

**DUTY-FREE ACCESS**

HT-9 26/12

# Delayed trade talks a jolt to Dhaka ties

India Bangladesh

**Imran Rahman**  
Dhaka, December 25

INDIA-BANGLADESH ties got a jolt as New Delhi deferred the trade talks following Bangladesh's rejection of new terms set by India.

Bangladesh has been told the talks, that had been slated for December 26-27 in Dhaka, will be held sometime in January or later, Commerce Secretary Sohel Ahmed said today.

Officials in Dhaka said India preferred to hold annual trade review this time encompassing several new issues linked with each other but Bangladesh preferred specific issues mainly duty-free access of 25 category products to India.

India proposed inter-linked agenda like duty-free access with transit or transshipment only two weeks before (December 13) when an Indian joint secretary visited Bangladesh, officials said.

They added that the time was not sufficient enough to prepare for such annual trade review talks on extensive issues.

"We were interested in talks on 25 categories and refused to inter-link one issue with another or setting pre-conditions," a senior commerce ministry official said. He pointed out that when Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee unilaterally offered duty-free access of 25 categories of Bangladesh products to Indian market, he did it without setting any terms.

India is not considering Bangladesh's "genuine concern" of gradually widening trade deficit despite the fact that it enjoys huge trade advantage of around one billion US dollars over Bangladesh, the official said.

On the other hand, the Government of India persisted with tariff concession on a reciprocal basis and demanded duty concessions by the Bangladeshi Government on 90 Indian items.

India even proposed that it could agree to Dhaka's demand of duty-free access if it allows



**KHALEDA ZIA**

similar facility to 10-12 Indian items.

"India could create a goodwill through allowing duty-free access of the 25 category items but now we are confused if they (India) are taking advantage," the ministry official regretted. "We're confused over how much they (India) are sincere about our concern and could not understand their intentions," he added.

In the proposed pre-review talks, the official said, Bangladesh wanted to see a good gesture from India if they could allow duty-free access of 25 categories of Bangladeshi products and discuss expansion of the Indo-Bangla trade pact.

A draft-modified agreement has already been handed over to the Indian joint secretary of commerce when he visited Dhaka on December 13, he informed. He said that next year, February-March could be a suitable schedule for annual trade review following preview talks on the long-delayed duty-free access and the expansion of the Indo-Bangladesh trade agreement. The balance of trade between Bangladesh and India has always been in favour of India. Bangladesh suffered a deficit trade balance of \$ 149.59 m in 1990-91 that rose to \$ 771.25 m in 1999-2000.

With the cancellation of the talks, Bangladesh's unilateral decision to allow transshipment of Indian fruits and allied products across the Bangla territory has also become uncertain.

# Dhaka 're-export' corridor for Indian goods to N-E

Imran Rahman  
Dhaka, December 22

DHAKA WILL allow Indian manufacturers to sell their products to India's north-eastern States using Bangladeshi territory from early next year.

The Khaleda Zia Government will allow Bangladeshi companies to import Indian goods for re-export to India, thus helping the neighbouring country send its own products to its remote hill States using Bangladesh territory.

The new trading arrangement will come into effect on an experimental basis early next year after the National Board of Revenue completes some formalities.

"It is neither transit nor transshipment. It is simple as re-export through back-to-back letters of credit (LoC)," Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud

Chowdhury told reporters in Dhaka today as many in Dhaka have viewed the arrangement as the other name of trans-shipment, a move the ruling BNP had opposed while Awami League was in power.

Similar re-export arrangements exist also in the garment trade in Bangladesh and Singapore and Hong Kong have long been benefiting from such business arrangements with third countries, he said.

Under the new arrangement, Bangladeshi traders will import Indian fruits and vegetables from one point through LoC and re-export those to other bordering states.

Bangladeshi carriers will carry the consignments from one point to another within Bangladeshi territory.

The re-export arrangement

will add minimum 10 per cent value to the commodities as well as provide business to Bangladesh's private transport sector, the Minister said explaining the arrangement, which is expected to come into effect from early next year.

Moreover, Khasru felt, the arrangement would give Bangladesh a chance to introduce its merchandises to bordering seven north-eastern Indian States. Initially, the cross-border trade will continue for six months on experimental basis and if found viable, it will be extended further, the Commerce Minister said.

What's wrong if both the Government and the private sector benefit out of it, he asked making it clear that the arrangement is completely different both in concept and practice from transit and transshipment.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 3 1991

# Bangladesh the new support source for Ulfa

Indo  
Bangladesh  
H-5  
20/12

**Jaideep Mazumdar**  
Kolkata, December 19

BANGLADESH IS once again emerging as a major source of support for Ulfa. A section of the new dispensation in that country has started extending a helping hand to the rebel outfit, Intelligence sources say.

This would give Ulfa, as well as other militant outfits in the Northeast, a fresh lease of life. Bangladesh had gradually cut off support to Ulfa during the last Awami League Government's tenure. But with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) back in power, the support lines to Ulfa are being activated again.

A section within the BNP as well as the Bangladesh security forces and the Intelligence establishment is vehemently anti-Indian. This section had, in the past too, provided Ulfa with a lot of support, including logistics and help in setting up bases.

With Ulfa being asked to move out of Bhutan, this help from anti-Indian forces in Bangladesh has come as a great relief.

"This is emerging as a source of worry. Ulfa was on the run primarily because it could no longer count on Bangladesh's

support and its supply routes through that country were plugged. The new Government there is perceived to be anti-Indian and this has encouraged sections of the establishment there to extend support to Ulfa once more. This will put the clock back on our anti-insurgency operations against this outfit," an Intelligence officer said.

But more than Bangladesh, what has been worrying the defence and Intelligence establishment here is the unguarded Siliguri corridor as well as the Darjeeling Hills and Sikkim.

"The Ulfa rebels have been using this corridor to cross into Bangladesh over the past two months. They know they will ultimately have to fold up their operations in Bhutan and are thus looking for new bases. Bangladesh is obvious choice now and they have also been using Bangladesh to get into the Garo Hills of Meghalaya where, again, vigil is lax. The Ulfa cadres cannot cross over from Bhutan to Assam. So they are using this circuitous route," a senior military Intelligence officer said.

Ulfa has set already set up bases in areas neighbouring Saidpur, Rangpur, Jamalpur and

Thakurgaon of Bangladesh. From these bases, they have been making forays into the Garo Hills and receiving support from the migrant Muslim population in the border areas of Meghalaya.

"We have to step up vigil along the Indo-Bangladesh border in Meghalaya now. The MHA has already sent a directive to the Meghalaya Government in this regard. But most important, we have to sanitise the Siliguri corridor and ensure that the insurgents do not use it to cross over to Bangladesh," the officer said.

"We are also worried over another route that Ulfa may use to cross over into Nepal—through the Darjeeling Hills and Sikkim. That's hilly terrain and keeping watch is difficult. The only way out is to gear up the Intelligence machinery so that we get to know beforehand about the rebels' movements and nab them.

he primary responsibility here lies with the State police Intelligence. That's supposed to be the frontline Intelligence agency. Unfortunately, nothing is being done to make it effective," the central intelligence officer said.

**(Concluded)**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 DEC 2001

# Bangla aliens take over island, officials look the other way

Subhendu Mondal in Kolkata

Dec. 10. - Indian territory has again been occupied by foreign nationals, but this time the "infiltrators" are watching the latest blockbusters on video while Intelligence agencies are busy pushing files.

A remote Bay of Bengal island, Jambudwip, which falls under the jurisdiction of South 24-Parganas, has become home to more than 1,000 Bangladeshis.

They have been sneaking into Indian waters, dodging Coast Guard over the past two years and have now literally taken over Jambudwip. Most of the infiltrators, state and Central Intelligence agencies told The Statesman, are Bangladeshis, involved in fish and timber smuggling. More alarming for the authorities are reports that the infiltrators run what amounts to a parallel administration on the island.

Officials said Indian fishermen too have encroached upon the island and many of them have been putting pressure on the district administration not to take any action against the Bangladeshis as their presence ensures livelihood for the locals. Also, the Indian fisherman believe that any move to drive out the Bangladeshis would include action against them as well.

The district authorities discovered this illegal occupation of Indian territory only last year. This was possible because they were informed of it by activists of an NGO working on environmental issues who had visited the



island on receiving reports about illegal felling of trees. But the administration took no action.

Now, a worried Intelligence Bureau has taken serious note of the matter. An IB team from Delhi visited Jambudwip recently and submitted its report to the Union home ministry. The state Intelligence branch too has finally got its act together and reported back to the state government.

IB reports say the Bangladeshi infiltrators have been running a parallel administration for the past two years. Officials, in fact, point to the neglect of the sea-route used by infiltrators by the state government which has concentrated its attention on preventing illegal migration across the land border with Bangladesh in Malda, North Dinajpur, North 24-Parganas, Nadia and Murshidabad.

The island is located quite far from the mainland and it takes a boat more than five hours to reach it, even longer when the sea is rough. This is one of the reasons, officials say, for the laxity in the vigil around the island. Perhaps the irony of such a statement after the Kargil war is lost on them.

The IB is now certain that the presence of the Bangladeshis pose a threat to the security of the country and action must be taken immediately. Mr Alapan Bandyopadhyay, district magistrate, South 24-Parganas, told The Statesman: "We have discussed the matter with the state home department and other authorities concerned, including the Coast Guard. The encroachers will be evicted from the island soon." Mr Bandopadhyay, however, refused to say how many islanders are actually foreign nationals.

The Bangladeshis started coming to the island in 1999 when they cleared a large area of foliage to build their houses. Now, shops and even video parlours (run on generators as the island has no electricity) have sprouted in the villages.

Turn to Jambudwip on page 5

THE STATESMAN

1 1 DEC 2001

# Ground reality disproves BSF claims on infiltration

Dipankar Bose  
Bongaon, December 3

THE BSF might be talking of a trickle of Bangladeshi oustees returning home reassured by the gestures of the Khaleda Zia Government, but the ground reality is different.

Frightened people continue to cross over illegally to escape violence that erupted after the October parliamentary polls across the border.

The arrival of traumatised and tired Bangladeshis at villages in the Bongaon and Basirhat subdivision continues unabated. Security officials stationed in these areas say they've never seen minority community members flee the neighbouring country in such large numbers.

Villagers have provided shelter to hundreds of such families. Alok Halder, a social worker from Thakurnagar village in Bongaon sub-division, confirms that the flight of minority community Bangladeshis hasn't stopped. "They come everyday - from Bagherhat, Faridpur, Rajsahi and other districts of Bangladesh. The BSF's claims aren't correct. They have either taken note of those who crossed over legally, or have given the number of people pushed back. Families which have taken shelter in these villages would never identify themselves as Bangladeshis out of the fear of being thrown out. This being the situation, the BSF's contention doesn't hold water. Things aren't back to normal in Bangladesh." Halder and some local youth have been providing food to nearly 50 families which

## 'DEATH STALKED US IN DHAKA'

"I HAD to flee Dhaka with my daughter; otherwise they would have killed both of us. They (BNP men) were threatening us continuously and our lives were at stake. We had to abandon our careers and the house," said a sobbing Narayan Biswas (name changed on request).

Biswas, a professor in a Dhaka college, crossed over with his daughter to India after BNP rowdies demanded 1 lakh Taka from him as "penalty for him".

HTC, Bongaon

have taken shelter in and around Thakurnagar.

The Indo-Bangla border has been divided into two halves—the North Bengal section and South Bengal. The BSF patrols both these zones. The South Bengal stretch is of around 11,058 km, out of which 6,050 km is riverine. This section is most vulnerable. For, both infiltration and 'push back' rates are higher than the Northern one, senior BSF officials say.

The southern section has 229 outposts to keep a vigil on the entire stretch. IG, BSF (South Bengal) S B Kakati feels that this particular zone is rather difficult to control as the rate of smuggling and infiltration is much higher than that of the Northern Section. "We've been facing severe shortage of manpower and modern equipment

to check border crime. Fencing has not been completed. But, I still feel that not more than 2,000 people have crossed over from all fronts of Bengal in the aftermath of the Bangladesh Elections", says Kakati. On the contrary, I-G BSF (North Bengal), K S Vora, says that infiltration of minority community people from the neighboring country continues unabated. "The reduced strength of the BSF in North Bengal has adversely affected guarding of the 1066.08-km stretch. We have apprehended more than 200 Bangladeshis in the area since the BNP came to power in October. 20 Bangladeshi intruders have been gunned down by the forces till the last week of November", said Vora, a few days ago, in connection with the 37th Raising Day.

Contradictory versions of the BSF top brass clearly present the actual picture of the border areas. Tapati Mondal, a tout, operating in the Basirhat subdivision says 'business' has been good after the October elections in Bangladesh.

Several families have crossed over in the recent days, taking Tapati's help. "You just can't refuse them. They are scared and need to get in. Most of them try to avoid the BSF, as they risk a push back threat, if caught or at times they also have to bear tortures at the hands of some eccentric personnel inside the force", says Tapati.

The 'reversal' process which BSF officials claim has started some time now seems to hold a lose ground when it comes to the ground realities.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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# Infiltrators sheltered in 4 dists

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## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MALDA, Nov. 23. — More than 100 Bangladeshi Hindus who fled their country and came over to South Dinajpur during the past few weeks, have spread out to different parts of the state.

According to a South Dinajpur district official, they have moved mainly to Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia and North 24-Parganas.

So far, only 53 members of 14 families have been identified by the Malda district administration. They have sought shelter at Badalapur in the Bansihari po-

lice station area and at Dikl in the Kushmundi police station area and are being taken care of by villagers and panchayat members since 15 October.

The district administration says it has received no instructions from the state government regarding any action to be taken against the Bangladeshis. At a recent meeting between BSF officials and the South Dinajpur SP, it was pointed out that the infiltrators had entered the district because of the absence of fencing and an insufficient number of BSF jawans patrolling the border. The infiltration, however, has been

checked over the past two weeks following better patrolling by Bangladesh Rifles. The district shares a 224-km-long border with Bangladesh. Forty per cent of fencing work is yet to be over. Work has been held up in certain stretches because of opposition by villagers and litigation. So the district administration has not been able to acquire land for fencing. The worst-hit areas are Kurnagari, Hili, Balurghat and parts of Kushmundi and Gangarampur.

The absence of fencing in these areas has also encouraged smuggling.

## BANGLA MINORITIES ON THE RUN: BJP

NEW DELHI, Nov. 23. — The minorities in Bangladesh, especially Hindus and Christians, are on the run with the change of regime in that country, Prof. VK Malhotra, BJP spokesman, said in the Lok Sabha today. Raising the issue during Zero Hour, he quoted The Statesman to drive home the point that Hindus were being persecuted in Bangladesh. More than 500 women have allegedly been assaulted by ruling party workers after Begum Khaleeda Zia's return to power. There was a sharp division in the House on the issue. The Congress and CPI-M wanted restraint in view of the "friendly relations between the two countries".

**BJP demand:** The BJP demanded that those Hindus who had fled to India should be given refugee status if their stay was going to be longer. It said while India was despatching food and other aid to Afghanistan, it should not turn a blind eye to the atrocities on its own people in a neighbouring country. — SNS

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**BANGLADESH SITUATION / ATROCITIES ON HINDUS**

## Opposition demands statement in LS

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, NOV. 23.** The issue of atrocities on minorities, particularly Hindus, in Bangladesh after the installation of the Khaleda Zia regime, evoked concern among members in the Lok Sabha today with the Opposition demanding a statement by the Government.

Raising the issue during zero hour, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra (BJP) quoted newspaper reports about incidents of rape, murder, violence and arson against members of the Hindu community.

He said the country's anguish must be conveyed to the Bangladesh Government. Hindus were being asked to leave Bangladesh and thousands had to flee and take shelter in India. The protection of the Hindus had been ensured under the Nehru-Liaquat pact, he added.

The Congress chief whip, Mr. Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, said nothing should be done to disturb the harmonious relations between the two neighbours. He sought to know the outcome of the recent mission of the National Security Adviser, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, to Dhaka at the behest of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. His remark, that the persecu-

tion of Bangladeshis living here should be stopped, drew a wave of protest from the Treasury Benches.

Describing the matter as "very serious and sensitive", Mr. Somnath Chatterjee of the CPI (M) said either the Prime Minister or the External Affairs Minister should have been present in the House. Claiming that the West Bengal Government was fully aware of the "human problem," he called for a "balanced approach" by the Government in responding to the situation. Dr. Nitish Sengupta (Trinamool Congress) said every effort should be made to strengthen the voice of reason in Bangladesh and added that the tide of protests in Dhaka against such incidents was also rising.

Mr. Shivraj Patil, Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy and Ms. Margaret Alva, all from the Congress, said that any response which was not carefully thought out could lead to tension.

It was left to the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, to assure the members that the Government had already taken up the matter with the Bangladesh Government. While stating that it was a "sensitive matter", he said India had always wanted good, friendly ties with Bangladesh.

He said he would convey their feelings to the Prime Minister and if necessary, the Government would make a statement on the issue or have a discussion in the House.

### 'Centre being soft'

PTI reports from Nagpur:

The RSS today said the Government should solve diplomatically the issue of "atrocities" against Hindus in Bangladesh which, it alleged, were on the rise after the new Government assumed power there.

The RSS disapproved of the "soft" attitude of the Centre towards Dhaka while handling the "excesses" on the Hindu community, the outfit's spokesperson, Mr. M.G. Vaidya, told presspersons here.

He said the Government should ensure that the displaced Hindus were not ill-treated on Indian soil and criticised incidents of their arrests, cane charge and opening of fire on a mob in the border districts.

They should be provided all necessary help and assistance on humanitarian grounds and authorities must make a distinction between refugees and infiltrators.

THE HINDU

24 NOV 2002

## EU-India textile accord on the cards

By Our Special Correspondent *gnd*

**NEW DELHI, NOV. 22.** The European Union has offered to conclude a bilateral textile agreement with India to accelerate quota increases and easier market access prior to the existing schedule for dismantling of January 1, 2005. In return, it is seeking easier market access for the European textile industry through tariff reductions. The visiting E.U. Trade Commissioner, Mr. Pascal Lamy, said similar agreements had already been concluded with Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Ukraine. In the case of Pakistan, the agreement envisaged a 15 per cent increase in quotas by 2002 in return for a five per cent cut in tariffs.

In the case of India, he indicated that the E.U. would expect greater concessions in view of the fact that it had a large potential market. At the same time, the E.U. members would have to appreciate the element of "asymmetry" in the system while dealing with developing countries.

Addressing a news conference, he said the proposal had been "on the table" since December last year but India had only now shown interest. Exploratory talks would begin soon but he said it would be difficult to give any indication whether the agreement would ultimately become a reality.

On the multilateral level, he said the proposal for relaxing textile quotas had been opposed by the U.S. and Canada. The E.U. did not have the authority to negotiate on this issue, he said, therefore it was not possible to take any steps in this direction. Currently

*10-15*  
The matter had been referred to a committee which would submit a report by mid-2002.

Mr. Lamy discussed the issue of the bilateral textile agreement with the Commerce Minister, Mr. Murasoli Maran, and the Textiles Minister, Mr. Kashiram Rana, at a meeting here today.

On the new generalised system of preferences, he sought to reassure that in no way would it be unfavourable to India. It would either be as good or better than the previous one, he said.

Regarding the Indian demand for extending the GSP benefits to more items, Mr. Lamy said the E.U. was unable to consider it as India was not part of the special preference groups like African and Caribbean countries nor was it a least developed country (LDC).

*23/11*  
Regarding the specific issues raised by India for parity in tariff structure for *gherkins* and cut flowers, he said it would be difficult to give India concessions on the same lines as the ACP countries owing to the E.U. free trade agreement with the region. Highlighting areas of interest for the E.U., he referred to liquor, steel, antibiotics, marble, jewellery and paper.

Mr. Lamy also expressed the view that the proposal to introduce investment and competition issues at the WTO would ultimately benefit India. It would provide stability, predictability and transparency to the investment climate, thereby providing comfort to investors. He also stressed that the E.U. was not looking at a remake of the failed multilateral investment agreement prepared by the OECD.

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23 NOV 2001



# India asks European Union to reduce non-tariff barriers

■ EU to start exploratory talks on textile quota

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 22

INDIA on Thursday asked the European Union (EU) to reduce non-tariff barriers and grant benefits under generalised system of preferences (GSP) so as to allow greater access to its markets.

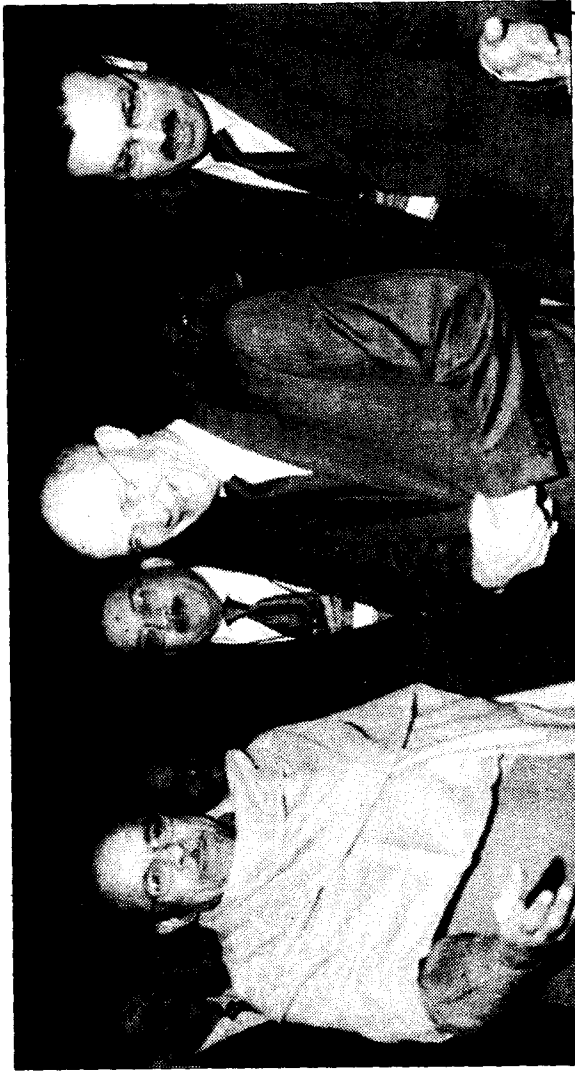
While addressing the second India-EU business summit jointly organised by Ficci and CII, commerce minister Murasoli Maran said that "in order to access the developed markets like EU, there is a need for deeper appreciation of large but developing economies like India. It calls for a series of positive steps in terms of granting GSP, reducing non-tariff barriers (NTBs) and also significant reorientation of contingent remedies".

While highlighting India's concerns Maran said that Indian industry is facing difficulties in EU market in the form of NTBs including SPS/TBT standards in agro/organic products, environment related barriers and tariff rate quotas. He also said

that EU should revisit anti-dumping/anti-subsidy initiatives against India in view of India's meagre share in EU market.

Maran said that though the bilateral trade with EU was over \$ 20 billion per year, India's share in the EU's global imports was just about one per cent. Commenting on the recent WTO meet at Doha, Maran said "it is important that all outstanding developmental concerns raised by developing countries on implementation are duly and urgently addressed and form the prime objective in the next WTO initiatives" he added.

However EU is stressing more on reciprocity in trade and market access between both the countries. While addressing a press conference EU's trade commissioner Pascal Lamy said that "to tap the full potential we will have to push the negatives out of the way on both sides". Regarding quota on textiles Lamy said that "we have agreed to start exploratory talks with India but we are not at the stage of talking the number."



