

Bhuj earthquake: Pakistan's gesture *The Daily Star* has Made a Difference

HARUN UR RASHID

THE sight of a Pakistani plane (air force) in Indian space was unthinkable a few days ago. All that changed, however, with the devastating earthquake that hit the Indian state of Gujrat on 26 January, where officially more than 25,000 (unofficial estimates run to 100,000) are feared dead. Pakistan's Chief Executive General Musharraf is reported to have telephoned Prime Minister Vajpayee following the natural disaster. This appears to be the first direct contact between the two leaders since the military took over power in Pakistan in October 1999.

Pakistan sent a plane to Ahmedabad with relief materials for the victims of the earthquake. It is an appropriate humanitarian gesture from a neighbour, despite its hostile relations with India, because of the Kashmir dispute for the last 53 years. This demonstrates that when lives are at risk, basic human compassion comes to the fore.

Pakistan's offer and India's acceptance is in the right direction and a welcome development. Every positive step counts to break the cycle of hatred and enmity in their relationship (the enmity and hostility was to such an extent that it was reported some time back that Indian

It is hoped that the telephone talk between the two leaders could lead to melting of icy relations between India and Pakistan. It remains to be seen to what extent the friendly gesture from Pakistan would have impact on their overall relationships in the days ahead.

cricket players did not wish to play in Pakistan).

It can be argued that this gesture of Pakistan to the victims of the Indian earthquake, may generate a propitious climate for dialogue between India and Pakistan. This initial gesture may soften Indian people's attitudes towards Pakistan. They may consider Pakistan not to be "all that bad after all."

In addition, at a time of natural catastrophe, mistrust and hatred take a back seat. Why? It is partly because such or similar disaster could happen to any country. The helplessness and insignificance of human life stares one in the face and people tend to be more reconciliatory towards each other. Moreover, people's opinions are very important for a democratic government.

The possible change of heart among the average people in India is likely to encourage the government to have a dialogue with Paki-

stan to improve its relations.

There are a few examples of where unusual events led to improving relations between hostile countries. Greece and Turkey were rivals for many years. However, when an earthquake hit Turkey in 1999, Greece responded promptly with relief materials for the victims. Extraordinarily, the natural disasters in Turkey provided Greece an opportunity to soften its stance to Turkey's entry into European Union. Greece finally withdrew its long-standing objection in principle to Turkish membership. It could be argued that what ordinary diplomacy could not achieve, "earthquake" diplomacy spontaneous human sympathy and co-operation accomplished.

Many political analysts believe that China managed to shed its negative image by sending its ping pong (table tennis) players to participate in several tournaments in

different countries. The players were successful in winning many of the tournaments. This created a positive impression of China and the Chinese people. The people in the West began to change their perceptions of China.

The "ping pong" players played an influential role, one that is usually earmarked for diplomats and later referred to as the "Ping Pong" diplomacy. The US had pursued a unfriendly policy towards the Peking government for 23 years. The "Ping Pong Diplomacy" was believed to be one of the factors that helped President Richard Nixon normalise its relations with China in 1972.

The bitterness generated between France and Germany during the Second World War went through a metamorphosis in the post-war era, and the two deadly enemies became not only friends, but are also close interdependent allies.

It is hoped that the telephone talk between the two leaders could lead to melting of icy relations between India and Pakistan. It remains to be seen to what extent the friendly gesture from Pakistan would have impact on their overall relationships in the days ahead.

Harun ur Rashid, a barrister, is Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED
writes from Princeton

IT was December 1991. Our trip home turned into tragedy as my father-in-law, Dr. M. N. Huda, passed away. As we were recovering after his Quikhan, I planned to visit the offices of "Bangladesh Observer." I was a part-time sports reporter for the paper during my student days at the Dhaka University Chemistry Department, and always made a point of looking up old friends that were still there, during my home visits. "Write for this new newspaper, 'The Daily Star'", my brother-in-law Wahiduddin Mahmud advised me. "Go and see my friend Executive Editor Mahfuz Anam; he knows you very well ("O tomakae bhale korae chiney."), the Professor assured me.

