

HD-8  
29/12

# India studying Bangladesh, China defence pact

Indo-  
Bangla

By Amit Baruah

**NEW DELHI, DEC. 28.** India is closely watching the December 24 "umbrella defence agreement" signed between Bangladesh and China in Beijing during the recent visit of the Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, to China.

Reporting the agreement, *The Daily Star* newspaper said in Dhaka, that the defence agreement would "rationalise the existing piecemeal agreements to enhance cooperation in training, maintenance and in some areas of production."

Asked about the new agreement, official sources said that they had seen press reports and that many countries signed defence cooperation agreements and often these did not amount to much.

There was need, however, to examine what had been happening between China and Bangladesh.

The sources said it remained to be seen whether the agreement simply formalised what had been happening or involved larger issues.

In many cases, the sources said increased defence cooperation simply involved increasing the number of training slots for military officers or bilateral visits by naval ships.

There is, however, little doubt that Bangladesh's relations with India have enor-

mous scope for improvement and the Khaleda Zia Government and Beijing have some interests in common. The Chinese have an interest in playing a greater role in South Asia and Bangladesh has interest in bringing in Beijing to the politics of South Asia. The Chinese have already asked to be associated with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, but the SAARC itself is showing little signs of life.

The fact that China and Bangladesh have close relations was clear from the statement issued by the Foreign Ministry in Beijing after a meeting between Begum Khaleda and Hu Jintao, general secretary of the Communist Party of China.

"Mr. Hu said that as friendly and close neighbours, the peoples of China and Bangladesh have traditional friendship.... the two countries enjoy mutual trust politically and mutual benefit economically, and extensive cooperation in all fields.

"China-Bangladesh ties are characterised by mutual respect, understanding, support and close cooperation. Mr. Hu noted that China would continue the policy of adhering to China-Bangladesh friendship in the future, and together with Bangladesh, push forward the existing friendly relations of cooperation," the Chinese Foreign Ministry's official website said. Whatever be the contents of the defence cooperation agreement, intent clearly is

important. A message has been sent by the Bangladeshis that there are other big powers that could play a role in South Asia.

And, as far as the Pakistanis are concerned, greater defence cooperation between China and Bangladesh can only be a welcome development. Some analysts argue that the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, may have played the role of a "midwife" in the whole process.

Whatever the truth of the matter, any weakening of the Indian position in South Asia would be welcomed by the Pakistanis in their larger strategic interest. Here, Islamabad will also be watching Indian actions in Afghanistan and the trilateral cooperation between Iran, India and Russia.

A Chinese-Bangladeshi linkage on India's eastern front could be a good counterpoise to addressing known Pakistani concerns about New Delhi's continuing determination to enhance its profile in Afghanistan.

As far as bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh go, official sources point to the fact that Dhaka has been less than serious about addressing the issue of terrorist camps on its territory.

New Delhi, they said, was prepared to work with Bangladesh in dealing with the terrorist camps. The matter continued to be pursued by India.

29 DEC 2002

# Bangladesh rejects transit facility for India

HD-12  
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Banila

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, DEC. 11.** The Bangladesh Finance and Planning Minister, Saifur Rahman, has outrightly rejected any transit or transshipment facility for India, saying the country's entire road system would collapse if such facilities were given.

Mr. Rahman said: "Transit and transshipment to India is impossible because of the poor conditions of the roads ...The roads and bridges are not for trucks with a capacity of 30 to 35 tonnes".

The Government's rejection has come at a time when Dhaka and New Delhi are in the midst of a war of words following Indian allegations of the presence of the Al-Qaeda network, growth of Islamic fundamentalists, including increased activities of Pakistan's ISI, in Bangladesh after the change of Government in Dhaka last year.

Addressing a seminar on "Bilateral trade with India and Economic Security of Bangladesh" held at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies on

Tuesday, Mr. Rahman described India as an "aggressive and a difficult country to live with". But "we have to live with them. So, any bilateral issue will have to be handled with cautiously and diplomatically."

Since Indian goods were cheaper and of better quality, they flood "our markets", he said adding, "we have opened up our market to foreign goods and there is no reason why there should be a restrictive policy for Indian goods".

Stressing the need for "tight security" by intelligence agencies and the customs department, Mr. Rahman requested the business community to bring to his notice any "misuse" by the Indian companies of "our liberalised trade policy".

"We often hear that Indian companies are dumping their goods in our country but nobody has ever come to me with valid documents," he said. "I would definitely move a strong anti-dumping law in Parliament if anyone can come up with evidence of such misuse".

The Minister said many Indians were

working in Bangladesh and Indian shops were also being opened without any formal approval. "They treat us as if we do not have any law in this regard."

The Commerce Minister, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, blamed the weaknesses of the trade bodies and Government institutions for failing to have a policy to address trade matters with India. "Elements of patriotism is very strong among Indian businessmen and consumers as well, which is missing among us as a nation", he said.

The Director-General, BISS, Maj.Gen. S.M. Shahabuddin, said trade from India also undermined the country's internal security.

Giving a set of policy guidelines for addressing the issue of smuggling, leading economist Atiar Rahman suggested regular monitoring of India's economic trends, dialogue between the two Governments, a conscious move from Bangladesh to mitigate the trade imbalance, adjusting the exchange rate between the two neighbours.

THE HINDU

1 2 DEC 2002

*Qurb*  
*Banla*

# Gas exports *\$18*

## Khaleda caught in her own web *A/12*

It will be interesting to see how prime minister Khaleda Zia broaches the proposal to export Bangladesh's natural gas to India and brings about a national consensus over this contentious issue. While in Opposition she had vowed that gas would be exported over her dead body. She accused then prime minister Sheikh Hasina of mortgaging Bangladesh by "conspiring" to sell gas to India. Her public rhetoric portrayed India as an "unscrupulous neighbour, out to pauperise Bangladesh by plundering its gas and natural resources." Her coalition partner, Jamat-e-Islam, accused Delhi of turning Bangladesh into an Indian colony. But this changed after Begum Zia's four party coalition assumed power last year. They began saying that there was no point in keeping natural resources underground and the decision on exports should be taken soon. What brought about the change is a mystery but this volte face endeared Begum Zia's government to the US administration which considered Hasina's stand of selling gas to India after ensuring 50 years "guaranteed reserve" for domestic consumption as "inimical" to American interests. The public mood supports the Opposition and has not taken kindly to Begum Zia's somersault.

Actually Begum Zia is caught in her own web which she had spun to trap Hasina. The American oil giant Unocal, which has so far invested \$350 million in exploring and developing gas fields in Bangladesh, wants Dhaka either to buy gas in hard currency or allow it to sell to India. Both the US government and Unocal have set this year end as the deadline for Begum Zia to decide. Dhaka has been warned that a negative response would result in drastic fall in American aid and investment in Bangladesh. Washington says it is disgusted because of the contradictory postures that the Bangladeshi leaders have taken on the export issue. This happens when an economic issue is over-exploited for political gains.

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THE STATESMAN

# HASINA:

(Continued from page 1)

order in the country, had not only laid bare her incompetence and helplessness to govern but also displayed how ruthless she could be, for 28 people had died in military custody in the first 30 days of the operation.

The army was working as the life support system - a ventilator - for Begum Zia's government, she said. The ministers and ruling party MPs were scared to go to their constituencies because the army was not sparing them for their misdeeds.

She conceded that after the army was deployed, the country's daily crime had come down. But people continue to live in terror. The ring leaders of terrorist groups were yet to be arrested. Opposition leaders, including her political secretary and a former minister, had been detained for over a month on trumped up charges of anti-state activities.

"But the most disturbing thing is the violation of human rights. People are being killed in fake encounters," Sheikh Hasina said. "Suspects, without any specific charges against them, are being tortured in a gruesome manner in the joint custody of police and the army and that many have become lifeless and could die in a few days. Many cases are much worse than those committed by the Pakistanis in 1971. International human rights groups have taken note of these and commented adversely. Actually all this is making the army, which is viewed as the country's pride, controversial. The good name earned by the Bangladeshi army in peacekeeping operations is getting sullied."

Sheikh Hasina denied that she had in any way undermined her country's image abroad.

## Hasina not afraid of Khaleda

MANASH GHOSH  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Nov. 30. - Sheikh Hasina today denied reports that she and other senior Awami League leaders had sounded Delhi on seeking political refuge in India.

The Opposition Awami League leader and former Bangladeshi Prime Minister said: "I am glad Sheikh Mujib's daughter and I don't run away from political battles. I am fighting for good governance and restoration of democracy and human rights in my

country. My fight against a ruthless oppressive regime will continue until I achieve my objective. The report wants to damage me personally and provide ammunition to our political opponents."

In an interview to The Statesman at Kolkata airport - on her way to Dhaka today - Sheikh Hasina said Prime Minister

Begum Khaleda Zia's BNP-Jamat-Islami coalition government was "clinically dead", for the army was running the show in the country now. Begum Zia, by calling the army to restore law and

See HASINA: page 7

THE STATESMAN

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# Indo-Bangla ties turning sour

By C. Raja Mohan

**NEW DELHI, NOV. 29.** The Foreign Office's decision to go public with its sharp criticism of Bangladesh reflects a growing pessimism here about bilateral relations with its important eastern neighbour. After waiting nearly a year to see if the Khaleda Zia Government is prepared to demonstrate a measure of good faith, New Delhi appears close to giving up on Dhaka.

Within days of Begum Khaleda Zia being sworn in as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, a little over a year ago, the National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister, Brajesh Mishra, flew into Dhaka. The objective was to communicate a simple message to the new Government: India was ready to do business with Begum Zia.

This message was important, given the widespread suspicions in Dhaka that India would have preferred the re-election of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League in last year's general elections. The Vajpayee Government wanted to make it clear that a change of Government in Dhaka would have no effect on India's commitment to improve relations with Bangladesh.

The message was reaffirmed in August by the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, when he travelled to Bangladesh. Nearly a year after Begum Zia took charge in Dhaka, the assessment here on the future of Indo-Bangla relations has become increasingly negative.

The bilateral engagement on all key is-

sues of concern to India — the question of illegal immigration, transit facilities, border management and energy security — has stalled with no hints of any movement in the near future. This was something India could perhaps have lived with.

The despondent outlook for bilateral relations, however, is based on the fact that Dhaka is seen here as undercutting the cen-

## NEWS ANALYSIS

tral political bargain between the two countries over the last decade.

The approach of New Delhi to Bangladesh was very simple: don't allow activities hostile to India on your soil, and New Delhi would not intervene in the internal affairs of Bangladesh and go more than half way in resolving long-standing bilateral problems.

