

# Dhaka-Agartala bus on dry run

Syed Sajjad Ali  
Agartala, December 26

**T**HE BANGLADESH Government conducted a dry run of the proposed Dhaka-Agartala bus service on Monday. Officials of the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation drove a luxury bus to the Akhaura immigration centre premises near Bangladesh's border with India.

Officials said the dry run was conducted to test the roads the Dhaka-Agartala bus would take.

The ministries concerned in both the countries have chalked out plans to begin the bus service by March 2001.

The team found that a 16-km stretch of road connecting immigration point and Darkhar was in bad shape.

The potholed road would soon be repaired, the officials said.

They said the Bangladesh Government would conduct a few more test runs before the bus service is flagged off. Union Minister of State for External Affairs Ajit Panja, during a visit here, had announced that Bangladesh and India were negotiating to start the Dhaka-Agartala bus service.

The departments concerned in both the countries would sign an agreement by January 2001, he had announced.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 DEC 2001

# Dhaka in double bus diplomacy

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Dec. 13: In a move to overcome the contentious "transit facilities issue" with India, Bangladesh has suggested that two more bus services — Dhaka-Shillong and Dhaka-Agartala — be launched between the two countries.

The Dhaka-Calcutta bus service was started last year and, perhaps, the success of this route has made Bangladesh suggest two more routes to India that will bring the two sides closer.

Dhaka has also suggested that the rail-links between the two countries, which were suspended since 1965, be revived.

These suggestions were put forward in the two-day foreign office consultations between India and Bangladesh at South Block this morning. The talks will continue till tomorrow.

The transit issue is important for both countries. India has been pressing Bangladesh to grant it transit facilities for the past many years. The demand gathered ground after the neighbours successfully sorted out the problem of Ganga water sharing with an agreement in 1996.

The ruling Awami League in Dhaka is willing to grant Delhi the transit facilities, but is apprehensive that such a move will have an

adverse impact back home.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is perceived to be "too close to India" and her political adversaries have been using this impression against her. At a time when the country is gearing up for elections — sometime in the middle of next year — it will be foolish on her part to yield on the transit issue as it will be seen by the Opposition as a major concession to India.

The Bangladesh government feels that by opening new bus routes and reviving the old rail-links, Delhi in effect can enjoy transit facilities in Bangladesh, though officially it may not be acknowledged.

Another contentious issue concerns Teen Bigha. Following the Indira Gandhi-Mujibur Rahman agreement in 1974, Delhi got back access to its enclaves in Berubari, but Bangladeshi enclaves in Angarpota and Dahagram have run into difficulties. Delhi has given Dhaka an "alternate-hour" access through Teen Bigha to its enclave.

This means that Bangladeshis can reach their enclaves within India every alternate hour during the day. However, this is creating problems for the neighbour who now wants "unfettered access" to the enclaves.

THE TELEGRAPH

14 DEC 2000

# Two-tier talks timetable with Bangla

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Dec. 11: India and Bangladesh foreign ministers will meet tomorrow to review the entire gamut of bilateral relations. The talks will be followed by foreign office consultations between the two foreign secretaries.

The meetings gather significance in wake of the recent killings in Assam by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), whose activists have been operating from camps in Bangladesh.

Indications are the two sides will lay special emphasis on counter-insurgency measures and try to improve upon arrange-

ments already in existence.

The talks are being held at a time when relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan have hit rock-bottom. There are indications the two sides will apprise each other of their relations with Islamabad.

After Bangladesh foreign minister Abdus Samad's talks with his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh, foreign secretaries H.M. Shafi-Sami and Lalit Mansingh will pick up the thread, their discussions lasting two days.

Foreign ministry spokesman R.S. Jassal refused to spell out the agenda, pointing out that foreign office consultations are

usually "free-wheeling discussions" where either side can bring up any issue it feels important.

Referring to Northeastern insurgent groups operating from Bangladesh soil, he said a mechanism for "border management" is already in place and the issue is taken up there at regular intervals.

Jassal indicated that the two sides will also review cooperation on economic issues and road and rail links.

Sheikh Hasina's government is perceived as "pro-Indian" and relations between the two countries have improved since she came to power in 1996. One of the

major achievements was an agreement on Ganga water sharing in December 1996. The deal paved the way for stronger ties with regular exchange of visits at different levels over the past few years.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee went to Dhaka last year during the Kargil conflict to flag off the Dhaka-Calcutta bus service. Last October, he met Sheikh Hasina on the sidelines of the UN Millennium Summit in New York.

Although trade and economic cooperation, particularly steps to narrow the trade gap will be discussed, the rise of religious fundamentalism and the threat both

countries face from it will also come up at the talks.

Sheikh Hasina, following an attempt on her life, had sent Shafi-Sami as her special envoy to India to get Delhi to share information about possible plots to destabilise the Awami League government there.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister has been extremely vocal and active in international fora in condemning military dictatorships and fundamentalist forces.

This has helped strengthen the bond between her government and the BJP-led dispensation, which, too, has been highlighting these issues.

India must be serious in its dealings with a confident young Bangladesh

# Notice thy neighbour

SUNANDA K. DATTA-RAY

5-12  
29/12

**D**id anyone else notice that the Bangladeshis slipped away before an excellent lunch was served on the first day of the seminar that the Centre for Research in Indo-Bangladesh Relations organized this week? The theme was "Indo-Bangladesh Relations — The New Millennium", and Bangladesh's industries minister, Tofayel Ahmed, set the ball rolling with an incisive dissertation on opportunities and obstacles. But it being Ramadan, he and his colleagues from Dhaka could not break bread with their hosts, something that the organizers may not have anticipated.

It is possible to exaggerate the significance of crossed signals. They matter here only because there are enough rocks already on which cooperation can run aground. The Bangladeshi high commissioner, Mostafa Faruque Mohammed, pointed out, for instance, Indian industry's jaundiced view of a joint venture cement factory in Bangladesh which, it shortsightedly fears, might eat into Indian exports. Avoidable atmospheric need not be added to such problems, especially since suspicion on one side is more than matched by sensitivity on the other.

I recall an embarrassing occasion in Banga Bhaban when I unwittingly gave deep offence to Zia-ur Rahman by adapting George Bernard Shaw's comment about two nations divided by a common language. "So what?" the president burst out. "So what? The English, Canadians and Americans all speak the same language! Does it mean they are all the same country?" A second occasion was a three-day international event in Dhaka where a fellow journalist from Calcutta, whose normal attire was shirt and trousers, religiously wore nothing but a *dhoti* and *punjab* every day. He thought that he would make a favourable impression by affirming his allegiance to a shared Bengali identity, not realizing that Bangladesh had redefined that identity in terms that are not identical with ours. "If we want to achieve national development and progress, we must speak of Bangladeshi nationalism," Zia had declared.

Sheikh Hasina Wazed and the Awami League have taken many positive steps to live down complexes and strengthen Bangladesh's economic security by, among other things, improving ties with India. The minister, who had been a Mukti Bahini commander and then political secretary to her father, underlined some initiatives. The one-time "international basket case" has become self-sufficient in food, literacy is up and poverty down. We know that reduced fertility is reflected in a lower birth rate, the Grameen Bank has won international recognition, and a recent World Health Organization study of 191 countries ranked Bangladesh 88th in terms of public health. India stood 112th and Pakistan occupied the 122nd place.

