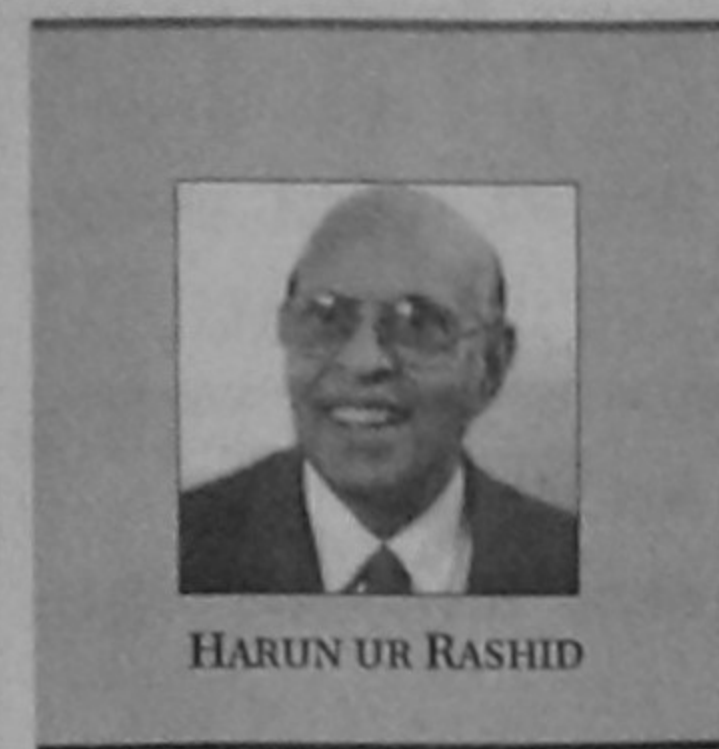


Indian prime minister's visit to China



HARUN UR RASHID

ON January 13, India's Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh paid an official three-day visit to China to boost relations with its neighbour.

Last October, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi visited China and that visit was believed to be a precursor to the prime minister's visit.

A long-standing mistrust has plagued bilateral relations since they fought a brief border war in 1962, in which China defeated India.

The most visible sign of progress is

BOTTOM LINE

Dr. Singh's visit to China comes amid a thaw in relations between the two Asian giants, with both sides looking to sweep aside past border disputes in favour of strengthened economic ties.

In the area of economic relationship, bilateral trade reportedly exceeded \$37 billion last year and is growing at a faster-than-expected pace.

India's Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon said: "For us, China is our largest neighbour, a neighbour with whom relations have developed rapidly since 1988, when we addressed the difficult issues and laid out the path for the future development of the relationship."

What are the imperatives for cooperation?

China and India are the world's most populous nations and have fast developing economies. Both are emerging new powers on the world scene.

India and China need each other because (a) the degree of interdependence among them has increased, not only in trade and investment but also in the area of regional security and (b) economic wellbeing of the people has become the dominant theme in the politics of both the nations.

India's growing consumer market,

skilled human resources, and software excellence, and China's own market, its manufacturing capacity and cost effectiveness provide the platform for cooperation.

Developments in both countries, such as population growth combined with environmental degradation, poverty in rural areas, widening disparity between rich and poor, and the increasingly strident voices of grievances and aspirations of people, pose threats to the stability of both countries.

In this context, it is noted that the Indian government wants to accelerate economic growth to as much as 10 per cent a year over the next decade, and the policy of China as expressed by President Hu at the last October Communist party congress is to reduce widening disparity between the rich and the poor in the country.

Furthermore, in the international scene, the differences among major powers, as often manifested at the meetings of the UN Security Council on global and regional issues

hand Iran's nuclear program), have created a much more fluid situation in the global order.

China and India have yet to acquire military profiles commensurate with their wealth.

In the current environment, there is now more room for powerful states other than China and India to manipulate world events, and some are bound to do so. China and India are "new kids on the block," and they need to cooperate with each other to enter into the global strategic environment, where they are unsure about the acceptance of their role in it by the current major players.

Issues addressed during the visit

China and India face a contested border that runs 3,500 kilometres. India argues that China occupies 38,000 square kilometres (14,670 square miles) of its territory, while Beijing claims the whole of the northeastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which is 90,000 square kilometres.

They realised that the dispute needed to be resolved peacefully. The two countries expressed their desire that territorial disputes should not be allowed to affect the positive development of bilateral relations.

