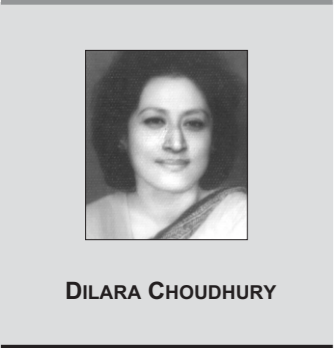


Management of Indo-Bangladesh border



DILARA CHOUDHURY

RECENTLY two-day Home Secretary level talks between India and Bangladesh with regard to border issues have been concluded, seemingly with no concrete results. The two sides have agreed to a compromise solution of coordinated patrol of the borders from their respective territories and have agreed to establish a hotline between the two secretaries in order to resolve any issues that may have a negative impact on Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations. Bangladesh has also agreed to grant double entry and exit visa to Indian nationals transiting through Bangladesh -- something that has already been given to Bangladeshis. Signing of an extradition treaty is also in the offing. From the press briefings and news headlines it seems that India and Bangladesh have made substantive progress in tackling the border issues. But in effect it is a misnomer. Let me explain why.

India shares 4,156 km border with Bangladesh of which all but 6.5 km has been demarcated. It is the longest border India has with any of its neighbours. It is not a natural border and was originally imposed in a rather whimsical manner. The Radcliff Commission drew the border between East Pakistan and India in such a way that it cut across a population that was integrated and interdependent for many centuries. As a result, a number of disputes arose between India and Pakistan. Bangladesh inherited the problem in 1971.

The disputes that arose due to historical legacy are the existence of 6.5 km underdemarcated borders (of which 1.5 km lies in Daikhata under Panchagarh District, 2 km in the area adjacent to Muhuri River under Feni District, and 3 km in Lathital-Dumabari under Moulvibazar), enclaves numbering 62 in total in each other's territory, and adverse possession by each other. These issues have not yet been resolved

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 Yaswant Singha 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

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.

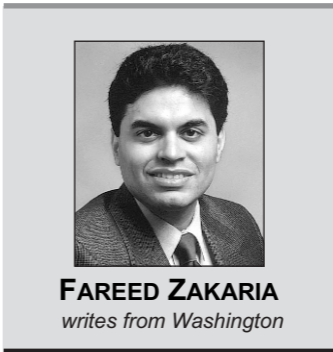
As to whether or not New Delhi made the proposal of having a joint operation against these alleged insurgents following the example of Bhutan is not known. Even if they did, it would not hold much water in the context of Dhaka's denial of their existence in its territory. The positions taken by Dhaka 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-Baraibari 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 theses 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.

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The holes in a 'Shiite strategy'



FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

TRENDS in Iraq seem to be moving in two different directions these days. The guerrilla war between the United States and insurgents continues, with mounting clashes and casualties. Yet the standoff with the Shiite leader Moqtada Sadr in Najaf and Al Kufah has ended, and those cities are no longer controlled by the Mahdi Army. The intractable security problems in Sunni areas coupled with success in Shiite ones might lead the Iraqi government (and Washington) toward a "Shiite strategy" in Iraq. But going down that path has its dangers. It would heighten Iraq's divisions along ethnic and religious lines. That could make today's problems look easy.

After the creation of the interim Iraqi government in June, many hoped that the insurgency would die down. It hasn't. Today it appears more organised, entrenched, and aggressive than ever. The American Army cannot use its military superiority to take Sunni cities from the guerrillas because it would mean high civilian casualties and fuel anti-Americanism.

The interim Iraqi government may itself not have the necessary credibility to take on such a task. Prime Minister Ayad Allawi is a tough guy, but he is clearly aware of the limits of his legitimacy. And the Iraqi Army will not be up to the job for at least another year. In these circumstances, it's difficult to see how the insurgency diminishes in strength. Last week Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations, Samir Sumaia'da'ie, predicted to *The Scotsman* that unless the United States and Britain added "a considerable amount" of troops to Iraq, the insurgency would grow.

But for all its resilience, the insurgency has not spread across the whole country, nor is it likely to. Its appeal has clear

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.

limits. While it has drawn some support from all Iraqis because of its anti-American character, it is essentially a Sunni movement, fueled by the anger of Iraq's once dominant community, who now fear the future. It is not supported by the Shiites or the Kurds. (The Shiite radical Sadr has been careful not to align himself too closely with the insurgency, for fear of losing support among the Shiites.) This is what still makes me believe that Iraq is not Vietnam. There, the Viet Cong and their northern sponsors both appealed to a broad nationalism that much of the country shared.

Hence the temptations of a "Shiite strategy." Such an approach would see the Sunni areas in Iraq as hopeless, until an Iraqi Army could go in and establish control. It would ensure that the Shiite community, as well as the Kurds, remained supportive of Allawi's government and of the upcoming elections. It would attempt to hold elections everywhere -- but if they could not be held in the Sunni areas, elections would go forward anyway. That would isolate the Sunni problem and leave it to be dealt with when force is available.

The Shiites are easier to handle. They supported the American invasion, which rid them of Saddam Hussein's tyranny. They have also disciplined their own, curbing Sadr's violent challenges to the government. Allawi and Washington handled this well, careful not to blast their way through Najaf's Imam Ali shrine (a "sensitive" war, one might say). But the key was that Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the towering Shiite figure, does not want Sadr to disrupt the path to elections (and thus, Shiite majority rule).

A Shiite strategy is understandable but risky. If the Sunnis end up with no representatives, they will have even less

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.

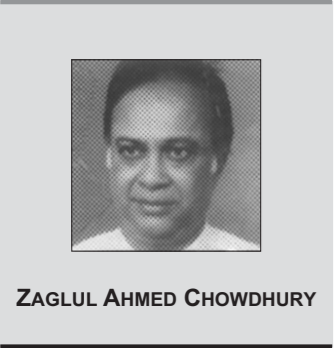
In Iraq, the one truly pleasant surprise so far is that there has been little religious and ethnic bloodshed. Many of the experts who counseled against an invasion predicted that after Saddam's fall, the Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds would tear each other apart. Nothing like this has happened. The problems -- 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.

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Will Manmohan-Musharraf talks produce any expected result?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

SOME quarters had placed too much expectations in the recent foreign ministerial level meeting between India and Pakistan in New Delhi and clearly their hopes have been belied. Consequently, they seek to describe the much awaited talks between Indian external affairs minister K Natwar Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri as a "failure". These quarters are now keeping a close watch on the coming talks between the heads of government of India and Pakistan in New York later this month on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly session (UNGA). May be once again they are pinning high hopes in the Dr. Manmohan Singh-General Pervez Musharraf dialogue. Such hopes are once again likely to be dashed because of the inflated nature of the expectations.

Indo-Pak talks at any level are constrained by colossal limitations. No government in the either country can on its own take the task of making the dialogue a success since it has to take the entire nation along with it as too much of emotive issues are involved. Prudence and rationale clearly suggest that any success in the talks between the two traditionally hostile neighbours can come through a long drawn process that has to proceed through a general ambience of goodwill devoid of mistrust and belligerence which generally characterise the bilateral ties. This process has begun and as such the positive outcome is contingent upon successfully carrying it out to a culmination where both sides can have a situation of not a loss of face but a win-win one.

Whether the current dialogue that is covering various levels will eventually lead to such a desirable stage is too early to conclude, but it will be too premature to call such

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 none 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.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

MATTERS AROUND US

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"summit" 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 unreasonably inflated in certain quarters. Several meetings including on nuclear-related matters between the two countries in the last few months were not fruitless. 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