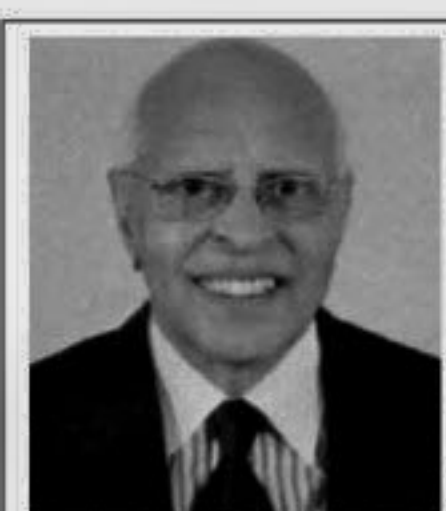


BOTTOM LINE

# Why is India so insensitive to our affairs?



BARRISTER  
HARUN UR RASHID

IN December 2010, New York based Human Rights Watch in a report described the Indian border guards as a "trigger-happy" force and documented hundreds of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment by the BSF. On February 7, the chief of Border Security Force (BSF) UK Banshal reportedly came made a chilling statement that "it would never be possible to totally stop firing; for so long the criminal activities continue along the border, we shall have to prevent the offenders."

Again, on February 23, one day before the Bangladesh home minister's visit, the chief of BSF reiterated his view that his soldiers at the border with Bangladesh would fire on criminals who dared them. In simple language, killing of Bangladeshis will continue along the border.

These statements of the BSF chief go directly against July 2011 statement of his boss, the Indian Home Affairs Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram, who said that Indian guards would no longer shoot people crossing the porous border from Bangladesh. Instead, the guards would use rubber bullets after giving warnings.

The people Bangladesh are puzzled that the Indian home minister remained silent on the reported statement of the BSF chief. Do we assume that home minister's July statement was not meant to be what he said? Was it only a political statement

meant for Bangladesh people to assuage their anger at the killings along the border?

On February 9, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni said the killing and torture of Bangladeshi nationals by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) along the border was not acceptable. She told journalists: "The government has long been protesting the border killing. India has also agreed to stop it."

On February 14, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reportedly noted with regret that despite the assurance of India's highest political level that the killings along the border would end, stray incidents of killing and torture of Bangladeshi nationals by the Indian BSF personnel continued.

On February 24, at a meeting with the Bangladesh home minister in New Delhi, the Indian home minister assured her Bangladesh that efforts were on to bring down the incidents of firing along the border to zero level.

The senseless torture and killing of Bangladeshis by BSF has led an overwhelming section of people in Bangladesh to believe that India did not care about the loss of lives of Bangladeshis.

It is not understood why the Indian government remains so insensitive to the sentiments of the people of Bangladesh. New Delhi is a long distance from Dhaka (1,424.20 km) but that does not mean that

Bangladesh affairs will be neglected or sidelined.

Some analysts say there are several reasons why is India insensitive to affairs of Bangladesh? Some are mentioned below:

There is a saying in the diplomatic circle in South Asia that India considers Pakistan as its only "neighbour" in South Asia, and does not deem others as "neighbours" because their relationships do not weigh much in India's concern.

In October last year, India's former foreign secretary Muchkund Dubey wrote:

***Goodwill cannot be imposed as it is built on principles of mutual respect and trust, which are created when promised deals are translated into action with fairness and justice. Self-interest demands that India pay more attention to the sentiments of the people of Bangladesh.***

"Attitude of most Indian political leaders, senior officials, business magnates and strategic thinkers towards Bangladesh has been one of disdain and apathy. Very few of these people either understand the dynamics of the domestic politics of Bangladesh or have grasped the full import of Indo-Bangladesh relations." (*The Daily Star: Forum -- October 2011*)

A similar position is reflected in the book *The Jamdani Revolution* by Krishnan Srinivasan, another former Indian foreign secretary, in which he writes: "The political will and attention span have been lacking in New Delhi even though the bureaucracy

has been willing to give a shove in the right direction -- which has not always been the case. In other words, the Indian government has tended to allow the hardliners and Hindu chauvinists to set the agenda for its policy towards Bangladesh."

Another eminent Indian journalist Sunanda K. Datta-Ray writes in July 2009 in Kolkata's *The Telegraph*: "Bangladesh may sizzle but it sizzles on a back-burner of Indian priorities."

From time immemorial, the behaviour of powerful and weak states has engaged

many historians and political scientists, and was aptly summed by Greek historian, Thucydides (460-395) when he wrote: "The strong do what they have power to do; the weak accept what they have to accept."

India is a "rising power" regionally and globally, and some

observers say many of its policy-makers may believe the above doctrine of Greek historian, with regard to Bangladesh.

Empirical evidence suggests Bangladesh has relied too much on Indian promises in the past, and even now. There have been many instances where India had been found deficient in fulfilling the pledges it made to Bangladesh.

Currently, the delay in implementing the promised deals with Bangladesh is causing serious misgivings among most people in Bangladesh about India's commitment and sincerity, and the existing behaviour

will only demonstrate the repetition of its past conduct. To Bangladesh, federal-state conflict in India's politics cannot be an excuse for non-implementation of India's pledges.

