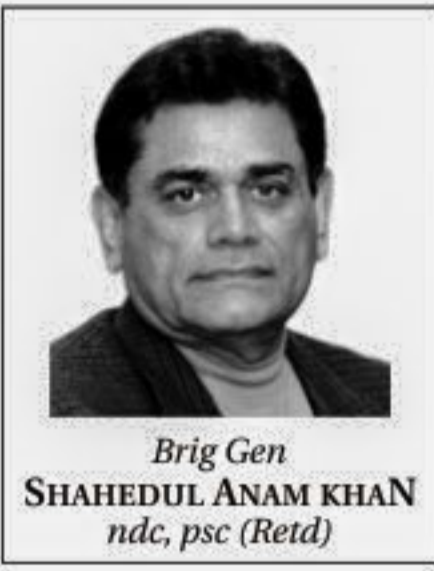


STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

The Mamata factor in Bangladesh-India relations



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THERE is perhaps no single example where the key to the furtherance of bilateral relations between two countries depended so much on the

goodwill, some would say good sense, of one person. That, unfortunately, is the case insofar as Bangladesh-India relations are concerned. The Mamata factor in our relationship has become a matter of cogitation in Bangladesh by experts and observers of Bangladesh-India relations.

The state of affairs is a great disappointment for those that would like to see harmonious Bangladesh-India relations and deepening of cooperation based on equity. It only gives the opportunity to the detractors to gleefully restate the foolishness of trusting India.

The fact is that the bilateral relationship has hit a snag, in spite of the surfeit of goodwill that had been created after the AL's coming to power, and in spite of public utterances on both sides of the fence, literally, that everything is absolutely OK on all counts; and that has been further compounded by the behaviour of the utterly errant BSF personnel on the Bangladesh-India border.

It seems that we are being held hostage by the Chief Minister of Paschim Banga. The distress is being felt by most people in Bangladesh, and one would hope it is distressing in equal

measure to those in the government of Dr. Manmohan Singh who would like to see India's commitments made to Bangladesh is honoured fully. In reality, the next steps regarding the major issues, which would lead to implementation of the MOU of September 2011, depend entirely on Ms. Banerjee giving ground on those.

The general people in Bangladesh have realised that we are in for a long haul as far as Teesta is concerned. We wonder whether our policymakers do. The sooner our policymakers realise

was a landmark achievement in many respects since it addressed the 6.4 kilometers of un-demarcated border in three different stretches. It has also addressed the issue of the enclaves and land in adverse possession (APL). The only shortcoming of the protocol was that no timeframe was fixed for the exchanges to be completed. One had hoped that one of the main causes of border tensions and sporadic clashes on the borders, the APL, would be removed permanently by implementing the protocol. Bangladesh's interest lay

cern and amusement the news that the Manmohan Singh government is still waiting for Mamata Banerjee to come on board, quite a ludicrous situation, one must add, given that the loose ends should have been ironed out before the Indian PM put his signature on the documents. And of course there is always the "legal aspect" to fall back upon, as India had done with regard to the Teen Bigha.

Bangladesh would hope that it would not have to wait another forty years before the 2011 protocols are implemented. As for the Paschim Banga CM, whom many in Bangladesh consider as the villain of the piece, she would do well to heed the advice of an eminent Indian journalist who suggested that the "West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee would be well advised to visit Bangladesh where she is popular and where the expectation is that she would make amends for her absence from the prime minister's team that visited Dhaka a few weeks ago. Were Mamata to announce more water from the River Teesta, something she had promised, the entire Bangladesh population would dance to her tune."

One is not certain about Ms. Banerjee's popularity rating in Bangladesh at this point in time, neither is one certain that the entire population would dance to her tune at her announcement for more water for Bangladesh, but they would certainly thank providence for implanting good sense in her.

We want no one's magnanimity but only what is rightfully ours.

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One notes with both a degree of concern and amusement the news that the Manmohan Singh government is still waiting for Mamata Banerjee to come on board.

that, the sooner and better we would be able to formulate our future strategy in this regard.

We can thank Mamata Banerjee for putting the spanner in the works as far as the Teesta deal is concerned; some, however, are unwilling to put the blame entirely on the Paschim Banga CM. But let us focus on the other important issues that were supposed to have been acted upon following the September 2011 Summit in Dhaka, particularly on the Protocol to the Agreement Concerning the Demarcation of the Land Boundary..... but acted upon by when? And that is the main criticism of the protocol.

The 2011 said protocol operationalises the Mujib-Indira LBA of 1974. It

in how quickly the exchanges could take place. It seems that we are in for another round of disappointments.

