

Chinese cooperation in health sector

There are abundant areas of opportunities where Bangladesh and China can cooperate in the health, nutrition and population sectors, specially to provide services to the urban population and implementing pro-poor growth led strategies.



DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH

THE joint statement issued by Bangladesh and China on March 19 emphasised closer partnership between the two countries in the areas of trade, agriculture, transportation and infrastructure development. In addition, our prime minister, while addressing Chinese investors, invited them to mobilise their resources and increase energetic efforts in promising sectors like textiles, telecommunications, health, education, small machineries, fertilisers, footwear, power, gas and energy, port development etc, and to participate in the initiatives of the Bangladesh government to achieve its target of vision 2021.

Bangladesh is considered as a land of opportunities for investors due to its unexplored areas of ventures supported by the openness of the government to accommodate foreign investors. One of the most attractive areas is the health, nutrition and population sector, where China can contribute much in terms of investment and

traditional wisdom.

China, an ancient civilisation, is used to providing health care services through traditional medicine. Traditional Chinese medicine is based on the concept that the human body is a small universe with complete and sophisticated interconnected systems, and that those systems usually work in balance to maintain the function of the body. This system could be kept in order with the application of traditional herbs, dried plants and animal parts like dried snake, turtle plastron, shark fin soup and dried sea horses, and by maintaining balanced diet, using water therapy etc.

Traditional Chinese practitioners believe that diagnostic methods should concentrate on intense observation, understanding of ailments, hearing, smelling, touching, pulse reading, and acupuncture. Acupuncture, dietary therapy, shiatsu massage are so popular that many Bangladeshis went to China to learn the technology and practice thereafter.

Another striking feature of traditional

Chinese health service was the mobilisation of "Barefoot Doctors." During the 1930s, the Rural Reconstruction Movement had pioneered village health workers trained in basic health as a part of a coordinated system of rural uplift programs in the areas of health, education, employment etc.

In 1965, Mao Zedong's speech on health care mentioned the concept of "barefoot doctor," which was developed and institutionalised and integrated into the national health policy. But this system was abolished in 1981 with the end of the commune system of agricultural cooperatives. It was successful in generating health consciousness and providing primary health care services to people living in rural areas.

The Chinese wisdom of implementing health imperatives through the massive support of people was observed when the party began to mobilise people to engage in mass in "patriotic health campaign" aimed at improving the environmental sanitation and hygiene and attacking certain diseases. One of the best examples of this approach was the mass assaults on the "four pests" -- rats, sparrow, flies and mosquitoes -- which had a wonderful impact in providing basic preventive health care.

Particular efforts were intensified by the Chinese government in primary health campaigns to ensure safe drinking water through deep tubewell and human-waste treatment. As a result of preventive and promotive efforts, epidemic and highly contaminated diseases like cholera, plague, typhoid, malaria, hepatitis, dysentery and most of the vector and water borne diseases were eradicated, infectious and parasitic diseases controlled and child mortality reduced remarkably -- increasing the life expectancy at birth dramatically. This is the proof that popular public support can change the life style of the population without huge investment and infrastructure development.

The overall pro-poor social development policy creates unique opportunities for implementing equity-promoting health policies in a country like ours. Thus, policy makers have to take into account the inequity problems in health and health care between rural and urban areas, regions and populations living in hard to reach areas.

The Chinese government has started to transform its "GDP-centred" to "people-centred" development policy. They have adopted a few interventions like rural health insurance, creating a medical assis-

stance fund, providing free service in essential public health programs, undertaking a massive education program on sexual and reproductive health and adolescent health care systems, and producing low cost medicine.

The government and private entrepreneurs of China, with their combination of traditional medicine and modern health care services, can join in public private partnership ventures to accelerate the initiatives of the Bangladesh government, especially in the production of contraceptives and most essential drugs and medicines.

China has a population of more than 130 crores, accounting for nearly 20 percent of the global population. With the implementation of state policy of one child per family, fertility rate started to decline dramatically and achieved the present rate of 0.67% population growth, maternal mortality decreased to 0.51 per 1000 live births and infant mortality to 25.5 per 1000 live births.

The State Family Planning and Population Commission, which replaced the former State Family Planning Commission, is expected to adopt strategic planning to focus on the control, quality and structural adjustment of the population as well as ensure employment and human resources development. The emphasis on the population growth issues always received priorities in Chinese planning, a lesson for Bangladesh where family planning is not as predominant as it was before.

In fact, there are abundant areas of opportunities where Bangladesh and China can cooperate in the health, nutrition and population sectors, specially to provide services to the urban population and implementing pro-poor growth led strategies. Modern health policy has become too complicated in view of the involvement of many stakeholders like insurance companies, contractors, suppliers, pharmaceutical companies etc., apart from the priorities of government and development partners.

