Japanese and about one hundred

thousands US soldiers serving in

DHAKA SUNDAY DECEMBER 15. 2002

Thai-Bangla relations

A new era heralded

RIME Minister Khaleda Zia's just-concluded threeday visit to Thailand had a dramatic start, indeed. In came Thai Prime Minister Dr Thaksin Shinawatra on a special Thai Airways flight to inaugurate the airliner's Chittagong-Chiang Mai service and then, the ceremonial over, took his Bangladesh counterpart on board on the way back. The gesture was unprecedented and, as it has turned out, marked the beginning of "a new era of economic cooperation" between Bangladesh and Thailand. Friday's talks in Chiang Mai between Dhaka and Bangkok could not only have far-reaching implications for the bilateral relations of the two countries but might well have also signalled the start of bridging South and Southeast Asia by way of opening a new vista for economic cooperation. Prime Minister Khaleda's three-day visit to Thailand has certainly pushed forward what began with Dr Thaksin's visit to Bangladesh earlier this year. Whether it will culminate in a greater regional cooperation between South and Southeast Asia remains to be seen. At this point, what needs a closer look is the benefit the talks have yielded to Bangladesh.

Dr Thaksin's declaration of tariff reduction for 128 items under six categories, including duty-free access to jute and jute products, leather and leather products, ceramics and pharmaceutical products, and five per cent duty on frozen food and agro-based goods, should rejuvenate the industrial sector. Put together with the prospect of a surge in annual trade, which currently stands at 2.6 billion US dollars, Bangladesh can expect a positive change in the foreign direct investment scenario. What we need to do at this juncture is make sure our industries, especially in the jute, leather, ceramic and pharmaceutical sectors, are equipped, in terms of infrastructure and logistics, so as to cope with the increase in demand the tariff reduction will trigger off. There should immediately be an inter-ministerial follow-up meeting to devise ways and means to reap maximum benefit of the change in bilateral tariff regime.

The foreign secretary has claimed Prime Minister Khaleda's visit to be "a great diplomatic achievement" in the making of which her Thai counterpart Dr Thaksin played a highly laudable role. However, such a great diplomatic achievement would count for very little, if it were not followed up with objective analysis of our industrial capacity and chalking out of a course of action to increase it. Greater trade access calls for higher productivity.

We can benefit immensely from Thai expertise in agrobased industries; their scientific method of fruit cultivation in

Reuters' questionable story

Was it a distortion or a fabrication?

ANGLADESH was stunned by a Reuters story in which the home minister was quoted as having said that the Mymensingh blasts could have been the work of Osama-bin-Laden's Al-Qaida network... This ran counter to Bangladesh's position that no terrorist networks exist on

For obvious reasons, the story was picked up by the newspapers all over the world, leading some of them to conclude that the blasts were a sequel to the Bali incident and the like. Bangladesh's image was the sad casualty of the wide coverage of the report.

Later, the home minister cried himself hoarse to make others, including his cabinet colleagues, understand that he had never uttered anything like that, but still could not avoid being criticised by his colleagues. Such was the credibility of Reuters. Now it has transpired that so far the news agency has been unable to produce any evidence to back the story.

The plot thicken's when we consider that the telephone number given by Reuters, as the one over which its stringer talked to the home minister, has been found to be the number of a local journalist. So how did the Reuters story originate? And whom did the Reuters stringer speak to? Finally, what steps did the Reuters take to check and crosscheck the authenticity of the comments, which any journalist worth the name would have found to be a potential bombshell?

So we are forced to ask whether it was a case of sloppy journalism or fiction writing. More pertinently, what is Reuters going to do about it now? We believe a mere withdrawal is hardly enough to make amends for the damage done to our country.

Bangladesh may not matter to Reuters, but professionalism and journalistic ethics, we believe, do. Over more than a century, Reuters has built an enviable and laudable reputation about the credibility and authenticity of its reports. Reuters has earned this reputation through a relentless pursuit of the highest standard of journalism. It is that pursuit that has given the Reuters the credibility that it enjoys today. But the unsubstantiated (as yet) story on Bangladesh has hit at that credibility. The only way for Reuters to limit the damage that it has done to itself is to give a clear picture of what had happened and apologise to its subscribers if it was on the wrong. We expect such a statement at the earliest from the Reuters regional chief who is now in Dhaka probing the incident. This is what professionalism and journalistic ethics demand. As advocates of free press and as a proud independent newspaper we also demand this of Reuters.