**H**ad she not felt secure at home, the Bangladeshi prime minister would not have signed the water-sharing treaty in 1996 and the Chittagong Hill tracts pact the following year. An agreement on riparian rights along the Muhuri river, the improved Calcutta-



Beyond sentimental diplomacy

Dhaka bus service and renewed plans for railway links indicate the political will to mend bridges. Ahmed believes that previous governments deliberately kept the water issue alive so as to have a stick to beat India with.

But the very success of Sheikh Hasina's reconstruction makes the challenge that much more difficult for India. Bill Clinton would not have spent longer in Dhaka than in Islamabad in March if he did not see Bangladesh as a country of strategic value. That assessment was confirmed when Sheikh Hasina became the first Bangladeshi head of government to pay an official visit to America. With oil hostage to West Asia's turbulent politics, Washington may have its eye on the unknown trillions of cubic feet of gas on which Bangladesh is floating. But beyond that, with Pakistan awash with heroin and Kalashnikovs and in the uncertain grip of yet another military dictator, Washington might see a stable, democratic and moderate Muslim Bangladesh as potentially a useful conduit to the Islamic *ummah*. American investment has gone up from \$ 20 million to \$ 800 million since Sheikh

Hasina became prime minister.

Though there is no conflict of interest between India and the United States, these overtures remind India that it must be serious in its dealings with a confident young neighbour who, even while valuing its Bengali culture, is proudly conscious of its sovereign status while West Bengal is only a state of India. Not for the new Dhaka the sentimental diplomacy of *Rabindrasangeet* and *rosogolla*. It is now in a position to demand the hard currency of economic dividend. It has argued its case for duty-free, quota-free market access for the least developed countries from Singapore to Seattle and won a market in the European Union.

Bangladesh unilaterally slashed its own tariffs from 350 per cent to 60 per cent long before the World Trade Organization was born. India's exports have soared as a result. Now, Bangladesh wants the *quid* for its *quo*. For M. Aminul Islam, a geographer and former vice-chancellor of the Bangladesh Open University, the water treaty is not enough. Much more will have to be done to augment dry season flows. At least three other seminar speakers — the

minister, high commissioner, and Syed Anwar Hussain, director-general of the Bangla Academy — reiterated that when he visited Dhaka in June 1999, Atal Behari Vajpayee had agreed "in principle" to abolish all tariffs on a non-reciprocal basis on 25 selected imports from Bangladesh. What prime ministers propose, bureaucrats dispose, and nothing has come as yet of that commitment.

**T**his is not the only time that the civil service has thwarted a political initiative. A gleeful Hussain Mohammed Ershad told me in 1985 that Rajiv Gandhi had promised to involve Nepal in future talks on water management and flood control. It was a tremendous feather in his cap *vis-à-vis* the "India lobby", his term for the Awami League. But South Block soon put an end to Rajiv's generosity. It had all the ammunition it needed to force the prime minister to renege on his promise when Ershad told a public meeting only a little while later that China, too, should be a party to riparian talks.

Sheikh Hasina and her advisors are far too sophisticated to make tactical mistakes. Nor can a mature Bangladesh be fobbed off any longer with delaying tactics. If Vajpayee promised Sheikh Hasina, he will have to deliver. If he does not, it will gravely affect all those regional groupings that reflect future hope — the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, South Asian Preferential Trade Area, South Asian Free Trade Area, Growth Quadrangle of Nepal, Bhutan, India and Bangladesh, the Ganga-Mekong project and BIMSTEC — Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation forum.

India-Bangladesh cooperation reinforces but does not need these wider arrangements — post-dated cheques on a promising bank — but the arrangements would collapse without firm bilateral ties.

A second point is that like many such events, the seminar was an occasion for believers. Apart from Awami League loyalists, Ali Ahsan of the Bangladesh Peace Council described himself as a communist. The strongly opposing camp which denounced the water and Chittagong Hill tracts agreements and constantly accused Dhaka of selling out to Delhi was not represented, though Paresch Dev, the Centre's president, and Bimal Pramanik, its director, assured me that invitations had been sent out.

**S**uch is their capacity for mischief that the only lasting relationship with India would be one that enjoys a broad consensus of support across the spectrum of Bangladeshi life, including elements that we might disapprove of. Whether Bangladeshis respond to the lilting tune of "Amar Sonar Bangla" or the stirring notes of "Prothom Bangladesh", their economic and strategic interests should remain exactly the same. But the wrong cultural signals from India can play into the hands of irresponsible politicians who would not hesitate to cut their own nose to spite what they think is the Awami League government's face. Tofayel Ahmed wisely advised circumspection in all India-Bangladeshi dialogues.

# India's gesture to Bangladesh

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, SEPT. 29.** India has offered to provide technical support to Bangladesh for the construction of a barrage on the river Ganga flowing within its territory. The neighbouring country was likely to get financial assistance from Japan for a barrage to rein in the excess water that flows from India.

Both countries have also decided to form a Joint Study Group for identification of reasons for the presence of arsenic in ground water in 58 of 62 districts of Bangladesh and the measures to deal with the problem.

The offer for technical support for a barrage was made by the Minister of State for Water Resources, Ms. Bijoya Chakravarty, when she visited Bangladesh earlier this week in response to an invitation from the Bangla Water

Resources Minister, Mr. Abdul Razzaq.

The highlight of Ms. Chakravarty's visit was her meeting with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, who expressed her satisfaction at the accord with India on the sharing of Ganga waters.

However, the Prime Minister expressed her concern at the presence of arsenic in ground water. She sought the technical know-how for tackling the problem. The Joint Study Group will establish a close network of monitoring stations to monitor and analyse ground water samples for determining the arsenic concentration in deeper aquifers, both laterally and vertically.

It will carry detailed geophysical survey and exploratory drilling to identify deeper layers free of arsenic and do artificial recharge studies to recharge shallow aquifers to reduce the

presence of arsenic below the permissible limit of 0.05 ppm.

Ms. Chakravarty said a Bangla delegation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee was likely to visit West Bengal in November to study how India had tackled the problem of arsenic in water. Eight districts in West Bengal are afflicted by arsenic contaminated water.

The Secretary, Water Resources, Mr. Z. Hasan said India had the expertise to provide technical support to Bangladesh for construction of a barrage on the Ganga. The gains of the treaty were not fully utilised by that country because there was no proper diversion for the waters. The Chairman of the Central Ground Water Board, Mr. Chadha said India was free of arsenic contaminated water except in parts of West Bengal and pockets of Madhya Pradesh.

# India seeks North-East passage to Bangladesh

HT Correspondent  
Calcutta, November 28

THE FUTURE of the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) would depend on whether the smaller countries understood Indian sensitivities. This was the view expressed by Meera Shankar, joint secretary for SAARC at the Ministry of External Affairs.

Shankar was in city to attend a conference organised by a private sector initiative from four countries — India, Nepal, Bhutan and India..

Later, Shankar told reporters that there is always a demand for more and more concessions from India, but there is hardly any understanding of the Indian sensitivities in these countries.

Speaking about Bangladesh, a country with a huge balance of trade deficit with India, Shankar said that Bangladeshi exports to India could increase manifolds if "they sell us what we want to buy". She indicated that natural gas as

well as access from the north-eastern part of the country to Bangladesh were two things that India would be happy to pay for but Bangladesh is not ready to provide.

**The External Affairs Ministry officer said that natural gas as well as access from N-E to Bangladesh were two things that India would be happy to pay for but the neighbour country is unwilling to comply**

"They want an integration of the north-eastern economy with Bangladesh but this has to be coupled with road access through Bangladesh. Or else we will be facing a situation where the north-east will be anchored with

Bangladesh and the rest of India will become irrelevant," she added.

