

## Bangladesh-India boundary talks

Are we making headway?

**W**E would like to share the optimism expressed by the delegation heads of the two countries at the end of the two-day meeting of Bangladesh-India Joint Border Working Group (JBWG) that was constituted four years ago but had met only once before since then. The concept of such a group is indeed noble, but it would remain an ineffective apparatus for addressing the boundary issues if forty-eight months have to elapse between two meetings of the group.

That both parties have agreed to meet yearly is certainly a very significant development that we hope would lend more effectiveness to the JBWG. What would be also very heartening news to the citizens' of the enclaves is the prospect of yearly visits to their areas by the Working Group.

The issue of border management, we feel, has been greatly hindered by the fact that the Land Boundary Agreement of 1974 has not yet been ratified by the Indian government, on the grounds that the 6.5 km area remains to be demarcated. Thus we must address some ground realities that continue to hamper the just and equitable application of all the articles of the Boundary Agreement of 1974.

There are clearly two very distinct matters that have to be tackled head on. One is the ratification of the treaty by India, which has been made conditional by it on the completion of demarcation of the border. And the second is the equally important matter of demarcating the remaining 6.5 kilometers of the border. And this is the crux of the issue that dominates the gamut of Indo-Bangladesh border management. This is where we are caught in a vicious cycle, and much as Bangladesh would wish to come out of this, it can't.

We must approach the Indo-Bangladesh border issue in a holistic rather than piecemeal manner. Very few will contest the assertion that the Bangladesh India border is less than peaceful and that Bangladesh has unfortunately lost a large number of its citizens to the reckless firing of the BSF. The need is to move expeditiously to resolve the hindrances to fulfilling the border agreement provisions. The prospect of waiting another thirty-two years before the boundary treaty is fully operational is too alarming to contemplate.

## Dialogue with teachers

Prime ministerial intervention augurs well

**I**T is with a sense of relief that we take the news of the prime minister directing education minister, state minister for education, prime minister's political secretary and education secretary to engage the striking teachers in a dialogue to redress their long-standing grievances. As a matter of fact, a committee comprising the above four functionaries has been constituted by the prime minister to go into the demands of the non-government teachers and employees of the educational institutions.

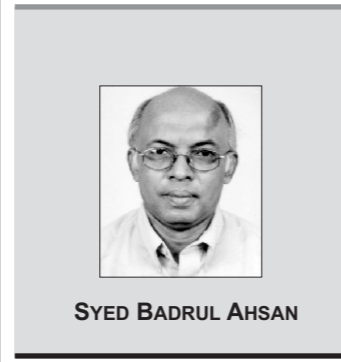
Given the multifaceted teachers' movement, our entreaties have been with the prime minister to initiate an intervention at the highest level for an early resolution of their longstanding demands. It seems our call has been answered. We would hope that the prime minister will go the whole hog with her pursuit of the matter so that whatever recommendations emerge from the forthcoming dialogue between the teaching community leaders and the high level government committee will be implemented.

Let's not forget that Begum Zia's government has had the obligation in terms of their pre-2001 election manifesto to remove the disparity in the salaries and service conditions between the government and non-government teachers.

It was a very wrong approach that on July 15 the police meted out ham-handed treatment to the peacefully agitating teachers. Since then, the teachers are taking a hard line presaging hunger strike and massive sit-in demonstrations. They have made it clear that unless the government makes a specific announcement by July 20 in regard to their demand for full pay support and other grievances they will be constrained to go for fast unto death programme any day between July 22 and 27. We are fully in sympathy with the legitimate demands of the non-government teachers and so are the public, but we would urge them not to demonstrate an ultimatum mentality, especially in view of the prospect for the prime minister's personal intervention.

The continuing closure of academic institutions has left hundreds and thousands of their pupils languishing in the backyards of life without anything worthwhile to do. We all have obligations to our children.

# The life and principles of Tajuddin Ahmed



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

**T**AJUDDIN Ahmed would have been eighty-one this month. The tragedy of our collective national life is that he was not destined to live to a ripe old age. Any chances he might have had of taking charge of the country after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and any possibility of his eventually transforming himself into an elder statesman were ruined the night he and three of his political associates were murdered in jail.

Tajuddin was fifty when the life was bayoneted out of him. He was too young to die, as young as Syed Nazrul Islam and AHM Quamruzzaman and not much younger than M. Mansoor Ali. And consider this: the entire generation of Bangladesh's political leadership that was eliminated between August and November 1975 was essentially a band of young men who had ended up doing what much older men usually do in history. They led a popular movement for self-assertion and in the end left Bengalis, on this part of the political divide, a free state for them to utilise and power their intelligence and intellect in, in myriad ways. Bangabandhu was a mere fifty-five when the soldiers mowed him down.

