, intolerant and misgoverned country. Added to that is the indifference, apathy and inaction of our educated and middle classes and their lack of faith in the future. State authority has weakened and the institutional vacuum has been filled by mafias, armed

planners and politicians. Urban unrest is taken merely as a law and order problem and treated as such. Instead of changing the colonial police-structure and stopping its use as a political arm of the government, an answer is sought in creating 'elite' forces or increasing the number of police personnel. Similarly, instead of analysing the factors responsible for our low literacy rate or changing the flawed process of setting up new schools without ensuring their proper functioning, we are embarking on new ambitious schemes. Therefore, if the country has to find solutions to its myriad problems, we will have to find visionaries who can guide us in different spheres of life. Based on their recommendations, we can have a broad conceptual framework for our future development.

Much needed deliverance

The above mentioned vision has to be followed by long-term and consistent policies and plans of action in

projects, particularly in the social sectors and also the user's charges. We also have to take very strong actions to control corruption following the easy money that flies in with foreign assistance.

We may put the entire blame for

most of our problems on politicians and government servants. However, the civil society has not set

high standards of morality, simplicity and hard work. It has to be remembered that without checks and balances most governments tend to be

corrupt and unresponsive. There is

still a lot of apathy and indifference towards addressing the problems of civil society and it is only recently that we see some awareness of these issues.

Bangladesh's single most important crisis is a moral one. Our privileged class as well as the middle classes have developed highly acquisitive instincts. They are virtually greedy to the core. Apparently religious, many of them hardly

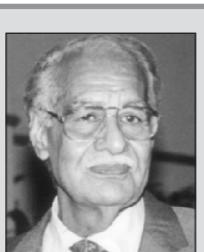
announcement before election. His intimation to the state governor not to support the RJD complicated things unnecessarily.

Former Home Minister Buta Singh, the Bihar governor, again the Congress nominee, did not have much of an option because Paswan held the key. His 30 members could give a majority either to the Lajpurti-BJP-led alliance. However, the governor's role in Jharkhand is reprehensible. He should have invited the BJP-led alliance which was the largest group even though three or four members short of majority. But inviting the other combination that includes the Congress was patently wrong. Such situations, as the Supreme Court judgments have said, have to be sorted out on the floor of the house. Obviously, the governor wanted to placate the Congress-led Centre.

India has to come out with some solution to ensure that governor's discretion is not according to the telephone calls from New Delhi. Such instances of bias have come to notice in the last few years. Goa is only the recent example. The code of democracy may not be necessary but it is essential that governors follow certain norms. The Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State relations has listed some. But no government at New Delhi has implemented them. Governors continue to take the cue from the Centre, whichever government in power. The nation should not expect anything better if politicians continued to be appointed as governors.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

Code of democracy



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

when the chips are down the democratic values have been found asserting themselves. Public and press opinion have chipped in.

That examples like Goa take place is unfortunate. The Congress cut a sorry figure in the state where the governor, a former Congress chief minister of Nagaland, dismissed the elected government of the BJP. No doubt, it was an unstable government with a majority of two members. But the governor went to the extent of not only sack-

In fact, the governor has emerged as an arbiter to decide on who will head the government in a state. This is a great responsibility, requiring objectivity and a sense of fair play. Take elections in the three states — Bihar, Jharkhand, and Haryana. The majority party, the Congress, had two-thirds strength and formed the government. It is another matter that the party did not allow its legislators to register their choice freely. Once

dominated. In truth, the Congress wanted to cut Laloo and Paswan down to size and it expected to recreate a base of its own in the state but in the process, it frittered away the advantage the secular forces had. The party itself also suffered and won some 10 out of 243 seats.

My worry is that if the Congress does not realise its folly, it may commit the same mistake in UP where the Congress has lost its base. The BJP, far from recovered

nothing new. Nor are his corrupt ways.