She indicated that India has extended zero duty status to Bhutan and Nepal and provides 50 per cent concession to Bangladesh on regular tariffs while Indian goods have to enter these markets under WTO conditions.

Speaking about SAPTA negotiations, Shankar said, "We are moving ahead bilaterally with all the countries that are ready to move fast and pragmatically. Pakistan is the slowest of the lot."

Providing facts and figures, Shankar said that the trade between SAARC members has grown by 17 per cent in the last one year while the global trade of these countries have grown by nine per cent only.

Speaking about the potential of cooperation between the member nations, Shankar remarked a good example would be the tea industry where the members together produce around 70 per cent of the world's tea.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 NOV 2000

# Indo-Bangla border will be lit up

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

**Kolkata, Nov. 4:** Parts of the Indo-Bangladesh border in the state will soon be illuminated like the Pakistan border along Punjab and Rajasthan. The matter has been discussed by the Union home and urban affairs ministries in New Delhi.

A comprehensive survey has been conducted to verify the feasibility of the project. If the survey proposals are accepted, CPWD will start its execution.

The decision was taken because it was noticed that border areas are too prone to crime and that the fencing can be easily breached. Places surveyed include areas where there is maximum infiltration. Another section earmarked is the area where fencing is complete. The survey notes that areas on the other side of the

fencing also needs to be monitored.

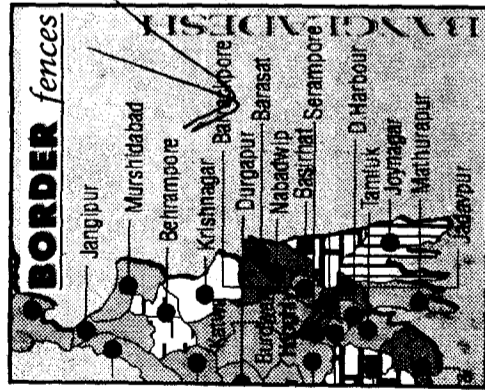
The first phase surveyed is 314 kilometers of the total 2,429 km border. The area has been divided in two sectors — Kolkata and Krishnanagar. The Kolkata sector covers 104 kms, whereas the Krishnanagar sector runs along 210 kms in Nadia, Murshidabad and some parts of North 24 Parganas. In Nadia, the most disturbed places under BSF (131, 138 and 49) have been brought under the proposal. Some other places considered vulnerable and have a history of cross-border crime like Sikarpur, Teinpur, Gede, Meghna also come under the proposal.

On the technical side, the survey proposes laying underground cables. The overhead cables are to be strung up only in low lying-areas. The poles for overhead cables need to be erected at least above 5

feet from ground level.

The illumination should cover the LOC, which is 150 metres from the Indian side of the border. The authorities foresee an electricity consumption of about 5 KW for this. As the proposed lighting arrangements have much to do with activities on the border, the district administration and the local people are eager to see the project executed. A villager in Nadia said he would certainly like to see an end to the looting of cattle, rape, murder that criminals here indulge in.

A human rights activist in Nadia was happy the government had realised the necessity of lighting up vulnerable areas of the border. However, he apprehended that power supply could be a problem as remote areas of this district still suffer from a serious problem on this account.



# Pakistan all set to join the nuclear suppliers' group

By L.K. Sharma

The Times of India News Service

LONDON: Having satisfied its domestic requirements, Pakistan is now ready to export sensitive nuclear material and equipment. It is thus set to join the prestigious nuclear suppliers' group — a task more challenging than detonating an atomic bomb.

Pakistan is doing it under the full glare of publicity and has made its intention known through a full page newspaper advertisement issued by the commerce ministry. The present military regime with its commitment to transparency does not believe in back-room deals in a dingy street of Peshawar.

The advertisement confused U.S. officials who told *The Guardian* that it appeared to undermine much of the recent progress made in talks on introducing greater controls on nuclear materials.

A U.S. state department official told the daily: "Up to now the Pakistanis have not supported the idea of making money out of selling this stuff. We're still trying to figure out all this new stuff means."

The nuclear powers concerned about proliferation could always buy up all the spare enriched uranium and plutonium and tritium and bale out Pakistan's economy and make the world a safer place. By jumping into the fray them-

selves, they may be able to deny access to terrorists.

But then, in their own countries there is no guarantee that the material would not be "diverted" for unspecified tasks by unspecified sources, as has happened in the past.

India could help out Pakistan in its hour of need by buying it but then these materials may not be on the Indo-Pak trade list. Of course, Pakistan is aware of the fact that enriched uranium is not cotton or groundnut and it is not organising a car boot sale, though some groups in and outside Pakistan would love that.

The government has formulated procedures for export licences and offers application forms costing up to 1,400 pounds sterling for those wanting to export such sensitive things.

The applicants would have to declare that the proposed sale is for peaceful purposes only and that the material would not be re-exported.

For example, if someone in Afghanistan buys it, he would not be free to sell it to any one outside the country and will have to use it within Afghanistan.

The applicants would have to reveal the source of the material and equipment and supply an end-user certificate and obtain a "no-objection certificate" from the government.

Does it mean that the govern-

ment itself is not the only would-be exporter and that some of these things are in private hands in Pakistan?

There had been no reports earlier that Pakistan's nuclear programme had been privatised. Or is it that the private parties were allowed to "import" surplus stocks which the government no longer needs. In that case, the "source" of the material should be known to the government instead of the exporter having to reveal it.

Pakistan can hope to have good sales because notwithstanding the decline in the nuclear power industry, there is a flourishing market for sensitive nuclear materials.

It will be competing against Russia which also has many such things to spare.

While America and other nuclear powers may not be amused, Pakistan expects them to applaud it for its new "transparency."

Information minister Javed Jabbar told the *Guardian*: "This is a fulfilment of our commitment to transparency. There is absolutely no scope left for any kind of misuse or pilferage and illegal export of any substance. We are doing this in order to be a good nuclear citizen."

Gen Mirza Aslam Beg, a former army chief, saw the material was surplus and it was a respectable way of earning money. There was enough material to maintain our low-level nuclear deterrence.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

5 AUG 2000



## **Bangla media condemns J&K killings**

DHAKA: Bangladeshi media on Thursday condemned the spate of killings in Jammu and Kashmir by militants and hailed India's stand not to let the killings derail talks with the Hizbul Mujahideen.

*The Daily Star* in an editorial termed as 'dastradly' the killing of over 100 people and lauded Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's resolve to pursue peace in Kashmir. "The talks that have begun between the Indian government and the Mujahideens, we hope, would usher in peace" in Kashmir, it said, calling upon Pakistan to extend fullest support to the process "instead of directly or indirectly working against it."

The newspaper said that Vajpayee's pronounced intention to usher in stability in the state finds resonance with the Kashmiris and the people of South Asia. "Credit certainly goes to the Indian government that the talks with militants got underway. Persistence with the negotiations reflects its intention to usher in peace and harmony" in the state, the newspaper said.

*The Independent* also condemned the killings as "a mind-boggling matter," adding "those who committed the misdeeds are clearly people who remain uncomfortable" with the idea of peace descending on the Valley. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 5 AUG 2000

# Indo-Bangla border trade in a spot <sup>HF 20</sup>

Rahul Karmakar  
Guwahati, August 10

118

THE INDO-BANGLADESH border trade has run into serious trouble with exporters from the Northeast refusing to accept Dhaka's decision to impose a mandatory pre-shipment inspection (PSI) system on the Indian side of four trading points.

