

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SUNDAY JANUARY 13, 2002

Zhu's productive visit to Dhaka

Sino-Bangla ties on a stronger footing, break new ground

THE time-tested friendship between Beijing and Dhaka has moved a step forward by virtue of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's just-concluded three-day official visit to Bangladesh. A single visit producing seven accords is reaffirmation of a robust intent to strengthen the special ties Dhaka and Beijing have had since a long time back. The areas covered by the memoranda of understanding (MOUs) signed in Dhaka last Friday revealed a strong need-based approach to Dhaka-Beijing relationship. Pragmatism rather than rhetoric has been the hall-mark of Sino-Bangla ties. That's why we find continuing Chinese support for our infrastructural sector. One MOU responds to our need for economic and technical cooperation to build the Sixth Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge. Two MOUs relate to construction of a water treatment plant and a sewage plant; and another two will help us build three power plants in a hugely deficit energy area.

The expansion of ties envisaged following Zhu's visit is featured by a positive Chinese response to Bangladesh's special demands in particular areas. On Dhaka's huge trade gap of US\$500 million with Beijing, the latter has decided to send a delegation to Dhaka to study measures to enable Bangladesh to increase her export to China. China will help us enhance our textile manufacturing capacity so that the readymade garments sector is helped in anticipation of the MFA withdrawal in 2004. With China according zero tariff entry to Bangladesh jute and jute goods despite being a jute producing country herself, we should perhaps pin hope on Beijing's further liberalisation of trade terms for Bangladesh. Overall, China's membership of the WTO should be a help to the developing world's cause.

The strength of Beijing-Dhaka relations lies in the fact that these have steadily grown since being tested through a vagary during our Liberation War. In the foreign policy perceptions of successive governments here, China has figured as a factor of constant importance. We have had close defence links with China. As allies, China and Bangladesh have shared common concern for peace, stability and progress in the region and its neighbourhood. We enjoy our friendly equations with both India and China and our relationship with Pakistan is also growing as well.

It is the dictate of economic development of their peoples that must receive the utmost attention of China, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in their inter-relationships in today's world.

Why charge under PSA when its about to die?

BNP looks more concerned about revenge than law and order

THE government's decision to charge AL leaders, Motia Chowdhury and Mohd. Nasim under the Public Safety Act (PSA) is bad publicity for its political image and credibility. The reason cited for the case is that these AL leaders blocked the traffic, which led to loss of public safety. The explanation just doesn't carry. It's almost a ridiculous display of political vendetta and has greatly reduced the image of a party, which claims to be the representative of public anger against political repression.

If one remembers what happened during the last Awami League regime, the culture of mindless hostility will become clear that it's alive and well. The past government sued the present Foreign Minister Morshed Khan on such a flimsy charge that it became a political joke. The incident in fact led to a legal challenge to the Act. It exists simply as an instrument of harassment. To use such a discredited law by BNP doesn't speak much of its political wisdom.

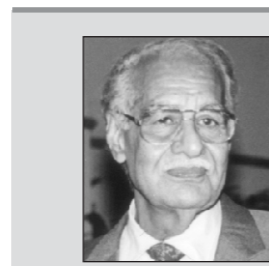
The general feeling towards the police beating of the two leaders is negative. The police image has taken a beating far more severe than it dispensed to the politicians. And the charges brought against the leaders will not improve the image either.

Being charged under the PSA for obstructing traffic flow will hardly make citizens believe that it was anything other than revenge taking. One fails to understand who among the advisers of BNP counsel steps that make the party look unable to keep public opinion in its favour.

Considering that the government has publicly declared that the PSA will be done away with in the next parliamentary session, and the cabinet having already approved it, the act of charging opposition leaders looks even more absurd. It makes the government seem that a minor street agitation is making it jumpy and a few sit-ins will force it to take inappropriately severe measures. This is a clash in which BNP has forced victory upon Awami League.

BNP must start looking serious about use and misuse of law. To file charges under PSA while discussing its demise eats into the credibility process which is the basis, not just of good governance but plain old-fashioned running of the government as well.

Will Musharraf take the leap?



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

IT has happened before. Pakistan has retrieved the failed parleys at the eleventh hour. The last round of conference or the words said at the goodbye meeting have raised hopes. They have been followed up by efforts to pick up the broken pieces so as to rebuild the structure of relationship. The exercise has been of use in the past.