There has been steady progress on the boundary talks, and the two sides are "determined" to uphold a

1993 frontier peace accord. They agree to make renewed efforts to resolve the Himalayan border dispute, over which they fought a brief war in 1962.

During the visit, India signed 12 agreements and MOUs that included cooperation between the two countries in various areas.

The agreements include, among others:

- A shared vision for the 21st Century,
Cooperation between the Planning Commission of India and the National Development and Reform Commission of China,
Cooperation between the railway ministries of India and China,
Cooperation between the Indian ministry of housing and urban poverty alleviation and the Chinese ministry of construction and
Cooperation between the Indian ministry of rural development and the Chinese ministry of land resources -- for cooperation in land resource management, land administration and resettlement and rehabilitation.

Both the nations agreed to set a target of \$60 billion dollars in bilateral trade in 2010, up from \$37 billion dollars last year.

On nuclear energy cooperation, India's prime minister said: "India seeks international cooperation in the field of civilian nuclear energy, including with China...the rapid growth of India and China will lead to expanding demand for energy. We have no choice but to widen our options for energy availability and

develop viable strategies for energy security."

China's readiness for civil nuclear cooperation with India is significant against the backdrop of a controversial nuclear deal between India and US that is in limbo.

Nuclear energy cooperation between the two countries could help slow the depletion of world energy resources. Since the populations of India and China constitute one-third of world's population, joint development of nuclear power can help reduce resource consumption.

Cooperation in defence between the two perceived rival countries was unthinkable a decade ago, but the very fact that China has concluded a joint exercise with India opens a new chapter in their defence ties.

The two sides expressed satisfaction over the conclusion of the first joint military exercise between the two countries in Kunming in China last month, and decided to hold the next exercise in India next year.

India's desire to secure a Security Council seat

The diplomatic language used by both sides does reveal the differences of opinion on India's aspiration for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. It is believed that China does not encourage it.

While, in the joint statement, India stated: "The Indian side reiterates its aspirations for permanent membership of the UN Security Council," China stated: "the Chinese side understands and

support India's aspirations to play a great role in the United Nations, including in the Security Council."

It is noted that the Chinese statement avoided mentioning the permanent membership of the Security Council but stressed on India's role in general within the UN and its organs. It is further noted that the attempt to increase the number of permanent members of the Security Council in 2005 was largely foiled because of opposition by China and the US, two veto-wielding permanent members of the Council.

Ramification of the visit on South Asia

The visit, according to many South Asian strategists, will have a possible impact on South Asia's security. The threat to security in South Asia is not confined only to Saarc countries because China casts a shadow on it.

It is common knowledge that India defines its defence strategy in the light of China's military strength, and Pakistan assesses its security concerns against India's position. This triangular security perception has been one of the main impediments in having a South Asian common security doctrine.

The visit may not be seen by Pakistan as comfortable, whatever the public declaration about the purpose of the visit. Sino-Indo cooperation is likely to ring alarm bells in Pakistan because Pakistan's strategic position and importance will be diminished in the region.

The Sino-Indian cooperation may have a positive effect in the

sense that some states within South Asia may not involve China in maintaining security in South Asia. Furthermore, there will be less chance of playing China against India by some states in South Asia.

Conclusion

Dr. Singh's visit to China comes amid a thaw in relations between the two Asian giants, with both sides looking to sweep aside past border disputes in favour of strengthened economic ties. The visit provided India an opportunity to discuss a wide range of issues, including UN reforms, regional dialogue and global issues such as climate change, energy security and counter-terrorism.

China and India have longstanding misgivings about their strategic intents against each other. Beijing fears India's deepening ties with the US are a part to contain China, while New Delhi perceives Beijing's increasing influence on Myanmar and Pakistan a threat to its backyard. It appears that the prime minister's visit is meant to build confidence that its blossoming partnership with the US is not against China.

However, analysts say that genuine cooperation will only be possible when mistrust between them disappears, and mistrust can be eliminated by settlement of territorial disputes and removal of Chinese anxieties that India is not a part of China-containment policy of the US.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Save the last drops

Therefore, considering the overall water situation -- especially in our region -- we in Bangladesh must save the last drop. And, in saving this precious national resource, we must think rationally, evolve a national water policy, and try to implement the projects out of our own resources or with minimal outside assistance.

