

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Bangladesh should feel sought after



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

He had come on an agenda of finalising a Myanmar-Bangladesh-India gas pipeline deal. The then BNP government linking it to trade imbalance and transit to Nepal, an originally perceived purposeful visit turned out a "goodwill" one.

What Aiyar said with his characteristic eloquence and candour half a decade ago, sounds prescient by hindsight, even prophetic. The underlying significance of Aiyar's statement had to do with India's transit, anti-insurgency and port use agenda, topped up by a geopolitical concern.

The impression in Bangladesh is that India has got much more than what it gave to Bangladesh through Manmohan's recent visit. The main bone of contention doesn't at the moment centre on the aborted Teesta deal. In fact, the focus has swung on Ceesta Articles of the Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development between Governments of India and Bangladesh.

Critics have principally taken issue with Articles 9 and 12. The articles to my mind are open-ended and not as set in stone as is being made out to be. For instance, Article 9 states they "will cooperate on security issues of concern to each other." The operative words here are "of concern to each other." I would argue that they will enjoy freedom of action in security matters that are not "of concern to each other." This freedom is underpinned by the clause -- "fully respecting each other's sovereignty." So it is far from "a mili-

tary pact."

Article 12 has come in for a good deal of criticism but this is assailable. It provides for termination of the agreement by mutual consent reached through an elaborate process in a joint consultative commission to be set up as the nodal implementation agency. Like in all international agreements, the provision to opt out is very much there.

Particular exception has been taken by the critics to the proviso: "Actions taken or agreements reached pursuant to the Agreement shall not be affected by its expiry or termination." Obviously, this clause is a necessary extension of the termination provision keeping in view political vagaries and eventualities in

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either of the two countries. If an agreement does not protect what it had achieved prior to its expiry or termination, then what it is worth? More to the point is, even during the implementation, if it is found that something is not to the benefit of one of the high contracting parties, it can invoke the option of coming out of it.

Whilst in the opposition BNP plays its anti-India card; in power, because it has to deal with India it conducts its relations with New Delhi keeping to normal diplomatic niceties. There is no reason to believe that BNP's ideological anchor has come unstuck from its previous mooring, yet its current posturing towards

India shows a sign of change. It has scaled down the strident rhetoric against India. From a recriminatory banter of "an AL sell-out to India" that New Delhi couldn't have savoured, the opposition party has softened its attitude towards the neighbouring country.

It all started with Begum Khaleda Zia admonishing a party leader who spoke of calling a hartal to coincide Dr. Manmohan's visit to Dhaka. Shiv Shankar Menon, Indian security adviser called on Khaleda Zia saying Dr. Manmohan's itinerary included a tête-à-tête with Bangladesh's opposition leader. In the talks the Indian PM invited Begum Zia to visit New Delhi. This was followed by an appreciative letter from the Indian PM to Bangladesh's opposition leader.

Understandably, Begum Zia's advisors are planning a trip to India ostensibly on pilgrimage to Azmeer Sharif, but with a purpose of meeting Indian leaders.

India is seeking to cultivate both parties, and that is about far-sighted, visionary leadership.

Speaking of a strategic vision and given our geopolitical circumstances, we believe, Bangladesh's simultaneous cooperative relationship with both India and China need not be mutually exclusive. In fact, pragmatism dictates Bangladesh to have a balanced relationship with both China and India as was reflected by Sheikh Hasina's first international trip to China which was

followed by that to India.

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Negotiating with India

ABDUL HANNAN

GOWHER Rizvi, the prime minister's international affairs adviser, in an interview with the Daily Star, waxed eloquent over what he described as unprecedented gains by Bangladesh during the recent visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in resolving the outstanding disputes with India. Apparently, his appraisal is contrary to the groundswell of criticism, anger, shock and dismay about the failed outcome of the summit, expressed across a wide spectrum of public opinion.

The summit was a flop and ended not with a bang but with a humiliating whimper for Bangladesh. There was nothing new in the eleventh hour volte face by India. It is consistent with its track record of breach of trust, back-tracking and intransigence in resolving its disputes with Bangladesh. Let me briefly revisit, by way of providing intelligence to the learned adviser, the chronicle of hypocrisy, deceit and dissimulation resorted to by India in its dealings with Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has conceded to India's agenda and shopping list one after another. First India received Dhaka-Calcutta bus service followed by Agartala-Calcutta bus service, inaugurated by the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. The latest concession was to allow the use of land transport, even without a formal transit agreement, from Ashuganj to Agartala to carry heavy machinery for setting up of a power plant in Tripura. Bangladesh cooperation to meet India's security concern, particularly about long-running separatist insurgency in its northeastern states, was a major concession.

