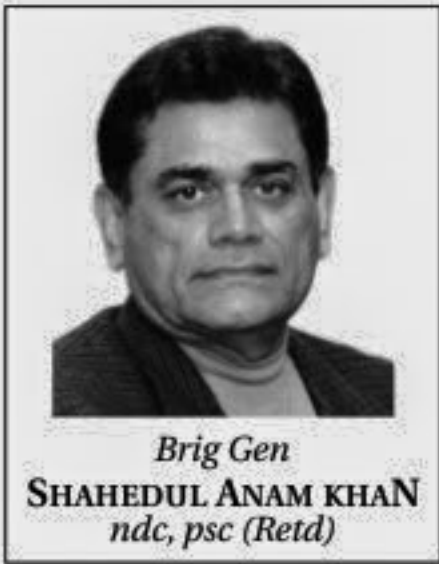


STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Issues with India -- take the people into confidence



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THE Indian foreign ministers visit ended with an optimistic note about many deals on the anvil waiting to be struck by the

two countries. The issues likely to feature are cooperation in trade, connectivity, water resources management, power, land boundary demarcation, border management, security, culture, education, and people-to-people contact, etc.

It is Bangladesh who should be looking more in anticipation towards all that is likely to come about in the form of agreements during Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka in September, for the simple reason that Bangladesh, for its part, has provided almost everything that the January 2010 memorandum had stipulated.

In return it has got, to paraphrase an Indian journalist's comment, a bagful of nothing. It is a matter of satisfaction for people on this side of the border that the Indian opinion makers are not only aware of the deficiency in delivery on the Indian side but do not also hesitate to come down heavily on their government for failing to do so.

It will therefore be a great disappointment for Bangladesh if the commitments were to remain confined to pious articulation only. And it is for the government of Hasina to ensure that we get some thing in the bag and at the same time take the people along in whatever it seeks to do in terms of bilateral cooperation, particularly on issues related to land boundary and transit.

One would, therefore, like to see the Teesta water issue resolved equitably, the question of 6.4 km unmarked stretch of border demarcated finally, the issue of lands as adverse possession (APL) on both sides be amicably settled, the trigger happy BSF

restrained through imposing a rigorous regime on them, and the most topical issue of transit be handled in more transparent manner so as to remove all apprehensions that still persist in some people's mind.

Given the reported activities of the survey officials of both countries in the border areas, it seems that the land issues are being addressed on a priority basis. However, it appears

of its own are in Bangladesh.

Certainly, there are prickly issues related to the border that need political goodwill on both sides to resolve. And there cannot be any more sensitive matter than the APL, which will involve ours parting with some and getting some amount of land from India and vice versa.

Why this fact is not made a matter of public discourse and why the gov-

to the public. And when one talks of transit there are the bilateral and the regional/international aspects of it.

It appears that we have lost our sense of history when it comes to bilateral transit. Bangladesh had, in fact, agreed to accord "transit" facility through the signing of the Indo-Bangladesh Trade Agreement on March 28, 1972. Article V of the Agreement provided for "mutually

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that there are misgivings in people's mind in Bangladesh about what is going on and why. And in some areas there is resistance against whatever it is that the two governments are trying to do. And I use the clause, "whatever it is..." quite deliberately to suggest that even the supposedly better informed segment of the society is not fully aware of the goings on.

Certainly, we have not had a progress report, if you like, about the functioning of the joint boundary working group working on APL. For the record, Bangladesh holds 226.81 acres of Indian land as adverse possession APL while 551.8 acres of Bangladesh land is in the adverse possession of India. And as for enclaves, India has 92 enclaves of Bangladesh while 110

ernment machinery is not proactive in informing the public is beyond comprehension. Lack of information or untimely dissemination only leads to speculation. And one is not sure whether the people are fully conscious of the difficulties that are facing the survey groups on the ground.

The issue of transit has been plagued by confusing statements from the advisors and ministers.