Their contention is that the Dhaka decision, passed in the Bangladesh Parliament on February 15 but brought into effect a few days back, was unilateral and was not conveyed to New Delhi. There are four major trade points along the Indo-Bangladesh border. While Sutarkandi is situated in Barak Valley of Assam, the other three, Dawki in Jaintia Hills, Borsora in West Khasi Hills and Gasuapara in Garo Hills, are all in Meghalaya. The Northeastern states export goods worth \$2 million to Bangladesh, the major commodity being coal.

The exporters, primarily those dealing in coal, have opposed the PSI system on several counts. First, it was not a bilateral decision despite the Dhaka claim that it conformed to the GATT valuation agreement. Secondly, the Bangladesh government wants the Dhaka branch of the London-based Inspectorate Griffith Limited to issue clean report of findings (CRF) certificates to exporters under PSI notwithstanding the fact that there's a Griffith branch in Shillong. Besides, PSI would entail a Griffith pre-loading check at myriad coal mines scattered across Meghalaya which is impossible, the exporters say. But what has angered them most is the silence maintained by the Centre and the governments of Assam and Meghalaya, encouraging Dhaka to dictate terms.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 AUG 2000

# It's official: North Korea is selling missiles to Pak

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi/Washington, August 16

INDIA'S WORST fears over Pakistan's covert missile development programme have come true. North Korean leader Kim Jong II has reportedly confirmed his country was selling missiles to Pakistan. According to an agency report from Washington, Mr Kim Jong is reported to have divulged this to a delegation of South Korean media executives visiting Pyongyang.

The report stated that Kim mocked US fears of N. Korea's development efforts and boasted that "I made the missile problem."

The leader, according to the report, also confirmed the long-held suspicion that his country was selling missiles to Pakistan, Syria and Iran. Mr Kim has been quoted as saying "for a strong nation to keep its pride it has confront powerful big nations."

The statement comes as no surprise as in the past India has drawn

world's attention to the rapid missile proliferation in the sub-continent. Significantly, while other countries in the neighbourhood have been testing ballistic missiles capable of striking Indian cities, New Delhi has tested only one intermediate range ballistic missile (Agni II) in the past five years.

During the same period, Pakistan has test-fired the 1,500-km range Ghauri missile which, according to defence experts, is actually the Nodong I missile of N. Korea. Pakistan has also gone ahead and unveiled Ghauri II and Shaheen, which are said to be exact copies of Chinese M-9 missiles.

N. Korea's covert nexus with Pakistan became clear when the Indian Customs authorities detained a Korean ship, Ku Wol San, at Kandla port during the Kargil war. The ship last year, was carrying 300 tonnes of missile related cargo. The cargo consisted of equipment and engineering drawings.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 AUG 2000

## Dhaka takes initiative to ease Indo-Pak tension

ISLAMABAD: Bangladesh has launched an initiative to try to reduce tension between neighbouring nuclear rivals India and Pakistan, Bangladeshi foreign secretary C.M. Shafi Sami said. He



Sheikh Hasina

said in an interview here that both countries had given a "positive response" to the initiative from Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Mr Sami said he had delivered a letter to Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf from Ms Hasina, after handing a similar letter to Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee earlier this month. He said he was encouraged

by the response from both the countries but gave no details of the talks. "We are reasonably happy," he said.

Mr Sami said Ms Hasina would study Indian and Pakistani responses to her move and was likely to pursue the initiative. He said Bangladesh wanted peace and stability in South Asia to ensure economic development and encourage foreign investment. "We have a well-defined objective... To achieve stability in the region. And in the pursuit of our objective we have shared our concerns with both India and Pakistan," he said.

Mr Sami said any further visits to the two countries would "depend on the evolution of the process". "The lack of peace and stability in the region does worry us a lot," he said. (Reuters)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

26 AUG 2000

# Commonwealth for early restoration of democracy in Pakistan

40-11  
22/8  
By B. Muralidhar Reddy

**ISLAMABAD, AUG. 26.** The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Don McKinnon, today called on the Pakistani military ruler, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, to convey the Commonwealth concerns over a time-table for early restoration of constitutional and democratic rule in the country.

However there was no commitment from Gen. Musharraf on the 'demand' for a clear road-map for restoration of civilian rule. Mr. McKinnon was merely informed of the Supreme Court deadline of October 12, 2002 for completion of the reform process set in motion by the military government and return of the Army to the barracks.

Pakistan has asked the Commonwealth to provide 'technical assistance' to hold elections to local bodies scheduled between December this year to August next year on a non-party basis. The Commonwealth has agreed to the proposal and has deputed a two-

member team for consultations.

It was not immediately clear if the Commonwealth Secretary General was satisfied with the response of the Musharraf Government. He would report back on his impressions to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration (CMAG) when it meets next month. The Pakistan Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, has been invited to the meeting to present the case of the military government.

Mr. McKinnon is to address the press tomorrow on the outcome of his visit to Pakistan. Today he was busy meeting representatives of the Government to hear their views.

Among those he met included the President, Mr. Rafiq Tarar, and Minister for Law and Attorney General, Mr. Aziz A. Munshi. Tomorrow he is scheduled to meet leaders of political parties.

Pakistan was suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth at a special CMAG meeting

in London on October 18, 1999 — exactly six days after the military coup in which Mr. Nawaz Sharif was overthrown.

Subsequently, the Durban Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in November 1999 endorsed CMAG's decision and directed it to "keep the situation in Pakistan under review and be prepared to recommend further measures to be taken by the Commonwealth if progress to democracy is not made speedily".

Ever since its suspension from the councils of Commonwealth, Pakistan does not participate in Commonwealth meetings or secure technical assistance. Mr. McKinnon's mission to Islamabad is in the context of establishing a timeframe in which Pakistan could be brought back into the councils of Commonwealth.

In an informal talk with a group of correspondents immediately on his arrival on Friday night, Mr. McKinnon said the three year time-frame for return of democracy fixed by the Pakistan Su-

preme Court and the time-table for elections to local bodies announced by Gen. Musharraf would be kept in mind in assessing the situation.

However the Commonwealth is faced with a dilemma in dealing with the three-year time-frame prescribed by the Supreme Court. The time-table for return of democracy in any Commonwealth country as per the charter of the organisation is two years.

Mr. McKinnon gave clear hints that there is little chance of readmission of Pakistan to the councils of the Commonwealth on the basis of the time-table announced for elections to the local bodies and the Supreme Court time-frame.

"We desire full restoration of democracy", he said in response to a question. He ruled out possibility of expulsion of Pakistan from the Commonwealth. He pointed out that there is no instance of expulsion of any member from the club.

THE HINDU

26 AUG 2000

## India to take up insurgency with Dhaka

AGARTALA, AUG. 30. The Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, today said India would talk to Bangladesh on the alleged use of its territory by insurgents for carrying out subversive activities in the North-East. India had taken up the matter with Bangladesh authorities on several occasions in the past and would do it again.

The Defence Minister's stop in the Tripura capital was part of his tour to the North-Eastern States including Nagaland, Manipur and Assam.

The Minister was non-committal on the deployment of additional Army units in the State to combat insurgency which was a long-standing demand of the ruling Left Front Government.

The Chief Minister, Mr. Manik Sarkar, expressed unhappiness at the development, saying the State had been demanding more Army units for the last two years.

Mr. Sarkar also expressed reservations about the Centre's decision to put up barbed wire fencing along the Indo-Bangladesh border which, he said, could not be implemented since the State did not have enough forces to ensure security for the workers doing the job. "I have asked where will I get forces to provide security to the workers when I do not have enough forces to combat insurgency," Mr. Sarkar told reporters at the Civil Secretariat.