At Tashkent in 1966, the prospect of an agreement was dashed because Lal Bahadur Shastri and Ayub Khan could not concur on the wording of the text. But suddenly everything changed drastically. Ayub wrote in his own hand, "not to resort to arms," while seeking a solution to the problems between Pakistan and India. There was such a gush of sentiments after Shastri's death that Ayub, pointing towards his body, said: Here lies the man who could have spanned the distance between the two countries. The conference between Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at Shimla in 1972 was also a failure till nearly the end. The farewell call by Bhutto on Indira Gandhi saved the situation. He reportedly told her that his failure would bring back the army to power. She relented. He had to get back the

official seal which he had sent along with his luggage to Kalka. President Pervez Musharraf too tried the same thing at Agra and Kathmandu when he stretched the duration of his goodbye call on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. But the reason why Musharraf did not succeed was the failure on his part to agree to the formulation on cross border terrorism. Both Ayub and Bhutto had at least given the assurance that they would eschew vio-

lenced some results in Pakistan. But he has managed to alienate even those Indians who have had no strong view on Kashmir. The rulers at Islamabad probably underestimate the anger in India. The attack on parliament was the last straw. The nation seems to be oblivious even to the devastation that a nuclear war can cause. Though a preponderant majority in India wants peace yet it does not protest against the war-like steps or statements. It does show a

leeway. He should be able to deal with the terrorists more sternly. For instance, he will have to stop justifying the terrorists on the ground that they are jihadis. Such a plea has, in fact, given a bad name to the once indigenously motivated movement. After being a signatory to the declaration adopted by the SAARC at Kathmandu, Pakistan's position has become still more untenable. The declaration rejects any justification of terrorism on "ideological,

Pakistan there are so many fissiparous tendencies that we cannot take risks.

True, Musharraf has taken some small steps to curb terrorism. But what is needed now is a giant leap. Imposing restrictions on Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, confiscating their assets and arresting some of their workers are certainly measures to curb terrorism. But they hardly mean anything when papers like the Sunday Telegraph

handed over to the US Mir Aimal Kansi and Ramzi Yousef, the two suspects, without following any legal procedures.

From British Prime Minister Tony Blair's trip to the subcontinent and his constant contact with President Bush, it is more than clear that both Islamabad and New Delhi are under pressure. China too is playing a role behind the scenes. Musharraf's dash to Beijing on the eve of the SAARC summit, even at the expense of delaying it by one day, is significant.

The ball is now really in Musharraf's court. He has to do more to curb terrorists operating from Pakistan. Maybe, five out of the list of 20 can be surrendered immediately so that the process can at least start. The scene in India is messy. The elections in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab have made it messier. The BJP-led government at the Centre has made it worse by heightening the hype. The situation has created widespread anti-Musharraf and anti-Pakistan feelings.

Musharraf's goodbye call on Vajpayee would have made the difference if he had told the latter that he would stop supporting the terrorists operating in Kashmir as he did in the case of Afghanistan. But would he survive after doing that? Not only the religious groups, the military itself have a vested interest in Kashmir which, they believe, cannot be solved until there is pressure on India through terrorists. It is a wrong reading. Such methods have not taken Pakistan anywhere. Why not try conciliation and cooperation for a change? It would do Pakistan no harm. EOM

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

It is understandable that Musharraf wants substantial talks with India and there is no reason why they should not be held. But a shotgun dialogue is like a shotgun marriage which does not last long. He will have to prepare the ground for talks. New Delhi will agree to them only when cross border terrorism stops.

contradiction in attitude but what it really reflects is a sense of exasperation. Therefore, the mood is not to have any truck with the Musharraf government if it does not come clean on terrorism.

It is understandable that Musharraf wants substantial talks with India and there is no reason why they should not be held. But a shotgun dialogue is like a shotgun marriage which does not last long. He will have to prepare the ground for talks. New Delhi will agree to them only when cross border terrorism stops. Musharraf has to change his outlook on Kashmir as he did on the Taliban. This is difficult because Pakistan was not so worked up about Afghanistan as it is about Kashmir. But New Delhi's undertaking of a "serious dialogue" on Kashmir may help Musharraf make up

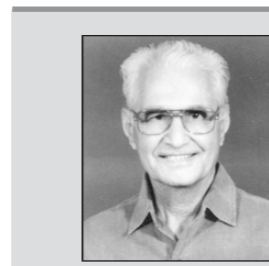
political, religious or any other ground." President Bush's statement that General Musharraf must do more than what he has already done makes it very clear that America and its allies are not fully satisfied with Pakistan's steps against terrorism.

