

Prospect for Yaswant-Morshed meet welcome

High time the push-in stopped

At least there is a recognition now at a very high level in India of the fact that the situation along the India-Bangladesh border has aggravated. The acknowledgment comes, at long last, in the wake of BSF's orchestrated attempts at pushing people of Indian domicile into Bangladesh territory and the resultant resistance to it being put up by the BDR. Hence, the root cause of the mounting tension at the border lies in the action of India, not in the reaction of Bangladesh.

However, we welcome the fact that three senior Indian cabinet ministers -- L K Advani, George Fernandes and Yaswant Sinha -- have spoken on the issue thereby signalling they are seized of the problem of a deteriorating scenario at the border. So far we have only seen the Indian Border Security Forces acting like automatons in having Bangla-speaking folks huddle together and trying to force them into Bangladesh territory. But now the Indian ministers seem to be taking cognizance of the fall-out of these push-in bids, although they are unfortunately yet to appreciate the logic of Bangladesh's natural reaction to a phenomenon that comes as a bolt from the blue. In a somewhat philosophical refrain Indian defence minister George Fernandes said, "There are times when things go out of control, and in this particular case, things have unfortunately gone out of control." Fernandes could not have blamed Bangladesh for her reactions, because no country, however friendly to India, can accept the principle of an imposed solution to what is basically touted as a problem by New Delhi. It is unacceptable historically, morally, ethically, diplomatically, and by the yardstick of inter-state norms followed to a particular finesse as between two next-door neighbouring countries.

Indian Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani, widely believed to be the architect of the so-called alien deportation move 'there are allegedly two crore Bangladeshis illegally living in India' sought Bangladesh's 'cooperation' in stemming 'the massive influx of illegal immigrants.' He met with West Bengal chief minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, who apparently preferred talks with Bangladesh to push-in bids, an inference that some observers drew from Bhattacharjee not making any press statement after his meeting with Advani.

On balance, however, it sounds positive that Indian external affairs minister Yaswant Sinha in a telephonic conversation with his Bangladesh counterpart on Wednesday night invited him to visit New Delhi at his earliest convenience. Set against the recent developments along the border, we would like to think that Sinha's approach is significant. Morshed Khan's prompt acceptance of his invitation in principle reciprocates the sense of urgency that Yaswant Sinha reflected by extending it. We peg our hat on to the prospective Morshed-Yaswant meet to initiate a meaningful dialogue on the question whereby we would be able to remove a potential thorn in the flesh of our bilateral relations.

If, for the argument's sake, the alleged illegal immigration has taken place into India from our side we should be able to address it by recourse to standard inter-state norms and practices. What these require is that India send us a list of suspected illegal immigrants and we verify their particulars at our end to determine their actual status. In this context, we endorse Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury's demand that "India has to stop the push-in first" (before the talks can begin) to address the question of so-called illegal immigration.

The issue is acquiring the classic trappings of a propaganda offensive being played out to the wire. These can not bode well for Indo-Bangla relationship in the long run, let alone the jeopardy it is being put into, right now. It does not augur well that BJP cadres and villagers are organising on the Indian side. The Bangladeshis are tensed up on their side. The issue is not about the scale on which this is taking place but the fact that it is happening at all is worrisome! We would urge India to realise that the guarantee for a mature neighbourly relationship lies in keeping it above domestic politics.

Indo-Bangladesh relations



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

It is perhaps nothing more than a coincidence but the eerie feeling persists, nevertheless. The book with the eponymous title written by Ambassador Harun Ur Rashid has resurfaced on the table at a time when relation between Bangladesh and India is at its nadir. In normal times the book would have attracted only readers with special interest on the subject. But nowadays India hogs the headline on daily basis causing anxieties, dismay and shock among Bangladeshis. News stories on India's push-ins of Bengali speaking men and women make sad and incredulous reading. The situation created all on a sudden by India looks disturbing and ominous, to say the least. The deeper significance of what is happening along the border transcends the immediacy of the incidents and the ruthlessness involved. It is as if a sea change has taken place in India's attitude towards Bangladesh and she is making no bones about letting it be known with all the harshness that is possible. The demonstration of this milestone in insensitivity has been made with utter cynicism and disdain. Ambassador Harun's book on Indo-Bangladesh Relations give a convincing insight into the mindset of Indian policy makers which goes a long way in explaining the atrocious act. Because of this the book published in 2002 will appear very timely and relevant even to lay readers.