The Khaleda Zia Government is now seen as breaking that compact. The belief here is that Dhaka has done nothing to prevent anti-India activity hostile during the last year. India has seen a dramatic rise in cross-border terrorist activity in Bangladesh. Dhaka has also acquiesced in increased activity by Pakistani intelligence agencies in Bangladesh.

New Delhi is puzzled by the somewhat gratuitous attitude of the Government in Dhaka and its entirely avoidable provocations. Dhaka's willingness to fool around with terrorist activity on its soil, particularly in the changed international environment

after September 11, appears self-defeating.

India conveyed its strong concerns at the growing profile of terrorist activity in Bangladesh, when its Foreign Minister, M. Morshed Khan, came here last June. But that seems to have had little effect on Dhaka, which is stuck in a denial mode. Meanwhile Bangladesh's willingness to tolerate Al-Qaeda activity on its soil has begun to get negative reviews in the U.S. media.

In pandering to the extremists, Bangladesh appears to be squandering the positive image the nation had begun to acquire in the international arena.

In the late 1990s, Bangladesh had increasingly been projected in the West as a likely "model" for the rest of the Islamic world given its improved economic performance and democratic framework.

Bangladesh had also the potential to emerge as the second largest economy in South Asia replacing Pakistan. Through the 1990s, Bangladesh was on a faster economic track. It had also had the potential to emerge as a bridge between the Subcontinent and South East Asia.

Yet, Bangladesh has persisted in its opposition to deeper regional economic integration.

Worse still, under Begum Zia, it seems willing to play second fiddle to Pakistan. Unless Dhaka recognises the deep Indian anxieties on growing cross-border terrorism, there is a danger that Indo-Bangla relations will head further South in the coming weeks and months.

## 'Bangladesh lashing follows Hasina visit'

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, NOV. 29.** In the backdrop of the serious Indian allegation against Bangladesh, Dhaka has linked the Opposition leader, Sheikh Hasina's current visit to Delhi with the External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha's charges.

The Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, said: "We totally reject his (Mr. Sinha's) statement. It is baseless, unfounded and malicious." But he simultaneously asked: Why was such a statement made when the Opposition leader (Sheikh Hasina) was in India?

"The European Parliament adopted a resolution against Bangladesh following her (Sheikh Hasina's) recent visit to Brussels", he said, adding it was too much of a coincidence that Indian leaders had started making "inconsistent statements" while the Opposition leader was there. "Has anything changed overnight as regards Bangladesh-India relations," he asked.

Both Dhaka and Islamabad have come out strongly and almost identically denying Mr. Sinha's pointed allegation that Bangladesh is harbouring Islamic radicals and anti-Indian insurgents and that the ISI of Pakistan is operating from the

Pakistan embassy in Dhaka.

The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani made a similar allegation against Bangladesh recently. Hence Sheikh Hasina's visit to India is under close watch by the Khaleda Government, according to observers.

The Bangladesh Government's sensitivity to the question of growing fundamentalist resurgence with the change of guard in Dhaka, — including that of "sanctuary" to the Indian insurgents — is so high that it recently arrested two foreign journalists working for Britain's Channel Four TV and three other Bangladesh journalists later. Saleem Samad, a senior Bangladesh journalist and Subhas Chowdhury, local correspondent of the daily *Bhorer Kagoj* were arrested on Thursday night in Dhaka and western Satkhira. But police did not confirm their arrests.

The foreign journalists, one Briton and an Italian, who came to Bangladesh on tourist visas, reportedly filmed and interviewed the activities of various radical Islamic groups, Opposition leaders and minority members who are allegedly persecuted. Police also detained and interrogated a woman journalist, Sumi Khan, from Chittagong on Thursday but she was

reportedly released later.

"It seems Bangladesh lashing is following Sheikh Hasina," the Foreign Minister said. "It seems", he said, "Sheikh Hasina harbours a lot of spite against Bangladesh which had been aggravated by her defeat in the elections of last year." Asked if international newsmagazines, the E.U. Parliament, the Indian Government and Amnesty International had been working at the dictates of Sheikh Hasina, the Foreign Minister retorted: "These are hired people from the media." He would not elaborate. Bangladesh was not aware of India's "domestic compulsions" for making the allegations which had no "substance whatsoever".

India, he said, had been raising the same issue of ISI and giving the same list which had been investigated so many times with negative findings.

New clues given would definitely be investigated, he said. "We have to work together."

He said he did not understand the reason behind India "tagging on" the new allegation of Taliban involvement to that of cross-border insurgents. Bangladesh would very much welcome any country to point out with evidence if any terrorist took shelter here.

# Delhi to serve demarche on Dhaka over terror

*Stf*  
**Nilova Roy Chaudhury** in New Delhi

*Nov 29*  
Nov. 29. – India is likely to serve a demarche (formal letter) on Dhaka detailing information that was presented in Parliament by external affairs minister Mr Yashwant Sinha. Due next week, the demarche would provide details of Al-Qaida operatives and activities in Bangladesh and assistance provided by it to insurgents in the North-east. New Delhi will delink the terrorism issue from charges of “Bangladesh-baiting” that the Dhaka foreign ministry has accused former PM Sheikh Hasina Wajed of instigating during her stay in India.

Dhaka has denied reports of any anti-India activities on its territory.

Border Security Force (BSF) Director-General Mr Ajay Raj Sharma today said Intelligence inputs suggest that Al-

**Details will be provided of Al-Qaida activities and of Bangla assistance to N-E insurgents**

*Indo-Bangla*  
Qaida operatives were present in Bangladesh, and that the ISI was using it to route arms and ammunition for terrorist activities in the North-east. He, however, said he had no evidence to prove that Al-Qaida functionaries were present in Bangladesh.

“We have no evidence to show that Al-Qaida men are there. But Intelligence inputs suggest that they are present and operating in Bangladesh.” Mr George Fernandes, however, asserted that India had the evidence to back its charge.

Dhaka has reacted sharply to Sheikh Hasina Wajed’s presence in India, saying her visit had acted as a catalyst for a tirade of anti-Bangladesh statements. Though officials refused to be drawn into the question of whether Sheikh Hasina would seek or be given refuge in India if denied entry into her country, it’s unlikely Delhi would deny her shelter.

**Editorial: Another neighbour, page 6**

THE STATESMAN

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# Bangla denies India's ISI charge

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

**B**ANGLADESH today denied the existence of any training camp of North-east militants in its territory. This was in reaction to External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha's declaration in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday that the Pakistani High Commission in Dhaka has become the "nerve centre" of ISI activities and that major insurgent groups have established training camps in different parts of the nation.

Bangladesh also said that it was not encouraging any ISI or Al-Qaeda activities on its soil.

Expressing disappointment at what he called India's "unfortunate" remarks about the country becoming a centre of terrorist activities, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury said: "We express our serious disappointment and surprise over External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha's statement in the Indian Parliament."

"Certainly, this unfortunate statement runs counter to the spirit of good neighbourly relations," the Chowdhury said. "We are committed to maintaining normal and friendly relations with India and addressing bilateral and regional issues through diplomatic channels," he added. He

reaffirmed Dhaka's position of not allowing any insurgency or terrorist activities against any country from Bangladesh soil.

Asked to comment on the Sinha's remarks that the Pakistani High Commission in Dhaka had become an ISI hub, Chowdhury pleaded ignorance of any such activity, saying "allegations of this nature need to be backed up by credible evidence".

Meanwhile, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Tufail K. Haider today said "Bangladesh neither has any terrorist hideout nor is it encouraging ISI activities." Dhaka would take suitable action as and when India provided us with concrete evi-

dence that anti-India activities were taking place in Bangladesh, Haider said.

"It is wrongly believed that the present regime has a soft corner for the ISI, Taliban and Al-Qaeda. But we have no sympathy whatsoever for Pakistan's ISI or the international terrorist network."

The present regime was not a fundamentalist one and did not have any empathy for Islamic hardliners. Although Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jot — partners in the Khadela Zia coalition government — were conservative parties, they could not be labelled as terrorist organisations, he clarified.

Earlier this month, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar

had said there were 52 hideouts in Bangladesh from where the outlawed All Tripura Tiger Force and the National Liberation Front of Tripura were operating.

Dhaka valued New Delhi's friendship and was not acting against India's interest, the High Commissioner said. "As neighbours, differences do exist but there is no deliberate attempt by Dhaka to aid insurgent groups."

Affirming that sponsoring militancy was against Dhaka's interest, he said Bangladesh did not pursue terrorism as a state policy and would never allow any terrorist activity on its soil.

# Hasina afraid to return to Bangla

Q. uel Hasina 57-1 28/11

**Nilova Roy Chaudhury in New Delhi**

Nov. 27. — A distinctly nervous former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, appeared cowed down by threats that the government headed by Begum Khaleda Zia had unleashed on her and her party's supporters.

Members of the entourage accompanying the Opposition Awami League chief said she feared whether she would be able to re-enter Bangladesh, given the spate of abductions and killings of her party members in recent weeks.

India appears to have taken the threats seriously enough to host her almost on par with the Head of State, sending a very clear message that it strongly valued her safety. Since yesterday, the kind of access she has been given to senior Indian leaders would be the envy of many present Heads of States. It definitely is several notches above the normal protocol for visiting leaders of Opposition parties, even of neighbouring countries.

Unusually cautious in her replies to questions on the functioning of the Bangladeshi government, Sheikh Hasina made a telling comment when asked about her suggestions to the government as leader of the Opposition. "You live in a democratic system here," she said. But, in Bangladesh "there is no real democracy; we need more time to learn to practice democracy... The views of the leader of the Opposition are not asked for."

In the past two days she has called on President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, and discussed "wide-ranging bilater-

al" issues during what she described as "courtesy calls."

She told The Statesman that as a former Prime Minister she needed to make "courtesy calls" on the leaders of the "friendly neighbouring government." She was hosted for dinner yesterday by foreign minister Mr Yashwant Sinha after delivering the first Dinesh Singh Memorial lecture.

The emphasis of Sheikh Hasina's visit, officials said, has been on the deteriorating human rights situation in Bangladesh, that includes "massive intimidation" of Awami League supporters and members. Observers say there are "very credible apprehensions" even for her personal security.

Massive human rights abuses was something she emphasised during her talks with the media too, saying minorities in Bangladesh were being targeted for being traditional supporters of her party.

She said a lot of "terrorist" activities were going on in Bangladesh because the present government had failed to stop them. The army, she said, was being used in Bangladesh to restore law and order.

She said her government had maintained congenial relations with neighbours as it helped strengthen cooperation among South Asian countries. "We strongly worked for promoting friendship with all our neighbours." But she refused to be drawn into commenting on whether the Saarc process had become a hostage of India-Pakistan hostilities. She only said the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation charter was very clear that no bilateral problems between countries could be raised.



