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CAUGHT IN CROSSFIRE

Nishikant Khajuria

Apprehensions of fresh migration by panic stricken border villagers to safer places looms large as frequent ceasefire violations by the Pakistani troops targeting Indian installations during the past couple of weeks have triggered a war like situation on the Line of Control (LoC) as well as International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir with the neighbouring country.

The unprovoked firing from across the border has thrown normal life out of gear in these hamlets where people are living under the constant threat to their life and properties. Repeated sounds of gunfire and shelling are keeping people scared.

More than 80 major ceasefire violations have taken place on border since January this year during which a number of civilians were critically injured and property got damaged besides casualties of Border guards. However, during the past couple of weeks, particularly since the recent killing of five Indian Army Jawans at Punjar Post near Chakkan-Da-Baagh in Poonch, hostilities have amplified on the border.

Areas adjoining the Line of Control in Rajouri and Poonch are the worst affected of ceasefire violations and unprovoked firing by the Pakistani troops. Tarkundi, Dera Dipsi, Mirpur, Basuni, Banloi, Jhallas, Salotri, Kasba, Kerni and Gontrian are among these worst affected hamlets on the LoC in Rajouri and Poonch, which are in direct range of Pakistani fire. Whenever there is firing from across the border, people of these villages suffer loss of lives, crops and cattle. Many times they have been uprooted.

Comprising more than two thousand families and spread in the radius of 3-5 kilometer, Kerni, is the most well-known and biggest among these villages bearing the brunt of Pakistan firing.

During escalated tension between the two countries in 1991, around 700 families of Kerni had migrated to Bandi Chachian, which is considerably safer and around 5 kilometer from this village. These families were resettled in their native village in 2008 when the border became calm following 2003 ceasefire between India and Pakistan.

However, the recent spurt in ceasefire violations and unprovoked firing from across the border has created situations like that of 1991 fearing fresh migration by these people from their homes and hearths. Frequent heavy firing that included 82 mm mortar shelling and the incidents of critical bullet injuries to a middle aged woman Noorjahan and a minor Farzana Kousar of three years, have made the villagers terrified and think of migrating again.

"It's like the war has started again. Pakistani bullets are hitting our houses resulting into fatal injuries to our people and cattle but there is no one to listen to our grievances. We can't even avail medical treatment for ourselves as well as animals since our hamlet is beyond the border fencing," rued Mohd Rashid of Dera Dipsi.

"We are getting killed but there is no Government initiative to protect our lives or even listen to our cries," he added while pointing out that there was no mobile tele-



Border people : Living on the edge

phone network in the area. To save themselves from Pakistani bullets and shelling, these villagers prefer to sleep in Kaccha structures instead of their own houses.

In Jhallas and Salotri, structures have been designed in such a way that each and every house as well as shops has their back towards border so that Pak bullets may not hit inside the premises. However, despite all precautions and safety measures, people are panicked to stay longer here. In 2002 entire populace of Jhallas village had shifted to Poonch and taken refuge in Government buildings there till the normalcy was restored on border. The situation seems taking the similar turns as people have no other option to save their lives, feared **Ravi Kumar and Kshatarpal of Salotri.**

In the schools on extreme border, the art of dodging bullets from across the border is more important and worth learning than the studies. "We give training to the students how to save themselves by hiding or taking cover of a wall during the firing," said **Manjit Singh Bali, Principal of Government Higher Secondary Islamabad in Shahpur sector.** Several schools buildings near the border have suffered damage due to unprovoked Pak firing.

According to the locals, a number of schools situated close to the Line of Control in Balakakot, Mendhar and Mankot areas in Poonch are unofficially lying closed in view of the continuous firing from across the border. Neither parents are sending their wards to attend the

classes, nor the teachers and staff are visiting the schools, which are lying closed for the last few weeks.

Government offices have also been virtually rendered defunct as attendance of employees is very thin in view of the prevailing situation, the villagers informed.

Further, more agriculture land is becoming barren as cultivation has become risky in view of firing. It is more painful to see the standing crop getting destroyed than leaving the fields uncultivated and barren, explained a villager while pointing towards his fields near zero line on other side of the fence. Going to fields, situated between the zero line and fencing, is just like inviting death and this is the reason that people have left their agriculture land uncultivated. "In case of firing, you can't flee to safer places as the fencing gates are located at big distance and remain lying on ground is the only way to save yourself from the bullets," explained people who have been demanding that the fencing should be extended closer to the border.

The Member of Parliament from Jammu-Poonch Parliamentary constituency Madan Lal Sharma had also taken up the issue of relocating border fencing closer to zero line during his recent meeting with the Prime Minister.

Though the situation near the International Border is not so worse, routine life continues to remain paralyzed following frequent ceasefire violations. Paansar, Man-



yari, Babia and Swara are among the firing prone areas along IB, which is stretched from Kathua to Pallanwala.

Women and children prefer to remain inside the houses and only men go to the fields that too during the wee hours or in the evening only as fear of firing continuous to haunt the border villagers, said Sarpanch Sadechak Vinay Sharma. He also expressed apprehensions on fate of the standing crop as harvesting season is approaching nearer but there seem no indication of let up in the border skirmishes.

