

On Road to Fruitful Friendship

THIS truly is a historic moment in Indo-Bangladesh relations. A most natural link between Dhaka and Calcutta that had been there for centuries and closed down following the 1965 Indo-Pak war has been resurrected but in another form. We have now established a direct bus service between the two contiguous premier cities of India and Bangladesh. Its symbolic significance notwithstanding, the opportunity for travel by a cheaper mode of transportation is highly valued in the overall context of the SAARC's much-vaunted vision for people-to-people contacts.

The historicity of the occasion is infinitely more enhanced by the presence of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu in the inauguration ceremony. The former paid a significant visit to Dhaka as the Minister for External Affairs in the Janata government led by Morarji Desai in the late seventies. It was Desai's doctrine of 'beneficial bilateralism' that bloomed under Vajpayee's stewardship of the Indian foreign ministry. As for Jyoti Basu he has made signal contributions to the consummation of the Ganges Water Agreement between New Delhi and Dhaka.

Now, the genuine concerns of Bangladesh will have to be allayed and addressed by the Indian leadership. The central concern for Bangladesh has been that the huge economy of India could one day swamp the small economy of Bangladesh through the trade imbalance suffered by the latter. India has eased up certain terms of trade but it is our belief that nothing short of giving Bangladesh products zero tariff access to the Indian market on non-reciprocal basis can help Bangladesh balance its figures with India to a reasonable extent. Zero tariff access on a non-reciprocal basis is a demand of the LDCs which India as the relatively much bigger economy than Bangladesh's can afford. We can quite see though that it is the Indian private sector that has to come forward to invest in joint collaboration projects with the Bangladesh entrepreneurs on a buy-back format. Costs of production can be brought down by recourse to efficient management. In this context, much as we greet the symbiotic relationship between CII and MCCI we also welcome the prospect for cooperative working between the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Ban Toxic Food Import

HIGH levels detected of poly-chlorinated biphenyl (PCB) and dioxin in Belgian dairy and poultry products, which may have carcinogenic effect on consumers, sparked off a food scare across the globe. Since the frightful finding, nearly 30 countries have withdrawn these products from their markets and put a ban on their import. French and Dutch products have not been spared either. Unfortunately, albeit rather predictably, there has not been any reaction from our government as yet. Let alone a ban on import and withdrawal of the dairy and poultry products from the market ministries concerned are not even sure who should make the first move. The commerce ministry awaits a reply to the faxed message it has sent to the embassies in Belgium, France and the Netherlands; the food ministry appears too happy for the fact that it imports cereals only while the health ministry is yet to initiate testing of items imported from these countries. With plenty of Belgian, French and Dutch products available in the market, the government indifference and inertia certainly exposes a substantial section of the citizenry to the risk of cancer.

Strangely though, the government's lethargic reaction to grave issues essentially emanating from lack of inter-ministerial co-ordination is nothing new. Many a time in the past, it displayed the slow-gone syndrome in matters of grave concern. This time around, what sounds disconcerting, too is the WHO's apparent failure to send a warning to the government in this regard. On the whole, the situation certainly speaks of a systemic failure drawing urgent attention of the government. The government should immediately impose a ban on dairy and poultry product from these countries. That done, it should direct its efforts towards establishing a mechanism, with participation from the ministries concerned, which will keep a close vigil on developments in the international market, so that, in similar situation in future, we are not caught napping.

AK-47 in Wrong Hands

THE Inspector General of Police has made a startling revelation about possession of modern arms by terrorists in the country. Weapons like the AK-47 rifles in the possession of criminals sends definite danger signals to the law enforcing agencies like the police which, according to the IGP, don't possess such lethal arms to combat the terrorists. This can cost dearly by way of demoralising the police force.

He told the newsmen at Chittagong on Friday that crimes and terrorist activities have gone up with the availability of sophisticated arms. Come as it does from the IGP himself the crime situation in the country can be easily fathomed. It is deteriorating in spite of various anti-terrorism measures taken by the authorities in the recent past. Giving casualty figures the police chief said that fifty persons were killed during the first six months of this year compared to thirty five during the corresponding period last year. Police have arrested a large number of suspected criminals numbering around forty-seven thousand and recovered a large number of firearms and ammunition. But according to newspaper reports the weapons seized are mostly obsolete small arms, manufactured in clandestine factories of Bangladesh. A considerable number of foreign made small arms have also been impounded. Recent reports indicate that a large-scale smuggling of arms has been going on via sea and land routes and small arms are easily available in certain points of the country close to the borders.

