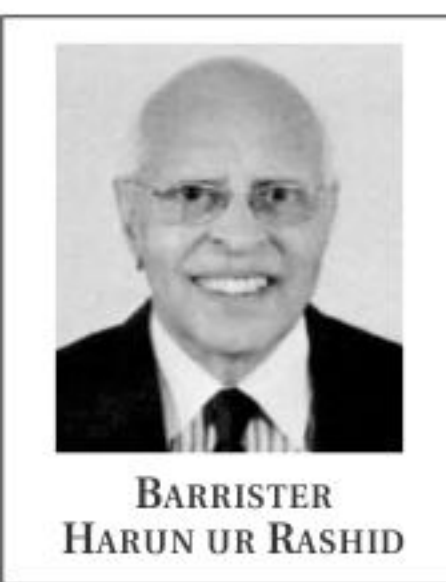


BOTTOM LINE

KHALEDA ZIA'S NEW DELHI VISIT

India reaching out to other parties



ON October 28, BNP Chairperson and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia left for India for a week's visit which is important for both sides. It has provided each others' perspectives on bilateral relations at the highest political level.

The bottom line for India is to find a friendly government emerging in Bangladesh after the next parliamentary election. India has also invited the heads of two major parties of Bangladesh to New Delhi to have a sense of the ways the political situation has been developing within Bangladesh.

Some Indian newspapers have described the visit of BNP Chairperson as "mending fences," since during the BNP rule in 2001-06 India had complained to the Bangladesh government about its security concerns; as Bangladesh territory was allegedly allowed to be used for training and sanctuary by insurgents from northeastern troubled-states.

Some analysts say that the period was one of the lowest points in the bilateral relations between these neighbours.

It is assumed that the BNP Chairperson must have a few important messages for India. The first one would be that a credible, inclusive and fair parliamentary election is held in 2014 in Bangladesh under the neutral caretaker government and not under AL government. If that cannot be maintained, the BNP would not participate in the election and it is possibly argued non-participation of BNP would result in serious political upheaval in the country; which may impact on India as well.

Second, whatever Bangladesh agrees to provide to India, a reciprocity must follow to satisfy Bangladeshi people letting them know that a fair deal has been signed with India.

Finally, the border-killing of Bangladeshis must be stopped because it continues to increase the anti-India sentiment among the people living in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, it is assumed that India wanted assurance from BNP that Bangladesh territory should not be used for activities inimical to India and might indirectly hint to de-linking itself from the religious-based party, Jammata-e-Islam.

Furthermore, India might sought affirmation that whatever agreements were signed with the AL government would continue to effectively harness their respective resources for the good of the peoples' of the two countries. Observers say that BNP may have realised that no country is a permanent ally or enemy in the world and what is paramount is its national interests.

The national interests of Bangladesh, we should note, appear to stand on two pillars: security and development.

Security does not mean only territorial security; it includes security in water, food, energy, health, environment and the people.

Development includes not only economic growth but alleviation of poverty among people. They can be achieved through sub-regional and regional cooperation. And here India's cooperation plays a major role.

While AL government has moved quickly to address Delhi's concerns on cross-border terrorism and connectivity to the North-East, India could not sign the most important pledge -- the Teesta Water Sharing Agreement -- during India's prime minister's visit to Dhaka last year on September

