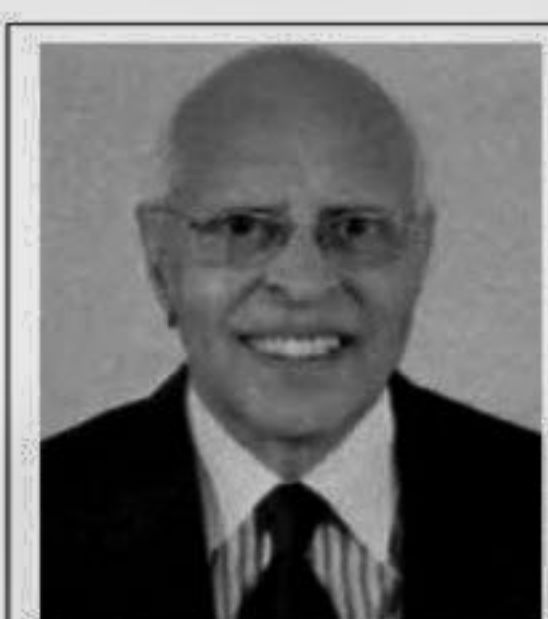


BOTTOM LINE

# Any positive move on our concerns?



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

INDIAN Foreign Secretary Ms. Nirupama Rao's two day visit from June 6 to Dhaka was perceived as important as some outstanding issues needed to be resolved before the proposed visit of India's prime minister to Bangladesh "well before" the end of the year as stated by Ms. Rao. It is reported that the bilateral talks focused primarily on:

- Sharing of the waters of trans-boundary rivers, including Teesta river;
- Demarcation of land boundary with India;
- Exchange of enclaves and adverse possession of territories;
- Killing of Bangladeshi nationals along the border with India;
- Gross deficit of Bangladesh trade with India;
- Relaxation of the 80% of project materials from India under the \$1 billion Indian loan.

The talks with Ms. Rao provided an opportunity for both sides to take stock of the progress of implementation of decisions on the above issues.

On June 7, at the joint press conference, India's foreign secretary could not indicate a final settlement of any of these issues, and an impression was formed that India's response to addressing Bangladesh's concerns is painfully slow.

Even the opening of "border haats" along the Indo-Bangladesh border has taken more than two years, much to the frustration of the Bangladesh commerce minister. Furthermore, India's promise to export 5 lakh metric tons of rice for the 2007 cyclone Sidr victims remains unfulfilled.

The main bottleneck in reaching a water sharing

accord on Teesta appears to be India's disagreement on sharing the water 50:50 as proposed by Bangladesh. This issue needs to be decided at a political level and Bangladesh has to wait for the visit of India's prime minister to Dhaka.

The talks on demarcation of land boundary and exchange of enclaves continue without any time-bound framework. It is reported that Bangladesh-Meghalaya border is yet to be demarcated.

*Given the right spirit and the desire to live together in cooperation, there is no reason why the two countries cannot have a mature partnership on political, economic and social level.*

Killing of unarmed Bangladeshi nationals by India's "trigger happy" Border Security Force (BSF) arouses anger in Bangladesh and has been extremely damaging for India.

The picture of gruesome killing on January 7 of a young Bangladeshi girl -- Felani (15) -- returning with her father from his work place in India, and the way she was flung on to the barbed wire fencing, demonstrate graphically BSF's brutality. According to Odhikar, a human rights organisation in Bangladesh, between January 1 and May 10, 2011, 12 young unarmed Bangladeshi nationals were killed by BSF.

A culture of impunity prevails in BSF, says Kirity Roy, head of Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM), a Kolkata-based human rights organisation. The Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission has

raised the issue in writing with its counterpart institution in India but no results have been achieved.

On the issue of border killing, the Indian foreign secretary stated that her government has decided to use non-lethal weapons on experimental basis to stop loss of life in some areas. One waits to see its implementation on the ground.

Trade imbalance for Bangladesh with India continues to be huge for years together. It is reported that Bangladesh's official imports from India during 2009-10 stood over \$3.2 billion while Bangladesh was able to export only \$304.63 million. Besides formal trade, informal imports from India stand at billions of dollars.

There has been no substantive progress in implementing Bangladesh's proposal to remove our main exportable products from the Indian negative list, together with non-tariff barriers.

Bangladesh has agreed to transit/transshipment with India, Nepal and Bhutan through its territory. Although India has agreed to allow its territory to be used for trade with Nepal and Bhutan, subject to signing of necessary protocols, as stated by Ms. Rao, transit/transshipment through Bangladesh is not yet been in operation for Bhutan and Nepal as they need India's agreement to use Indian territory.

