

The push-in bids

Why this avoidable strain on bilateral relations?

THE attempts by the BSF to push some Indian citizens into Bangladesh led to a heavy exchange of fire between the border guards of the two countries on Tuesday. It is cause for concern.

BDR sources have said that the push-in attempts were thwarted with the help of the local people. But the distress that some humans suffered at the no-man's land was beyond description. The tension that is now running high along a long swathe of borderland, is something that can only unnecessarily sour the relations between the two countries.

The latest push-in bid is the most persistent that we have seen in recent years and has taken place only 40 days after the home secretaries of the two governments agreed at a meeting in Dhaka to adopt a series of measures to remove potential irritants in their border relations. There was even talk of introducing a hotline to address any brewing crisis without loss of time. Evidently, the development is not in sync with what was agreed upon in Dhaka. It is understood that if India thought some Bangladeshis were residing illegally on its soil, the matter would be resolved through well-laid out and established procedures. But everything seems to have been lost when we watch the boorish attempts to push people on to Bangladeshi soil. Obviously, it is far from good neighbourly conduct to draw together some humans at the border-belt and force them to cross over to the other side.

Bangladesh and India are friendly countries committed to upholding good neighbourliness. The spirit has always been reflected in all high-level meetings between Dhaka and Delhi, but not unfortunately along the borders where so many untoward incidents have take place.

The BJP had, in the perception of analysts, used the issue of so-called illegal migrants to garner votes, but such a policy is hardly expected of the Congress-led coalition government.

The Indian government must not fail to see the inhumanity and impropriety associated with these push-in attempts made by its border security forces. These should stop in the best interest of neighbourly relations.

Terrible deaths in Thai custody

The responsible must face the law

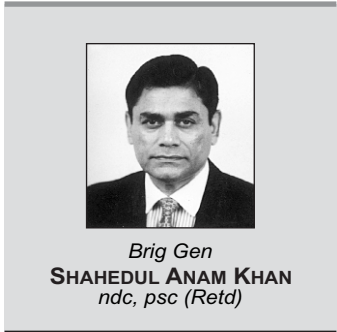
WE are shocked and appalled to learn of the death of seventy-eight Muslims in southern Thailand after some 1,300 protesters had been herded into trucks following a violent demonstration. Six protesters were killed when the police and troops used water cannon and tear gas to disperse the protesters -- excessive force by any definition -- but this pales in comparison with the brutality with which the protesters who were forced into the overcrowded and suffocating trucks met their end.

The cause of death of the seventy-eight was mostly suffocation -- but a significant number of the deceased were crushed to death and found with broken necks. There can be no doubt that the blame for these terrible deaths must lie with the Thai authorities who were responsible for the inhuman cramming of the protesters into the trucks in which they died. The fact that many of the dead had been fasting and that their weakened condition and dehydration most likely contributed to their inability to withstand the suffocation only makes things worse.

Monday's tragedy demonstrates that the Thai authorities continue to use excessive force and brutality in their dealing with southern Muslims and that the time has come for serious scrutiny of the methods used. It should not be forgotten that the 1,300 who were subject to the horror of the police trucks were merely protesters and not even armed insurgents.

The good reputation of the Thai nation in the world -- and in the Muslim world particularly -- is in danger. Closer ties between Bangladesh and Thailand have been beneficial for both countries and we would like to see those ties grow stronger and for the bilateral relationship to flourish. If the Thai government is perceived as being indifferent to Muslim life it could have an otherwise avoidable ripple-effect in the region. For all of these reasons, we urge the Thai government to take stern action against those responsible for the terrible deaths. The good image of the Thai nation as well as considerations of regional harmony demand this.

Is terrorism the only serious threat to our security?



WHILE the world is engrossed in tackling the menace of terrorism, another destabilising hazard, in the form of global warming, is gradually nibbling at our existence without many of us taking serious note of its destructive potential that may surpass the menace of international terrorism. And the single biggest contributor to global warming, the United States of America has decided to have nothing to do with the international efforts to stem the harmful consequences of this phenomenon.

Global warming caused by greenhouse gas (GHG), in its many harmful ways presents the single most dangerous threat to the continued existence of our planet. And as usual the source of this phenomenon is the unbridled consumerism of the west, and as usual the third world and the poorer nations are at the receiving end of its harmful effects. "Global warming is the greatest threat to civilisation the world has ever seen," according to Kert Davies, Greenpeace Research Director.

Just ponder the climate changes that have occurred in our region,

where unpredictable and untimely rains have caught the countries unawares and unprepared to tackle the after-effects.