Musharraf should have realised by now that the September 11 carnage in New York and Washington has changed international opinion on terrorism. What is not good for the gander cannot be good for the goose. Violence has ceased to be a solution to any problem because violence has become much too terrible and destructive. It does not differentiate between one type of people and another. Those who indulge in violence have no compunction in using the gun for their own sectarian ends. In India and

from London have reported that both organisations have only changed their leadership, moved their offices and stashed away their funds. Lashkar leader Hafiz Mohammad Saeed and Jaish chief Masood Azhar are said to be living in comfortable government quarters.

Azhar is one of the people wanted by India. He was bargained for the Indian Airlines passengers hijacked to Kandahar. Islamabad's plea that India must satisfy the Pakistan courts before the 20 people demanded by New Delhi could be handed over to it does not hold water. India did not bother about the court and legal procedures when its foreign minister took Azhar from the Jammu jail to Kandahar in a special plane. Pakistan should not raise such issues because it has already

Musharraf's gear shift on terrorism: Another set of troubles?



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

FOLLOWING what the British Prime Minister Tony Blair is said to have told President Pervez Musharraf -- it was in the nature of an ultimatum -- the latter is shortly to address the nation in which he will, as is billed, 'change history'. Confident expectations, fed by the touring 9-member team of US Senators and Congressmen, centre on a new and stronger campaign against extremist religious parties and so-called Jihadis. This should address many of the Indian concerns.

President Musharraf is also

PLAIN WORDS

While mainstream parties are at sixes and sevens in the absence of Parliament and top leaders, their mouths are shut on day-to-day politics in the emergency created by the war scare resulting from India's aggressive military moves. A closing of ranks is dictated by the usual political practice.

expected to take new policy initiatives vis-à-vis India. The pressures on President are surely intense. India has massed troops, tanks, guns and missiles and aircrafts on the borders in a threatening mode. It is demanding the handing over of 20 wanted terrorists and a general policy shift of supporting the insurgents in Kashmir. Apparently the US and UK have bought the Indian stance of rejecting the Pakistani description of Kashmiri insurgents as freedom fighters. Blair, after consulting with US President George W. Bush, was said to have been tough with Musharraf in demanding total stoppage of terrorism of all shapes and kinds after making plain the new definition of

terrorism that leaves no scope whatever for armed struggle for the right of self-determination despite the UN Charter's provision for it. A Toronto newspaper, Star, has reported that Blair threatened Musharraf by saying 'Pakistan risks the same fate as its former ally Afghanistan, if it persists in attaching political labels to acts of violence'.

The report went on to say: "Terrorism is terrorism wherever it occurs, whoever are victims. We have shown in Afghanistan that if the collective will is there, then the back of these terrorist organisations can indeed be broken." That is that according to the west. This would seem to be a moment of truth for the

military regime. It is being asked to make another U-turn -- this time in its Kashmir policy. This is like asking the Pope to visit brothel -- not to preach but for the other purpose. It does look as if Musharraf will do as told. It so happens that most liberal minded Pakistanis will approve of this new departure. But the means that are being applied to -- dictated by America -- cannot but be distasteful. If only the policy change had come about through the democratic process, it would be satisfying -- and lasting. Changes made under duress are superficial, partial and temporary. The political background is disquieting. While mainstream parties are at sixes and sevens in the absence of Parliament and top

leaders, their mouths are shut on day-to-day politics in the emergency created by the war scare resulting from India's aggressive military moves. A closing of ranks is dictated by the usual political practice. They have to be silent on many issues. Besides, Musharraf is right when he says that silent and vast majority is neither for the Mullahs nor with the so-called Jihadis. Except the religious lobbies, a section of the Army and a tiny section in Punjab and Muslim League, known as the Nawai Waqt school -- largely an extension of Army -- no one subscribes to the ideology that has sustained Jihad. This latter lobby is angry, very angry, with Musharraf.

A supporter of Musharraf, M.P.

Bhandara, a former member of National Assembly, has written an article in Dawn, the heading of which is: "Was it a coup bid?" He says: "the minutia of events of December 13 leads to the ardent speculation that it was an audacious coup d'etat staged by a lunatic fringe of Islamic extremism with possible help from former or serving elements in the ISI. Its aim might have been to reverse the U-turn of Pakistan's current pro-US policy and remove President Musharraf by providing causus belli for an Indo-Pak war with perhaps a nuclear dimension. They may yet succeed."

The situation is serious enough. Apparently, there is no other line. But this lunatic fringe -- that may be both lunatic and a fringe but it is not marginal or without some clout -- would like Pakistan to say 'No' to the US and reverse Musharraf's policies. It is not only not afraid of war with India, it wishes it. It is anxious to nuke India. "What are these weapons for if they are not to be used," as one former military man said to this correspondent.

