

# BDR action planned at the top, says BSF chief

New Delhi, April 29

THE BORDER Security Force today said the "totally unprovoked" action by the Bangladesh Rifles was a "planned" venture in which its chief was involved, and rejected charges that any Indian construction along the border led to the skirmish.

The BSF also said it had no prior information from any agency about the BDR action in Pyrdiwah.

BSF Director General Gurbachan Jagat said the claim by Bangladesh that the BDR action was prompted by the construction of a road in Pyrdiwah area was baseless.

"There was no construction on the border. A path is being built at Lynkhat, but that's about 4.5 km inside the border."

On reports that the BDR action was purely at the instance of the local commander, Jagat said: "It was a planned operation. BDR Director General Major-General ALM Fazlur Rahman was involved in it. Three battalions of the BDR would not move without the directions of the Director General."

Terming the BDR action in Pyrdiwah as "totally unprovoked", he said the outpost was surrounded by about 300 BDR personnel and hundreds of civilians.

"They repeatedly said they had orders from Dhaka."

Jagat said for the first three days after encircling the outpost, on April 15, the BDR personnel "insisted that we vacate the area, an adverse position."

"But we told them that it had to be decided by the political leadership and not the forces. The issue of the road was added only on April 18".

Referring to the Boraibari incident, he denied the action was aimed at avenging Pyrdiwah, saying: "Had it been so, we would have taken measures and moved in with more troops."

Detailing the events in Mankachar-Boraibari, he said: "On the night of April 18, a BSF patrol was fired at and it was construed as a precursor to a BDR attack."

The BSF commandant decided to enter Boraibari to gain "tactical advantage" in a bid to pre-empt any such plan, he added.

The BDR brought civilians forward as a defence shield for



Activists of a four-party Opposition alliance led by Bangladesh Nationalist Party of Khaleda Zia burn an effigy of Atal Bihari Vajpayee during a demonstration in Dhaka on Sunday.

## DM ORDERS BORDER SEAL-OFF

MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT Magistrate Vivek Kumar on Sunday instructed the BSF to seal the 150-km Indo-Bangladesh border in the district in view of the Assembly elections. He ordered the BSF to seal the border five days before the polls, but asked it to ensure that people living on the border can go about their daily chores without hindrance.

Meanwhile, the election observer for Murshidabad district, P Raghu, in a letter to the District Magistrate had complained that most of the candidates had not filed their election expenses account.

PTI, Behrampore

which BSF Commandant B R Mondal decided not to open fire, he said. "This resulted in their capture."

He said the issue of adverse possessions had remained unresolved for many years.

Forty-seven adverse positions belonging to Bangladesh are under Indian control while 43

such positions belonging to India are under Bangladesh's occupation. The two countries have formed joint working groups to sort out the issue. The terms of reference of these groups were sent to Bangladesh in December, their response is still awaited.

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 APR 2001

# Delhi, Dhaka await face-saving date

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, April 29: India and Bangladesh are keen that the seniormost leaders of the two countries meet and clear the air following the recent violence along the border, but neither wants to be seen as taking the initiative.

Despite claims about friendly relations, neither Dhaka nor Delhi wants to give the impression of blinking first on an issue that has gained importance in both countries.

If Bangladesh is seen to seek the meeting, the ruling Awami League may have some explaining to do at home about the need to be apologetic about successfully thwarting what is perceived to be an Indian aggression.

In India, reports and pictures of mutilated bodies of BSF jawans had resulted in national outrage, and the general perception is that it is only befitting that the Bangladesh government apologise for the misdeed.

There are indications that a mid-May meeting between Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpayee is being talked about. However, the exact dates have to be finalised.

The meeting may take place either when Sheikh Hasina is on her way to Brussels for the Least Developed Countries meet under the aegis of the UN on May 10 or on May 18 when she returns from Europe.

The Bangladesh prime minister had been keen to visit India since early February. She initially



Sheikh Hasina

expressed her desire to visit Delhi in the wake of the Gujarat earthquake. Delhi, however, felt her visit here may lead to similar visits from other governments in South Asia, especially Pakistan's chief executive Pervez Musharraf and jeopardise the relief work for quake victims. It, thus, decided to politely say no to Hasina.

The offer of a prime ministerial visit from Bangladesh was revived last month but Delhi had to say no on the plea that Vajpayee will be busy with the Parliament session after which he was scheduled to visit Malaysia.

Nothing more was said about Sheikh Hasina's visit and over the past week or so the flare-up on the Indo-Bangladesh border, which led to the deaths of 16 BSF personnel, kept the two sides busy in finding ways of repairing the damage in bilateral ties.

When Bangladesh high commissioner Mostafa Farooque Mohammed visited South Block yesterday to apprise the foreign min-

istry officials about Sheikh Hasina's visit to Europe and sought Delhi's permission for overflight clearance, Indian diplomats once again broached the subject of a meeting between the two prime ministers.

After the meeting in Brussels, Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to visit London to address a meeting of Bangladeshi diplomats there. Attempts are now being made to re-schedule the meeting in London so that the Bangladesh Prime Minister can be in Delhi either before or after her Brussels meeting.

However, even if she does visit India for a meeting with Vajpayee, it is likely to be extremely difficult for her to tender a public apology for the border clashes. This is mainly because in Dhaka the Bangladesh Rifles' action has wide support.

The people of Bangladesh are happy that their security forces succeeded in thwarting the BSF aggression at Baroibari. Though sections in Bangladesh have regretted the manner in which the bodies of the BSF jawans were treated by the BDR, there are few who question their right to defend the sovereignty of the country.

With general elections due in Bangladesh in a few months, Sheikh Hasina, who has so far managed to carry the nation with her, may lose support if she is seen bowing to pressure from India and making an apology before the Indian media. Efforts are thus being made to help the two leaders meet without trying to pass the buck on each other, and stress on settling their border and other outstanding disputes at the earliest.

THE TELEGRAPH

# Pro-Khaleda Generals plotted BDR foray: RAW

Soumen Datta  
Kolkata, April 29

A CLIQUE of senior Bangladeshi generals masterminded the recent BDR operations in Pyrdiwah and Borai-bari, RAW sources here say.

Led by Chief of General Staff Nazmul Ahmed Chowdhury, others in this group were Rangpur Divisional Commander Major-General Matin, Mymensing Divisional Commander Maj-Gen Waheb, Chittagong Divisional Commander Maj-Gen Kabir, Director-General (Forces Intelligence) Maj-Gen Nazrul and National Security Intelligence chief Maj-Gen Gholam

Rahaman.  
All of them, the sources say, are Opposition leader Khaleda Zia's supporters with pronounced pro-Pakistan leanings.

The operation was meant to bring the Army back on centre stage of national politics in Bangladesh ahead of the October general elections. It was aimed also at giving Khaleda Zia's BNP a head start in the polls. India-bashing usually sells well in Bangladesh before elections.

When the Army top brass got an Intelligence reports saying the BSF was building a pavement at Pyrdiwah, it decided to make use of the opportunity.

A report was sent to chief of General Staff Nazmul Ahmed Chowdhury. Within six hours, Major-General Fazlur Rahaman of the BDR got orders to go on the offensive.

Flare-ups along the Indo-Bangla border are a regular feature but are defused in most cases through flag meetings.

In Pyrdiwah, however, the BDR moved straight in, digging bunkers and sending scared villagers on the run. That explains the Pyrdiwah graffiti, most of it attributed to the BNP, the RAW sources say.

The BSF, they say, blundered in not having planned out its response. A "hotheaded and

impulsive" BSF tried to storm Borai-bari, a village along the Assam-Bangla border, 210 km from Pyrdiwah. The BDR's border intelligence had got wind of the BSF's plan and the Bangladeshis were ready for a counter-offensive when the Indian force struck.

On April 18, an advance party of around 20 BSF men walked straight into the trap and found itself hemmed in by BDR jawans and 2,000 angry villagers. Outnumbered, the BSF jawans were captured, tortured mercilessly and killed, the RAW sources add.

**BDR action planned at the top:**  
Jagat on Page 9

## BANGLADESH BEGINS TORTURE PROBE

BANGLADESH ON Sunday began an investigation into the torture and murder of 16 BSF personnel on April 18 following skirmishes along its border with India.

"Our investigation into the conditions under which the Border Security Force men were killed has begun," Foreign Secretary Syed Muazzem Ali

"The Indians have informed us of the allegations that the bodies were mutilated. We will investigate thoroughly in conformity with the allegations," he added.

"The investigation will cover in what conditions they got killed, where their bodies were lying, who retrieved those (bodies) when the bodies were taken for autopsy and how those were handed over to the BSF," Ali said.

The Foreign secretary said he could not give a time frame for the investigation, because his Government was serious about conducting a thorough

AP, Dhaka

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30 APR 2001

# Leaders' trips do not make border calm

TILAK RAI  
SHILLONG, APRIL 29

96-2  
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THE intrusion of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) into Pyrduwah and the subsequent killing of 16 BSF personnel has helped turn the spotlight on the problems of a group of tiny hamlets on the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Nongsken constituency MLA K. K. Dkhar, who represents around 60 villages including Pyrduwah and Lyngkhat, while talking to *The Indian Express* said that he was deluged with the problems faced by people of his constituency but was not getting any hearing.

Cattle thieves from across the border, bad roads, harassment from both BDR and BSF troops, lack of electricity were some of the problems the people of his constituency were facing regularly.

"Forget about redressing the border people's woes, most of the political leaders and government

officials did not even know that Pyrduwah and Lyngkhat existed before trouble broke out," complains Dkhar. "This obscure border hamlet now has Union Minister of State for Home I. D. Swamy, Chief Minister E. K. Mawlong, Union Home Joint Secretary G. K. Pillai and hordes of VIPs and mediapersons as visitors," said Dkhar.

Dkhar hopes to take up the problems of the electorate with both the Central and State Governments. Of the 60-odd villages he represents, Pyrduwah, Lyngkhat, Lyngkhong, Hat Thymmai, Pakhria and Nongri are the ones that are often embroiled in problems with Bangladesh.

The recent incidents, Dkhar says, have only added to his problems. "To convince the villagers that they are safe and such incidents are not likely to recur is a big task," says Dkhar. Filled with insecurity, villagers from the border areas are expressing apprehensions of repeat



A Bangladeshi woman from Baraibari, on Friday, displays a blanket allegedly left behind by BSF troops during a clash with BDR guards — Reuters

incidents by the BDR. With Bangladesh Army build-up reported opposite Jangrama, Tamabil, Pratapur and Agkaliya, the resi-

dents are in constant grip of fear.

BSF sector headquarter Shillong Commandant C. R. Chauhan informed *The Indian Express* that with the Bangladesh Army refusing to withdraw from these areas, DIG Ashok Kumar has gone to Pyrduwah to instill confidence that they are safe. He said the BSF are keeping a strict vigil on the border.

With claims that it was Pyrduwah villagers who had alerted the BSF about the movement of Bangladesh troops, the villagers are not likely to place much trust in the BSF, says Dkhar.

The MLA however said that both sides should learn to live and work together to avoid recurrence of Pyrduwah. He said that villagers and BSF in all the borderline villages should work as a team and learn to trust each other. Giving an example, he said, both the public and BSF should learn a lesson from the intrusion carried out by the BDR and the Bangladesh public

INDIAN EXPRESS

30 APR 1997



# Bangla war games a warning for India: Bhagwat

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, April 28

THE JOINT naval exercises by Pakistan and Bangladesh over the last two weeks off the Bangladesh coast should serve as a warning signal to India. Serving and retired military officers, including former Navy chief Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, told *Hindustan Times* that the joint exercises conducted without informing India should "caution" New Delhi.

They asserted that India should have been informed by Bangladesh of the joint exercises. "More so since it was Bangladesh, with whom we have very friendly relations," Admiral Bhagwat said from New Delhi. He recalled that during his tenure as navy chief, India had gifted Bangladesh a naval vessel. "So it was expected of Bangladesh to inform India about such an exercise through normal diplomatic channels."

He disagreed with the contention of a defence ministry spokesman who said the exercises "were of passing nature" and no intimation was required to be conveyed to neighbouring countries. "There is no law, but it is the practice all over the world for any country carrying out such exercises to inform the neighbouring countries in advance."

He pointed out that there is a written agreement between India and Pakistan to inform each other of exercises near the borders. "This agreement is also applicable in this case since Pakistan was involved in an exercise

near India's (maritime) borders," said a senior Navy officer.

A defence ministry spokesman told a news agency in New Delhi today that Bangladesh "had not broken any international convention" by not informing India about the exercises, which were "routine" in nature.

"No such exercises had been conducted in recent memory," said Bhagwat, contradicting the ministry spokesman. "The MoD spokesman cannot be believed."

The spokesman had said India and Bangladesh had conducted similar joint exercises two years ago. "At that time, Myanmar was informed. If there is no international convention or practice, why was Myanmar informed?" wondered a senior Navy officer.

"India informs Pakistan every time there is a military exercise in the western sector or Bangladesh in exercises in the eastern sector. This is because of the international convention," said a top army officer. He explained that the convention exists to avoid the possibility of a country misinterpreting military exercises as hostile action on its borders and taking retaliatory action.

Bhagwat said though the exercises would have had the clearance of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (considered friendly to India), "we have to see who is behind the whole thing — it could have been some elements in the Bangladesh military establishment who had been in the Pakistani Army or even Saudi Arabia, which controls Bangladesh's purse strings".

## *BSF kept on alert till 28/4 Bangla polls*

*New Delhi, April 28 46-9*

WITH NEW Delhi no longer treating the Indo-Bangla border as a "benign one", the BSF has been asked to "remain alert", at least till the Bangladesh elections were over.

Officials said today that the possibility of "further mischief" from Bangladesh "could not be ruled out". "There is a possibility of further mischief and the BSF will remain alert till October, until the Bangladesh elections are over," officials said when about the situation in border areas along Assam and Meghalaya.

"The recent border clashes, in which 16 BSF jawans were killed by BDR and their bodies mutilated, clearly indicates that there are enough rogue and anti-India elements on the other side. We can no long treat the border as a benign one," they said.

Meanwhile, a Union Home Ministry official has categorically denied reports from Dhaka, stating that India was "amassing fresh troops on the border". "The Indian Army was never deployed, even after the April 18 clashes, when tension prevailed along the boundary," he said.

The United News of Bangladesh had claimed that New Delhi was moving additional troops, including regular army personnel, along the border. Calling the report "baseless", a Defence Ministry spokesman said "there is no such troop movement."

Officials said 17 flag meetings were held between the BSF and the BDR yesterday along the border in Assam and Meghalaya and efforts were on by both sides to "ensure withdrawal of additional forces to positions well within their respective territories".

PTI

# Delhi-Dhaka tiff

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■ Continued from Page 1

-dations to both governments, while the other has the brief of recommending ways and means for handing over the area in adverse possession as well as the enclaves.

The Bangladesh Rifles, sources here said, has been opposed to the joint working groups which are seen as "delaying tactics." The BDR officials are reportedly of the view that the construction of concrete pillars should be cleared immediately so that the necessary work, as per earlier agreements, can be completed. This border force has made it clear to Dhaka that if the proposed terms of reference are agreed to it will just deny quick justice. The BDR was also exerting pressure that the JWG should be time bound by one year to submit their reports. The political leadership was unable to agree to this. New Delhi, the sources said, was not keen on accepting the Mujib-Indira accord as the basis for the functioning of the joint working groups. This agreement had provided for "lease in perpetuity," which the present government in New Delhi, according to the diplomatic sources, is not particularly in favour of. Presently people in the affected areas can move within along to a well defined time frame. The sources said that this amounts to "permission" to use the path and not the lease in perpetuity provided in the agreement signed by the late leaders. The diplomatic sources claimed that Delhi's resistance to the agreement becoming the basis for the JWG's approach was also based on its reluctance to part with land held in adverse possessions. Bangladesh has always claimed that only 7,000 acres of land has to be transferred by it to India as against the 17,000 acres to be transferred by India. It also maintains that Bangladesh holds 3,000 acres in adverse possession as against India's 3500 acres. New Delhi has been putting pressure on Dhaka to finalise the terms of reference. Attempts by the Bangladesh Rifles chief, Maj. Gen. Fazlur Rehman to raise the Padua dispute last month at a meeting with his counterpart in the Border Security Force was dismissed with, "we are waiting for Dhaka to clear the terms of reference."

Bangladesh, on the other hand, is in no hurry to do so with the sources maintaining that it is election year, "we have to hold a ministerial meeting to discuss the issue, it will all take time."

# Delhi-Dhaka tiff on guidelines holds up JWGs

BY SEEMA MUSTAFA 9ndv  
Randa

New Delhi, April 28: India and Bangladesh which had agreed, in principle, to set up two joint working groups to resolve outstanding border issues have been unable to agree on the terms of reference. The result is that the decision remains confined to paper with the two countries not even having begun the process of formulating the working groups.

The meeting of foreign secretaries of both countries decided to set up two joint working groups in December. India has reportedly sent elaborate terms of reference to Dhaka which has been sitting on the proposal as it is of the view that the terms specified in the Mujib-Indira agreement of 1974 should suffice.

Diplomatic sources said that if this agreement is followed to the letter, the contentious issues would automatically be resolved as under this particular agreement both sides had agreed to exchange all territory lying in adverse possession. Highly-placed diplomatic

sources insisted that New Delhi was not keen now to demarcate the remaining 6.5 km of land along the border, and to allow Bangladesh to construct concrete pillars in just over 35 km of territory, which is presently marked only by bamboo pillars.

Bangladesh has for long been insisting that the demarcation and marking of territory should be completed with diplomatic sources insisting that the delay is because of India's reluctance.

New Delhi on the other hand has made it clear that it is willing to talk on this issue, and that the joint working groups would be the best fora for discussions. And that Dhaka is "unnecessarily" delaying the issue by sitting on the terms of reference. One joint working group is to discuss the undemarcated 6.5 km of land and make recommen-

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## PAGE 2

- Sangh criticises Sonia for abusing Vajpayee
- Parliament adjourned to avoid Tehelka issue: CPM

# Violence on the Bangla border

**T**HE country is shocked and indignant at the loss of 16 BSF personnel on the Bangladesh border. How could this happen? Why were we so helpless in dealing with the situation? Was it the result of a tragic misunderstanding? Were there blunders from our side? Was it deliberately initiated by the BDR? The questions pile up thick and fast, and there are as yet no convincing answers.

The bodies of the fallen men have been returned. There is evidence of torture, or, at the least, of desecration of the bodies. Though tension had been building up and a number of minor local incidents had taken place, there was nothing that could demand or justify a massive military effort against a vulnerable Indian patrol. We are owed a full explanation, by our own authorities and by Bangladesh.

As the grim facts were progressively revealed, the public mood became, and remains, stern. The Indian authorities stand accused of too mild a reaction to this appalling incident. Many felt that the initial response from New Delhi tended to treat it as a local occurrence undertaken without the active sanction of Dhaka. This did not go down well, especially, as it revived memories of a similar reaction when Pakistani personnel first crossed the line at Kargil.

Indian opinion was not ready to accept that Dhaka had no share of responsibility for the occurrence. Hence, there were strong demands that the external affairs minister, or some equally exalted personage, should rush to Dhaka to express our resentment and demand an explanation. That this was not done, and all we had was a telephone conversation between the two Prime Ministers a couple of days after the event, remains a source of adverse comment.

In the absence of a convincing explanation, there is no end to speculative comment and supposition about the reasons for the incident.

There are many surmises, of which one of the most pervasive is that the Director-General of the BDR deliberately encouraged the clash for reasons of internal Bangladesh politics.

The argument runs that he is closely identified with the main Bangladesh Opposition party which makes political capital out of hostility towards India, and stands to benefit from the anti-India sentiment whipped up by this incident.

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29/4

**WIDE ANGLE**

**SALMAN HAIDAR**



*Bangladeshi soldiers keep watch on the Beloonia border with India in Feni district on Thursday. — AP/PTI*

With elections coming up and a close poll in the offing, this can turn the balance against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and help return her rival Begum Khaleda Zia to power. Speculative conclusions of this nature can never be wholly proved or, for that matter, wholly disproved. That they should come up as insistently as they have points to a considerable mistrust between the two countries which lies not far below the surface.

One reason suggested for diverting blame away from the Bangladesh Prime Minister is that she is identified as a friend to India who should be

backed and supported by us. It is true that over the years, under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, the quality of the relationship between the two countries has improved significantly.

When she came to power nearly five years ago, she took some bold steps that had the effect of removing major irritants.

There was the agreement on Farakka for one. The sharing of the Ganga waters had long been one of the enduring disputes of the sub-continent, no less emotional in Bangladesh than in Kashmir in Pakistan. So long as it

remained unresolved, it comprehensively poisoned relations between the two countries. For Sheikh Hasina to move to solve this issue, meeting the Indian leadership halfway, took real political courage.

The sharing arrangement signed between the two countries in 1996 has happily removed Farakka from the agenda, and almost from memory.

No less important was the curbing of material support funnelled through Bangladesh to insurgent groups in the North-east. The virtually free run for this purpose that the ISI had enjoyed earlier was brought to an end, which greatly eased our security concerns. These concrete developments have done much to lift relations between the two countries to a higher level, which make it all the more difficult to understand how the border incident could have been permitted to take place.

At present, tension and bad blood in the affected areas continue. There are reports of more troops being sent in, which is an index of a heightened anxiety that the frequent local flag meetings have not allayed. We have become aware of the unresolved state of portions of the border. The issues in these segments are relatively minor but a curious slothfulness has prevented their being sorted out.

We are yet to implement some obvious steps that have been agreed on in principle, such as the exchange of enclaves and putting an end to the "adverse possession" situation that affects many little pockets here and there.

As our experience has sadly shown, these unresolved issues can take a dangerous turn.

Even after the formal demarcation has been completed — and one must hope that this will be done soon — there will be need for the two sides to improve their institutional arrangements for better border management.

But the first step is to obtain clear answers about the incident itself. What happened there, and the loss of 16 lives, is not to be glossed over.

The full story will be known only through full and honest inquiries by both parties. It is in this area, requiring both internal inquiries and diplomatic effort with our neighbour, that our immediate effort must be directed.

*(The author is a former Foreign Secretary.)*

**100 YEARS AGO**

**TODAY**

APRIL 29, 1901

**GOVERNMENT HOUSE, CALCUTTA**

Owing to the numerous carriage accidents which have taken place, steps are already in progress to widen the road that runs between the South Gate of Government House and the Lawrence Statue facing it. It is intended to broaden the road by setting further back the balustrade that runs in a curve from the east of the Statue to the Red Road. This, of course, will entail the construction of a fresh path within the enclosure, which pedestrians and children now find so convenient and the gravelling of which is so carefully attended to.

**DETECTION OF AN ILLICIT STILL**

Mr Siddons, the Assistant to the Collector of Calcutta, assisted by Inspector J.N. Mukerjee, succeeded in arresting one Didar Bux at Gowaltolli, Bhowanipore, on the night of Thursday last for manufacturing country liquor. On the house of the accused being searched, a complete native still was found and a quantity of molasses in a state of fermentation. Yesterday the accused was placed on his trial before Moulvi Seraj-ul Huq, Police Magistrate of Alipore, and pleaded guilty. He was sentenced to three months' rigorous imprisonment and to pay a fine of Rs 200.

HT EXCLUSIVE

# India kept in the dark about Bangla-Pak war games

Jaideep Mazumdar  
Kolkata, April 27

THE PAKISTANI Navy has just carried out full-scale joint exercises in the Bay of Bengal within Bangladesh's maritime boundaries. One frigate, an Augusta submarine and a fleet tanker were involved in the exercises that concluded on Thursday. Two Bangladesh naval ships escorted the Pakistani vessels during the exercises.

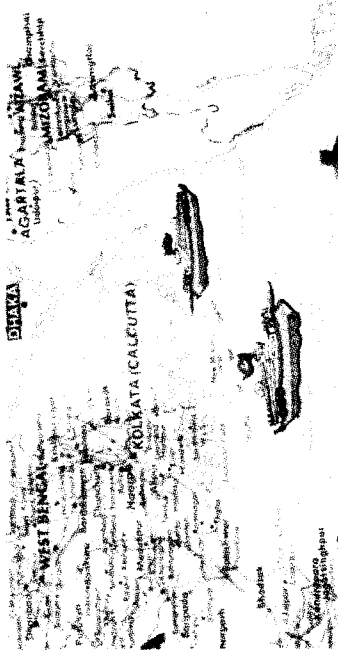
Neither Bangladesh (which hosted the exercise) nor Pakistan informed India of the exercises as is required under international conventions.

Indian Navy officers told the *Hindustan Times* that the exercises have been on since April 13. The 85-metre-long frigate, Zulfiqar, was equipped with laser-guided missiles, anti-aircraft guns and anti-submarine mines. Fleet tankers, like the one used in this exercise—Moawim—are an integral part of such exercises.

"The two-week-long exercise was apparently planned much in advance. But Dhaka did not intimate our Ministry of Defence. Had it done so, we would definitely have known about this," said a senior Indian Navy officer. "Any country that conducts military exercises either on its own or

jointly with another country always informs its neighbours in order to avoid the possibility of the exercises being misconstrued as an actual build-up. Such a (mis)interpretation can easily escalate into a flare-up. That is why there's an international convention in this regard," the Naval officer explained.

The Indian defence establishment has been monitoring the movement of the three Pakistani Navy vessels ever since they left Karachi port a few weeks ago. "They sailed down the Arabian Sea, passed through Sri Lankan waters and up the Bay of Bengal. They were escorted into



Bangladesh waters by a naval and Indian Navy.

"They (the three Pakistani vessels and two Bangladeshi vessels) conducted joint exercises at four

## ATAL-HASINA MEET ON CARDS

PRIME MINISTER AB Vajpayee and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina are likely to hold talks next month to defuse tension on the border. Hasina will make a stopover in Delhi on May 17 on her return from Brussels, where she is to attend a UN meeting. *The Independent* and *Manavjamin* said. Foreign Secretary Syed Muazzem did not comment on the report.

PTI, Dhaka

major locations—2040°N & 9010°E; 2030°N & 9125°E; 1915°N & 8925°E; 1835°N & 9030°E—inside Bangladesh's maritime bound-

aries," said the Indian Navy officer.

The top brass at the Eastern Command is viewing the whole affair with suspicion. "Stronger military ties between Dhaka and Islamabad will definitely have a far-reaching consequence on India's security interests," commented a senior officer at Fort William.

What's even more worrying for the Indian defence establishment is that the three Pakistani vessels have sailed away from Bangladesh on Thursday evening and are headed for Myanmar to conduct similar exercises with the Myanmar Navy.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 APR 2001

# Bengalis protest at Dhaka embassy

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 27: A delegation of the Bengali population of Delhi organised a peaceful protest, in front of the Bangladesh high commission, against the barbarous act of the Bangladesh Rifles at Pyrdiwah and Mankachar recently. They also gave the high commission a letter addressed to the Bangladesh Prime Minister.

The deputy high commissioner of Bangladesh met the delegation and accepted the letter of protest.

Later, the BJP councillor from south Delhi, Dr Anand Mukherjee, who spearheaded the delegation said, "The deputy high commissioner gave a very patient hearing to us and assured that our anguish would be conveyed to the Bangladesh Prime Minister." He added that the deputy high commissioner, however, tried to project that the Indians

were to blame for all that transpired along the border.

About two hundred persons mostly senior citizens, some with their roots in Bangladesh, assembled peacefully in front of the high commission wearing black badges to mark their protest.

A resident of Chittaranjan Park, N.N.Sarkar, said, "The brutality demonstrated by the BDR is unacceptable and must be denounced in the strongest terms." He made references to the Geneva Convention that bars brutalities to prisoners of war. Another agitator A.K.Maitra, said, "We feel for the BSF jawans who were mercilessly tortured and killed by the BDR."

"Our protest is a civilised protest against one of the most barbaric acts," said another protester.

The protest and was marked by the absence of slogan shouting and its peaceful nature.

Later escorted by the police, five representatives of the delegation went inside the high commission to hand over the letter to the deputy high commissioner.

"Most of us are agitated by the fact that a friendly country like Bangladesh could carry out such an unprovoked act," said Jyotirmoy Roy, a journalist.

"We helped them gain independence, yet they are indulging in back stabbing," said a resident from Chittaranjan Park.

The letter addressed to the Bangladesh Prime Minister read, "We remember when thirty years ago, Sheikh Mujibar Rahman was passing through Delhi on his way to liberated Bangladesh, the Bengalis of Delhi were full of joy and shouted 'Jai Bangla' with the leader. But this heinous crime has choked our voice."

The Bengalis also alleged that Major General Fazlur Rahman of the Bangladesh Rifles

unduly delayed the return of the bodies, which became decomposed beyond recognition. They also said that he had signed the Ganga water treaty with the Bangladesh government as a gesture of friendship from the side of the Indian government. The letter also said that about 5 lakh Bangladeshi immigrants were illegally living in Delhi and earning their livelihood, but they have never been turned out of the country as a goodwill gesture on the part of the Indian government.

The agitating Bengalis demanded that a high level inquiry should be set up into the incident, that should reveal its discoveries within a month, exemplary punishment should be given to the accused, the government should tender an apology for the act and a suitable legislation should be made to make sure that such incidents are not repeated.

# Hasina likely to visit Delhi

28/4 By Haroon Habib HD-1

**DHAKA, APRIL 27.** The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, is likely to pay a brief visit to New Delhi in the middle of May. Border problems are expected to top the agenda at a summit meeting planned with Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Sheikh Hasina, who is scheduled to attend a United Nation's conference in Brussels in the second week of May, is to visit Delhi on her way back home, or alternatively, on way to Brussels, to open the new chancery building of the Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi. Sources here said that Sheikh Hasina was expected to hold a meeting with Mr. Vajpayee tentatively on April 17.

Officials of the two capitals are preparing for the summit against the backdrop of the recent border clashes that left 19 border guards dead in the Bangladesh-Assam sector. Newspapers here have reported that the BSF has reinforced its forces in Belunia, Muhurir Char, Lathitila, along Tripura and Joypurhad, Godagari and Lalmonirhat along West Bengal. Panic-stricken villagers of these border regions feared to return to their homes.

Dhaka's concern was conveyed to the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. Monirul Tripathy, who held a meeting with the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Syed Moazzem Ali, on Thursday. Sources said the

## BSF examining returned weapons

**GUWAHATI, APRIL 27.** The Border Security Force is verifying and examining the weapons handed over by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) of the 16 BSF personnel killed on April 18 at Boroibari border village in Mankachar sub-division of Assam. BSF sources from Mankachar told PTI here over telephone that it was verifying whether the weapons belonged to the soldiers killed in the attack and whether they were damaged.

The BDR had handed over the weapons of the slain personnel yesterday at Mankachar border outpost and it included over 11 SLR, four carbines, one pistol, two grenades, two wireless transmitter sets and large cache of ammunition.— PTI



**Ms. Manjinder Singh, wife of Gurbax Singh, mourns the death of her husband in her house at Nainokot village, Punjab. Gurbax was one of the BSF jawans killed by the Bangladeshi forces last week. — AP**

proposed summit would particularly deal with the border tension triggered by the recent clashes in a land of "adverse possession".

The Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdus Samad Azad, in an interview, hoped that the two Prime Ministers would work out the modalities for durable peace along the border. Referring to the India's charge that the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) had fought with the Border Security Force without the knowledge of the Government, Mr. Azad said the BDR retained the right to act on its own judgment in the event of emergency. "The BDR is not isolated from the Government... We are proud of the performances of our border guards in protecting the territorial integrity," the daily *Independent* quoted the Foreign Minister as saying.

He also stressed the need for the full implementation of the 1974 Mujib-Indira treaty to bring about a permanent solution to all border problems. Bangladesh had ratified the treaty immediately after its signing, but India was yet to ratify the accord, he said.

THE HINDU

28 APR 2001

# India triggered off clash, says Dhaka

BY JOHN CHALMERS

**Dhaka, April 26:** Bangladesh accused India on Thursday of triggering a border clash in which 19 soldiers died, and said it had not fired a shot except in self-defence. Foreign secretary Syed Muazzem Ali denied that Bangladesh had reinforced its troops along the frontier since last week's flare-up and said he could not understand why India had deployed extra forces there.

"There is no build-up from our side as such on our border with India," Mr Ali said in an interview. "What we are trying to do right now is to ensure complete peace and tranquillity on the border."

Earlier India denied Bangladesh news-papers reports that the BSF had dug thousands of trenches along the northeastern section of its 4,000-km border and had deployed the Army as a second line of defence.

Mr Ali said the chain of incidents which led to the stand-off began on April 11, when Indian troops started building a road near

Padua on the southern edge of Meghalaya. He said Padua, which India calls Pyrdiwah, was recognised Bangladesh territory where his country's freedom fighters had held a post during the war of independence from Pakistan in 1971. This post had since been held by India's Border Security Force.

When BSF troops began the road from the border back into Indian territory — breaking an agreement between the two sides — the Bangladesh side urged them to stop. But construction continued at night, prompting the Bangladesh Rifles border troops to surround the area from three sides in a bid to make them stop, he said.

The Bangladesh foreign secretary said Indian forces responded to this by entering recognised Bangladesh territory near Roumari, across from the southwestern corner of Assam.

"If we had a problem in Padua we had to resolve it in Padua, we can't resolve it

somewhere else," Mr Ali said.

"But if you decide to open a new front which is 210 km away from this and send troops out on a mission, if there is firing on the BDR they will obviously act in self-defence."

India has said that half of the 16 troops it lost on that day had been shot at point-blank range and "brutally murdered." It has asked

Dhaka for an explanation of the incident.

But Mr Ali had his own demand for New

Delhi. "Please, on your side, carry out an investigation into how companies of the BSF could enter Bangladesh territory at 5:30 in the morning."

Mr Ali said that with the exception of a short stretch of frontier with Burma, Bangladesh was almost entirely surrounded by Indian territory and it was therefore in Dhaka's interest to ensure that the border problems between the two sides are resolved.

"My Prime Minister has expressed deep shock and grief at this loss on both sides. We have asked the Indian government to expedite implementation of the 1974 accord," he said.

The pact was signed by Bangladeshi independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

The Bangladesh parliament ratified the treaty within two months of its signing but the Indian parliament has yet to do so.

Only 6.5 km of border between the two countries is undefined, but there are dozens of enclaves known as "adverse possessions," which are occupied by people from one country even though on the map it belongs to the other.

This situation arose after the hasty Partition of India by British colonialists in 1947.

Mr Ali said the line even cut houses in half and in his home town, Sylhet, one quarter was sliced off into India and the rest into what was then East Pakistan. (Reuters)

## BANGLA FRONT



A BSF jawan patrolling a road along the Indo-Bangladesh border in Dhubri district of Assam. — Photo: Ritu Raj Konwar

## Govt. okays second phase of border fencing

110-13  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26. The Government has accorded "technical sanction" for the second phase of the fencing of the India-Bangladesh border and the collection of material has already begun, a Home Ministry spokesman said today.

With the completion of the phase II of the project, scheduled by 2007, 3420.38 km of border roads and 3286.87 km of border fencing will be constructed. By 2007, the entire India-Bangladesh border, except for 890 km, will be sealed. The second phase, which was approved by the Government last year, includes construction of an additional 797 km of road, 4062 mts of bridges, and 2429.50 km of fencing at an estimated cost of Rs. 1334 crores.

The phase I of the project includes construction of 2866.38 km of border roads, 21717.60 mts of bridges and erection of 857.37 km of fencing at an estimated cost of Rs. 1044.32 crores. Of this, 2379.86 km of roads, along with 20884 mts of bridges and 855.21 km fencing has already been completed.

### BSF to strengthen patrol

The Border Security Force and the Bangladesh Rifles today decided to strengthen patrolling in the territory between Karimganj district in Assam and Sylhet district in

Bangladesh. The modalities of patrolling were approved at a flag meeting today between high officials of the BSF and BDR at Jaki-ganj, on the border of Sylhet district, BSF sources said in Silchar (Assam).

Official sources said the situation in Karimganj and Mankachar was "normal" with the forces on "high alert."

Meanwhile, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Mr. I.D. Swami, today visited Pyrdivah village in Meghalaya to study the situation there. Earlier, he reviewed the situation in Mankachar with BSF sector commandants and held high level meetings with the BSF and the Meghalaya Chief Minister in Shillong today.

Mr. Swami said India would take all measures to strengthen security on the Indo-Bangla border. Addressing the villagers at Pyrdivah, he said the Centre had taken the incident very seriously and the people should not have any fear in residing here.

### FIR against BDR

The BSF has filed a FIR with the Mankachar police accusing the Bangladesh Rifles of indulging in international war crime by killing 16 jawans on the border. The FIR requested that the matter be investigated and a case was regis-

tered.

9.4.07 Bansk  
The Mankachar police said it was waiting for the version of the two injured BSF jawans who had returned to the country.

### Ex-gratia for slain jawans

The Government today announced payment of an ex-gratia amount of Rs. 7.5 lakhs each to the families of the 16 BSF personnel killed by the Bangladesh Rifles.

A Home Ministry spokesman said the Government had also decided to construct a memorial for the jawans at the frontier headquarters, Shillong. A memorial park would be created at Mankachar in Assam.

### Thackeray's demand

Meanwhile, the Shiv Sena supremo, Mr. Bal Thackeray, speaking to presspersons in Nasik, said India should give a "befitting reply" to the Bangladesh Rifles' act of killing 16 BSF personnel. He lamented that Bangladesh, which owed its freedom to India, should have committed such an act.

Various Hindu outfits also stepped up pressure on the Government over the issue, with the VHP demanding that both Pakistan and Bangladesh be declared as enemy countries. — UNI, PTI, Reuters

THE HINDU

27 APR 2007

# 'BSF entered Baraibari to neutralise firing'

110-13

26/4

By Vinay Kumar

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 25.** The 16 Border Security Force (BSF) personnel, killed brutally by the Bangladesh Rifles in Baraibari, were part of a patrol which came under heavy fire by the BDR troops on April 18.

Anticipating that the BDR troops would follow up the firing with an attempt to enter Indian territory, the BSF patrol decided to neutralise the firing by entering the area which was under the adverse possession of Bangladesh.

The decision to enter the area was taken by the local BSF Commandant after assessing the ground situation and had nothing to do with the clearance from the headquarters, the BSF Director-General, Mr. Gurbachan Jagat, said today.

Speaking to *The Hindu* here, the BSF chief said that a planned operation would not have been executed in such a manner.

The BSF patrol split into smaller units in order to cover a larger area around the border outpost. Reconstructing the sequence of events, as put together by various sources, Mr. Jagat said that one of the groups, comprising the Deputy Commandant, Mr. B.R. Mandal, two subordinate officers and 13 other ranks, advanced to an area towards the village and were confronted by a 1000-strong mob. The group was overpowered by the civilians backed by BDR units. The 16 BSF men were captured and disarmed by the BDR. He said that reinforcements of nearly three companies were sent and further mobilisation and action by the BSF silenced the BDR, which requested for a ceasefire.

Though a finality is yet to emerge, the BSF chief said initial inputs revealed that it was probably the hesitation on part of the BSF personnel to open fire at the civilians which led to their capture and killing.

The savagery with which the BSF men were tortured and killed only showed to what extent the mindless action of the BDR could go in violation of all civilised

and international norms. The post-mortem was conducted on April 20 by Dr. M. Anwar Hussain and his team of the Department of Forensic Medicine, Myensingh Medical College. It records that the 15 BSF men bore bullet injuries, making it clear that they were shot by the BDR troops and not lynched by the villagers as made out earlier.

Referring to the Pyrdiwah incident in Meghalaya, Mr. Jagat said that three companies of BDR, along with Bangladesh Army troops, dug 147 trenches overnight on April 15 but the area was finally vacated by them as the BSF men stood their ground.

He was inclined to believe while Pyrdiwah operation was "well planned" by the BDR and the Bangladesh Army, the Baraibari incident was not planned and certain sections of the BDR put on display their savagery in treating the BSF men in a brutal manner. As hot and humid conditions prevailed in the area, the bodies of the BSF men were allowed to decompose so that even mutilation did not come out in a ghastly way. Mr. Jagat said that Col. Mohammad Sadiqul Islam of the BDR, who accompanied the bodies of the slain BSF men to the border, had signed the examination report prepared by the BSF personnel before taking possession of the bodies.

Admitting that conditions in the North-East on the Indo-Bangladesh border were tough, Mr. Jagat said that nearly a 1000 BSF men get afflicted by malaria and dysentery every year of whom 10 die.

Though the 4000-km long Indo-Bangla border was demarcated, it was a stretch of 6.1 km in Cachar area and in Belonia in Tripura which was yet to be demarcated. "Several sensitive points along the border are being strengthened and we are asking for more forces," the BSF adding funds have been sanctioned for fencing the nearly 850-km long border with Bangladesh falling in Tripura.

India has also sent terms of references of two Joint Working Groups to Bangladesh but Dhaka is yet to confirm their terms of reference.

110-13

26/4

## 1269 Bangladesh Blunder 11-10

The problem is not new, nor has the government's ideology anything to do with it. In October 1962, when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru asked the Army to clear the Chinese occupation of territories claimed by India, he was operating on a Delhentric paradigm. Simply put, this meant a world view where friends and foes, countries big and small, individuals and groups, functioned as New Delhi wanted. The Chinese were not current with this perceived wisdom and promptly cleared us out of the territory they claimed. There was a repeat of sorts in 1987. New Delhi believed that the LTTE were our allies and would surrender their arms to the mighty Indian Army. Lamentably, as it turned out, the Tigers had other ideas and the error cost the country more than a thousand dead and twice that number wounded. Today, if we are gripped by an overpowering sense of having seen it all, it is perhaps because of the disjunction between what was actually happening on the Indo-Bangladesh border and what New Delhi imagined was happening. To start with the government said nothing, not even after Bangladesh forcibly occupied a small strip of land called Pyrdiwah on the evening of April 15. Nothing wrong with this. Given the close relations between India and Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina, it was wise to use discreet diplomacy to undo this mischief. Presumably this is what was done, but apparently there was no response. At this point, wisdom would have suggested that India up the ante by issuing a public ultimatum.

Instead, sometime on April 17, the BSF was asked to throw the Bangladeshis out of an Indian enclave in Boraibari which was in their 'adverse possession.' This was resisted by the Bangladeshi villagers and aided by the Bangladesh Rifles, they scattered the Indian force and killed 16 hapless jawans who were trapped in the wet paddy fields around the village. Given the fact that the forces were asked to go on a cross-border action, there is little doubt that the clearance for the misconceived operation came from the highest level. Till now, the government has not quite caught up with the reality. The government still believes that but for its masterly handling, the situation could have degenerated into wider hostilities. A statement in Parliament somewhat disingenuously claims that the Indian patrol 'went missing' in the midst of cross-border firing in the region. In truth, the men were part of a four company-strong force sent into Bangladesh-controlled territory on an ill-conceived mission. The list of failures arising from New Delhi's refusal to keep track of the realities on the ground is growing. The reason for this is a failing as old as history, something which durbari Dilli is not unfamiliar with. As the rajas become embroiled in their own survival, their instruments become adept at telling them what they want to hear. Since all that New Delhi hears is what it wants to, governance declines and the system begins to come apart. The situation is not of the making of this or that ruling group, but its consequences cannot but affect all of us.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

26 APR 2011

# Jaswant veto on border troops under scanner

FROM CHANDAN NANDY

New Delhi, April 25: The butchering of the BSF jawans at Baroibari could have been avoided.

