

## India mulling 'no firing' option

*Should be implemented immediately*

THE Indian Home Secretary's statement, given at a seminar in New Delhi on March 19, that India is considering a unilateral no-firing option at the borders with Bangladesh for a year, is welcome news. We felicitate it as a potential positive gesture that we would like to see happen.

It can really do wonders in improving the relations between the two countries that often came under a cloud of suspicion and tension due to unilateral border killings that ran counter to professed cordiality and understanding at the highest political levels. The second point made by the Indian Home Secretary is equally important as formation of a joint task force with the mandate to settle border disputes as suggested by him should go a long way in keeping the borders peaceful in the coming years. It is really surprising that only 6.1km of more than 4,000km borders between the two countries is still disputed -- thanks to lack of demarcation of the area. It is evident that the problem can be resolved without wasting any more time if the two sides work sincerely with a view to putting an end to the long standing disputes which cannot serve any purpose other than creating tension and misunderstanding between the two neighbours. If the plan of settling the disputes through a task force by the year end or early next year is implemented within the time-frame suggested by the Indian home secretary, there will be perceptible improvement in the border situation.

That the Indians have decided to address the issue of border killing is indeed an indication of sagacity that it is in the interest of both countries to leave behind the sensitive matter once and for all.

Most killing incidents reportedly take place at night. The BDR chief, while attending the Indo-Bangla conference at Delhi, said that we would strengthen vigil on our side of the border. People's awareness can be raised through using microphones in the border areas to tell them what they should refrain from is nocturnal movements. The possibility of clamping a ban may be considered, too. Indian authorities could also take similar steps on their side of the border.

A peaceful border has to be viewed as the cornerstone of good bilateral ties and this should be the guiding principle of border management between two close neighbours.

## Death of GP Koirala

*With him passes an era of values*

THE death of Girija Prasad Koirala brings to an end an illustrious career in Nepalese politics. Koirala was a political figure who came in the mould of those remarkable for their role in a reshaping of history. Like so many others dedicated to the principle of politics being a trust and a call to duty in the service of people, the late Nepalese leader upheld certain norms and values he considered essential for the growth of progressive thought. That his was an indispensable presence in Nepal's history was proved conclusively when he brokered the deal which was to put an end to the conflict between the state and its Maoist rebels and thereby inaugurate a new phase in the country's evolution to democracy. At a time when few people believed that Nepal could wriggle out of what then seemed to be an intractable problem, Koirala did not lose faith in his belief that better days would dawn.

And that was precisely what happened. And more. It was Koirala more than anyone else who caused an eventual transformation of the Hindu kingdom that was Nepal into a republic through easing King Gyanendra and the royal family out of power. Koirala was one of those men of foresight who knew that the monarchy was an anachronism in Nepal when the rest of the world was passing it by. It was this conviction which often earned him the wrath of such powerful men as the late King Birendra, who in the early 1990s was nevertheless forced into becoming a constitutional monarch. Over time, it was for Koirala to take the next logical step, which was to enlist the support of all political groups, including the Maoists, in the movement of bringing about the abolition of the monarchy. His adherence to parliamentary politics made it possible for the Maoist leader Prachanda to reorient his radical organisation towards democracy. Koirala could not have been happy with the attitude the Maoists demonstrated in the recent past through resigning from the government, but he surely must have been satisfied that for all its bumpy ride Nepal's democracy was well on track.

Koirala held the office of prime minister four times. In his long career in politics, he was looked upon as a stabilising force in Nepal, especially against a background of rapidly collapsing governments. With his passing ends an era in Nepalese politics, one remarkable for its emphasis on old-fashioned values so necessary to reshape a world in new colours.