Murasoli Maran with EU Commissioner for Trade Pascal Lamy, Ficci president Chirayu Amin and CII's Sanjiv Goenka at the 2nd Indo-EU business summit on Thursday. Express Photo by KAAJ DAYAL

INDIAN EXPRESS

23 NOV 2002

# Bangla influx gathers pace

92/3/28  
5-3-28

MANAS R BANERJEE  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MALDA, Nov. 28. — In the wake of reports from the Army of heightened activities of Muslim fundamentalists along parts of the Indo-Bangla border, the divisional commissioner, Jalpaiguri, has instructed the civil and police administrations of five North Bengal districts to step up vigil in the sensitive areas of the border.

The divisional commissioner, Mr AK Jain had recently sent a confidential note to the IG (North Bengal) and the SPs and DMs of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Malda, North and South Dinajpur. According to the note, Muslim activists from various fundamentalist organisations of Bangladesh have "decided to induct cadres in towns and villages on the Indo-Bangla border to assess the opinion of Indian Muslims and mobilise them against US designs".

The note further cautioned

that "approximately 75 cadres from Bangladesh, posing as Talybani Jamaat workers, who have a moderate image of being engaged in normal Islamic work, have reportedly been inducted into the state via Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, North and South Dinajpur and Malda around 17-19 September. They are likely to interact with the Muslim population there on the pretext of publicity for the popular "Hujur Saheber Mela" scheduled to be held in March 2002. It is also possible that these infiltrators may mobilise public opinion to voice resentment against the recent Indo-US co-operation on tackling international terrorism".

Local BSF officers have alleged that the policemen in charge of the international check-posts along the border have failed to check the entry of Bangladeshis with forged passports. Quoting BSF's intelligence branch reports, a BSF officer said "nearly 70 per cent of the passports issued in Bangladesh for those seeking entry into this country are forged". On an average 1,500 Bangladeshis enter into West Bengal each month through the international check-posts but barely one-third of them return to their country.

"State police man the checkposts. They should verify the signatures on the passport, but they never do so," the official alleged.

On this the additional SP, Malda, Mr Manoranjan Saha, said "We have no list of specimen signatures of the passport issuing authority and therefore are in no position to verify the authenticity of the passports".

On Saturday, a Bangladeshi from Tangail was arrested by the Gangarampur police in South Dinajpur for crossing over after showing forged passports. This was his third entry into the country, the police said.

EXCLUSIVE

## A 'secret' corridor into India

ANUPAM DASGUPTA  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Nov. 28. — Bangladeshi infiltrators have used a secret corridor in South 24-Parganas district to enter India. Bangladeshis may have crossed over into India through this route, which covers Usthi and Diamond Harbour, senior police officers told **The Statesman**.

State Intelligence officials admit that the discovery of this "Islamic corridor" (as they term it) by the state police exposes the limitations of the state machinery in combating infiltration from across the border. The police recorded a significant change in the demography of Usthi which led to the discovery of this corridor. The fact this passage has been used by infiltrators has left some red faces among the upper echelons of the state police and the intelligence department, as the government has conventionally held that infiltrators cross over mainly through North 24-

Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad, Malda, Dinajpur, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. Intelligence officials say their counterparts in Bangladesh have confirmed that the new route is being used by a many Bangladeshis to enter India.

Intelligence reports also suggest that the recent change of power in Bangladesh is likely to fuel heavy infiltration in the coming months. Given South 24-Pargana's proximity to Kolkata, the city police has reasons to stay alert. The police commissioner, Mr Sujay Chakrabarty, told **The Statesman**: "That Bangladeshis are entering through newer entry points is common wisdom. What worries us is that this could have an impact on the city of Kolkata. Demographic change in the hinterland will cause a ripple effect that will be felt by the city's population."

The DC (headquarters), Mr Banibarata Basu, said: "A steady inflow of Bangladeshis through this corridor, if it comes about, is a cause of concern for the police. The Special Branch has been asked to provide more intelligence inputs on this".

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# INFILTRATORS

23/11

(Continued from page 1)

The BSF has tightened vigil along the border. Jawans are patrolling villages and checking identity cards of villagers.

Mr Prasanta Bhadra, a BJP worker, said: "We are trying to rehabilitate the infiltrators as per the directions of our leaders."

He said: "We had handed over some infiltrators to the district authorities so that they could be taken care of till they felt it

safe to return. But they were pushed back in a haste."

**BJP wants report:** Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, BJP chief, has sought a report on the conditions under which Bangladeshi immigrants live in West Bengal. He asked for the report when the state BJP president, Mr Asim Ghosh, met him in Delhi over the past two days.

**BDO heckled:** Ms Susmita Mukherjee, block development officer II, Habra was allegedly

heckled by a group of Bangladeshi refugees this afternoon.

The refugees settled in Guma had gone to submit a deputaion, demanding the inclusion of their names in the voters' list.

They went on the rampage following heated exchanges. They damaged the BDO's car and also attacked several office staff.

Nine people have been arrested in connection with the incident.

# Search on to flush out infiltrators



Bangladeshi children line up for food at Babupara in Thakur Nagar, North 24-Parganas, on Thursday. — The Statesman

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

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*22/11*  
KOLKATA, Nov. 22. — Police have begun conducting house-to-house search operations along the Sutia border in North 24-Parganas to flush out Bangladeshis who have illegally crossed the border.

Around 200 infiltrators were arrested from different parts of Bongaon sub-division over the past few days, police said.

They have been remanded in custody and will be sent back to Bangladesh soon, Mr Harisen Verma, SP, North 24-Parganas said.

Police have marked Charugacchi, Laskipur, Jamtala, Gangulia, Boira and other villages near the Bangladesh border to check infiltration.

The Statesman had reported on 18 November that influx of Hindus from Bangladesh had increased recently in this area and that villagers and BJP workers were providing them with shelter.

After police operations started Indian villagers have grown wary of sheltering the Bangladeshis.

Police are questioning local BJP workers about the makeshift camps set up for infiltrators. The administration has also banned the use of microphones which BJP workers used to request villagers to provide temporary shelter to the Bangladeshis on humanitarian grounds.

The BJP alleged that police had taken away clothes and blankets, to be given to the Bangladeshis, kept in the party offices.

■ See INFILTRATORS: page 4

THE STATESMAN

23 NOV 2002

# Bangladesh keen on closer ties with India

19/4

HD-12

By Our Special Correspondent

**DHAKA, NOV. 18.** The new Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Mr. M. Morshed Khan, has emphasised the need for closer relations between India and Bangladesh for mutual benefit.

A successful businessman-turned politician, Mr. Khan, who assumed charge of the Ministry on Sunday, told journalists that neither India nor Bangladesh could afford to have bad relations due to geographical proximity.

"As close neighbours it is in each other's benefit to maintain friendly relations".

Mr. Khan said the issue of the export of the country's natural gas to India was not a "sensitive one....because it will be dealt from a practical and pragmatic perspective".

Answering questions on the issue which has already made the country's Opposition parties highly critical, Mr. Khan said, "we will sell gas after ascertaining our reserve and meeting domestic requirements. And if we do so, we

will sell it to the highest bidder".

"If and when we decide to sell the gas, it might be to India which would be in a position to give us the highest price due to geographical proximity".

He, however, believed that the country would have to quantify the actual reserve, formulate a gas policy, which included an estimate of its stock and projection of domestic utilisation over a period of time.

The new Foreign Minister also talked frankly about another key issue, the transit through Bangladesh to India.

"We must see it (the transit issue) both from a regional perspective and an economic perspective". Bangladesh must see what economic benefits it would gain if the transit is given. "We must see if 60-tonne trucks can ply on our highways, what would be the economic cost of building and maintaining the roads and whether that is recoverable from transit....the bottomline is what our people are getting for any economic deal".

Calling for boosting foreign investment through regional and sub-regional cooperation, Mr. Khan said economic diplomacy would be his priority.

Explaining the cancellation of next year's Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Dhaka by the new Government, Mr. Khan said "it was in the fitness of things that after the September 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., we called it off as we could not ensure security of so many heads of State and Government".

On exodus of minorities from the country, following post-election violence, he said he had not heard of any member of the minority community leaving from his constituency (Chittagong).

"Why should any one leave the country? I have not heard any one going because of suffering. One would leave if one had better opportunities."

Mr. Khan said Bangladesh would take part in the peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan if any request was made by the United Nations.

THE HINDU

19/11/98

# UNENDING TRAGEDY

Delhi must take up <sup>16/11</sup> minority issue with Dhaka

WITH the BSF killing a 10 year-old-Bangladeshi Hindu girl along the north Dinajpur-Bangladesh border and shooting another Bangladeshi Hindu boy along the Cooch-behar-Bangladesh border, the fate of minorities in that country is getting worse. These children were shot while fleeing from the post-poll minority bashing in Bangladesh and trying to enter India with their families. Although Sushma Swaraj says that the recent immigrants from Bangladesh should be treated as refugees as per UN norms, Delhi has instructed the BSF to shoot anyone crossing illegally. Obviously there is an inherent contradiction here which needs to be sorted out if more such shooting tragedies are to be avoided. Already thousands, along with their meagre belongings, are waiting on the Bangladesh border. But the BDR under instructions from Begum Khaleda Zia's government, are not allowing them to cross to save themselves embarrassment. Leading Dhaka dailies have published heart rending reports on their plight and the failure of the administration to instill confidence in them to return to their hearth and home. Tough action on the ground would prove Begum Zia's sincerity but even last week her party supporters went on a rampage near Chittagong killing minorities and destroying their places of worship. This raises doubts about her government's political sincerity.

*S.C. B. Indu Banerjee*  
Those who have returned have again been attacked and made homeless and the culprits are roaming freely as the minorities are too scared to file cases against them. The police refuse to record even rape cases. Delhi has to take into account the humanitarian side of the tragedy. It cannot shoot down those fleeing from death, dishonour and repression. One hopes that the anxiety to get natural gas from Dhaka will not prompt it to do a deal on Bangladeshi minorities. Delhi should insist that Begum Zia tackle the problem of communal frenzy properly and not let the adjoining Indian states suffer either infiltration or exodus of refugees.

THE STATESMAN

16 NOV 2001

# BSF firing kills Bangladeshi girl

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MALDA, Nov. 10. — A 12-year-old girl was killed and her 17-year-old brother injured when BSF jawans fired at a group of Bangladeshis crossing the border into North Dinajpur district last night.

The victims belonged to a group of about nine people fleeing their homes in Khangaon village in Pirganj thana area of Dinajpur district in Bangladesh, following alleged atrocities on Hindus by Muslim fundamentalists in that country.

This is the first instance of the BSF firing at Hindu families fleeing Bangladesh since 15 October.

More than 100 refugees have reportedly sought refuge in different parts of North and South Dinajpur and Malda districts so far, according to Border Security Force officers.

Only a few days ago, local BSF officials deployed in the region were reportedly instructed by their higher-ups in New Delhi to prevent any further intrusions from across the border.

A BSF official said the directive reaching them from Delhi had stated, infiltrators should be pushed back and jawans on duty should not hesitate to open fire.

The incident occurred at about 9.30

## SUSHMA HARD TALK

KOLKATA, Nov. 10. — Mrs Sushma Swaraj, the Union minister for information and cultural affairs, today said the recent immigrants from Bangladesh should be treated as refugees as per the norms laid down by the United Nations Organisation.

It is the state government's responsibility to look after their welfare, she said.

The Union minister for information and cultural affairs said the Centre was ready to offer all assistance in this matter.

The Government of India had sent a strong message to the Bangladesh government on this issue through Mr Brajesh Mishra, who had visited Dhaka.

— SNS

p.m. at Bindole near the Bahor border out-post in the Raiganj thana of the district. Jawans manning the post belonged to the Border Security Force's 97th battalion.

According to officials, the BSF fired ten rounds at the intruders after the latter refused to halt.

While the girl, Daya Rani Khettri, died at the spot, her brother Santo

Khettri was admitted to the Raiganj hospital.

The others accompanying them remain untraced.

Santo was hit by a bullet in the abdomen. Later, after surgery, he told investigating police officers, "We had been tortured in Bangladesh so we decided to come over to India."

He apprehended, his father, who is missing, "might have died in the firing".

The chief minister, when asked to comment on last night's incident, said at Writers' Building, he had sought details of the firing from the district authorities.

According to Mr Gupta, initial reports reaching him said Border Security Force personnel had fired after being attacked with swords by a group of people who were trying to cross the border.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, leader of the Opposition, condemned the incident and said, "We've been requesting the state government to provide protection to refugees. Our request has been reciprocated with firing."

Mr Abdul Karim Choudhury, Trinamul Congress MLA of north Bengal, has been asked to send a detailed report to the state party leadership on the issue.

THE STATESMAN

11 NOV 2002

# Buddha seeks update on Bangla influx

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Nov. 7. — The chief minister has asked the administration of nine districts bordering Bangladesh to send him reports on the influx of Bangladeshis into India.

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said, "I don't think the problem is very serious", but admitted to having instructed the district administration of the nine districts to not be complacent. The chief minister has also requested BSF authorities to step up vigil.

Mr Subhas Chakraborty said the influx had reached alarming proportions. He said that during his recent visit to Tangra village in Bonga sub-division, Bangladeshis were found entering the country in large numbers. He said there was infiltration earlier but now the numbers are increasing.

Mr Chakraborty said the chief minister has apprised the Prime Minister of the situation. "We feel for them and we will have to maintain communal harmony," Mr Chakraborty added.

The transport minister said Bangladeshis are putting up on Jessore Road, Hakimpur and Swarnnagar in Bonga subdivision.

"The former Awami League government was pro-Indian but after the present BNP government came to power, the situation has changed."

Asked if he'd any differences with Mr Bhattacharya in the past year, he said Mr Bhattacharya has duly discharged his duties.

He said: "I don't have any differences in policy with the chief minister. Otherwise I won't have been inducted in his cabinet. Differences are always there and it can be noticed even in a family."

## BANGLADESHI SHOT

MALDA, Nov. 7. — A Bangladeshi national stated to be a smuggler was shot dead by BSF personnel at Sonamatia border outpost early today, the Superintendent of Police, North Dinajpur, said. The victim was a resident of Thakurgaon, Bangladesh.

BSF jawans fired more than five rounds when some people tried to cross over to the Bangladeshi side from India.

The identification of families that have come from Bangladesh continues. Till date, 12 families in Malda and South Dinajpur have been identified. — SNS

It is the Opposition's policy to create differences within the members of the ruling party."

THE STATESMAN



# Unfenced borders abet influx: BSF

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MALDA, Nov. 12. — Absence of fences along certain stretches of the Indo-Bangla border is making it difficult to check infiltration, say BSF officials.

"It is very difficult to check infiltration because long stretches of the border are unfenced", a senior BSF official said. Where the border is open, Bangladeshi families are crossing over with ease. "Vigil has been stepped up but it is difficult to check infiltration during nights. Immigrants manage to evade patrol parties", he said.

According to latest reports 15 Bangladeshi families have taken refuge in the Radhikapur and Dalingaon areas of Ka-

liaganj block of North Dinajpur. The BDO, Kaliaganj has sent officials to check on the exact number of Bangladeshi refugees.

Barely 40 percent of the 500-km border in Malda, North and South Dinajpur, is fenced.

In Malda, fencing is absent along a 68-km stretch. South Dinajpur shares a 227 km border with Bangladesh. A 57-km stretch in Kumarganj, Hili and Bansihari areas is totally unfenced.

The North Dinajpur police has left for the Bahor border out-post to hand over the body of the 12 year old girl who was killed in BSF firing on Saturday night.

## Refugee crisis a human problem: Anil

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Nov. 12. — Mr Anil Biswas today said the influx from Bangladesh is a "human problem" and the government is looking into it "with utmost seriousness".

The CPI-M state secretary said the government would have to consider all aspects before taking a decision on dealing with the situation. "One has to be careful about rumours triggering panic."

The BJP today said the government was handling the influx problem very "casually". "The

state administration has assured that it is keeping a watch on the situation. That is not enough", Mr Muzaffar Khan, state unit vice president, said.

The BJP has asked the government to set up temporary camps for the Bangladeshi families. The party has instructed its border districts units to "stand by" the refugee families.

Bangladesh's minority population is now facing the wrath of the "communal fringe" of the new government and both the Centre and the state should take special measures to save them, Mr Khan said.

**Pranab reaction:** Mr Pranab Mukherjee today said people crossing over from Bangladesh should not be pushed back forcibly. The state should play a constructive role in this regard.

"The government should take up the issue with the Centre and the Bangladesh government and extend cooperation to the Bangladeshis camping in various parts of the border districts", he said.

The leader of the Opposition, said the government has not set up a single relief camp in the affected areas. "Rather, the refugees are being put behind bars and termed infiltrators", he said.

THE STATESMAN

13 NOV 2007

# Differentiate refugees from infiltrators: BJP

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, NOV. 5.** The Bharatiya Janata Party today stated there was need to 'differentiate' between the influx of "refugees" from Bangladesh who were being harassed in their country and were forced to flee and others who were "infiltrators" coming across the border. However, the party general secretary, Ms. Maya Singh, who made the statement, failed to clarify the criterion to be used to make this distinction. India should urge Bangladesh to protect its own minorities, she added.

In the past the party's stand had clearly been that the Hindus who cross over to India were refugees as they come because of religious harassment and intolerance, while the Muslims who come in were "infiltrators." But today Ms. Singh was shy about making the distinction on grounds of religion, although she made it clear that all the Hindus who cross the border should be treated as "refugees", stopping short of declaring that all the Muslims who come here were in-



**BJP workers protesting outside the Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner's Office in Kolkata on Monday, against the recent attacks on the Hindu community in that country. — Photo: Sushanta Patronobish**

filtrators. In a statement the party said that ever since the new Bangladesh National Party coalition Government had come to power "persecution of the Hindus has started in full swing" leading to "Hindu pogroms" and a fresh influx of refugees.

She said the Left Front Govern-

ment in West Bengal had "put a lid on all news" related to this influx and was protecting its "Bengali Muslim vote bank".

The party suggested a strong diplomatic offensive on the issue and adequate publicity of atrocities against the Hindus in Bangladesh. It was also imperative to

make a clear and "official" distinction between "refugees" and "infiltrators" so that they could be treated differently.

The party has also criticised the alleged strong arm tactics used by the Chhatisgarh Chief Minister, Mr. Ajit Jogi, against the Adivasi Vikas Parishad. The Opposition leader in the State, Mr. Nand Kumar Sai (BJP), today said that Mr. Jogi's goons blackened the faces of the adivasis, had them beaten up and forcibly got the Parishad to declare him a tribal. Ms. Singh charged Mr. Jogi with encouraging and leading hooligans.

## Violence in Nabarangpur

PTI reports from Bhubaneswar:

Violence rocked Raigarh block of Nabarangpur district in south Orissa with angry tribals setting fire to shops belonging to the Bangladeshi settlers in Jodinga village today. According to official sources, the tribals had cut off roads and put up road blocks at several places. The area had remained tense following clashes between the tribals and the settlers over land disputes.

# Prejudice and potentials

J.N. DIXIT

In the excitement of the United States of America's military campaign against international terrorism, and our pre-occupation with Pakistan's developing equations with the US, we have tended to ignore the reality of our foreign policy having other concerns and interests. No country's foreign policy can be successful if it becomes unidimensional in the focus of its attention.

A major development in our neighbourhood has been the change of government in Bangladesh after the elections held in that country in October. Hasina Wajed's Awami League government was defeated in this election by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by Khaleda Zia. Her electoral victory was a landslide phenomenon which has surprised opposition parties in Bangladesh somewhat. But then, political phenomena are never a matter of logic or statistical calculations. This is especially so in the case of electoral politics.

The prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, has shown practicality and realism by sending his principal secretary and national security advisor, Brajesh Mishra, to Dhaka as special envoy in the second half of October. Vajpayee was also the first to greet Khaleda Zia on her assumption of power. She has returned to power after a gap of five years. Her coming to power has been viewed with some concern and apprehension in the Indian media and political circles. This concern is rooted in the general perception that Khaleda Zia and the BNP are generally suspicious of India and are anti-Indian in their basic political orientations. This, in my perception, is an exercise in presumptive value-judgement.

Before one proceeds to analyze the reasons for Khaleda Zia's victory and undertakes a speculative analysis on the prospects of Indo-Bangladesh relations, it is necessary to be conscious of a fundamental reality — the policies of any elected government in any country, particularly such government in our neighbourhood, will be essentially responsive to its respective domestic public concerns, aspirations and apprehensions. A positive or negative response towards India is not and will not be adopted by such government in a vacuum.

Policies evolve on the matrix of public opinion specially in democracies, and Bangladesh is evolving as a strong democracy since the disappearance of the General Ershad government in the early Nineties. One should avoid *a priori* judgments on whether Khaleda Zia will be friendly or adversarial in her policies towards India. We must make our assessment on the basis of her India policy as it evolves in her current tenure. Our indulging in anticipatory nega-

tivism about her *ad nauseam* will only create tensions in Indo-Bangladesh relations, which we should avoid.

Having stressed the importance of this realistic approach, one must discern the reasons why Khaleda Zia succeeded. First, the incumbent factor militated against Wajed. Second, Wajed was wrongly projected as a pro-Indian prime minister who compromised with India at the cost of Bangladesh's national interests. This was a factually wrong projection of Khaleda Zia's leadership and her policies. But we in India were blamed for this projection because our media and political analysts went on harping about Wajed and her Awami League being friendly towards India.

Moreover, just before the October elections it seems to have been assumed that if Wajed is defeated and any other political parties come to power in Bangladesh, the latter would be anti-Indian. Wajed had no defence against this analysis in terms of Bangladesh's domestic politics.

Third, although the Bangladesh economy improved during Khaleda Zia's tenure, she could not impart the necessary dynamism to her developmental and economic policies. Fourth, her moderate and rational approach on religious and ethnic issues resulted in the Islamasand parties and groups of Bangladesh supporting the opposition. These factors contributed to her victory. It should be noted that the Islamasand parties supported Khaleda Zia and BNP in the elections.

