

FOCUS

Need for 'Constructive Engagement' with Myanmar

Bangladesh has much to gain from its relations with Myanmar. Apart from ensuring regional stability, the two countries' border trade can be sped up for their mutual benefit. Better surface communications between the two countries and linking Bangladesh with the proposed Asian Highway can accelerate trade and investment between them.

by Mansoor Mamoon

THE members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) decided in 1992 to no longer ignore the xenophobic authoritarian regime under the name of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) of Myanmar despite its gross violation of human rights, crackdown on August 1988 bloody uprisings, continued house arrest of the Nobel Prize winning Champion of Democracy Aung Sun Suu Kyi since July 1989 and annihilation of the results of 1990 general elections in which pro-democracy movement had registered a landslide victory. The ASEAN member states were a step further and invited the then Foreign Minister of SLORC in December 1992 to attend the group's foreign minister level meeting in Bangkok. Two years later ASEAN persuaded Japan, Australia and European countries to open up with Myanmar. Subsequently, Myanmar was admitted into the fold of ASEAN. All these happened despite international sanctions imposed on Myanmar for what has often been branded as the SLORC's gross violation of human rights. In the meantime billions of dollars in the form of FDI (foreign direct investment) were pumped into the economy of Myanmar. According to the latest estimate the quantum of FDI in Myanmar has exceeded seven billion US Dollars and more are in the pipeline. Mentionably, Singapore took the lead in this respect and its companies generously poured huge amount of capital following the model of flying geese — exploring and tapping new grounds of profitability.

The neighbouring ASEAN

states termed this extension of economic collaboration and cooperation to Myanmar as 'constructive engagement' — a new terminology in the context of multilateral diplomacy which, in other words, means, helping in the process of opening up through dialogue and partnership in economic ventures with the age-old dictum that if economic liberalisation can be effected it will be followed by political liberalisation as in South Korea.

The ASEAN member states were motivated by various factors in their eagerness to befriend SLORC. Not that Myanmar is an extremely resource-rich country, particularly in respect of hydrocarbons with an estimated 33 trillion reserves of natural gas. But mainly because of strategic reasons — SLORC's over dependence on China, which was reportedly heavily arming and aiding Myanmar. China stood solidly behind an internationally isolated regime and till 1994 provided one billion US dollars worth of arms and ammunitions.

China was also providing all logistic support in building a deepwater port at Kyaukpyu which could also be used as an outlet to products from Hainan, China's neighbouring province with Myanmar.

China was also rapidly projecting its naval power using its naval bases and facilities in the offshore islands of Myanmar which Beijing was helping in shoring up in the Indian Ocean near Malacca straits — South East Asia's major commercial crossroads much to the concern and consternation of the countries in the region as well as India.

The ASEAN member countries thought it appropriate to lessen as far as possible Myanmar's heavy dependence on China, if not totally delink it from its traditional and dependable ally. SLORC was also happy to find alternative avenues of support and responded positively to the overtures of the South East Asian countries. In close economic ties with and flow of FDI from the ASEAN have brought about radical infrastructural development in Myanmar, particularly in respect of rail, road, port and hotel development. Example can be cited of the 1.1 billion US dollar pipe line project from offshore drilling site in the Andaman Sea across the northern tip of the isthmus of Kra to Bangkok in which France's TOTAL and American UNOCAL were reportedly involved. Other such important projects were also completed or are underway.

For Myanmar it is a story akin from rags to riches — the country posted an average growth rate of more than five per cent per annum. Economic benefits have made SLORC leadership confident that it alone can hold the country together and Aung Sun Suu Kyi admits (in her 1994 meeting with Bill Richardson) that democracy cannot solve all the problems that the country is faced with, especially the problems of multi-raciality and ethnic strife which manifested through the outbreak of guerrilla or jungle warfare.

Between Bangladesh and Myanmar there exists a number of issues which need to be thrashed for the relations of the two neighbouring countries to bring to a level of cordiality. About twenty thousand remaining Rohingya refugees need to be speedily repatriated. The present rate of repatriation at a snail's speed is discouraging. Then there is the issue of demarcation of maritime boundary, Bangladesh's inclusion in the proposed Asian highway and accelerated trade and economic cooperation between the two countries which share a seventy miles border between them.

