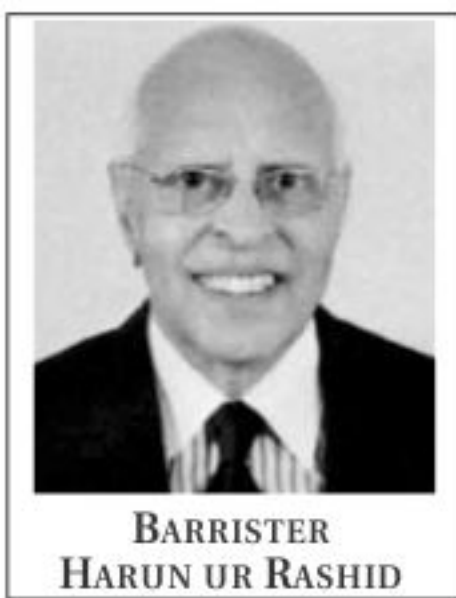


BOTTOM LINE

Suu Kyi's visit to India: Reflecting geo-political realities



ON November 13, Myanmar opposition leader and Member of Parliament Aung San Suu Kyi paid her first visit to India after almost 40 years.

The Indian media described her visit as "lighting up" India during Diwali.

Suu Kyi was in India to deliver the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture and meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, renewing the focus on burgeoning ties between the two neighbours.

The India visit in many ways holds the most significance for Suu Kyi, who spent her formative years in the country and studied and lived in Delhi. It was in Delhi where she had spent a considerable number of years as a student in the 1960s when her mother Daw Khin Kyi was the Myanmar Ambassador to India.

An admirer of Rammohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatama Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, she is said to have an "openness to ideas and innovations from other cultures," according to biographer Peter Popham.

She met with Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on November 14 and urged the people of India to help her country secure democracy. At the same time she expressed her sadness that India, which supported her movement for democracy in Myanmar after the military crackdown in 1988, changed its policy and sought engagement in the 1990s with the military rulers. She added: "I was saddened to feel that India had drawn away from us during our very difficult days."

Observers say that India insisted it had to follow a pragmatic policy because of its concerns about China's strong influence on its neighbour, Myanmar. For example, Myanmar allowed China to develop roads and ports in areas bordering the Indian Ocean. Moreover the reported installation of a Chinese surveillance naval base in one of Myanmar's islands opposite Andaman Islands of India (Cocos Islands) has heightened India's security concerns.

During the trip, she reportedly discussed the development of Myanmar, which has just come out of decades of political and economic isolation. She is particularly interested in learning from the Indian experience in agriculture, health, science and technology.

Suu Kyi's India visit is her fourth foreign visit in as many months. She first visited Thailand, then Europe, where she received the Nobel Peace Prize, and the US. These visits presented three different political underpinnings in the context of Myanmar's reform process.

In Thailand, Suu Kyi wore a cloak of reservation, neither sure nor certain of the nature of her country's reform process. This had resulted in some misunderstanding between her and the generals in power back home.

However, this bad-blood between her and the gov-

ernment was overcome when she appealed for responsible investment and engagement from the international community while in Europe. Her approach in Europe was based on attracting investment into Myanmar that would benefit the people.

Suu Kyi has thrown her support behind a bill on foreign investment before parliament and is calling on the West to further ease sanctions. "We are not worried about it at all," said Han Tha Myint, a member of the party's central executive committee. "What matters most for us is whether these investments and aid are beneficial for the people or not."

The Myanmar government of President Thein Sein has unleashed the "second wave of reforms" focusing on economic growth, foreign investment and infrastructure. In April, it scrapped the fixed exchange rate and moved to unify multiple exchange rates for the local currency, kyat.

Also, it has passed a new investment law tailored to attract foreign investment. Barring a few sensitive sectors, the government has allowed 100% ownership of foreign ventures with no minimum capital in all.