The BSF blundered by moving into Baroibari without enough men and firepower, but it is Jaswant Singh's alleged "veto" on a home ministry decision to deploy an Assam Rifles contingent near the trouble-spot that is raising eyebrows.

Soon after the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Bangladesh army troops "captured" Pyrdiwah, in "adverse possession" of India, on April 16, the home ministry moved swiftly. The next day, a file was prepared and necessary orders were issued to speedily move an Assam Rifles brigade — about 3,000 personnel — to take up position across Baroibari and several sensitive parts of the Indo-Bangladesh border in the North-east.

Both the Assam government and Assam Rifles headquarters were notified. But it is learnt that Singh, who is in charge of both external affairs and defence, put his foot down.

Singh, perhaps, acted for purely diplomatic reasons. Officials are wondering whether Singh's "veto" had anything to do with home minister L.K. Advani's sudden decision not to make the crucial statement in Parliament on April 23. Finally, Singh read out the statement.

It is being debated why Singh quashed the home ministry's move. Officials are questioning his rationale in halting the Assam Rifles deployment, which would have been "purely a tactical ploy to apply pressure on Dhaka to vacate Pyrdiwah".

But, by the time the decision to stop the Assam Rifles was taken, it was already too late. On April 17, the BDR and the Bangladesh army

— with a combined strength of over five battalions — had moved in from faraway Madhupur cantonment in Mymensingh district and taken up position in and around Baroibari.

When only a handful of BSF jawans moved into Baroibari, in "adverse possession" of Dhaka, they were quickly overpowered, tortured and killed.

The home ministry, however, describes the jawans as a patrol party of the Mancachar border outpost that was "fired upon heavily by BDR troops in our area".

The home ministry says: "Anticipating that the BDR troops would follow up this firing with an attempt to enter into Indian territory, the patrol decided to neutralise the firing by entering the area which was under the adverse possession of Bangladesh."

North Block is of the opinion that the BSF, described as a "disciplined and committed force", hesitated to open fire in Baroibari because that would have led to the killing of civilians.

A post-mortem of the incidents suggests there were intelligence lapses in Pyrdiwah and tactical failure in Baroibari. Officials admit that the Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing and the BSF's G-Branch should have sniffed the BDR's plans to "capture" Pyrdiwah.

The BSF's operations wing should have been more careful while venturing into Baroibari as there were apprehensions that the BDR was being backed up by the Bangladesh army.

There was not a shred of intelligence input in the four crucial days between April 16 and 20. This saw an embarrassed Vajpayee government bending over backwards to give a clean chit to the "friendly" Sheikh Hasina led Awami League government.

THE TELEGRAPH

# Bangla polls to decide policy with India

DIPANKAR ROY  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, April 24. — The managers of counter-insurgency operations in Assam are keeping their fingers crossed over last week's development along the Indo-Bangla borders and its likely impact on the October elections in Bangladesh.

The Sheikh Hasina government has been a help in that it has been stern with militants from the north-eastern states, who seek to take refuge in that country. At least 50 UlfA militants, including the outfit's general secretary, are imprisoned in Bangladesh.

"Of course, we have reports that some militants are still hiding there but they are not as comfortable as they used to be earlier," a senior police official here said.

On the other hand, Bangladesh Opposition leader, Begum Khaleda Zia, has described the North-east militants as freedom fighters, who deserved all help. This gives enough indication of her government's attitude if her Bangladesh Nationalist Party were to assume power after the elections.

A central home ministry official said that middle and lower level officials in Bangladesh police and administration are anti-India and are supporters of the BNP. They are the ones who continue to

help the militants in finding shelter in Bangladesh, the official added.

As far as resolving the problem of insurgency in the North-east is concerned, Sheikh Hasina's continuance in office would be of significant help, the official said.

The Bangladesh Rifles' withdrawal from Pyrdiwah in Meghalaya after keeping it under siege for three days, has given the Opposition the stick to beat the Hasina government with. It has always been harshly critical of the Hasina government for its pro-India stance and the withdrawal is being projected as a sell out to India.

Reports emanating from Bangladesh say that inhabitants of Padua, which is across the border, are unhappy with the BDR's withdrawal from Pyrdiwah after having recaptured land, which they claim belonged to them.

Such sentiments (as expressed by residents of Padua) are infectious and if the Bangladesh Opposition manages to spread it far and wide in the country, then it may not bode well for Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League in the elections, an Intelligence official said.

Sheikh Hasina finds herself in an awkward position over the massacre of 16 BSF jawans at Boraibari, too. Given her and her government's friendly disposi-

## BDR MOVEMENT ALONG TRIPURA BORDER WORRIES CM

AGARTALA, April 24. — Tripura chief minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, is worried over the manner in which provocations are being created along state's international fringe line with Bangladesh.

"This is ostensibly to bitter relations between two friendly countries," Mr Sarkar said and added: "The government has asked BSF authorities to put security posts along frontier line on the highest alert and keep a round the clock vigil in the border areas. The BSF has taken measures accordingly."

"We are always in favour of a friendly relation with a neighbouring country." The chief minister, however, said the Centre had not yet communicated to the state whether additional BSF battalions would be sent here immediately to reinforce the security posts along border.

He said his government was worried over the "unwanted happenings in some of the areas along border."

Official sources said a group of BDR personnel had launched a provocative raid along the Lathitila border in Cachar region of the Barak valley on Monday. The raiders, however retreated after the BSF men retaliated. The BDR has increased its strength opposite Muhuri Char, along Tripura's southern border in Belonia subdivision in last several days, the sources said.

BSF sources said the BDR was also constructing fresh bunkers along the state's southern fringe line opposite Belonia town. — SNS

tion towards India and left to herself, she would probably have chosen to apologise for the BDR's barbaric act. But the Opposition would tout such an act as an example of her subservience to India. In fact, the Hasina government finds itself so much on the back foot that it had to promptly counter India's contention that she had expressed regret, which is

certainly milder than an apology, over the killings during her talk with the Indian Prime Minister. The border incidents seem to have created an adverse situation for Sheikh Hasina with the elections not very far off and that may not be good news for India in general and the North-east in particular, the official said.

# Boundary an irritant to Delhi-Dhaka friendship

H BULA DEVI  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 24. - The Indo-Bangla border problem will continue to be a major irritant in the "friendly" relations between the two countries until the demarcation of the boundary line is completed, the Constitution amended and the two governments come to a mutual agreement.

The situation is not as simple as it is projected. Although an agreement on the Land Boundary was signed in 1974, it stands nowhere unless a constitutional amendment made, a necessary condition for any expropriation of territory.

To do so, the government has to move step by step. The agreement cannot be ratified unless a demarcation of the boundary is completed. Therefore, as a first step, the gov-

ernment will have to complete demarcation of the boundary line where 6.5 kilometres are yet to be demarcated, sources say.

The Agreement certainly talks about "transfer" of areas but there is no clarification on how to transfer or exchange the enclaves, whether the boundary should be re-drawn or to physically uproot the people from one area to the other, sources said.

So, unless the government addresses the two pending issues of completion of boundary demarcation and exchange of enclaves, the issue will remain an irritant.

The third pending issue is about the areas under "adverse possession", where a lack of clarity is stated to be creating the problem, unlike in the case of enclaves which are properly defined and whose geographical limits are

known.

A major part of the border line between India and Bangladesh falls in West Bengal and it is said that the West Bengal government has been reluctant to resolve the issue because of its own political compulsions.

According to a former diplomat, at one point of time the West Bengal government was prepared to consider exchanging a part of the enclaves but not all the enclaves.

During the foreign secretary-level talks in New Delhi last December, a mechanism was set up by the two nations to deal with territories in adverse possession. This related to the 111 Indian enclaves trapped in Bangladeshi territory and 51 similar areas of Bangladesh lying in India.

Boundary demarcation irritant to Indo-Bangla friendship.

THE STATESMAN

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# BANGLA:

(Continued from page 1)

about the loss of the party's image for going soft on the issue. On many occasions the government appeared to be defending Sheikh Hasina, one MP said after the party's parliamentary wing meeting. One member of Parliament said the government should pressure the Bangladesh government to prosecute those responsible for the killings and mutilation of the bodies of the BSF jawans. He also demanded adequate compensation.

## Alert:

The Indo-Bangla border along Karimganj district of south Assam was put on maximum alert with additional BSF contingent being rushed there, BSF officials said, adds PTI.

This afternoon a flag meeting was held between the Karimganj sector BSF Deputy Commandant Mr S Madan and his Sylhet sector BDR counterpart at Sadarasi near Karimganj.

The meeting, cordial, was to defuse tension and maintain lasting peace along the India Bangladesh border, officials said.

# Non-apology won't be an issue: India

DIVA ROY CHAUDHURY  
ATTESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 24. — The government will not make an issue of whether the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, expressed regret for the border incident in which 16 BSF personnel were killed, senior PMO officials said, as long as she takes action against the guilty.

The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee, told BJP MPs today that Sheikh Hasina had indeed expressed regrets.

**Border firing?** Contradictory reports of firing in the Karimganj sector in Assam created confusion today. An agency report quoting a BSF DIG (G) said the BSF had fired at BDR jawans at Lathitilla, about 20 km from Karimganj town, last night to repulse an attempt to take over the BSF post there. The BDR jawans were accompanied by civilians, the report said.

(However, a deputy commandant of BSF sector headquarters at Masimpur, under whose jurisdiction Lathitilla falls, said BSF jawans had noticed some movement last night and had asked the group to stop. When they ignored the warning, jawans fired three rounds and the group fled towards Bangladesh over an open ground. There was no retaliatory fire he said.)

PMO officials said there was

an intelligence failure that led to the BSF men getting entangled tragically, adding that a higher degree of alertness should have been maintained. PMO officials felt that since the incidents were part of a sustained scheme, they are likely to escalate as Bangladesh elections approach. They, however, said it was imperative that the reactions were "measured and restrained", so as to not have another hostile government in the immediate neighbourhood.

"The present Bangladesh government may not be friendly, but it is not hostile," the officials said, adding "the last thing we want is another hostile neighbouring government." The MEA today said New Delhi and Dhaka have been in touch through diplomatic channels till yesterday.

"India has conveyed to the Bangladesh government that the institutional mechanism we have in place must not be allowed to fail again," the MEA spokesman said, adding that on occasions of disequilibrium, recourse must be taken to flag meetings.

In case of any difficulty in ar-

- On page 8:
- BSF killings aimed at overthrowing Hasina
- Boundary an irritant to Delhi-Dhaka friendship



Bangladeshi guards on the India-Bangladesh border near Comilla keep a watch across the boundary on Tuesday. Comilla shares the border with Tripura on the Indian side. — API/PTI

group of the Bangladesh Rifles want to go to war on an issue like this?" officials said. "We will wait and see the kind of action she takes, if she punishes the guilty and calibrate our responses accordingly."

Asked to respond to the reported cross-firing along border areas today, the spokesman asked the media to contact the ministry of home affairs for details. The reported incident, in which a

■ See BANGLA: page 8

THE STATESMAN

25 APR 2001

# BSF men's bodies not deliberately mutilated: BDR

**B**odies of 16 Border Security Forces (BSF) members, who intruded into the Bangladesh territory and died during a fierce encounter with the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) at the Baraibari frontier in Rourmari last Wednesday, were not deliberately disfigured as New Delhi claims, according to local people and BDR personnel.

The Indian authorities have been claiming for the last couple of days that they received the bodies in mutilated condition. Some soldiers were beheaded while some others shot point blank, they claimed.

However, the villagers in Rourmari and BDR officials denied the allegations outright and said the BSF men were killed during a shootout and no act of savagery had taken place.

"The bodies were lying in wet paddy fields for more than 36 hours due to the tense situation and they were also exposed to direct sunlight. As a result these were partially decomposed and bloated," said a middle-aged farmer.

As the decomposed bodies began to reek, the villagers took the initiative to recover them, he added.

"Some villagers actually risked their lives to recover the bodies from the paddy fields late Thursday during

a lull in the heavy gun fight," a BDR official at the Baraibari camp, who preferred not to be named, said Sunday. "It was difficult to recover the bodies from the paddy fields, as the BSF continued firing with heavy machine guns, mortars, SLR and other weapons." After waiting for about 36 hours, during a lull in the gunfight, the villagers went to the paddy fields to recover the deceased soldiers, he added.

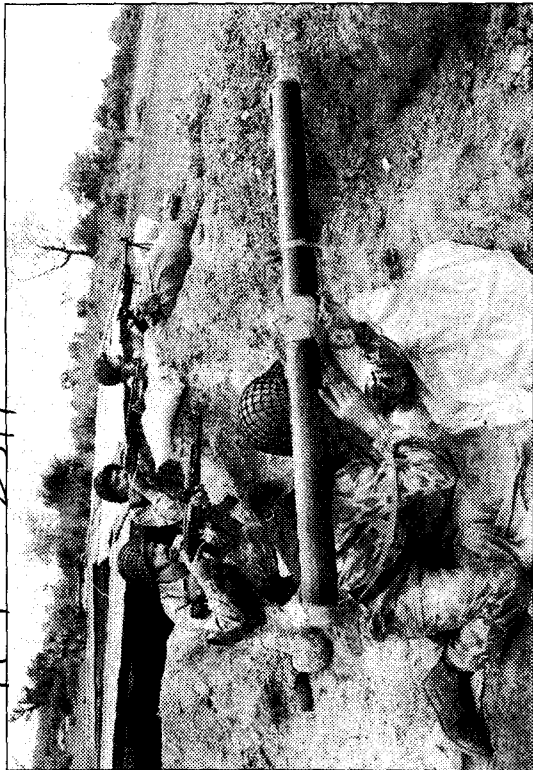
The villagers dragged the partially decomposed and bloated bodies to the Baraibari BDR camp.

"This caused further damage to their bodies," the officer said. "No question of mutilation by the BDR men arose in such a war-like situation." The firing stopped early Friday and the decomposed bodies were handed over to the Indian authorities later in the day after autopsy at the Mymensingh Medical College.

• *Report by Nazrul Islam, back from Baraibari frontier in The Daily Star, April 24, 2001.*

## Time for grief, not rancour

THAT the Indian authorities should be sore and hurt by the sight of eight



### BORDER VIGIL

mutilated dead bodies of their frontier guards out of the 16 made over to them following last week's border skirmish was something to be expected. Their sentiments are perfectly understandable. We have respect for their emotions of grief and shock.

We regret that this bodily disfigurement has occurred, regardless of how and why. The Indian authorities have termed this 'gruesome murder' with point-blank bullet wounds allegedly

inflicted on the bodies. Forensic view from our side, however, alluded to autopsy on somewhat decomposed bodies following a lapse of time. Comprehensive official version awaits a scooping investigation that has got underway at the behest of Bangladesh government.

Occasional rows and skirmishes along a flat, featureless borderline stretching over 4000 kilometers with man-made origins in the Radcliffe

Award topped off by undemarcated parcels of land are not unexpected occurrences. But how could things degenerate into a sore-point this time needs direly to be gone into. That is where we need to stress the importance of making appraisals afield by both Indian and Bangladesh governments in a tandem, so that in the fullness of time we will have jointly addressed the points of differences to bridge them on a durable basis.

In this context, it must be unhesitatingly said that India has dragged its feet on border problems during the last two and a half decades since the signing of the Mujib-Indira land boundary agreement in 1974. They are yet to ratify, far less implement the agreement that suffused with a post-liberation war bonding between the two neighbouring countries to readily help establish a border of peace. India's critical input of political will has been missing in this respect. The recent border incidents heighten a realisation that this should be forthcoming, now. Meanwhile as India makes it up with Bangladesh on the unfinished border demarcation issues, their joint endeavour should be to wholeheartedly head off any rancorous fall-out from the latest flare-up, since defused, at the border.

• *Editorial in The Daily Star, April 24, 2001.*



# বাংলাদেশ নিয়ে দলেই ক্ষোভের মুখে প্রধানমন্ত্রী

## সীমান্তে ব্যর্থ হানা বি ডি আরের

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৪ এপ্রিল— বাংলাদেশ নিয়ে নিজের দলের সাংসদদের প্রবল সমালোচনার মুখে পড়লেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী। আজ সংসদীয় দলের সভায় বি জে পি সাংসদেরা সরাসরি প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে প্রশ্ন করেন, বাংলাদেশের বিরুদ্ধে কেন কড়া ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হয়নি? ভারতের ১৬ জন জওয়ানকে হত্যা করে গ্রাম দখল করা সত্ত্বেও কেন বাংলাদেশকে যোগ্য জবাব দেওয়া হল না? ক্ষুব্ধ সাংসদদের প্রশ্ন, সরকার কেন শেখ হাসিনার প্রচারসচিবের মতো কাজ করছে?

সাংসদদের প্রশ্নের জবাব অবশ্য বাজপেয়ী দেননি, দিয়েছেন তাঁরই অত্যন্ত বিশ্বাসভাজন প্রতিরক্ষা ও বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশোবন্ত সিংহ। প্রধানমন্ত্রী শুধু বলেন, “প্রচার হচ্ছে হাসিনা আমার কাছে দুঃখপ্রকাশ করেননি। কিন্তু এটি নিছকই প্রচার। ঠিক কথা নয়। হাসিনা দুঃখপ্রকাশ করেছেন।” এ দিকে, কাল সংসদে যা বলেছেন আজ তারই পুনরাবৃত্তি করেন যশোবন্ত। কিন্তু তাতে বি জে পি সাংসদেরা সন্তুষ্ট হতে পারেননি। তখন যশোবন্ত বলেন, “তা হলে আমার কী করা উচিত ছিল। আমি তো বাংলাদেশের বিরুদ্ধে যুদ্ধ ঘোষণা করতে পারতাম না। বোম্বাও ফেলতে পারতাম না। প্রতিবাদ করার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশ জওয়ানদের সরিয়ে নিয়েছে। আমাদের গ্রাম ফিরিয়ে দিয়েছে। তার পর আর কী করার আছে?” প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী জানান, “আমরা তো ওদের বলেইছি, দোষীদের শাস্তি দিতে হবে। কিন্তু আমাদের এমন কথা শুনতে হচ্ছে পরমাণু বোমা হাতে থাকা সত্ত্বেও আমরা এমন ব্যবহার করছি কেন? আমরা কি বাংলাদেশে বোমা ফেলব?”

যশোবন্তের শেষের কথাগুলি আর এস এসের শাখা সংগঠন বিশ্ব হিন্দু পরিষদকে লক্ষ্য করে। কারণ তারাই এই ধরনের সমালোচনা করেছে। আজ বি জে পি সাংসদেরাও সোচ্চার ছিলেন সরকারের নরম মনোভাব নিয়ে। এমনকী সংসদীয় দলের মুখপাত্র বিজয়কুমার মালহোত্রাও বলেন, দেশজুড়ে এই ধারণা ছড়িয়েছে যে, সরকার কড়া হাতে বাংলাদেশের মোকাবিলা করতে পারেনি। এটা করা উচিত ছিল। সংসদে কার্গিলের প্রসঙ্গও তুলে আনেন সাংসদেরা। তাঁরা বলেন, কার্গিলের সময় পাকিস্তানের প্রতি যে মনোভাব দেখানো হয়েছিল, বাংলাদেশের ক্ষেত্রে তা দেখা যায়নি। তখন যশোবন্ত বলেন, কার্গিলের ক্ষেত্রে ব্যাপারটি

ছিল আলাদা। সেখানে পাকিস্তান ঘাঁটি গড়ে বসেছিল। এখানে বাংলাদেশ বলার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে দখল করা গ্রাম ছেড়ে চলে গিয়েছে।

সাংসদদের সমালোচনার পর যশোবন্ত বলেন, এখানে গোয়েন্দাদের ব্যর্থতার কোনও প্রশ্ন ওঠে না। বাংলাদেশের কাছে ঘটনার তীব্র প্রতিবাদ জানানো হয়েছে। ভারতের আশা, বাংলাদেশ দোষী জওয়ানদের শাস্তি দেবে।

যদিও প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রীর বক্তব্য সাংসদের তেমন খুশি করতে পারেনি। তাঁদের ধারণা, তহলকা-কাণ্ড সরকারের ভাবমূর্তির যে রকম ক্ষতি করেছিল, সে রকমই বা তার থেকেও বেশি ক্ষতি করবে বাংলাদেশের এই ঘটনা। আজ বৈঠকে উপস্থিত থাকলেও এ নিয়ে মুখ খোলেননি আডবাণী। গতকাল যশোবন্ত বলেছিলেন, যে ঘটনা ঘটেছে, তার সঙ্গে বিদেশ বা প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রক ততটা জড়িত নয়, যতটা জড়িত স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রক। তার পরেও আডবাণী মুখ খুললেন না। প্রশ্ন উঠেছে, এই নরম মনোভাবে আডবাণীও কি অখুশি!

কোঁটায় দলের লোক: টেলি যোগাযোগ-সহ প্রতিটি মন্ত্রকে যে সব কমিটি আছে তাতে দলীয় সমর্থকদের নেওয়া হচ্ছে না, দলীয় সাংসদদের অনুরোধ উপেক্ষা করে বিরোধীদের নেওয়া হচ্ছে বলে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কাছে নালিশ জানানো সাংসদেরা। বাজপেয়ী তাঁদের বলেন, তিনি মন্ত্রীদের সঙ্গে কথা বলে এটা নিশ্চিত করবেন কমিটিগুলিতে যেন সাংসদদের অনুরোধকে গুরুত্ব দেওয়া হয়। অভিযোগ মূলত টেলিফোন অ্যাডভাইসারি কমিটি (টি এ সি)-র সদস্য, এন জি ও-দের অর্থসাহায্য এবং অন্যান্য মন্ত্রকের কমিটি নিয়ে। রামবিলাস পাসোয়ানকে বার বার অনুরোধ করা সত্ত্বেও কোনও রাজ্যেই টি এ সি-তে বি জে পি সমর্থকেরা ঠাঁই পাননি। টি এ সি সদস্য হলেই বিনা পয়সায় একটি টেলিফোন সংযোগ। দলীয় সমর্থকদের এই সুযোগ পাইয়ে দিতে পারছেন না বলেই ক্ষুব্ধ বিজে পি সাংসদেরা।

### ঢাকায় হরতালে হত ২

ঢাকা, ২৪ এপ্রিল— আজ বাংলাদেশে বিরোধী দল বি এন পি-র ডাকা ৭২ ঘণ্টার হরতালের দ্বিতীয় দিনে নানা জায়গায় হিংসাত্মক ঘটনা ঘটেছে। ইতিমধ্যে দু'জনের মৃত্যুর খবর পাওয়া গিয়েছে। তাঁদের এক জন মারা যান গত কাল। পুলিশ জানিয়েছে, ধর্মঘাটীরা বোমা ছুড়লে পুলিশ তাঁদের হঠানোর জন্য রবারের বুলেট ও কাঁদানে গ্যাস ছোড়ে। তাতেই ওই ব্যক্তির মৃত্যু হয়।

আগরতলা, ২৪ এপ্রিল— ফের সীমান্ত দখলের চেষ্টা বি ডি আরের। এ বারে অসমের করিমগঞ্জ সীমান্তে। তবে শেষ অবধি বি এস এফের পাঁচ গুলিতে তারা পিছু হঠতে বাধ্য হয়। দিন কয়েক আগে বি এস এফের ১৬ জন জওয়ানকে যেখানে নৃশংস ভাবে হত্যা করা হয়েছিল, সেখান থেকে এই এলাকা খুব বেশি দূরে নয়। বি এস এফ সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, সাদা পোশাকের কিছু লোক নিয়ে বি ডি আর কাল লাঠিটিলা চৌকিতে হানা দিলে বি এস এফ গুলি চালায়। তারপরেই তড়িঘড়ি পালাতে বাধ্য হয় বি ডি আর ও তার সঙ্গের লোকজন। ত্রিপুরা-কাছাড়-মিজোরাম সীমান্তের ১২৮৬ কিলোমিটার জুড়ে এর পরেই চূড়ান্ত সতর্কতা জারি করা হয়েছে।

গুয়াহাটীর খবর, গত সপ্তাহের সীমান্ত সংঘর্ষের ফলে সংলগ্ন গ্রামগুলির যে সব বাসিন্দা অন্যত্র পালিয়ে এসেছিলেন, তাঁরা ফিরতে শুরু করেছেন। খুবড়ির পুলিশ সুপার জানিয়েছেন, মানকাছাড় মহকুমার প্রায় ৩০টি গ্রাম থেকে যাঁরা ভয়ে পালিয়ে গিয়েছিলেন, অবস্থা স্বাভাবিক হতে দেখে তাঁরা প্রায় সবাই ফিরে এসেছেন।

এ দিকে, ঢাকার খবর, ভারত-বাংলাদেশ সীমান্তে পাহারা আরও জোরদার করেছে বাংলাদেশ সরকার। বাংলাদেশ রাইফেলসে আরও ২০ হাজার জওয়ান নিয়োগ করা হচ্ছে। সীমান্ত সুরক্ষা ও চোরাচালান রোধেই এই ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হচ্ছে বলে সরকারি সূত্রে জানানো হয়েছে।

অসম সীমান্তেও সুরক্ষা বাড়ানোর কথা জবা হচ্ছে। দিল্লি থেকে ফিরে গুয়াহাটীতে আজ অসমের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী প্রফুল্লকুমার মহন্ত জানিয়েছেন, এই ধরনের ঘটনা এড়াতে অসম-বাংলাদেশ সীমান্তে আরও রক্ষী নিয়োগের কথা ভাবছে কেন্দ্র। এ ব্যাপারে আশ্বাসও দেওয়া হয়েছে মহন্তকে। বরোইবাড়িতে বি এস এফ জওয়ানদের উপর অভ্যুত্থার ও হত্যার ঘটনায় আই এস আই-এর হাত থাকতে পারে বলে আজ মন্তব্য করেন অসমের রাজ্যপাল।

### সল্টলেকে লোডশেডিং

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার: হাইটেনশন লাইনে গোলযোগ দেখা দেওয়ায় মঙ্গলবার সল্টলেকের কয়েকটি এলাকায় দফায় দফায় লোডশেডিং হয়। বিদ্যুৎ পর্যদের ওই এলাকায় দুপুর ১টা থেকে সন্ধ্যা ৩টা পর্যন্ত টানা লোডশেডিং চলে। সল্টলেকের সেক্টর-১-এর লাভশি এবং সংলগ্ন এলাকা রাত ১২টায় ফের বিদ্যুৎ-বিহীন হয়ে যায়।

25 APR 2001

## A border that falls to BDR every day

Jaideep Mazumdar  
Shikarpur (Nadia), April 24

THE RECENT "criminal adventurism" of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) at Mankachar and Pyrdivah in Assam and Meghalaya respectively were not isolated acts. They were, say people living along the Indo-Bangla border here, part of the BDR's grand design to change the demographic profile of the areas.

And the BDR's 'operation' has been showing encouraging results. Hundreds of Hindu families have moved away from the border areas and many more are planning to follow suit. Barajipara, Bikhampur, Ayadanga, Meghna and numerous other villages, all under Shikarpur gram panchayat in Tehatta subdivision of this district, stand out as prime examples. Abandoned houses and a terrified local populace are a shameful testimony to the Indian State machinery's failure to



AP PHOTO

BDR personnel patrolling the Indo-Bangla border along Tripura.

protect the lives, lands and interests of Indian citizens.

"The BDR has been encouraging criminal gangs from across the border to steal crops, cattle, foodstuff and our household goods," Shikarpur panchayat samiti member Sushanta Kumar Mondal told *Hindustan Times*.

"Such attacks have hastened the departure of hundreds of families from this area. The BSF is helpless and can't guarantee our safety," he added. "These attacks by criminal gangs from Bangladesh have become a regular affair," said Rabindranath Biswas, another panchayat member and a resident of Meghna village.

There have been more than 1,000 cases of murders, dacoities, thefts, loot, rapes and molestations in the 450 square km area along the 65 km-long international border here over the past five years. "Most of the crimes, especially the rape and molestation of women, are never reported. What is the point? The local police or the BSF are powerless," said Ananta Pramanik of Ayadanga. Ananta's is one of the 15 families planning to leave the village before the onset of the monsoon.

The latest mass migration from Ayadanga has been prompted by the murderous attack on April 12 midnight by Bangladeshi criminals on

Sanat Sarkar, head teacher of the Rajapur Junior High School and a resident of the village. Sarkar sustained multiple bullet injuries. "Sanatbabu has been raising his voice against the BSF's incompetence and against attacks on us by Bangladeshi criminals. That's why he was attacked and after this, it's totally impossible for us to stay here," said Pramanik.

Last year, 18 families left Ayadanga, 12 have left Meghna, 25 migrated from Barajipara and 21 from Bikhampur. These 66 families have had to sell off their croplands—approximately 700 bighas at throwaway prices. "Now the land is being cultivated by people who have migrated illegally from across the border and settled down here," said Sambhu Samaddar, who left Ayadanga and has settled down at Karimpur.

This is exactly what the BDR wants: make it impossible for members of a particular community to live here, force them to sell off their lands and leave and then supplant them with illegal migrants. This game plan has been successful," said Sushanta Mondal. The tens of thousands of other border residents hold the same view.

(To be concluded)

# Fresh Bangladesh Rifles bid in Assam

HT Correspondents  
Guwahati/Shillong/Agartala,  
April 24

THE BDR made a fresh intrusion bid in Assam's Karimganj district yesterday, but was forced to retreat as BSF men fired back.

BDR personnel, along with "people in plain clothes, who could be villagers", advanced on the Lathitilla border outpost, said BSF DIG S Basumatary. A maximum alert has been sounded in all outposts on the 1,286-km Indo-Bangla border in the Tripura-Cachar-Mizoram stretch following the fresh intrusion bid as well as

reports of a massive BDR build-up along the Meghalaya-Bangladesh border.

"All security personnel posted along the border have been alerted about the possibility of another intrusion by the BDR. A special watch is being kept in Domabari and Ladotilla," said L Thangcho, Karimganj DC.

He said BSF reinforcements had been deployed at the flash points. As additional precaution, the district administration has imposed Section 144 CrPC in the border areas, restricting movement of people and vehicles after 9 pm. "As of now, we have not initiated any measure to shift people from

these areas. But if required, we will do that too," said Thangcho.

The BSF and the BDR held a sector-level flag meeting in south Tripura's Belonia this afternoon. The BSF urged its Bangladeshi counterpart to reduce its troops and stop 'aggressive patrolling'. The BDR sector commander reportedly agreed to maintain peace, but did not give any assurance on pulling back additional troops.

Basumatary said the BDR has been consolidating its position at Parshuram, Kalikapur, Majumder and Majumder Hat, close to Muhuri Char, a peren-

nial flash point. At other border locations on the Tripura border, the BDR has increased its strength. "In normal times, a border outpost is manned by 25-30 jawans. They have increased it to 60," a senior official said.

There are also reports of BDR movements in the dense forests of the Chittagong Hill Tracts bordering Tripura and Mizoram.

**Injured jawans:** The two injured BSF jawans returned by the BDR are reportedly recuperating fast. Their testimony will be important in understanding the kind of treatment meted out to the slain BSF personnel.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 APR 2001

# MEA silent on latest border skirmish

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 24.** India today declined comment on the alleged attempt by Bangladesh to occupy a border outpost in Assam and the reported troop build up by the latter's paramilitary forces at the border.

According to reports from Agartala, the Border Security Force (BSF) had resorted to firing to prevent personnel of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and others in "plainclothes" to occupy a border outpost in Karimganj district of Assam.

Asked to comment on the latest incidents, the spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the situation on the ground was being monitored constantly.

Meanwhile, the Minister of State for Home, Mr. I.D. Swami, is visiting the Indo-Bangladesh border in Assam and Meghalaya tomorrow. The Minister will address the BSF personnel posted there. He will also discuss details about constructing a memorial for the 16 BSF men slain by the BDR.

According to the MEA spokesman, India had reiterated through diplomatic channels on Monday that existing institutional mechanisms linking the Ministries of External Affairs and Home should not be allowed to "fail again." In case of a disequilibrium on the border, both sides should take recourse to established norms such as flag meetings. "Should there be any difficulty, forces on the border

should get in touch with the Governments," he observed. India and Bangladesh had recently formed two high-profile working groups for demarcating the 6.5 Km. of border as well as for establishing institutionalised contacts between the BSF and the BDR.

In a separate statement, the BSF also stressed that neither side should take unilateral action to resolve differences along the border. "Neither the BSF nor the BDR should try to forcibly change the status of the border and this matter should be entirely left to the respective Governments." The statement also took exception to the BDR's justification of its takeover of the border enclave of Pyrdiwah by linking it to the alleged construction of a road by the BSF in its proximity. A company commanders flag meeting on March 31 had adequately addressed the issue and the "BDR did not raise any further objections", the statement added.

The MEA spokesman, asked about reports suggesting that the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Ms. Sheikh Hasina, had not expressed regret for the killing and torture of the 15 BSF personnel during her telephonic conversation with the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, said he had "nothing further to add to what the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, said in Parliament on Monday."

## ISI behind killing of BSF men?

PTI reports from Shillong: The Assam Governor, Lt. Gen. (Retd) S.K.

Sinha, today said Pakistan's ISI might be behind the torture and killing of BSF jawans at Borabari.

"The ISI might have used some criminals who helped the ULFA kill innocent people, belonging to a particular linguistic group in 20 places in Assam during the last one year," he told newsmen here.

These criminals could have been used by the ISI to kill the BSF personnel, he added.

There should be a proper investigation into the ghastly incident and the Bangladesh Government must punish the culprits, Mr. Sinha said.

Stating that the Sheikh Hasina Government could not be blamed for the incident, Mr. Sinha, who was in charge of 19,000 Pakistani POWs during the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, termed the mutilation of the bodies of the BSF men as "barbaric."

No people of a civilised country would torture a POW. If the BDR had captured the BSF personnel for violating border norms, they should have been treated as POWs under the Geneva Convention, Mr. Sinha said.

It was surprising that Bangladesh, which was liberated by India, did not know how to treat POWs, he added.

Referring to the intrusion by the BDR, he said "there was no intelligence failure on our part."

THE HINDU

25 APR 2001

# Politicians gain as intruders turn settlers

Jaideep Mazumdar  
Kolkata, April 24

Hf-9  
244

BANGLADESH'S GAME plan for the areas along its border with West Bengal is a tried and tested one. It has yielded rich dividends in Assam and parts of Meghalaya; so much so that most of the areas in Assam along the international border have, for all practical purposes, become an extension of Bangladesh.

The tactics India's 'friendly neighbour' has been deploying is simple: support regular criminal attacks on houses of a particular community, families and croplands across the border, scale up such attacks and make it impossible for them to stay on in the border areas. And, at the same time, push in thousands of Bangladeshi nationals who settle down as sharecroppers or daily wage earners in the border areas. The retreating and desperate families naturally sell off their croplands and houses at low prices, since no other Hindu family is willing to buy the land. Once the Bangladeshis become landowners, they become bona fide citizens of India but their loyalties remain with Bangladesh. Indian politicians have aided this game plan for



AP PHOTO

BDR personnel patrol the Indo-Bangla border in Comilla district.

the last few decades. The illegal migrants are treated as precious 'vote banks' whose support is crucial to win polls. To buttress their support base, the politicians—irrespective of their political colour—have facilitated such migrants' inclusion in the electoral rolls or obtaining ration cards. In Assam, for instance, the Congress has won successive elections since the late fifties solely because of the sup-

port of illegal migrants. So powerful and well entrenched is the migrants' lobby that even the AGP (that rode to power in 1986 on a decade-long agitation against illegal influx from Bangladesh now relies on the Bangladeshis for a comeback this year.

With the Indian politicians strongly resisting any move to even stem further influx from Bangladesh, leave alone deporting

the existing ones, Bangladesh has been slowly but surely building up its 'fifth column' in Assam, Meghalaya and West Bengal. The only state where it has not succeeded in doing so is Tripura, where the hardy and aggressive residents of the State—earlier migrants from Chittagong and Noakhali—have been foiling illegal migration. Politicians in Assam and West Bengal have, surprisingly, been denying the illegal influx that has changed the demographic pattern of the two States. They have even aided in falsification of census results to hide the truth. All this is a godsend for Bangladesh.

Given this attitude of the Indian politicians, it is no surprise that the BSF and the police forces of these States have no intention of defeating Bangladesh's insidious intentions. All areas along Assam-Bangladesh border—in fact, even many interior areas of the State—have a majority Muslim population. The existence of this 'fifth column' is what precisely encourages Bangladesh to undertake what External affairs Minister Jaswant Singh euphemistically calls a 'criminal misadventure' (of slaughtering 17 BSF jawans). And there are many more 'Operation Simanta' waiting to happen.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

APR 24 1991

OPPOSITION BLASTS 'INTELLIGENCE FAILURE'

# Jaswant hopes Dhaka will act against killers

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 23. The Vajpayee Government today came under fire in Parliament for the brutal killing of 16 BSF personnel by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and incidents on the Indo-Bangla border last week. The Centre defended its handling of the crisis, but the Opposition and even NDA allies, such as the Shiv Sena and the Telugu Desam Party, charged that it was a result of intelligence failure.

Members in both the Houses expressed anguish and outrage over the inhuman manner in which the soldiers were tortured, with the Government asserting that India would "not accept lightly defilement of men in uniform".

Irrespective of party affiliations, members in the Rajya Sabha were strident in their criticism with many likening the situation to the Kargil conflict. The former Union Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani (Independent), went to the extent of demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister in case he failed to find fault with his Ministers. After a day-long discussion in the Upper House, responding to sentiments such as Mr. Sanjay Nirupam's (Shiv Sena) demand for stronger retaliatory action, the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, asserted: "There is no way India will accept the defilement of uniform." He said "New Delhi's deep sense of hurt and anguish" was already conveyed to Dhaka which was "deeply saddened and concerned by these incidents".

He denied charges of intelligence failure stating that the terrain was such that any movement was visible to the normal eye. He said by activating all available security and diplomatic mechanisms, New Delhi was able to get Pyrdiwah vacated by BDR "without a shot being fired".

At Boraibari, the 16-strong BSF team was on "aggressive patrolling" following an alert sounded by the Home Ministry after the Pyrdiwah incident. The team occupied a Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) observation post but was later outnumbered by a large group of civilians and some BDR men who surrounded and dis-

armed them. Suggestions that New Delhi was unaware of the capture of 16 BSF jawans were "unfounded", Mr. Singh said, adding that the Home Ministry had acted with "alacrity". The situation, he said, could not be compared to Kargil which was "an aggression against India".

In his statement, Mr. Singh reiterated that "criminal adventurism" should not affect the strong ties of friendship between India and Bangladesh and it was up to the Government there to act against the perpetrators of these crimes and restore confidence and trust. He said a strong protest was lodged with Bangladesh over the treatment meted out to the BSF per-

## BDR build-up

NEW DELHI, APRIL 23. The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) has begun troops build-up in three sectors along the border with Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya, official sources said tonight.

The sources said additional BDR personnel were being sent in Belonia, Laldila and Pyrdiwah sectors in a move that could escalate tension along the border. In a bid to avoid "local adventurism" by BDR, the BSF has sought flag meetings. — PTI

sonnel. "We have been assured by the Bangladesh Government that all aspects of these incidents would be investigated, also that the BDR action was taken without their knowledge and was regrettable."

Earlier, in the Lok Sabha, the Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, said the External Affairs Minister's statement had allayed some doubts but not all; and hoped that at a later date the Government would take the House into confidence whether on there was an intelligence failure or slackness. She also hoped Bangladesh would bring to book those behind the gruesome killings of jawans.

'BDR fired in self-defence': Page 13

24 APR 2001

# Officer cloud on hands-off Hasina

FROM CHANDAN NANDY

New Delhi, April 23: India's theory that the mayhem by Bangladesh Rifles in Baroibari was a result of "local adventurism" is coming under strain.

Union home secretary Kamal Pande had said yesterday that the Bangladesh government was "unaware" of the BDR action. However, reports from Bangladesh suggest that BDR chief Major General Fazlur Rehman had met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina immediately after sections of the force "moved into" Pyrdiwah, and kept her informed of the developments.

Rehman, according to sources in Dhaka, briefed several ministers in the Awami League government, including the home minister. He had apprised Hasina of the

situation unfolding along the border in general and Pyrdiwah, a slice of territory in "adverse possession" of India, in particular.

In an interview to a local daily, *Manab Jamin*, on April 21, a senior BDR officer is quoted as having said that Rehman had discussed with Hasina the Pyrdiwah problem and the BSF move to construct a footpath there.

Hasina apparently approved of the BDR decision to move into Pyrdiwah to prevent the BSF from surreptitiously laying claim to the territory. Maps in possession of Dhaka and Delhi show Pyrdiwah as Bangladesh's but in "adverse possession of India".

The report quoted Rehman as saying that he got the impression that Hasina was "all along" with him as she was a "patriot".

Another Bangladeshi newspa-

per, *Prothom Alo*, said in a column today that a day before the BSF moved into Baroibari, which is Indian territory "in adverse possession of Dhaka", the home minister, Mohammad Nasim, addressed a public meeting in Dhaka singing paeans to the BDR. The daily quotes Nasim as saying: "Our brave BDR jawans have taught India a stern lesson."

In the backdrop of Nasim's comments at the rally, the columnist has asked whether he had prior knowledge of the April 18 troop movement from Madhupur cantonment in Mymensingh district towards Baroibari. The BSF had moved into the area to ensure the Bangladeshis to vacate Pyrdiwah.

Nasim expressed regret over the killing of the 16 BSF jawans at Baroibari only after the Awami

League secretariat asked him to. Contrary to what spin doctors in Dhaka claim, Rehman is understood to have "good relations" with the Awami League government. He was a *mukti joddha* (freedom fighter) in the 1971 War of Liberation and had undergone training at an Indian intelligence camp in Chakrata. In fact, on March 31, he helped organise a rally for an association of freedom fighters in Dhaka.

"There is no substance in the claims being made by certain quarters in Delhi that Rehman is pro-BNP (the main Opposition party) or was collaborating with it," a Bangladesh observer said.

Five days after the massacre of the jawans in Baroibari, the BSF chief's preliminary report has indicated that the operation to move into the area was ill-planned.

THE NEWSPAPER

24 APR 2001

# BANGLA: No Intelligence failure, says Jaswant

(Continued from page 1)

external affairs minister," Mr Jaswant Singh, told the Rajya Sabha at the end of a day-long discussion on the killings.

Mr Singh had said that deputy commandant Mandal had been killed less than 24 hours before his body was handed over. The marks of injury on all bodies were recorded and signed by representatives of BSF and BDR.

Referring to concerns that the government was being soft on Bangladesh, the minister said while he could not divulge details of his discussion over the phone with his Bangladeshi counterpart or Mr Vajpayee's with Sheikh Hasina, the anguish at the

desecration of the uniformed personnel had been conveyed.

The minister, however, made it clear that neither had there been any Intelligence failure nor transgression of borders which had any similarity with what was witnessed in Kargil two years ago.

Explaining the sequence of events, Mr Singh said that unlike Kargil, which was a case of aggression, this was a border management situation.

Rajya Sabha members, seeking clarifications on his written statement read out in both Houses earlier, had unanimously criticised the government's soft stance towards Bangladesh. The Lok Sabha was adjourned after the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, spoke on the situation

as her party colleagues were on their feet, demanding a JPC to probe into the Tehelka expose.

In the Rajya Sabha, however, over a dozen members sought clarifications on the statement and expressed doubts over the inquiry promised by Bangladesh being impartial. They called for stringent measures — some suggested going to war, some others were willing to forgive Bangladesh if it apologised — even if it cost the country its friendship with Bangladesh, and said either Intelligence agencies had failed to submit information or the government had failed to act on them.