Tajuddin Ahmed was five years younger. And yet in that brief space of time, he had carved a niche for himself in the history of this part of the world. To those who knew Tajuddin in the 1960s, the man was destined for a bigger role than what his demeanour chose to reveal. You only have to go looking for some of the men who once enjoyed the reputation of being young, educated Bengali idealists responsible for much of what subsequently came to be known as the Six Points. They will inform you, perhaps to your great surprise and then to your usual expectations, how on a moonlit night on the Sitalakhyia it was Tajuddin Ahmed who hurled the hardest questions at the men

## GROUND REALITIES

Tajuddin Ahmed was a principled man, one inclined to self-effacement and extra-ordinary humility. Not many were or have been able to command the intellectual heights of political leadership that he so easily was symbolic of. And few have been the individuals in our history who have so effortlessly cast the personal to the winds in the interest of the welfare of a toiling, battered nation. Self-abnegation was part of his character. As prime minister in 1971, he kept thoughts of family aside as he shaped the tortuous map of battlefield strategy. After October 1974 and till his murder in November of the following year, he went into exile of a kind. He internalised his pain, brooded in loneliness over the future of a country he had guided to freedom. And then he paid the price.

gathered to explain the core of the Six Points to Bangabandhu. A quiet man is always the keenest of observers. It was the silence in Tajuddin Ahmed that betrayed his eloquence every time he decided to ask a question here or seek a clarification there.

Through making his points in those formative days of emergent Bengali nationalism, Tajuddin helped to fine tune the Six Points and thereby turn them into an unassailable argument for the satisfaction of Bengali aspirations. On that river and after that, it was Tajuddin who, with Bangabandhu, laid the foundations of Bengali nationhood in what the state of Pakistan still thought was its pliant eastern wing. It was anything but pliant, as Field Marshal Ayub Khan was beginning to find out. When the dictator warned that supporters of the Six Points would have the language of weapons applied against them, he merely revealed the growing nervousness among people in West Pakistan about the rising political ambitions of the Bengalis in the east.

In this forging of Bengali ambitions, Tajuddin Ahmed's role was as crucial as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's. Where Bangabandhu was the inspirational leader, Tajuddin was the theoretician of the party. The relationship between the two men was in a very important sense akin to the ties that bound Mao Zedong and Zhou En-lai to each other. Tajuddin's courage was of the quiet kind. It rested on a perception of hard realities. Just how tough he could be came through almost immediately after the unfolding of the Six Points in early 1966. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, sulking over Ayub's handling of the dialogue with the Indians in

Tashkent, nevertheless felt, or was made to feel, that the proponents of the Six Points needed decisive handling. He valiantly challenged Mujib to a public debate at Paltan Maidan on the Six Points. Tajuddin Ahmed spoke for his leader, through offering to rebut Pakistan's soon to depart foreign minister. Bhutto never turned up, an early sign of the dread in which he held Tajuddin Ahmed. In the remaining years of united Pakistan, Bhutto would remain conscious of the power that Tajuddin exuded in political dialectics. He squirmed every time Tajuddin chose to speak at the abortive political negotiations in March 1971. He would warn his party men as also members of the Yahya Khan junta to watch out for Tajuddin.

Tajuddin Ahmed's political sagacity had become a pronounced affair by the time he found himself making his way out of Dhaka in late March 1971. While other political leaders and workers may have been overwhelmed by thoughts of the darkness that lay ahead for Bengalis in the face of Pakistan's genocide, or had been rendered too distraught to begin thinking of a swift response to the assault, Tajuddin snatched time out of his travails to dwell on what needed to be done.

He lost little time in making his way across the border and linking up with Indira Gandhi. He was perspicacious enough to see, even at that early stage of national predicament, the need for outside assistance in an armed struggle he envisioned developing for Bangladesh's freedom. The man of substance in Tajuddin saw little alternative to the formal shaping of a governmental structure for a struggling nation. The whereabouts

of his colleagues remained shrouded in mystery. That was a stumbling block, but he did get around it by doing the necessary thing of announcing the formation of a government, the first ever in the history of the Bengalis.

He came under political assault the moment he took that considered step. The younger elements in the Awami League, typified by the likes of Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni, thought they had been upstaged. Tajuddin, they thought and indeed propagated the message, had gone beyond his remit. He was not, said these angry young men, qualified or empowered to establish a government because he had not been authorized by Bangabandhu to do so. It was an unfazed Tajuddin who went ahead with what he saw as his historic mission of bringing Bengalis together. The socialist in him was unwilling to cave in to fate or human machinations. The intellectual in his being was prepared to withstand onslaughts of the kind his fellow Awami Leaguers were throwing his way. He emerged from the experience a sadder man and a necessarily stronger man.

