

Pak recalls envoy from Dhaka for his remarks

Mubashir Zaidi
Islamabad, December 1

PAKISTAN HAS offered regrets to Bangladesh and recalled its Deputy High Commissioner Irfan-ur-Rehman Raja from Dhaka, following a strong protest over the controversy created by the diplomat's remarks about 1971 incidents, who alleged that it was Awami League, not the Pakistan Army which was responsible for war atrocities.

"We regret the controversy created by the reported remarks of the deputy high commissioner made at a seminar in Dhaka on November 27.

In the circumstances, it has become impossible for the officer to effectively carry out his duties and responsibilities as a member of the high commission.

The government has, therefore, decided to transfer him from Dhaka," a foreign office spokesman conveyed the decision to Bangladesh's ambassador to Islamabad last evening.

The government's decision came after Pakistan's High

'71 war atrocities

Commissioner in Dhaka sent a detailed report of the incident, which provoked the Bangladesh authorities and sparked a series of

IMF loan

PAKISTAN'S AILING economy has received a much needed breather after the country on Thursday received the first installment of the International Monetary Fund's approved standby credit of \$ 596 million. A Press release issued by the IMF in Washington on Wednesday announced: "The Executive Board of the IMF has approved a standby credit for Pakistan until Sept 2001 in an amount equivalent to SDR 465 million (about US \$596 million) to support the Govt's economic plan. **MTC, Islamabad**

protests in Dhaka calling for expulsion of the diplomat. The angry protestors have burnt Pakistani flags and gave December 4 as the

deadline for the expulsion of the diplomat.

Bangladesh officially summoned Pakistan's High Commissioner in Dhaka on Wednesday and lodged an official protest over deputy high commissioner Irfan-ur-Rehman Raja's remarks in a seminar in Dhaka on November 27. There he alleged that it was not the Pakistan Army but the Awami League activists who initiated violence in Bangladesh during 1971 insurgency, which resulted in creation of Bangladesh which was East Pakistan before that.

According to reports, Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad has welcomed the withdrawal of the diplomat by the Pakistan Government.

While expressing regrets Pakistan has also asked Bangladesh to put aside the past and build a strong relationship. The Foreign office spokesman said that the events of 1971 were a tragedy both for Pakistan and Bangladesh.

This incident has further strained Pakistan's relations with Bangladesh.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
- 2 DEC 2000

Pak-Bangla relations hit all-time low

Udayan Namboodiri
New Delhi, December 4

PAKISTAN-BANGLADESH relations took a body blow last week when the Pak deputy commissioner in Dhaka, Irfan-ur Rahaman Raja, stated at a seminar that the Bangladeshi death count on the 1971 genocide caused by the West Pakistani Army was an exaggeration.

In the outburst of public emotion that followed, Islamabad announced it would withdraw this diplomat. But Islamabad did not inform the Bangladesh foreign office of Rahaman's date of departure. Whether it was a slip or a deliberate avoidance of niceties, the matter has been played up in the Dhaka Press as it rubbed salt into injured Bangladeshi sentiments.

General Pervez Musharraf's coup of the elected civilian Pak Government led to hostile relations with the Sheikh Hasina Government. In

September, the Bangladesh Prime Minister told the United Nations Security Council that military coups should not be tolerated. General Musharraf cancelled the appointment with her the following day.

Though Pakistan realised its folly in hurting India's neighbour and sent feelers to make up for the slight, the damage had already been done. The Raja incident has, according to a top Bangladeshi official, made things tough for pro-Pakistan elements in Dhaka and smoothed matters for those who trust India more.

India, though not party to this exchange of rhetoric, is undoubtedly interested in this sidelight to the great sub-continental conflict raging over Kashmir. Under Begum Hasina, relations between the two countries had been steadily deteriorating over the 1971 question, largely because of the her Government's insistence on resurrecting the role played by her father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rehman in the

birth of the nation.

Nawaz Shariff had offered token appreciation because he could not give the apology Hasina demanded because pressure from the Army. But General Musharraf was hostile to the suggestion. His formulation on the issue was "Bangladesh should move forward".

Bangladesh's relations with India cooled in the 1970s and 1980s. Its military regimes mended fences with China and built an Islamic blood bond with Pakistan in their bid to appease the Jamaat-e-Islami, which was politically a major force.

Begum Zia, known in the country as a fierce India-baiter, followed up with this policy much to India's concern. Begum Hasina faces elections next year and in this context, the continued whipping of Pakistan in popular Bangladeshi imagination can only work in favour of New Delhi, which is anxious to see the Awami League stay in power.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 DEC 2000

Pak peeved at Bangladesh move

Mubashir Zaidi

Islamabad, December 16

PAKISTAN HAS deeply regretted Bangladesh's decision to declare Pakistani Deputy High Commissioner at Dhaka Irfan Raja as persona non grata. Bangladesh asked the envoy to leave the city today.

"This decision, which is not in keeping with the spirit of the friendly relations between the two countries, was conveyed to the Pakistan High Commissioner at Dhaka this morning," Foreign office spokesman said in a statement issued last night.

"The Government of Pakistan also rejects the baseless allegation made by the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry that the Deputy High Commissioner had carried out activities incompatible with his status as a diplomat," the spokesman categorically stated.

Irfan Raja, reached here last night. He had come under scathing attack for his controversial remarks at a seminar in Dhaka on Nov 27, in which he had accused the ruling Awami League of Sheikh Hasina Wajid responsible for the atrocities, war crimes and excesses during the 1971 war.

After repeated calls by the Bangladeshi Foreign Ministry, when Pakistan did not recall the diplomat, the Bangladeshi Foreign



Irfan-ur-Raja (centre), a senior diplomat of the Pakistan High Commission at Bangladesh, on his way back to Pakistan. Raja was declared persona non-grata and was asked to leave Dhaka after his remarks about the country's 1971 independence war, sparking nationwide protests. Photo: AFP

Ministry summoned Pakistan High Commissioner Iqbal Ahmed and told him that Mr Raja had been declared persona non grata and if he didn't leave Dhaka by Dec 16,

he would be deported with the help of the police. The incident has further soured relations between the two countries, which began in August this

year when Gen Pervez Musharraf refused to meet Sheikh Hasina Wajid at UN summit, after Ms Hasina asked the organisation to oppose military regimes.

US announces \$ 5 m reward for clue on terrorists

HT Correspondent

Washington, December 16

THE US, as part of its counter-terrorism offensive, has announced a new \$ 5 million reward programme for people providing information leading to the arrest of terrorists. Washington's most wanted man is Osama bin Laden, believed to be holed up in Afghanistan.

An advertising campaign will be mounted through posters, matchbooks and public service announcements. The posters this time round will be brought out in Urdu as well, which is indicative of a Pakistani focus to the campaign.

A State Department spokesman, asked if the Urdu posters were born out of the thought Laden might be in Pakistan or have contacts in that country, simply said: "It is because of our deep concern and care for the people of Pakistan and our conviction that they want just as much as we do to stop terrorism."

Previous campaigns of the type, he said, have led to the arrest of 20 terrorists. More than \$ 6 million is said to have been paid to people who divulged information about terrorists. The greatest success has been the arrest in 1995 of Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind of the World Trade Center bombing.

Bangla
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Ties with Pak. will not be affected: Hasina

18/12

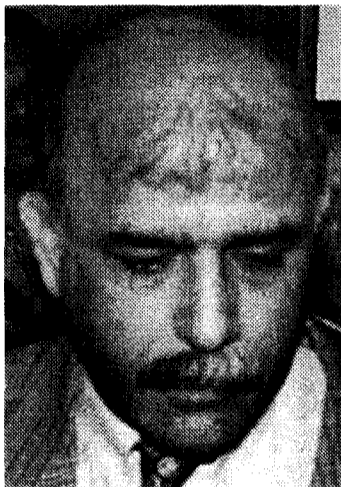
By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, DEC. 17. Two days after the expulsion of the controversial Pakistan diplomat from Dhaka, the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, has asked Islamabad to appreciate the sovereignty of the country and recognise the fact that Bangladesh came into being by defeating Pakistan in a bloody War of Liberation.