While it took nearly four decades to formalise the mechanisms to implement the 1974 Treaty, nothing has moved since September 2011 when the relevant protocols were signed. There are mixed news about the progress on the Indian side in this regard. The matter has not been put up to the Indian cabinet, reportedly because of the position taken by Mamata Banerjee with regard to handing over of land to Bangladesh. There is therefore a "go slow" policy on the part of India compelled as well by the BJP opposition to the protocol.

One notes with both a degree of con-

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

Japan's unending nuclear nightmare



PRAFUL BIDWAI

IT'S generally assumed that highly developed Japan would handle a catastrophic accident far more competently than callous, hierarchical, and

class-polarised societies with a poor infrastructure and safety culture like India or Bangladesh.

Japan was also expected to do better than backward Ukraine, which suffered the world's previous nuclear core meltdown at Chernobyl in 1986 -- especially as regards large-scale evacuation given Japan's experience with earthquakes and tsunamis.

Alas, Japan has abjectly failed to provide relief to those affected by the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident. Needless to say, India or Bangladesh would have done infinitely worse.

A majority of the victims of the three Fukushima reactor meltdowns continue to be exposed to high levels of radiation from atmospheric fallout and contaminated food and water. The radiation "exclusion zone" only covers a 20-km radius. But radiation levels are high 60 or even 200 km away.

Radiation meters show high gamma radiation readings such as 20 microsieverts an hour. Within roughly 40 days, these would deliver a dose equalling the maximum annual limit set by the Japanese government. This limit is itself 20 times higher than the internationally prevalent annual norm of 1 millisievert (mSv)! People's radiation exposure hasn't been systematically estimated or monitored by the government or plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co (Tepeco).

Had the authorities followed the Chernobyl norm for triggering evacuation (5 mSv), they would have had to evacuate five times more people and impose restrictions on food grown in an area 30 times the size of Fukushima's evacuation zone. Japan's public health

response was thus worse than poor Ukraine's despite its greater technological sophistication and financial capacity.

What explains this is the inability of government and industry to act in nuclear crises, mutual collusion between them, and suppression of critical safety-related information. An official committee's report released three weeks ago shows that bumbling nuclear industry executives and confused government officials mishandled the crisis from the beginning. The 507-page interim report found that tsunami risks were grossly underestimated.

Tepeco workers weren't trained to handle emergencies like the station blackout caused by the tsunamis, lead-

provide truthful information to the public.

Japan's Nuclear Industrial and Safety Agency failed to correct these errors. The government didn't make the extent of radiation spread and doses public. Many people were wrongly moved from low-radiation areas to high-radiation ones! The government lied through its teeth. It knew within a day that there had been a meltdown, yet didn't disclose that for weeks.

Media reports have just revealed that the Japanese government suppressed a worst-case scenario for the crisis soon after it began and kept it under wraps until December. After the document was shown to a select group of senior

inquiry commission just set up by Parliament, with the power to summon witnesses.

This culture of covering up and inadequate cleanup efforts have left the Japanese people exposed to unconscionable health risks. The mainstream media played a pernicious role in the cover-up, led by its dependence on Japan's power-supply industry, its biggest advertiser. Tepeco's advertising budget alone is roughly half what a global corporation like Toyota spends annually.

The Japanese people, I discovered, feel betrayed by their traditionally paternalistic state, which is not taking responsibility for the terrible effects of its policy to promote nuclear power. Lakhs continue to suffer as their generations-old occupations, including agriculture and dairy farming, become unviable.

People are resorting to community radiation monitoring, self-protection, and organic food cooperatives, to cope with the crisis. But the crisis has had one positive effect. All but five of Japan's 54 nuclear reactors lie closed -- and the country is none the worse for it.

At a two-day global conference in Yokohama, which I attended with 11,500 others, speakers emphasised the imperative of phasing out nuclear power. It's far too dirty, too expensive, too centralised, too bound-up with secrecy and deception, and above all, too dangerous. They also underscored the rising relevance and economic viability of low-carbon renewable energy.

Fukushima's tragedy can only be redeemed if the world -- including South Asia -- abolishes nuclear power, and promotes new energy systems and smart grids based on safe, environmentally benign, renewables which are relevant to people's needs, not the nuclear industry's greed.

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Lakhs continue to suffer as their generations-old occupations, including agriculture and dairy farming, become unviable.

ing to the overheating of reactor cores and their meltdown. They had no manual to follow and didn't communicate properly even among themselves.

Cooling of the reactors was delayed because of the mishandling of an emergency cooling system. Workers assumed it was working, despite signs that it had failed. A better response might have reduced radiation leaks and averted hydrogen explosions at Reactors 1, 3 and 4, which sent out huge radiation plumes. The radiation load wasn't even measured.

