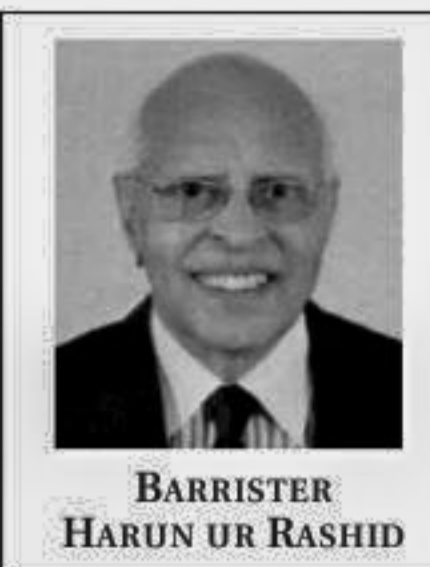


BOTTOM LINE

# Putin's visit boosts Indo-Russia defence ties



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

ON December 24, President Vladimir Putin visited India to attend the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Summit at the invitation of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. It was Putin's first visit after being re-elected as president of Russia for the third time in 2012.

Regular meetings between the leaders of the two nations played a crucial role in fostering better understanding and improving bilateral relations.

In an article in *The Hindu* on December 24, President Putin wrote that "deepening friendship and cooperation with India is among the top priorities of our foreign policy. India and Russia show an example of responsible leadership and collective actions in the international arena."

Russia was the first country with whom India established a strategic partnership. In 2010, during the 11<sup>th</sup> Summit, India and Russia elevated their relationship to a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership," status, indicating a mutual desire to emphasise the closeness of bilateral relations.

Indian ties with the Russian Federation are historic, close and uniquely enduring. During the Cold War era, India and Soviet Union were linked through the Friendship Treaty of August 1971. The ties are based on a strong national consensus in both countries that has cut across ideologies or political conditions.

When the Indian prime minister visited Russia in December 2011 to attend 12<sup>th</sup> Summit, Russian Ambassador to India, Alexander Kadakin, reportedly

said that after years of "strategic" ties, the two countries had redefined their relations as a "special and privileged" diplomatic partnership." He said Russia would be with India "rain or shine" and India was only country that both the Russian president and the prime minister visited in one year. It is Himalayan relations."

Now India and Russia have reached a stage where both countries are diversifying their partnership at a time when Russia is going through a transitional phase with changes within the country and India is going through the second phase of economic reforms.

During the visit, Russia and India signed weapons deals worth \$3 billion as President Putin sought to

further boost ties with an old ally. Under one contract, worth around \$2.2 billion, for licence production for 42 Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jets, Russia will deliver technical kits to the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited to assemble in India and another contract worth \$1.3 billion for the delivery of 71 Mil Mi-17 military helicopters.

These helicopters would be used by the Indian Air Force to replace the existing fleet of older versions of Mi-17 and Mi-18 aircraft in its inventory. India is now the world's largest arm importer and Russian-made equipment accounts for 70% of its arm supplies, according to a report. India has refitted Russian aircraft carriers and two are under construction, according to a report.

The Russian leader said that the military co-operation between the two nations has reached an "unprecedented level."

However, last year, Russia lost a tender to supply the Indian Air Force with 126 new fighter jets worth nearly \$11 billion to France's Dassault Rafale. And last month, Boeing won India's order for a batch of heavy-lift helicopters worth \$1.4 billion. India reportedly is buying French submarines and working on Brahmos missile.

As part of its co-operation with India, Russia also has built the first reactor at the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu and is building a second unit there. The project has been delayed by protests by anti-nuclear groups and local residents.

The People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy, which spearheaded the movement against the Kudankulam Nuclear Plant, has strongly objected to the visit of President Putin on December 24. The agitators based in Tamil Nadu have alleged that the

Russian government has been interfering in India's internal affairs and causing economic loss to people.

The head of the Russian nuclear corporation Rosatom, Sergei Kiriyenko, told reporters during the visit that the reactors in Kudankulam were the safest in the world, adding that studies have shown that they would have withstood a disaster like an earthquake and tsunami that caused multiple meltdowns and radiation leaks at the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan last year. Kiriyenko said Rosatom plans to build more reactors in India.

Both leaders had bilateral talks on regional and global issues. Dr. Singh told reporters that the talks

included discussions on the security situation in the region, including Afghanistan. "India and Russia share the objective of a stable, united, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan, free from extremism."

Trade between Russia and India is currently worth about \$10 billion a year, but has been growing more slowly recently. Ahead of the visit, President Putin said that he wanted to increase bilateral trade to \$20 billion by 2015.

This visit has provided a powerful new impetus for further development of the strategic partnership between the two countries. India, at the same time, wants to demonstrate that it has the ability to balance its relations with both US and Russia and provide a signal to the US that India can afford to run its independent foreign policy as an emerging global power.