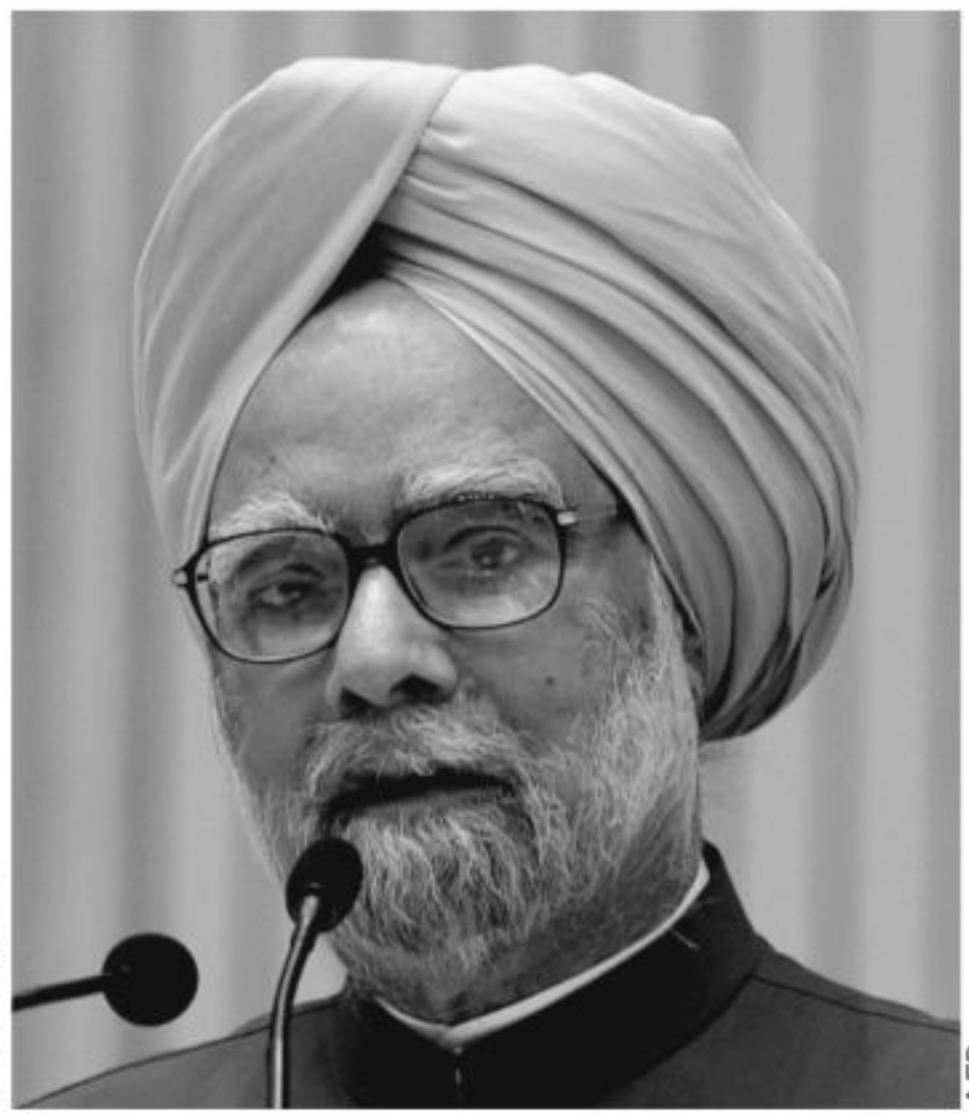
6, because the West Bengal's chief minister torpedoed it.

All other agreements signed with Bangladesh could not remove the public perception that the visit ended in failure. This was perceived a serious setback for



Secretary, in his book *Jamdani Revolution*, cites another reason: "Indian government has tended to allow the hardliners and Hindu chauvinists to set the agenda for its policy towards Bangladesh."

The other factor is that India is a federal



*The bottom line for India is to find a friendly government emerging in Bangladesh after the next parliamentary election.*

both the ruling governments of Bangladesh and India. Some suggest that the Indian prime minister should not have visited Dhaka until this important issue had been sorted out with West Bengal earlier; at the time a partner of New Delhi coalition government.

Often the agreements are not fulfilled by India and the main reason, according to Indian journalist Sunanda K. Datta-Ray was that "Bangladesh may sizzle but it sizzles on a back-burner of Indian priorities" (July 2009 in Calcutta's *The Telegraph*). Krishnan Srinivasan, India's former Foreign

country and states have their own political goals different from those of the Centre. Bangladesh's pending issues in some way or other affect one of the five states which surround Bangladesh (West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram).

Unless the involved state and New Delhi agree, India's central government, irrespective of its political affiliations, will find itself in difficulty in fulfilling the promises made with Bangladesh. For example, the 1996 Ganges Water Treaty was signed with the active support of former chief minister of West Bengal, late Jyoti Basu. This is a harsh

reality which Bangladesh government, media and people may not ignore.

At the next election in India in 2014, the Congress-led government may not be in power and either BJP-led coalition or a Third party coalition may hold power in New Delhi. In that case, the New Delhi government will again find it tough to meet its obligations with Bangladesh unless the affected states concur with the centre.

