

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Dissecting the agreements

Hartal can only bring woes

People want to see opposition in the JS

THE BNP along with its allies has again gone for a countrywide hartal to protest what they said price hike of fuels, share market scam and repression on the opposition.

Like in the past, we are strongly against hartal as a matter of principle. For hartal has never achieved anything other than blocking the way to less violent, but democratic means to engagement between the opposition and the government to resolve contentious issues.

Why has this economy-wrecking political weapon again become necessary for the main opposition, who only the other day had given the people to understand that they would not go for hartal anytime soon. They could instead return to the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) and raise their voice against price hike of fuels and police excesses against the opposition demonstrators on the street. By choosing a hartal as the way to solution they have done a disservice to their constituents who have sent them to parliament to speak for them about their problems. On what ground can they justify their continual boycott of parliament?

If they were genuinely concerned about the issues they have identified, then do they really believe that the hartal will succeed in bringing down the fuel prices, restore investors' confidence in the share market and convince the government of shunning the method of repression on the street protestors? These issues are better articulated in parliament with the advantage of taking public opinion along their agenda.

And they cannot also be oblivious that when they themselves were in power they never acquiesced in the then opposition's demands pressed through hartals. So, the inefficacy of hartal as a means to protest and realise demands cannot be unknown to them.

While expressing our strong reservation against hartal as a means to political protest, we urge the opposition and the ruling party so that public peace is not severely disrupted.

We hope the government would allow some space for the opposition to give vent to their demands through peaceful means.

Rabbani assassination

A serious setback to peace talks

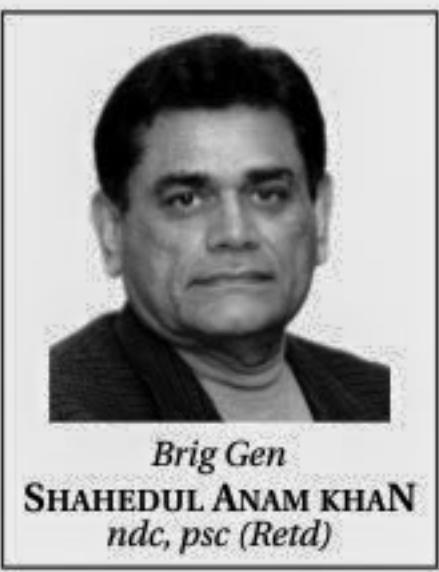
THE hopes of approaching an end to the crisis in Afghanistan were further tattered on September 20 with the assassination of former President Burhanuddin Rabbani by a Taliban insurgent.

At a time when the United States and Nato forces approach a withdrawal from Afghanistan, it is extremely crucial that that mainstream Afghan government reach a peace agreement with the Taliban in order to establish stability and the beginnings of peace in the country.

However, Tuesday's assassination is the third blatant show of violence and force demonstrated by the Taliban in the last couple of weeks. First, there came the bombings near the US Embassy, the assassination of President Karzai's half-brother and now this. It becomes more and more apparent that the Taliban have become more powerful, organized and confident. Their presence and violent attacks in Kabul itself and in highly secured areas such as near the US Embassy make it obvious that the negotiations which the Obama administration and President Karzai would hope for could be much more difficult than they thought.

This leads to certain questions regarding the real intent and thought process of the Taliban. If negotiations were under way, why then would they engage in assassinations and bombings? Furthermore, is it at all plausible that perhaps there are those who do not want the negotiations to a peace process to materialise? Could it also be that while in the process of negotiation, the Taliban want to portray the image of power to leverage an outcome in their favour?

These unanswered questions may be answered gradually as time passes. What we cannot ignore however, is that with the withdrawal of the US and Nato forces from Afghanistan and the ratcheting up of violence that the Taliban have embarked upon, there are signs that the aggressive elements in the Taliban wanted to take advan-



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IF the 2010 January Joint Communiqué contained three agreements and two MOUs, the 2011 September Joint Communiqué

contained as many as ten MOUs, protocols, and protocols to past MOUs. In Bangladesh, we have been so much taken up with the disappointment of not having a deal on Teesta, that not many have gone into the other agreements and protocols signed between the two countries in any great details, save a few.

