

Indo-Pak cooperation in Kashmir

It should help strengthen Saarc

THE decision taken jointly by the governments of India and Pakistan to open up the border dividing earthquake-hit Kashmir to allow freer flow of relief supplies and facilitate the movement of survivors and their families across the LOC is an act of bilateral statesmanship. It is a path-breaker; one that we hope will herald a sea change in the confrontational politics of the region.

Pakistan and India have been moving ever closer to friendly relations these last several months with significant engagement on the most sensitive subject of Kashmir. This latest agreement not only will come as a great comfort to Kashmiri families who will now be able to see relatives and friends on the other side of the border, but will also be of considerable practical benefit as well. Most importantly, however, it signals a new willingness on the part of the leadership of the two countries to put the interests of the people before the interests of the government.

The fact that the deadly bomb blasts that ripped through Delhi earlier this week have not succeeded in derauling this cooperative initiative is even more praiseworthy. What we are at last seeing is the emergence of true political maturity and compromise between the two countries on an issue that has been ruled by emotion and partisan politics for half a century.

Indeed, as a corollary, one is pleased to note that the upcoming Saarc summit in Dhaka does not seem to be in any jeopardy due to the terrorist attack in Delhi nor the serial bombings in Bangladesh earlier on. All countries in the region appear to be taking the matter in their stride and appear determined not to let saboteurs and provocateurs stand in the way of this crucial summit meeting.

There is a lesson here for all of us. What the region needs is statesmanship and the politics of maturity, that is responsive to the needs of the citizens, and aimed at defusing tensions and establishing cordial relations, that will ultimately be to the benefit of all concerned.

Night of divine blessings

Time to introspect and move ahead

LAILAT-ul-Qadr is a glorious night of divine blessings as the Holy Quran, the greatest gift from the Almighty was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) on this night. Muslims observe this night through praying for the well being of the human race as a whole.

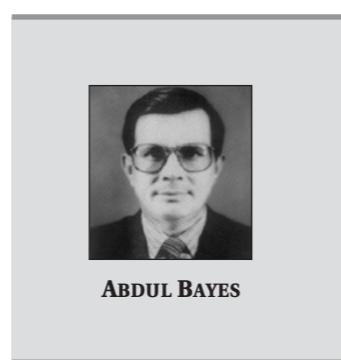
The night takes us beyond the mundane and the material world where seeking the mercy of Allah the beneficent is the noble goal of man -- His greatest creation. It comes at a time when the devotees have already spent 27 days of self-abstinence and purification. The night has been given greater dignity than that of a thousand months. So it is the finest time for the devotees to seek communion with the Almighty and reach a higher plane of spiritual advancement. It is time to seek Allah's forgiveness.

Islam has laid maximum emphasis on developing the human qualities that can elevate man to the level of the most blessed humans in the reckoning of Allah. And this can be achieved by sacrificing a bit of worldly pleasures and comforts even when a human being is endowed with enough wealth in this transitory life. Ramadan teaches us to feel the pangs of hunger and self-inflicted deprivation. So it is a month of great religious significance and Lailat-ul-Qadr is the greatest of the nights of Ramadan, as the Holy book that would shape the destiny of Muslims and change the world in a perceptible way descended on earth on this night.

Muslims observe the day with the same devotion and faith as they have done over the centuries. However, the world is now a different place as peace and tranquility is threatened in many places and violence and bloodshed have become the order of the day. So the message of Islam is now even more relevant -- the well meaning and the righteous have to raise their voice against all evils.

The violence and evil acts that some fanatic elements are resorting to in the name of Islam must be condemned unequivocally. Let the spirit of Lailat-ul-Qadr and the teachings of the Holy Quran help mankind overcome the crisis that it is passing through.