To a question, the Defence Minister said altogether 2,000 insurgents of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) had surrendered and talks were on with the National Socialist Council of

Nagaland (NSCN-IM).

On the possibility of the revival of the ceasefire with the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Mr. Fernandes said it was for the latter to decide as "we have clarified our stand on the issue" adding that counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir would be stepped up.

Ruling out the imposition of Article 356 of the Constitution in West Bengal in the wake of the recent violent incidents there, Mr. Fernandes, who is also the convener of the National Democratic Alliance, said, "we could not impose Article 356 in Bihar... The question of imposition of the same does not arise in West Bengal."

In Imphal, the Minister held discussions on the situation in Manipur with the Governor, Mr. Ved Marwah, and the Chief Minister, Mr. Wahengbam Nipamacha Singh, official sources said. The Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Leishangthem Chandramani Singh, and some senior Army officials, including the GOC 3 Corps commander, Lt. Gen. T. S. Shergill, were also present at the meeting.

Later talking to reporters in the Nagaland capital of Kohima, Mr. Fernandes said the Centre was continuing its exercise of framing guidelines and modalities to lure private sector investment, including foreign direct investment, into the defence production sector. "I first mooted the idea and made a proposal for private investment in the defence production sector," he said. — PTI

THE HINDU

31 AUG 2000

## SECURITY RISK

Political will needed to protect border

THE urgency for sensitising the residents living along the 2300-km-long India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal to the misuse of the porous frontier by Pakistani and other militants for easy movement to and from Bangladesh has increased. The successive arrests of two Kashmiri militants in Basirhat last week lend weight to the argument. One of the militants worked at Hizbul Mujahideen's office in Karachi and flew to Dhaka from Pakistan with large sums of cash. Another was caught while trying to reach Dhaka en route to Lahore. The alertness of the locals was crucial. Also from Basirhat, Bilal Ahmed was arrested last April for sheltering the IA Airbus hijackers. Security agencies complain about the general lack of sensitivity among the border residents and local bodies regarding militants operating under their noses. Efforts at sensitising the panchayats have had little effect. Last April a Bangladeshi Mafia responsible for killing Indians was granted bail by a Nadia court. Later he jumped bail and fled. Indians who stood guarantors were not arrested.

Unfortunately politicians have a great deal to do with the illegalities committed along the border. Their connivance is an established fact. The reason? Money. Panchayats, to promote smuggling of goods and cattle, have allowed mushrooming of haats all along the border. The political involvement is largely because the Marxists from Jyoti Basu downwards, never considered infiltration as a serious threat to the country's security. In fact he and other party comrades decried *The Statesman* for highlighting a non-existent problem and writing untruths. They overlooked the problem as long as the infiltrators swelled their vote bank. The problem was acknowledged only when the infiltrators switched allegiance. This opportunism cuts across party lines. A BJP Union minister recently forced the BSF to allow the smuggling of nearly 200 heads of cattles which had been seized on the Malda border. Clearly political will is lacking. Those concerned are well aware of the soft spots along the border like Basirhat and Dhulian. The only answer is to enforce the law.

THE STATESMAN

1 0115 7 00

## Indo-Bangla goods train service soon

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, JULY 4.** The much-awaited goods train service between India and Bangladesh through the Benapole-Petrapole border points will resume in two or three days as the railway authorities of the two sides signed a "working agreement" here today reviving the historic rail route.

But, the route will not ensure movement of passenger trains between the neighbouring countries as both the governments are yet to decide on the issue, an official said.

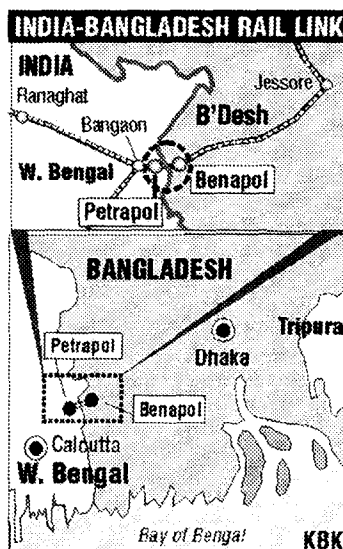
The Additional Director General of Bangladesh Railways, Mr. N. M. Khurshid Anwar, and the Additional Member (Traffic) of Indian Railway Board, Mr. Swarup Kumar Gupta, signed the agreement on behalf of their respective sides at Railway Bhaban here.

The route, fifth of its kind for both the countries, was introduced by the British Government in 1884 and had remained non-operative since 1974 due to no commercial viability. In 1994, the then BN Government led by Begum Khaleda Zia formed a committee headed by the then Shipping Secretary, Mr. Waliul Islam, to assess feasibility of the route. Soon after assuming office in mid-1996 the present Awami League Government took initiative to revive the rail link by upgrading infrastructure and restored train operation on the Jessore-Benapole abandoned route leading to the Benapole-Petrapole route last year.

Bangladesh officials said the route would cut short 63 km. road compared to the best used nearby Darshana-Gethe route to Dhaka

and facilitate smooth traffic of seven lakh tonnes of expected import-export items a year. According to the agreement, goods train from both the sides will be allowed at Benapole and Petrapole from where Bangladesh Railways and Indian Railways will take wagons of the counterparts to the destination.

The other routes are: Shahbazpur-Mohishashon, Rohanpur-Sinhabad, Birol-Radhikapur and



Darshana-Gethe, through which Bangladesh Railways carried 63,000 tonnes of export items and 17 lakh tonnes of imported goods last year.

Soon after signing the agreement, both the sides expressed their satisfaction and hoped that with the revival of the agreement transportation costs will come down remarkably. "Traffic congestion at the Benapole border land port will be eased as busi-

nessmen are expected to prefer rail for trucks," the Director General of Bangladesh Railways, Mr. Mohammad Abdur Rahim, said. Replying to a question on introduction of passenger train on the route, he said, "It depends on two governments."

He, however, said if the Government takes a decision, Bangladesh Railways can meet the requirements. "Yes, we are also ready to run passenger trains on this route," Mr. Gupta echoed Mr. Rahim. Mr. Khurshid Anwar said Bangladesh Railways could meet 60 per cent of the total demand in the past but now it would meet the full demand.

## Indo-French defence panel to meet today

**PARIS, JULY 4.** India and France would initiate a new round of talks on a wide range of defence deals and to work out ways and means to enhance service to service level co-operation when an Indo-French high-powered defence committee begins its three-day meeting tomorrow here.

Official sources said that the Defence Secretary, Mr. T. R. Prasad, would lead the Indian delegation which includes Vice-Chiefs of the three services. — PTI

## Correction

In the collage of pictures published along with the story on corruption in the Sunday, July 2 issue of *The Hindu*, the picture of Mr. R. Krishnamurthy, Retired Executive Director of BHEL, was published inadvertently. The error is regretted.

THE HINDU

- 5 JUL 2000



# Meet to boost Indo-Bulgaria ties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

S.F. 13 11/6

SOFIA, June 10. — The Indo-Bulgarian Joint Business Commission (JBC) will meet in New Delhi later this year to boost and diversify economic ties, particularly in areas of information technology and pharmaceutical sectors.

The joint commission meeting, whose dates are yet to be fixed, will examine the new areas of cooperation which also includes infrastructure and electronic sectors, a spokesman for Indian External Affairs Ministry said here today.