## Keeping shock therapy at bay

Fortunately, the government of Sheikh Hasina has not been swayed by successive natural and man made disasters and so far is acting according to the promises made in the election manifesto, with particular emphasis on reducing poverty. One hopes her government's success will keep away the dreadful shock therapy from Bangladesh.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

ONE may wonder about the relevance of the Bangladesh economy to Canadian author Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. After all, the book is centred around the thesis that free market fundamentalism and Breton Woods Institutions' imposition of their prescriptions in the wake of the 1997 Asian Crisis, forcing the afflicted governments to sell off many state owned enterprises to Western companies, had nothing to do with Bangladesh. These were done when these countries were reeling from the effects of disasters or upheavals.

She took examples from the last thirty years of South America of the 1970s to New Orleans after hurricane Katrina. Klein asserted that torture has been an essential tool for authorities to implement aggressively free market reforms. She forcefully argued that neo-conservatives' project was not to spread democracy in democracy deficit countries but to implement maximisation of profit mechanisms for small elites, or in other words, maintain consistency in rich-poor divide by keeping 20 percent rich and 80 percent poor.

This segment of the global population may be termed as "disposable" poor doomed to subsist in "planned misery." Naomi Klein alleged that at the most chaotic juncture in Iraq's civil war a new law was enacted to allow the Shell and British Petroleum to claim Iraq's vast oil reserve.

Though Bangladesh is being governed by a freely elected government our past has been a martial law, military backed government, corrupt Islamist allied government, and has been ravaged by natural disasters. Bangladesh has also been identified as one of the worst victims of climate change.

If we look at the apocalyptic political change of 1975, the constitutional change (now declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court) that changed the basic character of the 1972 Constitution, and the change in our economic system from

socialism to unbridled capitalism at the instance of the donors as the military governments without popular support had to be dependant on donors and Islamist forces; then Naomi Klein's Shock Doctrine should not look totally unfamiliar to us.

Klein described the conditions that would invite shock treatment as public disorientation followed by mass collective shock caused by war, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, which have been experienced by the people of Bangladesh. Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz reviewing Klein's book alleged that her treatment of the subject was "oversimplified."

Stiglitz also blamed Milton Friedman and other shock therapists of oversimplification by basing, he says, their belief in the perfection of market economies on models that assumed perfect information, perfect competition and perfect risk market.

Separately Stiglitz postulates that market economy does not automatically guarantee growth, social justice or even economic efficiency. He advocates "moral growth" that is sustainable, increases living standard, not just today but for future generations as well, and leads to a more tolerant and open society.

Since the behaviour of people -- both buyer and seller -- is not rational and information is not perfect, not appreciated by market fundamentalists, there remains an important role of governmental intervention as implied by Nobel laureates Daniel Kahneman and Vernon Smith. Some have tried to depict such intervention as Adam Smith's invisible hand that, according to Smith, was a conjunction of the forces of self-interest, competition, and supply and demand. Milton Friedman saw the invisible hand as "the possibility of cooperation without coercion."

The recent global meltdown has put countries like Bangladesh in a difficult situation. As it is, Bangladesh will have to prioritise between political development and economic development in order to consolidate and sustain democracy. While



FOR COLVIN

conventional wisdom states that democracy being more accountable to the masses should have more possibility to reduce poverty, both Milton Friedman and Joseph Stiglitz are sceptical that democracy can be sustained in poor countries unless these countries achieve rapid growth.

Many believe that the people trapped in the culture of poverty have a strong feeling of marginality, helplessness, dependency, and the feeling of alienation within one's own society. Closely associated with the concept of culture of poverty is the cycle of poverty, also known as "development trap," denoting low income, poor education, poor housing and poor health. Since these disadvantages work in a circular fashion it becomes difficult to break out of this cycle. As opposed to market fundamentalism the role of the state has been accepted not as an interventionism but as correcting dysfunctional market mechanism.

Lest we become complacent after hanging a few Islamist leaders, it would be wise to remember that Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami is still active in Bangladesh. With informa-

tion available in the public domain it is difficult to ascertain the depth and breadth of the Islamic extremism in Bangladesh. But the brutal murder of a student in a Bangladesh university, where the main accused alleged collaboration of some top leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami (denied by the leaders so alleged) deepens doubt about Jamaat's commitment to democracy.

