

An indemnity innovation! Somebody should pay for the offence

FOR all one knows, underutilisation of Annual Development Programme (ADP) funds comes under fire usually after a mid-term review, or a belated, albeit a much-bemoaned, assessment as has been the case with ADP 2004-05.

But that there could be an invidious downside even to the implemented parts of ADPs was something that escaped us until the parliamentary standing committee on establishment ministry spilled the beans about thousands of development project-related vehicles remaining untraceable for years. According to an establishment ministry report submitted to the parliamentary committee on March 30, out of a total 26,651 vehicles purchased for 615 development projects under 43 ministries and divisions, between 1997 and 2004, only 303 vehicles were returned to the central transport pool on completion of the projects. The reminder 26,349 vehicles are unaccounted for, which practically means though, that these are being used unauthorisedly and, therefore, culpably so.

The users being high government officials in clear breach of rules which required transports be handed over to the central transport pool on completion of projects those were attached to, are certainly liable to answer for their conduct. Furthermore, fuel costs for the transports were borne out of the government exchequer. Under what head or authority, who knows? If the money was drawn from the revenue budget, then the concept of budgetary discipline stood negated. Who will account for the unauthorised spending of public money?

When such questions have been making rounds and clamours are being heard for early identification and punishment of the guilty, we have the surprise news that the government might be contemplating to amend the rule on return of project vehicles which will have the effect of condoning the unauthorised use of public vehicles. In other words, the practice will be legalised, if and when such an amendment is carried out.

We urge the government to eschew the path and pay heed to the suggestions which are two-fold from our side: first, let there be a scooping investigation into the messy affair leading to fixation of responsibility and punitive action against the guilty; and second, we would like to see a comprehensive code formulated for use of government vehicles including transports attached to development projects after completion of the undertakings.

A tribute to Samad Azad

A void left in politics

OUR deep and profound condolences at the death of Abdus Samad Azad, a veteran politician, a respected parliamentarian and a wonderful human being. He was among the old guard politicians whose generation has all but vanished. He will be remembered as a politician of consistency and steadfast loyalty to party ideals, which are rarities in contemporary politics of Bangladesh.

His death has drawn a curtain on an illustrious and eventful political career spanning over more than six decades. He was not only the first foreign minister of independent Bangladesh, he was also the immediate past one. His contributions to the liberation war came in the shape of mobilising support for Bangladesh's cause around the globe.

Since his political career spanned basically all the major events in our national politics, from language movement in 1952 to liberation war in '71 to democratic movement of '90, he was there right at the forefront as an active participant. He had a great sense of humour, positive nature and a rare capacity to reach out to other political parties. He cultivated a very warm and friendly relationship with his political opponents, a rarity across the political spectrum today. He will no doubt be missed there.

Abdus Samad Azad possessed the old guard trait of being forthcoming, communicative and affectionate to the people he met. He was widely respected by the other political parties. Though he had an amicable nature of being a mediator, he always stuck to his guns when it came to his political beliefs and principles. A great follower of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and an ardent follower of Awami League ideals, his loyalty to his leader and party would be remembered for ever.

We mourn the demise of a person who strongly believed in democracy and fought for it unwaveringly. Our heart goes out in sympathy for the members of the bereaved family.

Clashes on our borders



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THERE were several disquieting developments last fortnight along the Bangladesh-India border that appeared to strain relations between the two countries. Several deaths of Bangladesh nationals from BSF firing and arraying of extra forces along the border by BSF on several points demonstrated a simmering tension between the two neighbours.

What was however most regrettable was the BSF incursion into Bangladesh in Akhaura on a village called Hirapur on the 16th of April by about a platoon along with 100 or more Indian civilians. The incident, which involved heavy exchange of fire, resulted in the deaths of a Bangladeshi girl and a BSF personnel of the rank of Assistant Commandant. The matter was doubly regrettable because it happened when the chiefs of the BDR and BSF were about to ink an agreement in Dhaka on some vexing matter relating to the management of the Bangladesh-India border.

What was not acceptable to BDR was the BSF attempt to construct fences, which in some places were less than 150 meters from the zero line, known as the No Man's Land (NML). This was a

clear violation of the "India-Bangladesh Guidelines for Border Authorities, 1975", an agreement between the two countries relating to the management of the borders. On the cards were records on the issue of construction of fence inside the NML and simultaneous patrolling on both sides of the border.