But, in return, Bangladesh has received nothing. India, far from promoting good neighbourly relation with Bangladesh, has consistently adopted a hostile attitude. India has upheld an obstructionist policy since 1974 by preventing Bangladesh from exploring for oil well within Bangladesh territory in the Bay of Bengal. India served notice of swift dispatch to four foreign companies preparing for oil exploration in the Bay of Bengal in 1974, and ever since it has shown least interest in joint survey and delineation of maritime boundary. Bangladesh was left with no other choice but to refer the matter to UN for arbitration. India has captured, by threat of force, Talpatty island near the Sundarbans and well within Bangladesh territory. The India map has renamed the island as New More Island.

India has flouted the Indira-Mujib 1974 land boundary agreement by not implementing it by exchange of adverse possessed enclaves and demarcation of 6.5 km land boundary. It has constructed 896 km long barbed wire fence along its border to stop what it alleges as infiltration from Bangladesh. The killing of innocent Bangladeshis in the border areas by BSF is a regular affair.

Indira-Mujib agreement provided for lease in perpetuity of the Tin Bigha corridor in return for handing over Berubari to India. But India dragged its feet on one pretext or another. The agreement with Manmohan for round-the-clock access through Tin Bigha is a poor substitute of the stipulated lease in perpetuity of Tin Bigha.

Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, under joint Indo-Bangladesh declaration in 1974, allowed a trial run of Farakka barrage on condition that India ensured water sharing of 55 thousand cusecs. In 1975, Bangladesh and India signed a water

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sharing agreement. India opted out of the agreement when relations between the two countries soured after the assassination of Bangabandhu. Without water from the Ganges, desertification, salinity and navigation difficulties raised a specter of economic and ecological disaster.

Bangladesh, out of desperation, sought UN intervention. The UN asked India and Bangladesh to come to a mutually satisfactory resolution of the dispute in a spirit of good neighbourliness. But it was not until 1977, during Morarji Desai's government, that a new 5-year water sharing agreement was signed. In 1982, an MOU was signed for 2 years. An MOU for 3 years was signed in 1985 during the government of I.K. Gujral, under which Bangladesh was assured of 34 thousand cusec. India signed a 30-year Ganges water treaty during the government of Prime Minister Dev Gowda

In the intervening period, Bangladesh's share of water was reduced to less than 10 thousand cusecs. It is significant that Bangladesh suffered most in matters of

water sharing during the rule of Congress governments in India.

The recent agreements during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit are short on substance and long on rhetoric. Triumphalism is premature and misplaced as we fully know how India reneged and soft-pedaled on its commitment to the 1974 Indira-Mujib agreement. Much depends on implementation inasmuch as most of these are a repeat of the Indira-Mujib agreement of 1974.

The latest agreement is not charity, but should be seen as a ploy to get Bangladesh on board for transit facility, the last and most important item in India's shopping list. Transit to Nepal and Bhutan is of minimal importance as our volume of trade with these two countries is peanuts when compared with well over \$3 billion trade imbalance with India. The threat of para-tariff apart, the duty free export of 46 Bangladesh items will not make substantial difference. Observers suspect that the Mamata factor was a stage-managed stratagem to wriggle out of the Teesta deal at the eleventh hour.

The performance of 2 advisers in matters of negotiating the deals with India, apparently sidelining the ministry of foreign affairs and other line ministries, has been widely criticised. As reported by newspapers, Manmohan Singh is replacing his adviser Shiv Shankar Menon, former Indian foreign secretary, with a political leader.

Our prime minister may likewise think of entrusting the task of future negotiations on transit and water sharing of remaining 53 rivers including Teesta to foreign ministry professionals, who are trained in the art of negotiating with foreign countries.

Alternatively, the assignment may be given to a retired seasoned and astute career diplomat, who has the experience of both serving in our Delhi Mission and in top positions in the foreign office, assisted by a core team of experts on water and transit.

Reticence and reserve are an essential preserve of diplomacy. The press and academic circles, however, were critical of the persistent optimism and exuberance of the incumbent foreign minister about the Indian conduct and what they described as her "apologetic" assessment of the success of Manmohan's visit.

