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INDIAN Premier Dr. Manmohan Singh is scheduled to make a two day official visit to Bangladesh on 6th September 2011. During the visit, he is expected to discuss the entire range of bilateral issues including cooperation in trade, connectivity, water resources management, land boundary demarcation, border management, security, etc. Expectations are running high that some ever lasting disputes will be settled, at least the process would start. Many say that this is one of the unique opportunities for India to convince its small worried neighbour that it pays heed to Bangladesh's concerns and it does so with positive intent.

India has to do it for its own sake. The state is aspiring to be one of the upcoming leaders in the regional and global stage -- both economically and militarily. But it will face a fierce challenge from another great Asian giant China. The geographic location of Bangladesh and its contiguous maritime spaces are of growing strategic importance to many, especially to China. Besides, the increasing economic and military presence of China in South Asia has caused a lot of irritation to its Indian counterpart. However, experts would rather like to term it as a good balance of power in the region that has been the catalyst for the security of other small neighbours and buffer states situating in-between China and India. Now, for India and China, an antagonistic approach to address any bilateral problems with neighbours will only cost their own securities in the long run and they must have to realise that.

For Bangladesh's point of view, maintaining good relations both with China and India is an imperative for a small state like Bangladesh. Besides, both giants have proven-strategic-ties with Bangladesh that largely defines the internal and external political dynamics of the country. But it has also to be remembered that there is

always a greater risk to annoy your next door neighbour than the one residing at arms length. India and Bangladesh should realise this sort of risks and rather see their inter-dependency from a positive slant.

Ironically, while talking about India-Bangladesh relations, there has been less to cheer about until recently. Therefore, for a meaningful cooperation and a sustainable relation, both India and Bangladesh have to do their own part without being too late. During the Bangladesh PM's recent visit to India, Bangladesh has shown a lot of positive intents to ameliorate the fragile relationship and started to deliver whatever it realistically can. Now when the Indian PM is reciprocating, there are a number of issues that his country immediately needs to address to quell the tense of the other side of the border and to give the changing mood a more sustainable frame.

The most prominent one is the water sharing and maritime boundary disputes. Of the water sharing disputes, sharing the water of Teesta River and Gajoldoba barrage project has been the second-most serious concerns for Bangladesh, only after Ganges, for decades which affects the river flow downstream and disrupts the navigability of the Teesta and ecology of the northern districts. The Tipaimukh dam project is the new addition to the river-dam-problems. Disputes surrounding maritime boundary also need to be settled for strategic reasons. Three issues that impede maritime settlement include claim over New Moore (South Talpatti) island, flow of the river Haribhanga, and the demar-



# Manmohon's visit to Bangladesh: Challenges and opportunities



cation of sea boundary. All these have to be settled sooner rather than later.

Border demarcations, management of border and its security, and transfer of enclaves remained as other major sources of concerns over the decades. Undemarcated 6.5 kilometres border including some riverine parts in Comilla-Tripura area, enclave issues -- Bangladesh has 51 enclaves inside Indian Territory and India has 111 enclaves inside Bangladesh -- also demand immediate resolution. Although Mujib-Indira Agreement of 1974 provided the framework to address and resolve the boundary and enclave issues, many experts blame the Indian governments for their sheer unwillingness and indifference to comply with the agreement. Killing people along the border line is also a very nasty element that is jeopardising all other good initiatives.

Regarding the transit issue, one of the main reasons Bangladesh has been reluctant to permit such facilities to India is that it was asking for similar facilities from India to access Nepal and Bhutan. There are also security issues that must be addressed while brokering any deal on transit.

Steps to minimise the trade gap and imbalances will surely be an agenda in the upcoming dialogue. There are plethora of allegations from the Bangladeshi exporters that their products often face severe tariffs, para-tariff and non-tariff barriers and other bureaucratic hurdles in India. There has been a case that even had to be initiated in the WTO dispute settlement process (anti-dumping duties on Rahim Afroz Batteries, Dispute DS306, WTO). Despite the fact that Trade

Complimentary Index between Bangladesh and India is quite low (5.42 now), one needs to understand that New Delhi's lenient approaches is not the panacea to redress this mammoth imbalance, rather Bangladesh needs to diversify its export items that can secure the greater access to Indian market. Bangladesh and India have to learn to live with their unavoidable neighbours and subsequently should create an enabling environment -- inside and outside -- where both countries can negotiate with ease and confidence.

For Bangladesh, a broad-based national consensus amongst the political actors must be reached about its external relations and some of its political actors must have to come out of negative politics. For India, it has to find a balance in maintaining relations amongst the political actors in Bangladesh as well as it needs to correct its own indifferent and sometimes dominating attitudes towards Bangladesh.

Both the countries have to acknowledge that playing zero-sum game may not help each other, instead may prove counter-productive as both countries have some strategically significant elements that made them very much inter-dependent. A win-win situation will help the both to grow faster in a world which is rapidly shifting its balance from the West to East. In this era of globalisation where the world is becoming promisingly much closer and borderless, there is also a risk that the problems of any society can spill over across the border and spoil the party of the others. Nobody can really deny this new reality. Therefore, it is imperative for both Bangladesh and India to realise that the fruits of cooperation will not only serve their positive interests but will help diffuse the negative elements as well. The task is challenging, but if you have a visionary look at the opportunities, you will always strive to go for it.

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# With Mideast in turmoil, Israel debates strategy

ETHAN BRONNER

JERUSALEM -- Eight days after Israel suffered a terrorist attack from Egyptian Sinai and weeks before it faces a Palestinian statehood resolution at the United Nations, its officials say they are struggling with a painful set of strategic and diplomatic challenges produced by the region's popular uprisings.