Sheikh Hasina addressing journalists in Delhi. — AFP

## Pak mission in Dhaka an ISI base: Sinha

**Statesman News Service**

NEW DELHI, Nov. 27 — The foreign minister today accused Bangladesh of allowing Pakistan to carry on anti-India activities from the Pakistani mission in Dhaka.

India is keeping a close watch on the high commission, which is a nerve-centre of the ISI activities and is being used as a hideout by terrorist groups such as Al Qaida, Mr Yashwant Sinha said in the Lok Sabha today while responding to a short notice question from Mrs Shyama Sinha (Congress).

He said the government had information on Pakistan using Bangladeshi territory for anti-India activities. New Delhi has brought the matter to the Bangladesh's notice.

Mr Sinha said Bangladesh had assured the Indian high commissioner in Dhaka that it would not allow its territory to be used against any country, particularly India.

India has been concerned at reports that Bangladesh was increasingly being used as a base for militants to infiltrate into this country. Dhaka has, however, denied the charge.

Mr Sinha also said that large number of madrasas were being set up along the Indo-Bangla border. To a supplementary by Miss Mamata Banerjee on circulation of fake Indian currency notes in parts of West Bengal bordering Bangladesh, he said the government was aware of the smuggling of drugs and fake currency into India.

28 NOV 2002

THE STATESMAN



# Khaleida Govt. patronising terrorism: Hasina

AD-12

Jan - Bangladesh

**NEW DELHI, NOV. 27.** The former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, today accused the Khaleida Zia Government of patronising terrorism and indulging in massive human right abuse, and asked India and Bangladesh to resolve issues of illegal immigrants and anti-Indian campaign in her country through talks.

Addressing a press conference after holding wide-ranging talks with the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, on bilateral matters and regional issues, she acknowledged the presence of the Al-Qaeda in her country. She said a lot of "terrorist" activity was going on in her country". The Government had failed to prevent such activities. She opposed use of Bangladeshi territory for subversive activities in India, stating "it is not good for her country".

The External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, hosted a dinner in her honour, besides discussing the entire gamut of bilateral ties, particularly use of the Bangladeshi territory for subversive activities in India. Referring to the attack on minorities by the supporters of the present regime, she said the Khaleida Government had unleashed a reign of terror against her opponents. The minorities were also victims of the present Government because of their affiliation with the Awami League.

She said her Government maintained congenial relations with neighbours as it helped strengthen cooperation among the South Asian countries. "We strongly worked for promoting friendship with all our neighbours."

Commenting on the National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra's comments that it would be difficult for India to take part in the coming South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit, she said "no bilateral issue

should be raised at the grouping's meetings".

But Sheikh Hasina regretted the fact that despite the existence of SAARC, the member-countries had not come together as one to tackle their problems, which transcended boundaries and were common to all countries in the region.

The SAARC Chambers of Commerce had also been a non-starter, she observed and suggested an association along the lines of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to facilitate greater regional cooperation.

"The BIMSTEC (an economic grouping comprising Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand) is a pointer in this direction," Sheikh Hasina said. Moreover, South Asia had vast natural and human resources, which had not been harnessed for the benefit of the people.

She urged the developed countries to share the responsibility of helping the Third World nations economically and bridging the wide gap between the rich and poor nations. "This is in the interest of developed countries too as they will have access to the abundant natural resources, cheap labour and the large market offered by the South Asian region." Referring to regional tensions, she said disputes could be resolved if all parties involved had goodwill. In this context, she cited the Hill Peace Accord and the Ganges Water-Sharing Treaty between India and Bangladesh, which had led to resolution of long-standing problems.

Outlining the steps taken by her Government to end the pressing problems faced by her country, Sheikh Hasina said literacy, health and empowerment of women and weaker sections had been accorded priority and commendable results had been achieved in social, political and economic sectors. Sheikh Hasina met the Prime Minister yesterday. — UNI

THE HINDU

28 NOV 2002

# Hasina softens stand on gas pipeline to Bengal

By Sanjay Dutta

THE TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The political passage is getting clearer for Bangladesh gas to flow to India. Bangladesh's former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, the main stumbling block, on Wednesday softened her stand, saying she was open to a barter deal now but needed to be sure of her country's needs before agreeing to piped export.

"If we get gas from Tripura, we can give the same quantity from our fields

(nearer to the eastern part of India). But we need to first take care of our own needs and tap our own market potential before allowing full exports," Hasina told TNN. Hasina also said she would be open to an Indian pipeline from Tripura to West Bengal through Bangladesh territory for a fee, "if such a proposal was made."

This is good news for ONGC and US energy major Unocal. ONGC is pushing for a 345-km pipeline through the Bangla land corridor to unlock surplus gas from its Tripura fields for bringing

it to West Bengal. Unocal's plans to sell piped gas from its Bibiana fields in north-east Bangladesh has been hanging fire in the face of opposition from Hasina's Awami League and some division in the Khaleda Zia Cabinet.

Hasina also disagreed that time was running out for Bangladesh. "Only 3-4 per cent of our population has access to piped gas. There is enough potential to exploit the gas reserves in Bangladesh itself," she said. Interestingly, a Bangladesh construction company, Mohona Holding Ltd, is also seeking Dhaka's

permission to build a Tripura-Bengal pipeline. It has said this pipeline could also be used by India in the eventuality of gas imports from Myanmar, where ONGC has a stake in exploration blocks. Mohona is also reported to have sounded out GAIL on this.

The pipeline could be built from Akhauri near Agartala to Bongaon, via Komilla in Bangladesh. Gas from Tripura's fields can be pooled into a pipeline network linking the fields as using Konaban, Agartala Dome, Baramura and Manikyanagar as nodal points.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

28 NOV 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# 'Reign of terror in Bangladesh'

By Our Diplomatic  
Correspondent

*Judh Banerjee*  
*HP-11*  
*27/11*

**NEW DELHI, NOV. 26.** The Leader of the Opposition in Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, said today that a "series of attacks" against the minority community had swept her country after the October 1, 2002, election in which the Awami League lost power. Delivering the Sixth Dinesh Singh Memorial lecture, she said the BNP Government had let loose a reign of terror in Bangladesh. "Incidents of minority repression, arrest and harassment of opposition leaders and activists, killing and torture of journalists...and widespread human rights violation and excesses by law enforcing agencies have overwhelmed one year of BNP-Jamat rule," the former Prime Minister said.

Ms. Hasina said South Asia faced problems like extreme poverty, poor infrastructure, terrorism, "absence of congenial bilateral atmosphere", terrorism, cross-border trafficking of drugs, weapons, women and children. All these issues, she said, could only be addressed under an agreed programme of action and specific implementation mechanisms.

"The track record of SAARC is not very encouraging so far in creating such a milieu. Availability of easy and inexpensive communications and interaction among the major actors of the countries of the region is a first step," she said. To accelerate cooperation in South Asia, she said that disputes between countries could be taken up bi-



**The former Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in New Delhi on Tuesday. — Photo: Shanker Chakravarty**

laterally for resolution. If the issue was "very difficult in nature", then a third country could take the initiative in bringing the differing parties to the negotiating table on the "basis of mutual understanding".

Referring to her tenure as Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina said: "We solved the long-standing ethnic problem...following signing of the Hill Peace Accord 62,000 tribal refugees returned home from India...this deep-rooted ethnic problem was solved without any third party mediation, which is unique in the history of conflict resolution."

"We resolved the problem of Ganges water sharing within a mere six months of my Government's assumption of power. A 30-year agreement on water sharing of Ganges and its tributaries was signed between India and Bangladesh on December 12, 1996. Therefore, I

strongly believe that disputes between the countries could be resolved bilaterally if both parties have goodwill," she said. The former Prime Minister said it was a "matter of great disappointment" that unlike North America, South-East Asia and Europe, South Asia had not been able to increase economic co-operation in the region and "trade and investment flows" were amongst the lowest of any grouping of countries in the world. "We have to actionably promote trade, investment and business for the benefits of the common people of the South Asian countries.

An effective ASEAN-like forum is very vital for the promotion of trade, investment and economic co-operation," she said. Calling for an easy and cheap communication network to link SAARC capitals, Sheikh Hasina said this would facilitate trade, business, travel and tourism.

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THE HINDU

# Delhi cautious on Hasina visit

PRANAY SHARMA

**New Delhi, Nov. 25:** After the initial hype, India appears to be making a deliberate attempt to play down the "private visit" of Awami League chief and former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The former Prime Minister arrived tonight on a five-day visit to the country and will address a seminar at the Habitat Centre tomorrow on 'Human rights, poverty alleviation and peace in South Asia'. Hasina will also travel to Ajmer to pay homage at the *dargah* of Moinuddin Chisti.

This is, however, essentially a political visit. Hasina will meet key members of the Indian government. This includes a meeting with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee tomorrow and with deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani the day after. Foreign minister Yashwant Sinha will host a private dinner in her honour tomorrow night at Hyderabad House, where she will get a chance to interact with senior officials from South Block.

The Bangladeshi leader is also scheduled to meet former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral and Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee.

Despite the wide access to the Indian leadership that she is being given, Delhi is now making an attempt to play down Hasina's visit.

"These are mainly courtesy calls," a senior official in the foreign ministry said, referring to her scheduled meetings with the Indian leaders. "One should remember she is also the leader of

Opposition in Bangladesh and may be the future Prime Minister of the country."

Hasina's visit comes at a time when Advani has openly accused the Bangladesh Nationalist Party dispensation in Dhaka for its failure to check the rising activities of al Qaida terrorists and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. To drive home the point, the deputy Prime Minister made it clear that such activities increased after the Khaleda Zia government came to power.

The rivalry between Hasina and Khaleda is well known and the timing of Hasina's visit was not totally lost in Bangladesh. But if initially India had thought of needling the BNP by using Hasina, serious doubts appear to have cropped up in Delhi on whether this will be prudent.

Delhi is now trying to walk the diplomatic tightrope in its handling of the Awami League leader's visit.

On the one hand, it wants to ensure that Hasina is given the right access in South Block so that she is convinced that India continues to value her friendship.

On the other, attempts are being made to make sure that Khaleda does not read too much in the meetings that her political rival has in India.

The existence of militant camps of Northeast insurgents in Bangladesh has been taken up by Delhi. The leadership is aware that it needs cooperation from Khaleda and the BNP government in taking care of its security concerns.

# Friendly neighbour, unfriendly acts

By Wasbir Hussain

YEAR 2002 is not 1971. But three decades is not long for anyone to forget someone's contribution, particularly if that happens to be as significant as backing a people to attain liberation and form a sovereign nation. When New Delhi asks Dhaka not to allow separatist rebels from northeast India to operate from its soil, it is not expecting a response out of gratefulness for its role in the very birth of that nation. However, it certainly, and justifiably, hopes for a responsible response from a neighbour that is not really hostile. Unfortunately, Dhaka has all along been rejecting suggestions and specific reports that leaders and cadres of several insurgent groups from the northeast are engaged in, or directing a hit-and-run bush war against the Indian state from camps and safe houses inside Bangladesh.