The minister said: "The question (of an Intelligence failure) simply can't arise considering the nature of terrain and the distance

between the two forces being just 200 metres. In such a situation, the accusations were at best fanciful.

"It's completely misleading and inaccurate to equate what had happened on the Indo-Bangla border with that of Kargil which was an aggression from a neighbouring country. There was no Intelligence failure. I've no difficulty in saying this to the House."

Mr Singh said the government was aware of the situation on the border from 15 April but the priority was to restore "status quo ante". "A self-correcting mechanism exists which becomes active in such situations and India wanted this system to do the task. After that, we learnt the killings had taken place."

'India won't take killings lightly'; BDR masses border

## Hasina didn't regret: Dhaka

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & UNI

DHAKA/ NEW DELHI, April 23. — Bangladesh today countered India's contention that Sheikh Hasina Wajed had "regretted" the killing of 16 BSF personnel when she called Mr AB Vajpayee over the phone last night even as the government said in New Delhi it hadn't taken lightly the defilement of (BSF) men in uniform.

(Bangladesh Rifles has begun troops build-up in three sectors along the border with Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya, official sources said tonight, adds PTI. (The sources said additional BDR personnel were being sent in Belonia, Laldila and Pyrdiwah sectors in a move that could escalate tension along the border. In a bid to avoid "local adventurism" by BDR, the BSF has sought flag meetings with its Bangladeshi counterpart. BSF was maintaining a close vigil along the entire border, the sources said.)

The Bangladesh foreign office today quoted Sheikh Hasina as having told Mr Vajpayee that the Rowmari incident resulted in casualties "when Bangladesh Rifles personnel were under attack and they had to open fire

in self-defence". She requested Mr Vajpayee to "find out the detailed position about this incident".

Asked about reports from Dhaka denying Sheikh Hasina had expressed "regret" for the incident, the PMO refused to comment without ascertaining the facts. The external affairs ministry spoke on the same lines.

The Bangladeshi foreign secretary, Syed Muazzam Ali, disagreed when asked if he had given any understanding to India that the border incident was "an action unilaterally taken by BDR, and the Bangladeshi government was not aware of it", as claimed by the home secretary, Mr Kamal Pandey. He, however, said the BDR takes on-the-spot decisions many a time.

About the situation at Pyrdiwah village, he said it "is within Bangladesh territory and is under Bangladesh's control... We did not withdraw our forces." The BDR withdrew its siege on the BSF camp at Pyrdiwah while the Indian border force demolished the illegally-constructed pucca road after the decision taken at the sector commander-level meeting between the two forces.

He said a BSF camp exists at Pyrdiwah village and a BDR

patrolling team is there too. Bangladesh, he said, is pressing for the removal of the BSF camp from "its territory".

Syed Ali replied in the negative when asked if he had received any communications or requests from India urging Bangladesh to punish the BDR personnel responsible for the incident.

In their conversation, Sheikh Hasina expressed her "deep shock and grief" to Mr Vajpayee on the recent Indo-Bangla border incidents, Syed Ali said. Sheikh Hasina told Mr Vajpayee that as soon as she heard the news about the border incidents, she asked all authorities concerned to pacify the situation and ease the tension.

Mr Vajpayee too expressed sorrow at the casualties on the Bangladeshi side. In New Delhi, the government said it was up to Bangladesh to act against the perpetrators of the crime to restore confidence and trust.

"Every such defilement of an Indian soldier is a comment on the defilement of the Republic of India. The defilement and desecration (of uniformed soldiers) is not an aspect we will take lightly and cannot take lightly, the

■ See BANGLA: page

THE STATESMAN  
24 APR 2003



# Mahanta demands sealing of Indo-Bangla border

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 23 APRIL

**F**EARING THAT the recent skirmish on the Indo-Bangla border could have an adverse impact on the AGP-BJP alliance's poll prospects, Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta on Monday called on the Union home minister, Mr L.K. Advani, to demand sealing of the Indo-Bangla border along the state along with enhanced deployment of security forces to avoid any further incidents.

Mr Mahanta had rushed to the national capital after having visited the border areas in Assam on Sunday. In his brief interaction with Mr Advani, Mr Mahanta sought additional paramilitary forces not only for the ensuing Assembly polls but also for permanent vigilance on the border.

"We have demanded the setting up of a BSF battalion headquarter in Mankachar, where 16

BSF soldiers were captured by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel and tortured them to death," Mr Mahanta told reporters after emerging from the meeting.

One particular demand made by the chief minister was the setting up of more border outposts (BOPs) so that distance between consecutive posts could be reduced. As per the current norms, the normal distance between two border posts is 5 km, with 15-30 personnel manning each BOP depending on its vulnerability. Mr Mahanta, who claimed that in some cases distances were as large as 10 km, suggested that no two BOPs could be farther from each other than 4 km.

According to sources in the MHA, while the decision to strengthen the deployment of paramilitary forces has already been taken by the ministry, the other two demands of Mr Mahanta for more BOPs and a bat-

alion headquarter in Mankachar "are being examined."

Mr Mahanta's decision to rush to Mr Advani, that too in the middle of his electoral campaign (Assam is slated to go to the polls on May 10), to seek enhanced security for the border villages in the state is aimed at addressing the Assamese' sustained grievance against in-filtration by Bangladeshi illegal immigrants. The infiltration issue, riding high on which Mr Mahanta had risen from a student leader to the chief minister of Assam, is likely to be revived in this Assembly poll, thanks to the BDR-Bangladesh army's "misadventure" on the Meghalaya-Assam border.

Facing as he is a strong anti-incumbency factor, Mr Mahanta's latest ploy to harp on the "national security" theme — which has also been ally BJP's pet platform — is being seen by observers as an attempt to woo the Assamese.

# Jaswant calls for action against Bangladesh Rifles

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 23 APRIL

**W**HILE OPPOSITION and treasury benches went for the government's jugular about the handling of the border intrusions and killings of BSF men, grilling the government about the security lapses, Jaswant Singh demanded "action against the perpetrators" of the "criminal adventurism" that created the crisis last week.

In a statement in Parliament on Monday, foreign minister Jaswant Singh attributed the flare-up on the border last week to "criminal adventurism" by the BDR, but largely exonerated the Bangladesh government from responsibility.

However, the government was put on the mat by the Opposition for the delay in action and called to explain the intelligence failure that resulted in such an incident.

"Criminal adventurism is a crime. India will not accept defilement of men in uniform. We will not take it lightly," foreign minister Jaswant Singh said winding up a day-long discussion in Rajya Sabha on the BSF killings.

Opening the discussion with a statement in Parliament, Mr Singh said, "We were assured by the Bangladesh government that all aspects of these incidents will be investigated — Also that the BDR action was taken without their knowledge and was regrettable."

The foreign minister's statement came after general outrage at the treatment of the BSF jawans was peppered with criticism about

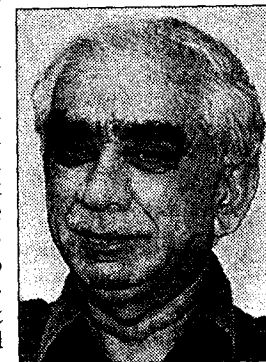
the political leadership's handling of the killings. While the Lok Sabha did not give itself time to debate the issue since the continuing clamour over Tehelka forced it to adjourn for the day, Rajya Sabha members expressed shock and outrage, demanding not only justice but an explanation from the government regarding intelligence lapses, and delay in resolution of the issue.

The leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi condemned the "inhuman and barbarous" killing of the BSF men which had "shocked and shaken" the entire nation and asked the government to see if there was intelligence failure or vigilance slackness. "The house and the country awaits answers,"

she said adding "I earnestly hope Bangladesh government constitutes an inquiry and brings the culprits to book for the heinous crime."

The refrain from most of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha was to focus on intelligence and security lapses by India. Former minister, Ram Jethmalani, describing the government's handling as "gross and criminal negligence" asked the Prime Minister to resign. "At least some ministers should resign. If Prime Minister cannot find fault with his ministers, he should resign," he said.

National Security adviser, Brajesh Mishra was also at the receiving end of attack in the Rajya Sabha. "We have got some kind of security adviser. This security adviser must go," Mr Jethmalani said, finding fault with the security situation in the country after the Kandahar hijack



Jaswant: Action player

# Absu joins hands with AGP, BJP to fight Cong in Assam

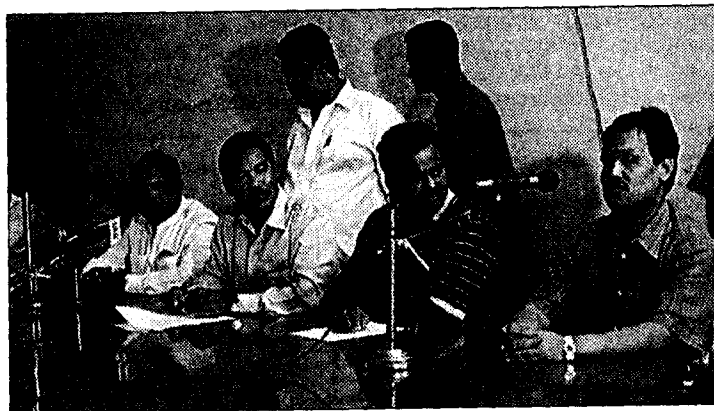
P.P. Singh  
GUWAHATI 23 APRIL

ALL BODO Students Union (Absu), on Monday, declared that though it would not deviate from its demand for a separate state, it had forged an electoral understanding with AGP and BJP for defeating Congress in the polls.

Absu leaders like U.G. Brahma (advisor) and Rabi Ram Narzary (president), addressed a joint press conference with AGP president P.K. Mahanta and its general secretary and agriculture minister Chandra Mohan Patowari.

The leaders said that despite the differences of opinion between AGP and Absu regarding the creation of Bodoland, the latter would join the front to protect the larger interests of the Bodo people.

Mr Brahma, when asked about the attempts to bring various Bodo factions like Absu and PDF under one banner for the greater Bodo cause, stated that it was unfortunate that these organ-



TRUCE TALKS: Assam chief minister P.K. Mahanta (second from left) addresses reporters at a joint press meet in Guwahati on Monday. — Caroline Singh

isations were facing pressure from certain anti-national forces, which was forcing them to stay away from a common front.

Mr Patowari said that to improve education standards in Bodo-dominated areas, they would take up the issue of setting up a university at Kokrajhar and an engineering college, a medical

college and an agriculture college in other Bodo-dominated areas.

Mr Mahanta said AGP would support Bodo candidates in nine constituencies, while in 3, they would have a friendly contest.

The Absu-BPAC combination would support AGP, BJP and ASDC (Holi Ram Tarang group) candidates in 26 constituencies.



# Delhi ducks flare-up home truth

FROM PRANAY SHARMA  
AND BIDHAYAK DAS

April 23: The outrage over the mutilation of men in uniform echoed in Parliament today and threatened to spill onto the streets, but the government has remained silent on a crucial factor which would have helped prevent the flare-up.

Nearly a year ago, the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) had asked the BSF to dismantle a footpath, considered the flash-point, in Bangladesh territory under India's "adverse possession". The BDR moved in and ringed the BSF outpost at Meghalaya's Pyrdiwah, where the footpath was being carved, after waiting in vain for an Indian response for 10 months.

A border agreement between the two countries prevents "defensive construction", which covers roads, in areas "under adverse possession" — diplomatese for occupied territory.

The footpath issue was first raised in last June through a letter between the security personnel of the two sides. A month later, it was again referred to by the BDR during a flag meeting.

After a few months, the BDR asked the BSF to stop work and get back with a response by March 15. On April 16, when reports crossed the border that the footpath had been completed, the BDR stormed the area.

The BSF eventually tore down the footpath — but a few days after the issue spun out of control and 16 Indian jawans were killed.

The initial Indian inaction will not absolve the BDR if it is unable to disprove allegations of brutality and mutilation of the BSF jawans' bodies. (Post-mortem chart on Page 6).

Intelligence sources said in Shillong the BSF deputy commandant, B.R. Mondal, was killed by the BDR in the presence of a Bangladeshi legislator in Kurigram. The sources said that BSF wireless monitors picked up messages saying 'shoot him, don't waste time' and 'aro ano' (bring more).

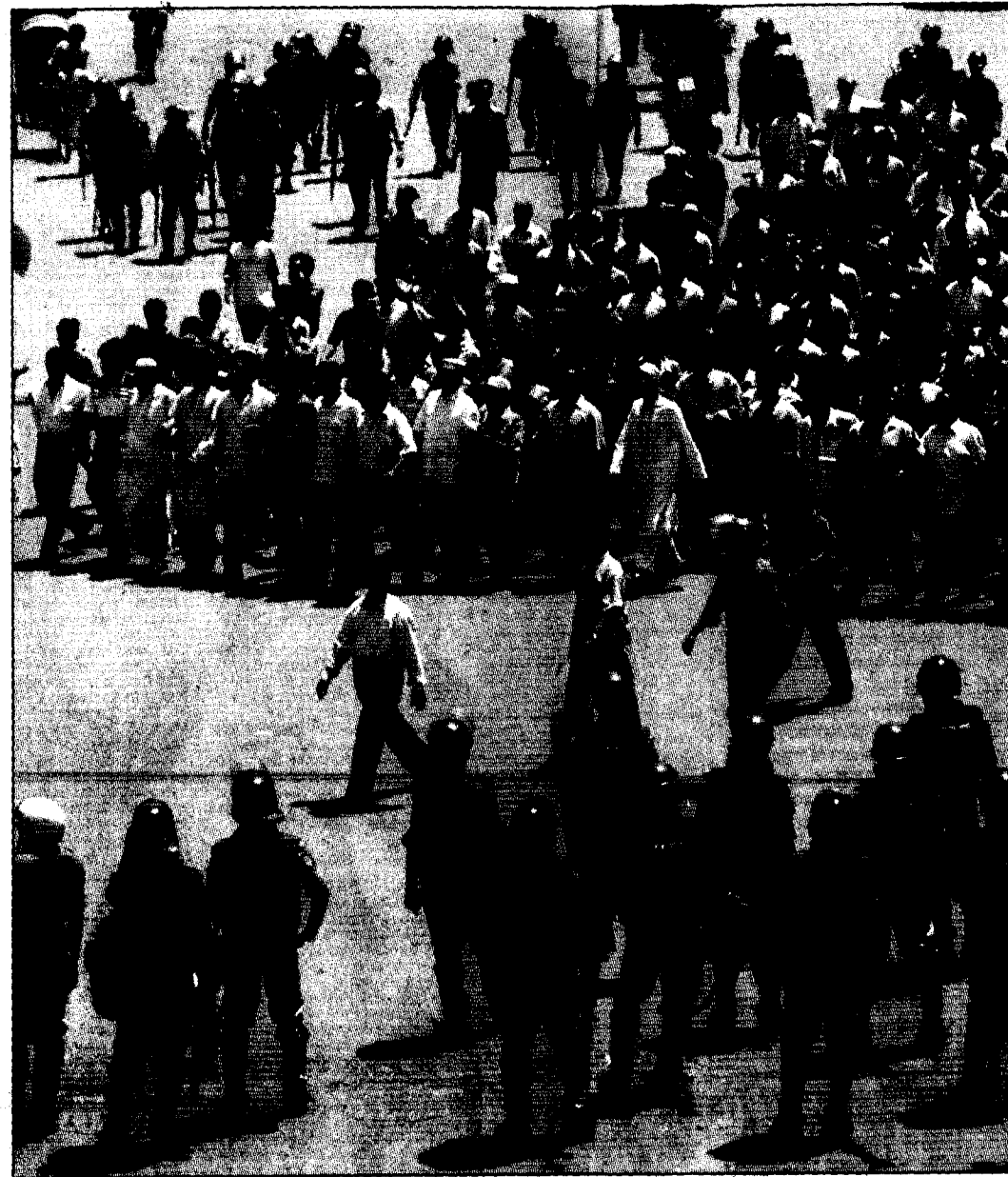
The BSF claimed that the footpath was not a road and it was being constructed by villagers. However, security forces along border areas usually step in even if civilians start construction in sensitive territory.

Moreover, though the BDR stormed Pyrdiwah and outnumbered the BSF, there was no violence in the area. It was only after a BSF team tried to lead an assault on the BDR outpost at Baroibari in the Assam sector that the bloodshed occurred.

The BSF has pulled back from Baroibari, senior officials said. At Lyngkhat near Pyrdiwah, however, reports of a heavy build-up by the BDR have alerted the Indian forces. Villagers said Bangladeshi troops and civilians were moving close to the controversial footpath.

Swept up in a storm of protest cutting across political barriers in the House, the government, which had shown restraint over the past few days, talked tough today but refrained from giving the full story.

Foreign minister Jaswant



Police confront Opposition activists as a three-day strike begins in Dhaka. (Reuters) ■ See Page 4

Singh today accused the BDR of "intruding" into Pyrdiwah and iterated that it was the "unprovoked and unwarranted" action of the Bangladeshi security forces that led to the violence. But he was quick to point out that these developments would not affect the "strong and friendly" bilateral ties between Delhi and Dhaka.

Singh stressed on the marks of torture on the bodies of the BSF

jawans and said a strong protest had been lodged with the Bangladesh government. "Criminal adventurism is a crime. India will not accept defilement of men in uniform. We will not take it lightly," he told the Rajya Sabha.

He denied charges of intelligence failure, saying the "question simply cannot arise".

Singh said his Bangladeshi counterpart Abdus Samad Azad

had yesterday phoned him. This was followed by another call by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Hasina expressed regret at the unfortunate incidents and promised a "thorough investigation".

Hasina, facing an Opposition backlash over several issues, including the border flare-up, is compelled to walk a tightrope vis-a-vis Delhi.

■ More reports on Page 6

# Exposed: The BDR's secret mission on Indian soil



AP PHOTO

BDR jawans keep vigil along the Indo-Bangla border in Sylhet on Monday.

Anirban Roy  
Pyrdiwah, April 23

THE APRIL 16 early morning BDR intrusion into this tiny Meghalaya village was an organised, well-thought-out operation codenamed "Operation Simanta (Frontier)".

Later, when this correspondent went on a round of the ravaged village, he found the walls full of chalk and charcoal graffiti, mostly in Bengali. But there was at least one in English, "Our Operation Simanta is for independence-Tarun Sangha."

Though the outfit's credentials could not be ascertained, it was clear that Tarun Sangha wanted this understood this side of the border that it wanted Padua (that's how Pyrdiwah is known in Bangladesh) for Bangladesh.

The members, Bangladeshi national-

ists as evident from the slogans, had shaken into Pyrdiwah and extended all conceivable help to BDR personnel to keep the 325 acres of disputed land under Bangladeshi control.

"*Tirish Bochoer Hisab Chai* (Want The Account of Thirty Years), *Paduar Mati Banglar Ghati* (Padua's Land, Bangladesh's Bastion), *Bangabandhur Sagner Bangla, Bangabandhur Sagner Padua* (Sheikh Mujib's Dream Bangla, Mujib's Dream Padua), *Bhoi Nei Bangladesh* (Have No Fear Bangladesh)," were some of the more jingoistic slogans.

The most interesting of these was found inside the Pyrdiwah Lower Primary School.

"*Aami Banglar Hoye Thakrey Chai* (I Want To Stay For Bangla)." The lone dissonant phrase was found on the

black board. "I Love India," perhaps the voice a tiny tot attending the last class before trouble broke out.

The villagers of Pyrdiwah, however, were unaware of "Operation Simanta" or anything of the sort. "We know they are BDR personnel. We don't know why they came," Pinbiangland Talang, a young woman, said.

Parimal Khonglah, found lying under a tree in the compound of his ravaged house, said, "They took away everything, I don't know how we will survive." Khonglah said everyone like him would have to starve if the Government stopped the supply of ration.

"They took away all our goats, cows and had merry feasts with our chickens," said Fokra. "We also found some village goats slaughtered. They killed them for nothing," he added.

When the Chief Minister visited the village, organisers of the meeting did their best to match the Bangladeshi slogan offensive.

Some slogans, written on chart papers and strung up at the venue were, "Land is our birth right. Let's protect it with sweat and blood", "Shun intrusion. And keep it that way" and "Let there be an immediate solution to the border problem."

But the villagers said they would return to the village only if the Government ensured proper security for lives and property. Some said they would prefer staying in the makeshift tents. That would be safer, they said. They don't want another "Operation Simanta".

Related reports and photographs on Page 9

# Friends put Jaswant on mat

## FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 23: Angry BJP and other National Democratic Alliance MPs today fired accusations at Jaswant Singh in both Houses of Parliament while the defence minister was making a statement on the brutal killing of the BSF jawans.

Singh, who is also the foreign minister, described the killings as acts of "criminal adventurism" and said the "defilement of men in uniform was a defilement of the Republic of India". But his words cut no ice as the MPs targeted him over the Centre's handling of the border standoff.

The ultimate embarrassment for the government was a stinging attack from Swaraj Kaushal, Rajya Sabha MP from the Haryana Vikas Party and husband of information and broadcasting minister Sushma Swaraj. Sushma quietly left the Upper House just before her husband started speaking.

Shortly after Singh made his statement, Kaushal posed a series of questions. He wanted to know what the government was doing for five days after the killings, was the flare-up a military or diplomatic failure, and why were the injured soldiers taken to Tura instead of Calcutta or Silchar when there was no blood-bank in the Meghalaya town.

"The home secretary and GOC (Eastern Command) had not even

visited the places where the incidents occurred. But the most shameful thing was when the 15 bodies were cremated, not a single minister or any person of authority was present. Is this the kind of treatment you give to our security forces who give up their lives for the country?" he asked. Kaushal ended with a poser: "Mr Jaswant Singh, as the defence minister, we did not expect this from you."

When the discussions resumed after the lunch recess, BJP's T.N. Chaturvedi said while the minister's statement was "couched in niceties", it was neither "adequate nor reassuring".

"When the nation's self-respect and confidence and the ability of the government and security forces are involved, I am afraid we have to speak with firmness and a clear conscience," he said.

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam was more scathing. "There are presently two ministers rolled in Jaswant Singh's persona. While the foreign minister has to work with tact and diplomacy, the defence minister's priority is to keep the security forces' morale high. Jaswant Singh may have won a diplomatic battle in a small way, but as the defence minister, he has failed," Nirupam said. "Small countries which owe their very existence to India are now threatening our sovereignty."

In the Lok Sabha, another Sena MP, Mohan Rawle, slammed Singh's statement as "unsatisfac-

tory" and asked the government to "take action against Pakistan and Bangladesh".

Replying to clarifications sought by Rajya Sabha members, Singh denied that the killings were a result of intelligence failure. He said the defence ministry did not come into the picture as the BSF deployment concerned the home ministry. "It is completely fanciful to say it was an intelligence failure or the failure of RAW," he added.

Singh also rejected the comparison with the Kargil intrusion. "The reference is misleading and unwarranted," he said. "The Kargil aggression was against India. The Bangladesh incident was part of a total border management situation and to confer any other kind of category on it is wrong."

Placing the flare-up in historical perspective, he said of the 4,096 km-long Indo-Bangladesh border, only six km were yet to be demarcated. But because of the unique riverine nature of the terrain and the shifting of the border line, there were as many as 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India.

Singh said the 1974 boundary pact signed between Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made a distinction between enclaves and adverse possessions. "The question of adverse possession is one of the pending issues related to the border," he said.

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Following are excerpts from the report of the post-mortem conducted by the department of forensic science, Mymensingh College, Bangladesh:

- Identified as constable Sukhwinder Singh. Cut injury on right temporal region. Point blank range.
- Identified the body as deputy commandant BR Mondal. Cut throat, injury on neck and cheek. Rigor mortis just setting, probably killed within 24 hours.
- Unidentified. Bullet injury on right arm and point blank bullet injury on the head.
- Unidentified. Bullet injury, entry wound. Right mandibular region. Exit wound left side of face. Point blank range.
- Identified as SI Amrik Singh. Throat cut open, head injury. Injury on right shoulder with knife. Cut marks on cuff muscles.
- Identified as SI Pannalal. Bullet injury on left arm. Vertical cut on forehead with knife.
- Unidentified. Cut injuries on left side of face. Vertical cut injury on head.
- Identified as head constable Raman Gaude. Cut injury on head and right arm. Multiple cut injuries on right leg by sharp weapon like *da*. Leg separated from body.
- Identified as constable Mafuluddin. Four inches cut mark on right arm with sharp knife. Point blank bullet injury below cheek. Exit wound on head.
- Identified as constable Gurbax Singh. Cut injury on right temporal region. Deep cut on medial side of right arm and forearm by sharp object.
- Unidentified. Deep lacerated wound on right forearm. Eyes bulged out with marks of strangulation on neck.
- Unidentified. Bullet injury on right and left temporal range. Point blank range.
- Unidentified. Bullet injury on right eye. Multiple cuts on lower one third and upper medial region of thigh right side.
- Identified as Sanatan Dalla. Bullet injury on right forearm and right side of chest.
- Unidentified blunt injury on face. Cut and lacerated wound on right arm and left thigh and foot.

# সীমানা এত কাল অচিহ্নিত ?

২৪/৪/২০০৮

ভারত-বাংলাদেশ সীমান্ত সংঘর্ষ থামিয়াছে। দুই পক্ষই সীমান্ত রক্ষীদের মৃতদেহ হস্তান্তর করিয়াছে। দুই দেশের সর্বোচ্চ রাজনৈতিক কর্তৃপক্ষের স্তরে সংযোগ স্থাপিত হইয়াছে এবং দুই মিত্র দেশের মধ্যে এ ধরনের অবাস্তিত ঘটনার পুনরাবৃত্তি এড়াইতে উভয় নেতৃত্বই প্রতিশ্রুত হইয়াছে। প্রাথমিক কিছু ক্ষোভ-বিক্ষোভের পর ভারতীয় সীমান্ত রক্ষীদের তীব্র বিরূপতা অংশত হ্রাস পাইয়াছে। গরম-গরম বিবৃতি দিয়া কোনও পক্ষই হাওয়া গরম করিবার চেষ্টা করে নাই। ইহা দুই দেশেরই নেতৃত্বের পরিপক্বতার লক্ষণ। বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা ওয়াজেদ তো ভারতীয় রক্ষীদের সহিত তাঁহার সামরিক বাহিনীর নিষ্ঠুরতার জন্য রীতিমত দুঃখপ্রকাশও করিয়াছেন এবং গোটা ঘটনাটি তদন্ত করিয়া দোষীদের শাস্তি দেওয়ার হুমকিও দিয়াছেন। ভারতীয় বিদেশ মন্ত্রক বাংলাদেশের কূটনীতিকদের ডাকিয়া পাঠাইয়া কড়া ভাষায় বাংলাদেশ রাইফেলস-এর এই নৃশংসতার নিন্দা করিয়া সতর্ক করিয়া দিয়াছে। কিন্তু কোনও দেশই প্ররোচনামূলক কোনও মন্তব্য করে নাই। এমন কিছু বলে নাই যাহা দুই বন্ধু দেশের মধ্যে ব্যাপকতর সংঘর্ষ বাধাইয়া তুলিতে পারে। এই সংযম এবং সহিষ্ণুতা প্রশংসনীয়। কিন্তু ইহাই সব নহে। আদতে এ ধরনের ঘটনা ঘটিল কেন, ঘটিতে পারিল কেন, তাহা খতাইয়া দেখা দরকার। এবং সে ক্ষেত্রে, দুর্ভাগ্যের সহিত বলিতে হইতেছে, ঘটনার জন্য ভারতের দায় বাংলাদেশ অপেক্ষা বেশি।

বিতর্কিত যে গ্রামগুলি বিরোধের মূল, কথা ছিল ১৯৭১ সনের মধ্যেই সেগুলি দুই দেশ পরস্পরকে ফিরাইয়া দিবে। পশ্চিম পাকিস্তানে এ ধরনের অসংখ্য গ্রাম হাত-বদল করিয়াছে এবং দুই দেশের সীমান্ত নির্দিষ্ট ভাবে আঁকা সম্ভব হইয়াছে। পূর্বে যখন সীমানা চিহ্নিতকরণের কাজটি শুরু হওয়ার কথা ছিল, তখনই বাংলাদেশের জন্ম, ভারতীয় বাহিনী যে-জন্মে আক্ষরিক অর্থেই ধাত্রীর কাজ করিয়াছে। বিতর্কিত গ্রামগুলি তখন বাংলাদেশি মুক্তিবাহিনীর আশ্রয় ও প্রশিক্ষণকেন্দ্রে হইয়া ওঠে এবং ভারতীয় সীমান্ত রক্ষী বাহিনীর জওয়ানরাই ওই সব গ্রামে বাংলাদেশের মুক্তি যোদ্ধাদের অস্ত্রশস্ত্র, রসদ ইত্যাদি সরবরাহ করিয়াছে। বাংলাদেশ স্বাধীন ও সার্বভৌম রাষ্ট্রে পরিণত হইলেও বিতর্কিত গ্রামগুলি লইয়া বিরোধের নিষ্পত্তি করা হয় নাই। বাংলাদেশের পৌনঃপুনিক অনুরোধের পরও ভারত এ ব্যাপারে উদ্যোগী হয় নাই। ফলে বাংলাদেশে ক্ষোভ বাড়িয়া গিয়াছে, বাংলাদেশ রাইফেলস-এর কাছে সে দেশের জনতার প্রত্যাশা বাড়িয়াছে এবং শেষ পর্যন্ত হাত গ্রামগুলি হাসিল করার

জন্য বাংলাদেশি বাহিনী মরিয়া হইয়া উঠিয়াছে। ভারত এই সমগ্র পর্যায়ে গত ত্রিশ বছর ধরিয়া গয়ং গচ্ছ মনোভাব লইয়া চলিয়াছে, সমস্যাটিকে বুলাইয়া রাখিয়াছে, এবং সর্বশেষ প্ররোচনায় দেখা যাইতেছে, নিজের দখলে থাকা একটি বাংলাদেশি গ্রামে ঘটনা করিয়া রাস্তা বানাইতে শুরু করিয়াছে। বাংলাদেশি বাহিনী এতখানি সহ্য করিতে পারে নাই। তাহারা নিজেদের এলাকায় 'অনুপ্রবেশকারী' ভারতীয় জওয়ানদের ধরিয়া লইয়া গিয়াছে এবং অভিযোগ—নির্যাতন করার পর ওই জওয়ানদের হত্যা করিয়াছে।

শেখোক্ত কাজটি যে ভাল হয় নাই, তাহা সকলেই স্বীকার করিবেন। কিন্তু ঘটনা যে এত দূর গড়াইতে পারিল, তাহার দায় তো একান্ত ভাবেই ভারতীয় বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের। কেন তাহারা এত দীর্ঘ কাল দখল-করা বাংলাদেশি গ্রামগুলি ধরিয়া রাখিয়াছিলেন? ঢাকার উপর্যুপরি অনুরোধ সত্ত্বেও কেন সেগুলি হস্তান্তর করেন নাই? ঢাকার রাজনৈতিক কর্তারা বারংবার বলিয়াছেন, দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্কের উন্নতির স্বার্থেই দুই দেশের সমগ্র সীমান্ত স্পষ্ট ভাবে চিহ্নিত হইয়া যাওয়া দরকার। তাহাদের এই বক্তব্য যে কত সঠিক, তাহা সাম্প্রতিক ঘটনায় প্রমাণিত। সামান্য একটি গ্রামের দখল লইয়া দুই দেশের মধ্যে যে তিক্ততার সৃষ্টি হইল, তাহার কি কোনও প্রয়োজন ছিল? কী দরকার ছিল পিরদিহা গ্রামে সীমান্ত রক্ষী বাহিনীর ঘাঁটিটি রাখিয়া দেওয়ার, যখন মুক্তিযুদ্ধ অনেক আগেই সমাপ্ত হইয়াছে? কেনই বা সীমান্ত রক্ষীরা দখল-করা ওই গ্রামে রাস্তা বানাইতে উদ্যত হইল? এই প্ররোচনাই তো সীমান্তের স্থিতাবস্থা নষ্ট করিয়া বাংলাদেশ রাইফেলসকে আক্রমণাত্মক করিয়া তোলে। বৃহৎ প্রতিবেশী হিসাবে ভারতের কি আরও সংযত হওয়া উচিত ছিল না? এ কথা বলার অর্থ বাংলাদেশ রাইফেলস-এর বর্বরতাকে সমর্থন করা নয়। যেখানে কোনও যুদ্ধ পর্যন্ত হয় নাই, সেখানে যুদ্ধবন্দিদের প্রাপ্য আচরণ না পাওয়াটা যেমন ভারতীয় জওয়ানদের দুর্ভাগ্য, তেমনই ঠাণ্ডা মাথায় তাহাদের শারীরিক নির্যাতন করিয়া হত্যা করার দৃষ্টান্তটি সীমান্তে মোতামেন রক্ষীদের পারস্পরিক ঘৃণা ও বিদ্বেষের প্রমাণ। অচিরে দুই দেশের সীমান্ত চূড়ান্ত করিয়া ফেলা দরকার। তবে সে জন্য সংসদের উভয় সভায় যে দুই-তৃতীয়াংশ গরিষ্ঠতার সাহায্যে সংবিধান সংশোধন প্রয়োজন, বাজপেয়ী সরকারের তাহা নাই। এই একটি প্রশ্নে—যেহেতু প্রশ্নটি জাতীয় নিরাপত্তার—অবশ্য সংসদীয় একমতের চেষ্টা করা যাইতে পারে এবং মনে হয় ভবিষ্যতে এ ধরনের দুঃখজনক ঘটনার পুনরাবৃত্তি এড়াইতে সব রাজনৈতিক দলই সেই প্রচেষ্টায় शामिल হইবে।

# জওয়ানদের হত্যায় ক্ষুব্ধ সংসদ চায় কড়া ব্যবস্থা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৩  
এপ্রিল— সীমান্তরক্ষী বাহিনী (বি এস  
এফ)-র ১৬ জন জওয়ানের অমানবিক  
হত্যা সারা দেশকে কতখানি নাড়া দিয়েছে,  
তার প্রমাণ মিলল রাজ্যসভায়। পক্ষকালের  
হানাহানি ভুলে সোমবারের অধিবেশনে  
সাংসদরা একযোগে এই হত্যাকাণ্ডে তীব্র  
ক্ষোভ প্রকাশ করেন। সেখানে বিপক্ষীয় ও  
শরিক দলের সাংসদদের সঙ্গে অনেকটাই  
একমত হয়ে গেলেন বি জে পি-র সাধারণ  
সদস্যরাও। তহলকা কাণ্ডের পর আজই  
প্রথম সভা মূলতুবি রাখার দাবিও তোলেনি  
কোনও দল। বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশোবন্ত সিংহ  
সকালে বিবৃতি পড়ার পর বিকালে  
জবাবদিহি করতে গিয়ে যা বলেন তার  
মর্মার্থ হল, আমরা আমাদের জমি ফের  
দখল নিতে পেরেছি। কিন্তু সদস্যদের চড়া  
মনোভাবের শরিক হতে তিনি রাজি হননি।

ঢাকা থেকে নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা  
জানাচ্ছেন, ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী  
অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ীর কাছে টেলিফোনে  
বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা বি  
এস এফ জওয়ানদের মৃত্যুর ঘটনায়  
দুঃখপ্রকাশ করার পাশাপাশি তাঁরা কেন  
রৌমারি সীমান্ত সংলগ্ন বাংলাদেশের  
কুড়িগ্রামে ঢুকেছিলেন তা তদন্ত করে  
দেখারও অনুরোধ জানান। আজ  
বাংলাদেশের বিদেশ সচিব সৈয়দ  
মোয়াজ্জেম আলি গত রাতে দুই দেশের  
শীর্ষ পর্যায়ের কথোপকথন প্রসঙ্গে অবহিত  
করতে গিয়ে এ কথা জানান। মোয়াজ্জেম  
বলেন, সীমান্তে আসলে তিক কী ঘটেছিল  
তা বিশদে জানার জন্যই বাজপেয়ীকে  
সীমান্ত-সংঘর্ষ নিয়ে তদন্ত করার আর্জি  
জানিয়েছেন হাসিনা।

এ দিকে, এ দিন সারা দিনে বিভিন্ন  
দলের সাংসদরা সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে যে  
অভিযোগগুলি তোলেন, তা সংক্ষেপে এই:  
১। কাগিলের মত মেঘালয়ের সীমান্তে  
পিরদিয়াতেও গোয়েন্দা ব্যর্থতার জন্যই  
জওয়ানদের প্রাণ হারাতে হল। ২।  
জওয়ানরা 'নিখোঁজ' বা অপহৃত হয়েছে  
জানার পরেও সরকার নিষ্ক্রিয় ছিল। যথা  
সময়ে উদ্যোগী হলে জওয়ানদের মৃত্যু  
এড়ানো যেত। ৩। সেনাদের নিরাপত্তা বা  
দেশের সম্মানের চাইতে কূটনীতিকেই  
সরকার বেশি প্রাধান্য দিচ্ছে। বেশ কিছু  
সদস্য দাবি তোলেন, বাংলাদেশকে ক্ষমা  
চাইতে হবে। তদন্ত শেষ হওয়ার আগেই  
বাংলাদেশ সরকারকে 'নির্দোষ' বলে মেনে  
নেওয়াতেও সাংসদরা ক্ষুব্ধ।

সব ক'টি অভিযোগই অবশ্য পুরোপুরি  
উড়িয়ে দিয়েছেন যশোবন্ত সিংহ। তাঁর  
মতে, এখানে গোয়েন্দা ব্যর্থতার কোনও  
প্রমাণই ওঠে না। কারণ, বি এস এফের  
পর্যবেক্ষণ পোস্ট ১৫ এপ্রিল থেকেই  
সরকারকে বি ডি আরের জমায়েত হওয়া  
ও বি এস এফের সঙ্গে তাদের  
গুলিবিনিময়ের খবর দিতে থেকেছে। সেই  
অনুসারে বিদেশ মন্ত্রক বাংলাদেশের  
সরকারের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করেছে।  
সরকারি নিষ্ক্রিয়তার অভিযোগ বাতিল করে  
তিনি বলেন, ভারত সরকারের উদ্যোগে  
উচ্চস্তরে আলোচনার ফলেই সে দেশের

এর পর তিনের পাতায়

24 APR 2001

# Mere 'sorry' won't do, punish guilty, Sangh tells Dhaka

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, April 23:** The Sangh Parivar outfits on Monday lashed out at the Bharatiya Janata Party-led NDA government for being "soft" against Bangladesh and demanded that the "guilty" Bangladesh Rifles officials should be punished.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal activists also demonstrated in front of the Bangladesh high commission in New Delhi to protest against the brutal killing of the Indian soldiers last week. The demonstration was led by Bajrang Dal chief Surender Jain and was also attended by VHP president Vishnu Hari Dalmia.

Sangh Parivar leaders suggested that the government should take stern action, including war, if the Bangladesh Rifles personnel responsible for killing of the BSF personnel were not punished by Dhaka. Bajrang Dal leader Surrender Jain said the events on the Indo-Bangladesh border had led to widespread resentment among the people across the country. He warned that it might result in a backlash against the illegal Bangladeshi migrants in Delhi and other places in the country if the govern-

ment fails to take strong action.

"We are not satisfied with the government's response. The BJP feels that any strong action would anger the Muslims. They should remember that national interests are more important than their image," he said adding that the Bangladeshi action was an affront to the nation's self-respect and would demoralise the troops.

"Mere regret by Dhaka will not do. They will have to court martial all guilty BDR personnel. If they fail to do so, India should retaliate even if it means war," he said.

The VHP has already said that India should treat Bangladesh as an enemy nation if it does not punish the guilty under the Islamic law. VHP leader Vishnu Hari Dalmia had said the government's soft response on the issue was not acceptable.

Mr Dalmia had earlier said that the Government of India should take strong steps to seek an apology from Dhaka. "If they do not accept these demands, than Indian government should review its policy towards Bangladesh. There is no need to treat them a friendly nation," he said, adding that Dhaka should be treated at par with Pakistan.

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TUESDAY, APRIL 24, 2001

## FOR NEIGHBOURLY TRUST

A SOLEMN EXPRESSION of regret by the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, over the heinous action against India's security personnel, suspected to have been perpetrated by her country's security guards, can serve as a meaningful step towards the restoration of trust between the two neighbours. Despicable indeed was the apparent manner in which some units of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) had either themselves tortured or allowed others to brutally assault several men belonging to India's Border Security Force (BSF) before killing them during the latest skirmish on the boundary between the two friendly countries. A tense calm now prevails on the frontier following a conscious agreement between New Delhi and Dhaka to defuse the crisis arising out of the firefights that suddenly flared up between the BDR and the Bangladesh Army, on one side, and the BSF, on the other. The two sides seem convinced that *status quo ante* has been restored on the border at this time as a result of the withdrawals by both from the pockets of territory that they occupied during the latest operations. Given the unprecedented scope of this appalling turn of events, Sheikh Hasina has struck the right note, even if somewhat belatedly, by telephoning the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, to express her sorrow and to assure him of her determination to conduct a "full and thorough" investigation of "all aspects" of the trouble on the border as also the related incidents. While her offer is a welcome gesture in a bleak ambience, it still remains to be seen how far she will be able to convince her bitter political opponents at home that she made a right move towards India at the right moment. However, Sheikh Hasina seems to have reckoned that nothing should override the civilised imperative of investigating the deplorable condition in which mutilated bodies of slain BSF men were handed over to the Indian side.

Sheikh Hasina may have exposed herself to a fresh round of domestic criticism about her al-

leged India-friendly disposition of a deferential kind. To this extent, her virtual apology is a testimony to her political courage ahead of a prospective general election. More significant, though, is the sign that her telephonic call and India's conspicuous restraint have defused a potentially explosive situation. However, if neighbourly trust is to be restored, the two countries should intensify the search for answers to some divisive issues, which often overshadow the symbolism of bilateral friendship. New Delhi not only played a catalytic role in freeing Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971 but also withdrew the Indian forces from the new country immediately thereafter. This aspect deserves to be affirmed if only because a potent strand of the latest political rhetoric in Dhaka is that the BDR has only tried to recapture an area under India's "occupation".

Now, the territorial question by and large pertains to the "enclaves" which the two countries control in each other's domain in what is regarded as "adverse possession" pending the finalisation of the *de jure* boundary in some clearly recognised sectors. A historical legacy of the colonial period as also the nature of the terrain account for this anomaly. Viewed thus, the border is not really in dispute. In any case, a referral document is the bilateral agreement of 1974, reached by Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, founder of Bangladesh and father of Sheikh Hasina. Dhaka has now begun to urge India to ratify that treaty in the latest context, while New Delhi seems inclined to sort out all "boundary related matters" first under a mechanism that was mutually agreed upon last December. Enhanced bilateral dialogue and border vigil will surely build mutual confidence. However, New Delhi will be well advised to ensure that its equation with Dhaka does not become hostage to the cynical calculations of how far Pakistan may be able to influence Bangladesh's foreign policy. For Dhaka, too, its long-term friendship with India is a substantive choice in itself.

THE HINDU

24 APR 2001

# BDR fired in self-defence: Dhaka

**DHAKA, APRIL 23.** A day after the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, spoke to her Indian counterpart, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, Dhaka today sought to give a new twist to the killing of BSF soldiers, claiming the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) "had to open fire in self-defence" since they were "under attack".

The Foreign Secretary, Syed Muazeem Ali, who briefed the press on a telephonic talk between the two Prime Ministers, made no mention of Ms. Hasina having made any direct expression of regret for the torture and killing of BSF personnel.