After my customary stopover at the "Observer," I crossed the street, entered "The Daily Star" premises located on DIT Avenue at that time, and asked to see the Executive Editor. I introduced myself and immediately realized that although I knew him, the embarrassed Executive Editor did not know who I was! It was reassuring to see some familiar faces, such as my sister-in-law and the editor of the Star magazine, Aasha Mehreen Amin at the DS office. Despite the first awkward encounter, our collaboration continued. I was very impressed with Mr. Mahfuz Anam's (now Editor) commitment to The Daily Star. On his visits to the US, he would call me up and request write-ups for his newspaper. Then in early 1997, when we met at a mutual friend's house in the Princeton area, he persuaded me to write a weekly or a biweekly column. Since then I have cut down on my writing commitments in the US, and have tried to write regularly for The Daily Star.

The Daily Star became an international newspaper on August 12, 1997, when its Internet edition made its debut. Instantly, it co-opted the entire Bangladeshi expatriate community as its readers. A perusal of the letters written to the Editor from America, Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Middle East, India, Pakistan and Central Asia is a testimony to the paper's international appeal. The international community also reads it. In late 1999, the writer was stunned

by a call he received from America's premier television network, ABC News. The reporter told me that he had read my article in The Daily Star entitled "What's in a name?" and wanted to know if I had a second source for the statement that "Muhammad" is the most popular name in the world (I had quoted American quiz programme "Jeopardy" as the primary source in the article.) Notice that reputed news organizations check multiple sources before accepting a statement.

The greatest asset The Daily Star has is its neutrality in politics. The DS should caress, cherish and protect that reputation like a pre-

students wishing to learn how to write good English, the writer would like to suggest that they study Star columnist Ms. Almas Zakiuddin's "If you Ask Me" columns very thoroughly. Expatriates have a wish list for The Daily Star: please put the Star magazine on the Net!

We in Bangladesh have a tendency to discuss highly technical matters in the newspapers. Details are better left to trade and scientific journals. If they write for the op-ed page of the New York Times, even Nobel Prize winners write so simply that a lay person can understand it. It is not easy to write authentically about America sitting in Bangladesh, just as it is not easy

by a Pakistani, he/she gets the impression that the Pakistani has difficulty with the truth. He does not seem to know what the truth is. Be that the Kargil episode or Bangladesh's war of independence, Pakistanis tend to paint themselves as the victims rather than the perpetrators.

We the readers and The Daily Star have come a long way in the last ten years. It all started with the brutal 1991 Gulf War in which the "Allies," Bangladesh among them, killed 100,000 Iraqis. We witnessed the massacres and rapes of Bosnia, Kosovo and Chechnya. The Israelis and the Palestinians have made peace. Sort of. We found out that our hero President Clinton has feet of clay. This reminds the writer of his first abortive attempt at romance. The female protagonist's initial reaction was mild amusement, "Chhaley prem korbe, shokh koto," ("Fancy, the boy wants to romance!"), which quickly turned hostile: "Amakae? Shahosh koto?" ("Me? How dare you?") And that was the end of that! Our dear President Clinton was far less forthcoming in accepting rejection from Paula Jones. That led to seven months of darkness in America, culminating in President Clinton's impeachment.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

The greatest asset The Daily Star has is its neutrality in politics. The DS should caress, cherish and protect that reputation like a precious stone. Even the most unsophisticated reader can decipher partisanship, and any hint of partisanship will kill a newspaper that yearns to cater to an enlightened audience.

Even the most unsophisticated reader can decipher partisanship, and any hint of partisanship will kill a newspaper that yearns to cater to an enlightened audience. The DS does an excellent job in its attempt to keep our politicians honest, although that is a Herculean task, to say the least. The paper takes an activist role through round table conferences, in addressing the issues such as pollution, arsenic contamination, the societal abuse of women and the minorities, and the respect for the laws of the land, that are vitally important for a nation wishing to forge ahead.

The writer learned most of his English from reading "The Statesman" of Calcutta (before it was banned after the 1965 India-Pakistan war) and the "Observer." "The Daily Star" fulfills that job admirably for the younger generation of Bangladeshi students. Many of The Daily Star staff and columnists are foreign educated, therefore write Modern English. For

to dissect the politics of Bangladesh from America. The columnists of The New York Times keep to certain domains of expertise, such as, domestic, foreign, social, legal, women's and minority affairs. Columnists express an opinion, instead of rehashing published news. What is different about The Daily Star is that on top of a fixed number of columnists, it also seems to have a group of dedicated letter writers!