We also protest the arrest of the Reuters stringer. We believe Reuters may have been on the wrong, but the treatment meted out to the journalist is equally wrong. And we find the forcible confinement of his family members highly

Confluence of Volga-Yamuna at Delhi

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

RESIDENT Vladimir Putin's visit to India on 3-5 December took place within the established practice of holding annual meetings at the summit level. The two countries signed several documents during the visit. These were (a) Delhi Declaration on further consolidation of Strategic Partnership; (b) Joint Declaration on strengthening and enhancing economic, scientific and technological cooperation; (c) MOU on combating terrorism; (d) Protocol on use and protection of intellectual property rights;(e) MOU on cooperation in the field of telecommunication; and, (f) Protocol between Karnataka and the Russian Samara Region Administration on trade, economic and cultural coop-Delhi Declaration elevated the

existing strategic partnership to a qualitatively higher level in bilateral and multilateral fields. As large multi-ethnic and pluralistic states, Russia and India "are convinced of our special responsibility to combat and bring to an end challenges posed to our unique attributes, including our territorial integrity by forces of terrorism, extremism and separation". Both countries agreed upon the need to strengthen the centrality of the UN in promoting international security in a multipolar world. India and Russia reaffirmed the necessity of UNSC reforms "reflective of contemporary geopolitical and economic realities and rendering them more representative of the interests of the vast majority of the UN members". In this context, Russia reaffirmed its support to the Indian candidature for Permanent Membership of the UNSC. Delhi Declaration made no mention of UNSC resolution 1441 on Iraq and called for continued political and diplomatic efforts to resolve the problem. Apparently this is indicative of the two countries' opposition to military intervenwithout first

exhausting all avenues. Understandably terrorism

received primary attention in the Delhi Declaration as both countries "have been victims of terrorism, and as democratic and open societies have been vulnerable to the threats posed by globalization of terror". They strongly condemned "those who support terrorism or finance, train, harbour or support terrorists. States that abet or shelter terrorists are as guilty of acts of terrorism as their perpetrators". This was an obvious reference to cross-border terrorism from Pakistan into Kashmir and Pakistan Intelligence Agency's assistance to

renewed Al- Qaida and Taleban efforts to destabilize the Hamid Karzai government made an oblique reference to Pakistan and informed the UN that "these elements (al-Qaida/Talebans) continue to receive moral and material support from their erstwhile mentors across the border". That Pakistan would turn a deaf ear to these words is stating the obvious. What the international community has universally condemned as terrorism is regarded by Pakistan as "freedom struggle". The league

difficult proposition. In December 1971 Pakistan declared war on India and India immediately recognised Bangladesh as an independent country. UNSC proved powerless. China and US gave strong support to Pakistani demands for an immediate ceasefire, an approach vetoed five separate times by the Soviet Union. Albeit President Vaclay Havel described the communist regime as a "contaminated moral environment...armed with arrogant and intolerant ideology" (Prague 01.01.1990). But the present dis-

Russian diplomats on charge of spying, tension over NATO expansion, and withdrawal from ABM Treaty were few examples. Putin. however, was among the first to denounce the tragic terrorist attacks of Nine-Eleven. He also did not object to temporary US presence in Central Asian Republics -- a region that had been a part of long standing Russian sphere of influence. Without the use of these former Soviet air bases the expulsion of the Taliban from Afghanistan would have been a difficult proposi-

tion for the US administration.

Apart from strengthening economic, trade, investment, technological and other relations India secured categorical assurance from the Russian President that he was ready, prepared and willing to develop relations with India in the nuclear field. Russian opprobrium of Pakistani aid and abetment of cross-border terrorism was unambiguous. Russia, too, gained India's strong opposition to "unilateral use or threat of use of force in violation of UN charter as well as interference in the internal affairs of other states".

insurgents in Northeast India. Russia had in recent past called on Pakistan to put a permanent end to cross-border terrorism and dismantle terrorist infrastructures based in its territory. One may recall Bush-Putin joint press meeting at St. Petersburg on 22nd November when President Putin wondering about the present whereabouts of Osama bin Laden, "somewhere between Afghanistan and Pakistan", expressed apprehension about "what can happen with armies armed with weapons that exist in Pakistan including WMD". When asked by the media in Delhi on 4th December about the danger of Pakistani WMD falling into terrorist hands President Putin suggested a strategy to prevent proliferation of WMD which could include (a) increasing public awareness of the presence of such a threat; (b) strengthening international non-proliferation mechanism; (c) peaceful settlement on Indo-Pakistan disputes; and (d) a system of international safeguards to be provided especially in the field of WMD. In early December India's

of Nations Covenant, the UN Charter, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe all have pledged the inadmissibility of any attempt at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and territorial integrity of any country. Though seemingly the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia contradicted this juridical practice but effectively internal borders were used to determine the external boundaries of the new states. Even in the case of Iraq, an aggressor state, its international boundaries were not violated despite its crime of aggression and overwhelming military defeat during the Gulf War.