In recent weeks though, Bangladesh has been on the back foot. During the biennial meet of the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) that ended in New Delhi on November 1, India handed over to the visitors a list of 99 training camps of northeast rebel groups existing inside Bangladesh besides the names of 77 insurgents, including several top leaders. The instant response of the visiting delegation was predictable — Indian insurgents were not operating out of Bangladesh. For once, New Delhi could shake off the diplomatic niceties, that were sort of institutionalised by the so-called 'Gujral Doctrine' of a good neighbourly policy, and push ahead with its claim.

The Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, was quoted as saying that "after the change of Government in Bangladesh, there has been an increase in the activities of the Al-Qaeda and the ISI there". Mr. Advani also said in no uncertain terms that "all insurgent groups from the northeast are getting refuge there" and that Dhaka was providing them 'covert' support. Dhaka, once again, denied the charges. New Delhi pushed on. This time, India's High Commissioner in Dhaka met the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary and personally sought action to stop the country's territory from being used by Indian insurgents. He also requested the speedy

repatriation of Anup Chetia, general secretary of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), under detention in Bangladesh, and some other rebels from Tripura and Nagaland.

As the two sides were engaged in a spat over the issue, Dhaka announced that it was investigating the presence of Indian militants and militant camps in the country on the basis of the list provided by New Delhi. Bangladesh's public announcement

jointly tackled. According to Bangladeshi media reports, more than 4,000 people have already been detained and over 500 weapons recovered in countrywide anti-crime raids during the operation. This only reinforces India's fear of the northeast rebels using both high Bangladeshi 'contacts' as well the organised crime syndicates to facilitate their operations from within that country, particularly insofar as logistic support and arms supply are concerned. This

***While the India-Bangladesh border may not be as live as the one with Pakistan, it is not an easy stretch to manage as it might seem... agreements such as the one to jointly fight terrorism need to be consolidated to keep the security situation under control.***

has not come as a surprise. But going by the ground situation in Bangladesh, it does not seem as much to do with improving ties with India, as it is to ward off the impact of the reports in the western media in recent weeks (*Time*, *Far Eastern Economic Review* and the *Wall Street Journal*) suggesting that Bangladesh has become the new theatre for the Al-Qaeda and other Islamist fundamentalist groups. *Time* even went to the extent of saying that ULFA representatives were among those who attended a meeting of jihadi groups in May at a secret rendezvous in Bangladesh. There are also suggestions, which Dhaka denies, that the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Government of the Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia — described as a heady cocktail of Islamic nationalists, radical fundamentalists and dormant Communists — is either lending support or is being soft towards the radical jihadi groups and their supporters who have, of late, become active in the country.

It is in this context that the Bangladesh Army offensive against 'crime' — Dhaka has not called it an anti-terrorist operation — that was launched on October 17 under the code name 'Operation Clean Heart' needs to be viewed, as also the BDR decision to agree with the BSF at the New Delhi meeting that terrorism and trans-national crime must be

Army offensive again could well have been launched to deflect attention, and to send out a message that Dhaka is against crime and terrorism. But, statements by influential politicians have made Bangladesh's position delicate regarding its claim that the country is free from terrorists or fundamentalists. Speaking in Brussels last month, the Awami League chief and former Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, said the last "general election results were manipulated through planned fraud, vote rigging and unfair practices".

Referring to the recent media reports on the Al-Qaeda and other radical elements becoming active in Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina was quoted as saying that the BNP, Jamaat and Islamic Oikya Jote (IOJ) — partners of the alliance government — "are open about their support for the religious fanatics". Sections of the media in Bangladesh have expressed shock over Sheikh Hasina's comments abroad, and have sought to deny western media reports that the country has become the new hub of Islamist extremist groups. But, the position taken by this section of the country's media, as also the Government, is understandable at a time when the big powers, and India, are engaged in what is called the 'global war on terror'. From India's security viewpoint, it is not important wheth-

er or not the Al-Qaeda is itself active in Bangladesh. What cannot be ignored is the fact emanating from intelligence circles that a local terror group, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, with an estimated strength of 2,000, is quite active in Bangladesh and is allied to the Al-Qaeda. It is unlikely that the ULFA could have attended a meeting of jihadi groups in Bangladesh. But, if the outfit had indeed sent some representatives to that meeting, as reported in a section of the international media, to express solidarity with the fellow 'fighters' for letting them stay on in that country undisturbed, it can have serious implications. The first could be a demand or a request from some of these jihadi groups to arrange for shelter in Assam or elsewhere in the northeast as a *quid pro quo* in the event of the anti-terror heat turning on them. It is more likely, however, for the Bangladeshi jihadis to head for the Arakans in adjoining Myanmar, the land of the Rohingyas, a large chunk of whom are Muslims, should the need arise.

India shares a 4,095-km long border with Bangladesh, the longest with any of its neighbours. While the India-Bangladesh border may not be as live as the one with Pakistan, it is not an easy stretch to manage as it might seem. In April last year, in the wake of a sudden spurt of tension between the two neighbours, 16 BSF troopers patrolling the border in the Assam sector were 'snatched' by a Bangladeshi mob and brutally killed under the very nose of the BDR. Bitter incidents aside, the positive development, of late, has been the agreement between the BSF and the BDR to jointly fight terrorism and crime. Agreements such as these need to be consolidated to keep the security situation under control. At the same time, the BNP chief and Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, would do well to clarify whether she would still like to regard Indian rebels belonging to groups such as the ULFA as 'freedom fighters' in much the same way as the Mukti Bahini were freedom fighters fighting the Pakistanis.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi. The views expressed are his own.)

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2 3 NOV 2002

# Bangladesh hosts 140 terror camps

H Bala Devi and Sanjay Singh  
in New Delhi

## ISI man held in Bhuj

Nov. 21. — There are more than 140 terrorist training camps, including some run by Al Qaida, in Bangladesh, senior officials said. In January, a number of Al Qaida operatives had sailed to Chittagong from Pakistan. Among other groups that have found India's eastern neighbour a receptive host are North-east militants.

The Bangladesh Rifles chief had reportedly "admitted" to the existence of such camps to his BSF counterpart in Delhi recently

Al Qaida plans, officials say, include infiltrating into West Bengal police and putting up men for recruitment in the Army. Fake documents are being processed by "hundreds and some sleepers (long term operatives) are being readied so that they can be absorbed by the West Bengal secondary education system," an official said.

Officials said Dhaka was "less than firm with terrorist groups". "Pro-radical Islam" and "pro-Pakistan" officers have been put in "key places" to oversee what New Delhi sees as a "big shift" in Dhaka's policy towards militancy, especially that targeted against India.

Security officers are advising the gov-

BEHRAMPORE, Nov. 21. — A suspected ISI agent, an IAF data entry operator, has been arrested from Bhuj on the charge of passing on sensitive information to agents in Bangladesh, said Murshidabad SP Mr Virendra.

Irfan Ukil was arrested on the basis of information provided by Murshidabad police, which recently arrested four suspected ISI agents. — SNS

ernment to change Delhi's "soft" approach towards Dhaka". An intelligence official said: "The Gujral doctrine is useless here."

As many as 133 camps of North-east terrorist groups are active in Bangladesh. The National Liberation Front of Tripura tops the list with 43 camps and shelters.

Next comes the Ulfa with 24 camps. Officials said the Jamat-e-Islami and Chhatra Shivar have been extending support to these groups.

Making Bangladeshi passports for Pakistanis, who want to sneak into India, have become a "minor industry". A firm, Bangladesh Rural Telecom Authority, was at the root of this.

# Bengal police net ISI gang of four

Soumen Datta and  
Romita Dutta  
Kolkata, November 18

AN ISI agent and three of his accomplices were arrested last night from Jalangi and Domkal in Murshidabad for passing information about Army installations in India to their aides in Bangladesh.

Jiauddin Ahmed Biswas of Durlavpara, Jalangi, turned out to be the kingpin, while his wife Ismat Ara Biswas, Gulam Mur-taza, a local PCO owner, and Hasan Habib were charged with aiding Jiauddin in his job. The

## SEIZURE LIST

- Sketch-map, photographs of air bases, military camps, armouries and other Defence installations
- Names and postings of Defence personnel apparently in contact with Jiauddin

team had been active in the area since 1997. "The arrests followed 11 months of surveillance," Murshidabad SP Virendra said.

Sensitive documents, including maps and photographs of

various Defence installations and a list of Indian Defence personnel working for Jiauddin, were recovered from the gang, the SP said. "Aufan Ukil, a jawan of the IAF signals department posted now at Bhuj, was on Jiauddin's pay roll. Hasan Ali Biswas, another IAF man who was posted in Jaisalmer and committed suicide two months ago, used to send him photographs of IAF installations."

Jiauddin had been introduced to Nurul Islam, a Dhaka-based retired officer of Pakistan Army, in 1997 by Hasan Habib. He lost no time in developing

contacts with Bangladesh-based ISI operatives and got in touch with some Army and Air Force officers in India to collect information about the movement of the Army and Air Force personnel, Virendra added.

Jiauddin revealed that he had taken his contacts in the Indian Army and IAF to Bangladesh on three occasions.

IG (law and order) Chayan Mukherjee said Jiauddin and his associates had been grilled by the State IB and the Murshidabad police. A Central IB team had arrived in the city to carry forward the investigation.

19 NOV 2002

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Hasina invite snub to Dhaka

13/11  
PRANAY SHARMA

*gnd Bank 1-8*

**New Delhi, Nov. 12:** After accusing the Bangladesh National Party government in Dhaka of failure to check the growing terror network in the country, India has decided to rub salt on its wounds.

Bangladeshi Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's predecessor and arch rival Sheikh Hasina is arriving here next weekend on an invitation from Delhi.

Ostensibly, it is a private visit as Hasina is scheduled to deliver a lecture at a seminar of the Indian Council for South Asia Cooperation at the Habitat Centre on November 26. But several meetings with Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, are on the cards during her stay here.

Officials in South Block pointed out that the proposed meetings have not been finalised and even if they took place, they should be seen as "courtesy calls".

But the "courtesy calls" come in the wake of Advani accusing Bangladesh of sheltering terrorists. The deputy Prime Minister drove the point home at a function recently when he said the activities of al Qaida and Pakistan's ISI have grown since Zia's BNP came to power in Bangladesh. Advani's remarks started a fresh spat between the two countries.

Hasina is seen as pro-India and her rivalry with Zia is well known. The fact that Delhi has decided to invite Hasina and not the Bangladeshi Prime Minister is a clear indication that it was not willing to patch up with Dhaka at this juncture. Not, at least, till Bangladesh took serious and effective steps to address India's security concerns.

