

Pipeline to bypass Bangladesh

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, May 16: With Dhaka putting pre-conditions for allowing passage of a gas pipeline for import of gas from Myanmar, India plans to bypass Bangladesh altogether and instead lay a line through the north-eastern states.

"No progress has been achieved (in getting Dhaka's nod for the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India pipeline) as Bangladesh wants the inclusion of certain bilateral issues in the trilateral MoU, which is not acceptable to India," minister of state for petroleum and natural gas, Mr Dinsha Patel said today. Dhaka, among other things, is demanding correction of the trade balance between India and Bangladesh.

"In view of the above, India is pursuing the option of a gas pipeline from Myanmar through the north-eastern states of India bypassing Bangladesh," he said in a written reply to a question in Rajya Sabha here.

Recently, state-run gas utility GAIL got a feasibility report of the project prepared, he said, adding that discussions with Myanmar are progressing. India wants to import the gas found in offshore A-1 block and potential volumes in block A-3. (ONGC Videsh Ltd and Gail together hold 30 per cent stake in the two blocks) through an inland pipeline.

On Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline, Mr Patel said second secretary-level trilateral meeting was scheduled to be held on 22-24 May at

Islamabad. "Various project related issues including those relating to the project structure, framework agreement and pricing are being discussed in these meetings," he added.

Mr Patel said that the steering committee of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) pipeline has invited India to become a partner in the project.

"The steering committee has invited India to become an official member of the project. The matter is under examination," he said.

An Indian delegation led by the minister of state for petroleum and natural gas visited Ashgabat in Turkmenistan on 14-15 February to participate in the ninth steering committee meeting of TAP project as an observer.

IMPORTING GAS FROM MYANMAR



India plans to import gas from Myanmar by laying a pipeline through the north-eastern states, instead of Bangladesh, as the latter wants the inclusion of certain bilateral issues in the trilateral MoU, which is not acceptable to India. — Dinsha Patel

With trust, our ties will improve: Hasina

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, JUNE 25

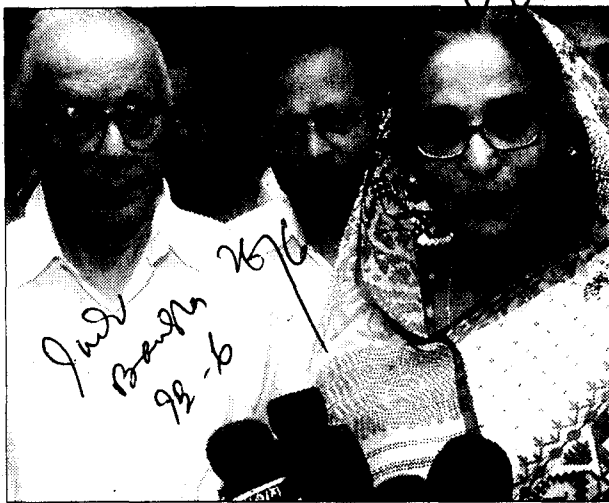
WRAPPING up her five-day visit to India, former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today called for cementing trust and friendship between the two nations to strengthen bilateral relations clouded by differences on a host of issues.

"If there is mutual trust and friendship, bilateral relations are bound to improve," she said here. In this context, she cited the successful conclusion of the 30-year Ganga Water Sharing Treaty signed during her tenure as PM.

To a question if her Awami League would stress strengthening of relations with India if the party were voted back to power next year, she said, "the Awami League will give importance to better relations with all neighbouring countries as it is our party's principle." Supporting this, she said the Ganga pact was signed without any third party intervention.

On India's concerns over the presence of camps of Indian insurgent groups in Bangladesh, Hasina said, "terrorism is a global phenomenon and Bangladesh is no exception. Terrorism is there in Bangladesh," she said, adding that she had been the target of a terrorist attack in August, 2005.

Hasina, who earlier held talks with top Indian leaders including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Congress president Sonia Gandhi and CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechuri, today had a 40-minute meeting with former West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, during which a



The former Bangladesh PM with Jyoti Basu on Sunday. PTI

Mother Teresa award for Hasina

► KOLKATA: Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed was given the Mother Teresa International and Millennium Award, 2005 at a function here.

The award, instituted by the All India Minority and Weaker Council, was given to the Awami League chief for "lifetime achievement" in governance, politics and social work. Receiving the award, Hasina said she felt honoured at being conferred an award named after Mother Teresa.

"I think human values should be viewed from a greater perspective. I welcome the initiative taken by the organisers who brought this honour for me," she said.

Hasina, who arrived here today from Delhi on her way to Dhaka, said she held courtesy meetings with Indian leaders and visited Ajmer during her brief visit.

— PTI

gamut of bilateral issues came up for discussion.

Basu expressed concern over the grenade attack on Hasina in Dhaka last year and said, "It was a worrisome incident." The veteran Marxist also recalled his association with Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and called for better relations between India and Bangladesh.

"I recounted my association with late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the architect of modern Bangladesh, and his role in liberating the coun-

try," Basu said.

Hasina, in turn, appreciated the role played by Basu in concluding the Ganga treaty.

"I acknowledge with gratitude Jyoti Basu's contribution to finalising the India-bangladesh water-sharing treaty during my tenure as Prime Minister," she told reporters outside Basu's residence.

Hasina said her party would wrest power in next year's polls "only if the election is held in a free and fair manner".

BSE, BDR exchange 7,500 rounds of fire

Statesman News Service

GEDE BORDER (Nadia), June 10: In the worst confrontation on the India-Bangladesh frontier in recent months, border forces of the two countries exchanged thousands of rounds of automated rifle gun fire last night for over four hours at the Gede border in Nadia. This triggered tension in the area.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) opened unprovoked fire and exploded mortar near the Gede border outpost in Nadia at around 7 p.m. yesterday. Earlier, the patrolling jawans of Border Security Force (BSF) had shot down a notorious Bangladeshi criminal. The Bangladeshi man who was later identified as Yusuf Ali Nadan (34) was trying to smuggle narcotics from India to Bangladesh after cutting off barbed wires on the Indian side.

BSF personnel retaliated against the BDR action by firing shells. Subsequently, the two forces exchanged fire twice before 11 p.m., they said. Around 7,500 rounds were fired. There was no report of any casualty. Although firing has stopped, tension prevails in the villages near the Gede border. BSF Inspector General (South Bengal) Mr Somesh Goyal reached the Gede border this morning and visited the spot. He said: "The whole incident was unwarranted. The unprovoked and indiscriminate firing by the BDR yesterday forced our boys to answer. The BDR fired 6000 rounds while our boys fired 1500 rounds. It is mysterious that we are trying to combat cross-border



BSF and police officers look at the body of the Bangladeshi smuggler. At Gede Border on Saturday. The Statesman

der crime along the India-Bangladesh border while Bangladesh Rifles often fire at our boys. Following the incident, we tried to arrange a flag-meeting this afternoon to settle the matter because this was the third time that the BDR had opened fire at us when our

boys tried to nab a criminal involved in smuggling narcotic drugs and fencydils. Earlier, the BDR had opened unprovoked fire on the BSF at Rangiarpota and Mohakhola border outposts."

The BSF Deputy Inspector General (Seem-

anagar) Mr S Ramaswami and other high-ranking BSF officials including the Nadia district magistrate Mr Rajesh Pandey and the SP, Nadia, MR Rajasekaran visited the spot with Mr Goyal. When he was asked about the allegations of backing given by the BDR

to criminals to continue cross-border crimes, Mr Goyal declined comment. Just a few days ago, a DM-DC level meeting was held at Kustia in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh administration agreed that it would collaborate with India in tackling cross-border

crimes. Both countries have submitted lists of criminals to each other but yesterday's incident may have sent the wrong signal to the people of both countries about the utility of these bipartite meetings. Villagers have been asked not to panic, the BSF officials said.

THE STATESMAN

1 1 JUN 2006

SPECIAL SCHEME FOR BANGLA TO GO

MEA relook at passport

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Manash Ghosh

KOLKATA, June 12: The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has decided to abolish the special India-Bangladesh passport before the year is out. This will be conveyed by senior ministry officials to their Bangladeshi counterparts when they meet in Dhaka on Saturday to discuss renewal of bilateral agreements on travel documents. Delhi also wants Dhaka to discontinue its special passport scheme that's availed by Bangla nationals to visit India.

Although Delhi says that the main reason for abolishing the 34-year-old special passport scheme is that "it has outlived its purpose and utility", senior ministry officials say that "national security concerns have forced the decision". According to them, the special passport scheme - a product of the 1972 Indira-Mujib agreement, is being "thoroughly misused" by smugglers, women and child traffickers and lately by members of international terrorist gangs and Islamic fundamentalist groups. For instance, an Indian residing in Basirhat who had helped terrorists hijack the IA Airbus to Kandahar in 1999, had used the special passport to make several trips to Bangladesh to coordinate strategy with



Security concerns have forced the decision, although officials say that the scheme has outlived its purpose and utility

the hijackers then planning their mission in Dhaka.

Delhi is worried that the "total absence of any security feature" has made these special passports vulnerable to misuse; the travel documents do not meet any international security norms. The special passports are, for example,

devoid of any lamination facility and this makes them highly vulnerable to misuse. There are numerous instances of the original owner of the passport selling this vital travel document to the highest bidder. The new owner replaces the photograph of the original owner with his own which seldom gets detected. Since the local district authorities of the five border states - West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura - are the issuing authorities for the special passports, security checks are extremely lax.

All this has made Delhi decide to abolish the special passport scheme whose original purpose was to help the divided families living in districts on either sides of the border to visit each other with ease. To facilitate travel, district authorities were empowered to issue the travel documents. Now that all the states on the Indian side have their regional passport offices, Delhi is insisting that the special passport scheme be scrapped at the earliest. Interestingly, while chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is all for abolishing the special passport "in the interest of national security", another Marxist chief minister, Mr Manik Sarkar of Tripura, is against the move.

13 JUN 2006

THE STATESMAN

Chambers outline blueprint for India, Bangla ties

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Task forces make recommendations on six areas

Haroon Habib

DHAKA: Business leaders from Bangladesh and India have agreed to push their respective governments to start containerised movement of cargo through road, rail and inland waterways to facilitate bilateral trade and investment. They also want the Dhaka-Kolkata passenger train service to start at an early date.

The agreement was reached at the first meeting of six task forces for promotion of India-Bangladesh trade and investment held here on Sunday.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) President, Mir Nasir Hossain, who led the Bangladesh side, told the media that "We have agreed only on the modes of transportation which can facilitate trade and investment."

The meeting formulated a charter of recommendations on six areas of cooperation for consideration by the respective governments, particularly by a commerce minister-level meeting scheduled to be held in Kolkata on June 20.

Joint statement

B. K. Bajoria of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Mir Nasir of FBCCI signed a joint statement on the recommendations.

Indian delegation leader Mr. Bajoria hoped that "bilateral trade will double in just one year if 30-40 per cent of the recommendations are implemented."

The task forces were formed under a memorandum of under-

• Ministerial level meeting in Kolkata on June 20

• Boost to Indian investment in Bangladesh

standing (MoU) signed between the FBCCI and FICCI on March 21 in New Delhi during Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to India. They relate to bilateral trade, raising Indian investments in Bangladesh, trade related infrastructure, removal of trade disputes, NTBs and activating programme of Bangladesh-Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"It is an icebreaking event to start a new era in a structured way," Mir Nasir said, referring to the outcome of the meeting. Mr. Bajoria said the recommendations would act as a platform and definitely help increase bilateral trade and investment.

According to the joint statement, the task force on bilateral trade agreed on a FBCCI proposal to allow duty-free access of 16 Bangladeshi items to India. The items are fish and fish products, edible oil, automotive battery, ceramic products, cosmetics and toiletries, electrical copper wire, jute and jute products, melamine, leather and leather products, pharmaceuticals and footwear.

The task force on raising Indian investments in Bangladesh recommended finalisation of the Investment Protection and Promotion Treaty, single window clearance for new investment proposals in Bangladesh, setting up of industrial parks for Indian

investments in Bangladesh and rationalisation of tax holidays. The task force on infrastructure suggested that the bilateral transport agreement should be reached by the two countries to facilitate the movement of vehicles for carrying goods and passengers. It also recommended infrastructure facilities in terms of warehousing, cargo handling equipment, parking, customs and immigration facilities, weigh bridges and improvement of telephone connectivity at land customs stations (LCS) on both sides of the border.

Inland water transport

It said the Petrapole-Benapole Land Customs Stations should work 24 hours and seven days a week. New LCS' might be opened up between Bangladesh and neighbouring Northeast Indian States. At present, there is no LCS in operation between Mizoram and Bangladesh. The Protocol on inland water transport (IWT) will be extended for a longer period and a joint study by India and Bangladesh to look into the potentials of improving IWT.

