

Revisiting an old friend

Political relations between Germany and Bangladesh are very friendly. In 1972, Germany was one of the first European countries to officially recognise the independence of Bangladesh. In 1990, German reunification was warmly welcomed by Bangladesh.

NAZMUN NESA PIARI

THE centre of the talks between German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and Dr. Dipu Moni was bilateral cooperation between Germany and Bangladesh in business, international negotiations on climate change and cultural relations.

This was the first visit of Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni to Germany. In their meeting on September 1, German Foreign Minister Dr. Westerwelle praised the role of Bangladesh in the international climate change conferences. Both countries will work together to make the December climate conference of the UN, in the Mexican city of Cancun, a success.

After their long conversation both ministers signed a declaration of intent to deepen the cultural relationship between the two countries. There will be exchange of artists, and organisation of exhibitions, plays and concerts. There will also be more schools in Bangladesh taking part in the global network of PASCH.

The partner school initiative PASCH is a global network of schools where the pupils are inspired to get an interest in German language and culture. Inclusion of more schools from Bangladesh means that there will be more chances for Bangladesh pupils to later study in Germany.

Germany and Bangladesh will also cooperate more closely in the economic field. In presence of both the foreign ministers, representatives of German and Bangladeshi companies signed an agreement for setting up joint ventures. Both partners plan to build container ships and run a shipping line for the transport of containers within Bangladesh, mainly in the Chittagong and Mongla. With this project there will also be technology transfer to Bangladesh.

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Economic relations are constantly growing. Germany is Bangladesh's second most important export market after the US. The volume of bilateral trade in 2009 went up to more than \$2 billion in spite of the global economic crisis. Bangladesh exports goods worth \$1.9 billion to Germany, while Germany's exports to Bangladesh amount only to \$290 million.

Dr. Dipu Moni also met the German minister for economic cooperation and development. The cooperation between Germany and Bangladesh is very strong. Since 1972, Bangladesh has received \$2.4 billion from Germany. Both ministers agreed to step up the programmes of development aid, specially in the fields of health, energy efficiency and protection against the effects of climate change.

In her very busy programme in Germany, Dr. Dipu Moni gave speeches at the famous Humboldt University in Berlin and at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, named after the first chancellor of the new Germany after the Second World War. There, she compared the start of the new Germany and Konrad Adenauer's role with the independence of Bangladesh and the role of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The minister aroused a lot of interest and sympathy in the audience when she compared the size of Germany and Bangladesh, saying that there would be

more than 400 million Germans if Germany were as highly populated as Bangladesh. She also pointed out that Bangladesh is a force for peace and cooperation in the region.

Other subjects talked about in these meetings were energy, specially coal mining, climate change and issues like Digital Bangladesh and the situation in the prisons of Bangladesh. In the Konrad Adenauer Foundation meeting, the former ambassador to Bangladesh Dietrich Andreas and present Ambassador Holger Michael were present. The chairman of a ship building company of Bangladesh, Neo G. Mendes, and his German counterpart also took part. The meeting was highlighted by the presence of the former defence minister Volker Ruhe. Representatives of the Bengali community in Germany were also present.

The visit of minister Dr. Dipu Moni was very successful, and she also gained a lot of sympathy and understanding for Bangladesh in her public appearances.

The foreign minister's visit to Germany started on August 28. She was invited to an iftar party organised by the Bengali community in Frankfurt, which Bengalees from all over Germany attended. In Bonn, she had a full day's meeting with the Humboldt Foundation. She met Humboldt scholars from all over the world, who cooperate with German institutions on climate change and other global issues.



Consolidating the goodwill.

Her speech on climate change was welcomed warmly by the Humboldt community. In Bonn, she also met with the Mayor of Bonn and had a meeting with the Director General of Deutsche Welle. She visited the Bengali service of Deutsche Welle, which started in 1975 at

the initiative of the late chancellor Willy Brandt. The minister left for Bangladesh September 3 after a successful and eventful visit.

Nazmun Nesa Piari is former Editor, Public Relations and Marketing Department, Deutsche Welle, Germany.

America's Afghan war



Stuck in the quagmire.

Though individual parts of the conflict are winnable total victory does not seem to be assured. Patience with the government in Kabul is largely exhausted throughout Afghanistan now. In all of the options available the constraints that prevent victory are inability or unwillingness of the international community, including the US, and the Afghan government to pay the price to counter them.

A.K.N. AHMED

THE United States went to war in Afghanistan in 2001, immediately after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York. But there is no

sign that it is going to end in the near future. President Obama had publicly stated that he would bring back American soldiers from Afghanistan by July 2011. But his top agents and civil officials do not seem to believe this and are singing from

different music sheets.

