

# Prospects of Indo-Bangla strategic partnership

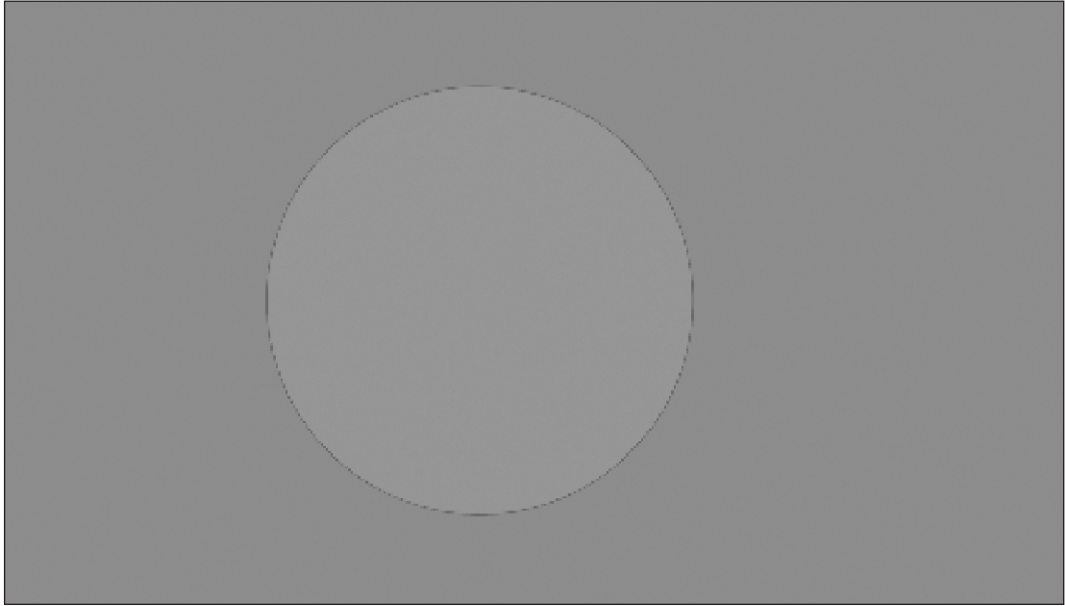
WALI-UR RAHMAN

CAN 'Political History' throw a spanner in the works of strategic partnership between India and Bangladesh? I shall argue in the negative. There is a tectonic shift in global geopolitics. Nothing better demonstrates this gradual but inevitable shift than the dramatic rise of Asia with China, India and Japan as the key players. Asia is reclaiming its lost economic (and therefore strategic) preeminence in the world. As a matter of fact, Asia is already working as ballast against the subaltern effect of globalization. Asia's growing strength is underlined by the fact that China, India and Japan with Taiwan and South Korea in the tow, account for about \$3 trillion in western debt.

Asia will continue to be the global economic locomotive for foreseeable future. In the past one-year or so, a quiet revolution (economic) has taken place in Asia. Japan is slowly but decisively moving out of China and investing in the capital market of India recognizing democratic India as a strategic partner. Japan used to give around \$30b as Development Assistance to

China in the past. After being rattled by the officially backed anti Japan mob-protests in China in April 2005 raking up 'political history', Japan is suddenly passing through a period of soul-searching with political assertiveness and nationalism reoccupying the center stage. The Koizumi Government cut its development assistance to China by half indicating to phase it out completely by 2008 or so. And India is the single biggest beneficiary in receiving the economic aid. According to the Reuters Group research, 40 percent of net funds are coming from Japan Inc. Under Clinton, the Indo-US NSSP signed in March 2000, and under Bush the July 18, 2005 nuclear agreement with the United States changed the canvas of strategic partnership in the global strategic equation "from a global democracy Initiative to an enduring military-to-military 'Disaster Response Initiative' for operation in the Indian Ocean region and beyond" puts India in the global stage.

In the above backdrop, the relationship between India and Bangladesh has to be reassessed. India is big, continental. Bangladesh is the underbelly, as



it were, of India. India is a successful democracy with secular culture as its linchpin. When the 'heretic' Geordano Bruno was burnt at the stake in Campo Di Fiore in Rome (16th century), Emperor Akbar finished his project of legally 'codifying minority rights including religious freedom for all'. Four centuries later, Bengalees fought a bloody war of independence in

1971 to assert her religious and cultural freedom. She fought for a secular, non-communal state. Bangalee Muslims were joined in her fight against the Waderamilitary led 'political Islam' of Pakistan, by the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Adivashis. India gave us strategic support and aided our just struggle against Pakistan.

