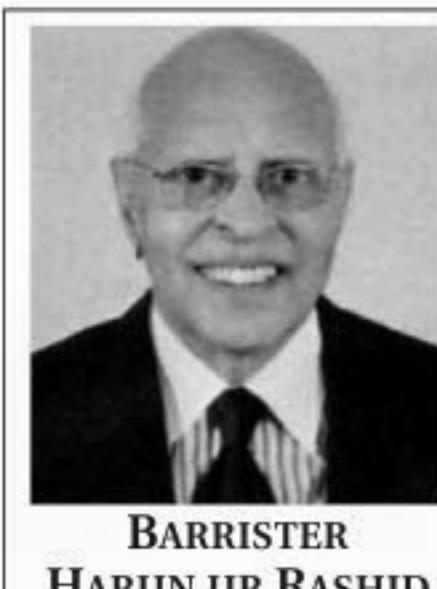


BOTTOM LINE



**S**RI Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa's three-day visit to Bangladesh from April 18 is of immense significance in terms of bilateral relations as both countries share commonality on many issues.

It may be recalled that in April 2003, former Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga paid a two-day visit to Bangladesh and held talks with former Prime Minister Begum Khaled Zia to reinforce bilateral cooperation in various sectors.

During the current visit, deals have been signed in the fields of trade, agriculture, fisheries, vocational education and science and culture. The deals had been discussed at the earlier meetings between foreign secretaries in January.

Diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were formally established in 1972 and the Sri Lanka High Commission in Bangladesh was set up in June 1979.

Bilateral relation between the two countries has always been friendly and cooperative and was consolidated through highest political level visits from both sides in the past.

Furthermore, there have been many visits by ministers of both countries to expand their relations. In 2010, the Bangladesh foreign

# A new chapter in Colombo-Dhaka relations

minister had a bilateral meeting with her counterpart on the sidelines of the Third Asia Middle East Dialogue Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok and discussed many issues of cooperation.

In 2008, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh reactivated the Joint Committee for Economic and Technical Cooperation, which was set up in 1985 to extend cooperation in trade, tourism, cottage industries and shipping.

Bangladesh is the fourth largest trading partner of Sri Lanka in the Saarc region in terms of exports and imports, although the trade volume is not large. During the 2009-10 fiscal year, Bangladesh reportedly exported goods worth \$23.74 million to Sri Lanka against imports of \$22.76 million, although there is huge potential for expansion.

Bangladesh's leather, ceramic and jute products and Sri Lanka's coconuts and its products, tea, gems and rubber have good prospect of expansion of trade relations between them.

To promote trade, the Sri Lanka Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SLBCCI), a business council, was established in Dhaka in 2006. The Council has urged businessmen from the two countries to step up investment and trading potential, given that there are many areas the two countries could

exploit. In October 2010, a business delegation from SLBCCI visited Sri Lanka with the objective of increasing investment and trade opportunities. The delegation initiated linkages that would lead to the establishment of joint ventures and technology transfers between the two countries.

**Both countries are rich in entrepreneurial spirit, and there is no reason why their innovative private sectors and democratic governments cannot cooperate with each other to reach the rank of middle-income countries in near future.**

There is growing technical cooperation on the production of garments between the two countries. Bangladesh employs highly skilled technical persons from Sri Lanka in the garment industry, and their number is estimated to be around 300. The instructors of Bangladesh Institute of Fashion and Technology receive training at mid-management level on readymade garments industry, pattern on garments, marketing and quality control in Sri Lanka's Clothing Industry Training Institute.

Some Sri Lankan garment exporters have moved to Bangladesh for its cheap labour and duty-free access to

developed countries. Sri Lankan investments have already entered service sectors such as hotels and hospitals in Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka's current investments have also been in Bangladesh's garment and banking sectors, and are expected to diversify into different areas.

availability of seats to attract Sri Lankan students to their institutions. There are ample opportunities to make the people of Sri Lanka aware of the many professional and ICT courses available in private universities in Bangladesh for Sri Lankan students.

In 2007, the government of Bangladesh donated the sacred hair relics of Lord Buddha to Sri Lanka, which is one of the milestones in bilateral relations. Bangladesh supported Sri Lanka in the UN Human Rights Council in 2009 for not committing war crimes in eliminating Tamil Tigers in May 2009.

There has been discussion to increase bilateral relations and cooperation between the two navies, and having Sri Lankan Navy personnel study in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka participate in the joint exercise of peace keeping under the UN department of peacekeeping operations. There have been goodwill visits between the two countries at the level of the chiefs of the armed forces.

Both countries are members of the Commonwealth, Non-Aligned Movement and Saarc. Both played vital roles in the formation of Saarc and are keen to see that the regional organisation grows to its fullest potential. They are members of BIMST-EC and Indian Ocean Rim

Association for Regional Co-operation (IOR-ARC). These two bodies are intended to explore and expand the economic, trade and investment co-operation among member-countries of the Indian Ocean.

