

Putting India Bangladesh relations in fast track

SMRUTI S PATTANAIK

WITH the assumption of office as the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi has put India's relations with its immediate neighbours as his foreign policy focus area. To take this policy forward on the 22nd of June the External Affairs Minister chaired a meeting of the Heads of the Mission (HoM) from neighbouring countries including China, Myanmar, Iran and Central Asian countries where reportedly issues concerning India's relations with its neighbours were discussed and effort was made to identify policy priorities which would require government's intervention. In this context, External Affairs Minister (EAM) Sushma Swaraj scheduled to visit Bangladesh which is her 'first stand-alone visit abroad as foreign minister' only proves the new NDA government's engagement with neighbouring countries is a priority. Though this visit is a part of 'good will visit' on the invitation of her counterpart Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali it will also serve to appraise herself on the state of Indo-Bangladesh relations.

Since 2007, India Bangladesh relations have witnessed significant forward movement which gained momentum after Awami League was voted to power in December 2008 elections. Both the countries have signed MoU containing 51 issues of mutual concerns and commitment of the two neighbours to address them. While the bilateral relations received a setback when the Teesta agreement could not be signed and as a result Dhaka could not provide must anticipated transit to the North Eastern states through Bangladesh. While taking the challenges of bilateral relations in its stride both the countries have continued to work without acrimony. In the meanwhile, as a part of engaging the opposition political parties, India also invited General Ershad and Begum Khaleda Zia the then leader of opposition who visited New Delhi in August and October 2012 respectively. Begum Zia was given a red carpet welcome in Delhi and she held important meetings with the Indian Prime Minister, President and also the then leader of Opposition Ms Sushma Swaraj and other senior leaders from the BJP. Therefore the NDA regime and especially the Minister for External Affairs do share personal warmth with various leaders of political parties' in Bangladesh. Moreover, except Jammāt Islāmī,

India continues to keep the opposition political parties of various ideological hues engaged in Bangladesh. In fact as a part of its effort to have a peaceful transition of power in Dhaka it persuaded all the political parties to participate in the January 5th election which took place as per the constitution of Bangladesh. India's effort was evident from the fact that Indian High commissioner met Begum Zia both before and after the elections. Keeping this tradition of engaging the opposition in mind, one hopes EAM would meet Begum Khaleda Zia even though she is no more the leader of opposition in Bangladesh. Such engagement would be in the interest of India which has tried to develop bipartisan relations with the two major political parties in Bangladesh.

Though this is a goodwill visit; it is likely that the issues of Teesta and the need to ratify the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) would come up for discussion. BJP, which initially was supportive of the Land Boundary Agreement and defended it as being in national interest later refused to back it keeping election in mind. However, now since it is in power it needs to take a pragmatic view keeping India's security need in mind. A well-defined and regulated border with Bangladesh is in India's interest. Enclaves, those are located deep inside Bangladesh over which India enjoys sovereignty only notionally, needs to be exchanged with the Bangladesh enclaves that are within India. For a long time the LBA could not be ratified because a census of people staying in these enclaves could not be held due to opposition from Dhaka. In July 2011, the Joint Boundary Working Group held joint census in 4 districts in Bangladesh and 2 districts in India where these 162 enclaves are located. After the Joint Survey on Adversely Possessed Lands and a Joint Headcount in the enclaves strip map was signed, resolving the 6.1 kilometer of disputed border. A protocol to the LBA was signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit. However, LBA ratification is pending before the Indian Parliament.

Sharing of Teesta water would remain another issue that would have significant impact on Indo-Bangladesh relations which needs to be addressed urgently. Already Bhutan, India and Bangladesh (referred to as BIB initiative) are cooperating to develop and manage water resources and hydropower from Brahmaputra. Similarly Nepal, India and

Bangladesh have formed a committee to exploit water resources and hydropower potential of the Ganges basin. They have formed a technical advisory committee to oversee this where the members would be drawn from the departments of water sources, power and Ministry of External Affairs belonging to all the three countries. Given the emphasis that India is placing on its neighbourhood and regional cooperation, these cooperations at the sub-regional level would surely help foster better relations.