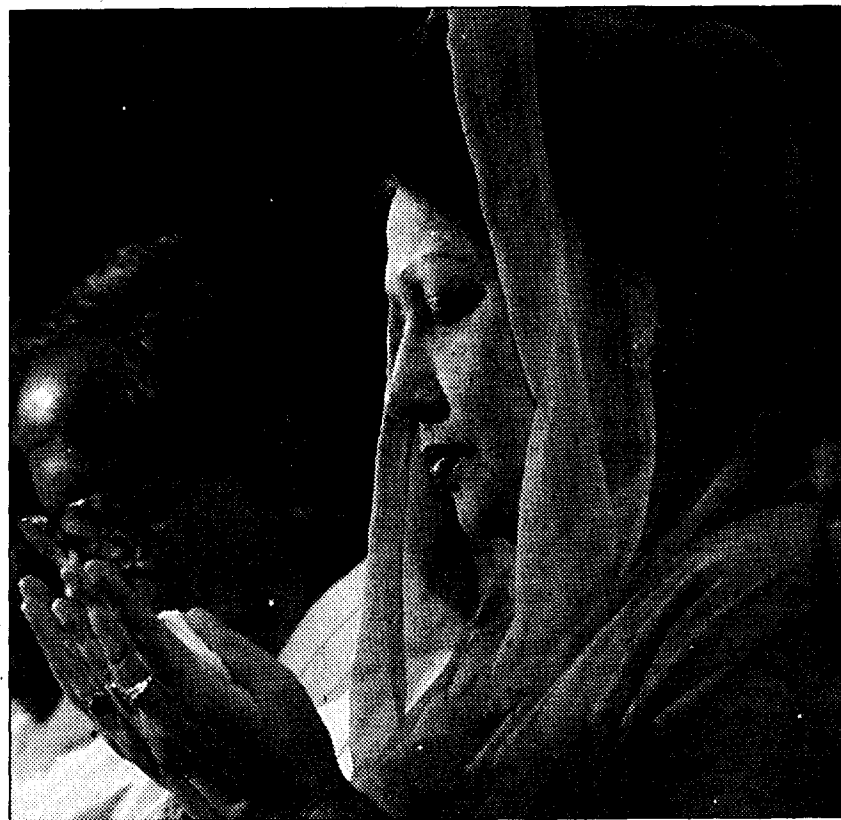
To move on to the prospects of Indo-Bangladesh relations under Khaleda Zia's present dispensation, our assessments could be based on her initial public pronouncements on her foreign policy and reports of her discussions with India's national security advisor, Brajesh Mishra, during his visit to Dhaka. Khaleda Zia was measured and practical in her public pronouncements on Indo-Bangladesh relations immediately after assuming the charge as prime minister in October. She stated that her aim is to have normal and friendly relations with India and to deal with all issues of Indo-Bangladesh relations in a constructive and cooperative spirit.

She stressed that her focus would be on nurturing the political stability of Bangladesh and galvanizing the economic development of her country. She hinted that she would like to structure cooperative relations with India, wherever necessary, to meet the second objective mentioned above. These pronouncements are practical and positive as far as they go. The question is how these statements would be translated into policies in the coming weeks and months.

During her election campaign Khale-

da Zia described the 1996 Indo-Bangladesh treaty on the sharing of waters of the Ganges, as inadequate in meeting Bangladesh's interests. She also expressed the view that Indo-Bangladesh trade relations have been unequal because India has not fulfilled some of the commitments regarding lifting of tariff and non-tariff barriers on certain categories of Bangladeshi exports. She has not been negative on the

Reports on these discussions indicate that the Khaleda Zia government is agreeable to substantive discussions on the problems related to water-sharing, enclaves, maintaining of peace and tranquility on the Indo-Bangladesh border and expanding economic relations. It is some of the nuances of this response which one has to take note of. Indications are that she would like to re-negotiate some provisions of the water-shar-



possibility of Bangladesh exporting natural gas to India. But she has not committed herself on this, one way or the other.

The issues which Mishra discussed with Khaleda Zia and other senior leaders in the Bangladesh government could be summed up as follows. Mishra had an across-the-board discussion on pending issues with Bangladesh, namely questions related to the implementation of water-resources-sharing arrangements about which the Khaleda Zia government has some concern; the problem of illegal migration of Bangladeshi into India; the need to resolve the residual problems related to enclaves in adverse possession of India and Bangladesh; prospects of Indo-Bangladesh cooperation to counter terrorist and secessionist activities in India's Northeast; the possibilities of the export of natural gas from Bangladesh to India; and the most recent problem of violence against the Hindu minority in Bangladesh.

**‘ Bangladesh should shed its irrelevant political and emotional reservations about a close relationship with India ’**

ing treaty; as far as trade and economic relations go, she is keen that India fulfil the past commitments on market access to Bangladesh exports.

Khaleda Zia remains committed to her previous stand on the issue of illegal migration, stating that such migration does not exist. On the question of recent violence against the Hindu minority, her response was that she does not distinguish between Hindus and Muslims of Bangladesh and they are all Bangladeshis whose security and well-being is her responsibility, and where

necessary she will take remedial action. She remains non-committal on the issue of the export of natural gas to India which is to be expected given the most recent public statements of the opposition leader, Wajed, that she lost the election because she did not succumb to Indian pressure on the export of Bangladesh's natural gas to India. Hasina has gone to the extent of saying that India has taken resort to intrigue in order to ensure Khaleda Zia's electoral victory. (So much for the Indian *pandits* who keep claiming that Wajed and the Awami League are more friendly to India and more amenable to Indian interests and concerns).

It ought to be stressed that natural gas exports from Bangladesh to India would be a significant factor in serving the mutual interests of India and Bangladesh. US multi-nationals have confirmed that Bangladesh is very rich in natural gas. The natural gas available at the Babiyana gas fields in northeastern Bangladesh can be on stream for exports to India in the foreseeable future if Bangladesh agrees to the project. Bangladesh could earn roughly 3.7 billion dollars in the coming 20 years if it exports natural gas to India. A positive decision by Bangladesh on the project can also result in Bangladesh getting several million dollars in immediate foreign direct investments. This would also remedy the adverse balance of trade which Bangladesh has *vis-à-vis* India.

While India's requirements for natural gas are obvious, Mishra did not make any insistent advocacy on the subject. He reportedly pointed out the benefits of this proposal for both countries, but added that India has no intention of generating any pressure or imposing on Bangladesh on this issue because India has other options if the Bangladesh option does not work out because of Bangladesh's political reservations. However, there are indications that certain segments of the Bangladesh establishment understand both the logic and economic benefits of the proposal. India has adopted the right approach of not being insistent on the issue and leaving the decision entirely to the judgment of Bangladesh authorities.

The fundamental reality which India and Bangladesh should take cognizance of is that there is substantive potential for economic, commercial, technological and cultural relationships between India and Bangladesh. The need is for India to be as sensitive as it can be to Bangladesh's sensitivities and concerns, and for Bangladesh to shed its irrelevant political and emotional reservations about a close relationship with India. The question is whether the leaders of our two countries can visualize this potential and these opportunities, and work together to fulfil them.

# Khaleda sets terms for border peace

117-7  
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Udayan Namboodiri  
New Delhi, October 28

BRAJESH MISHRA returned from Dhaka yesterday with mixed signals from the newly installed Khaleda Zia Government. His hosts used the opportunity to make it clear that New Delhi would have to make a wide range of concessions if it wants tranquillity with its eastern neighbour.

The all-too-familiar rhetoric about "equality" with India, which characterised Khaleda's 1991-96 term in Ganabhaven resurfaced yet again in the two rounds of talks Mishra and the Indian delegation held with their Bangladeshi interlocutors.

There are now conflicting versions on whether Mishra succeeded in extracting a promise to put an end to "atrocities" on Bangladesh's Hindu minority population. The border atrocities issue was one of the objectives behind the national security adviser's sudden decision to go to Dhaka.

Though Mishra claimed that he had been assured by Begum Zia of "protection" to Hindus, her foreign secretary Shamsher Mobin Choudhury stoutly denied that the 'vexed' issue was even raised at the talks.

The Bangladeshi stand is surprising. Only earlier in the week, Khaleda had made an open statement assuring Hindus of protection. Dhaka is perhaps a little peeved over India's meddling in its domestic matters.

Mishra's hosts put up the BNP-led Government's old demands for parity with India on economic matters. The Bangladeshi foreign secretary said Begum Zia wanted the



rejuvenation of Saarc. She also wanted New Delhi to address a wish list including reducing the \$ 1 billion trade deficit and immediate duty-free access to 25 categories of items agreed upon earlier.

Most significantly, Bangladesh has demanded a review of the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty. The BNP has held that the Hasina regime "sold out" to India by not securing guarantees and limiting its term to 30 years. By threatening to reopen the old pressure point, the Khaleda regime has indicated a rough ride for the Indo-Bangla bus for the next five years.

The party in Opposition in Bangladesh has traditionally been more anti-Indian than the one in power. Playing that role now is former ally, Sheikh Hasina, who is already accusing Khaleda of "selling out to her Indian masters" on energy cooperation. Mishra paid her a courtesy call before he left for India, but it is obvious that Hasina's policy of emotionalising the question of selling natural gas to India will prove an obstacle for Khaleda to push through her pragmatic policy on the issue.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 OCT 2001



# HOUNDED OUT

While Delhi's attention remained riveted on the American backlash to the Black Tuesday strikes, a sordid story of vandalism and intolerance was unfolding closer home. Bangladeshi zealots had let loose a reign of terror on minorities

Arindam Sarkar

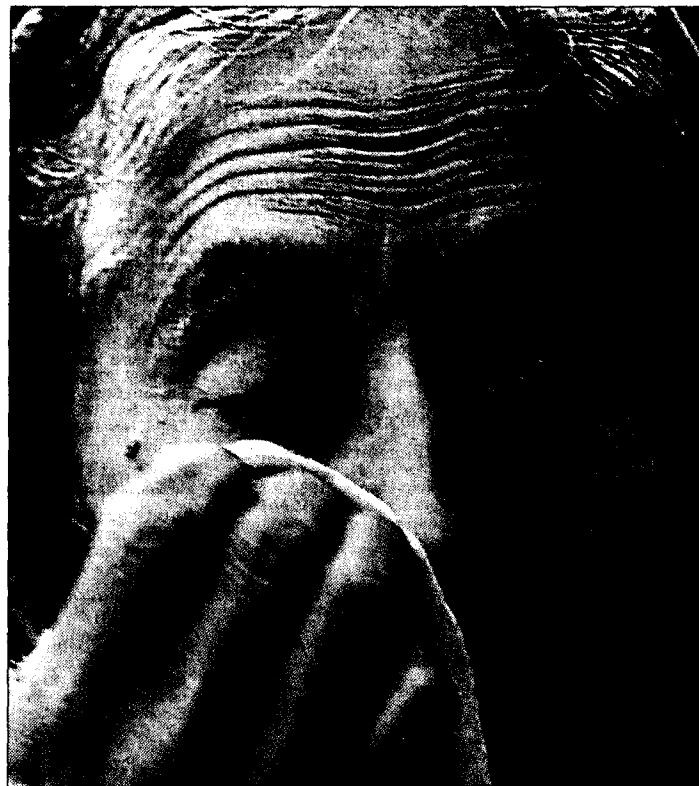
IT WAS a story the world missed. On September 11, a nonplussed India remained glued to TV screens, watching endless replays of the blazing World Trade Center crumbling in a heap in New York. The world was busy blaming Osama bin Laden, while the media waited with bated breath for US retaliation. Nobody, however, had any clue that in Bangladesh minorities were under siege.

While Delhi remained focused on the western sector, closer to the scene of action, where US troops were deploying for an assault on Afghanistan, the murder of minorities, the loot and arson of their property by zealots inside Bangladesh in the east went almost unnoticed. By the time Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's emissary Brajesh Mishra landed in Dhaka to meet Bangladesh's new Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, a lot of water had flowed down the Padma.

The tension that started like a slow fire almost a month before the October 1 general elections in Bangladesh, had already left scores of minority community members homeless, driving them across the border to seek shelter in Tripura and the northern districts of West Bengal.

Though no accurate figures are available with the BSF or the BDR, intelligence sources concede that more than 1,000 families may have migrated and taken refuge in North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Malda and other North Bengal districts over the last month and a half.

The situation reached such a pass that even major Bangladeshi dailies such as *Pratham Alo*, *Jana Kantha* and *Ittefaq*, and English-language newspapers such as *The Bangladesh Observer*, *Daily Star* and *The Independent*, came out with screaming headlines on minorities being attacked by fundamentalists allegedly loyal to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).



*Though no accurate figures are available, intelligence sources concede that more than 1,000 families may have taken refuge in North Bengal*

The violence that began with the run-up to the general elections, which left 140 dead, assumed dimensions of a pogrom after the October 1 elections in which Khaleda Zia's BNP-led coalition defeated Sheikh Hasina Wajed's Awami League hands down. The poll results came out on October 4, and within a week, the minorities began being targeted by fun-

damentalists in remote areas of the districts of Nator, Jessore, Khulna, Narayanganj, Dacca, Barisal and Sonargaon.

"We were cooking our lunch when we heard people rushing. Thereafter, it was mayhem all the way. The 200-odd attackers, who carried knives, stormed into our house, destroyed valuables, furniture and ran away with the gold ornaments we had

saved for our sister's wedding," recalled a relative of Gopal Mishra whose house was plundered at 11 am on October 7 at Krishnapur village in Sonargaon. "Our only fault: We had voted for the Awami League."

The villagers of Bhotopur have similar horror stories to recount. About 200-odd men armed with *ramdas* and sticks attacked six houses. Surjit Kumar of Belna has still not got over the nightmare. Surja and others — all Awami League supporters — had left their homes after the BNP's landslide win.

Only the women of the village were left behind. The attackers came late at night one day in October. Most women kept the insult to themselves, but two of them later lodged complaints with the police.

This was not just post-poll retaliation by fundamentalists loyal to the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami. This was also the beginning of a nightmare for the minorities in Bangladesh as a whole. Many of them have since fled the country leaving behind their property. Those who stay back have refrained even from observing Durga Puja.

Result: Durgotsav in Bangladesh was very low-key and lacked the usual glitter and gaiety. The spate of attacks on the minorities forced many organisers to refrain from celebrating the Puja. In most pandals, dhaks and loudspeakers remained mute. Dhaka's Dhakeswari Mandir and the Ramakrishna Mission Ashram too kept their Durgotsav extremely low-key.

Local dailies reported that at many places, pandals had been destroyed and organisers were told to call off the Puja. Idols were vandalised in Narayanganj, Nator, Faridpur, Jessore and other districts.

In Dhaka, intellectuals and university students observed a hunger-strike on Ashtami in protest against the attacks on the minorities.

While all this was happening, Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina blasted the BNP and its ally Jamaat. She urged the minorities to rise in protest against the attacks on them. On her part, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia declared after taking oath on October 10 that stern action would be taken against those guilty of such attacks and promised that the minorities would be allowed to celebrate their grand festival without hindrance. She also told her ministers to visit the pandals in their respective constituencies to ensure peace.

But these were words mouthed in vain. The damage done during the run-up to the polls had already marred the Puja spirit.

The *Daily Star* reported that priest Dipen Chandra Ghosh of Ram Kanai Jagannath Akra in Narayanganj was so dejected that he said that there was little about the Puja this year to celebrate. Those who had crossed over to West Bengal confirmed the incidents.

The Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner in Kolkata, Mohammad Touhid Hossain, however, believes these were stray incidents blown out of proportion by the media. But he concedes that there were acts of vandalism and attacks on the minorities.



A woman who recently crossed over into West Bengal with her child to escape persecution in Bangladesh.

## FLIGHTS OF FEAR

INDIA IS not new to periodic influxes of minority community members from Bangladesh. Communal tension has repeatedly assumed threatening dimensions during the chequered post-Partition history of Bengal.

The riots of 1947 and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 fanned communal fires driving large portions of the minority population across the border to seek refuge in India.

The recent influx of more than 1,000 people (October 2001) from Nator, Jessore, Comilla, Dhaka and Narayanganj into north Bengal was triggered by communal tension over Durga Puja, fundamentalist attacks on minority families and destruction of their properties.

"Infiltration is caused by the sense of insecurity prevailing among the minorities in Bangladesh. Whenever they faced fundamentalist attacks they migrated to India. Census figures confirm that at the time of Partition in 1947, 34 per cent of the population in East Bengal was from the minority community. The 1991 census shows the minority population in Bangladesh at 13 per cent.

"The fact is, migration never stopped and the communal clashes and the October incidents have only accelerated the process," says Ramesh Singh, BSF Commandant (GE), South Bengal Frontier.

Saleem Samad, a Bangladeshi media man and political commentator, concurs. The minorities in Bangladesh, he says, are settled mostly in Barisal, Khulna, Faridpur and Jessore, the dis-

tricts closer to West Bengal. It is natural, therefore, that under stress and tension they would cross over.

Samad says in his paper 'State of Minorities in Bangladesh: From Secular to Islamic Hegemony': "The vanishing minority population is understood from researching the census documents published by the Bangladesh Government. In 1941, 28.3 per cent of the total population was made up of the minorities. Evaluation of Government documents from 1941 to 1991 indicates a large drop in the number of minorities. The Muslim population increased by 219.5 per cent, but there was a large decline in the population of minorities. As many as 20 million people were missing.

This is corroborated also by *Mayer Dak*, the official mouthpiece of the Nikhil Banga Nagarik Sangha of Bangladesh. According to a case study undertaken by *Mayer Dak* in the three districts of Faridpur, Gopalganja and Madaripur, the number of migrating families has come down since 1994, but the process is on.

As I-G BSE South Bengal Frontier, SB Kakakti points out: "We apprehended the first group of 14 families on October 16 near Malda. They complained of persecution in Bangladesh. Every year, some 9,000 to 10,000 people try to cross the border. Some are apprehended, some manage to evade arrest. We are not interested in floaters who come for treatment or to meet their relatives. We are more concerned over ISI activists and the deep and shallow settlers who infiltrate the border," says Kakakti.

## BUMPY RIDE AHEAD

THE RECENT attacks on minorities in Bangladesh are not isolated incidents. Indeed, they may very well be an indication of the kind of ties India and Bangladesh will have for the next five years after the Khaleda Zia-led BNP coalition's landslide victory in the October general elections.

Political observers believe that it is just the beginning of a "headache", which is going to be "excruciating" for India in the years to come. "This is not merely because Khaleda Zia is a known India-baiter. If history says anything, the plight of minorities in Bangladesh decidedly took a turn for the worse when she ruled the country between 1991 and 1996.

In fact, many say that she is closer to Islamabad than Delhi. Also, Jaamat-e-Islami, one of her electoral allies, has very close ties with the Jamaat outfit in Pakistan.

"The change of Government in Bangladesh may sour relations with India," Bangladeshi political commentator M Rashiduzzaman said recently. His comment came immediately after the BNP-led coalition won a landslide victory in the 300-member Jatiya Sansad by defeating Sheikh Hasina Wajed's Awami League.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Rashiduzzaman feels that "many settled and pending bilateral issues would come under the new regime's scanner".

The BNP-led coalition believes that India is "indifferent to Bangladesh's grievances", tries to "manipulate" Bangladeshi politics and unfairly maintains the balance of trade in favour of Indian industry.

So, despite the fanfare over the Kolkata-Dhaka bus service, which was flagged off in 1999, these irritants may slow the wheels of friendship down.

The murky issues of sharing the Ganga waters and migration from Bangladesh would continue to overcast the ties between Dhaka and Delhi. Especially because Begum Zia has promised to scrap the Ganga Water Treaty the Hasina Government signed with India.

Zia believes the treaty is against Bangladesh's interests. She also feels that the agreement on the Chakma refugee problem is flawed and her Government would like to re-examine the treaty. "Begum Zia said that the treaty on Chakma



refugees, who fled to Tripura from the Chitragong Hill Tracts in the 1980s, was faulty and a new agreement was required to correct it," a Bangladeshi watcher said.

But a far more worrying problem for India is that under Khaleda Zia, Bangladesh is likely to show a pronounced tilt towards Islamabad. The Jamaat-e-Islami, a BNP ally, is quite open about its pro-Pakistan sympathies. Also, it could press Khaleda to convert Bangladesh from a secular to an Islamic State.

But Bangladesh's Deputy High Commissioner in Kolkata, Md Touhid Hossain, says, "Indo-Bangla relations will flourish, and so will the ties between people on either side of the border. Jamaat is a non-factor. Don't forget Khaleda Zia was the architect of better Indo-Bangla ties during her tenure between 1991 and 1996."

*The violence, which began in the run-up to the polls, assumed the dimensions of a pogrom after the elections in which the BNP routed the Awami League*

# We will protect minorities: Khaleda

By Our Special Correspondent

**DHAKA, OCT. 27.** Mr. Brajesh Mishra, National Security Adviser and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has completed his short but significant visit to Bangladesh, emphasising the need for "more cooperation at all levels" to strengthen bilateral relations.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, whom Mr. Mishra met here this afternoon, told the Indian envoy that she would carry forward the relationship and collaboration with India to a higher level. Responding to Indian concerns, she said her Government would protect the minorities and prevent the recurrence of recent incidents.

Mr. Mishra later called on the Opposition Awami League president, Sheikh Hasina. Party sources said that it was a courtesy visit with Mr. Mishra conveying Mr. Vajpayee's good wishes and extending an invitation to her to visit India. Mr. Mishra told presspersons later that he discussed bilat-



**The National Security Adviser, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, with the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, in Dhaka on Saturday. — AFP**

eral issues with the former Prime Minister. To a question, he said they had also talked about the "atrocities" on the minorities. He had discussed the prospects for export of gas to India not with Sheikh Hasina, but with the Ban-

gladesh Government.

Diplomatic quarters here said the trip consolidated the two Governments' resolve to further the "all-round development of relations and work together." Mr. Vajpayee has so far sent two

congratulatory messages to Begum Khaleda and invited her to visit India.

Earlier, Mr. Mishra, who came here on Friday night, held official talks with the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Prof. A.Q.M. Badroutouza Chowdhury, and discussed issues of "all bilateral interests". Mr. Mishra reiterated that it was a "goodwill visit" to establish contact with the new Government.

Briefing presspersons, the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Mr. Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, quoted Mr. Mishra as saying that his visit was "to establish contact with the new Government that came to power with a massive mandate".

Mr. Chowdhury said there was no specific agenda as Mr. Mishra's visit was "basically to promote friendship and cooperation" with the new Government. To a question, he said the alleged "persecution" of the minority Hindus was not discussed during the official talks. "No such issue was discussed," he emphasised.

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## Dhaka rumblings

**T**HE LATENT fears about the security of minorities in Bangladesh if Begum Khaleda Zia's party won the elections have unfortunately proved true. Despite the assurances given by the prime minister herself to protect the Hindu community, there have been a number of incidents of assault, molestation and worse. As a result, several families have sought shelter in West Bengal while others are reportedly waiting to do so. Ever since its formation, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party has been perceived to be anti-Indian. The reason evidently is that it was set up by Ziaur Rahman to counter the Awami League, which has been close to India because of their collaboration during the liberation war. These are, of course, no more than matters of public perception. At the official level, New Delhi's relations with Dhaka have rarely been under serious strain irrespective of which party — or dictator — was in power. The only exception perhaps was during the border skirmishes a few months ago.

There is every reason to expect, therefore, that the new government in Dhaka will exert its authority soon enough to reassure the minorities. The fact that the two fundamentalist parties — the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islamic Unity Council — have not fared too well means that the BNP need not cater to

their prejudices, as was feared earlier. It is also possible that the outrages committed by the Islamic militants in Bangladesh have less to do with who is in power than with the upsurge in fundamentalist sentiments as a result of the war in Afghanistan. Apparently, it isn't only the minorities who are at the receiving end, but also the followers of the Awami League. Since India harbours a large number of illegal Bangladeshi migrants, it will hope for a quick return to normality in that country lest the hotheads here should use this opportunity to create trouble.

However, even as the two governments begin their interaction, it may be necessary for New Delhi to stress the need for Dhaka to remove some of the persistent misgivings which can harm mutual ties. These relate not only to the security of minorities, but also to the suspicion that the BNP may not be averse to harbouring some of the subversive outfits of north-eastern India. That some of them, like the ULFA, found shelter in Bangladesh even when the supposedly friendly Awami League was in power underlines the gravity of the problem. Having helped Bangladesh to attain its independence, India had hoped for a fruitful relationship. But, despite the surface cordiality, an element of tension has remained. Perhaps both governments should now address this aspect of their ties.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 OCT 2001

# More Bangla refugees flee to North Bengal

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MALDA, Oct. 22. — More Hindu families from Bangladesh continue to cross over for refuge in Malda, North and South Dinajpur districts of West Bengal, following alleged cases of torture, atrocity and intimidation by religious fundamentalists suspected to be backed by the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Incidents of looting, rape, land grabbing and other forms of torture on Hindus have been reported on the eve of the Puja. The former Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, has also accused the BNP of carrying out a cam-

paign of "minority cleansing across the country".