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) has identified five core areas of co-operation, such as textiles and clothing, pharmaceuticals, horticulture and information technology products.

Both countries are rich in entrepreneurial spirit, and there is no reason why their innovative private sectors and democratic governments cannot cooperate with each other to reach the rank of middle-income countries in near future.

The relations are based on mutual benefits and will continue to grow further as they look forward to cooperative relations in various sectors if the private sectors seriously utilise existing opportunities and arrangements between the two countries.

Given the above scenario, the visit of the Sri Lankan president will be an excellent opportunity to discuss wide-ranging bilateral issues, including exploitation of their resource endowments. Both countries can act as a catalyst to constitute an integrated market for the dynamic economic region of South Asia. The visit has hopefully opened a new chapter in relations between the two countries.

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

# Challenging vulnerability

Z.A. KHAN

**O**UR society is gradually becoming restless. Wherever we go, only one question is asked, where are we going? It is over four decades that we have become independent. Lofty pledges were made that the foundation of Bangladesh would be built on social justice, political freedom and economic empowerment. These are considered to be the essential ingredients of human rights. Do we enjoy fundamental rights?

To deny human beings their rights is to set the stage for political and social unrest. Unfortunately, one finds that our inadequacies are enormous and our failure to ensure basic rights is monumental. This stands as a significant feature among other conditions that together make a country underdeveloped and vulnerable.

Vulnerability is manifested through deficiencies in legislation, particularly in observance and enforcement of law, widespread disobedience of rules and directives by public officials and their collusion with powerful persons or groups whose conduct they should regulate. Corruption is another cognisable index that causes a country to be a soft state.

The prevailing law and order in Bangladesh is far from satisfactory. Our economy is in disarray due to unprecedented stock market scam and galloping prices of essential food items. People have lost faith in the system of legal dispensation and the role of the parliament in framing legislation is shrinking.

The inclination of our people to resist public control and implementation is glaring. Loss in a game, or death due to road accident or wrong diagnosis, or negative emotional response provoke people to resort to vandalism. These are the syndromes of insularity, which substantially delays economic development. No sign of concern to bring order from a myriad of disorders is visible or heard at state or private level. There is no dialogue to promote goodwill between political parties, because of which the opposition does not feel obliged to exercise restraint.

The political strategy adopted by the major parties is to discredit each other by bullying and rhetoric. It seems that the opposition is sure to oppose everything that the government does. No in-house critique is ever carried out by the political parties for fear of reprisal as the leadership is intolerant and uncompromising. Leaders are eulogised and glorified so shamelessly that they themselves feel small about those who do so. Political parties transform into leaders' pocket institutions where democracy does not exist.

Tyranny teaches flattery. In the absence of democracy, the leaders take decisions on their own. If at all they do consult, they know that they have put their own people at

importance posts in the party's hierarchy, regardless of their ability, who will be obliged to agree to any proposal tabled for discussion by the leaders.

The leaders have been dictatorial in the conduct of both party and state affairs. Successive governments made the parliament a showcase forum by refusing to give due opportunity to the opposition to raise issues critical to state development. So most of the legislations made were by and large partisan in nature. This is why the opposition hardly felt obliged to help the government implement decisions adopted by the parliament.

The intention behind the government's decision to clip the wings of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is hazy. This will embolden those that thrive on corruption. It has created doubts in the minds of

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taxpayers who would like to see that a similar procedure to deal with corruption is followed at all levels of governance. Maybe this is the reason why some people remain scot-free despite their known corruption scandals, and it is these people who have made property and wealth to obtain nomination even if their contribution in politics for the people is minimum.

The selection procedure of judges of the higher courts has often been questioned. Therefore, priority should be given to realisation-focused justice over arrangement-focused justice as the former concentrates on actual behaviour of the people rather than presuming compliance by all with ideal behaviour.

Voters' psyche often causes wonderment. The pattern of voting so far has been to vote for the opposition regardless of performance. The same persons or their inheritors are voted to parliament even if their performance as lawmakers is utterly poor. Many of the lawmakers are blessed with money and muscle, which they generously use during election.

How can a person coming from "Y" con-

stituency win election in "X" constituency by defeating a local aspirant when the voters do not even know that person? This is an absolute misuse of their democratic right of franchise. The Election Commission can think of measures to up the ante by raising it as a critical national issue.

Prioritisation of subjects of agenda should be accorded to national issues over party or personal issues. Differences on party and personal issues can be initiated outside the parliament and can be brought up in the parliament to be recorded as resolutions. Eulogies for self-glorification and immodest references should be strictly avoided. It is time we inculcate a new culture based on civility and tolerance.

Our bureaucracy could have been above-board had it not been dragged into serving the government instead of the governed by enticement and cajoling for the mutual benefit of the government and the bureaucracy at the cost of good governance and development. They do so and get away because they are not blamed for the lack of transparency and are not answerable for any default.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) should be empowered to function independently if the bureaucracy is to be disciplined. Members of the PSC should be chosen from among the people of pedigree and wisdom with clean track record, and not by the government but by the JS. Enough time should be allocated for a purposeful debate before selection.

