

Bangladesh for stronger ties with Indonesia

By Haroon Habib

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DHAKA, JUNE 20. The visiting Indonesian President, Megawati Sukarnoputri, and the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, have reiterated their strong stand against all kinds of extremism and terrorism.

They also expressed their firm commitment to tolerance and understanding of diverse views, and stated that the two countries held similar views on regional and international issues of common concern.

The two leaders were addressing the dinner hosted in honour of the Indonesian President by Bangladesh Prime Minister here as Ms. Megawati began her three-day official visit to this country.

Ms. Khaleda Zia stressed the need for strengthening political and economic ties between the two Asian developing countries.

MoUs signed

Ms. Megawati's visit also saw signing of two MoUs and an agreement aimed at boosting trade and commerce between the two countries.

These are an agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and an MoU on Counter Trade Arrangement that will see Bangladesh enjoy free access of some items into Indonesian market.

Bangladesh has already listed 17 commodities and will propose the facility for seven items in the first phase while the remaining 10 will be included in the second phase. Another MoU on Establishment of Joint Business Council was signed between the chambers of the two countries.

Earlier, Ms. Megawati and Ms. Khaleda led their respective delegations at the formal talks. They also had brief one-to-one discussion on matters of mutual interests.

21 JUN 2003

Dhaka terms U.S. request unwarranted

By Haroon Habib

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DHAKA, MARCH 30. The Bangladesh Government has turned down a United States' request to downsize the diplomatic staff of the Iraqi embassy, and termed the request as "unwarranted" and "illegal."

"Yes, we received an informal request, but we formally told them that Bangladesh is a sovereign country and pursues an independent foreign policy. We take decision on our own considering our sovereign and national interest," the Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, told reporters.

The Minister was speaking after a meeting with the U.S. Ambassador in Dhaka, Mary Ann Peters, who was summoned to the Foreign Office on Saturday.

Washington made the request to Dhaka on the plea that some Muslim countries have cut down the number of Iraqi diplomats in their countries. "The Ambassador was called to make our position very clear that Bangladesh wants to see an immediate end to the Iraq war and unwarranted killings of civilians." "We registered our serious concern about the lingering war and the effect on the civilian population." Asked if Dhaka was taking a stand against Washington, Mr. Khan replied: "No, we are taking a stand against war... Bangladesh is always against war."

Mr. Khan was critical about the foreign media for dishing out unfounded stories about the war.

"Unfortunately, the foreign media are losing credibility," he said and hoped that they would be more careful before dissemination of reports.

Humanitarian relief

Bangladesh, meanwhile, decided to despatch foodstuff and medicine worth \$ 2 million in emergency relief supplies for the Iraqis in distress amid war. The humanitarian relief that would include medicine, tea, biscuit, saline and drinking water would be sent through the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Society or internationally recognised similar charities. Expressing solidarity with the peace-loving people of the world, Bangladeshis are staging demonstrations and rallies. Apart from stopping the war, the Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, called for launch of relief and rehabilitation and reform activities in Iraq under the U.N. leadership as per international laws and resolutions.

31 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

BDR digs in with mortars

Kinsuk Basu
Satgachi, February 5

THE BSF has found a blueprint of arms deployment by Bangladeshi forces within 150 yards of the border. The draft (a copy of which is available with *Hindustan Times*) reveals the BDR has positioned a powerful mortar for shelling near Nazringumani, the village closest to the Zero Line from Satgachi.

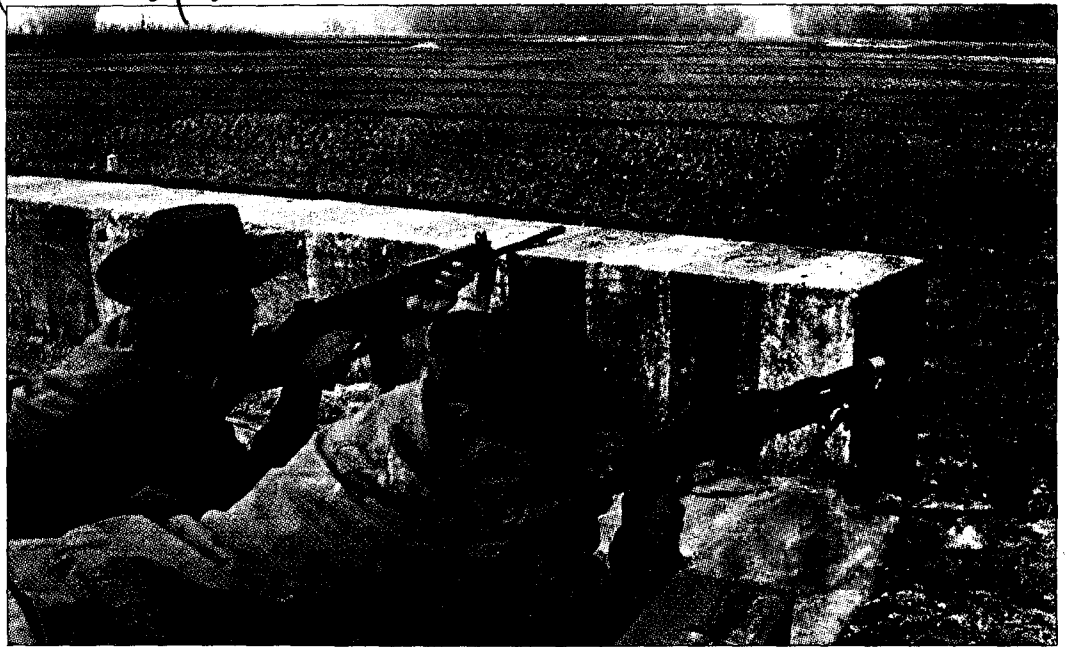
All border forces are bound by an agreement against moving heavy weaponry like mortars and heavy machine guns close to the border.

