

War cannot be the option

Pakistan must stop patronising terrorists

THIS is for the first time since 1971 that the air force of one of the two neighbours—India and Pakistan—has crossed the international border and launched strikes on the other's territory. India describes it as a "preemptive non-military strike," an action in self-defence to thwart a possible terrorist attack on Indian soil, targeting the terrorist camps located inside Pakistan. Pakistan has followed suit and claimed striking non-military targets inside India. It also claims having shot down two Indian aircrafts and having captured three Indian airmen. India admitted to losing a plane and one pilot in action who is supposedly in Pakistan's custody.

By their own claim, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) carried out the Pulwama terror attack and they have a safe haven in Pakistan, which gives sufficient ground to India to be extremely concerned. Groups like the JeM and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) have recently declared their intention to carry out further terrorist attacks on India. It was against this background that the Indian strikes took place. While we are not in favour of the air strikes, at the same time, we must condemn harbouring of terrorist groups like the JeM and LeT by Pakistan.

These developments have dangerous ramifications for the two countries as well as the region. We had hoped that Pakistan would not retaliate and spike up the spectre of a wider conflagration. Both the countries have expressed their intention of not escalating the situation and we would like to see that they do everything to ensure that the situation does not graduate to a full-blown war.

Violence will breed violence only. It will bring no solution to the very underlying causes that have kept the two countries in a state of mutual animus for the last 72 years. We urge the two countries to exercise restraint and engage in talks immediately.

We believe that at the same time Pakistan must take up confidence-building measures, foremost of which is to stop the terrorists from operating out of its territory against India. War cannot be the answer; history stands as a glaring testimony to that. Three major wars since 1948 between the two have caused more sufferings than resolved anything at all.

Pakistan's prime minister has expressed his willingness to discuss terrorism and how to tackle it, a condition which India wanted Pakistan to accept for any bilateral discussion to start. He has renewed his call for dialogue following the recent attacks and retaliation. India should take up on the offer, and address the Kashmir issue seriously.

Shift dangerous chemicals from Old Dhaka immediately

But grade them first according to combustibility

A roundtable organised by *The Daily Star* titled "Chawkbazar Tragedy: Way Forward" on February 26 brought together experts, chemical importers and traders, and other stakeholders to discuss the imperatives in the aftermath of the Chawkbazar fire. Among other things, two very important aspects that emerged very loud and clear from the discussions are the need to implement the 17 recommendations by the committee set up in the aftermath of the Nimtoli fire—the first and foremost of which is to relocate the chemical stocks from old town.

But an important corollary to that was to first grade the chemicals according to their combustibility and prioritise relocation accordingly. In the rush to move out these materials out of Old Dhaka, there is a risk that these dangerous chemicals may be scattered all over the city. Thus, the need to earmark areas keeping the safety factor in mind. The authorities should close down all unauthorised establishments and their stocks of chemicals should be impounded because enough time has been wasted and the lives of too many people have been lost.

Given that there are many departments involved in the import of chemicals, forming a national taskforce on fire safety is the need of the hour. Dhaka's land must be zoned so that there is no prospect of storing industrial-grade chemicals in residential areas and Rajuk needs to play its role in ensuring that building codes are followed. All these require political will because there is a need to put people's safety above and beyond profit and the greed of unscrupulous business interests.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

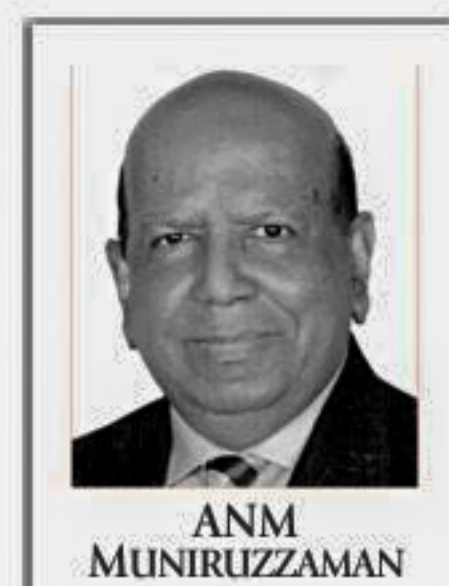
letters@thedailystar.net

For a fair Ducusu election

We, the students of DU, want a free and fair Ducusu election, which is going to be held on March 11, after 28 long years. All the residential and non-residential students should be able to freely attend the election campaigns without being threatened and vote for the candidates of their choice.

