

US lawmakers' outrageous demands



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

JRC meet bears fruit

Assurance on no river linking the key

TO our mind, the just-concluded two-day Indo-Bangla water talks held in Dhaka have been a success and, by past standards, a significant one. The joint declaration signed by the two sides is a positive statement of the magnitude of what has been accomplished during the meeting. We commend the cooperative nature of the talks and the amicable tenor of the joint declaration.

One must remember the fact that this is the first time in two years that the JRC has even met, and so on this count alone the meeting must be seen as a positive step forward. Further, the tone of discussion and apparent openness of both sides to listen to the concerns and point of view of the other country were very encouraging. On the whole, we express general if cautious satisfaction with the outcome of the meeting.

The most important thing to come out of the meeting from the Bangladeshi point of view was the categorical statement made by the Indian Water Resources Minister Priya Ranjan Dasmuni that the waters of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra rivers will not be diverted pursuant to any river linking project. The declaration was an unequivocal official statement, announced in front of the whole world, and thus we are persuaded of its credibility.

In addition, the Indian side made two more unequivocal proclamations that should be of comfort to us. The first is that India, as the upper-riparian, pledged that it would undertake no water project that would be harmful to Bangladesh, the second is that any steps taken by the Indian government that are likely to impact lower-riparian Bangladesh would be taken only after consultation.

Mr. Dasmuni has suggested that there has been wrongful propaganda on the subject of the river linking project. Perhaps. But it was also a lack of a categorical and unequivocal official statement on the part of India that fueled these suspicions. Any suspicions should now have been removed.

Finally, India will go ahead and build a power generation plant on the Tipaimukh, but has agreed to implement no irrigation scheme that would impede the flow of water to Bangladesh, and they have also promised to show us the design of that power plant. This strikes us as a mature and statesmanlike compromise that is emblematic of the cooperative nature of the talks.

There are still unresolved issues, such as the sharing of waters of some rivers, notably the Teesta. However, these have been noted and tabled until the next JRC meeting, and the positive tone of the recently concluded talks allows us to hope that these issues will be resolved before long.

Tidal wave victims

Sheltering them the pressing need

OVER 3,000 fishermen aboard around 200 trawlers are reported to be missing as the Bay turned very turbulent last Tuesday. At least 8,000 people had to leave their submerged homes after tidal waves swept across the coastal areas on the same day. As it happens in such cases, the magnitude of the disaster could be much higher than initial reports suggest.

The trawlers that were caught in the rough sea had sailed into it despite the fact that there was a depression and a cautionary signal was on. The weather in general was bad and it was very risky to sail into the deep sea under such circumstances. It is not clear whether they had ignored the signal or were not aware of it. Whatever might have been the case, there was some costly lapse. Dissemination of vital information regarding the weather to the fishermen and others working for their livelihood in the coastal areas is yet to achieve the desired level of efficiency. And no way has so far been found to prevent the smaller vessels from leaving the terminals when a grave danger is looming large. The result is often disastrous, as we have witnessed once more.

Some of the fishermen have been carried away to the West Bengal shore which shows that the Bay had turned very inclement.

Now, the first task is to trace the missing people and then rehabilitate those who have been forced to leave their homes, only to come back and see them in ruins. Reports indicate that the victims are yelling for shelter more than relief -- at this moment. The district administrations will have to provide shelter to the homeless first and then move on with further assistance.

Our disaster management record is good, but that perhaps is true when it comes to facing big natural calamities. However, the same sense of urgency to come to the rescue of the humanity in distress should spur the efforts to help the victims of Tuesday's tidal waves. Their needs have to be assessed accurately and a relief programme must be launched accordingly.

the facts. And the fact is that some US lawmakers have made some extraordinary demands of their government in respect of Bangladesh, which no self-respecting sovereign state can countenance, much less endure. One therefore cannot but wonder what is the actual position of the government on the matter?

Regrettably, it appears that the implications of the steps that the Congressmen have suggested in

the US lawmakers. At least we know what we are up against on both counts.

On the diplomatic front, the actions of the Congressmen suggested that their government should take, in view of what they term as political violence in Bangladesh, forebodes something dangerous and sinister. And insofar as the extremists are concerned, we at least have an adversary that has exposed its hand and much of its

ultimately take the entire region down the precipice. This has compelled them to urge their government to place a three-point proposal to the UN. One, send an investigation team to review the investigation and determine whether it has been conducted effectively. Two, appoint a UN special envoy to examine the Kibria case and investigate and report on the broader issue of political violence, and three, send inde-

and appropriate, for example in occupied Palestinian territory.