A carefully-worded statement read out by Mr. Ali said the Bangladesh Prime Minister expressed her deep shock and grief at the unnecessary and avoidable loss of lives "on both the sides".

Assuring Mr. Vajpayee that necessary investigation would be done to ascertain the "correct position", Ms. Hasina "requested the Indian Prime Minister also to

investigate and to find out the detailed position" about the incident in Boraibari along the Assam border.

Referring to the incident in Pyrdiwah village in Meghalaya, the statement said Ms. Hasina told

Mr. Vajpayee the "BDR troops had encircled the BSF camp when the latter was trying to construct a pucca road connecting the BSF camp with the Indian territories. There was no casualty or injury".

She said "but the second inci-

dent in Roumari (Boraibari) resulted in casualties when the BDR troops were under attack and had to open fire in self-defence".

On the outrage and shock over the torture of the BSF soldiers and the defilement of their bodies, the statement merely says Mr. Vajpayee "also referred to their views expressed earlier, on the treatment meted out to the dead bodies of the BSF personnel".

The foreign secretary said Ms. Hasina had emphasised that the recent border incident had once again highlighted the urgent need to complete the "unfinished tasks" of full implementation of the Indira-Mujib accord of 1974, which she believed would help both sides avoid recurrence of such incidents.

Mr. Ali said the two leaders agreed that as per the last senior official level meeting, two task forces would be constituted soon to expedite the process of implementation. — PTI

## BSF dismisses BDR claim

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 23.** The BSF today said the BDR's claim that it had encircled the BSF outpost in Pyrdwah to stop "illegal" road construction was totally false.

In a statement, the BSF Inspector-General, Mr. V.N. Rai, said, "it is absolutely wrong on the part of BDR to use the so called road as an alibi for their adventure in Pyrdwah. It was a deliberate effort to attribute the unjustifiable efforts of the BDR on the intervening night of the 15th and 16th of April."

He said BDR officials were blaming the BSF of making a road in Pyrdwah and claim that

since it was within 150 yards of the international border, the BDR had asked the BSF to stop construction and when the BSF did not stop the work, they resorted to the extreme step of encircling the BSF outpost.

"This position is absolutely false as the road which BDR is referring to is located at a place known as Lynghat which is about six km from BoP Pyrdwah.

In the real sense of the term it will be wrong to refer the construction as road as it is an old foot path between Lynghat and Lakhanchera," he said. — PTI

THE HINDU

24 APR 2001



# INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS FIGHTING THE GHOSTS OF A TURBULENT HISTORY

## Seeds of discontent

Jyoti Malhotra looks at the history of Indo-Bangladesh ties to trace the reasons behind the killings of BSF men by the Bangladesh Rifles

APRIL must be the cruelest month for India and Bangladesh, mixing memories with the recurring smell of blood and death, leavening the sowing and harvest with promises kept and betrayed. William Radcliffe drawing a line across the map in 1947. Jawaharlal Nehru and Feroze Khan Noon conferring about the border in 1958. The 1971 War of Liberation and its aftermath. Indira Gandhi and Mujibur Rahman continuing border talks in 1974. The Teen Bigha debacle. And through the remaining twilight years of the 20th century, the demarcation of the 4500-km-long boundary proceeding at a snail's pace.

In recent memory, though, this week's horrendous torture and killing of 15 BSF men by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in Boraipari, in the region of Cooch Behar, India, must be counted amongst the darkest moments in the history of the bilateral relationship.

Suddenly, the last five years of a relative honeymoon with the

Sheikh Hasina government, seemed fraught with peril.

Critically aware of the politically volatile situation in Bangladesh — which goes to the polls in October — and the determination by Khaleda Zia's opposition BNP to paint Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as an "Indian stooge", the foreign offices of both sides quickly moved to restore status quo in both sectors.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh-watchers here pointed out that the real reasons for last week's absolute mess could not be explained by "local-level adventurism" — as New Delhi had sought to explain the crisis — but was actually embedded in decades of bitterness between the two sides. That the history of the bilateral relationship was really the history of the scandalously slow pace in which the demarcation of the bilateral boundary had taken place over the decades, since Radcliffe willfully drew his line across the page in 1947.

Added to this potpourri of deliberate delay and subcontinental

apathy, was the fact of a major divide within Bangladesh's own political, bureaucratic and armed forces. Headquartered in Islamabad, hundreds of miles away from their homeland, the former East Pakistani elite preferred to be loyal to their masters in Islamabad. The War of Liberation in 1971 aggravated the social condition.

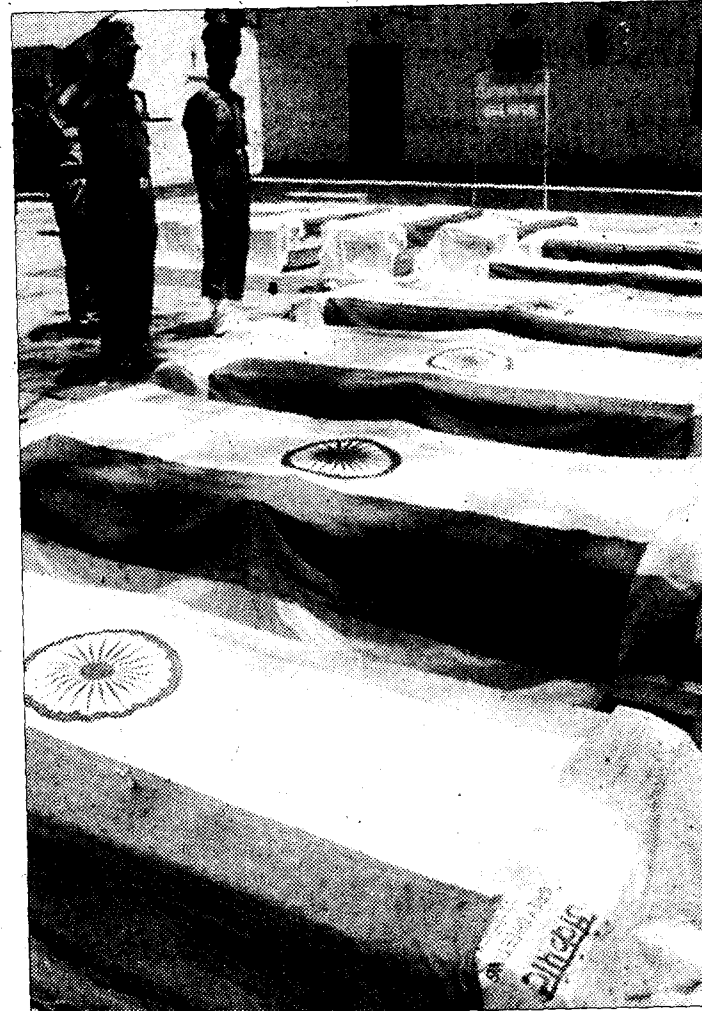
The 'Mukti Bahini', which fought the Pakistani army, was really composed of the poorer classes, their slogan 'Jai Bangla' a manifestation of their linguistic and cultural affinity with Bengal. As much, it was a rejection of the Urdu-speaking elite divorced from the nationalism of the sweaty masses back home.

Fazlur Rahman, the BDR chief who according to New Delhi is the villain of the piece, is said to be a representative of this "Islamabad crowd." Young men in 1971, some of these army officers have since risen through the ranks to occupy positions of authority in Bangladesh's armed forces today. Their ranks swelled

through the martial law regimes of Zia-ur-Rahman and Ershad — after Mujib's assassination in 1975 — and despite Sheikh Hasina's rule over the last five years, the power of the "cantonment" still courses strongly through the veins of Dhaka's establishment.

Across the years, meanwhile, the boundary demarcation proceeded at an excruciating pace. Much of the work has now been done, only 6.5 kms of the boundary remains to be demarcated. But an additional 42 kms continue to be dotted with tiny enclaves in "adverse possession" by both countries in the territory of the other.

Pyrdiwah-Padua is one such enclave in "adverse possession" by India within Bangladeshi territory, while Boraipari is held by Bangladesh within Indian territory. While Dhaka has been ready to exchange these enclaves as the demarcation of the border proceeded, New Delhi waits for its full completion, arguing that the exchange would require an



Coffins carrying the bodies of the BSF men killed by BDR. Reuters

amendment to the Constitution.

The history of the demarcation has been equally fraught with the frailties of men and women, promises made by them and broken, on both sides of the border. More than 10 years after Radcliffe carved up the subcontinent, the prime ministers of India and Pakistan, Jawaharlal Nehru and Feroze Khan Noon, met in 1958 for the first round of border talks.

The sticking point came with the town of Berubari in the Cooch Behar sector in West Bengal. It was decided that Berubari would be divided into half, the northern part remaining with India and the southern portion with Bangladesh. Soon enough, though, New Delhi was going back on its agreement to claim the whole area.

It took another 26 years for another set of prime ministers, this time of India and Bangladesh — Indira Gandhi and Mujibur Rahman — to come together for another set of talks in 1974. In exchange for Berubari, New Delhi offered a permanent lease of a corridor called the Teen Bigha, to access the villages of Dahigram and Agarpotta in Indian territory. The change of mind in New Delhi didn't take long in coming. Teen Bigha access, it was decided by later political lobbies, would be allowed only on certain days and for a few hours on those days.

The argument against giving Teen Bigha was that "permanent lease" amounted to a "cession" of Indian territory and therefore violative of the Indian constitution.

It took the Supreme Court, as late as 1990, to declare that that was not so — thereby liberating the bilateral relationship from the twists and perilous turns of the Indian political class.

With the election of Sheikh Hasina — Mujib's daughter — in 1996, relations with Bangladesh improved substantially. Hasina as well as the various governments in Delhi attempted to solve the problems leftover by history — whether it was the Ganga waters accord in 1996 or the recent restoration of Hindu property taken away before liberation — but the pace of the border settlement defied bilateral goodwill.

April, that cruelest month, has now returned to test the strength of political ties. Hasina goes to the polls in October, while Assembly elections in Assam and West Bengal will be held as early as next month. Expressions of regret as well as an investigation into the BSF massacre could be the secret of handling an ugly situation gone out of hand, especially when both India and Bangladesh reiterate the common fundamentals of an old friendship.

11-10

## Blood on the Border

There could have been no other end to the Indo-Bangladesh border skirmish, other than that of the restoration of the situation as it was before the Bangladesh Rifles occupied Pyrdiwah village. For two countries so closely intertwined by history, geography and indeed ethnicity, a resort to arms is the worst of all possible options. Particularly when the incident is made even uglier by evidence of extreme brutality said to have been perpetrated by the Bangladesh Rifles on Indian security personnel. This gross provocation, however, makes even more imperative the need for restraint on New Delhi's part. But the big question remains: Why did the Bangladeshis suddenly mount such a major military operation to seize what they have claimed for the past 30 years? These are questions that would have been better answered had the Intelligence Bureau, the Research & Analysis Wing and the Border Security Force intelligence not been caught napping once again. Mr Jaswant Singh's gratuitous claim in the Rajya Sabha to the effect that there was no intelligence failure, flies in the face of facts. Intelligence services are created to track trends and forewarn of the occurrence of such events. That said, it must be pointed out that the circumstances in the region are tailor-made for a clash. Bangladesh, one of the most populous spots on earth, is virtually the delta of the Brahmaputra and Ganga river systems, where numerous streams and rivers debouch to the Bay of Bengal, cutting across the alluvial plains. Some of these change their course periodically and create problems for those trying to pin down where the international border lies.

The problem is compounded by the fact that there was an artificial division between the Indian state of West Bengal and erstwhile east Pakistan during Partition, and both sides retain small enclaves deep in the other's territory. Possession of land, sometimes plots as small as a couple of acres, has been occasion for tension since then. Sorting out such problems requires patient diplomacy and the proverbial give and take. This is all the more so when the political leadership of Bangladesh is particularly well inclined towards India, which played a not insubstantial part in the creation of the state. Between 1975 when Sheikh Mujib was assassinated and 1996 when his daughter Sheikh Hasina returned as the elected prime minister, relations between India and Bangladesh were strained. Since then, however, things have improved. Sheikh Hasina has proved to be a deft politician and has contained not just the Opposition, but the anti-Indian elements who have considerable street-power in Dhaka. But she has a general election coming up in two months, and may be under pressure to prove that she is not an Indian stooge. There is an alternative explanation to the recent events as well. The Bangladeshi armed forces have, in the past at least, shown an inclination to get involved in politics, mostly of the anti-Indian variety. Whether or not they triggered off the attack on the BSF cannot be established, at least at this stage. There is no doubt that India has the military means to inflict punitive damage on the Bangladeshi forces, but this may be exactly what those who do not like India, and who may have engineered the incident, want.

# PM reviews situation on Indo-Bangladesh border

*Dhaka returns two wounded BSF constables, body of 'missing' jawan*

**The Times of India News Service**  
NEW DELHI: Two injured Border Security Force (BSF) jawans Akshay Kumar and Vimal Prasad and the body of a "missing" jawan, Dhyani Chand, were handed over to the BSF by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) at the Indo-Bangladesh border in Meghalaya sector on Sunday afternoon.

The body of the jawan has been sent for autopsy to find out the nature and cause of death. The two injured BSF constables, who were conscious and in a position to talk, were taken to the BSF Battalion headquarters of the area. The two injured constables were taken in custody by the BDR, badly beaten up and then taken to Dhaka for treatment. They were brought and handed over to the BSF after a countrywide uproar over torture and mutilation of 15 jawans and when India lodged a serious protest with the Bangladesh authorities.

The BSF authorities said they would be questioning the two injured jawans to find out what exactly happened over the past few days which led to the inhuman outrage against the BSF jawans.

Earlier in the day, BSF director-general Gurbachan Jagat submitted to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee his on-the-spot assessment of the incident when the

Bangladesh Rifle ran amok in two villages, killing 16 BSF soldiers in cold blood. The PM had called a high-level meeting to review the entire situation. The meeting was attended by home minister L.K. Advani, defence and external affairs minister Jaswant Singh and Planning Commission deputy chairman K.C. Pant. Mr Jagat was accompanied by home secretary

aware of it."

Asked how the Bangladesh government was being absolved of its responsibilities, Mr Pande said the Bangladesh foreign secretary had publicly stated that Dhaka was not aware of the unilateral action.

"When the foreign secretary is saying so, I believe it is with some responsibility," Mr Pande said, adding, New Delhi hoped that the

investigation ordered by the Bangladesh government would be an "open one." Asked whether there had been any intelligence failure, he said, "I don't think you can say that".

He, however, added that the inquiries to be carried out by the home ministry and the BSF would go into all aspects of the incidents. There is still no immediate word of any political contact between the two countries. Official sources denied reports of Mr Vajpayee having had a telephonic contact with his Bangladeshi counterpart.

The high-level meeting called by the PM discussed the entire situation in depth. It also deliberated on a preliminary report of the BSF chief who visited Pyrdiwah and Boraibari villages on the Indo-Bangla borders. He also supervised the taking over of the bodies of BSF personnel.

► See Edit: Blood on the Border, Page 10



**Home secretary Kamal Pande and BSF chief Gurbachan Jagat brief reporters at the Prime Minister's house in New Delhi on Sunday.**

Kamal Pande.

"It is a brutal act of murder," Mr Pande told reporters soon after the meeting. He said eight of the 15 BSF soldiers, killed by the BDR personnel, were shot dead at a point-blank range after being brutally tortured. One jawan was strangulated. The home secretary said it was "a unilateral action by the BDR local troops and the government of Bangladesh was not

THE TIMES OF INDIA

23 APR 2001

# Hasina calls up Vajpayee, expresses regrets It's a brutal act of murder, says home secretary

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & PTI

NEW DELHI, April 22. — Eight of the 15 BSF jawans killed by Bangladesh Rifles personnel along the Indo-Bangla border were shot dead at point blank range after being brutally tortured while another was strangled.

"It is brutal act of murder" and India hopes the investigation ordered by the Bangladesh government will be an "open one", the Union home secretary, Mr Kamal Pande, said.

(The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, spoke to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee over the telephone tonight. During the 30-minute talk, she expressed "regrets" over the torture and killing of 16 BSF personnel and said a "full investigation" would be carried out, a spokesman of the prime minister's office said.

(Mr Vajpayee conveyed to her a "deep sense of hurt and anguish", particularly over the inhuman and brutal torture of the BSF jawans. He pointed to the BDR's "utter disregard" for international conventions.

(The body of one more BSF man killed by BDR and two injured BSF jawans were today handed over by Bangladesh Rifles at Mahendragunj in Meghalaya.)

Mr Pande, however, said it was a "unilateral action by BDR troops" about which the



Mr Kamal Pande and the BSF chief Gurbachan Jagat coming out of the PM's residence on Sunday. — PTI

government of Bangladesh was not aware. Asked how the government was being absolved of its responsibilities, Mr Pande said the Bangladesh foreign secretary had said in public that Dhaka was not aware of the unilateral action.

"When the foreign secretary is saying so, I believe it is with some responsibility," Mr Pande said after a meeting, presided over by Prime Minister Mr AB Vajpayee to take stock of the situation.

Mr LK Advani, Mr Jaswant Singh, Mr KC Pant, Mr Bra-

jesh Mishra, Mr Gurbachan Jagat, were among those present at the meeting.

In Meghalaya, BDR personnel had dug trenches and taken positions before capturing the Indian border outpost at Pyrdiwah.

In Boraibari, it was yet to be ascertained how BSF personnel, who set out on patrol duty, were captured or hijacked.

He said the government didn't have details of the entire incident. In Meghalaya, the personnel dug trenches and had taken positions before capturing the Indian border outpost at Pyrdiwah. In Boraibari, it was yet to be ascertained how the BSF personnel, who set out on patrol duty, were captured or hijacked.

This information would be available only after the two injured personnel gave their versions.

The preliminary autopsy report, however, had made it "quite clear that eight of the bodies bore point-blank bullet wounds with mutilation and multiple injuries. Another BSF jawan bore wounds of strangulation," Mr Pande said.

Mr Pande said it would not be correct to say that there had been an Intelligence failure but was quick to point out that inquiries would be carried out by the Home ministry and BSF to go into all aspects of the incident.

THE STATESMAN

APR 20 1991

# Fair brother for Pakistan, stepmother for Bangla

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, April 22: India, which midwifed the birth of Bangladesh, has been denying its protégé for almost 30 years what it was on the verge of handing over to Pakistan.

Following an initiative taken by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1958, India and Pakistan had decided to swap demarcated territory without waiting for the process to be over in the east. The shortlisted areas included those labelled "under adverse possession" — an euphemism for occupied terrain.

Meghalaya's Pyrdiwah and Assam's Baroibari, where last week's flare-up occurred, are also referred to as territory under India's and Bangladesh's "adverse possession".

However, the approach that was adopted with Pakistan in 1958 was not followed with Bangladesh. Instead, India stressed during negotiations with Bangladesh that territory could be exchanged only after the entire boundary was demarcated.

As part of the Nehru initiative, Parliament passed in 1960 a Constitutional Amendment Bill — a requirement for ceding territory even if it is occupied by force.

Such amendments need two-thirds majority. After a decade-long laborious process, India and Pakistan managed to finalise the boundary in the west.

The east was on the brink of catching up with the west a year later and the date — March 27, 1971 — was set. But it was not to be because of an event that changed the face of the sub-continent.

On the same day, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced the creation of an independent state — Bangladesh — triggering a chain of events that led to the War of Liberation.

Though India and Pakistan had demarcated nearly 3,000 km of the 4,000-odd km boundary in the east, the discussions were restarted in 1972 as East Pakistan ceased to exist and Bangladesh was born.

To facilitate the border talks between the two sides, in 1974 an agreement was reached between Indira Gandhi and Mujib. India has 111 enclaves inside Bangladesh's territory, while Bangladesh has 51 enclaves in India.

The two sides have completed demarcation of most of their 4,000-km boundary. Only 6.5 km remains to be demarcated. Another 35.5 km within West

Bengal, though demarcated, has not been turned into a formal boundary.

Bangladesh has often impressed upon India that the speedy completion of the demarcation of the boundaries will help strengthen bilateral relations. Besides, it would have robbed the Delhi-haters' club in Dhaka of an opportunity to tar India.

One of the key planks of the anti-India lobby is Delhi's reluctance to part with the territory "occupied" during the war to train the Mukti Bahini.

Indian officials have argued that Bangladesh's attempts to raise new issues and "reinterpret" the Indira-Mujib agreement have stood in the way of speedy completion of the boundary work. However, political opposition from those who fear losing their vote-bank is seen as the main stumbling block before the transfer.

After the demarcation is completed, the government has to inform Parliament and move a fresh constitutional amendment to exchange territory. Once this is done, the Indira-Mujib agreement can be ratified by Parliament.

However, such a scenario seems remote given the present political equation in the House.

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THE TELEGRAPH

23 APR 2001

# Another dead jawan returned

HT Correspondents  
Shillong/New Delhi, April 22

THE BDR today returned two BSF personnel and the body of another to India this afternoon at Mahendragunj.

BSF Inspector General V K Gaur said the body would be identified after it is taken to the headquarters of the BSF's 118th Battalion at Praharinagar near Tura.

The two injured jawans had been undergoing treatment at Dhaka. They, too, will be identified after they are taken to the battalion headquarters.

"We want the injured jawans to rest at Tura," the IG said, adding that they would then be flown to a specialised hospital for better treatment. "They are not in a condition to speak as one had sustained severe head injury while the other has been wounded in the eye. Moreover, they had to bear the trauma of being in Bangladeshi custody for over three days."

The Government continued with its cautious response to the gory killings of BSF jawans. At a high-level meeting convened by the Prime Minister, the general consensus was to avoid any kind of hostile posturing that could harm the delicately poised friendly ties with Dhaka. The Government is apparently sticking to its stance that border skirmishes and the subsequent brutalities on the BSF men were the result of "local adventurism" devoid of any direct approval of the top echelons of the Sheikh Hasina regime.

PMO sources even discounted any immediate possibility of a direct telephonic contact between Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Sheikh Hasina over the issue.

Home Secretary Kamal Pande, who briefed the media after the meeting, said the Government attached considerable importance to the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary's statement that Dhaka was not aware of the BDR's unilateral action. "When the Foreign Secretary is saying



REUTERS PHOTO

Border Security Force personnel guard Jagrachowk village in Mankachar, Assam, on Sunday.

so, I believe it is with some responsibility."

On the inquiry ordered by the Bangladesh Government, the Home Secretary hoped that the investigations would be "open".

The Home Secretary confirmed that eight of the 15 BSF soldiers killed by the BDR were shot at "point blank range" after being brutally tortured while another jawan was strangulated. "It's a brutal act of murder." The

details of the autopsy reports were awaited, he added.

Officials said the issue of the brutality meted out to BSF jawans was discussed in details at today's high-level meeting. Apart from the Prime Minister, Home Minister L K Advani, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, Planning Commission Deputy Chairman K C Pant, National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra, BSF Director

General Gurbachan Jagat and other senior officials were present at the two-hour meeting.

The discussions were based on the preliminary report submitted by Jagat, who returned to the capital late last night after an on-the-spot assessment of the border flash points.

Sources said the Government would rather firm up its stance only after receiving a complete report of the entire episode. The

eye-witness accounts of the two injured jawans, who were returned today, would also be of considerable importance.

Besides the inquiries ordered by the home ministry and the BSF, the Government is expected to receive several other reports from its Intelligence outfits deployed on the border.

Related reports and photographs on Page 9

HASINA CALLS UP PM, EXPRESSES REGRET OVER KILLINGS

# Thorough probe promised

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, APRIL 22. Bangladesh today expressed regret at the highest political level over the inhuman treatment meted out to the Indian security forces on the border.

In a telephone call late tonight, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, promised the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, that her Government would conduct "a full and thorough" investigation into "all aspects" of the tragic incident on the Indo-Bangla border, in particular the torture of the Border Security Force (BSF) personnel and the disrespect shown to the jawans.

The call from Sheikh Hasina reflects the recognition of the intensity of the hurt feelings in India at the despicable treatment meted out to the BSF personnel by personnel of the Bangladesh Rifles.

During Sheikh Hasina's call at 11.00 p.m., lasting 30 minutes, Mr. Vajpayee conveyed to her "the deep sense of anguish" at the ugly turn of events on the Indo-Bangla border.

Sheikh Hasina's call was preceded by a telephonic conversation between the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Mr. Abdul Samad Azad, and the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh. After the call from Mr. Azad, Mr. Singh briefed Mr. Vajpayee on the latest on the diplomatic front.

The unambiguous expression of regret by Bangladesh and the promise by Dhaka to investigate the incident have defused the political tension between the two countries and allow them to face



The Union Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pande, and the Director-General of BSF, Mr. Gurbachan Jagat, at a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday.

together the common adversary who is trying to disrupt Indo-Bangla amity and friendship.

## A brutal act, says India

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 22. The Government today described the killing of Border Security Force jawans by Bangladesh Rifles personnel last week as a "brutal act of murder" after a high-level review of the incident at the Prime Minister's residence. There a presentation "confirmed" that at least eight jawans had been shot "at

point-blank range".

Even as reports from Shillong indicated that a decomposed body of a jawan — identified as Havildar Dhyani Chand — and two injured constables — Akshay Kumar and Bimal Kumar — were handed over at Mahendraganj, Meghalaya, to the BSF commandant, Mr. S. C. Zutshi, this afternoon, there was no clear word on how the Government would proceed besides lodging strong protests.

After the meeting which lasted about two hours, the Union Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pande, said it was clear that eight of the bodies handed over on Sat-

urday were "mutilated with multiple injuries" while another bore "strangulation marks".

He confirmed that the bodies of eight jawans "bore point-blank bullet wounds" and that there was no getting away from the harsh fact that "it was a brutal act of murder".

The Minister for Defence and External Affairs, Mr. Jaswant Singh, the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Mr. K. C. Pant, the National Security Adviser, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, the Foreign Secretary, Ms. Chokila Iyer, and the Director-General of the Border Security Force, Mr. Gurbachan Jagat, attended the meeting. Mr. Jagat, who had toured the area on the Indo-Bangla border in Meghalaya and Assam where the clash had occurred, apparently made a presentation to the Prime Minister.

### 'Unilateral action'

The Government, it was said, was awaiting a detailed report on the basis of a first-hand account by the injured jawans who were handed over to Indian authorities this afternoon, Mr. Pande said. Only then would the Government be able to come to some conclusion on the cause of the incident, especially when India and Bangladesh enjoyed a friendly relation. The then Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, had given a certificate of innocence to the former Pakistan Prime Minister.

Quoting the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Syed Moazzem Ali, as reported in a newspaper interview here, Mr. Pande said Mr. Ali must have spoken with "responsibility" and that he (Mr. Pande) had no occasion to doubt Mr. Ali's claim of his Government's innocence.

Mr. Pande said India would await the report of the inquiry ordered by Dhaka into the incident.

For the present, all that Mr. Pande shared was that in Pyrdiwah, the BSF border outpost was taken by Bangladesh Rifles who had dug trenches, indicating the force had the support of engineers. The post was later re-occupied by the BSF.

## I'm pained, says Bangla envoy

NEW DELHI, APRIL 22. The Bangladesh High Commissioner, Mr. Mustafa Farooq Mohammed, tonight said he was personally "very pained" and regretted the killing of BSF soldiers but said the question of his country's apology on the issue could only be decided after a thorough investigation.

"The question of apology will be decided only after investigation... as to who started and what happened," he told the Star News channel.

Asked whether action would be taken against the guilty BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) officials and others, he said investigation into the incident was on and "the law of the land will definitely prevail".

To a question, he said that many of the problems faced on the border between the two countries would not recur if personnel of the BDR and the BSF abided by the concerned guidelines. — PTI

THE HINDU

23 APR 2001



# Probe launched into jawans' torture

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, APRIL 22.** Bangladesh authorities today handed over to their Indian counterparts the body of a BSF jawan found on Saturday near the Boraibari border outpost, and the two injured BSF jawans after their treatment here, following the border clashes in Roumari last week.

The handing over was done at Kamalpur adjoining Mahendraganj in Meghalaya, the Foreign Secretary, Syed Moazzem Ali, said adding the situation along the border at Padua and Roumari was peaceful and there had been several rounds of talks at various levels to ease the tension. Efforts were also on to ensure that the thousands of villagers who had fled the area returned.

The Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, was aware of the Indian allegation of torture of BSF men and "the measures being taken on the matter as per her directives". Investigations into the allegation had begun and "we can comment only after completion of the process", he said. On the reported burning of the Bangladesh national flag in India, Mr. Ali termed it "unfortunate" and said this could only lead to "bitterness".

Meanwhile, the Home Minister, Mohammad Nasim, described the recent clashes with India as "unwanted and unfortunate" and said the problems relating to the border could be solved through dialogue in the light of the



**Border Security Force personnel keep vigil as a villager carries fodder near the Indo-Bangladesh border at Jagrachowk village in the Mankachar area of Assam on Sunday.** — Reuters

friendly bilateral relations. "We are committed to stopping recurrence of such incidents", he said in response to recent comments by his Indian counterpart, Mr. L. K. Advani, on the issue. Describing India as Dhaka's "principal friend" during the war of liberation against Pakistan, Mr. Nasim said the two countries had enjoyed friendly relations ever since.

THE HINDU

23 APR 2001

# The neighbourhood

By K. K. Katyal

*There are in-built handicaps for India in its dealings with neighbours, stemming from the asymmetry in size, population, economic strength and resources.*

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**T**HE RECENT clash on the Bangladesh border and the heavy loss of lives have again thrown up the multi-dimensional challenge faced by India in its dealings with the neighbourhood. Ties with the countries in the region, even with the exclusion of Pakistan, have posed formidable problems, both in episodal and conceptual terms. India is a major factor in the political agendas of the various parties there, whether in the Government or in the Opposition, and anti-India feelings could be generated with incredible ease to achieve narrow political ends. The factors and forces operating below the surface, that led to the adventurist action of the Bangladesh Rifles, have yet to be identified but there is little doubt — on the basis of preliminary evidence — of the linkage with it of anti-India sentiments and anti-India elements.

Any in-depth discussion of the ghastly episode has to deal with 1) the facts of the incident, 2) the present state of India-Bangladesh relations (including the perception of India by different sections), 3) India's relationship with the neighbouring countries (except Pakistan which falls in a different category), 4) the manner in which the Pakistan factor impinges on New Delhi's ties with others in the region, and 5) the lessons to be learnt from the sudden eruption.

The accounts available from different sources establish the fact of intrusion, in the first instance, by the Bangladesh Rifles. Had that not been the case the Bangladesh side would not have expressed regret over the killing of the BSF personnel and reports from Dhaka would not have ascribed the killings to local adventurism, without the consent and knowledge of the higher-ups. There were conflicting versions of whether there had been a failure of intelligence or whether the authorities concerned did not pay attention to information supplied by the local agencies on the emerging situation on the border. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani's denial of the failure charge does not carry conviction. Shades of Kargil.

In sharp contrast to the lapses on the ground was the handling at the diplomatic level. "Restraint" was the key word. Even before the Cabinet Committee on Security considered the situation, the official mind was made up — that conscious steps needed to be taken to de-escalate the sit-

uation. Both the Ministries of Home and External Affairs made known their concern, were firm in their postures but, otherwise, played it cool and saw to it that the clash did not develop into a bilateral crisis. This caution came under heavy strain when the gory details of the killing of the BSF personnel became known. While not giving up the restraint, New Delhi lodged a strong protest to Dhaka and made its displeasure known. On her part, the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, would need to do some tight-rope walking — recognising India's concern while avoiding the impression of succumbing to New Delhi's pressure.

The India-Bangladesh relationship is a mix of complex factors — which operate differently, depending on who is in power in Dhaka. The Awami League Government had been keen on forging friendly ties with India. At the same time, it had to guard against the perception of a tilt towards New Delhi. The Opposition is continuously looking to pounce on the Government at the slightest sign of a perceived softness towards India. The main Opposition party, the Bangladesh National Party of Begum Khaleda Zia, had never tried to hide its antipathy towards New Delhi — and, in this, it was supported by its allies. There were at least two factors that made anti-India sentiment highly potent — it had the support, on the one hand, of sections of the armed forces and, on the other, of religious fundamentalists. The pro-Pakistan elements, who had not reconciled themselves to the creation of an independent Bangladesh (but did not dare say so publicly) took shelter behind the India-baiting parties. It was a highly polarised pattern.

Elections in Bangladesh are not far away and this makes the current situation particularly sensitive. The Opposition is certain to intensify its efforts to find new means to embarrass the Government and what could be a more effective way than making use of the India factor? In the present surcharged atmosphere, this is the easiest of the political options.

The Hasina Government finds itself in

an unenviable position — it could not highlight, for instance, the benefits accruing from the agreement with India on the sharing of the Ganga waters, with a section of the Opposition either questioning the gain to Bangladesh or twisting it to highlight its pro-India bias. Sheikh Hasina, therefore, took a big risk in avoiding a jingoistic posture and in helping contain the diplomatic fall-out.

It is natural for suspicions to arise as regards the role of various elements and for the sequence of developments to be closely scrutinised. Could it not be the handiwork of elements out to stir, on the one hand, anti-India sentiment and, on the other, to put the Government on the mat? To talk of convergence between the interests of these elements and pro-Pakistan section is to stress the obvious. The infiltration of the ISI into sensitive agencies of Bangladesh is known, but some firm evidence is required to conclude that it was actively involved in the recent incident.

There are in-built handicaps for India in its dealings with neighbours, stemming from the asymmetry in size, population, economic strength and resources. India also has land or maritime borders with each one of them, while others do not have this contiguity. It creates presumptions of a hegemonistic approach among them while New Delhi is caught in fears of a gang-up.

In this setting, India becomes a major factor in the domestic politics of the neighbours — not only in Bangladesh but also in Nepal and Sri Lanka. The Hrithik Roshan episode in Nepal last December proves the point. The baseless rumour of alleged derogatory remarks by the film star was enough to trigger large-scale mob frenzy, rioting and killings — and for the protests to acquire shrill anti-India overtones. Only when the factual situation was known and it was established that the offensive remark ascribed to the actor was never made, was calm restored. By then considerable damage had been done.

The political parties in Nepal have vied with one another in generating and ex-

ploiting anti-India sentiment. Both the extreme left and the monarchists have been equally active in such campaigns. The issues cover a wide range — the 1950 treaty, rival claims on the demarcation of the border in unclear cases, especially on Kalapani, and the India-Nepal-China tri-junction. India has its quota of grievances. As regards Sri Lanka, the operation of the India factor has a long, unsavoury history, with the IPKF period representing the bitter climax.

Pakistan had been making all-out efforts to fan the anti-India sentiment in the neighbouring countries, finding the ground particularly fertile in Nepal and Bangladesh. In Nepal, the operations of Pakistan's ISI were both vast and deep. There were clearly identified cases, where the Pakistani hand was responsible for creating problems for New Delhi. At times, it succeeded in damaging its relations with Nepal. The Hrithik Roshan episode, for instance, could not have acquired the dimensions it did but for the role of Pakistani elements. The open India-Nepal border provides them an ideal situation to smuggle operatives into India. The case of the alleged involvement of a Pakistani diplomat in Kathmandu in the engineering of violent activities was the latest in the unsavoury series, of which the hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane was the most horrible. In Bangladesh, the ISI job is easier — it, after all, was part of their country and there are strong linkages at various levels.

What are the lessons for New Delhi? Increased vigilance, of course, apart from improved intelligence network. More important, there is a case for discarding the tendency to shelve solutions of pending problems. It is shameful on the part of authorities to cite the difficult terrain of the 6.5-k.m. undemarcated sector of the border with Bangladesh to justify their criminal inaction. Cases of "adverse possession" along the border are standing provocations and, as such, delay in sorting them out is inexplicable. Frequent contacts at the top level could help dispel misperceptions and misunderstandings and prevent petty wrangles from becoming unmanageable. If the Government heads in Western Europe, to cite one example, could meet every other month, what prevents the top leaders here from having frequent contacts?

# Dhaka unaware of BSF torture: India

## Two injured, one more body to be handed over to authorities

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 22: India has described the killing of the Border Security Force jawans by the Bangladesh Rifles personnel along the Indo-Bangladesh border as a "brutal act of murder."

The home secretary Kamal Pande while briefing the reporters after an hour-long meeting convened by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee disclosed that eight of the BSF soldiers were shot dead at point blank range after being brutally tortured while another was strangled. Also present at the briefing was the BSF director-general Gurbachan Jagat. The meeting had been con-

vened by the Prime Minister to discuss the killing of BSF soldiers at Boraibari along the Assam border and the intrusion by BDR in Pyrdiwah in Meghalaya. Those who attended the meeting included Union Home Minister L. K. Advani, defence and external affairs minister Jaswant Singh, deputy-chairman of Planning Commission K. C. Pant, national security adviser Brajesh Mishra, foreign secretary Chokila Iyer, home secretary Kamal Pande and other senior officials.

The meeting which was supposed to be held on Saturday night had to be postponed as Mr Jagat returned late to Delhi. Mr Pande stated that while

detailed autopsy reports were awaited, "It is quite clear that eight of the bodies bore point-blank bullet wounds with mutilation and multiple injuries. Another BSF jawan bore wounds of strangulation."

He said that it was "a unilateral action by the BDR troops and government of Bangladesh was not aware of it."

The entire situation was discussed at the meeting which also deliberated on a preliminary report given by the BSF chief, who made an on-the-spot assessment of the developments in Pyrdiwah and Boraibari besides supervising handing over of the bodies of BSF personnel.

Mr Pande said two injured

BSF soldiers, undergoing treatment in a military hospital in Dhaka, will be returned to the BSF authorities on Sunday evening. Another body will also be handed over, he said.

Details of how the whole incident had taken place will be available only after the two injured personnel gave their versions, he said.

Asked whether there was any discontentment among the BSF personnel along the Indo-Bangladesh border, Mr Pande said, "Yes, there is resentment on the ground."

He said in Meghalaya, the BDR personnel had dug trenches and taken positions before capturing the Indian border

outpost at Pyrdiwah.

In Boraibari, it was yet to be ascertained how the BSF personnel, who set out on patrol duty, were captured or hijacked.

Asked how the Bangladesh government was being absolved of its responsibilities, Mr Pande said the Bangladesh foreign secretary has publicly stated that Dhaka was not aware of the unilateral action. "When the foreign secretary is saying so, I believe it is with some responsibility," Mr Pande said adding that New Delhi hoped that the investigation ordered by the Bangladesh government will be an "open one." He denied that there was any intelligence fail-

ure.

# Hasina quiet, Centre quieter over Bangladesh intrusion

JYOTI MALHOTRA  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 22

**T**HE deafening silence of Dhaka over the torture and killing of 15 Border Security Force (BSF) jawans may be real. Despite Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's secular rule over Bangladesh for the last five years, she may not have been fully aware of the gruesome action unleashed by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) against the BSF a few days ago.

Hasina's dilemma is made poignant by the fact that New Delhi is unwilling to point an accusatory finger at her. In fact, highly placed sources here acknowledged some of the guilt

must be shouldered by the BSF given the theory being floated that the troops went wilfully into Bangladesh territory.

Much of that "guilt" has, of course, been erased by the photographs of tortured bodies. They have brought back chilling reminders of Indian soldiers tortured by Pakistanis during the Kargil war, but New Delhi is

making a huge attempt to differentiate between Islamabad and what happened at Boraipari in the last week. For a start, Major General Fazlur Rahman, Director-General, Bangladesh Rifles, who has been

dubbed the "local Napoleon", is said to have been behind the killings of the BSF jawans. That could account for the phrase "local adventurism" that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has used over the last couple of days.

The assessment here goes that Hasina's inability to control her country's periphery is real. Despite Hasina's rule for the last five years, the fact remains that for most of Bangladesh's existence, it has either been under martial law or a semblance of it.

In this case, Fazlur Rahman acted as an extra-constitutional authority.

But then, several key generals in the Bangladesh Army and paramilitary — known as the "Islamabad crowd" in popular parlance — are now in positions of authority in Dhaka.

Hasina's rule has not been easy. For the last two years, Khaleda Zia, wife of former martial law administrator Zia-ur Rahman and the main opposition party BNP's leader, has refused to let normal life go on in Bangladesh.

Sources here say one of the main reasons why Hasina has refused to go public about this week's incidents is that Bangladesh goes to the polls in October.

Any acknowledgement by her of

guilt or regret could be further used by Khaleda Zia to portray her as a "client of India".

Nevertheless, in the last five years, Hasina has slowly but surely tested the people by entering into agreements with India — such as the third rail link announced a couple of months ago — and announcing decisions that will have the effect of fundamentally changing the polity of Bangladesh.

The first was a 1996 election campaign promise to bring the assassins of her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to trial.

Over five years, Hasina has persisted with the United States, where some of the assassins still live, to send



Sheikh Hasina

them back to Bangladesh, where preparations are being made for the trial.

The second is her pathbreaking decision of a few weeks ago to restore to Bangladesh's Hindu citizens the property that was snatched from them in 1947.

So, if the Bangladesh Prime Minister's silence on last week's incidents at both Pyridiwah and Boraipari has been defeating, New Delhi too agrees it is a poignant one.

Only after the briefing by BSF Director-General Gurcharan Jagat this evening will New Delhi decide whether it needs to change tack and ask Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to speak to her at all.

INDIAN EXPRESS

23 APR 2001

# Rampaging Bangla troops loot village

BY SYED ZARIR HUSSAIN

Pyrdiwah (Meghalaya), April 22: A rifle slung over his shoulder, Raju Lal, an BSF guard, looked tense and pensive as he stood at his post in Pyrdiwah, a village along the India-Bangladesh border that was until Thursday occupied by Bangladesh Rifles troopers. BDR troopers took over Pyrdiwah, 100 km east of Shillong, after they overran a Border Security Force outpost here, besieging 28 Indian troopers for five days.

Raju Lal was among those BSF troopers taken hostage by the BDR, surrounded on all sides by heavily armed BDR men sitting in trenches and bunkers, holding the Indians under a spell of terror and

fear. "We were definitely scared and tense with BDR troopers surrounding our camp. We had no option other than to prepare ourselves inside the camp to counter-attack if the BDR resorted to firing," Raju Lal said on Sunday.

A flurry of high-level diplomatic initiatives between Delhi and Dhaka finally ended the stand-off Thursday afternoon, with the BDR retreating from Pyrdiwah, a 265 acre village, giving the BSF troopers a new lease of life.

The nearly 500 BDR men trekked back to their camps, a stone's throw away, but not before plundering and vandalising Pyrdiwah, changing the lives of local

Khasi villagers.

Pyrdiwah today resembles a ravaged village — thatched roofs being taken off huts, personal belongings like clothes, utensils, cattle and poultry, either looted or destroyed. "The BDR looted everything and even took away my children's schoolbooks," said

Pinky Jatti, a mother of four children, as tears welled in her

eyes. "It is a shame that troops from Bangladesh can stoop to such levels. They are no better than petty criminals and looters."

The village's primary school and Roman Catholic Church too bore the brunt of rampaging BDR troopers. This correspondent saw the

church and school walls defaced with graffiti and anti-India slogans written by the Bangladeshi forces.

"Our struggle for independence," "Out BSF," "Khaleda Zia Long Live," "This is our land — land of Bangladesh," "BDR Long Live," "This is Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's dream Bangladesh," were some of the writings on the wall. Village huts were plastered with artistic party symbols of both the Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the ruling Awami League. "The BDR officers broke open the church and were using the premises for sleeping at night. The holy cross inside the church was found broken nearby," said the village headman Piju Nongrum.