The BDR had agreed to coordinated patrol along the border, while the BSF had almost relented to the requirement to stick to the clauses of the 1975 Guidelines,

reprisals. Disconcerting also were BSF activities, following the incident of the 16th along several points on the Bangladesh-India border, in which several Bangladesh nationals were killed by BSF fire. One wondered whether it was a Baraimari all over again.

Interestingly, the press statement of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, and the BSF version of the Akhaura incident, are at variance, although the major thrust was that it was the BDR that had intruded into the Indian territory

High Commission on the other hand says that AC Jiwan Kumar had come to seek the release of one Ramdan Pal who was allegedly kidnapped by Bangladesh nationals and brought inside Bangladesh. Instead of sitting for a flag meeting, "Assistant Commandant Jeevan Kumar and Constable KK Surendran were dragged inside Bangladesh territory and attacked by BDR troops".

The contradictions in these two statements are evident and there are several anomalies that prevent

the nature of terrain, the Indian High Commission's statement, "From the marks on the ground, the spot enquiry established that assistant commandant Jeevan Kumar and constable K. K. Surendran were dragged inside Bangladesh territory and attacked by the BDR, resulting in the death of the assistant commandant," appears far-fetched.

As per records there has so far been no incident of trespass by the BDR into Indian territory. The terrain conditions as well as the

'Guidelines' of 1975 both in letter and spirit and not use its provisions in a selective manner. Bangladesh has no problems with construction of the fence along its border as long as the relevant provisos of the 'Guidelines' are followed by India. Given the comments from the Bangladesh side that it was willing to consider cases where India may be constrained by ground conditions unable to keep to the relevant stipulations of the 'Guidelines', there was no reason for it to continue as an intractable issue.

It is also learnt that the policy of fencing on the NML was a recent formulation based on the argument that as much use of land as possible would be made by India in its territory to construct border fences.

Since the incident the BSF had resorted to a lot of muscle flexing. Reportedly, its elements were on a high state of alert and several of our nationals were killed by the BSF at several other points of the border.

Border incidents are not unusual between neighbours. But, we must not let it get out of hand. It does not help to explain away events through contradictory statements and media hype calling for tough action against errant neighbours. Incidents such as this call for phlegmatic approach.

It is heartening to note that the two foreign ministers have decided to sit to take the "steam out of the present irritants through negotiation."

Flexing of muscles will not help, flexible minds will.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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particularly insofar as it related to construction of defence structures in the NML. Reportedly, it was initially decided that, should a need arise on the Indian side to erect fences within the NML, it would be referred to the Bangladesh side and decision would be given at the government level, implying that no arbitrary action by India would be resorted to in this regard.

The unfortunate incident of the 16th of April has put paid to any possibility of reaching a common understanding on two very important issues relating to management of Bangladesh-India border.

The incident unfortunately drew some very strong comments from the Indian side, some of which, according to many observers, went beyond diplomatic norms and bordered on veiled threats of

and resorted to abduction, shooting and killing of the Indian nationals.

The long and short of the BSF version of the incident is that on the afternoon of 16th April, BDR personnel intruded deep into Indian territory in the vicinity of the Indian BSF camp of Lankapura. They were requested by the BSF to go back, but instead, insulted AC Jiwan Kumar, the officer on the spot. A firefight ensued between BDR who, according to BSF version, were "well entrenched in a premeditated plan and defence", and the BSF. Implied in the statement is that the BDR shot and killed the officer and dragged his body inside the Bangladesh territory to give it the appearance of an Indian intrusion into Bangladesh. The statement from the Indian

one from accepting the validity of the substance of the Indian versions of the incident.