Errant and erratic education



ABDUL BAYES

THE Bangladesh Awami League (AL) recently organised a series of seminars in Dhaka city. Seemingly, the party has put up its efforts at anti-government points most productively during the month of holy Ramadan. As I can recall, AL also organised a number of such seminars while in opposition during 1991-96 period. The aim of the present seminars, as revealed by the introductory remarks of the party secretary general Mr Abdul Jalil, is to enable the party strengthen its information and knowledge base through dialogues and discourses. Arguably, this kind of exercise helps a party prepare itself for a future run on the basis of the deliberations in the seminars. I must appreciate the move at least in the backdrop of the allegation that politicians in Bangladesh tend to promote language of weapon rather than weapon of language. However, today in this column, I shall pick the seminar on Education Sector that took place on 27 October 2005.

Presided over by the former education minister ASHK Sadeq, the keynote paper embracing the whole education sector was presented by the former VC of Dhaka

University Dr AK Azad Chowdhury. A number of distinguished educationists and politicians made their points pertaining to education. A comparative picture of education sector -- during AL and BNP regime -- seemingly goes to support the hypothesis that education in Bangladesh today is gradually drifting towards decay. Allow me to cite few examples in support of the contention.

pared to Tk.400 million during the period 1968-1996 -- almost 30 years! Dhaka, Rajshahi and other universities moved, more or less on the same scale as far as infrastructural development is concerned. Whereas during the last four years, no such allocations appeared on the accounts of the universities. The science and technology universities established during the last government are limping on the ground under

influence of the goons.

The Kudrat-E-Khuda Education Commission -- set up soon after independence -- came up with a scientific, secular and 'socialist' education system for the society. The then government avowed to carry forward the recommendation of the said commission. But after the "massacre-1975", we noticed no progress towards that end. In fact, since then and sordidly

"bottom-up" devise to develop an education policy. The policy aimed at making education more meaningful especially in facing the chiming challenges posed by the new millennium. Unfortunately, the present government paid no respect to the earlier democratically devised policy and, instead, established a Commission comprising the ruling party supporters. The report so generated has neither been publicised nor placed for

government on this issue as to why and how we should move with the system. But it seems that the education ministry is interested more in imposing policies rather than involving discussions on policies. Nurul Islam Nahid, a former MP, possibly, rightly remarked: uni-track system has many-track business implying that few hundred crores of taka have already been spent and few more crores are in the offing in the name of publishing new books.

Of all the ailments mentioned, the most serious one seems to be the leakages of questions in the examinations conducted by the Public Service Commission (PSC). Few times, the leakages took place, allegedly, with a view to placing partisan political cadres at the pinnacle of administration. The PSC is said to be the constitutional custody of the merits in administration who would run the administration. By politicising the examination, the PSC has lost its credibility as an independent institution.

By and large, during the last four years educational system in Bangladesh saw no sign of progress. Politicisation and patronisation have gripped the system. To heal the wounds, one needs to invoke the education policy passed by the earlier government. There could be some additions or subtraction keeping in mind the changing scenario but the basic fabric should remain. We want to get rid of a society engulfed in high inequality and fundamentalist thoughts. And education could be the key towards achieving that goal.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

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During the AL regime, the literacy rate rose from 44 per cent to 65 per cent -- a quantum leap in five years. But then on, no appreciable progress could be in evidence on that account. The gender equality at primary level achieved during the earlier period and other achievements around education earned for the government a UNICEF prize. An international language centre was proposed at Dhaka and supported by international agencies. It could be a national pride but fell flat after this government assumed power in 2001.

The physical and human resources development in universities that took place in earlier period remains unmatched till today. My own university -- Jahangirnagar -- bagged Tk.440 million during 1996-2001 com-

mismangement. The session jam in universities came down from, on average, 1.6 year to 6-7 months and then rose to reach the earlier level again. The convocations were held regularly and extra-academic pursuits proliferated under the aegis of the then Bangladesh Association of Universities (BAU). Introduction of the semester and grading systems went to place the universities in the planks of modern universities. The rules of the game in universities and other educational institutions were truly adhered to at that time compared to their being, allegedly, 'ravaged' during the current regime. By and large, educational institutions are in disarray with educated people or education lovers disdained to the doors of these institutions. The school and college governing bodies allegedly groan under the

though, Bangladesh experienced a multi-polar education system in multi-colour educational institutions. In some places, especially in rural areas, poor pupils have open classes under shades of trees in the absence of structured class rooms while in urban areas we have cozy class rooms for the richer segments. If one examines the single most cause of the income inequality in Bangladesh, not surprisingly perhaps, one would land with the lack of level playing field in education.

