

# A self-esteem deficit?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has her hands full with weighty agenda to have any time to spare for distractions.

IN the vaudeville comedy of the last couple of weeks, something of a global focus on Bangladesh has got sadly overlooked. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ranks 47th in this year's Forbes list of world's 100 most powerful women. She is no stranger to such 'limelight' as The Time's list of world's top 10 women leaders placed her sixth in the pecking order in 2010.

The Forbes claims the listing as 'a definitive annual guide to the extraordinary icons and leaders, groundbreakers and ceiling crashers who commanded the world stage.'

Our PM has entered the Forbes' honour roll under the category of 'politics' - raising a question of the perspective from which it was seen.

The Forbes citation reads as follows: "After a violent election with suspiciously low voting this January, Sheikh Hasina was sworn to office for her second stint as the PM of Bangladesh ... Her victory has been called 'an electoral farce', and in 2013 alone over 500 people were killed as a result of political violence. Over UN objections Hasina's government oversaw the December execution of Abdul Quader Mollah, an Islamist leader who was convicted of war crimes committed in 1971 during Bangladesh's bitter separation from Pakistan. She has been leader of the ruling Awami League since 1981 ... Bangladesh has the world's ninth largest population at 166 million people, nearly 90 percent Muslim."

The tribute is paid as much to the country

and its people she represents as to her 'ground-breaking' leadership. The concept of Bangladesh being one of the 11 next emerging economies of the world was set afloat by Goldman Sachs in 2005 and since then this has, on and off, been repeated up until 2013. As the leader of such a country Sheikh Hasina has naturally been in focus.

Underlying Forbes citation is the overarching reality that Sheikh Hasina maintains her hold on power, keeps religious radicalism in check and thereby commands a secularist, libertine influence. Clearly she does not face any challenge from the army as did Pakistan and obviously Thailand which has gone under jackboots. It is thus the democratic and constitutional credentials of the country that most people repose their faith in. It is for Hasina to live up to the widely held expectation for completing the cycle of a full democratic order through a participative election as the essential harbinger.

Lately, Sheikh Hasina is enjoying the confidence of Japan and China. India remains a valued neighbour led by a strong Modi government in New Delhi. Incidentally, Mamata has softened her stance over enclave exchange on the back of Modi reportedly favouring an 'unconditional transfer' of adverse possessions along 6.1 kilometre un-demarcated territory between Bangladesh and India. The huge stash of arms hauled up by Rab at Satchhari along a sensitive point at the Indo-Bangla border should awaken both the countries about fending off the remnants of cross border insurgency.

With Tokyo, the PM has negotiated a landmark infrastructure building programme. She goes to Beijing with assurances of scripting a deal for deep seaport financing apart from Padma Bridge bankrolling under the belt. Just as some geopolitical differences between

Tokyo and Beijing did not weigh in with Bangladesh, so also India's perception of her relations with Bangladesh could not come in the way of Bangladesh broad-basing its strategic partnerships in Asia. An infrastructure-wise strong Bangladesh will be as much a strength to India as to our other partners aiming at quantum leaps in intra- and inter-regional trade and economic developments. Geopolitical considerations are balanced out with the primacy of economic development for the poor through vigorous connectivity and trade.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has her hands full with weighty agenda to have any time to spare for distractions. For instance, speaking about progress on probe committee reports by Rab, police, CID and public administration, Attorney General Mahubub Alam said: 'These did not contain any information pointing to Rab's 'association' with the Narayanganj seven murder case.' Quickly on the heels comes the refuting report on Major Arif's admission of responsibility along with purported involvement of other Rab officials.

That is one part of the story, the other is having black sheep in the ruling party which opportunists try to accost for power and pelf. The PM understandably values loyalty of staunch party adherents but should someone lend himself to any amount of incriminating role that must be placed under microscope. By allowing law to take its own course without defective comments, the government will only put across a robust signal to all concerned that it cannot compromise on rule of law, the best guarantor of citizens' security and welfare.

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# TOMORROW Never Dies

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHUBUB

WHAT happened to the good old days of gold bars in the stomach? Oh no, no, the air traveler makes it through customs alright. He just hits a small snag - bumper to bumper traffic in the intestines. "Drink a lot of water and

they pass out" was the mission briefing. But as they don't pass out, he passes out in pain. With nothing exiting for ten days despite gallons of water and stool softeners, he ends up on the surgery table with a case of *Acute Intestinal Obstruction*. But like 007, he guards the truth with his life, er, tummy: "Doc, I had an argument with the wife and swallowed a bottle cap in anger." See? Never keep the anger bottled up inside you...