There is a good chance that the demands of the Congressmen, the concatenation of events of the past several years, coupled with the ostrich-like mentality of the government, compounded by the bombings of August 17, may reinforce the view that many in Bangladesh hold, which is that there is a move afoot to make Bangladesh a failed state, that all

Kibria has brought the question of political violence in Bangladesh to international attention more than all the others. There has been, understandably so, more concerns expressed after his killing than the more than hundred deaths heretofore due to bombings.

But our efforts should be to bring to justice through proper investigation all those responsible for all the deaths caused by the more than twenty incidents of bombing so far since 1999. One unnatural death is one too many, and no death can be slighted. All cases of death deserve equal treatment; stressing on any particular one desecrates those that have perished in similar incidents. Therefore, what we need is not a UN watchdog but substantive assistance to go into the roots of all the bombings.

It seems also that the US lawmakers have also gone overboard in expressing concerns for the regional security scenario. To any objective observer, their apprehensions would appear grossly exaggerated. There are many security and strategic developments around us that have far greater potential to destabilise the region than the recent developments in Bangladesh. But this does not absolve the government in any way from its responsibility to suppress the religious extremists whose gestation in our soil has been largely due to the government's inaction. Eliminating the so-called Islamists and their convoluted ideology can hopefully put the situation right.

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

NOBODY -- with the exception of those who don't have the good of the country at heart -- can take any delight in some US lawmakers' suggestion to their Secretary of State to take up the matters of political violence in Bangladesh at the UN World Summit, a matter that is internal to us and should be for us to address.

And nobody but the most naive can dismiss it as being merely an "internal communication with their secretary of state" to quote the spokesperson of the foreign ministry. The formulation of the spokesperson's reply, in that he said: "I consider..." rather than, "It is the view of the government..." suggests that it perhaps was his own personal opinion. It hardly needs to be stressed that the public is interested not in what the views of the spokesperson on an issue are, but on what the position of the government is on a particular matter.

The spokesman also articulated his suspicion, by way of his opinion, as to who might have "instigated" the whole affair. The public is, however, not so much interested on his suppositions as in

It seems also that the US lawmakers have also gone overboard in expressing concerns for the regional security scenario. To any objective observer, their apprehensions would appear grossly exaggerated. There are many security and strategic developments around us that have far greater potential to destabilise the region than the recent developments in Bangladesh. But this does not absolve the government in any way from its responsibility to suppress the religious extremists whose gestation in our soil has been largely due to the government's inaction. Eliminating the so-called Islamists and their convoluted ideology can hopefully put the situation right.

the said letter have not sunk in with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy planners. One would like to think that there are some fine minds at the ministry who will have taken in the gravity of the so-called "internal communication" that is too serious to be brushed aside through a statement by the spokesperson of the ministry, who, as the substance of his statement suggests, did not perhaps have the time to think through the matter.

While one can ascribe any number of motives behind the US Congressmen's move, our policy makers, at least those for whom the ominous connotations of these developments are not beyond comprehension, must be thankful to them as well as to the extremists, whose actions of the August 17 were the immediate cause for motivating

weaknesses, by making public their aims as well their tactics. At least we know who to go after, although the masterminds are yet to be identified, and the two major actors are yet to be apprehended.

The lawmakers' comments sounds like a recorded replay of what we have been hearing over the last several years; of Bangladesh almost being close to a failed state, that this land of ours has willy-nilly become hotbed for terrorists and may soon become a centre of international terrorism, and that the political flux in Bangladesh has the potential for affecting regional peace.

The US congressmen have been moved by the recent events in Bangladesh. Their actions stem from the apprehension that it might lead to a situation which may

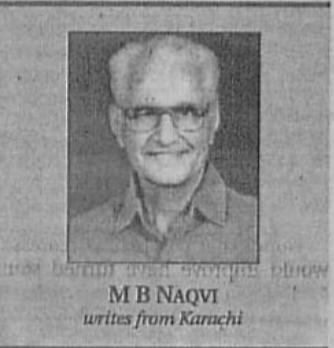
pendent UN monitors to Bangladesh if the Kibria case goes to trial.

