

## After the PM's visit to Beijing...

*Healthy new dimension comes into bilateral ties*

**T**HE move by Bangladesh and China, in light of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Beijing, to forge a closer partnership of cooperation between the two countries adds a new dimension to their bilateral relations. In the past many decades since the two nations established diplomatic ties, the degree of cooperation between them in various fields, especially economic relations and in the realm of infrastructure building has been on a rising curve. With the latest prime ministerial visit, there is little question that there has been a deepening of existing bilateral links and all for reasons spelt out in no small detail in the joint statement issued on the visit in Beijing.

An important aspect of the visit is the agreement on an exchange of high-level visits, beginning at the heads of government level and going all the way down to trips by lawmakers, politicians, civil and military officials as a way of maintaining the tempo of cooperation in some key areas. Obviously, these areas include diplomacy (insofar as regular consultation is concerned) as well as the economy and agriculture. Such a development now binds the two nations in a situation where they can keep each other abreast of the various streams flowing through their relations as well as their responses to regional and global situations as and when they develop. The deal, as we note, has been buttressed by another, this one on a regular exchange of information and consultation on the use of water resources such as in the case of the Yarlungzangbu/Brahmaputra. Add to that the paramount need for cooperation among all co-riparian nations in the utilization of water resources, a point that has been taken note of by Dhaka and Beijing. Indeed, the joint statement is a clear pointer to an acknowledgement of the regional realities confronting such states as Bangladesh, India and China, particularly in the matter of cooperation in common river water-sharing.

Which brings one to the support the Chinese authorities have extended toward a development of the SAARC endeavour in South Asia as also in the matter of China's cooperation with the organisation. One good gesture spawns another. The truth of it is to be spotted in the efforts toward setting in motion a Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) cooperative process. That Dhaka and Beijing have agreed to carry the process forward only adds another dimension to bilateral relations as well as reshaping perspectives in the region.

## The high achievers in O-and A-levels

*Nation looks forward to their future contribution*

**C**ONGRATULATIONS students. You have made the entire nation proud with your exceptionally brilliant results that you have earned through application and hard work. We feel exuberance in our heart to recall that 52 students got world's highest marks, among whom 31 secured the highest marks worldwide in 14 subjects in GCE O-level examinations and another 21 in six subjects in A-level examinations in 2008-2009 academic session. Furthermore, two students obtained A grade in 11 subjects in the 2009 O-level examinations and three others in six subjects in the 2009 A-level examinations.

One must be cognisant of the fact that increasingly our boys and girls are competing with students from all over the world and sitting for the examinations conducted by an international body of examiners and evaluators and coming out with flying colours. Therefore, the results reflect what our boys and girls are capable of doing through sheer application of merit. It is a matter of great satisfaction that undaunted by shortage of facilities and other constraints they are emerging as high achievers at the world stage in a way. The schools, teachers and parents deserve equal accolade for providing them with the needed encouragement and guidance.

Against the backdrop of deteriorating standard of education in general, the O and A level results impart one clear message that our policy makers, bureaucrats and politicians should get serious about improving the standard of education at all levels -Bangla and English medium schools, colleges, public and private universities, technical institutes and madrasas.

Our message to the O and A level achievers is to keep up the good work so that they do even better in the higher levels of education they would pursue at home or abroad. The country would be best served if they would use their advanced knowledge to contribute to the socio-economic development of the masses.

## A historic visit



**We have already entered into a new chapter of friendship and cooperation with India. With closer ties with China, we shall be able to overcome many of our obstacles to growth to place us on the road to attain the vision of Bangladesh 2021.**

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

**S**HEIKH Hasina's 5-day visit to China is indeed a bold initiative. This, her first visit to China since the AL-led government assumed office in January 2009 is sure to be strategically important for Bangladesh. Over the years China has proved to be a good friend of Bangladesh, and we are now keen to further develop our infrastructure with Chinese collaboration.

Bangladesh seeks \$2.2 billion from China for twelve new infrastructure projects which include the construction of the Padma bridge, single-line metre gauge railway track from Chittagong to Gundum (Myanmar), a second Meghna-Gumti

Bridge, a railway bridge over the Jamuna, and the Karnaphuli tunnel. Aside from the projects, Bangladesh may ask for financial assistance to help set up the Shahjallal fertiliser factory, the construction of a regional highway linking Kunming with Chittagong via Myanmar and building a deep-sea port.

