LATE S. M. ALI

**DHAKA SATURDAY APRIL 9, 2005** 

### A bouquet of accords

Cooperation to partnership envisaged

N a fitting tribute to thirty years of diplomatic relations between Beijing and Dhaka, the summit between Bangladesh prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia and her Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao has yielded as many as nine bilateral accords. Whatever may be the terms used to categorise them -- five agreements, two memoranda of understanding (MoU), a contract and an exchange of letters -- the volume and quality of cooperation envisaged by the accords must be a matter of satisfaction to both sides.

The plethora of agreements should also have no one in doubt that foreign ministers of the respective countries did their homework extremely well, albeit backed by political will on both sides.

What next? Obviously their job is now cut out to translate the accords into actions for cooperation leading up to partnership for development. The attention and emphasis now automatically rivet on having the implementation machinery in place to coordinate and interact within the framework of accords to yield maximum results. Of the accords, the assistance agreements on capacity building for civil service law enforcement, criminal investigation including forensic skill training have a ring of topicality about them. The list goes on: the MoU on installation of digital telephone exchange contract on production and service of Baropukuria Coal Mine, letters of cooperation on water management, MoU on cooperation in agriculture, exchange of letters on direct airlink.

There is also the cooperation agreement on peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Other highlights of the wide ranging understanding reached between the two countries include switch-over from suppliers credit to concessional lending by China. Moreover, premier Jiabao has shown a positive attitude towards Bangladesh's requests for duty-free access of her goods to the Chinese market and Chinese investment on collaboration basis by way of progressively reducing the huge trade deficit Bangladesh has had with China.

Just how much China values her relations with Bangladesh seems borne out by the fact that China is to have a month-long celebrations to make the thirtieth anniversary of her establishing diplomatic ties with Bangladesh. It is the people to people cooperation that both countries are now looking forward to.

### **Bus to Muzaffarabad**

A move for peace

S the bus carrying passengers from Indian Kashmir crossed the Line of Control (LoC) on its way to Muzaffarabad Thursday noon, it marked a new chapter in the relationship between not only the two Kashmirs but also India and Pakistan. It is a booster to the ties between the two neighbours who have fought three wars, with the rivalry revolving primarily around Kashmir.

The service is the biggest confidence-building measure that the two sides agreed to as part of the plan to bring back peace to Kashmir. It also shows Kashmiris' disenchantment with the terrorist activities which have had a crippling effect on the life in the Himalayan state. The peoples of Kashmir have responded very enthusiastically to the idea of linking the two capitals on either side of the LoC through a bus service. They have opted for peace.

The journey has not been without pitfalls. There was a eport of a bomb attack on a place where intending passengers were waiting and finally when the bus started moving it came under gunfire. Fortunately, it was dismissed as accidental fire. But the courage and determination of the Kashmiri people eager to break the nearly 60year old barrier won the day. The bus service is a solid step towards bringing the peoples of the two Kashmirs close to each other.

India and Pakistan have held peace talks to resolve the Kashmir problem several times, but could hardly reach any understanding. However, the bus service which will establish people to people contact and enable many Kashmiri families to reunite will certainly help ease the

The wind of change that is blowing across the Indo-Pak frontiers will get stronger with more interaction between the peoples of Kashmir.

Kashmiris have paid too heavy a price for the political violence. So it is only natural that they want peace in the region. Abus trip aiming to reunite the families driven asunder back in the late forties is indeed an auspicious occasion for them to celebrate. All the more so, because it may decisively influence the process of peace making in the

# Reality has finally dawned



E have been witnessing black humour over the last few months.

On the one hand, militant outfits have been on the rampage, blasting bombs, throwing grenades and maiming people. On the other, we have seen an outpouring of cartoons, depicting the inabilities of the law and order agencies in bringing the criminals to justice. This trend has reflected the inherent talent amongst us to discover the funny side even in the worst scenario. It has also been a psychological verdict of sorts about the credibility of our government.

Nevertheless, the responsible agencies appear to have finally woken up to the threats being posed to public security by militant groups who are more interested in pursuing their exclusive agenda. The last few days have seen a flurry of arrests and people being taken to remand. Cases are also being instituted against individuals on the charge that they are linked with activities

Contrary to earlier denials by senior representatives of the Administration, it is now being established that we have a problem. This cognisance has been important. Appropriate medication can only follow if the patient agrees that he is sick.