What is extraordinary is the spontaneity with which the Congressmen suggest UN intervention in matters that fall within the charter of a sovereign government. How quickly they suggest employing UN investigation teams to exercise oversight of those investigations that have been conducted. And not only that, the suggestion that UN monitors should be employed to monitor the case of the ex-Finance Minister if it goes on trial, is extraordinary indeed. The US legislators have moved much faster in suggesting UN intervention in Bangladesh than some of their colleagues have been willing to even countenance ideas suggesting its employment in places where it was more relevant

the bombings carried out with clockwork precision are perhaps the handiwork of those who would like us to fail, and all the recent developments are orchestrated to do just that, and that there is more to the lawmakers' concern than meets our eyes.

No doubt there is political violence in the country that must be addressed, but does it merit the intervention of a supranational entity? There has indeed been failure on the part of our governments to conduct conclusive investigation into the bombings, particularly those that have targeted high profile personalities. The government cannot hide behind the excuse that there is a general spurt of violence and terrorism all over the world. It must also be said that the killing of Mr.

Will the next summit succeed?



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

THE Indo-Pakistan summit last Wednesday (Sept 14) only succeeded in continuing the talks and saying that terrorism and other impediments will not be allowed to derail the dialogue. There was no word about further agreements. President Pervez Musharraf has put a positive spin on this blankness. One hopes he is right. The Composite Dialogue has failed in its first two rounds. It was expected that this summit would agree to inaugurate the third round. It has not done so. In a way, we are back to square one, if not further behind it.

Let's enumerate the issues that require resolution. One puts them in six boxes. The first is about Kashmir. The second groups Siachin and Sir Creek problems. The third comprises issues connected with water, the offspring of the Kashmir problem, that are growing up. The fourth is the nuclear issue, all the implications of which are not yet recognised. The ramifications of these weapons are far-reaching, and if the problem is not defined, debated, and resolved, no other settlement will work. It is linked to the overall purpose of the two countries: whether they will be friends or enemies will hinge less

on Kashmir and more on nuclear weapons. The fifth are questions of free trade, MFN status for India, and the rights of Indian goods to transit through Pakistan. A lot of benefits for all is involved.

Finally, there is free travel and the visa regime between the two. Its importance is seminal. Unless there is free travel for common people of each country, there would be little progress on any issue. In that sense, all issues are

Pakistan, Kashmir is a litmus test; it is still for "Kashmir first and other things later." As for a possible Kashmir settlement, Dr. Manmohan Singh has again identified the Red Lines beyond which India will not go: this is redrawing of the present boundaries of Jammu and Kashmir state, ie India's sovereignty over the state's parts it controls, cannot be questioned. What may be left is a half-formal

determinedly pressurise the two governments to become close friends, the vested interests would always prevent a final settlement. That needs to sink in in both countries.

Nuclear weapons are a misunderstood issue. Two hostile nuclear deterrents, confronting each other from such close quarters, cannot permit friendship between India and Pakistan. Period. Nuclear weapons being

have to disappear; nothing else will work. This issue needs far more debate to notionally define solutions. It is a big issue and surpasses Kashmir in importance.

The fourth set of disputes are again easy if the political will to resolve them pre-exists. If not, they too become a major issue. For Pakistan, water is increasingly being recognised as its Achilles' heel. It needs ever more water for irrigation and drinking for an

wasted. The question is should Pakistan continue to insist on 'Kashmir or nothing'?

This policy has produced no results. It is futile. India refuses to see it as a strong pressure; it is unlikely to submit to Pakistan's wishes. It is profitable for Pakistan to take what is available and feasible. This means mutual enrichment of trading classes. Economic cooperation flows out of free trade, and development follows. The sky is the limit for economic cooperation between India and Pakistan, which can easily be extended to the whole of South Asia. Islamabad can unlock trade, economic cooperation, and development by giving India the MFN status and easy transit rights.

Lastly, there is the question of free travel and cultural exchanges between the two peoples. Hitherto both states have restricted visas to only a few on compassionate grounds. The paranoia of intelligence agencies in the two countries needs to be curbed; free travel by people will not undermine either state. The states are well established and strong enough to bear the "threat" of free travel. All civilised countries permit free travel.

