

## The push-in bids

Why this avoidable strain on bilateral relations?

**T**HE 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 taken 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

**W**e 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?



Brig Gen  
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**W**HILE 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."

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.

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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.

Russia, by ratifying the protocol has become the fifty-fifth nation accounting for at least 55 percent of developed country emissions, the minimum required to allow Kyoto's entry into force. By doing so it has infused life into what many had given up as a moribund agreement. With Russian ratification, the second threshold has now been

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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-meter 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

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 McLean 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 ecosystem change could change the resource base and uproot rural people. Forced migrations of people almost always cause problems."

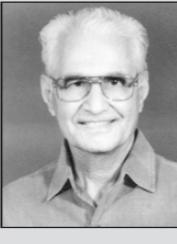
The environmental change may also impact availability of water, more so in the case of Bangladesh, where our needs for daily sustenance are dependent on sources which lie outside our borders. According to the UN: "some 50 countries have 75 percent or more of their territory falling within multinational 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.

## Five years of Musharraf regime



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

**M**USHARRAF 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 Musharraf's 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 due 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 upsurge 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 Imambars keep taking place.

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beginning 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 they regard 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.

Country's economy managers are

fanatical devotees of this religion. While heavy de-stabilisation results from inflation as also in unending depreciation of national currency they see no problem. It is not a managed float of the Rupee. The daily descent of the Rupee is intentional -- letting the market determine. WB, ADB and many other countries are giving large amounts for poverty alleviation. Mind you the original formulation 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

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 Communists 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.

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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.

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People ask questions: what are they getting in return for the taxes they have 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?

Gen. Musharraf will 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 fire-power, 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.

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MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

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



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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 advice to his Minister of the Crown. These were good old days when possibly Britannia ruled the waves. Poor Blair now hardly realises 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 Calcut