Russia's preference for multi-polarity and encouragement for the promotion of groupings like RIC (Russia-India-China), BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa), as well as SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) is intended to create a forum outside the Western block where India and Russia along with other countries can discuss regional and global issues.

Since the geopolitical scene is gradually shifting from west to east, India, Russia and China with a few other powers are emerging as important players in global politics. Both countries wish to pursue foreign policies keeping their respective national interests and aspirations to play important part in global affairs in the years ahead.

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

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## HATIRJHEEL PROJECT: How it came into being

MUHAMMAD ABDUL MAZID

CONGRATULATIONS. At long last people's great expectation for a breath of fresh air in the mega city, Dhaka, has been fulfilled with the inauguration of the much coveted Hatirjheel project today.

While the cosmopolis is becoming more and more suffocating every day with open spaces shrinking rapidly, Hatirjheel comes as a breath of fresh air. The fundamental work of this project has not only been to protect the environment, it has also restored the environment which had been destroyed. While the project will increase drainage retention capacity, it will also emerge as an embodiment of hopes and aspiration of the city dwellers for some respite and recreation. It is being acclaimed as the breathing space of the city.

The appearance of the area has changed, and the project has added to its beauty. The plan was for a water retention body -- in other words, a lake -- to stretch from behind Sonargaon Hotel for four kilometres up till Rampura bridge. There are plans for construction of an amphitheatre on the banks of the lake behind Tejgaon Industrial Area, where people can watch performances at the theatre sitting in the open air by the waters of the lake.

There is also a plan for a water deck at Magh Bazar, which will be an open platform for entertainment on the lake. In the middle of the lake near Badda and West Rampura there will be a forested island called Eco-Centre. It will be a haven for all sorts of flora and fauna. People will be able to travel by boat around the island but will not be permitted on it. There will also be water taxis to transport people down the lake. They will take people up to the lake at Gulshan-1.

Hatirjheel area is 244.74746 acres while Begun Bari Khal area is 30 acres. The Hatirjheel Development Project was not taken up all of a sudden. There had been discussions about an elevated road above Hatirjheel. In 1997, Rajuk had taken initiative to develop Hatirjheel as a commercial area with a lake. As a commercial area and environment-friendly activities cannot go hand in hand, there were protests from several quarters to prevent it. Yet the Begun Bari canal had been given over for the construction of Hotel Sonargaon, BGMEA Bhaban and Holiday Inn Hotel as well as a petrol pump. Rajuk had also planned to construct a multi-storied commercial building on 13 acres of Hatirjheel land. All these were contrary to the preservation of Hatirjheel.

At one time Hatirjheel and Begun Bari canal were connected to Dhanmondi Lake. At a later stage, when Panthapath was constructed, box culvert and box drainage line were placed at the Dhanmondi Lake and Begun Bari intersection. If there had been a connection between the Dhanmondi Lake, Begun Bari canal, Hatirjheel, Mohakhali canal, Gulshan Lake and Banani Lake, it would have been a resource. They were all connected at one point of time. It is still possible to link them up, except perhaps for Dhanmondi Lake.

Demands for Hatirjheel development had been made since 1995. A project at an estimated cost of Tk.873.50 crore, named "Panthapath-Progoti Sarani/Gulshan Avenue Link Road Construction," above Hatirjheel was being processed under supervision of Dhaka City Corporation. An elevated road was to be constructed under this project. The lake would be underneath. But on April 5, 2007, at an inter-ministerial meeting chaired by the then LGRD advisor, the discussion turned from the elevated road to roads all around the lake at Hatirjheel.

On the same day the Project Evaluation Committee (PEC) of the Planning Commission gave guidance and directives to the Ministry of Works to come up with the project. Accordingly, the Hatirjheel Development Project and the Panthapath-Progoti Sarani/Gulshan Avenue Link Road Construction Project were merged and proposal for a comparatively less costly construction of Panthapath-Progoti Sarani Gulshan Avenue Link Road along the bank of Hatirjheel project was drawn up.

The long-lasting disputes and disagreements between Rajuk and the DC office Dhaka on the size of the land and the price were solved. It was felt that work replication could be avoided and money saved by ascertaining accurate ownership of the land by different bodies. Later, this became the Integrated Development of Hatirjheel Area Including Begunbari Khal Project, and was approved at the ECNEC held on August 28, 2007. The estimated cost was Tk.1,473.58 crore. In another ECNEC meeting held on October 4, 2011 the total outlay was revised to Tk.1,971.30 crore, an increase of Tk.497.72 crore.

The Ministry of Public Works was made the lead ministry and Rajuk the lead agency of the project, with Wasa and LGED as the supporting agencies. Rajuk was given the responsibility of land acquisition, compensation, land excavation, site protection, waste disposal, etc. LGED was given responsibility for construction of a two-lane road by the lake, a two metre wide footpath, a 2.5metre wide walkway, bridge, overpass at Pathapath crossing and landscaping.