There are proposal to provide long term multiple entry visa under the age of 18 and above the age of 65. India has already agreed to hand over Nur Hossain allegedly responsible for killing seven people in Narayanganj under the extradition Treaty that was signed between the two countries. Apart from this, some of the projects that are being implemented through the Line of Credit that was extended to Bangladesh has been delayed, especially the execution of Akhura-Agartalarail link and Ashuganj port due to procedural problems. However, India's Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs in its 2012-13 report has recommended that "International commitments must be respected and that the Government must ensure timely release of funds for US\$ 200 million to Bangladesh." In April this year Dhaka agreed to provide 6000 mw Indian power transmission line through Rangia Raota in Assam to Borakpur in Bihar through Boro Pukuria in northwestern Dinajpur in Bangladesh and in return India has agreed to provide 130mw additional power. There are also talks of establishing joint mechanism between India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal to cooperate on power sector.

All these indicate that India and Bangladesh relations are on the fast track. To augment their bilateral relations India is keen to establish political, economic and energy connectivity between the two countries. There is now strong political will to improve relations and take it to newer height. BJP, which was opposed to some of the issues earlier, may see them on a new perspective given Prime Minister Modi's thrust on consolidating India regional policy and the linkage it provides to India's economic development and security which remains a priority if India is to emerge as a global player.

The writer is a Research Fellow, IDSA.

Let's Be Bold, Bangladesh!

Digital Bangladesh Meets the Manifesto for the Extreme Poor

SHAZIA OMAR

BANGLADESH has shown remarkable success in poverty reduction and achievements against various social indicators. Still some 25 million people, or 6 million families, live in extreme poverty (HIES 2010). The Manifesto for the Extreme Poor, a civil society document launched last year, called for the complete eradication of extreme poverty from Bangladesh by the end of 2021. 200 organisations across the realms of NGOs, private sector companies and donors, have endorsed the Manifesto and expressed their solidarity with the cause: the economic empowerment of the extreme poor.

In the National Budget announcement last week, the Finance Minister committed to eradicate extreme poverty from Bangladesh by 2018! He allocated BDT 1500 crore to extreme poverty reduction programmes. The Manifesto for the Extreme Poor, developed through an inclusive and consultative process, has suggested a strategy drafted by experts within its pages. It suggests three actions. The first action is to give extremely poor families a transfer of an income-generating asset or skills training to enable them to earn a living. To achieve the goal of eradication by the end of 2021, one million families need to be given this transfer every year for the next six years.

Reaching the poorest. This is doable but radical steps need to be taken. The poorest are 'invisible and silent', living in hard to reach areas and evidence shows that much of the safety nets allotted to the poorest do not reach them. Shiree, a livelihood programme that is lifting 1 million people out of extreme poverty, works with a mobile-based monitoring system called the CMS (Change Monitoring System) whose baseline survey (2009) showed that out of 1 million extremely hard core poor beneficiaries, only 20% received any support.

I am curious to know more about the Finance Minister's plan. Evidence does not suggest that extreme poverty will be eradicated by 2018 unless some radical steps are taken. How will our Finance Minister ensure that the BDT 1500 crores allocated to the extreme poor will actually reach the poorest? The plan should be made public and placed under the scrutiny of suitable experts.

Databases. We need a system in place to identify the 25 million people in Bangladesh who are extremely poor people. We need to make sure they receive the transfers they are eligible for and we need to ensure that the transfers are creating the outcomes we want.

Currently the World Bank is working with the government to create a database for people living below the higher poverty threshold. DFID is planning to work with the Ministry of Finance to develop a database of people who are in the safety nets. WFP is working at the upazilla level to identify regions with high levels of poverty that need to be specifically targeted.

Change Monitoring System. CMS allows Shire to track all its beneficiaries (census, not sample basis) to identify who is successfully climbing out of poverty and who need some more assistance. This makes it possible to target easily and adjust support as necessary.

Giving the poorest assets or skills. A handful of programmes working with the extreme poor in Bangladesh (including Shiree, BRAC-CFPR, CLP, REOPA, FSUP, Nobo Jibon) have had great success. Large government projects such as *Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar* should be brought into the extreme poverty targeting effort. Union Chairmen should have a database of the extreme poor in their union, and they should be rewarded monetarily for every 10% of extreme poverty reduced in their area. Shiree estimated the cost of lifting 1 million families out of extreme poverty a year, for the next six years, at \$3 billion USD. This is not an exorbitant amount for such a goal.

