

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Our loss is not India's gain



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

It is refreshing on no-loss-no-gain basis, instructive and can be good for the future, if a little too dramatic for anyone's comfort, far less that of Dr. Manmohan Singh and Sheikh Hasina. The failure hasn't been exactly an "orphan," nor has the degree of success had any "fathers." If crisis is an opportunity,

then this certainly promises to be one. The failed negotiation with the moral thrown up has a guiding implication we need to press into service to cut corners of sensitive deals.

Given the media coverage on both sides, it seems diplomatic posturing is about putting together the true and the false and therefrom manufacturing the plausible.

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If the Indian press reports were anything to go by, Bangladesh's share of water would have been between 28% and 33% and not 48-50% as we were given to believe. That perhaps explains away Foreign Minister Dipu Moni's scaling down from "equal" to "equitable," almost back-to-back.

But, of course, it was a done deal between Manmohan and Hasina governments, so it would have come as something of a fait accompli. Now, because of the non-signing of the deal, both sides have got a window to revisit the treaty and make necessary adjustments to better protect their mutual interests. For a good deal is effectively nothing short of give-and-take.

As for transit, conceptually, there is a lack of clarity about the intricacies involved, apart from Bangladesh having been expressly not ready with the infrastructure, its financing, construction, and guaranteed tariff, so on and so forth. These will have to be firmed up, so the respite has come in handy.

Let's not allow our understanding of the outcome of the just-concluded Indo-Bangla summit to be clouded by overemphasising the unachieved part. This could only deflect our attention from the gains that we otherwise should be taking note of and building up on. Nor should we, even unwittingly, indulge in oversimplification while interpreting the results. Because that could lead us to mood-play and bickering at the expense of taking things forward from where the summit left off. Reinforcing dynamics on four levels are critical to ensure a definitive improvement in neighbourly rela-

Dhaka summit, viz. exchange of enclaves and adverse possessions along the border and the dropping of 46 export items of Bangladesh from the Indian negative list, is drawing flak. Trinamool-Congress government in Pashchimbanga didn't only raise objections to the draft Teesta deal they have also taken issue with the exchange of enclaves saying that the protocols have not specified any timeframe or modalities for the hand-overs and the citizenship determination. As in the case of Teesta water sharing so in exchanging enclaves, Trinamool-Congress is playing to the electorate.



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tions. These include expression of mutually congenial political will, agreements in principle, cutting of the deals to the mutual satisfaction of both sides and their operationalisation on the ground. Apparently, the first two elements have been in place but the last two are yet to follow. That's where role of diplomacy, astute negotiation to extract our parts of the bargain and taking the political parties and the people along so as to underpin implementation, come into play.

Deal-wise, even whatever has been achieved at the

The business community of Bangladesh whilst making the most of the presence of the chief ministers of four northeastern states of India to talk business has demanded dropping of the negative list altogether and elimination of the non-tariff barriers.

The joint statement issued at the end of the summit has been more resolute than rhetorical. In that sense it makes up for some of the disappointment over the summit's less than expected results. It has very strongly reiterated the political goodwill for consistent and sustained improvement in the bilateral relations. The statement envisages a joint commission led by the external and foreign affairs ministers of India and Bangladesh respectively to explore new avenues to advance bilateral cooperation under the just concluded framework agreement on development and cooperation. Furthermore, speedy completion of formalities for use of Chittagong and Mongla ports has been emphasised. Our concerns over Tipaimukh dam would be addressed.

If the psycho-political characterisation of India that often comes through the writings of the Indian scribes themselves is borne in mind, the deficit in the outcome of the Indo-Bangla summit shouldn't have come as a surprise. Mamata factor may be crucial, but it hardly equals the importance of transit and connectivity.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.
E-mail: husain.imam@the.dailystar.net

