

Prospects of Indo-Bangla strategic partnership

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Responses to my previous articles on the issue were mixed. First, many cognoscenti don't believe that normal, good neighborly relationship can develop in the near future, let alone strategic partnership. The more optimistic view was that because India is our neighbor and was a friend in need in 1971, there is enough scope of improving the relation. As interstate relations grow so do they deteriorate. That is the order of relationship between nation states, as we understand in the post 1850 scenario. My argument has always been that you can have a new car or bicycle, you can even change your wife, but you cannot change your neighbor. With this reality in view, we always have to work towards a better and credible relationship between our two countries. And the onus lies on both, though India must make the first move because history has given her that privilege and position.

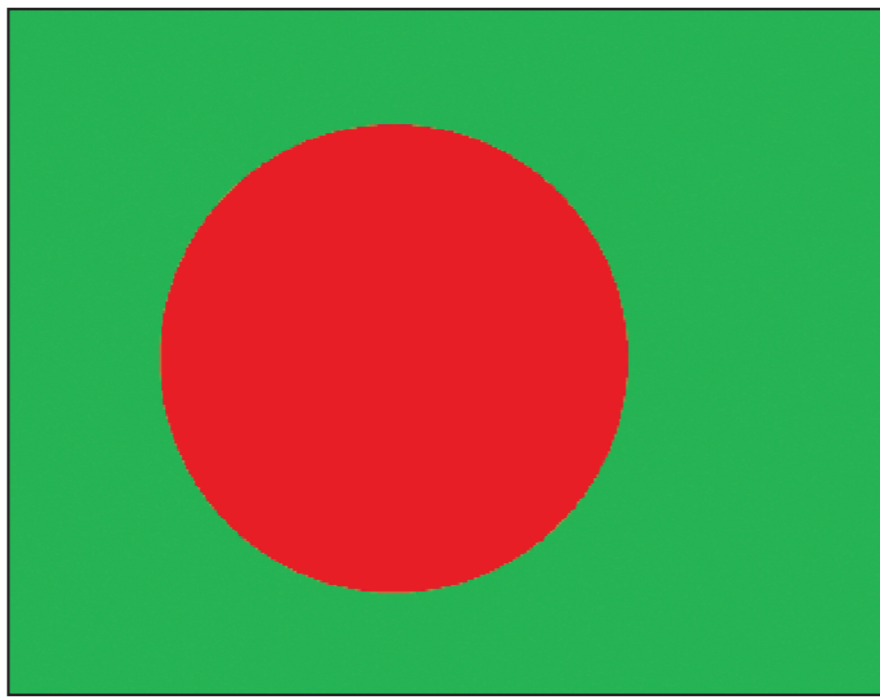
India is a regional superpower with gradual reach of a global power, particularly following the NSSP with the United States. They are working hard to improve relationship with China, and Pakistan with success. The Nathula Pass agreement is a landmark development in Indo-Chinese relations. While negotiating the Kunming Initiative in 1999 in the Yunnan Province, my paper, the only substantive paper presented from the Bangladesh side, I mentioned Arunachal a part of India! I asked the head of the Chinese Team Ambassador Lui Chi Sheng, former Chinese Ambassador to India: he paused for a moment and said "Ambassador don't worry, this is being negotiated and I am hopeful to find a

mutually satisfactory arrangement". I presented the paper as it was.

If this is how the Indo-China relationship is developing and with Pakistan advancing faster than expected, why should Bangladesh languish in self-remorse and sometimes self-flagellation. In diplomacy nothing is impossible, provided the necessary goodwill is there. This was the line of my arguments following Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Bangladesh. He left a good and healthy vive-some felt exalted--- but soon it seemed to have evaporated!

Secretary External Affairs Ministry Mr. Shiv Shanker Menon spent three days in Bangladesh. The two Foreign Secretaries signed an agreement on duty free-goods and discussed a variety of other issues impinging our relationship. His meeting with the CA was good and constructive. This is all good but my problem is different. Relations between nations grow and diminish because of an 'a priori' condition of political will of nations. Even during the First WW, when in Paris Napoleon insulted the British Ambassador in public, he immediately sent an emissary to London to apologize. The British were not sitting idle; they were pumping in money to overthrow the French monarchy by using the Jacobins. But the relations continued.

Indo-Bangladesh situation is certainly not like that. Two-way traffic is robust - other areas are about to open up. However, the incipient mistrust is still there. My own analysis is (sometimes against my inner belief) that New Delhi considers Dhaka as a far-away destination - it is a mere dot in their global diplomatic canvas - verbal pronouncements to the



contrary notwithstanding!