According to foreign ministry sources here, the Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Petar Jotev, is likely to lead his country's delegation at the meeting.

The decision to hold the JBC, set up in 1973, was taken soon after the visiting Indian Vice-

President, Mr Krishan Kant's extensive talks with the top Bulgarian leadership, including the Prime Minister, Mr Ivan Kostov, and the President, Mr Petar Stoyanov, yesterday.

During the talks, both sides recognised that the level of economic and cooperation between India and Bulgaria was far from the target and it was agreed that the two countries intensify efforts towards this end.

The Bulgarian Prime Minister hammered the point when he told Mr Kant that Indo-Bulgarian economic relations were not at the same high level as the political ties.

Officials of both countries were of the view that the economic cooperation could be given a big fillip through diversification in the spheres of information technology, infrastructure and pharmaceutical industries.

THE STATESMAN

11 JUN 2 000

## Hasina assures action against insurgents

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

GUWAHATI, June 14. — The Bangladesh Prime Minister has said that her government will not allow extremists to carry out cross-border terrorism from her country.

Sheikh Hasina told a visiting 30-member delegation of the Assam branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association that action would be taken against insurgent groups trying to carry out cross-border terrorist activities.

After a four-day visit, the Assam Speaker, Mr Ganesh Kutum, who led the delegation, told reporters here today that the purpose of the visit was to strengthen bonds of friendship between the two CPA fraternities, exchange each other's point of view on democratic government, share mutual experiences and open up new channels of cooperation.

On 11 June the delegation called on Sheikh Hasina. She emphasised further cooperation between Bangladesh and India in expanding trade and commerce for the prosperity of the North-east.

THE STATESMAN

15 JUN 2000

# Bangla Army buckles, kills 16 N-E rebels

**FROM SEKHAR DATTA**

Agartala, June 21: In its first major offensive against Northeast insurgents, Bangladesh Army last week gunned down 16 National Liberation Front of Tripura rebels and seized a huge cache of arms and ammunition at Sazek range in the Chittagong Hills.

The Bangladesh Army conducted surprise attacks on three NLFT hideouts. More such operations are likely as the Centre is mounting pressure on Bangladesh to flush out Northeast rebels from that country, sources said.

Consistent pressure from India and the growing nexus with insurgents and pro-Pakistani elements and parties like the BNP and Jamaat-i-Islami were the main reasons behind the operations, the sources said.

However, the Indian promise for trade concessions in exchange of operations against Northeast militants in Bangladesh cannot be entirely ruled out, the sources added.

Earlier, intelligence sources were quoted as saying that Bangladesh Army had gunned down 11 NLFT militants in the Sajek range of the Chittagong Hills on June 14.

The report was officially denied by the Bangladesh govern-

ment. But highly-placed sources from across the border confirmed that such an operation was indeed launched and "the denial had to be issued because officially the Bangladesh government had never acknowledged the presence of anti-Indian rebels on their soil."

Giving details about the operation on June 14, the sources said officers and jawans of Bangladesh Army's 113 brigade left their cantonment in Khagracherry district of Chittagong Hill tracts and raided three NLFT hideouts in Tanglaikanta, Japui and Thangan in the Sajek range.

In the course of the operation, 11 militants died in Tanglaikanta, two in Japui and three in Thangan. The dead included three unidentified commanders of the militant group. A large quantity of arms and ammunition were also recovered.

However, the Army did not launch any offensive at the NLFT headquarters at Lalukanu, which is also located in the Sajek range, "basically to give an opportunity to the NLFT leadership to flee Bangladesh soil", the sources said. Sporadic clashes between the NLFT and its rival group TIGER FORCE on Bangladesh soil might have also prompted the neighbouring nation to attack the Indian militants.

THE TELEGRAPH

22 JUN 2000

# India, Bangladesh move to revive IJO

Our Correspondent

CALCUTTA 4 MAY

A MOVE has been initiated by the jute industries of two major jute producing countries — India and Bangladesh — to revive International Jute Organisation (IJO), now defunct, following the 5-day UN conference on jute and jute products held in Geneva in the last week of March.

The Geneva conference was followed by a 3-day international conference in Dhaka in the first week of April where it was decided that the international agreement signed by jute producing and importing countries in 1988 would not be extended beyond April 11. It was decided to provide a liquidation period of 18 months, commencing April 12.

Immediately thereafter, the International Jute Council in Dhaka decided to set up a working group on future international cooperation on jute. The group will meet in June to decide on a future course of action.

Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA) has recently

ministry the need to reconstitute this international jute body in the interests of the world jute fraternity. For India in particular, the revival of IJO is significant as it will not only provide an effective framework for cooperation and consultation between exporting and importing countries, but also promote the growth and diversification of international trading in jute and jute products and improve the market for this agro-based fibre.

## FIBRE OPTIONS

For quite some years, there has been a sizeable market erosion in jute and jute products world-wide, with sustained inroads made by synthetic jute fibre.

Against this critical background, the importance of a common forum at the international level can hardly be overlooked. Such a forum will not only provide a common platform for consultations and interaction between various interest groups but also discuss various measures to improve usage of jute, both in traditional and non-traditional sectors. In fact, India played a lead role when the IJO was conceiv-

*The Economic Times*

5 MAY 2000

## Indo-Bangladesh border to be fenced

**NEW DELHI, MAY 23.** Faced with sustained illegal migration from across the border affecting the demographic composition, especially in eastern India, the Government has decided to fence the entire Indo-Bangladesh border at an estimated cost of Rs. 1,334 crores, a Home Ministry spokesman said here today.

The work on the project covering five border States — Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Mizoram and Tripura — would be completed by March 2007, he said adding that 2,429 km. of border fencing and 797 km. of construction of border roads were proposed to be undertaken.

The fencing would be maximum along the border with West Bengal with 1,021 km., followed by Tripura (736 km.), Mizoram (400 km.), Meghalaya (198 km.) and Assam (71.5 km.), he said.

The existing project for the construction of border roads and border fencing at a revised cost estimate of Rs. 1,042 crores is expected to be completed by March next year, the spokesman said.

The spokesman said the Government would also strengthen the deployment of the BSF along the border. — PTI

THE HINDU

24 MAY 2000

50-2  
114

## Intrusion increasing, says Mawlong

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

SHILLONG, March 31. — The Meghalaya chief minister today said that intrusion by Bangladeshis into the state had increased and at least 950 had been detected between January and February.

Answering a question raised by Mr P M Syiem (Independent), Mr E K Mawlong said 1,512 Bangladeshi nationals were detected in 1994, of which 1,429 were pushed back and 83 prosecuted. In 1995, as many as 1,474 were detected of which 1,382 were pushed back and 92 prosecuted.

Mr Mawlong said in 1996, 2,533 Bangladeshi nationals were detected and 2426 were pushed back while the rest were prosecuted.

In the next year, 2869 illegal entrants were detected, 2810 were pushed back and 59 prosecuted.

A total of 2,857 Bangladeshis was found to have made inroads into the state in 1998 and 2803 were pushed back with the rest being prosecuted.

Mr Mawlong said his government was trying to implement the central package for surrendered militants to solve the insurgency problem, PTI adds.

**THE STATESMAN**

1 APR 2000

# Dhaka-Agartala bus link on the anvil

Cartagena (Colombia), April 9 — The two ministers were of the view that only a minor problem over a small stretch of road needed to be ironed out for the Agartala-Dhaka bus service to be operationalised. The Calcutta-Dhaka bus service became functional last year at the initiative of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina.