M B Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

OPINION

Partition Kashmir like Bengal to achieve peace

MD. GHOUS KHAN

WE are more interested in war than peace. I am talking about the Kashmir problem, which is hurting India and Pakistan and South Asia as a whole. It has become the greatest cause of underdevelopment in the region.

People are so caught up in the hate festival that they have no concern about the consequences. The development of the nuclear weapons and potential devastating conflict is a good example of the madness that national hostility can

bring about. I am sure peace is possible but I'm not sure people and their leaders want it now

I used to think that the hostility was limited to leaders but my recent travels in both the countries have forced me to change my mind. I think the leaders are prisoners of their people whom they have created over many a years and who want war. Now the Frankenstein of public opinion has reached such a size that it will eat up the leaders if they want peace. You can't ask for peace in Kashmir and politically survive in either country.

You have to face the fact that the people have never lived without hate in these two countries. The North Indian leadership in both the states also revels in macho self-images where war and violence are glorified. Many in Pakistan believe that "the sword of Islam" must conquer the infidel India while in Bharat, the idea is clear that a much less developed economic player like Pakistan should be taught a lesson especially after what they did in Kashmir.

People can't accept the fact that no military solution can happen in

Kashmir because both parties have enough strength to fight each other for a few days after which they may well turn to the nuclear option if things go bad. Pride will force both to do so. It may happen before the US turns up to stop both from doing so. Will they accept the following:

- That the present line of control is the permanent border for the future. This means Kashmir will be permanently split and the status quo will be maintained. Forget injustice and other things. None care about the Kashmiris. They care about Delhi and Islamabad. And this is a

reality everyone including Kashmiris must accept.

- End hostilities immediately under UN supervision. This basically means that the US will have to supervise the peace process. Pakistan should realize that it can't support cross border militants anymore. That phase of politics is over. It's also an opportunity for Pakistani politicians to settle the problem without too much pressure from the Islamic lobby.

- India should agree to a third party role so that human rights excesses can be addressed and

special reconstruction measures taken to make up for the years of violence which the people experienced at the hands of the authorities.

After September 11, indulgence for long-standing wars, which may breed "terrorism", is low. Separation is bad but the only option. Remember Bengal too was partitioned which once was thought unthinkable. People will get used to this idea too.

Peace will at least let the children grow up with the body and mind intact. Now that can't even happen in Kashmir

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

"Has BNP been elected to take revenge...?"

I read the commentary (January 11) by Mafuz Anam about the treatment of Awami League leaders by the police and I must say the police has a right to move people if they block a public road in the busiest section of the city causing disruption to the flow of traffic. It is the job of the Police to maintain law and order in the country and that is what they are paid for. Therefore I don't think the Police have done anything wrong.

It is the AL leaders who were breaking the law and anybody who breaks the law should be treated the same be it Matia Chowdhury or any AL leader as in a democratic country everybody is deemed equal and has the same rights. Why should Matia Chowdhury or any AL MP be treated differently? Rather Matia Chowdhury and other AL leaders should abide by the law more strictly as they are the lawmakers.

Awami League should be thankful that they can at least be Members of Parliament and has a right to demonstrate as they are the ones who took away every democratic right of the people of Bangladesh in

1975 by creating BAKSAL and closing down all newspapers and banning all political parties. How can people of Bangladesh forget what Awami League did to the people of Bangladesh, how they betrayed the people of Bangladesh in every possible way? We also know how Sheikh Hasina has destroyed the economy of Bangladesh namely the garments sector with her three month long Hartal.

Snaheen Karim
Sydney, Australia

I am not a great personality as to comment on Mahfuz Anam's writings, but as an ordinary citizen I feel that the very intention of the present AL leaders is destructive. Ever since their loss in the October 1 election, the AL has been blaming everyone and finding conspiracy in everything. They have called Shahabuddin Ahmed a traitor, they have found Taliban linking with the government and what not.

They want a new election and have asked people to prepare to launch a movement soon to topple the government. Mr. Anam, surely you know the economic condition of Bangladesh

and the condition of the general people, for how long will you continue with this Jalao Porao (set afire) politics?

AL has been elected as the largest opposition party in the JS but instead drawing their monthly salary they are not doing anything to serve the interest of the nation. Now they have resorted to such programmes and created a scene only to draw people's sympathy and create more chaos.

We don't need this type of negative politics where only the politicians get benefited and general become the hartal victims.