Indo-Bangla relationship is

thus based on certain historic desiderata. The economic and military disequilibria is not a hindranceit is rather a strength. India is an Asian giant, on the way to be a big power. The NSSP with the US and the slow but gradual development of strategic partnership with Japan lent India an astounding level of strategic depth and geo-strategic height. India continues to be the largest

trading partner of Bangladesh, with formal and informal trading together. With the removal of non-tariff and other barriers, Bangladesh will find in India a healthy trading and business destination. Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee's whirlwind tour of Bangladesh carried a message. India is now ready to work with Bangladesh to the mutual benefit of both. With

possible investment in power sector and regional collaboration with India as the key player, Bangladesh stands to gain. Transshipment and Asian Highway will lend the historic connectivity lost due to the short sightedness of our leaders in the recent past. We have demonstrated in a research that Bangladesh will make Tk. 500 crore to Tk. 5000 crores as

annual transit fees through transshipment alone. The fresh air brought in by the government of Fakhruddin Ahmed will be our 'Plimsoll line' in considering our national security matters. We stand to gain more than any other country. To think otherwise will, in my view, be reductionism.

The writer is a senior member of the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), London.

## Another war knocking at the door of Asia

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSAIN

THERE appears to be another war knocking at the door of Asia to complete the cycle of President Bush's pre-emptive doctrine. This time again a Muslim country is likely to be the victim of aggression, although the president, in his recent speech, said that he would not invade Iran.

destroy networks providing weapons and training to US enemies in Iraq.

Another sign is the removal of Negro Ponte, 1st Director of National Intelligence, because he did not subscribe to the theory of Bush's neoccons that Iran could produce a nuclear bomb soon. Ponte is of the view that it could take another ten years for Iran to

Iraq. The American media has begun to dance to that tune, with briefing from the Pentagon. The newly appointed secretary of defense, Gates, also toed the same line of complaint against Iran, saying that Iranians were killing US soldiers. Meanwhile, the American intelligence community, in a report to President Bush, described the situation in Iraq, as

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was pressed by the House of Foreign Relations Committee on February 7.

Successive Iranian governments have failed to improve relations with the United States since President Bush assumed power in 2001. This is why Jim Webb, newly elected senator from Virginia, said that peace was not possible in the region if the US did not deal with them (Iran). Jim Webb called military saber rattling without diplomatic initiative half a strategy.

Although the President denied having any intention of attacking Iran, he raised US naval presence in the Persian Gulf to the highest level. Two aircraft carriers are now in the region. Another ominous sign is the increase of military spending in the new budget submitted by the president to Democrat controlled Congress on February 5. His budget calls for \$145 billion for Iraq and Afghanistan. The surge of troops in Iraq, according to the president, is aimed at giving the Iraqi government a window of time to make strides toward peace and unity. This is contrary to what generals in the field, the bipartisan Iraq study group, or the think tanks talked about. Additional troops will likely be used against Iran from Iraq.

That the Bush administration has no desire or vision for peace in the Middle East has been reflected in the comments made by President Bashir Assad of Syria on the ABC "good morning America" program on February 5. Any attempt by the president against Iran would have a devastating effect in the region. The US instigated civil war in Iraq would cause both Shiite and Sunni to fight against American troops.

The Christian Science Monitor, in its recent editorial, points out clearly that "the creeping confrontation over Iranians in Iraq could be part of an attempt to force Iran to meet a UN deadline later this month" to stop uranium enrichment. It said: "unexpected armed incident could trigger an irreversible slide toward open conflict with Iran. That would be disastrous."

I would like to conclude by quoting Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor to former president Jimmy Carter, who told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee recently that Bush's current strategy will likely lead to a head-on-conflict with Iran, and with much of the world of Islam at large.

The writer is a former diplomat.

## Intervention by States: A strategy

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

ORDINARILY intervention means forceful interference in the affairs of another country. During the 18th century, if a powerful state did not approve some aspect of policy of another weaker state, it used to intervene so that the other state would behave in the way as the powerful state wanted. This was known in common parlance as "gun-boat diplomacy".

For example, Lord Palmerston, Prime Minister of Britain, enunciated a theory when he was Foreign Minister that a state was entitled to intervene militarily against a defaulter state. In 1902 naval units of Britain blockaded the coast of Venezuela to compel that country to make payment of the loans provided by British private banks.

Intervention invokes two principles that are in conflict with each other. One is sovereign equality of states and the other right of self-interest. It is a question as to whether use of force can be used for self-interest. The UN Charter made it clear in Article 2(7) that provides that member-states are prohibited to intervene in matters that are "essentially within the domestic jurisdiction."

### Humanitarian Intervention Responsibility to Protect

The concept of sovereignty has undergone changes in the context

of protection of human rights. The protection of human rights at both the national and international level is intimately connected.

All international human rights instruments require states' domestic systems to provide adequate redress for those whose rights have been violated and accordingly, a state cannot treat its citizens in any manner it likes because it has to protect and respect citizens' certain basic human rights. It is only when domestic systems fail to protect basic human rights of citizens, international mechanisms for securing human rights come into play. This is known as humanitarian intervention.