The surgeon starts his process. "Scalpel, forceps, ... metal detector." Metal detector? Oh, it's just a handheld one, not those big ones you see at airports. After all, this guy is no sumo wrestler.

The surgery ends with finding no bottle cap, but twelve gold bars. *Operation Gold Digging* is a success nevertheless. The patient's post-op recovery room - a not so pleasant police station.

This is the true story of a 63 year old businessman flying in from Singapore to India, world's second largest bullion consumer, by swallowing the gold 'biscuits'.

The precious metal also transits in through neighboring countries, originating from the other major gold hub, Dubai. But this is not really the transit facility we had in mind.

Alas, the limited number of body cavities allow only so much stash to be transported. The appetite, literally, has become bigger - too large for the mere human abdomen to hold. What's needed now is the abdomen of a human hauling jumbo jet.

And so, Biman BG 052, with 106 kg of gold, takes off from Dubai. In order to evade anti aircraft artillery and surface to air missiles from nearby regions of conflict, the aircraft makes a sharp bank to the right. The maneuver, known as the 'Sonali Bank', sets the aircraft on its eastward flight path. Thank heavens for the eastern bearing, otherwise it could have been hijacked by Somalian pirates.

The gold is stashed in the toilets, rendering the toilet seats far more expensive than those in first class. Welcome aboard - now there is economy class, business class and Bappi Lahiri class. And the urge to use the toilet is indeed 'the gold rush'. As the plane makes its final descent, the announcement is made: "We will be landing shortly and are ending our bar service, including gold bars."

Smuggling... It's not just gold, but also ammunition, as found recently in Habiganj. A sudden surge? Quite the opposite. It's pure arbitrage. But there is surely a rise in whistle blowers. That's why always tip well, otherwise, get busted from a tip off.

The authorities at Dhaka or Delhi Airports surely deserve a Golden A, while the airlines don't deserve much in terms of blame. But there has to be some finger pointing. Thus, commences *Operation Gold Finger*.

Let's start with the guy who brings the sack full of gold to Dubai Airport, Mr. *Goldman Sachs*. Next, how does so much gold make its way to the aircraft? I am half dead of thirst from not being able to take in a bottle of water while having to drink my infant's formula in a culinary display to prove that it's no detonating material. But 106 kg of gold bars? That's a couple of petite young ladies going below the radar!

Some radar... just fix it! Otherwise, don't blame India's hunger or Bangladesh's transit, for the flow of gold will continue to come *From Dubai with Love* by way of non-descript 007s, each with a *Golden Eye*, believing *You Only Live Twice*, risking it all with *A View to [Making] a Kill*, confident that he will Die Another Day.

And the un-earned millions in terms of lost tax revenues from imported gold? Once and for all, let the conscientious stop this evil, otherwise, The Man with the Golden Gun will just Live and Let Die.

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# Looking East: PM visits China

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

EAST Asia has been the most dynamic economic region in the world for over half a century. It was first Japan that showed a spectacular economic growth eventually becoming the 2nd largest economy in the world, the rank the country lost to its neighbor China a few years back. Then the rise of a number of Tiger economies - Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan - in the region stretching from Northeast to Southeast Asia showed that income gap between advanced and lagged economies could be bridged to a large extent within a few decades. The re-emergence of China with a billion plus population after centuries of decline and humiliation has changed the economic and political geography of Asia for ever. Behold the Chinese Empire, Napoleon Bonaparte is reported to have warned. Let it sleep, for when this dragon wakes the world will tremble.

China has awakened following Deng Xiaoping's initiation of economic reforms following the demise of Mighty Mao in 1976. With a persistent near double digit growth for a long period, China is about to become the world's largest economy overtaking the United States in purchasing power parity terms and in terms of real exchange rate sometime by the end of this decade.

The rise of East Asia and steady economic growth in a host of Southeast nations made them the top trading and investment partners of almost all parts of the world. South Asia too has seen a rapid rise of trade with China and other east and Southeast Asian economies. India has pursued comprehensive trade, investment and other economic policies and geopolitical strategies, known as the Look East Policy, to draw maximum economic benefits as well minimizing its geo-political risks in engaging with the region.

Bangladesh too has witnessed rapid rise in trade with East Asia. China has become the top official trading partner of the country.