"Pakistanis should remember that Bangladesh achieved its independence by defeating them in the War of Liberation in 1971," she told a press briefing today organised by the Overseas Correspondents Association Bangladesh.

Pakistan expressed its "surprise" and termed "unfortunate" the expulsion of its Deputy High Commissioner who had to leave the country on the night of December 15 after Dhaka declared him person non-grata. Replying to newsmen's queries, the Bangladesh leader also mentioned that "it will be difficult to erase the scar that was caused to our nationhood by the Pakistanis by their barbarous activities during the War of Liberation".

Sheikh Hasina also advised Islamabad to send such diplomats to



Irfan-ur Rehman Raza

Bangladesh who are aware of the history of this country and their sensitivities on issues like the War of Liberation and related matters. Referring to the expulsion of the Pakistani Deputy High Commissioner, Mr. Irfan-ur-Rehman Raza, she said, "Islamabad should know it well that Bangladesh is neither a part nor a province of Pakistan now."

Mr. Raza's expulsion came following widespread protests over his "uncalled for and derogatory"

remarks on the War of Liberation and the role of Bangladesh Awami League during the war in 1971.

Bangladesh took the decision of expulsion because of the "inaction" of Pakistan which, after announcing the withdrawal of its diplomat on November 30, did nothing so far.

The Prime Minister said her Government maintained "utmost restraint on the issue, but Pakistan delayed to take back its diplomat under one pretext or other". Despite the undesirable development, she did not think that there would be any "negative effect" in the relation with Islamabad.

Referring to Bangladesh's relationship with India, the Prime Minister said, it was "extremely cordial" as most issues like the most pressing problems of Ganges water sharing have been sorted out.

She said Bangladesh had been flooded by Indian goods because the BNP Government allowed them (India) under SAPTA without taking reciprocal advantage. Now that Bangladesh was being provided duty-free access of its good to India, efforts had to be made to produce more exportables, she added.

THE HINDU

18 DEC 1971

MARCHING ORDERS

Dhaka-Islamabad ties hit new low

NEVER before have Bangladesh-Pakistan ties hit such a low as they have following the expulsion of Mr Irfan Raza, Pakistan's deputy high commissioner in Dhaka. Although bilateral relations have been under considerable strain since September when General Pervez Musharraf slighted Sheikh Hasina by cancelling an appointment with her for deprecating military takeovers, never have they reached a stage when a senior diplomat of the other country has to be declared persona non grata. It was expected that relations would improve after Islamabad announced the recall of Mr Raza following his arrogant outburst at a Dhaka seminar where he rejected Bangladesh's demand that Pakistan apologise for the crimes committed in 1971. But that was not to be. Mr Raza kept reiterating his earlier assertions. Most of his offensive remarks were made at functions hosted by Muslim fundamentalist groups whose links in Pakistan are well known.

Sheikh Hasina is right in saying that the expulsion was necessitated by the Pakistani diplomat hurting Bangladesh's feelings by speaking against its independence and sovereignty. Pakistan would have done the same to any foreign diplomat. Actually Mr Raza's statement was meant to articulate the view that some constituents of the BNP-led four party opposition combine have always held regarding the liberation war leading to the break-up of Pakistan. The role of these pro-Pakistani parties is well known. Like the Pakistani military establishment, they have been unable to accept the reality of Bangladesh and are out to undermine it in every possible way so as to serve notice on the pro-liberation forces that those opposed to the creation of Bangladesh have the strength and boldness to proclaim it openly. There is little doubt that Mr Raza was testing the waters for those who hope to sweep back to power in next year's poll by undermining the principles on which Bangladesh was founded. The fundamentalist outfits are desperate since another poll victory for the Awami League-led pro-liberation forces would sound their death-knell.

THE STATESMAN

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HASINA'S STRATEGY

Growing Alienation From Pakistan

By PARMANAND

SHEIKH Hasina Wajed has been following a very constant and consistent policy vis-a-vis Pakistan and India for quite some time now. This has had an impact not only on the country's foreign relations but also on domestic politics. Various events have indicated that she is achieving one success after another and the four-party opposition comprising the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the Jatiya Party, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islami Oikya Jote is becoming more and more helpless.

Though during the last days of his office, the father of the nation of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had tried to improve relations with Pakistan by visiting that country in February 1974 to attend the Islamic summit, the present Prime Minister is not missing any opportunity to sour relations with Pakistan from which Bangladesh seceded in December 1971. It began with the treatment meted out to the Pakistan chief executive, General Pervez Musharraf, during the September session of the UN General Assembly by Sheikh Hasina.

MILITARY RULE

Her statement on the rule of the military in various parts of the world — aimed conspicuously at General Musharraf — was enough to offend the Pakistani ruler, and a scheduled meeting between the two did not take place.

By asking for a copy of the Hamudur Rehman Commission Reports (1972, 1974) which had probed the failure of the Pakistan army in the 1971 war as also the atrocities committed by the Yahya Khan administration, the Bangladesh government has embarrassed its Pakistan counterpart. To make matters worse for the Pakistani authorities, there is now a persistent demand from some Pakistani politicians, human rights activists and intellectuals to know what atrocities the military committed on Bangladeshis which is reported to have resulted in the killing of three million people.

Significantly, these segments of Pakistani society now want to know the reasons for dismemberment of Jinnah's Pakistan in 1971, and they also expect Islamabad to apologise officially. Ms Asma Jehangir, human rights activist of Pakistan, and others have demanded trial and punishment of those who committed crimes against humanity in 1971. A truly embarrassing situation has been created for Pakistan even by its own people.

The situation was further complicated by the Pakistan's Deputy High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Mr Irfan Raza, on 27 November, while participating at a seminar on Bangladesh's foreign policy at Dhaka. Raza not only chose the occasion to criticise the ruling Awami League — which had indeed led the freedom movement of the country under the stewardship of Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman — but also termed Bengali freedom fighters "miscreants". Raza also questioned the logic in Dhaka asking for apology from Islamabad for the events of 1971. Should Pakistan apologise, he asked, for its own dismemberment.

Raza's remarks led to widespread condemnation and violent street agitations. Pakistani flags were burnt. With the exception of a few fundamentalist elements, the entire country demanded Raza's im-

mediate expulsion. Obviously, this fitted well into Sheikh Hasina's strategy. For the first time in its history, a diplomat was declared persona non grata.

In yet another move to spite Pakistan, Sheikh Hasina on 16 November described as "non-binding" the Islamabad-sponsored Organisation of Islamic Conference resolution adopted in Doha asking member-states to support the right of the people of Jammu and Kashmir to self-determination and said Dhaka wanted the Kashmir issue to be solved bilaterally between India and Pakistan. In the past, BNP leader Begum Khaleda Zia and JP leader Hussain Mohammad Ershad had shown some sympathy with Pakistan.

ERSHAD

Quite significantly, in the midst of all these developments, the Opposition is finding its position embarrassing. The imprisonment of HM Ershad has, if anything, weakened the Opposition further. Analysts, however, feel even a free Ershad could not have altered the situation. In any case, the Opposition has not been able to mobilise the people against the government.

The visit of Bangladesh foreign minister Abdus Samad Azad and foreign secretary CM Shafi Sami to New Delhi in December has, beyond doubt, brought an obvious upswing in the ties between the two South Asian states. The occasion was the annual foreign office consultation but various factors joined together to bring the two countries very close.

Sheikh Hasina had rightly said last year that competition for economic investment in Bangladesh had now become a global phenomenon. She also stressed that her government was committed to building up a "Sonar Bangla" free from poverty, hunger and illiteracy and stressed India's importance in making Bangladesh's economy stable and stronger. Bangladesh at present exports goods worth \$70 to 90 million to the Indian market whereas Indian exports stand at \$900 to

1,100 million a year. Quite naturally, Bangladesh chose this opportunity to urge India to allow greater access to Bangladeshi goods in the Indian market and extension of communication links between Dhaka and India's eastern and north-eastern regions. Satisfied with the present water-sharing arrangements between the two countries, Bangladeshi officials are now keen to take up the Teesta water issue.