The question is why does the central government in New Delhi sign an agreement with Bangladesh without first resolving the domestic issues? India may only sign agreements with Bangladesh which it can implement, otherwise in future Bangladesh will hesitate to conclude ineffective "paper" agreements with India.

Meanwhile, the political dynamics in the region is changing. Bangladesh shares borders with Myanmar which is not only going through internal reforms toward democracy but also is changing its foreign policy toward Western countries, India and Japan, balancing with China. Bangladesh's access to the open sea is another asset for commercial and strategic reasons.

Bangladesh is a near neighbour to China and if the road between Katmandu and Lhasa is connected, Dhaka will be able to interact with Beijing through Nepal. Bangladesh and China are interested to connect Kunming (Yunnan province) by road through Myanmar and hopefully the project will be activated as early as possible.

Geography has made Bangladesh and India neighbours. In the inter-connected world, Bangladesh seeks a modern partnership with India on the basis of mutual respect and equality in meeting the challenges to global, regional and sub-regional economic growth, peace and security.

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Accreditation for quality assurance

HAFIZ G. A. SIDDIQI

SO far about 62 private universities have been established in Bangladesh, with enrolment of about 60% of the university students of the country. This means a larger private sector coexists with a smaller but strong public sector. However, it is generally believed that only a small number of the private universities impart quality education. All these universities are teaching universities; they are not capable of undertaking research of international standard. None of them is ranked globally or regionally, although some are good given local standard.

Quality has become a national concern. This is reflected in the Private University Act 2010 (PUA). PUA, in its Preamble, emphasises the need for providing quality education, and Article 36 requires each university to establish a permanent quality cell to implement and monitor quality assurance programmes. This cell is required to continually evaluate the academic and administrative strengths and weaknesses of the university or its selected programmes. After evaluation, the cell recommends remedies to remove the weaknesses.

At a good university a system of quality assurance is institutionalised to continue the process of self-assessment. But such internal self-assessment does not reveal the comparative position of the university. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the relative quality and image of a university through external and independent assessment. Application of such external assessment leads to measuring the degree of quality assurance. This helps in gaining accreditation.

Accreditation is certification by a recognised external accreditation agency to the effect that the university (or its programmes, viz., Business School or Engineering School) accredited imparts quality education, advances knowledge through faculty research and scholarship, and produces graduates who have achieved specified learning goals.

This external assessment is done by using a predetermined set of criteria. There are many academic and non-academic pre-requisites that a university must fulfill before it gets accredited. A recognised accrediting agency reviews, evaluates and certifies whether or not the applicant university has fulfilled the pre-requisites. Once positive certification is issued it is believed that the institution concerned imparts high quality education.

The accreditation process is rigorous and takes a long time. During assessment exercises, representatives of the accreditation agency make many field visits and spot-checks; hold interviews with the professors, administrators and students; and examine the validity of the credentials the applicant university claims in its self-assessment report. Internal self-assessment is a pre-



*Accreditation certifies whether appropriate academic standards are maintained, and whether a built-in mechanism operates internally to continually improve the quality of education in private universities.*

requisite for both external assessment and accreditation. If there is any lacking, the visitors suggest remedial measures. The applicant institution is required to respond positively to those suggestions. All these are done as peer reviews.

Accreditation by a nationally or globally reputable agency is considered an appropriate instrument for quality assurance, which leads to the enhancement of reputation of the university and its individual academic programmes. Accreditation certifies whether appropriate academic standards are maintained, and whether a built-in mechanism operates internally to continually improve the quality of education in private universities. Accreditation is not static; it calls for continual improvement in the education quality. It is granted for a specific period, mostly for 5 years. After expiry of this period, the applicant institution has to seek renewal.

The initiative for getting accreditation is taken by the institution itself. The first step for the institution seeking accreditation is to apply to the accrediting agency and simultaneously prepare itself by auditing internally the strength and weakness of its academic programmes and teaching and research activities. In the process, the university prepares a self-assessment report. Then the report is reviewed and validated by one or more on-site visits of a team of external assessors designated by the Accreditation Council (AC). The process passes through several steps and final accreditation takes at least five years from the date of submission of application.