To top it all is the corruption of policemen. As the police are trying to control corruption through motivation and punishment as claimed by the IGP, so should they try to contain arms-trafficking with the help of specialised agencies and flush out criminals from their dens.

Kosovo Situation

Uneasy Peace Lies after Peace Agreement

The present stand-off between Russian and NATO troops emanated from a successful blitzkrieg by Russian troops entering Kosovo ahead of NATO troops and occupying the strategic Pristina airport. While the NATO high command was planning a befitting, if not a triumphal entry, into Kosovo and coordinating with US authorities for participation in the vanguard of NATO troops, a small contingent of 200 Russian troops pre-empted NATO and entered Kosovo from adjoining Bosnia.

FOLLOWING successful completion of a tense, protracted and arduous task of a series of multi-channelled negotiations, the long-awaited and much desired Kosovo Peace Agreement was finally concluded on the 3rd July. The UN Security Council resolution constituted the core and provided international support and commitment that was imperative to secure a smooth and effective implementation of the agreement. Yet, its implementation stumbles and stumbles heavily on the way.

It is strange but true that both the opposing sides claimed victory over the agreement and hailed it as vindication of their respective stands. NATO and the allies were happy that they were able to force the Serbian President, Slobodan Milosovic, by continuous bombing over 11 weeks, to agree to the withdrawal of all Serbian security forces from Kosovo and to the induction of an international force there to ensure free and safe return and rehabilitation of a million and a half refugees to their homeland.

The Serbian President derived satisfaction from the fact that the agreement stipulated Yugoslavia's sovereignty over Kosovo, it held no explicit promise for an ethnic political settlement there and the fact that an international force, technically at the behest of the United Nations and not NATO, was to get de jure authority and responsibility to undertake peacekeeping operation there. These provisions were clearly manifest and constituted the core of Milosevic's claim that he had succeeded in obtaining concessions over the original Western demands which as had been envisaged in the aborted Rambouillet plan. However, Serbian insistence on the stoppage of NATO bombing as a precondition for starting political talks was rejected and NATO

halted air attacks only following visible demonstration of the commencement of withdrawal of Serb troops from Kosovo.

The Russian factor played a very crucial but obtrusive role in the episode. No doubt, Russian efforts through its peace-broker, former Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin, finally prevailed upon Slobodan Milosovic accept some of the un-



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezauul Karim

palatable conditions of the peace plan. But, also a very difficult aspect of the negotiations was to secure agreement of the principal Serb mentor and veto rattling Russia on various points of negotiations, including and specially its role in the peacekeeping operation — the nature and degree of Russian authority and participation in the international force.

The general understanding reached about Russian participation did not clear up such necessary details. The Western powers made it absolutely clear that there would be no compromise over a unified command of the international peacekeeping force and that no carving of zones of influence or territorial sectors would be acceptable. The uneasy situation as it prevails now following induction of NATO troops in Kosovo and occupation of Pristina airport by Russian troops are no doubt products of the failure of clearing up such and other unsettled points.

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empty NATO troops into Kosovo has been a moot question due to uncertainty about who had really given the order for such action. The Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov had earlier assured USA that Russian troops would not be the first to enter Kosovo, and after he was proven false he explained it was a "mistake". But the mistake has not yet been rectified. This revealed incongruity of policy and action between the civil and military authorities in Russia and portends a measure of instability in that country. It was surmised that President Yeltsin himself had ordered, but in general terms. This appeared to have been over-stretched by the military, making their own interpretation and taking action accordingly.

The decision of a Ministerial meeting between the United States and Russia under the auspices of the Finnish President, the principal peace broker and international trouble-shooter, is to clear up the knotty problems which imposed serious obstacles to the implementation of the peace agreement. Defence Ministers of both the countries are now meeting at Helsinki to this end. The scenario has since undergone a substantive change.

The principal actor to play against NATO is no longer Serbia but Russia itself, who has a historic and ethical interest in the Balkans. This gives rise to a sense of greater uncertainty about the future shape of this trouble-torn region. The international community thus gasps and waits in a highly charged atmosphere of deep apprehension and concern.

The author, a former ambassador, presently a member of BNP's advisory committee, is a regular columnist of The Daily Star. He has sent this latest update from New York.

Vajpayee's Shaken Faith

What struck Vajpayee the most — he became pensive when he repeated it — was the remark of one soldier: "Don't you accept the cease-fire. Let us decide it once and for all." If Pakistan withdrew its soldiers, Vajpayee would be willing to resume talks on the matters pending between the two countries

PRIME Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee does not rule out the postponement of elections. "It will depend upon the situation prevailing at that time," he said. He was worried lest hostilities escalate. I talked to him for more than half an hour on various facets of the Kargil situation at his residence. He exuded confidence and left that the armed forces were doing a tremendous job. I touched upon the negligence aspect but he both agreed that this could wait till after the war.