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, said today in Lucknow that India views the matter of alleged harassment to the Hindu minority in Bangladesh "seriously".

"We have taken up the matter with the Bangladesh government and the Indian high commissioner has talked to the Bangladesh leaders," he said at a press conference in Lucknow today.

Earlier, it was reported in **The Statesman** that 45 Hindu families have crossed over to India and taken refuge in South Dinajpur and Malda since 18 October. The district adminis-

tration adopted a go-slow policy on deportation on humanitarian grounds.

Many Hindu families from the districts of Dinajpur, Nachol, Shibganj and Rajshahi in Bangladesh are flocking to South Dinajpur and Malda areas. According to the North Dinajpur SP, Mr Anuj Sharma, 22 families have come from Kashidanga village of Dinajpur district alone. They have taken shelter at Kushmandi in South

Dinajpur on this side of the border. Another 23 families have taken shelter in different areas of North Dinajpur and Malda. In Malda, 13 Bangladeshi families have taken refuge at Habibpur and some families have

come through the border in Baishnabnagar and taken shelter at Gazole.

The Malda DM, Mr AR Bardhan, told **The Statesman** that he had "unconfirmed" reports that some Bangladeshi families had crossed over the border and entered Malda. It is being verified by the DIB officials, he said. The SP has been asked to submit his report, Mr Bardhan added.

The refugee families have complained to the police that their houses had been looted and domestic valuables and heads of cattle forcibly taken away. Many families have sold off their property and come over for good. "BNP leaders took us to be

supporters of Awami League and launched a vendetta against us immediately after the results," alleged a refugee. A few refugee families have taken shelter in their relatives' houses but those without this privilege have put up in village schools and public buildings where the local *haat* committees are arranging food for them.

The Bangladesh government has assured New Delhi that the BNP-led government would take suitable action against those involved in such atrocities. An external affairs ministry spokesperson said Delhi's high commissioner to Bangladesh,

Mr Manilal Tripathi, had raised the issue with Dhaka's minister of state for religious affairs, Mr Musharraf Hossain. It is believed the minister had assured Mr Tripathy that the government was aware of such reports and it was "determined to take action against miscreants".

According to reports, Hindu leaders have threatened protests against the alleged attacks that minority religious groups are facing.

**Khaleda Zia:** Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Mrs Khaleda Zia, has expressed her commitment to further the cordial relations with India "in depth and determination".

THE STATESMAN

2 5 000 2001



internal critique, free of religious rhetoric, poet Akbar Jhababadi ridiculed the type of

victims of terrorism.

# The BNP and India

By Padmaja Murthy

India  
Bangladesh

APR-12  
15/10

ON OCTOBER 1, Bangladesh went to the polls to elect the eighth Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament). The Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led four-party alliance won a two-thirds majority — 201 seats out of the 284 for which results were declared unofficially as on October 4. The BNP alone won 186 seats and the Jamaat-e-Islami, one of its partners, got 16. Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, in power for the past five years, was left with just 63 seats.

What does this change of guard mean for India? The popular perception in India is that the Awami League is favourably disposed towards it while the BNP is not. However, India's experience of working with both when in power indicates that apprehensions about the BNP are undue. True, their manner of conducting bilateral relations is different. However, positive strides were made even under the BNP; further the Awami League and the BNP have common positions on certain issues of concern to India. It should be remembered that nations do not have permanent friends or enemies but only permanent interests. Public postures of belligerence or otherwise are guided many a time by domestic compulsions. What matters is action on the ground.

India should not view either of the parties solely through the prism of the past — particularly with regard to their role in the Liberation War and the nature of the governments they ran. Doing so now will result in our bias showing to the detriment of furthering our national interests. While the positive steps taken under Sheikh Hasina such as the conclusion of the Treaty on Sharing of Ganga Waters at Farakka, voluntary return of Chakma refugees to Bangladesh, inauguration of the bus service from Calcutta to Dhaka were well highlighted, the same is not done for the period when Begum Khaleda Zia was in power. With the return of democracy in Bangladesh, it was the Government under Khaleda Zia which set the tone for positive relations with India. High-level joint working groups and expert committees on trade, security and water issues were set up, thereby institutionalising relations. The two parties, however, differed in their

approach to resolving bilateral issues with India. While the Awami League, like India, believed in bilateralism, the BNP internationalised bilateral issues which soured ties. Though the BNP's election manifesto calls for the revision of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord and the Ganga water treaty, it cannot undo the positive steps which the Awami League Government has taken towards India. One can also anticipate that business interest groups will play a constructive role in Bangladesh politics which will influence relations with India.

There are, however, issues of concern to India on which both the major parties in

natural gas only after assuring 50 years reserve. India has always viewed with caution its neighbours' relations with China. Even on this issue there is a national bi-party consensus and the change in government in Bangladesh has not had any impact on its relations with China. Both the leaders upon coming to power first visited China and only then India.

An interesting aspect of the election campaign was that issues of terrorism, illegal arms, law and order, corruption, economic development, debate about the pro and anti-liberation forces occupied the major political space. Relations with India

**India and Bangladesh should focus on issues for, while conducting foreign policy the one factor that guides countries is not the question of friends or enemies but permanent interests.**

Bangladesh have a similar stand. The porous border which enables a massive illegal movement of people from Bangladesh has important consequences for India's internal security. The rigid Bangladesh official position, whichever party is in power, is that there is no illegal migration of people. While there are some apprehensions regarding the possibility of insurgents in the Northeast getting sympathy from the new Government, one should not overlook that the issue of illegal migration is an important dimension of the Northeast insurgency. India's programme of fencing the border is met with equal disapproval, whichever the government in power in Dhaka. Similarly, the trade deficit is another issue which has become emotive in Bangladesh under both the BNP and the Awami League. What is overlooked is that Bangladesh also has trade deficits with China, Singapore and other countries. Neither of the two parties differ much on the issue of provision of transit to India. Their views on export of gas show an interesting difference. While the BNP's manifesto spells out that the export of natural gas would take place if profitable, the Awami League manifesto calls for the export of

did figure, but not in a major way. The immediate analysis of the commentators within Bangladesh explaining the Awami League's debacle has primarily pointed to the BNP's alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami, the overwhelming negative vote against the Awami League because of corruption and terrorism, increasing violence, issues of law and order, shift of vote banks in rural areas to the BNP, which was overlooked, and similar domestic factors. India as a factor, or the Awami League being seen as pro-India, has not been cited as a major factor. This is indeed a positive aspect for bilateral relations. An analysis of the votes cast in the election has brought out that the Awami League secured 40.24 per cent, while the BNP's four-party alliance together got 46.9 per cent.

An additional aspect to be noticed while India conducts its bilateral relations with Bangladesh is that over the years, especially since the beginning of the 1990s, Bangladesh has carved out a positive international identity with contributions to the U.N. peacekeeping operations, an active role in forums dealing with Least Developed Countries, regional groupings in South Asia and those dealing with the

Muslim countries. Mr. Bill Clinton's visit, as U.S. President, furthered its image of a democratic, moderate Islamic country.

The just-concluded general elections have been monitored by various international observers who have certified it as fair and free. The working of the caretaker Government and the conduct of elections should strengthen the democratic credentials of Bangladesh. Following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., Bangladesh agreed to an American proposal for assistance in the global coalition against terrorism. Bangladesh would provide airspace, sea port, airfields, and refuelling facilities to the international coalition. These international measures would put pressure to check the rise of fundamental and radical elements in Bangladesh too.

Begum Khaleda Zia's initial reaction following the landslide victory reflects that a mature leadership is at the helm of affairs. She stressed the need to combat terrorism and asked the people not to take law into their own hands. Bringing out the need for peace, stability and patience, she asked the people not to show disrespect to any picture or shrine nor to misbehave with any person and not to run after others' property. The Awami League is, of course, shocked with the results and has alleged that 'crude rigging' had taken place. However, one is hopeful that both domestic and international pressure will result in a constructive opposition and that differences are resolved in Parliament and not through hartals.

India should note this changing image of Bangladesh — of its leadership, its democratic institutions, its regional and global agenda. India should not get identified with a particular party or a leader since on some crucial areas both the parties have similar views. India and Bangladesh should focus on issues for, while conducting foreign policy the one factor that guides countries is not the question of friends or enemies but permanent interests.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi. These are her personal views.)

THE HINDU

# Atal invites Khaleda

**FROM PRANAY SHARMA**

**New Delhi, Oct. 11:** Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has fallen back on the virtues of the late Zia-ur-Rahman to woo his widow, the new Bangladesh Prime Minister.

In his second letter to Khaleda Zia in less than a week, Vajpayee congratulated her on assuming office while stressing on Zia-ur-Rahman's "vision of regional cooperation that crystallised into (the) South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation".

Expressing Delhi's desire to have a strong and close bond with Dhaka, he also invited the new Prime Minister to visit India at a

mutually convenient date.

The letter may be aimed at ensuring nothing goes wrong in India-Bangladesh relations, but sources said it also sends out the signal that Delhi is not losing any time in abandoning its friend Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League.

"Our two countries enjoy an abiding friendship which draws on our shared history and heritage, our commitment to democracy, the complementarities in our economies and a commonality of problems facing us in our region," Vajpayee said.

"We look forward to building on this friendship and to give further momentum and content to our multifaceted bilateral coopera-

tion for the benefit of our peoples."

The Prime Minister said: "I recall my interaction, as external affairs minister of India in the late 1970s, with the late President Zia-ur Rahman. We recognise that it was his vision of regional cooperation that crystallised into Saarc. We have to work together to fulfil this vision more fully."

The letter comes at a time when there are reports from Dhaka about attacks on Awami League supporters by members of the new ruling coalition. Delhi fears Hindu families may also be targeted in the spurt of violence. So the letter can be seen as an attempt to pre-empt that possibility. At the same time it shows that despite her "pro-Indian" tag, Hasina does not have many supporters here after her defeat.

The rivalry between the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party has always been over putting Zia-ur Rahman side by side with Mujib-ur-Rahman.

THE TELEGRAPH

12 OCT 2001

## N-E QUID PRO QUO

*Ind. Banerji Sr-6 11/10*  
Khaleda's return may boost militants' morale

**I**NSURGENT groups in the North-east, barring the Meities, might rejoice with Khaleda Zia back in power next door. Not only have the National Liberation Front of Tripura and the All Tripura Tribal Force supported the BNP-led alliance, some of their top leaders reportedly cast votes in the recently concluded elections. It is no secret that the previous Khaleda regime supported the Ulfa after it changed its perception on migration of Bangladeshis. Many Islamic militant units have mushroomed in the region reportedly funded by Arabs through banks in Bangladesh, for a purpose as yet unknown.

Hopes that outgoing Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed would close down militant training camps following the Farakka waters accord were belied. India claims militants are running 29 camps in Bangladesh. The Ulfa, committed to winding up camps in Bhutan by December end, may try to operate through Bangladesh. The Bodo insurgents holed up in Bhutan are also trying to find another sanctuary. The changed circumstances in Pakistan are unlikely to deter the ISI from helping Indian and Muslim organisations to indulge in subversive activities.

*Ind. Banerji*  
The attempts so far to check destabilisation have to be strengthened and this calls for coordinated efforts by all the seven North-east states.

THE STATESMAN

11 OCT 2001

# Atal friendship note to Khaleda

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

**New Delhi, Oct. 3:** Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today extended a hand of friendship to Khaleda Zia, assuring her of Delhi's commitment to enrich ties with Dhaka.

India had issued a statement expressing its desire to work with the next government soon after the election results were announced yesterday. Today, Vajpayee decided to follow up that offer with a personal letter to Khaleda, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader and most probably the country's next Prime Minister.

"As close neighbours, India and Bangladesh share strong links of geography, history and culture. The longstanding friendship between our two countries is based on abiding bonds and common values," Vajpayee said.

"I would like to assure you of my government's continued commitment to further enriching this relationship. I look forward to working with you to promote Indo-Bangladesh cooperation for the progress and prosperity of our peoples," he added.

By offering the hand of friendship even before a new government has been sworn in, South Block wants to ensure that the BNP does not have any misgivings about the BJP-led coalition.

In Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, which was decimated in the elections, is considered "pro-Indian". The BNP and other Opposition parties had used this perceived tilt as a campaign plank. So India is making a serious effort to ensure that this does not turn into a policy for the new government in Dhaka.

Khaleda's initial comments suggest that her government will not do anything in a hurry to antagonise Delhi. She said though there are many pending issues between the two countries, she would prefer settling them amicably.

India's relationship with Bangladesh has gone through several ups and downs. Sharing the water of the Ganga was one of the most contentious issues before an agreement was signed in December 1996. The treaty is to come up for review at the end of the year. There are also serious differences on the imbalance in bilateral trade.

But the most important cooperation India seeks from Bangladesh relates to security in the Northeast. In the past, terrorists have trained in camps on the other side of the border and used Bangladesh for launching attacks on Indian security forces. The Awami League government had tried to stop this. Now, with the BNP returning to power, this is one area of worry for Delhi.

THE TELEGRAPH

4 OCT 2001

# India, Bangladesh to share notes on militants: BSF

HT 6  
209

**Jaideep Mazumdar**  
*Kolkata, September 19*

INDIA AND Bangladesh have finally put in place the framework for sharing intelligence on militants on both sides of the border.

The intelligence and information-sharing decision was taken at Prime Minister-level talks between the two countries two years ago. But the mechanism and the ground arrangements for the same were held up in bureaucratic wrangles and procedures both at New Delhi and Dhaka.

"We have finally decided on the nature of information and intelligence to be shared and the procedures involved for this," said a top-level BSF officer.

At a four-day coordination conference held at the BSF's Frontier headquarters at Shalbagan near Agartala both sides decided to exchange lists of militants from the two countries,

active in each others' territories. "We also agreed to share information on their activities and hideouts," said the BSF officer.

Intelligence sources said the latest decision would give counter-insurgency operations in the North-East a definite edge. "Many of the militant groups in the North-East have camps in Bangladesh. They also route their arms through that country. If we receive all information on them very promptly, our security forces, engaged in counter-insurgency operations in the region, would be able to deal a blow to them," he said.

"The BSF and the BDR are the border forces of the two countries and keep in regular touch with each other. Hence, it is only logical that whatever information or intelligence we gather on, say, the Shanti Bahini militants of the Chittagon Hill Tracts who come to India, is passed on to

BDR in Bangladesh through the BSF. These two conduits—the BSF and BDR—have been chosen deliberately keeping ground realities in mind," said an Army officer engaged in counter-insurgency operations in the N-E.

The officers said whatever routine intelligence is gathered by the agencies on both sides of the border would be passed on to the respective border forces.

"Of course, when it comes to highly sensitive information or something that cannot be routed through the normal channels, there is a top-level route that would be used," said the central intelligence officer.

The 11-member BSF delegation at the conference was led by the Inspector General of the force's Shillong frontier, V K Gaur. The nine-member BDR team was led by its deputy director general Abdus Samad Choudhuri.

20 SEP 2001

# Infiltration reports alarm State

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, August 20

THE STATE Government has been alarmed by an intelligence department report on the spurt in infiltration across the Bangladesh border. In the past three years, the number has shot up to 15 million.

An estimated 5 million entered India with valid visas but did not return. According to a senior police officer, the State Government has done little to check the infiltrators. An Intelligence report says that the infiltration

is not only the highest in the country but also the maximum since the Bangladesh War of 1971. According to a senior officer of the department, though most of these infiltrators come to India to earn a livelihood "things have changed now".

"They arrive with valid passports and visas and then disappear. They might be using the State as a transit to other countries such as Nepal, Pakistan and the West Asia."

Last year, police found 23 Bangladeshi nationals who stayed back after expiry of their

visas. Two persons were arrested from Murshidabad for having links with the ISI. In Hooghly, a Bangladeshi had rented a house in Chinsurah and was also found to be an ISI agent.

The telephone authorities had alerted police on seeing the huge ISD bills the man was running. The man, however, managed to give police the slip. He was found to be one of the thousands who overstayed their visa limits.

The sudden rise in telephonic activity in an otherwise quiet area is always a dead giveaway, say police.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 AUG 2001

# Bangladeshis put Gehlot in a fix

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

JAIPUR, Aug. 12. - The government is in a quandary over what to do with the Bangladeshis living illegally in the state and creating law and order problems for the police and administration.

Recently, some Bangladeshis living in an unauthorised colony here reportedly fought with the local people over a trivial issue and beat them up. Some of them were allegedly involved in a criminal case.

When the police arrived, the Bangladeshis attacked them, fracturing an ASP's arm. They also kidnapped a police officer who was rescued later that night.

After this, the local people, administration and political parties put pressure on the Gehlot government to deport the Bangladeshis.

But the government backtracked after deciding to deport them. It finally decided to delay deporting them for some time. The Bangladeshis could not be deported on the basis of an earlier survey; another survey would have to be conducted because their population has increased during the past few



Mr Ashok Gehlot

years, the home minister, Mr Gulab Singh Shaktawat, said.

After the new survey was over, the government would contact the BSF for further action, he added.

Many of the Bangladeshis are involved in illegal activities. If senior officers are to be believed, most are involved in organised crime ranging from theft, looting and smuggling to anti-national activities.

The state government had conducted a survey according to which 2,000-odd Bangladeshi families are living in the state illegally.

THE STATESMAN

15 AUG 2001

## SHRINKING DISTANCES

### Virtues of the Dhaka-Kolkata-Agartala triangle

LAST week's Dhaka-Agartala 144 km bus trial run encourages expectations that it will be possible to travel from Tripura to West Bengal in 30 hours. Already buses ply between Kolkata and Dhaka and next month a train is likely to run from Sealdah to Bangabandhu Setu East, 114 km from Dhaka. If services are regularised the main benefit will accrue from the time saved; the journey from Kolkata to Agartala by road and rail invariably takes about 72 hours. The resumption of bus and train services between India and Pakistan is a gesture of goodwill on both sides but it will be a necessity in the North-east. The "Chicken Neck", as the 20-km wide North Bengal corridor is known, provides the only road and rail link to the North-east and during the monsoon. For this reason, riverine transport through Bangladesh should also be encouraged.

There is general sympathy for the people of Tripura as they have borne the brunt of the impact of Partition which left the state landlocked and economically isolated. The lack of transport and communications has hampered development in a state otherwise rich in natural resources. The Centre must ensure that paucity of funds does not delay work on the conversion of the 208-km Lumding-Silchar metre gauge and the new 178-km Kumarghat-Agartala rail link. With an economy entirely dominated by local production, those living in border states will greatly benefit if cross border trade is legalised. It will be mutually rewarding.





SUBHENDU GHOSH/HINDUSTAN TIMES

A Bangladesh Railway guard waves to the crowds as the Bangabandhu-Sealdah Intercity Friendship Express pulls into Gede on the Indian side of the international border on Wednesday.

## Putting Indo-Bangla ties back on the rails

**Sourav Sanyal**  
Gede (India-Bangladesh border), July 11

IT WAS a dream run. An Indian engine pulling a Bangladesh Railway passenger train with some coaches made in Pakistan.

And as the seven-coach train made its way into Indian territory around 3.20 pm today, thousands gathered at the Indian and Bangladeshi check posts to witness the renewing of bilateral ties between "two nations separated by an artificial boundary".

The much-touted Bangabandhu-Sealdah Intercity Friendship Express which

touched the chords of hundreds in both Bengals, however, failed to impress Railway Board mandarins. How else can one explain the absence of any senior Railway Board official or a representative of the Railway Ministry to mark the historic 283-km trial run of the train between Bangabandhu (East) in Bangladesh and Sealdah in India?

But the absence of bureaucrats was made up by the warm welcome accorded to the 34-member delegation from Bangladesh.

Wiping tears of happiness, A K M Mustafiqur Rahman, DRM, Paksey (Bangladesh) said: "This is a historic

moment. The last passenger train that rolled on these tracks was way back in 1965 before the India-Pakistan war. We hope to introduce normal train services early next year and the train will run directly to Dhaka. The construction of the 89-km stretch of the 138-km Bangabandhu-Dhaka rail route is being carried out keeping the 2002 deadline in mind."

The train will cover 421 km between Dhaka and Sealdah in 14 hours. This includes two hours spent on either side of the border for immigration formalities. Though the fare structure is yet to be decided, the train will comprise seven

reserved coaches, including an air-conditioned one, said Din Mohammad, joint director, general operations, Bangladesh Railway.

A special train from Sealdah to Dhaka will roll out tomorrow morning carrying representatives of the Union Home Ministry, Indian Railways and the State Government. The train will reach Bangabandhu tomorrow evening.

Today's trial run assumes importance since tomorrow is the last working day for the Sheikh Hasina Government after which President's rule will be imposed in the country till the elections.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 JUL 2000

# To Bangladesh on the friendship track

SUGATA MUKHOPADHYAY  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GEDE, July 11. — Ritwik Ghatak's "end of the rail track" shot in *Komal Gandhar* symbolises the trauma of divided Bengal. But today the "cut-off" tracks were joined by Bangladesh and India.

The two nations' railways organised the first trial run of a passenger train, proposing to resume services after 35 years.

The train, likely to be called *Maitri Express*, will connect Kolkata (Sealdah) and Dhaka, covering 397 km in 14 hours, including four hours for Customs checks, railway officials said.

Though the fare structure is yet to be finalised, passengers without reservation will not be allowed on the train, they said. The service will begin as soon as



The Bangladesh-India train on its first trial run about to cross into West Bengal on Wednesday. — Rajib De

a new Bangladeshi government is formed after three months. Initially, the train will run three days a week from both sides between Sealdah and Bangabandhu Setu East till a new

114-km link gauge between Jaidevpur and Dhaka is completed, said Md Mostafa Jamil, a Bangladeshi railway official. It is expected to be completed by 2003.

The train will ensure safety and comfort to passengers and will run to its full capacity of 714, provided "harassment" by Customs officials on either side is avoided.

An Indian team today received a 34-member Bangladeshi delegation at Gede, the last station on the Indian side. Both the teams went to Joynagar village, the first station in Bangladesh.

Md. Atikullah Rahman said the Customs inspector of Bangladesh ruled out the fear of an increase in border crimes because of the train service.

■ Agartala-Dhaka bus: page 2

# Indo-Bangla train trial run today

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, JULY 10.** Bangladesh and India will go for a trial run of a passenger train between the two countries in the next two days, which is expected to revive regular rail service between the neighbours after nearly four decades.

The trial run from the Bangladesh side will take place on July 11 when a delegation of mostly technical persons will proceed towards Sealdah in a special train from the eastern side of the Bangabandhu Bridge on river Padma, the communications ministry said. There will be eight compartments in the train with officials from the ministries of communications, home and foreign affairs. It will leave at 10 a.m. and is scheduled to arrive at Sealdah at 7 p.m.

Regular train service is expected later in the year and the possibility of Dhaka-Kolkata direct rail service by the end of 2002 or early 2003, according to sources.

Wednesday's journey will be a

prelude to regular service, the schedule of which is yet to be finalised. The sources said the trial run of the Indian train would take place on July 12 and the train from Kolkata would come up to the eastern side of the Bangabandhu Bridge.

