

## Police reform in the offing

*Political will holds the key*

IT is welcome news that the much-awaited police reform process is likely to get underway, with the UNDP providing financial support for the project focusing on capacity-building for the police.

The UNDP has submitted the \$13.5 million reform plan for first three years, but it is extendable up to six years, depending on successful implementation of the start-up phase. However, the government will need technical, financial and logistic support of other international agencies to implement such a massive project, which entails the task of not only modernising the police but also retrieving it from the debris of degeneration taking place over decades. It is also heartening to know that the World Bank may respond positively to the government's call.

But it will not suffice to have all logistic support in place. What will be crucially important to the whole plan is a political will and understanding between the major parties that police will never be used for any purpose other than enforcement of the law. It is widely believed that political influence has had a crippling effect on the law enforcement agencies. They have had a low professional morale.

We have always insisted on raising the standards of police to the level that would enable them to meet the growing challenge of law enforcement in the contemporary world. Police are getting outsmarted by criminal groups and have neither the wherewithal nor the skill to fight cyber crimes or money laundering. They are deemed to be lagging behind.

For the police to perform better, they must improve their skills in intelligence-gathering and analysis, forensic investigation, case management, and also in dealing with the media.

The first phase of the reform plan will surely be the nucleus around which the future plans will revolve. So, it is imperative that the government implement the reform plan with precision, keeping in view the areas which deserve immediate attention.

## Old-age allowance scheme

*A potential social safety net*

WITHIN six and a half years since its introduction by erstwhile Awami League government, the old-age allowance scheme has grown in size, content and coverage. Starting with Tk 26 crore fund and a per head grant of Tk 100 in July 1997, it has come a long way. At present, the beneficiaries number half a million and each of them receives Tk 150 per month. The government has plans to extend the gratuitous monthly relief at an increased rate of Tk 180 among double the present number of beneficiaries -- one million.

Yes, this is a pittance and a huge number of senior citizens, who are the most marginalised among the poorest of poor remain outside its orbit. Even so, it is about the only social safety net we have in the country with an enormous potential for expansion.

Given such a huge prospect for taking the scheme forward, the method of distributing the allowance acquires critical importance. What it means is that the beneficiaries will have to be carefully selected -- on purely need-oriented lines. The government seems set to assign the newly formed Gram Sarkar, the lowest tier of local government, with the task of making a list of senior citizens within this fiscal year. The Gram Sarkar, as it functions now, has been hurriedly formed with its representative character being under some question mark. To entrust it with the selection job carries the possibility of a political slant in the decision-making. The cabinet committee has, however, decided that the Gram Sarkar's list will be vetted by a committee headed by the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) before being forwarded to the Ministry of Social Welfare for allocation. In other words, a bureaucrat's say will be final.

We would like this good scheme to be kept above politics. The distribution of the meagre, yet useful, facility should be need-based, not only in terms of selecting the beneficiaries but extending it to backward areas as well.

# Indo-Pak peace overtures: Little more than springtime flirtation



M ABDUL HAFIZ

WHETHER it is the advent of the South Asian summit, or international pressure that India has been taking steps that suggest an early resumption of dialogue with Pakistan -- interrupted under the impacts of 9/11 events. The latest developments, in one of which Mr Vajpayee stated during his talks with President Putin in Moscow that India had not rejected dialogue with Pakistan, also point to such prospect. Indeed, the peace overtures witnessed during last one month or so leave one in no doubt about their earnestness. They no more appear an exercise in surrealism, neither are they mere posturing nor empty rhetoric.

After it all began with Mr Vajpayee's bold offer of unconditional talks with Pakistan on 18 April last there is significant progress although made at a snail's

pace. Among the proposals made and accepted are the decisions to enhance the level of diplomatic representation, the resumption of Lahore-Delhi bus service, the exchange of visits by Parliamentarians and businessmen and importantly the revival of traditional cricket ties between the two countries. On October 22 the Indian side came up with a package of 12 more proposals dubbed as confidence

observe a unilateral ceasefire along the line of control in Kashmir duly reciprocated by India. In another gesture Jamali made some new proposals with regard to the issue of prisoners in each other's country and a Lahore-Amritsar bus service. In the meantime Vajpayee after breaking a spell of uncertainty stated to newsmen in Lucknow on 25 November that he intended to visit Islamabad to attend the

process.

