



Implementation is the key

Prof Rehman Sobhan

Chairman, Centre for Policy Dialogue

We should keep in mind that the critical issues cannot be solved in one summit alone. A summit is all about atmosphere and communications. Through this summit, the climate has been created for substantive negotiation. It is unrealistic to expect the prime minister to come home with a bagful of goodies. Issues such as maritime and land boundaries, which should have been resolved years ago, have remained on the shelf for over 35 years, and are not going to be resolved during one short summit at the prime ministerial level.

Reaz Rahman

Adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and former Adviser, Foreign Ministry

To my mind, the status quo is always better than heading out into uncharted waters. The outcome of the summit was very disappointing. Look at the Indian gains. There has been too much give and too little take. The nation was unprepared for some of the stunning concessions. Bangladesh made four mega-concessions: regarding bilateral security cooperation; use of Mongla and Chittagong ports for movement of goods to and from India; blanket cooperation on power; and support to India for getting permanent membership in UN Security Council.


The outstanding concerns of Bangladesh were not addressed. The Ganges water sharing treaty was the basis for Teesta water sharing talks. We meekly accepted the hollow assurance that the Tipaimukh Dam would constitute no harm or adverse impact to Bangladesh. Look at the trade deficit, it was a pathetic response from India.

The concessions will have far-reaching implications. The government neither examined the issues in parliament nor discussed them with the opposition.

Regarding the energy sector, the prime minister took a quantum leap into the dark by signing an MoU on cooperation



PHOTO: STAR



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PROF REHMAN SOBHAN

internationally acceptable.

To resolve maritime boundary dispute, Bangladesh has taken the matter to UN arbitration, side by side with carrying out bilateral talks. We need to resolve the dispute quickly as we need the mineral resources for the development of the country.

Farooq Sobhan

former Foreign Secretary

I believe this was a very successful summit. It has opened up whole of vista, not only in terms of Bangladesh's bilateral relations with India, but in terms of Bangladesh becoming a middle income country by 2021.

If Bangladesh is to move from 6 percent growth to 8 to 9 percent growth there is no way to achieve it without a meaningful regional and in particular sub-regional economic integration with its neighbours, starting with India, but certainly including Nepal and Bhutan, and extending beyond Myanmar and to Asean countries and China.

So I would like to say that the key to Bangladesh's growth and development is the need for connectivity. Our greatest strength has been our geographic location. And this is what we really need. India has made a major concession in permitting both Nepal and Bhutan and this is something needs to be fleshed out in future discussion. We hope that the port of Mongla, which is been lying idle, can now become a major outlet for goods of Nepal and also for Bhutan.

We have now excess container capacity in Chittagong and this would also provide a huge boost to Chittagong port and will make the idea of deep sea port in Chittagong considerably more viable.

Why should this be looked upon as a concession? We see connectivity and integration of transport system all across Europe, all across North America, all across the Asean region, all across the Arab world. Indeed the key to regional economic cooperation has always been connectivity. So I believe this is been a very major and important step forward.

In terms of the action that it has taken against ULFA operatives in Bangladesh we have consistently stated that this cannot in any way serve the interests of Bangladesh. The consequences of allowing Bangladesh to be a transit route for the movement of arms has been of immense cost to Bangladesh and I think cooperation in this field was long overdue and has been a major achievement of the visit.

On the subject of trade and investment I would like to say, realistically looking at Bangladesh's location and neighbourhood, where is the investment going to come from. Is it going to be Europe or the US? No. The companies that have shown now for many years an interest to invest in Bangladesh are

Indian companies. And I believe that this visit in particular the PM's speech when she addressed the joint chambers of FICCI, CII and AssoCham has now made it clear that Bangladesh would now welcome investment and this is going to provide huge boost to industrial development in the country as well as to trade because part of the attraction of India investment is the opportunity to re-export goods back to India, particularly north-east India, taking advantage of our geographical location. It is also taking advantage of Bangladesh's duty-free access to Europe and many other countries.

I think Reaz refers to the \$1 billion concessional line of credit as a negative. I find that difficult to understand. This is an opportunity for BD to upgrade its rail, road and infrastructure as a whole. I see this as an enormous opportunity. We all know that the railway system in Bangladesh is urgently and desperately in need of improvement. And we now have the opportunity through this line of credit upgrade the railway system because if we are to connect ourselves to India and Asean and the rest of the world we need to drastically improve our rail and road system.

Reaz also referred to energy cooperation as a minus. I would say this is

able to increase our exports to \$360 million from a mere \$60 million, mainly because of India's growth and increasing in purchasing power.