(India Abroad News Service)

## SPOTLIGHT

THE ASIAN AGE

23 APR 2001

VAJPAYEE TAKES A SERIOUS VIEW OF MUTILATION

# Delhi lodges protest with Dhaka

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 21. India today lodged a "very strong protest" with Bangladesh over the "inhuman treatment" meted out to the personnel of the Border Security Force (BSF), asserting that men in uniform have to be treated with dignity at all times. The official protest came within hours of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, took a "serious view" of the mutilation of the bodies of the 15 BSF personnel.

The bodies were handed over to the BSF officers on Friday after considerable delay. The BSF chief, Mr. Gurbachan Jagat, who was present at the border, had to rush to the capital to brief the Prime Minister on the situation along the border. Mr. Jagat is expected to brief the Prime Minister and other senior Cabinet colleagues including the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, and the Minister of External Affairs and Defence, Mr. Jaswant Singh, tomorrow.

Conveying his impressions about the ground situation before emplaning to New Delhi from Guwahati, the BSF Director-General was of the view that his men had been killed in "cold blood" and the bodies bore tell-tale signs of brutal torture inflicted on them.

The BSF personnel had been strangled, and their bones broken. Some of the bodies were charred beyond recognition. They had been shot from a pointblank range through their eyes.

The BSF chief said that available information indicated that the soldiers were killed by the men of

to be treated with dignity," the Ministry spokesperson said.

During his daily briefing, the MEA spokesperson indicated that the BSF personnel who were killed were part of a border patrol "which went missing" along a sector of the Indo-Bangladesh border in Assam. He denied that the BSF personnel were killed while trying to seize a cross-border enclave in retaliation to the takeover of the village of Pyrdiwah along the Meghalaya-Bangladesh border by the Bangladesh Rifles earlier this week. He clarified that there was no firing during the standoff between the BSF and the BDR at Pyrdiwah. "The *status quo ante* was restored within 48 hours on account following a diplomatic engagement." India, the spokesperson asserted, had stressed to the Bangladeshi authorities that the incident had to be "fully investigated". It also expected that such incidents were not repeated. Besides, New Delhi demanded that the two injured BSF personnel now undergoing treatment in a Dhaka military hospital be returned immediately.

The Foreign Secretary, Ms. Chokila Iyer, summoned the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to South Block today to lodge New

Delhi's protest. The High Commissioner was told that such incidents were not in keeping with the friendly relations between countries and, therefore, recurrence must be prevented. Ms. Iyer also spoke to her counterpart in Bangladesh on similar lines. Besides, a parallel statement was also issued by the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Mr. M.L. Tripathi, in Dhaka.

UNI reports from Shillong:

The last rites of the 15 soldiers were performed at the BSF's 118th battalion camp at Tura. While 13 of the 15 bodies handed over to the Indian authorities at Meghalaya's Mahendraganj were consigned to flames, the bodies of two Muslim soldiers, identified as constables H. Sheikh and Mafuluddin, were buried.

## Bangladesh to launch probe

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, APRIL 21. Bangladesh will soon launch an investigation into New Delhi's allegations of mutilation of the bodies of BSF personnel handed over to Indian authorities late last night. "We will launch an investigation into the allegations," the Foreign Secretary, Syed Moazzem Ali, said while briefing reporters on the efforts to restore peace on the border.

Confirming that the Government had received a protest from New Delhi, he said he was aware of the concern of the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, concern over the issue. "Our reply would be reflective of his concern," Mr. Ali said.

The Foreign Secretary, however, did not dismiss the allegations outright, and said such incidents were not unusual when a mob assaulted intruders. "If the allegation is true, it is a heinous action."

## PM convenes meet

NEW DELHI, APRIL 21. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, has convened a high-level meeting here tomorrow to discuss the torture and killing of BSF soldiers by Bangladesh Rifles, sources said. The BSF chief, Mr. Gurbachan Jagat, who visited the area for a spot assessment, would make a presentation at the meeting on the situation there. — PTI

Bangladesh Rifles and not by villagers as widely suspected earlier.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said that India had stressed before the Bangladesh authorities that its security personnel had to be treated with dignity under any circumstances. "Even their bodies have



A BSF jawan lights the pyre of his colleagues at a village in Assam on Saturday. — Reuters

India treads carefully: Page 8

THE HINDU

APR 21 1991

# India treads carefully on border clash

By Atul Aneja

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 21.** In the aftermath of the border flare-up, India is moderating its stance to discourage the emergence of a radical regime in Dhaka, which will be detrimental to its security and political interests.

Government sources here said that any reaction now to "avenge" the killing of 15 BSF jawans would prove counter-productive. It would only strengthen the anti-India forces in Bangladesh, and could help bring them to power in the coming elections. That would be unacceptable, for the presence of a right-wing government, supported by extremist religious groups, could result in Bangladesh becoming a base for launching militant activity in the country's strife-torn North-East. Already stretched in Kashmir, India can ill-afford the re-opening of its "eastern front".

Sources said the assessment was that the takeover of the Pyrdi-wah enclave was undertaken without the knowledge of the Bangladeshi Prime Minister, and was ordered by a combine which may have included a "junior Minister", key senior bureaucrats and a section of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR).

Pakistani influence within this group was also not ruled out. One of the "theories" the Government is considering is that the BDR action was a retaliation by the Pakistani intelligence, which saw itself acutely embarrassed by India in Nepal. The Pakistanis hold India responsible for the detention by the Nepalese authorities of their First Secretary, Mohammad Ar-

shad Cheema, and the recovery of 16 kg RDX from his rented accommodation.

The border clash between the BSF and the BDR, which was widely covered in the Bangladesh media, has brought the "India factor" to the centre stage in the run-up to the elections. That is bad news for the Awami League Government of Ms. Sheikh Hasina.

Though elections are not likely before October, the friction between the Awami League Government, which is perceived to be well disposed towards India, and the Opposition BNP alliance has acquired an abnormally high pitch. The BNP alliance, led by the former Prime Minister, Ms. Khaleda Zia, has always attacked the Government for "selling out" to India.

Significantly, in its campaign the BNP has been joined by the radical Islamic parties. These include the Jammāt-e-Islami (JeI), whose leader, Mr. Ghulam Azam, has been a vocal supporter of Pakistan. The Islami Chhatra Shibir, the JeI's student wing, has been accused of being involved in an assassination attempt on Ms. Hasina in July last year.

Others in the alliance include the Islamic Okiya Jote, an alliance of Islamic fundamentalist organisations and the Jatiya Party of the former President, Gen. Ershad.

Some radical Islamic groups may also be benefiting from the presence of transnational 'jehadis'. The Harkat-ul-Jehād-al-Islami has a presence in Bangladesh since 1992. Two years ago, security forces shut down the office of the monthly news magazine, *Jago*

*Mujahid*, for allegedly pushing pro-Taliban articles.

Prior to the border skirmish, the negative campaign against the Awami League was not making much headway. This was, according to analysts, on account of the reasonably good performance of the Hasina regime. The Government scored high marks for skilfully tackling natural calamities and for reforms which benefited the people at the grassroots level. Besides, Sheikh Hasina's capacity to push a deal on the Ganga waters with India and interest big transnational companies in developing Bangladesh's resources of natural gas has also gone down well.

On the diplomatic side, the visit of the former U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, was yet another feather in her cap.

In fact, confident of her popularity, Sheikh Hasina has been openly taking on the extremists. In February, the security forces had clashed with fundamentalists at Brahmanbaria, bordering Tripura. Seven people were killed and many injured in the incident.

The border clash, however, may push the moderate Government on the back foot. Attacks against Sheikh Hasina by her rivals, exploiting her alleged "India connections", are becoming more strident. "India is creating unwanted incidents to save its subservient puppet government in Bangladesh," claimed Matiur Rahman Nizami, 'ameer' of JeI. The BNP secretary-general, Mr. Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, praised the BDR personnel for combating Indians several times during the rule of the Awami League.

THE HINDU

22 APR 2001

# Urgent need to resolve border disputes

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, APRIL 21.** The exchange of fire on the Indo-Bangladesh border has stopped, but there is apprehension here as to whether the authorities on both sides would be able to prevent the recurrence of such bloody skirmishes in the future.

The apprehensions are pertinent because despite the resolution of most outstanding issues, some smaller ones still cause conflicts along the 4,000-km-long border.

The Mujib-Indira agreement dealt with 110 enclaves of Bangladesh in Indian territory and almost an equal number belonging to India in Bangladesh. While Bangladesh implemented the treaty quickly, India has not done it fully so far.

These are minor issues, including the one of Padua (Indian name Pyrdiwah) which was seized by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on April 16. Discussions over the handing over of Padua, which borders Meghalaya, to Bangladesh have been going on for a long time without any tangible result.

Observers said that the latest clash was probably the result of local adventurism and field-level overreaction, and hoped the situation would improve soon. "But the facts re-

main that the border guards of India and Bangladesh had clashed 51 times in last 16 months, in which 47 BDR men died and 37 were injured," said the pro-secular daily *Sangbad* in an editorial today.

While stressing the need for both sides to observe restraint, newspapers here have raised several questions. Who was to blame for the clashes? Were the clashes the outcome of issues which remained unresolved for decades? Or had some interested quarters seized their chance?

The popular Bangla daily *Prothom Alo* questioned in a front page analysis the role of the BDR Director-General, whose forces had taken a group of journalists on a trip to Padua the day it was seized by them. The daily said the journalists were later flown by a helicopter to Roumari, where the worst clashes took place.

The daily also questioned why the BDR chief had taken a major military decision — to seize Padua — when there was an elected government, and also the neighbouring governments had been maintaining regular contact on all issues.

Although there is no official confirmation, another daily *Vorer Kagoj* reported today that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had demanded an explanation from the BDR for its action,

which may have provoked the BSF to attack a Bangladesh border outpost in the Kurigram-Mankerchar region, resulting in the large number of casualties.

The construction of a road by the BSF in Padua was protested by the BDR. But it is still unclear what actually prompted the latter to seize the tiny hamlet, which was a strategic camp of Bangladesh freedom fighters during the nation's war of liberation in 1971.

The *Daily Independent* in an editorial said, "It is, at this time, certainly important to find out the causes responsible for what transpired at the Indo-Bangladesh frontier on Wednesday." It demanded a quick, judicious inquiry and also the reasons for the large number of casualties.

The border is not only densely populated on both sides but also mostly demarcated except a few disputed portions. And the recent clashes took place only in the two undemarcated areas.

Even if there was a design by "an interested foreign quarters", for instance the ISI whose name is being discussed, to destabilise the friendly relations between the neighbours, there is an urgent need to resolve the unsettled issues to prevent the recurrence of such conflicts in the future.



## BORDERS ON TWO VILLAGES

Two small villages in the Assam-Meghalaya-Bangladesh border have become the bone of contention between India and Bangladesh. Blood has been shed and lives have been lost. The asymmetry inherent in the situation is striking. For one thing, it is inexplicable that temperatures should rise over two hamlets. For another, the sheer discrepancy in the size and strength of the two sides involved. India, by any reckoning — in size, in military might, in numbers, in economic power and all other known criteria — is the strongest country in south Asia. That it should choose to quarrel with Bangladesh over two villages is a cause for some comment and concern. According to reports that are available, including the official Indian survey, one of the villages, Pyrdiwah, is actually Bangladesh territory in the possession of India. India claims that the other village, Baroibari, belongs to India but is in the possession of Bangladesh. There is also evidence that the flashpoint to the crisis was provided by Indian border forces when they tried to disrupt the *status quo* by trying to build a footpath connecting the outpost in Pyrdiwah to another one in Meghalaya. It is clear that beyond the niceties and the quibbles indulged in by the ministry of external affairs and the Border Security Force, India has to accept a major share of the responsibility for the totally unwarranted flare-up.

If India accepts that at least one of the two villages belongs to Bangladesh, what have Indian forces been doing there for so many years? What stops India from handing over to Bangladesh what legitimately belongs to Bangladesh? At an even more profound level, why does India squabble with a small neighbouring country which, in fact, it helped form? These are uncomfortable questions which the ministry of external affairs must answer. It has been India's contention in all important international fora that China and Pakistan are holding on to areas that belong to India. This accusation loses all its moral force if

India is seen to be holding on to territories which rightfully belong to Bangladesh. However distasteful it may sound to the mandarins in South Block, India's policy towards its neighbours does have an ugly face. Events in the Assam-Meghalaya-Bangladesh border are proof of its existence. For obvious reasons, this face is visible first to India's neighbours. The face is so heavily made up with the rhetoric of "security considerations", "national interests" and such like that Indians take a long time to recognize it, if they recognize it at all.

Indian foreign policy cannot wish away the way India is perceived by its neighbours.

At a time Indian foreign policy is changing direction, skirmishes with a less powerful neighbour over border villages are best avoided

Their reactions will be influenced as much by their perceptions as by official pronouncements. India's size and strength inevitably make it the object of suspicion. There is always the fear among the neighbours that India's ambitions — perceived or real — will threaten their sovereignty. India thus has to work twice as hard to convince its neighbours that it has no *mala fide* intentions. An incident like the one that has just happened on the border with Bangladesh with its attendant stories of butchery, torture and exchange of fire only serves to vitiate the entire process of creating goodwill and fellow feeling among neighbours. It is one of the situations in which India has to climb down from its high horse and apply balm on hurt egos to remove threats to a neighbour's identity. This may not be acceptable to those who peddle the "powerful India" or even the "greater India" thesis. But this is not the time when India can afford to play games with its neighbours. To force through the most important task, economic reforms, India needs to be free from any kind of distraction and instability. Indian foreign policy is in the middle of changing its bearings. The nose of the ship of state is no longer pointing towards Moscow but is looking towards Washington. In the context of such a shift, border games can only be a bizarre distraction which is best avoided.

THE TELEGRAPH

22 APR 2001

# 'Perpetrators of border killings can be tried'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 21. - The Geneva Convention has said those responsible for killing BSF jawans and mutilating their bodies could be tried in Indian courts.

The incident has raised three major issues:

- whether the Geneva Convention is applicable to not just war but also border clash.
- whether the Convention discusses issues like mutilation of bodies in case of border clashes and
- whether the criminals can be tried in Indian courts.

It can be argued that in all the three cases, the answer may be "yes".

Dealing with the first issue, Article 2 of the GC says: "...the present convention shall apply to all cases of de-

clared war or of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties even if the state of war is not recognised by one of them."

There is no state of war between India and Bangladesh but there was a case of armed conflict.

The article goes on to say the Convention "shall also apply to all cases of partial or total occupation of the territory of a High Contracting Party, even if the said occupation meets with no armed resistance." Again, it is clear Bangladesh occupied Indian territory.

Regarding mutilation of bodies, Clause A of article 5 speaks against mutilation, cruel treatment and torture.

On the third issue, the GC states that the High Contracting Parties have agreed

to provide penal sanctions for persons "committing or ordering to be committed any of the grave breaches of the Convention." It adds that each High Contracting Party is obliged to "search for persons alleged to have committed or to have ordered to be committed such grave breaches and shall bring such persons regardless of their nationality before its own courts. It may, if it prefers and in accordance with provisions of its own legislation hand such persons over for trial to another High Contracting Party concerned provided such HCPs have made out a prima facie case."

A grave breach can be wilful killing, torture and inhuman treatment. Also, two additional protocols broaden the scope of the Convention, bringing in internal armed conflict.

THE STATESMAN

22 APR 2001

# BDR, not villagers, killed jawans: BSF

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & AGENCIES

GUWAHATI, April 21. — The BSF director general, Mr Gurbachan Jagat, said today it was not Bangladeshi villagers who had tortured and killed the BSF jawans as the BDR had tried to project, but the BDR itself. "We have specific information in this regard."

He said the jawans were severely tortured before being shot through the eyes at point blank range. "They were strangled and their bones broken. Some of the bodies were badly charred as boiling water was poured on them. The bodies bore clear signs of torture".

The bodies, returned yesterday, were so badly mutilated that they were not handed over to the families. The last rites were performed in Tura with full police honours.

A wave of anger swept through the jawans at the BSF command headquarters in Tura when the bodies were brought for funeral. "The dead were among us and our brothers. How can we remain quiet," said a BSF jawan.

A BSF officer in Tura, who had attended the funeral, said no civilised army or paramilitary force would do what the BDR had done.

Some jawans were burnt, some others had their hands and legs chopped off, and at least one was strangled, he said. "The bullets were fired only after they had died to mislead us."

He said the BDR could have captured and arrested the jawans and punished them according to their laws, but they had no right to do what they did. "It's the most bestial act that I have ever come across and the worst instance of human rights violations."

Doctors at Tura hospital, where a post mortem was conducted on the bodies this morning, confirmed the BSF's suspicion that Mymensingh Medical College Hospital's post mortem report was incorrect. Intelligence agencies don't rule out more such acts of belligerence by the BDR before Bangladesh goes to parliamentary polls in October.

Senior intelligence officials here said a repeat of Pyrdiwah and Boraibari

■ See BDR: page 10

Vajpayee calls high-level meeting

# Delhi lodges protest with Dhaka

SFI  
22/4

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, April 21. — Reports and photographs of the bodies of 15 BSF jawans being carried with hands and feet hung from a pole, the way animals are carried after slaughter, prodded the Centre to take a firmer stand against Bangladesh.

A "seriously concerned" Prime Minister has asked the external affairs ministry to lodge a "strong protest" with Bangladesh against the jawans' murder and mutilation of the bodies. He has convened a high-level meeting here tomorrow to discuss the incident. The BSF DG, Mr Gurbachan Jagat, who had visited the eastern frontier for a spot assessment, would make a presentation at the meeting.

The foreign secretary, Mrs Chokila Iyer, "summoned" the Bangladesh high commissioner to her office this morning and formally protested against the outrage. She was assured that all aspects of the "unfortunate incident" would be probed.

In Dhaka, the Bangladesh foreign secretary, Syed Moazzem Ali, today said: "We'll launch an investigation into the matter."

Bangladesh has received India's protest against the incident and was aware of Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's concern over the matter. "Our reply will be reflective of his concern."

Syed Ali indirectly blamed the villagers for the incident, saying it was not unusual for them to assault "intruders", be it within the country or along the border. However, "if the allegation is true, it's heinous action." He admitted that some bodies were not properly handled.

In Patna, the external affairs minister said two inquiries — by the Union home ministry and the BSF — were being conducted into the "inhuman" killings. The status quo ante had been restored along the Indo-Bangla border in Meghalaya and Assam, he said. A six-km stretch of border in Meghalaya is yet to be demarcated and unless the stretch is fenced such incidents might recur.

Protest was also lodged against the destruction of the properties of Pyrdiwah villagers even after the governments had agreed through diplomatic channels to restore the status

quo ante.

Bangladesh has also been asked to immediately return the two injured jawans being treated at Dhaka military hospital. The Bangladesh foreign secretary has, however, said that if the doctors allow, the two may be handed over tomorrow.

Mrs Iyer told Syed Ali over phone that such "unfortunate" incidents were not in keeping with the friendly ties between the two countries. The Indian high commissioner in Dhaka also met the foreign minister there.

When asked if India's protest was under the UN convention, an external affairs ministry spokesman said: "Whatever the circumstances might be, security personnel need to be treated with dignity. Even their bodies should be treated with courtesy and dignity".

Both the governments have been exercising a fair degree of restraint because of the "fairly good relations" between them, a senior official said.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee has been in constant touch with Mr LK Advani, in Ahmedabad, and Mr Jaswant Singh. "He is extremely concerned, but doesn't want the friendly relations to get soured," an official said.

The VHP however, felt no need to show such restraint. It has demanded "stern action" against Bangladesh if it did not disclose the names of those who mutilated the jawans' bodies. "Bangladesh should be forced to punish the culprits under the Islamic law," said the VHP president, Mr Vishnu Hari Dalmia.

If India's demand was not met, the infiltrators from Bangladesh should be pushed back and the country should be treated like an enemy, he said.

The CPI-M today demanded an explanation from the government on the torture and killing of the jawans. Politburo member, Mr Sitaram Yechuri, said: "The government owes an explanation to the country...It's most unfortunate that such an incident has taken place with a country like Bangladesh."

**No extra force:** The BSF is not planning to send additional troops to the Indo-Bangla border as there was sufficient force to hold the ground, said the IG, Mr VN Rao.

■ 'Perpetrators of border killings can be tried': page 10

THE STATESMAN

22 APR 2001

# Chokila summons Bangla envoy, lodges strong protest

HTC & Agencies  
New Delhi, April 21

*gndi. Banalla*

INDIA TODAY lodged a strong protest with Bangladesh over the torture meted out to BSF soldiers killed in Assam's Boraibari village along the Indo-Bangla border by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and the mutilation of the bodies of the slain men.

Foreign Secretary Chokila Iyer conveyed New Delhi's concern over the brutality inflicted on the BSF men to Bangladesh High Commissioner Mustafa Farooque who was summoned to the foreign office.

Indications of the government's tough stance were clear earlier during the day when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee reportedly took a serious view of the mutilation of the bodies of the soldiers amid countrywide anguish over the tragic incident. New Delhi's strong protest is understood to have been conveyed to Dhaka following Mr Vajpayee's directions.

Later, Mostafa Farooque Mohammed said India and

## Two inquiries on: Jaswant

*HT-1 22/4*

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS Minister Jaswant Singh today said two inquiries were being conducted into the killing of 15 BSF personnel by Bangladesh Rifles. He termed as "inhuman" the way they were killed. Singh said the Union Home Ministry and the BSF were conducting the inquiries and the reports were yet to be ready.

PTI, Patna

Bangladesh were trying to limit tensions from escalating and were in constant touch.

"We are trying to defuse this situation from escalating ... The two Governments are in constant contact both in Dhaka and in New Delhi over the unfortunate incident," the diplomat said.

He asserted the dispute between the BDR and the BSF

had not affected excellent relations between India and Bangladesh. "The situation is so far localised and has not affected the good relations between the two countries. Our relations are much stronger," he said. "I am not aware if India has sought an apology from Bangladesh," Mohammed said and declined to offer details of his meeting with India's chief diplomat Iyer.

The Prime Minister also summoned BSF Director General Gurbachan Jagat to provide him for the details of the incident. He was to reach here from Shillong this evening.

A senior PMO official said Vajpayee spoke this morning to Home Minister L K Advani, presently on tour in Ahmedabad, and also to the BSF chief in Shillong.

Significantly, the External Affairs Ministry spokesman last night gave a clean chit to Sheikh Hasina Wajid regime while apportioning blame of the border skirmishes and the inter-linked incidents to "local adventurism".

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5-10 BDR: 22/4  
(Continued from page 1)

is a distinct possibility, more so because the Bangladesh government seemed to have little or no control over the BDR. Last few days' incidents would enthuse the "anti-India" Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the fundamentalists and they could try to do the same again through the BDR or army to reap electoral benefits.

The officials said security forces, particularly the BSF, would need the government's blessings to foil such game plans. "We can't afford to be so decent as to allow them (BDR) to lay siege to our village and BSF posts for nearly three days. Had the BDR been pushed out immediately there would have been no need for the BSF to go for the BDR's Boraibari post and use it as a bargaining point to have Pyrdiwah vacated."

While the BSF's response to BDR incursion into Pyrdiwah was restrained, the latter tortured and killed 16 Indian jawans when they went for the Boraibari post.

THE STATESMAN

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22 APR 2001

# BSF jawans were tortured, shot through the eye

Anirban Roy  
Praharnagar (Meghalaya),  
April 21

THERE WAS pin-drop silence, save the humming of house flies around the 15 coffins stinking with the mutilated bodies of the BSF jawans. Autopsies revealed that hot water was splashed on them and most were shot point-blank between their eyes.

"There are also slit marks all over the bodies," said BSF DG Gurbachan Jagat, who air-dashed from Shillong to lay the bravehearts to rest with state honours. "Most jawans had bul-

let injuries on the head or in the eyes. They were killed mercilessly."

The bodies were, in fact, so mutilated that the BSF decided not to send them to their families and instead, perform the last rites at the camp itself.

"We had no other option but to have the funeral without their family members. It was really a hard decision, but their bodies, mutilated as they were, would have been too shocking for their families. Besides, the condition of the bodies would have deteri-

orated if we delayed the funeral," Jagat said.

A senior BSF officer said the bodies bore "injuries from sharp and blunt instruments, burn marks and signs of acute physical torture... It is quite possible that some of our boys might have died of sheer torture".

Only nine of the 15 jawans have been identified so far. They are Deputy Commandant B R Mandal, Sub-Inspectors Amrit Singh and Panna Lal, Head Constables Raman Gowda and B R Nath, and Constables Mafluddin, Gurbax Singh, A H Shiekh and Sukvinder Singh.

While the Hindu jawans were laid on the holy pyre in the BSF

headquarters itself late in the afternoon, Mafluddin and A H Sheikh were laid to rest as per Islamic rights.

The BSF chief said the other bodies could not be identified as they had been stripped of their uniforms. Even the numbered undergarments, issued by the BSF, weren't of any help.

Seven personnel still missing are Head Constable U Rama Nair, Constables Pradip Kumar, Sudhir Kumar, Anand Singh, Sanatan Bhat, Desh Raj and Dhyan Chand.

One more body of a BSF jawan and two injured personnel

were to be handed over later tonight. The slain BSF men were from Punjab, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

Gloom descended on the BSF camp here as the coffins arrived in trucks early this morning. The bodies were handed over to the Indian authorities by the Bangladesh Rifles late last night at a checkpoint near Boraibari along the Assam border, from where they were brought by road to the headquarters of the 118 Battalion here.

Not satisfied with the BDR's post-mortem reports, the BSF

performed its own this afternoon. "There were tell-tale signs that boiling water was poured on some soldiers as their skin was peeling off," a senior BSF officer said. "Though there has been no exchange of fire since Thursday night, tension was palpable along the border, with the BSF maintaining a close watch to prevent any further Bangladeshi incursion."

Narrating the BDR attack, an officer said BSF personnel were patrolling the border when firing started from the Bangladeshi side at about 6 am on April 18.

The details of what actually hap-

pened to the slain jawans would be known from the two injured Indian personnel when they return home, he added.

He said mortar shelling from the other side was carried out by a contingent of the Bangladesh Army dispatched from Mymensingh. Though New Delhi has described the incident as "local adventurism", the officer said the Pyrdiwah incident appeared "planned" since the BDR was backed by the Bangladesh Army.

More reports, photographs on Page 9

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 APR 2001

# Bangladesh returns 15 mutilated bodies

DIPANKAR ROY  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, April 20. — The BDR today returned the bodies of 15 BSF men killed at Boraibari, Mancachar sector, on Wednesday. Some of the bodies bore marks of torture and were mutilated. The BDR had earlier said 16 BSF personnel were killed.

A probe team, led by a former BSF DG, is trying to find out the circumstances leading to the jawans' death.

The bodies were handed over to India at 6 p.m. ending the 48-hour wait during which the BDR failed to abide by its assurance of returning the bodies at least twice.

Only seven of the bodies could be identified, including that of the deputy commandant of the 118 Battalion, BR Mondol. Those killed were from the 118 Battalion based at Tura, Meghalaya. An officer commanding, an inspector and two sub-inspectors were among those feared to have been killed.

The BSF had initially refused to accept the bodies because the weapons were not returned with them.

However, the Dhubri DC and SP, confirmed around 9 p.m. that the bodies were on their way to Mancachar en route to the battalion headquarters. "The Mancachar O-C told me just now that BSF officers are waiting at Mancachar to receive the bodies," the SP, Mr

Apurbajyoti Barua, said over phone.

Sources at the Battalion headquarters at Tura said they suspected that some of the jawans had died of torture.

Some reports had said that 118 Battalion personnel had carried out an attack on the BDR's Boraibari outpost. The attack was repulsed and the BSF personnel were killed in the ensuing exchange of fire.

The IG, BSF, Mr VK Gaur, yesterday said Bangladeshi villagers had captured a BSF patrol party and handed them over to the BDR. He said the jawans were killed in cold blood.

Sources said the BSF men had walked into an ambush laid by the BDR, who had anticipated a strike in the area in retaliation for the BDR's capturing of Pyrdiwah village in Meghalaya on Sunday.

They said the BDR jawans captured some of the BSF personnel and handed them over to villagers who then lynched them.

Both Pyrdiwah and Boraibari are in "adverse possession". While Pyrdiwah is in "adverse possession" of India, Boraibari is in "adverse possession" of Bangladesh. In other words, although Boraibari is in India, its possession has been with Bangladesh since the borders were demarcated. The reverse is the case with Pyrdiwah.

The SP said there had been no firing in Mancachar since Thursday midnight and some villagers who had fled the area had returned.

THE STATESMAN

21 APR 2001



# Bangla Opp bays for blood, media says cool off

HF 9 2/9

Utpal Parashar  
Guwahati, April 20

WHILE EFFORTS are on, both in New Delhi and Dhaka, to defuse tension along its borders, Opposition leaders in Bangladesh have blamed India for "acts of aggression". In contrast, most newspaper editorials in Bangladesh were either neutral in their view or silent on the issue.

On Thursday, the leader of the Opposition in Bangladesh Parliament, Begum Khaleda Zia, strongly protested "the unprovoked attack" by Border Security Force (BSF) on Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel and its "intrusion into Bangladesh territory in Kurigram", the Bangladesh Daily reported.

She called the "attack" on the BDR camp as "tantamount to an aggression of India" and said international boundary laws had been violated through the attack.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson alleged that BSF had launched attacks inside Bangladesh territory

many times in the past and killed BDR personnel and innocent people. She alleged that "hoodlums from across the border" had also resorted to looting and abducting Bangladeshi citizens.

Begum Zia also claimed that BSF had launched the attack on the BDR camp at Roumari, as the Bangladesh Government "could not take proper steps to prevent such attacks". The Opposition leader accused the Government of pursuing a "subservient foreign policy" and called for effective diplomatic steps to stop recurrence of such aggressive acts in future.

Other political parties and organisations in Bangladesh have also expressed concern over the clashes between the BDR and the BSF personnel and condemned the killing of BDR personnel by the BSF.

In sharp contrast to reactions from political parties, most newspapers in Bangladesh projected neutral views on the attacks or remained silent altogether on the issue. While, the editorial in The Independent

asked both countries to "cool off", the editorials of The New Nation and The Daily Star had absolutely no mention about the firing incidents.

"It is.....important to find out the causes responsible for what transpired at the Indo-Bangladesh frontier on Wednesday.... There is a grave need for a quick, judicious inquiry into the incident," mentioned Friday's editorial in The Independent. "Vajpayee and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have a tough job on their hands. They need to ensure that despite the border incident, normality in ties will remain unaffected," it added.

On the other hand, Jatiya Party chairman, H M Ershad, in a statement yesterday, expressed concern over the incident and called for settling the problems through mutual negotiations. Maulana Matiur Rahman Nizami of the Jamaat-e-Islami has asked the Government to lodge a formal protest with India against the attack and demand due compensation for the losses caused to Bangladesh.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Intelligence failure or misplaced faith?

sons for failing in this particular instance. Seeing the terrain and the importance of the border, which the Union Home Ministry has always identified as the "most sensitive", a new battalion was sanctioned by the Centre, especially for the Meghalaya-Bangladesh border last year. The headquarter however could not be set up till today as the Meghalaya Government could not provide them with any suitable land.

Further, the BSF communication network often gets into trouble, as there is no electricity supply along a long stretch of the Meghalaya border. They find it difficult to charge the batteries of the wireless sets even. Given such ground conditions, the idea of an intelligence failure can never be ruled out of course.

village, which was being funded by the Meghalaya Government.

Even Chief Minister E K Mawlong alleged that it happened because of the lackadaisical attitude of the BSF personnel. Analysts said the Indian frontier guards should have been a "little more cautious" as there have been constant report of skirmishes along the border.

But BSF Additional Deputy Inspector General (Operations), V S Ahalawat, who has been camping on the border to supervise the operations, is not ready to accept that the crisis cropped because of any sort of intelligence failure. He denied that there was any report from the villagers that the BDR were infiltrating into the area.

The BSF too has genuine rea-

the first person from the State Government to visit the spot and take stock of the village under siege by the BDR said: "We have lost a village because of BSF's utter intelligence failure."

When the homeless villagers of Pyrdiwah said they had been informing the BSF personnel at the outpost since the evening of April 15 that there had been a sudden presence of BDR personnel in and around their village, the intelligence failure theory suddenly seemed very much a possibility.

Moreover, the villagers in Lynthakhat had filed a formal complaint with the State Government as well as the BSF on March 27 alleging that the BDR personnel were obstructing repair works of a footpath in the

there was no intelligence failure in Pyrdiwah." Disowning all the allegations by the State Government as well as the people, he maintained: "The question of intelligence failure with a friendly country like Bangladesh does not arise."

The theory of intelligence failure crops up because the frontier at Pyrdiwah is comparatively much easier to guard, unlike the other stretches of the 443-km-long Meghalaya-Bangla border, which zigzags through hills and valleys. It is absolutely a flat plot with a village very close to it. And BDR personnel intruding into the area in such a large number could never go unnoticed if one kept one's eyes open.

Meghalaya Home Minister Thrang Hok Rangad, who was

The enormity of the situation hit them only when the BDR personnel opened fire on the BSF posts with machine guns at about 1.30 pm the next day and declared that they had taken over the village. They told the BSF personnel to vacate the post as the land "belonged to Bangladesh".

If it was intelligence failure on the part of the BSF, another pertinent question that arises is how could the BDR time its attack exactly when all senior officers of the BSF's Frontier Headquarter as well as the Meghalaya Sector were out of station? V K Gaur, on an official tour to Manipur, had to dash back to Shillong to take control of the situation in Pyrdiwah.

He told *Hindustan Times*: "I can tell you in clear terms that

**Anirban Roy**  
*Shillong, April 20*

**THE MOMENT** Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) jawans encircled the Border Security Force outpost in the wee hours of Monday at the nondescript tribal village of Pyrdiwah in East Khasi Hills district, everyone was rudely surprised, including the BSF jawans themselves.

The BSF jawans at the outpost reportedly pook-pooched the initial reports of villagers about the movement of BDR personnel, and said, "*Woh kuch nehi hai* (it's nothing)." The BSF jawans, sharing the misplaced confidence of their Inspector-General, V K Gaur, on Bangladesh's friendliness, reportedly asked the villagers to go back home and sleep.

~~THE HINDUSTAN TIMES~~

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 APR 1971

# HASINA:

5-8 21/9  
(Continued from page 1)

Press Information Department, the government-owned Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha were kept out of the press party. None of the correspondents of leading Dhaka dailies were taken to the border.

The intent behind taking a select press party of only photographers was clear: to show the world that India had got a bloody nose over Pyrdiwah.

Shots of two blindfolded and bloodied BSF jawans being flown to Dhaka were purposely taken to show that the BDR had in its possession even Indian POWs.

The government was so embarrassed by this that Sheikh Hasina at once ordered the Ekushey TV not to show any footage on the border skirmish.

Violation of the order, the government cautioned, might result in the cancellation of the channel's licence.

Awami League leaders have praised India for showing "tremendous restraint" despite suffering heavy casualties.

They said Sheikh Hasina would talk to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee soon.

The foreign minister and foreign secretary were instructed to closely interact with their Indian counterparts for defusing the tension.

Ironically Maj-Gen Fazlur Rahman is a freedom fighter. The Bangladesh army has sent him to the BDR on deputation.

He had taken a leading part in organising a massive rally of freedom fighters on 26 March, the country's national day.

Those who know him well say he is highly ambitious and harbours political ambition.

What is causing considerable worry in Dhaka is that if the BDR chief could, without the government's knowledge and sanction, embroil the country in a border conflict he could do far worse things including jeopardising the existence of the Awami League government.

But Sheikh Hasina at present is in no position to touch him as any move to transfer him out of the Bangladesh Rifles would be exploited by the Opposition whose sole objective is to destabilise and oust the government by any means before July when the Prime Minister proposes to handover power to a neutral caretaker government for holding the parliamentary polls.

## BDR chief masterminded Pyrdiwah, Boraibari operations Hasina kept in the dark

5-8 21/9  
MANASH GHOSH  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 20. — The Bangladesh Rifles' capture of Pyrdiwah village and the attack on the Indian border outpost at Boraibari, Meghalaya, on Wednesday in which 16 BSF jawans were killed was launched without the knowledge and approval of the Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is also the country's defence minister, and the home minister, Mohammed Nasim.

Officials in Dhaka, contacted over phone today, said the operation was "masterminded" by the "hawkish and hot-headed" BDR director general, Maj-Gen Fazlur Rahman, who had kept the government totally in the dark.

The sources said the "sinister motive" of the "covert" operation was not only to "embarrass" Sheikh Hasina before the October parliamentary polls, but also to provide enough ammunition to the Opposition leader, Begum Khaleda Zia, to gun for the Awami League government. This was confirmed by Awami League leaders who said that already Begum Zia and 106 of her party MPs had issued statements decrying the BDR's pull-out from the disputed village of Pyrdiwah. They termed the withdrawal as a "sell-out" to India by the Prime Minister, an "Indian stooge". The withdrawal is also being projected as Sheikh Hasina's policy of "subservience to India."

The Awami League leaders and officials said the BDR chief's controversial operation as well as his objectionable utterances had drawn widespread criticism from the Bangladesh press and the public at



BSF jawans keep vigil in Mancachar, Assam, on Friday. — AP/PTI (Another report, photograph on page 8)

large. What was strongly decried was his comment that the India should pay compensation and tender unqualified apology to Dhaka for the distress and damage caused to Bangladesh for resorting to unprovoked firing from across the border.

An aide of Sheikh Hasina said: "What is his locus standi for making such a demand? It can be made only by an authorised representative of the government. The BDR chief has certainly not been authorised to make such a demand. We're

deeply shocked by his behaviour. The Prime Minister was visiting remote areas when the attack was launched. She is intrigued by the timing and provocation of the attack."

The sources said BDR chief's gameplan was to provoke India into a major retaliation which would result in heavy casualties on the Bangladesh side. This would help Begum Zia and other Opposition leaders to whip up mass hysteria not only against the Awami League government but also India. At the

same time this would alienate Sheikh Hasina from the India.

It is now known that the BDR director (operations), on Maj-Gen Rahman's instructions, contacted photographers of international news agencies like AP and AFP and also of a local private television channel, Ekushey TV, on Wednesday morning and airlifted them to Tamabil in whose vicinity the fighting was raging. Representatives of the government's

■ See HASINA: page 8

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# Borders of no control



SEEMA MUSTAFA

India and Bangladesh claim to be friends. Both governments stress upon the excellent relations, the absolute rapport and the general "friendliness" (sic) of attitude. The decades of mutual understanding are recalled at every turn of diplomatic phrase as both governments seek to convince their people that nothing is as it should not be. Contentious issues are swept under the heavy carpet in the hope that these will just lie there, and perhaps at some point of time, even go away.

So it was a shock for Delhi to learn that three battalions of the Bangladesh Rifles along with Army personnel had attacked and occupied the Padua adverse post. This was on April 15. And that this was not in the nature of a border skirmish but a planned operation with a specific purpose. The Border Security Force, which was caught completely by surprise, regrouped and sought to occupy an adverse outpost in the Boraibari area. In the process a patrol party of 16 BSF men "strayed" and reports now suggest were kidnapped and killed by the Bangladesh Rifles.

A virtual war was declared with both sides rushing in reinforcements and carrying on heavy fire against each other. In the process the poor villagers living in continuous tension at the border were compelled to flee their homes, and are now living in the open waiting for peace to return. Delhi woke up to the seriousness of the situation after the patrol party disappeared, and began diplomatic negotiations with Dhaka to defuse the situation. Last reports suggest that matters have been sorted out, both sides have agreed to forgive and forget after expressing mutual regret about the loss of lives.

But this is not going to be enough. There is a lot more that has to be investigated and accounted for in the short term. There is even more that has to be done, in the long term, to actually strengthen India-Bangladesh relations which are obviously too fragile to withstand the pressure of local sentiments and anger. The verbal rhetoric will not be able to compensate for inaction on the ground, and the anti-India feeling despite Sheikh Hasina will again spill over unless the issues concerning the two nations — border and illegal migrants — are handled honestly and with a sense of responsibility.

To take a quick look at the short term list. There has been complete intelligence failure. As in Kargil the intelligence agencies, despite the supposed revamp (again big talk?) have failed on the ground. There was not a whisper from our sleuths about the movement of 3000 and more Bangladeshi troops towards Indian territory. The result was a quick and successful takeover with little to no resistance from the Border Security Force. Of course, once again the government and its security advisors will talk at length about taking lengthy



ANOTHER SKIRMISH: Members of the Border Security Force stand guard in Pyrdiwah at the India-Bangladesh border on Thursday. An encounter with Bangladeshi soldiers on Wednesday claimed the lives of 16 Indian soldiers. On Thursday, Bangladeshi soldiers who had entered the area left, ending a four-day standoff. (AP)

action, reports will suggest all kinds of measures, the nation will be assured of the vigilance and competence of the government and matters will rest there. In the process some equipment might be purchased to better equip our border forces, allowing politicians and middlemen to grease their ever ready pockets. As was done post Kargil.

Two, the Border Security Force itself needs a thorough overhaul. A senior bureaucrat during the present crisis referred to it as the "Border Smuggling Force." One has only to speak to the villagers living at the borders to get a full picture of its activities. And needless to say the behaviour pattern and the "interests" of the men in charge of our security at

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Once again the government and its security advisors will talk about taking lengthy action, the nation will be assured of the vigilance and competence of the government and matters will rest there. In the process some equipment might be purchased to better equip our border forces, allowing politicians and middlemen to grease their ever ready pockets. As was done post Kargil

the border do not do the nation proud. This aspect needs to be looked at by the senior officers and the experts, and measures introduced to check the corruption that has taken over the BSF which needs to be made more responsive and accountable than it has been in the past. This aspect has been ignored for far too long, and while patriotic jingoism is all very good there are times that reality should be recognised and dealt with as well.

Three, India cannot allow the death of 16 BSF men to be buried under diplomatic biage. Dhaka will have to explain this dastardly event, and while it is nobody's case that the issue should be blown out of all proportions it cannot be ignored just for the sake of peace. These men were not killed in action. They were lured away and then killed in what was a deliberate and premeditated move. This requires answers and Delhi will not be doing its full duty if it allows the bodies to be buried as an incidental episode to the main event.

Related to this is a rather interesting surmise that is making the official rounds. That the Bangladesh Rifles chief General Fazlur Rehman acted on his own. That he is an anti-India and pro-Pakistan man. That Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina did not really know what was happening. That he belongs to the Opposition and initiated this action to embarrass her. That she is quite innocent insofar as this border conflict is concerned.

This conjures vivid memories of Kargil when senior ministers had gone on the record to suggest that Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was innocent and unaware of the entire operation; that his Army chief at the time General Pervez Musharraf was the bad man who had masterminded the operation without taking his Prime Minister into confidence; that there was a difference that only the government here knew of. Significantly Mr Sharif never confirmed the Indian premise, and subsequently General Musharraf denied it in several interviews.

The same effort appears to be on. Save friend Sheikh Hasina from Indian anger, and keep India-Bangladesh relations on an even footing. This is fine if it is just tactical. But Indian diplo-

macy has a sycophantic tendency of converting tactics into genuine belief. And after a few days of parroting this argument, Indian diplomats will factor it in as an integral part of the background to this particular episode. If Sheikh Hasina was indeed ignorant of the action on the ground she has one of two options: she should initiate action against General Rehman for daring a major operation without her knowledge; or she should resign for her inability to control those working under her.