The book does not contain any account of the tragedy of push-in, this being a recent development. But the author's chronicling of Indo-

Bangladesh relation since inception is so revealing of a pattern that it is almost prescient in predicting events like push-in. Reading the book one has no illusion about India's policy towards Bangladesh. As is suggested by the author, it is one based on self-aggrandisement, selfishness and naked use of power in the pursuit of narrow national interests. This is not the first time that India has shown her contempt for genuine interests and international rights of Bangladesh. The book also destroys the myth that India turned hostile only after

ments India's unwillingness to resolve bilateral issues amicably and gives examples one after another. Among the first of these that left Bangladesh at the receiving end and non-pulsed was Ganges water dispute.

Considering the contribution India made to Bangladesh's independence, Bangladesh sincerely hoped that India would come to an amicable agreement regarding allocation of Ganges water before it was diverted through Farakka barrage. The Joint Declaration of the two Prime Ministers, on 16 May,

fairness and legality should govern the sea boundary between two adjacent countries India insisted on a boundary line that gave Bangladesh a tiny little area in the Bay of Bengal, effectively making her sea-locked. All meetings at Secretaries, Foreign Ministers and even at the level of Prime Ministers of the two countries in 1975 failed to resolve the issue. The sea boundary remains undetermined till today because India failed to impose her will on Bangladesh. The description of events surrounding this dispute is as absorbing as it is dismaying. The

Bangladeshis. The gravest Indian border incursions took place in April 2001 in which 19 BSF members were killed. Since then BSF is shooting down Bangladeshis all along the border as if with a vengeance. All efforts from Bangladesh side to settle the border issue has fallen on India's deaf ears.

The fourth case where India's aggressive attitude became manifest is over the ownership of South Talpatty Island. In 1981 India's naval vessels docked at the island to assert possession over it and an armed naval clash nearly took

To understand fully the state of Indo-Bangladesh relationship one has to understand the security concerns of India in South Asia and its counter-response from China and Pakistan. This is the most profound observation in the book and perhaps holds the key to unlocking the mind of India in its attitude towards Bangladesh.

Referring to security experts the author believes that India's strategy in South Asia appears to be based on four considerations. First, that no outside power should intervene or interfere in matters pertaining to South Asia without India's involvement. Second, all bilateral issues involving her should be resolved through mutual negotiation. Third, no neighbouring country should acquire weapons threatening the security of India. Fourth, her neighbours cannot build close relationship with India's regional rivals.

According to the author one can argue that if Bangladesh ignores the four principles of India's strategic interests, she may consider such actions as "un-friendly". From this he concludes that "the bottom line is that a recalcitrant country will not be able to consider India as a 'friend' and that will in turn bring about all the attendant adverse consequences." Is the present push-in the manifestation of such adverse consequences? If it is so the solution is not a policy of appeasement and surrender because a country cannot do so and remain self-respecting and sovereign. But neither is a policy of minimal engagement pragmatic. What Bangladesh can and should do is to clarify and inform her position before and after taking an independent posture and initiative in foreign relations. This much needs to be done for the sake of diplomacy. As they say, when you are dining with the devil use a long spoon.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

"The bottom line is that a recalcitrant country will not be able to consider India as a 'friend' and that will in turn bring about all the attendant adverse consequences." Is the present push-in the manifestation of such adverse consequences? If it is so the solution is not a policy of appeasement and surrender because a country cannot do so and remain self-respecting and sovereign. But neither is a policy of minimal engagement pragmatic.

August, 1975. Bangladesh did not get a fair and equitable treatment from India even when it was a war ravaged country struggling to rise from the ashes of destruction from the liberation war. The moment Bangladesh started to assert independence as a sovereign country India began tightening the screw. This sordid saga began with the first government in Bangladesh with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Prime Minister. India did not treat him differently from his successors.

Ambassador Harun refreshes the memory of his readers with interesting accounts of various disputes between the two neighbours. In none of the disputes India showed fair mindedness and reason about the legal rights of Bangladesh. No concessions were made even when those would not harm her interests in any significant way. In negotiations her representatives behaved boorishly and arrogantly as implacable adversaries, always ready to carry the day in no-holds-barred skirmishes across the table. The author painstakingly docu-

1974 confirmed this unequivocally. In July 1974 India reiterated that a mutually accepted solution would be arrived at before operations of the barrage. Bangladesh was therefore taken by complete surprise when India proposed that the barrage would be commissioned as a test-run. In the meeting of Foreign Ministers held in April, 1975 Bangladesh argued that India's proposal was in contravention of the agreement reached between the two Prime Ministers. But all arguments were futile and Bangladesh was compelled to agree because, in the words of the author, "it understood that India would proceed with the test-run of the Barrage, even without Bangladesh's agreement. Thus Bangladesh had no choice but to agree to India's proposals as a face-saving device." It is pertinent to "revisit" Farakka whenever Indo-Bangladesh relation is discussed because of its benchmark status.