MIRZA SHAFI

"A healthy mind in a healthy body is a thing to pray for," said the great Roman satirist, Juvenal, about 2000 years ago. And to be healthy we must get, among other things, enough water to cater for the body's needs; and if the water is not sufficient and potable, we face health problems, diseases, and finally damage to the body's mechanisms.

We have water scarcity in the Sadr affected areas, yet we failed to ensure water stocks before the cyclone hit the southern parts of the country. That was our failure when seen from disaster management point of view, especially when potable water has not reached to even half of our population.

Water is a natural resource and, therefore, is considered a national wealth. Our constitution not only gives us the right to live, but also the right to clean environment and hence clean water. This right to clean water entitles the people to use available water in their domains, and a right for demanding water under a government managed system -- both during normal and emergency situations.

Present availability of water

Presently, large cities like Dhaka and Chittagong get government managed water through the Water

and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), and other urban centers and many villages are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE). The latter has shallow tubewell projects in rural areas. The requirements of the city dwellers are presently met to some extent -- about 50% in Dhaka -- through water pumped out of underground aquifers.

Dhaka Wasa is yet to commission its project for collection of water from the rivers. Water scarcity is going to remain a permanent feature of our water management. We have a general mistrust of banks, insurance companies and other service-oriented organisations, as they are only "too keen to give their products and services," but have lame excuses when things go wrong, and Wasa, too, has developed the same tendency; no amount of threat or persuasion is likely to help the general public, and our miseries will remain same in the near future.

Let us see the situation from other angles. Throughout the world the fresh water situation is getting worse day-by-day, and in the last 30 years water has become a rare commodity.

The dismal state of fresh water supply to the growing multitude could turn into a world-wide crisis, especially because of global warming, ozone depletion, and other environmental threats. Yet, the very notion of a global water shortage

seems far fetched when 70% of the earth's surface is covered by water.

But it should be kept in mind that 98% of that water is salty, and unfit for drinking or agriculture. Desalination is technically possible but far too expensive to be extensively used anywhere except in an ultra-rich, sparsely populated country like Saudi Arabia, or in affluent cities in the US. Most of the planet's fresh water is locked up in the polar ice-caps or stored in the underground aquifers; only .014% is readily available in lakes, rivers and streams.

However, that precious supply is distributed most unevenly. Bangladesh is lucky to be in an area where water could be said to be available in plenty. Presently, countries are poised to go to war over oil; the cause of future-armed conflicts could be water. Jordan and Israel, Egypt and Ethiopia, as well as India and Bangladesh have serious disputes over water supplies through common rivers, while Turkey has the power to curtail the water flowing into Iraq through the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Whatever the consequences for human beings, water shortage has an even greater effect on other living things. Birds, fish and other countless creatures are crowded out, marooned, or poisoned as industries and agriculture reroute their wastes to rivers, dry up wetlands, and destroy the ecosystem. The notion that engineering

could produce water where and when it was needed is mistaken, and there is a limit to mankind's ability to move water from one place to another without seriously disrupting the natural balance.

Therefore, considering the overall water situation -- especially in our region -- we in Bangladesh must save the last drop. And, in saving this precious national resource, we must think rationally, evolve a national water policy, and try to implement the projects out of our own resources or with minimal outside assistance.

Bottled water

Water is the essence of life and, yet, when it comes to bottled water we hardly ensure its purity -- we take it for granted that bottled water is purified, tasteless and colourless, and hygienically free of bacteria. With all sorts of manufacturers here in Bangladesh, it is not enough to be a tea tester or a wine snob -- we must also be aqua experts. Water is no more than a stuff that falls from the sky, rushes down the rivers or fill the ponds. We have to buy the same, be it from Wasa or in bottles. Therefore, potable water is free no more.

In cities like New York, Paris, Rome etc., water is no more just water anymore. With more than 700 brands of bottled water, known as eau de bouteille, drinking of water has become a fashion. In Europe, at least 80% of the French and Italians take water and, like in America, the sale is growing by about 10% faster than any beverage. Some day in the future, market analysts expect that bottled water will overtake coffee to become the second most consumed beverage after soft drinks.

Why people are attracted to bottled water? Because it is safe; is kilojoule-free, whereas a 150 millilitre glass of wine has 400 kilojoules of calories; when "enhanced" it offers such nutritive trimmings as calcium, soy, vitamins, vegetable extracts (in a product called Water Salad) ginkgo biloba and Echinacea; and a high-octane blend of potassium, calcium and magnesium (called Glaceau Smart water) is supposed to provide the fountain of youth.

