

Sharif-Vajpayee Meeting in New York

A Breakthrough in Bilateral Talks

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

An environment of durable peace and security was in the supreme interest of India and Pakistan. The peaceful settlement of all outstanding issues including Jammu and Kashmir was essential for this purpose.

THE reported one hour meeting on 23 September in New York between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly appears to have ended the stalemate of the dialogue between the two countries, to a great relief of the countries in South Asia in particular. An agenda including the contentious Kashmir issue is reported to have been agreed upon that presages a meaningful dialogue between them for peace and security in the region.

It is to be noted that Simla Agreement of 1972, contemplated that the Kashmir issue should be discussed between the two countries. Pakistan maintained that its cooperation with India on other areas would entirely depend on the progress of the Kashmir issue. On the other hand, India's position was that cooperative efforts on other issues must be established first to build confidence and trust between the two countries to resolve the Kashmir dispute. The position of both sides is comparable to an age-old riddle of "chicken or egg first".

In Indo-Pakistan bilateral talks at the Colombo Summit the parties could not even agree on an agenda including the Kashmir issue. Pakistan wanted the Kashmir question as one of the core issues while India perceived it as a political "point-scoring" against India. It was a dialogue of the deaf in Colombo.

Possible Reasons of Change of Strategy

As the time elapsed, India realised that Pakistan was going through tough times internally and in foreign relations.

The economic sanctions slammed on Pakistan made the people restive and the religious parties were exploiting the fragile situation. The Government came up with the 15th amendment of its Constitution to enforce Islamic laws in the country to placate the religious parties. In the economic front, Pakistan's situation appears to be precarious and there are signs within the country which could destabilise political environment. In such situation a Taliban type of regime is not unlikely to emerge in Pakistan to the consternation of India. Further Iran's war of words to the Taliban in Afghanistan placed Pakistan in a strategic dilemma because of its alleged backing of the Taliban.

India perceives that Sharif's Pakistan is much better than a regime controlled by the orthodox religious parties. Further a nuclear Pakistan with extreme Islamism could be a serious threat to India. Many of the militant Muslims were reported to be trained in Afghanistan to fight for self-determination of Kashmiris in the Indian administered Kashmir. Added to this is the recognition that India is now governed by a right-wing Hindu political party (BJP-Bharatiya Janata Party). Some BJP stalwarts are reported to have floated a novel idea that Hinduism is not a religion but a philosophy of life and embraces all religions including Islam. One may ask that if a right wing party with an ideology of "one religion, one people and one nation" can govern India, what does prevent a Taliban-type of religious party rule in Pakistan?

India's principal rival is known to be China and not Pakistan. China, some believe, replaced Japan as the second-biggest economy in the world. India felt that unless political tensions are eliminated in the Indian sub-continent, its economic progress similar to that of China is not possible. In an unfriendly global economic environment coupled with the existing economic sanctions on India, large foreign investment is likely to shy away from it. Furthermore, because of sanctions, India is prevented from undertaking essential economic reforms which are needed for accelerating its economic growth to match China's. With the diminished economic power India knows well that it will lose gradually its strategic edge in this region.

India and Pakistan demonstrated their capability as nuclear powers and the perception of equilibrium seems to have stabilised the situation. Pakistan can sit on a negotiating table on an equal footing with India and not from weakness. One may argue that such recognition of equality is conducive to fruitful negotiations.

Though belated, the meeting augurs well that they will resume talks at Foreign Secretary level on all pending issues after the June 1997 meeting. India and Pakistan have to live as neighbours. They cannot re-fash their geography. In Europe, France and Germany live side by side harmoniously, although they fought wars with each other in the past. If they can do it, why can't India and Pakistan? It is time that both countries look for reasons and address the issues for the benefit of peace, progress and security in the region. Is it too big a demand of the two key players in the sub-continent from their friends?