The second case of India's perfidy and high-handedness mentioned by the author relates to the sea boundary dispute. Even though

author played a key role in the negotiation over the issue, which lends special attraction to the narration.

The third example of India's lack of sincerity and good neighbourly attitude cited by the author is regarding land boundary. To prevent bloody conflicts along the long border, Bangladesh was keen to settle the boundary issue with India. Although an Agreement was signed by the Prime Ministers of the two countries in 1972 due to non-ratification by India, the provisions could not be put into effect. On her part, Bangladesh ratified the Agreement promptly and handed over Berubari to India. It was only in 1992 that India allowed Bangladesh to use "Tin Bigha" area in West Bengal as corridor between Bangladesh enclaves and mainland. The exchange of more than 50 enclaves by India to Bangladesh and demarcation of 6.5 km. of border remain un-implemented. As a result, border clashes, initiated mostly by India, have become regular incidents in which victims are mostly

place. This dispute too, remains unresolved and an agreement was reached only to maintain status quo.

The author narrates the history of these and other issues as an insider. As a lawyer-turned diplomat he took part in negotiations in most of the disputes and as an eyewitness had first hand knowledge about them. Anecdotes and personal experiences enliven the narration of events centering these issues. In expressing his reactions and personal thoughts he exercises restraint and a sense of propriety. His perception of problems, knowledge of issues involved and analytical skill cannot fail to impress. Though the subject is dull and depressing he manages to make it riveting.

The most interesting and important chapter of the book concerns the strategic and security interests of India. The author rightly points out that Indo-Bangladesh relations cannot be assessed in isolation without regional political and security environment as perceived by India. These constitute the backdrop to India's foreign policy.

Another theory of relativity



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

MORALITY is comparable to a filter that separates good from evil. It defines what is right and what is wrong, a guideline for people, who wish to stay on the righteous course. Morality is a cuisine of character, where instincts are marinated in the juice of rectitude, and attitude of men is relished in the flavour of virtue.

Alfred North Whitehead asks in Dialogues, "What is morality in any given time or place?" He then answered to his own question: "It is what the majority then and there happen to like, and immorality is what they dislike." Friedrich Nietzsche was laconic in his answer to the same question: "Morality is the herd-instinct in the individual." So, morality is the flavour of virtue of a particular generation in a particular age. Men once used to fight duels to amicably settle differences between them. It was alright in the Middle Ages to have children outside wedlock, so long as men were ready to give their names to the children. In ancient Arabia and in China until recent past, baby girls were killed at birth.

In the beginning of history, men

worshipped trees, fires, stones and lightning. Aborigines in Australia roasted and devoured the flesh of their enemies who were captured. It was perfectly okay for men to marry several sisters (in Bhutan, the king is married to four sisters even in the twenty-first century), and in the ancient world men were allowed to marry their sisters. In certain parts of southern India, maternal uncles have the first right to marry their own nieces.

a sinking man it would be costly to weigh the moral aspects of clutching at a straw. What about a father who needs money to save the life of his sickly child? What about a starving man, who comes across a stockpile of foodgrain? Child labour, for example, is a horrible thing in the Western countries, which they have struggled to eliminate since the days of Oliver Twist. In a developing country, a child has to play the role of a grown-up man at his tender age

a tooth for a tooth, at the same time elevating forgiveness as the supreme virtue. Thus even within morality there are choices for one to pick and choose. But people do what suits them most. There are but few examples of the rich and powerful forgiving those who wrong them. The meek and weak always forgive in the hope that the hell of this life would be compensated by the heaven in the next.

Yet morality is the third most used

and tunic firmly laced and tied together, because that was her only means of defending herself against rape, since a dress didn't offer any protection at all. Joan pleaded with her inquisitor to transfer her to a Church prison with women to guard her, in which case she could wear a dress; but this was never allowed.

When all other charges proved futile, her enemies eventually accused her of violation of the prohibition against cross-dressing,

justifying the end, hypocrisy is the other way around. It is when the end justifies the means. In the myth of Behula and Laxminder, the mischievous snake waited to be kicked three times by a sleeping Laxminder before it justified biting its victim in his foot.

Politicians use plays to win their elections, robbers use mask to commit their crimes, magicians use spells to deceive their audience and others use charm to work on their targets. In the world that swings between light and shadow, contriving men and women use morality to perpetrate insidious offence in the garb of innocence.