With regard to the \$1 billion loan under condition that Indian companies will supply 80% of the project materials, Ms. Rao's reply was vague as she said there was still scope to discuss it as "we want to help Bangladesh with open heart and see the prosperity of the Bangladeshi people."

Dhaka has moved quickly to address Delhi's concerns on cross-border terrorism and transit/transshipment to the North-East. However, it appears that the implementation of the bargain on the Indian side has not been met as yet, even though two and half years have passed.

Noted Indian columnist Kuldip Nayar, in his

recent article after visiting Bangladesh in mid-April, wrote: "It (Dhaka) has given the transit facilities to enable northeastern states to have better and quicker connectivity with the rest of India ... I have never been able to understand why New Delhi drags its feet when it comes to trade with Bangladesh ... India is too squeamish when it comes to dealing with neighbours." (DS, 23April 2011)

Observers suspect that the issues concerning Bangladesh get low priority within the cover of discussions in many technical committees, sub-committees and joint working groups. Whether bureaucrats in New Delhi or state governments are responsible for the delay, the ultimate responsibility rests on the government of India to facilitate the smooth implementation of outstanding issues quickly. Many friends of India in Bangladesh think that it would be a missed opportunity for India to create goodwill if it does not deliver the goods within a reasonable period.

In settling the disputes, Bangladesh's gains do not have to come at India's expense, or vice-versa. Win-win solutions are possible on all the issues, given the comprehensive new vision for bilateral cooperation following the Bangladesh prime minister's visit to New Delhi in January 2010

Hopefully, the foreign secretary's visit will make Indian leaders and top bureaucrats realise that India has to move quickly on issues such as border killings, agreement on water sharing of Teesta river, agreement on border demarcation together with exchange of enclaves and removal of bottlenecks in trade.

Given the right spirit and the desire to live together in cooperation, there is no reason why the two countries cannot have a mature partnership on political, economic and social level.

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

## Water Act 2010: Whose interest will it serve?



QUDDUS ALAM/DRINK NEWS

ited from entering them.

The same is happening in the forest areas in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Sundarbans, Modhupur and other forest areas. The forest people have no access to the forests. "Permit" holders are now reigning over the forests and reaping all the benefits. The same thing will happen if the law comes into force.

Will a license be required to fish in the river or in the sea? Will the licensing system in the name of protection of water resources, a gift of nature which the common people depend on for their living and livelihood, be restrictive? I think it will even jeopardise all our efforts to ensure food security.

Reading the Water Act 2010 (draft) I got the impression that it is meant to prevent misuse of water. However, it has ignored the actual purpose -- the issue of rights. For example, the purpose of water distribution (page 14), as mentioned there, is to use it in households, and for fish farming, irrigation, power generation, etc.

The list is long, but the purpose of water distribution should be to ensure equitable distribution of water for each

and every citizen for their living and livelihood, not merely regulating water related activities as mentioned.

I think that living and livelihood cover all the aspects mentioned in the document, and it keeps the equity issue in the centre to protect it by law.

In one chapter, it is mentioned that the ownership of all water lies with the state. This statement is absolutely fine for the advanced states where the state is for the people. But, in our country, state means the people in power. I think the word "state" should be replaced by the word "people" in the draft. This spirit should be established by law.

In the name of "good faith" an opportunity to exploit water resources has been kept for the organisations that deal with water. In page 38, it is mentioned that these organisations can continue their ownership by paying compensation.

It seems that these laws are going to be framed to protect the companies/organisations. Punishment is heavier for individuals than for the companies/organisations that violate the water laws. For an individual, it is a maximum of five years jail and Tk.500,000 in fines, or both, for misusing water, while an organisation can violate water law by paying only financial penalty. To me it is like having the right to violate the law by paying money!

We have heard that the draft is still with the review committees, of which the DG, WARPO is the head. The government should arrange for a public hearing, listen to the people and the experts, and then do something. We should keep in mind that it is water which we are going to deal with in the law. It is no less than life. This law should not be framed such a way that it protects the interest of the rich, who are just a small portion of the population of this country.

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## Digital Bangladesh: Ready for "cloud services?"

M. ZAHANGIR KABIR

WHETHER these changes are good or bad depends in part on how we adapt to them. But, ready or not, they are about to come!!

**The newspaper:** The younger generation in recent times simply doesn't read the newspaper. As for reading the paper online, get ready to pay for it. The rise in mobile Internet devices and e-readers has caused all the newspaper and magazine publishers to form an alliance. They have met with Apple, Amazon, and the major cell phone companies to develop a model for paid subscription services.