Outcome of the Meeting in New York

Having taken into account of the emerging compelling realities, both nations, in my view, are now prepared to adopt imaginative lead and some political risks. India is ready to talk about Kashmir with Pakistan. The top political level meeting took place in the background of five rounds of meetings between the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries at Durban (South Africa) where the Non-Aligned Summit con-

cluded on 3rd September. The old adage "where there is a will, there is a way" proved correct as India agreed to have the Kashmir issue included as one of the two core issues in the agenda, the other being peace, security and confidence-building measures. The rest items include terrorism, border skirmishes, people to people exchange and economic cooperation.

The two leaders have agreed to resolve their dispute over Kashmir peacefully and to hold series of wide-ranging talks on all issues immediately at Foreign Secretary level. The two Prime Ministers are to open a hotline for crisis communications. In a joint statement published earlier, both the leaders "reaffirmed their belief that an environment of durable peace and security was in the supreme interest of India and Pakistan. The peaceful settlement of all outstanding issues including Jammu and Kashmir was essential for this purpose."

Conclusion

Though belated, the meeting augurs well that they will resume talks at Foreign Secretary level on all pending issues after the June 1997 meeting. India and Pakistan have to live as neighbours. They cannot re-fash their geography. In Europe, France and Germany live side by side harmoniously, although they fought wars with each other in the past. If they can do it, why can't India and Pakistan? It is time that both countries look for reasons and address the issues for the benefit of peace, progress and security in the region. Is it too big a demand of the two key players in the sub-continent from their friends?

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Winter of Discontent Ahead for President Clinton

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

President Clinton's fate lies in the results of November 3 Congressional elections. Before the Lewinsky scandal, the Democrats were expected to pick up 5 or so more seats in the House, or even to threaten the Republican majority. Now forty more Democratic seats are considered not safe.

A decade from now, when America looks back at the Clinton-Lewinsky episode, they will wonder how the entire nation took leave of its senses for a few months. The confluence of an out of control President, out of control Republican party and out of control media, has produced a moment of national madness!

America is stuck with an extremely intelligent and successful President, who nevertheless, is a sexual adolescent. A cartoon summed up America's dilemma: "The President should not be impeached. He should be grounded!" It said, Clinton is forcing puritanical Americans to comprehend what constitutes "phone sex" and "oral sex" — terms that are mysterious to those brought up in the Bangladeshi morality. According to Jennifer Flowers, Clinton's one-time extra-marital love, the President told her that he saw somewhere in the Bible that "oral sex" did not constitute adultery! That is why Clinton adamantly denied under oath in the Paula Jones case (which is about to be settled with money) that he and Lewinsky did not have a "sexual relationship." It has now transpired that they did not have sexual intercourse, but had everything else imaginable, including "oral sex." The President would have done himself and the nation a great favour by putting his sexual desires on hold for the eight White House years.

From the beginning, lifelong

Republican, Independent Counsel "Judge" Kenneth W. Starr was a prosecutor in search of a crime. For four years he utilized the full resources of the government of the United States to investigate possible wrong doings by the President in the Whitewater land deal, the White House travel office and FBI file mismanagement, and came up empty. Last year, he announced his resignation to take the job of the President of a California College. In the face of severe criticism for not finishing his work, Starr agreed to stay on. Then last January, the Lewinsky saga gave him a golden opportunity to justify the enormous expense of his existence. Failing to convict Clinton on real crimes, Starr is now attempting to have the President removed on sexual misconduct. So one-sided is Starr's report to Congress that when ever there was a conflict in the grand jury testimony of two witnesses, Starr incorporated the version most damaging to the President. Starr is recommending that the President be impeached for obstruction of justice, yet, in his 445-page report full of salacious details, he finds no room for any exculpatory evidence, such as Lewinsky's grand jury statement that no one at the White House asked her to lie or tried to buy her silence in exchange of a job.