"How long will the hostilities continue?" I asked. He did not indicate any time. He pinned his hopes on President Clinton's efforts. Vajpayee said that he had been assured on the phone that America was exerting all its pressure on Pakistan to call back the infiltrators. The US President, he said, was also in touch with other powers, including China, to make Islamabad respect the sanctity of the Line of Control (LoC) and restore the status quo ante. In line with what Clinton communicated to Vajpayee, the US President has asked Nawaz Sharif to withdraw his forces. According to the Prime Minister, the talks between Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and the Chinese leaders had gone "very well." They had made it clear that they did not want to take sides. But they wanted both countries to sort out their problems between themselves peacefully.

When I used the word 'infiltrator', Vajpayee corrected me. He said that they were all Pakistani soldiers. There was no Kashmiri, not even Afghans who once constituted the majority of infiltrators. Vajpayee admitted that the Pakistani forces had come into the Indian side of the LoC up to seven kilometres at one place and two to three kilometres at a few other points. The bulk of them had been pushed back. He assured me that "every bit of our territory will be cleared and the position prevailing before the Pakistan attack restored."

Not even once did he use if or 'but' while talking about the sta-

tus quo ante. He was firm on that and no talks would take place before that was effected. The Prime Minister said that when Pakistan Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz met him, the latter pointed out that India too had violated the LoC in the past. He cited instances of certain heights, under Pakistan, were not returned by India after the 1971 war. Vajpayee did not deny that there might be some truth in that. But since then, for some 28 years, the LoC had been respected. It had come to have the sanctity which both countries respected till "Pakistan embarked upon the aggression." Clinton particularly praised India's restraint in not crossing the LoC. Vajpayee said,

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Pakistan has a bad record of infiltration. It went over the same exercise in 1965. Islamabad's calculation was that there would be an uprising in Kashmir. The Pakistani army, then heading Pakistan, was reluctant to do anything to needle India. But Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then foreign minister, assured him that the Kashmiris would rise like one man. When Ayub Khan heard that there was no response, his comment was that it was Bhutto who made him go wrong in his assessment of the Kashmiri attitude. (Bhutto told me later that he had no regrets about having persuaded Ayub Khan to send in the infiltrators).

Vajpayee was worried over casualties, also aware of the fact that the Pakistani troops had positioned themselves on mountain heights. "But their casualties are far more than ours," he said. The Prime Minister agreed with me that the process of reconciliation between India and Pakistan would remain stalled for a long time. Our faith had been shaken. Vajpayee felt cheated. How could simple, straight Nawaz Sharif, who talked to him at Lahore

and earlier, change so suddenly? Even now on the phone, he sounded warm and friendly. Vajpayee said,

The Prime Minister said that after his visit to Lahore, the anti-India feeling in Pakistan had gone down considerably. The anti-Pakistan lobby in India had collapsed. The Lahore Declaration created the goodwill atmosphere. Vajpayee said that Clinton specially commended his bus trip to Lahore and congratulated him for having taken the initiative to go to Pakistan.

"Why did Nawaz Sharif do so?" Probably, he did not know all, Vajpayee said. He attributed most of what had happened to certain elements in the armed

forces and the hawks in Pakistan. Armed forces, I recall, have always been a problem in Pakistan. Although they have gone back to the barracks in the last few years, they continue to call the shots. They are the third chamber and have the last word. They were bitter after the defeat in the Bangladesh war. They are still smarting from that defeat. They want revenge.

They did not like the climate of friendship which was building up. They did not want the two countries to come nearer to each other. They did not want to bury the hatchet. The fallout in India has been anti-Pakistan bias. In the last few days, I have visited Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Patna, Guwahati and Calcutta. I have been amazed to find a strong anti-Pakistan feeling that was not there earlier.

During the past decade, border posts were occasionally run over and artillery firing on villages had become a common occurrence. This was the first time, however, that a military offensive has been carried out to seize and hold territory across a clearly-demarcated line in the absence of declared war. The scope of the current

military operations to seize the heights overlooking Kargil and other towns and to disrupt the road that India uses to reach Ladakh and to transport equipment, artillery and communications support — all suggest the direct involvement of Pakistan — the army and the intelligence agencies.

Vajpayee once again ruled out the reconvening of the Rajyasabha. "Some parties will use the session to say such things as would lower the morale of the forces. They have a different agenda. Were they to decide to pass a resolution to express solidarity, it would be something different." Told that his own image was high in the country but not that of his party, the BJP, he only smiled in reply. Vajpayee seemed reluctant to have a national government. "They tell me that I can lead it," Vajpayee said. "But I prefer some advisory council. We are still working at it, the parties which will be part of it, the number of people manning it, etc."

