

Brutality at the borders

Need a change in BSF attitude

THE TV footage of a Bangladeshi being tortured by BSF personnel was, to say the least, appalling and contemptible. It shows a depraved mentality. The Indian TV channels deserve compliments for exposing the brutal side of the BSF behaviour at the borders. The pictures were a shocking and outrageous narrative of how one cattle smuggler was tied hand and feet after being deprived of his clothes and mercilessly beaten up by the BSF jawans, apparently for not paying up the BSF for plying his trade, smuggling cows.

We have in the past repeatedly highlighted the issue of BSF highhandedness and their rather trigger free attitude on the borders, and called for reining in the Indian border guards. If anything, the TV footage has vindicated our position.

Killings of Bangladeshi nationals at the borders by BSF have been taking place with impunity. Nothing has been done to bring down these killings despite assurances from the highest quarters in India. Regrettably, according to human rights bodies, in the last three years more than 200 Bangladeshi nationals have fallen victims to BSF firing, among them many women and children, and many tortured to death by the BSF.

It is a matter of regret that these should continue to occur given the state of bilateral relationship between the two countries. Descriptions of the Indo-Bangladesh border as the “world’s deadliest frontier” or “one of the world’s most dangerous border” are some of the testimonials to the insensitive way that the border is being managed.

Although such incidents have been termed as human rights violation by the Human Rights Watch in 2010, the perpetrators have apparently gone scot-free so far. We are glad that the Indian authorities have acted quickly by suspending the jawans. We would hope that these errant BSF men would be made examples of.

Rid Gulshan Lake of grabbers

Land ministry's intervention required

THE recent encroachment of the Gulshan Lake is yet another stark instance of how the capital city's wetlands and canals are facing constant threats from land grabbers. A news item carried in a leading Bengali daily shows that a dam over five bighas has been put up across the lake without any permission from concerned authorities, dividing it in the middle. Worse still, several tin-shed houses have been erected along the dam, that too, by claiming land ownership. We express our grave concern at such malpractices in the face of the city's shrinking water bodies.

What worries us more is the fact that the encroachers are outrageously operating right under the nose of Rajuk, city authorities and the law enforcing agencies as if they are given a free hand through some collusive arrangements. It has been a long time since the Gulshan Lake was subjected to pollution and illegal land filling. If this trend continues, soon the grabbers will fill in the rest of the lake, thus killing one of the largest inland water bodies in the city.

For all we know, about 40 acres of the 100-acre lake falls outside the ambit of Rajuk's authority which is why the authorized body is in a quandary about how to monitor those undemarcated parts. There are also some unresolved disputes as to the ownership of land since dwellers of the newly built houses along the dam as well as of those built previously along the lake shore are claiming to have bought them from legal owners. In most cases, however, lands belonging to the lake were sold by influential grabbers having political clouts.

In view of the continued degradation of the lake, we urge the land ministry to intervene sooner rather than later and bring the law and order forces into picture. A joint drive would do really well to free lands from the

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

was a difficult emotion to summon when one saw this bespectacled bug-eyed octogenarian prisoner whose flowing beard is white as the driven snow. This nation took a close look at Ghulam Azam for the first time in many years, and suffered from that quiet confusion. His imposing bearing scornfully betrayed our knowledge of his infamous background when television cameras zoomed in on his face on the courthouse steps and inside a prison van.

Many like me must have grappled with their emotions when that mastermind of monstrosity appeared on the television screen. A seraphic-looking man was arrested for his purported role in a gruesome genocide, an unreal character in a surreal world looking as if he couldn't so much as hurt a fly. Some of us struggled for words to express how they felt while putting that misleading impression in its proper context.

When Cho Seung-Hui, the 23-year-old Korean student, went on a killing spree at Virginia Tech in the USA in 2007, Stanton Samenow, a forensic psychologist and author of the 2004 book *Inside the Criminal Mind*, gave his reaction: "Is this a person who has no conscience at

all?" That terse and quizzical statement somehow captured the essence of our horror. I don't know about others, but I uttered those exact words under my breath when I saw Ghulam Azam.

In an ironic twist of fate, this man is facing trial for outrageous crimes committed forty years ago. He and his band of bigots are said to have killed and tortured in cold blood. They committed those heinous crimes in their desperate bid to save

act out his anger on those who fought for the independence of Bangladesh. This dastardly man and his despicable desperados had collaborated with an invading army that plundered, raped and killed indiscriminately to take their anger to its logical conclusion. It is hard to believe that anybody in his sane mind could go that far for the nourishment of his rage.

But foremostly, watching Ghulam Azam on television was metaphysi-

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a political union whose breakup by then was a foregone conclusion. It is most disturbing that they had perpetrated their atrocities in the name of sublime sentiments such as love of country and religious devotion.

Researchers have found that 95% of mass murderers are men; they tend to be loners, and they feel alienated. They also tell us that these killers look normal on the outside and are really, really angry inside. We know there were some men amongst us who were really angry in 1971. They were angry because their beloved country, erstwhile Pakistan, was going to be dismembered.

Ghulam Azam was not alone to

cal. It was as if the wind of history finally whipped up the waves of disdain that crashed on the shores of our collective conscience. It was shocking by all means that life should come to this, and many of us felt cheated by its obvious contradiction. The profound visage of a grandfatherly man cleverly concealed the godfather-like perfidy which presided over a monumental madness including delivery of our mothers, sisters and daughters to the Pakistani camps amongst other brutal acts.