Mr Singh also agreed with Mr Azad that the Petrapole-Benapole rail service between the two countries also needed to be expedited.

The External Affairs Minister assured Mr Azad that New Delhi would look into the non-reciprocal export of goods from Bangladesh to India. Mr Singh, who called on Colombian President Andres Pastrana, had bilateral meetings with Foreign Minister and heads of NAM delegations from 15 countries including Colombia, Morocco, Thailand, Norway, Algeria, Guatemala, Namibia, Iraq, South Africa, Dominican Republic and Qatar.

The External Affairs Minister assured Mr Azad that New Delhi would look into the non-reciprocal export of goods from Bangladesh to India. Mr Singh, who called on Colombian President Andres Pastrana, had bilateral meetings with Foreign Minister and heads of NAM delegations from 15 countries including Colombia, Morocco, Thailand, Norway, Algeria, Guatemala, Namibia, Iraq, South Africa, Dominican Republic and Qatar.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1400 APR 2000

10 APR 2000

# Dhaka will be told to check insurgency on its soil: Advani

AGARTALA: Union home minister L.K. Advani on Tuesday said maximum pressure would be exerted on Bangladesh to prevent insurgents from using its soil.



L.K. Advani

Mr Advani, who is here on a two-day visit, said, "We had earlier spoken to the Bangladesh Prime Minister and home minister when they visited India and we will exert pressure at the highest level again so that the militants from the North-East are not allowed to use its soil."

Mr Advani told journalists here that the massive influx of Bangladeshis in the region and the opportunity for the insurgents to use Bangladesh territory are hampering the government's attempts to curb insurgency.

"Taking advantage of the long porous border with Bangladesh, the insurgents from the region easily sneak into the country and it is difficult for the security forces to combat them," he said.

He said the Centre and the state governments of the North-Eastern region would work "hand-in-hand" to crush insurgency and had decided to strengthen the intelligence

network in the region so that all security forces deployed there can share information.

Mr Advani ruled out the possibility of direct talks between the insurgent outfits and the Central government any more. "It is they who should initiate talks with the state government first and if the state government wants, the Centre can talk to them," he said.

Any talks with the insurgents should be within the framework of the Constitution and there should not be any agenda like sovereignty, independence and secession, he said. The state government, Mr Advani said, should identify the persons who are fomenting insurgency and detain them under preventive laws. (PTI)



# 'Indo-Bangla border trade will curb crime'

SUMIT SEN  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

59-2 2A/2

CALCUTTA, Feb. 23. — A study sponsored by the external affairs ministry has suggested that border trade between India and Bangladesh be introduced in North Bengal to curb smuggling, other trans-border crimes and to ensure economic rejuvenation of this backward region.

The opening of the Bangabandhu Jamuna bridge in Bangladesh and the reopening of the erstwhile trade routes has brightened the prospect of such trade in North Bengal, according to the study.

A few existing checkpoints have already lost much of their relevance while the others could be utilised for border trade and flow of human traffic.

The study conducted by the Centre for Research in Indo-Bangladesh Relations and Bharat Bangladesh Maitri Samiti states that smuggling has been on the rise in the areas where there are gaps in the fences along the border. Cattle lifting and dacoity too are common in these areas.

If the local economy can be rejuvenated by introducing border trade, constant migration of local people to other parts of the country can also be prevented. Around one lakh labourers have migrated to northern India from Dinbata in Cooch Behar in recent times, the study says.

Mr Bimal Pramanik and Mr Pradip Hom Roy who conducted the study said two existing checkpoints at Gitaldaha, Haldibari in Cooch Behar are losing their relevance mainly because of inadequate transport facilities.

On the other hand, checkpoints such as the one in Phulbari, Jalpaiguri could be well utilised for such trade, they said.

At present, the Phulbari checkpoint is used by Nepal for exporting various items like baby food, plywood and fruits to Bangladesh.

According to the report, this route is presently used for five to six days a month and the infrastructural facilities for Customs and Immigration remain largely unused.

Thus, if border trade is introduced

through this checkpoint, the Centre can earn substantial revenue without increasing infrastructural facilities.

Similarly, the Changrabandha checkpoint in Cooch Behar — which is used by Bhutan for exporting goods to Bangladesh — can be utilised for the proposed border trade. The Radhikapur checkpoint in North Bengal can also be used for trade between India and Bangladesh.

The study identified Sahebgunj, Sitai, Mekhligunj, Choudhuriahat, Nagar Giridhari, Haldibari, Gitaldah and Changrabandha in Cooch Behar, Hili, Kaliagunj, Chopra, Balurghat, Goalpokhor, Gangarampur and Islampur in South and North Dinajpur; Mohadipur and Kaliachak in Malda as major markets and smuggling points. The smuggled items — according to the report — include cycle, tobacco stem, salt, onion, sugar cattle, cloth seasonal fruits and fertiliser.

The report suggests the reopening of some 'old routes' which became defunct after the partition of India. Some new routes can also be built to facilitate trade.

THE STATESMAN  
24 FEB 2000

# Centre hands over ISI camp list to Dhaka

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, Feb. 25. — The Centre has handed over to the Dhaka authorities a list of names of as many as 16 areas in Bangladesh where ISI agents have stepped up their activities.

According to border Intelligence sources here, documents with specific details with regard to ISI's strategic camps from where trained saboteurs carrying powerful explosives and sophisticated arms are being sent to the hill areas of the north-east, have been given to the border management authorities of Bangladesh.

The ISI is also active in creating a crisis by circulating forged Indian currencies in the region. A number of rebel elements who crossed over to this state with fake currencies were captured by security forces from different areas.

Earlier, a joint working group meeting on border management attached to the home ministries of both the countries which met in Dhaka last month discussed ISI's threat along the border and exchanged information with regard to the mode of foreign Intelligence group activities along India's border with Bangladesh.

According to officials here, Dhaka has agreed to cooperate with India's border management authorities for doing away with the ISI menace along the border.

The officials said the list of names of

places where ISI operates in Bangladesh was collected from agents earlier captured by Indian security forces in the region.

Security posts along Tripura's 856-km frontier line with Bangladesh have been asked to keep a round-the-clock vigil on areas along the border following reports on smuggling of sophisticated explosive mate-

## TRIPURA KILLINGS

AGARTALA, Feb. 25. — Armed militants have killed two persons, including a former NLFT rebel at Saratchandra Para of West Tripura district, police said today.

A group of unidentified insurgents raided the house of Tarun Debbarma, a former NLFT rebel last night, and shot dead him and his mother-in-law, Krishnapati Debbarma (65) at Saratchandrapara. Police have launched a search operation in the area. — SNS

rial into the north-east.

**Trinamul-TUJSPA**: Leaders of the Opposition Trinamul Congress and the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity have iterated their demand for imposing President's rule in the state "to ensure a free and peaceful election to the state's tribal areas autonomous district council".

Mr Sudhir Ranjan Mazumder, state Trinamul Congress chief and Mr Nagendra Jamatiya, a senior TUJS leader, complained during a Press conference here that the ruling Left Front "which has completely failed to show its political will to tackle insurgency is reluctant to provide adequate security for Opposition party contenders to carry out their election campaign".

"In view of intensified activities by outlawed rebel groups, it has become quite difficult for Opposition party candidates to campaign in the state's hilly areas", Mr Jamatiya said. Mr Mazumder felt "the ruling front is all set to reduce the hill council poll to a naked farce".

**Shops, houses torched**: Armed NLFT insurgents last night raided the hill market at Killa in Udaypur sub-division of South Tripura and torched about 20 shops there. The local office of the ruling CPM was also razed.