In a free Bangladesh, Tajuddin Ahmed ought to have played a bigger role in the transformation of society. That role could have come through his holding on to the position of head of government. As minister for finance, though, he demonstrated a tremendous degree of courage in warding off evil spirits, both in the form of international donor agencies and local opportunists. It was his conviction that a development strategy for Bangladesh did not have to include thoughts of aid from nations which had opposed its birth. Such a position, naturally, did not endear him to the right-wingers in the govern-



ment; and these men kept up their noisy complaints against him before the Father of the Nation.

But what hurt Tajuddin Ahmed more than the whispering campaign against him was his sad, shocking realization that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was listening more to men like Khondokar Moshtaque and Sheikh Moni than to him. Decent almost to a fault, Tajuddin never complained in public. In private, though, he found it inexplicable that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader and political soul mate with whom he had shaped the political course of the Bengali nation, never once sought to ask him about the events leading up to the formation of the provisional government and the war of liberation that such a government waged.

The differences between these two giants of Bengali history only grew wider. Tragedy was bound to follow. It remains a curious, almost macabre tale in Bangladesh's history that Tajuddin Ahmed was instructed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to leave the cabinet in the very month -- October 1974 -- when Henry Kissinger, prime architect of the Nixonian policy of backing Pakistan in its repression of Bengalis in 1971, came calling. That visit was a sign that Bangladesh was ready to pass into the American orbit. We as a people are still paying the price for the rudeness of overturning Tajuddin Ahmed's socialism and

replacing it with unfettered capitalism. The robber barons in our midst, since that October day, have multiplied in number many times over -- and do so every living long day.

Tajuddin Ahmed was a principled man, one inclined to self-effacement and extraordinary humility. Not many were or have been able to command the intellectual heights of political leadership that he so easily was symbolic of. And few have been the individuals in our history who have so effortlessly cast the personal to the winds in the interest of the welfare of a toiling, battered nation. Self-abnegation was part of his character. As prime minister in 1971, he kept thoughts of family aside as he shaped the tortuous map of battlefield strategy. After October 1974 and till his murder in November of the following year, he went into exile of a kind. He internalised his pain, brooded in loneliness over the future of a country he had guided to freedom. And then he paid the price.

[Tajuddin Ahmed, prime minister in the provisional government of Bangladesh in 1971, was born on July 23, 1925. He was murdered by soldiers in Dhaka central jail on November 3, 1975.]

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# Chickens coming home to roost

RAMI G KHOURI

**I**F you've never seen chickens come home to roost in real time, turn on your television. Watch the expanding military attacks by Israel, Hamas and Hizbullah, and listen to the background music from the United States, Iran and Syria. The widening war is primarily the result of four decades of failed hard-line policies by the United States and Israel, combined with moribund Arab diplomacy and leadership, and resurgent Iranian influence in the region.

The conflict is only partly about retrieving three captured Israeli soldiers held by Hizbullah and Hamas, or the thousands of Arab prisoners held by Israel. What we're seeing is the predictable convergence of several popular and official forces in Arab and Iranian society that feel they have no other option than to defy, confront and resist the combined power of the United States and

Israel. Mass popular sentiment in the Arab world is increasingly voting in elections for Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Resistance groups like Hizbullah and Hamas have much more effective and ample military means at their disposal than before, along with strong public support. Iran and Syria exploit this situation to fuel anti-American, anti-Israeli sentiments, tapping into global concerns about Israeli-American policies.

Israel is like an aging boxer who packs a mighty punch that is no longer effective, because its intended victims know how to absorb and evade it -- and, more significantly, how to counterpunch with blows of their own. Behind their strutting demeanor and boastful threats, Israel's generals and politicians flail helplessly, disoriented by the futility of their decision to rely primarily on military options to resolve what are at heart political disputes. The core

issue remains the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which can only be resolved by mutual recognition and security, by Israeli and Palestinian sovereign states who address the 1948 Palestinian-refugee issue equitably and legally.

Instead Israel today repeats tactics it has used without success at least five times before in Lebanon since 1968, including destroying dozens of bridges, roads and electricity plants as well as Beirut airport, targeting political institutions, and assassinating militant leaders. They have done the same thing to Palestinians for decades, claiming they aim to stop attacks against Israelis. In fact, they've generated exactly the opposite effect.