Morality is a relative thing that varies across spatial and temporal plains. However, a common stream has emerged for the convenience of all, which is explained by Immanuel Kant: we must do to others, what we want others to do to us. That one must not take his neighbour's wife or be generous to the poor and sick, is rooted in the realisation that what goes around also comes around.

In 1929, Albert Einstein was addressing an audience at the Sorbonne in Paris. He said that if his theory of relativity was proven correct, Germany would claim him as a German and France would declare that he was a citizen of the world. But should his theory prove untrue, he added, France would say that he was a German and Germany would declare that he was a Jew.

Morality is a relative thing and hypocrisy is its alter ego. All other debates ensue from the tension between these two.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

Morality is a relative thing that varies across spatial and temporal plains. However, a common stream has emerged for the convenience of all, which is explained by Immanuel Kant: we must do to others, what we want others to do to us. That one must not take his neighbour's wife or be generous to the poor and sick, is rooted in the realisation that what goes around also comes around.

So morality is not fixed. It is a living concept that grows and changes within its own dynamics, which makes it more relative than absolute. Morality, therefore, varies from man to man, society to society, religion to religion, running like a fluid through a checked channel, its colour changing every time it goes through a different shade. In some Middle Eastern countries, the groom must pay dowry to the bride's father, whereas in South Asia, women are even burned to death if their families don't pay dowry to their husbands. In the West, the whole idea of dowry would be considered appalling and degenerate.

In Education of Henry Adams, Henry Brook Adams writes, "Morality is a private and costly luxury." For

and work to support his family.

Again, child pornography is a delicacy for the sex maniacs in western countries, but it is a repulsive thought in the east. In the developing nations, bribery is as if amongst the perquisites of bureaucracy, while this is a moral turpitude in the west, punishable by law and social indignation. Christians drink wine as the blood of Jesus, Muslims abhor it, while Sikhs are allowed to drink but forbidden to smoke.

Moral sanctions are more mundane than divine, although religion has its role. Mathews Arnold argues in Literature and Dogma, "The true meaning of religion is thus not simply morality, but morality touched by emotion." Every religion permits revenge, an eye for an eye,

word after religion and God. As a matter of fact, morality is used in the name of both as if the sanctity of man is rooted in his faith or the higher being in whom he has that faith. But then people have been accused of heresy for not conforming to the moral tenets of their time. Galileo Galilei ended his life in house arrest after an inquisition by the Catholic Church had found him guilty of heresy, because he had supported the Copernican system that the sun was the centre of the universe.

Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. When the English captured her, she was held in a secular military prison with English soldiers as guards. There she clung to her soldiers' outfit and kept the pants

deliberately ignoring the fact that St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Hildegard, and other medieval theologians specifically allowed an exemption in such cases of necessity. Once the flames had consumed the body of Joan of Arc tied to a tall pillar, many amongst her captors were found sobbing because an innocent life was destroyed by an unjust inquisition. Five centuries later this condemned heretic would be canonized as saint.

Morality is mostly impersonated by hypocrisy, when the wolf muddies the water to pick a quarrel and uses it as an excuse to devour the lamb. George Bush has recently said in his State of the Union Address that the oppressed people of Iraq are awaiting to be liberated by the USA. If morality is means

Not war but peace is demand of the hour

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

AGAINST the backdrop of war looming over Iraq in the light of American President George W Bush's insistence that Saddam Hussain does have weapons of mass destruction in spite of the statement by Chief UN inspector Hans Blix to the contrary (he is reported to have stated that no 'smoking gun' was found in Iraq) Europe's two powerful allies, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of the Federal Republic of Germany and President Jacques Chirac of the Republic of France opposed war against Iraq. While speaking at a press conference after addressing the congressional chamber at the palace of Versailles on 22 January, where about 900 Deputies of German Bundestag (Parliament) and French National Assembly held their first ever joint session of Parliament as a part of marking the 40th anniversary of the signing of German-Franco Elysee treaty President Chirac said any decision against Iraq should be decided by the Security Council of the United Nations alone and everything must

be done to avoid war. UN panel monitoring sanctions against Al-Qaeda made it clear that there was no proof to link Iraq with Al-Qaeda network, which explicitly negates the charges made by America and Great Britain recently.

Meanwhile, both Russia and China, two other permanent members of the Security Council hold the opinion that 'it is indispensable to pursue diplomatic efforts' to resolve the problems with Iraq and unilateral military action 'without explicit authorisation' from the Security Council will complicate the situation in the region. In a latest move both Russia and China joined hands with France and Germany in opposing war. This means majority members of the Security Council are against war. Six neighbouring countries of Iraq in the Gulf region at a meeting in Istanbul on 23 January called on Iraq to fully cooperate with UN inspectors. A clear message was given to America to avert war and remain within the parameter of Security Council. If America and Great Britain take unilateral action against Iraq, it will not only violate the Charter of the United Nations

but also cause irreparable damage to the existence of the world body. The world body was founded to save succeeding generation from the scourge of war, 'which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind'.

