

Initial thoughts on BDR incident

Let's hope sanity and good sense prevails in all quarters and we get back to normalcy. We want to continue to be proud of an organisation that has sacrificed so much for the country.

SYED MUNIR KHASRU

FEBRUARY 25 the entire nation was gripped with anxiety with events surrounding the BDR Headquarters. By the time this article gets into hands of readers, probably events would have unfolded further and observations made in this article may or may not seem relevant. Hence, this article is an impromptu reaction based on initial thoughts that have surfaced into the minds of many when news of disturbance in BDR spread first.

Historically BDR is known to be a well organised and disciplined force whose main task is to protect the borders of Bangladesh. It has a rich tradition and professional reputation. From being called in for special duties (elections, law and order maintenance) to praiseworthy civilian works (food distribution, relief during natural disasters) it has an established track record of delivering reliable services to the country. BDR is the driving force against smuggling and other forms of illegal cross-border activities.

Hence, beyond defence, the role of BDR also has an effect on both economy and overall law and order situation of the country. However, compared to armed forces and police, BDR

usually has a relatively low profile and seldom gets much attention in the media. In that sense, public perception on BDR is rather limited beyond what has been described.

BDR is our first frontier of defence for maintenance of territorial integrity and independence. By account of most independent experts, BDR has done a commendable job in protecting our borders. This is in spite of the limited resources and logistics they are equipped with. They have been an indispensable part of all major national endeavours that has spanned from defence to humanitarian works.

The nation reveres this organisation whose members risk their lives every day to patrol the large border and to safeguard the country against intruders. Hence, to begin with, we pray in earnest that this unexpected and unfortunate incident ends peacefully with no precious lives lost for causes that seems to be purely internal in nature.

Before we discuss the issues, it has to be categorically stated that what the BDR jawans did has to be condemned. The death of people -- both uniformed and civilian -- cannot be accepted. Such acts of indiscipline and rebellion must never be allowed.

Although it is too early to make any informed opinion or observation, it may be worth sharing some of the initial thoughts and reactions which many of us have had when events started unfolding in the morning. It seemed people were largely confused and surprised by this incident and did not know what to make out of it. One of the primary reasons being, the general public have very little information or idea about issues internal to these organisations.

Questions can be raised about what is their pay scale, what system is in place for promotion, how performances are recognised, whether they are free from political influences, do they have responsibilities beyond what we generally know, etc. Some information may remain classified for valid reasons and hence unavailable to the general public. The public also does not need to be aware of regular administrative affairs of specialised forces like BDR.

However, there also is the possibility that prudent dissemination of non-classified information can help the public develop better understanding of how these forces are organised, managed, and compensated for their services. After all, salary of any public servant has contribution from ordinary taxpayers' money.

One of the floating perceptions or misperceptions that immediately seemed to have surfaced is that probably BDR jawans had long pending grievances about their salaries and facilities. How far it is true or not,

remains to be seen. Here comes the question of how much actually we should be knowing about these forces so that increased public awareness comes to the advantage of all relevant stakeholders.

As a matter of principle, from greater awareness comes better understanding; from understanding comes increased public support to valid causes; from public support comes the will and necessity to do the needful so that public servants are treated fairly.

For example, because of frequent discussion and debate about police, we know that policemen are poorly paid given the round the clock vigil each member of police force has to maintain -- from IGP to an ordinary constable. Hence, police reform measures always have enjoyed wide public support in spite of failure of successive governments to implement them for reasons that are more political than administrative in nature.

Another relevant question is: for disciplined forces like BDR, what are the available conduits to ventilate their legitimate grievances. As we know such forces are oath bound to be strictly obedient to the chain of command and their career progresses based on unquestioned loyalty, subordination to authority, and professional performance.

For valid reasons, these organisations do not have trade unions or CBAs, which are officially recognised units to represent their interest to concerned authorities. Hence, the question is if



Hoping for calm.

there were any valid demands from these forces, how would have been they channelised.

If official conduits are indeed available for expressions of such grievances, then obviously ventilation of frustrations that happened in the manner is most unfortunate and undesired. Probably some soul searching would become inevitable after the dust settles and things become much clearer.

Any expression of demand, even if legitimate, should not take a lethal form in a civilised democratic country. It is indeed a sad day for the country that such an event happened at all. Nobody is a winner and every citizen is a loser when a trusted organisation with a cherished history like BDR gets

embroiled in such an untoward incident.

Let's hope sanity and good sense prevails in all quarters and we get back to normalcy. We want to continue to be proud of an organisation that has sacrificed so much for the country. The nation is indebted to each and every member of the BDR family -- from generals to jawans -- who remain awake in vigil, day and night, keeping the borders safe and secure, when we either go on with our lives or sleep in peace. However, we cannot condone or accept yesterday's violence. May God help us all.

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The day I officially started smoking

And I join them too, in laughing. I say my good byes after watching Munni Shaha's report in television. On my way home I stop by the cigarette stand and buy my first pack of cigarettes.