The return journey of the Bangladesh train from India will start at 8 a.m. and reach the eastern side of the Bangabandhu Bridge at 5 p.m. on July 12.

Prospects of a passenger train service between the two countries was brightened when the links for goods trains between Bangladesh and India were restored via Petrapole in India and Benapole in Bangladesh on January 24 this year.

The train from Bangladesh will reach Sealdah via Darshana and Gede in Nadia. Before the service was discontinued in 1965, some trains from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) also used to go to Kolkata via Darshana. The possibility of running

passenger trains between the two countries through Benapole-Petrapole will be looked into at a later stage, the sources said.

The direct train service between the then East Bengal (present Bangladesh), which was started in the early 20s, continued till 1965. The India-Pakistan war destroyed the communication links. Efforts to revive the service after the war in 1971, had to be abandoned following the political changeover in 1975. Fresh initiatives were taken after the present government assumed office in 1996. Because of non-use for more than three decades, the tracks, particularly the portion between Jessore and Bongaon, have been damaged.

The Bangladesh and Indian officials last Thursday signed a Memorandum of Understanding in New Delhi for operating passenger train service between the two countries. They expressed the hope that regular service would begin by the year-end.

# Rail barriers break, customs doesn't

FROM SUNANDO SARKAR

**Gede, July 11:** Irked by a two-hour Indian customs-engineered delay in the trial run of the Maitri (Friendship) Express, the first non-freight train that rolled into India from Bangladesh in 36 years today, the Bangladeshi government has decided to ask its Indian counterpart to ensure a stop to customs' "excesses" on this side of the border.

The hold-up of the trial train -- which had on board a 34-member high-level Bangladeshi delegation led by director (public relations), ministry of communications, Md Mostafa-e-Jamil -- came as an embarrassment to Indian railway officials, who admitted that any recurrence of such delays might adversely affect Maitri's commercial viability.

Bangladeshi officials feel the Indian customs will have to speed up its work if Maitri Express, the proposed name for the train which will carry passengers between Calcutta and Dhaka, is to pose a competition to the cross-border bus service. If customs officials take two hours for 30-odd dignitaries coming on an official visit -- an average of four minutes for every person -- the time they are going to take for a train carrying 714 passengers will turn passengers off, they say.

"I chided our customs officials when they took five minutes at the Joynagar check-post in Bangladesh," Jamil said. But he, and the others with him, were in for a rude shock; the delegation, coming on an official visit about which the customs had prior information, was held up for two hours as each Bangladeshi official was forced to give particulars of their wristwatches, mobile phones, rings and other ornaments.

The cross-border journey up to Dhaka should take about nine hours, say Bangladeshi officials. "But if the Indian customs continues to do what it does today, then



The Maitri Express at the check-post where it was held up by Indian customs. Picture by Amit Datta

the train service will be a no-show," a senior Bangladeshi official said.

Passenger-train services up to Bangabandhu (East) station in Bangladesh may begin within three months if the caretaker government there, which will succeed Sheikh Hasina before elections are held, gives the go-ahead, say officials. But the 397-km journey between Calcutta and Dhaka may not begin before 2003 as the construction of double-gauge tracks between Bangabandhu (East) and Kamalpur near Dhaka is expected to take some time.

Though details like the frequency of services and the fare are yet to be finalised, Bangladeshi officials say the fare is likely to hover around \$12; three pairs of trains are likely to run every week.

When the deal is sealed, people like A.B. Jabbar -- who returned to Bangladesh from Calcutta with his father Md Mohiuddin and wife, Kabita today -- will stand to gain the most, say officials. The three, like others crossing the border legally, had to walk four km from the Gede check-post to the nearest bus-stop in Bangladesh at

Kaliganj. "The bus will help us immensely," Jabbar told **The Telegraph** at the Joynagar check-post within his own country.

Officials from both countries shared his enthusiasm but it failed to rub off on people living close to the border.

The reasons were not very far to seek: gaping holes in the border fence, particularly at Daspara and Uttarpara near Gede, were there to facilitate smuggling of salt and sugar to Bangladesh and rice to India, villagers explained. For those who want to avoid the risks of picking holes through the fence,

there are "syndicates" to help them cross the border.

Villagers said that is why the only welcome for the first travellers by train from Bangladesh was a stage-managed one, organised by a local club and financed by money-changers who dealt in foreign currency. Except some more eateries, which would be put up by club-members, and some more business for the money-changers, the train from Bangladesh would not have any impact on life close to the border, villagers on this side of the border explained.

# Dhaka-Sealdah train stuck in the tracks

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, July 4

THE SPECIAL inaugural run of the Indo-Bangla passenger train on July 11, if it takes place, is likely to be a solo effort by Dhaka, Eastern Railway's Sealdah Division does not have any plan to run an Indian rake to Bangladesh on that day, senior officials in the Division said tonight.

A team of five Bangladeshi officials and an official each from the Bangla home and foreign ministries arrived in the city this evening and later flew out to New Delhi for a meeting with their Indian counterparts tomorrow.

Tomorrow's meeting would discuss the modalities for running a regular passenger train service between India and Bangladesh. Indian officials have already had a preparatory meeting on the subject on July 2. Indian goods trains already trav-

el to various parts of Bangladesh.

A regular passenger train service between the two countries has been on the cards for quite some time now. Mamata Banerjee as Railway Minister had announced at Petrapole that she would be happy to see the day the passenger service was resumed.

The Government of India and Indian Railways had initially thought of running the passenger train via Petrapole-Benapole-Jessore en route to Khulna — the planning was probably guided by the fact that the bus to Dhaka goes by this route. Based on this assumption, Indian railway officials went on to hold several meetings at Petrapole to work out the modalities of the run, involving in the meetings representatives from the State Government, Customs, Immigration, IB, BSF and the local police. All these organisations reportedly jumped at the idea of the regular

passenger service, and immediately put forward a series of demands for new buildings, watchtowers, fencing along the tracks, and accommodation for their officers, all at Railway cost.

Dhaka, however, had different ideas. They wanted the service to target the more prosperous districts of Dhaka, Mymensingh, Tangail and Kishoreganj that lie to the east of the Padma. They wanted the train to cross into Bangladesh at Darsana, quite some distance to the north of Petrapole-Benapole.

The special train from Bangladesh, with a Bangladeshi engine and coaches and carrying Bangladeshi dignitaries, is likely to arrive at Sealdah at around 6 pm on the 11th. The same train will return on the 12th.

Bangladesh has laid tracks from Darsana on the border up to the Bangabandhu East station, lying to the east of the newly-built Bangabandhu

bridge over the Jamuna, Dhaka estimates that the journey from Bangabandhu to Sealdah would take seven hours.

The July 11 run reportedly follows a "special request" from Sheikh Hasina Wajed to New Delhi. Hasina apparently wants to claim credit for the train service before giving up power to a caretaker Government on July 15. It appears that India has been happy to oblige, and would welcome the Bangladeshis next Wednesday.

The final fate of the hyped-up service, however, will depend on who comes to power in Dhaka after the Bangladeshi elections, officials at Sealdah said. If Hasina returns, a regular passenger service right up to Dhaka may be in place within a year. But if she doesn't, that might well be the end, at least for now, of any hopes any one might have of taking, like Lahore, a train to Dhaka.

## Maoist shadow over Nepal King's b'day bash

Keshav Pradhan  
Kathmandu, July 4

A BOMB explosion near Prime Minister G P Koirala's residence rocked this ancient city today as trouble-torn Nepal prepared to celebrate King Gyanendra's birthday on Saturday in the shadow of Maoist violence.

The kingdom yesterday decided to celebrate the new Monarch's birthday every year with fanfare. It declared the day as a national day. The King turns 55 this time. The stepping up of violence by the Maoists might have an adverse impact on the celebrations.

The insurgents, who vowed to target only supporters of the King and the PM three days ago, went on the rampage in the districts. Reports reaching here said they abducted at least 21 boys who were on their way to Thawas in Rolpa district to join the police force this morning.

# Indo-Bangla talks on border issue begin

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, JULY 2.** The officials of Bangladesh and India have agreed that the problems on the frontier of the two countries be addressed expeditiously for maintaining "peace and tranquillity" along their common border that witnessed bloody encounters recently.

The two sides, in their meeting here on the first day of the three-day talks, stressed on the speedy resolution of demarcation of the U.N.-demarcated areas between them, a spokesperson of the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs told presspersons.

The Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Ms. Meera Shankar, led the 14-member Indian delegation in the meeting, while a 12-member Bangladesh delegation was headed by Mr. Janibul Huq, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs.

The first Joint Boundary Working Group meeting held after the Delhi meeting which finalised the terms of reference of the JBWG was marked by cordiality and friendship. It took up the issue of 6.5 km of undemarcated border between the two countries.

The Indian side said they had come with an open mind and assured their Bangladesh counterpart of doing everything possible to resolve the issue in the spirit of the Indira-Mujib Land Boundary Agreement of 1974.

To a question, the spokesperson said, "there was good understanding" between the two sides on issues that were raised today. "The talks progressed in the right direction" and "we are hopeful" of a positive outcome, he added.

To another question, he said the Indian delegation had assured that they would instruct their concerned authorities to exercise restraint, so that border shootings in recent weeks, which had claimed six to seven Bangladeshi lives, did

not recur. The second JBWG meeting slated for tomorrow would deal with exchange of enclaves and their adverse possession.

Later in the day, the two delegations called on the Land Secretary, Mr. M. Saiful Islam, and are scheduled to meet the Home secretary, Mr. M.A. Reza, tomorrow.

Meanwhile, a Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTC) bus, as part of a joint trial carrying a Bangladesh official delegation, left here for Agartala in Tripura today to finalize a draft agreement prepared in Dhaka on introduction of Dhaka-Agartala direct bus service.

The four-member Bangladesh delegation led by the BRTC chairman, Mr. Azmal Chowdhury, during its stay in Agartala would hold talks with the Tripura Road Transport Corporation (TRTC) authorities to finalize the agreement in the light of the Dhaka talks held on Sunday and today with the Indian side.

An Indian delegation of equal number led by the TRTC chairman, Mr. Manik Dey, arrived in Dhaka by a TRTC bus on Sunday afternoon for the trial run. The Indian side had two rounds of talks with their Bangladesh counterpart. The two sides prepared the draft agreement which would be finalized during talks at Agartala, capital of Tripura.

Sources said the two sides initially agreed on the proposed two-way bus fare, reconstruction of part of the Dhaka-Agartala road after detailed discussions held in Dhaka during the last two days.

The visiting Bangladesh delegation is expected to return home on Wednesday.

The BRTC sources said the Dhaka-Agartala road needed some renovation and it would be difficult to do that immediately due to the monsoon rains. They expected to start the commercial bus service in August this year.

THE HINDU

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# Bangladesh 'keeps word'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 2. - The sudden transfer of Bangladesh Rifles' chief Fazlur Rahman with a few other officials, ahead of the Indo-Bangla Joint Boundary Working Group talks, is significant in the backdrop of India's demand for action against those responsible for the attempt to capture Pyrduah that led to the killing of 16 BSF jawans at Boroibari in mid-April.

Though reports from Dhaka didn't ascribe a reason for the transfers, Maj-Gen Rahman had gained notoriety after the jawans' killings.

The Sheikh Hasina government, to complete its term soon, seems to have kept its word to New Delhi.

India isn't raising the Boroibari incident anymore. The government today asserted that the transfer of the BDR chief was Bangladesh's "internal matter."

An official delegation, led by the joint secreta-

ry in the ministry of external affairs Ms Meera Shankar, arrived in Dhaka yesterday; talks on the border dispute started today.

The delegation comprises a huge team of officials including representatives from the ministries of external affairs, home affairs, water resources, law, Survey of India, Border Security Force and census.

The team has been entrusted to address all aspects of boundary matters under the Land Boundary Agreement.

The JWG will submit the reports to their respective foreign secretaries and after several rounds of talks they are expected to submit a final report by April 2002.

**Talks on border issues:** The second meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint Working Groups (JWGs) today began discussions to narrow down differences on the border issue that led to violent clashes between the two countries in April, adds UNI from Dhaka.

THE STATESMAN

# Trial run for Agartala-Dhaka bus

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, July 1. - A four member state delegation left for Dhaka today by the Agartala-Dhaka bus which was on a trial run.

The delegation included the Tripura State Transport Corporation chairman Mr Manik Dey, state transport commissioner Mr Debashish Sirkar, state highways department secretary Mr LK Gupta and additional secretary, home af-

518 2/7  
fairs Mr NC Sinha. Later in the day, they met senior officials in Dhaka.

A Bangladesh delegation led by Mr M Azmal Chaudhuri, road transport corporation chairman, will arrive here with Tripura delegation members tomorrow.

The Bangladesh delegation will include Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation technical director, Mr Amanulla Chaudhuri, BRTF general manager (operations), Mr SA

Ind. Banerjee  
Salah Hasan, and a senior BRTF official.

The delegation will leave for Dhaka by bus on 4 July. Official discussions on the service schedule and fare structure are now being held in Dhaka. The talks will continue in Agartala.

The Bangladesh council of ministers, in a meeting on 25 June, approved the draft agreement to start a regular bus service between Dhaka and Agartala.

The agreement will be signed

formally between senior road transport corporation officials of both the countries.

The draft agreement was finalised after discussions between officials of both countries in Dhaka on 28 February.

The agreement includes provision for issuing multiple-entry visa for the passengers. The Bangladesh authorities are, reportedly, keen to start the service before Sheikh Hasina Wajed hands over power to a neutral caretaker govt on 15 July.

THE STATESMAN



# BSF firing kills 3 Bangladeshis

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MALDA, June 15. — Three Bangladeshis were killed and another injured when a BSF jawan fired on a group of men near the Sirshikalaibari border out-post in the Habibpur area yesterday afternoon.

Two BSF jawans challenged a group of Bangladeshi rustlers trying to cross into Bangladesh with two buffaloes — from Tilason village to Jagannathpur, BSF officers said.

A BSF jawan, Mr Ramalal Prasad, was injured when the Bangladeshis attacked him with a sharp weapon. His colleague, Mr Ramesh Chand, then fired in the air to scare away the assailants.

The sound of the gunshot drew about 30 Bangladeshi farmers working in a field at Jagannathpur. They gheraoed the BSF jawans. Mr Chand then fired six rounds, killing three persons and injuring one.

The BSF has kept a body while the villagers car-

ried the other two into Bangladesh, the officers said. The injured jawan has been admitted to a hospital and his condition is reportedly serious.

The local BSF authorities have announced an award for the two jawans for their courage.

There was tension in the area today even as BSF officers attempted contacting the Bangladesh Rifles for a flag meeting.

An AFP report from Dhaka, however, said two Bangladeshi villagers were killed and another injured when the BSF allegedly fired on them while they were grazing cattle.

A BDR commander, identifying himself as Colonel Ahmed, said over the phone that initial reports suggested the villagers were trying to retrieve cattle that had strayed into the Indian side. A BSF patrol fired on them after an altercation. The BDR has lodged a protest with the BSF for the shooting of unarmed civilians, Col Ahmed said. BDR officers were in touch with the BSF to recover the other body.

THE STATESMAN

16 JUN 2001

# Delhi, Dhaka finalise working groups

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, June 13. — India and Bangladesh today finalised the terms of reference for two Joint Boundary Working Groups (JBWGs). While one went into the question of 6.5 km of undemarcated border, the other examined the issue of enclaves and adversely pos-

sessed areas. Both sides agreed that JBWGs would complete their work and submit final reports to their respective foreign secretaries by next April, an MEA spokesperson told reporters, briefing them on the outcome of the two-day official level talks between the two countries. New Delhi and Dhaka de-

clared their commitment to the land boundary agreement of 1974 and emphasised that the status quo should be maintained and peaceful conditions should prevail along the border.

Terming as "positive" the outcome of the talks, the first since the killing of 16 BSF soldiers in border clashes in April, the spokesperson said it was agreed that JBWGs would meet in Dhaka preferably in the first week of July. Further meetings would take place alternately in the two countries, she said.

Both sides acknowledged the joint efforts by the survey authorities of the two countries in steadily demarcating the over 4,000-km-boundary, of which

only 6.5 km remain to be demarcated.

"The discussions focussed on early operationalisation of the two JBWGs, the first on border demarcation, and the second on enclaves and adversely possessed territories," the spokesperson said.

The decision to constitute the two boundary working groups was taken by the foreign secretaries of India and Bangladesh last December to address the pending issues in a focussed and systematic manner.

"After detailed discussions on the basis of the draft sent by India to Bangladesh in February this year, the two sides finalised terms of reference of the JBWGs," she said. The two

sides agreed that pending implementation of the 1974 boundary accord, "status quo shall be maintained and peaceful conditions should prevail along the border," she added.

While the Indian side was led by Ms Meira Shankar, joint secretary in the external affairs ministry, the 11-member Bangladesh delegation headed by Mr Janibul Haque, a joint secretary in the home ministry.

The two teams included representatives from survey and land authorities, departments of census, home affairs, water resources and law, BSF, Bangladesh Rifles and from the two high commissions.

Observing that the meeting

took place in a "cordial and friendly atmosphere", the spokesperson said the JBWGs would examine the issue of erecting permanent boundary pillars.

Asked why it had taken so long to demarcate the remaining 6.5 km of border, she said this was a "complex" issue and would be studied by the JBWGs.

During their stay here, the Bangladesh delegation met foreign secretary Ms Chokila Iyer and home secretary Mr Kamal Pandey and discussed issues of mutual interest.

Official sources said the April border clashes underscored the need to address the boundary issues quickly and in a purposeful manner.

## HOME MINISTER'S DISPLEASURE

NEW DELHI, June 13. — Mr LK Advani is understood to have voiced his displeasure to Bangladeshi envoy Mustafa Farooque Mohammad on his country's silence on the killing of 16 BSF soldiers by Bangladesh Rifles in April.

Mr Mohammad had called on the Union home minister on Monday on the eve of the Indo-Bangla official level talks and had delivered a letter from Bangladesh home minister Mohammad Naseem.

Sources said Mr Advani took exception to Mr Naseem's letter as it failed to even make a passing reference to the border incidents, especially the brutal killings of the BSF soldiers which had hurt national sentiments. The letter made no mention of any regret over the incident and just suggested that bilateral issues should be resolved through negotiations.

Mr Advani reportedly told Mr Mohammad that photographs published in newspapers showing a BSF jawan's body being carried like an animal carcass by two Bangladeshi villagers would not be easily forgotten since it had created public outrage in the country. — PTT

THE STATESMAN

14 JUN 1974

## JWGs to meet in Dhaka <sup>HT-9</sup> next month

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, June 13

14/6

THE TWO Joint Working Groups (JWGs) will meet for the first time in early July in Dhaka, to sort out border disputes between India and Bangladesh.

This was decided after the draft terms of reference guiding the new institutionalised framework were finalised at delegation-level talks. The two-day talks ended today.

A joint statement was issued at the end of the talks, in which both countries committed themselves to peace till a final solution is reached and implemented. Both sides agreed to drop initial plans of an Indian delegation visiting Dhaka before June-end.

The JWGs' first task would be to examine the border demarcation.

<sup>9nd - Baula</sup>  
The second task is to examine patches of land deemed as "territories in adverse possession" and enclaves.

This is the first time that such a focused exercise is being carried out. There are actually very few disputed areas: a stretch of about 6.5 km in undemarcated border, some 170 enclaves between the two countries and tiny patches like Pyrdiwah and Mankachar in adverse possession.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 JUN 2001

# India, Bangla meet first time after border clash



Meira Shankar, Joint Secretary in the External Affairs Ministry, and Janibul Haque, Joint Secretary in the Home Ministry, Bangladesh greet each other on the first day of the summit in Delhi on Tuesday - PTI

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

INDIA and Bangladesh today held their first official level talks since the killing of 16 BSF soldiers in border clashes in April, in a bid to finalise terms of reference for two working groups on pending border issues and find a solution to 6.5 kms of undemarcated boundary.

While the Indian side was led by Meira Shankar, Joint Secretary in the External Affairs Ministry, the 11-member Bangladesh delegation was headed by Janibul Haque, a joint secretary in the Home Ministry. The talks will continue tomorrow.

Both the sides would discuss, during the two-day parleys, matters

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

~~On a separate ministry level...~~

## Indo-Bangla talks begin...

relating to exchange of enclaves and adversely possessed land by the two countries in the context of a 1974 agreement, official sources said.

At Dhaka's request, New Delhi had sent a draft terms of reference in February this year on the two working groups, the sources said, adding the the terms and modalities for their operation were expected to be finalised to allow them to begin work soon. The sources said that the April border clashes underscored the need to address land boundary issues quickly and in a purposeful manner.

Both Indian and Bangladeshi teams have representatives from departments of land records and survey, the High Commissions, Ministries of Law, Water Resources and Home Affairs and BSF and BDR. The Indian team also has land record and survey officials from Assam, West Bengal and Meghalaya.

The decision to form the working groups to address the border issues was taken during foreign secretary level consultation here last December. The working groups were constituted to deal with "unfinished task of boundary demarcation in the UN-demarcated boundary along India-Bangladesh border".

# Indian, Bangla teams begin border talks

New Delhi, June 12

INDIA TODAY hoped to finalise with Bangladesh the terms of reference for two working groups on pending border issues during its first official-level talks with Dhaka since the killing of 16 BSF soldiers in border clashes.

"We expect to finalise the terms of reference during these talks," a spokesman of the External Affairs Ministry said here. The two sides, which would also go into the question of the 6.5 km of undemarcated boundary, acknowledged the efforts of the Indian and Bangladeshi survey teams in demarcating more than 4,000 km of boundary, he said.

While the Indian side was led by Meira Shankar, Joint Secretary in the External Affairs Ministry, the 11-member Bangladesh delegation was headed by Janibul Haque, a Joint Secretary in the Home Ministry. The talks will continue tomorrow.

The two sides will discuss during the two-day parleys matters relating to exchange of enclaves and adversely possessed land by the two countries in the context of a 1974 agreement, the spokesman said.

On Dhaka's request, New Delhi had sent a draft terms of reference in February on the two working groups, official sources said, adding the terms and modalities for their operation were expected to be finalised to allow them to begin work soon.

Sources said the April clashes underscored the need to address the boundary issues quickly and in a purposeful manner.

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 JUNE 1971

# Indo-Bangla border talks from today

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, June 11

INDIA AND Bangladesh will begin delegation-level talks tomorrow in New Delhi on border disputes.

A joint secretary of the Bangladeshi Home Ministry, Janibul Huq, will lead the team from Dhaka. The team comprises officials from Bangladesh's home, land and foreign ministries as well as representatives from the Bangladesh Rifles Survey Department.

The Mankachar skirmish in April has lent a grim background to the talks. But for now, both countries view the discussions as little more than an attempt to get a dialogue mechanism working.

The Bangladeshi High Commissioner, Mustafa Faruque, met Home Minister L.K Advani today to hand over a letter from



BSF men guard the Indo-Bangla border near Dawki, Meghalaya.

AFP PHOTO

Bangladesh's Home Minister, Mohammed Naseem.

A Ministry of External Affairs spokesman indicated that New

Delhi wanted Dhaka to confirm the terms of reference for two Joint Working Groups that the countries have agreed to set up.

Dhaka has not been confirming this, holding up the task of making the JWG functional.

The arrival of the Bangladeshi delegation was preceded by offers and counter-offers to host talks. First India announced its invitation, to which the Bangladesh Government sent a counter-offer that talks be held in its soil.