Other items for discussion are reported to include the purchase of military hardware from China, support for resolving bilateral issues with Myanmar regarding maritime boundary and Rohingya repatriation, duty-free access of Bangladesh goods to China, reducing the huge trade imbalance of \$3.5 billion, and increasing Chinese investment in Bangladesh.

In dealing with China and India we must not overlook the need for friendly and mutually advantageous relations with both the Asian giants to bring huge dividends to us but we have to be careful about how we balance them. We also need to be aware of the global strategy of the US in the region. Incidences like the Dalai Lama's demand for self-determination after his visit to Washington, growing US-India cooperation in nuclear development, US posturing to make India its junior partner, and India-Russia nuclear agreement (with US consent) have only increased the irritation between the two countries.

One thinks the recent US strategy to bring India closer aims at building a China containment policy. The US is fully aware that the role and authority of China is increasing and it is fast becoming the world's second superpower even though it still has a fair way to go: The Chinese economy is one-third of US, defense budget

one-sixth, per capita GDP one-fourteenth.

The need for our closer relations with China, which is the biggest economy in Asia, is beyond any doubt. China has a good image in Bangladesh; thus we feel that there should not be any difficulty in obtaining the support of the opposition parties in implementing the Bangladesh-China projects and agreements. However, there should be a thorough open discussion on China-Bangladesh treaties, agreements and memoranda of understanding in the parliament.

Bangladesh is also worried about the present state of its border security because of the rather aggressive nature of the Indian BSE. For a peaceful border with India we need to overcome our deficiencies in personnel, arms and ammunition of our security force to protect our people at the borders. China could help provide the arms and ammunition needed to secure our border.

Both China and Bangladesh have been successful in facing the global economic crisis during the last year. Both the countries are anticipating their economies will do well this year. Therefore, we have good reason to expect a successful summit-level dialogue between China and Bangladesh.

Our prime minister should be commended for bringing boldness and dynamism in her foreign policy. This is the first time we see great strategic thinking based on in depth assessment of the world situation. With the location of our country at the cross-roads of South Asia, it is only sensible that we are to benefit from the dynamic economics around us, and this points us to our need for greater regional connectivity.

We are unhappy about the too-slow growth of investment which is mainly due to a lack of infrastructure facilities. The development of infrastructure will result in the growth of employment. We have already entered into a new chapter of friendship and cooperation with India. With closer ties with China, we shall be able to overcome many of our obstacles to growth to place us on the road to attain the vision of Bangladesh 2021

A.B.M.S. Zahur is a former joint secretary.

## The great nuclear folly

**It makes no sense to cap the liability for a potentially catastrophic mishap in an accident-prone, highly hazardous industry, whose radioactive fallout can produce cancer and contaminate large areas for centuries.**

PRAFUL BIDWAI

**M**ANY Indian governments have pushed some anti-democratic or unconscionable laws and policies. In 1984-85, Rajiv Gandhi blundered on the Shah Bano case and opened the Babri Masjid's gates to Hindu communalists, eventually catapulting them into power. In 1998, the BJP conducted nuclear tests and tried to rewrite the constitution. The first United Progressive Alliance government sought the US nuclear deal like nirvana -- splitting society, even the nuclear establishment.

Now, UPA-II has embraced its own folly -- the civil liability for nuclear damage bill, which caps nuclear accident liability. The government couldn't introduce the bill in the Lok Sabha because non-UPA parties and its own constituent, Trinamool Congress, opposed it.

It makes no sense to cap the liability for a potentially catastrophic mishap in an accident-prone, highly hazardous industry, whose radioactive fallout can produce cancer and contaminate large areas for centuries.

All 430-odd nuclear reactors worldwide can experience a reactor-core meltdown, like at Chernobyl (Ukraine, 1986). Till 2007, 63 potentially catastrophic nuclear accidents were documented, the including hair-raising loss of coolant accidents (LOCAs).

In a LOCA, the coolant -- usually water, which must continuously draw out heat from the core -- is lost through leaks, evaporation or chemical reaction. Unless the LOCA is contained, the core overheats, and a runaway chain reaction leads to a core meltdown.

Although this probability is low, its consequences are catastrophic -- hundreds of early deaths from burns and acute radiation poisoning, and tens of thousands from cancers over decades; environmental contamination, and poisoning of vegetation and animal life.