With every new Israeli attack against Hamas and Hizbullah leaders or civilian populations, the Lebanese and Palestinian governments lose credibility and impact, opening the space for other groups to step in. Hamas

and Hizbullah garner greater popular support, which enhances their effectiveness in guerrilla and resistance warfare, while they improve their technological capabilities. The anti-Israel, anti-US resistance campaign led by Hamas and Hizbullah generates widespread political and popular support throughout the Middle East and much of the world.

This accentuates the diplomatic and military impotence of Arab regimes, strengthens opposition movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, and allows determined, increasingly defiant governments in Tehran and Damascus to mobilize all the weapons available to them in the region.

The United States for its part is strangely marginal, having worked itself out of any significant role in this conflict for the moment. Its chosen policies have lined it up squarely with Israel. It has applied sanctions against, and thus cannot even talk to, Iran, Hizbullah

and Hamas, and it has pressured and threatened Syria for years with only modest success. For the world's only global power, America is peculiarly powerless in the current crisis in the Middle East, due to its own biased policies.

Nor are the Arab countries anywhere to be seen, having long ago lost the capacity or the will to act in a meaningful political manner. The United States and Israel are isolated and alone diplomatically, have less and less impact on their foes militarily and politically have painted themselves into a corner from which they are too vain or incompetent to escape. Therefore Islamist resistance movements and defiant governments appeal to Arab public opinion, but at a terrible cost of continued warfare and mass civilian suffering that will not resolve the underlying political conflicts. Many in the region criticize Hamas and Hizbullah for triggering Israel's destructive

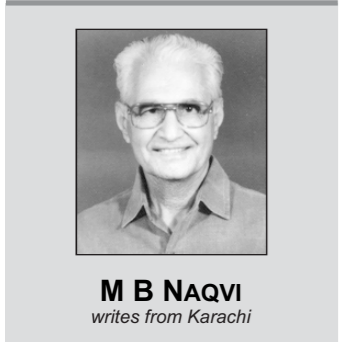
wrath on their societies, but many more others cheer on as they watch Israel use more and more firepower with less and less impact.

While these chickens all come home to roost, one sane approach remains to be tried: a diplomatic negotiation that responds to the legitimate grievances of all parties in the Arab world, Israel and Iran. Instead of a widening regional war, perhaps someone more sensible than the current Arab, Israeli and American leaderships would step forward and propose a regional peace conference? If it is based on the equal rights of all parties, it will succeed; if it is based on Israel having greater rights to security than everyone else in the region, it will only give us more chickens to count.

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# Do we need a new constitution?



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

**M**ANY groups and parties have demanded a new constitution because the present one, and also the earlier to 1973 basic law ones, have not worked and have served as the instruments of military dictators to run or control political life. There are others, and they are powerful, who affect to be shocked at the very idea of trying to make a new constitution. They believe that should the effort be made, it would destroy the present social order and uncontrollable new forces will be released.

Let's see who wants and who opposes a new basic law. Large number of individuals, groups and parties think that without a new constitution Pakistan's problems will go from bad to worse. Pakistan now stands in peril with a bad

## PLAIN WORDS

The question is who should prevail: the conservatives who want no change or the reformists who want a new constitution for desired changes. The change sought by reformists is to make Pakistan both an ordinary representative democracy and a federation in which the units or states are the real government that expands the economy for the benefit of the bottom 70 per cent and the centre is confined to performing agreed common tasks. The choice is urgent.

constitution. All Pushtoon, Sindh and Baloch nationalists want a new constitution; many prominent commentators have advocated a new organic law. It must be admitted that most of these are outside the charmed circle of power.

Those who oppose the idea include most of the feudals -- who always tend to support all dictators and are solidly for retaining the 1973 constitution as it stands today. The big business is mostly for it. The armed forces too are no changers. The Q League opposes a new supreme law. Many successful lawyers are also working in the service of conservatives.

Some think drafting a new constitution is a dangerous task. Why? Because those who prosper in the present dispensation want no change. All those whose lives are

beset with myriad difficulties -- because of unemployment, high prices, and lack of social amenities and for want of opportunities for alternative politics -- want a change. The disadvantaged see 1973 constitution to be no real improvement on previous ones. It also provided a fig leaf for military dictators to enjoy ultimate power and permits social and political elites to make more personal gains. Factually Pakistan has been looted by its social and economic elites; the common man has been at the losing end all along. No wonder if the elites are for preserving the present constitution as do the rulers.