In December 1991 in the wake of influx of Rohingya refugees there had been border

incursions by Myanmar's army in which one BDR personnel was killed and a number of others were injured. Bangladesh put its army, airforce and navy into full alert. The relations between the two countries reached their lowest ebb. Tensions ran high along their common border as the militant groups belonging to Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) were active in their encounters with the Myanmar army being financed and getting arms from the Middle Eastern sources. Since that time Myanmar has largely beefed up its defence potentials and its air power is reported to be double of Bangladesh's strength.

In view of the development in the region it will be prudent on the part of Bangladesh to enter into constructive engagement with Myanmar as the ASEAN member states did. Under the sub-regional grouping with the acronym of BIMSTEC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) Dhaka has already entered into structured economic cooperation with Yangon. With Myanmar's formal entry into ASEAN

Bangladesh has become a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia. Through Myanmar

and Thailand under BIMSTEC Bangladesh is now poised for spreading its external wings to South East Asia — an advantage which except India no other South Asian country enjoys.

Bilaterally also Bangladesh has much to gain from its cooperative relations with Myanmar. Apart from ensuring regional stability, the two countries' border trade can be speeded up for their mutual benefit. Better surface communications between the two countries and linking Bangladesh with the proposed Asian Highway can accelerate trade and investment between them. There is also a proposal for setting up of a special economic zone at Teknaf in Bangladesh with manufacturing facilities under joint venture utilising raw materials from Myanmar (The Daily Star May 25).

Bangladesh can explore its market for various goods like RMG, textiles, ceramics, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals etc in Myanmar and purchase various agricultural goods at a much cheaper price from there. A coastal shipping service between the two countries, and building a jetty at Teknaf and a bridge over the river Naaf can also boost trade and economic cooperation between the two countries.

All these call for seriousousness on the part of Bangladesh and its intent of purpose for constructive engagement with Myanmar keeping in mind the reality obtaining there — with SLORC firmly holding the rein of power in Yangon with the simultaneous strategic backing from China as well as the economic support being provided by the ASEAN.

SIERRA LEONE

UN Battling for Itself

by Jonathan Power

WHEN Kofi Annan, the UN's Ghanaian Secretary-General, visited Rwanda in May, 1998 he was up being pilloried in an aggressive press conference for presiding over the UN's "hands off" policy during the genocide of the Tutsis by the Hutus four years previously.

Journalists were quoting from Philip Gourevitch's shocking, just-published, book, "We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families". In it he charged that the UN had ignored a cable from its local commander warning of the impending genocide.

As William Shawcross tells it in his important new book on the UN, "Deliver Us From Evil", "His voice almost cracking, Annan ended by saying that 'too much was made of one cable and that if information was indeed the only problem then peacekeeping would be much easier. We would not have been having problems in Kosovo because everybody knows. We would not have had a problem in the Congo because everyone knew we had to separate the troops and the refugees. Why didn't it happen despite the information? Later everybody knew that there were refugees left behind when one million went back to Rwanda. Why didn't the information make us go and save them?'

Ever since the Rwanda genocide the corridors of the UN have been pervaded by a heavy sense of guilt. For his part, President Bill Clinton tried to make amends for America's obstructive role by actually going to Rwanda and making a contrite apology. Yet as we all know from day to day life, guilt on its own doesn't always encourage better behaviour. Neither, come to that, does having more information. We either have the will because we have the conviction.

Thus, until a week ago, we had to watch the unfolding carnage in Sierra Leone, as did Kofi Annan, with hands clasped, baited breath, wondering how far the situation had to spiral downwards in the direction of genocide or mass killings before the resolve of the Security Council made itself apparent.

Meanwhile, we were swamped with information on children being conscripted into the rebel army and children at large having their limbs amputated by machete.

"How much information do they want?" Kofi Annan doubtless asked his wife.

The Secretary-General is supposed to make bread without flour much less yeast.

A man with an ego would have quit long ago. One of Annan's predecessors, the Burmese U Thant, suffered similar attacks, when in 1967 he ordered a UN peacekeeping

force to honour an Egyptian government request to withdraw from its soil, triggering an Israeli attack on Egypt and the Six Day War. "He suffered irreparable psychological damage" and his physical health steadily declined, recalls a biographer.

Walter Lippmann described the odds in one of his telling columns in the *New York Herald Tribune*: "The cause of the opposition to the UN from East and West is a determination not to have the UN succeed in what it is attempting to do. For if the UN succeeds, there will not be a communist government in the Congo. That is what Khrushchev hated about Hammarskjold. And if the UN succeeds, there will not be a restoration of white supremacy in the Congo and that is why money, propaganda and clandestine intervention are being employed by the French, the Belgians and the British" to frustrate the UN.