Security issues constitute a significant component of Indo-Bangladesh relations. It is

noteworthy that while Bangladesh faces the Bay of Bengal to the south, it is bordered by India along a 4,053-km stretch except for a 193-km border with Myanmar to the southeast.

In the past, India had asked Bangladesh to take active steps to curb the transit of arms to insurgents in the north-east. On the other hand, India wants Bangladesh to crack down on the "safe havens" of some leaders of the United

Liberation Front of Assam operating from its soil.

Moreover, India is looking for energy supplies from Bangladesh, which has large deposits of oil and gas.

IRRITANTS

Domestic political compulsions are often coming in the way but during the prime ministership of Sheikh Hasina, India has been able to remove several irritants — including those of the Chakma refugees, the Ganga waters and the 1972 Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Sadly, though, the Bangladesh Opposition is never tired of describing any mutually advantageous agreement or settlement as a "sell-out". In view of the upcoming parliamentary polls in the country, Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government has to be careful.

Significantly, Bangladesh and India also discussed infrastructural projects involving revival of their cross-border and road and rail links. On its part, India is looking for transit rights from Bangladesh, which will reduce transportation costs.

Unfortunately, this issue, too, has to be sorted out in the light of the domestic political milieu. Dhaka is equally keen to settle the issue of 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 53 Bangladeshi enclaves in India which often gives rise to tension among the villagers on the border.

India and Bangladesh have agreed to form working groups to resolve all "boundary related matters". At the end of the foreign office consultation, both sides agreed that the working groups would look into the demarcation of the six-km segment of their boundary and oversee the exchange of some enclaves.

Bangladesh's growing alienation from Pakistan is a reflection of the new relatively secular nationalism among young Bangladeshis which disappoints the powers that be in Islamabad and the handful of fundamentalists in Bangladesh. It may force Pakistan to think again.



The author is Hon. Director, South Asian Studies Foundation, New Delhi.

Pak '71 report slams generals

REUTERS

ISLAMABAD, Dec. 30. — Pakistan today released a judicial report on its 1971 war with India over Bangladesh. The report, kept under wraps for about quarter of a century, blames Pakistan's defeat on the Army leadership of the time and recommends that they be put on trial.

The report, compiled in the mid-1970s by former Chief Justice Hamoodur Rehman, was declassified by the Musharraf government.

The Hamoodur Rahman Commission report accuses the Generals of a "premature and shameful surrender". It says: "Dhaka could have been held for several days more. Things had not yet come to such a pass in east Pakistan as to warrant an immediate surrender."

The then-military ruler Gen Yahya Khan, who stepped down



ZA Bhutto with daughter Benazir and Indira Gandhi at Simla in 1972.
— A Statesman file photograph

after Pakistan's defeat in December 1971, "permitted and even instigated" the surrender. The report says he should be publicly tried along with some other senior military colleagues.

Yahya Khan died some years after the war but some of his key colleagues are alive. They are all retired and live on pension.

The report said the surrender of over 90,000 military and paramilitary personnel, who were made prisoners of war, was because of the "cumulative effect of a number of factors namely, political, moral, psychological and military."

The prisoners were released under a 1972 peace accord sign-

ed by Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

The report blames Bhutto for "a lack of political foresight" in opposing a parliamentary session in Dhaka — a move that provoked Bangladeshi leaders.

"We can't resist the conclusion that there has been a serious failure on the part of the army general headquarters in the matter of guiding, directing and influencing the battles either in East Pakistan or in West Pakistan," it adds.

Witnesses cited the military's continued involvement in running the government by martial law as a reason for corruption among senior military officers. "This moral degeneration and inefficiency of senior army commanders had been attributed by and large by all concerned to their prolonged and continued involvement in martial law

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REPORT:

(Continued from page 1)

duties since 1958." ^{53.01} 3/12

The report said: "We responsible service officers have asserted before us that because of corruption resulting from such involvement, the lust for wine and women and greed for lands and houses—several senior army officers particularly those occupying high positions, had lost not only their will to fight but also their professional competence for taking vital and critical decisions."

The commission blamed the start of the 1971 violence on the Awami League Party of Bangladesh, but admitted military excesses against the people. "Our examination of the available evidence shows that there is substance in the allegations that during and after the military action, excesses were indeed committed on the people of East Pakistan, although the versions and estimates put forward by Dhaka authorities are highly coloured and exaggerated," it said. The report recommended that a high-powered court look into the allegations of atrocities committed by the Pakistani army.

The government has not given any indication whether it will take action against surviving former Pakistani Generals for alleged crimes committed in Bangladesh.

Gen Musharraf had earlier said termed incidents in 1971 as a political and military debacle, so calls for generals to be tried were not fair.

But Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, has repeatedly demanded that Pakistan make a public apology for alleged atrocities by its troops in Bangladesh.

Islamabad has asked Dhaka not to revive such memories saying they could damage the prospects of better relations.

THE STATESMAN

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Pak-Bangla relations come under strain

Dhaka, September 10

RELATIONS BETWEEN Bangladesh and Pakistan seem to have suddenly come under strain following the cancellation of the meeting between Bangladesh Prime Minister Hasina Wajed and Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf in New York yesterday, according to analysts and media here today.

In a surprise development, Gen. Musharraf did not turn up for the scheduled meeting with Sheikh Hasina at the United Nations headquarters, after a hard-hitting speech by the Bangladeshi Prime Minister at the UN Millennium Summit.

Addressing the summit on Friday, Sheikh Hasina had called for action against military regimes that

Sheikh Hasina's acidic remarks against military takeover might have prompted Gen. Musharraf to abstain.

The UNB quoted a Bangladeshi diplomat as describing it as a "sudden development".

The meeting, on the sidelines of the summit, was set up at the request of the Pakistani military ruler who seized power last October, overthrowing the elected government of Nawaz Sharif.

Bangladesh's UN representative Anwarul Karim Chowdhury said: "We are not sure what the reasons are, but it came as a surprise".

Rezaul Katim, a former diplomat and foreign affairs adviser to Bangladeshi Opposition leader Khaleda Zia, told reporters that "if one requested a meeting, it would have been held".

Mr Sami, who visited Islamabad in late August as a special envoy of Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Shafi Sami clarified that the Prime Minister's speech "was not directed against any particular country". However, the United News of Bangladesh (UNB) news agency, quoting diplomatic sources, said that an opportunity missed.

But an opportunity missed. However, the United News of Bangladesh (UNB) news agency, quoting diplomatic sources, said that an opportunity missed.

Hasina's point HT-10

IT STARTED with an assertion for democracy at the recent UN Millennium Summit where Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the Bangladesh Prime Minister, urged action against countries where coups have countermanded civilian rule. But it is now threatening to snowball into a first rate row between Dhaka and Islamabad. She had not named any country in her speech, making only a broad reference that is in tune with the world's present political mood. Indeed, in our own region, the sentiment which Sheikh Hasina voiced applies as much to Myanmar as to Pakistan. But General Pervez Musharraf was quick to take umbrage while the generals in Yangon have maintained a diplomatic silence. Pakistan's military CEO cancelled his scheduled meeting with the Bangladesh Prime Minister after her speech and his Foreign Minister went a step further, accusing her of acting at India's behest, a ludicrous charge promptly denied by Bangladesh.