We have now seen the first step. We also hope that the Administration will understand that criticism in the media about non-performance is not a 'conspiracy' by people who 'lack in patriotism'. Instead, it is an expression of righteous concern as a citizen. It needs to be viewed from

killings had taken place in the country from October 1, 2001 to June 15, 2004. It is true that very few of these deaths were due to militant causes The figure however reflected not only deterioration in the standards of maintenance of law and order but also the widespread presence of

referred to by many columnists including myself ('Those other wars' 17 May, 2003, The Daily Star) in earlier op-ed pieces. In our own way, we have tried to draw attention of the Administration to the latent dangers.

Use of explosives to create chaos

is not something new in Bangla-

desh. This has happened since the

beginning of the seventies. The

dimension has however changed

with the introduction of small arms

and light weapons. This has made it

more deadly. Use of hand grenades

is now wrecking havoc on a massive

Public concern about the illegal

proliferation of such lethal arms has

heightened with reports of smug-

gling of military arms and ammuni-

tion and their seizures in Bogra,

Kuril (Dhaka) and recently in the

Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Factory

The seriousness of the situation

was underlined by the report pub-

lished in Jane's Intelligence Review

indicating that the Chittagong arms

shipment, in all probability was

shipped from Hong Kong and that

more weapons were added on to the

consignment in Singapore. Appar-

ently, the shipment might have been

for different insurgent movements in

attacks on cinema halls, cultural

venues and political meetings. In

most cases, progressive elements

and the political meetings convened

by Opposition parties (particularly,

the Awami League) have been

There have also been repeated

North-east India

attacked. This has happened in Dhaka on 21 August, 2004 and most recently in Habiganj on 27 January this year. There have also beer attacks in Gazipur and in Sylhet. These incidents have led to the deaths of important political leaders and innocent bystanders. It has also resulted in serious injuries to hundreds of people.

The use of small and light arms has emerged as the single biggest threat to our economic and sociopolitical stability. It is affecting our national security. A news report in the 'Independent' (published from Dhaka) of 28 February, 2005 has

have become 'the arbiter of differences and settling of political scores' (S Anam Khan 'Small arms, big problems', The Daily Star). The scenario has deteriorated even more because of the easy access to such weapons by groups who enjoy political patronage. This is turn, has created another problem. Armed militants have gradually acquired a qualitative edge in the weapons at their disposal as opposed to those available for law and order agen-

A new factor has now been added to the equation. Militants have now started targeting NGOs. Several

POST BREAKFAST

We cannot allow our external image to be tarnished by extremism, intolerance and violence. A large majority of our

population might be Muslims but we are essentially secular in nature. Bangladeshis love music, poetry and cultural

festivals. We might be economically challenged but we are rich in terms of civilisation. We cannot barter away

stability and prosperity because a few feel that the only way to implement their agenda is through terrorism and fear.

more intensively and the culprits identified. This has not happened. Inquiry has led to a charge-shee with regard to the late Mr. Kibria, but the scope and ramifications are not transparent.

I am however an optimist. believe in always calling the glass half-full. It is this aspect that has led me to welcome recent steps by the

After months of procrastination the government has banned the activities of two militant Islamic organisations the JMJB (Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh) and the JMB (Jamaatul Mujaheedin). They

this assertion is completely true. We have also read that some cases did not receive the importance they deserved, because of the 'acquiescence of some law-enforcers'. It has been also reported that some material evidence in custody has been misplaced.

If this is correct, even in one case, then that is most disappointing.

We cannot allow our external mage to be tarnished by extremism, intolerance and violence. A large majority of our population might be Muslims but we are essentially secular in nature. Bangladeshis love music, poetry and cultural festivals. We might be economically challenged but we are rich in terms

We cannot barter away stability and prosperity because a few feel that the only way to implement their agenda is through terrorism and fear.

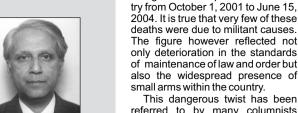
The Government's determination to tackle militant terrorism is before the people's court. The perpetrators of these violent acts must be identified and they need to be brought to justice. Those guilty of crimes and providing leadership in such banned organisations, must also, not be allowed to escape from the country.

The Administration must not be dissuaded from containing this militancy just because some of its partners are upset and are describng these steps as an effort to create distance between the government and the pro-Islamists. The responsible authorities must stand up and be counted. They must not yield to pressure

It is in their hands to prove that Islam is not only a religion of peace but that it also abhors uncalled for extremist attacks resulting in harm to innocent civilians. We must show that we are able to maintain a peaceful environment within the country.