What Bangladesh wants is an open mind from India. Indian heritage is our shared heritage, only language is different in some cases. A Hindu scholar translated the Quran and a Muslim scholar translated the Vagabat Gita. Why then this mistrust?

I draw my follow up suggestion from the SAARC summit meeting between Dr. Manmohan Singh and Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed.

Thoughts for India

a) India must take into consideration that Bangladesh is a small country with a large population. It is no longer Kissinger's basket case. Our only ambition is having peaceful relations with our big neighbor India----with economic development as the only priority. Today our export is \$ 12 billion dollars---we shall reach about \$ 20 billion in the next few years; our manpower

remittance is \$ 6 billion dollars---it should reach \$ 25 billion dollars in the next 5 to 10 years.

- b) Where does India fit in? India as a big power has to demonstrate their political goodwill not by gestures only but by concrete measures;
- a) Our overall relationship should be on the basis of non-reciprocity;
- b) India has to be more generous;
- c) Non-tariff barriers should be done away with forthwith; some progress has been made after the meeting between the two foreign secretaries I believe.
- d) The antidumping law about export of our battery (since withdrawn) is still a nightmare to us!
- e) The understanding reached between our officials from time to time should be acted

upon, for example the last visit of our BDR chief to New Delhi.

- f) Bureaucratic red tapes more from the Indian side than ours is the biggest handicap;
- g) Our borders can be demarcated out if there is political will: 6.5 kilometers of undemarcated border should be sorted out immediately; India must ratify the Indira-Mujib Treaty;
- h) Adverse possessions should be sorted out if it is doable.
- i) At the heart of some of the cross-border issues are enclaves; we must resolve them.
- j) We have signed two landmark agreements---the CHT Accord and the Ganges Water Treaty, all because of political will. Why can't we solve the rest?
- k) Last but not the least, India must use its soft power more diligently and sincerely. China

is stealing a march over India in using its soft power so carefully and intelligently. Why can't India do it?

- l) India should consider Bangladesh's request for corridor to Nepal and Bhutan with sympathy;
- m) India must stop the smuggling of narcotics to Bangladesh. This is destroying a generation of youth. India should consider with sympathy and should play a pro-active role in assisting Bangladesh in containing human trafficking.

Some suggestions for Bangladesh

- a) The present government of Bangladesh has shown goodwill in more than one way. Our negotiators must take advantage of that in the future.
- b) We should follow a robust policy on energy and energy utilization vis-à-vis India.
- c) The water issues should be

negotiated with care and understanding. We have our arguments-but it is also true that after 20 years or so the Ganges-Kobadak Project is working- though haltingly for non-dredging of the canals.

- d) I have some sympathy with the argument that 'Water-Management' by Bangladesh can go a long way in helping us. India may extend her assistance towards that.
- e) The glacier melting and temperature rise is a common problem. We should concert our efforts with India to save the region and us.
- f) When I left the ministry, I initiated very preliminary discussion (not negotiation) on the Extradition Treaty with India. The 1974 enabling Extradition Treaty Act of Bangladesh can be used as our base, as I did in the case of negotiations on Extradition

Treaty with Thailand. I understand from the media that India submitted a draft in 2003. We should work on that. This will help in getting our criminals hiding in India and wanted Indians to be deported without any hassle.

- g) The US gesture in handing over Bangabandhu convicted perpetrator Mohiuddin Ahmed should not be used as an alibi is a friendly gesture. Bangladesh should negotiate with India invoking their historical role in such affairs so that they can start deporting criminals on case by case basis pending the signing of an Extradition Treaty.
- h) Above all we should not consider India as our enemy as many tend to suggest! Remember those spin doctors who propagate this are not our friends. Our history is our biggest testimony.
- i) Today the relationship between BDR and BSF is much better than a year ago. This is leadership.

In 1820 Asia-with India, China and Japan together were producing 2/3 of global goods and services. This gravitas has now shifted decisively to Asia again after over 150 years. The US owes \$ 3 trillion dollars in debt to China, Japan, South Korea, and India.

India should have an inclusive vision for the future. It is the Asian century; it is the Indian century if they can show their leadership in making this happen. But India must be generous befitting a global power as they did during the Tsunami.

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Reliable Replacement Warheads: A dangerous expansion

RESHMI KAZI

The non-proliferation regime is once again threatened by the contentious issue of Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) development by the US. The US Department of Energy has proposed the development of a new generation of nuclear weapons that seeks to demonstrate the feasibility of developing reliable replacement components which are producible and certifiable for the existing US nuclear arsenal. The objective of the RRW program is to improve the reliability, safety and security of the US nuclear weapons stockpile, achieve reductions in the size of the arsenal and reduce the need for underground nuclear testing.