Even as Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah had also voiced concern over the plights of border residents due to the ceasefire violations, the affected people have reasons to believe that the Government was not concerned to take measures for their protection from enemy bullets.

Since hostilities between the two neighbouring countries is a bitter truth and there seems no permanent end to the same notwithstanding the efforts of peaceniks, the Government has to take short term as well as long term measures for security of border residents and their property. Besides providing them basic amenities of life even during the odd hours and insurance cover to their lives, property and crop, the Government administration has to instill a sense of security among these people by always remaining at their service so that they may not feel hapless at the time of crisis.

Artificial Lake in Jammu

H. L. Langeh

Creating an artificial lake over the Tawi River is an appreciable endeavor by the Govt in the development process of Jammu region and J&K State as a whole. The successful commissioning of the artificial lake project can prove a great boon for the Jammuites. Very limited efforts have been directed so far in beautifying the Jammu city and this kind of recreational point of attraction happens to be executed for the first time as compared to the counterpart regions across the Valley parts of the State. The significant effort made by the Govt in this direction shall give impetus to develop the unexplored potential of tourism in the Jammu region. Sometimes, it was also heard that the State Govt is also contemplating to provide Gondola service from Mubarak Mandi to Bahu Fort for amusement of the inhabitants of the region and tourists. Though, no official declaration regarding the project has yet been made public. At certain point of time when the Gondola project gets matured and the simultaneous operation of these projects shall, indeed, add one more feather to the beauty of the city. The Jammu is already known by the City of Temples by virtue of having famous historical temples such as Raghu Nath Mandir, Pir Kho Temple, Bawe Wali Mata Temple and Mohmaya Temple. The upcoming projects meant for beautification purposes and already completed Recreation Park popularly known as Bagh-e-Bahu situated at Bahu Forte are intimately connected with each other. The collective operation of all the important tourists sites including an artificial lake in Jammu is likely to turn the entire city into a hub of tourists in near future. Such sort of projects need to be encouraged since these often create good avenues for sources of income for local people besides the source of entertainment. This way the Revenue Deficit States like ours may achieve the desired levels of revenue generation and gain self reliance.



Excelsior/Rakesh

For any of mega project that finds the use of natural resources such as the case of harvesting of Tawi river water which involves the risk factors of human health and safety of the proposed civil structures of the project itself and the adjacently located important establishments thus the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Environment Management Plan (EMP) studies become significantly essential parameters for its better execution; maintenance of environmental and ecological concerns, and the ultimate successful operation. Obviously, it is quite understandable that no

project of such nature is executable until the mandatory consultancy and expertise services are obtained from a recognized institute of repute followed by clearance from the authority concerned.

Lakes, normally, serve as a source of water for agriculture, municipal and industrial purposes. But, the primary purpose behind the creation of an artificial lake over the Tawi River is believed to be recreational one and forms part of the beautification scheme of the city. Expectedly, the beauty of the artificial lake so formed shall serve as a good source of amusement, entertainment and recreation for the

people of the State especially for the Jammuites. This site can serve as an additional tourist destination for the visiting devotees who come to Vaishno Devi, Amarnath shrines and other important parts of the State for pilgrimage purposes. The successful operation of the conceived project will bring the Jammu city on prominent position on the tourist map of India. The hotel industry and local transport industry shall get considerable business around the city. The common people residing in the localities such as Old city, Gujjar Nagar, Gorkh Nagar, Prem Nagar Chand Nagar, and Krishna Nagar may be the direct beneficiaries on

the operation of the scenic site of the Tawi River Barrage. Employment opportunities for the local people may be increased due to enhanced business activity in general and tourist potentiality in special. Consequently, the revenue generation of the State is expected to be on the increase. Responsibly, the govt should devise some procedure as policy matter so that the part of the income so earned from the operation of such prestigious projects must be utilized for further development and maintenance of the developed structures.

Benefits of an artificial lake are commonly related to their function such as water supply, irrigation, navigation, recreation, hydropower production and flood control. In order to assess the functions of artificial lakes and reservoir system in general it is necessary to deal not only with their benefits but also with their impacts. It is being widely observed the world over that the Environmental and Ecological Impacts of such prestigious projects have apparently been experienced and need to be managed skillfully by the advance scientific knowledge.

After the proposed reservoir gets filled the increase in the groundwater level around the vicinity of impounding water/upstream in the artificial lake is inevitable. The existing groundwater structures on both the banks shall be recharged but at the same time the danger of infiltrating the biological contaminants from unsealed septic tanks and sewage water into the reservoir cannot be ignored which may enter the aquifer systems of the region. If the groundwater level increases to ground surface fowl from the existing groundwater structures may be resulted through capillary rise of groundwater. This ugly situation, however, may be tackled with the commissioning of Sewage Project which is on the verge of completion and shall mitigate the problem of sanitation to the greater extent by diverting the waste water drains into the Treatment Plant situated at Bhagwati Nagar instead of pouring into the reservoir/Tawi river.

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