Perhaps the features that the writer likes best about The Daily Star are the columns from foreign correspondents. It is always a pleasure to read Kuldip Nayar's insightful views of events from an Indian perspective. Ikrum Seghal does a thorough job for Pakistan. Even after so many years, when a Bangladeshi reads a column written

Of course, the real fireworks came from the Indian subcontinent, when both India and Pakistan shook up the world with exploding nuclear bombs, thus transforming the line of control into ground zero. President Clinton honoured Bangladesh with the first US Presidential visit. The cricketing lords smiled on Bangladesh, conferring it the test status. President Clinton is gone now; once again we are in the Bushes. It is the writer's fervent hope that The Daily Star will continue, through its authoritative, The New York Times-like editorials, to act as the nation's watchdog, and help prevent Bangladesh from sliding into anarchy. It is very unlikely that the writer will continue writing for the Daily Star for the next ten years. Rest assured though, he will be browsing its Internet edition!

Putting an end to the revengeful cycle

ANEES JILLANI
writes from Islamabad

WHETHER in the Government of Pakistan thought of sending C-130s with blankets and tents to help the earthquake victims in Indian Gujrat must be credited with prudence; and should be strengthened for bringing some sanity to our policies. There is no doubt that it was a simple token and symbolic gesture and could not have been expected to alleviate in any major manner the suffering of the unfortunate more than half a million people in Gujrat. However, the courtesy at least illustrated that the people and the Government of Pakistan are capable of thinking beyond their noses and believe in helping non-Muslims as well.

I would have been thrilled if the religious organizations on both sides of the border regardless of their affiliation or denomination had

come forward in helping the victims in India. Why does it always have to be the Europeans like the Swiss, the British and the Scandinavians who come forward to help victims in any calamity? Regardless of whether it is a civil war in Rwanda or floods in Southern Africa or drought in Afghanistan or earthquake in India, we see European nurses standing in the midst of calamities; the Swiss landed in Gujrat and pulled out 17 survivors during the first day of their operation. The Turks pulled a woman out after seven days. Has the White Man been entrusted the task to protect humanity on the globe while the rest, particularly the Muslims, have been given the job to take out processions and burning those very European and American flags?

Allah is Great but Allah has also been kinder to the White Race. One has to read history to realize as to how the Western powers have always retained their domination;

and it is a misconception amongst a section of the Muslim population that the West helps the world out due to certain sinister motives. We may be depressed to realize that our market hardly matters to the West; and you can appreciate this by simply looking at Pakistan's imports from the West: they are negligible. If anything, our exports are greater in most of the cases and the balance of trade is mainly negative due to high oil prices. The world at one point of time was taking interest in Afghanistan and we were accusing it of selfish reasons. We now have reached the stage where the whole international community has simply disregarded Afghanistan and where Taliban despite being in control of almost the whole country is not being recognized by more than three countries throughout the world. The West is not interested in the Afghan market.

Is it interested in the Pakistan market? One of the most influential international weeklies of the world, The Economist, recently commented that Pakistan is a country that is "internationally reviled" for its military dictatorship. And it would be unfair to the Musharraf Government to blame it for this declining image. It has more to do with the perception that the Islamic fundamentalist forces operating all over the world are using Pakistan and Afghanistan as a base and many of their training camps are located in these two territories. Our Foreign Office spokesmen may keep saying all their lives that Pakistan is only offering "moral, political and diplomatic" support to the Kashmiri freedom fighters but the world community can no longer ignore the existence of not hundreds but thousands of religious madrassas spread out all over the country. The religious outfits are collecting funds in the name of Jihad all over the country and it is not a secret. It may perhaps be known to the people who matter in Pakistan that Jihad is not permitted by the United Nations Charter because the Bangladeshi freedom fighters' Jihad was Pakistan's secessionist movement. The so-called Balochistan Liberation Front, from wherever it has cropped-up, is another reflection of this syndrome.