As far as the Teesta is concerned, without sounding pessimistic and, in spite of the assurances of many Indians who should know what is happening in the South Block, it seems that we are in for a long haul. And just as one had assumed, there are many more persons than Mamata Banerjee who are responsible for the Teesta embarrassment for Manmohan Singh. And it was not a last minute volte-face by the Chief Minister of Paschim Banga, as many would have us believe. However, what is ridiculous in this regard is that neither our foreign office nor the two ubiquitous PM advisors were willing to acknowledge that the situation had changed, till the last. Whether it was Providence or their Indian counterparts or their own capacity to convince the Indians that they were putting their faith on, we do not know. But whatever it was, they and the country have been badly let down.

Our renewed uneasiness about Teesta stems from a report appearing on Wednesday in our leading Bangla daily that India has asked for statistics of Teesta runoff of the last 10-15 years from 1995-96. That being so, there is all the possibility that the three-month time assurance of our finance minister will be greatly overrun as some of our experts predict. Having said that, one wonders what the substance of the proposed Teesta water sharing document was in the first place, and what was the basis on which the share of water was worked out, till it fell through at the last



VISUAL NOZART

The pious hope that Article 8 holds out, of cooperating on matters relating to the national interests of the two countries may remain pious only because it would also do us well to keep in mind that national interest of countries collide, and even within a country there is difference of opinion on what the vital interests of the country are.

moment. Are we starting from square one, one might ask.

But we shall leave Teesta aside for now and look only at two of the agreements/protocols signed on September 7, 2011, namely the Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development, and the Protocol to the Agreement Concerning the Demarcation of the Land Boundary. We shall dwell on the former last, since it requires close and objective scrutiny. It has come under severe criticism from a section of our intellectuals, so much so that it has been termed as worse than the 25

Years Treaty of Friendship between Bangladesh and India of March 1972.

The Protocol to the Agreement Concerning the Demarcation of the Land Boundary has not come a day soon, come as it did more than 27 years after the original Agreement was signed. The protocol operationalises the Mujib-Indira LBA of 1974. It is a landmark achievement in some respects since it has at last managed to address the 6.4 kilometres of undemarcated border in three stretches. It has also addressed the issue of the enclaves and land in adverse possession (APL). The only shortcoming of

the protocol is that no timeframe has been fixed for the exchanges to be completed. It is hoped that one of the main causes of border tensions and sporadic clashes on the borders, the APL, would be removed permanently. What we are looking for is how quickly the exchanges can take place.

The Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development has managed to raise the ire of some analysts. The two criticisms that I have come across are by reputed scholars in their own rights, who, in one broad brush, have called it a replication of the 25 Years Treaty, and only more so. The similarity is not merely that both the documents contain twelve articles but certain other provisions which they feel will severely impinge upon the country's sovereignty.

Detractors take umbrage at Article 9 of the Framework Agreement which enjoins the parties to cooperate on, "security issues of concern to each other while fully respecting each other's sovereignty and that neither party shall allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to the other."

This is indeed a security matter and Bangladesh too needs assurance that Indian soil will not be used to carry out hostile and anti-Bangladeshi activities. It needs no reminding that not very long ago Bangladeshi insurgent groups had operated against us from Indian soil, but is it fair to call the proviso a euphemism for "security cooperation" as the critics have averred.

What however lends itself to further explanation is the term "security." One would hope that the "security issues of concern" are indeed of mutual interest because it will be unrealistic to assume that Bangladesh's security concerns will always be coterminous with India's.

In the same vein, the pious hope that Article 8 holds out, of cooperating on matters relating to the national interests of the two countries may remain pious only because it would also do us well to keep in mind that national interest of countries collide, and even within a country there is difference of opinion on what the vital interests of the country are.

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

After the UN vote on Palestine

JIMMY CARTER

IN September 1978, Anwar Sadat and Menachim Begin signed the Camp David Accords, following four Arab-Israeli wars in which Egypt had provided the overwhelming military force that threatened the existence of Israel.

