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FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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A bouquet of accords

Cooperation to partnership envisaged

In 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.

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.

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.

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.

Bus to Muzaffarabad

A move for peace

As 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 Kashmiris but also India and Pakistan.

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.

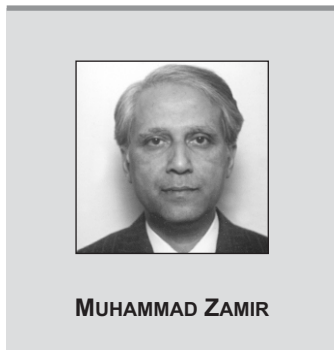
The journey has not been without pitfalls. There was a report of a bomb attack on a place where intending passengers were waiting and finally when the bus started moving it came under gunfire. Fortunately, it was dismissed as accidental fire.

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 situation.

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.

Reality has finally dawned



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

WE 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.

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.

Contrary to earlier denials by senior representatives of the Administration, it is now being established that we have a problem. This cognition has been important.

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'.

We must not forget the response of the State Minister for Home Affairs in the Parliament, in July last year, to a question by a Member of Parliament from the Awami League.

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.

This dangerous twist has been referred to by many columnists including myself ('Those other wars' 17 May, 2003, The Daily Star) in earlier op-ed pieces.

attacked. This has happened in Dhaka on 21 August, 2004 and most recently in Habiganj on 27 January this year. There have also been attacks in Gazipur and in Sylhet.

The use of small and light arms has emerged as the single biggest threat to our economic and socio-political stability.

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

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.

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

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

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

After months of procrastination, the government has banned the activities of two militant Islamic organisations the JMB (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'.

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

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.

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.

The Administration must not be dissuaded from containing this militancy just because some of its partners are upset and are describing these steps as an effort to create distance between the government and the pro-Islamists.

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.

This assumes particular importance given the fact that we are despatching our brave soldiers abroad to maintain international peace and security.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador... any response to mzamir@dhaka.net

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.

Use of explosives to create chaos is not something new in Bangladesh. This has happened since the beginning of the seventies.

Public concern about the illegal proliferation of such lethal arms has heightened with reports of smuggling of military arms and ammunition and their seizures in Bogra, Kuril (Dhaka) and recently in the Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Factory.

There have also been repeated 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

also indicated that trained militants are active in Bangladesh, particularly in the districts of Sirajganj, Gaibandha, Naogaon, Joypurhat, Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, 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.

We are in dire straits. We are however not alone. This predicament is valid for other countries in the region as well.

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'.

Bangladesh is not a terrorist state. We neither have Taliban nor extremism in general. We do however have pockets of militant Islam and some conservative rightwing elements intolerant of other's views.

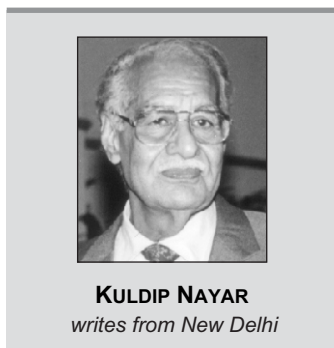
There is however a tangible difference the presence of law and order and the judicial process in other countries. A grenade attack on the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and a High Commissioner could have been investigated

have arrested some of their leaders and 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.

The question that we are faced with now is the presence and continuity 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.

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 if

A summer of Indo-US relations



KULDEEP NAYYAR writes from New Delhi

IF 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 21st century - has sent hopes soaring.

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 Jiabao to India.

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.

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.

Does this attitude indicate a change in India's perception that America tends to tilt towards Pakistan? Or, does it mark 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 world are realising that their interests are common?

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.

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.

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

world are realising that their interests 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.

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.

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.

of 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

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.

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India'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?

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

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.

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 prescriptions, and do not even disclose the name of the medicine.

I believe there are laws protecting the patient's interest, and the legal aspect of medical treatment. The bond signed by a patient before an operation has to be officially approved, for legal implications.

Too many newspapers

As a regular and serious reader of newspapers all my life, I am following with interest the court ruling on some questionable reporting.

reports from the diagnostic medical 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? 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, Dhaka

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.

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 (ret'd) Anjan Kumar Dey had successfully performed the operation but the

patient had died due to the negligence of some medical staff at the post-operative unit of the hospital.

Meanwhile the joint hospital Director who was present at that 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 accountability.

Prof M Zahidul Haq Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka-1207

Video tapes

In response to the letter by reader 'Ishrat Jahan Mitilata, DU' on video tapes I would like to mention that

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 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 thrown my 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 populated. 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 jungles. I 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.

Bazu, Vancouver, Canada

Our Pakistan feelings

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

shown in TV in our hall where 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.

Hasnat Ahsan CUET, Rangunia, Chittagong

Pre-emptive politics

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

practised by the super-power at the 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 imitation.

Here, both the major political parties have their own camouflaged 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.

AZ, Dhaka