The purest water in the world is the Norwegian artesian water, "Voss," taken from a virgin aquifer and bottled before it gets sullied by exposure to the air. The water "Feji" comes from rain that fell 450 years ago on the pristine South Pacific islands. King Island's "Cloud Juice" guarantees 4875 drops of Tasmanian rainwater per 375 millilitre bottle, and "Lrisia" is melted Italian snow water that seeps up through volcanic cracks.

"Chatledon," one of the oldest and most exclusive water from a village in Auvergne, is coveted as it has no taste. The latest in America is "Iceberg" water, which is harvested from huge icebergs, and "Bergy Bits" from water off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada. We once went to Margazar, Swat State, where the water coming down from an aquifer on a hill was so pure and tasteless that we had to consume nearly double the normal meal each time we drank the water. And what about our tap water? We know that New York city's municipal water was dubbed the champagne of tap water and, till recently, was considered the best in the world in terms of taste and purity. In England, Thames River



Water, water..... nowhere!

water came out to be the best among several leading brands of bottled water that were 400 times more expensive.

We, in Dhaka, hardly question the quality of any bottled water produced here. It is now a fashion to be seen with a bottle of "Mum," or any other brand, in public. We have no authority to check taste or control production of bottled water and, therefore, every other day we read in the newspapers of unscrupulous people changing the name of the brand -- God knows what we are drinking!

A restaurant's typical markup on wine is 100 to 150%, whereas on bottled water it is often 300 to 500%. But since water is much cheaper than wine, and many of

the fancier brands are not available here, there is no protest. As a result, the hoteliers are turning up the pressure to sell bottled water of other brands and make extra money.

Some of the most shameless tactics they use include placing attractive bottles on the tables for visual sell, listing brands on the menu without prices, and serving bottled water without asking the diners.

In Bangladesh, as far as the information goes, there are a few brands -- Aqua, Trisna, Duncan, Everest, Polarise, Mum -- that claim to have their own deep tube-wells and/or ozonising plants, yet none is producing mineral water. These are costly, and the so-called posh

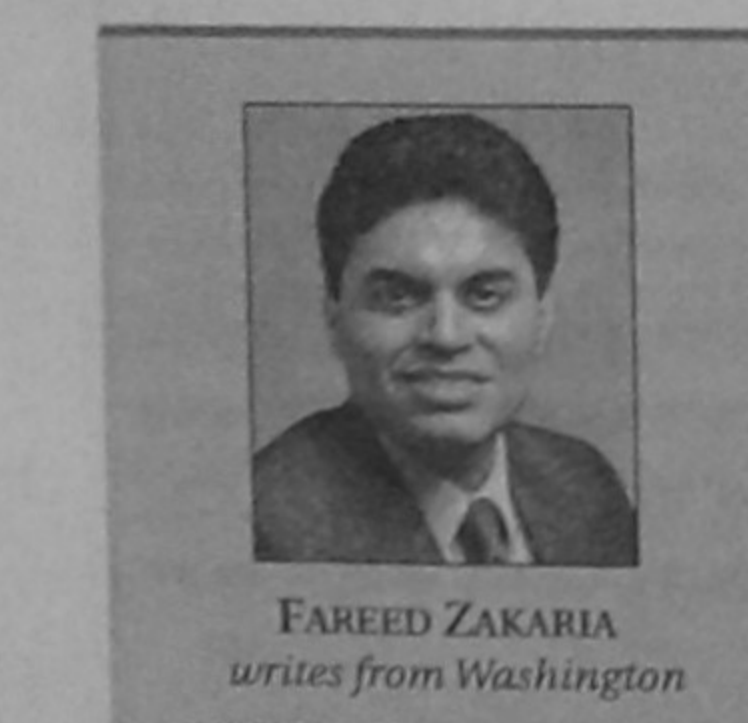
restaurants charge up to Tk. 20.00 per bottle of 10 ml.

Every day, the public makes numerous complaints about the water supplied by Wasa and/or DPHE; in fact, the complaints are as many as the varieties of contamination. Therefore, we can safely use the saying we hear very often, "Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink," be it in the Sadr hit areas or in other parts of Bangladesh.

Surah Waqu'a, or The Inevitable Event (68-70), says, "... were it our will we could make it salt (unpalatable), then why do ye not give thanks?"