The subcontinentals talk of a 6,000 year old civilisation. But their behaviour belies any respect for their inheritance. Ideally there should be no visas between India and Pakistan. If they become friends, economically cooperate, and engage in free trade, free travel, and free cultural exchanges, nothing injurious can happen and much will be gained. Look at what Nepal and Sri Lanka do. Scope for useful cooperation in culture and media needs no elaboration.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

Vested interests work against India-Pakistan friendship, which would hurt them. Industrial-military lobbies comprise resourceful people with much influence, for they ride on the chariot of patriotism. Unless the common people on both sides determinedly pressurise the two governments to become close friends, the vested interests would always prevent a final settlement. That needs to sink in in both countries.

inter-dependent, though some are more important. Among these are four: free travel, free trade, nuclear issue, and Kashmir.

Indications were that the New York encounter would sort out Siachin and Sir Creek. Well, it didn't. Whether the next encounter will or will not resolve them is the question. They are easiest to resolve. Everybody knows that a settlement on Siachin has been arrived at and a treaty has been initiated. Sir Creek is also not a grave issue. Will they settle these three next? Let's wait.

As for Kashmir, the assessment is like half-full or half-empty glass. Pakistan wants a settlement that "satisfies the two countries," though for PR purposes Kashmiris' satisfaction is frequently mentioned. The jointly accepted formulation is "to the satisfaction of the two countries." For

and half-informal settlement in separate regions that President Musharraf had indicated at one stage. That Indian Prime Minister has shown annoyance at President Musharraf's mention of Kashmir in his General Assembly speech throws a blindingly clear light on the problem's current status.

Don't forget Kashmir has been a bone of contention for 58 years. Strong vested interests have grown up in both countries leading them to militarise, and has set each against the other. The history of three wars and many quasi-wars is militarisation's result. These vested interests work against India-Pakistan friendship, which would hurt them. Industrial-military lobbies comprise resourceful people with much influence, for they ride on the chariot of patriotism. Unless the common people on both sides

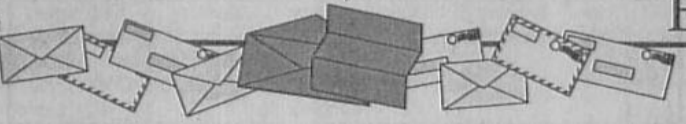
weapons of attack only, with no defence against them, two such states can never trust each other. So long as the issue is not resolved radically to either make the two deterrents disappear or the relationship should become so close that hostility between the two becomes unthinkable -- such as is the case of France and Britain. Probably, Indian and Pakistani hardliners still believe in the illusion that a detente can possibly prevent the two from going to war and enable political agreements to work.

Well, no such detente has emerged in two years. A certain number of CBMs have certainly been implemented; some more are likely to be. But are CBMs a solution? For the relationship to be so reoriented as to make hostility between the two unbelievable, the two sets of hostile deterrents will

exploding population. The hopeful factor in this is that both countries want to remain bound by 1960 treaty on Indus Waters. It provides a workable framework to sort out such issues, if necessary by arbitration. Baglihar issue has already been referred to the World Bank for arbitration. But given political will both issues can be resolved.

As for free trade and transit, Pakistan has made Kashmir the fulcrum on which everything turns. If Kashmir is not resolved, Pakistan would not give India MFN status, shun free trade with it, nor grant it transit rights for its trade with Central Asia. This is inconsistent with the need to exploit all economic opportunities. If no trade and no transit for four decades have not forced India to accept the Pakistani viewpoint, another forty years can also be

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.

Cockroach and railway

A journey is supposed to be interesting and enjoyable. And when it's a train journey, the enjoyment knows no bounds. I usually go home (Brahmanbaria) by train, though bus is also available. I just do it to have a pleasant journey. But when "COCKROACHES" become my fellow travellers, what can I do? I know the answer because I had to travel with them. A few days ago, I was going home by the Dhaka-Chittagong inter-city train--Mohanagar Provali. On that day I got up early in the morning and very soon started for Kamalapur Station in a jolly mood. After buying a ticket (shovon chair) I began to wait for the train. The train was late by an hour. I got on the train and took a seat. At that moment I felt a stinking odour coming from the toilet. Soon I also found olfactory images of cockroaches. I started searching for the source of the images. The image was

so bad that I could hardly tolerate. It was absolutely difficult for me to stay on my seat. I noticed through a peep that thousands of cockroaches were running to and fro. Cockroaches were here and there and cockroaches were all around. They were playing with each other as usual. They apparently revolted against me for spoiling their freedom. I am describing the situation that I faced. Furthermore, the room was very much filthy and unhygienic. The situation was extremely unpleasant for a journey. I was forced by them (cockroaches) to leave my seat and look for another. Now my question to the authorities is, how was my journey? How much I enjoyed it?