The task force on trade disputes recommended the formation of a panel consisting of three members from each country for resolution of trade disputes with various mechanisms. It also recommended mutual recognition of accreditation agencies, making Northeast Indian banks capable of transacting business directly with Bangladeshi banks and recognising the FBCCI and FICCI to be the nodal points for resolving the NTBs.

MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2006

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A useful dialogue

The visit of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh to India was important for several reasons. This was the first visit by a Bangladesh head of government to New Delhi in nine years. It gave both sides an opportunity to address, at a political level, the several issues that trouble their relations. Although Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Zia in Dhaka in November 2005 on the sidelines of the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation, this was the first focussed discussion of issues of mutual concern. Since 2001, when a coalition led by Prime Minister Zia's Bangladesh National Party came to power, relations between India and her eastern neighbour have been dogged by mistrust. Dhaka's perception clearly was that India preferred to do business with the Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina. It did not help that India-Bangladesh trade was heavily weighted against the smaller country. Dhaka was unhappy over New Delhi's reluctance to give its exports duty free access. Further, given that it has to share the waters of many rivers with its big neighbour, the lower riparian state seemed jittery about Indian plans for interlinking rivers. India, for its part, has been concerned over illegal immigration across the porous border and militant groups from the Northeast finding sanctuary in Bangladesh with the connivance of elements in its army and intelligence apparatus. Recently, possible linkages between *jihadi* groups operating in the two countries have begun to worry Indian security agencies.

The Khaleda visit has not led to a breakthrough but there are indications of progress. A revised version of the 1980 trade agreement acknowledges the importance of expanding trade. The two neighbours have agreed to make "mutually beneficial arrangements...[for the] passage of goods between places in one country through the territory of the other." Does this mean Dhaka will now make available a land route to connect West Bengal to the States of the Northeast, which it has so far refused to do? The two sides have also agreed to tackle terrorism "jointly," although it is not clear if this means joint operations on the India-Bangladesh border. The recent arrest of two leaders of the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, who allegedly masterminded several terror strikes in Bangladesh, has helped Dhaka send out the message that it takes the threat of Islamist extremism seriously. The visit has shown that undoing years of neglect in bilateral ties is not going to be easy. The key to this may lie in addressing the imbalance in economic ties; this hinges on the willingness of the bigger and more developed neighbour to take generous and constructive steps. With general elections in Bangladesh likely by year-end and a regime change quite conceivable, India will watch its neighbour's volatile political situation with keen interest and be prepared for either outcome.

A talk with the Begum

The two sides agree to disagree

Begum Khaleida Zia's visit to India has been a resounding non-event that can readily be relegated to the footnotes in any monograph on South Asian studies. The host country's diplomatic niceties went hand in hand with Dhaka's sanctimonious cant on the contentious issues. Not many flunkys in any visiting delegation could be as brazen, even direly arrogant, as the Bangladesh finance minister, Saifur Rahman, who declared that his country doesn't believe in terrorism. And if that in his reckoning is an "erroneous impression" impeding relations, so be it. That could be the most charitable construction upon Mr Rahman's chutzpah which can in large measure be explained by India's conduct of the visit. Similarly, Bangladesh displayed a gung-ho assertiveness that was all too clear when the Begum went beyond the tittle-tattle at the banquet to shoot down the proposal on river-linking. The MEA's curtain-raiser that came with an assurance on "tough talk" has been reduced to so much waffle.

That posturing would have been relevant if India had the nerve to echo the BSF chief's assessment and tell Bangladesh to its face that it poses a more insidious danger than Pakistan. Alas, it doesn't. As much is plain from its failure to raise, far less thrash out, the persistent irritants, notably illegal migration, the border fence and the trans-border movement of terrorists in the north-east. These are matters that have acted as a double whammy for India. Not that relations alone have been soured; no less disastrous has been the impact on internal governance and electoral politics in the border states. With the core issues virtually untouched, the agreements cover such peripherals as a rail route — the bus is off the bay all too often — trade and drugs. The pledge to find mutually satisfactory solutions is at best a saccharine statement of intent. Indeed, the BSF-BDR gunbattle in North Dinajpur, intriguingly coinciding with the conclusion of the visit, willy-nilly symbolises the volatile state of equations. For India, the occasion must rank as another instance of wasted opportunity. More's the pity that Dr Manmohan Singh couldn't go beyond conveying a goodwill message that a strong Bangladesh was in India's interest. Not to put too fine a point on it, that hope was dashed not long after the heady days of 1971-72.

27 MAR 2006

THE STATESMAN

Khaleda talks peace, but BDR up in arms

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi/Kolkata: Even as Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is radiating friendship in India, her armed force along the border — Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) — opened fire on Wednesday in North Dinajpur, leading to a fierce exchange with the BSF.

The BDR's action has obviously embarrassed Khaleda who arrived here on India's invitation to talk, among other things, the twin issues of illegal migration and terrorism emanating from Bangladesh's soil.

Wednesday's firing incident, in which BSF and BDR fired 700-800 rounds from ri-



Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at a business meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday

fles and machine-guns at each other, is a reminder of the fact that forces like the BDR have virtually become a rouge organisation with

an agenda that's often at variance with that of Khaleda Zia.

BSF (North Bengal Frontier) inspector-general S K Tiwari said BDR opened fire after his force protested against the construction of an embankment on the Korotoa river, which runs as a natural boundary between the two countries.

Though there were no casualties on the Indian side, there is considerable tension in the area after the firing. This is the third incident of the cross-border firing along this particular stretch of the border in the last few months.

In the past also, the BDR has proved to be trigger-

happy. Its personnel, for instance, had killed 16 BSF jawans at Pyrdiwah village in April 2001, which had led to a diplomatic spat between the two countries.

India took up these security concerns with Bangladesh during the delegation-level talks on Tuesday after the meeting of the two PMs.

But casting aside ill-will for the moment, the two sides signed a joint statement, agreeing to hold more frequently meetings of bilateral institutional mechanisms — the home secretary-level talks, joint boundary working groups, the joint rivers commission and joint economic commission.

Khaleda welcomes Indian investment

Expresses concern over mounting trade imbalance

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: "We welcome foreign investment, particularly from our friendly neighbour, India," Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said at a business meeting here, her last engagement before leaving for home on Wednesday night.

Describing Bangladesh as a "significant" investment destination, the Prime Minister said: "We welcome our friends abroad, particularly those from India, to take full advantage of Bangladesh's favourable investment friendly regime and the various incentive packages that are in place."

Though a small country in terms of area, Bangladesh had a population of over 140 million

and a sustained, annual average growth rate of over five per cent over the last two decades or so.

Begum Zia did not shy away from saying that the "ever-growing" trade gap between Bangladesh and India was a matter of considerable concern to Dhaka.

"It is a matter of concern not because India stands to be the gainer. Certainly we cannot and we do not see it that way. Nevertheless, we are concerned because such a situation is hardly sustainable. We would, therefore, urge our friends in India to facilitate preferential duty-free access of Bangladeshi export to India.

"We also look forward to the dismantling of various non-tariff barriers. The traders in Bangladesh would particularly

appreciate an improvement in land port facilities on the Indian side of the border," the Prime Minister stated.

In turn, she said, her Government would "examine" the possibility of greater "trade creating" Indian investment in Bangladesh within the framework of the existing investment regime.

"Bangladesh has a very open mind about strategic business partnership between the traders and investors of the two countries. My Government is keen to support such partnership in key areas, so that investment in specific manufacturing sectors may meet domestic consumption as well as export to SAARC countries, especially India and abroad," Begum Zia added.

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23 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

Kamal Nath for separate FTA with Bangladesh

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Suggests MoU on standards between designated institutions

Amit Baruah

quoting Baruah
NEW DELHI: India is for a South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) "plus" (a separate) free trade arrangement with Bangladesh that would address the existing trade imbalance between the two countries, Commerce Minister Kamal Nath said on Wednesday.

Addressing Indian and Bangladeshi businesspersons, Mr. Nath said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had given clear guidelines that all non-tariff barriers to trade should be removed. "Non-tariff barriers are there not by design, but by default," he said.

The Commerce Minister suggested in the presence of the Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, that a memorandum of understanding be reached on the overall issue of standards between designated institutions of the two countries, so that all non-tariff barriers could be eliminated.

Call for 'political impetus'

On the issue of lopsided trade between the two countries, Mr. Nath pointed out that Bangladeshi exports to India had grown by a massive 68 per cent in 2004-05, but the trade imbalance still remained.

Stressing that Dhaka and New Delhi needed to look at their basic trade basket, the Commerce Minister stated that with the operationalisation of SAFTA and India's initiative to address mar-



BOOSTING TRADE TIES: The Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Kamal Nath (centre), with the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia (right) and the Chairman, CII National Committee on Steel, B. Muthuraman at a luncheon meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PHOTO: SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

ket access issues of Bangladesh's textile and garment sector, there would be a "substantial increase" in exports to India.

Calling for greater "political impetus" to existing economic mechanisms, he pointed out that the Joint Economic Commission between the two sides had not met for the last three years. "We need to give more political impetus to these groups," he said.

"We must develop a roadmap to address issues which are hin-

dering the growth of trade between our two countries ... a clear priority is the improvement of infrastructure at various land customs stations, operationalisation of fresh land customs stations, simplification of customs procedures and improvement of [the banking] system." While suggesting a bilateral FTA with Bangladesh, Mr. Nath cited the success of the India-Sri Lanka FTA. Pointing out that Sri Lankan exports to India in 2001 were barely \$45

million, the Commerce Minister said this was less than those for Bangladesh in the same year.

"By 2004, Sri Lankan exports to India had grown to \$200 million. The balance of trade, which favoured India 15:1 when the FTA was signed, has come down to 4:1 at present. India has emerged as Sri Lanka's third largest investor ... in the light of this experience ... the proposal for a India-Bangladesh FTA should gather momentum," he added.

23 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

Dhaka, Delhi to work closely on security, trade

Handwritten notes: "Khaleda Zia" and "10/1/06"

"Khaleda Zia's visit helped consolidate ties between two countries"

Amit Baruah

the "already close and friendly relations" between the two countries.

NEW DELHI: India and Bangladesh have agreed to work closely to find "mutually satisfactory solutions" to issues relating to security, trade and river water sharing.

A joint release said on Wednesday that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit had contributed to further consolidation of

as they are on shared history and culture and wide-ranging people-to-people relations."

Begum Khaleda's visit had provided both nations an opportunity to sustain their high-level political dialogue. "The visit is a testimony to the highest priority attached by both countries to the promotion of their bilateral relations in all aspects."

It was agreed that meetings of

the Joint Economic Commission, Joint Boundary Working Groups, Joint Rivers Commission and the Home Secretaries would be more frequent to ensure a movement in a positive direction and their outcome monitored by the political leadership on a "continuous basis".

Invitation to Mannohan

Begum Khaleda invited Dr.

Singh to visit Bangladesh.

"The invitation was accepted by the Indian Prime Minister with pleasure and precise dates would be worked out through diplomatic channels," the statement said.

See also Page 17

BANGLADESH TALKS | Ties can't improve so long as 'erroneous impression' remains

We don't harbour terror: Rahman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 22

INSISTING that it did not harbour terrorists, Bangladesh said today that ties with India could not improve so long as this remained the country's impression.

"This is an erroneous impression. As long as this erroneous impression remains, relations between India and Bangladesh cannot improve", Bangladesh Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman told reporters here on the last day of a three-day visit by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

He said Bangladesh was "shocked to hear reports in yesterday's meeting (with the Indian delegation) that some of its nationals were involved in terror attacks in Benares and other places."

"Bangladesh does not believe in terrorism. Terrorists are nobody's friends. There should be no terrorism in the name of religion," Rahman said.

Answering a question about illegal migration from his country to India, he

claimed, "The economic situation in Bangladesh in some areas is much better than in India. We have dealt with terrorism much more effectively."

Rahman pointed to the recent arrests of Jamat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh chief Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai militant group head Siddiqui Islam to drive home his point.

Regarding India's proposal for a bilateral FTA, he said that the businessmen of both countries have been asked for a list of goods to be put on the list of goods to be traded under it and once that was completed, "we will study the proposal".

Rahman said Bangladesh wanted access to a trade corridor through India to transport its exports to Nepal and Bhutan.

Asked about the fate of Tata group's proposed \$2.5 billion dollar investment in steel, power and fertiliser plants in Bangladesh, he said his government was considering it seriously as there were a number of issues to be sorted out.



Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, on the third and last day of her India visit, in New Delhi on Wednesday. PTI

সন্ত্রাসে মদত প্রশ্নে নরম বাংলাদেশ

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ২২ মার্চ: ভারতের চাপের মুখে সন্ত্রাসের প্রশ্নে অনেকটাই নরম হল বাংলাদেশ। সন্ত্রাসবাদ এবং জাতীয় নিরাপত্তার বিষয়ে নয়াদিল্লির সঙ্গে হাত মিলিয়ে কাজ করতে অবশেষে রাজি হয়েছে ঢাকা। দীর্ঘ সাত বছর পরে এই প্রথম বাংলাদেশের কোনও প্রধানমন্ত্রী ভারতে এলেন। এবং বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার এ বারের সফরে সন্ত্রাসবাদ প্রশ্নে যে অগ্রগতি হয়েছে, তাতে ভারত স্বাভাবিক কারণেই আশাবাদী।

দিল্লির পক্ষ থেকে ঢাকাকে স্পষ্ট জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে, বাংলাদেশের মাটিতে ভারত-বিরোধী জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপ বন্ধে ব্যবস্থা না-নেওয়া হলে বাণিজ্যিক ক্ষেত্রে সহযোগিতা সম্ভব নয়। খালেদার সঙ্গে সফররত বাংলাদেশের অর্থমন্ত্রী সইফুর রহমান অবশ্য আজ বলেছেন, সে দেশে ভারত-বিরোধী জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপে তাঁদের সরকার মদত দিচ্ছে, এ ধারণা ভ্রান্ত। তাঁর মতে, এই 'ভ্রান্ত ধারণা' যত দিন থাকবে, তত দিন ভারত-বাংলাদেশ সম্পর্ক উন্নততর হবে না। তাঁর কথায়, "বাংলাদেশ সন্ত্রাসবাদে বিশ্বাস করে না। জঙ্গিরা কারও বন্ধু নয়। ধর্মের নামে সন্ত্রাসবাদী কার্যক্রম হওয়াও উচিত নয়।"

বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার তিন

দিনের ভারত সফর শেষ হল আজই। সেই উপলক্ষে প্রকাশিত এক যৌথ বিবৃতিতে বলা হয়েছে, "নিরাপত্তা, বাণিজ্য বা জলবন্দন, যে কোনও দ্বিপাক্ষিক বিষয়ে এক সঙ্গী কাজ করবে ভারত ও বাংলাদেশ।" প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহকে বাংলাদেশে যাওয়ার আমন্ত্রণও জানিয়েছেন খালেদা। প্রধানমন্ত্রী সেই আমন্ত্রণ গ্রহণ করেছেন। তবে শুধু রাজনৈতিক শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বের বৈঠক নয়, দু'দেশের স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিবদের মধ্যে ঘন ঘন আলোচনা করার বিষয়েও একমত দু'পক্ষ। তা ছাড়া, ভারত-বাংলাদেশ সীমান্ত সংক্রান্ত যৌথ ওয়ার্কিং গ্রুপ, যৌথ অর্থনৈতিক কমিশন, যৌথ নদী কমিশনের মতো দ্বিপাক্ষিক পর্যায়ে আরও বেশি আলোচনার উপরেও জোর দেওয়া হচ্ছে। সাফটা প্রসঙ্গেও দু'দেশের মধ্যে কথা হয়েছে।

তবে নানা স্তরে আলাপ-আলোচনার সময় বাংলাদেশকে যে চাপের মধ্যে থাকতে হয়েছে, গত কাল হায়দরাবাদ হাউসে নৈশভোজের সময়ের একটি ঘটনা থেকেই তা স্পষ্ট। সেখানে নানা কথাবার্তার মাঝখানে সিপিএম সাংসদ মহম্মদ সেলিম ভারত-বিরোধী জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপে বাংলাদেশ সরকারের মদতের প্রসঙ্গ তোলেন। বাংলাদেশ প্রতিনিধিদলের এক সদস্য সেই অভিযোগ অস্বীকার করলে পাশেই বসে থাকা মিজোরামের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীকে দেখিয়ে সেলিম বলেন, উনি তো বাংলাদেশে দীর্ঘদিন ছিলেন। সেলিমের বক্তব্য সমর্থন করে মিজোরামের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তখন জানান, পালিয়ে বেড়ানোর সময় তিনি বাংলাদেশে যে আশ্রয় এবং আতিথেয়তা পেয়েছিলেন, তা তাঁর এখনও মনে আছে। এই ঘটনার উল্লেখ করে সেলিম আজ বলেন, "আমরা বাংলাদেশের বিপক্ষে নই। কিন্তু সে দেশের জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপের সমালোচনা করছি।"

ভারত ও বাংলাদেশের মধ্যে এ বারে মোট দু'টি চুক্তি হয়েছে। এর মধ্যে একটি দ্বিপাক্ষিক বাণিজ্য এবং অন্যটি মাদক চোরালান রোধ সংক্রান্ত। বাণিজ্য সংক্রান্ত চুক্তিতে বলা হয়েছে, দু'দেশের মধ্যে ক্রমবর্ধমান বাণিজ্য ঘাটতি মোকাবেলার জন্যে দ্বিপাক্ষিক বাণিজ্যের পরিমাণ আরও

এর পর আটের পাতায়

বাঁধ নির্মাণ ঘিরে গুলি বিডিআরের

মেহেদি হেদায়েতুল্লা • চোপড়া

রাতের অন্ধকারে 'নো-ম্যান্সল্যান্ডে' বাংলাদেশের তরফে বাঁধ নির্মাণের চেষ্টাকে কেন্দ্র করে বিএসএফ-বিডিআরের মধ্যে কয়েক দফায় রাতভর গুলির লড়াই হল উত্তর দিনাজপুরে। আগে থেকে খবর না-দিয়ে বিতর্কিত বাঁধে নির্মাণের কাজ শুরু করায় আপত্তি জানায় বিএসএফ। তখনই বিডিআর বিনা প্ররোচনায় গুলি চালায়। জবাব দেয় বিএসএফ।

ঘটনাস্থল চোপড়া থানার গোয়ালগছ সীমান্তে করতোয়া নদীর তীর। সময় মঙ্গলবার মাঝরাতে। বিএসএফ-বিডিআরের এই সংঘর্ষে সব মিলিয়ে প্রায় ৫০০ রাউন্ড গুলি চলেছে। ওই এলাকা ও লাগোয়া ৫টি গ্রামের বাসিন্দারা নিরাপদ আশ্রয়ে সরে গিয়েছেন। বুধবার সন্ধ্যায় কমান্ডার স্তরে ফ্ল্যাগ মিটিংয়ের পরে পরিস্থিতি কিছুটা স্বাভাবিক হয়। বিএসএফ সূত্রে দাবি, ফ্ল্যাগ মিটিংয়ে বিডিআরের তরফে দুঃখপ্রকাশ করা হয়েছে। বিডিআর জানিয়েছে, এক সময়ে ওই এলাকায় বাঁধ নির্মাণের দায়িত্বে থাকা বেসরকারি সংস্থা তাদের না-জানিয়ে রাতে বোল্ডার ফেলায় গণগোল হয়েছিল।

নির্মাণ নিয়ে জটিলতার নিষ্পত্তি না-হওয়া পর্যন্ত বাঁধ তৈরির চেষ্টা হবে না বলে বিডিআর জানিয়ে দিয়েছে। আজ, বৃহস্পতিবার ফের উচ্চ পর্যায়ের ফ্ল্যাগ মিটিং হওয়ার কথা।

বিএসএফের ওই এলাকার দায়িত্বপ্রাপ্ত ৩২ নম্বর ব্যাটেলিয়নের কমান্ডার আর সি চৌহান বলেন, "পরিস্থিতি কিছুটা ধমধমে থাকলেও পুরোপুরি নিয়ন্ত্রণে রয়েছে। বাসিন্দাদের দুশ্চিন্তার কিছু নেই।" ওই ঘটনার খবর পেয়েই ইসলামপুর মহকুমা প্রশাসনের পক্ষ থেকে বাসিন্দাদের অবস্থা সম্পর্কে খোঁজখবর নিতে বিডিও-কে দায়িত্ব দেওয়া হয়েছে। ইসলামপুরের মহকুমাশাসক গোপাল ঘোষ বলেন, "সি ডি ও-কে সব খোঁজখবর নিয়ে রিপোর্ট দিতে বলেছি।" কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল জানান, পুরো বিষয়টি নিয়ে বিএসএফের ডিজি-কে অবিলম্বে রিপোর্ট দিতে বলা হয়েছে। তবে ঘটনায় বিএসএফের কোনও দায় নেই বলে পাটিল স্পষ্ট জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন।

বিএসএফ সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, কন্নড়ার ধারে ওই এলাকায় বিডিআর বহু দিন ধরেই একটি বাঁধ তৈরির চেষ্টা করছে। মাসখানেক আগে বিএসএফের আপত্তি সত্ত্বেও জবরদস্তি বাঁধের কাজ শুরু করলে পরিস্থিতি অগ্নিগর্ভ হয়ে ওঠে। সেই সময়ে দু'পক্ষের মধ্যে গুলির লড়াই হয়। বিএসএফের তরফে আলোচনার প্রস্তাব দেওয়া হলেও বিডিআর আগ্রহ দেখায়নি। তবে চাপে পড়ে বাঁধের কাজ বন্ধ করে দিতে বাধ্য হয় তারা।

মঙ্গলবার রাতে বিএসএফ জওয়ানেরা পাহারার সময়ে সীমান্তের ও-পারে বাংলাদেশের মিরগড় ক্যাম্পের দিক থেকে ট্রাক আসতে দেখেন। কিছু ক্ষণের মধ্যেই নদীর ধারে বোল্ডার ফেলার শব্দ শোনা যায়। বিএসএফের পদস্থ অফিসারেরাও ঘটনাটি শুনে তা প্রতিরোধের নির্দেশ দেন। বিএসএফের তরফে আপত্তি জানানো হলে বিডিআর গুলি চালানো শুরু করে। পাল্টা গুলি ছোড়ে বিএসএফ-ও।

মধ্যরাতে মুহূর্তে গুলির শব্দে আতঙ্ক ছড়িয়ে পড়ে ওই এলাকার গ্রামগুলিতে। গোয়ালগছ গ্রামের বাসিন্দা

এর পর আটের পাতায়

গুলি বিডিআরের

প্রথম পাতার পর

মজহেরুল ইসলামি বলেন, "হঠাৎ গুলির শব্দে হুঁশি ভেঙে গেল। কী হয়েছে, বোল্ডার জন্য আশেপাশের কয়েক জন জওয়ানকে জিজ্ঞাসা করলাম। ওঁরা আমাদের এলাকা থেকে দূরে চলে যেতে বললেন। তখনই সপরিবার ছুটে পালিয়েছি। কিছু ক্ষণের মধ্যেই সীমান্তের রাস্তায় চলাচলেও নিবেদাজা জারি হল। খুব ভয়ে আছি।"

অন্য দিকে, মঙ্গলবার গভীর রাতে সুতি থানার হাসানপুরে পজার চরে গরু পাচার করার সময়ে সীমান্তরক্ষীরা এক বাংলাদেশি যুবককে গুলি করে মারে। পুলিশ জানায়, রাতে দু'টি গরু নিয়ে হাসানপুর থেকে গঙ্গা পেরিয়ে চর বরাবর সীমান্তের দিকে হট্টছিলেন জনাকয়েক যুবক। সেই সময় ছবিঘাটি ১০-নম্বর টাওয়ারের জওয়ানেরা তাঁদের ধামতে বলেন। ভয় পেয়ে ওই যুবকেরা বাংলাদেশ সীমান্তের দিকে ছুটেতে শুরু করেন। বিএসএফ জওয়ানেরা গুলি ছুড়লে ঘটনাস্থলেই মৃত্যু হয় এক জনের। বুধবার রাত পর্যন্ত তাঁর পরিচয় জানা যায়নি। বিএসএফ-এর চাঁদনিক বর্ডার আউট-পোস্টের ১০৮ নম্বর ব্যাটেলিয়নের কোম্পানি ইনচার্জ এস কে রশ্মিঙ্গী ঘটনার কথা স্বীকার করলেও কোনও মন্তব্য করতে চাননি। গ্রামবাসীরা জানিয়েছেন, নিহত যুবকের নাম সইদুল শেখ। বাংলাদেশের নবাবগঞ্জ জেলার শিবগঞ্জ থানা এলাকার বিশরশিয়া গ্রামে তার বাড়ি। স্থানীয় পঞ্চায়েত সমিতির সদস্য কংগ্রেসের শেখ নিজামুদ্দিন বলেন, "খবর পেয়ে আমিও ঘটনাস্থলে গিয়েছিলাম। খোঁজ নিয়ে জানতে পারা গিয়েছে, ওই যুবকের নাম সইদুল।"

