

Towards a closer link with ASEAN

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BETTER late than never. Right from independence the different governments in Bangladesh paid attention towards the countries with which Pakistan had developed links. The developed countries came first because of her need for economic and technological development. As a Muslim-majority country she had to win the confidence of Muslim countries. In her quest for achieving a place in the comity of nations she had to try to win the friendship of as many nations as possible. She did not have any choice.

Though out and out a soldier Ziaur Rahman understood clearly that economic development in South Asia, particularly for its small states like Bangladesh, can only be accelerated if peaceful political climate can be achieved in the region. This is only possible if there is reasonably good relationship between India and Pakistan. It was envisaged that at least peaceful coexistence can be established through some arrangement of regional cooperation. This resulted in the creation of SAARC. Unfortunately right from its establishment India did not like that bilateral issues be discussed in this multilateral forum. Thus SAARC could not make any contribution to develop better relationship between India and Pakistan and Kashmir

crisis continues to exist even after "Simla Accord" of 1972.

SAARC could not bring any real benefit to Bangladesh though she was most enthusiastic about its success. Some critics of SAARC even say that Bangladesh could possibly develop better bilateral relations without SAARC. It appears that there are reasons to believe that they have good points.

During the last half a century some of our neighbours like Malaysia, Thailand or Singapore have advanced at a much faster pace than us. There were good many reasons for this. Among the critical factors are undemocratic rule, poor investment in education and health, unstable political situation and inefficient economic plans. From the beginning we depended more on aid oriented growth and we shielded away from competition because competition is risky and involves hard work. Our bureaucracy, a legacy of the British colonial rule, naturally enough remained conservative in outlook. It may be pointed out in this regard that Ziaur Rahman thought about Islamic Common Market on the line of ECM. The then bureaucracy was not convinced enough of such project and as such the proposal was ultimately dumped.

It is true that without direct involvement of India in the liberation war of Bangladesh we could not have achieved freedom within only

nine months. Relationship can perhaps be mutually gainful and workable when the parties concerned are of equal or near equal status. If any relationship develops due to expediency between a big, rich country and a small, poor country then maintenance of good relationship depends more on the bigger and richer party.

Maintenance of good relationship thus mostly depends on Indian attitude. If Bangladesh always has to sacrifice how long her good relationship can last? It all started from Farakka Barrage. Controlling river water to a mainly agricultural country connotes many things. The enclaves issue, the prevalence of border tension, happy-unhappy and unhealthy trade relation and the latest a heinous attempt to tarnish the image of Bangladesh government as harbouring terrorists reveal no good attitude.

We patiently waited for long seventeen years (1985-2002) after establishment of SAARC. The said regional co-operation could not help augment good relationship. Nor it enhanced economic development. Thus without wasting more time we have to look for some alternative just for our survival and development a self-respecting nation. One therefore, would welcome the steps taken by the present government to develop closer relations with Myanmar and Thailand because of the following factors:

(a) These countries are medium-sized states. Therefore, they do not have high political or economic ambition or stake.

(b) Even though Thailand is much more developed economically compared to Bangladesh both the countries are against terrorism and believe in peaceful coexistence;

(c) The relationship between Myanmar and Bangladesh is historical. In fact steps to develop closer relationship between these two developing countries should have been taken right from the beginning;

(d) Bangladesh is now emphasizing the need for developing agroprocessing industries. Thailand is fairly advanced in this respect among developing countries;

(e) With the assistance of Thailand, an active member of ASEAN, Bangladesh may receive favourable response from the ASEAN countries. Incidentally Bangladesh is already maintaining good relationship with the ASEAN countries; and

(f) If Teknaf (Bangladesh-Akyab (Myanmar) road can be developed Bangladesh will be connected with Singapore through Thailand.

Bangladesh is in desperate need to balance her trade. Despite her best efforts to raise the level of her export to India during the last two decades the situation appears to be disappointing. Apart from formal trading various malpractice have made the position all the more precarious. So far the government of India has refused to make real concession to Bangladesh traders. This has encouraged smuggling which also goes in favour of India.

For survival or growth Bangladesh will have to depend much on its export trade. Shortly she will face difficult time because of her loss of extra facilities in the export of readymade garments. She will have to concentrate on addition of value to her exports. She has a good future in developing agroprocessing industries in particular and labour intensive industries in general. She will have to try hard to improve the quality of her products. Her people may strive to become a trading nation. Her drive to develop closer relation with the ASEAN countries should not, however, damage her good neighbourly relation with India. Bangladesh believes in "friendship with all" policy. In the present circumstances it is not incorrect for her to look intently toward the east not only for her growth but also for her economic survival.

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Quality assurance in engineering and technological education

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The work of equipping students must be done at the individual course level and all faculty members must now understand and be involved in the accreditation process on a continuing basis (as opposed to "periodic" basis). To comply with EC-2000 a programme must first formulate "programme educational objectives" that address institutional and programme mission statements and are responsive to the expressed interests of various groups of programme stakeholders. The programme must then formulate a set of "programme outcomes (knowledge, skills, and attitudes the programme graduate should have) that directly address the educational objectives and encompass certain specified outcomes".

4.2.2 ISO 9000

ISO 9000, the most widely used standard for QA in industry, does not refer directly to the products or services delivered, but rather to the production and administrative processes that produce them.

5. Lifelong Engineering Education and QA

In a constantly changing business and industrial environment, formal four-year undergraduate education and even postgraduate education is becoming less than adequate preparation to help engineers to maintain their employability. Lifelong learning and 'continuous professional development' (CPD) are becoming integral parts of engineering education.

6. Implications for Bangladesh

In this century QA in engineering education involves institutional initiatives as well as international interactions to ensure conformity to the new paradigm that is being put in place around globe. The major implications, which emerge from the issues discussed in this paper are:

! Curriculum Development needs to include a rigorous "needs and capability" analysis with interaction between faculty, industry, and international agencies

! External peer review, feedback from users and accreditation by national as well as cross border foreign professional bodies should become integral features of QA initiatives.

! Peer-run accreditation bodies should be set up which should establish links with similar agencies in other countries and modalities should be put in place for MR of engineering qualifications for "substantial equivalence" in different countries.

! Attempts should be made to ensure that there is proper balance between various courses/groups of courses in an engineering curriculum and the "intellectual challenge" to the student is more or less uniform

in all courses.

! A thorough study of the new "outcomes assessments-based criteria" should be carried out in developing countries and the academics may be prepared to incorporate necessary changes in engineering education system to conform to the new criteria. This will help produce engineers better endowed with skills to address the challenges of the new century.

! Lifelong learning and CPD are to be recognized as essential elements in assuring quality and relevance in the education of a

successful professional engineer.

! Quality management for engineering education should be entrusted with a peer-run professional body.

! Adequate Funding for QA should be available in order to narrow the knowledge gap in science and technology between the developed and developing worlds. Recently World Bank has launched a Quality Improvement Programme in India INPE72123 for Tertiary Education in Engineering whose First phase will involve IDA investment of US \$

235 million.

! Uninterrupted academic programme and making up for our session jam are issues, which merit urgent attention if we wish to get international recognition and accreditation.

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