My remedy for the present predicament in Pakistan is extremely simple. I have been advising the Chief Executive from the first month he took over office to start considering a review of our Kashmir policy. Pakistan at this juncture in its history can either become a fundamentalist

state which is not a far fetched idea considering not so much the popularity of the religious forces but the complete annihilation of the other political forces; or it has the choice to become a liberal state with a modern outlook. For the latter, it need not crush the fundamentalist forces; no one is asking it to pulp them as the armed forces did in Algeria but the least that could be done is to rein them.

The business of exporting Jehadi forces all around us should immediately stop. We have already played havoc with Afghanistan and cannot afford to repeat the same mistakes on any other side of our borders. Each and every Pakistani aspires to see a prosperous Pakistan that he or she can rightly be proud of. We can accomplish this not by conquering Kashmir, Chechnya or any other place in the world, but by possessing a strong and dynamic economy that does not operate on pellets from the international financial institutions. What is our justification and locus standi for even thinking of exporting any kind of revolution when the whole country is virtually constantly endeavouring to emigrate to greener pastures, including ironically the very revolutionary themselves? Why cannot we first put our House in order before setting to get the world on the right path?

I would be prouder of Pakistan's religious forces if I see them pulling Hindus and Christians out of rubble following an earthquake anywhere in the world instead of roaming streets the world over with mugs in their hands to collect funds to build another religious school. You convert people by serving people and not through barrel of guns. You may suppress religious communities through sheer force but the repression eventually bounces back. Who knows it better than us: the Mughal King Aurangzeb Alamgir (1658 - 1707) quelled the Sikh community during his rule and the empire reached its zenith; Aurangzeb's compatriots paid the price for his repression in 1947 at the time of partition when the Sikhs took revenge for the barbarities committed against their forefathers by the Muslim rulers. We will have to put an end to this revengeful cycle if civilization in this part of the world is to ever move forward.

Jillani is a lawyer based in Islamabad.



All health information to keep you up to date

Before the doctor comes

Bruises and Swelling

A bruise is a purplish-red stain in the skin, usually resulting from a blow or knock, and is rarely serious. It usually takes 10-14 days for a bruise to disappear completely.

Swelling is often associated with a sprain or injury to a joint or the ligaments that surround the joint.

What to do:

Bruises

■ minor bruise needs no treatment at all. If the bruise is large, apply a cold compress for half an hour or so to contain the bruising.

Swelling

■ apply a cold compress or ice pack to reduce the swelling.

■ support the joint with a firm crepe bandage applied over a thick wad of cotton wool.

■ elevate the joint.

■ rest the joint for at least 24 hours.

Cuts and Grazes

■ If a wound is relatively trivial with only small blood loss, treat the wound yourself.

What to do:

■ clean the wound and surrounding area under running water.

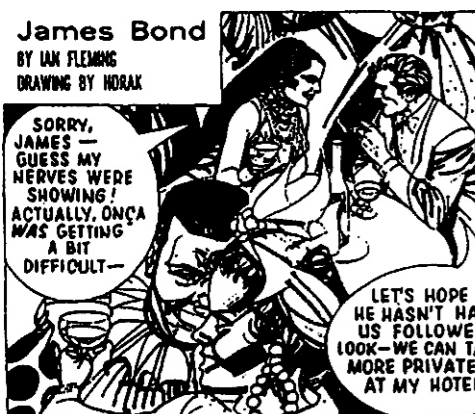
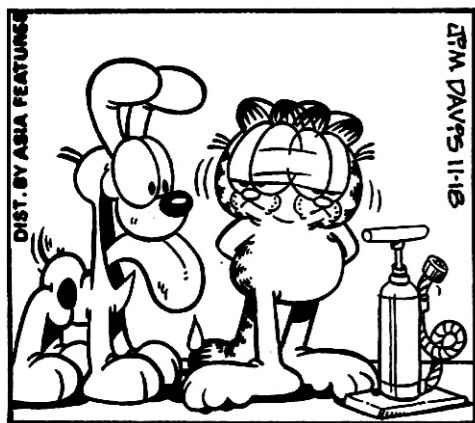
■ an antiseptic can be applied to help protect against infection.

■ apply a plaster or dressing once the area around the wound is dry.

Tomorrow: Facts and fiction

Garfield®

by Jim Davis



117