Making matters worse, Gen. Musharraf asked Dhaka not to live in the past when Sheikh Hasina demanded an apology from Pakistan for the events of 1971 and also asked Islamabad to release the sensational Hamoodur Rehman report, which is the official history of the Pakistan army's rampage, and debacle, in the former East Pakistan. The Bangladesh demand is hardly likely to be conceded, but the report has touched a raw nerve in Bangladesh, reviving memories of the Gestapo-style killings by the Pakistan army. The revelations of the Hamoodur report have triggered a controversy in Pakistan as well on the role of politicians vis-a-vis that of the army in the context of the 1971 dismemberment of Pakistan. Gen. Musharraf has expectedly sided with the army, but it has done little to bolster his image as a ruler in fatigues who has throttled democracy.

Perhaps, instead of getting bogged down in petty recriminations, Gen. Musharraf could have pondered how Bangladesh, previously regarded as a 'basket case', has benefited greatly by remaining a democracy while his own country is sinking into a fundamentalist quagmire. In contrast, Bangladesh's promising economic indices and the empowerment of women are gradually being widely noticed and admired. In New York, Sheikh Hasina was, thus, only spreading a message about the virtues of democracy whose validity is undeniable.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

BROTHERS IN ARMS

Hasina Wajed ^{bluffs} calls Musharraf's bluff

CLOSE on the heels of Vajpayee's denying Musharraf his chosen appellation as Pakistan's "Chief Executive" in his customary address to the head of state while overflying Pakistani territory, Hasina Wajed referred to him as a "self-proclaimed chief executive" and criticised the military rule he has clamped on his country, indicating that while Musharraf may have had success in presenting a *fait accompli* to Pakistan, he is in no danger of winning the popularity stakes in his subcontinental neighbourhood. Musharraf had urged Bangladesh to forget the "mistakes" of the past since both "Pakistan and Bangladesh are brothers", which must have evoked atavistic memories in Wajed of the time when those "mistakes" caused the Pakistani army to kill 200,000 of its "brothers", the figure cited by American media reports of the 1971 war. Quite logically, she has asked for an apology for Pakistan's behaviour of the time. This is quite moderate, so far as demands go — had it been, let us say, European Jews after the holocaust, they would have asked for, in addition to an apology, heavy financial compensation, as well as a handing over of those principally responsible for the massacres in erstwhile East Pakistan, to be put on trial for war crimes.

What makes the apology demand topical is the probe within Pakistan of the army's role in the 1971 war, as well as demands by Pakistani political leaders and army officers for action against those responsible for genocide. Such a cleansing, however, would call the army's role in the Pakistani polity into question. Expectedly, Musharraf has ruled out action on the probe report. For the same reason, he is not likely to accede to Wajed's demand. Within the context of Bangladesh's domestic politics, the demand represents a struggle for its very soul, as anti-liberation fundamentalists recently attempted to kill Wajed with a 76 kg time bomb placed near the rostrum of a public rally. The issue is one over which the 1971 war was fought, but which doesn't seem settled yet — is Bangladesh a sovereign and democratic nation, or is it a handmaiden of a larger Islamic entity within the subcontinent? Musharraf no doubt would like to move it towards the latter, which would give legitimacy to his authoritarian politics within Pakistan as well as the attempt to foment *jihad* in Kashmir. By the same token, India would do well to support democratic interests in Pakistan, as Wajed has done.

THE STATESMAN

15 SEP 2000

Dhaka denies interfering in Islamabad's internal affairs

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, SEPT. 17. Bangladesh has strongly refuted the Pakistani military ruler, Gen. Pervez Musharraf's charge that the recent statement by the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, at the United Nations Security Council condemning overthrow of elected governments by militaries was an interference in the internal affairs of that country.

The Foreign Secretary, Mr. C. M. Shafi, said Sheikh Hasina's remark was not directed at any particular country but was a policy statement. "The statement enunciated the belief, ideals and conviction of the people, the Government and the Prime Minister regarding the dispensation of government as Bangladesh envisages for the next millennium."

Gen. Musharraf, on his return to Karachi from the U.N. Millennium Summit on Friday, reportedly said that some of the statements of Sheikh Hasina were "direct interference" in Pakistan's "internal affairs".

Refuting Gen. Musharraf's charge, Mr. Shafi said the Prime Minister's statement was a "visionary one". It was made in the "context of the long struggle that Bangladesh has made for ensuring a democratic dispensation. It was a reflection of the struggle of the Prime Minister herself for ensuring a democratic polity."

On her return from New York last week, Sheikh Hasina reiterated what she stated at the U.N. and mentioned that it was nothing new for her. "It was only a repetition of what I have been saying for a long time" she said. "I could not understand why he (Pervez Musharraf) has taken it personally."

Sheikh Hasina also called for the trial of the Pakistani war criminals who carried out genocide in Bangladesh in 1971 and wanted Pakistan to apologise to the people of Bangladesh.

Understandably, Sheikh Hasina's statement in the U.N. and the subsequent reaction from Gen. Musharraf have caused a diplomatic stand-off between the two countries, the first-ever after Bangladesh achieved independence from Pakistan through a bloody war of liberation in 1971.

While most leading Bangladesh dailies and the pro-liberation lobby have congratulated Sheikh Hasina on her "bold and just statement", the major Opposition BNP and its alliance partners have remained silent on the issue. They have also refrained from commenting on the allegations of Gen. Musharraf.

Sheikh Hasina, who inaugurated her party's "election office" in Dhaka on Friday, accused the Begum Khaleda Zia-led Opposition alliance of "conspiring" to turn Bangladesh into a province of Pakistan again. She said, "The de-

feated forces of 1971 are active to turn Bangladesh into Pakistan again." She also expressed the optimism that the people would support her party in the coming general election.

A similar hope was expressed by Begum Khaleda Zia, saying her alliance would form the next government.

Several Pakistani dailies, including the *The News* have quoted Pakistani officials as saying that Sheikh Hasina's observations "caused a dent in the proposed peace Initiative she (Hasina) was supposed to launch at the sidelines of the U.N. Millennium Summit".

Reuters reports:

Chittagong port was virtually paralysed today by a day-long strike called by Opposition student groups, port officials said. There was partial cargo handling at the country's main port, where 31 ships were at berths and in the outer anchorage, but deliveries were halted because of lack of transport, they said.

The strike was called by the All-Party Students' Union, protesting against alleged harassment of Opposition leaders and activists by security forces. The APSU groups the student wings of major Opposition parties, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party of Begum Zia.

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Bangladesh
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STANDARD

Revisiting the ghosts of 1971

EXPRESS FOCUS FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's remarks that Pakistan should apologise for the brutalities its army committed during the liberation of Bangladesh has rocked relations between the two countries. **JYOTI MALHOTRA** reports

SOUTH Asia is agog with the latest political opera unfolding across the canvas of the Indian subcontinent. As Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh gathers up the courage to ask the rulers of Pakistan some questions about the brutal and bloody circumstances of her nation's creation 29 years ago, the region is keenly watching the outcome of the argument between the Lady and the General.

Speaking in Parliament before it was prorogued last week, Hasina lashed out at "Pakistani lovers" who continued to live in Bangladesh. She also demanded that Islamabad not only give Dhaka a copy of the Hamoodur Rahman report on the role of Pakistan's army in Bangladesh's liberation war of 1971 but also apologise for the "genocide" it unleashed there.

"Why do these Pakistani lovers live in

Bangladesh? Why are they creating chaos? They have no right to stay here. They should go to that country and let us live in peace... Pakistan must apologise for the crimes it committed... War criminals should be brought to trial," she said.

Hasina's first outburst against the General came during her speech at the UN millennium summit on September 7. Without naming Pakistan or Musharraf, Hasina lashed out at dictatorships which had toppled constitutionally elected governments, and called upon the world body to treat them as unacceptable regimes.

The matter would have ended there. Nobody expected the General to react to the Lady's remarks. That kind of bitter back and forthness is usually the trademark of the Indians and the Pakistanis, analysts said. Until Musharraf, on his return home from New York, clearly stung

by the comments, told reporters that Bangladesh was "interfering" in his country's internal affairs and that Islamabad would reject any such attempt.

The General even admitted that he had cancelled a meeting with her in New York after her UN speech. "There was no point in meeting her in such an atmosphere... I was polite and she was hostile when we were sitting at one table during a function at the UN," Musharraf said.