Ever since the partition of the sub-continent Pakistan's insecurity complex drove her to seek solace in SEATO and CENTO though she was neither a part of South East Asia nor the Middle East. India, on the other hand, embraced NAM and accepted the proffered hands of the Soviet Union. It is necessary to remind ourselves that but for Indo-Soviet entente emergence of Bangladesh could have been a

course is not a critique on communism but on Putin's visit to India. Indian diplomacy has come out with flying colours from Putin's visit. Apart from strengthening economic, trade, investment, technological and other relations India secured categorical assurance from the Russian President that he was ready, prepared and willing to develop relations with India in the nuclear field. Russian opprobrium of Pakistani aid and abetment of cross-border terrorism was unambiguous. Russia, too, gained India's strong opposition to "unilateral use or threat of use of force in violation of UN charter as well as interference in the internal affairs of other states". Additionally reiteration of multi-polarity appears to be a challenge to Bush's doctrine of preemptive and or preventive use of military force. Though Australia and Japan's endorsement of John Howard have enabled Bush doctrine to get a foothold in Asia but opposition remains overwhelming.

Bush administration's initial handling of relations with Russia was insensate. Expulsion of 50

Mention of Shanghai Cooperation Organi-zation consisting of Russia, China and four Central Asian Republics would also be relevant. Though the primary focus of SCO was to fight Islamic fundamentalism, the secondary focus was to contain increasing US influence in Asia. While US' dominant global position is unquestioned perhaps the US administration would consider to be sensitive to the concerns of Russia, China, India and other countries because the world is more likely to accept multi-polarity than unilateral dictates from the sole super-Reportedly Putin-Bajpaye

discussions also covered Pakistan-North Korea clandestine exchange of nuclear and missile technology. Putin is understood to have discussed the issue with President Bush on his return from India. The alleged exchanges between Pakistan and North Korea are not only contrary to existing international agreements and conventions but have potentially endangered the lives of South Koreans

this region. Diabolism of such total disregard of human lives, if one were to try to comprehend the incomprehensible, could be an Indian assessment of the personality of President Musharraf as a "risk taker" regardless of the consequences, and through the "confession" of a North Korean official to an US emissary that the North must have the nuclear weapon at any cost. Since President Bush (and the majority of the Americans) is unwilling to wait "for the final proof -- the smoking gun -- that will come in the form of a mushroom cloud" the question remains as to how to deal with such truant states. Should they be declared as "rogue/terrorist" states with attendant follow-up actions? Or should their delinquency be overlooked because one or more of them are momentarily serving the interests of the rich and the mighty? Diana Allin of London Intern-ational Institute for Strategic Studies (NATO Review-Debating Intervention-current issue winter 2002) feels "If there is a problem with US unilateralism, it is not so much that US policy is overmilitaristic as that it is insufficiently ambitious". She adds that since marriage between US forcefulness and Furopean humanitarianism consummated in Kosovo intervention is unlikely to meet the challenges of Al-Qaida and failed states; the wealthy and democratic states should fight on two frontsmilitarily and "moral equivalent of war" e.g. Marshall Plan. Given the multi -- polarity of the world and global allegiance to the United Nations it is doubtful how many converts such an approach would attract. But there is no doubt that the international community faced with this agenda having the complexity of Rubik's Cube will have to come to grips and find an equitable solution.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a retired Secretary of

military revels in such a situation.

People to people contact is the only

silver lining in the dark clouds of

NGOs and people outside the

government may some day help

the two sides to exchange ideas,

commodities and cricket and

hockey teams. This may generate

Indo-Pak relations.

Tolerance dips in South Asia



KULDIP NAYAR writes from New Delhi

ENAZIR Bhutto was in the wilderness and living at Karachi when she conleaders from South East Asian countries, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Her purpose was not so much to enhance her own stock as to get recognition for the opposition's role and its point of view. She also wanted the opposition leaders to exert pressure on their governments so that the latter would not adopt the posture of confrontation against their neighbours.

This did not work. The parties in power had their own agenda. In fact, the scenario has deteriorated since. Ruling combinations have come to believe that they must stay in power by hook or by crook. They are oblivious to the point of view of different parties in their own country, much less that of neighbours.