The Egyptian Parliament and the Israeli Knesset overwhelmingly approved the agreement, which called for honouring all aspects of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242. One of its key provisions was the "inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security." The accords called for the withdrawal of Israeli military and political forces from the occupied territories and the granting of "full autonomy" to the Palestinians.

Six months later, a peace treaty between the two nations was adopted, which provided for Israeli withdrawal from the Egyptian Sinai, Israel's use of the Suez Canal and full diplomatic relations.

Since then, the terms of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel have prevailed, but the key provisions of the Camp David Accords have been ignored. Following the death of Sadat, President Hosni Mubarak did not press for Palestinian rights, though most of the Egyptian people have continued to insist that Israel honour these commitments. The

primary subject of concern is the continued occupation by Israel of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the building of Israeli settlements on confiscated Palestinian land.

President Barack Obama acknowledged the centrality of this issue in a major speech in Cairo in March 2009, when he called for a freeze on all settlement activity. Later, in May 2009, President Obama declared that the prevailing borders before the 1967 Arab-Israeli war -- adjusted to account for some Israeli settlements near Jerusalem -- should be the basis of a peace agreement.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected both proposals, continued building settlements, and raised unacceptable new demands for a permanent military presence in the Jordan River valley and recognition of Israel as a "Jewish state" (about 25% of Israeli citizens are non-Jewish).

The U.S. has basically withdrawn from active participation in the peace process. The Palestinians and other Arabs have interpreted U.S.

policy as acquiescing on the occupation and biased against them.

Declaring that they are left with no alternative, Palestinians plan to request recognition of a Palestinian state later this month in the U.N. Security Council and General

With leadership from Europe, there will be an opportunity for the United States and other members of the International Quartet (Russia, the European Union and the United Nations) to put forward a comprehensive peace proposal based on the fully compatible U.S. official policy, previous U.N. resolutions and the Quartet's previous demands.

Assembly. In Egypt, militants have over-run the Israeli embassy and forced the evacuation of the ambassador.

With the reasonable assumption that Palestinian statehood is widely recognised despite a U.S. veto in the Security Council, what are the options for the future?

With leadership from Europe, there will be an opportunity for the United States and other members of the International Quartet (Russia, the European Union and the United

Nations) to put forward a comprehensive peace proposal based on the fully compatible U.S. official policy, previous U.N. resolutions and the Quartet's previous demands. There is little doubt that the Arab Peace Proposal could be modified to comply.

This can be followed by the full engagement of the United States and/or the United Nations in a mediation effort with direct or indirect talks -- whichever is more effective -- between Israel and the Palestinians. Subsequently, the same approach can be taken to resolve the issue of the Golan Heights with Syria.

The Palestinians will have to refrain from violence, accept Israel's right to exist in peace within the 1967 borders (modified through negotiations with land swaps), a long-term presence of either U.N. or Nato peacekeeping forces within Palestine, and the right of return of its people to its own lands (with perhaps a token number to Israel). Israelis would, in the process, accept the same borders and peacekeeping presence.

The result can lead to peace for Israel and all its neighbors. The United States would regain its leadership role in the region, based on its commitment to freedom, democracy and justice, and a major cause of widespread animosity toward America within the Arab world would be eliminated.

The alternative to this new international effort will be an expansion of hopelessness, animosity, and probable violence.

The writer, 39th President of the United States, is founder of the Carter Center, which works to advance peace and health worldwide.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 22

- 1499**
Treaty of Basel: Switzerland becomes an independent state.
- 1789**
Battle of Rymnik establishes Alexander Suvorov as a pre-eminent Russian military commander after his allied army defeat superior Ottoman Empire forces.
- 1896**
Queen Victoria surpasses her grandfather King George III as the longest reigning monarch in British history.
- 1908**
The independence of Bulgaria is proclaimed.
- 1965**
The Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 (also known as the Second Kashmir War) between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, ends after the UN calls for a cease-fire.
- 1980**
Iraq invades Iran.
- 1995**
Nagerkivil school bombing, is carried out by Sri Lankan Air Force in which at least 34 die, most of them ethnic Tamil school children.