At the official level, however, the India-Bangladesh Joint Working Group on security is scheduled to meet either at the end of this month or in early December. But, at the political level, Delhi has given out a clear signal that it wants to keep up the pressure on Bangladesh.

The recent stress on the issue is an attempt to signal that India's fight against terrorism was not Pakistan-centric and it was serious in fighting the menace from wherever it originated.

The immediate provocation for the spat seems to have come from the steps taken by the BNP government, indicating its pronounced tilt towards Pakistan.

At the recent meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group in London, Bangladesh pushed for Pakistan's return to the Commonwealth fold. But India succeeded in getting the other members of the group to strongly recommend that the suspension be kept in force till the country returns to democracy.

13 NOV 2002

THE TELEGRAPH



# India loses interest in Bangladesh gas?

By C. Raja Mohan

**NEW DELHI, NOV. 11.** Besides dramatically altering the hydrocarbon scenario in the country, the large natural gas field in the Krishna Godavari basin recently discovered by Reliance has reduced the political urgency of importing natural gas from Bangladesh.

Knowing the extreme sensitivities in Dhaka about exporting natural gas to India, New Delhi has resisted the temptation of asking for access to the energy resources of Bangladesh. But India was clearly interested in a natural gas pipeline from Bangladesh to meet its soaring energy requirements.

But after the unexpected gas bonanza from the Andhra Pradesh coast, said to be around 7 trillion cubic feet (TCF), India is unlikely to lose sleep over Dhaka's reluctance to export energy to India. The recoverable Bangla gas reserves have been estimated at around 20 TCF and only a small portion of it is likely to be exported, if at all.

For nearly five years, Bangladesh has been traumatised by a painful debate on the wisdom of exporting gas to India. In a typical fashion of the subcontinent, extraordinary emotional baggage was loaded onto what was a simple commercial decision.

Indications are that the Bangla parliament which starts a new session this week is likely to take up the question of gas exports. Two committees established by Dhaka, one on assessing the size of the natural gas reserves and the other on their best possible utilisation, are with the government and are likely to be placed before the Parliament.

The debate in Dhaka takes

place amidst growing international pressure on Bangladesh to come up with a quick decision on exports to India. The international oil companies which have invested a lot of money in the Bangla hydrocarbon sector insist that without a commitment on exports from Dhaka, they will be unable to develop the natural gas resources of Bangladesh.

The natural inclination of the Bangla political class is to emphasise the domestic consumption of natural gas. But Bangladesh is reportedly running into problems with the international financial institutions, whose support is

more than a yawn from New Delhi.

The significance of the gas find in KG basin is that it is the first deep water drilling project undertaken by Indian companies. Until now all the off-shore fields developed by India have been in shallow waters.

The use of new technologies and the exploration of deeper waters by India are likely to lead to more discoveries of natural gas reserves. Besides rushing to tap the huge hydrocarbon potential along the east coast, Indian companies are also expected to begin drilling off the Rakhine coast of Myanmar in the next few months.

One of the sticking points in the Bangla debate on gas exports has been the unending wrangle over the size of the reserves and if there was enough for exports beyond domestic consumption. But the arguments missed the point that there may be a lot more gas to be found, given the under exploration of the region.

Ideally, India and Bangladesh should be working together for energy security in eastern subcontinent and making grand plans for a network of gas pipelines and electricity grids connecting eastern India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and India's northeast and Myanmar.

But that kind of cooperative arrangements in which everybody wins has been politically elusive in the subcontinent. "Beggar thy neighbour" remains the first principle for decision-makers in the region. Dhaka's inconclusive, and perhaps increasingly irrelevant, debate on gas exports reflects the tragic subcontinental tradition of wallowing in isolation and poverty rather than creating shared wealth.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

necessary to build the infrastructure for gas distribution within the country.

The IFIs are apparently refusing to fund the internal projects unless they are coupled with a decision to export at least a part of it to India.

Bangladesh is torn between the economic logic of exporting natural gas and the political compulsions for avoiding energy cooperation with India.

Bangladesh can continue to agonise whether it should "gift away" its natural resources to India. But the debate is beginning to lose its political salience for India. Statesmanship is mostly about timing. In failing to act in time, nations lose bargaining power.

That precisely is what has happened to Dhaka. A decision by Bangladesh to export natural gas even a few months ago would have had India jumping at it.

A favourable decision by Bangladesh now is unlikely to get

# Pulled up, Delhi pushes Dhaka

## OUR BUREAU AND AGENCIES

**Nov. 10:** The spark lit by deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani has touched off a diplomatic spat between India and Bangladesh with Dhaka today summoning the Indian envoy to lodge a formal protest and Delhi sticking to its guns.

Bangladesh foreign secretary Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury today handed over a formal memo against Advani's "totally baseless, motivated and irresponsible statements".

Advani had said on Thursday that "after the change of government in Bangladesh, there has been an increase in the activities of al Qaida and ISI there".

Served the protest, a nonchalant India asked Bangladesh to take "serious and immediate action" to stop misuse of its territory by terrorist and insurgent groups.

Official sources said in Delhi that India has asked Bangladesh

to close down militant training camps and hand over insurgents taking shelter there.

Delhi has also handed over to Dhaka a list of 99 training camps there, pinpointing locations, and a list of 77 insurgents and nine criminals who have been arrested by the authorities there.

At the meeting with the Bangladesh foreign secretary, Indian high commissioner Manilal Tripathy demanded early repatriation of extremist leaders such as United Liberation Front of Asom leader Anup Chetia, PTI quoted sources at the high commission as saying.

Tripathy said Indian insurgent groups were receiving shelter and support from elements in Bangladesh, despite assurances by the Khaleda Zia government.

The high commissioner was summoned to the foreign office for the third time in 10 days.

The envoy defended Advani's remarks on the alleged activities of the ISI and al Qaida in Ban-

gladesh and described as regrettable and objectionable Dhaka's reaction to them.

Advani's remarks were made with full responsibility and based on reliable information, he was quoted as saying.

Reacting to the sharp response from Bangladesh on Friday, Advani had repeated his statement yesterday.

"I don't know why they are reacting like this. I had just said there were reports about growing activities of al Qaida and ISI in Bangladesh after the change of the government," he told reporters in Delhi on Saturday.

Tripathy assured Bangladesh India would not offer shelter to fugitives allegedly crossing over to India in the wake of an army action in Bangladesh.

As many as 23 people, including a political activist, have died in the Bangladesh army's month-long crackdown against what it terms as rising "crime".

# Advani burst stuns Dhaka

FARID HOSSAIN

Dhaka, Nov. 8: Bangladesh foreign secretary Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury today said his country has never allowed any terrorist group to use its territory for campaign against India.

"The question of Bangladesh providing sanctuary to any terrorist group does not arise at all," Chowdhury told reporters in response to deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani's statement yesterday.

Advani had said al Qaida and ISI activities had increased in Bangladesh after Khaleda Zia's government took over.

Chowdhury said the latest Indian allegation was part of a "conspiracy to tarnish Bangladesh's image as a secular and peaceful nation".

The foreign secretary's reaction was mild in comparison to what a ministry spokesman said.

"Bangladesh never expected such comments and observation from such a top Indian leader as Mr Advani," the spokesman, who cannot be identified under local briefing rules, said.

"What he (Advani) said is totally baseless, motivated and irresponsible."

"We expect that in future he (Advani) will not make such comments about Bangladesh for the sake of friendship between the two countries."

Dhaka has always rejected repeated allegations by Delhi that separatist groups in northeast India have been using its territory to train and carry out attacks in India.

However, at least once the allegation proved correct when Bangladesh arrested United Liberation Front of Asom leader Anup Chetia from a rented house in Dhaka in 1997.

**Our Delhi bureau adds:** Referring to Advani's statement, home ministry officials acknowledge the possibility of Delhi taking a hard stand against Dhaka.

The officials said India is angry with Bangladesh's lackadaisical response to its concerns and wants firm action against Northeast insurgents as well as al Qaida activists who are a potential threat to India.

Delhi's worries have been conveyed to Dhaka time and again, but so far Bangladesh has shown no willingness to follow through with the promises made.

"India's patience is running out, and Advani has clearly indicated our frustration," an official said.

THE TELEGRAPH

9 NOV 2002

# Dhaka to open port for N-E

Satyabrata Chakraborti in Agartala

Nov. 6. — Dhaka may soon approve New Delhi's proposal for using the Chittagong port for transportation of commodities to the northeast, the Bangladesh minister for water transport, Lt Col Akbar Hossain, told the Tripura minister for commerce and industries, Mr Pabitra Kar, in Dhaka recently.

Mr Akbar said a formal announcement in this regard might soon be made in Dhaka. He said work on development of the Chittagong port had been initiated.

Mr Kar also met the Bangladesh minister for commerce, Mr Amir Khasru, and the minister for rural development, Mr Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, on 3 November.

Arriving here, Mr Kar said the Bangladeshi ministers' attitude towards introducing a regular bus service for passengers on the Agartala-Dhaka route was "positive".

Mr Kar said the Bangladeshi ministers told him that Dhaka had declared Akhaura, a Bangladeshi railway junction five km away from Agartala, as a land harbour to help

transportation of materials to the northeast.

Earlier, New Delhi had asked Dhaka to earmark Ashugonj, a river port near Brahmanbaria, as the "port of call" for the purpose. The Tripura government wants the Centre to persuade Dhaka to develop two more townships — Shrimantapur and Raghna — along the Indo-Bangla border with Tripura for transportation of commodities.

A memorandum of understanding has been signed between the Dhaka Chambers of Commerce and the Tripura Chambers of Commerce after a two day meeting of the trade organizations in the Bangladeshi capital on 2 November.

A joint study group was earlier setup after the meeting of trade delegations of both the countries in Chittagong recently. The study group will submit its report along with recommendations before the appropriate authorities within December.

A World Bank official has been involved in the process of preparing the report. A Bangladeshi team will visit Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam this month to explore prospects of bilateral trade.

THE STATESMAN

7 NOV 1977

# Al-Qaeda, ISI activities on the rise in Bangladesh: Advani

*Indo Bangla*

**BHIWANI (HARYANA), NOV. 7.** The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today voiced serious concern over the growing activities of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and the Al-Qaeda in Bangladesh and asked the international community to treat the ISI on a par with terrorist outfits like the Taliban.

"After the change of government in Bangladesh, there has been an increase in the activities of the Al-Qaeda and the ISI there," Mr. Advani said after inaugurating the 51st All India Police Games here.

Asked whether Dhaka's "support to the militants" was covert or overt, he said, "Covert. All insurgent groups of the North-East are getting refuge there."