When accreditation exercise is completed, the assessment process used and quality level of the accredited university or its programmes are made known to the academic community and the public at large. This is helpful both for the university and its potential students. When there are many institutions of higher learning, students need to know which of them would meet their

academic aspirations best. Accreditation generates necessary information for students and other stakeholders. Availability of information on quality and reputation helps students choose the programme/college/university according to their preference.

Accreditation will be of value only if the AC itself has a very high global standing. There is no AC in Bangladesh. However, Private University Act 2010 under Article 38 stipulates establishment of a national, separate and independent AC. When the Council is in place, the private universities of Bangladesh will be required to become its members and then apply for accreditation.

In Bangladesh, the academic programmes run by the private universities need to be approved by the University Grants Commission (UGC), a government agency. But the UGC's approval does not provide the detailed information the AC looks for during quality measurement, therefore it is less than accreditation. PUA provides a legal framework. All private universities are required to abide by the provisions, rules and regulations stipulated in the PUA.

Because UGC gets its legitimacy from PUA, approval of UGC adds to the image of the university. But this is does not grant accreditation. The UGC's approval facilitates standard setting and benchmarking only. The UGC supervises and monitors the degree of compliance by the universities to the conditions mandated by the PUA. This is basically a mechanism to ensure a minimum level of standard in terms of legal requirements. While measuring quality AC goes beyond legal requirements. It looks for an internally built-in mechanism that pushes continuously for improvement of quality and excellence at the university to be accredited.

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What to do with dead passengers

THE plane was about to begin its descent so the flight attendant gently tried to wake up the young guy in front of me. "Excuse me sir," she said. She repeated it several times. No response. She nudged him, nudged him harder, and ended up shaking his shoulder and speaking directly into his ear.



Still no response. That's when her eyes widened, and the rest of us sitting in the vicinity took sharp intakes of breaths. He was dead! He'd died right there in his seat after eating an airplane meal! I'd eaten the same thing. Suddenly I was sure I could feel the cold hand of death squeezing my heart.

"I should have had the pasta!" I said out loud. Were these going to be my last words?

The flight attendant straightened up, nonplussed and we all wondered what would happen next.

The problem was clear. The flight was full. So where would you put a corpse? You can't leave them in place.

Earlier this year, a Swedish woman demanded compensation from Kenya Airways after sitting near a corpse for 10 hours.

That really annoyed me. I've sat with people way more irritating than corpses, including drunks, molesters and insurance salesmen, but never received compensation.

Corpses are quiet and don't put their elbow on the armrest when you are trying to put your elbow on the armrest.

(Incidentally, why are all aircraft economy cabins designed for 160 one armed people? can a cabin designer kindly explain this to me?)

In the old days, they used to put corpses in the rear toilets. This was an interesting idea, especially on night flights close to Halloween.

And particularly if the corpse was dead but still moving, like members of the Rolling Stones.

I suppose on full flights you could put corpses in the overhead bins, but they sometimes burst open (the bins, not the corpses). (Well, maybe the corpses too.)

Having a zombie dropped on your lap might damage that customer's sense of brand loyalty.

And if the pilot dies? No problem.

On automated Airbuses, I'm told, pilots are there basically to make sure announcements like this are never made:

"This is a fully automated plane, flown by computers. It has been fully tested. Nothing can go wrong. Go wrong. Go wrong. Go wrong..."

On Airbuses, pilots simply make sure the electro-mechanical systems are following proper human pilot guidelines, i.e.:

- 1) Try to stay roughly in the middle of the air.
- 2) Try not to go too near the edges.
- 3) The edges of the air can be identified by the appearance of mountains, cities, forests and outer space.

Anyway, back to the scene on the aircraft.

Just as I had convinced myself that my life was slipping away, a passenger from elsewhere in the cabin approached the inert body in front of me.

"He's not dead," he said. "He's Polish."

The newcomer, also Polish, slapped around his buddy until he miraculously came back to life. (Alcohol may have been involved.)

It must be amazing to sleep so deeply that a beautiful young woman shaking your shoulders and speaking close to your ear can't wake you.

I'm definitely going to try this on my next flight.

For more on mid-air crisis, visit <http://www.mrjam.org>