

Delhi meeting

Good work must be taken forward

IT is welcome news that the talks between Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and his Indian counterpart Yashwant Sinha have ended in New Delhi on a positive note. It has been decided that the foreign secretaries of India and Bangladesh would meet in April to resolve the 'illegal immigrants issue' which has posed as the latest irritant in their relations. Both the ministers are optimistic that the issue can be left behind through a dialogue.

Obviously, the recent developments on the borders between the two countries, following push-in bids by the BSF, have been a matter of great concern, and it was necessary to gear up diplomatic activities to address it squarely. So, the meeting between the two foreign ministers could not have been more propitious. Basically we look at it as an acceptance of the time-honoured modalities of resolving any unforeseen crisis in the relations between two neighbouring countries.

They are on the right track at the moment, but then it is imperative that the ground for an enduring solution to the so-called illegal immigrants issue is prepared with patience and care in the prelude to the secretary-level meeting in April. Holding of flag meetings between the BSF and the BDR and other tension-defusing activities must continue as part of routine exercises along the border whenever needed.

There is more than one and a half months left before the foreign secretary-level meeting takes place. It has to be seen that the borders remain calm and no untoward incident, which might put pressure on bilateral relations, occurs during the interregnum. That's needed to make sure that the foreign secretary-level meet proves effective in resolving the crisis.

In the meanwhile, it is highly imperative that sweeping comments and vitriol are avoided in order to foster the right kind of atmosphere for the forthcoming secretary-level talks to yield some tangible results.

We look at the outcome of the Morshed-Yashwant meet as a manifestation of maturing relations between the two friendly nations. However, the good work needs to be conscientiously taken forward so that we can leave the so-called illegal immigration issue behind us, once and for all.

Our growing shame at the World Cup!

Losing streak topped by record-giving spree

WHEN our cricketers took to the Kingsmead stadium in Durban on January 11 for their first match in the eighth ICC World Cup, even the staunchest of sceptic might have thought that Bangladesh's 26-match losing streak in one-day internationals was about to be over. After all, the opposition was Canada, a cosmopolitan outfit of six West Indians, two Indians, a Sri Lankan, "a largely unsuccessful" New Zealand first class cricketer, a "fringe Sheffield Shield spinner" and a former Caribbean youth player. The last team to pull off a win against Bangladesh, right? Wrong. The so-called tigers of Bangladesh could not even last 50 overs and fell 60 short of a modest Canadian total of 181.

In the annals of the cricket, the Canadian win could go down as an upset result. But the Canadians did beat a Test-playing nation. And, for the most part of the match, Bangladeshis were at the receiving end. Mediocre bowling stood out in the end, as the batsmen once again proved they might have been prematurely pushed into the game's fast lane. That was just the start.

Against the 1996 winners Sri Lanka in the next match, Bangladesh did what no other teams had done before in the World Cup; they lost their first four batsmen in the first over. Given the inept performance of the top order, the eventual total of 124 did look respectable, not enough anyway to give the emerald islanders a run for their money though. They rattled the required runs in a shade over 21 overs without losing a single wicket. What's there left for us, the millions of cricket fans in Bangladesh!

Hoping against hope, maybe. No, even the most incorrigible optimist did not expect the cricketers to be the David and slay the Goliath. However, they were expected to play by the knowledge of their past pitfalls, stay on the crease for most of the 50 overs and give some semblance of a fight. They did not. The defeats do not hurt as much as does the lack of guts and grit in our cricketers.

How to deal with dictators?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

US Supreme Court Justice William Douglas once said that the people who proclaim civil liberties but extend them only to preferred few start down the path of totalitarianism. They emulate either the dictatorship of the Right or the dictatorship of the Left. If one defines a totalitarian state as one which controls not only the political life but also the economic, spiritual and cultural lives of the people while an authoritarian state exercises political control but leaves other realms relatively undisturbed; one may then find little difference between Stalinism and Hitlerism. Albeit, social scientists sympathetic to the left would quickly point out the positive and humanistic aspect of left ideology implied in the brotherhood of the people and social equality. In their enthusiasm to trace similarity between Soviet system and Western democracy, these social historians were of the view that Soviet totalitarianism was ideologically inspired with utopian overtones, and one would only need to remove to discredit and remove the communist system to return the Soviet society to "normalcy" which is defined as akin to western democracy. Through this odyssey the

totalitarian state would attain Francis Fukuyama's famous theory of the "end of history" which emphasizes present day western democracy as the ultimate goal of humanity (Dimitry Shlapentokh -- *The Problems of Russian Democracy*).

