THURSDAY FEBRUARY 11, 2010

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

Reaz Rahman

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

summit at the prime ministerial level.

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 megaconcessions: regarding bilateral security cooperation; use of Mongla and Chitagong 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

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in power. The government has allowed

India to use Mongla and Chittagong sea

ports and transshipment in the name of

With clauses 22, 23 and 24 of the joint

communiqué, the Awami League has

seriously, in my opinion, endangered our

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

membership in the UNSC,

BNP-led government had

done the same with Japan

The visit did not take place in the

context of the two countries only rather it

should be evaluated from South Asian

With respect to supporting India for

getting permanent membership in the

UNSC, BNP-led government had done

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

Regarding Tipaimukh Dam, India has

assured us of not doing anything harmful

for Bangladesh. No harm principles are

this year to make further progress.

the same with Japan on July 14, 2005.

on July 14, 2005

Dipu Moni

context.

Foreign Minister

connectivity.

ground work was laid.

nation.

REAZ RAHMAN

DIPU MONI

The concerns of



PHOTO: STAR



the climate has been created for substantive negotiation

Through this summit,

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 Foreing 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 With respect to supporting boost to Chittagong port and will make the idea of India for getting permanent deep sea port in Chittagong

> 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

considerably more viable.

key to regional economic cooperation has always been connectivity. So I believe this is been a very major and important benefit. 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 from many years an interest to invest in Bangladesh are export to India. In seven years we were

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 reexport 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.

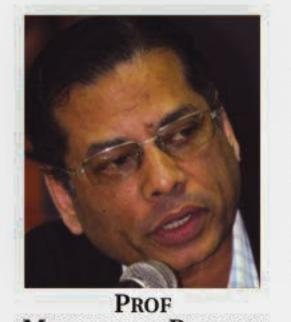
North-eastern states are really our captive markets, but we can't avail the opportunity because of their limited purchasing power.

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

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



MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

If the economy of northeastern states is improved through connectivity they will become Bangladesh's export markets

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

of connectivity pushes the price higher.

Ninety percent of imports come through

the land ports that are not well

developed. Connectivity can reduce the

Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman

BNP Standing Committee Member and

I think that we could not forward our

cases properly, did not prepare

homework properly, and therefore were

defeated. The trip has fallen much short

All topics related to Bangladesh's

concern were discussed at the summit.

successful or failure, this is a different

former Chief of Army Staff.

of the expectation they had.

If Bangladesh is to move

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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

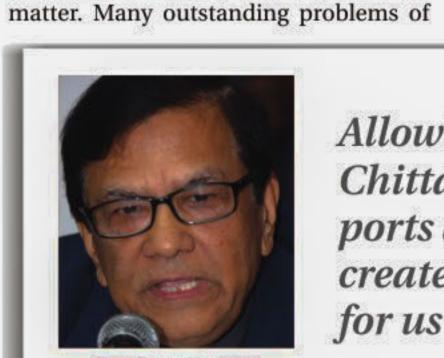
This is all right. There is no problem. But the government should have discussed prior on that issue.

Mahfuz Anam

But your government also did not

But how much the discussion was Mahbubur Rahman

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



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

FAROOQ SOBHAN

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

But we don't see the dynamics of this

LT GEN (RETD)

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN

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