It remains to be seen if Gowher Rizvi can be persuaded to abandon his futile exercise to defend the indefensible.

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Earthquake: A warning

M. MIZANUR RAHMAN

A magnitude-6.8 earthquake was felt across the country on September 18 evening, shaking buildings in the capital and elsewhere. Panic gripped common people. The US Geological Survey said on its website the quake was centered 64 km (40 miles) northwest of Gangtok, capital of northeastern state Sikkim and below 20 km of the surface.

It is very alarming the world has entered a new era of catastrophes. Economic losses from hurricanes, earthquakes and resulting tsunamis, floods, wildfires and other natural disasters increased from \$528 billion (1981-1990) to more than \$1.2 trillion over the period 2001-2010. The 9.0 earthquakes and massive tsunami in Japan this past spring caused hundreds of billions of dollars of direct and indirect costs (Washington post, 2011). It has affected the Japanese macroeconomic forecast and resulted in the departure of the then-prime minister. And before this, massive earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and New Zealand inflicted record human and financial losses as well.

There were tremors that shook various districts twice in Bangladesh including Dhaka on the night of September 10. And again, it was in 18th of the same month. The observatory at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) recorded 86 tremors of over four magnitudes during January 2006-May 2009. The meteorological department detected at least 90 earthquakes taking place in the country between May 2007 and July 2008, nine of them above five on the Richter scale and epicenters of 95 percent being within a 600 km radius of Dhaka city. There are four active sources of earthquake in the Bay of Bengal can generate tremors with a magnitude of over 7 on the Richter scale, affecting the country seriously.

Date	Time	Magnitude	Place
19.09.2011	22.30	4.6	Southern Iran
18.09.2011	18.32	5.1	Japan
18.09.2011	13.54	4.6	Sikkim
18.09.2011	13.12	4.8	Sikkim
18.09.2011	12.41	6.9	Sikkim
18.09.2011	10.40	5.0	Japan
18.09.2011	07.04	5.6	Japan

This was the frequency of earthquake nearby Bangladesh on September 18 and 19. Experts say that there is a possibility of a great earthquake after every 100 years and we are now passing through this danger time. The Great Indian Earthquake occurred on 12 June, 1897 with a magnitude of 8.7. Besides this, there were Cachher Earthquake, Manikganj/Bogra Earthquake, Shrimangal Earthquake, Dhubri Earthquake all of which were with more than magnitude 7 and near about 100 years ago. So, analysing the historical trend and the recent incidents, we can assume that it is not impossible that a big earthquake could happen now.

The country is surrounded by three tectonic plates, which are always on the move. This is one of the major reasons of the vulnerability of the country. But all these things are natural vulnerabilities; our self-created ones are not less, rather greater.

We have made ourselves vulnerable to earthquakes in various ways. Weak infrastructure, lack of awareness, lack of law enforcement and massive corruption, though all are interlinked, are the major factors that have made us so. Our problem is that we do not learn from history and we cannot think for the greater interest of the country and the countrymen.

More than 72,000 buildings are vulnerable to earthquake in Bangladesh. The capital city, mostly built on wetland, has so many high-rise buildings (a significant number of them do not comply with the building code) that it has become a risk zone for the populace. Again, supportive infrastructure or agents like roads, fire brigade, trained volunteers, equipment are incapable of responding in a post-earthquake situation.

It has been shown in different studies that people having less experience of earthquake suffer most if it happens, as they do not have knowledge about, and preparation for, it. If the structural mitigation is out of control of a citizen, he/she can easily go for at least non-structural ones with which he/she can protect himself/herself. Even, the falling down of furniture due to a small tremor can create fatality. If household level preparation can be taken this sort of fatality can be prevented, a strong level of awareness is necessary. In these days of high satellite media coverage, it is essential that people be educated on these issues.

According to TIB, every year 7,000 to 8,000 people get permission for the construction of residential and commercial buildings in Dhaka, therefore training of engineers, masons and bar binders is also an important area to concentrate on. It is really good that some Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have come forward to work for addressing urban risks by awareness raising, capacity building of the people involved in the construction sector, and creating a strong volunteer group.

The government has also taken some initiatives which are praiseworthy. We do not know when all the plans for urban risk reduction of the government will come into being, but we hope for the best.

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