The decomposition of Soviet society and the disintegration of the Soviet empire as one of the major events of modern history are known to all. To many the unlikely emergence of the "Phoenix Phenomenon"--- the rise of a strong leader to lead Russia to its former glory leads and sustained by CIA through Pakistan to fight the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Saddam Hussein was courted and sustained by the west in his long war with Iran, which then posed and still does a threat as one of the "axis of evil" to the west. Many Asian, African and Latin American dictators (Ayub Khan of Pakistan, Mobutu of Zaire, Pinochet of Chile to name a few) could not have survived for long

without western support. But then they were pawns in cold war game, which has now irrevocably ended. Some of the authoritarian regimes also used command economies to the benefit of their people. Many in South Korea today may argue that Park Chung He could have used the state finances more judiciously as some called him crazy(behind his back) for building the long and wide highway from Seoul to Pusan, the port city. One must however admit that South Korea's monumental economic

achievement is a by-product of his ironclad rule. It would be fallacious to deny the contribution of Lee Kwan Hue in the economic advancement of Singapore to the stage she is in today as the most advanced nation after Japan in Asia. Thailand under successive military regimes (propped up by the Americans because of the Vietnam War and communist onslaught in the area) scored double-digit growth rate

in East Europe. Throughout history there have always been fear of the unknown and the obscure. This fear, which has unfortunately become an obsession in the west after Nine-Eleven events, has to be dealt with judiciously but firmly. There is no reason why the entire Iraq people have to suffer because Saddam Hussein gets "elected" with more than ninety nine percent "votes"?

It is to be understood that the use of force is the end of reason; every one concerned has a right to have a shout in making this extreme decision; and that there is a risk of contagion from chaos which may follow such use of force. As in the case of Iraq Franco-German policy as opposed to American haste appears to have more merit and that diplomacy should be given more time to play itself out before Saddam Hussein and his likes are removed from power.

to the logical conclusion that the focus of western foreign policy in the future would be China and not Russia. This school of thought finds sustenance from the inclusion of Russia in G-8; her acceptance of NATO at its door steps; and no less importantly her dependence on western capital for revival of Russian economy.

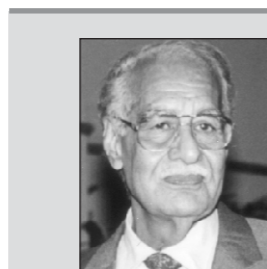
The object of this enquiry is whether the international commu-

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It's temple all over again



KULDIP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

IT is always difficult to reconcile religious passions with the discipline of legal judgments. Still, organisations and individuals do so for sordid motives. But when the governments go the same way, they betray their political leanings.

The BJP-led government at the centre does not seem to be even embarrassed about it. That it has wanted to build a temple at the disputed Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid site is not something that it has hidden ever. But when it kept the issue out of the agenda of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) -- the 24-party conglomerate -- the BJP made it clear that it would not mix its intention with the consensus of the NDA to have the temple issue aside.

The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), the BJP's Taliban, was never reconciled to it because it wanted three sites -- the Babri masjid and the mosques standing alongside at Varanasi and Mathura. The VHP's entire activity, in fact, revolved around what would polarise the society. And now it wants the possession of the Trisul (trident), to be legalised, because it thrives on the success it gets in an atmosphere of

force, not the law of the land.

Apparently under pressure from the VHP, the BJP has made the NDA government approach the Supreme Court to vacate the stay on construction of any structure on the land the centre had acquired around the demolished Babri masjid site. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has supported the reference on the ground that "when a dispute cannot be resolved through negotiations, the verdict of the judiciary has to be

verdict of the judiciary that Vajpayee holds so high.