However, students are not satisfied with the arrangements of the polls as the demand of most of the student bodies—setting up polling booths in academic buildings—has been ignored by the university authorities. Their decision to set up the polling centres at the residential halls may give way to opportunities to manipulate the voting process. Thus, we want assurances from the university administration that they will take every possible step on their part to ensure a participatory election. All the student organisations should be able to participate in the election—and not just one student organisation. To put it simply, the election must be held in a manner that is acceptable to all.

Mohibullah, University of Dhaka



ANM MUNIRUZZAMAN

THE ongoing tension between India and Pakistan is taking a dangerous turn. The Indian air force crossed Pakistani airspace and carried out strikes against alleged terrorist training camps within Pakistan-administered territory, followed by Pakistan's own airstrike. This is a paradigm shift as airstrikes across line of control did not occur even during the Kargil War. As a matter of fact, this is the first airspace violation of offensive nature since the two states fought a war in that sector in 1971.

In spite of heightened tensions, the violation of airspace by both sides adds a new layer of complexity. Tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbours are not new; however, we have scarcely encountered situations where a rapid escalation is feared. Any escalation between India and Pakistan, which have a history of protracted conflict, can have significant ramifications for the wider South Asian region. A special concern of the current situation is that the escalation ladder may very easily go out of control resulting in not a localised but a wider conflict.

India and Pakistan both have some of the largest armies in the world. What is also worryingly significant is that they are both nuclear powers. Any kind of conflict or war, therefore, must be analysed from a different angle because, if war really breaks out, it will not be a national security problem of these two conflicting parties only, but a threat to security and stability of the region and the international security system. Therefore, utmost effort should be made to defuse the crisis before it starts climbing the escalation ladder.

Later reports indicate that Pakistan fighter jets have also violated Indian airspace in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch and Rajouri sectors. Reports also indicate that eight airports in North India were declared shut by Airports Authority of India. Pakistan has stopped flight operations from

Islamabad and Lahore as well. In such a situation of increasing tensions, it is of utmost importance that confidence-building mechanisms between the two states are activated immediately.

For the first time in the current situation between India and Pakistan, a new dimension of conflict has been added. We have talked about water and resources as a source of conflict between the two countries. And now, we are seeing those symptoms come to life.

region in Kashmir and control the flow of water coming down to Pakistan.

Pakistan has long feared such a move from India and has said in a number of statements earlier that such a step will be completely unacceptable to Pakistan as it will have severe negative consequences for its agricultural productivity and impact on its food security. Some Pakistani strategy experts have even gone to the extent of identifying unilateral water withdrawal by India as a "nuclear redline". We

point of view. Any addition of new security pressures would mean serious consequences for all member states of the region. Bangladesh, which is an important member of the region, also stands to meet the challenges from any fallout from a potential conflict between India and Pakistan. Regional efforts must therefore be taken to defuse the tensions and avoid conflict at any cost. Bangladesh, which has a longstanding international reputation of peacemaking, can also play a vital



Pakistani soldiers stand next to what Islamabad says is the wreckage of an Indian fighter jet shot down in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

PHOTO: AFP

Both countries are signatory to the Indus Water Treaty through which they share the transboundary rivers flowing from the Kashmir valley. The treaty, which has also been guaranteed by the World Bank, has survived two wars between these two states and is seen as a model of water treaties. For the first time, India has threatened that it will unilaterally withdraw water from the upper riparian

should be watching very closely to see if this is the beginning of water wars. In an environment of resource scarcity, even if other issues of disputes between the two states are solved, this will have a long-lasting consequence for both bilateral and regional security.

South Asia is one of the most populous regions in the world and is already in a fragile state from a security

role in initiating such a move. We firmly believe that solution of all conflicts and disputes can only be found through discussions and dialogues. A solution has to be reached in conference tables and not in battlegrounds.

Major General ANM Muniruzzaman ndc, psc (ret'd) is the president of Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS).

India's new response template against terror

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

RESTRAINT is no longer an option. Action is. That is the message sent out by the Indian Air Force mounting the lightning attack on terror camps deep inside Pakistan on February 26.

By giving the political backing to what Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay K Gokhale termed as a "non-military and preemptive action," the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has turned India's long-standing strategic doctrine on its head from one of reaction and restraint to action.