The International Institute for Sustainable Development confirms the state of climate change when it says: "The frequency and impacts of natural disasters are on the rise, driven in part by an unpredictably changing climate. The poor are the most threatened by these catastrophes and the least equipped to recover."

met. However, the protocol has not been ratified by the US, which disassociated from it in March 2001 when the new Bush administration decided to pull out, ostensibly on the grounds of enlightened national self-interest, but which, according to some, was motivated primarily by Mr. Bush's compulsions to preserve the interest of the big US corporate bodies that are the biggest contributors to his Republican party and also to global warming.

to former Canadian Environment Minister David Anderson, global warming poses a greater long-term threat to humanity than terrorism because it could force hundreds of millions from their homes.

Of the several impacts of global warming, the most dangerous is the rise in sea level.

According to a study carried out by BCAS a few years ago, for Bangladesh, the rise in sea level by one metre would affect 17 percent of its landmass and about sixteen

acres of prime arable land producing 16 percent of our rice would cease to exist, and the cost to fish cultivation as well as the cost of abatement is likely to be in billions of dollars. And the chances of a substantive portion of Bangladesh's landmass being submerged in another hundred and fifty years from now, given a rise in 1.5 metres in sea level, is very real.

But how are all these related to security? Robert McLeman and Barry Smit in their "Climate Change,

from global warming would be forced migrations, the dislocation of people because of flooding or drought," according to Steve Sawyer, climate policy adviser to Greenpeace. "Or drastic eco-system change could change the resource base and uproot rural people. Forced migrations of people almost always cause problems."

The environmental change may also impact availability of water, more so in the case of Bangladesh, where our needs for daily sustenance are dependent on sources which lie outside our borders. According to the UN: "some 50 countries have 75 percent or more of their territory falling within multinational river basins: over one-third of the world's population lives within such basins, a rich potential source of conflict."

Reportedly the ill effects of global warming may already be in evidence in certain parts of the globe. For example, in the central region of Nigeria where the nomads from the south are being forced to move north to escape the southern push of the Sahara, the peasant farmers are rising up in arms against these nomads.

There is a very strong case for a global coalition against the threat of global warming. The initial platform, the Kyoto Protocol will become operational soon. But one wonders how much will the global community be able to achieve without the active participation of the single largest source of the threat, the US.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

According to a study carried out by BCAS a few years ago, for Bangladesh, the rise in sea level by one metre would affect 17 percent of its landmass and about sixteen percent of its population. How do these match up with actual damage in real terms? Some 85 conurbations of various definitions will go under water with the Mongla port being the biggest casualty along with 8,000 km of road, 4,200 km of coastal embankment, and 7,500 sq km of poldered area.

Interestingly, the US alone accounts for 25 percent of all the global GHG emissions, and there have been a yearly increase of 15 percent in its GHG emission level over the last ten years.

Global warming continues and will continue to pose risk to our environment with the potential of impacting the economies adversely particularly of the poorer countries and countries at sea level that are less endowed economically and technically to cope with the after-effects on their own.

While eyebrows may be raised at the equation of global warming, brought about by GHG effect, with terrorism, analysts have indeed gone so far as to suggest that global warming, "might eventually top terrorism on the global security agenda, provoking new conflicts and inflaming old ones." According

percent of its population. How do these match up with actual damage in real terms? Some 85 conurbations of various definitions will go under water with the Mongla port being the biggest casualty along with 8,000 km of road, 4,200 km of coastal embankment, and 7,500 sq km of poldered area.

Just imagine the impact on our eco-system if the entire Sundarbans were to be submerged. That is exactly what would happen if there were a one-metre rise in sea level due to global warming. This would also see the end of all the coastal islands covering an area of almost 3,500 sq km. The chances of recurrence of flood with more areas going under water due to the melting of the Himalayan ice will compound the situation even further.

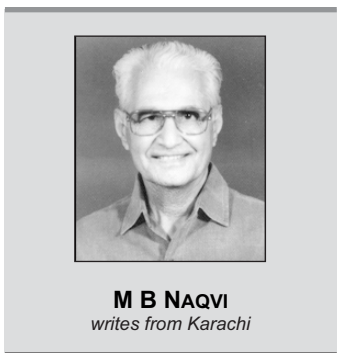
And, in an already food deficit country like ours, over 3 million

Migration and Security" published by the CSIS in March 2004, establish the causal link between environmental degradation and security thus: "[E]nvironmental change has become a significant factor in international security...that climate change and environmental degradation were likely to contribute significantly to conflict and instability in coming years ... conditions of scarcity might cause population displacements, undermine institutions and social relations, and lead to violence."