IFFAT NAWAZ

SPRING officially hit Dhaka only 12 days ago. I felt it this morning upon waking up, alone in my flat at the side of Dhaka where life seems to be unaffected by most of Dhaka's balanced chaos. Baridhara, Gulshan, Banani -- the bubble within the bubble.

Living here alone in Dhaka, without a mother, maid or morning paper I feel the height of isolation that I chose for myself. It has not at all been bad living this way. I pick up the phone to confirm the first meeting of the day with a high profile media figure. He picks up my phone and tells me to not leave the house, Dhaka is not safe he says, and without any explanation hangs up.

To understand his worries I pick up

the phone to dial a few more numbers. It was 10:35am then. Through phone calls and online news I hear "thousands of rounds of gunshots and mortar firing are rocking the BDR Headquarters and adjacent areas in Dhaka as 'angry and aggrieved' BDR soldiers launched a violent and armed mutiny against their high command from around 7:45am."

The smses start arriving: "Don't leave the house." "Watch the news." "Dhaka is under attack." And I can't figure out what I need to do with these information. I don't own a television so I frantically keep refreshing online news and blog sources.

Rumours of curfew start to spread, different status on friend's profiles on Facebook, some with worries and some already criticising the current govern-



Let us hope that scenes such as these are a thing of the past.

ment. Ex-pat friends concerned, Bangladeshis friends telling the ex-pats: "See what we live in, and you want to move back here?" Thousands of words crowd my eyes, and I feel like crying.

The bazaar next to my house still keeps making its due noises. I feel

lonely, I think of times when sitting in Washington DC I heard of Dhaka's unrest and just felt sorry and moved on. But now I was in it, not directly but even in my own safety bubble I was still in it.

I go through my "to call in case of emergency list" and I realise there is no

one there, really, who I can call who will run to my rescue. I feel like breaking down, my paranoid mind makes me run to the bazaar to pick up bottled water and other essentials.

At the bazaar, people watch television intently. I stand with them to see the same clips playing over and over again. The crowd in the road seem much thinner than usual, all of Dhaka starts returning home around 1pm. People in the streets tell me mobile phones might be shut down and I realise I don't have a land phone. I see bloody bodies, angry BDR faces on the screen.

At a lavish Gulshan restaurant, chomping on mediocre lunch buffet, a young successful businessman tells his wife: "They planned this whole thing so they can have tomorrow off, so it can be a long weekend."

His adventurous, beautiful wife says: "I want to see this drama, let's take a drive to Dhanmondi and check it out."

But instead they go home to take an afternoon nap. They will wake up to Costa Rican coffee and English toffee.

I come home from the bazaar call up my relatives in the US and unexpectedly

break down. I cry my heart out, I feel lonely again, unsafe, insecure. I think of why I came here, my work, how much it means to me, I tell myself I am exaggerating because I have never been in a situation like this, but I still can't calm myself down.

So I walk out to the bazaar and with a bunch of *cha walas* keep watching the news. They make space for me. They tell me: "Apa bari jaan, bari giya TV dekhon, apnara to borolok, ey khane thaiken na."

Yet somehow they help me fit in. And then a tire bursts on the street and everyone scatters and runs for their lives and a few seconds later realising what happened breaks into contagious laughter. And I join them too, in laughing. I say my good byes after watching Munni Shaha's report in television. On my way home I stop by the cigarette stand and buy my first pack of cigarettes. And February 25, 2009 becomes the first day I officially started smoking and melted into being a part of Dhaka like I never thought I could be.

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Facebook made me do it

Facebook is our own personal reality show and our friends are the stars. What else besides "American Idol" or "Project Runway" allows you to be so judgmental while wearing pajamas?

RAINA KELLEY

EVERYBODY loves to complain about Facebook. But I've been wading through the nonstop commentary over the last few weeks and I've made a startling discovery. Everybody also lies about why they use Facebook. After exhaustive research, here are the seven lies you tell yourself about Facebook.

I only friend people I know: You will friend anyone. You want your friend count

to be sky-high. That's why I accept all sorts of people I haven't seen in 20 years. I refuse to have one less friend than my arch nemesis from college. Admit it, you're no better than I am -- how many of your "friends" would you invite to your house?

Facebook made me do it: Facebook didn't make you tell all 1,384 of your friends that you once had chlamydia. Facebook didn't hold your hand onto the mouse and force you to type things. Psychiatrists call this "externalising blame." It's a way to lay-off

shame and self-loathing onto somebody (or something) else so you can feel better about yourself.

Wall-to-wall flirting isn't cheating: Just because it's called "social networking" doesn't make hard-core online flirting OK. Do not try and tell me you were surprised when your boyfriend left you after he read your wall-to-wall with his cousin. Also, stop sending your assistant cute virtual gifts. Virtual gifting counts. Same thing goes for wall-to-wall stalking the love of your 7th grade life. Online harassment is just as bad as the bricks and mortar kind.