Finally, the two countries decided to exchange delegations. An Indian team is expected to visit Dhaka by the end of the month.

The Bangladeshi Prime Minister has expressed regret over the Mankachar incident. A formal inquiry was ordered to determine how the 16 BSF jawans were killed and under whose orders.

India is expected to request Bangladesh to expedite the progress of the probe, sources said.

## Indo-Bangla talks today

5/1 12  
**STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE**

NEW DELHI, June 11. - India and Bangladesh will hold talks on pending border issues from tomorrow. This is the first interaction between the two countries since the killing of 15 BSF soldiers on 18 April.

India today reiterated it had been pursuing the issue actively to resolve the matter and had send the terms of reference of the two Joint Boundary Working Groups but Dhaka had not responded so far. New Delhi had sent a draft of the terms of reference of the groups in February this year.

In the next two days, Dhaka would finalise the terms of reference of the groups as well as the modalities of the two groups' operations so that they can become functional at an early stage.

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

## Bangla team coming for talks

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, JUNE 10.** A Bangladesh delegation leaves for New Delhi tomorrow to attend the border talks on June 12. A Foreign Ministry release said the delegation, led by the Joint Secretary, Mr. Janibul Haq, is going at the invitation of the Indian Government to discuss boundary demarcation and related issues. *Mr. Janibul Haq*

The meeting takes place in the wake of worst-ever border skirmishes between the two countries that claimed the lives of at least 19 border guards on both sides. The talks will finalise the terms of reference for the functioning of the Joint Boundary Working Groups (JBWGs). The meeting is the outcome of intense diplomatic efforts by Dhaka and New Delhi and enjoys the full backing of the heads of both Governments.

The decision to form JBWGs was taken during the Foreign Secretary-level consultations in New Delhi in December last year. They were constituted to deal with "demarcation of the still undemarcated 6.5 km boundary".

"The groups would also touch on the issues of exchange of enclaves and lands in adverse possession.

The delegation will include representatives from the foreign, land, law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministries, Department of Land Records and Survey, Joint Rivers Commission and the Bangladesh Rifles.

The second meeting will be held here and the dates of the Indian delegation's visit would be discussed at the New Delhi meeting.



# Bangladesh team coming in June

By Haroon Habib

*9th June 1974*

**DHAKA, MAY 30.** A Bangladesh delegation is leaving here for Delhi on June 11 to take part in the much awaited official-level talks with India to resolve issues arising out of the recent border disputes.

The first round of talks between the two neighbours, after the mid-April border clashes, will begin in the Indian Capital on June 12, an official announcement said here today.

Disclosing the schedule of the two-day meeting, the Foreign Secretary, Syed Muazzem Ali told a press briefing that "Bangladesh attaches particular significance to the Delhi meeting because it is taking place after the unfortunate incident on the border last month which claimed lives on both sides".

A 12-member Bangladesh team, comprising representatives from several ministries, including Water Resources, Land, Law and Parliamentary Affairs and Foreign Affairs, will be led by a Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The Foreign Secretary said the second meeting of the officials of the two countries is expected to be held here in the later part of June. The announcement of the official-level meeting, Mr. Ali said, is being simultaneously made from the Capitals of the two countries.

The prime objective of the Delhi meeting is to finalise the terms of reference of the Joint Boundary Working Group (JBWG), Mr. Ali said, adding it will also work out the composition and *modus operandi* of the JBWG.

The JBWG was formed during the meeting of the Foreign Secretary of the two countries in Delhi last December. While the first JBWG will deal with demarcation of the un-demarcated 6.5 km border of the two countries, the second JBWG will take up the

*BMS*

settled issues — exchange of enclaves and adverse possession — between the two countries.

Mr. Ali who expressed great "optimism" about the Delhi meeting, said, "it will definitely yield positive results".

The Foreign Secretary also said Bangladesh would like to have the demarcation work completed within one year of the first meeting of the JBWG. He said in the last two years, the two countries have succeeded in demarcating nearly 121 km of border area.

Replying to a question, Mr. Ali said the exact date of Dhaka meeting will be fixed at the Delhi meeting and it is expected to be in the last week of June.

To another question, he said Bangladesh's investigation of last month's border happening is going on. He added that "Bangladesh understands that a similar probe is being done in India to ascertain how and when the BSF men intruded into Bangladesh territory which led to the unfortunate deaths on both sides". He said that "we are in constant touch with each other" on the matter.

The Foreign Secretary said although exchange of enclaves and adverse possession are settled matters, a mechanism has to be evolved to do the actual work. "We have the guidelines chartered in Mujib-Indira Land Boundary Agreement of 1974, but details have to be worked out," he added.

Mr. Ali who is scheduled to meet his Indian counterpart, Ms. Chokila Iyer in Colombo on June 9 on the sidelines of the SAARC Foreign Secretaries meeting in Colombo next month, said in reply to a question that the entire gamut of bilateral relations including border issues will also come up for discussion.

If the official-level meeting fails to resolve the disputes, the matter will be taken up at higher level, he said in reply to a question.

THE HINDU

7 JUN 1974

# India, Bangladesh go slow on talks

By Seema Guha

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: After their brief border skirmish, both India and Bangladesh made reassuring sounds about ensuring that such incidents do not recur.

However, domestic political considerations have led both governments to drag their feet on where and when the talks should be held. India set the ball rolling by issuing the initial invitation for a team from Bangladesh to come to New Delhi between May 22 to 25, for discussions on the border. Dhaka countered the Indian move by calling on New Delhi to send a team to Bangladesh between May 28 to 30.

Officially, Bangladesh says it wants an Indian delegation in Dhaka because in the last one year, there has more or less been a one-way traffic to Delhi. In April 2000, a Bangladesh delegation headed by the home secretary was here. Around June-July another official team from Dhaka visited Delhi, in December last year, foreign secre-

tary Shafi Sami arrived for foreign office consultations with Lalit Mansingh. In April, Major General Fazlur Rahman, the chief of the Bangladesh Rifles was here for talks with his BSF counterpart.

"Considering this, we thought it would be nice for India to send a team for a change," an official of Bangladesh said. The Hasina government, worried about political repercussions in an election year, would much rather have an Indian team there. "We don't mind back to back meetings either. Soon after the Dhaka meet we can have another in Delhi," the official said.

The important point for Sheikh Hasina is to ensure the opposition does not say that she is kowtowing to India.

Indian officials publicly say New Delhi will announce a team soon. "It takes a little time to organise a delegation, because several ministries are involved—home, external affairs and also representation from the BSF," an Indian official said. "We will announce a decision once the team is ready."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 MAY 2001

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Tension along the Indo-Bangladesh border is closely linked with political instability, economic problems and the population explosion leading to large-scale infiltration

# LESSONS FROM BORAIBARI

5x8 27/5

**T**HE ghastly killing of 16 Border Security Force personnel has caused a sense of anger and horror all over the country and cast a shadow on the friendly relations between India and Bangladesh. Former director general of BSF, Mr Prakash Singh, released to the press a statement raising a number of pertinent questions. He held the government responsible for mishandling the issue and expressed the view that the ill-fated BSF foray into Boraibari in Bangladesh must have had some kind of clearance from Delhi. He was correct in pointing out that the pictures of mutilated bodies of BSF personnel will have a very demoralising effect on the minds of BSF jawans guarding the borders of the country.

I have served the BSF first as the Inspector General in West Bengal Frontier and thereafter as the Additional Director General for nearly five years. I had visited every nook and corner of the long and porous Indo-Bangladesh border and I feel that only a thorough inquiry will reveal the tragic circumstances culminating in the massacre. However, some facts have to be borne in mind.

First, the long 4,096-km border between India and Bangladesh does not follow natural geographical alignments everywhere. It moves in a criss-cross manner through the densely populated villages, long green paddy fields, seasonal rivers and nalas. At the time of country's partition the boundary line drawn on the map by the Boundary Commission under Radcliff was straightaway implemented owing to paucity of time at the Commission's disposal. The entire border, and more so between West Bengal and Bangladesh, is thickly populated. A number of villages extend up to the zero line on the border and strangely enough there

*The author is a former Director, National Police Academy.*

are bordering villages parts of which are in India and parts in Bangladesh.

Second, there are 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladesh enclaves inside India. A stretch of 6-1/2 km of the border is yet to be demarcated because of the concern of the Hindu population leaving on the lands which are likely to go to Bangladesh after demarca-

By SANKAR SEN

flag meeting. On numerous occasions there were clashes between villagers on two sides of the border leading to confrontation between the BSF and BDR.

I recollect an incident in Murshidabad where following clashes between the villagers on two sides

the feelings of a small neighbour.

However, the BSF foray into Boraibari was a grave operational blunder. The decision was perhaps taken at a local level. The general order for border alert was issued by BSF headquarters, but this counter-strike was perhaps

standable, but it is a wise decision not to allow them in the name of redeeming national honour to go in for counter-strikes. This kind of retaliatory action would be short-sighted. Though BSF senior officers as well as jawans feel frustrated, this is the time to remain calm, exercise restraint and take measures after careful consideration.

Tension on the Indo-Bangladesh border is closely linked with infiltration from Bangladesh. Political instability, inadequate economic development, and population explosions are some of the factors compelling a large number of Bangladeshis to leave their homes and enter India in search of employment. Many of them have settled down in the border districts of West Bengal and Assam and created an explosive situation. Somehow, state governments, particularly West Bengal and Assam, have not taken note of the gravity of the problem. In meetings and conferences, officers of BDR have consistently taken the stand that there had been no infiltration from Bangladesh and refused to take back the Bangladeshis handed over to them by us. We suggested to the state government in West Bengal the introduction of identity cards initially in some of the border areas where infiltrations have become an alarming menace. The state government had dragged its feet.

Meanwhile, the wider issues of settling the territorial disputes with Bangladesh pending since 1947 — that is, enclaves in each other's adverse possession and clear demarcation of the 6.5 km unmarked border — should be speeded up. The BSF strength in the eastern border has to be augmented. This incident which must have caused a misunderstanding between the top brass of BDR and BSF should not trigger off further clashes.

**The BSF foray into Boraibari was a grave operational blunder. The decision was perhaps taken at a local level**



tion. Land has to be found to resettle these people before the demarcation is completed. Bangladesh ratified the Indira-Mujib Boundary Agreement in November 1974. But it has not been ratified by India because parliamentary approval has not been obtained so far. This is unfortunate, and creates a feeling in the minds of the Bangladeshis that India is not serious about it.

Third, the recent tension on the Indo Bangladesh border is related to the issue of adverse possession. Pyrdiwah is a small khasi village of about 20 families near Dawky in Assam-Bangladesh border. It is located on a plot of land about 300 acres inside Bangladesh and the BSF border outpost is also located on this plot in adverse possession of India. On 15 April, about 1,000 Bangladesh Rifles men surrounded the post from three sides. They also chased away the local villagers. The BSF force, however, held its ground. Incidents of this kind are not new. Similar incidents had occurred in the past. The BSF would bring in reinforcements, exchange fire with BDR, and then have a

of the border, there was heavy exchange of fire between the BSF and BDR. The DIG, Bangladesh Rifles, immediately got in touch with me over the phone and skirmishes came to an end and tension subsided after the flag meeting. Both BSF and BDR are equipped with automatic rifles and mortars. In this exchange of fire three or four BDR constables and one BSF jawan died. When I visited the spot, the local villagers gave me a hero's welcome and I was overwhelmed with emotion to find that they had installed a statue of the BSF jawan, who had laid down his life for protecting their hearths and homes.

There were many occasions when the BDR complained of aggressive tactics of BSF and in some cases I found that there was some substance in their allegations. After some time tension would subside the status quo would return. Sometimes during flag meetings and border cooperation conferences with BDR, some of the BSF commandants used to behave uppishly, if not rudely. There was a display of a big brother attitude and lack of appreciation of

the brainchild of the local Commandant. The truth would come to light after the inquiry which has been ordered. I also cannot fathom as to why the BSF jawans were mercilessly killed and their bodies mutilated. In the past BSF jawans intruding into Bangladesh have been captured by the BDR and returned after a flag meeting without any harm being done to them. The BSF also did the same thing in respect of BDR personnel. I feel that the lynching was done by the local villagers who had scores to settle with the BSF. But what baffles me is why the BDR contingent could not prevent this ghastly torture and killing.

It is reported in the press that present DG, BSF, Gurbachan Jagat, has said that three patrol parties entered Boraibari, and one group led by the Deputy Commandant was captured by the BDR. However, if BSF jawans were shot dead in captivity by the BDR personnel, it would be a wanton and shocking act of brutality.

Tension and anger among the BSF personnel is under-

## India weighs Bangla talks offer

INDIA ON Tuesday said Bangladesh's offer to hold border talks this month-end was "under consideration" and indicated that a decision on this would be taken shortly.

India had suggested May 22 to 25 for talks on boundary demarcation and other contentious issues and invited a delegation from Dhaka to New Delhi. Bangladesh made a counter-offer inviting an Indian delegation to Dhaka and proposed May 26 to 30 for the purpose. "This is under consideration," an external affairs ministry spokesman told reporters in response to questions. Delhi's proposal was for discussing all pending matters relating to the 1974 agreement on demarcation of the land boundary and related matters.

*PTI, New Delhi*

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 MAY 2001

# Indo-Bangla border meet in June

Dhaka, May 20

TOP INDIAN and Bangladeshi border officials will meet next month to discuss the recent clashes that killed 19 guards on both sides and take steps to prevent a similar confrontation in future.

The meeting will be held from June 2 to June 5 on the Bangladeshi side of the Rajshahi border, 270 km north-west of Dhaka.

The deputy heads of the BDR and BSF will discuss issues such as cross-border trade, smuggling and human migration. This is the first high-level meeting between the two sides since the violence at the Boraibari-Assam frontier.

Bangladesh is probing an Indian allegation that the bodies of its paramilitary soldiers were mutilated and tortured in custody.

Bangladesh says its soldiers fired in self-defence after the Indian guards attacked Boraibari on April 18, two days after the Bangladeshi troops had occupied an Indian village.

Tension was defused after Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed spoke to Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the phone and junior border officials from the two sides met several times in the past month.

AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

## Indo-Bangla talks: venue undecided

**DHAKA, MAY 18.** Bangladesh and India are undecided on a venue for a proposed talks aimed at resolving the border disputes which triggered a clash last month, Foreign Ministry officials said today.

"We are awaiting response to our invitation to India for holding border talks in Dhaka later this month," the Foreign Secretary, Syed Muazzem Ali, told reporters.

Bangladesh earlier agreed to an Indian proposal for a meeting in New Delhi, but last week it suggested that Dhaka be the venue. "The talks will take place as both the Governments are eager to solve the disputes through negotiations," Mr. Ali said. — Reuters

THE HINDU

19 MAY 2001

# Illegal migrants: A phantom menace?

Indrajit Hazra  
Guwahati, May 17

IN FIVE minutes, High Court lawyer Gautam Uzir made two very strong statements. "All Assamese people are extremely lazy. The migrants are ready to do any job while we are always grumbling." He followed it up with "I don't consider them (migrants) to be human."

Assam has a 262km border with Bangladesh and on the issue of illegal migrants, most people here have a strong opinion. In Dhubri near the international border, however, most locals dismiss the existence of migrants. Tea shop owner Subodh Das thinks that these are

"just politically motivated rumours".

A few like Abdur Sheikh from nearby Phulbari, however, talk of a cross-border racket that was busted in Lakhimpur a few years ago.

"Four individuals were arrested for providing forged citizenship certificates and documents to illegal migrants for 14 years. There's bound to be more."

E N Rammohan, Director General, BSF, in his 1997 report said: "As Additional SP in 1968 in Nagaon, I did not see a single Bangladeshi village in Jagi Road or in Kaziranga. In 1982, when I was posted as DIGP, Northern Range, Tezpur, five

new Bangladeshi Muslim villages had come up near Jagi Road and hundreds of families had built their huts encroaching the land of the Kaziranga Game Sanctuary."

From the other side, former Bangladeshi diplomat Sadeq Khan said in 1991: "All projections clearly indicate that by the first decade of the 21st century, Bangladesh will face a serious crisis of 'lebensraum' (living space)... The natural trend of population over-flow from Bangladesh is towards the sparsely populated lands in the South-East in the Arakan side and of the North-East in the Seven Sisters side of the Indian subcontinent."

While from a distance, the migration issue in Assam may seem to be communally tinged, it is seen here as a serious demographic problem. Rammohan recalls: "In 1983, the people of the villages living on the banks of the Brahmaputra opposite Chawalkhoa attacked the encroachers on this island when they found that they had been given voting rights by the Government. Assamese Muslims of Sanuna village attacked the Bengali Muslim encroachers on this island. I am a direct witness to this."

To counter an understandable fear among the minorities of victimisation, the Illegal Migrant (Determination by Tri-

bunal) was passed in 1983. Nearly 20 years down the line, it is now being seen as serving the interests of illegal migrants and political parties intent on creating vote-banks.

With the Congress coming to power, people like Uzir fear the worst. "Over the last 15 years, only about 9,600 illegal migrants were identified, only about 1,450 were deported. Now that the Prime Minister has suggested giving Bangladeshi migrants work permits, the Congress will actually implement it. All political parties have given up on tackling the real issue, putting a stop to foreigners flooding into Assam," he said.

**Concluded**

# Border clashes won't affect ties: Hasina

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LONDON, May 13. — Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed has said the recent border clashes with India will not affect bilateral relations, which are "very good."

"There are border clashes some times and it can be solved. I believe the clashes will not affect our bilateral relationship," Mrs Wajed said. The Bangladesh Prime Minister arrived here on her way to Brussels to attend the third least developed countries (LDC) conference.

Mrs Wajed said Dhaka always gave importance to good relationship with neighbouring countries and hoped the problem will be solved "very quickly".

"We believe friendship between neighbouring countries should exist and improve. We want to solve this problem (border clashes) very quickly. It can be solved because we have a very good relationship," she said. The Opposition party in Bangladesh had tried to capitalise on the situation but did not succeed, she added.

On the problems Bangladesh faced in guarding its long international borders, Mrs Wajed said the previous government had not implemented the Indira-Mujib agreement on the 4,000 km border with India. "We will try to solve the problems on the basis of the agreement," she said. A task force has been set up to tackle the problem and it would meet very soon.

Mrs Wajed appreciated UK's role in 1971 during "the great war of liberation against the Pakistani occupation army".

The British press had also extended its cooperation to the oppressed people of Bangladesh.

14 MAY 2001



# BDR operation decoded <sup>HT-9</sup> from messages <sub>12/5</sub>

HT Correspondent  
Shillong, May 11

THE INTRUSION by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) jawans in the tiny non-descript border village of Pyrdiwah on April 16 caught everyone by surprise. How could Bangladesh gather the courage to take on India?

Intelligence agencies here eavesdropping on wireless communication of BDR were initially flummoxed. It was on April 18 morning at 10.15 am, when a top official from BDR's headquarters in Dhaka was directing the Commandant of the 40th battalion to continue shelling.

The 40th battalion of BDR was deployed along the Mankachar sector, where the border skirmish witnessed the bloodiest fight. "Don't worry. Continue firing. Ammunition are being sent..." the BDR message decoded by the Indian cryptologists reported.

Acting on the interception, the Indian forces immediately beefed up operations. There was heavy shelling by the BSF jawans in Mankachar sector and subsequently, Pyrdiwah was also forcefully vacated by BSF jawans the next morning (April 19).

Interestingly, after the copy-book-style operation in Pyrdiwah there was sudden change in the tune of the intercepted BDR messages from the morning of April 19. An official of BDR's 33rd battalion informed the headquarters in Dhaka. "The present deployment is not capable of fighting the counterpart (BSF)

immediately rush reinforcement..."

The 'boss' in the headquarters directed the official on the frontier to hold on till further orders. The next message came to the Commandant of the 33rd battalion within half an hour of the first SOS. "It is not possible to send reinforcement. Withdraw immediately if it is unsafe," the order came from the top. The order also said "save men and materials".

For the next hour, there was repeated inquiry about the withdrawal operations from the headquarters. Soon, the commandant of 33rd battalion directed the BDR personnel posted at Izlamari, Patherchar and Boraibari border outposts to "vacate immediately".

Quoting intelligence sources, the commandant of the battalion, was reportedly heard saying over the wireless that 80 to 90 vehicles, carrying Indian Army personnel, were approaching Boraibari.

As a precautionary measure, all the BDR troops were ordered immediately to retreat at least three kilometres south of the frontier to evade any casualty. "Do not fire, do not fire..." the order said. However, the BDR's intelligence information was wrong and there was no such deployment of Army personnel along the frontier.

The last SOS from one Captain Samul at BDR's outpost at Kordipara during the late hours of April 19 said, "We will be finished in half an hour if we do not retreat..."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 MAY 2001

# CAREFUL HANDLING

## Relations with Bangladesh must be revived

LEFT to herself, Sheikh Hasina, prime minister of Bangladesh is a good friend of India and this friendship has brought her rich dividends in the shape of tariff concessions for her country's products and help in solving long-standing problems between the two countries. She has not forgotten how India helped her father achieve independence from erstwhile Pakistan in 1971 and both father and daughter have been close to this country. If anything the only factor impeding even closer relations has been the rise of fundamentalism in Bangladesh and ties that her arch rival Begum Khalida Zia has forged with extreme elements in her country's polity and who loses no opportunity to indulge in India-baiting for domestic consumption. When the deplorable incident took place recently on our unguarded border in which 16 of our men lost their lives to the unprovoked violence and barbarism of the Bangladesh Rifles, the restraint in Delhi was dictated by the fear that in the coming elections Sheikh Hasina could not afford to be seen as too close to India. It is clear that the violence was the result of fundamentalist influence in the Bangladesh armed forces and the consideration influenced Hasina's barely concealed desire to visit Delhi and apologise. The suggestion was hastily withdrawn for the same reasons and we understood.

Clearly we underestimated the advantages to be drawn from using India as a bogey and brownie points to be scored by appearing to stand up to the larger neighbour. All things considered, few could have been prepared for Hasina's need to appear even more uncompromising towards India than her tormentor. Speaking in Dhaka she carried the fight to her opponent's camp, accusing Khalida of being pro-India instead. Clearly the best form of defence is attack! The Prime Minister accused the Opposition of being soft on India. She gave examples to justify her new stance. It was Khalida who had reduced duties on Indian imports, she on the other hand was negotiating duty-free access for 25 Bangladesh products. The recital of her standing up to India is not important, that she feels it necessary to do so is the point. In the short term there is no difficulty in understanding Hasina's predicament. But this can become a bad habit. This newspaper has warned of how fundamentalism is filling the vacuum of the slowing down of warm and friendly relations, of exchanges and of cultural and linguistic ties that once existed between the two neighbours. There is no point in apportioning blame. As the larger country we must understand the compulsions of our much smaller and weaker neighbour.

It is the tendency now coming to the surface that is worrying. We have not done enough to contain the fundamentalist influences coming from Pakistan and underestimated the ease with which ties of language, culture, art and music can be smothered by the cry, simple, narrow and wrong that the common bond of Islam is all that matters between what was once one country, an absurdity in geography and representing all that we have fought against in our national struggle for independence. It would be an oversimplification to suppose that this is explained by the proximity of elections in Bangladesh and afterwards it will all be hunky-dory again. Appeasement is not suggested; it is rarely good policy. But it is true that taking a much smaller country for granted comes naturally. We have been warned. We must pay far more attention to Dhaka than we have done so far. We must be fair and seen to be fair but cultural ties that have fallen into disuse should be revived. We must not play into Pakistan's hands; to fight any battle on the enemy's turf is bad tactics. //

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

9 MAY 2001

## Hasina Govt. to blame: Minister

**NEW DELHI, MAY 7.** The Minister of State for Home, Mr. I.D. Swami, today said the Bangladesh Government, not just the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) chief, Mr. Fazlur Rahman, should be held responsible for last month's border incidents in which 16 Border Security Force soldiers were killed.