Take Bangladesh first. Its opposition leader Sheikh Hasina daughter of the country's founder, is being accused of every sin, even sedition, for her speeches at Brussels and Delhi. She said that the government at Dhaka was doing little to suppress fundamen-

talists or terrorists. This had made the minorities feel still more inse-

The demand for Hasina's trial for 'defaming' Bangladesh is not surprising. She has also been pilloried by people who were opposed to the liberation struggle, 31 years old this month. The muddied waters of Bangladesh are getting muddier day by day.

The position in Sri Lanka is different. The President and the Prime Minister are two parallel authorities. They do not hit it off. What was once the opposition point is a welcome development. But I am intrigued by New Delhi's attitude. First, it refused to be present at Oslo despite requests by all the parties, including Norway which brokered the settlement. Now Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal has said that Colombo must be certain that the LTTE has given up its demand for a separate homeland. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has hailed the settlement. He must have satisfied

We seem to be throwing a spanner in the works. Do we hate the

cannot be two opinions on the kingship that has to conform to the demands of democracy.

The king must set an early date for elections. It is none of his business to forge a consensus among political parties to resolve problems before the country. This is the job of the elected members. The sooner Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur, the King's nominee, is replaced by parliament, the better it would be for the country. New Delhi should not influence events one way or the

Nowhere has the opposition

Pakistan, is always in the way. It has never gone back to the barracks since the take over by General Ayub in October 1958. Even Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's interregnum was not a democratic stint. Perhaps the National Security Council, the apex ruling body that Musharraf has constituted, is an appropriate arrangement for the time being. It looks as if Pakistan, like Turkey, has to live with the military for a long

Whether India wants to have any relationship with Pakistan as long as the military is the real ruler is no

goodwill that can break the logiam. Official level talks have led us nowhere. When one top Hurriyat leader commends regional autonomy within Sri Lanka, it is clear that the Kashmir solution on those lines is a

possibility. But the most important thing is a dialogue between the people of India and Pakistan. The governments should be kept into the picture but not take over the talks till the ground has been prepared. In the process there may be a fillip in Pakistan to the democratic

At present, India is acting the Big Brother to its neighbours. Its size overawes them. It has to introspect its policies. Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha did well to start his stint with visits to countries like Nepal and Bangladesh. But then there was no follow-up. There have been such spurts in the past with no long-term strategy. Something is lacking somewhere because "we are ugly Indians' practically throughout South East

Maybe, the opposition leaders of the region should meet once again, this time to consider how to live in all accommodative spirit. India's opposition leader Sonia Gandhi

These departments have their

maintenance office on these ille-

gally occupied lands. They needed

on katha each for their offices, but

they have occupied more than a

bigha each. Officers and staff and

even some outsiders who have no

connection with the maintenance

work of the area live here in the

illegally built quarters, barracks and

slums. None got proper allotment,

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist

BETWEEN THE LINES

The SAARC meeting at Islamabad would have been a normal forum. The organisation does not belong to Pakistan. All countries in South East Asia are its members. The more India stays away from such meetings the more it punishes people in Pakistan. The military revels in such a situation. People to people contact is the only silver lining in the dark clouds of Indo-Pak relations... NGOs and people outside the government may some day help the two sides to exchange ideas, commodities and cricket and hockey teams.

of view has provided the breakthrough in the 19-year-old Colombo-LTTE war. Prime Minister Ranil Wickr-emesinghe, who won on the plank of bringing peace to his country, is happy over a federal structure emerging. But President Chandrika Kumaratunga is not, although she once led the peace lobby. There have been reports that she, after getting new powers under the constitution, may dismiss the Prime Minister.

That LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran has renounced the demand for independence and accepted self- rule under Colombo LTTE so much that we do not want a solution? The settlement that envisages regional autonomy may set a healthy precedent, which other countries in the region can follow to sort out their problems with the defiant population. We should be persuading President Kumartunga to give her support to

Nepal also needs New Delhi's help in breaking the deadlock between King Gyanendra and the political parties. There can be two opinions whether or not the king should have sacked Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. But there been so pulverised as in Pakistan. Political parties have gone into shadows that are lengthening since the army is tightening its hold more and more and diluting even the semblance of democracy. Religious parties, once nothing more than a nuisance, have become a power to reckon with. President Pervez Musharraf would rather sup with them than political leaders who, even after avowing loyalty to him, do not want to be considered the king's men.

The key to Islamabad's predicament is equation with Delhi. But the military, which is the arbiter in more an ethical question. It is a real one. After all, New Delhi had normalisation of sorts during the regimes of General Ayub and General Zia-ul Haq. Why not now when General Musharraf is all powerful and when our army chief has said that cross-border terrorism has come down by 60 per cent.