The time couldn't have been more conducive for seizing a peace initiative. Impressive as the developments are on both sides one notes with regret and surprise that they do not somehow lead up to composite and purposive dialogue covering the whole gamut of Indo-Pak relationship. Even when brought up to a point of maturity they fail to gel. So far they only

that the talk could not begin unless Islamabad stopped the infiltration the refrain of which was soon back in Indian circle. The magnanimity of Vajpayee's offer was soon lost in the image of conditionalities. The Pakistanis argued that no real progress towards normalisation of bilateral relation is indeed possible without the resolution of Kashmir dispute. To them the bus, train and ferry services are all peripheral issues. If the gains

India. However, as Pakistan will be hosting the summit early next year there may be informal exchanges between both the countries but scepticism abounds that such exchanges would lead them anywhere. Though Vajpayee is undoubtedly keen to go down in history as a peace maker he will be persuaded by BJP's extremist colleagues to maintain tough stand on Kashmir in a year that will be marked by India's general election.

There are some stirrings as a result of a statement made in Washington by KC Pant, a member of India's National Security Council. He stated that Kashmir issue could be solved and that New Delhi was willing to discuss it. Even though the statement seems to have been made for the consumption of American hosts this is a positive statement. Islamabad must earnestly examine his view to establish if there was a possible shift in India's stand on Kashmir. Unless there is a paradigm shift in the stances of both the countries over Kashmir, the groundswell of good will demonstrated so far will soon dry up and it will continue to be the never never land of peace and harmony between the subcontinent's two nuclear rivals.

## PERSPECTIVES

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building measures (CBMs). The package included the start of Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service, travel by sea between Mumbai and Karachi, a resumption of rail-link across Sindh-Rajasthan border and the establishment of a 'visa camp' to simplify the visa procedure.

While accepting several of these proposals Pakistan's prime minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali -- in a bid to give further boost to the peace process -- decided to

SAARC summit. He expressed desire to meet 'everyone' there indicating that there might as well be his meeting with President Musharraf. The softening of the tone of Yashwant Sinha, India's hawkish foreign minister, is also noticeable. In a TV interview he said that there was a change in Pakistan's 'mindset'. President Musharraf told the visiting American senators including the US former first lady Hilary Clinton that the current moves should mark the beginning of a genuine peace

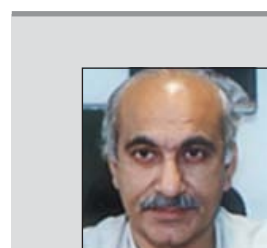
amounted to springtime flirtation but no courtship. Both India and Pakistan went round and round the mulberry bush failing however to engage each other.

In his Srinagar speech on 18 April the Indian Prime Minister had offered to talk to Pakistan without any precondition. It meant that India wouldn't link the initiation of talk to Pakistan's alleged support to 'cross border terrorism' even if the issue could crop up during the talks. Yet Indian leaders continued to dither on the question of dialogue saying

of the last six months are to be built upon the more substantive issue need to be addressed, they argued. But India's readiness to engage in a dialogue appears to be contingent upon Kashmir being put on the backburner while other issues are addressed.

Any optimism that India may soon agree to a composite dialogue or accept an expansion of the SAARC's mandate must therefore be tempered with realism based on well-known stands of

## Dream sequence



M. J. AKBAR

ON 7 September 2005, India and Pakistan will commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the start of their most useless, and their most expensive war. They will remember the vanquished, they will commiserate the lost lives, they will recall the attendant heroism, and, if they are intelligent, they will mourn the consequences. No one is sure who won that war. But one thing is certain: both countries lost the peace that day. 1965 marked the second partition of India. What do I mean by that?

What does partition mean? The geopolitical meaning of partition is fairly obvious. You only have to consider the power and influence of a united Indian defence force to recognise its impact upon the region and the world. To the west Iran and Afghanistan would have been India's borders, and we would be a direct player in the ecopolitics of the Middle East. To the north, our borders would have been with the Soviet Union and China; and to the east we would have been neighbours of Asean. There would have been an Indian factor for both the United States and Russia (or the USSR) to consider if they wanted to intervene directly in either the Middle East or Afghanistan. China would have been less eager to test the strength of India in a war, as it did in 1962. But most importantly, as the nation with the largest Hindu and Muslim populations, and a region of cultural and economic confluence, India would have been the centre of a world stretching from

Morocco on the shores of the Atlantic to Indonesia on the further shores of the Indian Ocean, across an arc that would have included central Asia.