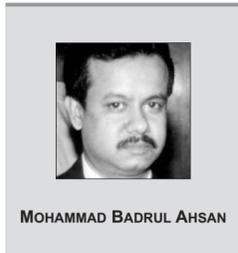
It seems rather incongruous that a group of intruders would be 'requested' to go back into their own territory instead of being arrested for trespass. Even more odd is the fact that this body of troops (could not have been more than four or five) had themselves "well entrenched in a premeditated plan and defence," well inside Indian territory, shot and killed the assistant commandant of the BSF, and carried his body and also that of another injured person (an injured Indian national was also recovered about 400 yards inside Bangladesh territory) from 'well within Indian territory,' into Bangladesh, and all this under the eyes of the BSF in broad daylight. Given

character of the barbed wire makes it difficult to rationalise the Indian statements. Even Ramdan's account that appeared in some local dailies of Agartala admits of his crossing into Bangladesh territory in search of his stray cattle.

There is no doubt that the BSF had intruded into our territory on whatever pretext, and it is evident that there was a firefight following the looting of Bangladesh property by Indian nationals. The unfortunate result was the death of Indian BSF personnel and a young Bangladeshi girl.

There cannot be any doubt that the fence that has been erected along the Bangladesh-India border is by any definition a defence structure. It is for the two countries to follow the

The face



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE face looks as if it has been carved out of a block of light brown granite, its two cheeks sloping down in measured hollowness on two sides of the nose like a hillock thinned by erosion and mindless earthcutters. The nostrils are firm and round as if mouths of two gorges, which lead deeply into the surface. The forehead stretches like a rolling plateau, edging on the bangs of hairs parted in the middle and then going around the head in neatly bobbed clusters.

The ground is slightly depressed under the nose and then slants down to the upper lip, which sits on the lower lip like two layers of subcrustal rocks. Then further down, the surface sinks and narrows into the delicate chin like a promontory where the high point of a rock projects into the water. The earlobes peek through the hairs on two sides of the face like shifting rears of two rabbits hiding in the bush.

But the sign of life doesn't come until you look in the eyes. The eyeballs dance behind the sockets like two amusing faces lurching behind the windows. The eyes

speak before the mouth opens, joy and sorrow, hope and despondency, fear and courage, all thoughts and emotions are captured in the motion of the eyes before they reverberate through other parts of the face, in the twitch of muscles, crinkles on the forehead, swollen cheeks or smacking lips.

This face seldom smiles, but when it does it sprinkles laughter like a spray gun, filling the air with colours of happiness that can leave lasting stains on others. This

expressions of a life soaked in fear and fury.

Behind the lips the cavity of mouth sits like the centre of universe, a terrible bitterness filling its space as if dark clouds spreading in the sky. Resentments rise from the heart like vapours from subterranean streams. This face is poised like an ice-capped crater on a volcano that is waiting to erupt. Yet it brings comfort to those who behold, like sweat in the summer and fire in the winter. This face is decorated with filigrees of emo-

eyes at its midpoint. The mouth and nose are each placed at golden sections of the distance between the eyes and the bottom of the chin. The pupils of the eyes and the outside corners of the mouth must form a perfect square. The golden section of this square defines the nose, the tip of the nose, the inside of the nostrils, the two rises of the upper lip and the inner points of the ear. The square also defines the distance from the upper lip to the bottom of the chin.

awkwardly close to ear opening. The relative positions of the neck, the back of the eye, the front of the eye, back of the nose and mouth are in chaos. The dimensions of the face from top to bottom, the positions of the eyebrow, nose, and mouth are a riot. Even the teeth are no exception. The front two incisor teeth are disoriented like the loose keys of an old typewriter. The golden ratio of the width of the smile to the third tooth from the centre is grievously inadequate.

slowly scan everything around it like searchlights. It tells you nothing at the first sight. But if you observe it for a while, the face unfolds the irony of a depleted life, a life that, like an opinion, has been shaped by experience instead of hope. It is a beautiful face without the golden sections, but hangs from a body that stoops when it walks, arms inwardly bent like two dangling triangles.

The face wears the strains of carrying the burden of life and much of that strain shows in the stream of fatigue flowing inside the dark brown eyes. A pair of glasses protects these eyes, oval shaped frame clasped on a pentagonal face like contrasting geometric forms in a single artwork.

This is the face that struck me as unusual when I first saw it. It looked attractive to me, but I couldn't tell why. It laughed with the echo of shattering glasses, glanced with the calm of a spent storm, breathed with the grace of summer breeze, and spoke with the notes of dulcet music. The lips quivered like the string of a bow that had just shot an arrow. The hairs looked smooth as a manicured lawn. The skin was soft like velvet.