Imagine the massive number of people displaced by inundation looking for refuge upcountry, and then eventually, like water, the demographic pressure breaking-out, seeking its own level, which may not necessarily be confined to the national borders.

"The biggest security problem

Five years of Musharraf regime



MUSHARRAF regime completed its first five years a while ago. It looks set to go on ruling, uniform and all. Its unavowed celebrations required government and semi-government departments' lavish ads praising Musharrafs' and Shaukat Aziz's achievements during the period. The cost to the public exchequer must have been billions of Rupees.

How to weigh those achievements. The President and Prime Minister claim credit for having stabilised the state finances, certified by over \$ 12 billion monetary reserves and IMF-WB's chits of good economic behaviour. Their political achievements -- betrayal of Taliban, joining President Bush's Afghanistan campaign and War on Terror, carrying on a war of terror of his own etc -- have won praise from Bush, Powell and American generals.

How can the people judge a government can only be by assessing what it delivers? What has Musharraf-Shaukat Aziz duo delivered? Government claims have been noted: economy's stabilisation and turning around; it has been ready to take off now -- for all of three years, though this take off has not yet happened. Or people would have noticed it. What the ordinary people see is a big economic deficit for the nation: despite government claims, prices of daily use commodities keep rising steeply. The other side of this inflationary picture is the shrinking Rupee. Something has happened in the year 2004 that the upcreep of prices of all these years has spectacularly escalated, with

prices of food items having risen by over 14 per cent. Not that the other prices are not steadily rising. Then, there is the rapidly growing poverty. It has no agreed figure, of course. The government claims it is around 34 to 35, while international organisations talk about 40 to 45 per cent and random non-official surveys suggest 50 to 60 per cent of population being actually below the povertyline. It manifests in growing mass unemployment, with social evils that result from poverty.

Government claims of economic successes are genuine in terms of the quasi-religion of free markets.

buying their own security, though the three major crimes -- robberies, car jackings and kidnapping for ransom, not to mention a growing rate of murders -- are still growing at a rate that would be unacceptable in Chad. People who go to mosques are now frisked before entering the holy portals; far too many sectarian attacks on various mosques and Imambaras keep taking place. There has been recent growth in terror attacks all over the country. They bespeak the government's primary failure of maintaining law and order, let alone anything more like the rule of law. The point is that

began when the Soldier of Islam, Ziaul Haq ruled and has kept on growing through the controlled democracy of the 1990s. What does it show?

It is government's inability to perform its primary function of maintaining law and order and providing justice to its citizens. Pertinently the crime's growth has registered a steeper rise in the Musharraf years. The government expenditure on security has been rising steadily year after year. Indeed Pakistan has been a national security state *par excellence*. And yet security is what the

persistent and growing disaffection; it is like a slow-burning fuse of a wider conflagration. Worse can be feared. And yet no political approach or healing touch is in evidence, though Pakistan's future can be affected critically.

People do ask the question about the political system's legitimacy. Do the people own it as their own? Do they regard it as responsive to their needs? Has it been made with their help and for their purposes? The answer to all these related questions is in the negative. That is the heart of the tragedy.

The 'system' is headed by a

PLAIN WORDS

There is a contradiction: despite a basically authoritarian regime, the press and media are relatively free. This is superficial and relative freedom. Perhaps this is so because (a) the press did struggle and managed to acquire a degree of independence over a long period; and (b) the system is a hybrid, neither the fish of Martial Law nor the fowl of democracy nor good red herring of the rule of law. Even so the media's relative freedom is under serious threat.

crime graph is rising rapidly all over the country.

The government is bravely battling the holy warriors of yester years in South Waziristan and elsewhere in the country. Foreign militants were the people brought in by ISI and CIA to fight the godless Commies in Afghanistan in 1980s. What the contribution of that Jihad is well-known: Klashnikov and heroin culture, sectarian terrorism and rise of crime syndicates as well as enrichment of religious political parties with suspected narco funds. The Americans may have won a famous victory over the Soviets but Pakistan is still paying for it.

Islamabad's War on Terrorism against domestic sectarian terrorists and those holy warriors in South Waziristan, has not yet been won; this war has not impaired the ability of terrorists to strike at the time and place of their choosing. Well over 170 Pakistani soldiers have died in South Waziristan. The terrorists' spectacular attacks on minority targets in Multan, Sialkot and Lahore show that the victory is still far. But the spectacular rise of crime

citizens actually lack. They fear criminals. As for the security establishment, the people fear its corruption even more. More than half the dacoities in Karachi are not reported to the police for the fear of a second robbery -- extortion by the police. The question is persistent: Why is Authority failing in its primary duty of maintaining order and administration of justice. The only valid answer is: Authority is unable to tackle this problem because it lacks legitimacy.