Since every 'If' is a waste of time, let us move on.

In human terms, partition wrenched out roots and caused a savage migration of peoples. But when the blood-red dust finally settled down, three ethnic groups were left divided: the Bengali Hindus, significant numbers of whom decided to remain in Ban-

investment in means and methods of destruction. So 1965 was the second partition. In 1947 geography had been partitioned; in 1965 the people were also partitioned.

Both the wars till then, of 1947 and 1965, were launched by Pakistan in order to wrest the Muslim-majority Kashmir valley from the Indian Union. The strategy was more or less the same: in 1947 "irregulars" were goaded into a "jihad", and in 1965 "infiltrators" were meant to reach Srinagar under the nose of an unsuspecting

Kashmir and Hyderabad, were large and powerful. Their rulers believed that they could sustain some form of independence protected by treaty obligations with the British Empire, although the British had made it crystal clear that there was no third option available to the princely states. They would have to accede to either India or Pakistan.

In other words, the status of both Kashmir and Hyderabad would have inevitably entered the agenda of discussions between

## BYLINE

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gladesh; Muslims from the UP-Bihar belt, who were cut apart when many of them chose migration over their motherland; and Kashmiri Muslims, who were left on two sides of a cease-fire line. Punjabi and Sindh Hindus, and Punjabi Muslims, suffered severe traumas, but eventually reconciled themselves to their new homes even as they set in motion domestic passions that contributed heavily to conflict between the two countries. In Punjab the migration process was bloody and complete. Many Sindh Hindus opted to remain in Pakistan, although they were marginalised politically.

Till 1965, the borders of the subcontinent were loose enough to permit what is called "family tourism" across both sides of Pakistan. Visas were a formality. There was also trade, enough of it unofficial to make borders an irrelevance. The war of 1965 put life into reverse gear. For nearly four decades now, the cost in human terms is matched only by the waste in economic opportunity and the

Indian Army. In the second war, the use of regular troops was more transparent, as the Pakistan Army was on official call to follow up with a decisive blow once the "irregulars" had completed their sabotage missions. 1947 ended with the creation of the Line of Control. 1965 did not change it. The one constant fact through two generations of turmoil has been the cease-fire line. The other thing that has remained with us is the dispute over Kashmir.

History is not a fashionable subject, so those who miss the irony when Pakistan asks for talks on Kashmir might be forgiven. If Pakistan had believed in talks over the future of Kashmir in 1947, the dispute would have long been solved. When the British left in 1947, the whole of the subcontinent did not become independent. Three rogue states refused to join either India or Pakistan. One, Junagadh, was in the possession of a maverick Nawab whose pretensions were quickly sorted out. But the two other states, Jammu and

India, Pakistan and the British, represented in India by Lord Mountbatten, who was unique in the sense that he outlasted his own empire. He remained governor-general of India after freedom. A peaceful resolution would have certainly been found, with the involvement of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, by the time of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact in 1951, which put the seal on the outstanding issues of partition. But for some reason outside the realm of logic, or even common sense, Pakistan sought to pre-empt a peaceful solution through a war, initiated within just nine weeks of freedom. War, in other words, was the first substantive decision taken on India-Pakistan relations by Karachi (the first capital of Pakistan). Such bitter seeds produce a harvest through the decades.

Assuming that war as an option has been deleted; and presuming that Kargil was the last hurrah, how do we travel from here? Forward movement in this complex rela-

world where travel and trade are worse than existed between India and Pakistan in 1965. The world is loosening up under the pressure of emerging technology. The age of communication is free-range; this is a sprint, not a sack race.

A quantum leap of the imagination took place when Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, addressing the Hindustan Times Peace Dividend conference in Delhi, envisaged a time when there would be open borders and a single currency in South Asia. We have become so used to conflict that the thought of peace rattles us almost as much as the prospect of war. Those who noticed the phrase, tucked away in the midst of heavy statistics, responded with a range of queries. Was the Prime Minister being too naive? Why must a dream be considered unreal simply because it has not become fact? Someone in 1950 dreamt that Europe should not go to war over German steel and Polish coal; and that Alsace and Lorraine, the execrable excuse for

terrible Franco-German wars, would become irrelevant if a border was treated as an open door rather than a fortress wall.