Foreign policy analysts in the capital pointed out that Hasina, at the Commonwealth summit in Durban, South Africa, last November had eloquently—and similarly—trashed Pakistan. Her speech (along with remarks by Nigerian President Obasanjo), the analysts said, had been instrumental in expelling Pakistan from the Councils of the Common-

wealth. But unlike in Durban, the incident in New York took place in the full glare of the world's arc lights. For the first time since she became prime minister four years ago, Hasina had gone public about her private traumas.

Meanwhile, the Hamoodur Rahman report seems to have electrified Bangladesh. Newspapers are serialising the story and the debate has acquired the overtones of a national catharsis. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 so divided the country—the elite remained traditionally pro-Pakistani, while the proletariat was pro-Bengali—both groups realising that the nation was too fragile to be subject to further introspective debate. Subsequent military regimes repressed freedom of speech and buried the debate—for another,



gentler time.

That time has arrived, it seems. One anguished article in the *Daily Star*, a Bangladeshi daily, last week said, "While Bangladeshis celebrate

December 16 as the Victory Day, Pakistanis lament that it was the day Pakistan was pieced. It has always been hard for them to accept the fact that it had happened because of the brutal and oppressive policy of the then ruling junta. Authorities in Pakistan may try to cover the genocide in Bangladesh as the "debacle of East Pakistan" or "Indian intervention in East Pakistan", but there is no denying the fact that the Pakistani army carried out one of the cold-blooded massacres in human history."

Round One, analysts say, has clearly gone in favour of the Lady. One dark night 25 years ago, Hasina's father and Bangladesh's then Prime Minister Mujib-ur Rahman was murdered in a midnight attack. The assassination plot was so thoroughly planned that the entire family—including young brothers and sisters of Hasina—were wiped out. The only reason Hasina and her sister Rehana survived was because they were out of the country at the time.

Analysts, even those who feel that Sheikh Hasina's attack against Musharraf abroad was, in part, an attack against the pro-Pakistani domestic opposition, say they understand the depth of her anguish. But one South

Sheikh Hasina's attack against the Pakistani military is, in part, an attack against the pro-Pakistani domestic opposition

Asian diplomat in the capital felt that one of the immediate results of the altercation was that it would now be far more difficult for any SAARC political meeting to be held in the region, at least in the immediate future.

One diplomat pointed out that Hasina's private trauma has so influenced her life, that as the PM of a country which is currently a non-permanent member of the Security Council, she felt she needed to warn the world about the possibility of such a situation repeating itself in her country.

Evidently, just before the elections in 1996 that brought Hasina's Awami League to power, Dhaka was rife with rumours that the army would move in to topple the caretaker administration and impose martial law. It did not happen, but some now say that Hasina is precisely warning against such a possibility during elections that are to be held next year.

"She is warning all those cantonment-dependent parties that have ruled Dhaka

for 12 years out of 29," one analyst, referring to the pro-Pakistani opposition, "that she will do everything in her power to protect Bangladesh's nascent democracy."

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Abdus Sattar has not been as kind. Hasina, he told the Pakistani press, was possibly being privately encouraged by New Delhi to go public about her anger against Pakistan.

Almost immediately and without much demur, Hasina rejected the charge. "Bangladesh is an independent and a sovereign state. Whatever we do we do independently... we never do anything at other's dictates."

At a press conference reported in detail by the Bangladeshi press last week, Hasina referred to her long struggle against the military regimes of Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Zia-ur Rahman and H.M. Ershad, and pledged to continue her struggle for democracy.

"I don't know why Pervez Musharraf took my words personally. He should know that my views against martial law are not new and that I always stood for democracy... Overthrowing elected governments by the military is never acceptable to us," she told one journalist.

She told another that Dhaka had formally asked Islamabad for the Hamoodur Rahman report. "But they're dilly-dallying in giving the report... Its publication will unveil Pakistan's real face to the world," she said.

Pak.-Bangladesh ties take a downturn

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, SEPT. 23. Relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan have hit an all-time low after the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina's scheduled meeting with Pakistan's military ruler, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, on the sidelines of the U.N. millennium summit in New York was called off by the Pakistanis.

The reason for the abrupt cancellation of the meeting was Sheikh Hasina's forceful plea at the U.N. Security Council against toppling of democratic Governments by military leaders, and also her demand that Pakistan apologise to Bangladesh for the crimes committed by that country's army in 1971.

While Bangladesh has not taken kindly to the cancellation of the meeting, the remarks made by Gen. Musharraf against Sheikh Hasina were seen as "very harsh". The General accused Sheikh Hasina of interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan through her speech. He also wanted the Bangladesh leader, whose party led the country's war of liberation against Pakistan in 1971, to bury the past.

Diplomatic circles here feel that this is for the first time relations between the two countries have witnessed such a sharp deterioration. Though Dhaka has some longstanding issues with Pakistan including that of repatriation of the thousands of Urdu-speaking Pakistanis and the sharing of the pre-independent assets, Dhaka-Islamabad relations remained good even during Gen. Zia-ul-Haq's military regime.

There have been no stable Governments in Pakistan during the last 50 years but all the Governments in Bangladesh, particularly after the bloody political change-over in 1975, had maintained good relations with Islamabad. Therefore, the sudden deterioration in relations has saddened the "pro-Pakistani lobby" in Bangladesh including the fundamentalists who have taken a strong position under the leadership of the former Prime Minister, Be-

gum Khaleda Zia, to dislodge Sheikh Hasina from power.

Some mouthpieces of these sections have criticised Sheikh Hasina for what they say was "untimely and unjust remarks" against Pakistan. They have also attacked her for "acting at the behest of India", virtually echoing the allegation made by Mr. Abdus Sattar, Pakistan's Foreign Minister.

But Sheikh Hasina has scored a point both at home and abroad through her bold stand against military regimes. Leading Bangladesh dailies, including those which normally remain critical about her, have also praised her "principled pro-democracy stand" and accused Gen. Musharraf of "over-reaction".

Surprisingly, the two big Opposition parties — the BNP led by Begum Zia and Jatiya Party led by Gen. H. M. Ershad — have refrained from making any comment on the Dhaka-Islamabad row. Sheikh Hasina has defended her remarks at the U.N., stating that it was not directed at any individual or country. "If these comments made anyone uncomfortable", she said, "so be it... I cannot help it because I have been saying it for long, and will continue to do so".

Diplomatic analysts here do not see any immediate fallout from the stand-off between Dhaka and Islamabad, but they say that the peace initiative which Sheikh Hasina had begun, especially after the nuclear detonations by Delhi and Islamabad, may face a jolt.

Some former Bangladesh diplomats and political commentators said that Islamabad may take some time to realise the impact of its "harsh reaction".

The Bangladesh side, one top official said, was caught unawares when the scheduled Hasina-Musharraf meeting, organised reportedly at the request of Islamabad, was unceremoniously cancelled. "Such a behaviour is not permitted in the diplomatic grammar", one diplomat said.

HASINA'S CHALLENGE

5/10 Need to translate words into deeds 16/6

SHEIKH Hasina's bold comments at the UN millennium summit on staging of military coups, the need for restoring democracy and trying the Pakistani war criminals for atrocities committed during the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war are snowballing into a major political issue both in Pakistan and Bangladesh. General Parvez Musharraf whose tete-a-tete with Sheikh Hasina was cancelled, said on his return that her "uncalled for comments" amounted to "direct interference in Pakistan's internal affairs" which in turn has evoked an instant riposte from Hasina. Undoubtedly her comments have stoked afresh the controversy over his military takeover and provided Pakistan's opposition with ammunition to gun for him. Hasina's demand that a copy of the report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission, set up to investigate the debacle suffered by the Pakistani army in 1971, be made available to the Government and that 195 Pakistani war criminals accused of committing rape and genocide be tried have caused him considerable discomfiture at home and abroad. In fact human rights groups in Pakistan led by Asma Jehangir have publicly demanded release of the commission's report and asked General Musharraf to tender on behalf of the Pakistan army an unqualified apology to Bangladesh. Publication of the report would not only have brought the guilty generals to book but would have also prevented General Zia-ul Haq from staging a coup.