Colonel Mirza Shafi is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

We're fighting the wrong war



FAREED ZAKARIA writes from Washington

PITY the U.S. presidential candidates. They had their positions on Iraq all worked out by last summer and have repeated them consistently ever since. But events on the ground have changed dramatically, and their rhetoric feels increasingly stale. They're fighting the Iraq War all right, but it's the wrong one.

The Democrats are having the hardest time with the new reality.

The problem with such a mission is that it requires lots of troops. By most estimates, peacekeeping in Iraq would take more foreign troops than are there right now. While it is all well and good to say that the United States should not be policing a civil war, the fact is that we are, and were we to leave, it would likely start up again. This is not the war that we signed up for and it is not really about fighting Al Qaeda, but it is the reality.

Every candidate is committed to "ending the war" and bringing our troops back home. The trouble is, the war has largely ended, and precisely because our troops are in the middle of it.

From 2003 to 2005 the war in Iraq was defined by an insurgency. After the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra in February 2006, it became largely a sectarian conflict. Now the dominant feature of the war is the proliferation of local ceasefires across the country. The real questions that candidates

need to answer are these: How do they interpret this new reality? What would they do to maintain the new stability? What does all this mean for U.S. foreign and military policy in the next few years?

American forces in Iraq have done superbly but the violence has not ended because they won great military victories. Instead, the adversary the Sunnis switched sides. Instead of shooting Americans they are now allied with them. This has happened for many reasons changes in U.S. policy, Al

Qaeda's brutality, Sunni defeats and war weariness. But it's a fragile peace. Stephen Biddle, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations who has made several trips to Iraq to advise Gen. David Petraeus, says, "If you go south of Baghdad you will see Sunni units that are the most impressive Iraqi fighting forces in the country, never defeated, with their command structure, tight discipline, equipment and gear all intact. They have simply made a decision to stop fighting." This realignment, however, has

been directed at the United States and not the Shiite-led government in Baghdad. Petraeus has been trying to integrate these "Concerned Local Citizens" the military's wonderful euphemism for Sunni militias within the Iraqi police and security forces, so they can be paid by the central government and develop a new relationship with Shiites. But both sides remain extremely wary. The Shiites suspect the former insurgents' motives; the Sunnis say that jobs and weapons are being withheld by the government. As of now, the United States Army is the organizer, financier, guarantor and enforcer of the peace.

Iraq remains deeply divided. The national reconciliation that Iraqi politicians promised has not occurred. Some movement has taken place on sharing oil revenue but on almost nothing else. The complicated new law on de-

Baathification has been, in the words of a senior Iraqi official, "a big mess, perhaps worse than if we had done nothing." The non-Kurdish parts of the country remain utterly dysfunctional, and chaos and warlordism are growing in the south. Of the 2.5 million Iraqis who have fled the country, a trickle a few thousand have returned home.

This is why Republican rhetoric about Iraq is also somewhat unhelping. John McCain deserves credit for supporting the surge. But the notion, articulated by many Republicans, that if we just stay the course a bit longer we will achieve "victory" is loopy. Iraq is seenned will be for years by the rest of the Middle East as a cautionary tale and not a model.

"Our initial goals in Iraq WMD, democratic transformation are impossible," says Biddle. "What remains is a negative objective,

stopping the war from spilling over, within Iraq but also outside it." It's similar to the challenge the Clinton administration confronted in the Balkans in the 1990s where the mission was to end a civil war and keep the peace.

The problem with such a mission is that it requires lots of troops. By most estimates, peacekeeping in Iraq would take more foreign troops than are there right now. While it is all well and good to say that the United States should not be policing a civil war, the fact is that we are, and were we to leave, it would likely start up again. This is not the war that we signed up for and it is not really about fighting Al Qaeda, but it is the reality.

The most intelligent strategy for the United States now is a combined political and military one. If we are to engage in peacekeeping, the operation needs to be internationally recognized, sanctioned

and supported as it was in Bosnia. We should call an international conference on Iraq and get the support of other countries crucially Iraq's neighbors for this new mission. There should then be a joint international push to get the Iraqis to make the kinds of political deals that will turn the ceasefires into lasting peace. Over the next year if the violence continues to decline, countries like India, Poland and South Africa could be persuaded to relieve American troops. With sustained and focused efforts, over time, American forces could draw down substantially. The mission could then become what it was always billed as, a genuinely international effort to assist the Iraqi people in founding a new nation.

Fareed Zakaria is editor of Newsweek International.

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