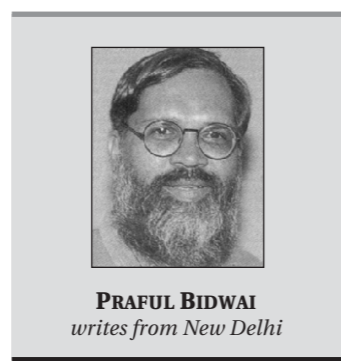
Unfortunately the country does not have an education policy at the moment. Everything seems to be running on adhocism. However, the last AL government enacted an education policy for the country after threadbare discussions with stakeholders, in parliament and within government. It was almost a

public discourse. An imposed education policy seems to be impinging upon the whole system.

Critics go to argue that the real motive of the present government pertaining to education is revealed by the very desire to take us some decades back. The so-called "one or uni-track" system in the secondary level survived in the 1960s but, given the growing changes around us, had to give way to the on going multi-track system. The present system is not without faults but the government needs to update the system. The proposed uni-track system places science education behind the burner while putting the religious education into prominence. As much as 18 subjects will have to be studied by students within a span of 15-16 effective months! People could be benefited from an explanation from the

Farewell to disarmament?

India in the US 'nuclear tent'



PROF. BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

WHEN Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed a nuclear cooperation agreement in July with President Bush, he signalled a major shift in India's energy policy, as well as its foreign policy and international security posture. The implications of the nuclear deal soon began to unfold.

India started dithering on the Iran gas pipeline. The link between "strategic partnership" with the US and ditching Iran, India's long-standing friend, became clear. On September 24, India broke ranks with the Non-Aligned Movement at the International Atomic Energy Agency and voted with the US for reporting Iran to the UN Security Council for minor breaches of IAEA rules.

The vote signified a *turning point* -- away from independence in foreign policy-making. India had decided on the vote even before Dr Singh left for New York two weeks earlier.

Now, Foreign Secretary Shyam

Saran has announced a further shift in India's nuclear posture. In a lecture on October 24, just two days after the India visit of US under-secretary of state Nicholas Burns, he outlined India's new nuclear doctrine.

After 60 years, India has unceremoniously buried the disarmament ghost and decided to become a "responsible" nuclear weapons-state (NWS) which will prevent

fighting for a nuclear weapons-free world.

Yet, Mr Saran claims "continuity and consistency" in India's approach. To do this, he falsifies India's record on nuclear disarmament. Thus, he says, India "can truly claim to be among the founding fathers" of non-proliferation. He invokes Nehru as non-proliferation's apostle.

Nothing could be further from

ultimate instruments of *terror*. Nuclear weapons aren't even a sign of strength. Their possession doesn't ensure strategic superiority or military victory. Or else, the US wouldn't have lost in Vietnam and the USSR in Afghanistan.

There is of course a link between nuclear weapons elimination and their step-by-step reduction. It's in that spirit that Nehru proposed a Comprehensive Test Ban in 1954,

are generally illegal.

Two years later, India exploded five bombs and joined the very global order which it had condemned as "Atomic Apartheid." There was *no security rationale* for this. The Vajpayee government didn't conduct the promised strategic defence review. It merely fulfilled the obsession of one particular political current.

The decision was hidden from

kinds of compromises to save it -- pressures on energy policy, trade negotiations on agriculture and services, patents, and on Iran.

Mr Saran has already prepared the ground for the next Iran vote by saying India won't accept "pursuit of clandestine activities in respect to WMD-related technologies." This sounds tough, but reflects US pressures.

By jumping on the non-proliferation bandwagon, India will become the world's laughing stock. It has hypocritically moved from being a force for peace to a force for hegemony. India's capitulation to the US even while it pays lip-service to a multi-polar world will earn it ridicule.