There is increasing evidence in South Asia that a door never opens upon a one-way street. Sri Lanka, among the smallest of the nations of South Asia, has free trade with the largest nation of the region, India. So what has happened as a consequence? The trade deficit has improved in Sri Lanka's favour since then. A smaller economy may have fewer products to offer India, but India has a much bigger market. The algebra is equitable. War is tactical and strategic; peace is creative. Indians are thinking out of the box. The chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir says publicly that the Line of Control cannot be the eventual solution to the Kashmir impasse, because it is a Line of Conflict, not a Line of Resolution. Answers are hidden in the mists of the future, but everyone appreciates that the language of the past is not the answer. The answers lie in process, and process is an exercise of collective will, of movement on simultaneous fronts.

The spirit of this age accelerates time. Years now move at the pace of former decades. In the December of 2003 we are witnessing a conference of peace dividends. Precisely two years ago the air was full of little but the war dividend. As India mobilised on the borders, Islamabad retaliated with talk of a nuclear strike. George Fernandes, who believes that offence is the best form of defence, replied that while Pakistan might get in a first strike, the Indian response would be so massive that Pakistan would not survive. Dr Strangelove had Indian and Pakistani aliases. It was a nightmare. What is the only answer to a nightmare? A dream. Vajpayee has the courage to dream because he has lived through many a nightmare.

On 7 September 2005 India and Pakistan should remember the past by offering their people a future.

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## OPINION

# EPZs and how about a Hartal Act for Bangladesh?

DR. M. S. HAQ writes from New York

In many senses, the suggestion pertaining to granting trade union rights to the workers of the export processing zones (EPZs) in Bangladesh merits consideration by the people, the political parties, the investors, the media, civil society and the government of Bangladesh. The acceptance of the suggestion by Bangladeshis would demonstrate, among other things, the country's will and motivation for taking on higher level challenges in the pursuits of protecting and promoting the existing export markets for its products and services, reinforcing and expanding market partnerships and creating new market opportunities. Uncertainties associated with markets and market places are on the rise. The ex-country marketing of products is posing additional challenges to countries that have been suffering from human rights related deficiencies. One of the reasons is the global market environment, given the contemporary product-market-dynamics, has increasingly been influenced by a conscious effort towards enhancing the human rights of the workers who are involved in the production of export items. Given the facts that an industrial democracy is yet to take firm

roots in the development dimension of Bangladesh, that the country can no longer afford to postpone the creation of wholesome conditions for an imminent WTO regime, and that the fear of risks associated with the anticipated trade union activities in the EPZs is higher particularly among the investors, one suggestion is that the country allow trade union activities in the EPZs initially on a fixed term basis for a period of two years. This would afford the investors, the government and others an opportunity to monitor and evaluate the effects of trade unionism in the EPZs during the above period. The outcome of the evaluation and the lessons learned could assist the government and others in implementing additional institutional, operational and other measures, as required. Alternatively, accountability of the EPZ unions in production and other areas should be established and closely monitored for ensuring pertinent targets.

For an optimal positive return from the activities in the EPZs, the country should ensure an efficient and effective use of:

1. antidotes for preventing production and productivity losses, unfair labour practices on the part of the employers or the workers, and other complications or infractions arising out of and in

the course of exercising the rights by all concerned; and

2. industrial relations methods and tools, such as a more professional handling of industrial disputes; a continually reliable and result-generative labour inspection regime; alternative dispute resolutions; and arbitrations.

Bangladesh would need to formulate and implement a labour-market policy composite involving such constituents as national interest, human rights, trade unionism and productivity for facilitating, among others and on a continuing basis, higher savings for, and satisfaction of, all concerned. The policy composite could be useful in creating a basis for, say, modifying or changing relevant laws of the land. For more customer oriented, fair, and just-in-time services, the country's labour inspection machinery should be overhauled, corruption eliminated, bureaucratic barriers removed, and capacities for service delivery enhanced.

The existing opportunities for workers education and union leadership training -- particularly, for female workers and female trade union leaders -- need to be enhanced in quantitative and qualitative terms and on a priority basis. The capacities of both government institutions (such as the Industrial Relations Institute) and private sector insti-

tutions (such as the Institute of Personnel Management (IPM)) currently involved in providing education and training in industrial relations to Bangladeshis should be improved. The competencies of industrial relations professionals engaged in Bangladesh mills, factories and other organizations should be enhanced by improving their opportunities for obtaining professional education and training in the area of industrial relations.