We all know that democracy is a bulwark of freedom. Liberties, franchises, privileges and jurisdiction of parliament are the undoubtedly birthright and inheritance of the people of a democratic nation.

It is time that we shun the culture of parliamentary truancy to develop parliament into a trustworthy, result-bound and vibrant organ for promoting free exercise of democratic rights. The EC, PSC and ACC should be empowered enough to function outside government influence. The Right to Information (RTI) and Human Rights Commission (HRC) should be more functional to be effective watchdogs against violations and denials or refusals. A legal commission should be activated to guard against legal default.

To inspire the nation to help protect our democracy, which will pave the way for development, the government, the opposition and the citizens should sincerely evolve a new work ethics based on patience, tolerance, prudence and fairness. The collective majority view is that we have a need for better governance, which will be possible if we remain focused on engaging the government and the opposition to work concertrately for economic empowerment of the people and for development of democracy.

The writer is a former Director General of BIISS.

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

# Al-Qaida stirs again

JUAN C. ZARATE

**M**ANY in the West had taken comfort in al-Qaida's silence in the wake of the uprisings in the Muslim world this year, as secular, nonviolent protests, led by educated youths focused on redressing longstanding local grievances, showcased democracy's promise and seemed to leave al-Qaida behind.

Indeed, the pristine spirit of the Arab Spring does represent an existential threat to al-Qaida's extremist ideology. But al-Qaida's leaders also know this is a strategic moment. They are banking on the disillusionment that inevitably follows revolutions to reassert their prominence in the region. And now al-Qaida is silent no more and is taking the rhetorical offensive.

In recent statements, Ayman al-Zawahri, Osama bin Laden's second in command, and al-Qaida surrogates have aligned themselves with the protesters in Libya, Egypt and elsewhere, while painting the West as an enemy of the Arab people. In North Africa, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb claimed that while protesters flooded the streets of Tunis and Cairo, it had been fighting in the mountains against the same enemies.

Anwar al-Awlaki, a Yemeni-American cleric affiliated with al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, declared that in the wake of the revolutions, "our mujahedeen brothers ... will get a chance to breathe again after three decades of suffocation" and that "the great doors of opportunity would open up for the mujahedeen all over the world."

Al-Zawahri has denounced democracy, arguing that toppling dictators is insufficient and that "justice, freedom, and independence" can be achieved only through "jihad and resistance until the Islamic regime rises."

The chaos and disappointment that follow revolutions will inevitably provide many opportunities for al-Qaida to spread its influence. Demographic pressures, economic woes and corruption will continue to befall even the best-run governments in the region. Divisions will beset the protest movements, and vestiges of the old regimes may re-emerge.

Al-Qaida and its allies don't need to win the allegiance of every protester to exert their influence; they have a patient view of history.

Although Washington must avoid tainting organic movements or being perceived as a central protagonist, the United States and its Western allies should not be shy about working with reformers and democrats to shape the region's trajectory and ensuring al-Qaida's irrelevance in the Sunni Arab world, the heart of its supposed constituency.

In countries where autocrats have been toppled (as in Egypt and Tunisia), we must help shape the new political and social environment; in nondemocratic, allied states (like the region's monarchies), we need to accelerate internal reform; and in repressive states (like Iran, Libya and Syria), we should challenge the legitimacy of autocratic regimes and openly assist dissidents and democrats.

This is not about military intervention or the imposition of American-style democracy. It is about using American power and influence to support organic

**The chaos and disappointment that follow revolutions will inevitably provide many opportunities for al-Qaida to spread its influence.**

reform movements.

The US Agency for International Development and advocacy organizations can help civil society groups grow; human rights groups can organize and assist networks of dissidents; and Western women's groups and trade unions could support their counterparts throughout the Middle East.

Wealthy philanthropists and entrepreneurs who are part of the Middle Eastern diaspora could make investments and provide economic opportunities for the region's youths, while technology companies interested in new markets could partner with anti-corruption groups to aid political mobilization and increase government accountability and transparency. Hollywood and Bollywood writers and producers should lionize the democratic heroes who took to the streets to challenge the orthodoxy of fear.

A focused campaign to shape the course of reform would align our values and interests with the aspirations of the protesters. More important, it would answer the challenge from al-Qaida to define what happens next and reframe the tired narratives of the past.

In 2005, al-Zawahri anticipated this battle for reform and noted that "demonstrations and speaking out in the streets" would not be sufficient to achieve freedom in the Muslim world. If we help the protesters succeed, it will not only serve long-term national security interests but also mark the beginning of the end of al-Qaida.

The writer, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, was the Center's deputy national security adviser for combating terrorism from 2005 to 2009. © New York Times. Distributed by The New York Times Syndicate.