On February 15, the *Times of India* warned the Indian government to rectify its policies before it was too late. New Delhi failed to deliver on big-ticket issues and risked losing most of the goodwill it had previously garnered, it added.

While Dhaka has moved quickly to address Delhi's concerns about cross-border terrorism and connectivity to the North-East, it appears that implementation of the bargain by the Indian side has been lost, especially in water-sharing of the common rivers.

Time is of the essence in implementation of the agreed deals with Bangladesh, and India must realise that its failure is not helping the government of Sheikh Hasina.

Furthermore, India is creating an environment in which the Sheikh Hasina government will be unable to respond positively in future to Indian requests. It is a pity that India does not appear to have appreciated, or has taken for granted, Bangladesh's quick actions to meet its vital interests.

Goodwill cannot be imposed as it is built on principles of mutual respect and trust, which are created when promised deals are translated into action with fairness and justice. Self-interest demands that India pay more attention to the sentiments of the people of Bangladesh.

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## LNG for power generation

MOHAMMAD FARUQ HAIDER

LIQUEFIED Natural Gas (LNG) holds tremendous opportunity for Bangladesh as the country seeks ways to ensure power supply for the people. The current international price (I should say North American market price) for natural gas is hovering around \$2.5-\$4 per thousand cubic feet, a cheap commodity indeed when one considers the highly volatile and pricy energy sector.

Bangladesh has been suffering from lack of electricity for a long time and ineffective policies and practices have led to an enormous gap in energy production, consumption, and distribution systems. Both the industrial and the agricultural sectors will require uninterrupted supply of energy to ensure growth. Numerous small scale electricity generation facilities are being set up in Bangladesh, which is welcoming news but, in my view, this measure falls short in sustaining future development and growth.

I suggest setting up LNG-based large-scale power generation systems involving LNG receiving, converting/processing and associated power plants in Bangladesh. LNG is natural gas in its liquid form.

Natural gas is converted to LNG by cooling it to -162° Celsius (-260° Fahrenheit), at which point it becomes a liquid. This process reduces its volume by a factor of more than 600 -- similar to reducing the volume of a beach ball to the volume of a ping-pong ball. This allows natural gas to be transported efficiently by sea. The ability to convert natural gas to LNG, which can be shipped on specially built ocean-going ships, provides consumers with access to vast natural gas resources worldwide. LNG is an odourless, non-toxic and non-corrosive liquid, and if spilled, it will not result in a slick. LNG evaporates and disperses quickly, leaving no residue.

According to a recent industry forecast natural gas will overtake coal as the number 2 fuel by 2040. Natural gas is a cleaner and environmentally friendly choice over other fossil fuels. Currently, around 74% of electricity is generated from natural gas in Bangladesh. Think about a scenario where 74% of electricity is generated by coal. As Bangladesh prepares to become "Digital Bangladesh," it makes little or no sense to depend heavily on a dirty fuel of the past generation -- coal. When generating electricity, natural gas emits 60% less emissions that are responsible for greenhouse effect than coal.

Because it seems that Bangladesh will import energy to generate power in the short term, it is strategically important to ensure diversity, as well as economic prudence, when it comes to importing coal, natural gas or other fossil fuels to reduce dependency on one particular country or region for energy production to ultimately strike a balance.

Bangladesh is also well positioned to receive LNG from Canada, Australia, Asia Pacific countries or Middle Eastern countries. Natural gas also stands out as a favourable candidate when it comes to safety, availability of technology, long term sustainability, and the duration of life cycle to produce energy (i.e. from concep-

tion, design/engineering, construction to operation/production) is also relatively small.

To ensure economy of scale, large natural gas based projects in locations close to Bay of Bengal are necessary. This should not depend on whether we find or not find enough natural gas in the Bay of Bengal. Because, at the end of the day, we need electricity, and natural gas stands out as one of the cheapest, cleanest, and safest fuels available today. Even if we find natural gas in the Bay of Bengal, we can always keep it as a reserve. But, if we do not start considering and eventually investing now to set up agreements and associated infrastructure, we may find ourselves missing a good opportunity. A phased approach can be taken in designing and constructing of the facilities, starting with LNG import terminals.

We have to keep in mind that a new large scale project usually takes at least 5 years to build. Let us evaluate on a holistic level, the scenario if we do not have enough natural gas within our borders. Bangladesh will then end up setting value chain agreement with a natural gas producer/supplier for the next 20-25 years. In my view, this represents a better prospect than relying

on other fossil fuels (e.g. coal, petrol/diesel) based power generation schemes. This type of "value chain" agreement also provides cost predictability as the cost is usually locked in the agreement through a "formula" for the period. Similar agreements are in place among several nations (e.g. Qatar, Japan, UK, etc.).