I was bewildered to see the indifference of the railway authorities. Now I dare to say that if such a situation continues, the number of passengers will decrease gradually. Finally, I appeal to the ministry of communications and

the railway authorities to take necessary steps to remove the problems and make train journey a little more comfortable. Md. Abdur Rahman University of Dhaka

Naipaul & Americanism

I was appalled after going through an interview of V.S Naipaul published in a recent issue of SWM. I've read some of his famous books, but while reading his interview I couldn't help wondering what's happened to the people of this civilisation. He is of the view that some nations deserve to be destroyed from the earth, including Saudi Arabia & Iran as he finds the nations terrorists. Now the sensible question that rises in a sensible mind is that if a person of his stature, who is believed to be a social reformer, a humanist & so on, nourishes the thought of demolishing countries, as Bush & Blair are

doing in the name of a war against terrorism, then what is left for the humanity? Suppose these countries are breeding terrorism, though there is no authenticity about the point, can any human think of complete demolition of nations with their innocent people? What Bush has unleashed in Iraq is causing annihilation of innocents at random.

We have to come to the conclusion that V.S. Naipaul does belong to the camp of Busha fatal blow to humanity at large. Rafiqul Islam Rime Agrabad, Chittagong

Jamaat MP's stand on Aug 17

The news report itself was cause for great concern to us, specially in the backdrop of the official Jamaat position on the issue, that is, RAW and Mossad were behind the Aug 17

blasts and not the JMB and JMJB. Now with the editorial on the subject, we feel a little relaxed because the government may now take cognisance of the issue of Jamaat links with the JMB and JMJB. We have seen before the government taking DS editorials seriously.

But the issue of vote stills clouds BNP's mind and prevents it from annoying the Jamaat. Can't the press suggest a solution to the BNP on that issue?

How about an election alliance between the AL and the BNP to fight a common enemy of Democracy?

Will the DS take up its pen to achieve this objective? Nothing after all is impossible, if the will is there and the intention is good. Areader, One-e-mail

What Israelis think...

Only a few weeks ago a twenty something ex-Israeli army officer

and his girlfriend helped me when I locked myself out my car -- for a fee. They came to California to visit and find part time work before going back to Israel for higher studies. One thing led to another and I showed them page 6 of my Bangladeshi passport, which famously states, valid for "all countries of the world except Israel". They chuckled. Amongst other things, we discussed suicide bombers; while the man was less forgiving, the young woman said that when people have nothing to lose and are treated like animals, people whose father or brother or mother or sister have been killed, people who have nothing left in life to lose they are easily persuaded to become suicide bombers. All three of us agreed that there are those on both sides who want to live in peace people like them and I who cried when Yitzhak Rabin was killed by fundamentalist Jewish terrorists.

They have to let their voices be heard. I told them that one day when peace breaks out in that region, my country would probably recognise theirs and I could go and visit their country.

I feel that the Palestinian national flag flying high and proud from Gaza is a step closer to that end. Shabbir A. Bashir, PhD San Francisco Bay Area, US

Good example

Some days back, one of my favourite students, Maureen, told me an almost unprecedented story: an indigent lad somewhere at Anandapur, Savar, with great enthusiasm, was teaching his playmates, who are deprived of education, what he had learnt at his school.

Which factors induce the boy to undertake that sort of responsibility? Whatever the factors, the boy, without any doubt, has felt the urge to instill his quest for knowledge into

his peers. What a yeoman's service he is rendering! Maybe he will never know.

Couldn't it be taken as an example to educate those children, who are financially or in other ways incapable of pursuing education? Let's forget any sort of class discrimination, and take an initiative that each and every educated person would, with great responsibility, teach the wretched children, at least to make them capable of reading and writing and assimilating some arithmetic. Such initiatives can be effective in ensuring an illiteracy-free Bangladesh. To rehabilitate those children properly, the government and the affluent NGOs should undertake the next step.

Let's, putting the example of that gracious lad before us, do something for society. Minhazur Rahman Jahangirnagar University