To create a positive environment the journalists have to play a major role. Through their constructive, unbiased criticism and writings they have to serve our society. Democracy does not mean that you can do anything. Don't the AL leaders know how this hartal culture ruining our country?

Tarun Bandbarban

I read Mahfuz Anam's commentary and it seems to me that the party has changed but the government activities are still the same.

It is really very unfortunate to see the Members of Parliament getting assaulted by law enforcement officials whose first and foremost duty is to protect the people. Reading the past couple of months newspapers I thought that things might have started to change. The Prime Minister's steps to ban student politics, polythene bags, and old vehicles really deserves some credit.

On the other hand, the actions taken by the government's law enforcement agencies reflects a different picture. Is this government any different from the previous one? May be the good deeds were just a mere public eye washing. I am sure that the people are sick and tired of the same old government activities and may be that is the reason why Democracy does not mean that you can do anything. Don't the AL leaders know how this hartal culture ruining our country?

Nafees Alam
Dallas, USA

Washing one's dirty linen in public

Premier Tony Blair certainly didn't come to Bangladesh to solve the petty domestic quarrels of different

political parties of the countries of the region. But the Awami League leaders behaved in a way, which was most unbecoming of a party of its stature. A true patriotic party would never think of damaging the image of its country in such a manner as it did.

If they have their grievances, they have the parliament to express themselves instead of complaining to Blair. The people didn't elect them to remain outside the parliament giving lame excuses.

In fact they have plenty of issues to debate on, and AL has quite a lot of good orators too; So there's no point in telling the British PM that they were not joining the parliament claiming there is no democratic atmosphere. Let them join the parliament, be barred from speaking freely and then prove their point, instead of raising hue and cry beforehand.

Lulu Ahmad
Dhamondi, Dhaka

Sew jute bags

To provide jobs for the displaced workers of polybag and garment industries, the jute mills may sell a portion of the jute fabric at a subsidized rate to the jobless workers.

That would save lives of many poor and able people. The paper mills can take similar actions. They can leave something for the displaced workers. The demand is huge --ten million bags are used daily in Dhaka alone.

A Consumer
Dhaka

"Bangladeshis not fit to be Muslims?"

I am appalled at the fact that Mr Ashraf has got the opportunity to know and evaluate 150 million Muslims in India, 120 million Muslims in Pakistan, 125 million Muslims in Bangladesh to conclude that we have little or no knowledge of Arabic and glory of cultural Islam.

Mr Ashraf's comments not only seem absurd but incomplete as his claim that Bangladeshis brothers in the U.S. are part of a strange herd. Exactly what herd are you referring to? There are a lot of Muslim Bangladeshis organisations in the United States. Exactly whom are you referring to? Exactly what is the true glory of Islam according to you Mr. Ashraf? Are you stating wearing the hijab for women is identical to repression on women? How many

Muslim women have you heard from the subcontinent that wears hijab by force? Sir, I encourage you to attend ISNA conventions. Have you heard of ISNA in the United States? The conventions provide a broader outlook of modern Bangladeshis Muslim women wearing hijab by choice not force.

So all the Muslims from Bangladesh residing in the United States are strange and unsure of Islam? If not all, a possible majority, okay exactly how many of these individuals' views have you read, heard of or documented? Before making a comment about Muslims especially Bangladeshi in the United States, I suggest you get your facts straight. Finally Mr Ashraf, what I think you are trying to point out is some of the fallacies observed in the subcontinent with respect to half-educated sermons, uneducated Imams and strict version and application of Islam but also seen in the Middle East and other countries. Also, if you didn't know, there are four schools of Islamic thought with respect to Islamic teachings where four opinions are differed on the interpretation of the Sunnah and Hadith of Prophet Muhammad(SV) and we all (including Arabs) sub-

scribe to any of these four schools.

Being of Middle Eastern descent, Mr Ashraf, can you please tell me which part of the Middle East conducts an Islamic wedding, in Jordan (marriages similar to American Christian wedding culturally), Syria, Lebanon, UAE, Oman? Is dancing, singing, having fun and women dressing immodestly part of Islamic culture or Arab culture? I would like to end with this note, please remember a quote from Prophet's Muhammad (SAW)'s last sermon "No Arab will be above a non Arab nor vice versa".

Nafis Iskander, on e-mail

Bureau of Anti Corruption

The government seems unwilling to set up an independent corruption watchdog. Only yesterday they castrated whatever independence there existed by subsiding the BAC within the PMO, not exactly the bastion of impartiality.

It would appear that the government is running scared, fearful of what an independent authority would unearth.

MA, on e-mail