How did this happen? Why did it happen? These are the answers that India should now be looking for. Simplistic explanations of "good woman versus bad man" or "election

How did this happen? Why did it happen? These are the answers that India should now be looking for. Simplistic explanations of 'good woman vs bad man' or 'election gimmicks' cannot suffice. Delhi for its own security and future dealings with Bangladesh should know what was the motivation, who was in control, and why did the Hasina government allow the action to continue. Friends and foes are determined on the basis of these answers, and while India prides itself on ostrich like diplomacy sometimes it is important to take one's head out of the sand. A weak friend at times can be more dangerous than a declared enemy. Delhi should also stop procrastinating on what are serious issues of concern for not just Bangladesh but also the Northeast

"gimmicks" cannot suffice. There is obviously more to the incident, and Delhi for its own security and future dealings with Bangladesh should know what was the motivation, who was in control, and why did the Hasina government allow the action to continue. Friends and foes (for strategic purposes) are determined on the basis of these answers, and while India prides itself on ostrich like diplomacy sometimes it is important to take one's head out of the sand. A weak friend at times can be more dangerous than a declared enemy. Delhi should also stop procrastinating on what are obviously serious issues of concern for not just Bangladesh but also the Northeast. The border is demarcated on paper but not on the ground and both sides today occupy what are referred to as adverse posts: essentially villages which on the map belong to one country but continue to be occupied by the other. This creates its own tensions and while joint working groups have been set up it is important for India to accelerate the pace of settlements. Of course this will not be an easy process, for it will also require the simultaneous issue of citizenship to be settled. But it has to be sorted out, and the recent incident has amply demonstrated, without too much delay.

The question of illegal migrants continues to confound the two nations. The present government in Delhi has used the issue of foreign nationals to whip up a domestic campaign against Muslims. Dhaka has continued to resist Delhi's efforts to send back alleged Bangladeshis with hapless families often finding themselves being pushed from one to the other side of the border by two determined governments who lack the maturity and the will to address this issue across the negotiating table. The BJP has for long used it in its communal campaign of hate and divisiveness with the credentials of minority voters being challenged on this count. It is time to put the facts on the table, to sift through the voluminous records, and to reach a settlement that will allow the people of both countries to breathe easy.

Today friend Sheikh Hasina is in power, and diplomacy was able to contain the situation. Tomorrow the circumstances might be very different. It is time for minister of external affairs Jaswant Singh to put aside his vivid fascination for the US and the great West, and concentrate on improving ties with the countries around us. Unfortunately his attitude has begun to reflect the bias of the developed countries towards the developing nations: a couple of days for you and the rest for the "civilised" world.

India, in Mr Singh's dream world, has crossed the threshold to join the United States. In the process diplomatic speech has acquired the same arrogance, not while speaking to the more affluent nations of course, but in dealing with these impoverished, Third World countries that need to be told what to do! This arrogance, unfortunately, generates resentful reaction as governments no matter how small or insignificant they might seem to this new Delhi, cherish their pride and sovereignty. The US, through this arrogance, has lost the goodwill of the developing world. India, if it does not watch out, stands to go the same way without having the advantage of naked power and money to see it through.



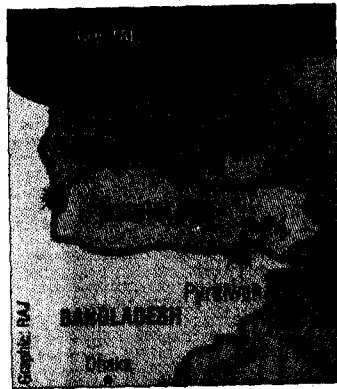
# Body bags in 'torture-mark' tussle

## Guest overstays and oversteps

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, April 20: Preliminary reports suggest the flash-point of the eruption in the east might have been an attempt to lay a footpath in a stretch "occupied" by India during the Bangladesh Liberation War.

Top officials in Delhi conceded off the record that the BSF had tried to carve a footpath connecting its Pyrdiwah outpost, the Meghalaya border unit which was besieged by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), to another centre in



the state. If an attempt was made to "build" a road, it violates bilateral guidelines.

According to official survey records, Pyrdiwah, where the Indo-Bangla stand-off began, is referred to as Bangladeshi territory under the "adverse possession" of India. Similarly, Baroi Bari in Mancachar, where the BSF jawans were killed, is labelled Indian territory under the "adverse possession" of Bangladesh.

The official records show that 3,000 acres of Indian territory are under the "adverse possession" of Bangladesh, while over 3,500 acres of the neighbour are with the big brother.

Till 1971, Pyrdiwah was considered East Pakistan territory. A BSF outpost was created there only during the Liberation War. Indian security forces had chosen the land for training the "Mukti Bahini" fighting the Pakistani army.

But exchange of territory under "adverse possession" between the two "friendly" countries ran into hurdles due to a number of reasons. Chief among them is the need for a constitutional amendment in India.

Any decision by the government has to be ratified by Parliament where at least two-thirds support is required. This cannot be done in the absence of a consensus among various political forces which fear that any change would affect the status of the enclaves' people, who are essentially part of the votebank now.

In its muted official response, India has so far termed the BDR action as "unilateral and unwarranted". It has argued that since the two sides have set up a joint working group to settle the border dispute, the BDR action was not acceptable.

But India has not mentioned in public the footpath controversy. The guidelines stipulate that no "defensive construction", which includes roads, should be constructed within 150 metres of the "zero line" — the agreed border.

It is learnt that the "defensive construction" continued despite protests from the Bangladesh side. Last weekend, the BDR entered Pyrdiwah and tried to stop the footpath construction by squatting on the area. Initially, there was no confrontation but the presence of a large number of BDR men sparked panic and wild rumours spread.

Reports flew to other areas that the BDR had forcibly taken pos-



Bangladesh soldiers load the coffins of BSF jawans in Mymansingh. (AFP)

session of Pyrdiwah, prompting the bloody flare-up at Baroi Bari. India and Bangladesh share over 4,000 km of border. Of this, only 6.5 km of stretches in the Assam, Tripura and West Bengal sectors are yet to be demarcated.

The land boundary settlement work between India and Pakistan began soon after Partition in 1947. But the task in the east was left unfinished.

After the creation of Bangladesh, border negotiations

were revived. The talks finally led to the 1974 Indira-Mujib agreement under which the two sides decided to demarcate the boundaries and exchange the enclaves. India has 111 enclaves in Bangladesh, while the latter has 51 enclaves.

Around two years ago, a joint survey was also done. However, after bamboo poles were put in place, the Indian side seemed reluctant to formalise the demarcation by constructing pillars.

## Custody deaths, says BSF chief

FROM BIDHAYAK DAS AND  
BJOY KUMAR SHARMA

April 20: An inflammatory gust fanned the dying flames on the eastern frontier as Indian officers found "tell-tale marks of torture" on the bodies of 15 Border Security Force jawans killed allegedly by Bangladeshi troops.

The BSF initially refused to accept the bodies. The force relented late tonight but not before lodging a strong protest.

BSF director-general Gurbachan Jagat said in Shillong the bodies were received in "pathetic condition". Seven of them were badly charred. Boiling water had been poured on the jawans and their limbs chopped off, he added.

Describing the killings as "a clear case of custody deaths", Jagat said the jawans were severely tortured before being shot through the eye at point-blank range. He said he had information that the jawans were killed by Bangladesh Rifles, and not by villagers as suspected earlier.

He said a "mass cremation" would be held at Tura in Meghalaya tomorrow as "we don't want the family members to see the bodies in such condition".

Of the 15 bodies, seven have been identified, including that of deputy commandant B.R. Mondal. Two injured jawans are still being held captive by Bangladeshi troops.

Jagat, however, said truce will be maintained on the border. Echoing the government, he said: "Our friendly nations could have suffered" because of the "aberrations of individuals". "But we're still friends and maintaining excellent relations."

The heavy artillery fell silent on the border after two days of fie-

ring fighting, but the torture controversy fuelled fears of renewed clashes in Assam's Mancachar.

The bodies were handed over to Colonel Gurcharan Singh at Mahendraganj in Meghalaya at 7.45 pm by Colonel Saddiqur Islam of the Bangladesh Rifles' 8th battalion. A sort of a flag meeting was held in Mancachar to thrash out the wrangle over the "cause of death" of the jawans.

Dhubri deputy commissioner Gayatri Baruah confirmed that India had "accepted" the bodies. She said BSF would announce the acceptance tomorrow "after completing certain formalities".

A BSF officer said Bangladesh Rifles has been asked to hand over the post-mortem reports of the jawans.

BSF jawans posted in Mancachar were furious when they heard of the "mutilation". One jawan, who identified himself as Konwar, asked: "Why is the government taking such a soft stand? Is it afraid of Bangladesh?"

The Centre, which has so far been restrained in its response to the flare-up, might now be forced to toughen its stand. "No government will be able to accept the torture and mutilated bodies of its security forces," a foreign ministry official said.

However, officially, the government struck a conciliatory note. A foreign ministry spokesman said the "unfortunate developments" could be the result of "local adventurism".

In Pyrdiwah, from where Bangladeshi jawans had retreated yesterday, villagers returned to find their homes ransacked. There was graffiti on the walls of a church, saying "aita Bongo desh (this is Bangladesh) and joi Bangla (hail Bangladesh)."

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THE TELEGRAPH

21 APR 2001

# Bangla border: mutual withdrawal led to peace

By C. Raja Mohan

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 20.** The rapid de-escalation of the ugly violence on the Indo-Bangla border this week was the result of an intensive diplomatic communication between the two governments, informed sources here say.

Although the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, did not speak directly to his Bangladesh counterpart, Sheikh Hasina, during the crisis, the two leaders were fully seized of the developments and took the ultimate decisions in defusing the crisis, the sources said.

The Indian mission in Dhaka kept in close touch with Sheikh Hasina's office and the Ministry of External Affairs was in continuous contact with the Bangladesh High Commission here over the last few days.

These confabulations led to a final decision by the two leaders to restore the status quo ante on the border through a mutual withdrawal from the new positions they had occupied this week.

The Bangladesh Rifles withdrew from Pyrdiwah which they had taken a few days ago, and the Border Security Force personnel

pulled out of the Boriabari area where they had moved after the disturbance of the status quo by the Bangla forces in Pyrdiwah.

In withdrawing their forces, the two governments were reaffirming their mutual respect to the basic principle that nothing on the border should be changed by unilateral application of force.

The two leaders demonstrated some courage in squelching the tide of jingoism that was beginning to rise. The similar but competing domestic impulses on both sides, if allowed unchecked, could have been disastrous for bilateral relations.

Reflecting on the crisis management, a Foreign Office spokesman here said, the "speed and maturity with which the two governments reacted within 48 hours through diplomatic channels testifies to the goodwill and understanding" between the two nations. It was particularly bold on the part of Sheikh Hasina to recognise the dangers of escalation. She is facing elections and unending accusations from the opposition parties in Dhaka that she follows a "subservient policy" towards India.

The principal lesson from the crisis is that unresolved disputes

on the ground create space for "Bonapartism". Pointing to the efforts by the two sides to cope with the complex challenges of border management, the spokesman said, "focal adventurism can still lead to unfortunate developments like the unwarranted and unprovoked action by the Bangladesh Rifles at Pyrduwah".

India and Bangladesh have done considerable work over the years to sort out the many problems on their long border of about 4,000 km. But a lot remains to be done. The spokesman today said the two governments were "determined to address all residual matters relating to their common border through peaceful dialogue."

Almost the entire border but for a 6.5-km. stretch has been demarcated. But the problem of territories in "adverse possession", has remained unresolved. For example India acknowledges that the Pyrduwah post belongs to Bangladesh. Similarly, Bangladesh says Boriabari is in Indian territory. But India controls Pyrduwah and Bangladesh holds Boriabari.

There are scores of such territories along the Indo-Bangla border in "adverse possession" —

belonging to one side but in control of the other. New Delhi and Dhaka agree there must be an orderly arrangement to end this untenable "adverse possession".

There are many ways in which the issue could be resolved. One, readjust the boundary to facilitate the transfer of territories in "adverse possession"; the other, move populations with their consent. One way or another, India hopes the issue can be settled sooner than later.

Demarcating the remaining stretch of boundary, ending "adverse possession" with the least discomfort to the population involved would allow India to ratify the 1974 boundary agreement with Bangladesh.

Since there is an exchange of territory involved, a constitutional amendment would be required for the ratification of the treaty.

One hopes the crisis has provided a wake up call for the two governments to proceed purposefully towards a final settlement on the Indo-Bangla border. Leaving it hanging provides opportunities for forces hostile to Indo-Bangla friendship to create mischief and tension between New Delhi and Dhaka.

Indi-Bangla

## MARKS OF TORTURE, STRANGULATION

# Bodies of BSF men handed over

**MANKACHAR (Assam), APRIL 20.** After hours of controversy, India late tonight accepted the "highly mutilated" bodies of 15 Border Security Force men killed by Bangladesh Rifles personnel in recent border clashes.

"Almost all the bodies brought by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) men were highly mutilated and beyond recognition. We have now accepted them," a senior BSF officer said after Indian authorities refused to accept them initially. When the bodies were brought by Col. Sadiqul Islam of the 8th BDR battalion to a checkpoint near here after darkness, they were refused on the ground that they were in a "very bad shape and in a state of decomposition", the officer said.

India accepted the bodies after a flag meeting between the BSF and BDR commanders at Kamal-

pur in Bangladesh held in the night after an earlier meeting at Kakrepara on the Indian side had failed to resolve the issue.

The bodies were handed over without the weapons carried by the slain soldiers and the issue would have to be sorted out with the BDR, the officer said. Official sources said the bodies bore

### Bangladesh alleges air space violation

**DHAKA, APRIL 20.** Bangladesh today alleged that Indian Air Force jets violated its air space yesterday.

The Foreign Secretary, Syed Moazzem Ali told reporters here that Dhaka had lodged a protest with New Delhi over the 'air space violation.' — PTI

marks of torture and strangulation. The BSF Director-General, Mr. Gurbachan Jagat, who flew to the border areas for an on-the-spot inquiry, was present. — PTI

### Ceasefire enforced

Haroon Habib writes from Dhaka:

Bangladesh and Indian forces have enforced a total ceasefire along their troubled border as Foreign Ministry officials here said diplomatic efforts had helped restore peace following clashes this week.

"This indicates the mutual trust between the two countries," the Foreign Secretary, Syed Moazzem Ali, told reporters today. He added that Bangladesh Rifles and Border Security Force officials were holding a meeting on the zero line near the Roumari frontier

after the BSF men went back to their territory.

"I tell you no shots were fired in the area today and the situation is peaceful," Mr. Ali said. He praised the Indian authorities for "showing restraint" and withdrawing their troops from the Bangladeshi territory at Dhaka's request.

Mr. Ali said the BDR troops had withdrawn their encirclement of the BSF outpost, but still "preserved the patrolling rights" in the area. He also rejected reports in a section of the Indian media on the involvement of the Bangladeshi Army in the clashes.

On the reported mobilisation of Indian troops along the border, he said, "we will need some more time to confirm and comment on the report."

Where mutual withdrawal helped: Page 13

THE HINDU

21 APR 2001

# Delhi, Dhaka agree to restore normalcy

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 20. — After the fierce gun-battle between the BSF and the BDR since last Monday, it is all quiet along the Indo-Bangla border in Meghalaya now. Status quo ante has been fully restored with India and Bangladesh expressing determination to address all matters related to border issues through peaceful dialogue.

An external affairs ministry spokesman said today the two governments had reached an agreement to restore normalcy along the border. "Firing has come to a halt and Bangladesh Rifles personnel have withdrawn and status quo ante fully restored."

Indicating that Bangladesh government was not involved in the border clash in Meghalaya, India cautioned that "local adventurism" could lead to "unfortunate developments". The spokesman said, "Local adventurism can lead to unfortunate developments like the unwarranted and unprovoked action by the BDR at Pyrdivah."

Responding to a specific question on whether New Delhi was convinced that Dhaka was not involved in the firing on BSF personnel, killing 15 of them, the spokesman said, "The speed and maturity with which the two governments reacted to resolve the problem within 48 hours through diplomatic channels testifies to the goodwill and understanding between the Indian government and the Bangladesh government who are determined to address



Villagers leaving Mancachar after heavy firing in the area. — AP/PTI

all residual matters relating to the common border through peaceful dialogue," he said.

The two governments have recognised that the common border between them could pose problems of border management from time to time. The government's consistent effort had been to work together with the Bangladesh government in defusing any tension that may arise due to such events, he said.

To a question about the treatment meted out to the two

BSF soldiers taken captive, the spokesman said, "We do believe that it is important to maintain the dignity of the personnel in any situation."

He said BSF director-general Gurbachan Jagat had been in touch with the BDR chief for the return of the mortal remains of the BSF jawans killed by BDR personnel.

The external affairs minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, who also holds the defence portfolio, also spoke to his Bangladesh counterpart.

THE STATESMAN

21 APR 2001



## FLARE-UP IN THE EAST

## Delhi 'agent' in Dhaka cesspool

FROM CHANDAN NANDY

New Delhi, April 19: Before the BSF, it was the country's external agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), which was at the receiving end in Bangladesh.

For the past one month, a section of the Bangladesh Opposition had been demanding the expulsion of an Indian diplomat, alleged to be a RAW operative.

This has embarrassed not only Delhi but also the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina Wajed, which is largely perceived to be "pro-India". The Opposition is planning to make it an issue in its campaign for the general elections scheduled in September.

Last month, then Jatiya Party general secre-

tary Naziur Rahman alleged that an Indian diplomat posted at the high commission had clandestinely met his party chief, Gen (ret'd) H.M. Ershad (deposed former chief martial law administrator), at Dhaka Central Jail.

Rahman alleged that the Indian intelligence agency was trying to divide the Opposition and prevent it from cobbling together a four-party alliance against the Awami League before the September elections.

He claimed that the diplomat, going via Ershad's brother G.M. Kader, had tried to get the Jatiya Party chief to ask his MPs to stop boycotting Parliament or, in other words, align with the Awami League.

Going a step further, Rahman also alleged that the Israeli ambassador, too, had tried to achieve

the same end to keep fundamentalist political parties at bay.

Rahman was expelled from the party for these outbursts. He made these allegations when some of the main Opposition parties in Bangladesh decided to boycott Parliament, demanding the resignation of Sheikh Hasina and early elections.

Four Opposition parties — the rightist Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of Begum Khaleda Zia, Ershad's Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islamic Aikyo Jot — joined hands to form an anti-Hasina platform. The BNP has often taken a tough stand against India in the past.

At one stage, Hasina was prepared to go for early elections but changed her mind when the BNP boycotted Parliament for a long stretch. She then threatened to dissolve the House, run a care-

taker government for three months before going to polls.

In the middle of these political developments, Rahman came up with his allegations, which have since been picked up by the local press.

Analysts said the anti-India card has often been played prior to elections in Bangladesh. The BNP had come to power in 1991, riding the crest of a sustained campaign against "big brother" New Delhi.

Bangladesh observers here believe that the alleged meeting between an Indian diplomat and Gen. Ershad coupled with the border dispute at Pyrdiwah in Meghalaya and the skirmish at Baroihari in Assam, in which 16 BSF jawans were killed, will have an impact on the polls in Bangladesh.

## Freak gunfire punctuates truce meet

FROM BIDHAYAK DAS

Pyrdiwah, April 19: While the flag meeting was on between Border Security Force and Bangladesh Rifles officials at Tamabil today, the comparatively relaxed atmosphere at the BSF camp in Pyrdiwah suddenly turned tense.

Reports of gun shots from BDR men positioned at a distance alerted the jawans inside the camp, who rushed to take up position. However, the situation was brought under control as BDR confirmed that one of its men had misfired.

Assistant commandant S.S. Rawat, who has been holed up in the camp with his 31 jawans since Sunday, took charge and ensured that the agreement between the two sides was maintained.

It was later confirmed by BSF inspector A.S. Dabrania that BDR men, who could be seen moving near the village with photographers from the Bangladesh press, fired in the air apparently out of "excitement".

On the Bangladesh side, there was a change of attitude among BDR men. Waving at journalists, they said: "Don't worry, everything is well and fine."

Rawat breathed a sigh of relief and looked a lot more relaxed today. "So we meet again," he said. "Look, like I told you I have held on to my post."

There was no BDR today to stop reporters or locals residents from meeting the BSF jawans in their camp. Top government officials, politicians and NGOs also visited the camp.

Narrating his experience of the tense standoff, Rawat said

BDR had tried to attack the camp and were regularly putting pressure on him to vacate it. "We were always ready for the fight and were waiting for orders to come from the top," he said.

He added that the BSF was never casual in its approach and there was no intelligence failure. "They (BDR) came in the night and surrounded the place," he said.

"BDR men are normally positioned at nearby Pratappur and change duty during the night. On Sunday night, BDR men were seen near Pratappur, but we thought it was their regular exercise of troops change."

The BSF camp, he said, was not informed about BDR movement by any civilian. "Instead of believing in us, they started leaving the village seeing the BDR and Bangladeshi civilians."

Rawat said BDR men had been behaving strangely. They have appealed to the Indians not to fire several times during the last five days. "Trust us, we will not fire. Please leave the place, we too are under pressure," they had pleaded.

He said BDR would finally have to vacate the place and go back. The BSF, he said, was handicapped as it did not have orders to fire. Otherwise, the situation could have been completely different, Rawat said. Most of the BSF jawans said they were prepared to avenge their colleagues' death.

Omprakash Pachoria, the most talkative of the lot, pointed to the mortar shells: "Do you see these? We want to pump all these into their territory." He was backed up by cries of *Jai Hind*.



Indian jawans with mortars along the Bangladesh border at Mancachar on Thursday. (Eastern Projections)

## Aasu seeks army on border

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, April 19: The All Assam Students' Union (Aasu) today demanded immediate deployment of the army along the Indo-Bangladesh border to give "Bangladesh a befitting reply" for its unprovoked attack on the Border Security Force (BSF) and innocent civilians.

The student body warned that if their demand was not met immediately, "Assam and other north-eastern states will soon become a second Kargil".

Aasu adviser Samujjal Kumar Bhattacharyya said the attack vindicated its apprehension about a growing threat to the security and identity of the indigenous Assamese people because of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants.

"It is most surprising that when Bangladesh forcibly occupied our land, the Indian government tried to tackle the situation diplomatically, and failed to take a bold stand. This shows Delhi's lack of concern for security and safety," Bhattacharyya added.

The situation would not have arisen if the Centre had reacted to their earlier demands, he said.

Bhattacharyya pointed out that the Assam Accord, signed 15 years ago, clearly defined the role of the government on the influx problem.

## Sangma meets PM

Nationalist Congress Party general secretary P.A. Sangma has met Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and apprised him of the Bangladesh Rifles attack.

Sangma said the Centre is seized of the matter and diplomatic efforts are on to solve the issue. Foreign minister Jaswant Singh has summoned Bangladesh authorities, he added.

## SHRAPNEL ROBS VILLAGERS OF LIVELIHOOD

## Meghalaya opens doors to refugees

FROM A. ISLAM

Hatsingimari, (Mancachar): Thousands of terrified villagers fleeing their homes in Assam's Mancachar area after the border flare-up have found rest and relief among the Garos in neighbouring Meghalaya.

The refugees have swamped village after village in the nearby West Garo hills. Nearly 4,000 people from about 10 villages of the affected area have found a home away from home among the Garos.

The school buildings have turned into temporary shelters. Villagers are even accommodating complete strangers in their houses. With no official relief forthcoming, the uprooted people in the West Garo hills are also being provided with food and water by the villagers.

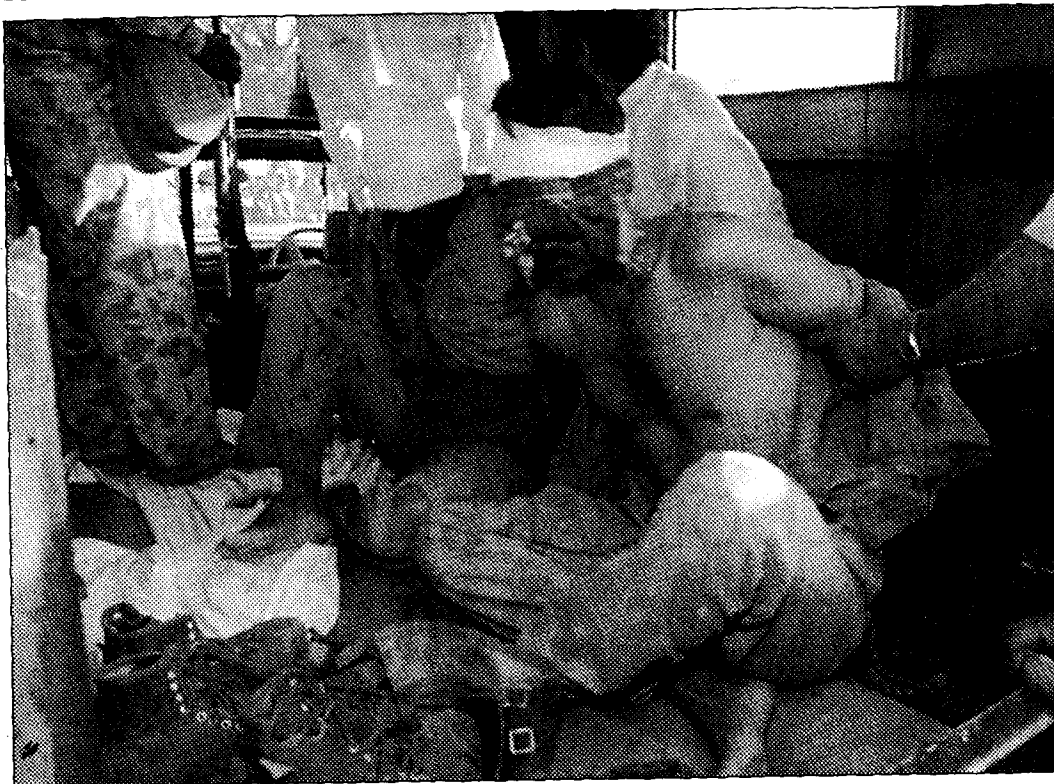
A villager in Julgaon said: "Tomorrow we may need help from them. As human beings, it is our duty to help our brothers and sisters in distress."

Joyal Abidin and his wife Ayesha of Kakripura village said they are "feeling almost at home" at Helidigrang.

"We thought we would have to live in the open... but a local family has given us shelter. We could not have asked for more," the 42-year-old Ayesha said, relief writ large on her face.

Coming from a virtual war zone, the peace and tranquillity in the village has soothed the frayed nerves of the Abedins. "We are afraid, yes... but the hospitality of the villagers has given us great relief," Joyal said. He added that panic-stricken villagers from the neighbouring villages of Kakripura, too, have fled to "safer places" in the West Garo hills.

Though most of the affected have fled to Meghalaya, many have also taken shelter in the Khairabandha Janata Higher Secondary School in Hatsingimari.



BDR soldiers pull out two captured BSF jawans from a truck. (AFP)

## Sialtari shell-shocked

FROM BHOJ SHARMA

Ampatty (West Garo Hills), April 19: Noor Banu is still in a daze. The 26-year-old housewife has seen her cattle blow up into pieces just a few metres away. She herself had a close encounter with death.

For the shell-shocked villagers of Sialtari on the Assam-Meghalaya-Bangladesh trijunction, it was a miraculous escape. At a half-built school building serving as an unofficial refugee camp 15 km from where the action is, there are a hundred others who will repeat Noor Banu's story.

There is a reason for this. When the first shells came flying from across the border in the wee hours of Wednesday, they first rained down on Sialtari. "I was jolted out of my slumber by a booming sound, then the earth was shaking. I thought it was an earthquake," Noor Banu said, as she lulled

her 11-month-old baby to sleep.

Her husband Ramadan, awake by then, shouted to her to run. As they rushed out through the back door, something landed right on their cow shed. "The pair of bullock simply vanished, as did the shed. All we saw was flying pieces of the shed," she revealed, gesticulating with her hands to draw a picture of the scene.

A bamboo splinter hit Ramadan in his chest. It is a superficial wound and will heal quickly. "But I have lost my cattle. How will I till my land... I don't have money to buy another pair," he said.

Sixty-eight-year-old Karim Man's failing eyesight confines him indoors after sunset. But the shells chased him too. "A part of my house was blown off. I just about managed to come out," Miai said as he gazed blankly at the cobwebs in the ceiling.

"The long trek to the school has left me so weak that he can barely

speak. He took in gulps of air as he spoke, his voice coming no louder than a whisper.

Nearly 100 people have taken shelter in the two-room school and more continue to pour in.

Children played outside — unable to comprehend the gravity of the situation. Inside, their parents discussed the future. Most have left their belongings in the village.

"We want to go back as soon as possible. I am not worried about my house but my cattle in the shed," said Khaliluddin. But his wife refused to listen. Many others agree with her. In the jam-packed room, fear was written on the faces of the poor villagers. As thunder rumbled overhead, all of them almost jumped to their feet. When they realised what it was, all burst out laughing — for the first time since Wednesday.

"It is music to the ears," Noor Banu said, managing a grin.

## Khasi chiefs up in arms over fertile land

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Shillong, April 19: If the icy heights of Kargil were worth fighting for, so are their fertile plains which have been forcibly occupied by Bangladesh, feel Khasi tribal chiefs, who recently submitted a memorandum to the President, seeking his intervention to get back their "lost land".

The Pyrdiwah flare-up has put the focus back on their demand for a re-survey of the international border. The chiefs are also not averse to a military solution to get back these tracts.

The eight-page memorandum to the President ends with a truculent message.

"We draw your attention to the fact that one of our youths, the late Captain Cliffor K. Nongrum, MVC, laid down his life for the cause of the country at Kargil to protect the inhospitable and treacherous snowcapped mountains and, more importantly, to protect the LoC with Pakistan," it said.

"We seek similar intervention, attention and protection in settlement and in resolving the border of the Khasi states with Bangladesh, which has illegally occupied thousands of acres of valuable cultivable lands."

L.M. Syiem, one of the tribal chiefs, said the government was apathetic to their plight. "Really, why can't the government of India take our issue seriously? It is a national issue but they are just not bothered about our problem," he said at a news conference after the 200-odd tribal heads handed the memo to Governor M.M. Jacob.

According to the chiefs, during the border demarcation — first with east Pakistan and later with Bangladesh when it was born — they lost thousands of acres of land.

Their claim over their

ancestral land, they said, was drowned in the larger conflict as the two hostile new-born nations tried to adjust in the post-British era. They said pacts were signed which violated the rights of the Khasis.

"Most of these erstwhile Khasi states which had to join India fell on the international border but they were never consulted when the borders were drawn," the chiefs said.

Years have passed, but the flashpoints are still the same. Pyrdiwah, Lyngkhat, Raid Mukertilla figured then as it does today in the border standoff.

This week, villagers making a road at Lyngkhat may have been one reason for the Bangladesh Rifles strike at Pyrdiwah.

But in 1956, S. Khongwang, sardar of Mukertilla, wrote to the officer-in-charge of Dawki outpost, saying he had made preparations to build a footpath from Pyrdiwah to Borhill to Lyngkhat so that they could be easily protected by "our shipai" against the "shipai from Pakistan". Even then, the Pakistani army had tried to stop them.

After Bangladeshi Rifles destroyed their new footpath a few weeks ago, the people of Lyngkhat had asked the government to send the army to protect them from Bangladeshi aggression as they did not have faith in the Border Security Force.

All these are included as annexures in the memorandum to the President which is also another instance of history repeating itself. Delegations of tribal chiefs have been serving similar memorandums over the last 50 years.

"Now, we are gathering all the historical documents to prove our claims," says John F. Kharshing, a spokesman of the tribal chiefs. "We will continue to fight for what is rightfully ours."

# সীমান্তে 'স্থানীয়' সংঘর্ষ শুরু, ফি

০৭/০৪/২০০৮

## অস্বস্তি ঢাকতে

২৪/৪/২০০৮

## তৎপর দিল্লি,

## ঢাকা দু'পক্ষই

০৬ - ০৭/০৪/০৮

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি ও গুয়াহাটি,

১৯ এপ্রিল— আলাপ-আলোচনার মাধ্যমে ভারত ও বাংলাদেশের মধ্যে সীমান্ত সংঘর্ষ বন্ধ হতে চলেছে। ভারতীয় বিদেশ মন্ত্রক সূত্রে আজ বলা হয়েছে, মেঘালয়ের সীমান্তবর্তী পিরদিয়া গ্রাম থেকে বাংলাদেশি জওয়ানেরা ফিরে যাচ্ছেন। দু'দেশের শীর্ষ নেতারাও জওয়ানদের নিজেদের এলাকার মধ্যে সীমাবদ্ধ থাকতে ও গোলাগুলি না-চালাতে নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন।

ভারতীয় বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের মুখপাত্র রামিন্দর সিংহ জসসাল আজ বিকেলে জানিয়েছেন, দু'দেশের মধ্যে যে সংঘর্ষ ও প্রাণহানির ঘটনা ঘটেছে তা 'দুর্ভাগ্যজনক'। এই ধরনের ঘটনা যাতে ভবিষ্যতে না-ঘটে তা ভারত ও বাংলাদেশ খতিয়ে দেখছে। তা ছাড়া যে সব বিষয় নিয়ে বিবাদের দরুন এই ঘটনা ঘটেছে তা-ও আলাপ-আলোচনার মাধ্যমে নিষ্পত্তির উপরে জোর দিয়েছে ভারতীয় বিদেশ মন্ত্রক। বাংলাদেশ দূতাবাস সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, ভারতীয় বিদেশমন্ত্রকের বক্তব্যের সঙ্গে তাঁরা সহমত। উভয় দেশের মধ্যে আলাপ-আলোচনার মাধ্যমেই যে সীমান্ত সংঘর্ষের নিষ্পত্তি হচ্ছে, তা এ থেকেই প্পষ্ট হয়ে গিয়েছে।

ভারত-বাংলাদেশ সীমান্তে বৃহস্পতিবার উত্তেজনা কমতে শুরু করেছে। অসমের মানকাছার এলাকায় এ দিন দুপুর থেকে গোলাবর্ষণ বন্ধ। কেবল মহেন্দ্রগঞ্জ গ্রামে বিক্ষিপ্ত ভাবে গুলিচালনার ঘটনা সন্ধ্যায়ও শোনা গিয়েছে। অন্য দিকে, মেঘালয়ের পিরদিয়া গ্রাম থেকেও সরে যেতে শুরু করেছে বাংলাদেশ রাইফেলস (বি ডি আর)। সন্ধ্যাবেলা পর্যন্ত পাওয়া খবর অনুসারে, পিরদিয়া বর্ডার পোস্টে আটকে থাকা কুড়ি জন জওয়ানের সঙ্গে বি এস এফের যোগাযোগ স্থাপিত হয়েছে।

বি এস এফ এবং অসম সরকার সূত্রে পাওয়া খবর অনুসারে, বৃহস্পতিবার সকালেও মানকাছারে দু'পক্ষের মধ্যে গোলাগুলি চলে। কিন্তু দুপুর সাড়ে তিনটের পরে ~~এই~~ ~~কোরা~~ ~~সংঘর্ষ~~ ~~হয়নি~~। তবে তীব্র গ্রামবাসীরা বৃধবার সকাল থেকেই ঘরবাড়ি ছেড়ে পালাচ্ছিলেন, তা অব্যাহত। ধুবড়ির ডেপুটি কমিশনার গায়ত্রী বড়ুয়া

জানান, "মূলত বড়াইবাড়ি ও শাহপুরা গ্রাম দু'টি থেকে লোকজন চলে গিয়েছে। এই গ্রামগুলি থেকে প্রায় আড়াই হাজার মানুষ মেঘালয়ের পাহাড়ি এলাকা আমপত্তিতে আশ্রয় নিয়েছেন।" এ ছাড়া, আশপাশের কয়েকটি গ্রাম থেকেও লোকজন চলে এসেছে মানকাছার শহর ও হাতসিংহিমারি গ্রামে। সব মিলিয়ে প্রায় সাড়ে তিন হাজার লোক আপাতত ঘরছাড়া।

মানকাছারে সংঘর্ষ প্রায় থিতুয়ে এলেও পিরদিয়া কিন্তু পুরোপুরি বি ডি আর-মুক্ত হয়নি। বি এস এফ সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, আউটপোস্টের চারধার থেকে ঘেরাও তুলে দিলেও গ্রামটি পুরোপুরি হাতছাড়া করেনি বাংলাদেশিরা। তাখিল শহরে বি ডি আর-এর সিলেট সেক্টর কমান্ডার আসিফুল হুসেন এবং বি এস এফ-এর ডি আই জি ডি এস আল হট-এর মধ্যে বৈঠক হয়। স্থির হয়েছে, পঁচাত্তর সালের সীমান্ত চুক্তির স্থিতাবস্থা বজায় থাকবে। বি এস এফ সূত্রে দাবি করা হয়েছে, দু'পক্ষ নিজেদের 'এরিয়া অব রেসপনসিবিলিটি'তে শান্তি ও স্থিতি বজায় রাখতে সম্মত হয়েছে।

সোমবার থেকে দু'দেশের মধ্যে যে সংঘর্ষ শুরু হয়, তাতে দু'দেশই প্রচণ্ড অস্বস্তির মধ্যে পড়ে যায়। আজ সকালে বি জে পি নেতাদের সঙ্গে আলোচনার সময় প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী অস্বস্তির কথা স্বীকার করেন। এই অবস্থা থেকে বেরিয়ে আসার জন্য সকাল থেকেই দু'দেশের মধ্যে শীর্ষ পর্যায়ে আলোচনা শুরু হয়। বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশোবন্ত সিংহ কথা বলেন বাংলাদেশের বিদেশমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে। বিদেশ সচিব পর্যায়ে কথা হয়। তা ছাড়া বি এস এফ এবং বি ডি আর প্রধানদের মধ্যে যেমন কথা হয়, তেমনই স্থানীয় পর্যায়েও সীমান্তে আলোচনা শুরু হয়। ফলে বিকেলের মধ্যেই শান্তি ফিরে আসার প্রক্রিয়া শুরু হয়ে যায়।

ভারতীয় বিদেশ মন্ত্রক সূত্রের বক্তব্য, এই ঘটনা বাংলাদেশ সরকারের প্ররোচনায় ঘটেছে বলে তাঁরা মনে করছেন না। কারণ, সংঘর্ষ বন্ধ করতে ভারত যতটা উদ্যোগী হয়েছিল, ততটাই ইতিবাচক সাড়া পাওয়া গিয়েছে ঢাকা থেকেও। আজ দুপুরে ~~এর পর আটের পাতায়~~

20 APR 2008

## দিল্লি, ঢাকা দু'পক্ষই তৎপর

প্রথম পাতার পর  
রাজ্যসভায় যশোবন্ত সিংহের বক্তব্যও ছিল অত্যন্ত নরম। আলাপ-আলোচনার মাধ্যমে দু'পক্ষের আগেকার অবস্থান ফিরিয়ে আনার উপরে জোর দিয়ে তিনি বলেন, সরকার সেই উদ্দেশ্যেই কাজ করছে। ভারতীয় নাগরিকেরা যাতে নিরাপদে দেশে ফিরে আসতে পারেন সে দিকেও নজর রাখা হচ্ছে। তাঁর বক্তব্যের মধ্যে একটি মাত্র কড়া বাক্য ছিল। তা হল, “বিনা প্ররোচনায় বি ডি আর যে কাজ করেছে তা ভারত কোনও ভাবেই মানতে পারে না।”

তখনই কিন্তু বিদেশমন্ত্রী এ কথা স্পষ্ট করে দেন যে খুব শীঘ্র বিষয়টির অবসান ঘটবে এবং সরকার বিষয়টি নিয়ে আলোচনা চালিয়ে যাচ্ছে। ততক্ষণে সীমান্তে দু'দেশের সীমান্তরক্ষীদের মধ্যে আলোচনা শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে এবং পাঁচ জনের মৃতদেহ ভারতের হাতে দিয়ে দেওয়ার প্রতিশ্রুতিও পাওয়া হয়ে গিয়েছে। অসম সীমান্তে যে সংঘর্ষ চলছিল তা বন্ধ করার জন্যও এর পরেই বাংলাদেশ তার বাহিনীকে নির্দেশ দেয়। ভারতও বি এস এফ-কে পুরোপুরি সংযত থাকতে বলে। বিকেলেই একদিকে অসম সীমান্তে গোলাগুলি বন্ধ হয় এবং মেঘালয়ের পিরদিয়া গ্রাম থেকে বাংলাদেশি জওয়ানেরা ফিরে যেতে শুরু করেন।

আপাতত ঘটনার নিষ্পত্তি হলেও এই ধরনের সংঘর্ষ যাতে ভবিষ্যতে আর বড় আকার না-নেয় সে জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রী

অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী আজ মন্ত্রিসভার নিরাপত্তা বিষয়ক কমিটিতে দীর্ঘক্ষণ আলোচনা করেন। বৈঠকে স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী আডবাণী বলেন, এটি নিছকই একটি সীমান্ত-সংঘর্ষ। সরকার একে আক্রমণ হিসাবে দেখছে না। এই অবস্থায় কী কী ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া উচিত তা ছকার কাজও শুরু হয়েছে। সীমান্তে বেড়া দেওয়ার কাজ ছাড়াও বিতর্কিত এলাকাগুলি নিয়ে আলোচনা শুরু করার বিষয়েও আলোচনা হয়েছে। কোন জায়গা নিয়ে কী ধরনের ভাবাবেগ রয়েছে এবং কতটা নরম ভাবে তার মোকাবিলা করা যায় তা-ও সরকার খতিয়ে দেখবে। কারণ বাংলাদেশের মতো ছোট প্রতিবেশী দেশের সঙ্গে সংঘর্ষ সরকারের কাছে অভিশ্রুত নয়।

**ভ্রম সংশোধন:** গতকাল আনন্দবাজার পত্রিকার প্রথম সংস্করণে যান্ত্রিক বিভ্রাটে বাংলাদেশ হাইকমিশনারের মুখে ভারতের বক্তব্য (বিনা প্ররোচনায় অব্যক্তি কাজের নিন্দা) প্রকাশ হয়েছিল। অনিচ্ছাকৃত এই ত্রুটির জন্য আমরা ক্ষমাপ্রার্থী।

## ওড়িশায় বর্ষবরণ

**স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, ভুবনেশ্বর, ১৯ এপ্রিল**— ওড়িশার পুরনো রাজধানী কটক এবং এখনকার রাজধানী ভুবনেশ্বরের বাঙালিরা এ বারও মহাসমারোহে বিভিন্ন অনুষ্ঠানের মাধ্যমে বাংলা নতুন বছরকে বরণ করলেন। কটকে দু'দিন ধরে নববর্ষ উদযাপন করা হয়। বরাবটি স্টেডিয়াম ময়দানে নববর্ষ সমিতির প্রথম দিনের অনুষ্ঠানে কলকাতার ‘তালছন্দ’ গোষ্ঠীর শিল্পীরা লোকগান, নাচের মধ্য দিয়ে নতুন বছরকে বরণ করেন। দ্বিতীয় দিনেও কলকাতার ‘বাঁশরী’ গোষ্ঠীর শিল্পীদের অনুষ্ঠান হয়। দু'দিনের অনুষ্ঠানে উপস্থিত ছিলেন ওড়িশার নগরোন্নয়ন মন্ত্রী নমীর দে এবং উচ্চশিক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রশান্ত নন্দ। ভুবনেশ্বরের বাঙালিরা রবীন্দ্রসঙ্গীত নৃত্যে নববর্ষ উদযাপন করেন।