It also stands favourably over nuclear power plants and associated risks that come with nuclear energy. Many countries are also considering phasing out nuclear power plants in the future (e.g. Germany, Japan etc.). I am not advocating that we should not use nuclear energy but, in the next 20-25 years, we have to ensure adequate energy supply to sustain and take Bangladesh's economy to a new level. I am advocating setting up of natural gas based power plants, LNG conversion facilities, and associated receiving terminals close to the Bay of Bengal.

Natural gas is relatively economic over the long term as the existing network of energy delivery can be utilised to supply natural gas to the households. Current reserve in Canada or US is so huge that the price is expected to remain low in the North American market for years to come, if not decades. It is important that Bangladesh lines up agreements to obtain economic supply of gas for 20-25 years, lock down the price and start receiving a cleaner fuel. It is also important to shop around as there seems to be more supply of LNG available than there is reliable market -- Canada, Australia, Qatar, US among others can be supplier/s of choice. A good price can be ensured if Bangladeshi government and/or private sector takes the initiative to place an agreement as new LNG exporting terminals are built, and not wait until other potential customers line up deals and Bangladesh ends up paying a premium price!

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## Volunteer teaching: A boon for deprived students

RAJIB KUMAR ROY

EDUCATION is rightly dubbed as the backbone of a nation. It is a fundamental right of every citizen. In Article 17 of the Constitution, it is said that the state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of free and compulsory education. According to a UNDP report, Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals -- achieving universal primary education -- is hard for Bangladesh to reach. Out of the three indicators of that Goal, only one -- net enrolment ratio in primary education -- is on track. The other two -- proportion of pupils starting grade one and reaching grade five, and literacy rate of 15-24 years old population -- are not achievable by 2015.

According to newspaper reports, around 23.16 lakh students registered for Primary School Certificate and Ebtedayee examination last year, and 1.3 lakh skipped the exam. Besides, 59,879 students failed. A large number of the unsuccessful students are girls and their parents are reluctant to send them to school again.

Most of the non-enrolled children belong to socio-economically disadvantaged families and illiterate parents. These parents are more interested in engaging their children in household or income generating work. Most of them believe sending their children to schools won't guarantee them food. These students need extra care in the classroom. They cannot take preparation at home. In fact, they cannot afford time for that. Sometimes it is found that they go directly from schools to the fields to help their parents. Most of these students are first generation learners. As the parents are illiterate, they cannot help in their children's studies.

After a lot of struggle and difficulties, these students get some knowledge on the general subjects. But subjects like mathematics, English and science still remain the main fear for them. They get no help from either home or school. It causes the dropout rate to increase as they don't find any interest in school anymore.

The teachers, on the other hand, are not qualified enough for these students. With some exceptions, they don't have proper training to deal with students with special needs. The number of teachers is not sufficient. At present, the student-teacher ratio is 60:1, though the government is trying to make it 30:1. Most of the schools have classrooms packed with students. The weak learners feel shy to come in front and very often miss the lectures. As they don't respond, they remain out of the sight of the teachers. As teachers take a number of classes at different levels in a row, they feel tired and don't want to spend extra time for the slow and weak learners. It is noticed that many teachers do not even prepare properly before taking a class.

Teachers are also engaged in private tuition and coaching. They find teaching in the coaching centres

more economically beneficial than giving extra time to weak learners at school. There are complaints that some teachers even take classes in the coaching centres at school time. This "shadow education system" is considered as a social problem.

Since private coaching by school teachers is considered "unethical," there should be some alternative. An option can be volunteer teaching by the educated persons of the locality. One educated person can help one or more students in their studies. If the students face any difficulties while preparing their lessons they can go to the volunteer teacher for help.

Anyone having knowledge of a particular class can be a volunteer. Here, the benefit is two-fold. The student as well as the helping teacher can be benefitted from the practice of study. It will help the volunteer in competitive examinations. Students, teachers, service holders, even house manager, can be volunteers if they have the willingness and courage. Unlike private teaching, volunteer teaching is more relaxed in a number of ways. Students and volunteers can arrange a convenient time and sit

together. It can be anywhere and anytime they like.

The practice of volunteer teaching exists in a number of countries, and many countries have different organisations for it. They publish advertisements looking for volunteers. Students in their vacation serve through those organisations in different parts of the world. In our country, a few NGOs are trying to initiate this programme in rural areas. Their report

says they get very good response from the volunteers and the students get very good results in the examinations. This initiative should be encouraged by the government and other organisations.

One big challenge in this initiative is to keep the volunteers motivated for a long time. It is found that most of the time they start with full enthusiasm but become reluctant later. To keep their interest up, various initiatives can be taken. Education officials should be engaged to find interested persons from different parts of the country to work as volunteers. Short training can be arranged for them on certain subjects so that they do not find it difficult to teach. Refresher trainings should be arranged at regular intervals. Teacher training colleges and PTIs can be used to provide trainings. A forum can be formed for the volunteers. Union Information and Service Centres can be a very good place for them to form an online forum so that they can communicate with the other volunteers about their problems and facilities. Excursions can be arranged for volunteers to nearby places of interest. District and national level awards can be arranged for best volunteers. Besides, volunteer service can be included as a course with field-level practical activities at the university level.

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