The origin of the RRW program can be traced to 2004 when the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) efforts to launch a new round of nuclear weapons were thwarted by the US Congress. Thereafter in May 2005, two nuclear design laboratories - Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore - began an 18-month RRW study to produce the first RRW warhead for replacing the W76 submarine launched ballistic missile warhead. The RRW study has generated substantial concerns as it is perceived to be an opportunity to expand from a program of warhead refurbishment to one of warhead replacement with higher margins. As a world leader, the US decision over nuclear issues portends far-reaching implications for the global non-proliferation system.

The RRW program has given rise to certain fundamental issues and concerns. First, is there any need for new replacement warheads? RRW advocates have argued that since the US halted nuclear weapons production and underground testing with the end of Cold War, the existing US nuclear stockpile consists of warheads that are almost 40 years old - with doubts about the reliability of plutonium there is a need for replacement warheads. However, JASON, an independent panel of scientists and engineers has concluded that plutonium components - known as pits - have lifetimes of a minimum of 85 years and so US nuclear weapons will remain highly reliable for at least the next several decades. Even after this period there will be no pressing need for developing new weapon designs, as the plutonium cores can be remanufactured.

Second, RRW proponents have proposed that the new warheads would significantly reduce the need for testing. This is a fallacious argument. As the new weapons are made more reliable, more plutonium will be added to the weapons' primaries. While this will boost the confidence of the RRW designers that the primaries will meet its minimum yield requirements, it will also increase the potential for substantial nuclear yield if there is an accidental detonation of a high explosive. The issue is rendered graver with the claim that the new warheads do not have to undergo full-scale testing. Hence, there will

be no guarantee that the weapons can adhere to the stringent US one-point safety requirements of the existing stockpile. Changes made while increasing the reliability of the new warheads will also enhance the risks of accidental detonation since these new weapons will be built without nuclear explosive proof testing. Hence, there will be a trade-off between reliability and safety.

Third, will the military planners in the US Department of Defense (DoD) accept the new warhead into the existing stockpile without a nuclear test? This seems quite unlikely and can also be perceived as a "bait and switch trick". Hypothetically, ten years from now if the DoD states that it needs the new warheads to replace the existing SLBMs and requires one or two confirmatory underground nuclear tests to ensure the credibility of these weapons would the US Congress object? In all probability, it will not. If the US were to conduct a single nuclear test it will open the Pandora's Box of other nations to resume nuclear testing and lead to the resumption of a full-scale nuclear weapons arms race.

Fourth, contrary to the RRW supporters' claims that it will be cheaper to build new weapons than to maintain the existing "aging" stockpile, the design costs for an RRW will be enormous. First funded at US\$9million in 2005, the RRW study was awarded US\$25million in 2006 and in 2007 the NNSA has requested US\$27.7 million for the program. The NNSA's projected funding for the next five years is estimated at US\$97 million. If left unchecked, the weapons labs would expand the RRW study into a multi-million-dollar project in an effort to redesign the entire stockpile. Massive defense spending by the US would encourage other nations to indulge in similar ventures leading to spiraling arms race at the cost of domestic requirements.

Finally, new warhead designs and their subsequent production with new capabilities and new missions will cast significant doubts on US non-proliferation commitments. This may well lead to reducing pressure on Iran and North Korea to relinquish their nuclear weapons programs and encourage other nations to develop nuclear weapons.

The RRW has the potential to dangerously expand the role of nuclear weapons. It can also be used to develop earth-penetrating warheads making them more usable and severely reducing the threshold for nuclear weapons. As a world leader, US reliance on nuclear weapons would severely disrupt international cooperation in non-proliferation and prove to be a major setback for global disarmament.

By arrangement with IPSC, New Delhi.

Echoes of Cold War

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

On July 2, President Bush of the US and President Putin of Russia met at their summit for 24 hours at the family holiday resort, Kennebunkport, a small town on the Maine coast that is home to President Bush senior's summer retreat. President Putin agreed to meet the US President as he was on his way to Central America.

The media dubbed the summit as "Lobster Summit" because lobster is the seafood of choice at Kennebunkport. Bush's officials however did not consider it a summit but an unofficial visit of Russia's President.

Why was the meeting held at Kennebunkport?

President Putin responded positively when, at the G-8 Summit in Germany in June, President Bush invited Putin to Kennebunkport because Bush thought the venue would be a congenial setting for discussions on unresolved strategic issues, away from the White House and the media spotlight.