As angry rallies by Egyptians outside the Israeli Embassy in Cairo this week have shown, Israel's relationship with Egypt is fraying. A deadly exchange of rockets fired at southern Israel and Israeli airstrikes on Hamas-controlled Gaza this week showed the risk of escalation there. Damaged ties with Turkey are not improving. Cooperation with the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank seems headed for trouble.

"We are witnessing a paradigm shift in front of our eyes," said a top Israeli official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "Egypt was a major stabilizer in the region, and that may be over. Coordination with the Palestinian security officials could be lost. We are concerned about Turkey."

Israeli officials say they are certain from detailed intelligence that the Aug. 18 infiltration that killed eight Israelis was planned and carried out from Gaza by Palestinians associated with a small radical group. But in its pursuit of the killers into Sinai and its assassinations of the group's leaders in Gaza, Israel found itself with less room to maneuver than in the past.

Last weekend, officials were contemplating a major military assault on Gaza. But that plan was shelved by the crisis that emerged with Egypt, by the realization that Hamas itself was uninvolved in the terrorist attack and by the worry about how such an assault would affect other countries' views during the United Nations debate of a Palestinian resolution in September.

Instead, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his most senior ministers decided over the course of several late-night meetings this week to promote cooperation with Egypt and restrict military action in Gaza to more limited strikes. Scores of rockets have hit Israel; dozens of Gazans have been killed and injured.

The Israelis say their challenge is that they needed to send different -- indeed contradictory -- messages to different audiences.

To groups they say have attacked Israel from Gaza and Sinai, their message was death. To the interim military rulers of Egypt, however, they offered expressions of regret at the loss of Egyptian life and an assur-

ance of nonaggressive intent.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak has told the Egyptians that they can skirt the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty and send thousands more troops, accompanied by helicopters and armored vehicles, into Sinai to restore order in the increasingly lawless peninsula. In the past, Israel opposed any alteration of the terms of the treaty. But the lawlessness -- a mix of Bedouin tribalism, radical Muslim infiltration and a breakdown of Egypt's security control after its revolution -- affects not only Israel, but Egypt, which depends on tourism revenue and gas exports from there.

As a result, officials here say, the Egyptians are cooperating with Israel. The two governments agreed to jointly investigate the Israeli forces' killings of three Egyptian policemen after last week's terrorist attack,

hours, for the 1995 funeral of Yitzhak Rabin. But his rule is associated with cooperative relations.

In spite of the concerns, Israeli officials noted Egypt's new leaders have not carried out changes they had promised publicly.

"When the new government came to power in Egypt it vowed to change its policies toward Iran, the United States, the peace treaty with Israel and Gaza," said Shlomo Brom, a retired general now at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University. "So far it hasn't done any of it."

By contrast, there has been a steady shift away from Israel in Turkey, which until a few years ago was both a strategic ally and a society welcoming to Israeli visitors and business. The government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has angrily criticized Israel's Gaza policy and demanded an apology after Israeli commandos killed eight Turks and an American of Turkish origin aboard a flotilla seeking to break Israel's naval blockade of Gaza last year.

Mr. Netanyahu's aides and advisers have been divided over how to respond to Turkey's demands. So far, a majority opposes an apology, arguing that Israel has nothing to apologize for and that it would make no difference.

A minority disagrees, calling for some apology and compensation for the victims. As one put it: "Turkey is not a lost cause. We may not be able to divert the stream of where it is headed, but with care we can cross the river. We still have a lot of common interests with them."

Some officials say the concerns over Israel's diplomatic difficulties are overstated, that Israel is stable and reliable and still has plenty of friends, for example, Greece, Cyprus, Romania and Bulgaria.

And with Arab countries focused on inner turmoil and President Bashar al-Assad of Syria fighting for the survival of his government, Israel's strategic position may be better than believed, since those countries cannot now expand their militaries or contemplate a war.

"Our biggest concern is Iran, and Iran's biggest ally is Assad, so his fall would be good for Israel," one official said. "Stepping back, diplomatically and culturally, things are worrying. But strategically we are not on the edge of a cliff."

Others disagree. "They don't understand how fragile the calm now is," another Israeli official said of the optimists. "We are losing support and legitimacy. I am not panicked. But I am worried."

Source: NY Times.



An Israeli soldier checked Palestinian women at the crossing between Jerusalem and Kalandia in the West Bank on Friday (Aug 26, 2011).

## Chidambaram lays foundation for integrated check-post



Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram, his Bangladesh counterpart Shahara Khatun and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during the unveiling of the Foundation Stone for the construction of an Integrated check post (ICP) at Petrapole (India-Bangladesh Border) in West Bengal on August 27, 2011.

UNION Home Minister P. Chidambaram laid the foundation stone for a Rs. 172-crore integrated check-post (ICP) at the India-Bangladesh international border here on Saturday in an effort to boost bilateral ties, ahead of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's scheduled visit to Bangladesh on September 6.

"In the last many years, both the countries have striven to strengthen relations...several new agreements will be signed between the two countries during the Prime Minister's historic visit to Bangladesh..."

Mr. Chidambaram expressed the hope that both the Prime Minister's visit and the setting up of the ICP would augment trade relations and tourism and result in rapid multiplication of the bilateral trade volume...

The ICP project, which is part of the government of India's initiative for better border management to put in place systems which address both security concerns, as well as facilitate cross-border trade and commerce, is expected to be completed in 17 months.

An ICP is envisaged to discharge sovereign functions of security checking, immigration, customs and quarantine apart from providing facilities for smooth cross-border movement of persons, goods and transport.

The ICP here will be one of the 13 similar ICPs to be set up on the borders between India and Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Myanmar as part of a plan with an initial outlay of Rs. 635 crore during the 11th Five Year Plan. Out of the 13 ICPs, seven will be set up on the India-Bangladesh border...

Source: thehindu.com