Talking about the army morale, Vajpayee said that in forward areas the hospitals to which he went, he found the soldiers tallying proudly the casualties their state had suffered. They also compared the number of men participating from one area with another. "Your people are still fewer than ours," said one soldier to another. They hailed from all parts of the country and there were from all communities whether Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian.

What struck Vajpayee the most — he became pensive when he repeated it — was the remark of one soldier: "Don't you accept the cease-fire. Let us decide it once and for all." If Pakistan withdrew its soldiers, Vajpayee would be willing to resume talks on the matters pending between the two countries.

He says he has a vested interest in peace. Even otherwise, he finds no other option. He knows that we are all prisoners of geography. "We can choose our friends but not our neighbours," he said. He said at Lahore during his speech at a civic reception,

compensation extracted, on the unfortunate falling of gas pipelines under the BB Jamuna Bridge (perhaps due to hurried opening date of the bridge).

The public has the right to know, through the usual channels of communication — the JS, JS Standing Committee, probe report, press briefing and investigative reporting.

The minister in charge is expected to tell the press what deterrent action has been taken after the unfortunate accident due to bad workmanship. There should be no hush hush affair in this case.

A Husnain Dhaka

Inform us, please

Sir, The public has not yet been told the full story of the disciplinary action taken, and

OPINION

What Next for Bangladesh Cricket?

Fayyadh R Yusuf

Having participated in this year's World Cup, Bangladesh has now entered the premier stage of cricket. Reaching this elite level, however, should not satisfy the players, coaches or citizens of Bangladesh. Remaining among the top teams in the world and challenging for the championship should now be the priority of everyone committed to Bangladesh cricket.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has already demonstrated some of the qualities of a stable governing body: a) good coaches produce smart players; b) qualified fitness coaches produce strong/fast athletes; and c) competing against strong opponents improves a team's ability. Now the BCB must ask itself, "What next?" What other means are necessary to ensure that Bangladesh maximize their potential rather than fade away like Bangladesh?

The answer, which teams such as South Africa have already figured out, is this: a qualified sport psychologist who can develop the mental acuity of players is most needed. Before explaining the role of a sport psychologist, let me review a few basic principles about athletics. All over the world, most athletic commissions will ask the following issues as they piece together administration and coaching staffs.

Cricket can be broken down into three main components. They are: technical, physical and mental. Usually, teams with some proficiency in each of these three areas will beat teams who excel in just one or two of them. In other words, players who are physically strong and fast (but lack knowledge in batting and bowling) will lose to weaker opponents who are strong technically and mentally. Likewise, average teams who tap into all three areas can often beat superior teams who don't prepare mentally for a game (e.g. the Bangladesh versus Pakistan one).

Examples in cricket of technical expertise are knowing how to bat (e.g. holding the bat, swinging the bat, etc.) and how to bowl (e.g. gripping the ball, release point over head, twisting of the wrist, etc.). Strategy is another area which falls under "technical" because it requires an understanding of the game. The persons responsible for teaching these skills to the athletes are the coaches. A good head coach should be an expert in at least one area of technical proficiency and be able to hire assistant coaches to help teach in the other areas. For example, a head coach who knows batting techniques and game strategy must find others who are experts in fielding and bowling.

But simply knowing how to perform these acts is not sufficient. Athletes must be physically capable of doing the actions at high speeds for extended periods of time. For this reason, smart (capable) athletes need the services of strength and conditioning (fitness) coaches. Good fitness coaches challenge the players physically. They design programs which will strengthen the players' forearms and torsos for greater bat speed; shoulder joints are manipulated so that bowlers can put faster pace on the ball without injury; and speed is increased so that fielders can chase bats and batsmen can score runs.

Both the technical and the physical aspects of sport are important — in fact, even the novice sportsman can identify these elements through simple observation. But the factor which is most important during competition is unquestionably the mental aspect. Travel the world and ask any elite athlete why mental toughness is important and they will tell you something like this: "at all levels of play, technical and physical differences are negligible. Unless you've never lifted weights or never practiced batting, all international cricket players have the same ability to play the game. But what separates the good players from the great ones is how they think during the game."

When I think of thoughts, I don't mean strategy. The mental aspects which I'm speaking of influence matters such as: confidence, cooperation, commitment, composure and consistency. Certainly coaches can address these matters. In fact, the best coaches are masters of them. However, most will admit that they don't possess the expertise to do so thoroughly.