সন্ত্রাসে মদত প্রশ্নে নরম বাংলাদেশ

আলোচনা হয়েছে। মাদক চোরালান রোধ সংক্রান্ত চুক্তিতে বলা হয়েছে, পারস্পরিক তথ্যের আদানপ্রদান ছাড়া ভারত ও বাংলাদেশের মাদক নিয়ন্ত্রণ দফতর এ ব্যাপারে একসঙ্গে কাজ করবে। সীমান্ত দিয়ে ব্যাপক মাদক চোরালানে দু'পক্ষই উদ্বেগ প্রকাশ করে জানিয়েছে, এই সমস্যা মোকাবেলায় কড়া মনোভাব নেওয়া হবে।

প্রথম পাতার পর
বাড়ানো প্রশ্নেই বাণিজ্যের
প্রয়োজনে পারস্পরিক জলপথ,
সড়কপথ এবং রেললাইন ব্যবহার
নিয়ন্ত্রণে বাধ্য হওয়া হবে। বাণিজ্যের
উন্নতির স্বার্থে দ্বিপাক্ষিক
বাণিজ্যমেলার অয়োজন, দু'দেশের
শিক্ষাগণিত্য মহলের মধ্যে ঘনিষ্ঠতর
সোপানোপ তৈরি, এ সব বিষয়েও
দু'তরফের প্রতিনিধিদের মধ্যে

HINDUSTAN TIMES

HF 6
23/3

Ind: Barla

Engaging Dhaka

CONSIDERING HOW important Bangladesh is for India, the first bilateral visit of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has been somewhat low-key. Two pacts were signed — one, a revised trade accord, and another to prevent illicit narcotics trade. Both agreed on the anodyne formulation that they, as victims of terror, needed to fight terror together. This is election year in Bangladesh. Neither New Delhi nor Dhaka was, perhaps, up to any dramatic agreements at this stage. India, too, probably, didn't want to annoy Sheikh Hasina with too close an embrace of her rival. It was in Ms Khaleda's interest to visit New Delhi and signal to the electorate that she too could do business with India. As for India, it was important for it to play host to Ms Khaleda so as to make it clear that our interests lay in working with whoever the Bangladeshi people elected as leader.

Bangladesh represents a huge challenge for policy-makers in New Delhi. It is surrounded almost completely in its land borders by Indian territory. Perhaps as a result of this, it has developed a pe-

culiar phobia about India. As a result, it would rather not earn revenue by permitting Indian transit trade to the North-east than see India prosper. Likewise it would rather let its natural gas reserves remain untapped than sell it to its neighbour. India would be willing to live with this. But what it cannot countenance is the steady trickle of Bangladeshi economic migrants into its territory, or the Pakistani intelligence services and a clutch of North-eastern separatist groups being allowed to use its territory to launch attacks on India. As it is, Dhaka's inability to exercise control has given rise to anarchic conditions in parts of the country, allowing the unchecked rise of all kinds of Islamic radicals. New Delhi does not have too many instrumentalities to deal with the situation there.

But it could be less niggling and niggardly on matters of trade. It is in our interest to offer Bangladesh duty-free access to Indian markets and as well as promote Indian investment there. An India-Bangladesh partnership is the key that can unlock the potential of the entire eastern region of the subcontinent.

23 MAR 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Call to boost Indo-Bangla trade

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 22. — India today called for a roadmap to address issues that hinder growth of trade with Bangladesh as the visiting Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia invited “trade-creating” investment.

“We welcome foreign investment, particularly from our friendly neighbour India,” Begum Zia told a joint business meeting organised by Ficci, CII and Assocham.

At the same time, the Bangladesh PM raised the issue of the balance of trade skewed in India’s favour and the increasing gap, asking India to allow duty-free import of goods from Bangladesh and removal of

non-tariff barriers.

“The ever-growing trade gap between India and Bangladesh is a matter of considerable concern for us... Not because India stands to be the gainer... Nevertheless, we are concerned because such a situation is hardly sustainable,” she said.

While India’s exports to Bangladesh in 2004-05 stood at \$2 billion, Bangladesh’s exports to India were a meagre \$140 million. Begum Zia also urged India to improve its land port to increase trade flows.

In his address, the Union commerce and industry minister, Mr Kamal Nath, said: “Greater connectivity is vital. We must encourage, if not insist on, movement of goods across our land borders through sealed containers.”

Mr Kamal Nath also mooted a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA), which could be “Safta plus”, to substantially address the current trade deficit.

Pointing to the success of the India-Sri Lanka FTA, the commerce minister said: “Sri Lankan exports to India in 2001 was barely \$45 million, which was less than that of Bangladesh in the same year,” he pointed out. “By 2004 Sri Lankan exports to India had grown to \$200 million.”

The balance of trade, which favoured India by as much as 15:1 in 2001 has now come down to 4:1, he said, adding “it is in the light of this experience that the proposal for India-Bangladesh FTA should gather momentum.”

23 MAR 2006

THE STATESMAN

PLEDGE TO FIND MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY SOLUTIONS

Khaleeda vows to do more

Special News Service

Terrorist haven tag irks minister

NEW DELHI, March 22. — At the end of her visit, the Bangladesh Prime Minister returned home with only two agreements, a decision to operationalise the Sealdah-Joydevpur rail link and an assurance to work closely for "mutually-satisfactory" solutions.

"Whether it is security, trade or sharing of water, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to work closely together to find mutually satisfactory solutions," said the joint Press release issued at the end of the three-day visit.

It noted that the visit has led to further consolidation and progress in ties between the two neighbours. Yesterday, during the delegation-level talks, India had raised the issue of terrorism, which was its chief concern, while Bangladesh had talked about the trade gap and water-sharing. The official spokesperson of the external affairs ministry had noted on the topic of "terrorism" that both India and Bangladesh are "victims of terrorism". "That was all recognised and terrorism by its very nature is a kind of phenomenon which can be best tackled by joint

NEW DELHI, March 22. — Insisting that it did not harbour terrorists, Bangladesh today said ties with India could not improve as long as this "erroneous impression" remained. "This is an erroneous impression. As long as this erroneous impression remains, relations between India and Bangladesh cannot improve," Bangladesh finance minister Mr M Saifur Rahman told reporters here on the last day of a three-day visit by Prime Minister Begum Khaleeda Zia. He said Bangladesh was "shocked to hear reports in yesterday's meeting (with Indian delegation) that some of its nationals were involved in terror attacks in Benaras and some other places." "Bangladesh does not believe in terrorism. Terrorists are nobody's friends. There should be no terrorism in the name of religion," Mr Rahman said. Answering a question about illegal migration from his country to India, he claimed "the economic situation in Bangladesh in some areas is much better than in India. We have dealt with terrorism much more effectively." Mr Rahman pointed to the recent arrests of Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh chief Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai militant group head Siddiqui Islam to drive home his point. — PTI

cooperation," he said.

Speaking at a business luncheon, the Bangladeshi finance minister, Mr Saifur Rahman, was more combative on the issue, implying that the matter had been exaggerated. "So long as this erroneous impression continues, it is very difficult to improve ties with India, including trade," he said.

He asserted that "Bangladesh does not believe in terrorism". "Terrorists are nobody's friends. There should be no terrorism in the name of religion," he said.

Mr Rahman also

expressed shock at reports that some Bangladesh nationals were involved in the recent terror attacks in Varanasi and some other places.

Insisting that the living conditions in Bangladesh were "much better than in India", the finance minister denied reports about illegal migration into India. "The economic situation in Bangladesh in some areas is much better than India. We have dealt with terrorism much more effectively," he claimed. Mr Rahman pointed to the recent arrests of Jamatul Mujahideen

Bangladesh chief Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai militant group head Siddiqui Islam to drive home his point.

On Teesta, both sides had yesterday decided to hold discussions soon.

The joint press release, however, made no explicit reference to any of the specific issues raised by both sides.

It, however, added that discussions were "underpinned by the common desire to strengthen and consolidate the friendly ties that already exist between the two countries based as they are on shared history and culture and wide-ranging people-to-people relations".

The discussions, the release added, "resulted in greater understanding and appreciation of each other's point of view".

The press release also said both leaders agreed to maintain high-level political dialogue. The PM, Dr Manmohan Singh, has accepted an invitation to visit Dhaka.

During the visit, two agreements were signed, a revised trade pact and another for mutual cooperation for preventing illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

23 MAR 2006

THE STATESMAN

Delhi, Dhaka to fight terrorism

Home Secretaries to meet more often to exchange information

Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI: India and Bangladesh agreed they were "victims" of terrorism and should join hands to deal with the menace following two hours of talks between Prime Ministers Manmohan Singh and Khaleda Zia at Hyderabad House on Tuesday evening.

The External Affairs Ministry spokesman told presspersons that the Home Secretaries of the two countries would meet more often to exchange information. The Joint Rivers Commission, too, would meet frequently to address water issues.

While Prime Minister Khaleda Zia called for duty free access for Bangladeshi goods coming into India to address the trade imbalance, the Indian side took the view that investment projects like the \$2.5 billion project proposed by the Tatas was one way of dealing with the problem.

According to the spokesman, India and Bangladesh also agreed to operationalise the Sealdah-Devpura railway link between the two countries. However, the two countries could not sign a bilateral investment protection agreement due to some last-minute problems.

Accords signed

Two agreements — a revised trade accord and another for preventing illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs — were signed in the presence of the two Prime Ministers. The revised trade agreement aims at expanding trade and economic relations between the two sides.

Senior officials stated that all issues of concern came up for discussion during the restricted, one-on-one and delegation-level talks between the two sides. An advance seems to have been made on the issue of terrorism with New Delhi and Dhaka agreeing to deal with the problem jointly.

In his banquet speech on Tuesday night, Dr. Manmohan Singh stated that the dialogue



WARM WELCOME: Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PHOTO: V.V. KRISHNAN

had been "most useful" in understanding each other's point of view and in making progress on different issues.

"We believe sincerely that India and our neighbours all have a common destiny. One cannot prosper without the other and it is only through cooperation within the region that we can compete outside it. We believe it is our fundamental interest to

see a strong, stable and economically strong Bangladesh making its full contribution to regional development," the Prime Minister said.

On economic relations

In her speech, Begum Zia made a direct appeal to the Prime Minister to take specific steps to encourage more exports from Bangladesh, including du-

ty-free access to Bangladeshi goods. "This would help use base our economic relations on an even more solid foundation. Your positive response would help Bangladesh in narrowing the widening trade gap between our two countries."

She also called for a "common approach" towards the sharing of river waters. "It is necessary that we have such an approach

within the framework of satisfactory agreements. This is particularly important for those common rivers for which we do not have dry season sharing arrangements," Begum Zia said.

"Constructive engagement in result-oriented solution to water-related issues would certainly contribute to consolidating and strengthening Bangladesh-India relations," she added.

Khaleda arrives with offer of friendship



Begum Khaleda Zia is received by officials on her arrival in New Delhi on Monday

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Bangladesh wants to usher in "a new phase" in friendship and co-operation with India and improve bilateral ties, bedevilled by diplomatic sparring between the two neighbours over the last few years.

Bangladesh PM Khaleda Zia, arriving here on a three-day visit on Monday afternoon, said she hoped her trip would create conditions for "perceptible improvement in the content of

our cooperative relations".

"During my visit, I look forward to very candid and constructive discussions with our friends in India," said Zia, who will hold discussions with Manmohan Singh on Tuesday.

New Delhi, too, is keen to mend fences with Dhaka. But, at the same time, will seek Bangladesh's active co-operation in ending illegal immigration and terrorism emanating from its territory.

The two countries are likely to sign three pacts, in-

cluding double tax avoidance agreement and investment protection agreement. Finance minister P Chidambaram on Monday indicated India's readiness to allow easy access to Bangladeshi goods, which Dhaka has been demanding for quite some time.

"We must be able to absorb their (neighbouring countries) exports. What is the point in calling ourselves a regional economic power if we can't help our neighbours?" he said.

22 MAR 2006

NEW DIMENSION TO BILATERAL TIES

PM case for

strong Bangla

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, March 21. — Seeking to give a new dimension to bilateral ties, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today said “a strong and prosperous” Bangladesh is in the interest of India and the region.

“A strong and prosperous Bangladesh is in the interest of India, South Asia and the Asian region as a whole,” Dr Singh told reporters after a ceremonial reception was accorded to visiting Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan.

“She (Begum Zia) is an honoured guest and we have intimate ties of friendship with Bangladesh,” he said adding the two countries would discuss all bilateral issues.