Heavily armed troops have also been positioned close to the Zero Line. All these in addition to the trenches already dug up by the BDR along the border.

The BSF top brass has shot off a letter asking the BDR to desist from any action that might incite border tension. The letter, written by DIG D.L. Choudhury, has also warned the BDR not to make provocative statements, as it did on Tuesday night, through the public address system.

Devi Adhikari said the BDR called upon local residents around 8 pm on Tuesday to gather at the border with whatever weapon they could lay their hands on. This spread panic on the Indian side, with villagers rushing to the BSF post for shelter.

"From the trail of torch light in the bamboo bushes, we could



BISWARUP BASAK/HT

ON THE EDGE: BSF jawans keep vigil at Satgachi on Wednesday.

sense an elaborate civilian build-up on the other side in response to the BDR's call to arms," said middle-aged Jatin Sarkar.

In its letter to its opposite number, the BSF made it clear it was in no mood to tolerate any disruption of peace. "We have stated that the announcement was an attempt to provoke the Indian troops to open fire. It was a blatant ploy to create a human shield," said Choudhury.

That the BDR is not game to negotiations was made clear on Wednesday morning when one of its commanders, Abdul Halim, walked up to the Zero Line carrying a letter from Rongpur Sector Commander Col Karim. In the letter, Karim expressed inability to turn up for the flag meeting scheduled on Thursday for "some other commitments". The meeting, BSF said, was a routine one, scheduled at least

10 days before the row broke out. The BSF shifted the 37-odd families from their earlier position to a few metres on the western side of the Zero Line. Technically, the stranded immigrants are now on Bangladesh soil. The cold logic: in case of any death (from any shootout), the bodies would be on the other side.

■ On Page 3: Advani takes a tough stand on illegal migrants

6 FEB 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Dhaka ignores Centre

Takes up infiltration issue with West Bengal govt

Chandan Nandy
New Delhi, February 1

IN BRAZEN diplomatic adventurism, Dhaka is understood to have raised on Friday two controversial issues plaguing relations between the two neighbouring countries with the West Bengal government, instead of the Centre.

Before leaving for Dhaka on Friday, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Manzur Morshed Khan met West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya and conveyed to him his government's displeasure over the continuing stay of some Awami League leaders and party supporters in the state.

According to senior government sources here and in Kolkata, Khan also told Bhattacharya that the Indian Intelligence agencies and the Border Security Force (BSF) were trying to "drive out" and "push" Bengali-speaking Indian Muslims into Bangladesh in the name of checking infiltration from across the border.

Khan's conclave with

Bhattacharya, officials felt, will not help improve Delhi's ties with Dhaka, which have touched its nadir since the BNP-led government of Begum Khaleda Zia came to power last year.

Khan is reported to have conveyed to the CM that

some Awami League leaders, like former Bangladesh parliamentarian Joinal Hazari and front-ranking Youth League activist Liaqat Hussein, along with several party supporters had taken shelter in West Bengal.

Describing the Awami

League activists as "shantrashi" (terrorists), Khan demanded that they be handed over to his country. Hussein, sources said, had earlier been arrested by the Kolkata police for living in the city illegally. To take advantage of the Left Front government's previous "soft" stand on illegal immigration and infiltration, Khan had said before leaving for a visit to the US a few weeks ago that both former Bengal CM Jyoti Basu and Bhattacharya had the "correct perspective".

In the late-'80s and '90s, the CPI(M)-led Left Front government would consistently downplay the seriousness of the issue of illegal immigration. Basu had gone on record saying that there were only 10,000 Bangladeshis living illegally in West Bengal. "It was a cunning move by Khan, whose objective was to drive a wedge between the Centre and the state. Otherwise, he should have discussed sensitive subjects with his counterpart (Yashwant Sinha)", a senior External Affairs Ministry official said.

BDR boycotts flag meeting

THE BANGALDESH Rifles on Saturday refused to turn up for a flag meeting to discuss the fate of 213 people "forced in" and stranded on the zero-line for the last 48 hours.

While India has labelled the 40-odd families as "intruders," Dhaka claims Delhi was trying to "push back" the group for political mileage.

The BSF in North Bengal has sent an SOS to both the Home and External Affairs ministries seeking intervention at a national level to resolve the crisis. The BDR has

threatened a shootout if the deadlock persisted.

Late on Thursday night, a gang of 213 people comprising 68 males, 65 females and 80 children were pushed into India through the porous Sargachi border. The family, comprising snake charmers, are residents of Purbapara under Sabor PS, near Dhaka. BSF sources say they had strayed into Panchgram and Lalmunirhaat to collect snakes. They were held by the police, beaten up and handed over to the BDR.

HTC, Kolkata

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