I use Facebook to keep in touch with people: You're nosy. Admit it. You scour the profiles of other people to know their business. Facebook isn't addictive -- your desire to know what other people are up to is addictive. The over-sharing thrills you. I

know I'm hooked. Don't you hunt through your friends' walls looking for any scrap of information that will produce that warm tingly schadenfreude feeling?

Facebook is our own personal reality show and our friends are the stars. What else besides "American Idol" or "Project Runway" allows you to be so judgmental while wearing pajamas? If people stopped revealing ridiculous stuff about themselves in their status updates, "Rock of Love" would be your "guilty pleasure" instead.

You know you're dying to discover your college roommate lives in a trailer in his mom's backyard. I literally cried from joy when I saw that an ex-boyfriend was sporting a comb-over.

I'm sooooo over Facebook: You love Facebook for exactly the reasons you pretend to hate it... it's the Big Thing. And

we're not falling for that ironic distancing pose you've been adopting lately. We know you spend hours looking for former girlfriends or that guy who you loved but didn't have the courage to talk to. I tried to act all Margaret Meadish when I first joined Facebook. But everybody knew I wasn't on there doing social anthropology. I was on there because I wanted to snicker at that girl I went to elementary school with, who reports every single one of the eight pomegranate martinis she drinks every night.

I am sooooo not competitive: We don't just want more friends than everybody else; we also want the highest score in Word Twist, recently spent nearly 24 hours playing Scramble on Facebook until I had a higher score than my friend. Why? Because I knew Facebook would send him

a note that said: "Raina has beaten your personal high score on Scramble." When he commented on his complete and total defeat, I just said: "I didn't know Facebook would tell you that. OMG! LOL!" We love Facebook because it allows you to gloat to your heart's content and hide that self-satisfied smirk on your face behind the wall of the Internet.

Facebook is my friend: No, it's a business. Everyone knows casinos hide the exits and pump oxygen into the air to keep you gambling and get all your money. Facebook is doing the same thing but with avatars and Food Flings. They want to trap you behind their dotcom walls so they can attract advertisers.

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The Age of Stupid has arrived



THIS is clearly a good choice of subject for generating interest and not pointless at all. Definitely worth a follow-up.

Well, you live and learn, That's the life of reporters, I guess: we are always delivering information to an audience which actually is smarter and more knowledgeable than the journalists ourselves. Actually, this became particularly clear to me with a

recent assignment.

"Write a piece about the disaster in Australia," a magazine editor says to me. "No worries, mate," I reply.

So I look up a news website to find material to do what journalists call "in-depth background research" ("cut and paste").

I find two headlines: "Drought triggers inferno in Australia" and "Deluge triggers floods in Australia".

I phone a friend in Sydney. "I understand that you guys are on fire and drowning at the same time," I say. "Yeah," she replies. "That's normal round here."

"I don't want to sound like an insensitive idiot, but can't you just use the extra water to put out the fire?" I asked.

"You insensitive idiot," she replied. "Australia is big. It has the same surface area as the planet Jupiter, or Rupert Murdoch's wallet, whichever is larger. The flood is precisely one quintillion kilometers away from the fire."

I asked her what caused the fire. She replied: "Global warming. And the flood? Global warming."

I have been making a list of things for which global warming has been blamed. It now includes fires, floods, droughts, freezes, cold spells, kidney stones, stock market crashes, American Idol, obesity, and the flopping of a soufflé made by a friend of mine last Sunday.

Could all these things really be the fault of global warming? Apparently, Yes. It is an

extremely complex effect, which touches literally everything.

The truth of this is shown in a brilliant new movie called "The Age of Stupid." The filmmaker decided that she was so fed up of people being confused about global warming that she would explain everything so simply even journalists could understand it.

The movie isn't launched until next month, but critics are already raving about it. "Fabulously funny, heart-wrenching and bizarre," said one. But this is the really amazing thing: the director is my niece Franny, who I still think of as a tiny, freckled brat, but who I suppose must be out of diapers now.

I decided to email Franny to congratulate her. But she was busy wrestling with the movie ratings agencies over the trailer. The problem is that a person on screen, realising that the end of the world is high, makes a colorful exclamation. This made the movie rating agencies nervous whether it was okay for children to see. "The complete annihilation of the human race is fine for under-15s, but a bad word or two is just not on," Franny explained.

So how does global warming cause heat waves and cold spells, bad hair days and soufflé flops? It's simple. Global warming should actually be called climate change, because individuals (and soufflés) are designed for one climate, but

have to adapt abruptly to different ones, which will become increasingly extreme.

Like most genius-level ideas, the film's premise is simple. It shows the world in 2055: there's no snow on the Alps, London is flooded, and Australia is burning. Just as she was putting the finishing touches to the movie, Australia caught fire in real life. At this point, the magazine editor mentioned at the beginning called to tell me that he had no interest in climate change and was going to fill the space with a feature on designer handbags instead.

Yes, The Age of Stupid is proceeding as expected.

For more in-depth analysis on the Age of Stupidity, visit our communist at www.vittachi.com.