This assumes particular importance given the fact that we are despatching our brave soldiers abroad to maintain international peace and security. If our government is to be an example abroad. we need to be one at home as well.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador -- any response to



**MUHAMMAD ZAMIR** 

prejudicial to the security of citizens.

We must not forget the response

of the State Minister for Home Affairs in the Parliament, in July last vear, to a question by a Member of Parliament from the Awami League. It was indicated then that 9,737 also indicated that trained militants are active in Bangladesh, particularly in the districts of Sirajganj, ibandha, Naogaon, Joypurhat, Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Kurigram, Thakurgaon Dinajpur, Bogra, Natore, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Sherpur,

Tangail and Manikganj. Unfortunately, till now, anyone daring to draw attention to this malaise has been immediately branded as someone out to destroy the image of the country.

It is most fortunate for us that recognition is slowly being given now to a situation fraught with danger. We might not have liked it, but critical articles have been most helpful in this regard. They need to be viewed in the spirit of constructive criticism and being a part of the democratic process so essential for strenathening democratic institutions. We also need to appreciate the efforts made by senior lawyers to determine the causes of such attacks, particularly the grisly August 21, 2004 incident.

We are in dire straits. We are however not alone. This predicament is valid for other countries in the region as well. There is a growing symbiotic relationship between

explosive devices have caused injury to innocent people associated with such NGOs. Arrested militants have since defended such action through absurd and perverted claims that NGOs are 'patronising anti-Islamic activities and taking people away from religion'. One arrested JMB militant is reported to have informed investigators that NGOs are the modern version of the notorious East India Company. Their anger probably stems from the fact that NGOs are empowering women in the rural areas and their traditional male bastion is consequently under threat. The inverse logic being practised is indeed very

Bangladesh is not a terrorist state. We neither have Talibans nor extremism in general. We do however have pockets of militant Islam and some conservative rightwing elements intolerant of other's views. This is not unique. One could state similar things about most developed countries, including the USA.

There is however a tangible difference the presence of law and order and the judicial process in other countries. A grenade attack on the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and a High Commisand indicted them for a series of bomb attacks and murders. The Government has claimed that it acted 'out of its own sense of responsibility' and not due to any external pressure. That is good. Better late than never At least iournalists are not being lambasted for creating figments from their imagination. The question that we are faced with now is the presence and conti-

have arrested some of their leaders

nuity of political will. There have been reports that the ruling Alliance particularly the BNP, have been reluctant till now to come down strongly against such Islamic militancy because of the delicate nature of the electoral balance that might affect the next general elections There has been a sort of 'tunnel vision' where ruling party strategists have underlined the need for support from fundamentalist forces in victory is to be assured. This weakness in electoral policy has helped extremist groups.

Probably, this is also the reason why many extremists have been released despite having been 'nabbed with firearms, bombs and explosives, objectionable books and documents' (page 2, New Age 27 February, 2005). I do not know it

generous credit What probably is true is that America is worried over India's growing relations with Iran on the one hand and China on the other. A long-term deal which New Delhi has signed with Tehran for gas, with the possibility of the pipeline through Pakistan, has irritated Washington. Rice minced no worlds when she met government leaders at New Delhi. America does not like any country, much less India, to foster closer relations with Iran which may well be Washington's next target despite Europe's pressure on Tehran to give up its nuclear

As far as China, India's equation with it may not be to the liking of America. Beijing still remains the most recalcitrant capital that Washington faces in the world. In America's scheme of things, the democratic India is supposed to counter the doctrinaire China. If the two were to sink their differences, what answer does Washington have to Beijing's defiance? America has seen how China has passed Anti-Secession Act to occupy some day Taiwan which Washington swears to keep independent.

The report that China wants a free-trade area with India on the lines Beijing has contracted with Islamabad cannot be to the liking of Washington. If the markets of India and China are to be limited to the US, it is bound to suffer. Tomorrow's two economic giants are India and China. How can America sit back and watch the developments that are against its interests?

## A summer of Indo-US relations



F India's wishes were to come true, it would have the best of equation with America. This is obvious from the mood prevailing in top government quarters at New Delhi. One sentence attributed to US

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice -- America wants to help India become a major world power in the soaring. The observation may sound patronising, as one BJP leader has said, but not many have lent him ears. In fact, Rice's remark has practically erased the past bitterness against the US.

What will be the contours of the bilateral relationship is on the top of an unending discussion in the military, economic and political circles. Now the civil nuclear technology is taken for granted. But many more goodies are expected. The importance attached to Washington's next move can well be imagined that New Delhi is paying it a lot of attention even in the midst of the long-awaited visit by Chinese Premier Wen Jaibao to India.