In Bangladesh society, there still exists a great deal of love and acceptance for government accredited diplomas and degrees. The government of Bangladesh may, in this respect, consider the granting of statutory recognitions to the graduate and the post graduate diplomas awarded in human resources management by in-country institutes like, the IPM. The recognition should, however, be contingent upon the fulfillment of certain quality criteria and other pertinent requirements (by the institutes) as deemed fit by the government.

A decision to allow trade unionism in the EPZs would enhance the accountability of the EPZ workers and their union leaders manifold. Because an improper exercise of the rights by them could lead inter alia to an eventual marginalization of the

FDI flow into the country, thus affecting not only the EPZ workers and their families, but Bangladeshis as a whole, either directly or indirectly (or both). The media and other development partners should be able to inform or educate (or both) the EPZ workers regarding their obligations in pertinent areas and the consequences thereof.

The investors should support the effort of Bangladesh towards developing an investment climate in which the relationship between the employers and the workers would be based on mutual respect, tolerance, fairness and justice; the main thrusts of that relationship would be human rights, productivity, innovations, inventions, fair compensations and rewards for good work; and the employers would at least be reasonably sensitive to workers' welfare and their legitimate concerns and grievances. As part of their social obligations, the investors should assist the country -- in the development of a work culture that could assist the Bangladeshi work force in the continuous internalization of the market challenges of the 21st century and in the promotion of environment friendly industrial and commercial activities in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh may elect to establish an investment promotion

forum comprising the representatives of the political parties, the EPZ workers, the investors including the chambers (where applicable), civil society, the media, relevant government ministries, the donors, the UN organizations such as ILO, for promoting broad based dialogues, consultations and feedback in the pursuit of developing influential partnerships in the area of investment promotion. Further, the forum could work as an interphase (used in an engineering sense) when it comes to efforts towards bridging the gap between expectations and outcomes concerning economic emancipation of Bangladesh and Bangladeshis. The chambers of commerce and industries would have a catalytic role in promoting the constituency of the forum. For complementing and supplementing the forum's investment promotion effort, Bangladesh may explore the feasibility of developing financial service businesses in the country.

Finally, it is expected the EPZ workers would be able to exercise the rights in the near future in a constructive manner.

In Bangladesh, hartals have so far been used as a handy tool by political parties and others in their effort towards creating pressure on a sitting government or an entity for advancing party

agendas or group demands, or other things, as applicable. The hartal has, by now, assumed a number of dimensions in terms of the magnitude of its cause, effect and causality; the profiles of those who call the hartal; and the support level for the hartal, to mention a few. As a result, Bangladeshis are familiar with what I would call, for example, deca hartals, hecto hartals, mega hartals and giga hartals depending on the power of each of the hartals on a factor of 10 (yet to be quantified), determined hypothetically on the basis of several parameters including their places of occurrence at local, district, national and other levels.

The news, commentaries, opinions and other forms of hartal related expressions have been a hot media subject. Despite the fact that the hartal has so far led to loss of human life, damage to property and other anti-people and anti-development consequences, that its purposes have become stereotyped due perhaps to overuse or thematic limitations (hartal in support of poverty alleviation?) and that its outcomes (based on an approximation) have brought only a few tangible benefits for Bangladeshis, the reality is, the hartal still exists in Bangladesh and the people's power is yet to be powerful to fight out the hartal from the coun-

try's soil. During the AL government in the immediate past, the issue of hartal even went to high court of the land.

In view of the above and other factors concerning the hartal, Bangladesh may explore the possibility of enacting a Hartal Act for regulating hartals and their effect on the well-being of the country. The act should contain inter alia: a) definitions of such terms as hartal, group, and political party; b) the scope of hartal; c) the conditions (to be met by a political party or parties) prior to the declaration of a hartal. The conditions may include inter alia referrals to the ombudsman (when applicable) and parliamentary interventions; d) the hartal notice; e) the conditions concerning leading and conducting hartals; f) the list of unfair practices on the part of those who would be involved in hartals; g) the hartal liabilities; h) the punishment clause; i) the jurisdictions of the special court, if constituted, for trying offences under the act and j) the appeal process. At the formulation stage of the act, one of the challenges would be to strike a right balance between the human rights aspect of hartals and the implications of hartals on the national interest and image.