Coaches have spent their lives understanding the technical side of sport because for decades that is what was expected of them. Understanding strategy and batting technique got them jobs so that's what they learned. It was the same with the physical aspect of sport. Coaches weren't experts in fitness because it wasn't important in the early days. Over time, attitude changed and strength was slowly recognized as being important. Consequently, persons studied physiology and then offered their services using the title "fitness coach". Now, several decades later, the same is happening for the mental side of sport. Although only a few exist, there is a small group of people who have studied the psychology of sport and they are helping players fulfill their potential on the field.

What are some situations where a mental coach would help?

"Thinking Great All of the Time — Attitudes must be consistent in order for them to function as a weapon. Players must think great in practice AND in matches televised around the world.

"Loving the Challenge of Be-

ing Great Under any Circumstance — It's easy for most anyone to feel and think great when winning, but the great players maintain a positive and effective mental attitude even when things aren't going their way. They love the challenge of overcoming obstacles or simply trying to get better.

"Working Hard vs. Working Smart — Dedication to working hard is admirable. However, when it comes time to perform great, working smart is equally important. For example, running 20 wind sprints before a game is working hard, but if it prevents you from performing great come game time, it's not very smart.

"Staying in the Present Playing, learning and forgetting. While learning about both the positives and negatives of each play is beneficial, dwelling on successes or failures when the next ball is bowled will ultimately take away from your ability to execute the next play.

"Knowing When to Think and When to Play — Because of modern technology, lots of analytical processing occurs off the field. However, if players continue to analyze while competing, they won't be able to stay loose, unconscious and trust their instincts.

"Taking Calculated Risks — Fear of failure or lack of confidence may result in athletes playing safe. Players who hesitate, or are unwilling to change positions or try new techniques limit their opportunities to make the "big" plays.

"Dealing With An Injury — The ability to deal with injuries usually depends on an athlete's experience with them.

"Most cases involving injuries require simple management strategies which focus on importance and controllability of external variables.

"Returning to Play After a Severe Injury — At this level, athletes are used to playing with or through minor injuries. However, coming back from major surgery (i.e. ACL tear) and having the confidence to spring that first run — trusting that the knee will hold up — requires a solid mental attitude.

"Conditioning the Mind to Play Year-Round, All-Around — This concern is particularly relevant to young players unaccustomed to long travels and stays abroad. They don't have the experience of veterans in terms of maintaining a strong mind over a long period of time.

"Enhancing Team Cohesion Amongst Athletes And Coaches — Despite the best intentions, the relationship between team mates or an athlete and his coach is sometimes strained and that may inhibit learning and productivity. Having impartial resources to help overcome obstacles and promote unity and team chemistry is valuable.

These are just a few of the instances where a sport psychologist (or mental coach) can help the team. Obviously, not all players need help in all of these areas, but a qualified mental coach can address any potential problem which may present itself. What are other justifications for adding a person of this expertise to the cricket staff?

Why should the BCB hire a sport psychologist?

"Coaches have limited resources and energy, but the number of team related commitments and obligations grow every year. Dedicating one person to serve as a resource to coaches and athletes can increase the chances of improving performance.

"The personality of the players has changed as quickly as the game itself. Working with a new generation of ball players is a whole new challenge for coaches trained under older styles.

"Teams appreciate a "neutral" resource who can over-arch cultural, political and religious differences of players and coaches.

"Teams appreciate having a resource to work with who doesn't influence salary, job security, playing time, or personnel evaluations.

"Great coaches love thinking about the game and are passionate about creating excellence. Consulting with a mental training resource tends to put opportunities for developing cutting edge concepts and training plans for the players.

Are there other pressing needs for the team?

In my opinion, no. There simply isn't another more important area for Bangladesh cricket (or any other Bangladeshi sport) to develop at this time. I'm not suggesting that there aren't other professionals who could make positive contributions to the team, but none could have as profound an affect as a sport psychologist. In the coming months you may hear about nutritionists, physiologists or motor learning specialists. Each is a legitimate field in it's own right, but their potential impact doesn't warrant attention at this time.

I am still learning the intricacies of cricket and am uneducated regarding the politics which seem to influence decisions-making in Bangladeshi athletics. However, given my background and a recent trip to Bangladesh, I feel somewhat qualified to comment on this matter. Furthermore, it's nice to know that news of my parents homeland can now be a matter of national pride rather than tragic natural disasters. Hopefully, the BCB and any political figures who have a say in the matter will not be the cyclone that washes away all of the glory which the national cricket team has bestowed on Bangladesh.

The author, a Doctorate, is a sport psychologist in the US.