

Better business ties to India

Closer economic and trade cooperation is win-win

THE recent statement made by the PM to an Indian trade delegation on the government's plans to boost bilateral business and trade relations we hope heralds a new era of cooperation between the two countries that will redound to our mutual benefit.

For too long now our two countries have been engaged in a relationship that was not very productive and did not leverage the advantage to both countries of working together. The costs of such a policy have been a stalemate on both sides of the border.

It is long overdue for a complete reevaluation and overhaul of the bilateral relationship. We are heartened to see that transferring it to a more mutually advantageous footing appears to be high on the government's foreign policy agenda.

Specifically, the proposal to re-open the cross-border rail link that was closed following the 1965 war, is one that we think has great merit and will help facilitate trade and travel between the two countries. In addition, the idea to solicit Indian expertise in developing our rail sector is also a good one.

Similarly, we welcome Indian investment, as we welcome investment from any other foreign country willing to put the funds to help develop our manufacturing sector. If we have EPZs for other countries there is no reason we cannot consider an Indian EPZ.

The trade deficit, of course, needs to be narrowed, and the government's plans to boost exports to India by bringing the Bangladeshi testing regimen into conformity with India's, is a good step. We also need to diversify our export base, and develop land port infrastructure to help boost trade.

PM's emphasis on opening up routes to Bhutan and Nepal through India, is a crucial step to creating a sub-regional zone of cooperation that will ultimately prove advantageous to all four countries.

We would like to see a new era of Bangladesh-India relations, and it seems as though the political will is there, on the Bangladeshi side. We hope the Indian government will reciprocate in kind.

In closing, we would like to mention the caveat that with so much at stake and with things seemingly poised to take off, it would be contrary, in fact, harmful, to the overall positive environment for heralding a new phase of burgeoning bilateral relationship, if India were to take any unilateral action on Tipaimukh. New Delhi must share all the information on the proposed dam with Bangladesh and ensures full protection of our rights as a co-rriparian state, which Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has promised.

Jalil's exit

It could have been better handled by both sides

ABDUL Jalil's exit as the Awami League general secretary, a post he had held since December 2002, is unceremonious to say the least. It was only a matter of time that this would have happened. And, his failure to realise that it was coming before he actually decided to act, reflects on his poor sense of judgement, and self-respect. This is where his apparently dramatic resignation strikes as pitiful and tragic. It sounds ironic, because a man of his long association with the AL in various important capacities -- as international affairs secretary, joint general secretary, presidium member, and finally, general secretary -- certainly deserved a better treatment.

That a major political party like the AL will go for changes in party leadership to inject dynamism into it, is only to be expected. But there should be normality, transparency and discretion about the method adopted to bring these about. Jalil has been virtually presented with a *fait accompli* and that does not amount to a good political culture. It must have been plain to AL leadership, let alone Jalil himself, that he had lost the confidence of the party chief and that the prospect for resignation was real for him. This is all the more reason why, making the resignation look like a forced one, could have been avoided. If he were given a proper farewell with his contributions to the AL recognised, the party would have emerged as one wedded to a sophisticated political culture, and living up to its rich traditions. Instead, his nose has been rubbed on the ground.

In the ultimate analysis, Jalil is the one to be faulted for the fact that much as he had longed for dignity in his departure, he basically courted indignity upon himself. He kept hanging around despite visible signs of the ground under his feet slipping away. Jalil has been practically jettisoned since September, 2008 when on return from his medical treatment in Singapore his express desire to reassume the party post met virtually with a disapproval from the party chief. Actually, his credibility took a beating in 2007 when in detention under the Army-backed caretaker government he apparently gave an undertaking to retire from politics on a critical note of 'autocratic' leadership in the AL. So, if there has been no method in his exit, at least the process of his being eased out was very much afoot, only he was too naive to bury his head in the sand.

Re-evaluating 1/11

The relevant provision of the constitution mandates the caretaker government to handover power to an elected government for which the election should be held within ninety days. The extension was validated by the highest court of the country that gave the EC up to December 2008 to hold election to the parliament.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

THE changes of January 11 have come under criticism; it is particularly those who had suffered due to various forms of mental and physical duress during the two years of CTG that have taken up the cudgels against 1/11.

It is very interesting to note that the concept of the caretaker system is also coming under attack, particularly from those that were responsible for conceiving the idea. And it is no wonder that the BNP, who was against it initially, but was forced to introduce the system in the face of a very strong political movement by the opposition, wants it to continue. To hear some AL leaders talk now of doing away with the caretaker system is as amusing as listening to the BNP extolling the virtues of the system.

I for one had never made a secret of my position about it. The caretaker system is a reflection of our political immaturity -- we can no longer hide behind the excuse of "nascent state" and "inexperienced polity." If we have not graduated from political infancy to manhood after 38 years, will we ever?

It is also a reflection of the innate animosity and distrust that have motivated the behaviour of the two major parties, both in so far it related to their mutual relationship as also assuming positions on various nationalities.