Access to services. The second action necessary as outlined by the Manifesto for the Extreme Poor is to ensure access to public services and social protection transfers. The poorest are more susceptible to illnesses as they are chronically malnourished and often working in hazardous conditions. Illnesses wipe out their minimum ability to earn money from physical labour and loans taken to pay for a single treatment can throw a poor family into debt for the rest of their lives. An audit of the role of health and education services in targeting the poorest is needed.

Policies. The third action outlined in the Manifesto relates to pro-poor policies. This includes strategies to encourage fair wages and safe working conditions, mobilise CSR funds, provide wide-scale vocational training and enhance routes for the extreme poor to graduate into formal employment opportunities. With over 8 million extremely poor youths in Bangladesh, policies should encourage the private sector to tap into the talent of an expanding labour force. Gender dimensions are critical and need to be handled with special attention if we are truly to eradicate extreme poverty and maintain a balanced society.

The writer is Head of Advocacy at Shiree.

Land of 'netas' not 'leaders'

ABU AFSARUL HAIDER

SINCE independence our country has had many 'netas' but is suffering a leadership drought. Leadership can be defined as the process by which a person influences others or a group of individuals to accomplish an objective and directs the organization or country in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. A good leader is a person with good communication and inter-personal skills, who can work with a range of other people, regardless of political opinion, to achieve goals for the country.

Today's politics and leadership tells us a different story. What we see is for some people, politics is family calling; for others, just business, a means to acquire wealth through the preferential allocation of contracts once in office. It is a commonly accepted fact that politics is the best profession that one can opt for if one aspires to make lots of money in the shortest possible time. Politics as a career is becoming lucrative in our country, and more and more people are getting interested in this profession. These 'netas' often claim that their politics is for the people and for the welfare of the country but in reality what we see is that many of them serve themselves upon being elected to serve the people. And many, if not all, find themselves on a magical rise to the highest rung of the social hierarchy. It is distressing and frustrating seeing those who was once a part of the general public, seeking votes from door to door, once elected become inaccessible to those who put them in the 'chair'. People are fed up of these 'self-serving' netas, acting imperiously where citizens, rich or poor emerge bruised and

bear the maximum brunt, sometimes with loss of precious life. Some of these 'netas' are capturing the system by taking control of their local areas and amassing fortune through tender manipulation, drug trade, shady land and sand business and by extorting money from transport sector and putting the ill-gotten money in politics.

We do understand that money (funds) is essential for political parties to survive, compete, and carry on their activities, both during and between elections. But, unfortunately, there is no guideline on how parties should be funded, or on the regulation of contributions, expenditures and public disclosures. Taking this advantage, people with questionable credentials are coming to the frontline of politics. According to Transparency International Bangladesh report of October 2012, ninety-seven percent of the 149 sitting MPs were involved in "negative activities," including being involved in or supportive of criminal activities, misuse of government funds and influencing government decisions. And seventy percent of them were engaged in "criminal activities" such as killing, land and river grabbing, extortion, tender manipulation. It is a definite indication that political standards are going down to abysmal levels. Nowadays, a mere clerical job without college degree is rare, whereas for holding public office there is no minimum education qualification required.

Today's politics is mainly driven by two things – power and money. Money wins elections, and the winners enjoy power. It is natural to assume that when a candidate who spends lavishly in elections will only focus on recouping his/her investment or by returning favours

to those who funded him/her after winning. Money also plays a central role in determining whose voices are heard in the political process. From local to national, the representatives of the people are expected to talk on the key issues of economic development, health, education etc, but instead most of the time they are seen criticising and abusing each other using offensive languages and cheap arguments. The decency and decorum once considered inseparable from the public offices are thrown to the wind; these elected netas would stoop to any level, for achieving their personal political aims or the interests of their parties. And as such we do not see any healthy debate or discussions on the issue that touches our lives directly.