Wasa was put in charge of building the storm water and sanitary drainage system and water supply network. Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) was given the responsibility for architectural as well as structural design of the drainage system of Hatirjheel and adjacent areas, the traffic system, low land excavation, and road and walkway construction. Bangladesh army was given the responsibility of implementing the project as the Special Works Organisation.

The project was supposed to have been completed by 2010, but that was not possible. Work was delayed due to the lengthy procedures involving land acquisition and eviction of illegal occupants.

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ANISUR RAHMAN

### In 1997, Rajuk had taken initiative to develop Hatirjheel as a commercial area with a lake. As a commercial area and environment-friendly activities cannot go hand in hand, there were protests from several quarters to prevent it.

## Ending India's rape culture

NAOMI WOLF

THE crime seems incomprehensible. A 23-year-old physiotherapy student is dead, 12 days after having been raped for more than an hour by six men in a bus travelling on main roads in the Indian capital. Her internal injuries from the iron rod that her attackers used were so severe that doctors had to remove her intestines in their effort to save her life.

Indians, it seems, have had enough. Dozens of large and increasingly angry demonstrations have been held to demand that the government ensure women's security and stop treating rapists with impunity. While the authorities have sought to quell the protests -- cordoning off central New Delhi and subjecting the rest of the city to traffic restrictions -- violence has escalated. After a policeman died, live ammunition was fired into the crowds -- killing a journalist, Bwizamani Singh, and provoking a rebuke from Reporters without Borders.

It is not simply the high rate of rape in India that is driving the protests' virulence. In a passionate speech, Kavita Krishnan, Secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association, spoke to the deeper issue behind the protests: the blame-the-victim culture in India around sex crimes. She notes that government and police officials recently insisted that most rapists cannot be prosecuted in India, because, as one official put it, they are known to the women attacked. Other officials have publicly suggested that victims themselves are "asking for it" by their use of freedom of movement.

This return to pre-feminist discourse is not confined to India. Italy is having a similar debate about whether women's clothes and behaviour invite rape. Even in Sweden, activists complain, rapes in which the men know their assailants go unprosecuted, because the victims are not seen as "good girls."

Krishnan assailed the fact that the conviction rate for rape prosecutions in India has fallen from 46% in 1971 to just 26% today (which, it should be noted, is higher than the conviction rates in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the United States). Indeed, the fact that most rapes are committed by men who are known to the victim should "only make it easier to apprehend the rapist." Instead, women who go to the police are urged not to file a complaint. "Strange people will begin to assemble at the station out of nowhere to 'explain' to you" why that advice is correct.

The problem, Krishnan points out, starts at the top. In the midst of the protests, Delhi Police Commissioner Neeraj Kumar sparked further outrage by suggesting that women carry chili

powder to deter would-be rapists. And, at a press conference, he said that women should not roam around without male escorts. Otherwise, whatever happens to them is their own fault.

Now, with the protests continuing in the aftermath of the victim's death, officials are emphasising the need for measures to guarantee the "safety and security" of women. But, as Krishnan notes: "The word 'safety' with regard to women has been used far too much." Indian women have heard it all their lives. "It means," she says, "you behave yourself. You get back into the house. You don't dress in a particular way. Do not live by your freedom...A whole range of patriarchal laws and institutions tell us what to do in the guise of keeping us 'safe.'"

The six men accused of the bus attack have been arrested and charged with murder, and the government has ordered an inquiry into how rape cases are handled. But the government's critics remain skeptical of official intentions, noting that only 600 rapes per year are reported in the capital, despite the thousands that are estimated to occur annually.

The deeper truth underlying the protests can be found on blogs, where young Indian men and women bemoan the fact that travel

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guidebooks routinely warn women about pervasive sexual harassment in India, and advise them to move around in groups. Movies, religion, music, and women themselves are all blamed for male sexual violence against women, but rapists are not held responsible. A "male-cossetting culture," as one blogger put it, in turn supports a rape culture.

The connection between rape, male privilege, and female sexual vilification was one of the key insights of feminists in the 1970's -- an insight that they thought had been successfully applied to cultural debate about rape, and to law. In India -- as in Italy, Sweden, and around the world -- women and men who support freedom of movement and safety from sex crimes are being forced to refight that battle. One hopes that the protests in India will inspire the West to emulate the protesters' lack of complacency.

In the developing world, women are in special jeopardy. Their embrace of autonomy and mobility risks putting them in conflict with a law-enforcement establishment and media that still view women through a pre-feminist lens: "good girls" who stay at home should not be raped, while "bad girls" who stake a claim to public space are fair game.

The writer plays a leading role in "third-wave" feminism and as an advocate of "power feminism." She advised the presidential campaigns of Bill Clinton and Al Gore. Her books include *The Beauty Myth*, *The End of America* and, most recently, *Vagina: A Biography*.