Moreover the political and managerial complications over Sierra Leone are nothing as compared with the Congo. Brian Urquhart, a former head of UN peacekeeping, described the effort to persuade the rebellious, secessionist leader Moise Tshombe to agree to the National Reconciliation Plan as "like trying to get an eel into a

By this measure the UN operation in Sierra Leone is a haven of good sense. The Security Council is reasonably united. The diamond traffickers and some of the companies may have their own agenda but they do not have the ear of Western governments, as did the copper miners of Katanga forty years ago.

Very much for their own reasons, the British have got involved in Sierra Leone and perhaps even saved the situation. Prime Minister Tony Blair sent in a naval task force to evacuate British and other foreigners. Once they got their feet on the ground, finding their superior training gave them a cutting edge and backed by a favourable press at home they've stayed on, secured the capital and helped with the capture of the murderous rebel leader Foday Sankoh.

But such ad hocing is not good for the UN in the long run. Insisting on operating outside the UN chain of command, the British follow in the footsteps of the bad example that the U.S. set in Somalia. And now the Nigerian military is talking about operating in Sierra Leone outside the UN as well. This is no way to revitalise the UN, nor to build up the reputation of its peacekeeping department for future conflicts.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer (R&H)

Road Division, Pirojpur

Tenders are invited in Bangladesh Form No 2911 in sealed envelopes.

1. Tender notice number : 37 PRD of 1999-2000
2. Name of work : Double soiling construction work on 3rd and 4th KM of Naikathi Talukder Road under Pirojpur Road Division during 1999-2000 (Head of expenditure: 266 Development Tk 16,81,753/- Tk 33,635/- 30(thirty) days

3. Estimated cost : Will be available on all working days during office hours except holidays in the office of the Divisional Commissioner, Barisal/Executive Engineer, R&H, Road Division, Pirojpur/Barisal/Jhalakathi/Barguna/Patukhali/Barisal/Planning & Design Division (PD) Dhaka/Barisal/Sub-Divisional Engineer, R&H Road Sub-Division, Pirojpur/Kawthali. No paper related to tender will be sold on the day of opening tender.

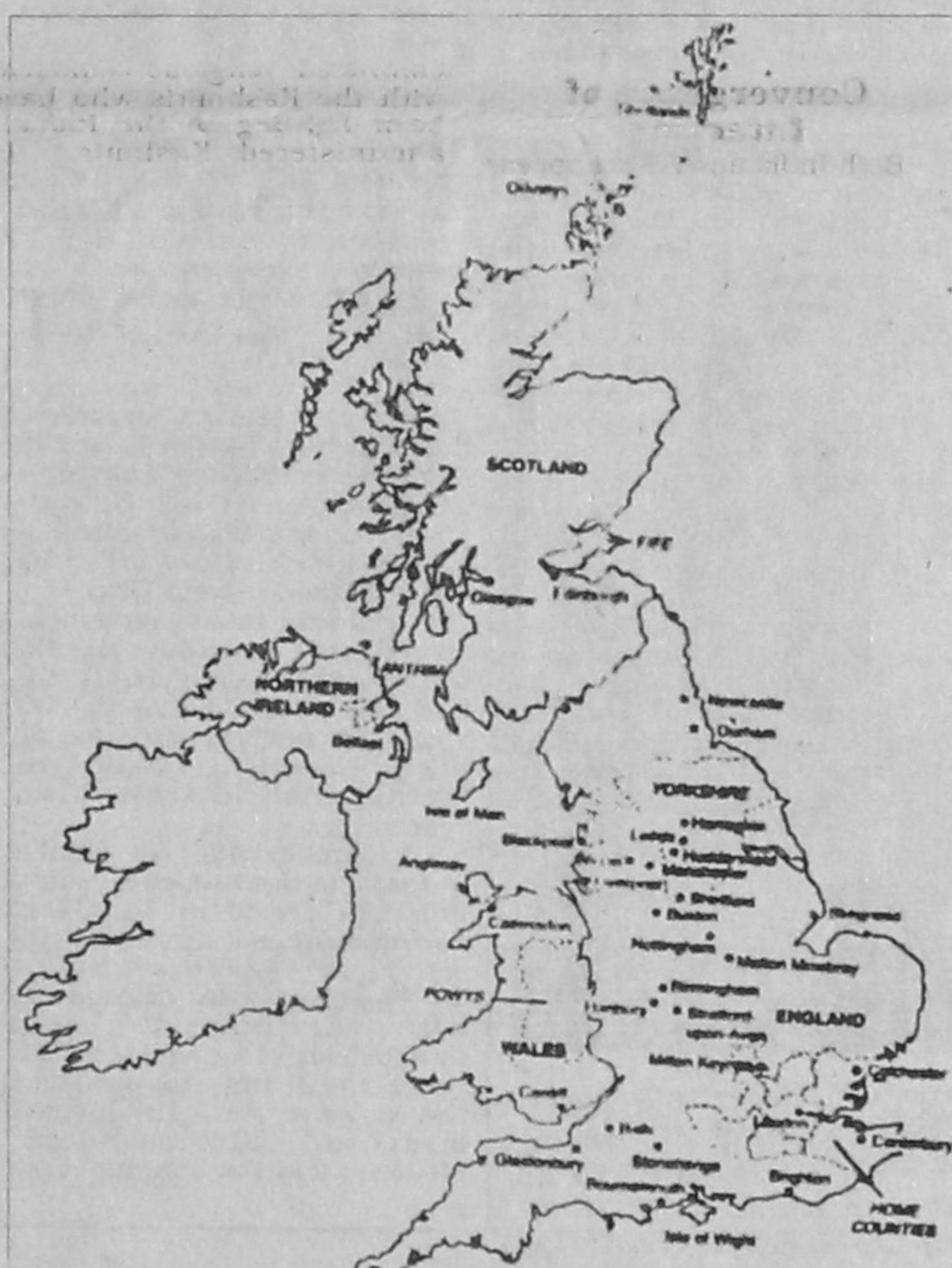
4. Earnest money : Additional Chief Engineer, R&H, Barisal Zone, Barisal/Divisional Commissioner, Barisal/Superintendent Engineer, R&H, Monitoring & Evaluation Circle (PD) Dhaka/Superintendent Engineer, R&H, Barisal Road Circle, Barisal/Executive Engineer, R&H Road Division, Pirojpur/Barisal/Jhalakathi.
5. Time for completion of work : 12-6-2000/29-2-1407 Bang till 5.00 PM.