As the leader of the opposition, Suu Kyi would be interacting with her Indian interlocutors at the same level. The visit is indeed important in more than one way. She is also emerging as a significant political force.

Suu Kyi's trip is expected to facilitate future engagement between India and Myanmar. Diplomatic observers say the country is gradually breaking free of the "Chinese grip."

Myanmar's strategic significance is not lost on India since Myanmar shares borders with four populous countries India, China, Bangladesh and Thailand. Its ports on the Indian Ocean and Andaman Sea, just north of the Malacca Strait, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, are strategically and commercially important.

Endowed with rich natural resources, which include natural gas, oil, timber, and gems, Myanmar is also attracting foreign capital in search of cheap labour. The cost of manufacturing labour in Yangon, its largest city, is only one-eighth of that in Beijing and one-quarter of that in Bangkok.

India laid the foundation in December 2010 for the construction of port and waterway terminal of a Myanmar-India Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project in Sittway (Akyab) township of western Myanmar's Rakhine (Arakan) state. The Kaladan River project is expected to be completed by 2013.

High-level visits have their own dynamics and impact in strengthening relations between countries. Suu Kyi's trip is expected to facilitate future engagement between India and Myanmar. Diplomatic observers say the country is gradually breaking free of the "Chinese grip."

The next parliamentary election in Myanmar will take place in 2015 and Suu Kyi's party will contest the election. If she wins the election, she could be the president of Myanmar, a position which President Thein Sein agreed to accept if voted to power.

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The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

ARMED FORCES DAY

Our nation's pride, our nation's glory

MUSTAFA KAMAL RUSHO

AS we celebrate the 42nd Armed Forces Day, it is time for the nation to look back and assess the contribution of the Armed Forces to the country. Not many like our country can take pride that their Armed Forces came into being through a war of liberation. The Liberation War had brought more challenges than opportunities for the country and the Armed Forces had endured difficult times during the nation's initial years of freedom and thereafter. However, it has matured over the past four decades and made us proud both within and outside the country. Our Armed Forces have always supported the country in safeguarding its national interests and enhancing national security and development. It fought a long counterinsurgency battle in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and finally created conditions for a Peace Agreement in December 1997.

Members of the Armed Forces have displayed resilience, dedication and professionalism during the call of duty both within and

Shipyard into a profitable outfit.

In the international arena, since 1988, participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations has brought Bangladesh wide recognition globally. For years Bangladesh has been the largest troops contributing nation to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. So far 115,722 members have participated in 47 out of 67 missions across Asia, Africa, Europe and America. However, the achievement is not without a price -- 108 peacekeepers laid down their lives in the line of duty and 168 have been wounded.

The members of the Armed Forces are drawn from our own society. They bring in the culture, education and values from their respective families and society. The training and grooming in the Armed Forces to transform these individuals into professionals to take up responsibilities have been a time tested practice. In a society that suffers from challenges of modernity and decay, members of the Armed Forces, who are very much a part of it, cannot be impervious to it. There are a few reasons for it.

Firstly, the society faces challenges of modernity, and its ill effects influence the members of the Armed Forces as well. Secondly, materialism and lack of motivation influence the members. Thirdly, jobs in the private sector apparently appear more lucrative to a few in the Armed Forces. However, given the ethos, Armed Forces personnel drawn into corruption are exceptions rather than a rule. But when such incidents happen, they draw everyone's attention and media focus. This is not surprising since the nation cannot accept members of the Armed Forces faltering or succumbing to the odds. They are expected to remain steadfast under all pressing conditions. On the flip side, these images are very disturbing for the members of the military who are used to living a simple and decent life in a country where corruption is now a growing concern.