If the eyes are the windows to the heart, then the face is the doorway to the human body and the mirror of life that lives within it. Beauty is the glow of fire that burns in the heart, not the heat of flame which rises from the flesh. In so much as it lies in the eye of the beholder, this face has taught me one thing. What is behelden does not come from the surface. You have to go deeper to know what makes it.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

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face often resounds with harsh words, sizing up people, as if canons, roaring through spasmodic lips, are firing to cut down the enemy lines. This face rarely shows pain or sorrow, but bears the hardened composure of the façade of a house, which has withstood demolitions in the back.

Yet this face has a certain beauty, a fatal attraction that draws derring-do people to their adventures. It beams with a kind of glow that pulls the flies to the fire, the heat of passion radiating from every grin, every nod, every smile, every turn and every glance. But this face is mostly stolid, its muscles taut with the

dimming and shining like the shifting lights in a magic lantern show.

It is said that beauty is when the face is arranged in a number of golden sections. When Leonardo da Vinci painted Mona Lisa's face, he is said to have fit it perfectly into a golden rectangle, and structured the rest of the painting around similar rectangles. Greeks invented these golden sections and the Parthenon is full of them. Pythagoras and his followers believed that these golden sections or ratios were divine proportions.

In a beautiful face, the head forms a golden rectangle with the

This particular face does not configure many of these golden sections. The width of the nose, the distance between the eyes and the eye brows and the distance from the pupils to the tip of the nose, nothing forms the rectangles or are arranged in divine proportions. Likewise, the width of the eye, the distance of pupil from eyelash to eyebrow and distance between the nostrils are not aligned. The required distance from the upper lip to the bottom of the nose and several dimensions of the eye are not sadly there.

Even if you look at this face from the side, its profiles are also not symmetric. The front of the head is

Still this face has something about it that turns your head. Still this face has something that catches your eyes, when it bounces its hairs and the rises of its upper lip are pulled like the string of a bow in a comely smile that glints through the corner of its eyes. This face, this sculptured block of light brown granite, comes alive only when its eyes move like the feeble pulse running in a listless body. This face looks stiff in the concentrated expression of anguish, a face of the face that hides underneath festering wounds of a deplorable life.

This face sits on the shoulder like a watchtower where two eyes

OPINION

Deaths in the Mediterranean

Catch perpetrators not facilitators

ABDUL ALIM

THE death of eleven Bangladeshi youths in the Mediterranean seeking clandestine entry into European dreamland from Morocco has shocked the nation. Drifting on high seas for days on end, they died of sheer lack of food and water. It was cruellest of deaths imaginable. Fate betrayed them. By a navigational mistake, the small boat carrying the ill-fated 26 Bangladeshi job seekers drifted towards Algerian coast instead of the comparatively short distance Spanish coastline. Their supply of food and water ran out in two days that was the estimated time to reach Spain. Ten of them died on board, until the Algerian coast guard found and rescued them in near-death condition. One of them died later in Algerian hospital.

Less than a month into the harrowing Mediterranean tragedy, yet another horrible story came to light as 24 Bangladeshi job-seekers

returned home after languishing for months in jails in the western African country of Mali. On a similar errand and dumped in deep deserts of Sahara, they were rescued by police and put into custody. They were brought back home under the good offices of IOM (International Organisation for Migration).

These two incidents raised many questions and prompted frenzied attempts by different authorities to solve the whole problem in one go. Alarm bells tolled in every corner of the administration and the media flared the issues that gave the impression that anybody involved in sending people on jobs abroad or selling air-tickets is perpetrating a crime by exploiting gullible poor people of the country. Hectic inter-ministerial meetings were held and sweeping directives were passed to law enforcing agencies to curb errant and unauthorised travel and recruiting agents. This perhaps offered a heyday for our law enforcers who landed in hordes on the hubs of travel and recruiting in the

city.