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## রছে জওয়ানেরা

### বহু গ্রাম নিয়ে বিবাদই উৎস সীমান্ত-দ্বন্দ্বের

রহমান জাহাঙ্গির-ঢাকা

১৯ এপ্রিল: ফ্ল্যাগ মিটিং হলেও পাদুয়া

গ্রাম (বাংলাদেশ বিতর্কিত ওই পিরদিয়া গ্রামকে ওই নামেই ডাকে) নিয়ে আলোচনায় কোনও মীমাংসা হয়নি। সীমান্তের নো ম্যানস ল্যান্ড থেকে বাংলাদেশের দিকে বেশ কয়েকশো গজ ভিতরে পাদুয়া গ্রাম। ১৯৭৫ সালে বি এস এফ জোর করে সেখানে একটি ক্যাম্প বসায়। তার পর থেকেই এ নিয়ে বিবাদ চলছে। বাংলাদেশ সরকারের সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, শুধু পাদুয়া নয়, দু'দেশের সীমান্ত বরাবর বেশ কয়েকটি এলাকা নিয়েই দীর্ঘ দিন ধরে সমস্যা জিইয়ে রয়েছে। গত ১৬ মাসে এই সব সীমান্ত এলাকায় দু'দেশের সীমান্তরক্ষী বাহিনীর মধ্যে অন্তত ৫১টি সংঘর্ষ হয়েছে, যাতে ৪৫ জন বাংলাদেশি নাগরিক এবং বি ডি আরের দুই জওয়ান নিহত হয়েছেন। কিন্তু এত সব সত্ত্বেও দু'দেশের মধ্যে এই সব ছিটমহল নিয়ে আলোচনা এগোচ্ছে না। গত ডিসেম্বরে দু'দেশের বিদেশ সচিব ঠিক করেছিলেন এ নিয়ে একটি যৌথ ওয়ার্কিং গ্রুপ তৈরি হবে। তার মাধ্যমে সীমান্ত চিহ্নিত করা, ছিটমহল সমস্যার সমাধান— সবই করার কথা। কিন্তু কাজ এগোয়নি।

বাংলাদেশের দাবি, যদি ছিটমহল সমস্যা মেটানো হয়, তা হলে বাংলাদেশ অন্তত ১৭ হাজার একর জমি ফিরে পাবে, অন্য দিকে বাংলাদেশকে ছাড়তে হবে ৭ হাজার একর। সমস্যা হল, এ নিয়ে ঢাকা বহু বার চেষ্টা করেও নয়াদিল্লিকে নড়াতে পারেনি। তবুও দীর্ঘ দিনের ব্যবধানে মাত্র গত বছর জমি চিহ্নিতকরণের কাজ কিছুটা হলেও শুরু হয়েছিল। দু'দেশের মধ্যে মোট ৪,০৯৫ কিলোমিটার সীমান্ত রয়েছে। তার মধ্যে আবার মুহুরির চরে ৩.৫ কিলোমিটার এলাকা চিহ্নিতকরণের কাজ বাকি। বাংলাদেশ সরকারের ভূমি নথিভুক্ত করার জন্য ভারপ্রাপ্ত সার্ভে বিভাগের হিসাব অনুসারে বাংলাদেশের বৃকে ভারতের ১১১টি ছিটমহল রয়েছে, যার আয়তন ১৭ হাজার একর। অন্য দিকে, ভারতের বৃকে বাংলাদেশের ৫১টি ছিটমহল রয়েছে, যার আয়তন ৭ হাজার একর। ওই সব ছিটমহলে বাংলাদেশি জনসংখ্যা সাড়ে ৪ লক্ষ। বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের এক কূটনীতিকের বক্তব্য, ছিটমহলের সমস্যা না মেটালে মাঝেমধ্যেই দু'দেশের মধ্যে সীমান্ত সংঘর্ষ বেধে যাবে। সমস্যা বেড়েই যাবে। দু'দেশের সুসম্পর্কের পক্ষে এই ছিটমহলের সমস্যা একটি বড় অন্তরায়। গত বছর দু'দেশের ওয়ার্কিং গ্রুপ তৈরি হওয়ার পরেই এই মর্মে একটা বোঝাপড়া হয়েছিল যে সীমান্ত চিহ্নিতকরণের কাজ পুরোপুরি শেষ হয়ে গেলেই ছিটমহলগুলি একসঙ্গে হস্তান্তর করে ফেলা হবে। একমাত্র তা হলেই সীমান্ত সমস্যাটি আয়ত্তে আনা সম্ভব বলে বাংলাদেশের কূটনীতিকেরা মনে করছেন।

একজন শীর্ষস্থানীয় কূটনীতিক বিষয়টি ব্যাখ্যা করে বলেন, ছিটমহল হস্তান্তরের বিষয়টির সঙ্গে অনেকখানি জমি হস্তান্তরের প্রশ্ন জড়িত। তাই দু'দেশের সংসদেই এই সিদ্ধান্তের অনুমোদন নেওয়া দরকার হতে পারে। সে জন্যই সব ছিটমহলকে এক সঙ্গে হস্তান্তরের প্রস্তাব দেওয়া হয়েছে। একই সঙ্গে তিনি আশা প্রকাশ করেন, গোটা বিষয়টি ১৯৭৪ সালের ইন্দিরা-মুজিব চুক্তির সুরে সুব মিলিয়েই করা যেতে পারে। উল্লেখ্য, ১৯৭৪ সালের ১৬ মে দু'দেশের স্থলসীমা চিহ্নিত করার ব্যাপারে চুক্তি হয়েছিল। ওই চুক্তিতেই স্পষ্ট করে বলা হয়েছিল যে যত ভাড়াভাড়া সম্ভব ছিটমহলগুলি হস্তান্তরের কাজ শেষ করতে হবে। বাংলাদেশ এই হস্তান্তরের ফলে বেশি জমি ফেরত পাবে ঠিকই, কিন্তু সে জন্য ভারত কোনও আর্থিক ক্ষতিপূরণ পাবে না। শুধু মাত্র বেরুবাড়ির বিষয়টি ওই চুক্তিতে ব্যতিক্রম বলে ধরা হয়েছিল।

বেরুবাড়ি ও আঙ্গরাপোতার ক্ষেত্রে ঠিক হয়েছিল, ভারত বেরুবাড়ির নীচের দিকের অর্ধেক অংশ (ইউনিয়ন নম্বর ১২) এবং পার্শ্ববর্তী ২.৬৪ বর্গমাইল এলাকা পাবে। বিনিময়ে বাংলাদেশ দহগ্রাম ও আঙ্গরাপোতা পাবে। এটাও ঠিক হয়েছিল, দহগ্রামের সঙ্গে পানবাড়ি মৌজার সঙ্ঘর্ষের জন্য বাংলাদেশকে ভারত তিনবিঘার কাছে ১৭৮ মিটার দীর্ঘ ও ৮৫ মিটার প্রস্থ এলাকা বরাবরের জন্য লিজ দেবে। আরও ঠিক হয়েছিল, এই চুক্তি দু'দেশের সংসদে অনুমোদনের পর থেকেই বলবৎ হবে।

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# Peace tiptoes back, but finger on trigger

## Firing resumes after flag meet

April 19: Delhi and Dhaka scrambled to douse the fire on the border after Bangladeshi troops killed four more Border Security Force jawans this morning.

Shelling at Assam's Mancachar, where 20 BSF jawans have been killed since yesterday, stopped around 3.30 pm, raising hopes of a truce. But just when it seemed that the bloodshed had ended, firing began again at 7.15 pm.

"There are reports of fresh firing... We are waiting for the details," Dhubri superintendent of police Apurba Jivan said.

During the brief lull on the sensitive tri-junction of the Assam-Meghalaya-Bangladesh borders, a flag meeting was held at Mahendragarh in Meghalaya. Preparations were on to hand over bodies of five BSF jawans to Indian authorities.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) Sylhet commander Asif-ul Hussain and BSF director-general V.S. Ahlawat met at Tamabil and resolved to maintain status quo.

Addressing a joint news conference near the Bangladesh Customs office at Tamabil, BSF and BDR commandants said the meeting was cordial and it was decided that peace would be maintained "in our area of responsibility".

Both Hussain and Ahlawat said the problem in Pyrdiwah would be referred to their governments. Till then, they would follow the 1975 guidelines, which explain how border forces should function and also provide details of how the two forces should take up position against each other.

Earlier, Hussain had called BSF inspector-general V.K. Gaur to discuss Pyrdiwah. Gaur said the crisis had been defused with Bangladesh Rifles pulling out of the area, where they were holding 20 personnel hostage at the BSF

outpost, after three tense days.

Bangladeshi troops began to pull out around 7 am after the BSF "broke the cordon", Gaur said. But the troops are yet to vacate the village. They have only withdrawn from the BSF camp and taken up position some distance away.

"I told Hussain that what they had done was completely unexpected from a friendly country, that they had looted like dacoits, even taking apart civilians' houses and driving out cattle," Gaur said.

The BSF officer told him to "leave the village entirely". He also asked Hussain to call a meeting of the affected villagers and their headmen to assess the damage done to their homes.

At the news conference, Hussain denied there was a crisis on the border. "We will maintain status quo as the situation stands from April 14," he said.

Asked if BDR was pulling out of Pyrdiwah, he said: "We don't know." The officer claimed there was no aggression on the part of the BDR and that not a single bullet had been fired. When it was pointed out that the BDR had intruded into the village, forcing the villagers to flee, he laughed. "BDR has always been going to the village for regular verification of the village," Hussain said.

"Do you realise that the border pillar is right in the middle of the village?" he asked. Hussain claimed that the BSF and the BDR were staying as friends in Pyrdiwah. Ahlawat said the BDR jawans have been pushed back from their positions near the BSF camp but it would take time for the situation to return to normal. "Give us some time," he pleaded.

From Linda C in Shillong, Bidhayak Das in Pyrdiwah and Bijoy Kumar Sharma in Mancachar



BSF jawans in trenches along the Indo-Bangla border in Dawki. Picture by Utpal Baruah

## Dhaka politics takes over diplomacy reins

### OUR CORRESPONDENTS IN DHAKA AND NEW DELHI

April 19: As questions swirled about who pulled the Bangladeshi trigger, India stuck to its velvet-glove diplomacy to avert a domestic backlash in Dhaka politics.

Foreign minister Jaswant Singh spoke to his Bangladeshi counterpart Abdus Samad and impressed upon him the need to pull his forces out of the Pyrdiwah outpost and hold a flag meeting.

He also managed to persuade the Bangladesh government to join India in regretting the "deaths" in the clashes and agree

that restraint should be shown by all parties. Senior officials from the two capitals were also in touch with each other to ensure that more areas along the border were not drawn into the conflict.

The Prime Minister convened the Cabinet Committee on Security in the evening. After the meeting, home minister L.K. Advani refused to describe Bangladesh as an aggressor. "I will only say that we have had very good relations with Bangladesh and, therefore, this event did come as a big surprise to us."

The home minister said Pyrdiwah belongs to India and cannot

be described as disputed territory. Advani said the picture will be clear after the BSF director general, Gurbachan Jagat, visits Pyrdiwah and submits a report.

The issue figured in Parliament today. For the record, Delhi has lodged its displeasure at the "unwarranted and unilateral action" of Bangladesh Rifles.

Keeping the Bangladesh elections in mind, Delhi wants to ensure that its remarks do not embarrass Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has been dubbed a "friend of India" by her opponents.

The flare-up has come at a po-

litically sensitive time in Bangladesh, which is heading for polls in June. The border clash is certain to become one of the main issues of the elections.

The Bangladesh high commissioner has described the "unfortunate" flare-up as "localised and isolated". However, the Hasina government has so far made no statement on the issue. Questions are being raised whether the Bangladeshi forces acted on their own or with the government's approval.

The inspector-general of the BSF, V.K. Gaur, today quoted Col. Asif-ul Hussain, Sylhet sector commander of Bangladesh Rifles,

## Carnage, not clash

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Shillong, April 19: The Inspector-General of the Border Security Force today alleged that his men had been murdered in "cold blood" and not in a "border clash".

V.K. Gaur said people in civilian clothes had lured the jawans to the other side of the border and handed them over to the Bangladesh army.

However, Bangladesh claimed the jawans had intruded into its territory.

Gaur said that at Assam's Mancachar, where the BSF men were killed, the Indians did not even fire a single shot. He said some men in civilian clothes asked a patrol party of 12 jawans to stop.

"Suddenly, they were surrounded by over a thousand men who had been hiding behind bushes. They were dragged to the other side and handed over to the (Bangladesh) army," Gaur said. The officer added that one of the jawans escaped to tell the story.

"There was no firing, no encounter. They were killed in cold blood," Gaur said.

as saying that the force was following orders from Dhaka. Officials in Dhaka refused to comment whether the government would order an inquiry into the matter.

Hasina is caught in a fix. If her rivals manage to convince the electorate that the Bangladeshi force has been forced to retreat from the outpost, she will find it difficult to shrug off the "friend of India" tag.

Bangladesh Opposition leader Khaleda Zia said the clash was proof of poor governance and renewed a call for Hasina to step down.

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# Border flare-up ends as Bangladesh Rifles pulls back, expresses regret

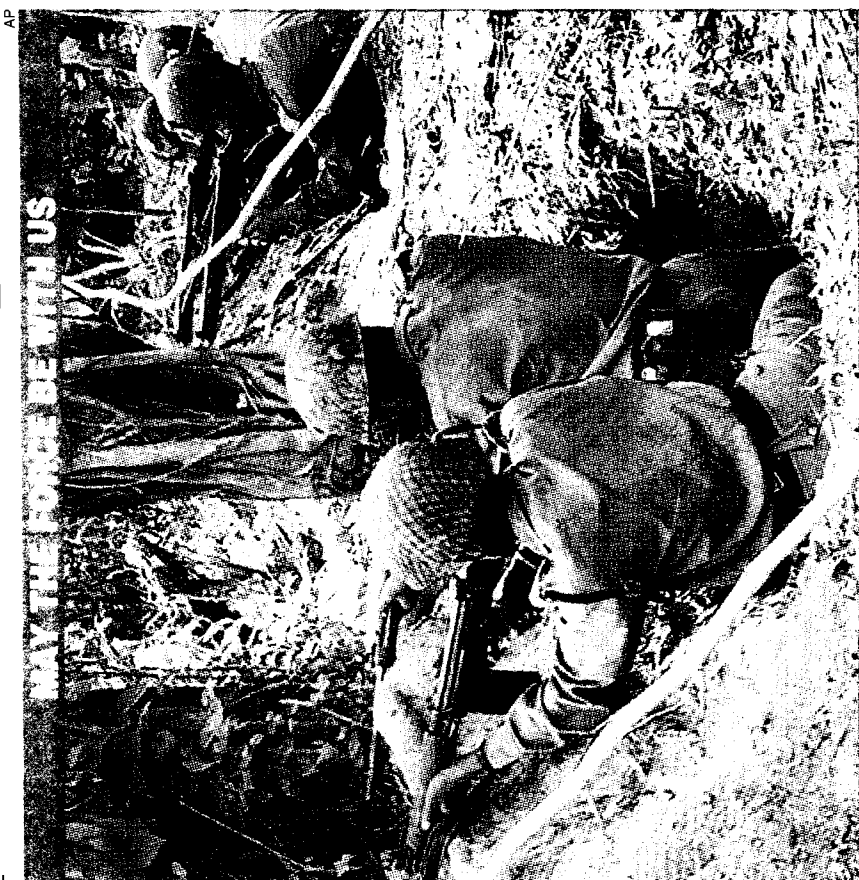
The Times of India News Service  
**NEW DELHI:** After three days of skirmishes, the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on Thursday withdrew from Pyrdiwah village in Meghalaya and firing between the border security forces of the two countries at Boraibari in Assam came to an end.

Home secretary Kamal Pande said on Thursday that Bangladesh Rifles chief Fazlur Rehman spoke to BSF director-general Gurbachan Jagat and expressed regret over the incident. The Bangladesh Rifles, supported by the regular force, had forcibly occupied Pyrdiwah, a border outpost village, on Tuesday. At least 16 BSF jawans were reportedly killed in the incident.

The decision to halt the firing was taken at a flag meeting held in the Boraibari area by the commanders of the border security forces of the two countries. Mr Pande said. Following the meeting, BDR chief Rehman informed Mr Jagat that the bodies of the 11 BSF personnel killed in the firing would be handed over to India as also the two injured persons.

Earlier, the BDR chief had said there were five bodies which would be returned to the Indian side. However, the bodies were not handed over. In the afternoon, the Bangladesh side said that there were not five but 11 bodies and two injured persons who would be handed over.

Mr Pande said efforts were on to trace other missing BSF personnel. "We are awaiting the return of the bodies," he said, when asked if any



**Border Security Force personnel keep vigil in Pyrdiwah on the Indo-Bangladesh border on Thursday.**

the "status quo ante". Although the request by Samajwadi Party member Ram Gopal Yadav for the suspension of question hour was turned down, the discussion was taken up after question hour.

Speaking on the issue, Mr Yadav and Manmohan Singh expressed concern over the incident. Mr Singh said that the incident was unfortunate because Bangladesh and India enjoyed good relations.

Mr Jaswant Singh said the intrusion was unacceptable and Bangladesh had been clearly told of the Indian position. He denied that there was any failure on the part of intelligence.

Despite India maintaining that the tension along the Indo-Bangladesh border was triggered by the "unprovoked action of the BDR", New Delhi has been measured in its response to the crisis, keeping in mind the fact that the Sheikh Hasina government is a friend of India.

"The two governments regret the loss of lives in the unfortunate incidents and agree that utmost restraint must be exercised to prevent further incidents," MEA spokesman Raminder Singh Jassal said. Asked if India was speaking on behalf of the Bangladesh government since no regret was forthcoming from Dhaka, Mr Jassal simply stonewalled the issue. "Both sides are sorry at the loss of lives," he repeated.

The spokesman kept emphasising that Bangladesh was a friendly country and all problems must be sorted out through mutual discussions.

withdrawn and efforts were on to persuade those villagers who had fled to return.

Earlier in the day, external affairs minister Jaswant Singh assured the Rajya Sabha that the government would ensure an early restoration of

BSF officer was among those killed. "We have gone into the area in strength. We will start the process of vacating the area from Thursday night to restore the status quo ante," he said. About the situation in Pyrdiwah village, he said the BDR personnel had

# Bangladesh beats retreat in Meghalaya

*But moves  
army to  
Assam border*

Anirban Roy &  
Rahul Karmakar  
Shillong/Guwahati, April 19

PENETRATING THE Bangladesh Rifles bunkers in three bulletproof vehicles, BSF jawans this morning drove out their opposite numbers from Pyrdiwah on the Meghalaya border after "overpowering" them, "without even firing a round".

But heavy exchange of fire continued on the Assam border with reports that Bangladesh has deployed the Mymensingh-based 19th Brigade of its Army in the area bordering the Mankachar sector of Western Assam.

Dhubri SP AJ Baruah said the reinforcement of Bangladeshi forces in Roumari was alarming. The Indian Army has not reacted to the intimidation yet but several CRPF contingents have been deployed behind the BSF as a second line of defence.

Some 1,500 people have been evacuated from at least five border villages in Assam. The 1,286-km long Tripura-Cachar-Mizoram border with Bangladesh has been put on 'maximum alert' in view of the situation.

Describing the Pyrdiwah eviction, BSF I-G V K Gaur said the jawans jumped out of the vehicles and overpowered the BDR personnel taking positions in their new bunkers. "Our boys have captured all their bunkers. We maintained utmost restraint. The situation is under control."

BSF Assistant Commandant S S Rawat, in charge of the Pyrdiwah outpost, said the operation was easy as BDR personnel had started withdrawing in smaller groups since last night.

BSF Additional DIG (Opera-



AFP PHOTO

Villagers carry a dead BSF jawan in Roumari village on Thursday.

tions) V S Ahalawat met the Sylhet Sector Commander of BDR, Colonel Ashiq, at Tamabil in the afternoon and made it clear that India would vacate the land by force as it had been illegally occupied. Ahalawat and Col Ashiq then announced their decision to maintain the status quo as per the 1975 agreement between the two countries and that the matter would be taken up at a diplomatic level later.

On whether the BDR would attempt more intrusion, Col Ashiq said his side would "strictly maintain the status quo" till "further orders from the higher level". But though the BSF has driven out the BDR

and other civilian Bangladeshi intruders from Pyrdiwah, the villagers are yet to return to their houses. Villagers said they had been told that Bangladeshi intruders had taken away all their belongings.

The Government came under attack from the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha earlier in the day over the BDR's aggression. Sharing the members' concern, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh said the BDR's "unprovoked" action was not acceptable and efforts were on to restore the status quo ante.

He denied there was any intelligence failure, as alleged by some members. New Delhi, he

said, had conveyed its displeasure to the "friendly" Government in Dhaka.

Even the BJP pulled up the Government, asking it to firmly deal with the issue as "a wave of anger" was sweeping the country. Party spokesman V K Malhotra said the party viewed the killing of 16 BSF men as a "very serious incident" and that the Government should seek compensation from Bangladesh for the slain soldiers.

**Body handover**  
The BDR will hand over five bodies of BSF jawans tomorrow at 10 am in Roumari. There was no information on the other 11 reported killed in the battle.

*One bullet for India,  
another for Hasina*

Udayan Namboodiri  
New Delhi, April 19

MAJOR GENERAL Fazlur Rahaman, Director-General of Bangladesh Rifles, was something of a minor national hero even before the latest border spat with India.

Only two months back, he forced the Myanmar military to suspend the dam construction on the Naf after weeks of hostilities. Yangon was forced to admit that it was infringing on the terms of the 1966 Naf River Accord and beat a retreat.

Today Gen Rahaman is hot potato for his Government. The Sheikh Hasina Government is at its wits' end on what to do to contain the Bangladesh Rifles chief.

With characteristic gung-ho attitude, the General claimed that he had "liberated" Pandua (the village in Meghalaya which India calls Pyrdiwah) and accused the Indians of launching an "unprovoked attack at dawn along the Kurigram border".

The head of the 30,000-strong paramilitary force came to New Delhi last month for routine consultations with his BSF counterparts. Sources said Gen Rahaman had come across to his hosts as quite a bellicose officer. Now India knows why.

Through astute timing and political insight, he has exploited the deep divide in the collective Bangladeshi consciousness over perceived Indian "hegemonistic designs" on their country.

A jingoistic Press and an eager Opposition whose role in the whole affair begs

investigation, rushed to capitalise on the event.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party chief Begum Khaleda Zia tore into Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's "India-subservient" policy.

There are signs of a meltdown now with the two sides agreeing to restore the status quo, but not before much political mileage has been extracted by the Opposition on the eve of the general elections.

There is a lesson here for India. Since 1996, a complacency had set in at South Block about Bangladesh.

The Ganga Water Treaty, bus and rail links, near settlement of the transit question and significant breakthrough in collaborations to tackle the Ulfa had indeed been notable gains of the post-1996 Indian diplomacy. But it is now clear that India had placed all its eggs in Hasina's basket.

New Delhi had overlooked the ability of the 'Empire' to strike back. Gen Rahaman belongs to the generation of Bangladeshi military officers which enjoyed unbridled power through the 16 years of martial rule.

Though forced back to the barracks after 1991, the loyalty of this class lies with Khaleda Zia who is herself the widow of former military ruler Ziaur Rahaman.

Sulking from the marginalisation by Hasina since 1996, the military had been quietly preparing the ground for a major showdown using the classic route — India baiting — to ensure that the 2001 elections is anything but a cakewalk for her.

INJURED BSF MEN TO BE HANDED OVER TODAY

# India, Bangladesh agree to restore status quo

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 19. In a bid to prevent the boundary clash from damaging irreparably their friendly ties, India and Bangladesh quickly restored the status quo on their border.

Responding to questions on the firing incident which led to the death of over 10 Border Security Force (BSF) jawans as well as the takeover of Pyrdiwah village by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), the spokesman of the External Affairs Ministry said, "It has been agreed that the status quo ante on the border would be restored." According to the Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pande who also briefed the press, the Bangladesh side has vacated Pyrdiwah. Firing in the affected Boriabari area in Assam had also ceased since afternoon. He pointed out that the decision to halt firing was taken at a flag meeting which was held in the Boriabari area between the lo-



cal commanders of the BSF and the BDR. Besides, the BDR Director-General, Mr. Fazlur Rahman, who spoke twice over telephone with his BSF counterpart, Mr. Gurbachan Jagat, had expressed regret over the incident. According to informed sources, regret has also been expressed by Bangladesh at the Government-to-Government level.

According to Mr. Pande, Maj. Gen. Rahman informed that arrangements were being made to return the injured personnel, who

were now in the custody of Bangladesh, as also the bodies of 11 of those killed.

On whether the firing was carried out without Dhaka's consent, the spokesman declined to comment on what he described as the "internal affair of a friendly country." He also parried questions on whether the Bangladesh side had offered an apology for its "unprovoked" and "unilateral" actions.

The agreement covered two other aspects. Both sides agreed that their border personnel should exercise the "utmost restraint" to prevent the recurrence of such incidents. Also, it was emphasised that instead of using force, the existing "institutions and mechanisms" should be exercised "in a spirit of mutual co-operation".

Sources pointed out that a regular dialogue between officials of the two countries from the Home and External Affairs Ministries and paramilitary forces was well institutionalised.

In fact, the BSF and BDR heads, at their meeting which concluded on April 1, had agreed to exercise maximum restraint along the border. They also agreed to draw an interim boundary in the disputed Muhuri Char sector. The Foreign Secretaries had earlier decided to establish a Joint Working Group at the Home Ministry-level to demarcate a controversial six km-stretch of the border.

## 'BDR action unacceptable'

Earlier during the day, the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, termed the BDR action as "unacceptable." Responding to concerns by members in the Rajya Sabha, he said the situation along the Assam-Meghalaya-Bangladesh border was "worrying", though the Government was "seized of it". The Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Manmohan Singh, described the incident as a "most unfortunate development".



Indian soldiers keep vigil at Twaki village in East Khasi Hill District along the border with Bangladesh on Thursday. — Reuters

Haroon Habib writes from Dhaka:

The exchange of fire came to a halt at 3 p.m. today at Roumari under Kurigram region of northern Bangladesh, bordering Mankerchar town of Assam. BSF and BDR personnel had exchanged heavy fire for the second consecutive day today.

The situation along the border near Roumari and Padua in Sylhet, bordering Meghalaya, was now tension-free and peaceful as the two sides had decided to resolve their dispute amicably and through dialogue, the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Syed Muazzem Ali, told presspersons this afternoon.

## Flag meeting held

After the day-long parleys, the two sides decided to hold flag meetings; the first took place at Padua today. The flag meeting at Roumari could not be held due to the heavy rain, Mr. Ali said, admitting that there were intermit-

tent exchanges of fire late in the day. There had been direct contacts between the chiefs of BDR and BSF over phone, who instructed their respective field level commanders to stop firing. While there was some exchange of fire near Roumari in the morning for about an hour, things were quiet at Padua, the disputed village which was claimed to have taken over by BDR.

Mr. Ali said that as per their agreement, the BDR would hand over the bodies of 11 BSF men when the Sector Commanders arrive at the flag meeting tomorrow. Two injured BSF men would also be handed over.

Sources here said that Indian officials had met the injured men in hospital. The Foreign Secretary, while expressing optimism of strengthening the existing cordial and friendly relations, said, "It has been a great success" for both countries to agree to sit within 24 hours for dialogue to resolve the issues.

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# 'Centre sat on IB reports'

SHIVNATH JHA  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 19. — Intelligence Bureau sources today said the agency had forwarded as many as 27 messages to the government regarding the "emerging" situation in the North-east border areas since July last year, but no action had been taken.

An IB officer said: "The government's lackadaisical attitude in resolving the crisis is the main reason for the killing of at least 16 BSF jawans."

The border issue, officers said, was discussed at the recent meeting between the Bangladesh Rifles director general, Maj-Gen Fazlur Rehman, and Union home and defence ministry officials.

The officers compared BDR's capture of Pyrdiwah with the Kargil intelligence failure. Despite having a modern communication system in the North-east, "information lapses" were not uncommon in the region.

Sources said border areas in the North-east are connected to the defence and home ministries through a modern communication network. This ensures that messages reach fast

and are kept secret. As far as the BDR intrusion is concerned, the Centre couldn't claim it was not informed.

"It needs political will to solve the problem the government has been facing since 1960. Neither the Centre nor the Bangladesh government has initiated any move to solve the problem," an IB officer said.

An MEA official said the government had put under alert the entire 1,286-km long Tripura-Cachar-Mizoram border and the 1,066-km North Bengal border with Bangladesh.

The government has also alerted the forces deployed between Dawki and Lyngkhat sectors in Meghalaya, and also directed the state government to keep a close watch on activities from across the border.

The strength of the BSF units at Muhurichar outpost, South Tripura, and Lakhitilla in Assam's Cachar district, have been increased.

"All BSF outposts in Tripura, Mizoram and Cachar district have been put on alert, so that any attempt to attack our nationals or occupy our land by any foreign quarters can be thwarted," a senior official said.

## No Intelligence failure: Advani

NEW DELHI, April 19 — Mr LK Advani tonight said he did not think Intelligence failure had led to the Bangladesh Rifles occupation of Indian territory in Meghalaya and killing of BSF personnel in Boraibari.

"I would not think so", the Union home minister said when asked whether there was any Intelligence failure. Observing that India had good relations with Bangladesh, Mr Advani said: "This event did come as a big surprise."

The Cabinet Committee on Security, headed by the Prime Minister, met this evening and decided to send the BSF director general, Mr Gurubachan Jagat, to take stock of the situation.

The government is making all efforts for an early return of 11 bodies of BSF personnel killed by the BDR at Boraibari on the Assam-Bangladesh border, Mr Advani said: "There is some confusion about the casualties we've suffered because the Bangladesh media has put the figure at 16, but the latest communication is that they will be handing over 11 bodies."

He said that from 15 April, when the BDR occupied Pyrdiwah, the government had been making all attempts to restore normalcy in the region.

"For me personally it was extremely distressing to be told that 15 BSF jawans have lost their lives defending the border." — SNS

THE STATESMAN

HO-14

## Wave of anger over border episode: BJP

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 19.** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) today demanded that the Government lodge a "strong protest" with Bangladesh for its intrusion into Indian territory and take "firm action" in response to the incidents on the border, which resulted in the death of over 10 BSF jawans.

"A wave of anger has spread across the country," the party spokesperson, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra, said. The BJP view was that the episode "was all the more reprehensible" considering India had helped with "men and materials" during the Bangladeshi War of Liberation in 1971, and the two countries enjoyed a strong friendship and were good neighbours. "Nobody should have taken advantage of the fact that we are friends," Mr. Malhotra said, while warning that the "friendship should not be taken as a sign of softness".

He said the Vajpayee Government "could not be blamed if someone takes advantage of our friendship". Indirectly, he suggested that perhaps India had a laidback attitude because of this friendship and had been taken by surprise as such an event was least expected. "We cannot but take seriously the death of our jawans," he said.

He rejected the suggestion that the incident may have been staged to give the BJP-AGP alliance in Assam some advantage creating a war scare in the manner Kargil was used during 1999 Lok Sabha elections.

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FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2001

## A NEW CRISIS ON THE BORDER?

HO-12

THE UNCOMMON FEROCITY of the latest clash between some units of the Bangladesh Army as also Bangladesh Rifles, on one side, and the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), on the other, should serve as a wake-up call against complacency in bilateral neighbourliness. The death of 16 BSF personnel and at least two security men of Bangladesh on Wednesday, besides the reports of sustained tensions on Thursday, can only be seen as the price of neglect by both countries in keeping their ties in a state of good repair. Yet to be clearly established are the facts of the latest skirmishes which are seen by the Indian side as a categorical case of unprovoked firing by the Bangladesh forces near the Borai-  
bari BSF post. India will be fully justified in observing utmost vigil on its frontier with Bangladesh. But the general emotion in Dhaka is one of dismay over the alleged "intrusion" by the BSF personnel — a charge that has been quickly dismissed by the Indian security establishment as absolutely untrue. On the whole, the Bangladesh Government, headed by Sheikh Hasina, seems to have so far adopted a somewhat cautious line in making sense of the flare-up and its fall-out. The Bangladesh Foreign Ministry has been reported to have called the Indian envoy in Dhaka to discuss ways to defuse the rising tensions in bilateral ties. The general impression conveyed by Dhaka thus far is one of a desire to de-escalate a growing crisis on the border with India. Yet, it is too early to predict how Bangladesh will manage the highly emotive issue, given especially the constant refrain of the opposition forces in that country about Ms. Hasina's presumptive pro-India bias.

For the Vajpayee administration, on the other hand, the Borai-  
bari clashes could not have come at a more awkward time. For long, it has maintained that India's relationships with almost all its neighbours, except of course Pakis-

tan, have remained on a largely friendly course. The dormant South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is expected to try and renew in a few weeks' time a process of active interactions among its member-states. As the predominant player in South Asia or at least the first among the SAARC's equal members, India can ill-afford a border fracas with Bangladesh. Significant, therefore, is the latest assertion by the External Affairs and Defence Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, that New Delhi is already fine-tuning its initiative for the restoration of *status quo ante* on the India-Bangladesh border. A deep concern over the dramatic downturn in ties with Dhaka is only mitigated by his apparent confidence in a triumph of the bilateral "friendly" spirit. However, what has occurred at this time is no friendly fire, a diplomatic euphemism for combat action caused by a mistake. The event must be fully investigated and addressed. ✓

New Delhi's relationship with Dhaka, unique in many ways with some signs of maturity too, is still a matter of powerful emotions that are directly traceable to the circumstances in which India had facilitated Bangladesh's liberation from Pakistan. The leaders of India and Bangladesh have had to deal with problems about the status of border enclaves as also the freedom of movement of people across what some tend to regard as a potential frontier of friendship. The sharing of river waters, too, has taxed the diplomatic ingenuity of both countries. And, there has also been an experiment in what was seen as bus diplomacy with a difference, regarding a Calcutta-Dhaka service. Of prime relevance to the current context, though, is the need to revive the spirit of border coordination talks and of the accord, reached last December, on the formation of working groups to resolve "all boundary related matters". ✓

THE HINDU

# 'Pak. hand' in border clash

By Atul Aneja

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 19.** Taken aback by the excessive use of force by the Bangladesh paramilitary forces, the security establishment here today engaged in a major brainstorming exercise to ascertain the motives behind the border clash with India.

The Government is working on two key "hypothesis", but is likely to view the incident in clearer light after analysing the information that is likely to filter in during the next couple of days. It is now clear that 15 Border Security Force (BSF) personnel lost their lives while Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) lost four. In the mortar firing by the BDR, four Indian civilians were also killed.

An influential section of the Bangladesh press has so far attributed the clash to the BSF's unilateral decision to construct a road towards Pyrdiwah on Meghalaya's border with Bangladesh in violation of the 1975 Indo-Bangladesh agreement.

Highly-placed Government sources said the clash was out of sync with the confidence-building measures which the two sides had undertaken recently. In fact, prevention of border firing was specifically taken up during the

three-day meeting between the Director-General, Bangladesh Rifles, Major General A.I.M Fazlur Rahman, which concluded on April 1. Expressing concern over the frequent exchange of firing along a segment of the Indo-Bangladesh border in Tripura, the two sides had agreed to exercise "maximum restraint."

They had also specifically taken up the issue of boundary demarcation in the Muhuri Char sector, another trouble spot. The Director-General, BSF, Mr. Gurbachan Jagat, had, at the meeting, responded positively to the reiteration by the Bangladesh side to fix a interim boundary in the zone, pending completion of border demarcation.

The meeting had been preceded by detailed talks in the Ministries of Home and External affairs and had imparted a momentum to the relationship.

According to one assessment, the Awami League Government, in order to shake off its excessive pro-India image, may have given its nod to the firing in order to draw benefits during the forthcoming polls.

The Government was also examining a possible link-up between the firing and recent developments in Nepal. Sources

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said the clash may have been an expression of "retaliation" by sections of the Pakistani establishment. Islamabad held India responsible for the recent souring of its relations with Nepal by masterminding events which led to the detention of its first secretary, Mr. Mohammad Arshad Cheema, with 16 Kgs of RDX which was retrieved from his rented accommodation.

Consequently, Pakistan could have activated its "sympathisers" within the Bangladesh security forces at the local level, resulting in the clash. Despite Bangladesh's liberation, the Pakistanis had never lost their influence in the country. The Jamat-e-Islami had been traditionally close to them and the Islamic Okiya Jote (IOJ) has emerged as an alliance of religious extremists in Bangladesh. The presence of the Jehadi Harkat-ul-Jehad-al-Islami has also become perceptible.

Sources here said though the Sheikh Hasina Government had a firm hold on the Bangladesh army, including the key nine division in Dhaka and 11 division located at Bojra, the emergence of middle-ranking officers from religious schools, had become cause for concern.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

20 APR 2001

# The Bangla tangle

Key to handling the troubled eastern front: restraint

INDIA and Bangladesh have a good relationship and no real quarrel on the Meghalaya sector of the border between the two countries. That a situation has developed on the border and quickly taken a nasty turn in the last few days, despite these positive factors, is very depressing. It is a concocted dispute which nevertheless will require great skill and statesmanship to resolve peacefully after the forcible seizure of land, albeit a small parcel, and the deaths of a number of Indian BSF jawans. Upcoming elections in both countries are further complicating factors. Foreign minister Jaswant Singh's tone in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday — a mixture of confidence and firmness — was precisely right. But it is obvious he is walking a tightrope. The Vajpayee government must seek an early diplomatic end to the dispute or find jingoistic sentiment is aroused in India as it is already aroused in Bangladesh. Once that happens, diplomacy will have to take a back seat to the domestic political agenda.

Jingoism is very much in the air in Bangladesh and, as the first statement from a political leader shows, the government there is not immune to it. From Dhaka, the minister of state for foreign affairs speaks emotively of defending every inch of sacred Bangladeshi territory when what he is actually referring to is a small village ceded to India in a 1960 agreement and not contested since then. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the case, it will not take long for chest-thumping patriots in this country to pick up the strain. That is why it is dangerous to leave the public ignorant

of the facts and delay an official clarification about the historical background, the alleged seizure of Pyrdiwah village over the weekend and the firing along other stretches of the border. It is essential for the public to keep a sense of perspective and that is not going to be possible if the first with the "facts" are demagogues and trouble-makers. The government needs also to find out whether its agencies were caught off guard again. Less than a year ago, E.K. Mawlong, Meghalaya chief minister was asking for the BSF to set up more posts and to be more vigilant about intrusions.

Restraint is the key to a solution. Anything else would prolong a wholly unnecessary quarrel. Although it may be hard for the Vajpayee government to observe it in the face of provocation from the other side or criticism from political opponents at home, there is no other option. The Pyrdiwah seizure could be an election gambit or opportunistic moves at the local level by border commanders deciding to take matters into their own hands or by business interests. India-bashing is something of a permanent feature at election time. So diplomacy is not likely to make headway until the polls are over. At best, by adopting a low key approach, India can hope to deny Bangladeshi politicians the chance to blow up border problems out of all proportion. The next prime minister should be left plenty of openings for talks and a settlement. India and Bangladesh have sorted out much trickier problems in the past — such as the sharing of river waters. Once past the elections, good sense will surely return quickly on the border.

INDIAN EXPRESS

20 APR 2001

# BDR vacates Indian village

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE, PTJ & UNI

SHILLONG, April 19. — The four-day old siege of Pyrdiwah village, Meghalaya, and the Border Security Force post there by the Bangladesh Rifles ended this afternoon, though firing and shelling between the BDR and BSF in Assam's Mancachar sector continued till about 5 p.m.

The BSF IG, Mr VS Gaur, who is in charge of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya and the Nagaland frontier, told **The Statesman** here this evening that the BDR personnel vacated Pyrdiwah after the BSF sent in at least two companies and several armoured vehicles this morning. (A late night report said that after a three-hour lull, the BDR had resumed mortar firing on Indian posts, wounding a villager at Thakurianbari in Assam's Dhubri district. (BSF and BDR personnel were engaged in "low-scale" exchange of fire near

the village till late tonight, the deputy commissioner, Ms Gayatri Barooah, said.)

All the villagers, about 700, left Pyrdiwah on Sunday midnight and took shelter in the jungles after the BDR occupied the village.

Mr Gaur said the decision to send in reinforcements was taken after intelligence reports said the BDR too brought reinforcements, including about 30 armoured vehicles which were

■ **Editorial: Border flare-up, page 6**

On page 8:

- **'Bangla politics behind BDR firing'**
- **Restrained response to clashes**

parked at Tamabil, across the Dawki border.

There seems to be some confusion over the number of BSF men killed.

Mr Gaur said the BDR had not returned the bodies of five BSF jawans killed yesterday, though it had offered to do so earlier today. But in Delhi, the

Union home secretary, Mr Kamal Pande, said Bangladesh would hand over the bodies of 11 BSF men tomorrow. Efforts are on to trace the five jawans said to be missing.

Mr Gaur said: "The BSF official waited at Mahendragunj for the bodies to be delivered but that was not done till 5.30 p.m. Instead, a letter was sent to the BSF DIG by the BDR. Its contents are not known because he has not yet contacted me."

Denying reports from Bangladesh that 16 BSF jawans were killed by the BDR after they intruded into Bangladesh, Mr Gaur said the BSF jawans were dragged into Bangladesh by a mob of about 1,000 Bangladeshi villagers and were handed over to the BDR.

He said a few Bangladeshi villagers had hailed a BSF patrol party. As the team responded to the call, about 1,000 people appeared on the scene and dragged away the BSF men.

When asked about yesterday's report that 16 BSF men were alerted.

He said: "We've not received any concrete message to confirm the toll. And no one has complained about the exact number of the BSF personnel missing."

Mr Pande said the BDR chief, Maj-Gen Fazlur Rahman, has "apologised" for the action of his troops.

He had talked twice over phone with the BSF chief, Mr Gurbachan Jagat.

**North Bengal alert:** Areas along the Bangladesh border in North Bengal have been out on "high alert", SNS adds from Siliguri. Apart from the BSF, police too have been asked to step up vigil with the help of the civilians.

Last year, the BSF and BDR had clashed at Dinbhata, Cooch Behar. The firing continued for two days with both sides calling in reinforcements. Two BSF jawans were killed.

The Jalpaiguri SP, Mr Ranveer Kumar, said Rajganj police station, adjacent to the Bangladesh border, has been alerted.

# The Statesman

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20 APRIL 2001

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## BORDER FLARE-UP

Need to resolve vexatious issues early

WEDNESDAY'S killing of 16 BSF personnel by the Bangladesh security forces at Boraibari in Meghalaya's border with Bangladesh is the most serious incident to have taken place on the border and will cast a shadow on an otherwise cordial Indo-Bangladesh relations. But more shocking was the ferocity with which the attack was carried out to capture the disputed Pyrdivah village which Bangladesh claims as its own. Going by the border pillars Pyrdivah falls under Bangladesh although it has been in India's possession since partition. During erstwhile East Pakistan nothing was done to change its status. The problem of adverse possession is not peculiar to Pyrdivah alone. The existence of enclaves, known as chits — 112 Indian chits in Bangladesh and 32 of Bangladesh in India — anachronisms left over should have been cleared when India helped create Bangladesh. It was an offshoot of the imaginary line that Sir Cyril Radcliffe drew at partition. The problem has been allowed to fester slowly but inevitably. But Wednesday's incident shows that the problem has the potential to suddenly blow out of proportion. In the West Bengal sector alone there are in all 65 enclaves (35 Indian in Bangladesh territory and 31 in reverse) and countless adverse possessions whose residents suffer from a serious identity crisis. Neither country acknowledges all residents to be nationals nor does it bestow upon them voting and other rights. Unfortunately the plight of these stateless people has failed to engage the attention of two countries whose leaders are more interested in addressing emotive issues from which they can secure political and electoral mileage.