TRIBUTE

Shykh Seraj: Pioneer of a new trend of rural TV journalism

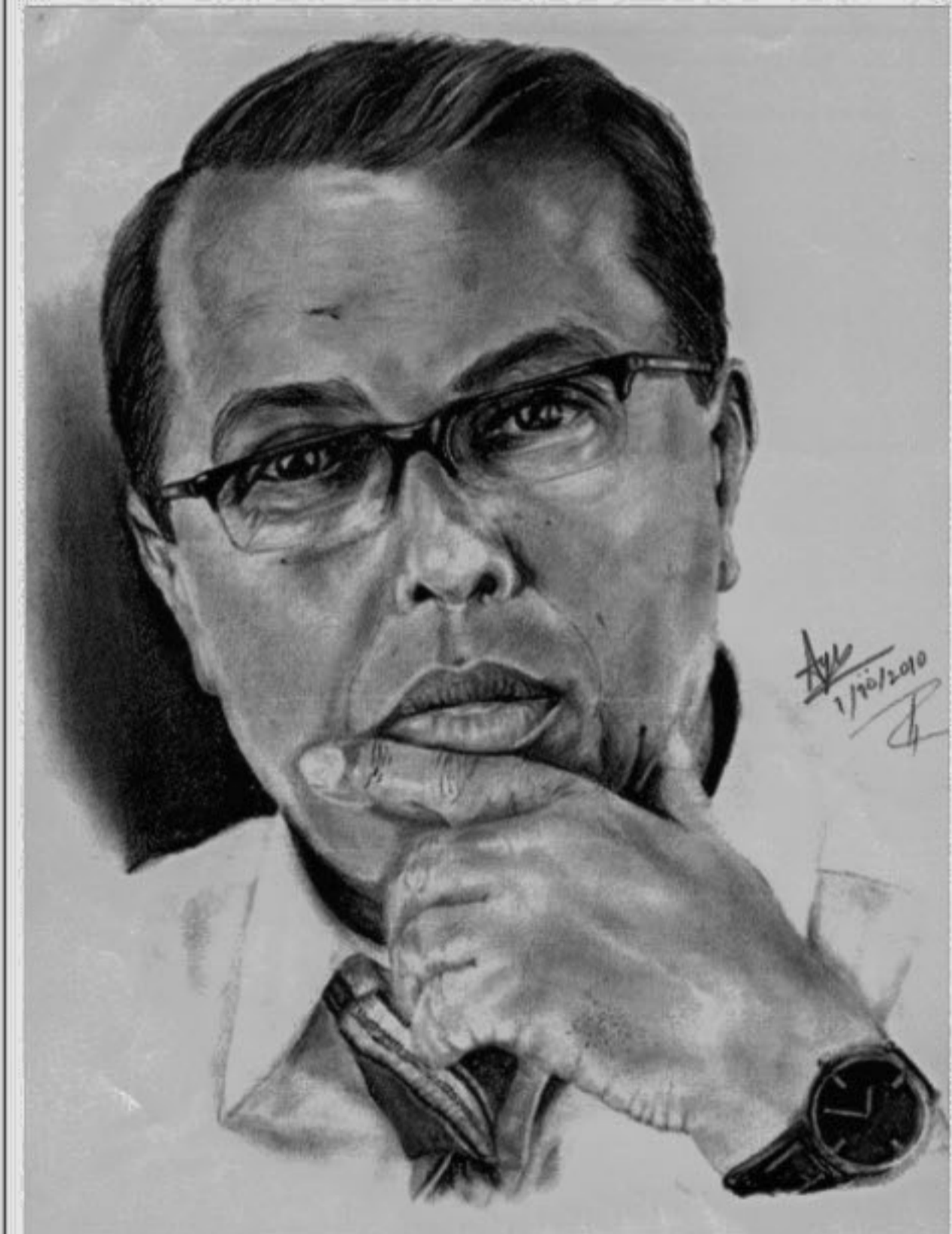
AD SPIJKERS

SHYKH Seraj, who turned 55 in June, is an innovative and intuitive genius in the mainstream media of Bangladesh. He is best known as an agricultural and environmental journalist, whose versatile works have taken media coverage on agriculture beyond the borders. His outstanding work for more than three decades contributed to agricultural development, sustainable food security, farmers' empowerment and agricultural transformation. This has set a sustained impact on the livelihood of the rural poor. Through the power of the media Shykh Seraj's works also influenced the policy makers in taking proactive interventions for pro-farmer development.

He brings the voices of the poor farmers from every corner of the country to the capital and beyond. He underscores not only the face of disaster-prone Bangladesh, but also those of the resilient and hard working farmers and their immense knowledge to adapt to the varied climatic and farming conditions. He has proven to be a journalist who has facilitated boosting the agricultural development and at the same time upholding the morale of the farmers of Bangladesh. His voice has become the farmers' voice. We, in FAO, were able to analyse in depth his activities and initiatives for the nomination of the 2008 A. H. Boerma Award which was a well-deserved recognition of his work and also an inspiration to the brave farmers, who are the actual beneficiaries of all his achievements. This recognition also opened a window of opportunity to share the experiences of Bangladesh in general, and of Sheikh Seraj in particular, among the farming communities of the world.

Shykh Seraj's camera has not only focused on the domestic scenario, but has also covered the vast canvas of global agriculture. His lens has panned across China, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Japan, the Philippines, Norway, Sweden, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Australia, the USA, Britain, Italy and other countries. He introduced many new agricultural technologies and good farming practices from abroad to Bangladesh and popularised them by his numerous TV programmes and publications. Farmers are becoming aware of the farming standards of a new crop vis a vis their local adaptation techniques through the scientifically designed programmes of Shykh Seraj. When he is unearthing the problems of the farmers, he is also highlighting the success stories. That has inspired other farmers to undertake new ventures and also influenced policymakers to take initiatives and introduce new interventions.