Psychologists have tried to differentiate serial killers from mass murderers. The former type likes to take one life at a time, mostly to derive

Links in the feud chain

MAHIR ALI

AFTER the army chief met his putative boss last week after a long interval, presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babar assailed accounts of what had passed between them with what could be described as a quadruple whammy: "The reports, without quoting [a] source, are hypothetical, based on conjecture and in the realm of speculation."

The trouble, of course, is that all too many of the reports emanating from Pakistan fall into one or more of those categories. One of the more obvious causes of this phenomenon is the tendency of official spokespeople to be frugal with the facts. Sometimes the simplest of questions elicits an absurd response.

For instance, after Asif Zardari last week succumbed yet again to the "Dubai chalo" urge and, contrary to fevered speculation, returned from the private visit, his spokesman, asked whether the president was concerned about the national political crisis, pithily responded: "Absolutely not. Why should he be?"

Perhaps he should be because almost everyone else in the country is. He may have nipped down to Dubai in a vain attempt, inter alia, to demonstrate his nonchalance, yet might not relish being typecast as the Alfred E. Neuman of Pakistani politics -- particularly in view of that earlier "what, me worry" moment in the aftermath of the worst floods in the nation's history.

The president doesn't always require a spokesman to give the impression of a disconnect with reality. On Benazir Bhutto's death anniversary last month he was quoted as claiming at a rally in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh: "I tell you, politics...is the art of the possible. But making a nation is the art of the

impossible and I believe I am doing the art of the impossible."

Making a nation? It must be a top-secret project. But any skills he may possess as a conjurer will be sorely tested in the days ahead.

The confrontation between the federal government and the military high command seemingly waxes and wanes from day to day -- providing plenty of scope for speculation. Harsh words alternate with conciliatory signals. A coup of sorts still appears to be in the offing, and the Supreme Court's issue of a contempt order against Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani may well mean that the first act of a tragic farce will be wrapped up in the next few days.

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The issue in question here is the National Reconciliation Ordinance pushed through by Pervez Musharraf and subsequently squashed by the court. It's judgment had some merit, but it's hard to imagine why it would expect this -- or any other -- government to follow instructions that effectively entail picking up a firearm and shooting itself in the foot.

Whether the Swiss authorities would heed a formal request from Islamabad to reopen a financial impropriety case against Zardari is far from obvious; what's much clearer is the determination of certain players to find a way around his domestic presidential immunity. The hapless Gilani has reportedly been advised by senior coalition

partners to heed tomorrow's court summons. It promises to be a dramatic encounter.

The fallback for the powers that be is memogate. It is hard to see how that sordid case could stand up in any court, given that the primary witness for the prosecution is so prone to contradicting himself. It has never been very clear what made Mansoor Ijaz decide, several months after having conveyed the memo in question, to go public about it.

Was it a quest for publicity or self-aggrandisement? A threat or a prod from some direction? A response to a personal slight? Whatever the case, it can be argued that Husain

Haqqani deserved to be penalised for dubious associations, if nothing else.

More generally, there is no dearth of grounds on which the present government's merits can be questioned. What's easy to defend, however, is the concept that power -- or, more precisely, political office -- should change hands by democratic means. That, in the Pakistani context, would be a novelty worth striving for. Yet such a trend will prove impossible to establish as long as the army remains a key behind-the-scenes political player.

The periods of direct military rule that make up half the nation's history proved disastrous in various ways and to varying degrees. For the moment, though, the likeliest pros-

sexual gratification from their killings. They do not want to be caught, while maximising their perverse pleasure every time they kill. Mass murderers are more obsessed with number, working on economies of scale. They like to take out a gun and kill as many people as they can.

Genocide is a combination of both when the intention of mass murder is driven by the instinct of serial killing, and it kills a lot of people over a long period of time. The perpetrators of genocide have the inspiration of a serial killer but the aspiration of a mass murderer. They are very sick people who can kill ruthlessly and then lead normal lives.

That explains why Ghulam Azam and his entire ilk never apologised. Millions of people in this country have hated them for forty years, yet the burden of that hatred never bothered them. It's because deep down inside they have never repented for their crimes.

Neither did Adolf Eichmann. Hitler's henchman shouted from the gallows that he had to obey the rules of war and of his flag. He believed the Jews belonged to an inferior race.

But Ghulam Azam obeyed enemy rules and enemy flag. What was he thinking every time he sent a victim to the enemy? If proven guilty, he deserves the highest punishment. But nothing will hurt him more if he knows he isn't a superior man.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 20

1265

In Westminster, the first English parliament conducts its first meeting held by Simon de Montfort in the Palace of Westminster, now also known colloquially as the "Houses of Parliament".

1960

Hendrik Verwoerd announces a plebiscite on whether South Africa should become a Republic.

1969

East Pakistani police kill student activist Amanullah Asaduzzaman. The resulting outrage is in part responsible for the Bangladesh Liberation War.

1972

Pakistan launched its Nuclear deterrent program few weeks after its defeat in Bangladesh Liberation War and Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.

1991

Sudan's government imposes Islamic law nationwide, worsening the civil war between the country's Muslim north and Christian south.

2001

Philippine president Joseph Estrada is ousted in a nonviolent 4-day revolution, and is succeeded by Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.