Nevertheless, structural change in the Chinese economy and the region's geopolitical imperatives have forced Beijing to revisit its economic and foreign policies in the neighborhood. Following the America's 'Asia pivot' that aims to contain the rise of China, the growing tensions in the South China Sea on maritime boundary disputes, not to mention historical animosities with Japan, and to secure its energy routes,



First day cover commemorating 35 years of Bangladesh-China relations

China has adopted the 'Silk Route' diplomacy. Under the new leadership of President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang, the proposal of rebuilding the 'Maritime Silk Road' and 'Silk Road Economic Belt' are manifestations of Beijing's 'two-wheel' approach: development and security.

This whole new approach intends to connect history with the future. That China is reemerging as a regional as well as a global power after centuries of decline, signals an intent to revive both the land and sea silk routes connecting its immediate neighbourhood, namely Central Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia as well as Middle East and Africa. Moreover, the new policy, according to some Sinologists, is also in line with the 'Chinese dream' that underscores shared prosperity.

China is developing ports and other maritime infrastructure across Asia. China also plans to develop a number of economic belts from the Central Asia to South Asia. In South Asia, there is some progress with regard to the development of the BCIM, an Economic Corridor that intends to connect China with India, Bangladesh and Myanmar physically.

Historically, Bangladesh was part of both land and maritime silk routes. Thus, as far as Dhaka is concerned, Beijing's plan offers a host of new possibilities that could change the economic geography of the country. While Bangladesh has maintained good ties with China, never in history has the Middle Kingdom emerged as an indis-

pensable economic partner of the country as it stands today. Dhaka now realizes that it is a comprehensive economic partnership with Beijing that could change its physical infrastructure and could help Bangladesh become a manufacturing nation, encouraging China and other East Asian economies to invest and relocate their manufacturing units in Chittagong and other coastal belts of the country. These economic engagements are critical for Bangladesh to develop a modern urban economy taking its growth to a new trajectory.

For Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, China matters for other imperatives as well. Her government has been less than successful in improving the governance structure of the country. World Bank and other multilateral agencies withdrew from the Padma Bridge and other projects on corruption charges. Political uncertainties in recent years discouraged private investors to commit fresh investment.

Sheikh Hasina and her party have not been in a comfortable situation internationally, particularly in managing relations with the West, following the controversial elections of 5 January. However, China and other countries of East Asia that do not have track records in meddling in other countries' internal matters - be it governance or be it election - came to her rescue agreeing to work with her government closely.

It is in this changing perspective that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Japan and China is very important for

Bangladesh. Given the changing economic scenarios in the West and the political imperatives at home, Bangladesh has to ensure that aid and other assistance that it receives does not dry down suddenly. The Prime Minister's Japan trip was a success as she was assured by Tokyo of channeling a loan of \$1.18 billion in the next fiscal for five projects, mostly in the energy and city development sectors.

Prime Minister's China visit that starts from today might see the signing of a number of high profile projects, including development of a deep sea port in Sonadia, Chittagong, with Chinese assistance. If the deal is finally signed, it could change the economic geography of Bangladesh. That Bangladesh has settled its maritime boundary disputes with Myanmar and is likely to do the same with India sometime this year, it stands to develop an ocean economy (also known as Blue Economy) in the Bay of Bengal, opening new economic opportunities in the world's largest Bay. From China's perspective, this project is a priority as it is in line with Beijing's maritime silk route development strategy in the region.

Dhaka-Beijing breakthrough pertaining to the deep-sea project could largely determine the future flow of Chinese investment in Bangladesh's infrastructure projects. The government has already sought Chinese help to develop a large number of infrastructure projects. China has emerged as a leading source of FDI - outflows from China continue to grow, reaching \$84 billion in 2012 (a record level), this excludes Hong Kong that also invested \$84 billion overseas in 2012.

Like what Bangladesh has promised to Japan, it should also attract Chinese investment in the manufacturing sector. Manufacturing is important - without developing a modern manufacturing sector, Bangladesh will face increasing difficulties to absorb millions of youth in the labour market and will not be able to see fast rise in its per capita income growth.

Looking forward, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's trip to China and Japan signifies that Bangladesh has to look towards its Eastern neighborhood for its future sources of economic development. That will largely depend on how fast it develops its fragile infrastructure and develop a modern manufacturing sector attracting Chinese and other East Asian investment.

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QUOTABLE Quote I'm not a professional politician. I'm a professional problem solver, and I believe we should cut the salaries of senators and congressmen 10 percent until they balance the budget. I call that conservative common sense. Herman Cain

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