**The book:** You can browse a bookstore online and even read a preview chapter before you buy. And the price is less than half that of a real book. And think of the convenience! Once you start flicking your fingers on the screen instead of the book, you find that you are lost in the story, can't wait to see what happens next, and you forget that you're holding a gadget instead of a book.

**The television:** Revenues for the networks in some countries are down dramatically. Not just because of the economy. People are watching TV and movies streamed from their computers. And they're playing games and doing lots of other things that take up the time that used to be spent watching TV.

**Music:** This is one of the saddest parts of the change story. The music industry nowadays is dying a slow death. Not just because of illegal downloading. It's the lack of innovative new music being given a chance to get to the people who would like to hear it. Greed and corruption is the problem. The record labels and the radio conglomerates are simply self-destructing. Over 40% of the music purchased today is "catalogue items," meaning traditional music that the public is familiar with.

**The land-line telephone:** Unless you have a large family and make a lot of local calls, you don't need it anymore. Most people keep it simply because they've always had it. But you are paying double charges for that extra service. All the cell phone companies will let you call customers using the same cell provider for no charge against your minutes.

**The post office:** Get ready for a world without the post office. They are so deeply in financial trouble that there is probably no way to sustain them long term. E-mails, Fed Ex, DHL, UPS, national and international couriers, money transfer houses, have just about wiped out the minimum revenue needed to keep the post office alive.

**The bank cheque:** Britain is already laying the groundwork to do away with bank cheques by 2018. It costs the financial system a lot of money to process cheques. Plastic cards and online transactions will lead to the eventual demise of the cheque.

**"Things" that you own:** Many of the very possessions that we used to own are still in our lives, but we may not actually own them in the future. They may simply reside in "the cloud." Today, your computer has a hard drive and you store your pictures, music, movies, and



DIETER SPANNKNEBEL

*All we will have that can't be changed are memories. Extinction is in the process, but it may not happen within a decade, it will possibly take a few decades.*

documents. Your software is on a CD or DVD, and you can always re-install it if need be. But all of that is changing. Apple, Microsoft, and Google are all finishing up their latest "cloud services." That means that when you turn on a computer, the Internet will be built into the operating system. So, Windows, Google, and the Mac OS will be tied straight into the Internet. If you click an icon, it will open something in the Internet cloud. If you save something, it will be saved to the cloud. And you may pay a monthly subscription fee to the cloud provider. In this virtual world, you can access your music or your books, or your whatever from any laptop or handheld device. That's the good news. But, will you actually own any of this "stuff" or will it all disappear at any moment in a big "Poof?" Will most of the things in our lives be disposable and whimsical? It makes you want to run to the closet and pull out that photo album, grab a book from the shelf, or open up a CD case and pull out the insert.

**Privacy:** If there ever was a concept that we can look back on nostalgically, it would be privacy. That's gone. It's been gone for a long time anyway. There are cameras on the street, in most of the buildings, and even built into your computer and cell phone. But you can be sure that 24/7, "They" know who you are and where you are, right down to the GPS coordinates, and the Google Street View. If you buy something, your habit is put into a zillion profiles, and your ads will change to reflect those habits. And "They" will try to get you to buy something else. Again and again.

All we will have that can't be changed are memories.

Extinction is in the process, but it may not happen within a decade, it will possibly take a few decades.

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MD. FIROJ ALAM

LAND, air, water and sun are the most essential elements for life. In absence of one of these elements, life will be impossible on earth. All other living entities gratefully enjoy these gifts of nature. But, we human beings want to grab them for personal interest. This often deprives others.

Now, the major part of the land in every country is in the hands of a small number of people. What to grab next? Water. Conflict over water is not new at all.

Money has created an inequitable world. Anything involving money is under the control of rich people. The poor can still breathe, can have a bath in the river, and can warm their bodies in the sun because, to some extent, air, water and sun are still out of the monetary system.

Nowadays, water is often treated as a commodity. To make people understand the value of water, a price has been imposed on it. The good intention is now turning into a bad practice. Evaluating the things essential for life in terms of money and regulating them by imposing a price is dangerous.

Water Resource Planning Organization (WARPO), a department of the Ministry of Water Resources, recently drafted the Water Act 2010 to regulate water resources in this country. It has been prepared after reviewing the existing laws and policies in the country and across the globe.

I have gone through the document and what I have found is disturbing. The worrying points with which I started my article are all there. To protect water, licensing will be an obligation for the users.

The water bodies in the north-eastern part of the country have gone to the rich and powerful people because of the leasing system. The fisher folk who grew up swimming in those water bodies, whose ancestors lived near them for hundreds of years, are now prohib-