Mr. Advani said that while the international community had recognised the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban as the fountainhead of terrorism, they were yet to acknowledge Pakistan's ISI as among the major sources of terrorism.

"This will cost them dear," he said, adding "irrespective of foreign policy compulsions, one should not be supportive of terrorism anywhere in the world." "There should be no

room for leniency towards terrorists."

Asked whether the Government had taken up the issue of insurgent groups and Al-Qaeda activities with Bangladesh, he said Dhaka had been told that these were areas they would have to think about seriously. He said the recent massacre in Assam was carried out by terrorists based in Bhutan. "Bhutan was not supporting the insurgent groups though it was not taking enough action."

Mr. Advani declined to comment on the controversy surrounding the "encounter" at Ansal Plaza in South Delhi, where two terrorists were killed.

On the decision of the new Government in Jammu and

Kashmir not to use the POTA, he said, "it is for the State Governments to decide. We feel it (POTA) is necessary to contain terrorism". However, if a "State is able to do it without using POTA, nothing like it."

He recalled that a Marxist Chief Minister, who was initially opposed to using the National Security Act in his State, finally did so to check insurgency.

To a question, he said the BJP would win with a comfortable majority in Gujarat.

Earlier, inaugurating the police games at Bheem Stadium here, Mr. Advani said India was not dependent on the U.S. in its fight against terrorism. "It is our problem and we are com-

mitted to win it on our strength."

Quoting from a recent U.S. book, *Breakdown*, written by a journalist, he said Washington had received warnings prior to September 11 that if Taliban activities were not checked, it would become a victim, but the warning was not taken seriously enough.

Mr. Advani said that during the days of terrorism in Punjab, it seemed as if normality would never return but due to the courageous actions of the Army, paramilitary forces and police, militancy was wiped out.

He said the Government would "examine" the Haryana Chief Minister, Om Prakash Chautala's request for a helicopter for the State police. Mr. Chautala, in his address, had agreed to bear half the expenses for the chopper, which he said would be used in preventing terrorist infiltration into Delhi.

Expressing satisfaction over India's performance at the recent Commonwealth and Busan Asian Games, Mr. Advani said the BJP-led NDA Government had set up the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs with a view to creating enthusiasm among university and college

## Chautala's faux pas

**BHIWANI (HARYANA), NOV. 7.** The then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, was killed during the Emergency and the Pentagon was blown up in the September 11 terror strikes in the United States.

Bloomers from answer sheets in some Public Service Commission examinations? No, it is Chautalaspeak.

People listening to the Haryana Chief Minister, Om Prakash Chautala, particularly those in the press gallery, were amused as he mentioned these "examples" of terrorism in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, at the inaugural function of the 51st All India Police Games here. — PTI

9 NOV 2002

# Heat on Bangla migrants

GAJINDER SINGH

Chandigarh, Nov. 3: The Haryana government has resolved to initiate action against Bangladeshi migrants residing illegally in Haryana.

The decision was conveyed by Director General of Police M.S. Malik yesterday at a meeting of senior police officials presided over by chief minister Om Prakash Chautala.

Last year, police had launched a vigorous drive to identify and deport Bangladeshi nationals living in the state. Over 100 families were deported following reports about the involvement of Bangladeshi youths in several crimes. Most of them operated in the urban sector and lived in towns around Delhi.

Police sources said at least 200 Bangladeshi families have been identified. They will soon be rounded up, sent to the border and pushed back into Bangla-

desh either from Bengal or Assam. The state police have launched a combing operation to identify more migrants.

The Haryana government's decision to deport the illegal Bangladeshi migrants comes in the wake of pressure from the Delhi administration.

Delhi police put the number of Bangladeshi migrants in the capital at about 1.5 lakh, though unofficial estimates quote a figure of 5 lakh. Many of them serve as cheap factory labourers or domestic hands.

A senior police officer said Haryana alone has over 5,000 Bangladeshis. While many are employed as labourers in factories, some of them have been working on part-time basis as domestic hands. Several women and children even resort to begging at railway stations, bus stands and markets. So far, 212 Bangladeshi adults and 129 minors have been detected residing illegally in the

districts of Panipat, Jind, Gurgaon and Faridabad.

Chautala made it clear in the meeting that the government would not tolerate corruption in administration at any level and those found guilty would invite action irrespective of their official position and social status.

The chief minister said that in case the government had to amend any Act to retrench the services of corrupt officials, he would not hesitate to get such legislation passed.

Chautala also directed the police to ensure that their official vehicles were not misused and urged them not to indulge in wasteful expenditure keeping in mind the state government's limited resources.

He said a special campaign should be launched to check the menace of recycled polythene as it was causing environmental hazards.

4 NOV 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

## India, Bangladesh to set up panel on border issues

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 1. While India and Bangladesh today decided to set up a joint coordination committee to take care of border problems, the two neighbours differed in their perception over the existence of training camps of Northeast insurgents in Bangladesh.

The issue of training camps was taken up by the Border Security Force (BSF) with the visiting Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) chief, Maj.-Gen. Rezaqul Haider, during the two-day bi-annual discussions here.

Mr. Sharma and Maj.-Gen. Haider signed the joint record of discussions after the conclusion of their talks focussing on border issues, infiltration of illegal immigrants, smuggling and other related problems.

While the two sides re-affirmed their intentions to pool resources and carry out a relentless and determined fight against terrorism, the BSF raised the issue of "insurgents of the Northeastern India" find-

ing shelter in Bangladesh, the BSF chief told reporters.

Mr. Sharma said that the BDR chief denied the existence of such camps but added that the BSF would provide proof which would be looked into by the BDR.

On the smuggling of arms and other items, the BSF D-G shared the concerns of Bangladesh and stated that the Indian side had stepped up its vigil on the border resulting in the seizure of large quantities of phenisidyl. The BDR chief reiterated Dhaka's stand that no insurgents or foreign elements would get any support in its territory.

The two sides agreed to exchange the list of active trans-border criminals and gangs by December 31. It was also agreed that the periodicity of coordinated operations could be fixed at the sector commander level meetings after taking into consideration ground realities. Both sides also reiterated their commitment to work together to maintain peace, tranquility and security on the border.

7 2 NOV 1971

## Call to expand Indo-Bangladesh trade ties

By Haroon Habib

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410-01

**DHAKA, OCT. 19.** Bureaucrats and business leaders of Bangladesh and India have pleaded for broader bilateral trade ties to include expansion of business facilities to the northeast.

They were speaking at a seminar cum mini-trade summit on "Promotion of Trade and Investment between Bangladesh and North-Eastern States of India," which concluded on Friday at the port city of Chittagong. The Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) and the Indian High Commission in Dhaka jointly organised the seminar, aimed at bolstering investment and trade between the two countries.

The delegates recommended a few steps, including the formation of a study group, to assess the problems and prospects of trade between Bangladesh and the northeastern States.

The group, comprising representatives of the CCCI and the Tripura Chamber of Commerce and Industry will prepare a report within the next three months recommending a joint task force to promote bilateral trade.

The recommendations adopted at the end of the two-day seminar, first of its kind in Bangladesh, were aimed at reducing the staggering

trade gap and withdrawing para-tariff and non-tariff barriers, development of infrastructure and communication facilities, improvement of banking and insurance, and development of other support services for trade with the seven north-eastern States.

The Bangladesh Commerce Minister, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, inaugurating the seminar, underscored the need for proactive and friendly attitude from the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, particularly India, to increase the volume of trade and investment in the region.

Referring to anti-dumping rules, tariff, non-tariff and para-tariff barriers imposed by New Delhi, which "impeded the access of Bangladeshi products" in the Indian market, he said India could create a win-win situation for the benefit of both sides.

And being a big economy, India would benefit from broader regional cooperation.

Mr. Chowdhury called upon all concerned to formulate a comprehensive but realistic work plan to find out ways and means for removing all impediments, including policy matters, to boost trade relations among the SAARC member States.

20 OCT 2002

7-10-02



H10-11  
19/10

## 'Bangladesh, a hotbed of anti-India terrorists'

**NEW DELHI, OCT. 13.** Bangladesh has become a hotbed of terrorists waging a war against India, and its intelligence agents have been maintaining contact with their counterparts in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), according to the latest issue of the *Time* magazine.

Quoting sources in the Indian intelligence and Bangladesh's largest Al-Qaeda-allied terrorist group 'Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami' (HUJI), the magazine said agents of Bangladesh's military intelligence service 'DGFI' "maintain contact with their counterparts in Pakistan's ISI and have a long history of supporting rebels fighting Indian rule across the border, including providing safe houses in Dhaka for the leaders of

(banned) United Liberation Front for Assam".

A HUJI source told the magazine that 150 men belonging to 'Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters from Afghanistan' had entered Bangladesh through its Chittagong harbour in December last year. They came in a boat 'MV Mecca' which carried boxes of ammunition and men carrying AK-47 assault rifles.

The source in the 2,000-strong HUJI and port workers, who saw the ship's arrival, claimed that a DGFI Major greeted the new arrivals.

However, an intelligence service spokesman denied the Major's existence despite diplomatic registration records showing that he was a long-standing GDFI. — PTI

1 0 OCT 2002

THE HINDU

# Anup Chetia gets 7-year jail term

*9/20/98  
Bangla*

**Statesman News Service**

DHAKA, Sept. 24. — A Bangladesh court today sentenced the general secretary of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam, Anup Chetia, to seven years in prison for illegal possession of a satellite telephone.

Chetia, who has been undergoing six-years jail term in Bangladesh after being convicted in a number of cases including illegal entry, possessing fake passport and huge amount of money in currencies of 16 countries, was present at the court along with two others when First metropolitan Session Judge Mr Abu Sayeed delivered the verdict. Chetia's accomplices Babul Sharma and Laxmi Prasad were also awarded a similar jail term. This was the fourth case against Anup Chetia who was arrested in Dhaka in December 1997 during the previous Awami League government of Ms Sheikh Hasina and then prosecuted.

The Ulfa leader is wanted by India in a

number of cases. New Delhi wanted his extradition. But Hasina government instead tried him in a Bangladesh court.

The Awami League government refused Chetia's appeal seeking political asylum in Bangladesh. The Ulfa leader again sought political asylum to the present BNP-led government of Prime Minister Ms Khaléda Zia which did not respond favourably.

Sanjib Debsharma pf National Liberation Front of tripura also sought political asylum in Bangladesh but in vain. Security forces in Bangladesh recently captured six suspected Indian insurgents and seized some sophisticated weapons from their possession in the south-eastern Cox's Bazar district.

India has been constantly conveying its concern to Bangladesh against the use of Bangladesh territory by outlawed insurgents groups in North-eastern Indian states. Bangladesh, however, denied such allegations and said that its soil will not be allowed to be used for carrying out subversive activities in India.