Partnership with China in population planning and research, and providing urban health care through massive investment, could be explored to achieve the target of millennium development goals and successful implementation of a pro-poor health care delivery system as envisaged in the draft National Health Policy, 2010.

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Little Pakistan's big India problem



The world's powers and superpowers cannot be indifferent to India-Pakistan relations, not only because the two neighbours have nuclear weapons, but also because they are involved in a critical battle zone of the next decade.

M.J.Akbar

PAKISTAN'S India policy is nurtured by a fundamental principle: Pakistan is always right. The obverse assumption is, but naturally, that India is always in the wrong, and gets away because of its size. The conflation between size and strength is meaningless and unhistorical, but remarkably effective. Britain was less than the size of a medium-level principality of the Indian subcontinent, and it ruled half the world.

Grievance is a wide canvas, creating elbow room for the unacceptable. In this Pakistani logic, even cross-border terrorism becomes India's fault since its root cause is Indian injustice towards the Muslims of the Kashmir valley.

History becomes the story of lament, and if facts do not suit the lament then facts must be suitably altered. Little mention is made therefore of the fact that it was Pakistan which began the war on Kashmir within six weeks of freedom; this was the first foreign policy decision taken by independent Pakistan, on the assumption that it could seize what it wanted while India remained comatose.

The reality is that if there had been no Pak-sponsored invasion in 1947, the status of Kashmir would have been settled through negotiations by 1948, probably through some form of partition. There would have been no Kashmir problem.

There are two starting points to history as written by Islamabad: Kashmir in 1947 and Bangladesh in 1971. The first exonerates cross-border terrorism; the second is used to explain Islamabad's need for strategic depth, which, in effect, means Pak control of Kabul without interference from India.

Once again, the military defeat of Pakistan and birth of Bangladesh is big India's fault. The sequence of events from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's spectacular victory in the general elections to the massacre of Bengali civilians in East Pakistan and the consequent arrival of millions of refugees into India is excised from public memory. These are not academic issues; they impinge on current objectives creating tensions, as for instance in Afghanistan.

Any nations foreign policy must keep space for flexibility, and therefore cannot be bound to a specific pattern, but its contours are always evident. The worlds powers and superpowers cannot be indifferent to India-Pakistan relations, not only because the two neighbours have nuclear weapons, but also because they are involved in a critical battle zone of the next decade.

America and Britain would be happy to see peace between India and Pakistan, not because it is a good thing in itself, but also because it is in their interest to release Pakistan from confrontation with India so that it can concentrate on the confrontation with their foes in Af-Pak region.

Their need for Pakistan makes them add to their historical ambivalence about a core problem, the terms on which this peace can be arranged. It would suit them to see a more compliant India, even though, on paper, India is closer to Anglo-American definition of terrorism than Pakistan.

Washington and London, therefore, have to negotiate each decision, whether on policy framework or specifics like Headley, through a complex web of immediate necessity, medium-term options and long-term horizon. Contradictions are inevitable.

Russia, aware of its post-Soviet limitations, and determined to pursue its interests in Iran, Central Asia and Afghanistan to the extent possible, would prefer a greater convergence of Russia-India objectives on terrorism as well as national priorities in South, Central and West Asia.

The revival of a military equation between these two powers is evidence of shared goals.

The reasons are not the same, for the world is radically different, but the impulses and intellectual reasoning that brought India close to the Soviet Union are again in play within the India-Russia relationship. Russia would be happy at a resolution in South Asia, but with its tilt towards Delhi.

China is the one regional power that has no interest in Indo-Pak peace, and as long as China remains Pakistans all-weather benefactor, a settlement is unlikely. Pakistans self-image, painted with the brush of lament, suits China perfectly, because it can outsource a substantive part of its competition/confrontation with India to Pakistan.

China and Pakistan offer a vital service to each other, by improving mutual comfort levels. With China by its side, Pakistan can negate, psychologically, India's big factor. China helped build Pakistan's nuclear arsenal not only as reassurance, but also to stretch the nuclear confrontation from the north to the west. Pakistan is the nuclear hedge that China factors into its war games at a time when India is displaying the promise of economic resurgence and military potential.

Diplomats and their political guardians are used to tiptoeing through minefields, but surely there is no region more explosive than the stretch between North India, Iran and Central Asia.

West Asia has dangerous triggers of course, but only one side, Israel, has nuclear arms. (This could change, of course, if Iran goes nuclear, a prospect that keeps the mood wintry in Washington and Tel Aviv.) The sheer danger of an unmanageable explosion should, in theory, make the imperative for an Indo-Pak settlement that much more urgent.