As the prospects for war are increasing with the deployment of armament and troops, by both America and Great Britain, in the Gulf region, worldwide protest demonstrations against war are becoming louder. The biggest ever demonstrations were held at Washington and Los Angeles recently. This trend shows clearly that the people, by and large, are against launching war. The voices by saner elements from within America, which include former President Jimmy Carter, respected senator Edward Kennedy and the former Vice-President Al-Gore, speak against war and urge upon President Bush to concentrate on economic developments to improve ailing economy of America. Senator Kennedy accused President Bush of driving Americans and their allies apart.

Deployment by America and

Great Britain ahead of completion of inspection of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq by UN inspectors is tantamount to showing disregard towards the world body. UN inspectors were mandated by resolution 1441 of the Security Council. Apparently the action initiated by Bush and Tony Blair administration jointly is provocative in nature. Although one cannot hold brief for Saddam Hussein because of his bad track record of violation of human rights, Saddam administration should be given credit for according all possible cooperation to UN inspectors in spite of humiliation.

One really wonders under what context Bush administration intends to invade Iraq? Action is required by the world body with respect to threats to peace, breach of peace and act of aggression. In this connection, one may refer to article 39 of chapter 7 of the UN charter, which explicitly stipulates that the Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to peace, breach of peace, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with articles 41

and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security. Articles 41 and 42 speak for solution of problem by applying complete or partial economic sanction and severance of diplomatic relations. In case of failure to prevent threat to peace, the Security Council may decide to use force and request member countries to make available armed forces. As per article 46, plans for application of armed force shall be made by the Security Council with the assistance of the Military Committee. Article 51 of the charter provides provision for individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a member of the United Nations. These articles are clearly indicative of the fact that the UN charter is against the use of force except for self-defence.

In case of Kosovo issue, which US Secretary of State Colin Powell refers to, the Security Council never authorised use of force against Yugoslavia. Because some European countries were flooded with refugees from Kosovo and in view of intransigence attitude of Milosevic, former President of

Yugoslavia, towards Kosovo problem, members of European Union through the apparatus of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) attacked Serbian forces to drive them out of Kosovo and also hit Belgrade to bring Milosevic to his senses to honour autonomy in Kosovo and re-settle refugees consequentially. It may be noted that former President Bill Clinton was reluctant to join NATO to attack Serbian forces. NATO led attack is not lawful precedent. It is indeed a bad precedent. According to Michael J. Glennon, Professor of International Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, NATO, which led the Kosovo war, never seriously claimed a defensive rationale, and the United States has yet to advance such a justification concerning Iraq.

President Bush's speech on 12 September 2002 at the General Assembly of the United Nations did not contain any further evidence against Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction, something that have posed a threat to America and its allies. President Bush also mentioned in his speech that he

was doubtful that Saddam would meet his demands to comply swiftly and fully with UN resolutions, a subtle indication that US leader was bent upon to hit Iraq at any cost, come what may, irrespective of whether or not Saddam complied with the UNSC resolutions. There is hardly any justification to carry out war against Iraq, which no way poses a threat to America and when majority people including three out of five permanent members of the Security Council are against war.

The present situation in West Asia is actually fluid and tense. When the people of Palestine are dying and the cycle of violence in the Israeli occupied region continues unabated, the war against Iraq will escalate the volatile situation beyond control.

Apart from this, one should note that Shi'ites are the majority segment of the population in Iraq (60-65 per cent), which is bounded by Iran, another Shi'ite dominated country, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Turkey and Syria. Ideologically Shi'ites are anti-western. It may be noted that Amal Shi'ite militia in Lebanon backed by Iran has

caused concern for Israel. America also shares this concern. Kurds in Iraq and Turkey also pose serious political problem. The Bush administration knows very well that a victory by Iraqi Kurds might encourage the on-going Kurdish uprising in Turkey, a trusted ally of NATO. A radical Shi'ite Arab unity would cause concern for Gulf allies of America and to other western powers too.

If President Bush intends to launch an attack unilaterally to change the regime of Saddam Hussein without having a powerful successor from the Sunni sect, he will certainly open Pandora's box in West Asia. It would also cause damage to the international alliances so assiduously built during the war against terrorism if the Security Council does not back Bush's plan.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain is a former diplomat.