Latest being on the status of the deal, whether what we have is merely a draft or it has been finalised and waiting to be signed. The foreign secretary, reportedly terming it a draft, seems to suggest that not everything has been ironed out as far as Bangladesh is concerned. And indeed there are many things that need to be clarified

beneficial arrangements for the use of their waterways, railways and roadways for commerce between the two countries and for passage of goods between two places in one country through the territory of the other."

This was renewed in 1986 and, notably, in 2006 with the above mentioned clause still in place. One therefore finds BNP position on the issue rather disingenuous.

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Bad borders, good neighbours

EPHRAIM SNEH

TODAY, as US, European, Russian and UN officials meet in Washington to discuss the future of the Middle East peace process, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, remains adamant that a peace deal premised on returning to Israel's pre-1967 borders poses an unacceptable risk to its security.

He is right: The country's 1967 borders are not militarily defensible. But his use of this argument to reject the only viable formula for Israeli-Palestinian peace -- a negotiated two-state solution based on mutually agreed upon land swaps -- is wrong, and it does not serve Israel's security interests.

Israel needs peace with the Palestinians, and that will likely require a return to the 1967 lines with a few adjustments. These borders can be made defensible if they come with a security package consisting of a joint Israeli-Palestinian security force along the West Bank's border with Jordan, a demilitarized Palestinian state and a three-way Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian defense treaty. Combined with such a package, the balanced formula President Barack Obama outlined in his May 19 speech can give Israel the security it needs and deserves.

Until June 1967, Israelis feared that a swift Arab military move could cut Israel in two at its narrow "waist" -- an area near the city of Netanya, where the country is less than 10 miles wide. By doing so, Arab tanks and artillery could have reached Tel Aviv within a few hours. In the 44 years since, the geography has not changed, but the threat has. Today, there is a menace we did not face in 1967. Short- and medium-

range rockets, mortars and missiles supplied by Iran are making the lives of Israeli civilians a nightmare. Thousands of these rockets have been launched from Gaza into Israeli towns and villages since Hamas wrested control of Gaza in 2007; and if an independent Palestine emerges on the West Bank, these weapons could find their way there, too.

That is why the border between the West Bank and Jordan must be made impenetrable. This cannot be done

territorial integrity.

Third, an Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian defense treaty is necessary to safeguard their common strategic interests. Joint military planning and sharing early warning systems to prevent threats from Iran, its proxies and other jihadist forces in the region would cement this treaty.

This security package would make the 1967 borders defensible, and keep Palestine from becoming another launching pad for terror. Moreover, an

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remotely, from the 1967 lines; it will require a joint Israeli-Palestinian military presence along the Jordan River.

Such joint military activity would not violate Palestinian sovereignty and could be modeled on Israel's current coordination with Palestinian security forces in the West Bank. It would be far more effective than deploying an international force. After all, UN forces in southern Lebanon have failed to prevent a colossal military buildup by Hezbollah since Israel withdrew from the area in 2000.

Second, the Palestinian state must be demilitarized. No tanks, artillery or missiles can be deployed within its boundaries. In the absence of this weaponry, international guarantees will ensure Palestine's security and

Israeli-Palestinian agreement would bring about a dramatic, strategic change in the Middle East. It would remove the obstacle preventing moderates in the region from uniting against militant Islamist extremists and lay the groundwork for a new strategic alliance in the region, including the Persian Gulf countries, which are natural business partners for Israel, Jordan and Palestine.

As a result, Israel would be able to extend its hand to new democratic and secular governments in the Arab and Muslim world. And those committed to Israel's destruction would be confronted by a new alliance with enormous economic and military power. I have devoted more than three decades of my life to defending Israel,

from the Litani River in Lebanon to the western bank of the Suez Canal in Egypt, and I would never support irresponsible, hazardous solutions to Israel's security problems. I don't believe durable peace in the region is possible unless Israel remains the strongest military power between Tehran and Casablanca.

We have no choice but to protect ourselves in a perilous world of aggressive Islamist fanatics and complacent, confrontation-averse Western democracies. But nurturing settlements in the West Bank and maintaining an occupation in order to protect them is not the proper way to do it.