6. Name of offices where tenders will be available : 13-6-2000/30-2-1407 Bang at 12.30 PM.
7. Name of offices where tenders will be received : 20-6-2000/6-3-1407 Bang at 12.45 PM.

8. Last date of selling tender : 25-6-2000/11-3-1407 Bang at 10.30 AM.
9. Last date and time of receiving tender in sealed condition : (R&H) Department enlisted contractors of A to C class of general category and D class of general category of Barisal Road

Circle.

NB: If due to unavoidable circumstances, lottery is not held on the specific date, then the lottery will be held the following office day at the specific time. Interested tenderers are requested to remain present. Tender has been invited before the approval of the estimate. Work order will be given as per rate and quantity of the estimate as approved by the appropriate authority. Bill will be paid subject to the availability of allocation. But the progress of the work cannot be hampered.

DFP-13009-26/5
G-1046ZQM Kamrul Ahsan
Executive Engineer R&H
Road Division, Pirojpur.

an independent state, it would have little link with the independent Southern Ireland. According to the Britain-Ireland Treaty of 1981, it would also have provisions to summon the inter-governmental council.

The autonomy of Northern Ireland came into effect from 1st December 1999, and due to

name a go-between to an international body set up to oversee parliamentary disarmament. The Irish government was to modify the country's Constitution to delete those sections making a territorial claim over Northern Ireland. British Prime Minister Tony Blair told the Parliament in London on 1st December 1999 that, "one huge giant step forward has been taken." In Belfast, Protestant David Trimble, who is First Minister of the new government, said the sectarian wrangling would be put aside. "We are going to have an institution with responsibilities...that is going to change the climate in Northern Ireland," he said.

The Crucial Moment
The alleged non-compliance by the Irish Republican Army with the condition to surrender their arms to a decommissioning body within two months of the formation of the cross-party government, which is said to have expired on 31 January last, seems to have obscured somewhat the hopes and aspirations. On the other hand, the Ulster Unionist Party threatened to "collapse" the newly formed government by withdrawing their representatives, if the IRA did not begin decommissioning of their arms by February 12 (when their policy-making body met).

On the contrary, the IRA denied violation of any provision of the accord which provided them time upto May 2000 for disarmament, and they had already appointed a 'go-between' to discuss with the International Decommissioning Body, about handing over their arms. But the UUP hardliners said that they agreed to sit with their