25 SEP 2002

THE STATESMAN

51- Kowala ① 21/9 . 1

**Bangla  
infiltrators  
handed  
over to BSF**

*quid p. 1/2*  
**Statesman News Service**

KOLKATA, Sept. 20. — Ninety-eight Bangladeshi nationals including some children who were arrested as part of a combing operation in Delhi a week ago were brought by a Delhi Police team to the city by Lal Quila Express today. They were later handed over to Border Security Force and will be sent back to Bangladesh.

"These infiltrators were staying in different parts of Delhi without any documents. They were involved in various anti-social activities," said an officer of Delhi Police who accompanied the team to Kolkata.

Most of these people are reported to be from from Khulna in Bangladesh. "Poverty drove us to leave our country and we first came to Kolkata after crossing the boarder. Then we went to Delhi and have been living there for the past one and a half year," one of them said.

**THE STATESMAN**

21 SEP 2003

# India, Bangladesh to activate all task forces: Sinha <sup>11</sup> HD-11 26/8

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, AUG. 25.** The External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, has said that India and Bangladesh have decided to reactivate all the committees and task forces, including the Joint Working Group, to give a boost to bilateral relations.

Mr. Sinha, who ended his two-day, first-ever Bangladesh visit today, said the JWG would meet in October next for removing customs impediments and facilitating greater trade flow.

Both sides had also agreed to develop communication infrastructure, including utilisation of the railways to facilitate trade. The Dhaka-Agartala bus service would be started soon.

The Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, said India had agreed to withdraw tariff

and non-tariff barriers to facilitate greater Bangladeshi export to its market to reduce trade imbalance.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, told Mr. Sinha during a meeting that her Government had taken all initiatives to strengthen relations with India and hoped that New Delhi would adopt a similar approach.

Mr. Khan, who was present during the meeting, said Begum Zia wanted all the SAARC nations to ensure that the process was not halted.

Mr. Khan hoped that Mr. Sinha's visit would "contribute positively" towards cementing ties.

Mr. Sinha said he had a "very cordial meeting" with Begum Zia who accepted an invitation from the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to visit India.

She also invited Mr. Vajpayee to visit Bangladesh.

Mr. Sinha also called on the former Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, Sheikh Hasina. He also met the acting President, Zamiruddin Sircar, and held discussions with the Bangladesh Finance Minister, Saifur Rahman.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Shamser Mobin Chowdhury, said at a briefing that Begum Zia had requested India to take steps to stop the killing of Bangladesh nationals along the border.

According to the Bangladesh Foreign Office, 47 of its nationals were allegedly killed by the BSF this year.

During official talks, Dhaka and New Delhi had earlier agreed that the BDR and the BSF would maintain maximum restraint.

26 AUG 2002

## Dhaka, Delhi agree on panels

9:20 PM  
STATERMAN NEWS SERVICE 57-10  
25/8

DHAKA, Aug. 24. — India and Bangladesh today agreed to further activate bilateral channels and set up a joint experts committee and economic panel to resolve outstanding issues.

This came up at a 90-minute discussion between Mr Yashwant Sinha and his Bangladeshi counterpart, Mr M Morshed Khan, here. Mr Sinha arrived here from Kathmandu this afternoon on a two-day "goodwill visit" to this country.

"We've discussed all issues" and the talks added a "new dimension" in the relations between India and Bangladesh, Mr Sinha told waiting newsmen.

He said issues such as the current border and incidents of firing, trade and commerce and cultural exchanges came up for talks. Mr Sinha said the two sides agreed that in the event of failure to reach a decision on an issue at the official level, the matter would be taken up at the political level. He also said there were no talks on the issue of Bangladesh's gas export to India.

# Decision on gas export only after examining reserves: Bangladesh

By Sushma Ramachandran

NEW DELHI, AUG. 1. Bangladesh may ultimately export a "moderate" quantity of natural gas to India, but it will take some time for a final decision to be taken on the issue. According to the Bangladesh High Commissioner, Tufail Haider, the question will arise only after a view is taken on the extent of gas reserves in his country.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, he said that many questions were being raised here about gas supply from Bangladesh, but expert committee reports on its export were still being considered. Besides, the issue of gas reserves had been politicised and Dhaka had to take into account the sensitivities of its people.

However, Bangladesh had no intention of taking an "anti-Indian" stance either on the gas export issue or other factors, Mr.

Haider said. He recognised that there was a demand for energy in India and that Bangladesh had the reserves, which could possibly be utilised to meet this demand. The ultimate solution could lie in the export of "moderate" quantity of gas, after ensuring that domestic requirements were fully met.

Highlighting the need to satisfy the people back home that gas was not being sold cheaply, Mr. Haider said that when exploration for hydrocarbons began in Bangladesh, it was expected that oil would also be found. Since only gas had been discovered, there was a sense of disappointment, coupled with apprehension over its utilisation.

Earlier, addressing a meeting organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry, Mr. Haider regretted that India had not been able to resolve the issue of reducing tariff barriers on 25 product lines. Though

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India-Bangla HD 12  
a decision had been announced at the political level, tariff reduction as well as removal of non-tariff barriers remained a non-starter at "other levels."

The Sri Lankan High Commissioner, Mangala Moonesinghe, stressed the need for the South Asian countries to function in a spirit of cooperation rather than confrontation. Citing the success of the Indo-Sri Lanka free trade treaty, he said that the reality of India being the most important player in the subcontinent had to be accepted, if the region was to progress.

Pointing to the success of the European Union with its differing cultures, he felt that there was no reason why the South Asian nations could not work together. By giving up its oil-tankages to India, Sri Lanka had actually forfeited a measure of sovereignty, but it was meant to ensure protection for the vital installations.

2 AUG 2002

# 'No handover of Awami leaders'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, March 30. — Tripura's ruling Left Front has ruled out speculation about extraditing Opposition leaders from Bangladesh who had earlier crossed over to this state and elsewhere in the region following the political change-over in Bangladesh. "The government is not aware of such a proposal from Dhaka," a senior LF leader said.

Mr Joynal Abedin, former MP of the Opposition Awami league with his followers had taken shelter in South Tripura's Belonia subdivision immediately after the 1 October elections last year in Bangladesh. He has already left Tripura.

A local daily today carried a story which said Bangladesh had already tipped off India regarding the matter. Two Bangladesh government officials in their recent visit to New Delhi and Calcutta had given an impression to the Indian authorities that Dhaka might hand over a number

of leaders and front ranking activists of the northeast rebel groups operating in that country "if Delhi shows readiness to extradite the prominent Awami league leaders who have taken refuge in India."

The LF spokesman refused to give credence to the story. He felt, the handing over of the NE rebel activists should not be conditional under any circumstances as its involved question of security and integrity of India. He said an influential lobby of the ruling alliance in Dhaka had already projected the insurgency as the "struggle by indigenous groups for a sovereign homeland in northeast." The lobby has pressurised Bangladesh to extend moral and material support to the NE insurgents.

Earlier, Tripura chief minister Mr Manik Sarkar wanted the centre to persuade Dhaka to hand over some of the prominent leaders of the NE rebel units operating in that country to the Indian authorities on the lines of New Delhi's asking Islamabad for ex-

tradition of select militants.

Mr Sarkar complained when the centre was bringing the entire focus on Pakistan backed insurgency along border of Jammu and Kashmir, the situation in northeast was being undermined by New Delhi. The situation here was equally alarming as the Islamic, Christian and Hindu militants were getting an easy flow of funds and supply of sophisticated arms and explosives from ISI and other foreign agencies.

Mr Sarkar told the Union home ministry that the NE rebel groups had stepped up their activities in the border areas opposite Tripura following recent political change over in that country.

The Tripura rebel groups including the outlawed National liberation front of Tripura, the All Tripura Tiger Force and the Borak National Commando Force of Tripura were now running a total of 51 camps along the state's border with Comilla, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet, he alleged.

THE STATESMAN

31 MAR 2002

# Chetia seeks asylum in Bangladesh

Manish Chooch in Kolkata

March 24. — Anup Chetia, Ulfa chairman undergoing a six-year prison term in Dhaka, has sought political asylum in Bangladesh. He has routed his application to the Bangladesh government through the law firm of Barrister Najmul Huda, who is a minister in Begum Zia's Cabinet holding charge of transport and communications, and his wife Mrs Sigma Huda's non-government human rights organisation.

The Ulfa chairman has sought sympathetic consideration from the BNP-Jamaat government. Delhi has told Dhaka that granting asylum either to Chetia or some Tripura tribal insurgents will be an unfriendly act that could harm bilateral ties.

Chetia, who will complete his prison term in 2004, was convicted in 1998 by a Dhaka court for entering and staying illegally in Bangladesh and possessing vast sums of foreign currency whose source he could not explain. He was arrested from a flat in Dhaka soon after Sheikh Hasina's Awami League was voted to power in 1996. The arrest was in keeping with Sheikh Hasina's policy not to allow the North-east insurgents to set up base in Bangladesh for anti-India activities. This was in contrast to the policy of the previous BNP government whose leaders had described the Indian insurgents as "valiant freedom fighters needing all our moral and material support".

An influential section within the BNP government is pleading for Chetia's early release and asylum which would help Ulfa launch its overt and covert operations.

India has also conveyed its displeasure over the BNP government's refusal to hand over Sanjib Deb Barma, a dreaded activist of the All Tripura Tiger Force responsible for several massacres of non-tribals in Tripura. The diplomatic protest was lodged when

## Chetia:

(Continued from page 1)

Sanjib was released before he completed his prison term. He was set free following a writ filed by Mrs Sigma Huda's NGO. He was handed over to the NGO for safe custody.

Mr Pinak Chakroborty, India's deputy high commissioner in Dhaka, said over phone: "We have told Dhaka that both Chetia and Sanjib should be handed over to us as they are wanted in numerous criminal cases in India. We are handing over the papers to buttress our demands. Begum Zia's government has assured us that it would not allow Bangladesh territory to be used by Indian insurgents. We are keeping a close watch on what follow-up action they take on both Anup and Sanjib".

THE STATESMAN

25 MAR 2002

Turn to page 6



## India, Bangladesh discuss border

57-10 killings 24/3

DHAKA, March 23. - Top border security officials of India and Bangladesh today discussed killing of each other's nationals at the borders and illegal entry by citizens from both sides.

BSF director-general Mr Gurbachan Singh Jagat led a 12-member team for the talks with BDR director-general Mr Rezakul Haider and his 20-member team. This is the first meeting at the highest level of the border forces of the two countries after the last year skirmishes which left 16 BSF and three BDR personnel killed.