They were charged for holding so many passports of so many persons. Very conveniently, neither the travel agents' nor the recruiting agents' ordinances allow them to hold passport of their clients. This appears as a mockery of law. Almost always the first question these service providers have to ask a client is: 'Do you have passport?' Ironically, they are denied the legal right to hold the basic tool of their trade. No visa can be stamped or obtained without passport nor any airlines would issue tickets without verifying visa in the passport. Without passport, there can be no travelling or recruiting business. Naturally, every office, small or big, holds passports of its clients. This loophole or inadequacy of law gives the law enforcers a scope to frame a 'case' against any travel or recruiting agency anytime.

The sequence of scenario that follows is anybody's guess. If the unfortunate owner could buy out his exit, he is lucky to have saved his

prestige and goodwill. If not, a picture of handcuffed owner/staff of the agency with stacks of 'fake' passports splashed in the front pages of the dailies next day is not usually an exception. In many of our reports, any passport seized in any context is termed as 'fake'. No need to await an investigation to arrive at this conclusion. And if the seized 'fake' passports are in hundreds in a single haul, nothing can be of better 'news value'.

In a country that exports about three hundred thousand recruits annually, possession of hundreds of passports by a moderate-size recruiting agency is a very common phenomenon. The frenzy generated by the tragedy at the Mediterranean, resultant crack down on recruiting and travelling agencies and the flare up by the media have shifted the whole focus from the material context of the incidents. After ATAB pointed out in a press conference that there exists more than one thousand unauthorised travel agencies all over the country, who are not

even their members, the administration woke up. Hectic activities are afoot to track them down. Why now? Why not before? Why we have to act so pious after a tragedy? This is how the whole sequel of the tragic incident was played in home front. Such activities sent panic among both recruiting and travel agencies. Result is 32 percent slide in manpower export in the month of March alone.

Recurrence of such incidents is not for the first time in Bangladesh, nor are such cases monopoly of this country. How can we forget the past instances of desperate job seekers trying to escape the country by hiding in the wheel box of aircraft and frozen to death at high altitude? Only the other day 19 people, out of 76 in a trailer van, died from suffocation at doorsteps of the US on the Mexican border. They were desperate poor people from Latin America, trying to enter USA to sell their labour. There are innumerable instances of people from third world countries trying to enter first world

countries in search of better earning and better living, and dying horrible deaths en route. It is symptomatic of the increasing divide between rich and poor countries. The greater is the divide, more prolific will be such desperate adventures and the number of deaths.

One feels more saddened by the loss of eleven enterprising youths. They had chosen this dangerous journey instead of opting to be Ershad Sikders of the society. Of late, there is growing activity among NGOs and international organisations to measure what extent Bangladesh has veered as a trafficking nation. Hectic seminars are afoot. Lots of papers are being printed towards developing modules for awareness building at grassroots level against trafficking. Trafficking is a symptom, not a disease. Hunger knows no awareness. Bangladesh would have been more benefited, if the seminars were focused on how to create more opportunities in orderly migration.

The real solution to human traf-

ficking lies in creating opportunities for the people, especially in regular migration. Until now, apathy of developed countries has relegated to backbench the issue of mobility of labour as a facilitator to globalisation. Nevertheless, the economic realities are catching up fast. Countries with edge in cheap labour are occupying world consumer markets. Tremendous opportunities are opening up for temporary labour migration to developed countries. Bangladesh should prudently forge negotiations with developed countries on WTO platform for liberalisation of labour movement.

No logic, statistics, apathy or media report can downplay the present role of manpower export in our national economy. Keeping aside nett contribution through remittances to the tune of US\$ 3.6 billion a year, the multiplier economic effect of this sector in the lowest segment of the society can hardly be matched by any other sector. Even our RMG export is, in

fact, a different form of manpower export. The RMG manufacturers are essentially providers of outsourced tailoring services to foreign buyers. The only sustainable resource we have in abundance for export is our human resource. The easiest and shortest route to economic take-off of the country lies in how fast we can develop and deploy our human resources abroad.

It is painful to observe how incomplete and hazy knowledge can cripple an important sector. Many have little idea of the difference in the role and activities of recruiting and travel agencies; that two different ministries regulate travel agencies and recruiting agencies. Our policy makers played the same way and instead of identifying true perpetrators in the Mediterranean tragedy and investigating the matter properly, sent the law enforcers to terrorize a sensitive sector.

Wrong focus can kill the golden-egg laying goose!