The prevailing trend is spreading fast and if not treated, soon the nation will face dire consequences of a leadership crisis. All political parties' talks about change but mere mouthing platitudes will no longer work; a revolutionary change is needed. The field of politics nowadays does not attract committed persons; political parties can change this scenario, first by stopping criminalization of politics, second by promoting honest, educated, service-minded people with passion, vision and knowledge who will put national interest first, then party interest, and then self-interest. For the country to progress we need leaders. 'Leaders', who would adopt a highly committed approach to politics, weed out all the wrong practices, oppose wrong traditions and at the same time be able to resist the various lures of the political arena, and be able to take on increasing responsibility.

The writer is a businessman.

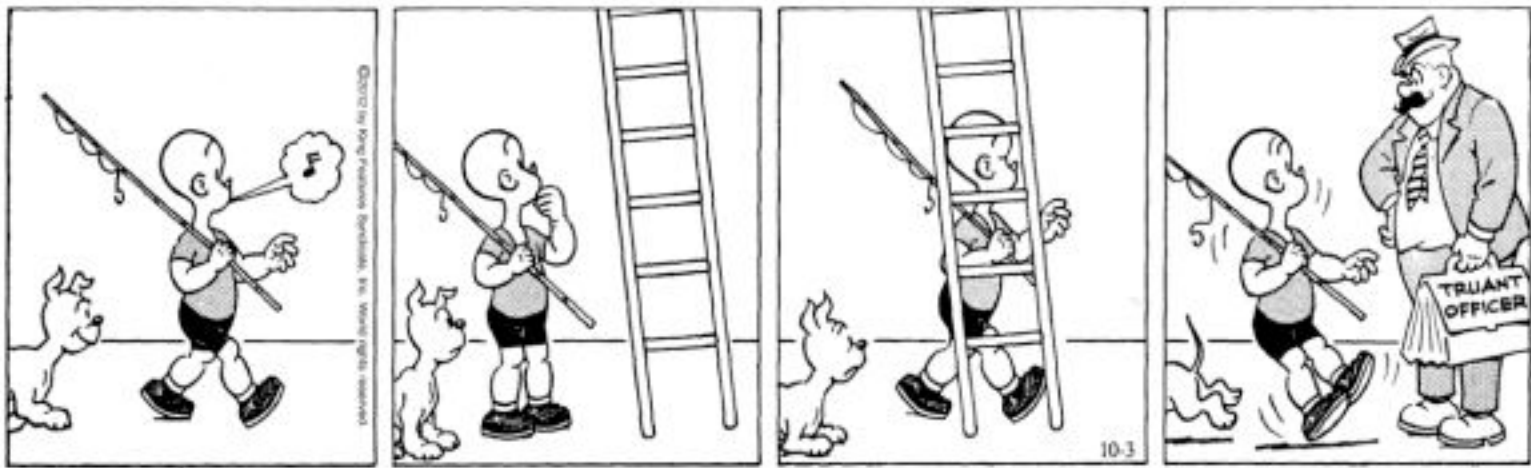
BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte



QUOTABLE Quote

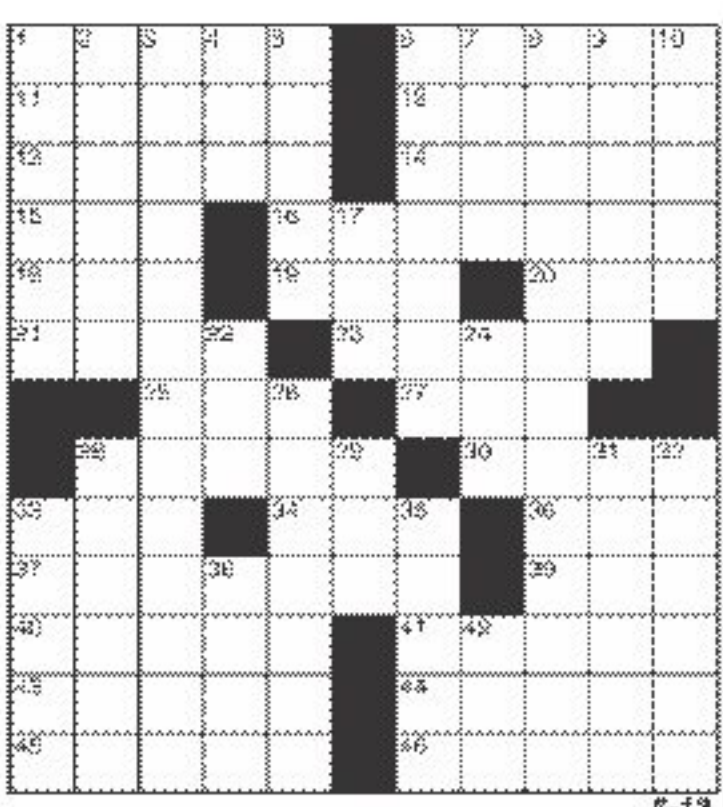
Man is an animal which, alone among the animals, refuses to be satisfied by the fulfilment of animal desires.