With Beijing it has been an on-

going dialogue which New Delhi had begun more than two decades ago. It is now nearing the post; there is very little worry of any failure. What remains is the last lap which will cover the principles to settle the boundary dispute, expand economic ties and reach an arrangement whereby the two giants do not come into each other's way as they did in 1962. But with America, the real relationship is yet to built up. The cold war and Washington's distance even after that did not give New Delhi any hope for normalcy.

pigeonhole the purchase although Islamabad had paid out in cash What got our goat earlier was even a proposal of sale or transfer of US weapons to Islamabad. We still believe that such a move fuels arms race in the two countries. But America's offer to make India "a major world power" is too tempting to stoke old objections.

True, New Delhi's spokesman voiced India's protest against the sale of F16s to Pakistan. But it was more to go on record than to upbraid Washington. Even the Left, the main ests are common? It is too early to find answers to these questions. But by the time President Bush visits India January next, New Delhi or, for that matter, the world would have known the reply. Experts have not forgotten that the induction of the US arms in the region has been invariably followed by hostilities between India and Pakistan. Nor has New Delhi ignored the fact that Islamabad is using the opportunity to obtain as many as 70 F16s. Yet. what has made India as bland and

world are realising that their inter-

followed by a categorical announcement by the White House, if not the State Department. President Bush did convey to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on phone about the sale of F16s to Pakistan. But Bush did not say anything on America's help to build India into "a major world power." It was only Rice's observation and that too when she was juxtaposing the supply of F16s to Pakistan against what America was having in mind regarding India. New Delhi is reportedly thinking

ment by the US Secretary of State is

What probably is true is that America is worried over India's growing relations with Iran on the one hand and China on the other. A long-term deal which New Delhi has signed with Tehran for gas, with the possibility of the pipeline through Pakistan, has irritated Washington. As far as China, India's equation with it may not be to the liking of America. Beijing still remains the most recalcitrant capital that Washington faces in the world. In America's scheme of things, the democratic India is supposed to counter the doctrinaire China.

President Clinton was inclined to initiate the process to draw India nearer but then it exploded the bomb. Relations became worse After the remark by Rice, New Delhi is beginning to believe that America's attitude is changing and it has only to wait for Washington to open up its gates. This may explain why the proposed supply of F16s to Pakistan has not created the furore that it would have done otherwise. The very mention of F16 would make New Delhi furious in the past 15 years. Washington had to prop of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government, was not really angry. This might be because when it came to reaping the benefits all -- Left, Right or Central -- converged to become the same establishment.

Does this attitude indicate a change in India's perception that America tends to tilt towards Pakistan? Or does it mean the beginning of a new type of understanding between New Delhi and Washington where there is a realisation that the two largest democracies in the

VHS format are still in wide use all

over the world. While they are less

frequent in use compared to DVDs

the comment "I wonder if anybody

owns a VCR now-a-days" is totally

uncalled for. In fact it makes me

wonder if the reader is aware of some

grand event where the entire world's

mute as possible is the dream to become a "major world power" with Washington's help.

There is nothing wrong in it. But the ground realities do not give any indication that America means what Rice said. The US media paid little attention to her observation. Practically, no Congressman or Senator spoke in favour of what she said. If anything, the remark by Rice was taken as part of rhetoric, not worthy of any specific attention. This will be the inference drawn in any part of the world because a policy stateof buying F16s or the later version and also acquiring the technology to manufacture them. The step is not without risks. Russia, India's main supplier, may lift the ban on selling weapons to Pakistan, Moscow has persistently said 'no' to Islamabad's request for arms in the past.

The visit of the US officials from the Department of Energy does not suggest anything big. Even if this is the beginning, it is at a low level. America will have to go out of the way to release latest technology in different fields and offer a long-term

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

shown in TV in our hall where

Kuldip Navar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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.

### Doctor's prescriptions

All doctors do not issue written prescription to the patients for medical treatment. Some do, but do not mention the diagnosis. The homeopath doctors hardly issue prescrip tions, and do not even disclose the name of the medicine. It is a dangerous practice. Sometimes the blood pressure taken is not recorded on the sheet. The homeopath doctors hardly issue anything in writing! It is not possible for the non-technical patients to argue with the doctor.

