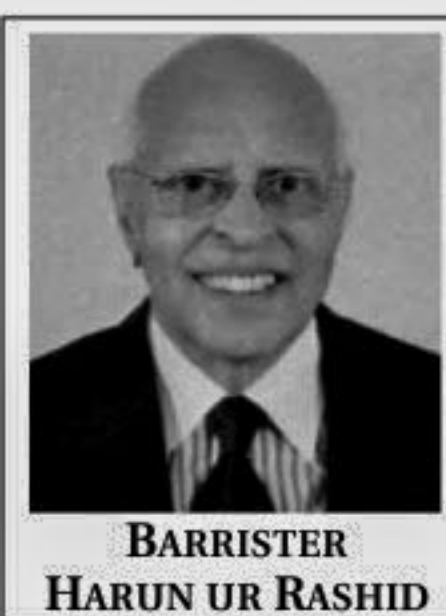


BOTTOM LINE

Indo-Afghan strategic ties



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

IN the backdrop of their suspicion of Pakistan, Afghan President Hamid Karzai reached India on October 4th for a two-day visit. It was his second this year and came at a time when his govern-

ment had been blaming Pakistan for sponsoring the Taliban attacks in Afghanistan.

Karzai went to India after the Indian prime minister's landmark visit to Kabul in May.

During that trip, Dr. Singh said India-Afghan cooperation "has expanded significantly," including India's development assistance commitment of about \$1.5 billion.

"We are people of the same region. We cannot remain unaffected by developments in Afghanistan," Singh had said. There has been speculation that India wants to do more in the security sector and to train Afghan forces so that the Afghanistan government can look after security when international troops leave the country in 2014.

India is aware that Pakistan is not comfortable with India's growing influence in Afghanistan and wants to balance its relations with Afghanistan. It does not want to have "its fingers burnt."

India's relations with Pakistan have remained tense since the November 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, although talks between them have in recent times com-

menced at both official and ministerial levels.

The Indian External Affairs Ministry said on its Web site that Karzai's trip provided "an opportunity for both countries to consolidate their strategic partnership and discuss bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest."

Strategic analyst Brahma Chellaney said the Haqqani terror network's links with Pakistani spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) could be the focus of the talks between the political heads of the two countries.

"The Haqqani network is an extension of ISI, as pointed out by Mullen. But Haqqanis are not the only ones in Afghanistan. And long before they attack the United States, they were attacking Indians. So that will of course be discussed," Chellaney said.

Pakistan vigorously denied any link between ISI and Haqqani group.

Pakistan warned the United States that it risked losing an ally if it kept accusing Islamabad of playing a double game in the war against militancy, escalating the crisis in relations between the two countries.

"You will lose an ally," Pakistan Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar told Geo TV in New York in remarks broadcast on September 23. "You cannot afford to alienate Pakistan, you cannot afford to alienate the Pakistani people."

During the visit, the Afghan president

and the Indian prime minister discussed the fragile security situation in Afghanistan and cooperation on counter-terrorism.

Karzai also reportedly discussed his revised strategy for reconciliation with the Taliban.

The recent attacks in Kabul included the September 20 assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former president who had been heading the High Peace Council to negotiate with the Taliban.

Afghan officials said Rabbani's assassination was planned in the Pakistani city of Quetta with the involvement of Pakistan's

with the Taliban alone would not be effective as Pakistani authorities exert control over the insurgents, *The Washington Post* reported. Pakistan has denied any involvement with the Taliban.

During the visit, India and Afghanistan signed a security cooperation agreement which will open the door for India to arm and train Afghan security forces. India has already pledged \$2 billion for a series of development projects in Afghanistan. Both countries signed MoUs in the field of exploration of mineral resources.

India's growing presence in Afghanistan is a source of concern for Pakistan. On October 5, the Afghan president sought to reassure Pakistan that warming ties with India would not sour their relationship. He said: "Pakistan is a twin brother, India is a great friend."

Analysts say corruption, poor governance, the disunity among the Afghan tribes, the lawless areas

across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the inexorable rise of religious extremism in Pakistan itself, and Taliban attacks on Nato forces led to the instability of Afghanistan.

India's position on the reconciliation strategy with the Taliban has evolved from opposition to any accommodation with the Taliban to supporting re-integration and eventually to endorsing it as an Afghan-led initiative within the ambit of the Afghan Constitution.

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intelligence agency.

Islamabad has strongly denied the accusation, saying that Professor Rabbani "was a great friend of Pakistan and widely respected in this country."

In an address on October 3, Karzai said Afghanistan and Pakistan are "inseparable brothers," but also said despite all destruction and calamities faced by both countries, Pakistan plays "a double-standard game and (the use of) terrorism as a tool continued," the BBC reported.