Shykh Seraj's persuasion and endeavour over the years has succeeded in the broadcasting of agricultural news as a regular news item in almost all the TV channels in the country. This is a paradigm shift in a



society where agriculture was neglected on the grounds that it was the poor's job. Farmers can join his programmes live from remote areas and put forward real time problems and share the solutions. He has also introduced an "E-Agriculture" initiative to propagate and disseminate agricultural information, reviews, farmers' demands and views through the digital world. This will help modernise agriculture and also minimise the digital divide in the farmers' favour.

With this motto, he has motivated farmers to take up new varieties of rice and other crops, and to practice new technologies. Through his programmes and writings, he continuously fed the farmers with the latest information that acted as an incentive to produce more food. Shykh Seraj has also been wise in covering the agriculture industries and market infrastructures from around the world. This has been a part of the drive to minimise the middleman culture and enable the farmers to obtain the best value for their products in the market. Thus, his work has also contributed significantly to alleviation of poverty.

Shykh Seraj has triggered a silent revolution in agriculture in Bangladesh and his achievements are well recognised at home and abroad. Channel i has excellent staff and crews at all levels and the work morale is very high.

The writer is former FAO Representative in Bangladesh.

Manmohan's visit: Lessons for Bangladesh

FARIDUL ALAM

THE recent visit of the Indian prime minister was more important than any other previous meeting as it was hoped that many things would be discussed and many problems resolved. But just before his arrival, the outcome of the meeting was almost clear to the people of Bangladesh through the refusal of Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of Paschimbanga, to be a part of the Indian team; and later on through the press briefing of the foreign secretary of India that the two countries were not going to take any decision regarding the Teesta river.

However, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni categorically rejected that and expressed her strong optimism regarding the solution of the of Teesta issue. As a result, the visit appears to have been nothing more than a courtesy call to Bangladesh.

Though one protocol and some MoU have been signed the question is whether a summit was needed to settle these issues. For example, the MoU signed between the University of Dhaka and the Jawaharlal Nehru University on exchange of knowledge could have been signed between the two Universities, or the exchange of television programmes between BTV and DD could have been agreed to by the information ministers. The protocol signed on border problems was not on the agenda, rather the two prime ministers decided on it during their exclusive meeting. After the "shuttle diplomacy" of the last 20 months, the outcome could have been better.

Let us see our achievements from the visit of the Indian PM. Firstly, 24-hour access to Dahagram-Angorpota through the "Tin Bigha Corridor" was a demand for long time from the Bangladesh side. It was in 1992 when the Indian government agreed to allow access for twelve hours, but no significant progress was made on this issue for 20 years.

Secondly, though Bangladesh has not yet permitted India to use her land as a "corridor," India has agreed to let Bangladesh trade with Nepal through India.

Thirdly, The Indian PM has fulfilled the demand of our corporate sector by allowing duty free access to 46 items, which will surely play a vital role in promoting our industrial as well as economic development. Though the number is less than our expectation, the smooth functioning of this facility will enable us to bargain further.

Fourthly, India will provide technical support for

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setting up a 1,320 MW power plant in Khulna.

Though India raised no demand, she has also been benefited. As per international river law, India has no right to control the waters of international rivers, but she is doing so. A Ganges water treaty was signed in 1996, but it is reported that Bangladesh is not getting water as per the treaty. Regarding Teesta, as Paschimbanga is involved here and it has strong objection regarding the framework of distribution of water, India has bypassed the issue in the name of further talks of the Joint River Commission.

We have a lot to learn from the visit of the Indian PM. Firstly, regarding the issue of national interest, he did a lot of homework before the visit. On the other hand, the Bangladesh government did not discuss anything regarding the talks in any forum, save a few. Even the chairman of the parliamentary committee on the foreign ministry blamed the government for not keeping the committee informed.

Secondly, though the ministry of foreign affairs is primarily responsible for the preliminary work for this type of exclusive meeting, the role of our foreign minister seemed to be overshadowed by two advisors to the prime minister. They seemed to play the major role during the visit of Indian National Security Advisor Shiv Sankar Menon, and before then also.

Thirdly, in parliamentary democracy, the opposition is called a "shadow government." Here, the "shadow government" was not informed by the government.

Fourthly, we should learn how to act on issues of national interest from Ms. Mamata Banerjee. She became chief minister of Paschimbanga a few months ago. Immediately after her victory, she was congratulated by the people of Bangladesh -- from the prime minister to ordinary people -- and it was expected that she would play a vital role in promoting Indo-Bangladesh relations through her love for Bangladesh. We should not blame her for what she has done, but need to respect her for her commitment towards the people who put her in the position she is in.

Finally, we need to keep the relevant personnel updated regarding our relationship with India, and considering the importance of Indo-Bangladesh relations we need to organise such top level meetings once a year to remove the differences and ensure better relations between the two countries.

The author is Chairman, Department of IR, University of Chittagong.
E-mail: mfulka@yahoo.com