The economic damage from Chernobyl, in which an estimated 65,000 people died from cancer, is \$250 billion. Should a Chernobyl occur in Germany, the damage, according to an independent expert study, would be \$2,400 to 6,000 billion -- equivalent to Germany's GDP.

Capping the liability for such large-scale damage violates two vital safety tenets: the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle. The first says no activity with inadequately understood hazards should be undertaken. Under the second, those causing damage must compensate the victims.

These principles and the absolute liability notion have been upheld by the supreme court of India in many judgments deriving from Articles 21 (right to life), and 47 and 48A (improving public health and safeguarding the environment) of the constitution.

In a 1996 case, the Court held: "Once the activity carried on is ... potentially hazardous, the person [responsible] is liable to make good the loss ... irrespective [of] whether he took reasonable care ...". Absolute liability extends to restoring environmental degradation.

The nuclear liability bill violates these principles. It artificially caps total liability for an accident at \$ 300 million special drawing rights, or about Rs 2,300 crores and the operator's liability at Rs 500 crores. The difference is to be made up by you and me. This is outrageous.

The bill lets nuclear equipment suppliers and designers off the hook. The notions of strict liability and product liability demand that they pay damages in case the equipment is poorly designed or manufactured. Equally obnoxious is the 10-year limit to liability: many forms of radiation injury, including cancer and genetic damage, reveal themselves only 20 years after exposure.

These flaws stem from two 1960s nuclear conventions meant to promote and subsidise nuclear power when it was seen as safe and "too cheap to meter" and hence deserving of subsidy. But not even a tenth of the projected increase in nuclear power has since materialised.

The US, once the world's leading nuclear-power nation, hasn't ordered a new reactor since 1973. Nuclear power's contribution to global electricity generation is stagnant -- while non-polluting solar and wind energy are growing annually at 20 percent-plus. "Next-generation" fast-breeder reactors, which can conserve uranium by producing more fissile fuel than they consume -- has failed everywhere.



The polluter pays, but the price must be right.

Nuclear power is inherently hazardous, because it involves high-pressure, high-temperature processes and great energy intensity. A nuclear reactor is a complex system, whose sub-systems are tightly coupled. A mishap in one sub-system gets instantly transmitted to others, potentially causing a runaway reaction.

Nuclear power poses the radiation danger at every step -- routinely, even without accidents. The costs of the damage, including treatment, are hard to estimate.

Nuclear power generation generates tonnes of radioactive waste which remains hazardous for thousands of years. Science hasn't found a safe waste storage solution, leave alone disposal method. The costs of long-term storage would be unfairly dumped on society.

India's experience with the 1984 Bhopal disaster has been terrible. Even today, the plant site and nearby water sources remain contaminated with toxic chemicals, including carcinogens. And nuclear materials are more hazardous than chemicals.

That's why developed countries like Germany, Japan, Austria and Sweden impose unlimited liability on the operator, supplier and transporter, etc., and often demand a \$3 billion-security deposit.

However, the UPA has latched on to the 1997 convention on supplementary compensation for nuclear damage sponsored by the International Atomic Energy Agency, as if it enjoyed wide acceptance.

It isn't actually in force yet -- five states need to ratify it, but only four (Argentina, Morocco, Romania and the US) have.

The IAEA's mandate is to promote nuclear power as safe and economical. It trivialises Chernobyl and only admits to under forms of 5,000 cancers. The CSC follows the Paris-Vienna model and raises total liability per accident to a miserly \$986 million.

The sole justification offered for India's nuclear bill is that without a low liability cap, no foreign nuclear operator will invest in India. But Indians don't need nuclear power at the expense of safety or constitutional principles. The Rs 500-crore operator liability (even if raised, according to a new proposal) won't remotely compensate for Indian lives.

The bill represents capitulation to US and Indian corporate pressure, and a retreat from the state's responsibility to protect citizens against hazards. The US, having given India the nuclear deal, is now furiously lobbying to extract nuclear contracts for American corporations. This must stop. The sooner the bill is scrapped, the better for Indian citizens.

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### Corrigendum

In the article titled "Righting a historic wrong," published on March 18, 2010 the author's designation should have read, "Air Commodore (Retd) Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury is Registrar, Brac University." We sincerely regret the error.