What beats understanding is that when many intractable problems like the sharing of the Ganga waters, right of passage through the Tin Bigha corridor and restoration of peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts have been resolved through negotiated settlements, the Bangladesh security forces launched an unprecedented attack on the Indian outpost. The military operation and the reaction of Bangladesh Rifles chief suggest that the two neighbouring countries have gone to war over Pyrdivah. It is an established fact that the fundamentalists have infiltrated the rank and file of the Bangladeshi armed forces. The BSF showed restraint but it is also not clear whether the attack had the clearance of top Bangladesh leadership. Sheikh Hasina knows that such a border flare-up would do irreparable damage to her image in India where she is looked upon as a close friend and ally. In an election year she will not risk doing anything which would project her as a rabid India baiter like Begum Khaleda Zia. It will be tragic if she uses the Pyrdivah issue to secure electoral and political mileage. To clear up doubts she must order her troops to cease fire and initiate moves for holding bilateral talks. Spilling blood is counter-productive.

THE STATESMAN

20 APR 2001

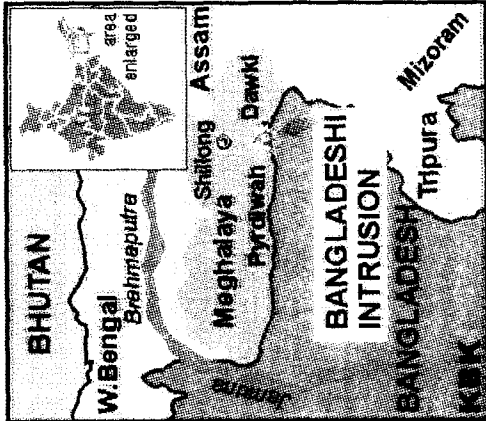
# Bangladesh Rifles kills 16 BSF men in Meghalaya sector, stand-off continues

The Times of India News Service  
**NEW DELHI:** Home secretary Kamal Pandey confirmed on Wednesday that 16 men from the Border Security Force (BSF) were killed by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) at Borabari in the Meghalaya sector of the international border with India. Mr Pandey said firing and shelling by Bangladesh forces in the area continued.

BSF chief Gurbachan Jagat Singh reports the situation in the area "is serious and the stand-off continued". Faroque Mohammed was called in on Wednesday and told about India's serious concern at the "unwarranted action" of the Bangladesh Rifles in the Meghalaya sector of the border between the two countries. He was told to advise the local

Bangladesh authorities to avoid the use of force in the interests of the close and friendly relations between India and Bangladesh. India's response to the incident has been carefully calibrated, keeping in mind its excellent relations with Sheikh Hasina's government in Dhaka. In fact, the spokesman of the external affairs ministry was careful not to use the word 'summoned' while referring to the Bangladesh high commissioner being called to South Block.

The Union government is under pressure from the public in Meghalaya to call in the Indian army and throw out the Bangladesh Rifles now occupying what Khasi villagers claim is their traditional land. External affairs ministry spokesman R.S. Jassal said, "India has learnt with regret of the unprovoked action of the



Bangladesh Rifles at Pyrduwah on the Indo-Bangla border in the Meghalaya sector, leading to the exchange of fire, vacuation of villages and escalation of tension in the region." Mr Jassal said the meetings between the sector commanders of the BSF and the Bangladesh Rifles held on Monday and again on Wednesday were both inconclusive.

The high commissioner was told of the urgent need to restore the "status quo ante", meaning the situation as it was before the incident. India urged "utmost restraint to defuse the tension". India believed in working together with Bangladesh to restore peace in the area. Pyrduwah village is one of the several disputed villages along the 4,000 km border between India and Bangladesh. Most of the international border has been

demarcated, with only about six to seven km not yet delineated in the Meghalaya sector. Last December, when the foreign secretaries of India and Bangladesh met, they decided to constitute a joint working group (JWG) to delineate the few remaining kilometres of the international border. The JWG was also to look into the exchange of disputed villages between the two sides. Bangladesh officials have long been emphasising the importance of quickly deciding on the status of villages which both sides claim often leads to unnecessary tension and loss of lives.

Meanwhile, official sources said Union home minister L.K. Advani was in constant touch with defence minister Jaswant Singh and Meghalaya chief minister E.K. Mawlong. Mr Pandey also held an inter-ministerial meeting on the matter.



India expresses 'serious concern' ■ Strategy to free occupied village discussed

# Bangla troops kill 16 BSF men

5-1 19/1 A

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 18. — At least 16 BSF personnel were today killed by the Bangladeshi Rifles and the Bangladesh army in the border district of Boraibari, Meghalaya.

"As per information, about 16 BSF personnel were killed when Bangladeshi troops opened fire and resorted to shelling in Boraibari," the Union home secretary, Mr Kamal Pande, said. The Centre has directed deployment of adequate forces in the troubled areas.

The BSF in West Bengal has been asked to step up vigil along the Bangladesh border. The Centre has expressed "serious concern" over the incident and lodged a protest with

Bangladesh over the "unwarranted and unprovoked" action of its troops.

The ministry of external affairs, however, is confident that the incident would not affect bilateral ties.

On page 8:

- Refugees in their own land
- BDR remains adamant

lateral ties. "We have a long border with Bangladesh and a reliable mechanism is in place to deal with such incidents," a ministry official said yesterday.

About 3,000 BDR personnel entered Pyrdiwah village in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hill district on 16 April. They surrounded the BSF outposts in the village and drove away the villa-

gers. A senior Union home ministry official said the BSF, which has since been re-inforced, had retaliated by shelling and firing. (The BDR chief, Maj-Gen Fazlur Rehman, said in Dhaka: "One of our soldiers and 16 Indian soldiers were killed, while two of their injured have surrendered," PTI says quoting AFP.)

(The BSF DG, Mr Gurbachan Jagat, today denied that his men had intruded into Bangladesh, UNI adds. "The territory belongs to us." Reports from Dhaka quoted the BDR chief as saying that the BSF had intruded into Bangladesh.)

Mr Pande convened a high-level meeting this evening to chalk out a strategy to free the village of Bangladeshi forces. Though details of the discuss-



ions have not been disclosed, a senior official present at the meeting said. "The government is likely to discuss the issue with the Bangladeshi govern-

■ See BSF: page 8

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19 APR 2001

508 BSE: 14/4  
(Continued from page 1)

troops is not an unusual affair. But this particular incident seemed to have taken such a turn that it might become a serious irritant to the otherwise "friendly" relationship between the two countries.

An experts on India-Bangladesh ties said: "The unfortunate incident is beyond what was generally concerned normal and it might take sometime to revive the friendly path."

A series of meetings were held in North and South Blocks today. At one such meeting in South Block, the Bangladesh high commissioner, Mr Mustafa Farque Mohammed, was apprised of the Centre's concern over the "unwarranted action" of the BDR.

Mr Farque Mohammed was asked to advise Bangladeshi authorities to avoid the "use of force along the border in the interest of close and friendly relations" between the two countries. During his meeting with the MEA joint secretary (North), Mr BR Shankar, the envoy was asked to "ensure immediate vacation of the village (Pyrdiwah).

An MEA spokesman said Mr Farque Mohammed had been told of the need for "restoration of the status quo and exercise of utmost restraint to defuse the tension." The Centre's approach has been to work together with Bangladesh in defusing the tension in the spirit of mutual cooperation.

A sector-level commanders meeting was held today to end the stalemate. But like Monday's meeting, this too failed.

The two countries have set up a joint working group to deal with demarcation of border and exchange of enclaves and territories in "adverse positions". "The work is being done in a systematic and peaceful manner. It's our hope that the two pending matters would also be resolved peacefully," the spokesman said. He said India wants to improve its relations with Bangladesh.

19 APR 2001

# BDR opens new front in Assam

Rahul Karmakar & Anirban Roy  
Guwahati & Shillong, April 18

BANGLADESH RIFLES men, backed by the Bangladesh army, today opened a fresh battlefield in Mankachar area of Assam's Dhubri district, raining mortars on the Indian side of the border. Nine civilians were injured in the shelling and subsequent shootout with the Border Security Force that lasted over 11 hours.

Dhubri Deputy Commissioner Gayatri Baruah told *Hindustan Times* that the BDR attack on a BSF camp at Karipara on the south bank of the Brahmaputra river began around 4 am and continued till about 1 pm. "Though the exchange of fire has stopped for now, the situation there is tense," she said.

This is the second assault by the BDR on BSF outposts in less than a week. BDR personnel attacked a BSF camp at Pyrdiwah in the East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya in the wee hours of Monday. A BDR officer reportedly asked the BSF to prove that Pyrdiwah belongs to India during a meeting with the ADIG (Operations) this evening.

More than 2,000 people abandoned their villages after today's attack and took shelter near Ampati in Garo Hills of Meghalaya. Inspector-General of BSF V K Gaur said the BDR attack in civilian areas was completely unprovoked. He could give no casualty figures, but reports from Dhaka quoted BDR Director-General Major-General Fazlur Rahman as having said that 16 BSF men have been killed. Police officers in Mankachar could not say whether any BSF jawan was injured, but said a couple of BDR men may have ended up on the casualty list.



A Bangladesh Rifles man guards two Border Security Force jawans in an Air Force helicopter on the way to Dhaka from Roamri village. The jawans were captured in Bangladesh's northern border district of Kurigram.

"The BDR men fired throughout the day," Inspector-General Gaur said. He said additional forces were being flown to help BSF jawans at Dhubri. A CRPF contingent has also been posted in Mankachar as a second line of defence.

ADIG (Operations) V S Ahalawat and the Sylhet Sector Commander of BDR, Colonel Ashiq, met at the office of the Customs Office at Tamabil in the evening, but no solution emerged. "We have not decided anything as yet," V S Ahalawat said at Dawki.

He has asked his Bangladesh counterpart to vacate the area since it has been in India's possession since Independence. Colonel Ashiq has asked the BSF to prove that Pyrdiwah village belongs to India. The BSF has accepted the challenge, and has said it will present all relevant land documents tomorrow.

BDR men have reportedly refused to leave Pyrdiwah, saying it belonged to Bangladesh. Meghalaya's Home minister Thrang Hok Rangle said today. "We have lost a village because of

Intelligence failure."

Police officers in Mankachar suspect today's BDR shelling was a pre-planned move since the Bangladesh Army was also involved.

They said that five people were seriously injured in the border village of Sahpur, which faced a volley of mortars. Four more were hit by BDR bullets. The Dhubri sector is perceived to be highly sensitive with a constant influx of Bangladeshis who smuggle out essentials from India via the river route.

## Govt admits 16 BSF casualties

HT Correspondents  
New Delhi, April 18

HOME SECRETARY Kamal Pande admitted that 16 Border Security Force personnel were killed today in continuing border clashes between the BSF and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). One BDR personnel was also reportedly killed.

Government sources claimed that the Bangladesh Army was involved in the skirmishes.

The clashes have placed new strains on the neighbourly ties assiduously cultivated by the two countries since the Sheikh Hasina government came to power in 1996. The Bangladeshi High Commissioner in India, Mustafa Farooqui Mohammed, was called to South Block today and informed of India's "serious concern at the unwarranted action of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR)".

Dhubri is a very sensitive area: there is almost a constant inflow of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants into India through this route. With today's firing the situation has become very tense.

India has urged the Bangladesh Government to advise local authorities on the border to avoid the use of force on the international border. "The need for the restoration of status quo ante and the exercise of utmost restraint to defuse tension was emphasised," the External Affairs Ministry spokesman said.

Related reports on Page 9

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

APR 18 2001

# Bangladeshi troops overrun Indian village

The Times of India News Service

**GUWAHATI:** About a thousand Bangladeshi troops overran Pyrdiwah village in Meghalaya on Sunday evening and settled civilians from that country in houses abandoned by the fleeing villagers, it is reported.

The situation in the village, where a heavy exchange of fire took place between the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on Sunday evening, is still tense. Senior BSF officials, including inspector-general D.K. Gaur, were closeted in a meeting with BDR officials at the border at the time of filing this report.

John F. Kharshiing, spokesman for traditional institutions in Meghalaya, said it was a "well-planned operation" by the Bangladeshi forces. He quoted local villagers as saying that more than a thousand BDR and Bangladesh army personnel had overrun the village. They had also brought along civilians, whom they had settled in the houses abandoned by the fleeing

locals. Reports suggested that Bangladeshi troops surrounded the BSF picket headed by a company commander, and did not allow either him or his men to move out. BSF sources said none of their men had been kidnapped or taken hostage.



Eyewitnesses who returned from the spot on Tuesday morning said they had seen a number of bullet-proof BSF vehicles rushing to the village. Mr Kharshiing said, "The BDR has dug trenches all over the village. We have also got to

hear that the BSF has been instructed to shoot in case there is any further attempt at intrusion." He regretted that not all villagers could flee. "Some old people, along with a few disabled persons and some women, could not be evacuated. While those who fled took shelter in neighbouring villages, nobody really knows what is happening to those left behind," he said.

According to him, even those who had escaped were fending for themselves and some have not been able to get any proper food ever since they fled. "No help has been forthcoming from the Meghalaya government for the displaced people. It was only today that Meghalaya home minister T.H. Rangad went to the spot," he said. "It has been a total intelligence failure on our part. The BSF personnel were caught unawares. Even before the intrusion, local villagers and the headman, Pijo Nongrum, who understand the Bengali dialect spoken by the Bangladeshis, could sense that something like this was in the offing."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 APR 2001

# Bangla troops seize Meghalaya village

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SHILLONG, April 17. — Bangladesh Rifles backed by the country's regular army, which had occupied the border village of Pyrdiwah in Meghalaya after midnight on Sunday, held their positions despite a flag meeting with the BSF today.

The BDR, which had refused to come for talks on Monday, insisted today that they would stay where they are unless asked otherwise by authorities in Dha-ka, official sources here said.

Pyrdiwah is a small village of about 325 acres with an estimated population of 700.

The villagers have cleared out of their homes and taken shelter on a hillock af-ter hours of exchange of fire between the BSF and BDR on Sunday.

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According to the BSF IG, Mr V K Gaur, Pyrdiwah has been in India's possession since partition.

The East Pakistan Rifles Dy Director General and the commander of the Indi-an Army's 181 Brigade recorded this fact on 6 January 1960 and agreed that the status quo should be maintained.

The Bangladesh Rifles has been claim-ing this parcel of land saying that India occupied it after the 1971 war and de-manding that India vacate it.

But the Indian side has said that the status quo ought to be maintained while awaiting the Indian and Bangladeshi Parliaments to ratify the demarcation done after 1971.

"This is the first time, that the BDR has taken any physical action," Mr Gaur said.

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The BSF official said that another flag meeting has been convened tomorrow. "If they don't withdraw, then we shall decide on our next course of action," he said.

Mr Gaur said the BSF has increased its presence in the area since yesterday fol-lowing the intrusion by the Bangladesh Rifles.

"We are holding on to our BOP (border outpost) although the Bangladesh Rifles personnel have surrounded it from three sides," he said.

Meanwhile, the state administration has rushed relief to the displaced villagers.

The Meghalaya home minister and se-nior police, paramilitary and civil offi-cials visited the area today to take stock of the situation.

THE STATESMAN

18 APR 2001

# 'Kargil replay' on eastern frontier

**FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT**

Shillong, April 16: Bangladesh Rifles forcibly took possession of Pyrdivah village, 5 km from Dawki near the Indo-Bangladesh border, last night.

According to reports, the village which has a population of around 700 witnessed an armed intrusion of the BDR and the Bangladesh army at 11.30 pm.

This was preceded by a heavy exchange of fire between the BSF and the BDR for over 18 hours. BSF staff officer C.R. Chauhan said 35 rounds were

fired by the BDR and about 15 rounds by the BSF. He claimed that the situation was back to normal.

Chauhan said a flag meeting between top BSF and BDR officials was held today but it did not yield any result.

However, eyewitnesses claimed otherwise. Spokesperson for traditional institutions John Kharshiing, who was visiting the area, termed the situation "Kargil-like". He was on his way to the Pynursla market. He said all the villagers had fled their homes.

People are living in "inhuman conditions" on the high cliffs, Kharshiing said. He said local *sordars* took them to a place close to the village to show the BDR jawans patrolling the area.

He said that two BSF men have been taken captive by the BDR. He was also told that the BSF camp adjacent to the boundary pillar was encircled by the BDR. At the time of the incident about two dozen BSF jawans were in the camp. But no senior officer was present.

A BSF Gypsy was spotted being driven into Bangladesh.

Till late this evening, there was no report of its whereabouts, Kharshiing said. He termed the episode as a well-planned "intrusion" by the BDR.

Senior BSF officers were not in the station when the incident occurred. When the BSF office was contacted, no one except staff officer Chauhan was available for comment.

Additional district magistrate H. Shangpliang visited Lyngkhat today. A Meghalaya police battalion was sent to Pyrdivah to tackle the situation, sources added.

THE TELEGRAPH

17 APR 1994

# Road link to boost Nepal-India ties

**Keshav Pradhan**  
Kathmandu, February 23

BANGLADESH HAS upgraded a highway that connects Nepal with West Bengal as an alternative route to India's NH 34 that links Kolkata with North Bengal.

Since May 1998, Mongla—a newly developed southern Bangladesh port—has been Nepal's second access route to sea after Kolkata after India allowed Kathmandu to use the 44-km Fulbari-Kakarbhitta stretch that passes through Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts to transport goods to and from Bangladesh. Nepal and Bangladesh do not share a border.

A senior official from the Bangladeshi embassy here said:

"Bangladesh is planning seek India's help to promote the Banglabandh-Mongla road as an alternative to NH 34 for goods traffic from Bengal and North-East during our commerce minister Abdul Zamil's visit to India next month."

Banglabandh, a Bangladeshi border village near Fulbari in Jalpaiguri district, is 595 km from Mongla. Highlighting the importance of the Banglabandh-Mongla route, the diplomat said, "The route can be useful in times of crises like floods when traffic between South Bengal and North Bengal gets disrupted."

Besides North Bengal and the North-East, Bangladesh wants to promote the road in Bhutan also, which it says, can use Mongla for

overseas trade. For quite some time, traders in North Bengal have been seeking the right to trade with Bangladesh through Fulbari that is exclusively opened for Nepal.

The official added, "As South Asia's biggest economic power, India can alone help us boost our trade with neighbours." Bangladesh has a trade deficit of about \$1000 billion with India. To expand trade with Nepal, Bangladesh may also seek India's permission to ply vehicles right up to Kakarbhitta, a Nepalese village on the Nepal-Darjeeling district border. At the moment, only Nepalese vehicles are allowed to run through the strategic Kakarbhitta-Fulbari road.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 FEB 2001

Anti-tobacco law:  
Employment of  
millions at stake

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, February 17

MAJOR CENTRAL trade unions have warned the government that a hasty "anti-bidi, anti-tobacco" legislation could put to risk employment of millions of people in the bidi and tobacco sectors.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, AITUC, BMS, CITU, HMS and TUCC leaders said today that the health ministry should be asked to have talks with representatives of bidi and tobacco workers before going ahead with the legislation.

The letter stated that the health ministry had preferred to toe the WHO line, which was concerned with the health aspects only. The WHO approach ignored the other important socio-economic issues. The legislation could spell doom for six million farmers and 20 million workers.

## India, Bangla visa system to be relaxed

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, February 17

INDIA AND Bangladesh have agreed in principle to relax the existing visa system in order to make travel between the two countries easier. The liberalisation of existing visa-regime is being considered as a significant step towards strengthening of Indo-Bangladesh ties.

The two nations arrived at a broader understanding in this context during the three-day meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG), which concluded here today.

To begin with, the two sides concurred to have a visa-free regime for diplomatic passport holders and also permit unrestricted entry valid up to one year for businessmen, stu-

dents and research scholars.

Visas on an year-to-year basis would also be issued now to the work permit holders, a home ministry spokesman said.

The free-travel related recommendations made by the JWG and steps suggested by it to facilitate travel between the two countries for sight-seeing, medical treatment, studies, business and trade, would come into effect once these were ratified by the respective governments.

While G K Pillai, joint secretary in the home ministry, led the India team, the visiting team was headed by his Bangladeshi counterpart Mohd Janibul Huq.

The JWG has also recommended doing away with the prevailing system of sponsorship requirements for tourist visas.

THE HINDU

18 FEB 2001



## ~~Delhi, Dhaka~~ ~~discuss terrorism~~

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 17.** Home Ministry officials from India and Bangladesh have concluded a meeting on ways to counter terrorism.

During the talks, the Indian side expressed concern over the activities of terrorists operating from Bangladesh and stressed that Dhaka should take "firm and demonstrable action" to counter militancy.

The Bangladesh side, on its part, said it had forbidden use of its soil by "undesirable elements" engaged in activity which were prejudicial to the interests of any country, including India.

Both sides expressed satisfaction over reduction in firing along the border and agreed that they should continue to exercise "maximum restraint." The visiting delegation expressed grave concern over smuggling of huge quantities of Phensidyl from India.

The Indian delegation was led by Mr. G.K. Pillai, Joint Secretary (North-East), while the Bangladeshi side was headed by Mr. Janibul Huq, Joint Secretary (Political) in the Ministry of Home Affairs.

THE HINDU

19 FEB 2001

# India, Bangladesh plan joint study on arsenic

Tapan Das  
Kolkata, February 16

THE CENTRE will soon talk to Bangladesh about undertaking a joint study on water contamination by arsenic, salt and iron.

This decision was taken after a meeting between Union Water Resources Minister Arjun Sethi, Union Health Minister C P Thakur, Bangla Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak and the West Bengal Minister of Water Resources Investigation Nandagopal Bhattacharya. At the meeting, Sethi and Thakur said experts had found out a joint scientific field research and exchange of data between the two countries is imperative because almost the whole of West Bengal and about 36 districts in Bangladesh were affected by arsenic contamination.

"Groundwater contamination in West Bengal is at a critical level. The fact that a high level of arsenic and iron has been found in water in many places of the Kolkata municipal area is also cause of concern," Bhattacharya warned.

But, arguing in the same breath that an acute fund crunch and lack of effective technological knowhow and expertise have been the bane for the State's woefully inadequate fight against arsenic so far, Bhattacharya called for implementation of joint Indo-Bangla artificial water recharge schemes. And, since surface water and groundwater reserves are interrelated, this would help improve the quality of groundwater vastly, facilitating dilution and removal of hazardous contents by scientific treatments, he said. While tackling the problem at a macro level, Bhattacharya claimed that the State could, with adequate help from the Central Government, contribute significantly by setting up water testing laboratories in all the 18 districts of the State. These units, equipped with mobile vans, can be radio-linked for faster transmission and exchange of relevant data. Besides, the Central Groundwater Board's laboratory in Calcutta can be upgraded with the help of the latest overseas technology, he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 FEB 2001

# Karmapa to arrive in Delhi today

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 20. — The 17th Karmapa, Urgyen Thinley Dorjee, is arriving here tomorrow from Dharamshala, en route his pilgrimage to the Buddhist circuit. His visit comes following grant of refugee status to him by India.

Dorjee, who had fled from a Tibetan monastery last year and sought refuge in Dharamshala, can now visit any monastery in the country.

Beijing, however, had recently expressed concern over grant of refugee status to the Karmapa. Its serious concern was focussed on whether granting of refugee status to Karmapa meant change in the bilateral relationship between the two nations.

Early this week, when Beijing had raised the issue with New Delhi, they were told that granting refugee status to the Karmapa did not mean a shift in India's policy on Tibet. China also warned that the Karmapa should not get into any kind of anti-China activities.

Meanwhile, preparations are on to give a warm welcome to the Karmapa here. He will be received at the Delhi-Haryana border by members of the National Commission of

S/S M/V  
Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and various other organisations. Besides, the Sikkim chief minister, Mr PK Chamling, several dignitaries are expected to present at the reception ceremony.

After spending the night here, he will leave for Varanasi, where he is likely to spend five days and then leave for Bodh Gaya, Nalanda and Rajgir, according to Mr T Topgay, representative of the Joint Action Committee of Sikkim.

The Karmapa is expected to spend about another five days in Delhi after returning around 13 March and is scheduled to grace several public functions.

The visit of Urgyen Thinley Dorjee, officially recognised as the Karmapa by Beijing, has once again raised the controversy over who holds the 17th Karmapa's position.

The International Karma Kagyu Forum, the rival group in the Karma Kagyu lineage in a statement reiterated its claim that the genuine 17th Karmapa is none other than Trinlay Thaye Dorje, who fled to India in 1994.

According to the forum, Karmapa Thinley Thaye Dorje resides in India and had already visited the holy site of Bodh Gaya in 1996.



Urgyen Thinley Dorjee

THE STATESMAN

21 FEB 2001

# Buddha for 'Bengali BSF'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COOCH BEHAR, Feb. 4. — Efforts are on to raise a force made up of Bengali-speaking people to guard the state's India-Nepal border, the chief minister said here today.

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya explained that this could bridge the communication gap that often leads to clashes between the BSF and residents of border areas.

He accused the BSF of "atrocities" on border villagers, but said his government would not ask the Centre to withdraw the BSF from the India-Bangladesh border.

He was speaking at the inauguration of the Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya, the



**STORM AT SUNSET: Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya addresses a rally in Siliguri on Sunday. — Salil Bera**

second agricultural university Siliguri, the chief minister said in the state and the 35th in the KPP's demand for a state didn't have the people's support.

THE STATESMAN

5 FEB 2011

# Hasina wants to repay debt to India by visiting Gujarat

Udayan Nambodiri  
New Delhi, February 1

BANGLADESH HAS proposed to fly in 200 doctors attached to its "Gana Shastha" movement to the earthquake affected areas of Gujarat. Also, it is the first country whose Prime Minister has offered to fly down to express its people's sympathy for earthquake victims.

"Gana Shastha", or Public Health Service, was formed during Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971 as a barefoot medic arm of the Mukti Bahini. Subsequently, it became an important government supported organisation based at Sahar near Dhaka specialising in disaster relief at times of natural calamities using minimum inputs. It has acquired considerable experience in handling disaster situations during the cyclones which often hit Bangladesh.

When Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called up Mr Vajpayee on Tuesday night, she offered the services of "Gana Shastha" in Gujarat. Sources said today that



aircraft and transport helicopters of the Bangladesh Air Force would be reaching Ahmedabad as soon as the necessary clearances are available from Delhi.

Sheikh Hasina's visit would occur close on the heels of the "Gana Shastha" team's arrival in Gujarat.

However, it is not yet clear whether the Bangladesh Prime Minister would combine her sympathy visit with the official one which was any way planned for this year. An MEA spokesman said: "There is already an invitation to her to visit India."

Beyond this, there was no confirmation from the South Block, which, incidentally, adopted a strict code of media silence beginning today.

Such a visit by a neighbouring country prime minister to a natural calamity site in India would be unprecedented. In the late 80s, then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi along with then Sri Lankan president Jayawardene had visited the cyclone-hit areas of Bangladesh.

However, soon after the visit, there then military dictator General Hussien Mohammed Ershad publicly humiliated IAF pilots in cyclone-hit Chittagong.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 FEB 2001

# Work on border fencing to begin in March

HT Correspondent  
Agartala, February 13

19/2 9<sup>nd</sup> B. G. H. S.

WORK ON a barbed-wire fence along the Tripura-Bangladesh border would begin from the middle of March. The decision was made on Tuesday at a meeting presided by Chief Minister Manik Sarkar.

The State PWD Minister Badal Choudhury, chief secretary, director-general of police, PWD secretary, inspector-general of BSF, commissioner of borders and an officer of the Union Home Ministry were present at the meeting.

State PWD secretary S Nag said BRO, the executing authority of the fencing project, had told him that it would begin the construction work in mid March. He said work would begin on a 40 km stretch. Though no time frame had been set for execution of the project, it was expected to be complete by five years, he said.

The meeting resolved to erect the fence 150 yards from the border in keeping with a bilateral treaty between India and Bangladesh. Thousands of those who would be left on the other side of the fence would be relocated. Modalities for the rehabilitation process, however, would be decided later.

Nag said the work would be done along the border areas of the North, West and Dhalai districts.

This would be part of the proposed first phase accounting for 192 km of the border. He said State officials had stressed at the meeting that the entire 856 km border should have barbed wire fencing. Commissioner of borders P L Thanga said the Union Government had sanctioned Rs 19 crore for the project.

## Naga forum calls for peace

HT Correspondent  
Kohima, February 13

THE NAGALAND Peace Centre (NPC) has vehemently condemned the firing on February 6 between Chakabama and Pfutsero.

The NPC alleged that some unidentified gunmen fired at a car in which youngest brother of Nagaland power minister was travelling along with his three friends. The NPC president N Theyo said one of the occupants in the car, Wale Lasuh, was injured in the attack.

They added that such aggression should be curbed at once as they jeopardize the ongoing peace talks between the NSCN(I-M) and the Government of India. Kohima Chakhesang Hoho general secretary Theja Therie expressed concern and appealed to all underground groups operating in the area to clarify their position and expose the culprits involved. He also asked the district authority ensure safety and security of the citizens.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 FEB 2001

# More buses to Bangladesh likely

51-5 23/1  
AJANTA CHAKRABORTY  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 22. — All-night rides, more frequent service and better amenities at stop-overs. The state transport department wants to add these facilities to the Dhaka-Kolkata bus service. It also wants to extend the service to Khulna, Jessore and other Bangladeshi cities.

Now that Miss Mamata Banerjee has flagged off the goods train to Bangladesh and is all set to begin a passenger service on the same tracks, the Left Front government doesn't want to be left behind. It is thinking of ways to add more steam to Dhaka-Kolkata bus service and also to streamline it.

The state transport department wants to maintain its clientele flow by extending the bus service to Khulna, Jessore and other cities of Bangladesh.

A meeting will be held in Dhaka on 5 and 6 February to review the bus service. Mr Santanu Goswami, managing director, WBSTC, said all these points would figure in the meeting.

Standing committee members of both countries will attend the meeting to discuss the proposed night service. A transport department official at Writers' Buildings said, "For this, we need more buses. We have offered ten buses and want Bangladesh to provide ten more". Two buses from either nations are being run at

the moment.

More money is needed to run more buses. Therefore, a fare hike is on the cards. Transport officials said passengers may have to pay more than \$ 22 that they are paying now.

But the issue of streamlining the present service tops the review committee's priority list.

The communication minister of Bangladesh, Mr Anwar Hossain Manju, while inaugurating the Petrapole-Benapole rail-link yesterday, told the reporters, "The bus service is not all that successful because there aren't enough commuters from Kolkata."

To attract tourists from Kolkata, stop-overs en route will be made more customer-friendly.

THE STATESMAN

23 JAN 2001

23 JAN 2001

# Tracking history, driving trade

HT Correspondent  
Jessore, January 21

IT WAS a special day at Benapole. At 11.50 am, Bangladesh Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju landed at the helipad of the truck terminal and rushed to the railway station to see if everything was in order.

Accompanied by Director-General of Railways M A Rahim, the Minister instructed officials to ensure

the crowds were kept at bay when Indian Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee arrived at 3.30 pm by the first freight train between India and Bangladesh.

Traffic policemen, shopkeepers, cart-pullers and lorry-drivers at Jessore were all eager to show the way to Benapole railway station. "Buses are running but we never thought trains would run again. It will be of great help - many of our relatives are in Kolkata," said hardware merchant Kabir Qazi.

"It (a train service) will help greatly in business," said trucker Rafiq Qazi. "Not only does travelling by road take time, it is also very costly." According to D-G Rahim, freight trains will push up the volume of business by several lakh metric tonnes.

Mamata Banerjee's arrival pushed excitement levels up several notches. People stood along the tracks and milled outside the station to catch a glimpse of West Bengal's stormy petrel. Cheers went up as she got off the Sonar Bangla Special train at Benapole.

The Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner to Kolkata, Humayun Kabir, pointed out a very practical gain for most Indian Bengalis. "Now *fish maachh* can easily come in from Bangladesh much to the delight of the people in Kolkata," he said.



The train chugs into Benapole.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 JAN 2011



India, Bangladesh revive railway links

# A train called nostalgia

Arindam Sarkar

Petrapole-Benapole border,  
January 21

CARTPULLER MOINUL of Benapole, Bangladesh, probably hit the nail on the head when he told this correspondent: "*E-ta naarir taan babu, na holey shudhu gaarir taane ki aar emon hoy...*" (This has to be the call of blood, Babu - how can a mere train inspire such a scene)?"

The maiden run of Sonar Bangla Special today could have been powered by feeling alone. Lining the tracks for miles on either side of the border were thousands riding the crest of euphoric emotion. To them, the movement of the 35-wagon, wheat-laden train stood for much more than just a historic railway contact between their two countries - it could have symbolised the pulling down of borders, the reunion of kins separated by destiny, history in reverse.

Fifteen minutes past noon, two convoys, Mamata Banerjee's from the Indian side and that of the Bangladeshi Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju from the Bangla side, screeched to a halt at the Petrapole border checkpoint. The two leaders got off, walked 50 yards or so to zero point and shook hands, creating history.

The mood of the moment rang in the speeches of Mamata and Anwar Hossain at Petrapole. "It is the fulfilment of a dream, the



The Sonar Bangla Special moments before pulling out of Petrapole on Sunday. Photos: Ashok Nath Dey

coming together of Kazi Nazrul Islam, Rabindranath Tagore and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman," said the Railway Minister. "It is an occasion to remember our common roots, language and heritage. We are ready. I am waiting for the Bangladesh Government to give the clearance and we will start the first passenger train as well. I am looking forward to the train between Sealdah and Dhaka. India and Bangladesh can never be divided."

Anwar Hossain was beaming. "In June 1999, Prime Ministers AB Vajpayee and Sheikh Hasina

Wajed kicked off the passenger bus service between India and Bangladesh. This is the first step in the direction of a regular passenger service," he said. "Once passenger trains start, people from both sides can meet their relatives frequently. Partition has separated our people, but the borders should be traversed now."

At 3 pm, Mamata and Hossain released white pigeons and balloons. The train was flagged off soon afterward, the last compartment carrying the dignitaries to the next stop, Benapole, 15 minutes away.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 JAN 2007

# Wheels back on track to Bangla

BY PRONAB MONDAL

Calcutta, Jan. 21: The wheels rolled again after 25 years on the tracks connecting India and Bangladesh.

Railway minister Mamata Banerjee reopened the Petrapole-Benapole rail-link today, flagging off the first train on the reconstructed tracks, the freight-carrier Sonar Bangla Special, at 3.05 pm. The train will run from Sealdah to Noapara, the biggest terminal in Bangladesh.

The minister promised more. "The Railway Board had to spend Rs 5.5 crore to commission this rail-link. Now I am all set to run the Sealdah-Jessore passenger train. I am only waiting for Bangladesh's green signal."

She added: "I would like to say *salaam* to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her co-operation. I hope the Bangladesh

government will soon be ready to run the passenger train. Today's freight train is a trial run for the passenger train which will be flagged off soon."

An emotionally charged Mamata said: "The people of both countries share the same language, same food and same life-style. Sometimes I forget that Bangladesh is another country." The rail link between Petrapole and Benapole is the fifth link between India and Bangladesh. The other four are Gede-Darshana, Singabad-Rohanpur, Radhikapur-Biral and Karimgunge-Mahisashan.

Mamata went to Benapole in a rake attached to the freight train to attend a programme organised by the Bangladesh government. The programme started with the Rabindrasangeet *Aaji Bangladesher hriday hote kokhon aaponi* sung by Dwijen Mukhopadhyay, which was followed by a

ballet by Mamata Shankar and troupe.

It was an emotionally-charged atmosphere for all the guests — Bangladesh communications minister Anwar Hussein Manju, M.A. Rahim, director-general of Bangladesh railways and Indian envoy M.L. Tripathi.

It was also the coming together of the two Bengals. Mohammad Anwar, a resident of Sayadpur, a frontier pocket in Jessore district, said: "This is a historical moment. It will develop our local economy. I have come here to see your railway minister as I have heard about her. I have been waiting here for so long if she goes through Jessore Road."

Manju said: "Keeping an eye on the heavy pressure on Jessore Road, the road-link between India and Bangladesh, we finally decided to run the freight train. The southern portion of Bangladesh will benefit from the service."

THE TELEGRAPH

22 JAN 2001

# Bangladesh minister keen on improved trade ties with N-E

Syed Sajjad Ali  
Agartala, January 12

BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT is set to create a sub-regional group that will work on increasing trade with all seven States in the North-East, the country's Minister for Fisheries and Animal Resources A S M Abdur Rob told reporters here on Friday.

Rob is leading a delegation of Bangladesh liberation war heroes, intellectuals, cultural artistes and journalists at the three-day-long Muktijuddo Utsav (Freedom Struggle Festival) that began here on Thursday. The festival is commemorating 30 years of Bangladesh's independence.

Rob said Dhaka is interested in increasing economic cooperation with North-East India and countries such as Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan. The sub-zonal group is being created keeping in mind the need for better trade and commerce ties in the region.

He said the Dhaka-Agartala bus service would be flagged off soon and the Bangladesh Government may extend the service to Kolkata.

People of Tripura would be benefited more if they could avail of multiple visa facility, the minister said.

He said Bangladesh had already consented and was waiting for India Government's decision.

He denied that rebels in the North-East had their hideouts across the border. "I have no knowledge of their (rebels) presence in my country. Our Government will never allow them to carry out subversive activities against a friendly neighbour like India," he asserted.

A S M Abdur Rob conveyed Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's greetings to the people of Tripura for their cooperation during Bangla's liberation war. Before the inaugural session, the war heroes, delegates and Chief Minister Manik Sarkar placed wreaths at the 71 War Memorial in the city. A contingent of the Army's infantry unit conducted military rituals at the venue.

The inaugural session began at the Rabindra Bhavan here.

Chief Minister Manik Sarkar, in his speech, stressed on the need for better bilateral ties. He made an indirect reference to the presence of extremists across the border when he said better understanding should also be based on a principle of not allowing destructive forces to use each other's soil.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 JAN 2001



ARY 16, 2001

## PEACE ATTACK

119-12 ✓ 16/1

being held after an interval of 23 years. Pathologically hostile as they are to any democratic exercise, the militant outfits, including the Hizbul Mujahideen, have not taken kindly to the Abdullah regime's decision to hold the much-delayed panchayat poll and have threatened to disrupt the process; after all, a smooth and peaceful conduct of the exercise would mean yet another testimony to the weakening of the deadly grip these terrorist forces had managed to have over the masses for a decade and more, thanks to a combination of complex factors. It is, however, a moot question whether Dr. Abdullah should have embarked upon an admittedly challenging task at this juncture when the incipient peace initiative is at a delicate stage.

As for the response to what undoubtedly are brutal and highly condemnable attacks by the terrorist groups, nothing could be more unwise for the Centre — or the State Government — than to buckle under pressure and be provoked into winding down the peace process in any way. Instead, it should push ahead undeterred and with greater vigour its peace initiative, even while ensuring that the security forces do not lower the guard against possible subversive attempts. The reactions of Mr. Vajpayee and the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, are unexceptionable; their sense of outrage against the Srinagar episode as also their view that such attacks do not make for a "conducive" milieu will be shared by all right-thinking sections of society. One, however, wonders whether seeing them as hard evidence of Pakistan's unwillingness to "abandon cross-border terrorism" — as Mr. Advani is inclined to do — or, for that matter, suggesting the possibility of the peace process being "affected" on account of such attacks — as Mr. Vajpayee has done — is warranted especially when there are quite a few positive signs on various fronts and distinctive improvements in the overall situation on the ground as testified to by the Chief of the Army Staff, Gen. S. Padmanabhan.

THE HINDU

16 JAN 2001



TUESDAY, JANU

*DP's news*  
**A DESPERA**

THE ATTEMPT ON the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, while he was participating in an official public function in Srinagar on Sunday, has quite rightly been condemned widely as an act of cowardice perpetrated by the foreign-inspired groups who are out to scuttle the peace process under way even as there is relief at his escaping harm. It is the third major 'conspicuous' strike — after the Red Fort episode and the car bomb blast outside a military establishment in Srinagar — by such outfits since the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's announcement of the extension of the unilateral ceasefire till January 26. If the pro-Pakistan Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Jamait-ul-Mujahideen and Jaish-e-Mohammad had claimed 'credit' for the earlier attacks, now it is the Hizbul Mujahideen that has owned up responsibility. Such determined attacks by highly motivated, if not brainwashed, terrorist elements — particularly the suicide squads — are only to be expected where some well-meaning political initiatives are on, as in Jammu and Kashmir, to restore peace and harmony, something the people of the State have been yearning for. Realistically speaking, there can be no foolproof arrangement to prevent them, as the experience of terrorism-plagued countries worldwide would demonstrate. But, much can be achieved by way of bringing down their frequency and containing the damage if only the security forces — and their back-up systems — are vigilant and professionally competent enough.

The targeting of Dr. Abdullah has to be seen in the context of the heightened prospect of a delegation of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference visiting Pakistan for 'talks' with the militant groups and, possibly, the military regime also; the Hurriyat leadership, having named a five-member team, is awaiting the Centre's clearance of travel documents for the persons concerned. No less significant is that the attack came just a day before polling was to take place in the first phase of the Panchayat elections (January 15).

# Nepal agree to build river checks

territory, which led to massive flooding in ten villages on the Nepal side last monsoon. According to government reports at the time, 1500 villagers were rendered homeless due the floods.

In the latest talks in Kathmandu, Nepal asked India to construct two embankments to protect the villages, a 7 km-long embankment on the western banks and a 12 km-long one on the eastern banks.

India partially agreed to the proposal, acquiescing to build 2.5 km embankment on the western side and a 7 km long embankment on the eastern side.

India also asked Nepal to justify the need for a longer embankment through further studies. "We will soon start the investigations as asked by the Indian side," said Mr Amodanand Mishra, secretary of the Joint-

Committee, and deputy director general of Nepal's department of irrigation. If all goes well, said Mr Mishra, the construction of the embankment could begin before the year is out.

The embankment on the Rapti is just one of several such projects being financed by India, according to the latest agreement.

India also agreed to fund embankment construction on the Bagmati river near the town of Gaur, where a barrage on the Indian side has contributed to flooding since 1974.

But by far, the most important, controversial project, is the Laxmanpur barrage on the Rapti river. Last monsoon, after the flooding began, Nepali politicians raised a hue and cry over the unilateral construction of the barrage by India. A Nepali Parliamentary team even alleged that the barrage was con-

structed by flouting international norms.

India angrily rejected the charges. The issue was settled in the middle of last year when Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala visited New Delhi to thaw out the post-Indian Airlines hijack chill in bilateral ties. Mr Koirala and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee agreed to resolve a host of matters, including the Laxmanpur barrage issue, and directed their officials to hold talks on the matter.

An Indian team that visited Nepal as a result agreed to construct the embankments on the Nepal side of the Rapti, soothing many of the complaints Nepal had.

All of Nepal's Himalayan rivers flow into India, and the sharing of the precious resources have often clouded relations between the two neighbours.

15 JAN 2001