Pakistan has agitated for democracy several times. Ignoring East Pakistan's movements, the 1964 election campaign by peace-time Field Marshal against Miss

Fatima Jinnah became a pro-democracy mass movement, though only 80,000 persons were to vote who favoured Ayub Khan. The second major movement erupted in 1968 against the Field Marshal's dictatorship and brought him down, though another general snatched victory from the people. Third major movement took place in March 1977 that brought down the Bhutto government -- again for the benefit of Gen. Ziaul Haq. Zia went on to bloodily suppress the fourth popular agitation by MRD that had remained confined to one province. Thereafter people became far too dejected and apathetic; they remain pessimistic and alienated. ARD and MMA are talking of agitations soon; let's see what happens.

Writing a new constitution is not

an academic exercise. A constitution reflects the social, political and economic purposes of those who frame it. All constitutions so far have provided cover to powerful elites who were the rulers. Pakistan has had much travail in constitution making because people's conscious pressure was absent.

Pakistan was born a parliamentary democracy. Muslim League had mid-wifed it. But the League was a different thing in its two zones. East Bengalis did not have elites such as in West Pakistan and wanted simple democracy. In West Pakistan, almost all elected deputies belonged to landed aristocracy with no tradition of opposing governments; they always deferred to bureaucracy for selfish ends. Faced with the prospect of being ruled by Bengalis -- who had abolished landlordism without compensation in their own province -- WP grandees accepted higher bureaucracy's leadership to deny Bengalis the power to harm them.

Thus emerged the bureaucratic coterie around Ghulam Muhammad, prominent members of which were Col. Iskandar Mirza and Chaudhry Muhammad Ali. Secret of its power was the rumour that Iskandar Mirza carried Pakistan army in his pocket; Gen. Ayub owed him gratitude. After a decade of manipulating the political

class, bureaucracy lost out to Ayub who, with American collusion, maneuvered Mirza to abrogate the constitution and appoint him Martial Law Chief.

Initial political discourse in late 1940s concerned three cliches: ruling Muslim League relied on Muslim nationalism and an amorphous Islam. The Bengali contingent demanded political democracy and economic development. The third slogan that later arose was about creating a uniquely Islamic State -- raised by Jamaate-Islami that later attracted other religious groups. The reality however was a tug of war between the social elites of West Pakistan and the Bengali majority in the Constituent Assembly.

First two constitution-making efforts were unsuccessful and the third one nearly succeeded. As soon as success approached, Ghulam Muhammad sacked the Constituent Assembly whose creature he was -- to widely acclaim by West Pakistani elite and press. After ruling as a civilian dictator for over a year, he was persuaded to call another Assembly which did pass a constitution, the 1956 one, based on Bengalis foregoing their majority status.

The constitution that Pakistan had inherited and the one made in 1956 served as covers for the power

and influence of the top men (later the army chief wrote his own). The latter sacked the whole political lot and ruled as a dictator for 11 years. The point is that Ayub Khan showed that constitutions can be killed and a new one written if you have the power. Pakistan experienced democracy for first few years while it has lived under a constitution-covered dictatorship ever since.

The 1973 statute was billed as closing the chapter of military rule. But that was not to be. First intolentant ZA Bhutto behaved autocratically, barely keeping the facade of democracy intact. But General Ziaul Haq again showed that he could always tear up a constitution or put it on the shelf. Choosing the latter device, he ruled for 11 years. After him came 11 years of military-guided democracy in which five prime ministers were shown the door at the president's whim. After 1999 we are back in an openly military-controlled democracy -- all under the 1973 constitution.

True, no constitution ensured effective human rights to common people or occasioned economic development that could change their economic fortunes. For 55 years Pakistan has been ruled by dictators who pursued a development that enriched the top 15 per cent of the population. For the rich, Pakistan is shining. Fate of bottom 40 per cent is

poverty. The rest of the lot makes the two ends meet with difficulty.

The question is who should prevail: the conservatives who want no change or the reformists who want a new constitution for desired changes. The change sought by reformists is to make Pakistan both an ordinary representative democracy and a federation in which the units or states are the real government that expands the economy for the benefit of the bottom 70 per cent and the centre is confined to performing agreed common tasks. The choice is urgent.

Attitudes among opposition parties on this question vary. PML(N) seems to abhor the idea of a new organic law; on this question, government and opposition do not differ. Both have conservative outlook and are opposed by those who hate the strong centre and favour radical social and economic policies.

As for PPP, it too would oppose a new constitution because the party is today as conservative a force as PML(Q) is; it is unlikely to have any different social and economic policies than what Musharraf is pursuing. Other regional parties want more provincial autonomy; therefore will opt for a new basic law. Small groups are too many and too small to matter.

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