It is easy to see the Indian Air Force's action in the aftermath of the February 14 attack by Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed on the convoy of paramilitary personnel in Pulwama as India's way of getting back at Pakistan. Some Indian commentators have termed the IAF's successful attack as great symbolism in New Delhi's long battle against state-sponsored cross-border terror. But it goes much beyond that.

Ever since Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had outlined Pakistan's strategy of bleeding India by a thousand cuts, India has been a victim of Pakistan's terror. All these years, India has been trying to mobilise international opinion against terror emanating from Pakistan—directed against both India and Afghanistan. But not much heed was paid by the international community beyond words of solidarity and calls to Pakistan to dismantle the terror apparatus in its territory. It became clear to India that it has to fight terror on its own.

Successive Indian governments have confined their responses to the cross-border incidents of terror to diplomatic and economic measures like scaling down the staff at their respective high commissions in Islamabad and New Delhi, cutting off civil aviation links and clamping down on bilateral trade. It was senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader LK Advani who had years ago suggested the idea of "hot pursuit" of terrorists by India across the border, receiving censure from certain quarters who believed in peace overtures with Pakistan. The closest India came to hard military option to counter cross-border terror was in 2001 in the wake of the JeM attack on Indian parliament when the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government had amassed troops along the border.

The Modi government too had stuck to the template of punitive diplomatic and economic measures until September 2016 when India undertook the first surgical strike across the border by its special forces. That response set the stage of India exercising the hard option. The air strike in Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan on February 26 was a notch higher than the previous one. This was the first time that India's war planes crossed the territorial air space since the 1971 India-Pakistan war. During the 1999 Kargil conflict, the Vajpayee government had instructed the Indian Air Force to take care in not crossing into Pakistan's air space and risk escalation of hostilities even though the IAF had the capability to strike at terror facilities on the other side of the border.

By ordering cross-border air strikes on terror camps in Pakistan, the Modi government bit the bullet. In the past, the Indian reaction has been hamstrung by a view that Pakistan's possession of

by this view because such a strategy has not worked with Pakistan. In fact, there is a growing view in the security establishment in India that the country should give up its strategic restraint and that there should be no first use of nuclear power because of the atomic arsenal buildup across its northern and western borders.

In fact, Pakistan has so far taken advantage of the nuclear flashpoint red herring to deter India from going for the conventional military response against cross-border terror. The Indian war planes' assault on the terror camp is clearly a departure from that narrative and drawn a new red line for an effective response. It is in this perspective that one must see Gokhale using the words "non-military pre-emptive" strike by Indian planes directed at terror camps and not Pakistani civilians or military. This is a new phraseology in the diction of India's security strategy under Modi vis-à-vis Pakistan which no government in New



Indian Air Force (IAF) Mirage-2000 fighter jets were used to target Jaish-e-Mohammed terror camps in Balakot.

nuclear weapons could turn the Indian sub-continent into a dangerous flashpoint as India is far ahead of Pakistan in a conventional non-nuclear war and that India should be seen as responsible and restrained. But Modi has underlined that he is not to be held back

Delhi has attempted in the past. Most importantly, it signals that Pakistan has to bear a cost beyond the diplomatic and economic domains for the cross-border terrorism it encourages.

Arjun Subramaniam, a retired Air Vice Marshal of IAF, writes in an article in *The*

Successive Indian governments have confined their responses to the cross-border incidents of terror to diplomatic and economic measures like scaling down the staff at their respective high commissions in Islamabad and New Delhi.

Indian Express that air strikes in counter-terrorist operations "are the preferred first option across the Western world for a few reasons" because they do not risk casualty of soldiers of the country using that option, allow precision strikes with the help of technology, and such strikes are "not seen as escalatory mechanisms in sub-conventional conflicts."

Pakistan today finds itself cornered on the issue of terror. The recent killings of members of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard Corps in an area bordering Afghanistan found a Pakistani and Afghanistan too has blamed Pakistan for fomenting violence in its territory, an unstated allusion to the nexus between Pakistan's military and the Taliban.

India also carried out an elaborate diplomatic spadework before launching the air strikes. The result is there for all to see. The US has recognised India's right to self-defence in the face of terror, a view conveyed by the American national security adviser to his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval during a phone call after the Pulwama incident. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo wanted Pakistan to exercise restraint and act against terror. Even Pakistan's closest all-weather ally China has asked Islamabad as well as New Delhi to exercise restraint after the air strikes.

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent for *The Daily Star*.