Begum Zia, after receiving a ceremonial guard of honour, told reporters that she had come with an “open mind” and would “discuss everything”.

Earlier, she was received at Rashtrapati Bhavan by the Prime Minister who was introduced to



Begum Khaleda Zia offers floral tributes at Rajghat on Tuesday. — AFP

members of her delegation.

Begum Zia, who arrived here yesterday on a three-day visit, has expressed hope that conditions would be created for “perceptible improvement” in bilateral ties to usher in a “new phase” in friendship and cooperation.

The two countries are likely to sign three pacts, including double tax avoidance agreement and investment protection agreement.

During the Prime Ministerial-level talks, India is likely to seek Dhaka’s cooperation in ending terrorism emanating from Bangladesh, besides the issue of illegal immigration.

Suggesting more connectivity between India and Bangladesh, President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam today said this would lead to “more connectivity of mind”.

“Physical connectivity will lead to more connectivity of mind,” the President told the Bangladesh Prime Minister when she called on him at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

During the 30-minute meeting, the President talked about connectivity between the two countries and said there should be more links between the two countries by road, rail and air, Rashtrapati Bhavan spokesman Mr SM Khan said.

Dr Kalam also offered assistance to Bangladesh in its rural-health programme, including telemedicine, he said.

Explaining the Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA) policy to Begum Zia, he said it was also applicable to Bangladesh whose majority population lived in rural areas.

Sources in the meeting said the two leaders discussed water-sharing issues between the two countries. Begum Zia invited Dr Kalam to visit Bangladesh.

22 MAR 2006

বাংলাদেশে
যাদের ঘাঁটি

পাকপন্থী জঙ্গিগোষ্ঠী

হিজবুল মুজাহিদিন

লস্কর-ই-তইবা

হরকত-উল-আনসার

ভারতের জঙ্গিগোষ্ঠী

আলফা

কেএলও

এনএলএফটি (ন্যাশনাল

লিবারেশন ফ্রন্ট অফ তুইপ্রা)

এটিটিএফ (অল ত্রিপুরা

টাইগার ফোর্স)

ইউএনএলএফ (ইউনাইটেড

ন্যাশনাল লিবারেশন ফ্রন্ট)

পিএলও (পিপলস লিবারেশন

অর্গানাইজেশন)

কেসিপি (কান্সলেইপাক

কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি)

এইচএনএলএফ

(হাইনিউট্রোপ ন্যাশনাল

লিবারেশন ফ্রন্ট)

বাংলাদেশের জঙ্গিগোষ্ঠী

ইসলামি ছাত্র শিবির

হরকত-উল-জেহাদ আল

ইসলামি অফ বাংলাদেশ

জামাতুল মুজাহিদিন

জাগ্রত মুসলিম জনতা অফ

বাংলাদেশ

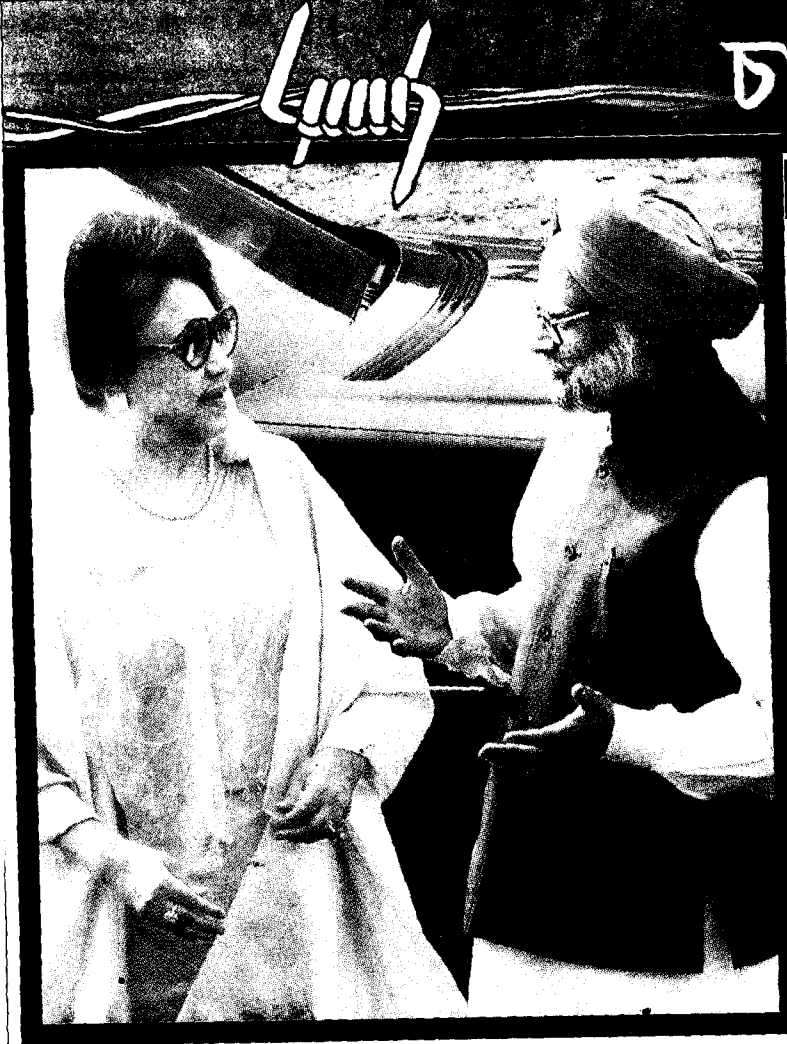
সাহাদাত-ই-আল হিকমা

আহলে হাদিস মুভমেন্ট অফ

বাংলাদেশ

তবলিক-ই-জামাত

অপ্রিয় বিষয় নিয়ে খোলাখুলি কথা ● মাদক চোরাচালান বন্ধে চুক্তি



চাপের বৈঠক

ভারতের অভিযোগ

- বৈধ ভাবে ভারতে এসে বাংলাদেশিদের নাশকতা
- বাংলাদেশে জঙ্গি ঘাঁটি
- সীমান্তে বেআইনি মাদ্রাসায় বাংলাদেশি জঙ্গি সংগঠনের তৎপরতা
- অরবিন্দ, পরেশের মতো জঙ্গি নেতাদের আশ্রয়
- চট্টগ্রাম সীমান্ত দিয়ে জঙ্গিদের প্রবেশ
- অবাধ অনুপ্রবেশ

জঙ্গি-মদত নিয়ে খালেদার প্রতি কড়া মনমোহন

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ২১ মার্চ: যদিও অতিথি, তবু বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী বেগম খালেদা জিয়াকে যথেষ্ট কড়া কথা শোনাতে কসুর করল না ভারত। অনুপ্রবেশ, জঙ্গিদের মদত থেকে শুরু করে চোরাচালান, সীমান্তে বেড়া—সব বিষয়েই তাঁর সরকারের অসন্তোষের কথা খালেদাকে জানিয়ে দিলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ।

এই 'প্রো-অ্যাক্টিভ' কূটনৈতিক রণকৌশলের প্রবক্তা অধুনা প্রয়াত জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা জে এন দীক্ষিত। বাংলাদেশের মতো প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্রকে সামলাতে কড়া মনোভাব নেওয়ারই পক্ষপাতী ছিলেন তিনি। দীক্ষিতের দেখানো পথেই হেঁটেছেন তাঁর উত্তরসূরি এম কে নারায়ণন।

সাত বছর পরে এই প্রথম কোনও বাংলাদেশি প্রধানমন্ত্রী ভারতে এলেন। খালেদার চার বছরের শাসনকালে বিতর্কিত বিষয়গুলি নিয়ে তাঁর সঙ্গে অন্যত্র বহুবারই আলোচনা হয়েছে ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর। কিন্তু সে সবই ছিল কোনও না কোনও আন্তর্জাতিক সম্মেলনের ফাঁকে। এ বার কিন্তু দ্বিপাক্ষিক আলোচনা করতেই দিল্লি এসেছেন খালেদা।

আজ সন্ধ্যায় তাঁর সঙ্গে বৈঠকে বসার আগে মনমোহনের হাতে একটি ফাইল তুলে দেন নারায়ণন। তাতে স্পষ্ট ভাষায় লেখা ছিল, কী ভাবে বাংলাদেশের মাটিতে আশ্রয় নিয়ে ভারত-বিরোধী কাজকর্ম চাঞ্চিয়ে যাচ্ছে জঙ্গিরা। মনমোহন এমনিতে নরম স্বভাবের মানুষ বলেই পরিচিত। কিন্তু নারায়ণনের দেওয়া তথ্য হাতে নিয়ে খালেদার সঙ্গে অপ্রিয় বিষয়গুলি সম্পর্কে খোলাখুলি আলোচনা করেছেন তিনি।

দিল্লির অভিযোগ, বাংলাদেশের জমিতে ভারত-বিরোধী জঙ্গিরা ঘাঁটি গড়েছে। আলফা, কেএলও-র জঙ্গি নেতারা বহাল তবিয়তে বাস করছে। বহুবার বলা সত্ত্বেও ঢাকা তাদের ধরে ভারতের হাতে তুলে দিচ্ছে না। অনুপ্রবেশ রোধেও যথাযথ ব্যবস্থা নিচ্ছে না বাংলাদেশ। ফলে সে দেশ হয়ে ভারতে জঙ্গি ঢোকাচ্ছে পাক গুপ্তচর সংস্থা আইএসআই। বারাগসীর মতো বিক্ষোভে বাংলাদেশের ইসলামি জঙ্গি সংগঠন যুক্ত। পাশাপাশি, বাংলাদেশ সীমান্ত বরাবর অব্যাহত মাদক চোরাচালান।

মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশের সাম্প্রতিক ভারত সফরে পরমাণু চুক্তি চূড়ান্ত হয়েছে। এই সফর বিশ্ব সন্ত্রাস মোকাবিলায় দুই দেশকে আরও কাছাকাছি এনেছে। বুশের পরে খালেদার এই সফর কূটনৈতিক দিক থেকে বিশেষ তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ। তিনি ভারতে আসার আগেই 'বাংলা ভাই'-সহ বেশ কয়েক জন জঙ্গিকে গ্রেফতার করে ইতিবাচক বার্তা দিতে চেয়েছে ঢাকা। এ দিনের বৈঠকে বলা হয়েছে, দু'দেশই সন্ত্রাসবাদের শিকার। তাই জঙ্গিদের মোকাবিলায় হাত মেলাবে দিল্লি-ঢাকা।

দু'দেশের অর্থনৈতিক সম্পর্ক আরও এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়ার ব্যাপারে বাংলাদেশের শিল্পপতির যথেষ্ট উৎসাহী। তা ছাড়া, জলসম্পদ নিয়েও দু'দেশের মধ্যে যে জটিলতা, তার মীমাংসায় আগ্রহী ছিল বাংলাদেশ। শিয়ালদহ-জয়দেবপুর ট্রেন যোগাযোগের ব্যাপারে এ দিন নীতিগত সিদ্ধান্ত হয়েছে।

খালেদা ক্ষমতায় আসার পরেই দু'দেশের সম্পর্কে উত্তেজনার পারদ চড়ে যায়। তৎকালীন প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী তাঁর প্রিন্সিপাল সেক্রেটারি ব্রজেশ মিশ্রকে ঢাকায় পাঠান। এর পর কাঠমাড় সার্ক সম্মেলনে খালেদা-বাজপেয়ী বৈঠক হয়। তার পর পাকিস্তানে সার্কের ফাঁকে ফের বৈঠক। মনমোহন প্রধানমন্ত্রী হওয়ার পরেও বেশ কয়েক বার দ্বিপাক্ষিক বৈঠক হয়েছে। কিন্তু সমস্যা মেটেনি। এ বার সুযোগের সম্পূর্ণ সদ্ব্যবহার করেছে ভারত। তবে খালেদা জিয়ার সরকারও ভারতের বিরুদ্ধে নানা পাল্টা অভিযোগ বিভিন্ন স্তরের বৈঠকে জানিয়েছে। অতীতে ভারত জঙ্গিদের তালিকা দিলে বাংলাদেশও পাল্টা তালিকা দিয়েছে। এ বার বাংলাদেশের অভিযোগগুলিও মন দিয়ে শুনেছে ভারত।

এই সফরে খালেদা প্রধানমন্ত্রী ছাড়াও দেখা করেছেন সনিয়া গান্ধীর সঙ্গে। তাঁর একান্ত সাক্ষাৎকারের তালিকায় দুই বাঙালি নেতাও আছেন। এক জন স্পিকার সোমনাথ চট্টোপাধ্যায়। অন্য জন সংসদীয় মন্ত্রী প্রিয়রঞ্জন দাশমুন্সি। প্রতিনিধি পর্যায়ের বৈঠকে কথা হয়েছে প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়ের সঙ্গেও।

আজ দু'ঘণ্টা বৈঠকের শেষে দু'টি চুক্তিতে স্বাক্ষর করেন মনমোহন-খালেদা। একটি চুক্তিতে মাদক দ্রব্যের চোরাচালান রোধে পারস্পরিক সহযোগিতার কথা বলা হয়েছে। অন্য চুক্তিটি ভারত-বাংলাদেশ বাণিজ্যিক সম্পর্কের সংস্কার বিষয়ক।

সন্ত্রাস এবং অনুপ্রবেশের প্রশ্নে দু'দেশের বিস্তারিত মতপার্থক্য থাকলেও শেষ পর্যন্ত মেলালেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ। রাষ্ট্রপতি ভবনে আজ খালেদার অভ্যর্থনা অনুষ্ঠানের শেষে প্রথা অনুযায়ী দু'দেশের জাতীয় সঙ্গীত বাজানো হল। দু'টি গানেরই রচয়িতা তিনিই। একেবারে শেষে 'আনন্দলোকে মঙ্গললোকে'র সুর বাজছিল রাষ্ট্রপতি ভবনে।

● মাদকের ঘাঁটি বাংলাদেশে...পৃঃ ৬

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

২২ MAR 2006

We are keen to deepen ties, says Bangladesh Premier

Agreement on bilateral investment protection likely to be signed on Tuesday

Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI: Calling for "candid and constructive" discussions with the Indian leadership, Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia arrived here on Monday on a three-day State visit. She is scheduled to hold talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Tuesday evening.