In practice, the absence of minimal trust, and the competition of a widening arc of national interests, keeps India and Pakistan frozen in a winter of despair.

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Renewing ties

The role of emerging economies such as India and Saudi Arabia within the G-20 framework and otherwise will be crucial to the restructuring of the global economic and financial architecture. The integration of economies of the two countries with the rest of the world would create new opportunities.

HARUN UR RASHID

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh paid a three-day visit to Saudi Arabia late last month. It was the first visit of an Indian prime minister since Ms. Indira Gandhi's visit in 1982, seeking to build economic ties and to enlist the kingdom's help in improving regional security.

He was greeted by Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, the official Saudi Press Agency said.

Accompanying the prime minister was a high-level delegation including Minister for Health and Family Welfare Ghulam Nabi Azad, Minister for Commerce and Industry Anand Sharma, Minister for Petroleum and Gas Murli Deora, Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor, senior officials and a 25-member CEOs delegation from corporate India.

The purposes of the visit were manifold, and are primarily related to:

- Security
 - Energy
 - Commerce
 - Cooperation in knowledge-based sector
- Saudi Arabia is India's biggest crude supplier, accounting for 30 percent of the country's total consumption. Bilateral trade is running at more \$25 billion dollars a year.

There are also an estimated 1.6 million Indians working in Saudi Arabia, mostly low-skilled workers, who remit several billion dollars back home each year, an important source of foreign exchange for India.

Noting that his visit carries "special significance," Singh said in his departure statement that the Gulf region was an area of vital importance for New Delhi's security and prosperity.

"There is great scope for opening new frontiers of cooperation in the areas of security, defence, science and technology,

space, human resources development and knowledge-based industries," he said.

The PM said that he planned to discuss regional stability, which, along with the Afghan war, was complicated by a standoff between Iran and the West over Tehran's nuclear program.

He also said that India wanted to strengthen energy ties with Saudi Arabia, its biggest supplier of oil. "We believe that conditions are ripe for moving beyond a traditional buyer-seller relationship to a comprehensive energy partnership," he said.

"Indian companies are well-equipped to participate in upstream and downstream oil and gas sector projects in Saudi Arabia," he told business leaders.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Shashi Tharoor said that India could seek Saudi support in persuading Pakistan to act against Pakistan-based Islamist militant groups -- adding, however, that this did not mean looking for Saudi mediation.

"Saudi Arabia of course has a long and close relationship with Pakistan but that makes Saudi Arabia all the more valuable an interlocutor for us," Tharoor told Indian reporters.

India broke off talks with Pakistan after the November 2008 attack on Mumbai, for which the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba was blamed. The foreign secretaries of the two countries held talks in New Delhi but have yet to resume the peace process.

A bilateral cooperation agreement, which Singh signed with King Abdullah, emphasised the need for an independent Palestinian state. In the agreement, the two leaders "stressed that Israel's continued building of settlements is a major obstacle to the peace process." New Delhi's support for an independent Palestinian state with its capital in east Jerusalem is "an article of

faith for us," he said.

On the economic front, the robust growth of the Indian economy created immense opportunities for business communities in Saudi Arabia. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that Indian investment in the kingdom had risen considerably, and stood at more than \$2 billion covering 500 joint ventures.

India's public sector company RITES has recently won a contract to participate in the North-South Railways project in Saudi Arabia, which is an ambitious plan to build a 2,200 km-long railway across some of the most inhospitable terrain in Saudi Arabia.

Education and skill development are of primary importance to both countries. India has a proven track record in the field of knowledge-based industries, which have great potential for the improving the skill set of the workforce. India wanted to share its experience with Saudi Arabia in the area of human resources development.

As for energy cooperation, he said that conditions were ripe for moving beyond a traditional buyer-seller relationship to a comprehensive energy partnership.

Saudi Arabia is the largest supplier of crude oil to India, meeting 30 percent of the latter's needs.

Indian companies are well equipped to participate in upstream and downstream oil and gas sector projects in Saudi Arabia, the PM said. The role of emerging economies such as India and Saudi Arabia within the G-20 framework and otherwise will be crucial to the restructuring of the global economic and financial architecture. The integration of economies of the two countries with the rest of the world would create new opportunities.

The prime minister's trip also coincided with the renewed focus on regional alliances and rivalries as both India and Pakistan maneuver for influence in Afghanistan ahead of a 2011 deadline set by US President Barack Obama for starting to draw down troops from that country.

Some analysts had argued that India should build its own relationship with Saudi Arabia, in part to ensure that it did not lose out to Pakistan in Afghanistan.

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