Post facto evaluation of a political issue is inevitable. And one finds nothing wrong in assessing the performance of the CTG. It was a unique arrangement compelled by the politi-

cal situation. But any suggestion that it was an aberration that should not have happened is rather inane. And that is why one is amused to hear people terming the erstwhile CTG as "so-called" and even illegal. Interestingly, the ranks of the critics are weighted rather heavily towards the AL, the party, its detractors claim, that was the biggest beneficiary of the postponed election.

Those politicians who are crying hoarse must recall the people's perceptions and opinions regarding the change, the vast majority who heaved a sigh of relief at being spared from even more serious consequences of the prevailing unrest in terms of the political dispensation that might have followed, not to speak of a heightened level of political violence.

But it was not that one was not alive to the pitfalls of an unelected government, which may not have been unconstitutional or illegal, but which at the same time could not expect to have an open ended tenure, leaving all to guess the meaning of holding election "as soon as possible."

The relevant provision of the constitution mandates the caretaker government to handover power to an elected government for which the election should be held within ninety days. The extension was validated by the highest court of the country that gave the EC up to December 2008 to hold election to the parliament.

However, even at that time we had cautioned in this very column saying that the government should be aware of the dangers and the consequences of a prolonged tenure



1/11 was the best available option.

of an unelected government, albeit constitutional. Not only was it likely to influence our international relations, particularly with our development partners, an unelected government may not be equipped or prepared to address national issues or problems that might crop up eventually, in the way an elected government can.

It is also disconcerting to note that the blame for the so-called "minus two" formula is being put on certain section of the media. One is not certain who coined the phrase but the idea was certainly not the media's innovation. In fact one's memory serves one right, the idea of new leadership, restriction of tenure of party chairmanship to two terms, democratisation of political parties, etc were matters that were being talked about by senior members of both the political parties. These gentlemen may have reasons to have gone quite now on the matter, having perhaps fallen out of favour with their party bosses.

It was the people's perception that much of the political woes that we faced were due to the very nature of AL-BNP

relationship that was most acrimonious to say the least, and to a large extent the relationship was determined by the personal equation of the leaders of the two parties. And the people did not want to be held hostage to this situation any longer. However, it was not for anybody other than the members of the party to choose their leader.

But not everything was right with 1/11 either. The CTG government had taken too much on its plate that it did not fully deliver. While we will reevaluate the erstwhile CTG later, we cannot end without saying how badly its anti-corruption drive has gone. It was, as we had said before, motivated by considerations other than the honest desire to rid country of corruption. And that is why, while some innocent people have suffered, some, who in public estimate were less than honest, have gone scot-free. We feel sorry on both counts.

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan ndc, psdc (Retd) The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star..

Hillary in India

India fully realises that it cannot achieve its due role in the region and globally without American participation. Only American power can restrain Pakistan's adventurism and contain China increasing influence in the region.

HARUN UR RASHID

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's choice of India for a visit of three days in South Asia implies how important India is perceived with the Obama administration. The US and India are allies because strategic interests coincide, reinforced by democracy, oil diplomacy, war on terrorism, and the presence of more than a million Indians in the US.

America's engagement with India has been blossoming since the days of Vajpayee of late 90s. The US-India nuclear pact, signed in 2007 and ratified in October 2008 by the US Congress was a significant milestone for relations between the two countries.

As the former American undersecretary of state, Nicholas Burns, who played a key role in the negotiations, declared: the agreement signaled the beginning of a "strategic partnership" between the two nations.

Strategic partnership is to be based on long-term shared strategic vision, based on convergence of strategic interests, mutual trust, confidence in each other and respect for each others' strategic sensitivities.

Regional powers, such as India, cannot be influential actors without significant accretions to their military capabilities, both conventional and non-conventional.

India fully realises that it cannot achieve its due role in the region and globally without American participation. Only American power can restrain Pakistan's adventurism and contain China increasing influence in the region.

On the other hand, American strategy in Asia is preoccupied with "managing" the rise of China. It also means deepening relations with key Asian allies such as India, Asean and Japan. This strategy is designed to not only improve American standing and influence in the region but also to manage the rise of China. Under these approaches, the plan is to prevent Chinese growing influence in Asia Pacific region.

Furthermore, India has a growing middle class (about 300 million and increasing) and they have disposable incomes to buy sophisticated American consumer goods. It is a big market for American multinationals. There is a huge possibility for cooperation in joint investment, joint enterprise and joint exploitation of natural

resources.

India takes seriously its long-standing status as an independent rising power. Few things would be more unpalatable to New Delhi than being passed off as an American messenger. India might not agree to become a member of American security alliances in the region; but New Delhi and Washington have common strategic interests when it comes to managing China.

An emerging India-US partnership appears to be an essential pillar of the new strategy. Washington would be happy to allow New Delhi a growing pre-eminence in Asia and in the India Ocean. Against the backdrop, three-day visit to India of the Secretary of State is to be viewed.