As far as the Republicans are concerned, this is pay back time for Watergate and Iran-Contra hearings with which the Democratic House and Senate majority had tortured Republican Presidents Nixon and Reagan respectively. Paying lip service to bipartisanship, all House Republicans voted to release the Starr Report to the public; 63 Democrats opposed. When the Starr Report failed to damage the President's standing with the public, the Republican majority in the House Judiciary Committee, ignoring White House protest, decided to release Clinton's August 17 video grand jury testimony to the public. (Once again, all Republicans voted for, and this time all Democrats voted against the release. So much for bipartisanship efforts.) Unfortunately for the Republicans, although evasive at times, Clinton earned the nation's sympathy for the drilling he took regarding very private matters at the hands of Starr's attorneys. Clinton's approval rating shot up 4%, to 66% after the release of the video tapes. In spite of howling protests by the Democrats, the Republicans have refused to release the audio tapes of conversation between Linda Tripp and Monica Lewinsky, which according to reports, damage their credibility.

The media had written President Clinton's obituary last January. They are furious that he is still around. The media shouted "Fire!" in the theater and dropped a lighted match stuck to boot! Every allegation against Clinton is reported as the ultimate truth. The media gave scant coverage to Whitewater and other Ken Starr investigations. Sex is altogether a different matter. Its reporting raises viewer ratings, increases revenues. That is why the media reports and repeats every sexual allegation against Clinton, beating a story to death and then reviving it. Of course, the media can never be wrong. Since all reporters had predicted heavy-weight boxer Muhammad Ali's destruction at the hands of Sonny Liston in their rematch in Lewiston, Maine in 1965 (Liston had lost due to a hand injury in the first match in 1964), they quickly proclaimed the contest a "fix", after Ali won! Twenty-two years later, when Sugar Ray Leonard defeated media-favourite Middle weight Champion Marvin Hagler in 1987, the media called that a "fix" too!

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God. Thirty years ago, Hyde was 44 (he is now 74), not much more "youthful" than Clinton is now (52). Plus all of Clinton's affairs have been with unmarried women. Hyde destroyed someone else's marriage to save his.

President Clinton's fate lies in the results of November 3 Congressional elections. Before the Lewinsky scandal, the Democrats were expected to pick up 5 or so more seats in the House, or even to threaten the Republican majority. Now forty more Democratic seats are considered not safe. If things go very well for the Republicans, they may end up with sixty Senators. If the voters favour the Republicans in the November election in a big way, Republicans will be emboldened, Democrats demoralized, and Clinton will be in serious danger of losing his job. The Republicans run the risk of alienating the voters, by their refusal to pay heed to the public's demand that Clinton not be impeached, only censured, and that the matter be dropped. Further, the US constitution calls for the impeachment of the president only for "treason, bribery and high crimes and misdemeanors." It is doubtful that Clinton's "low crimes and misdemeanor" rise to the level of an impeachable offense.

Clinton's high poll ratings may change. Ten months before President Nixon resigned in August, 1974, only 30 per cent wanted him impeached. The Republican strategy of slowly releasing information damaging to the President, may eventually poison the public's mind. If the public feels that Clinton's personal problem is impacting the job he was elected to do, they may turn on him. That is why President Clinton wants to be seen as attending to the affairs of the nation. When the full House voted for impeachment hearings, President Nixon invited Barry Goldwater and other senior Republicans to the White House. "How many Senate votes do I have?" Nixon asked. "Ten", Goldwater replied. (He needed at least 34.) That's when Nixon decided to resign. If things reach that stage, some times next year, that will be the moment of truth for Clinton's propensity to lie.

American judicial system can be bizarre. Monica Lewinsky received complete immunity from perjury for lying about the same sexual encounters with which President Clinton may lose his job! The whole impeachment procedure is political. The Republicans will have to factor in the possibility of handing (President) Al Gore two year's jump on the 2000 Presidential election!

Ken Starr's grand jury was very sympathetic to Monica Lewinsky. At the conclusion of her testimony, they gave her a bouquet. "I hate Linda Tripp" (for destroying her life) were Lewinsky's last words to the grand jury. "And Ken Starr", she might have added.

Iran has long argued that the death order should not hamper its improving relations with the United States and Britain. Speaking after a EU delegation to Tehran in July urged Iran to distance itself from the bounty set for killing Rushdie, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi said "such issues which belong to the Cold War period" should occupy "a minimum of time".