Alexander Graham Bell

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS
1 Cracks-man's targets
6 Nasser's successor
11 Student of Socrates
12 Emulate Clay
13 Appraised
14 Enticed
15 Tough wood
16 Minos' daughter
18 Mamie's mate
19 Short time
20 To date
21 DEA agent
23 Beholds
25 Small rug
27 Dam-building org.
28 Was furious
30 Screws up
33 Completely
34 Place: Abbr.
36 Casino action
37 Simon and Garfunkel hit
39 Much of N Amer.
40 Taunt
41 Happen again
43 Orange shade
44 Tibia's end
45 Short-stop Jose
46 Battery makeup

DOWN
1 Athlete's mishap
2 "Seward's Folly"
3 "M*A*H*H" character
4 Riviera season
5 Fizzy drinks
6 Ask for
7 District
8 "Little Orphan Annie" character
9 Makes amends
10 Principle
17 Gun, as a motor
22 Motor part
24 Holiday lead-in
26 Bank workers
28 Swindle
29 "How -- Love thee?"
31 Upshot
32 Rude looks
33 Ham, perhaps
35 Garnet unit
38 "Got it"
42 Hydrocarbon suffix



Yesterday's answer

BOYS SPEED
ABOUT SHELVE
COMA WEAKEN
HEAR HEAR
ARTIST LIAR LIAR
POUTS LATIN
EBB RECAST
DEAR DEAR
YE AYE AYE AYE
ERODED LURE
MODEMS IRAN
TIERS COBS

CRYPTOQUOTE

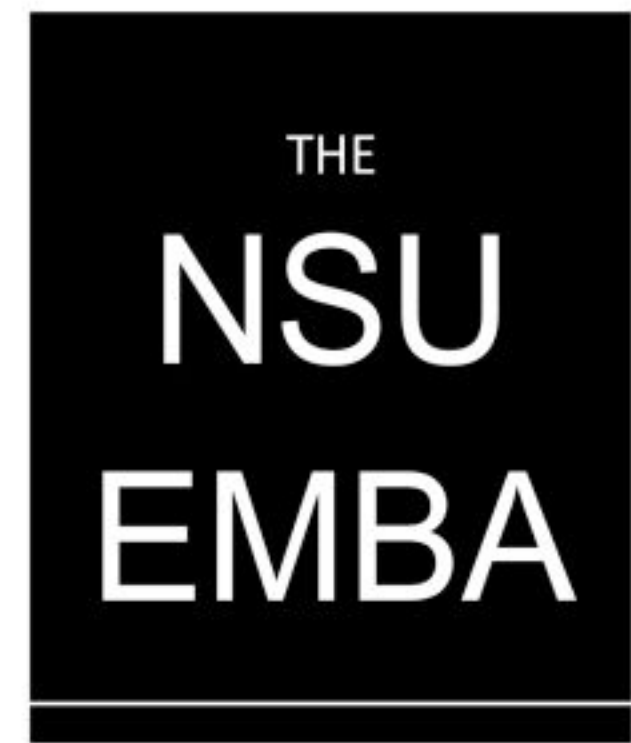
UZPQ UP VPP G QGXEKGM VXOMP, UP GPK GVXSQVZPA GQA IZGKHPA; DSK UP PBCPIXPA XS VPP GQ GEKXZ, GQA UP DLQA G CPKVSQ.

-- YMGLVP CGVIGM

Saturday's Cryptoquote:

ALL THE WORLD IS BIRTHDAY CAKE, SO TAKE A PIECE, BUT NOT TOO MUCH.

-- GEORGE HARRISON



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