Amongst the elements of national power of a country, the Armed Forces is one of the most important. This is more so in a developing country like Bangladesh. A question might come to mind as to why we should maintain a large standing military in Bangla-

desh. Bangladesh has lot of challenges to face poverty, healthcare, education, climate change. But, there is another greater challenge that of security. Often, this issue is deliberately put on the back-burner or ignored by many. We must not forget that despite the other challenges mentioned, we can never ignore the security of the country. And we must realise that mere presence of the military is a deterrent to our adversaries, and there can be no compromise on that.

We often find narrow partisan interest or different groups working to undermine the image of the Armed Forces and its members. Vested groups in and outside the country realise that the presence of a professional and dedicated Armed Forces is a safeguard for Bangladesh. And to damage it in any form would undermine its capability, weaken its security and slow down the development of the country. Therefore, we must hold this organisation in high esteem and never let it decline or be undermined.

In our country, when we see many other organisations decline in their standards and fail to uphold their position and quality, the



military has carefully continued to maintain its high standards. There are occasional mishaps in the organisation. While many other organisations fail to bring to book the defaulters, the Armed Forces always does. This is unique and unmatched by any standards in the country not letting anyone escape with a wrongdoing! I am sure the general people in the country appreciate it. Thus, in the midst of so many odds, it is encouraging to see the support of the people during bad days and in moments of sorrow and grief.

One was deeply touched when one saw the nation mourning for the army officers killed during the BDR (now BGB) carnage in February 2009. One has also not forgotten that the entire nation grieved when some of our officers lost their lives in a plane crash in Benin, and when our peacekeepers were killed in action in Congo. I know that the nation believes that the Armed Forces is the most valued institution that it can take pride in. And the nation cannot afford to lose its dignity or allow its pride to fade no matter what.

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The writer is Lieutenant Colonel in the Bangladesh Army.

The perfect job for your child

MOST parents want their children to grow up to be brain surgeons or lawyers or billionaires. But not me. I've got ambition. This planet is awash with doctors and lawyers, and have you ever met a billionaire? I have. Eww, ugly miserable grumps with grotesquely spoiled children. The fact is, you don't need a billion dollars to have grotesquely spoiled children, and I should know.

Typical weekend conversation at my house. ME: "Dinner's ready." THEM: "Wait." ME: "It's on the table. I spent three hours cooking lobster thermidor a la provençal for you!" THEM: "Dad, we're on Level Four of Angry Birds. This is important. Have a bit of consideration." ME: "Sorry!"

But I have plans to turn my kids' personality defects to advantage. We live in Asia, you see, which is the only part of the world where youngsters can actually grow up to be actual gods. I mean, why have a mere rocket scientist when you can have a divine being?

For example, the real Dalai Lama is exiled from China but it is well known that the government youngsters at be guiding deities nese officials kids who think world to be and foot, check

If I can't get that job, I'm comple in Lucknow, maintains a fulling God. This job by kids on three-The last time I place, the incum-Sujeet Kumar nine, from pretty neat. The servants to bathe and every few adult devotees els at his feet. (I

were born for this job.) Freshman deities get on-the-job-training. As well as maths, Sanskrit and English, Sujeet was receiving drama lessons to enable himself to acquit his divine duties in sufficiently omniscient style.

The young god, I was amazed to hear, also gets a steady supply of women. "I have been married ten times over," Sujeet, aged nine, told an Indian reporter. When I heard that, I found myself actively thinking about where I could get a cap, shorts and a good make-up artist, to apply for the post myself. I'm a guy! I'm short! I can do the whole imperious leader thing!

But then I learned that the god goes nowhere near the women and the marriages only last a week since they are purely for the purposes of spreading good karma.

The contract for Living God in Lucknow comes up every three years, so anyone who wants to apply should write to the administrators at the Bibhuti Bhavan temple, Lucknow, India.

My colleagues think that I spoil my children dreadfully, and have been telling me that parents ought to be the presiding deities at home. So I've been thinking that I should change my official title in my family from "Dad" to "All Powerful All Seeing All Knowing Almighty Being." Then I realised there was a problem. Yeah, my wife doesn't want to give up her title.

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