Furthermore the term "domestic jurisdiction" came into sharper focus when apartheid South African white minority regimes discriminated the black majority people in that country. The racist regimes passed laws restricting black people to enjoy political, economic and social rights on the basis of skin colour.

Under international law, supported by the UN Charter, such treatment in South Africa is contrary to basic human dignity and equality. Accordingly, sanctions were imposed on South Africa by the UN. Although South Africa sought to invoke the argument of domestic jurisdiction, it did not cut any ice.

Against the background, it is canvassed that a minimum

standard of civilized behaviour towards its citizens is expected from every state. A dictator or a ruler cannot deny fundamental human rights of citizens within the country in such a manner that would shock the conscience of the international community. This newly developed international public policy imposes an obligation on a state to treat a human being with dignity and the duty of international community to render assistance to people is being increasingly emphasized by the UN.

The humanitarian intervention is now called the doctrine of "The Responsibility to Protect". The issue is not the "right to intervene" but "responsibility to protect" people of every state. This means sovereignty today has to include the states' responsibility to protect its own people. If a state fails its responsibility, international community will come to protect the people from gross violations of human dignity.

### Preventive intervention

Preventive intervention is legal if it is acted upon with the approval of the UN. Such collection action gives international legitimacy of action. However use of force does not mean that it can be used arbitrarily. Five criteria are to be observed for legitimacy in use of force: seriousness and imminence of threat, proper purpose, last resort, proportionate use of weapons to remove threat and consequences

of action.

This doctrine of collective preventive intervention is vastly different from the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive intervention. Bush said that America would not permit world's dangerous nations to threaten America with weapons of mass destruction. Basically what he said is "He who rises to kill us, we will pre-empt him and kill him first".

This Bush doctrine is misconceived and wrong because it does not distinguish between imminent threat and the capacity to threat. Capacity is different from action. Capacity means potentiality and that it may not be used at all. Furthermore it is a unilateralist policy and ignores the UN. Bypassing the UN means destroying international legal order. Hard power cannot resolve an issue what is an essentially political conflict. Dialogue is necessary; use of hard power will aggravate tension and conflict.

The world consists of an international society of multiple actors co-operating in resolving inter-state disputes rather than handling them on its own. The Bush administration has burnt its "fingers" on Iraq and has returned to multilateral diplomacy with regard to its dispute with North Korea and Iran on nuclear proliferation. It is a welcome signal for peace and stability of the world order.

The writer is a Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.



In his first press conference in two months, President Bush, on February 14, indicated that he was planning to take action against Iran as he had found "evidence of the presence of quads force in Iraq," which is an elite special operation unit in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary guard. This press conference took place when fierce debate on President Bush's surge of US troops to Iraq is taking place in the House of Representatives. Many Republican Representatives spoke against the president's surge policy.

The fact remains that the president did not buy the idea of dialogue with Iran and Syria to stabilize the volatile situation in Iraq, a key recommendation of the Iraq study group. While praising the group for its thoughtful recommendation, the president had tough words for Iran and Syria in his State of the Union address on January 23, and declared that he would step up operations against both countries. In fact, the president has decided to interrupt the flow of support from Iraq's two neighbours, and to seek out and

produce nuclear bombs. Neither the Bush administration nor its closest ally, Israel, accepted that idea. Meanwhile, the president ordered US troops in Iraq to punish any Iranian involved in sabotaging peace in Iraq, or intending to harm American troops.

The Bush administration has gradually been building up a case against Iran along the same lines that he talked about an immediate threat from Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. All the intelligence reports turned out to be baseless. These reports were manufactured by intelligence agencies to fit President Bush's idea of invading Iraq. That Bush had planned to invade Iraq was revealed at the first cabinet meeting during Bush's first term.

Recently, the president has been harping on the theme that the weapons that are used by the "insurgents" in Iraq are being smuggled in from Iran without any concrete evidence. Without substantiation, the Bush administration claims that Iranian Intelligence officers are training and supplying Shiite militias inside

reported by the Washington Post, as a civil war between Shiite and Sunni sects. It says that the interference by Syria or Iran is not likely to be a major cause of violence in Iraq.

On the other hand, the Iranian leaders stated categorically that Iran did not intend to get involved in Iraq. The door for negotiations on the Iraq issue is open if the United States agrees. The Iranian leaders blamed the United States for fuelling fratricidal conflict in Iraq. The Iranian authority is of the opinion that the US is making Iran the scapegoat because of the unresolved problem in Iraq.

Moreover, it now appears that Iran had proposed dialogue when Saddam Hussein fell from the power. The Iranian proposal came to the Bush administration through the Swiss embassy in Washington. It included a series of Iranian issues, including ending of sanctions, full access to peaceful nuclear technology, recognition of its legitimate security, and recognition of Israel and two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The Iranian proposal came to light when

