

Management of Indo-Bangladesh border



DILARA CHOWDHURY

due to lack of ratification of Land and Border Agreement of 1974 by India - a treaty ratified and implemented by Bangladesh soon after its signing. Thanks to these disputes the border between India and Bangladesh instead of becoming a bridge of friendship has remained a source of tension.

Subsequently, due to the porous nature of the border and disputes arising out of historical legacy, other issues like border incidents of shooting of Bangladeshi civilians by Border Security Forces (BSF), large

would not allow its soil to be used against India. Despite these assurances, the Indian Foreign Secretary of the past NDA-led coalition government in a visit to Dhaka reiterated New Delhi's allegations. New Delhi also added a new and ominous dimension to its cross-border offences by stating that Bangladesh during post-9/11 period has become a sanctuary for Al-Qaeda. Former Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Singh stated in parliament in November 2002 that some Al-Qaeda elements have

Actions of these kinds are directly a threat to Bangladesh's security.

Besides there are linkages between the crime syndicates of West Bengal and Bangladesh. Bangladeshi criminals after committing crimes cross over and take shelter in India. It is alleged that most of the top criminals also crossed over to India during the Operation Clean Heart. The media in Dhaka reported that nine most wanted criminals were arrested by the Kolkata police. Reportedly the arrested criminals were released in



PANORAMA

Needless to say that addressing security issues requires an environment of mutual trust and understanding. To generate mutual trust India, as a bigger county, may implement the Land and Border Treaty of 1974 and, thus, begin to undertake the arduous task of turning the Indo-Bangladesh border into a bridge of friendship.

scale smuggling of arms, ammunition, and drugs into Bangladesh and human trafficking across Bangladesh's borders, cross border offences, and "push in" by India across Bangladesh's borders emerged. Of all the issues India is most concerned about cross border offences, which India feels impinge on its security, whereas Dhaka feels that all the above issues are security concerns for the country.

What are these cross border offences? Both India and Bangladesh accuse each other of harbouring insurgents in their respective territories. New Delhi has accused Bangladesh of giving sanctuary and training to insurgents from northeast India on numerous occasions.

In November 2003 Indian Foreign Secretary Kavita Sibal in a seminar in Paris pointed fingers at Dhaka stating that insurgents from the northeast cross over to Bangladesh and are given sanctuary, and that Dhaka is a hotbed of ISI activities. Consequently, a list of 119 alleged insurgent camps within Bangladesh territory was handed to DG BDR by DG BSF during the DG level meeting in Delhi on January 5-10, 2004. But the DG BDR opined that the list was randomly picked and without any basis. He pointed out to me when I spoke with him that some of the addresses on the list were those of Bangladeshi cantonments.

Bangladesh thus denied the allegations and the PM of Bangladesh also assured her counterpart during the 11th SAARC Summit in Islamabad that Dhaka

taken shelter in Dhaka. The Bangladesh Foreign Minister in reply said that he could not find any reasons for the additional Indian allegations. Despite Dhaka's denials, former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani raised the issue in Paris and stated that Al-Qaeda members were crossing over to Bangladesh from Nepal. Dhaka reacted sharply and the allegations were officially denied.

Dhaka, on the other hand, alleges that there are as many as 39 camps inside India along the western and eastern borders of Bangladesh, which are hotbeds of anti-Bangladesh activity. The movement for Shadhin Bongabumi carried out by Niki Bonga Nagork Shangh and Bonga Sena based along the West Bengal districts of South 24 Pargana, North 24 Pargana, and Nadia is a case in point. In addition another group of highly motivated Indian nationals identified as Hindu Republic of Birbanga is allegedly propagating anti-Bangladeshi activities from its main office in Kolkata. It is alleged that these people are fomenting unrest in the southwestern part of Bangladesh.

Secondly, even after the signing of CHT there are insurgents groups from the area who have bases in Tripura. Priti group of PCJSS and other insurgents who did not lay down their arms following the signing of the treaty have taken shelter and set up bases within Indian territory. These groups create serious law and order problem in an already volatile area like CHT.

the absence of extradition treaty yet to be signed between India and Bangladesh. Bangladesh expected that India would deport the criminals on the basis of good will and understanding.

