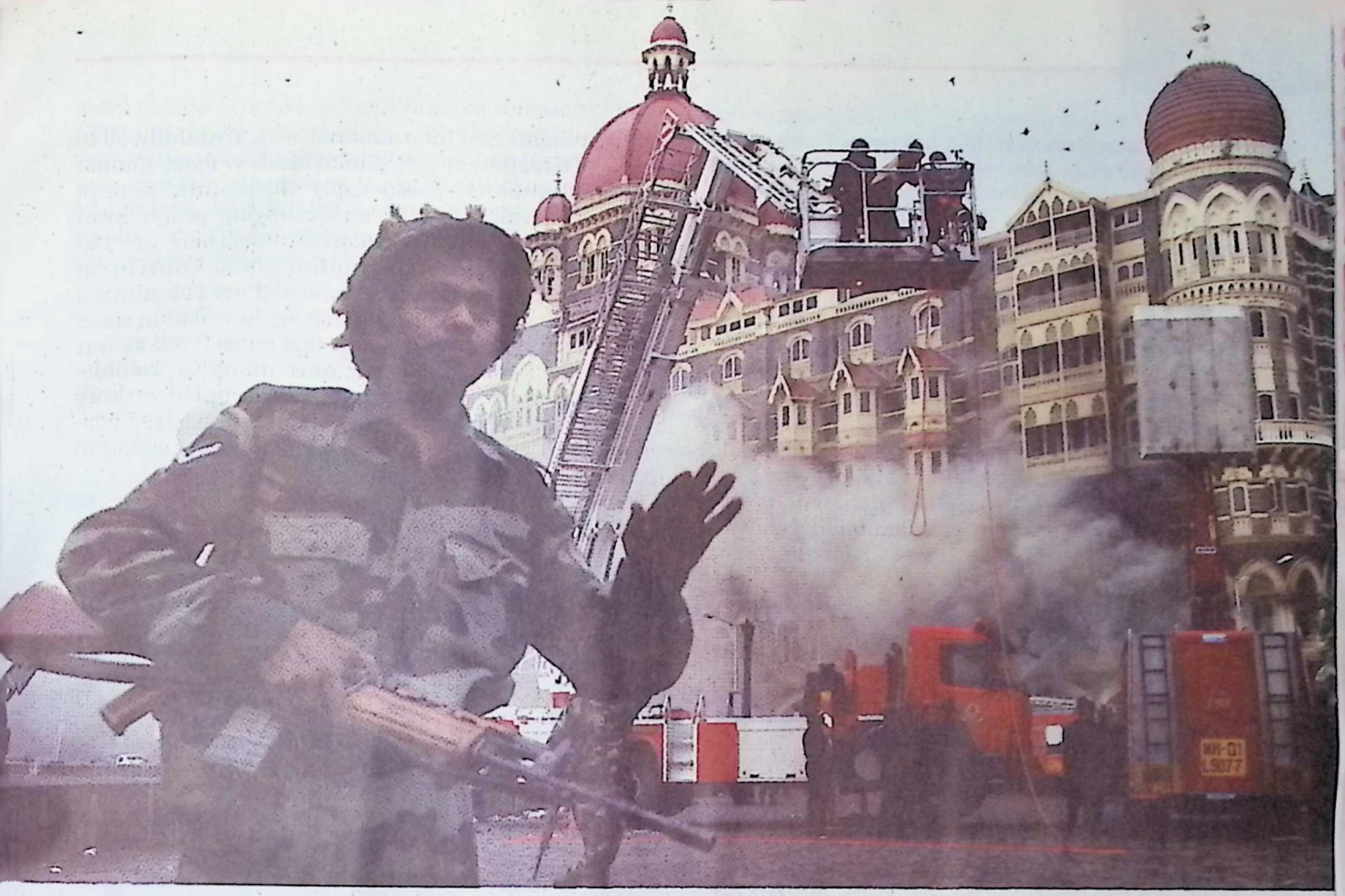


those flags? According to her, not the Indian flag, not the Congress flag, but the Pakistani flag!

Quite apart from the absurdity of this assertion (the idea that anyone would be suicidal enough to fly Pakistani flags after an incident like this is patently ridiculous), to make such a statement is nothing short of an incitement to riot against minorities living within those slum populations. I was disappointed to note the failure of Barkha Dutt, a respected journalist and anchorperson, to rein in Garewal's wild assertions, or to encourage the others on this show, many of whom spoke well, to refute her views or express their own more robustly.

It was only when the reaction to Garewal's obnoxious commentary came in the form of an outburst from a young man in the audience, who accused people like her (and not Pakistan) of being the problem, that Barkha ponderously moved into action, rebuking them for letting themselves down, and requesting silence from everyone not very successfully, I might add. Furthermore, although the young man was quick to apologise for his language, no such gesture was made by the unrepentant Ms. Garewal.

Another somewhat worrying aspect of media coverage was the usual, almost automatic inclusion of Bangladesh's "suspected" involvement in the events in Mumbai, mentioned repeatedly in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. This is not the first time such accusations have been thrown about with an unacceptable degree of ease and without any sign of proof; the same thing has happened after almost every other recent attack. And the sad fact is it would not be impossible for this to indeed be the case. But it does not help bilateral relations or greater mutual understanding between India and Bangladesh to have such serious statements made with a degree of casualness that borders on insulting.

It was initially reported that the lone surviving gunman had stated under interrogation that 40 individuals were involved in the strikes, among which 29 were from Pakistan and 11 from Bangladesh. Whatever the truth of that piece of reportage the allegations were never repeated thereafter, with suspicion concentrated firmly on India's neighbour on its western border. But at the time, that "news" was broadcast repeatedly; and subsequently, the accusations against Bangladesh were never officially withdrawn or apologised for. I would respectfully submit that India should think twice about adopting such an attitude, not least because it runs the risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

(to be continued next week...)

All facts and figures taken from The Independent (UK), The Telegraph (India) and NDTV