"We should always hold the Bangladesh Government responsible for what happened and not

just the BDR chief," he told Mr. Karan Thapar on *Line of fire* programme to be telecast on Sab TV on Saturday.

To a question on the statement of the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary that the premier, Sheikh Hasina, had only voiced deep shock over the killing of BSF soldiers and mutilation of bodies, Mr. Swami said that during the 25-minute telephonic talk with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari

Vajpayee, she had said "sorry" thrice and had given the assurance of a full-fledged inquiry and strong action against those found guilty. The Haryana Vikas Party MP, Mr. Swaraj Kaushal, and the Congress leader, Mr. K. Natwar Singh, said there was "gross" intelligence failure and "slackening of vigil" on the part of India along the border area in Pyrdiwah in Meghalaya and in Assam. — PTI

**Hasina blames Opposition: Page 14**

THE HINDU

- 8 MAY 2001

# Opposition soft on India, says Hasina

**DHAKA, MAY 7.** Another dimension was added to the India factor in Bangladesh politics with the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, accusing the Opposition of being soft on the country's neighbour in the west, contrary to its rhetoric.

Sheikh Hasina said on Sunday that her opponents "are eloquent against India in their speeches but appease India".

She took all credit for the speedy resolution of the crisis triggered by recent border clashes with India.

"Usually in such national crisis all get united voluntarily, but I did not get any cooperation from the opposition," Sheikh Hasina said. "Since the Awami League is in

power, it could solve the problem speedily and peacefully. Had there been any other party in government, they would have messed up the matter," she said.

Refuting opposition criticism, Sheikh Hasina asked what previous regimes of General Zia, Gen Ershad and Begum Khaleda Zia had done to resolve the problem of Pyrdiwah in more than two decades.

"You call us collaborators of India, what you have done? Why didn't you capture Pyrdiwah? Where were you sleeping at that time?"

Criticising the opposition campaign colouring the Awami League as pro-India, Sheikh Hasina said it was the Awami

League that protected territorial integrity when the opposition kept mum. "When the problem is settled, the opposition is talking so much." During her visit to New Delhi as Prime Minister, Begum Zia signed a joint communique with India and it was the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) Government that endorsed the push-in issue, allowing the Indian authorities to deport Bengali-speaking Indian nationals to Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina said.

The past BNP Government unilaterally brought down the import duties on Indian goods from 300 to 400 per cent to 30 to 40 per cent without any reciprocal arrangements and giving any protection to local

industrial products, she said. "My government, on the other hand, is now in negotiation to get duty-free access of 25 Bangladeshi export items to Indian market," the United News of Bangladesh was reported as saying.

After assuming power, the Prime Minister said, she had settled the long-running issue of sharing of the Ganges waters there by halting desertification in northern region and removing salinity in southern districts. Besides, she said, her government has convinced India to extend the time of movement through Timbigha corridor from every alternate hour to dawn-to-dusk. —

UNI

# India-Bangladesh: Web of deceit

NEWSWATCH



M.K. NARAYANAN

**T**he many, and contradictory, versions of the clash between India's Border Security Force personnel and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) ignore a significant truth viz., the highly tense and unsatisfactory nature of the relations that exist today between the two countries, despite the character of the regime in power in Dhaka. The gruesome killings and the torture of BSF personnel, whether solely by the BDR or in conjunction with local mobs, contains a message that India cannot afford to overlook much longer and must be faced squarely. It might save India's hurt and agony — to an extent — if Sheikh Hasina were to offer an unconditional apology, but she is clearly in no position to do so. The sooner we accept this as the omnipresent reality, instead of giving certificates of good conduct to particular regimes in Dhaka, the better. This is not to suggest that India should act on impulse, but that we need to remove the many cob-webs that hamper our thinking along new lines.

Officialdom, the media and the intelligentsia all have excelled in minimising the gravity of this incident, and in passing it off as an instance of "adventurism" by a few BDR elements located on the Indo-Bangladesh border. The director general of the BSF has, however, not bought this and in his press interview squarely blamed the chiefs of the Bangladesh Army and the BDR, accusing them of a pre-planned attack on the BSF unit posted on the Assam-Meghalaya border. There is also little grist to the speculation that this might be the work of anti-establishment elements in Bangladesh — including sections in the Army and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party — to embarrass Sheikh Hasina. While some see in this Pakistan's hand, and the role of the ISI, to sour relations between India and Bangladesh, firm evidence is lacking. Delhi's restrained response so as not to adversely affect Indo-Bangladesh relations, and its attempt to distance the higher echelons in Dhaka from the carnage, has gone down well with "liberals," but leaves many a question unanswered.

Anyone familiar with border disputes or border settlement issues would know that an unsettled stretch of 6.5 km of a several hundred kilometre long Indo-Bangladesh border could not have been the cause of a bloody carnage of this kind. Several stretches of India's borders with China, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh remain to be either demarcated or yet to be settled. In glib "officialese" efforts have been devoted towards better border management in all such areas, including more effective ways and means to prevent illegal migrations, reduce trafficking in drugs, narcotics, arms and explosives, and check smuggling, etc. Paradoxically, the situation usually tends to be more difficult where "weaker" countries — like Bangladesh and Nepal — are concerned. Therein lies the rub, and the earlier the real reasons are determined, the less the chances that these mistakes will



BSF JAWANS GUARD THE INDO-BANGLA BORDER: 'If there was a failure, it is not so much with the detailed granularity of the information provided, as with the inability to assess, or perhaps more correctly project, the panorama of deceit that has been unfolding for some time. It is the nature of the big picture, rather than lack of information on the capabilities or resources of Bangladesh, that was possibly not made available'

be repeated.

Admittedly, India's relations with many of its neighbours have not always been satisfactory. Deteriorating relations with China and Pakistan in the past led to conflict and war. India's relations with Burma remained in deep freeze for long, but signs of a thaw are now discernible. With Nepal, many problems remain to be sorted out. With Bangladesh and Sheikh Hasina's government, relations were expected to show improvement, but apart from some cosmetic changes at the top, relations have remained unsatisfactory. With the exception of Bhutan, and possibly Sri Lanka, India and its neighbours have often operated on different wave-lengths.

Imparting greater realism to our policies and attitudes vis-à-vis our neighbours has hence

**M**any (in Bangladesh) fear that India's information advantage and growing military supremacy is reducing Bangladesh to insignificance. Bangladesh, which already feels 'hemmed in' politically and commercially by India, finds it difficult to come to terms with forecasts that India is likely to emerge as an economic giant with a dynamic and growing economy and 'unrivalled regional power,' and that countries like Bangladesh have few prospects other than to go closer to India and become more dependent on it. All this translates into a 'deep distrust' of India. To disregard the intensity of feelings on this account, and take refuge in Sheikh Hasina's personal friendship will thus be a serious error

become necessary. In both Nepal and Bangladesh, for instance, we were caught unprepared at the extent and depth of anti-India feelings. Giving clean chit to the regime's leaders or donning an air of "injured innocence," is hardly the best way to sort out such matters.

There are clearly sinister forces at work, who are burrowing deep into society and psyche of the people in these countries, engaged in distorting existing relationships. The surface calm can be highly misleading. It would be wiser to admit that such elements exist and have the strength and ability to queer the pitch for India. Hiding our heads ostrich-like in the sand will only damage our standing. We are hardly responsible for our geography, or for that matter our history, and have no reason to be apologetic for the asymmetries of size, population and resources. If our economic potential makes India an object of fear, apprehension, and envy of our neighbours, we should not be expected to make amends by accepting each and every one of their demarches.

Making allowances for contradictory strands of policy in a divided polity like Bangladesh is one thing. Absolving the Sheikh Hasina regime of any kind of anti-India taint, as if all or most members of the regime share a common perception of India, is another. We should regard this unfortunate incident as an early warning signal and take a hard look at what kind of policy correctives require to be put in place. Our restraint on this occasion should not be mistaken for "helplessness," tempting other smaller countries to emulate Bangladesh. Geo-political reality dictates that India is not perceived as the butt of ridicule of countries in its neighbourhood. Adequate compensation by a country violating canons of civilised behaviour is the minimum that is called for.

**T**he Boraibari incident, hence, must not be treated as a mere error of judgement. A serious introspection is called for, since it is symptomatic of a serious malaise with longer-term consequences. Bangladesh today, is a deeply polarised nation, a victim of the complex interplay of social, economic, religious and political forces. It confronts a host of problems for which answers are not readily forthcoming. The dominant political discourse is no longer based on a secular Bengali identity. Increasing religious fundamentalism leading to "Islamisation" of Bangladesh has deeply scarred the nation and led to a high level of intolerance of other communities. Traditional communal groups with strong religious underpinnings pose a range of challenges for the governing elite. NGOs, many funded by Islamic societies in Pakistan, West Asia and elsewhere, are using the opportunity to mobilise co-religionists. The quality of governance has been

steadily declining and the State is seemingly less and less in control. Inability to deal with issues of poverty and disease, and slow economic growth has exposed the regime to the charge of being both ineffective and incompetent.

Political forces on the extreme right and extreme left, and including sections in the middle, are today highly critical of India. Many fear that India's information advantage and growing military supremacy is reducing Bangladesh to insignificance. Bangladesh, which already feels "hemmed in" politically and commercially by India, finds it difficult to come to terms with forecasts — such as those contained in Global Trends 2015 — that India is likely to emerge as an economic giant with a dynamic and growing economy, and

**U**rging Sheikh Hasina to do something must not be fallaciously viewed as likely to help her 'enemies' — who fiction dictates are equally India's 'enemies'. Cooperation between nations transcends mere bonds of friendship among their leaders. National interests seldom are subordinated to personal interests or friendship... Arguments that any attempt to humiliate Sheikh Hasina would only result in her defeat in the elections due later this year, are equally specious. India does not presume, or claim, nor is it in a position to influence the course of elections or of democratic politics in Bangladesh

"unrivalled regional power," and that countries like Bangladesh have few prospects other than to go closer to India and become more dependent on it. All this translates into a "deep distrust" of India. To disregard the intensity of feelings on this account, and take refuge

in Sheikh Hasina's personal friendship ignoring those of the regime and the people, will thus be a serious error.

Not unexpectedly, the print medium has talked of yet another colossal intelligence failure in this context. If there was a failure, it is not so much with the detailed granularity of the information provided, as with the inability to assess, or perhaps more correctly project, the panorama of deceit that has been unfolding for some time. It is the nature of the big picture, rather than lack of information on the capabilities or resources of Bangladesh, that was possibly not made available. Divining the thinking of key decision-makers in Bangladesh is one thing. Making sense out of the many "intangibles" that compel a regime or the people to act in a particular way is clearly another, and more difficult, task. That kind of assessment needs much more than intelligence inputs. It requires the involvement of other disciplines and skills and, more importantly, putting aside the mind-set of more than a quarter of a century.

**T**he Indian establishment has so far displayed a pathetic unwillingness to accept that Bangladesh now responds more readily to the "drum beat" of Islamic nationalism than to any secular philosophy. Also that, coming on top of the usual friction between a small nation and a big neighbour, this had the effect of drastically altering attitudes in a negative direction. Economic and social decline and severe dislocation of populations have greatly exacerbated frustrations, much of which is directed at India. In this backdrop, pet theories that with Sheikh Hasina and "pro-liberation forces" in control, India holds all the cards and that Pakistan is at the receiving end, will need to be jettisoned.

Urging Sheikh Hasina to do something must not be fallaciously viewed as likely to help her "enemies" — who fiction dictates are equally India's "enemies". Cooperation between nations transcends mere bonds of friendship among their leaders. National interests seldom are subordinated to personal interests or friendship. The Ganges Waters Agreement between India and Bangladesh became possible because India made concessions which it had been unwilling to do so previously, and hardly because Sheikh Hasina was any more conciliatory than her predecessors. The Tin Bigha Agreement took place in 1992 when the present Opposition leader, Khaleda Zia, held the reins of office in Bangladesh. Arguments that any attempt to humiliate Sheikh Hasina would only result in her defeat in the elections due later this year, are equally specious. India does not presume, or claim, nor is it in a position to influence the course of elections or of democratic politics in Bangladesh.

What India must do, however, is to fine tune its policies taking into account the emerging reality in Bangladesh, irrespective of the regime in power there. The growth of religious fundamentalism, the degree of animosity seen towards India, and the depth of antagonism that prevails among the people, all demand careful assessment. We must avoid misplaced sympathy or become "apologists" for any regime or its actions. Worse, we must avoid any wrong understanding of where indeed a nation like Bangladesh is headed. Exposing the limits of our capability to intervene, or avoid taking steps to set right situations, merely to shore up, a regime in Dhaka can cause us untold harm.

M.K. NARAYANAN has served as chief of the Intelligence Bureau

India should examine its own ambivalence towards Bangladesh

# Border tragedy

MANVENDRA SINGH

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**S**eparated at birth, and pretty much under strain ever since is just about how the India-Bangladesh relationship can be described. Despite the unique cultural and historical baggage that both countries share, the relationship has not entirely been one of tranquillity. This causes more angst in Indian hearts and minds than it does in Dhaka. There should be nothing surprising about this fact, but there are many who refuse to accept what the reality is. The root of this disquiet lies in what can loosely be called the "Lahori" spirit prevailing over rational thought and historical fact.

There is a belief amongst some of those displaced from western Punjab by the partition of the Indian subcontinent that relations between the two peoples can be hunky-dory since the medium of expression is the same in the divided province. A similar certainty prevails amongst some of those displaced by the emergence of East Pakistan. This community of the hopeful draws amongst its believers even some who were rooted on the right side of the Radcliffe Line. But the principle behind their conviction remains the same — a belief in linguistic similarity as the magic potion to overcome all other problems.

This passion flies in the face of world history and the evolution of civilizations. Nevertheless, Indians are not unique in succumbing to this failing, and neither is the Indian subcontinent the only repository of the culturally misled. South America is a vivid example of this phenomenon, and try as he might, Simon Bolivar could not bring the various countries united by language and church together. Understanding this factor is essential for Indians in evolving a workable relationship with two of their neighbours who parted ways at birth.

India was divided because a sufficient number of Muslims did not visualize a safe and secure future for themselves in a country where Hindus would be in a majority. It was a violent partition, as all separations must be. Language, neighbourhood or membership of the Government College debating society did not prevent those who ostensibly may have been friends from killing each other in Lahore. And the same did not prevent Calcutta from sinking into orgies of slaughter.

**M**emories of that period have not entirely healed for many who experienced those terrible days. To deny that reality is to bait the brutalities of the Balkans all over again. In this milieu, then, appear some who wish to gloss over the period of partition and play "the priest again" — little realizing that in the process they only further the distance in the minds.

The reality of Partition is permanent. What is also a fact is that a good many of those living in the two wings of



Pakistan have in fact prospered since India was split. They have had opportunities to grow socially, economically and politically that they might not otherwise have had. That the opportunities may have been gotten through dodgy deals is another matter, but the fact is that many are better off today than they, or their forbears, had been in August 1947. Those who regard the Radcliffe Line as just another imperialist plot conveniently ignore this aspect of the neighbour's psychology. And that ignorance lies at the root of India's inability to reconcile itself to the dodgy in Dhaka.

East Pakistanis were instrumental in the creation of Pakistan, as important a part as their western co-citizens. And they would have been content to continue calling themselves East Pakistani had it not been for the sheer scale of ignorance and arrogance of those living in Lahore. Even after the emergence of an independent Bangladesh the resolve to lead a life separate from India remains as steadfast as ever, notwithstanding New Delhi's role prior to and during the 1971 war. For the simple reason that they viewed themselves to be different in 1947 and continue to see themselves so since 1971. A national anthem scripted by Rabindranath Tagore is unlikely to make the Bangladeshi believe otherwise. And why should he?

There are generally two Indian reac-

along such sensitivities. After all, the Pakistan army's surrender in Dhaka was to both the Indian army and the Mukti Bahini. Indians have grown accustomed to seeing only their military in the picture.

**D**haka also does not want the Radcliffe Line to wither away, for they believe they have struggled for it twice, before 1947 and in 1971. Bangladesh is not going to let it be erased, a fact that all Indians have to accept. Indians must also condition themselves into accepting Bangladesh as a viable, sovereign and stable nation seeking its own place under the sun, in honour, dignity and self-respect. All of which it sought prior to 1971. And they are not going to accept any bullying, or bashing, even when it comes from a Border Security Force patrol trying to violate its integrity.

Indians have been quick to place the blame squarely on Dhaka without first analysing the negative role played by the BSF. The fault lies largely within, and India must be graceful enough to accept it as that. Indians must also use this opportunity to come to terms with the reality that Bangladesh poses. It is, after all, the country that could have the fastest economic growth rate in the subcontinent, the country where social indicators have shown remarkable changes in the last decade. If Bangladesh were to come to terms with its geography, then there is really nothing stopping Dhaka from becoming an economic powerhouse.

For that, however, it has to come to terms with its psychology as well. The nation is split between the East Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, united, of course, in their animosity or antipathy toward India. But the reality is that there is still a fairly large East Pakistani opinion in Bangladesh, and it is large enough to shake the state. Some of them could well have engineered the episode with the BSF. Maybe they did not, but the fact is that they exist and they are most in abundance at a cricket match, currently the favourite barometer for measuring patriotism worldwide. This reality too cannot be changed, and coupled with the recent tragic happenings on the Indo-Bangla border the country should not miss the opportunity to initiate a debate on the validity of India's role in 1971.

**T**he question to be posed within is whether it was in India's supreme national interest to have helped re-naming East Pakistan. After all, precious little has changed there, and it is also a fact that had it not been for 1971, there very likely would not have been a Khalistan movement, and neither would there have been an insurgency in Kashmir. West Pakistanis testify toward that. But first Indians have to learn to accept the realities.

**Even after New Delhi's role in 1971, independent Bangladesh's resolve to remain separate from India remains steadfast**

tions to Bangladesh. A large number feel that there is not enough gratitude demonstrated by Dhaka toward India for all that was done in 1971. The visible, vocal minority that sells the cultural line believes that the Radcliffe Line is a passing phenomenon, liable to be erased sooner than later. Both are off the mark since both ignore how Dhaka feels. No people are going to accept, let alone be reminded, that their freedom is owed to the blood and sacrifice of another country. The countries of Europe don't feel that they owe a similar debt to the British or Americans. And likewise neither do the countries of the Asian southeast feel their liberty has been paid for by the blood of foreigners.

The Bangladeshis believe, and accurately so up to a point, that their liberation is a result of their own sacrifices with some Indian help. Throwing military statistics around cannot alter people's perceptions, for nations are built

4 MAY 2001

THE STATESMAN  
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# Hasina for talks on border row

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By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, MAY 3.** The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, whose proposed visit to India in May second week has reportedly been dropped, expressed the hope that border disputes between the two countries would be resolved through discussions.

Addressing a May Day rally in Chittagong, she referred to the recent border skirmishes and said it was because of her Awami League Government that "we have been able to restore peace along our borders".

On the criticism of her opponent, the former Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, that she had failed to protect the country's sovereignty from "Indian aggression", Hasina claimed her Government had been successful in settling disputes along the 145-km border with India and Myanmar. Only 6.5 km of border with India remained unsettled. Measures had already been taken to resolve the remaining disputes through separate task forces formed under the Mujib-Indira border accord, she said.

The Opposition, led by Begum Zia, launched a countrywide pre-

poll campaign against the Government over the border clash terming the Awami League as "subservient to India".

Hasina posed a counter-charge, asking Khaleda why her late husband, Zia-ur-Rahman, who was the country's President for many years, failed to solve the border issues with India.

On Hasina's cancelled visit, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdus Samad Azad, told a press briefing at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs here last night, "she (the Prime Minister) will not be able to visit New Delhi either on way to London or on way back home". This was because of domestic compulsions. The visit might take place at mutual convenience. "Both sides are interested in receiving each other," Mr. Azad said.

He said the Government had accepted India's invitation and would soon send a delegation to New Delhi to discuss border problems. On Wednesday, Mr. Azad told the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. Moni Lal Tripathy, during a meeting that border problems should be resolved swiftly through the implementation of the accord in the interest of good relations.

THE HINDU

- 4 MAY 2001





# Delhi may send team to Dhaka

Udayan Nambodiri  
New Delhi, May 2

DHAKA HAS not formally responded to New Delhi's offer for delegation-level talks between May 22 and 25 on the border issue, but the Bangladeshi foreign ministry is believed to have told the Government here that it would prefer the talks to be held in Dhaka.

It is a week now since Dhaka informed the foreign ministry here that the Bangladeshi Prime Minister would stop in New Delhi on her way back from Brussels, but her office has not cared to confirm the dates that India proposed as being convenient for Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

India is sensitive to Sheikh Hasina Wajed's political compulsions at home, which could presumably prevent her from making a visit as she had intended to, or from sending over a delegation. Foreign ministry sources here said today that the Bangladeshi "counter-invitation" to host delegation-level talks was being considered at the highest level, and a formal announcement on the venue may be made in a few days.

A senior Ministry of External Affairs official said, "When the Bangladesh foreign ministry informed us of the Prime Minister's intention to come on a visit, we gave them dates between May 17 and 20 as suitable for the Indian Prime Minister, who is scheduled to visit Malaysia in May. However there has been no confirmation from Dhaka."

Hasina may not be able to make it to India because of the political repercussions of such a visit, but she told a May Day rally in Chittagong yesterday that the two countries would "soon have a task force to resolve the border problem", a PTI report from



HASINA

Dhaka said.

India on Monday invited Bangladesh for talks to clear the air over the border skirmishes at Prydiwah and Mankachar, but did not mention any specific level at which it wanted the talks to be held. The Joint Working Groups, which the two neighbours agreed to form in December, are yet to take shape.

Hasina is under attack in her country for what the Opposition sees as a "surrender" to India. At the May Day rally in Chittagong, Hasina pointed out that her Government had been able to restore peace quickly after the clashes on the border.

The Bangladeshi Nationalist Party leader Begum Khaleda Zia and her slain husband, former military ruler Zia-ur-Rahman, had "done nothing to resolve the border issue with India when they were in power," Hasina said.

At a BNP rally yesterday, Khaleda Zia said: "The national frontier is not safe in the hands of a subservient government."

"The BDR men recovered Padua after 30 years, but the subservient government handed it over to the Indian BSE," she said.

# RSS raps govt. for taking soft stand on Bangla border issue

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The RSS has attacked the government for its handling of the Bangladesh border issue. The government's reaction to the killing of 16 Border Security Force (BSF) jawans by Bangla forces has sent out a wrong signal to the international community, the RSS has said.

"An impression has been created that India is a soft state. Our government's reaction should have been much stronger," said RSS spokesman M.G. Vaidya. Drawing a parallel between the American spy-plane incident, which resulted in a stand-off between China and the U.S., Mr Vaidya said: "The U.S. expressed regret and all the crew and the spy plane were released by China. China didn't torture and kill the Americans who violated the Chinese air space. America and China are not intimate friends like India and Bangladesh".