Actually Hasina has killed two birds with one stone. While decrying military takeover has lent support to Pakistan democratic movement's fight against the junta, her other observations have warned those in Bangladesh whom she suspects are plotting a coup with Opposition support, not to embark upon such a misadventure. But her biggest gain has been her success in consolidating Bangladesh's pro-liberation forces vis a vis the Muslim fundamentalists and other anti-liberation forces who derive their sustenance from Pakistan military establishment and fundamentalist groups. With parliamentary polls less than a year away Hasina has put the BNP-led four party alliance on the defensive as neither Begum Khaleda Zia nor H M Ershad had ever demanded trial of war criminals and their Bengali collaborators. It remains to be seen whether Hasina will be able to translate her words into deeds and honour her pledge that 1971 war criminals will be punished.

THE STATESMAN

7 11 1999

Bangla to continue its efforts to settle assets issue with Pak

We do not owe Bangladesh anything: Gen Musharraf

Dhaka, July 6

THE ISSUE of asset-sharing between Bangladesh and Pakistan, which remained unresolved for nearly two decades, has come to the fore with Dhaka calling for efforts to settle the lingering dispute with Islamabad.

But military ruler Gen Pervez Musharraf said, "Pakistan does not owe Bangladesh anything."

Reiterating Bangladesh's clear position on the issue, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary C M Shafi Sami said, "We have claims over the assets and we will continue to try to reach a reasonable settlement on the issue."

"Pakistan does not owe

Bangladesh any thing. Both sides made mistakes we should forget the past," Musharraf was today quoted by Dhaka's *Independence* daily as telling a Bangladeshi editor in Islamabad recently.

"We have not received accurate information in this regard as no official text of the statement is yet available.

"On the basis of reports that have appeared in the Press, I can say that Bangladesh does not agree with this viewpoint," the Foreign Secretary said reacting to Musharraf's comments.

He said division of assets is an outstanding problem between Bangladesh and Pakistan and in the past Pakistan had agreed to

discuss the matter.

The issue of repatriation of more than 200,000 Pakistani nationals who have remained stranded in Bangladesh since 1971 was another outstanding problem between the two countries.

The Bengali-speaking eastern flank split from west Pakistan in 1971 to become Bangladesh.

About three million civilians died in the nine-month war, triggered by a Pakistani military crackdown on March, 25 1971 in the former east Pakistan, which broke away to become the independent state of Bangladesh. The war ended with India sending its troops into Bangladesh and the surrender of Pakistani forces. (PTI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Bangladesh
19-17

BNP alliance may cut down on hartals

57A

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, APRIL 4. The chairperson of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and leader of the four-party Opposition alliance, Begum Khaleda Zia launched her election campaign calling her party as an "alternative government."

With an eye on the next election, Begum Zia is said to be considering relegating hartal programmes to the backburner and instead focussing on mass contact programmes. This thinking marks a significant change in the policy of Begum Khaleda Zia, who, until recently, vowed to "overthrow" the Government of Sheikh Hasina by force, particularly by holding regular hartals.

But Opposition sources said the BNP-led Opposition alliance was considering calling dawn-to-dusk hartals on April 6 and April 9 to intensify the movement. But Begum Zia may opt for a one-day hartal if only to keep the "hardliners" and "liberals" satisfied, they added. This indicates that the alliance is divided on the question of street agitations which have failed to yield any substantial results. The alliance has not been able to force the Government to concede their demand for a mid-term poll.

The BNP chairperson has started reorganising her party and front organisations. But the formation of the "All Party Action Committee" comprising the BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-E-Islami and

Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), has not proved productive. There are reports that the Opposition alliance may field consensus candidates in the 300 parliamentary seats but the seat adjustment plan may run into difficulties.

Begum Zia, now on a country-wide tour to assess public support, reiterated the "failures" of the Awami League Government, including its "protection of India's interests." It is clear that the BNP-led alliance will highlight the India issue more forcefully to garner popular vote. But political analysts say the plan may not work this time. Even during the 1996 elections, the BNP tried to project the Awami League as an "Indian stooge".

THE HINDU

5 APR 2000

HD-17
B/B

Dhaka to seek free trade pact with U.S.

Bangladesh

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MARCH 5. With only two weeks left for the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton's visit to Bangladesh, the Finance Minister, Mr. Shah AMS Kibria, has said that his Government is considering raising the issue of a bilateral free trade arrangement between the U.S. and Bangladesh during the visit.

"I personally think that the proposal of free trade arrangement is worthy and I shall talk to concerned Ministries to raise the issue officially for the greater benefit of the two countries, especially Bangladesh," Mr. Kibria said in an interview. He said a free trade arrangement would help the country's export-oriented industry grow as its main export destinations were the U.S. and Europe.

Meanwhile, the American Chamber (Am-Cham) president, Mr. Forrest E. Cookson, has said that the "Micro Credit Programme" and the democratic transition of Bangladesh worked as the driving elements for Mr. Clinton's visit. Mr. Clinton, the first-ever U.S. President to visit Bangladesh, is expected to be here on March 20.

Mr. Cookson, in an interview, said it was

natural that Mr. Clinton, who tried hard to improve the condition of the poor in his country, would like to visit the "home of micro credit."

Mr. Cookson said as democracy was working the "fastest" in Bangladesh among all Muslim countries in the world, Mr. Clinton, who was interested in seeing democracy flourish everywhere, was coming to this country.

He dismissed the notion that U.S.-based multi-national companies engaged in oil and gas sector exploration worked as the major catalyst in Mr. Clinton's visit. Even though the gas and oil sector figured high in U.S.-Bangladesh trade relations, it was not the major or lone reason for the President's visit.

Press reports here have been highlighting that American business interests, particularly in the oil and gas sector and Bangladesh's geopolitical position were the main reasons for Mr. Clinton's visit.

Mr. Cookson, however, expected that the U.S. proposal to Bangladesh to increase the export of gas and oil would be discussed during the talks between Bangladesh leaders and Mr. Clinton.

THE HINDU

- 6 MAR 2000

Bangladesh is first to ratify CTBT in South Asia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHAKA, MARCH 8

BANGLADESH on Tuesday became the first South Asian nation to ratify the CTBT after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina signed an executive order ratifying the treaty days ahead of U S President Bill Clinton's visit here.

Announcing this to the media, Foreign Secretary CM Shafi Sami said that instrument of ratification of CTBT would be deposited to the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in New York effecting Bangladesh's ratification of the treaty. By taking the "landmark decision" to ratify the treaty, the Minister said, the nation would become the 28th state of the 44 states whose ratification is necessary for the treaty to enter into force.

He said Bangladesh, which was a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, was the first country from South Asia to have ratified the CTBT.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 9 MAR 2000

Bangladesh scores over Pakistan

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, MARCH 11. "Moderate Islam" has always had a huge brand value in the American foreign policy market. Bangladesh has now begun to replace Pakistan as one of America's most favoured "moderate Islamic" states.

On the eve of President Bill Clinton's visit to the Subcontinent, a senior Administration official in Washington pointed to the reversal of political fortunes of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

In a speech on Thursday, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Mr. Karl Inderfurth, was lavish in his praise of Bangladesh, as he explained the reasons for the first ever American Presidential visit there.

Mr. Clinton's main objective, he said, "will be to recognise, reciprocate, and reinforce a tradition of friendship and cooperation with Bangladesh, one of the leading moderate Muslim democracies in the world."

The new official characterisation as a "moderate Muslim democracy" gives Bangladesh political credit on two different accounts in Washington. One is for being "moderate" in its orientation which is an important virtue in a world where many leading Islamic countries have pursued radical policies.