Regulatory agencies failed to impose tough safety standards on Tepeco, which was too slow to gather information on radiation and relay it.

The report documents Tepeco's misjudgment of the reactors' operational situation, its poor handling of water injection, and its failure to prevent damage magnification. It also exposes the government's inadequate responses as regards initial radiation monitoring, emergency evacuation, and failure to

officials in late March, the government decided to quietly bury it. "The content was so shocking that we decided to treat it as if it didn't exist," a senior official is quoted as saying.

The document forecast that in a worst-case scenario, the reactors would release massive quantities of radioactivity for about a year. The projection was based on the premise that a hydrogen explosion would tear through the first reactor's containment vessel, forcing station workers to evacuate because of lethal radiation levels.

In that event, 40 million residents within a radius of 170 km of the station would be forced to evacuate. Those living within a radius of between 170 and 250 km, including Tokyo, could choose to evacuate voluntarily.

Logically, this scenario may already have materialised. After all, hydrogen explosions ripped through not one, but three, Fukushima reactors. Many people expect yet more disclosures from an independent bipartisan

India's pro-active response

Hopefully it will lead to deterrence

WE are thankful to the Indian minister P. Chidambaram for his expression of regret at some BSF personnel's barbaric treatment of a Bangladeshi national. He has also held out an assurance that the offending Indian Border security personnel will be handed harsh punishment.

We noted the Indian media's prompt reaction to the incident and its exposure of the full details of the torture on a Bangladeshi by BSF men as he allegedly refused to give bribe to them. Indian human rights organisations have also expressed their concern over the incident.

All this is welcome because within India there is a growing recognition of the excesses that the BSF personnel have been committing. These should lead to exerting pressure on the concerned quarters to put a stop to the border atrocities.

While we would like to be reassured at the Indian home minister's words, we may recall that despite repeated commitments from the Indian government including the BSF chief, incidents of killing or torture of Bangladesh nationals at the BSF's hands have been taking place from time to time.

Even after the sensational story of stripping and torturing of a Bangladeshi named Habibur Rahman in Murshidabad by the BSF personnel drew world attention and outrage, the Indian border security people did not put a brake on their trigger-happy manners as some subsequent incidents tend to suggest.

After the minister's assurance, we have reasons to hope that the Indian government would move beyond putting the BSF delinquents under suspension and take punitive measures against them.

What is equally, if not more important, will be to take appropriate precautionary measures against recurrence of such incidents in the future.

The instructions from the top must permeate the field level for the desired impact.

Joint venture with Nepal on power

Tremendous potential exists

NEPAL'S willingness to export power to Bangladesh and its offer of setting up a power plant as a joint venture holds tremendous potential for us. Of the country's total hydropower potential of 83,000MW, 42,000MW is economically exploitable, while Bangladesh's 5,000MW of electricity covers only half of its over 16 crore population. Cooperation from Kathmandu could well help meet the power needs of our country.

Inter-basin cooperation between countries such as India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal would result in greater electricity generation to meet the countries' needs, underpinned by an ecological balance beneficial to all. It could even extend to region-wide drought, flood and land erosion measures.

With regard to transit, Nepal has expressed interest in transporting goods from Mongla Port in Bangladesh, but which covers 17 kilometres of Indian territory. India has been forthcoming at times but less so at others in terms of providing bilateral and trilateral transit. This should be done within the ambit of Saarc cooperation. For the greater good, India should come out of its wavering position and play a cooperative and effective role which would smoothen the path towards materialisation of such projects. Such multilateral cooperation can be of great advantage to all parties involved.

In the case of bodies like Saarc, such cooperation between member countries can only serve to strengthen these organisations and reap benefits for all concerned nations if they can take a reciprocal and united stand. For greater progress in the sub-continent, the nations must come forward with their own needs and also come together in seeking out understanding and negotiating on mutually beneficial ones. With the right intentions and goals set, intelligent diplomacy should lead to better

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 2

1542 Portuguese under Christovão da Gama capture a Muslim-occupied hill fort in northern Ethiopia in the Battle of Baçente

1901 Funeral of Queen Victoria.

1943 World War II: The Battle of Stalingrad comes to conclusion as Soviet troops accept the surrender of 91,000 remnants of the Axis forces.

1966 Pakistan suggests a six-point agenda with Kashmir after the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965.

1982 Hama Massacre: Syria attacks the town of Hama.

1989 Soviet war in Afghanistan: The last Soviet armoured column leaves Kabul.

1990 Apartheid: F.W. de Klerk allows the African National Congress to function legally and promises to release Nelson Mandela.