There is yet another category of terrorists. They are regional nationalists, especially active in Balochistan and at the tri-junction of three provinces of Balochistan, Sindh and Punjab. They are fighting for their right of having more autonomous Provincial Governments. This war has gone on for long and the government intends building a series of military cantonments in Balochistan. Emphasis is on Mekran coast where a new deep seaport (Gwadar) has been built. The locals are furious that all the new jobs are expected to go to people from outside -- from Punjab not to put too fine point on it. This is a

government servant, still on Army's active list who took over through a coup d'etat. After the coup he has draped himself in democratic raiment. He held a laughable referendum and proclaimed himself a validly elected President of Pakistan for five years, although he had already moved into the President House by pushing Rafiq Tarar out. Then, he enacted many far-reaching constitutional amendments that echoed what other military dictators had always wanted: absolute power in the showpiece political system to foreigners. He held an election on that basis in which most votes were secured by PPP and Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League.

Thus elected parliament has had its legitimacy widely questioned for the fairness of the polls and spooks' role in it. The government formed to represent it was by an entirely new party comprising mainly defectors from Nawaz League and over 20 from the PPP. Even so its original majority was of one vote, though it later accumulated more defectors. The system runs the country the way

Gen. Musharraf wills it. All can see it is a one man show. That saps their confidence in the usefulness of the entire political game. A wave of cynicism has overtaken the populace.

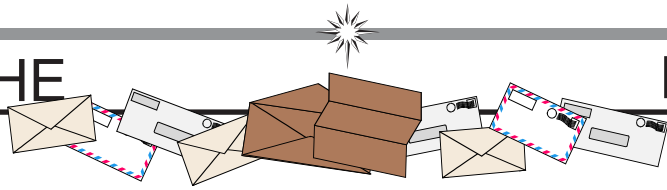
Background for the rise of the crime rate is this: When petty criminals see the top general can seize power because of his firepower, why should not others do the same in their restricted spheres by harming the weak? It is these two deficits -- in economy and political system -- that are responsible for most ills. For one thing the political system is neither straightforward Martial Law -- acknowledged emergency step outside the law altogether -- nor it is simple democracy without adjectives. It is an ugly hybrid.

There is a contradiction: despite a basically authoritarian regime, the press and media are relatively free. This is superficial and relative freedom. It does not prevent the information overlord Shaikh Rasheed Ahmed from threatening the entire media with a terrorism of government's own. Perhaps this is so because (a) the press did struggle and managed to acquire a degree of independence over a long period; and (b) the system is a hybrid, neither the fish of Martial Law nor the fowl of democracy nor good red herring of the rule of law. Even so the media's relative freedom is under serious threat.

People ask questions: what are they getting in return for the taxes they have anyhow to pay? What does the government deliver? Since its delivery is so unsatisfactory, the people do not respond to what it says or wants. They also ask what price will Pakistan pay for this military takeover? They saw to the loss of East Pakistan as a result of Ayub Khan's takeover and the present conditions as a legacy of Zia. What will Musharraf cost despite the US need of him today?

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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.

"Yes Minister"

Bangladesh civil servants (sorry masters, not servants by any stretch of imagination) have far outstripped Sir Humphrey of "Yes Minister" fame; hence the above heading. Astute civil servant that Humphrey was, knighthood was his reward for the adroit advises to his Minister of the Crown. These were good old days when possibly Britannia ruled the waves. Poor Blair now hardly rules the Thames River. Sadly, but surely, all the ruling has gone to the pocket of the Bush shirt.

Coming to our august civil masters, the recent remarks by the top gun of commerce to the media about the abnormal price hike of vegetables-- the last part of the quote (DS: 24 Oct) rings historic bells. The worthy is quoted as "people would not die if they do not eat them" (meaning vegetables). It reminds me of the French Queen's alleged historical remarks during the revolution. When informed that poor people in France could not afford to eat bread, she replied "Why

don't they eat cake instead". Without vegetables our poor countrymen will not die. I distinctly remember seeing many years ago in Calcutta in early 1940s people living on water only with "pantabhat" an occasional luxury!