In the recent past, the top American commander was changed and more soldiers were dispatched, but there was no progress towards victory over the Taliban. The much-heralded Kandahar campaign is yet to take place, while the American army is reported to have offered bribes to Afghan warlords and Taliban agents for the American trucks to pass with war materials, food, air-conditioned tents and even drinking water for American soldiers. General Petraeus recently said that American inputs in Afghanistan had to be converted into output, and the easy was difficult and the difficult was impossible there.

The Afghan conflict seems to have five main features:

- It is against international terrorism, primarily against Al Qaeda;
- The insurgencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including the Taliban forces in both countries. It is a military conflict divided only by the international border and Pakistan's policies, which offer sanctuary to Afghan insurgents and its own insurgents to target the Taliban rather than Islamabad;
- Production and movement of all narcotics are helped by the instability and absence of strong state authority, and so far Afghanistan is still chaotic enough for cultivation and trafficking to thrive;
- Multi-faceted strife within Afghanistan itself, resulting from ethno-linguistic divisions, religious practice, warlords, and land and water rights -- to name only a few;
- The crisis of governance in Pakistan and internationalisation of its problems have gone to such an extent that it is difficult to sort out problems of

Afghanistan alone without involving Pakistan. The recent devastating flood there has further complicated the situation. Insurgents are threatening to fight foreign relief workers. The Pakistani public is not favourably disposed to landing of US troops for relief work there. Pakistani troops are equally unpopular in Swat Valley, in particular for their intervention there in search of insurgents, displacing large number of people from their homesteads in the process.

Though individual parts of the conflict are winnable total victory does not seem to be assured. Patience with the government in Kabul is largely exhausted throughout Afghanistan now. In all of the options available the constraints that prevent victory are inability or unwillingness of the international community, including the US, and the Afghan government to pay the price to counter them.

Amy Chua, a noted historian in Yale University, has rightly observed: "One thing is clear. The United States cannot simply call for elections and universal suffrage and at the same time support an economic system that is seen as benefiting only a tiny privileged minority -- whether ethnic or religious minority or US or British companies. To do so would be a recipe for disaster."

For decades, American policy has been based on the seductive belief that there exists throughout the world a logical relation between democracy and stability between the might of the state and the success of society. One only wishes this is true.

The belief that globalisation, which has brought American hegemony, is harmonising the planet has failed both tests of science. It neither predicts nor explains

our world. Nor does it admit the inherent unpredictability of the present world we live in. Until American policy makers become aware of this deficiency in their thinking they will continue to slip in managing their own country and others under their occupation, control and hegemony.

The combination of the Nintendo-style American victory in the Gulf War in 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union convinced some military theorists that America's military dominance was untouchable. In their eyes, the world was on the verge of a "revolution in military affairs" not unlike the ones brought on by artillery or fortification.

This revolution would be led by information -- an area in which the United States, with innovations from IBM to Intel to Google held an unassailable advantage. Armed with this comfortable belief American defence forces along with other western powers embarked on spreading the gospels of free market, western democracy and free trade all over the world with boots on their feet and bayonets in their hands.

A few years back, in one of my published articles on the Iraq War, I had mentioned that America had to win but its adversaries -- Taliban and Al Qaeda -- had only to avoid defeat. The statement about war between mouse and elephant has come true in Afghanistan in a vivid form.

The real mathematics of the present moment yields the opposite answer from what security optimists postulated in the 1990s. Attacking now is cheap. The 9/11 hijackers spent less than \$1 million to attack the United States. The cost of preventing a similar attack on police, airport security and other systems runs, however, to \$1 million an hour in the United States

alone.

What do we learn from the above discussion?

- The offence-defence balance switch has flipped;
- The collapse of the USSR was not a proof of determinism (input democracy get stability) but rather proof of the opposite (input democracy get unimaginable);
- Mao Zedong, the father of modern guerrilla tactics, once said: "Countries with legislature cannot make a war of attrition either financial or in the long run, psychologically."

To sum up, the old way of war is increasingly becoming useless. It is senseless to aspire for peace on earth during our lifetime unless we begin to change our outlook about how, where, when and why we fight.

American policy planners, both in Washington DC and in the battlefield, should give attention to these problems without, as a commentator has said, hoping to have a bite into the reported \$1 trillion worth of minerals lying still untouched under the earth in Afghanistan.

Right now, while USA is pouring billions of dollars to fight the war and change Afghan society, China is reported to have struck a deal with the Afghan government to extract iron ore by offering a few million dollars -- without any strings attached -- to the powers that be.

It is hoped that at least the highly respected scholar General Petraeus will keep in view what has been said above in his input-output analysis on Afghanistan. In the "digital" age we are prone to surrender to data by giving up information.