Since then, Karzai has said peace talks

political settlement in Afghanistan. It was the staging ground for the Mujaheddin offensive against the Soviets in Afghanistan. It sees itself as the country most vitally interested in shaping any future political settlement in Afghanistan. Analysts say the Islamabad government is looking to the Haqqanis to secure its interests and guard against being squeezed out of Kabul's power equation by India.

On October 7, while visiting the US, former President General Musharraf reportedly said: "India is trying to create anti-Pakistan Afghanistan and there is some kind of proxy conflict going on between Pakistan and India in Afghanistan." Pakistan claims that since the Indians are giving money to their own favourites in Afghanistan, Pakistan too feels compelled to play the game. It accuses India of using consulates along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan to spy on it. Pakistan does not wish to be sandwiched between India and pro-India Afghanistan for strategic reasons.

It is difficult to visualise how the conflict in Afghanistan will unravel in the lead-up to and beyond the 2014 timetable for the withdrawal of US troops from there. A big question mark looms over whether the country will remain united or be Balkanised along ethnic lines -- and what such a partition could mean for Pakistan, Iran, India and China and Central Asian countries.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION

Necessity for 'culture of disaster preparedness'

M. MIZANUR RAHMAN

INTERNATIONAL Day for Disaster Reduction is being observed today with the slogan "Making Children and Young People Partners in Disaster Risk Reduction." The main motive is to involve the young generation in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) initiatives so that they can have a long-term effect. The Bangladesh government and NGOs have taken up programmes to raise awareness throughout the country.

From various aspects, this Day is very important for us. We have taken the Day as an opportunity to reach every corner of Bangladesh with disaster preparedness messages to students for wider dissemination and long-term effectiveness of the knowledge. The main aim is to have a more prepared and resilient Bangladesh.

According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2010, an average of 8,241 people died each year in 244 cases of extreme weather conditions in Bangladesh, with the damage amounting to over \$2 billion a year and a GDP loss of 1.81%, during 1990-2008 (*The Daily Star*, October 7). Day by day, disasters are going to be the main agent of human crisis and also economic threat worldwide. In 2010 only, 385 natural disasters killed more than 297,000 people worldwide, affected over 217 million others and caused \$123.9 billion damages. 131 countries were hit by these natural disasters, though only 10 accounted for 120 of the 385 disasters (31.2%). (ADSR: 2010)

Gradually, our vulnerability is increasing. Frequent earthquakes in India, China and Japan, flood in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India, drought in China, series of storms in the Philippines have added a new dimension of thinking for disaster risk reduction in the Asia-Pacific region.

The people of Bangladesh have been living with disasters like flood, cyclone, and river bank erosion for hundreds of years, but the recent tremors have added a new dimension in the area of disaster management. Disasters with which people are more acquainted cause less damage, but an earthquake can cause havoc as people have not experienced it.

It is a positive sign that the people have become sensitised on this issue after observing the recent tremors. Now it is high time we prepare the people and the institutions to face them, for which flow of information is mandatory. If people get the proper information, and are aware of the ferocity of earthquake, they will obviously be conscious while making buildings.

History and statistics show how even rich and better prepared countries have been shattered by earthquakes. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) estimates that several million earthquakes occur each year. Many go undetected because they hit remote areas or have very small magnitudes. In 2009, 22 earthquakes killed 1,888 persons, made 3.2 million victims and caused \$6.2 billion of damages, according to EM-DAT -- the OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database.

In 2010, 25 earthquakes caused 226,735 fatalities, 7.2 million victims and \$46.2 billion of damages. The historical database from USGS counted 74 earthquakes stronger than magnitude 8 between the China (Shensi) earthquake of January 1556 and the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011 -- including the Lisbon quake of November 1755.

Now let us think about our capital city; what will happen if we are faced with an earthquake of magnitude 7? This is a city of more than one crore people and thousands of risky buildings. If these buildings collapse, there will be no way other than declaring Dhaka a dead city. We do not have the capacity for either search and rescue or treatment of the affected people. And even debris removing from Dhaka will not be possible. We don't have either the place to remove the debris or much infrastructural support (road and vehicle) to do it.

We talk about decentralisation, but neither the government nor the non-government institutions are moving a bit from their earlier attitude. Why are the banks so prompt in investing in the housing sector for Dhaka but not for the other cities? Why does the government not initiate resettlement of factories and industries out of Dhaka? And why is Rajuk not able to persuade people to comply with the Building Codes? And also why are the people not aware of the risk of earthquake? We are building our homes for our sons and daughters by spending crores of taka, but are we not endangering their lives by letting them live in unsafe constructions? These are all crucial questions now.