Another drawback in his defence is that the government has gone back on what it once considered was the best way out. At that time, the VHP's threat was so real and so persistent that acquisition of the 67 acres of land surrounding the disputed site was considered the right move to stall any untoward incident. When the Supreme Court upheld the government's step some nine

The VHP is only diverting the nation's attention. On its part, the BJP is trying to cover up its failures with emotive issues like the Ram temple. A Hindu card, played too often, can evoke a feeling of disgust among the Hindus who have imbued the spirit of pluralism and accommodation for centuries. The demolition of the Babri masjid evoked a sense of disgust among them and they showed it during the state elections in UP, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

accepted." This statement is unexceptionable. But it suffers from two drawbacks. One, the VHP has declared that it would not accept a verdict that goes against its stand. If that is the case, then how does Vajpayee propose to implement the judgment if the masjid site is given to the Muslims? By requesting the Supreme Court to vacate the stay, his government has already yielded to the VHP's blackmail. Its mentor and Ram Janambhoomi Nyas chairman Mahant Ram Chandra Pramahans has already declared that the Ram temple would be built "at any cost" within 18 months at the disputed site. In other words, the VHP does not mean to respect the

sanctum sanctorum will be ready. It will be surrounding the disputed site. How will any government stop the VHP from extending the temple to the disputed site?

A similar situation arose before the demolition of the Babri masjid when lakhs of *kar sevaks* were allowed to assemble at Ayodhya with shovels and baskets despite the Supreme Court's order not to disturb the status quo. Kalyan Singh of the BJP was the state chief minister then. Now Mayawati's support is assured because the BJP's gives her majority in the UP assembly. When the centre under the Congress government could not

do anything to stop the demolition, how will it now check the VHP when both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister are a willing party? True, not all the NDA constituents are behind the BJP's reference to the court. But George Fernandes, the convener of the alliance, is already working on smothering the differences. Even Andhra chief minister Chandrababu Naidu, whose voice counts, may not be

country enough to face the polls any time. Two-thirds of majority in the Gujarat assembly elections seem to have gone to the party's head. The BJP should realise, if it has not already, that its strength is proportionate to the weakness of the Congress. The latter has not been able to put its act together because people like Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh are trying to fight the BJP on a religious plank. Some in the Congress believe that it is a political fight. The party does not seem to realise that the real problem is economic. The VHP is only diverting the nation's attention. On its part, the BJP is trying to cover up its failures with emotive issues like the Ram temple. A Hindu card, played too often, can evoke a feeling of disgust among the Hindus who have imbued the spirit of pluralism and accommodation for centuries. The demolition of the Babri masjid evoked a sense of disgust among them and they showed it during the state elections in UP, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

BETWEEN THE LINES

It is an opportune moment for the Liberhan commission to come out with its verdict. It has been sitting for more than 10 years to find out who were responsible for the demolition of the Babri masjid. The commissions, headed by retired judges or bureaucrats, tend to extend themselves endlessly. The verdict of the Liberhan commission is very much needed at a time when the VHP has revived the temple issue all over again. People want to know the names of those who destroyed the masjid and why.

Let us imagine a possible scenario when this gas pipeline is sabotaged by vested quarter within or outside Bangladesh and our importer under the pretext to protect their vital interest makes a pre-emptive strike to secure the pipe line and resume supply, even worse decides to station its security forces along the pipeline inside Bangladesh to prevent such occupancies in future. World has witnessed such incidents in Cote d'Ivoire recently.

Similarly, since it is difficult to assess the popularity or unpopularity of Kim Jung Il in his impoverished starving nation North Korean defiance of IAEA obligations and its withdrawal from NPT cannot be condoned. Long before Nine-Eleven the nexus between the shadowy world of terrorism and failed and failing states as well as states that support terrorism in the name of freedom struggle had been established. It was typical expression of western colonial mentality that the nexus and the resultant threat were ignored when the "natives" died and now they are resorting to Hitlerism when their own perished on the US mainland.

The present exploration is not for the context and lineage of the degree of morality of western reaction nor a forensic investigation into acts of terror. It is to be understood that the use of force is the end of reason; every one concerned has a right to have a voice in making this extreme decision; and that there is a risk of contagion from chaos which may follow such use of force. As in the case of Iraq Franco-German policy as opposed to American haste appears to have more merit and that diplomacy should be given more time to play itself out.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is retired secretary to the Bangladesh government and former ambassador.

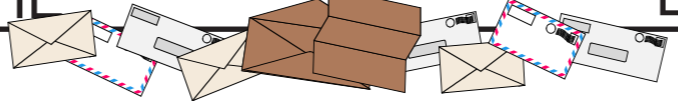
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What would be our recourse, are we going to risk our sovereignty, are we going to play into the hands of those who openly term Bangladesh as a soft terrorist state.