But hardliners have taken a directly opposite view. "Western countries must accept that the death sentence against Salman Rushdie cannot be revoked under any circumstances, and they must not discuss this issue again," Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, a leading government figure, told Tehran University students at prayer in July.

Although the Iranian government has always told the West that they don't want it on the agenda, and that we don't plan to assassinate Rushdie they've always refused to rescind the fatwa," Ibrahim told IPS.

He said that if true, the news would be very heartening. "It may open the way to the future, if the (Iranian) government can find a face saving formula." But he added, "The West may buy this superficial declaration by Khatami, to justify their trade relations".

British exports to Iran were worth 648 million dollars last year, though they lag behind Iran's main EU partner, Germany, which exported 1,722 million dollars worth of goods to Iran in 1997.

Britain's Foreign Office gave the comments a guarded welcome. "We have heard these reports. We have always taken the opportunity of any meeting with senior Iranians to press for assurances of Salman Rushdie's safety" a spokesman told British BBC TV.

Robin Cook had a meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister in New York on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly on September 24. He will use the meeting to seek clarification of what the Iranian Government's position is on the fatwa.

Despite this Khatami has drawn attention for his favourable comments about denouncing the fatwa and dialogue between civilisations in New York this week. "From now onwards, we want to push forward a dialogue, and we hope that we have entered the period of dialogue," he told the press on September 22.

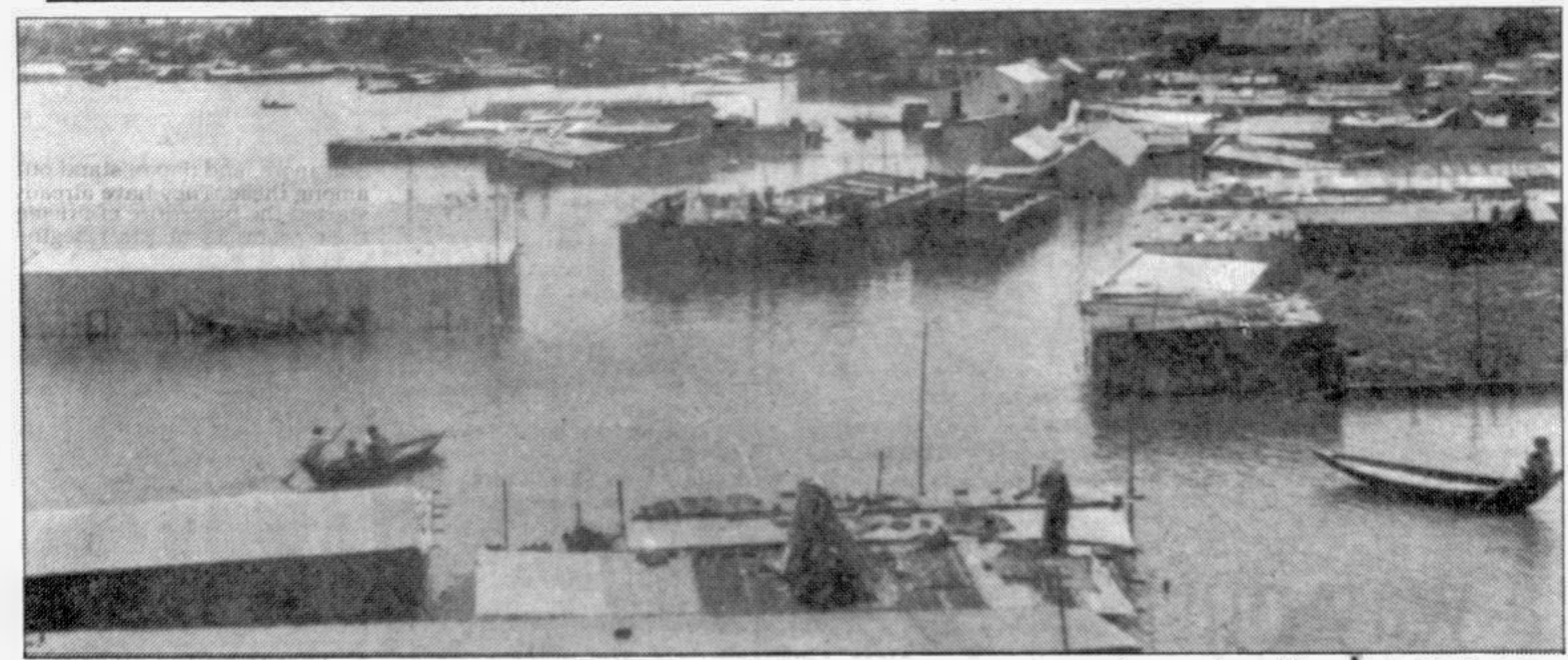
EU relations with Iran have steadily improved since Khatami's election last year. All EU states bar Greece cut links with Iran after a German court found that Iran's leadership had ordered the killing of Iranian dissidents in Berlin in 1992.