The other credit is for being a democracy. Not many Islamic countries have made a success of democracy. At a time when the Islamic world is in deep political ferment, the continuing experiment with democracy in Bangladesh is of considerable strategic value for the United States.

The contrast with Pakistan could not have been starker. Pakistan has lost political ground

in the U.S. on both counts. With the shadow of the Taliban over its internal and external policies, Pakistan has ceased to be moderate. And the army in Pakistan has once more put an end to civilian rule.

As a consequence, the style and substance of Mr. Clinton's travels to Bangladesh and Pakistan will be radically different.

Mr. Clinton will spend a full day in Bangladesh and barely a few hours in Pakistan. His trip to Dhaka will be a state visit and in Islamabad it won't be.

Mr. Clinton will pat Bangladeshi leaders on their backs for being a "leading moderate Muslim democracy." In Pakistan, he has promised to wag his finger at the military rulers and demand that they stop supporting terrorism, and start taking steps towards a restoration of democracy.

Pakistan has the advantages of a geo-strategic location, a powerful army, and now nuclear weapons to boot. Bangladesh cannot boast of any of these, but it has something else the U.S. has always valued—petroleum.

The discovery of large reserves of natural gas in Bangladesh has dramatically increased American economic interest in Dhaka. To quote Mr. Inderfurth again, "American investment in Bangladesh is rising exponentially, from barely \$ 25 millions three years ago to over \$ 750 millions today."

If Bangladesh can effectively use its energy resources and get its economic act together, the Clinton administration believes, Bangladesh would in a few years find itself among the ranks of middle income countries. Think of a Kuwait in the Subcontinent.

While the economic potential of Bangladesh

is real and tangible, there is little hope in Washington that the Generals would be able to get Pakistan moving on the economic front again.

Mr. Inderfurth gives Bangladesh credit on two more accounts. One for "fostering regional cooperation." And the other for taking leadership a leadership role in the Islamic world.

After the Cold War, Washington had hoped that Pakistan would perform the role of a "bridge state" among three important regions—the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, and the Subcontinent. But by raising the Taliban monster and exporting extremism, Pakistan has put itself at odds with most of its neighbours.

Bangladesh, in contrast, has the potential to be a "bridge state" between India and its north-east as well as between the Subcontinent and South-East Asia. It has also been keener than Pakistan to promote regional economic integration.

The U.S. has long valued a moderate Pakistan's leadership in the volatile Islamic world. As Islamabad comes under the sway of radical Islam, Washington is ready to back Dhaka for the same role.

Mr. Inderfurth said approvingly that Bangladesh "is in line to play leading role in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, which represents over 50 countries of the Muslim world." Bangladesh is now preparing to take over the reins of the OIC.

Washington has a huge stake in the stability of the Islamic world. It would rather have a "moderate" and "democratic" Bangladesh lead the Islamic world than an ideologically extremist Pakistan.

'Clinton visit will benefit Dhaka'

By Haroon Habib

Dhaka
DHAKA, MARCH 13. A top official of the Clinton administration has said that the objective of the coming visit of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, to this South Asian country would be to recognise and reinforce traditional friendship and cooperation.

The Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Mr. Karl Inderfurth, said, "The President's main objective will be to recognise, reciprocate and reinforce a tradition of friendship and cooperation with Bangladesh, one of the leading moderate Muslim democracies in the world."

Delivering a talk at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington recently, the senior Clinton aide said that American investment in Bangladesh had risen "exponentially" from \$25 millions three years ago to over \$750 millions today. He said Bangladesh was "moving forward in developing its vast energy reserves, particularly in natural gas" and that "U.S. companies are highly interested" in the hydrocarbon sector.

14/3
Describing Bangladesh as a "constructive participant" in the international community, Mr. Inderfurth said this country, a top contributor of personnel for U.N. peace-keeping missions, is now serving the U.N. Security Council with "energy and distinction", and also playing a "leading role" in the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

Meanwhile, there has been a mixed reaction in Bangladesh to Mr. Clinton's decision to make a brief stopover in Pakistan. While some see it as a result of "complex U.S. diplomacy", others see it as a ploy to legitimise the military rule there.

The President of the American Chamber in Bangladesh, Mr. Forrest E. Cookson, said in an interview that the country might receive another \$600 millions in the next one year if Bangladesh opened up more of its sectors allowing export to India.

Mr. Cookson said the question of increasing the garments quota by the U.S. was likely to be linked to a U.S. proposal for allowing trade unionism in Export Processing Zones (EPZ) after Mr. Clinton and Sheikh Hasina hold talks.

THE HINDU
14 MAR 2000

Plea to declare Pak a rogue state

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 14. — Well Mr Clinton, now there is a call from Bangladesh as well to declare Pakistan a terrorist state for the "unspeakable atrocities" it committed during the 1971 Indo-Pak war — crimes that "surpassed the brutalities of the Nazis and Chengis Khan".

In a letter to the US President, a Bangladesh-based organisation called The War Crimes Facts Finding Committee, says America's endorsement of "criminals as criminals", "terrorists as terrorists" and declaring Pakistan a rogue state could bring stability and peace in "this part of the

unstable and chaotic world".

Raking up the gruesome tale remains of the 1971 war, the committee has sought the US President's help to set up a court of inquiry and bring the guilty Pakistanis and their collaborators to justice.

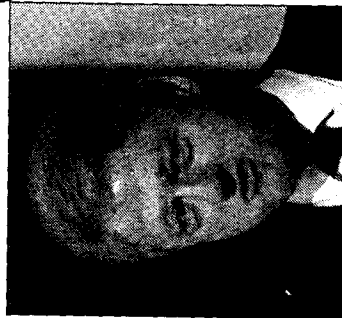
Dr M A Hasan,

convenor of the committee, says the newly-unearthed mass graves in Bangladesh not only reveal the bodily remains of the martyrs but also how civilians — men, women, children and

members of the Mukti Bahini — were massacred. Many were butchered and hacked to pieces, many were shot, gored with bayonets, some were simply stabbed to death, he says.

"If today you or your representatives look into the matter and a committee or

court of inquiry probes into it, they will see how mercilessly and savagely the so-called Muslim Pakistanis tried to annihilate a nation just because they were Bengalis",



Mr Bill Clinton

the letter says. The committee claims access to evidence that victims were chopped into bits, skinned and their eyes were gouged out.

The letter says "The war of 1971 was not a mere civil war. It was genocide that went unpunished and unrevealed to the international community".

It cites a book authored by a Pakistani armyman, Siddique Salek, as proof. The book narrates how, after Operation Searchlight on 25 March 1971, one Pak soldier remarked "Bengalis had been cleansed and weeded out for at least one generation". This attitude, says Dr Hasan, is similar to the Nazi philosophy about Jews.

US pushing for status of forces pact with Dhaka

Apratim Mukarji
New Delhi, March 19

WHILE BANGLADESH has assured, on the eve of US President Clinton's visit, that the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) in its humanitarian avatar is not on the agenda, India is nevertheless keeping a vigil.

The information available here says that Washington is pursuing the matter with renewed vigour as it perceives Dhaka to be receptive and nearer to taking the step. This is being viewed against the overall perception that the US is moving closer to both India and Bangladesh, setting up a new strategic configuration in the region in which the stiff Indian opposition of yesteryears should be out of place.

India is still formally opposed to the SOFA with unabated vigour but, in Washington's perception, it cannot but look at its proposal without taking a holistic view of the changing South Asia scenario.

Bangladesh has emerged as a nation which has broken out of the limitations of a "basket" case and is moving rapidly towards fast economic development under its creditably performing "moderate Muslim democracy". Natural calamities, however, continue to disrupt the development drive, a condition which can be neutralised to a large extent by facilitating emergency relief operations by US agencies. The humanitarian version of the SOFA fits the bill well.

When the US was pushing ahead its SOFA agenda quietly onto Bangladesh, India was quick to oppose as a virtual US military base next door (the SOFA will allow US military forces to land on Bangladesh soil without formal permission) would have come up.