The SAARC meeting at Islamabad would have been a normal forum. The organisation does not belong to Pakistan. All countries in South East Asia are its members. The more India stays away from such meetings the more it punishes people in Pakistan. The

should take the initiative.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing. its citizens, rich or poor. To that end, the lake side.

Notice

The readers are requested to send their comments on the series of bomb blasts in Bangladesh starting from the Udichi meet at Jessore, Ramna Batamul to the recent Mymensing Cinema Hall incident and other similar incidents.

The readers may focus on the efforts of the authorities to bring the culprits to justice, the accusation and counter accusation from amongst the political parties regarding the incidents and the consequent effect on the general people about the carnage.

Economic cooperation - Bangladesh

chapter I am pleased to observe fruitful discussion between the governments of Bangladesh and Thailand. Indeed, such form of discussion and cooperation are the first steps to the formation of a more effective platform - the Asian Union. The European Union is a good model to emulate for Asian nations. It is no more impossible to imagine a time when Bangladesh and Thailand. amongst other Asian nations, may share a common currency, a common foreign policy and perhaps, a common military also.

It is a matter of great shame that our regional SAARC has now become almost dysfunctional and survives only by its name. Perhaps, the two feuding members of this block viz. India and Pakistan who have contributed most adversely would have the foresight to set aside personal vendetta for the greater good of this region. Prosperity of SAARC region is prosperity for unfortunately, that is not to be.

individual member states also, but The government should now focus on running Bangladesh like a busi-

ness, while protecting interests of all

cooperation with all Asian countries to further trade and commerce. particularly China and the ASEAN bloc is highly desirable. Gone are the days of political invasion when nations would invade to grab each other's land. Economic cooperation is the name of the game now. In present day global scenario, alliances are formed and unity forged amongst nations through economic cooperation. Bangladesh should secure a strong foothold on this economic bandwagon and strive for its fair share of global might and power. Let's not forget Belgium and Japan - both countries about the size of Bangladesh, but with muscle power comparable to a mini superpower. Why should Bangladesh be any different? AA, California, USA

"DV or no DV"

This is in response to Mr. Sani's letter "DV or no DV" (December 9). DV visa is usually the only way for poor Bangladeshis to gain legal entry in the United States, but there

are requirements that must be met. 1) He/she must be a native of Bangladesh. 2) He/she must have a minimum

12 years of primary and secondary education. For Bangladeshis, they have to pass at least 12th class. If he/she does not have the education, he/she must have at least two years work experience in an occupation that requires minimum of two years training, as mandated by the U.S. Department of Labor.

3) He/she must also pass a security check. If one of these criteria is not met,

DV visa will not be issued. Does Mr. Sani know if his relatives failed to meet any of these criteria? Karim Abdullah New York, USA

Detained local iournalists

I would like to draw your attention to the growing concern about the fate of the local journalists Saleem Samad and Pricilla Raj. They were arrested and charged of assisting

the Channel 4 journalists Zaiba Naz Malik and Leopoldo Bruno Sorrentino. It is disheartening to learn that following the release of the foreign journalists, Saleem Samad and Pricilla Raj still remain behind the bars.

As it has turned out, the result of Zaiba Naz Malik and Leopoldo Bruno Sorrentino's mission refutes every suspicion of al-Qaeda links in Bangladesh. The guestion is what role did the local journalists play in this? The answer is obvious. They did a good job by helping and guiding them. The result was the foreign iournalists found "no evidence" of al-Qaeda and Taliban activities and saw "evidence of communal harmony". Since there is no 'sedition' charge against the main offenders, how can those who helped them be

guilty of sedition? It will be a positive move on the part of the Bangladeshi authorities to release Mr Samad and Ms Raj immediately. What is good for the goose is good for the gander. Foday Kangbai

Washington DC, USA



Encroachment goes on unabated

Only a few months ago the lakeside of road no 14. A Dhanmondi R/A was cleared from all illegal occupation. Now PDB who illegally grabbed the lake side earlier are back again to reoccupy the same land and also to

double their aggression, they are even filling earth to reclaim land from the lake. An illegal multi-storied construction work is going on in this illegally occupied land. It may be mentioned PWD, WASA, PDB etc have already occupied large tracts of lake side land and are increasing their occupation by taking land from

building plans are approved from Rajuk. There is even a big shop in their compound which is creating all sorts of nuisance. These corrupt and inefficient departments are expected to be abolished or privatised in course of time, but the damage they have already inflicted may never be repaired. It is unfortunate that there is no body to see these things and do something to stop these damaging blows to the environment of the

area. We hope something is done soon to protect Dhanmondi Lake and the lakeside

MAR, Dhanmondi, Dhaka