India's nuclear posturing lacks credibility given its miserable rank of 127 in the UN Human Development Index -- among the bottom one-fourth of the world's nations.

India earned the world's respect when it was poorer -- because of its democracy, its moral clarity, its secularism, and its effort at making the world a better place. The new turn will rob India of all this and earn it the world's disdain, even contempt.

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Prof. Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons, while keeping and expanding its own atomic arsenal. That's what the one-sided non-proliferation agenda is all about.

This bias is duly reflected in Mr Saran's speech. The word "disarmament" occurs just once in it -- in a de-contextualised reference to the 1988 Rajiv Gandhi plan for global nuclear abolition, presented to the United Nations. "Global nuclear disarmament" doesn't figure at all. But "non-proliferation" occurs as many as 25 times!

This is a *shameful break* with India's long-standing policy and the solemn pledge made by the United Progressive Alliance only last year to take "leadership" in

the truth. Nehru campaigned for *disarmament*, not non-proliferation.

There's a clear difference between the two terms. Non-proliferation is about preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, both *horizontally* (to countries other than the NWSs), and *vertically* (expansion and refinement of existing arsenals). Disarmament is about getting rid of *all nuclear bombs from all countries*.

Non-proliferation accepts the legitimacy of weapons of mass annihilation. *Disarmament* regards them as an unmitigated evil, which must be abolished *everywhere*.

Disarmament's premise is that nuclear weapons don't generate security and cannot defend national sovereignty. They are the

while *renouncing* nuclear weapons for India. India continued to link nuclear restraint and non-proliferation to disarmament even after the 1974 blast.

Now, that link has snapped. This is a *betrayal* of the Nehruvian legacy.

Only a decade ago, India pleaded before the International Court of Justice that nuclear weapons are *incompatible* with international law. India's Foreign Secretary said: "We don't believe that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is essential for national security... We are also convinced that the existence of nuclear weapons diminishes international security."

The Court, the world's highest authority on international law, ruled in 1996 that nuclear weapons

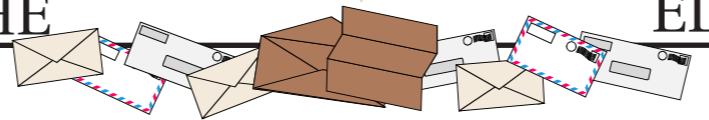
the Cabinet, but not the RSS. The *sangh* mandated it.

Soon, India teased and taunted Pakistan into crossing the nuclear threshold. A year later, the two fought history's most serious conventional conflict between any two NWSs. Today, millions of their citizens have become vulnerable to nuclear missile attacks.

Since 1998, India's military spending has more than doubled. India is getting sucked into *two arms races*, a minor one with Pakistan, and a major one with China. India's room for independent global manoeuvre has shrunk since Pokharan-II.

Now, India is compounding its 1998 blunder. It has put such high stakes on the US nuclear deal that it can be blackmailed into making all

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.

Shiekh Hasina

Emotion has no role in running a country. Sk. Mujib was a great leader, but could not run the administration. BAKSAL could have been a good idea if it was formed right after his return from Pakistan. Not after he allowed his party members to get into all activities, including looting state property, and raising of Rakkhi Bahini. People must have seen the activities of LAL BAHINI and all such outfits. Leadership is no easy thing; one has to have vision and determination to acquire leadership qualities. Sk. Hasina got an opportunity and messed it up because she made almost similar mistakes like her father in running the country. Masud, One-e-mail

with our attention. These are the GYAN PAPI s who, time and again, sabotaged our heroic struggles against all sorts of tyrannies, oppressions and brute repressions from the time of Mir Jafar. My simple question to them is, where have they been during our nation's most grim days of 1971? Had they been anywhere near our War of Independence, they would have known what price we paid to earn those lofty ideals: Democracy, Nationalism, Socialism and Secularism. These are the ideals for which millions of our brave sons shed their lives and succeeded in setting them as our national ideals and aspirations. None has the right to challenge this as long as one claims to be a citizen of Bangladesh. The conspirators and the backdoor-mongers, taking advantage of the cowardly assassination of our great leader Bangabandhu, have broken