"I hope that as a result of our discussions it would be possible for us to create conditions for perceptible improvement in the content of our cooperative relations," Begum Zia said on her arrival.

Deeply rooted

Describing the two countries as close neighbours, she said: "Our bonds of friendship are deeply rooted in ... history. Our friendship has over the years drawn strength from our very intimate economic, political and cultural ties. We are, indeed, keen to deepen these ties."

According to Begum Zia, the

- Hopes for perceptible improvement in cooperative relations

- Sees immense potential for India-Bangladesh relations

- Intent on carrying forward association in a positive direction

potential for India- Bangladesh relations was immense and it would be her "desire" to discuss with Dr. Singh and other Indian leaders how best to realise this potential.

The visiting Prime Minister said that while India and Bangladesh had made impressive economic and social progress, their many problems remained daunting. "The problem of poverty and deprivation still stalks our countries. We can overcome these problems only through cooperation in an environment of peace and stability."

"I would certainly like to utilise my present visit to discuss all

issues of relevance to our multifaceted relations. But, equally, importantly, it would be my intention to carry forward our sustained engagement in a positive direction ..." she added.

To meet Kalam

An agreement on bilateral investment protection is likely to be signed on Tuesday after talks between Begum Zia and Dr. Singh. The Bangladesh leader will also call on President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam apart from meeting a host of senior Ministers.

Soon after her arrival, Minister of State for External Affairs E.Ahamed and Lok Sabha Speak-

er Somnath Chatterjee called on the Prime Minister. Welcoming her to India, Mr. Ahamed referred in general terms to trade, investment and security issues between the two sides.

India, Mr. Ahamed said, wanted to see a strong, stable and prosperous Bangladesh: a point made by Dr. Singh to Begum Zia during their meeting in Dhaka on the sidelines of the SAARC summit in November 2005.

In a related development, the External Affairs Ministry spokesman said her visit "may be seen" in the context of the policy of sustained and continuous high-level engagement that India has instituted with Bangladesh.

"Bangladesh is a close and friendly neighbour and the visit is testimony to the importance that both countries attach to bilateral relations," the spokesman stressed, adding that the entire gamut of relations would be discussed during the Manmohan-Khaleda meeting.

21 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

WITHIN days of the election of the BNP-led four-party coalition to power in October 2001, the NDA government's special emissary, Brajesh Mishra, air-dashed to Dhaka in a bid to improve Indo-Bangladesh ties. Amidst the no-holds-barred countrywide post-election Hindu cleansing that was in progress then, Mishra assured Begum Khaleda Zia that New Delhi had no political favourites in Bangladesh, nor was it inclined to interfere in its internal affairs. He took the

opportunity to convey Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's invitation to her to visit India at her earliest opportunity.

In the last four and half years, Begum Zia visited Saudi Arabia (several times), China (twice), Pakistan, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, Burma and a host of other countries, but she found no time to set her feet on the nearest neighbouring country and the major regional power, India, with which Bangladesh has a number of serious problems, most of which are Dhaka's own making. The problems range from support to northeastern insurgencies to unchecked illegal immigration — that has acquired the proportions of demographic invasion — to the rise and cross-border spread of radical political Islam. New Delhi's repeated complaints on these issues met with cynical denial of their existence. Instead, Khaleda Zia and her two Jamaat Cabinet colleagues repeatedly insinuated India's involvement in the acts of Islamic terrorist violence in Bangladesh. Efforts by New Delhi to obtain supply of gas from Bangladesh and secure transit and transshipment facilities for accessing North-east states through its territory as parts of a package to strengthen bilateral economic ties have been persistently rebuffed. The Khaleda government has also reneged from its earlier commitment to the tripartite agreement for transportation of gas from Myanmar to India through pipelines running through Bangladesh, demanding impossible quid pro quo from India.

The proposals by the Tatas to make massive investment in the country are now stuck, thanks to the high price demanded by Bangladesh for the power supply to its industrial projects. If the disagree-

ment is not resolved soon the investment is going to die a natural death.

Dhaka's unrelenting hostility towards India is aided by sections of foreign and Indian media. Early last year, at the height of Islamic terrorist depredations in Bangladesh, writing in the *International Herald Tribune* a Hong Kong-based journalist stated that the reputation of Bangladesh for religious extremism was "much exaggerated" and that "despite recent blemishes, the country's record of communal

peace is better than that of India." He went on to claim that "instances of intolerance are exception than the rule" in the country and that "the Jamaat has not pressed on its Islamic agenda too overtly", conveniently forgetting to mention that all the Islamic terrorist outfits in the country are organically linked to the JI, which shields them from any legal action.

In the months that have elapsed since then, lesser scribes in the Indian media have made low-key attempts

to paint an acceptable portrait of the BNP-Jamaat government that did not cut much ice with the Indian public. But now, coinciding with the state visit of Khaleda Zia, a media heavyweight of New Delhi has given a pep talk to Dr Manmohan Singh on what should he and his government do and not do in relation to Bangladesh. Commenting on why bilateral relations have hit the rock bottom, he has squarely blamed New Delhi for "the mess the two nations stare at today". He has dismissed assessments that Bangladesh is "turning towards Islamic radicalism, is headed down the road of Talibanisation and its leadership is a hostage to religious extrem-

treatment of its religious and ethnic minorities that result in influx of refugees to this side of the border thus imposing a crushing burden on this country?

Second, India must demonstrate some empathy with what Dhaka has to say about its political and economic grievances. There is no harm in listening to what Khaleda wants to say but the Prime Minister must clearly insist on mutual accommodation as the basis of meaningful bilateral relations.

Third, the Prime Minister must lay out India's expectation on its security concerns. This has been done times without number, but to no avail. In the summit this time, the Prime Minister must signal to our guest that Bangladesh has tried our patience far too long and any further intransigence on its part will encounter tougher response in concrete terms.

Fourth, despite using huge trade surplus with Bangladesh, New Delhi has been miserly in offering market access to Dhaka; Dr Manmohan Singh must proclaim unilateral trade concessions to Bangladesh. But the fact is products of Bangladesh like *jamdani saris*, handicraft and dry fish, et al, have limited market in India. Gas has demand, but Dhaka would not spare any. New Delhi cannot make any extraordinary gesture at its own expense without something in return. There is no free lunch in international relations, particularly when its applicant is a hostile country.

Fifth, Dr Manmohan Singh should strongly resist the temptation to link trade openings to Dhaka's actions on India's security concerns. The Indian state is surely not running a charity house.

International relations being strictly a matter of reciprocity, these suggestions would surely intrigue many.

(The author is former Additional Secretary, Research and Analysis Wing.)

No free lunch

Despite what visiting Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia might have to say about her country's political and economic grievances, Dr Manmohan Singh should make it clear that mutual accommodation is the basis of meaningful bilateral relations, writes
BIBHUTI BHUSAN NANDY



21 MAR 2006

THE STATESMAN

21 MAR 2006

Khaleda comes with a vision

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 20. — Hoping to make "perceptible improvement" in bilateral ties, the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, arrived in Delhi this afternoon on her first visit to India after assuming power. This is also the first prime ministerial visit in nine years. Three pacts are expected to be signed during her stay.

On her arrival, Begum Zia issued a statement saying she looked forward to "very candid and constructive discussions". She hoped that the discussions would result in creating conditions "for perceptible improvement in the content of our cooperative rela-

tions". While water-sharing and trade issues are expected to be Bangladesh's main priorities, India is expected to raise security concerns.

Begum Zia and her delegation, including foreign minister, Mr Morshed Khan, and finance minister, Mr Saifur Rahman, were received at the airport by the minister of state for external affairs, Mr E. Ahamed, and the foreign secretary, Mr Shyam Saran. Thereafter, Begum Zia checked in at the sumptuous Sheraton Hotel, suite in Maurya Sheraton Hotel, whose previous occupants had been the US presidents, George W Bush and Bill Clinton.

She had only two official appointments today, with Mr Ahamed and the Lok Sabha

Speaker, Mr Somnath Chatterjee. Later in the evening, she attended a reception hosted by the Bangladesh envoy.

Begum Zia observed that it was her desire to discuss with PM Dr Manmohan Singh, the ways to realise the immense potential for bilateral relations. On a sombre note, she said that while both South Asian nations have registered good economic progress, "our many problems still remain daunting".

"We can overcome these problems only through cooperation in an environment of peace and stability," said the Bangladeshi PM.

Stating that she came to Delhi with "tremendous goodwill", Begum Zia said: "Our friendship has over the years, drawn strength



Begum Khaleda Zia accepts a bouquet from a government official after her arrival in New Delhi on Monday. — AFP from our very intimate economic, social and cultural ties. We are, indeed, keen to further deepen these ties."

জঙ্গি-মদত, অনুপ্রবেশ নিয়ে বরফ গলাতে আজ খালেদা-মনমোহন কথা

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ২০ মার্চ: ভারত-বিরোধী সন্ত্রাসে মদত, অবাধ অনুপ্রবেশ, সীমান্তে কাঁটাতারের বেড়া নিয়ে বিতর্ক এবং চোরচালাচাল। কাল হায়দরাবাদ হাউসে বাংলাদেশের সঙ্গে দ্বিপাক্ষিক বৈঠকে এই সমস্ত বিষয় নিয়ে সরব হবে নয়াদিল্লি।

ইউপিএ সরকার ক্ষমতায় আসার পরে বিভিন্ন মঞ্চে বারবার এই সব বিষয় নিয়ে চাপানউতোর চলেছে। গত বছরের শেষে ঢাকায় সার্কের অধিবেশনের ফাঁকে এই বিষয়গুলি নিয়ে দু'তরফের মধ্যে পার্শ্ববৈঠকও হয়। বাস্তবে বরফ কিন্তু গলেনি। তখনই স্থির হয়, এই নিয়ে সবিস্তার কথা বলতে ভারতে আসবেন বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী। সেই মতো তিন দিনের সফরে আজ দিল্লি এসে পৌঁছেছেন বেগম খালেদা জিয়া। কাল প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের সঙ্গে তাঁর বৈঠক। সেখানেই বরফ গলানোর চেষ্টা করবে দু'পক্ষ।

বহুবার বলা সত্ত্বেও তাদের মাটিতে অবস্থিত ভারত-বিরোধী জঙ্গি শিবিরগুলি ভাঙতে বাংলাদেশ কোনও ব্যবস্থা নিচ্ছে না, এমনই অভিযোগ দিল্লির। তারা জঙ্গি শিবিরগুলির তালিকা ঢাকার হাতে তুলে দিলেও খালেদা জিয়া প্রশাসনের বক্তব্য, তাদের দেশে এ রকম শিবিরের অস্তিত্ব নেই। খালেদার চলতি সফরে এই বিষয় নিয়ে ফের কথা হবে।

বাংলাদেশে পাক গুপ্তচর সংস্থা আইএসআই-এর উপস্থিতি নিয়ে চিন্তিত কেন্দ্র। ৯/১১-এর পরে স্বাভাবিক কারণেই পাকিস্তান বা সৌদি আরবের মতো দেশগুলি থেকে কাজকর্ম গুটিয়ে নিতে বাধ্য হয়েছে আইএসআই। তুলনায় বাংলাদেশের চট্টগ্রাম বা কক্সবাজারকে ঘাঁটি করে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ

বা উত্তর-পূর্বের রাজ্যগুলি হয়ে ভারতে ঢোকা অনেক সহজ। প্রসঙ্গত, বাংলাদেশ থেকে জঙ্গি অনুপ্রবেশের সমস্যা নিয়ে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বুধদেব ভট্টাচার্য তাঁর সাম্প্রতিক দিল্লি সফরেও প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে কথা বলেছেন। অনুপ্রবেশের জন্য পশ্চিমবঙ্গ, আসাম, ত্রিপুরার মতো রাজ্যগুলিতে জনসংখ্যার চরিত্র বদলে যাচ্ছে। আবার অনুপ্রবেশ রুথতে দু'দেশের মধ্যবর্তী প্রায় চার হাজার কিলোমিটার সীমান্তে কাঁটাতারের বেড়া দেওয়ার যে কাজ ভারত শুরু করেছে, তা নিয়েও আপত্তি তুলেছে বাংলাদেশ।

এ সব বিষয়ের পাশাপাশি কাল মনমোহন-খালেদা বৈঠকে দু'দেশের বাণিজ্যিক সম্পর্কও আলোচিত হবে বলে জানা গিয়েছে। বর্তমানে দ্বিপাক্ষিক বাণিজ্য ঘাটতির পরিমাণ ২০০ কোটি ডলারেরও বেশি। এই পরিস্থিতিতে বাংলাদেশ থেকে কী ভাবে আরও বেশি জিনিস ভারতের বাজারে আমদানি করা যায়, তা খতিয়ে দেখছে কেন্দ্র। তা ছাড়া, বাংলাদেশের মধ্যে দিয়ে কলকাতা-আগরতলা বাস যোগাযোগ সংক্রান্ত ভারতের প্রস্তাব এবং বন্দিপ্রত্যর্পণ চুক্তি নিয়েও দু'দেশের প্রতিনিধিদের মধ্যে আগামিকাল কথা হবে।

তাঁর চার বছরের জমানায় এই প্রথম ভারতে এলেন খালেদা জিয়া। আজ বেলা সাড়ে তিনটে নাগাদ তাঁর বিমান এসে পৌঁছয় দিল্লির ইন্দিরা গান্ধী আন্তর্জাতিক বিমানবন্দরে। জিয়ার সঙ্গে রয়েছেন বাংলাদেশের অর্থমন্ত্রী সইফুর রহমান এবং বিদেশমন্ত্রী মোর্শেদ খান। বাংলাদেশি শিল্পবাণিজ্য মহলের তরফ থেকে ৪৩ সদস্যের একটি প্রতিনিধিদলও ওই বিমানে এসেছে।

21 MAR 2006

Trust, 'doables' on Khaleda wish list



Khaleda Zia: Mending fences

NILOVA Roy Chaudhury
New Delhi, March 19

THE PRIME minister of Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia, arrives in New Delhi on Monday for what is being termed a "landmark" visit that will concentrate on mending bilateral fences that have frayed with mistrust and mutual suspicion. The focus, senior officials said, would be to concentrate on "doables" to build trust while not skirting the concerns that have plagued the bilateral dialogue.

That Khaleda is coming, not as the SAARC chairperson, but on a bilateral state visit, the first in her second term in office, is indicative of the "definite desire" to improve ties. The more the leaders meet and talk, the less scope

there is for mistrust. Officials said the recent arrests of key terrorist leaders like "Bangla Bhai" in Bangladesh was a "positive sign" that indicated Dhaka's "acceptance" of the problem of Islamist terrorism using the country as a base.

"Coming out of denial mode into acceptance mode" was the first step to resolve the problem, an analyst said. Diplomats said there had been no incidents of terrorist violence in over four months, indicating Dhaka's seriousness in dealing with the issue. Amnesty International called it the first signs of a "shift" in government policy.

Treason charges have been filed by Bangla authorities against top leaders of the banned militant outfit Jamaat-ul-Mujaheed in Bangladesh, including Sidiqul Islam (Bangla Bhai) and Sheikh Abdur Rahman, for allegedly conspiring to oust the Khaleda Zia government, reports said. Concerns about infiltration and the denial of transit rights will figure in the talks, as will the river water issue.

The entire gamut of bilateral relations, including unresolved border issues, security-related matters, trade and the sharing of river water, would be discussed when Khaleda meets Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for formal talks on March 21, Bangladeshi foreign secretary Hemayetuddin said. But results are expected in improved economic and commercial ties. The major investment planned by the Tatas in Bangladesh, caught up in "protracted negotiations" will also figure. India is likely offer duty-free access for a number of Bangladeshi products to meet Dhaka's concerns.

20 MAR 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Dhaka hopes visit will be a "milestone"

"Begum Khaleda is going with an open mind"

Haroon Habib

10.11.2017
DHAKA: Bangladesh Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan foresees Begum Khaleda Zia's three-day visit to India from Monday as a "milestone, and, maybe, one of the last calls for the train of opportunity in the region".

Mr. Khan in a media interview said, "I think India can afford to take a unilateral initiative to open its market for Bangladeshi products to help resolve the huge trade deficit.

The interview was circulated by a private news agency.

Spelling out the Government's position on bilateral trade and FTA, water sharing, border demarcation, transport connectivity, tri-nation gas pipeline and terrorism, he said: "She is going with an open mind, ready to discuss anything and everything for mutual benefit."

Sharing of waters

On the sharing of waters and Indian river-linking projects, including the Tipaimukh barrage, he said such schemes might be matter of "augmentation" for India but a "life-and-death question for Bangladeshi people."

On India's proposal on a bus route along the Dhaka-Sylhet-Shilong-Guwahati line and a passenger train service from Sealdah in Kolkata to Gazipur in Bangladesh, he said the roads in Bangladesh were not fit for taking heavy-duty container cargo. Besides, after development of rift in the Jamuna Bridge, the cross-border train service from Sealdah to Gazipur remains a doubtful proposition.

Demarcation

On the demarcation of a 6.5-km stretch along the common border and exchange of enclaves and adversely possessed lands,

• Trade and economic cooperation to take centre stage

• Border demarcation, terrorism to be discussed

he said the Joint Working Group was working on the issue.

About bilateral free trade with India, he said Bangladesh and India had two FTAs — BIMSTEC and SAFTA.

On the tri-nation gas pipeline from Myanmar to India through Bangladesh, he said, "It is a business venture, not a political issue."

He said militancy and terrorism were a global problem. "It has spread like an epidemic, and we were last to be hit." Bangladesh, he said, had done excellent job by arresting 700-800 militants and two of the most-wanted leaders, Shaikh Rahman and Bangla Bhai.

Fight against terrorism

A Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Begum Khaleda would discuss "joint cooperation to fight terrorism" with Dr. Singh.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Zahirul Haq said, "Both sides will discuss all bilateral issues, including cross border terrorism, security, trade, transport linkages and water sharing of common rivers."

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin, who returned from New Delhi on Friday, said he met his counterpart Shyam Saran and both sides were looking forward to the visit. "The talks will address common concerns and ways of expanding trade and economic cooperation," he said.

20 MAR 2006

Dhaka keen to cut trade deficit

New Delhi likely to raise alleged presence of training camps of insurgents

Sp. Sec. B. S. A. K.

10-12

29/3

Siddharth Varadarajan

NEW DELHI: Confidence-building measures (CBMs) — that staple of the India-Pakistan peace process — could well provide a way out of the bilateral logjam on India's eastern front with this week's state visit by Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia providing the perfect occasion for the two sides to engage in some creative diplomacy.

Ms. Zia arrives in India on Monday and will hold official talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Tuesday. The visit, her first in her current tenure as Prime Minister, comes even as Bangladesh slowly slips into poll season with general elections to be held no later than January 2007.

After a prolonged period in

which normal institutional mechanisms for bilateral discussion had fallen into disuse, India and Bangladesh have managed over the course of the past year to revive high-level engagement in the areas of trade, security and water management. The Indian side sees the visit, therefore, as the culmination of that process. "From now on, we want to make sure there is sustained and continuous engagement with Bangladesh", a senior official told *The Hindu*.

Open-ended agenda

Although the agenda for discussion is fairly open-ended, each side is expected to bring to the table issues that are of particular concern to itself. This means Ms. Zia is likely to raise the question of trade, where

Confidence-building measures could well provide a way out of the bilateral logjam

Dhaka wants Delhi to cut or eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers so that Bangladesh has a "fair chance" of reducing its yawning \$2 billion annual trade deficit with India.

Water management will also figure prominently, with the Bangladeshi side looking for Dr. Singh to reiterate the earlier assurances made by Priyaranjan Dasgupta — when he was Water Resources Minister — that India's river-linking plans would not cover rivers in which Bangladesh has lower riparian rights. In addition, Dhaka is anxious

about the effect the proposed Timpukh barrage would have on dry season flows of the Surma and Kushiyara rivers.

India will raise the issues of security — the alleged presence of training camps of Indian insurgent groups from the north-east in Bangladesh — and transit and transport infrastructure linkages to improve connectivity between India and Bangladesh as well as between the north-eastern States and West Bengal. With Delhi and Dhaka failing to reach agreement on the reciprocal conditions under which a gas pipeline from Myanmar to India could be built through Bangladesh, this issue is unlikely to be taken up with Ms. Zia, a senior official said.

Dhaka is also looking for unilateral concessions on some spe-

cific product lines and an "early harvest package" under the proposed free trade agreement. While transit corridors for India are some distance away, the Bangladeshi side is apparently ready for "forward movement or connectivity" between the two countries.

Among the rail and road link on the agenda are revival of the Sealdah-Tongi and Agartala-Akhaura-Chittagong rail lines and bus service between Shillong and Sylhet.

In the run-up to election season in Bangladesh, Indian officials are realistic about the prospects of any major breakthrough on the bilateral front. But transport connectivity is seen as a confidence-building measure that could help set the stage for wider interaction.

Terror & migrants on Khaleda table



Khaleda

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 19: Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will arrive here tomorrow on a three-day visit with several contentious issues on her plate.

This is Khaleda's maiden visit to India after she assumed office in 2001.

New Delhi has two high-priority issues to settle with Dhaka. The first is to seek Dhaka's cooperation for dismantling the infrastructure of Northeast insurgents on Bangladesh soil.

Dhaka has denied the existence of such insurgent camps within its territory but India is still expected to air its concerns and seek the dismantling of such camps.

Delhi has been repeatedly sending Dhaka lists pin-pointing locations of the insurgent camps across Bangladesh.

The other issue that troubles India is illegal migration from Bangladesh. New Delhi wants Dhaka to take effective measures to check this.

The two sides are also expected to sign three economic pacts. One will be an agreement on double tax avoidance

and the second an investment protection pact.

The neighbours will also discuss ways to enhance trade cooperation.

Khaleda will be accompanied by her finance minister Saifur Rehman and foreign minister Morshed Khan.

On Tuesday, she will meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to discuss a wide range of issues. She will also call on President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. She will also meet UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and leader of Opposition L.K. Advani.

She is also scheduled to address Indian business leaders.

Apart from talks on trade and dismantling militant camps, border problems, particularly disputes over enclaves in "adverse possession", and river water sharing are also on the discussion agenda.

Dhaka could seek the dismantling of tax barriers by India for easy access of Bangladeshi goods here. It feels the step would be an important confidence-building measure.

The trip by Khaleda, the longest serving Prime Minister of her country, comes just less than a year before Bangladesh goes to polls.



Singh

Terror on Khaleda's talks table menu

ADITYA Sinha
New Delhi, March 18

WHEN BANGLADESH Prime Minister Khaleda Zia arrives in India this week, the question on most people's minds will revolve around the timing of her visit. National elections are due in her country in less than a year (they have to be declared by October, and can take place three months after that). Why, after four years of India-bashing, does she suddenly deem it fit to come calling?

The obvious point of reference is the election. Her main opposition, the Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina, is a relatively pro-India party. Government experts think Khaleda's visit might be an attempt to depict her government's relations with India as warm, and thereby confuse the opposition.

Though India will roll out the red carpet and give Khaleda a warm welcome, the government expects nothing substantial to come out of the visit. Dhaka seems to give a low priority to Indo-Bangla relations; it's blocking major economic projects like the trans-Asia highway and the proposed gas pipeline from Myanmar, and New Delhi has long-standing security concerns.

Three agreements will be negotiated during Khaleda's visit. One will be on the prevention of illegal cross-border trade in psychotropic substances. But an agreement won't

be enough unless the 4,000-odd km border is more closely watched.