Mr Kajal Chakraborti, a CPM activist, was kidnapped by gun-toting rebels from the area before escaping. He is still missing. Sima Patwari who was abducted by insurgents in January from a South Tripura village was released by her captors last night. Mr Umapada Sarkar, a villager who was kidnapped by militants from the area on 22 February is still missing.

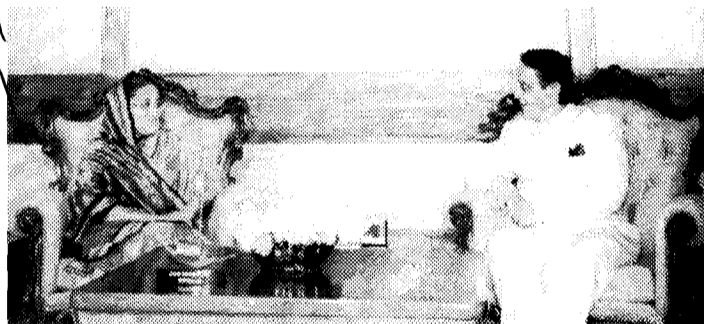
# Dhaka-Delhi expert-level talks next week

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, JAN.20.** India and Bangladesh will hold an expert-level meeting in Dhaka next week to discuss and resolve problems existing between the two countries. This was announced by the Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Ajit Kumar Panja, after meeting the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina. Mr. Panja, who arrived here today on a three-day goodwill visit, is the first Minister to visit this country after the Vajpayee Government was sworn in.

Mr. Panja said, Sheikh Hasina had asked him to identify the problems between the two countries and take steps to resolve the same.

"My objective is to reinforce the existing relations of goodwill and friendship between the two neighbours," Mr. Panja told newsmen on his arrival at the airport. He said the visit is intended to take up various issues that af-



**The Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Ajit Panja, with the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Ms. Sheikh Hasina, at the latter's residence in Dhaka on Thursday. - AP**

fect the relations, and maintain the present level of goodwill.

He said the enthusiasm generated among the people of the two countries during the visit of Mr. Vajpayee to Bangladesh last year to open the Dhaka-Calcutta bus service, would have to be kept alive by extending all facilities needed to make the journey smooth and comfortable.

Briefing presspersons, the Bangladesh Prime Minister's Press Secretary, Mr. Jawadul Karim, said Mr. Panja conveyed Mr. Vajpayee's warm greetings to Sheikh Hasina. He said Sheikh Hasina had told Mr. Panja that the direct bus service was working well. The Prime Minister also wanted a direct train service introduced between the two countries.

## Dhaka-Agartala bus service soon: Panja

**STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE**

CALCUTTA, Jan. 22. — Bus services between Dhaka and Agartala will soon be introduced, Mr Ajit Panja, minister of state for foreign affairs, said today.

India and Bangladesh have agreed in principle to this, specially after the success of the Calcutta-Dhaka bus services. The minister returned from Bangladesh today.

Mr Panja said the country had requested for a bus service from Agartala, and India wants to respond to it positively.

The Bangladesh government also requested to increase the frequency of Dhaka-Calcutta bus services in view of rush of passengers from Bangladesh.

Passenger train services between Calcutta and Dhaka will also begin soon. The railway minister, Miss Mamata Banerjee, has taken special initiative for this, Mr Panja added.

The Hasina government has proposed to set up a cultural centre in Calcutta. Mr Panja said the proposal would be taken up with Mr Jyoti Basu.

The possibility of setting up an Indian cultural centre in Dhaka will also be considered, he said.

**THE STATESMAN**

23 JAN 2000

## Teesta talks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

*39-10*  
*201*  
DHAKA, Jan. 29. — The two-day Indo-Bangla talks on sharing water of common rivers began here today. *Indo-Bang*  
“We will discuss and chalk out a scientific study as to how much water is required, availability and flow of the river Teesta in the lean season,” Mr Zafrul Hasan, head of the Indian team, said. Bangladesh said it expected an accord on the Teesta to come out of the meetings. *—*

THE STATESMAN

30 JAN 2000

# Call for better Delhi-Dhaka ties

By Haroon Habib

49-14

**DHAKA, JAN. 30.** Eight former Foreign Secretaries of Bangladesh, who did duty after the country's 1975 political changeover, and the incumbent have emphasised the need to improve relations with India, their next-door neighbour.

In a roundtable, organised by a Bengali daily on Saturday, most of the former secretaries criticised India's "big-brotherly attitude" and its "unwillingness" to resolve major issues like land and maritime boundary demarcations, exchange of enclaves, water-sharing, removal of trade gap and ratification of the 1974 India-Bangladesh Agreement.

They were, however, unanimous on the need for strengthening regional cooperation and said the SAARC should be made more effective and dynamic.

Incumbent Foreign Secretary, Mr. C. M. Shafi Sami and the former diplomats stressed the need for a consensus among the major political parties of Bangladesh, especially the ruling Awami League and the BNP on relations with India.

They observed that while they are in the opposition, the parties take anti-Indian stance and make 'irresponsible statements' for temporary political gains. But when they come to power, they try their best to improve relations with India.

The political parties must give up such 'double standards' and reach a consensus on Indo-

Bangladesh relations. All successive Governments in Bangladesh had tried their best to improve relations with India and resolve existing problems, but little success had been achieved in this regard.

Mr. Shafi Sami, who was until recently Bangladesh's High Commissioner to India, said that the bilateral relations were marked by suspicion from August 15, 1975 to June 1977. The assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the architect of Bangladesh, and subsequent change of government had adversely affected relations. They improved following the signing of the Ganga Water Sharing Treaty on November 5, 1977 and again deteriorated in 1980.

Mr. Sami, said the then Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia's visit to India in 1992 was very significant as the 'Tin Bigha' corridor was transferred and tribal refugee repatriation started. Relations improved following the signing of the 30-year Ganga Water Sharing Treaty, return of tribal refugees and an end to the Shanti Bahini insurgency, he added.

He was critical of Bangladesh's unilateral reduction of tariffs on Indian goods during the BNP rule. On the much-publicised trade gap, he said, it is next to impossible to bring a drastic reduction in the gap because of a number of factors.

On the issue of exporting natural gas to India, he said that this natural resource could be one of the important items that could reduce the trade gap. Referring to transshipment facilities to India, being fiercely opposed by the ma-

ior opposition parties, he said till date there has been no agreement on this issue.

The Foreign Secretary was critical of India's reluctance to implement agreements with Bangladesh and laid stress on resolving the issues of water-sharing, early demarcation of boundaries and ratification of the 1974 agreement.

Mr. Abul Ahsan, who is heading an election monitoring group, said India should be more 'open minded' and should come forward to improve relations with its small neighbour.

Mr. Mohammad Mohsin observed that there should be 'alternative thinking' to improve relations with India as the 'classical method' has gained little success. He underscored the need for a regional approach and said relations among the countries could be improved through the SAARC.

Mr. A.K.H. Morshed claimed that India did not have a "good image in the mind of the people of Bangladesh", because India was yet to ratify the 1974 boundary agreement although Bangladesh had done it long ago.

Mr. Reaz Rahman said relations between Bangladesh and India were based on 'hard realities' because India was a 'dominant partner', a big State and had a strong economy.

Mr. Farooq Sobhan, the immediate past Foreign Secretary, said many problems had been solved because of the changing reality. He stressed political consensus in improving relations and said "We should welcome Indian investment."