Interestingly the present Congress-led UPA government after coming to power echoed the similar lines of the NDA government despite its expressed desire to improve its relations with Bangladesh. The issue was raised during the Bangladesh Foreign Minister's goodwill visit to India and the FM once again denied these allegations. Subsequently, the FM, during his inaugural speech at the Indo-Bangladesh Dialogue for Young Journalists, also pointed out that although India alleges the existence of insurgent camps within Bangladesh territory it has not provided Bangladesh with other details like their phone or fax numbers or addresses, whereas Bangladesh has already provided the same for the alleged anti-Bangladeshi camps to India.

As the recently concluded secretary level talks took place against the backdrop of these allegations and counter-allegations there were speculations about its outcome. Not surprisingly both sides, after the conclusion of the talks, remained tight-lipped about how these issues were addressed by Dhaka and New Delhi, except for stating that they have discussed all security issues and have reached an understanding to work very closely with each other. There have

been, however, talks of signing of extradition treaty, but that itself would not solve the ticklish issues like harbouring insurgents in each other's territory.

As to whether or not New Delhi made the proposal of having a joint operation against these alleged insurgents following the example of Bhutan is not known. Even if they did, it would not hold much water in the context of Dhaka's denial of their existence in its territory. The positions taken by Dhaka and New Delhi have remained the same as before. No other issues have been resolved including the much talked about Land Border Treaty of 1974 whose implementation Dhaka has been insisting upon since the treaty was signed.

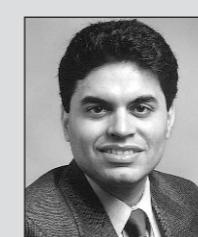
However, though there has been no breakthrough, some significant progress has indeed taken place. What is encouraging is that by establishing CBMs like the hotline and remaining engaged at the Secretary level, India and Bangladesh have taken the management of Indo-Bangladesh borders beyond its management by Joint Indo-Bangladesh Guidelines of Border Authority (JIGB) of 1975, which stipulated two meetings a year at Deputy Director-General level, again alternation between sites in Bangladesh and India, and regular meetings at Sector and Battalion Commander level. This is an encouraging development. The management of Indo-Bangladesh borders is complex and it needs engagement at the political level instead of merely at the field level. It is

expected that the new mechanism would not only help solve the cross-border offences like harbouring insurgents in each other's territory, but would address the border management in a holistic manner. It would also prevent any repetition of incidents like the chilling Indo-Bangladesh border clashes over Padua-Barabari in April 2001.

Since both sides expressed and reiterated that talks have taken place in candid and friendly atmosphere and that hopes have been expressed to find resolutions to these security issues by remaining sensitive to each other's concerns, there are expectations that other issues would also be addressed and mutually beneficial solutions would be found. Needless to say that addressing security issues requires an environment of mutual trust and understanding. To generate mutual trust India, as a bigger county, may implement the Land and Border Treaty of 1974 and, thus, begin to undertake the arduous task of turning the Indo-Bangladesh border into a bridge of friendship.

Dilara Choudhury is Professor, Govt and Politics, Jahangirnagar University.

The holes in a 'Shiite strategy'

FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

In Iraq, the one truly pleasant surprise so far is that there has been little religious and ethnic bloodshed. In many of its colonies the British would often favour a single group as a quick means of gaining stability. Almost always the results were ruinous -- a trail of civil war and bloodshed. If Allawi and the United States make the same mistake, there will be 140,000 American troops in the middle of it all.

incentive to support the new Iraqi order.

Today a significant number of Sunnis feel disenfranchised, and thus they support the guerrillas (estimates vary from 25 percent to 65 percent). If they are cut out of the government, all will feel disenfranchised. And to have one fifth of the population -- people who are well trained and connected -- supporting an insurgency will make it extremely difficult to defeat militarily.

Allawi is trying hard to co-opt Sunni tribal and religious leaders. But the structure of Sunni political authority is fractured; there is no dominant Sunni leader like Ayatollah Sistani. And Allawi's plans to offer insurgents amnesty were derailed by the US's objection to pardoning anyone who was involved in killing Americans.

In Iraq, the one truly pleasant surprise so far is that there has been little religious and ethnic bloodshed. Many of the experts who counseled against an invasion predicted that after Saddam's fall, the Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds would tear each other apart. Nothing like this has happened. The problems -- of resistance, nationalism, and anti-Americanism -- have been quite different. But the balance is fragile. If the United States and the Iraqi government play a sectarian strategy, things could unravel.

In many of its colonies the British would often favour a single group as a quick means of gaining stability. Almost always the results were ruinous -- a trail of civil war and bloodshed. If Allawi and the United States make the same mistake, there will be 140,000 American troops in the middle of it all.