The menu of issues between US and Russia were many and prickly. It included (a) missile defense in Eastern Europe, (b) Kosovo independence, and (c) Iran's nuclear proliferation.

On each issue Russia differed with the US. Nothing could move on until Russia would agree because it is not only a Security Council member but has viewed the US initiatives as extending its influence across the world, even in the backyard of Russia.

Miscalculation of President Bush about Putin?

It is interesting to note at their first meeting in June 2001, President Bush famously said about Putin: "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy...I was able to get a sense of his soul."

That reading of Putin by Bush looks like a serious error of his judgment. Does the US President now see the darker side of this Russian President, a lawyer and former KGB officer? I bet it is.

President Putin's recent candid statements have alarmed Washington. First his indirect comparison of US foreign policy to the Third Reich (Hitler's regime), his criticism of the war in Iraq and then his threat to point Russian missiles at Europe, if the US stations missile defense bases in the Czech Republic and Poland against spurious US claim of possible Iran's missile attack in Europe.

At the G-8 summit, Russian President proposed to Bush that for Iran's missile attack, Azerbaijan's Russian radar base could be used for American missile defense shield. This very proposal not only surprised the Bush administration but also had been viewed as a shrewd

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diplomatic move on the part of Russia. Azerbaijan is the backyard of Russia and has a huge military missile base.

Putin's Russia

Putin's Russia is different. He wants his vast country (the largest physical territory) as a symbol of stability and unity. With the rise of oil and gas price, Russia is much richer now. Its economic growth steadily increased for more than 7% for the last few years. Inflation fell down under 10% per cent last year. Russia has taken control of its natural resources.

Russia has come back quickly under Putin from depth of humiliation and this makes Russians feel

better. Oil wealth has helped bring back Russia. A \$200 billion military modernisation project over the eight years indicates a sense of heightened power.

Opposition to Putin is small and the media is controlled by Kremlin. The regional governors are appointed by the Kremlin and elections are not held. A new Opposition "Just Russia" was recently established and it supports Putin policies. The party has no plans to put up a candidate for the Presidential election.

His popularity has grown among Russians because they have money and stability in the country. Opinion polls suggest that President Putin

could easily win a third term, if there were no constitutional bar. He could return in 2012 as the President.

Summit at the Kennebunkport
To get into an informal setting of the summit, details have planned. Bush and his wife Laura greeted President Putin, flanked by former President Bush (President's father) who went to pick up the Russian leader when his flight landed in the US and accompanied him on the short helicopter ride to Kennebunkport.

After posing for pictures and exchange of kisses of greeting with Laura Bush, US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice and former first lady, Barbara Bush, Mr. Putin

climbed into a car with the US President for a drive to the water front and a boat ride. All these settings were to put Putin to ease into informality.

Putin played the diplomatic game well. He arrived without a tie but took flowers for Laura Bush and for former first lady, Barbara. Before he left Moscow, President Putin disarmed the US by saying that "I hope that the dialogue with this person with whom I have formed good, I would say, friendly relations, will take place in exactly that spirit." How diplomatic he was in expressing the hope of finding solution to the prickly issues.

He termed the relations with President Bush "good" and then he said "friendly". This diplomatic statement had been couched in a very ambiguous language and could be interpreted in either way - cool and correct or good and friendly.

For President Bush, the effort to squeeze Iran seemed to be the most urgent issue with President Putin. Washington needs Russia's support at the Security Council to pass new harsh sanctions against Iran, the third round this year by mid-July. Russia has deep economic interests in Iran and has supplied much of the equipment and expertise for Iran's main civilian reactor. It is not known whether Putin would agree to new range of sanctions against Iran, although it did support earlier sanctions.

Media called the relations either a "new Cold War" or a situation in which Russia is not an enemy but cannot be described as close friend of the US. Russia is a competitor, playing some international rules, and is determined to see that unipolarity in the global world by lone superpower US is gradually eliminated. China and Russia have been close to see the end of one superpower calling all the shots in the world.

Some political analysts say that Russia is not seeking confrontation with the US but is seeking a basis for remaking a globalised world in which multiple players will have a role to play including the UN.

Reports indicate that Putin stuck to his ground. He sees the missile defense proposal in Eastern Europe as a potential threat to Russia. He proposed that his alternative to use Azerbaijan base be developed jointly by Russia-NATO Council, set up in 2002. The leaders did not announce any breakthroughs on Kosovo's independence and did not agree on new sanctions against Iran for its uranium enrichment.

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