Bangladesh's nod to SOFA almost came to pass when, during the SAARC summit in Colombo in 1978, Dhaka moved quietly. But an announcement tipped off the Indians, who took up the matter with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 MAR 2000

security reasons.

Bangladesh's Islamic heritage, tolerance lauded

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MARCH 20. The U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, has lauded Bangladesh for its Islamic heritage, unique culture, commitment to tolerance and democracy and active participation in the world community. He praised Bangladesh's role as a peacekeeper and its courageous example in sending peacekeepers to end conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo.

The U.S. leader also appreciated the country as the first nation in South Asia to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). "Today is only the beginning of a stronger partnership," Mr. Clinton said in a press statement announcing a \$ 97 million food aid to Bangladesh. He announced an aid of another \$50 million for Bangladesh and other South Asian countries in harnessing clean energy resources, reducing air pollution and fighting climate change.

Three agreements were signed after the business conference was over. A protocol was signed with World Tel for installation of three lakh telephone lines in Dhaka involving an estimated cost of \$300 million. Another MOU was signed to design, manufacture and instal an undersea fibre optic cable system which will connect Bangladesh and Singapore,

giving Bangladesh worldwide connectivity.

The U.S. President, at another function, said his day-long visit to Bangladesh has convinced him that poverty should not be anybody's destiny. "Bangladesh, in traditional economic consideration, is still poor but after what I saw today... in spirit, this country is full of riches," he told a gathering of several hundred beneficiaries of the government-run Ashrayan Project and Grameen Bank at a function arranged at the U.S. Embassy here.

Mr. Clinton, who joined the hurriedly-arranged programme after the abrupt cancellation of his scheduled trip to Joypura village in Savar due to security reasons, said in view of the success of the micro-credit programmes and development initiatives he would like to tell his country that Bangladesh was a unique land for investment."

'Deport Mujib killers'

Ms. Hasina has requested Mr. Clinton to speed up the deportation of the killers of the country's founding father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, most of whom are now reportedly living in the U.S. Mr. Clinton, however, did not respond to the request directly.

THE HINDU
21 MAR 2000

FD-15 Joy, but a jarring note

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THE MARCH 20 visit of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, to Bangladesh, first by any American President, was a historic one. Though brief, it will remain a milestone in bilateral relations. Barring protests by a few Left-leaning parties, the people, in general, and most major political parties attached unusual importance to the visit.

Mr. Clinton's 11-hour stay in Dhaka went off well except for the controversy over the last-minute cancellation of his visit to the National Memorial and Joypura village. People seemed unwilling to accept the abrupt cancellation, citing "security threats", particularly the visit to the National Memorial, this being a very sentimental issue connected with the nation's independence, which was opposed by the United States then.

However, for most Bangladeshis, Mr. Clinton's visit was a dream come true. For the Government of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, it was an opportunity to vindicate its position. For the main opposition, the BNP, and its new-found allies, it was frustration, though Begum Khaleda Zia talked to Mr. Clinton about allegations against the Sheikh Hasina Government. And for the Left-leaning smaller parties, it was an opportunity for rejuvenation of their traditional "anti-imperialist" role.

The visit saw signing of agreements on energy, telecommunications and social sectors. Contrary to speculation, there was no agreement on the natural gas sector. Sheikh Hasina was categorical in telling the U.S. President that her country would go in for gas exports only after ensuring reserves for 50 years. The stand was appreciated at home. But the U.S. business community in Bangladesh has a different view. The AMcham president, Mr. Forrest E. Cookson, said "We are happy that the President visited Bangladesh, which worked as an inspiration for us, but we cannot say that a dramatic breakthrough took place relating to bigger U.S. investment."

The visit has also raised the



Bangladesh's Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina... a bold stand.

The maiden visit by a U.S. President to Dhaka went off well except for the controversy over the cancellation of Mr. Clinton's trip to the National Memorial, writes HAROON HABIB.

question: what has Bangladesh gained? Most dailies in the country saw the visit as a landmark one, considering Mr. Clinton's praise for Bangladesh's potential and democracy. But his failure to visit the National Memorial invited strong criticism.

The U.S. embassy in Dhaka has regretted the last-minute cancellation and explained that it was due to a specific threat from Osama bin Laden's group. The Government too said it was shocked to see Mr. Clinton failing to visit the National Memorial. At the height of the criticism, Mr. Clinton himself explained that the security threat against him was not the fault of the Bangladesh Government or the people. "Insofar as there was risk, it had nothing to do with the Bangladeshis, nothing to do with

the Government or the people of Bangladesh, and they were not in any way at fault."

However, Mr. Clinton paid tributes to the Bangladesh Liberation War, which was strongly opposed by the then Nixon administration. In what is seen as something of a reversal of the U.S. stand, Mr. Clinton said, "Twenty-nine years ago this month, against extraordinary obstacles, Bangladesh began a lonely fight for existence that did not receive the support it deserved from many countries around the world." He also showed high respect for Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Sheikh Hasina, who turned out to be bold in making her assertions, urged Mr. Clinton to send strong message across the world in support of democratic Governments, and to discourage unconstitutional and illegal change of state power.

Sheikh Hasina spelt out her Government's stand on various issues quite categorically. She even requested the U.S. President to expedite deportation of the killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. She later said she was touched by Mr. Clinton's sympathetic response on the issue. Mr. Clinton described Bangladesh as "a nation with a very big future" while meeting some villagers of Joypura at the U.S. embassy in Dhaka. He also said he was convinced that poverty should not be anyone's destiny.

He announced that the U.S. would provide several million dollars for the schooling of 30,000 child workers, health insurance for 30 lakh women and promotion of clean solar energy, besides \$ 97-million in food assistance. He said Bangladesh would also share \$ 50 millions for the region to harness clean energy resources, to reduce air pollution and to fight climatic change along with several more millions for conserving tropical forests. He also praised Dhaka's decision to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which India and Pakistan have so far refused to sign.

CLINTON IN DHAKA

US forging closer ties with Bangladesh

THERE is little doubt that Clinton's Dhaka visit and the talks he held with Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia were aimed at strengthening democratic forces in a country which has seen bloody military coups replace popular elected governments. That he is the first US president to visit Bangladesh which he calls a nation of "considerable promise and hope" and not a "bottomless international basket case", suggests a change in US perceptions. Although democracy is yet to strike root because of the brand of politics being pursued by the Awami League and the BNP, the democratic experiment in this moderate Islamic country has had a few successes. Not surprisingly Clinton's advice to Begum Zia, who is spearheading the Opposition's oust-Hasina movement, was to observe restraint without which, he feared, Bangladesh's democratic and development process would be stalled and foreign investment and political stability would disappear. In a country where military interventions and phoney elections had been the order of the day until a decade ago, the US President's advice is not without significance. The ouster of a democratically elected government in Pakistan, must have been at the back of his mind. The point was buttressed by Sheikh Hasina who urged the President to support democratic governments and discourage usurpation of power through bullets. That he endorsed her stand was indicated by his readiness to back her demand for extradition of three of Sheikh Mujib's killers now living in the US.

President Clinton's visit was also significant for his oblique apology for the American role during Bangladesh's liberation war. Without naming the US he said many countries had not supported Bangladesh's cause although the cause was just. Also notable was his public tribute to Sheikh Mujib's role in the freedom struggle and his silence on General Ziaur Rahman. All this should help Hasina. But it was his attempt to forge closer economic ties with Bangladesh over its huge hydrocarbon reserves that drew maximum attention. In the last three years US investment has increased 30 times and most of it in the gas sector. Already 200 US companies, including oil giants, have made their presence felt in key sectors. The Clinton entourage did not hesitate to lobby for the sale of gas by these companies to India citing the Mexican export of oil to US which had made Mexico prosperous. But will Hasina follow the suggestion? Unlikely because she is afraid of the opposition which calls her government a stooge of India.

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