If we can strengthen the relationship we will be able to take the advantage of India's economic growth.

Exports to north-eastern states won't be more than \$15 million out of total \$275 million. Imports will not be more than \$35 million because of those states' poor purchasing power. Those states are like least developed countries.

So if the economy of north-eastern states is improved through connectivity they will become Bangladesh's export markets. Those who think that Bangladesh may lose the market because of connectivity, they actually lack the statistics.

North-eastern states are really our captive markets, but we can't avail the opportunity because of their limited purchasing power.

Bangladesh have been discussed in the summit though in a very brief manner. Even some issues were also discussed in the summit, which we could not think even.

I think the head of the government should have discussed with the people of all walks of life before visiting India. She should also have grown a national consensus, should have discussed in parliament, should have talked to the major political leaders. All this was completely absent.

I think our main problem is water security. We have 54 common rivers with India. They are in upstream and we are in downstream. Geographically we are oppressed but we have nothing to do.

But we will have to win over India by applying pragmatic policy. The joint communiqué should have much good things on these rivers. Especially, people got the assurance from our prime minister over the water sharing of Teesta



REAZ RAHMAN

The concerns of Bangladesh were not addressed. We meekly accepted the hollow assurance that the Tipaimukh Dam would constitute no harm

in power. The government has allowed India to use Mongla and Chittagong sea ports and transshipment in the name of connectivity.

With clauses 22, 23 and 24 of the joint communiqué, the Awami League has seriously, in my opinion, endangered our nation.

Finally, the prime minister conveyed Bangladesh's support for Indian candidature for permanent membership in UNSC, which is a huge psychological gain for India. This was an unprecedented move, for which no ground work was laid.



DIPU MONI

With respect to supporting India for getting permanent membership in the UNSC, BNP-led government had done the same with Japan on July 14, 2005

Dipu Moni

Foreign Minister

The visit did not take place in the context of the two countries only rather it should be evaluated from South Asian context.

With respect to supporting India for getting permanent membership in the UNSC, BNP-led government had done the same with Japan on July 14, 2005.

The issues of Teesta river water sharing, Tipaimukh Dam, and maritime boundary did not arrive suddenly. In fact, after 1975, BNP was in power for 16 years. But the issues were never raised and discussed. Discussion on Teesta was kicked off and progress was being made in this regard. A meeting of Joint River Commission (JRC) will be held in March this year to make further progress.

Regarding Tipaimukh Dam, India has assured us of not doing anything harmful for Bangladesh. No harm principles are



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FAROOQ SOBHAN

a huge plus in the relationship. We all know one of the urgent requirements of Bangladesh at the moment is to meet its shortfall in the energy sector. And grid connectivity has been something that we have pursued for 20 years, ever since I was a high commissioner. It has been pursued through two BNP governments, through the last AL government, and now finally we hope to see a conclusive agreement being reached on grid connectivity, which will be of enormous benefit.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman

Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue

I would like to focus on two bilateral issues -- trade deficit with India and the talks on losing Indian northeast markets if the connectivity improves.

Bangladesh imported goods worth \$400 million in 1990 that reached \$3.3 billion in 2007-08. Despite global financial crisis Bangladesh imported \$2.8 billion worth of goods from India. On the other hand Bangladesh exported \$60 million in 2002 that stood at \$275 million in 2008-09, down from \$360 million a year ago.

But we don't see the dynamics of this export to India. In seven years we were



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PROF MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

Second is that our import from India. Import costs stand lower and our consumers get at lower price. Prices of raw materials become lower and ultimately consumers are benefited. But our importers and consumers often do not get goods of India at lower price because of higher transaction costs. Lack

River.

The foreign minister said we have gone to UN tribunal. She later informed that we have shifted from that position and will solve the problem through negotiation with India. But what we will gain through negotiation, as we did not get anything in the past through negotiation. There was no concrete discussion held on the maritime boundary issue. Again that delaying practice, long time -- and the fact that the country will keep waiting and by that time all our resources will be hijacked. The government even did not discuss with anyone on the issue of giving support to India's candidature for the permanent membership of the UNSC. We have friends like Japan and China, but we extended support to India without talking with them.

Mahfuz Anam

As the foreign minister said here that your government also gave same assurance to Japan. Now this government has given support to India.

Mahbubur Rahman

This is all right. There is no problem. But the government should have discussed prior on that issue.

Mahfuz Anam

But your government also did not discuss.

Mahbubur Rahman

There is no gain if we always look back. Please look forward.



Allowing India to use Chittagong and Mongla ports at this time would create security problems for us

LT GEN (RETD) MAHBUBUR RAHMAN