The court verdict temporarily ended a period of so-called "critical dialogue" between the EU and Iran. Germany returned its ambassadors to Iran in January.

Flood Mitigation: Thoughts on Strategy

by Engr. Shaheedul Islam

The school of thought on 'living with the flood' still exists. But the bitter experience of this year's flood has pushed the planners or philosophers up on the horns of dilemma what to do and how to live in such a situation.



and the Ganges/Padma are snow-fed and rain-fed while the Meghna is only rain-fed. The Brahmaputra rises on the northern slopes of the Himalayas in Tibet, flows in an easterly direction for a length of 1127 kms before turning south through the mountains and flows towards west for a length of about 644 kms and then suddenly turns towards south and enters Bangladesh as a braided river. Its watershed area is about 583222 sq.kms of which only 8.7 per cent lies in Bangladesh. The Ganges which is a meandering river, rises on the southern slopes of the Himalayas at an elevation of about 7000m at a place called Gongtri and flows in an easterly direction almost parallel to the Himalayan range for a length of about 2575 kms. Its total drainage area is about 956485 sq.kms of which only 3.6 per cent lies in Bangladesh. The watershed of these two rivers combined spreads over several countries besides Bangladesh, namely, China, Bhutan, Nepal, and India. Bangladesh is the lowest reach of this watershed. The Meghna on the other hand rising in Assam (India), has a total length of 805 kms of which about 419 kms lies in Bangladesh. The drainage area of these three rivers together is about 1616,050 sq.kms of which only 7 per cent lies in Bangladesh. The combined maximum discharge of these three rivers only is over 141,643 cms. The annual runoff is nearly 1.2 billion acre/ft., which if could have been impounded would have attained a water height of 10m approx. over Bangladesh. The length, area of drainage basin

Issues and Concerns

Flood Control vs Flood Mitigation: Flood control is misnomer, being not feasible nor desirable. What is desirable is controlled flooding. But the fact remains whether this also is achievable with marked success in the absence of no control whatsoever, over almost all major rivers including the principal ones, particularly the Ganges and the Brahmaputra-Jamuna with their sources lying outside the country's territorial boundary is a real concern. In this respect, what is wanted most is a co-operative approach by all CO-BASIN STATES for regional inter-basin development for mutual benefit. At present, apparently this is not forthcoming though, a silver lining in the horizon is in sight, as ice is broken with the signing of a water sharing treaty on the Ganges with India after a long protracted negotiations. This is not the end in itself but a means to an end. Some look at this historical treaty as of no avail, some others treat it as a bright prospect for future development efforts.

The treaty has set the ball rolling. A starting point from where efforts will be continuing till the ultimate goal or destination is reached when the much desired joint and ambitious development plans of all riparian countries involved are in place. Until then, the country should carry on within its limited resource to fight flood menace with strategy which is possible within its means.

Lessons have been learnt from this year's flood to recognize all the more importantly such a strategy to mitigate the sufferings of the people.