A.K.N. Khan is a former governor of Bangladesh Bank.

LEST WE FORGET

Prof. Noman: A teacher extraordinaire

FARRAH JABEEN

TEARS. Such a small word but profound in connotations. The obvious explosion of it is in sadness, the very moment when a heart experiences any loss, goes through pains and agonies. There is "positive" outburst of tears as well -- we cry when we are extremely happy after possessing "something" after long and difficult trials. For me there is a presence of another dimension -- the tears of inspiration.

When I remember my Boro Chacha (eldest uncle), I instantly feel these tears of inspiration. Prof. Mohammad Noman is my Boro Chacha. Though he has left us, I want to use "is" instead of "was" as his presence, even today, is not "surreal" for me. I believe that I do not need to introduce him as a renowned educationist, the principal of Dhaka College, the treasurer and vice-chancellor of Jahangir Nagar University, because his contribution in teaching, knowledge and education is known to all. For his colleagues, his students, his well-wishers he was the man who exhibited the "light" of truth, knowl-

edge, virtue and strength.

But today I will present Prof. Noman in a very different way -- from a daughter's point of view. I am his niece (biologically), but I never felt that, actually he never did give me the chance to feel otherwise. It was in 1996 when he fell sick. I had just got the result for my Masters Final Exam. It was good, I secured 1st position.

Naturally, I went with my father to see Boro Chacha and give the good news. I can still remember, he was not very well. I told him my result and Chachi repeated it to him. Happiness engulfed him, and he started crying. Chachi told me: "He is very happy to hear this so he is crying". It was a very simple event, but it shook me, my whole existence. The tears in my Boro Chacha's eyes made me realise how important my achievement was to him.

It is not sadness, it is even more than that, numbness overshadows me when I fail to share my achievements with my Boro Chacha now. I am a lecturer at present. Prof. Noman's students always say that his classes were full of life and knowledge. When I take classes I do not know why these words hover around in my mind

all the time. I take those words as inspiration for me.

Chacha was not only a teacher; he was also a creator of different styles. Nowadays, in modern English language teaching, there is a method called learning-across-the-curriculum, which involves in-depth and practical learning through the combination of different subjects. The main objective of this method is to encourage the creativity of the students. This method was innate in Boro Chacha, he did not make any effort to learn it. Material development is another field where people do degrees now, but Boro Chacha was ahead of all these unconsciously. For him the techniques and materials for a class were natural manifestations of his feelings.

Patriarchy means one-man ruling system and Boro Chacha was the head of our family. The way Boro Chacha interacted with us, with his family, amazes me still now. We are an extended family. I am proud to nourish the essential values of family life, which are fading away. And this eternal bond was planted, watered and properly nurtured by Boro Chacha. The way he stood by his brothers and sisters

(including cousins as in an extended family) in the time of happiness and sadness, and the immense support he bestowed to all the members of the family is unbelievable.

I would like to mention his relationship with my father, which was so special. My father used to take Chacha's suggestion at every step of his life. Once my mother was sick and we had to take her to her to the hospital. I still remember my father called Boro Chacha even before calling a doctor for help because, for him, Boro Chacha was the source of tremendous support.

As a head of the family Boro Chacha could easily be overwhelming dominant, which is a fairly traditional approach in families, instead he won everybody with his smile and soft-spoken words. For us (the kids of the family), he was never a person to be scared of, he never taught us the so-called do's and don'ts of life. Nevertheless, he went beyond this, he gave us a profound teaching.

His students always praised his spontaneous style in the class. Similarly, he has taught us the norms and values through

his innate norms and values. He formulated in us a strong sense of choosing between good and bad. Now we follow the rules of our extended family without being pressurised. I consider myself a lucky person as I can easily practice the lessons that I learnt as a member of an extended family.

While talking about Boro Chacha I would like to share one of my experiences of the time when he was in hospital, fighting to breathe. My brother and I went to see him. Boro Chacha was with him, looking after him. It is natural that when a husband is sick the wife is a pillar of support, however, Chachi was even beyond this. The tenderness I saw in her when she talked to Boro Chacha is still so fresh in my mind. I think Boro Chacha could recognise only Chachi at that time.

The reason for relating this incident here is that I believe this is a teaching for us (the kids of the family). That was their way of teaching as heads of the family, and they bonded our family by being role models in different situations.

Boro Chacha is no longer with us. But there is hardly a day or a moment when I do



Prof. Noman

not remember him. I feel proud of him when people praise him but then again become careful not to cross the limit and become arrogant as that was never a principle of my Boro Chacha. A sense of sheer agony and pain overtakes me when I cannot share my achievements with him anymore.

Farrah Jabeen is Lecturer, Centre for Languages (CfL), Brac University.