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.

(c) 2004, Newsweek Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

Will Manmohan-Musharraf talks produce any expected result?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

exercise a "failure" given the complexity of the subjects at stake and a similar attitude in determining the outcome of the coming summit level talks is also still-born since one must not lose sight of the fact that one really expects any substantial progress in the discussions. A reasonable degree of achievement in terms of keeping the talks going and lessening the enmity will be a step in the right direction.

The coming talks between the two heads of government are not a

progress at all on the central problem governing their ties -- the vexed "Kashmir" issue.

The Natwar-Kasuri talks in New Delhi were preceded by discussions by their foreign secretaries Shyam Charan and Riaz Khokar and both men did not seek to project much hype as they underlined the sensitivity of the Kashmir issue where two neighbours hold diametrically opposite positions. But the expectations surged as the foreign

any rancour in the parleys and the pledge to carry forward the discussion itself is a positive sign.

Indian contention of cross-border insurgency aided by Pakistan and Islamabad's assertion that talks must revolve around the wishes of the Kashmiri people and alleged human rights abuses by New Delhi are unlikely to find a common ground easily. Continued talks may help reduce the yawning gap even though none should be under the illusion that a critical problem could be resolved in quick time. But it is necessary that conditions are slowly created so that some solution of the thorny issue is finally found.

The Manmohan-Musharraf meeting is not expected to yield much results as it is not supposed to deliver anything very substantial. The full-fledged summits like Vajpayee-Nawaz Sharif in Lahore was dubbed as positive but in reality did little as within months "Kargil" erupted and later Vajpayee-Musharraf talks in Agra was seen also as negative. Musharraf originally hails from Delhi and Manmohan from west Punjab in Pakistan. The Pakistan president was given high honour when he visited his ancestral home while a similar welcome is awaited for Manmohan whenever he chooses to visit his village home during a visit to Pakistan. Two "M's are set to talk critical issues to improve bilateral ties which has a big bearing on the overall political climate of the south Asian region.

Pragmatism suggests that no "breakthrough" -- an expression often used by certain sections of media in both countries on their important bilateral meetings -- is expected since such development seems somewhat out of context. But the positive signals need to be consolidated in the quest for lasting peace by eventually settling the main issue in a spirit of accommodation. Manmohan-Musharraf meeting will hopefully deliver reasonable degree of gains that will help further create a conducive atmosphere not only between the two principal players of the area but for the region as a whole.

"sumit" as such because they would meet at a third country where they will be present for multilateral purposes. However, bilateral meetings even on such occasions at times produce high results and there is no dearth of such instances in the international diplomacy. But the current state of Indo-Pak relations is "normal" which does not warrant any "breakthrough" or, for that matter, any spectacular achievement. In fact, when president Musharraf and former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee were in Kathmandu and shared the same dais for the SAARC summit, even though they did not have any bilateral meeting, the occasion helped tremendously to improve New Delhi-Islamabad ties, which were then on the brink of total collapse owing to severe tensions. Two leaders had no talks except shaking hands when Musharraf rather dramatically approached Vajpayee at a time when another India-Pakistan full blown war looked imminent but the Kathmandu gathering helped reduce the tensions and both nations rolled back from the near-war situation.

When Manmohan-Musharraf meeting hopefully takes place in New York, it has more to offer than lose in setbacks since two countries are now on a path of reconciliation where confrontation is not the order of the day, albeit no

ministers met evidently for the reason that it was the political level discussions. As it happened to be the first politically high level talks since the new UPA government took over in India a few months ago, many eyes were fixed on how this new government view ties with Pakistan compared to the previous NDA authority of Vajpayee. Most part of NDA government's time saw hostile relationship with Pakistan although last few months witnessed New Delhi's initiative to normalise the relations.

The UPA government inherited a good environment and hence was the expectation reasonably inflated in certain quarters. Several meetings including on nuclear-related matters between the two countries in the last few months were not fruitful. True, no progress was made in Natwar-Kasuri meeting on the central issue of "Kashmir" while two sides described it as "modest gains" on peripheral matters like extension of ceasefire along the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir and cooperation in some other fields. "Kashmir" was discussed and two sides reiterated their vastly divergent positions. An impression began to gain ground that the meeting was unsuccessful since this issue remained as it is. But one has to be mindful that progress in such a highly contentious problem cannot be attained in one swoop, let alone any settlement. The absence of

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

9X4