I believe there are laws protecting the patient's interest, and the lega aspect of medical treatment. The bond signed by a patient before ar operation has to be officially approved, for legal implications Sometimes these prescriptions have to be shown to other doctors for second opinion. Patients with long sickness have to maintain files of history of the treatment. There is Similarly, the standard forms of test centres/clinics have to be scrutinised and approved by the authorities. Many patients suspect that these days too many tests (some expensive) are prescribed [a sort of fashion like going abroad for treatment]. How to curb such tendencies?

reports from the diagnostic medical

There is no official or independent referral centre for complaints at all district headquarters or for further information. Public awareness on these daily

routines has to be properly publicised, for obvious reasons. Can the citizens know what is the official reaction to such misgivings? A Mawaz.

## Too many newspa-

newspapers all my life. I am following with interest the court ruling on some questionable reporting.

As a regular and serious reader of

The problem, I reckon, is that the supply (the number of newspapers

in LDC) far exceed the demand (limited readers with limited budget at the lower-income levels). These papers need input to fill up the pages. Also, publishing a newspaper has become a sort of cult locally. wonder why; perhaps it is a status

"Freedom of the press" appears to be a secondary issue on the current local problems in our mass media. There may be hidden moving fingers! Old reader

### Mysterious death

of patient

My attention has been drawn to the above news item published in the DS on March 26, 2005. Incidentally I was present there when a chaotic situation erupted at the emergency unit of the Central Hospital, Dhaka that morning.

What I gathered is that, the surgeon, Brigadier General (retd) Anjan Kumar Dey had successfully

post-operative unit of the hospital. Meanwhile the joint hospital Director who was present at that

patient had died due to the negli-

gence of some medical staff at the

time couldn't handle the situation creditably. Unfortunately, the Director of the Central Hospital, Dr MA Quasem was in Gazipur on that day. If he was present, the situation had not aggravated. Dr Quasem is a very efficient and well-mannered hospital administrator. We would expect him to form an inquiry committee to investigate into the unfortunate incident and take necessary punitive measures against those who might be found guilty by the inquiry committee. This will retain and enhance hospital's accountabil-

Prof M Zahidul Haq Sher-e-Banala Aaricultural University, Dhaka-1207

Video tapes In response to the letter by reader "Ishrat Jahan Mitilata, DU" on video

millions of VHS players were destroyed. If not, they must still be around in millions of residences. I own such two "ancient" equipment along with 2 DVDs, 1 PS2 that can play both DVDs and CDs. Unlike the esteemed reader. I have not thrownmy VCRs into the garbage. But I am quite happy using them to view old films that are not out in DVD yet or have a cheaper VHS version. Rashid Atlanta, GA, USA

In memory Our country is small and over popu-

lated. When I was a small boy I saw in Dhaka and my district town Jessore a lot of paddy fields which are now filled with concrete junks. I tapes I would like to mention that do not mind to build in bad land, but

a lot of good and low land, which grow good rice, now a days filled with concrete and a big chunk of our country's urban sites is built on that fertile land. If you visit the cities in Japan and Korea, you see the govt. does not allow building anything where good rice grows even in the urban areas. Our govt, is all the time busy with power and politics and also some of our so-called specialists, who were educated in the west, but did not learn how the other developed countries built their countries in a nice way. So, somebody in the country should take action or show how to deal with this matter. Our good future depends on the protection of our lakes, rivers forests, flora and faunaÊfrom man made disaster. Bazlu. Vancouver, Canada

Our Pakistan feelings Some time I think that I am doing a wrong. Doing a wrong by hating

When live cricket matches are

Pakistan is competing, lots of students support Pakistan. I cannot do that. I always think about 71. Was that a dream? Or was that an error? If Pakistan cricket team come to our country then we go to the stadium with Pakistani flags. Our ladies are also seem attracted to the handsome cricketers of Pakistan. Some people say that they do not merge cricket and normal life. Ok they are players. But they are players of Pakistan, A country from where some people killed a great number of human beings in our country. The number was more than the total population of many countries in

I am not doing wrong. I am sure of that.

Hasnat Ahsan CUET, Rangunia, Chittagona

**Pre-emptive politics** Do the RAB activities in Bangladesh remind us of pre-emptive politics as

global level, and by Israel in the ME. not to speak of its fondness by the dictatorial regimes in many parts of Asia, Africa and S America. Bad imitation is more popular than good Here, both the major political parties have there own camou-

practised by the super-power at the

flaged styles of working, not to speak of the leftist stray groups. Now terrorist bombings in the country remind us of this modern way of enforcing political and other dogmas on the innocent. Our parliament is not working:

corruption has become institutionalised, the teaching profession has eroded moral ethics, cheating in business and contracts are widely prevalent. The government is supposed to take corrective actions at the national and social levels. But who cares, when sensitivities are also polarised? The ship of state is floating rudderless.