The bloody, violent and despicable revolt by the BDR in Dhaka at the beginning of the Mahajot government was allegedly to destabilise the present government. As the trial for the offences committed is now going on it would be imprudent to comment on the mutiny.

Fortunately, the government of Sheikh Hasina has not been swayed by successive natural and man made disasters and so far is acting according to the promises made in the election manifesto, with particular emphasis on reducing poverty. One hopes her government's success will keep away the dreadful shock therapy from Bangladesh.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## The army is beaten

In the short term, Turkey will likely sour on the EU and have a loud row with US over Armenia. In the long term, the downfall of the Army will make Turkey a stronger democracy and a more stable and mature partner.

OWEN MATTHEWS

THE political logic should be simple. The arrest of a shadowy group of generals for allegedly plotting a bloody coup should be a victory for justice. The end of military meddling in politics should be a victory for democracy. And greater democracy should make a country more liberal and more pro-European.

Except that in Turkey, political logic doesn't always follow simple patterns. Yes, the arrests of dozens of Army officers on charges of plotting bombings and murders are a win for civilian prosecutors over the once untouchable military.

More important, the arrests also mark the quiet demise of the military as a decisive force in Turkish politics for the first time in centuries. That's a vital step in Turkey's road to becoming a mature democracy.

But the paradox is that a more democratic Turkey doesn't necessarily mean one that is more pro-European or more pro-American. And with the last major obstacle to the ruling AK Party's power gone, Turkey's conservative prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, will be free to implement his vision of a more Islamic Turkey. More democracy, then, doesn't necessarily lead to more liberalism, either.

The first victim of the new order may be Europe. Ever since they came to power in 2002, AK Party leaders have used EU membership as a shield to defend their reform programs against attacks from ultrasecularists in the military and the judiciary.

Notionally, the military was in favour of joining Europe, so the AK Party railroaded through most of its most radical changes under the EU's banner. Downscaling the powers of the military-dominated National Security Council, banning the death penalty, scrapping some restrictions on free speech, allowing Kurdish language rights -- all were in the Copenhagen criteria set by the EU. But now that the AK Party's main rival, the military, has been shown to be a paper tiger, there's not much utility for Erdogan & Co. in pushing the European project any further.

That's terrible timing for Europe.

hostile to America?

During the Cold War, when the military was in charge, Turkey fell into the first camp. Now it makes sense for Washington to choose democracy -- even if the outcomes aren't, as George W. Bush found in Iraq, always pro-Western. Cutting the Army's dead hand from politics will allow Turkey to define secularism democratically and to deal openly with issues like the demands of the Kurdish minority for autonomy.

That choice should be particularly easy now, as evidence presented by Turkish prosecutors suggest that the self-declared guardians of Turkey's secular order plotted heinous crimes in order to destabilise the AK Party, possibly including the bombing of the British Consulate in Istanbul in 2003.

If Turkey becomes more anti-Western, that's probably inevitable. A storm of popular anger is brewing over the EU's undeclared rejection of Turkish membership, even as the accession process continues, and over moves in US Congress to recognise the massacres of Ottoman Armenians in 1915 as a genocide. If the vote goes

ahead, expect Turks to retaliate, perhaps by refusing to support US sanctions against Iran in the UN Security Council.

Turks have made it clear repeatedly at the ballot box that they endorse the AK Party's vision of a less-rigorously secular country. Ordinary Turks aren't huge fans of US, either.

But it's also clear that Turkey under the AK Party will remain a Western ally, and Nato will remain Ankara's most important strategic partner. How do we know? The AK Party says so, and it has no real options. There's no rival alliance, not with Iran, the Arab world, or Russia, which could possibly rival the clout Turkey has, with the second-largest Army in Nato.

In the short term, Turkey will likely sour on the EU and have a loud row with US over Armenia. In the long term, the downfall of the Army will make Turkey a stronger democracy and a more stable and mature partner. So the world would be wise to side with the AK Party, not seek a return of the discredited generals.

©Newsweek International. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.