One recourse I can think of is that the organisation currently engaged in production of gas in Bangladesh

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Push-in

There are three distinctive causes which are responsible for the rising Indian media propaganda and diplomatic offensive against Bangladesh. First and foremost is the unprecedented rise of Hindu Fundamentalism in India nurtured and backed by the present government of BJP. India's rhetoric also appears to be linked to efforts by the governing Bharatiya Janata Party to drum up votes for the Party by appeals to Hindu Communalism.

Secondly our Opposition Leader's campaign of Bangladesh harbouring terrorists coupled with religious persecutions of the Hindus as a measure of discrediting the Ruling Party which in turn resulted in fortifying the already existent hostile attitude of to-day's Indian Government towards the BNP Ruling Coalition. Bangladesh being the third most populous nations and the world terror threats being linked to extremists belonging to the Muslim Community, it was also easier for the foreign media to pick up these derogatory press reports against Bangladesh "giving them a colour of credibility".

The last but not least in importance is the emerging face of Indian Imperialistic Ventures to dominate its "weaker neighbours". India is on the path of turning Bangladesh into yet another of "its Sikkim or Bhutan".

The Indian push-in of the so-called illegal Bangladeshis living in India, therefore must be viewed and analysed against the above background. This push-in is nothing but

an integral apart of that greater strategy and ambition which India is pursuing with religious zeal in order to establish its hegemony on the region.

Shamsher Chowdhury, Dhaka

I agree with Mr. R. Kalita that the border is porous between Bangladesh and India. But it is really doubtful if "thousand" of Bangladeshis flood India. May be India is the "biggest democracy" and the "most secular country" but it is no utopia. As far as I remember, under the law of India if an alien lives in India for 10 years, he becomes a citizen of India.

And the question is why India has chosen to push-in these illegal aliens now? It is because in the upcoming election BJP needs a ground. Sectarian violence (in the most secular country (!) will not pay off in these parts of India. So go for nationalist rhetoric and start push in.

Joy, Dhaka

As an Indian it's important that I make my voice heard. And since I am here your page seems to be the best platform.

I don't have to be in anybody's good book. I don't have to tow any party-politic line. I am the polity, I am a free citizen of India and I know my rights. The present stance taken by India is very unfortunate but not innocent. The intention is clear. This is the age-old vote bank politics. The ruling party at the centre, I don't have to display their colours, we all know it, is using this as a strategy used in the recent Gujarat polls to

corner the Hindu sympathy wave in the country as a whole but more specifically in the East. As they have not yet found a foothold in these parts of the country and which won't be as easy as it was in the "Hindi belt".

I can only hope that my fellow citizens in the east of India won't be so gullible. I can only hope because I have many a times been rudely surprised amongst friends and relatives both in India and here at their hidden communal agenda. Thus it was heartening to read the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya's statement that the Government of West Bengal won't throw out any Bengali speaking people from the state. So the government at the centre is using the BSF, a central force, to do it.

I have a feeling that this will last until the assembly elections across the country. After that it will die out. But let's all be clear that this is an election ploy of a particular saffron party and not the wish of majority of secular Indians, who I hope are yet secular! This world is full of surprises!

Awrup Sanyal, Dhaka

It is really strange and sad that during the meeting with the US Ambassador, Sheikh Hasina didn't mention the Indians' push-in attempts and the misery of hundreds Indians Muslims.

Asif Jamal Siddeshari Lane, Dhaka

If India really continues and suc-

ceeds to push in thousands, not to speak of millions into our territory, it will bring in a calamity of health hazard because India has large incidence of HIV and the type of Indian slum people being chosen by India are likely to carry the virus. The World Health Organisation should be alerted immediately.

Altaf Choudhury, Dhaka

India should learn how to behave properly with a neighbour. It is unfortunate that this country has problems with all the neighbouring countries, let alone with Pakistan. Bangladesh is not an exception. Since 1972, India has been showing a big brotherly attitude towards Bangladesh, reminding always that without India's help Bangladesh could not achieve independence. It is true that India helped us during the independence struggle and for that we are grateful to India. But that does not mean that we have become their satellite. We admit that 10 million people took shelter in India during 1971, but they all came back after the war was over. So question does not arise that there are two million Bangladeshis on Indian soil now as claimed by Mr. L K Advani, a person who is fond of creating troubles with the neighbours.