S. T. I. L. The Congress that has accommodated him as the Railway Minister at the Centre should have handled him differently. Instead of allowing him to allow the number of seats to his allies, the Congress and the Left should have asserted themselves to get a better deal. At least they should have put their foot down on the candidature of criminals. He could not have gone it alone.

Maybe, Paswan would have

BETWEEN THE LINES

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again, the Congress president was asked to nominate the leader. This meant that the members fell in line with the choice of the high command, not their own. This was unfortunate but it related to internal democracy which, in any case, was absent not only in the Congress but other political parties as well.

This was a murder of democracy. However, the wave of shock that has spread throughout the country has made the Congress look sheepish. It may not have admitted its mistake. But it is trying its best to meet the criticism as far as possible. So long as institutions are healthy, things can be retrieved. A judicial review by the Supreme Court, which it introduced on its own some 10, 12 years ago, has lessened the governor's whimsical interference in states.

from the blows it received during the L. S. Sabha elections, got a negative advantage in Bihar. It would be worse in UP if secular forces did not unite if and when the state poll took place. The Congress' inscrutable moves can help the BJP recover. The larger question that secular forces must face is how to fight against communal elements unitedly and concurredly. But this consideration, as the recent poll show, has been pushed into background. However, secularism should not be used to cover up crime or corruption. That Laloo has done little for the state in terms of development is

been a better bet from the very beginning. He has emerged taller. But his strategy could have been different. He should have said "nothing doing with Laloo," without dissociating himself from the party, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). It is like throwing the baby out with the bath-tub. Paswan's proposal to have a Muslim chief minister is understandable because he has announced the constitution of an all-India Muslim-Dalit front. If he is successful in doing so, he may as well change the entire India's political scene. But Paswan's choice for a Muslim chief minister looks more of a tactic. He should have made this

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These people have searched for employment within these districts and found nothing available. We must ignore urban prejudices that they have not done so. Virtually no rickshaw puller wants to be in this inhuman profession. They would much rather be working in the agriculture or service sector near their families and village, rather than struggle in this polluted city.

From a purely electoral perspective, it would be prudent to get the message across that the authorities recognise that is not just a transport issue and that it is a social and economic issue. That the authorities are listening to both affected passengers and also the pullers and ensuring a smooth transition for the latter.

There has to be an exit away from

the rickshaw industry. That is what the Bank has finally made in calling for proper handling of compensation for affected rickshaws. It now needs to go the whole way by ensuring there is a watertight and fair procedure before embarking on a politically sensitive mission that could lose a whole lot of votes. They have miscalculated before. Neither they, nor the government, can afford to get this one wrong.

Seizing 'illegal' rickshaws: Not an effective deterrence

is consensus on that. Where we differ is where the process is being handled callously and the short time frame in which it is being conducted.

We should learn from past operations. For example, most citizens supported the introduction of CNG auto-rickshaws because they replaced the polluting 2-stroke "baby taxis." They might be less

supportive of how many auto-rickshaw drivers and owners have allegedly not been properly compensated and been thrown on the scrap heap. Numerous stories have come out in the media. We are in danger of repeating this on a much larger scale.

Take a look at what is on offer this time:

this does to their image if people living below the poverty line are not allowed an honest attempt to earn a living. The public relations unit (if there is one) of this institution has already scored an own goal with its attempt to gain immunity from the Bangladeshi government. Before that, it pledged mostly old money for flood rehabilitation after the 2004 deluge. Santa Claus turned into Scrooge. They got away with that one because we have learnt to be quiet or look elsewhere. Civil society was more excited about the war of words over immunity. They were less interested in getting funds for reconstruction for our 20 million victims. Notice the generosity of donors for South East Asian tsunami victims by contrast.

So far, as regards rickshaws, the Bank has finally made the right move in calling for proper handling of compensation for affected rickshaws. It now needs to go the whole way by ensuring there is a watertight and fair procedure before embarking on a politically sensitive mission that could lose a whole lot of votes. They have miscalculated before. Neither they, nor the government, can afford to get this one wrong.

Bad for PR

They might also like to think what