Even if the kid-glove treatment has been for diplomatic reasons to help out a friendly government during election times, the RSS feels the government has failed by not reacting sharply to the incident.

Among other controversial issues that mire the BJP-led government, the border skirmish too could come up for discussion in the two-day *karyakari mandal* (national executive) meeting scheduled on June 30 and July 1 in Kanpur. Around 200 senior RSS leaders and workers are expected to attend the meeting of this highest official decision-making body.

Meanwhile, the exclusive club of 8-10 senior most RSS leaders had their once-in-two months retreat in Bangalore recently. Though, officially the three-day meeting from April 24 to 27 did not take major decisions or undertake serious discussion, it seems that most leaders disapproved of veteran labour leader Dattopant Thengadi's vituperative attack against finance minister Yashwant Sinha.

Mr Thengadi had called Sinha a "criminal" for usurping the labour ministry's powers in his budget. Despite the disapproval of Mr Thengadi's language, the fact that Mr Thengadi could hijack the emerging opposition platform against the government's economic policies, has been greatly appreciated by the Sangh elders.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

3 MAY 2001

Bangladesh mustn't take our tolerance threshold for granted

# Friends and neighbours

It was puzzlement and outrage that marked one's initial reaction, in this column, to the border clash between Indian and Bangladeshi forces. Puzzlement over the strength of the attack by Bangladesh forces against the Indian forces and outrage at the manner in which 16 BSF jawans were tortured and killed. The low-key Indian response was also intriguing. The origins of the clashes are more complicated than initial reports seem to indicate.

Initial reports put out from India were that Bangladesh forces launched an unprovoked attack against BSF cadres in the Pyrduwah area, capturing the enclave. This was followed by the statement that 16 BSF cadres were "lured into Bangladesh territory and then murdered in cold blood, after being tortured". The statements of the Bangladesh government contradicted this version of the events. It averred that Bangladesh forces fired in self-defence against intrusions by the BSF. The statements between the April 22 and 30 compounded the confusion. One version was that BSF was in the process of building a road to the enclave of Pyrduwah which was objected to by Bangladesh forces, leading to clashes. Similarly, early statements from our side explained the border clash in Boraibari as a counter-measure by the BSF to balance off the capture of Pyrduwah by Bangladesh forces. This was later modified. The clash was seen as the result of BSF undertaking border exercises at a higher level of alertness after Pyrduwah.

What caused this violence is also subject to contradictory and confusing explanations. Official pronouncements from India described the clashes as localised adventurism by Bangladesh forces on the border. There was speculation that the attempt was to create tension between the two countries, by the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and sections of the army, with a view to embarrassing Sheikh Hasina in the forthcoming elections.

While Indian public opinion is grap-

pling with the confusing and uncertain perceptions created by these statements, the director general of the BSF, Gurbachan Jagat, in a recent interview, categorically accused the chiefs of the Bangladesh army and the Bangladesh Rifles of having launched a pre-planned attack against BSF forces on the Assam-Meghalaya border.

Although Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has ordered an inquiry into the events, the statement issued by her government categorically asserts that Bangladesh forces acted in self-defence. Contrary to Indian claims, Bangladesh's statement does not refer to any apology or regret from



J.N. Dixit

**Public perception of India being a soft state, caused by its handling of the crisis, can only be removed by purposive action to stabilise Indo-Bangladesh ties**

either Hasina or her government.

Sifting through these contradictions and claims, these are the basic facts that emerge: first, that the Bangladesh security forces mounted an offensive against the BSF in the Pyrduwah area in brigade strength. Second, the BSF did undertake some kind of a large-scale patrolling exercise in the Boraibari region which came apart and ended in a fiasco leading to the brutal murder of the BSF personnel. It also seems that the Boraibari violence occurred in Bangladesh territory. Third, it is difficult to accept that a three to five battalion strength operation by the Bangladesh Armed Forces could be organised autonomously by any local Bangladeshi commander. The operation was clearly planned at the highest military levels. It is also reasonable to presume that Hasina and her government was gener-

ally aware of this operation as it was taking place. It follows from this that the field intelligence and monitoring mechanism of the BSF did not anticipate the events between April 15 and 19.

There is a tenuous simmering down of the situation but undercurrents of tension continue to mark Indo-Bangladesh relations in the short-term and there have been public demonstrations on both sides of the border. India's reaction has been low key, practical and based on the larger consideration of sustaining good relations with Bangladesh. It was also influenced by the fact that it does not wish to embarrass the Hasina government — which is supposed

to be more friendly towards it — during an election year. The third reason for our non-assertive reaction is because of a perception that the border clash should perhaps not be blamed on Bangladesh alone.

One has fairly authoritative information on Hasina's telephone conversation with Prime Minister Vajpayee. She expressed sorrow and pain at the events and felt they could have been avoided. There was no apology or regret from her. Simultaneously, Foreign Secretary Chokila Iyer's demarche with her Bangladeshi counterpart, Syed Muazzem Ali, led to the vacation of Pyrduwah by Bangladeshi forces.

Going beyond the rights and wrongs and responsibilities of either side, two actions by the Bangladesh government cannot be explained away: first, the large-scale offensive in the Pyrduwah sector. Second, the brutalisation and murder of BSF

jawans. India must raise these issues with Bangladesh and sort them out at an appropriate level. Jaswant Singh could have been sent to Dhaka within 48 hours of the border clash. This decision was not taken because of a lack of clear cut evidence about the origin of the conflict. Now it is too late for such a move. Foreign secretaries of SAARC countries would be meeting in Colombo in June and our foreign secretary could utilise the occasion to have a detailed exchange with her Bangladesh counterpart.

There are reports that Hasina would be visiting India later this month on her way back from Europe. Such a visit is not advisable because she may face angry demonstrations. It would also put her in a difficult position back home, apart from the fact that such demonstrations would embarrass our prime minister. Some more time should be allowed to pass before such a visit.

In the long run, we must be conscious that India has unresolved border disputes with Pakistan, China, Nepal and Bangladesh. Our endeavour should be to resolve those among them which can be managed more easily. Regardless of short term political considerations, India should ratify the 1974 Agreement on exchange of enclaves with Bangladesh and resolve its border disputes with that country. Simultaneously, we must strengthen and intensify our border security management arrangements to counter not only the phenomenon of illegal migration, smuggling, and so on, but the impulses of anti-Indian political attitudes entertained by some political segments, encouraged and abetted by extremist religious forces and Pakistani intelligence agencies.

One cannot wish away the fact that our initial reaction has resulted in a public perception of India being a soft state, though our governmental reactions are based on long-term considerations affecting Indian interests. Such a perception can only be removed by structured and purposive action to stabilise Indo-Bangladesh relations. We must do this without Bangladesh taking India's tolerance threshold for granted.

INDIAN EXPRESS

30 MAY 2001

HINDUSTAN TIMES

HF-8

## Set the fences right

MS

INDIA'S DECISION to initiate talks with Bangladesh to settle the problems along the border is a step in the right direction, although it can be described as becoming wiser after the event. If the question of demarcating the border and dealing with the contentious issue of 'adverse possessions' were left unresolved for so long, it may be because the surface reality of friendly relations allowed a sense of complacency to prevail on both sides. Now the recent tragic incidents have underlined the need for clearing up the situation on the ground in order to eliminate any scope for 'local adventurism', as India described the initial Bangladeshi moves in Pyrdiwah.

It is salutary to remember that ideas such as friendly relations are a misnomer. Since what matters in the end are permanent interests, no two countries are either permanent friends or permanent enemies. Besides, it is undeniable that there is always an element of tension between two countries, no matter how much of bonhomie mark their formal interactions. The strains are all the greater where one country is much larger than the other. India has the disadvantage of being the Big Brother in its neighbourhood, with the result that an anti-Indian attitude has an immediate appeal in the smaller countries, whether it is Nepal

or Bangladesh. It is a readymade factor which politicians in these countries cannot but exploit, especially if they are in the opposition.

In the case of Bangladesh, the situation has been further compounded by the perception that it has not been treated fairly in the matter of river waters despite a formal treaty. Reports have appeared in the Dhaka newspapers that the western part of the country dependent on the Ganga-Padma system will continue to suffer if the requisite amount of water is not released by India. The conditions can become even worse if the Ganga swings away from Padma, as it has shown signs of doing, and flows along the Bhagirathi-Hooghly channel in West Bengal as centuries ago. India's grouse, on the other hand, relates to the uncounted numbers of Bangladeshis who have slipped into this country in search of livelihood, thereby distorting its demographic pattern and electoral politics. So, while the problems of enclaves in each other's territory can be sorted out, there will still be other issues which will continue to introduce an element of sourness in mutual ties. True, nothing can be picture-perfect. But it is this very fact of the various strains in the relationship which have to be kept in mind while talking to each other.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1971

## *Bangladesh says Hasina's visit to India is ruled out*

The Times of India News Service  
NEW DELHI: Bangladesh has ruled out a visit by its Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, to New Delhi, but talks on the boundary issue may still take place.

Bangladesh foreign minister Abdul Samaad Azad on Wednesday ruled out the possibility of Sheikh Hasina visiting New Delhi later this month, but kept the hope of talks alive by saying that the Indian offer for a dialogue was being considered favourably with a sense of urgency.

So far, there has been no official response from Bangladesh to the Indian government's offer to host a delegation to discuss the boundary issue. Despite the public posture on the talks, however, it seems clear that Bangladesh will try and persuade India to send its delegation. The emotive significance of the talks being held on Bangladeshi soil will be a powerful signal that can be used to advantage by the ruling party during the general elections later this year.

Sources said the Bangladesh government had informally sounded out India about the possibility of an Indian delegation visiting Dhaka, citing domestic political sensitivities.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 2 MAY 2001

## Trinamool candidate escapes bid on life in Midnapore

HT correspondent  
Midnapore, May 1

ADDING MORE heat to the rising poll temperature in this already volatile district, CPI(M) men attacked Trinamool Congress candidate Mohammed Rafiq, who escaped unhurt. Rafiq was attacked while he was passing through Bostom More in a car in the morning.

The superintendent of police A K Maliwal, and the additional SP, S S Panda, rushed to Garbeta. There was, however, no written complaint to the Garbeta police from the Trinamool till the evening.

Meanwhile, 16 more Trinamool activists were arrested from the Keshpur area in connection with Sunday's violence at Chechura-Mahishgeria and adjoining villages.

CRPF and EFR jawans have been patrolling the area to stop entry of further gunmen, allegedly being hired by the Trinamool.

Sunday's incidents, meanwhile, have left the Trinamool Congress frustrated as the police have rounded up the party's almost the entire action squad.

**Chhota Angaria arrest:** The CBI arrested CPI(M) leader Mokhtar Khan today for alleged involvement in the Chhota Angaria massacre. The agency detained 10 more people in the case.

# Bangla yet to formulate talks offer response

Udayan Namboodiri  
New Delhi, May 1

BANGLADESH HAS not yet officially responded to India's invitation to host a round of discussions on the border dispute between May 22 and 25.

The sudden arrival of a note offering talks without any prior agreement on the dates as well as the "level" of the officials to gather around the table had put the Bangladesh Government in a tight spot, sources said.

The foreign secretary-level talks in New Delhi in December last year produced the decision to set up two new Joint Working Groups. The task of the first was to demarcate the still-contentious 6.1-km borderline. That of the second was to address the question of exchanging territories in "adverse" possession. There has been no follow-up on this for the past four months.

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mouazzim Ali has indicated that Bangladesh is yet to decide on the people who would join its formations in the two JWGs.

In absence of any evidence that the two JWGs are ready to get to work, the Hasina Government may be forced to weigh its options. It could offer to defer the event to a later date, or form its

two delegations in haste, expecting India to do the same before May 22, and, send the same old people who have failed repeatedly over the years to reach even a semblance of understanding with India on the border issue.

The last named includes Major General Fazloor Rahaman, the BDR director-general, who has not been censured by his Government for his role in kick-starting the latest border spat. Politically, this is a sensitive moment for Sheikh Hasina. If she readily accepts the Indian offer, her detractors are sure to accuse her of giving in to Indian "arm twisting". Since last week, not a day has passed in Dhaka without Opposition demonstrations and "citizens' protest" at her Government's alleged "surrender" to India.

Sources agree that the Indian offer amounts to nothing more than creating a positive atmosphere. It would reassure liberal elements in Bangladesh at a time when coloured reports about "massive troop build-up on the border" are vitiating the atmosphere in that country. But there is no promise factored into the invitation that India is going overboard to mollify the Bangladeshis. This is worrying for Dhaka.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 MAY 2001

# Delhi invites Dhaka for talks

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

*J. Khan*  
*J. Khan*  
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**New Delhi, April 30:** Keen to calm the eastern frontier, India has asked Bangladesh to send an official delegation to Delhi next month to discuss all "pending issues relating to the boundary".

The foreign minister conveyed the request to the Bangladesh high commissioner here this evening in a verbal note. The message asked Dhaka to send a delegation between May 22 and 25 or suggest alternative dates to discuss the boundary issue.

Officials in the high commission here said a formal response from Dhaka was expected on Wednesday as tomorrow, May Day, is a holiday.

However, Bangladesh high commissioner Mostafa Farooque Mohammed struck a positive

note, saying: "We should always talk and never use arms to settle our differences. We must cross our hearts and vow not to cross the border."

However, it has not yet been confirmed whether Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will stop over in Delhi on her way back from Europe next month. Officially, India has maintained that "there is a standing invitation to the Bangladesh Prime Minister".

Relations between Delhi and Dhaka had strained following recent border clashes in which 16 BSF jawans were killed. India had accused the Bangladesh Rifles of "unprovoked and unwarranted" action which led to the death of its security personnel. Dhaka, on the other hand, maintains that the BSF had entered its territory and tried to occupy an outpost.

The Indian message has not been explicit whether the talks will be held at the foreign secretary-level or between junior officials of the two governments.

The last meeting between the foreign secretaries of the two countries in December 2000 had led to the formation of two working groups to tackle border disputes.

Of the 4,000-km-long Indo-Bangladesh border, a stretch of 6.5 km is yet to be demarcated. Besides, the two sides have a number of common enclaves and areas "under adverse possession". The flashpoints of the border flare-up fall in the last category.

One working group has been set up to look into the 6.5-km stretch along Muhurirchar in the Tripura sector. The other deals with the manner in which the

enclaves and areas under "adverse possession" could be exchanged.

Delhi has already submitted a draft terms of reference for the two working groups. Once Dhaka agrees to this, demarcation along the boundary and exchange of enclaves and areas under "adverse possession" could be completed.

According to official estimates, nearly 3,000 acres of India are under Bangladesh's "adverse possession", while 3,500 acres of Bangladesh are with India. The number of Indian enclaves within Bangladesh totals 111 and those within India 51.

Dhaka feels Delhi has not been accommodative enough to settle the issue, often used by the Opposition Awami League in Dhaka to derive political mileage.

THE TELEGRAPH

- 1 MAY 2001

# India Govt invites Bangla delegation for border talks<sup>115</sup>

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, April 30

INDIA ISSUED a formal diplomatic invitation to Bangladesh asking Dhaka to send an official delegation to Delhi to discuss "all pending issues relating to the international border". India has proposed the dates May 22-25 but said Bangladesh could offer alternative dates if it wished.

The note verbale was presented to the Bangladesh high commissioner on Monday evening.

The move indicates a determination on India's part to end the border dispute that continues to bedevil Indo-Bangladeshi relations. "The proposal is to discuss all pending matters relating to the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement for an early settlement," said the MEA spokesperson.

New Delhi has been stung by claims that India's heel dragging over talks with Bangladesh is the reason for the recent flare-ups.

Official sources say that, if anything, the opposite is true. India had proposed to Bangladesh in December 1999 that the then Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Shafi Sami, come to India to discuss the setting up of a joint working group. However, the entire year slipped by before Sami came to Delhi in December 2000. The terms of reference for the JWG were finalised, but only by February this year. If Bangladesh responds positively to the invitation, it will be the first time the JWG will have met, more than two years after it was proposed.

Meanwhile, India is still awaiting confirmation of Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina's visit to Delhi. She hoped to visit India soon after the border incident and India had suggested a date after Vajpayee returned from Malaysia. This was three days back and Dhaka is yet to get back on this.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 MAY 2001





# One big hotchpotch

The India-Bangladesh border flare-up has highlighted all-round failure – be it of Intelligence, foreign policy, pre-emptive response or sensitivity. It's time New Delhi sat down over border demarcation, writes JK DUTT

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Bangladesh in Indian territory and about half that number vice versa, the euphemistic term used to describe this awkward scenario being, "adverse possession."

This surely is twisting English language into a new lexical! India should have regularised this landscape aberration at the very instance of Bangladesh's birth while Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was still around. We knew that the problem which commenced with East Pakistan kept intensifying over the years and we should have accordingly forced Rahman's hand into immediately resolving the gamut of the border dispute. We had every right to do so, considering India's part in Bangladesh's life story. Whether our "go slow" over this had any esoteric compulsions such as permitting Bangladeshis easy transit through India for political plums as a quid pro quo, is a moot hypothesis.

Even the Sunderbans and the Bay of Bengal were affected. The uncomfortable truth we face after the border flare-up which showed India in poor light is, what should we do now?

To begin with, New Delhi must sit down with the border demarcation. A fresh frontier line has to be put in possession with the objective of physically making over all the enclaves to the two respective countries. The initiative should be taken by India.

Despite what Cyril Radcliffe had carved out, a restructured India-Bangladesh border covering West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram has to be instituted, straightening out all the 150-odd enclaves.

Further – and this is realpolitik in its true sense – India should be prepared to sacrifice its own enclaves to Bangladesh. This will avoid ambiguity along the frontier line. The River Muhuri has to be included in the overall package as this escalates tension among



Top left: Residents of Mankachar village in north-east India return after the violence; Home Secretary Kamal Pande and the Director-General of BSF Gurbachan Jagat in New Delhi last Sunday and Bangladesh Rifles guards on alert on the frontier border of Tamabil in Sylhet. – AP/PTI

fishermen of both countries every now and then. India should lay the frontier line along our bank of the Muhuri, replacing the unrealistic centre-of-the-river boundary line.

Seen in the correct perspective, it would be prudent to contribute our mite in ensuring the continuance of the Sheikh Hasina government. There is no gainsaying the advantages. So, we have to shape our foreign policy for Bangladesh with the accent on pragmatism. Sacrificing some portions of our territory to Dhaka should be a tremendous boon to her, an act that would fetch worthwhile political reimbursements to both countries. It would be grossly unwise to make the border incident such an issue that it would estrange Sheikh Hasina from us.

If we could sacrifice innumerable Indian Servicemen for the cause of a nascent Bangladesh, minor territorial sacrifices should not disturb us. We must not be

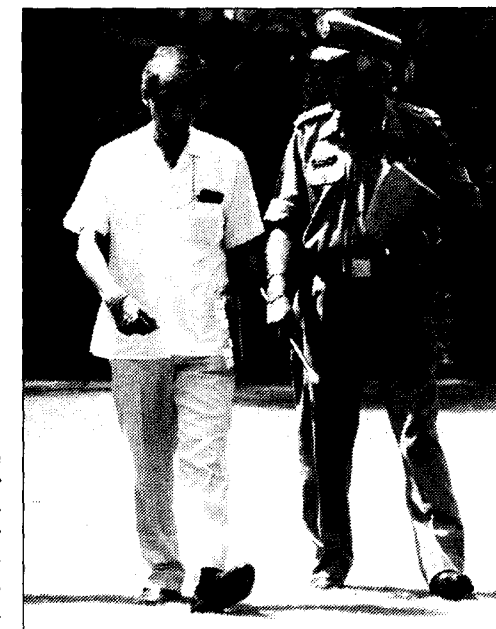
inexorable about this. In the alternate vein, we need to ponder the consequences if Begum Khaleda Zia came to power, courtesy our intransigence over some insignificant real estate. Indian villagers who get displaced after a redrawn border should be relocated and adequately compensated. A defensive perimeter has to be laid all along the 4,000-km border on the Indian side. This tract will have to be "seeded" with mines, barbed wire, booby traps, improvised explosive devices, artillery and mortar tasks, modern surveillance systems and the like. There should be a few, nominated, two-way check posts.

The Border Security Force has been the most unfortunate organisation ever since its inception, supposedly as a safeguard against an Army coup. The BSF's biggest hassle is its command and control set-up – on paper, it belongs to the

Union home ministry but it usually operates under the defence ministry. Its effectiveness gets curtailed because of this dichotomy.

In the instant case, the BSF sector HQ at Tura apparently approached the home ministry for deployment of additional troops, particularly the Assam Rifles, so that in the context of relative strength we could be at par with the Bangladesh Rifles. No one knows what transpired at New Delhi. There are reports that the BSF's request floated between the ministries of home, external affairs and defence before finally getting a lemon! The BSF also lacks punch in firepower.

Its ability to secure decisive results in operations gets hampered because of such lacunae. However, the BSF has always given an excellent account of itself in battle; Kargil exemplified this. What the BSF wants in its character is viability as a pro-active security establishment, as underscored by the holistic



comprehension of military management. A total revamp of its charter is called for, vis-a-vis its role. The BSF must promote its own officers to senior ranks instead of coopting them from the IPS as is the norm. The Director-General should be of 4-star rank.

The entire organisation has to be placed under the defence ministry for all purposes and it should functionally operate as brigade group equivalents. Most important, the BSF must have its integral strike capability to wit, attack helicopters, heavy mortars, field and medium artillery, armoured cars together with anti-tank guided missiles, engineers, armed speedboats for river patrolling and the Indian Air Force "on call".

All these elements must become part of the BSF's inherence. The organisation has to have enough physical clout for prolonged independent operations, not as second line for the Army but as combat tandem with our armed forces. The Baroibari-Pyrdiah crisis should really have been handled by the Eastern Command. Sadly, the whole affair was an all-round monumental failure – failure of Intelligence, of foreign policy, of command and control, of force levels, of pre-emptive response, and worst, of sensitivity.

The home minister's studied silence over the subject in Parliament was disquieting. What hurt most was our indifference to the tragedy: It is a matter of national shame that not a single minister was present during the last rites of the 16 intrepid BSF jawans who laid down their lives for the country.

(The author is a retired Lieutenant-Colonel, Indian Army.)

**T**HE recent incidents at Boraibari and Pyrdiwah along the India-Bangladesh border have highlighted some major failings on New Delhi's part. Two areas warrant an examination – our foreign policy and the security set-up on our border.

It is a sad reflection of our incompetence that even after 30 years of Bangladesh's creation, we are still plodding along trying to resolve a tangled, 4,000-km border demarcation. What exactly is meant by our external affairs ministry's statement that just six kilometres of this issue is left to be sorted out, the balance having been "amicably settled" is arcane.

A border problem subsumes two factors that affects relations – the geographically linear frontier line, and any enclave or pocket that may have become isolated in the process of defining this frontier line. We are culpable for faulting on both factors.

The border problems in the east began at Partition and the main constituent of the problem was the continuous influx of illegal immigrants into north-east India and West Bengal from erstwhile East Pakistan. This infiltration was covertly encouraged by our political parties for mustering their vote-banks. Hence, no proper arrangements were made along the border to check this unauthorised flow of humanity. Border pillars were inconsequential. Besides, a principal irritant was the spawning of a number of enclaves which caused periodic clashes between Indians and East Pakistanis initially, later Bangladeshis.

It defies reason that even today there are about 100-odd enclaves belonging to