The continuous push-in attempts started following a recent statement by Mr. Advani which is totally irresponsible. The other Indian leaders are singing chorus with Mr. Advani which is surprising in a democracy like India. The inhuman situation of several hundred people in no man's

land and the military build-up close to our borders indicate their negative attitude towards Bangladesh.

India is dreaming to become a regional superpower. But what India needs is a personality befitting for a superpower. Pelting stone to neighbours' houses and quarrelling with them does not show that it has got anything called personality.

Mohammed Kamal Uddin Baridhara, Dhaka

Muhuri Murder case and ICS

In reference to the previous discourse in this forum regarding the participation of Islami Chhatra Shibir in DU campus. I think the Muhuri murder have shown us the true colour of Shibir and its intentions regarding educational institutions. Professors and students, none are safe from this vicious organisation.

Yahya, USA

Image of a nation

Enter the office of Bangladesh Consulate General in New York, 211 East 43rd Street, first on the left you will see a dirty, ancient looking reception desk manned by unsmat, unfriendly, never smiling faces waiting for an opportunity to harass innocent looking less fortunate children of lesser God - *deshies*.

Next on the right side you see a little mosque like place with filthy rugs on the floor ever ready for prayer giving you a feeling that you entered a mosque in Dhaka rather than a Consulate/Embassy of a country. Wonder why we are so alarmed that Ban-

gladesh has been listed. Is it not the image our Foreign Service guys created for us too?

They keep going with their life in overseas accumulating dollars, living a life of luxury and treating their little *deshi* fellows as dirt, occasionally beating and torturing their maids imported from Bangladesh and getting the torture news published in the New York Times or Washington Post.

"What has been your achievements during your tenure in Washington for last three years and how many new investments you brought in to India?" This was a question asked by a journalist to a returning Ambassador in India few years back. When will we be asking such questions to our ambassadors?

Abdul Munim Chowdhury, USA

Star Chittagong

This refers to the photograph published on February 5th in the Star Chittagong page.

The photograph taken from Aubhoy Mitra Ghat by Zobaer Hossain Sikder are those of SEA GULLS who are permanent residents of that place. Those are not guest birds, and have never been a common scene in the river which is a heavily trafficked area. Guest birds do come to Chittagong and only be seen at the Foucherhat Sea area. The other place is Kapitai Lake.

Farhad, Mehdiabag, Chittagong

"Economics of gas export"

Dr. Zohir in his article (January 28)

has proficiently elaborated on the economics of gas export.

I belong to the second group and a strong advocate of gas export. I believe that a bird in hand is worth two in the bush (TCFs of gas under the ground), what we need to discuss and consider is the price-- an economist's price not an accountant's price.

However, Dr. Zohir's article did not address one very important issue which is a strategic issue, particularly under the current context of changing world order after the 9/11 incident.

Our planned gas export is to India by terrestrial pipeline running through the heart of Bangladesh. This gas will be utilised by India in their vital energy sector which is linked with the country's security and development.

Let us imagine a possible scenario when this gas pipeline is sabotaged by vested quarter within or outside Bangladesh and our importer under the pretext to protect their vital interest makes a pre-emptive strike to secure the pipe line and resume supply, even worse decides to station its security forces along the pipeline inside Bangladesh to prevent such occupancies in future. World has witnessed such incidents in Cote d'Ivoire recently.

What would be our recourse, are we going to risk our sovereignty, are we going to play into the hands of those who openly term Bangladesh as a soft terrorist state.

One recourse I can think of is that the organisation currently engaged in production of gas in Bangladesh

and keen for export persuade their Government to provide a sovereign guarantee against any such pre-emptive strike, it is just a thought.

I would therefore request to include lawyers and strategist along with the bureaucrats and economists in the committee for gas export.

Shika Mansoor, Gulshan, Dhaka

A fine paper, Mr Powell?

The latest British dossier on Iraq's weapons program is supposed to be a "fine paper", according to Colin Powell. But now it has been revealed that, most of the information is few years old and were in fact copied from an article by a research associate, Dr Ibrahim al-Marashi. I wonder how many special-effect designers and computer junkies from Pentagon were used to create those hopeless "evidence" in Powell's speech to UN.

If Mr Blair and Bush are that desperate for people's support in their mass murder, why don't they just ask in plain English? But to steal someone else's work, without mentioning his name and claiming it to be the work of your billion-pound, laughable intelligence service, is a disgrace.

Azad Miah, Oldham, UK