India is fencing the border, but Dhaka has lately objected to fencing within 150 yards of the zero line of the border. Bangladesh Rifles has never seemed serious about cooperating with the BSF on countering smuggling because this is a highly profitable business.

The most serious problem facing India is the refuge that Northeast insurgents get in Bangladesh.

Foreign minister Morshed Khan's warning, in 2004, that while India surrounded Bangladesh, Bangladesh surrounded the Northeast, still rings in many ears.

Insurgents from the Northeast not only live in Dhaka, but also travel abroad on Bangladeshi passports.

Also, insurgent groups have been illegally importing arms through Chittagong. In April 2004, the Bangladesh army had seized 2,000 AK series assault rifles, sub-machine carbines, Chinese rifles, rocket launchers, 27,000 hand grenades and two lakh rounds of ammunition from Chittagong.

What's more, most of this cargo was headed for India.

New Delhi's other concern is that Bangladesh is increasingly becoming a staging post for terrorism in India. All of the major attacks in the past year — Ayodhya, Delhi, Bangalore and Varanasi — have had a significant Bangladesh connection.

**INDO-BANGLA
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Depoliticise India-Bangladesh issues: envoy

Haroon Habib *ND-VA 1873*

DHAKA: Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka Veena Sikri has called for depoliticising the long-standing issues between India and Bangladesh and looking at them with utmost seriousness. "The issues should be looked at in a serious way. If the politicians want to solve the problems, they should look for a solution through dialogue. And constant engagement in dialogue is the only way for a good solution," she said in an interview to **BDNEWS**, a news agency of Dhaka, ahead of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to India, which begins on March 20.

Ms. Sikri said the Bangladesh Prime Minister and her Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh would discuss all aspects of the bilateral relations.

She hinted that both sides were looking forward to signing a number of trade agreements. There would also be a long-term extension of the agreement on water transit.

As for the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) proposed by India, she said Bangladesh had unbalanced trade with many other countries, but that did not become a political issue. India put forward the proposal in good faith. "I think open discussion is the only way to solve the problem."

The envoy said she acknowledged the concerns raised by Bangladesh over the FTA. "If you have any other

proposal, we are ready to discuss. Now the Bangladesh Prime Minister will meet our Prime Minister and we will discuss it and we hope, a substantial outcome will be there."

On Bangladesh's concerns over trade deficit and removal of non-tariff and para-tariff barriers, she said the problem arose when "you do not look for a long-term solution."

Replying to a question on sharing

India seeks emergency meeting with Bangladesh

Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI: India has sought an emergency meeting with Bangladesh to discuss the Ganga water-sharing schedule in view of unprecedented low flows in the Ganga at Farakka in West Bengal. India fears that the low flows may affect power generation at the National Thermal Power Corporation's Super Thermal Power House at Farakka and hit operations at the Kolkata port fed by the feeder canal.

The feeder canal waters that take water to the Kolkata port are also used en route for cooling the thermal plant. Any impact on the thermal plant would affect power supply to parts of West Bengal — a possibility that does not augur well with Assembly elections round the corner.

There has been scanty rainfall in the catchment areas of Ganga

basin. The water level in the 12 reservoirs in the Ganga basin is minus 55 per cent. Consequently, the storage is around 51,700 cusecs. The alarm bells would start ringing at 50,000 cusecs, the sources said.

Under the treaty India and Bangladesh share Ganga waters during the lean season, from January to May, based on the average water flows of 40 years. As per the schedule, between March 11 and May 10, each country would get 35,000 cusecs of water alternatively for 10 days each. At the current level of 51,700 cusecs, India would be left with barely 16,700 cusecs for its feeder canal — when it is Bangladesh's turn to draw its share — which would not be enough depth for the feeder canal. A minimum of 20,000 cusecs is required for the feeder canal, the sources said.

of common river waters, the High Commissioner said that after the signing of Ganges water sharing treaty, India looked forward to resolving similar issues with the same spirit. Bangladesh was a water surplus country, but faced the problems of water management and siltation, areas where India could help.

On Dhaka's concern over criminals taking shelter in India, she said the issue was of high importance to New Delhi. "The security issue will come up during the discussion between the two leaders." Things could not move without an extradition treaty, she said.

Answering a question on commencing the Dhaka-Guwahati, Dhaka-Shillong, Dhaka-Shiliguri and Dhaka-Kathmandu bus services, Ms. Sikri said the Indian Prime Minister dealt with the issue in his speech at the SAARC Summit.

"Bangladesh can be a hub between South Asia and the South East Asia. There was connectivity before 1965 ... we would like to have it and we want an all-way link."

Asked about the tri-nation gas pipeline, she said it had not been discussed for sometime. It was a commercial project to be implemented by an international consortium.

There was no scope for discussing the conditions imposed by Bangladesh within this framework.

CCS okays stronger border fencing

RAJNISH Sharma
New Delhi, February 13

CONCERNED OVER the increasing infiltration from Bangladesh, particularly into Assam and West Bengal, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has cleared an ambitious proposal to further strengthen and upgrade the fencing along the India-Bangladesh borders in these states.

Illegal migration from Bangladesh is a highly political issue in poll-bound West Bengal and Assam. The Cabinet Committee of Political Affairs (CCPA) had recently taken a decision to amend the Foreigners Act, particularly for Assam, where an illegal migrant will get an opportunity to present his case before a tribunal before he is declared a foreigner and deported.

Highly placed home ministry sources said the CCS, at its last meeting, had sanctioned Rs 884 crore for the fencing work along the Indo-Bangla border - particularly in Assam and West Bengal. While, in West Bengal, fencing along the 507-km border will be upgraded, in Assam, the total border of 149.29 km will be covered. Some parts of Meghalaya have also been included in the proposal. While clearing the home ministry proposal, the CCS was particular that the entire project should be completed within two years. The home ministry will also have to submit a regular status report to the CCS regarding progress on the fencing work.

Ministry officials said most of the fencing on the Indo-Bangla border in the two states had been covered during the first phase in 1989. Thus, this fencing had been badly damaged at most places providing easy access to the illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

Sources said the Centre was also keen that the new fencing should also cover the area between the zero line and 150 yards. This has been an extremely contentious issue, since Bangladesh has been strongly opposing any fencing or construction work in this area. Bangladesh Rifles has often resorted to heavy firing if fencing is done between the zero line and 150 yards.

Dhaka releases Meghalaya forest officials

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Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Jan. 4. — Bangladesh has finally returned three forest officials from Meghalaya who had been taken into custody by Bangladesh police about a month back. The three officials had inadvertently crossed the Indo-Bangla border at Jaintia Hills area in Meghalaya and their release comes after a month-long effort by Indian authorities.

A Meghalaya state forest department source said that Bangladesh Police handed the officials back to Meghalaya Police at Dawki in presence of the Jaintia Hills district forest officer (DFO) around 8 p.m. yesterday. The source said the officials were in good health and all their belongings, too, were returned.

The three officials — Mr Moses Lyngdoh, Mr Woldis Swer and Mr Ram Pohlong — were charged with guarding the Narpuh Block 1 Reserve Forest at Jaliakhola, Jaintia Hills. They had strayed into Bangladeshi territory while taking a short cut on 1 December 2005.

Meanwhile, forest staff in Meghalaya, which shares a long land border with Bangladesh, have been asked to be careful so that they don't stray inside Bangladeshi territory while discharging their duty inside the forests along the

Three AR jawans killed

IMPHAL, Jan. 4. — Three Assam Rifles jawans were killed and five others injured in an ambush by Manipur insurgents at Longpi village in interior hill district of Tamenglong, an official said today. He said personnel of the 35th Assam Rifles battalion yesterday launched a massive manhunt at Longpi area, about 55 km west of here, following reports that well-armed insurgents were roaming freely there. As they intensified the search operation, insurgents who were hiding in the thick jungles opened fire and in the ensuing exchange of fire three Assam Rifles personnel were killed. Casualty, if any, on the side of the insurgents was not immediately known. — PTI

international border.

Soon after the incident, the BDR and the BSF had a flag meeting for the release of the three officials. However, their released couldn't be secured easily as the BDR had handed over the forest officials to Bangladesh Police after taking them into custody for crossing the border.

Subsequently, Meghalaya chief minister Mr DD Lapang had called on the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, the Union home minister, Mr Shivraj Patil, and the Union tribal affairs minister, Mr PR Kyndiah, urging them to take up the matter with the Bangladeshi authorities.

THE STATESMAN

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Assam sector of India-Bangladesh border will be sealed: Patil

Home Minister, Assam Chief Minister visit border at Maslabari in Dhubri sector

Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI: The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on Tuesday said the Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil had assured it that a vast portion of the Assam sector of the India-Bangladesh border would be sealed by December 2006.

Student leaders who accompanied Mr. Patil and Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi for an inspection of the border told reporters that they showed Mr. Patil an open 20-km stretch at Maslabari in the Dhubri sector.

Describing Mr. Patil's visit as a great achievement, AASU president Shankar Prasad Rai, general secretary Tapan Kumar Gogoi and adviser Samujjal Kumar Bhattacharyya, claimed they could convince Mr. Patil why they had been agitating for sealing the border.

"Through our continued agitation we have been impressing upon the Centre and the State Government that the Assam-Bangladesh border is porous and illegal migration from Bangladesh has been taking place. On Monday, the Union Home Minister and the Assam Chief Minister could see for themselves that a vast area of the border is still open and even the old barbed wire fence in many areas like Sonahat needed to be replaced," said Mr. Bhattacharyya.

He said the AASU had asked the Centre that if the India-Pakistan border could be sealed in just two years why the India-Bangladesh border could not be sealed even 20 years after signing the Assam Accord.

The AASU leaders said they would monitor the progress of sealing the border within a stipulated time frame. They said the Union Home Minister had also assured them of undertaking another joint visit to the Karimganj sector.

Mr. Bhattacharyya said the Director-General of the Border Security Force had shown his mobile phone to Mr. Patil,



CHECKING BEFORE TILLING: Border Security Force personnel checking a farmer who is going to plough his land lying in the no man's area on the border with Bangladesh in Sonaghat, Dhubri district of Assam, on Tuesday. - PHOTO: RITU RAJ KONWAR

pointing to the non-availability network in the area.

Visits Tin Bigha Corridor

PTI reports from Siliguri:

Mr. Patil said that India accorded importance to better relations with Bangladesh, and the Berubari issue could be solved on the basis of dialogue.

Berubari in north Bengal is a

disputed area lying between Bangladesh and India. There has been a long-standing demand to settle the issue on the basis of the Indira Gandhi-Mujibur Rahman treaty.

Mr. Patil spoke to MP Hiten Barman and other local leaders and also received memoranda on the issue. The Home Minister, who is on a three-day visit to

north Bengal, earlier visited the Tin Bigha Corridor in Coochbehar district. He crossed over to the Panbari checkpoint in Patgram in Bangladesh where he interacted with senior officials of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). He was also given a guard of honour by the BDR personnel.

Mr. Patil signed the visitor's book at the specially construct-

ed camp at the checkpoint. He took tea with the officials there and also received gifts.

He also visited the border outpost at Bheem and discussed local issues with BSF officials.

He told newsmen that the Centre was keen on socio-economic programmes for the uplift of the people living in the border areas.

Patil inspects Indo-Bangla border fencing

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Jan. 2. — Union home minister Mr Shivraj Patil today carried out physical inspection of the fencing along the India-Bangladesh border at two places in the Dhubri sector in Western Assam along with the Assam chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi and a delegation of the All Assam Students Union (AASU).

Mr Patil visited the ongoing border fencing work in the Mancachar stretch of the international border and inspected the condition of already erected fencing at Sonarhat area. He happened to be the first Union home minister to pay a visit to the India-Bangladesh border in Assam. The visit was in accordance with the Assam Accord signed by the AASU and the Assam government representatives in New Delhi during May last year.

Construction of fencing along the India-Bangladesh border in the northeast to check illegal migration of people from Bangladesh was one of the main clauses of the Assam

Accord signed in the year 1985 by the Centre with the AASU as a consequence of the six-year-long (1979-1985) Assam agitation against illegal migration from Bangladesh. Immediately after his arrival here earlier in the day, Mr Patil held tripartite talks on the implementation of clauses of the Assam Accord with AASU representatives in the presence of Mr Gogoi and Union home ministry officials and the Assam government. Mr Patil said the AASU had discussed the fulfilment of its various demands through the implementation of all the clauses of the Assam Accord at the meeting.

The AASU, besides demanding the completion of border fencing work by the end of this year, pressed for its demand for the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) of 1952 till 25 March 1971 to facilitate the detection and deportation of illegal migrants from the state. As per the Assam Accord, all Bangladeshi immigrants who have come to the state illegally after 25 March 1971 must be detected and deported.