Mitigation Strategy

The school of thought on 'living with the flood' still exists. But the bitter experience of this year's flood has pushed the planners or philosophers up on the horns of dilemma what to do and how to live in such a situation. It is strongly felt that issues and concerns that accentuate flood damage need be well taken to minimize damage and consequent suffering. With little or no control over the vagaries of Nature to which again added the recent much talked about phenomenon of 'El Nino' and 'La Nina' causing more rains than expected normally in the region, visitation of such a flood as the one experienced this year is likely more often than not, may be in defiance of the law of probability.

Now, taking a stock of what is achieved and what remains to be achieved, an attempt is now made for planning a strategy for flood mitigation within possible means. This year's flooding is regarded as the worst ever in recent history, and has been an eye opener for planners to redirect their thoughts to new dimensions. Under the prevailing context of the series of stress and strains the country is passing through, the possibility may be explored considering two aspects: 1) Structural measures and 2) Non-structural measures. The scope of this paper has been limited to only non-structural ones. These are less or even non-expensive and nonetheless important for mitigating people's suffering, and are expected to bring about some improvement in flood condition and thus may be considered as supplemental to structural measures which can be undertaken where possible with external assistance and funding.

Land development and use pattern:

This is however, getting all the more difficult to implement in space and time, being gradually complicated due to population explosion, unplanned urbanisation, indiscriminate industrialisation etc. Over development of flood plains brings in harmful effects of drainage congestion and should be restricted as such. Regulation of land development and use pattern is a must. Impromptu and unwise building construction particularly in low lying areas on earth-filled grounds on the strategic paths of floods intensify flood stage making provision for more flood damage and therefore should be prohibited strictly.

Watershed management: Watershed management plays a vital role in flood management. Deforestation and degradation induce rapid runoff and rapid rise in flood level. Soil erosion takes place as a consequence of denudation of land. Therefore, the indiscriminate felling of trees without their planned replacements and over-grazing have to be stopped. Commensurate with flood situation involving the elements of its arrival, depth and duration, cropping practice and pattern be adjusted to reduce damage.

Slums and squatter area development: In towns and cities, particularly in all divisional towns and in Dhaka city where slum dwellers overcrowds the slums and squatter area development be duly attended to for orderly settlement of the dwellers. They should not be allowed to settle in ditches and depressions blocking natural drainage. They be encouraged to go back to their villages, giving some incentives by engaging them on rural development programmes viz. earthworks for roads, embankments, drainage channels, irrigation canals etc. and their repairs and maintenance.

Garbage disposal: Cities' garbage disposal should be planned for dumping in suitable sites so that natural drainage on strategic flood paths are not obstructed. Particular reference may be made of polythene bags which should be totally banned. In place of these bags paper bags be used. House Building Research Institute Dhaka has evolved a

Non-Structural Measures

These measures being inexpensive or even non-expensive have advantage over structural ones. Yet, these were neglected so long for some reason or other. A lesson is now learnt

Name of River	Length (km)		Drainage Basin (sqm (sqkm))		Max-Discharge* (cms)
	Total	B. Desh	Total	B. Desh	
The Brahmaputra	1800 (2900)	171 (277)	225,000 (583222)	19,500 (50545)	2,500,000 ("0000)
The Ganges	1600 (2575)	160 (258)	369,000 (956485)	13,200 (34215)	2200000 (63000)
The Meghna	500 (805)	260 (419)	29,500 (76467)	11,500 (29809)	500,000 (14000)
TOTAL			623,500 (1616,050)	44,200 (114478)	5200,000 (147,000)

*Source: BWDB Hydrology 1985. *Figures are not those of the highest recorded ever, since updatage figures are not readily available with the writer. Current year's or latest record is expected to show that maximum combined discharge is more than what is mentioned in the above table.

Severity Recurrence Interval (years)

Rated as flood 2.25
Moderate to severe 4
Severe 5
Catastrophic 33 to 57

The Flood Discharge: In context of flood flow, it is important to mention about the three great river systems ranking one of the world's largest namely, the Brahmaputra/Jamuna, the Ganges/Padma and the Meghna with some description here. Both the Brahmaputra/Jamuna