To demonstrate India and the United States as allies in the fight against terrorism, Ms. Clinton stayed in the Taj Mahal, which was attacked by terrorists on November 26, 2008. She said at a news conference: "We have a great sense of solidarity and sympathy, having gone through what we did on 9/11."

Earlier, Clinton attended a ceremony commemorating the Mumbai attack, which killed 166 and raised tensions between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan. Ms. Clinton held talks on July 18 and 19 with Indian government officials on a wide range of issues, including nuclear nonproliferation, defence agreement, strengthening trade ties and combating climate change.

She also met with 11 Indian business leaders, including Mukesh Ambani, chair-

man of Reliance Industries, the largest privately held company in India.

Echoing remarks made by Ambani at the meeting, Clinton said that India should leapfrog the developed world to come up with its own innovative way to encourage environmentally friendly growth. "We believe India is innovative and entrepreneurial enough to figure out how to deal with climate change while continuing to lift people out of poverty and develop at a rapid rate," she said.

India however does not want others to see the relations with the US as sacrificing its policies. Rather it considers the relationship with the US as a partnership to achieve its dominant role in the region and globally. India's relationship with Russia has been growing and its economic relations with China has

Global economic power continues to shift to Asia, despite the current global crisis. An awkward truth is that the world is neither dominated by a unipolar power nor multi-polar powers. Currently we live in a non-polar world and the balance of power is going through an evolution period in which G-8 has turned into G-20 as of necessity.

Clinton's visit to India calls to mind what 19th century British prime minister, Lord Palmerston once said: "We have no eternal allies and we have no permanent friends. Our interests are eternal and perpetual and those interests it is our duty to follow."

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

Between public and private

National planning must be conceived as diffusion of power and knowledge through out the society. Public personnel administration should, therefore, seek to reduce division between careers in government and private institutions.

A.B.M.S ZAHUR

PERSONNEL policies have focused on recruitment, training, tenure, and eventually retirement. In advanced industrial societies there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of conceiving of public service careers in a much more flexible and adoptive fashion. In these countries there has emerged the phenomenon of men who do not have political appointments, but who are professionally skilled, serve in the government for a while, move out, and then return again.

The basic problem in developing countries is lack of enough alternative structures of power in the society. Power of a modern bureaucracy is heightened by having within the society adequate and other groups and institutions at a level of comparable specialisation/modernisation and shortage of skilled personnel.

For rapid development there must be elevation of power and knowledge among all possible sectors of the society. The whole nation can benefit from the spin-off effects of improvements in public and private bureaucracies.

and private centers of dynamic activity.

National planning must be conceived as diffusion of power and knowledge through out the society. Public personnel administration should, therefore, seek to reduce division between careers in government and private institutions.

Process of development involves more than state building. For a government personnel policies should, therefore, be cast in a larger context of the most effective policies for advancing the total society. Qualified people are needed not only to serve government they are also required to expand the total talent pool of the society.

If perspective for analysing the effectiveness of personnel policies for society is broadened to include the total society, the whole nation can benefit from the spin-off effects of improvements in public and private bureaucracies.

When the process of state building is seen in the context of nation building the types of knowledge that will be viewed as relevant for the state to encourage its employees will be far greater than the immediate need of the

government. Once government officials are trained to have more skills relevant for more activities within modernising sectors of the society the effect will be to make the government itself be perceived by the people as having greater capacity and hence authority.

Governments are concerned about getting a proper return on the investments they make in the advanced training of government officials. It is a wide practice to require government officials to pledge themselves to specific years of service in return for specialised training. From a broad perspective for national development it would seem that such commitments might neither be necessary nor entirely desirable.

When governments are subsidising training abroad it is proper that the individuals involved should be required to make commitments to return to their home country for national development. As long as commitment is to national developments the economic and social goals can be achieved and the individuals feel less imposed upon and more prepared.

Interchange is not inconsistent with building an elite and firmly structured administrative service. In a country like Bangladesh there may be hesitation in opening public bureaucracy to short-term appointments from private bureaucracies because such an approach is seen as a threat to building the more rigid structure of state necessary to give more solid form to political

development. Such hesitation makes civil service an isolated but lower status institution than intended.

Power and status of public service increase greatly by induction into the government from private sector. Careers in public service can be stimulated and power of bureaucracy greatly strengthened by infusion of talent and leadership at mid- and higher ranks of noted personnel in the private sector.

Public bureaucracies can benefit from personnel practices in joint ventures. Cooperation in personnel matters between government bureaucracies and joint venture industries can be greatly facilitated if government itself is involved in making policies that affect specialised training.

In future government bureaucracies may increasingly be able to use talents of retired personnel from the private sector. This needs formulation of proper personnel policies. Bangladesh can no longer continue with backward-looking policies in personnel administration.

The concept of interchange between public and private bureaucracies is relatively novel. Interchange policies need safeguards against improper influences. Excessively permissive policy of interchange from private to public bureaucracies can make the government vulnerable to improper outside influences. We should be careful about too much permissiveness.

The writer is a former Joint Secretary.