Following that path will lead to disaster. Israel could become a binational state of first- and second-class citizens at war with each other; a third Intifada could break out, damaging Israel's economy and destroying Palestine's nascent infrastructure; or the pro-negotiation policy of the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, could collapse, allowing Hamas to take power in the West Bank. If this happens, the doomsday prophecy of rockets raining down on Ben-Gurion International Airport just might be fulfilled.

To avoid this fate, we must embrace the proposals of our American friends, end this conflict and allow Israel to become an active member, rather than an isolated actor, in the rapidly changing Middle East.

Ephraim Sneh, a retired general in the Israel Defense Forces, was Israel's Deputy Minister of defence from 1999 to 2001 and from 2006 to 2007.

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HC's observation

When judiciary speaks in this language society needs to wake up

THE concern that the High Court (HC) expressed about the country's political situation while hearing the bail petition for lawmaker and opposition chief whip Zainul Abidin Farroque, who was badly hurt, is welcome. Though very rarely do such observations come from the judiciary, when they do, the politicians, business community, professionals and academics; in fact, the whole society need to wake up.

Needless to say the general public are very frustrated with the ongoing stalemate between the ruling Awami League (AL) and the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

The recent 48-hour hartal followed by a 30-hour one imprisoned the people in their houses bringing people's patience to an end. They are in no mood to countenance it anymore. On the other hand, police excesses on the pro-hartal demonstrators exceeded all limits.

But it is also not for the first time that a government is being so intolerant towards the pro-hartal demonstrators, regardless of their socio-political status. When the BNP was in power, they also subjected the then opposition to the same kind of treatment.

The demonstrators, too, are no less intolerant and mindless in their activities during these shutdowns. So, the court justifiably drew the parallel between the attitudes of the two major political parties towards each other. We fully share the court's concern and join it in asking the two parties to put an end to their irrationalities for the sake of normality, sanity and peace.

We have categorically termed the doing away with caretaker government as a mistake. Can it be denied that the present political deadlock is traceable to this single action of the government? But then what did really hold the Opposition back from using the floor of the House to voice their protest rather than going for the disruptive action of calling nationwide shutdown?

Why not spare the public the state of perpetual misfortune you have been pushing them through? Once again, we, in tune with the HC, call upon the ruling party and the opposition to give sanity and peace a chance instead of the battle of attrition.

We mourn the children's death

Resolve to make highways safe

EDUCATIONAL institutions across the country have mourned deaths of 44 school boys in a truck plunge at Mirsarai in Chittagong last Monday. Teachers, students and staff of the institutions expressed their grief wearing black badges. Education Minister pledged financial grants to the families of the victims.

While we fully empathise with the symbolic gestures we would however stress the importance of taking lessons from this huge national tragedy.

In spite of our being resigned to such preventable road accidents, if this particular tragic incident does not wake us up to the vulnerability to highway accidents then nothing else will. Causes of these accidents have been identified many times over. Reckless driving by truck and bus drivers, most of them unskilled and without valid license, lack of road sense, dilapidated yet overloaded vehicles, all contribute to the frequent catastrophes. The use of mobile phones while driving is extremely hazardous in speeding traffic.

We have to accept the fact that accidents are just waiting to happen on our highways. There is practically no highway police to monitor the vehicles and carry out random checking at different points, which is the routine practice in other countries. Most of the drivers simply vanish after such accidents and they are hardly brought to book. Even if some of them were nabbed there were hardly any instance of trial and punishment to the offenders.

It is high time that the government came up with some serious measures to stop these accidents. It should be easily done by increasing the number of highway patrols, equipping them adequately to do their job, continuous supervision of the highway traffic,

replacing lenient laws of punishment by exemplary ones and strict enforcement of those. For all practical purposes, the responsibility rests with the government to

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 14

1223
Louis VIII becomes King of France upon the death of his father, Philip II of France.

1789
French Revolution: citizens of Paris storm the Bastille.

1933
Gleichschaltung: in Germany, all political parties are outlawed except the Nazi Party.

1958
A military revolt in Iraq overthrows the monarchy and prompts King Hussein of Jordan to call for British and US military help to avert a similar rebellion in his country

2002
French President Jacques Chirac escapes an assassination attempt unscathed during Bastille Day celebrations.