According to Margareta Wahlström, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction: "In earthquake zones, three factors affect our degree of risk: changes to our natural environment, the quality of the built environment around us, and whether awareness and knowledge is widespread enough for us to modify our behaviour in response to these factors." To her, "the key to surviving high magnitude quakes is to live and work in seismically safe buildings, while being aware of how nature around us can also change."

So, two things are important here, living in safe places and being aware. And here, of course, we need to have a simultaneous two-way approach (top down and bottom up); the government will strengthen its institutions and, at the same time, the people need to be more conscious so that they can take at least some non-structural mitigation measures and restrain themselves from constructing risky buildings.

On this day, we the people, the government, NGOs, media and all concerned, must vow that we all will work for establishing a culture of disaster preparedness in every corner of the country.

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Education first

M. ASHRAF ALI

EDUCATION is a precondition for economic and social development. We have professed the importance of minimum education for the masses but have done very little in translating those pronouncements into action. We want democracy to function in the country, but how can democracy work in a nation where a vast number of the people are illiterate? We also want to implement such vital national programmes as family planning, increased food production, improved health and sanitary conditions, etc. But can any of those make any headway unless the people are able and willing to participate? The answer is obvious.

Although education is a vital sector, deserving special attention due to the fact that progress in the other sectors depends on it, ironically it was given the least priority during the Pakistan era. As a result, the inevitable has happened. In spite of heavy investments in money and effort, we have failed to make substantial progress in family planning and the health sector.

Food production has slightly improved over the past years, but there has not been any breakthrough in terms of utilisation of modern agricultural practices mainly due to lack of education among the people, which prevented assimilation and utilisation of modern agricultural technology by the people.

The tradition of assigning low priority to education still persists, and this is reflected in the financial allocation for the education sector. It can be said without any doubt that until and unless our people are developed through education and awareness, we will be a nation of hand-to-mouth living perpetuated through a spoon-feeding development process.

In order to make the development process self-sustaining and self-propelling, it is essential that the people participate in nation-building activities voluntarily with a strong urge to improve their own condition as well as the condition of the nation. This will not happen unless steps are taken to educate the people within the shortest possible time. In this connection, one may remember the statement made by Dr. Julius Nyerere when he became president of Tanzania. He said: "We have chosen to remain poor for the next 20 years because we are going to invest 50% of our national income for education. We want to develop our people first and then they will develop the country."

Our priority should be basic education, which comprises universal primary education together with widespread mass education, so that democracy can take a strong root. Higher education for a poor country like ours is a luxury we can ill afford. At present there are 50 private universities and 11 more have been approved. Many people opined that these universities were producing sub-standard graduates who

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HABIBUL HAQUE / DRINKNEWS

were likely to perform poorly on the job, taking the country further into degradation.

Since centralised planning, which is a legacy of the colonial rule, does not involve the general people whom it intends to serve, it is most likely to fail. Very little has been achieved through centralised planning manifested in the form of five-year plans. It is time to start doing things in the proper way so that wastage could be substantially minimised while optimising the benefits.

Local-level planning does not call for high-level economists and technocrats. Rather, it can be done on a smaller and simpler scale

involving local resources and personnel. The following strategies may be appropriate for effective local-level planning:

- The Union may be taken as the planning unit. As the first step, surveys of resources in the villages under a particular union should be undertaken to have an idea of the existing resources. Such a survey should also identify the areas which need additional inputs for further improvement and also new areas of development which have potential for improving the infrastructure of the locality;
- After the survey is completed, new projects which need to be undertaken as well as previous projects which need further improvement need to be identified. Next, estimates of cost should be calculated and a realistic budget should be prepared for each of these projects;
- The union plans should be compiled together at the thana level and may be sent to the district authority for compilation at the district level. Again, they should be compiled at the divisional level and then forwarded to the planning ministry for final scrutiny and approval;
- The Planning Commission at Dhaka should scrutinise each of these plans and modify them depending on their viability. Commission personnel should undertake tours in the planning areas to gather first-hand knowledge so that modifications are not based on purely arbitrary decisions;
- The plans should be ultimately compiled on the basis of divisions. This way there will be six plans for the divisions compiled into one. These plans may be printed at Dhaka and sent to the divisions for distribution to the local planning authorities.

It is very likely that through this process of planning, local involvement will be ensured. Since local representatives will be involved in preparing the plan, they will try to sincerely implement it as they have a stake in its success. If this process works a self-sustaining development process may be the outcome, which is the long-cherished dream of both the government and the people.

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