A citizen
Gulshan, Dhaka

Appeal to REB

We are the inhabitants of Vill.-Gopalpur, P.O.-Kunjanagar, Union-Ramnagar, PS --Nagarkanda, District-Faridpur. The government has taken the initiative to boost village and agriculture-based development. We, villagers, are impressed by this initiative. But without proper plan and essential elements it is impossible to get the fruits of development. Among the key elements, electricity plays a vital role in developing our villages. To implement this idea, Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (BREB) was formed and it is playing a key role in rural development.

But our village has not yet been brought under the electrification scheme. We hope the REB authorities will look into the matter.

Harun ar Rashid
On e-mail

Income of political leaders

Most people are beset with penury living in tin-shed and muddy houses without electricity, gas, pure drinking water and sanitary facilities. They earn their two meals with the sweat of their physical labour and hard work from early morning to sunset.

But most of our political leaders, whether in the ruling or opposition party, are leading a luxurious life in gorgeous buildings, with electricity, gas, sanitation, running hot and cold water supply, telephone, air-conditioners, televisions, refrigerators, VCR and other costly equipment and furniture. They possess beautiful cars, visit foreign countries for recreation shopping and medical

care as and when desired. They eat delicious foods, sweetmeats and fruits and spend most of their time sitting on cozy and comfortable sofas gossiping and joking with friends, party workers and visitors.

We wonder what is the source of this colossal income of our political leaders? What is the accountability and transparency of their income and expenditure, wealth and property?

With malice to none and due respect to all, may we humbly request our political leaders of both the ruling and opposition party to kindly enlighten us as to what occult power they possess to lay golden eggs and to get rich so quickly?

O. H. Kabir
Hare Street
Wari, Dhaka

Leather City

The article by the AGM of BSCIC (DS Oct 12) was rightly critical of the deplorable leather industry in Bangladesh. Till recently, this high export-value sector could not attract

official or political notice for formal thrust as a development and export sector. We have been foolishly earning much less foreign exchange for decades by exporting semi-finished leathers most of the time; whereas the prices of finished leather goods (as sold to shoppers) are several times higher, as it is a fashion and style trend-setting sector in the affluent countries.

The construction of the Leather City in Savar is a right step, although late; but the traditional objectors have to be kept firmly in control by a new surge of professional glitz, with the assistance of foreign technical collaboration in the finished goods wing.

This sector can easily compete along with the jute industry. The latter is also weak in finished goods--the industrialised nations sucked the raw materials from the LDCs and DCs for centuries. It is high time to go for the Value Added markets overseas (another name for VAT = Value Added Trade).

Our governance is rather leatheryin

a negative way!
A Mawaz
Dhaka

Handicraft industry

Bureaucratic delay is hampering the fast growth of the huge handicraft industry in Bangladesh (employing 3.7 million persons). Even the directives from the PMO are being ignored (DS report Oct 17) for the immediate establishment of a Handicraft R&D and Exhibition Centre in the metropolis.

The local market is expanding fast (turnover Tk 1,000 crore annually); but it suffers from lack of variety and options for consumers under different age and income groups. There appears to be an amateurish approach to market, research, and feedback from the users.

The latter are also rather orthodox, without awareness and publicity campaigns. The standard reply of the empty shops in the shopping areas to new specific designs by customers who have traveled abroad is: "Choley na" (no demand). The seller's psy-

chology is peculiar: not to stock items for which there is low demand. No place for minority buyers!

Then how do style and fashion change? The new Handicraft Institute has to train the producers to be more open-minded and not depend exclusively on tradition; although the Bangladeshi touch has to be there in anything "Made in Bangladesh".

Notice the effect of the RMG industry in our sartorial changes as noticed in the society in the day to day life. The surplus, factory-rejects or unsold readymade garments sold in the footpaths by hawkers are cheap and popular at all economic levels of the society, right from the rickshaw drivers, the students and the office-goes. Some young men of the new generation wear half pants instead of loongee at home. Most of the male readymade dresses are oversize, as the local wearers have smaller built compared to Europeans and the Americans. This is a big market for correction. The labels do not carry enough information. This should be made mandatory by government

laws.

What makes one person (consumer) innovative, and the other imitative? This psychology has to be learnt by the marketing managers (producers and sellers) in our new industries, to push the sales of new products. In Dhaka, the customer feedback service is not yet effective, as no importance is attached to it by the management, as the salespersons are not trained or encouraged to report feedbacks. The small and cottage industries do not (as yet) believe in spending money for advice. Free advice is useless. The government departments have to pay more attention helping the small industries with R&D. I am wearing a cotton *fatua* claimed to be imported from India, and charged double the local price. As a shopper, how do I know what is the truth?

Abu Abd
Dhaka