the heart of our nation, the Constitution of 1972 and introduced all the irrelevant words with the ulterior motive of turning the nation subservient to the interests of their masters. But despite all the failures and lapses, we can take pride in our brilliant success of having frustrated the cherished dreams of those traitors, even in the absence of Bangabandhu, Tajuddin Ahmed, Capt. Monsur Ali, Nazrul Islam etc. Without even knowing well what BAKSAL really meant and what it aspired to achieve, some individuals have embarked upon crying for democracy. They do not even know what an excellent form of democracy BAKSAL had proposed. That would have been the best form of democracy for the toiling masses. A democracy where the government would not sponsor any particular individual. There would be no Godfather!

None need be apologetic about BAKSAL. We of course firmly uphold BAKSAL as a concept. Yes, there were errors in implementing the programme due to various reasons. Bangabandhu was no super-being. He was entitled to making mistakes. But it would be a blatant lie to state that he imposed BAKSAL without the consent of the Nation. The proposal was discussed in depth for two full days in the National Parliament and later overwhelmingly voted for adoption. All the existing political parties at the time were warmly invited to participate in the programme and Most did. But those who opposed it were not persecuted or harmed in any manner. Col. Osmani, for example. That was the nature of Bangabandhu's BAKSAL.

Our country is now passing through the most difficult period of its history. The so called Islamists

have declared a war on our freedom, culture and the values with the vile design of setting up a Taliban style regime. The government in power is behind the ugly forces, providing the much needed shelter and publicity. It is no easy task to resist and foil the well organised conspiracies of the evil cult. Though I am no fan of Sheikh Hasina, I with all eagerness to find an alternative, find that there is none other than Sheikh Hasina who could unite and assume the leadership of the combined progressive forces to spearhead a successful mass movement to return the country to its original track, where all conflicting patriotic forces would be able to resolve their differences in peace and without fear. Anticipating the emergence of a powerful combined resistance under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, the enemies of freedom and

Bengalee nationalism have begun a smear campaign against the progressive political parties like AL, Workers Party, JSD etc., and the politicians in general. We must not be swayed away by the cheap slogans and ill-motivated publicity of these enemies of our independence and culture. Victory is ours. Meghodut, Dhaka

Sleeping ministries?

More than four years' time has passed since the BNP-led coalition came to power, but things have changed little for the people who live in slums, streets or near the railway stations. Many of them are jobless, frustrated about what has happened to them in the last few years. The rich got richer, and the poor got poorer. That means if you are rich, you can live with less difficulties using the modern technologies,

changing your lifestyle, and if you are poor, you better start thinking about saving money for buying foods, clothes, and a shelter, because they are not cheap anymore. On September 30, 2005, Star Weekend Magazine published a progress report on the past four years of BNP-led alliance government. The report highlighted some interesting comments of economist Abul Barakat. Regarding agriculture the economist said, "Our economy is still agro-based, but if anyone deserves credit for anything good that happened to the agriculture, it is the peasant and Allah, the government did nothing." The Prime Minister and top ranking BNP men always claim that production has increased dramatically. It's hard to believe, there is no name of agricultural products, such as wheat, sugar or soybeans in the list of main exports, which may contain four

things--- garments, fish, jute goods, and leather products. I guess the Ministry of Agriculture is now sleeping and will wake up during the campaign for votes next year.

Recently, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has decided to introduce a unitrack system, instead of a multi-track system in high schools. A lot of discussion has been going on the issue, as many academics and columnists do not appreciate the decision made by MoE. I am not a professor, nor a member of any board, but I, as a student, just could not agree there is any need for introducing such a system while the MoE has other problems to deal with, like banning student politics in universities or developing the quality of curriculum in madrassahs. Tahsin Hyder Maple Leaf International School Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Grim days of 1971

I thought I would never favour them