The three-day Border Coordination Conference of India and Bangladesh, which began today, discussed killing and wounding of nationals of both the countries and illegal entry by citizens from both the sides into each other's territories, BSS news agency reported. The meeting will conclude on Monday. - PTI

11

THE STATESMAN

24 MAR 2002



# Dhaka restricts coal import from India

Imran Rahman  
Dhaka, January 15

THE KHALEDA ZIA Government of Bangladesh has imposed a five per cent regulatory duty on coal imports from India in a bid to raise revenue earnings and imports.

"This will increase in the consumption of locally-produced coal," officials of the Commerce Ministry said in Dhaka today.

With this, duty and taxes on industrial coal imports will be 33 per cent, including 15 per cent import duty and 15 per cent value added tax (VAT). The regulatory duty will bring roughly 50 million taka as additional import revenue from coal.

Coal is mainly imported from India and the volume was worth 740 million taka in 1999-2000 financial year, from which the National Board of Revenue earned roughly 210 million taka as import revenues.

Revenue officials said there was no reason to think that minimum regulatory duty would hike the prices of imported coal in Bangladesh's markets.

A Commerce Ministry official justified the imposition of regulatory duty saying that some sort of restriction should be imposed on coal imports to encourage use of Bangladeshi coals. Barapukuria coals are



KHALEDA ZIA

superior in quality than those imported from Indian state of Meghalaya, which is cheaper.

On the other hand, the much-talked-about Barapukuria coalmine project in Dinajpur district is expected to go on partial production in June this year and full production by October of the year 2004.

The first production of coal from the mine will start coming up from June this year and continentally from October of 2003, while the full production from the first phase will commence by October of 2004, officials of the project said. With churning out coal from the project for the first time, Bangladesh will be joining the league of coal-producing countries in the world.

Works on the development of Bangladesh's first coal mine are going on full swing to start partial production by the stipulated time. The Barapukuria coal filed has a mineable reserve of more than 270 million tons and the recoverable reserve of 84 million, according to a survey carried out by China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation, known as CMC and Wardell Armstrong Limited, consultant to the project.

The Barapukuria coal mining project is being implemented by the CMC on suppliers credit of \$109.235 million.. Managing Director of the Barapukuria Mining Co Limited, a subsidiary of the State-run Petrobangla Golam Mostafa expressed the hope that partial production would start by June this year. Mission chief of CMC Chen Yuyu hoped that he would hand over the project to Bangladesh after successful completion by the stipulated time.

Experts have termed the coal find in Barapukuria minefield measuring 5.5b square kilometer as high quality with low sulphur, ash and inherent moisture ideally suited for power plant and industrial uses without washing. Golam Mostafa said the coal of the Barapukuria coal mine would be much cheaper than the to coal which was now being imported from India.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 JAN 2002

9/12/01  
Bombar  
95-8

## Conversations with Khaleda Zia

# Politics of hatred

AS/1

**B**ANGLADESH Prime Minister Khaleda Zia fancies herself playing the role of a mediator between Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf. She tried to convey the impression that she was "ideally suited for it," when she talked to me at Dhaka a few days before the SAARC summit. Apparently, she did not succeed at Kathmandu although she met both of them there. It is significant that she made no reference to the attack on the Indian Parliament but mentioned the September 11 carnage in her prepared speech at the summit.

Still I found Khaleda less anti-India than in the days when she was prime minister earlier. Most of her observations at that time would be laced with her anti-India bias. She assured me a year ago, when she was in the wilderness that she would not indulge in anti-India rhetoric if she returned to power. That probably explains why she did not make India an issue in the last election, which despite rigging, went convincingly in her favour. Khaleda seems to have matured over the years. Her words are now measured and her remarks show that she has thought things out. She remains unruffled even when provocative questions are put to her. Yet, she has an imperious flourish in the way she talks or postures herself on domestic issues. Her predecessor Sheikh Hasina continued to retain the common touch during her tenure as prime minister even though she became impatient and somewhat authoritarian in the latter half of her office.

"I am not going to allow any nuisance this time," said Khaleda. Her hatred for Hasina still remains implacable. Khaleda had in mind Hasina's announcement that the Awami League, which Hasina heads, would initiate a public agitation to demand fresh polls. Khaleda said "they organised a hartal during the holy month of Ramadan but it

was a big flop." She seemed to bring in the word 'holy' to underline her religious fervour, which she is trying to revive in a country that has been settling to a secular ethos in the past few years. She has already visited Mecca twice, the first time she delayed even the formation of her cabinet to offer her thanks at the holy shrine. I was struck by the photos of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman still hanging on the wall of the waiting room adjacent to the prime minister's office. The credit for this goes to her able law minister who reportedly pointed out to her at a cabinet meeting that there was a law, enacted by the Hasina government, to punish those who pulled down Mujib's pictures from government offices or public places.



KULDIP NAYAR

**While answering questions on relations with India, Khaleda Zia was equivocal. But she took care to see there was no anti-India remark**

There may be an amendment to the law so that the photos of Mujib and Khaleda's husband, Zia-ur Rahman, can be displayed together. In the meanwhile, she has ordered the removal of Mujib's picture from Bangladesh currency notes.

Khaleda has also stopped official holidays on Mujib's birthday and the day on which he was assassinated. I asked her, why? First she tried to rationalise the order on the grounds that there were too many holidays in her country. But then she was frank enough to justify her action by saying that they (the Hasina government) had cancelled the holiday on September 7. It was the day when her husband took over the charge of Bangladesh after a mutiny by army jawans. Khaleda had no convincing defence when I asked her about the killing and looting of Hindus in the

wake of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) victory. Her explanation was that it happened mostly at the time when the caretaker government was in power. The other argument she advanced was that it was the "doing of the Awami League," which expected the Hindus to vote for it but "pounced upon them" when it found they had voted for the BNP. "You can ask the Hindus," she said. "I shall give you their names." When she saw that I looked unconvinced, she said that she

had ordered a judicial inquiry. She went on in the same vein to put the blame on the Awami League. (The Awami League has already held an inquiry and has found the BNP and its ruling allies, the Jamaat-e-Islami and other extremists, "responsible for the kill-

But she took care to see that there was no anti-India remark. She said that some irritants remained between the two countries. But she corrected herself and said, "no irritants," only problems. She mentioned the Ganga water treaty, which she said, should be reviewed. But it would create no problem because the treaty is already due for review after finishing the run of five years. The period ended on December 31. I asked her point-blank to specify the problems between Bangladesh and India. "Tension on the border between the police of both countries," was her reply. I purposely mentioned whether she meant the Chittagong Hills Tract, Hasina's commendable effort which the BNP had characterised as a sell-out to India. Khaleda said no and made no other comment.

"I have invited Prime Minister Vajpayee to visit Dhaka and he has agreed to it," Khaleda said. Asked if she would be visiting India soon, she said that she had been invited but she has no immediate plans to travel to India. She evaded a straight answer to the question of selling gas to India and allowing transiting its goods to the Northeastern states through Bangladesh. I believe that talks on both subjects are in an advanced stage. At one time the BNP was exploiting both points to foment anti-India feelings. It is now the Awami League which is warning the government against selling gas to India. The roles seem to have changed. The BNP does not want to give the Awami League any issue which it may use to mobilise public opinion against the government.

The other ministers, including those in charge of foreign affairs and commerce, I met were positive in their attitude towards India. "We want the best of relations with New Delhi," they said. They wanted close trade relations and unilateral tariff concessions from India. They had their doubts whether it would do so. Khaleda reportedly shares their fears.

INDIAN EXPRESS

15 JAN 2002

# Dhaka seeks review of water treaty

Imran Rahman  
Dhaka, January 3

*Indo  
Bangla ✓*

BANGLADESH WATER Resources Minister L K Siddiqui said the country would soon seek a meeting with India for a review of the water treaty signed in 1996.

The experts have begun preparing a dossier containing technical data to tell India that Dhaka is not receiving its share of the Ganga river water as agreed upon in a 30-year treaty signed by the Sheikh Hasina Government, Siddiqui said. Bangladesh would insist on a guarantee clause in the treaty so that the country receives its due share, in view of heavy illegal withdrawals in the upper stream in India, he said.

The 1996 Indo-Bangladesh treaty does not provide any guarantee of Dhaka's share in the Ganga water. The water-sharing treaty between Bangladesh and India has in the meantime marked its sixth anniversary amid allegations that the flow of the Ganga water down to Bangladesh rarely picked up in the last five years as envisaged in the accord. The accord covers the dry season beginning from January 1 to May 31 every year.

Many parties including the then opposition BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami opposed the treaty signed by Indian Prime Minister Deve Gowda and Sheikh Hasina in New Delhi. But Bangladesh did not get its due share during the last five years particularly the first and the fifth years.

According to the accord, Bangladesh is supposed to receive 29,688 cusecs of water in

the last ten days of March but it was only 16,528 cusecs in 1997. However, the flow of water in 1998, 1999 and 2000 was reasonable," said an official of the state-run Water Development Board. But again in 2001, Bangladesh did not get its share from January 31 to May 10, resulting in the closure of the massive Ganga-Kobadak Irrigation Project in Bangladesh due to sharp fall in the water level of the Padma river.

The experts said the mighty Padma river has dried up and turned into a narrow canal. Meanwhile, two Indian representatives arrived in Bangladesh to watch and record the water flow of the Padma at Bheramara in Kushtia district. An estimated 40 million Bangladeshis are dependent on the Ganga water.

## PM TO DISCUSS BANGLA MINORITIES WITH KHALEDA

PRIME MINISTER Vajpayee on Thursday expressed concern over reports of atrocities on the minorities in Bangladesh, and said he would take the matter up with Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia during the Saarc summit beginning tomorrow in Kathmandu.

"The reports emanating from Bangladesh pertaining to persecution of minorities are a matter of concern. The issue will be taken up with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia," Vajpayee told a news conference in Lucknow before leaving for Kathmandu. "They (the Bangladesh Government) have initiated some action but they are not sufficient."

PTI, Lucknow

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES  
- 4 JAN 2002

## George looks into border fencing issue

*M. George Fernandes*  
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 11. — The defence minister is inquiring into reports of indiscriminate fencing along the Indo-Bangla border in North 24-Parganas district.

Mr George Fernandes, in a recent note to Mr Pankaj Banerjee, leader of the Opposition, has informed that he has instructed officials to look into whether fencing was being done in a proper manner. Mr Banerjee had expressed his concern over the issue to the defence minister, stating that indiscriminate fencing would lead to shifting of thousands of people from Bongaon, Bagda and Gaighata to Bangladesh. Following this, Mr Fernandes has informed the Opposition leaders that he is "having the matter looked into."

Fencing is supposed to be within 150 yards on both sides or what is commonly described as "no man's land." But people of Gaighata and Bongaon complain that intrusions are being made into villages for erecting fences. This could lead to displacement, the villagers fear. They urged Mr Jyotipriya Mallick, Gaighata MLA, to take action.

THE STATESMAN