

Bangladesh-India relations: The next steps

ISHFAQ ELAHI CHOUDHURY

SINCE the visit to Dhaka by the Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, there have been new hopes on all sides that the cordial relations between the two countries will scale new heights. It is, therefore, imperative that the tempo be maintained and the spirit of goodwill and friendliness that exists between the two people be used to build mutually benefitting relationship. I shall deal with a few issues here that are awaiting implementations and a few new areas that could open windows of cooperation.

First, the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) that is awaiting ratification by the Indian Parliament. Nowhere in the world are so many small enclaves clustered along a border. There are not only Indian enclaves within Bangladesh and Bangladeshi enclaves within India, but there are also enclaves within enclaves – thus there are a few acres of India inside Bangladesh and within that enclave there are an acre or two that belong to Bangladesh. What the two governments agreed was to follow the international boundary line and transfer all enclaves to the country inside which those are located. The deal involves swapping 162 enclaves – India will get 51 Bangladeshi enclaves located inside India (7,110 acres) and Bangladesh will get 111 Indian enclaves located inside Bangladesh (17,149 acres). A fact that is often ignored is that since 1947 the enclaves had been de facto part of the country inside which they are located. The LBA simply wanted to turn what was de facto into de jure. Once the legal decision is obtained the people in the enclaves can have the citizenship rights and respective governments can provide all the governance benefits that these people have been deprived of more than six decades.

The adverse possessed land is also a legacy of 1947. These are patches of land, mostly along Assam, Meghalay and Tripura border, where the international boundary cuts across areas which had been traditionally settled and cultivated by citizens of the other country. There are 3,500 acres of Bangladesh land which are under Indian possession and 3,000 acres of Indian land that are in Bangladesh possession. Ideally, all adverse possessed land should be exchanged and demarcated as on the map, but the problem is the local people who have been in possession for ages do not want to lose what they have. This is common to both Bangladeshis and the Indians who are affected.

The other option would be to redraw the map and give rightful possession to the affected citizens of both countries. Redrawing the map, even by few acres here and there, will involve Parliamentary ratification. In the larger context of Indo-Bangladesh relations, giving away and taking over few acres here and there might be a small matter, but unfortunately those issues have retarded the relations between the two neighbours for decades.

The second issue that remained unresolved is the Teesta Water Agreement that was ready to be signed, but WB Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee refused to agree because she was not consulted on an issue that involved her state. Mamata's support for the tottering UAP government was vital at that time. The Teesta deal remains in limbo, much to our disappointment. The new BJP government is not dependent on the support of Mamata's Trinamul Congress for its survival, yet the Centre will not probably go ahead with the deal ignoring the WB state government. The government and the people of Bangladesh expect that under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi the Centre would be able to take the WB CM along to sign the deal that will pave the way for greater cooperation in future.

While these two issues remain in the process of implementation, we need to go ahead with other mutually beneficial issues. Ms. Sushma Swaraj mentioned greater connectivity by road and rail, power purchase, relaxation of visa to ease travel, trade and commerce and increased Indian private sector investment in Bangladesh. As an exploratory visit the deliverables were quite impressive indeed. The visit could form a foundation on which we could move forward.

On the issue of connectivity, in addition to the proposed bus service between Guwahati and Dhaka, we need to start air service between Guwahati and Shilchar to Dhaka and Chittagong. These services will be commercially viable and assist business and tourism. So far, road connectivity has got the most attention, yet it is the railways that would provide the most efficient and economic connectivity. We need to restore railway link between Jessore-Benapole-Petrapole, which was snapped by the Pakistani regime during the 1965 Indo-Pak war. Indeed, after the construction of the Padma road-rail bridge, Dhaka-Jessore-Benapole-Kolkata railway and road link will become the primary mode of communication between the two countries. In the same way, we need to restore Kulaura-Latu-Mahashashan railway line for greater

connectivity with NE India. On the WB side, we may reconnect Rohanpur-Shingabadi, Birol-Radhikapur, Chilahati-Haldibari and Burimari-Changrabandha railway links. Bangladesh railways, with little investment, will be a beneficiary of the traffic that the connectivity will generate.

On inland waterways, steamer service between Kolkata and Dhaka via Barisal and Chandpur is definitely a viable proposal from both trade and tourism. The existing water transportation treaty could be the basis for barge cargo service from Chittagong to Guwahati or Shilchar, using Jamuna-Brahmaputra and Meghna-Barak river systems.

On the water issue, we need to immediately start construction of Padma Barrage. Since signing the Ganges Water Treaty in December 1996, we have not done anything to use the water that we are getting. The Padma Barrage is essential to flush Gorai River and reduce salinity in Khulna division. The project will give Bangladesh better leverage in the next round of Ganges water negotiation with India.

Meanwhile, we need to initiate a multi-country study on the use of Brahmaputra water. The countries involved are China, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh. China's reported building of storage dam and hydro-electricity project in their part of the Brahmaputra without prior consultation with the lower riparians is a cause of concern for us. In the same spirit, we need to initiate Indo-Bangladesh study on Barak-Megna basin where there is potential for cooperation as well as tension. Empowering and strengthening of Joint River Commission (JRC) is long overdue. In fact, what we have now is occasional JRCs meetings. What we need is a single JRC with a permanent secretariat and executive power to implement its decisions.

On the power issue, we need to seek Indian investment in more coal-fired stations, especially on the western side where we could use Indian coal from Asansole. On the hydroelectricity issues, we need to get in contact with India and Bhutan and get our share from the multiple power projects that the Indians are implementing upstream of Teesta, Dudhkumar and Dharla. These are massive projects, some of which are already generating thousands of megawatts of electricity. If need be, we should invest in these projects to ensure our share of the power produced.

The writer is Air Commodore (Retd), and Registrar, East West University.

Mango magic

MOHAMMAD FARUQ HAIDER

I applaud the drive to identify fruits tainted with harmful substances, but one may question the 'methodology' being used to carry it out. Lots of fruits, loads of hard work by the growers and most importantly an important sector of agriculture which many depend on for their livelihood are gone in a matter of hours. I am not advocating growing, supplying and eating fruits or anything with harmful substances, but what I feel is that there seems to be a fundamental flaw in the approach. This is reactive behaviour, which generates losers and winners, instigates blame and finger-pointing and only 'attempts' to address the symptoms on the surface and not the underlying issue.

Testing something is a good thing, but it is sometimes done in the wrong way, especially if one does not start with asking the right questions, which are "what to measure" and "how to measure." The "how" is critical. Reactive approach to testing mangoes when they are bound for their destination will show the 'blind' spot of the instrument as most instruments have a blind spot depending on "how" they perform and "what" they measure. Organic chemistry is an interesting subject. Instrumentation is another interesting area. Before long someone will figure out what more (chemicals) to mix to avoid detection. If we make this a chemical problem, a potential chemical solution will not do any good to anyone. The current drive is a solution indeed, but one may argue that it is a "half-baked" one which only scratches the surface a bit.

A proactive approach to move away from fruits with harmful substance starts with engaging the people involved with growing, supplying and distributing fruits at the field level and not when they are bound for their destination. The agricultural authority at the field level should engage the growers before the fruits are even seen on the trees, let alone taken down for selling, by showing how fruits grown and sold without harmful substances can benefit the growers significantly. We should also work with the suppliers/distributors towards this same end in a proactive way. They should be asked what benefit they get by using formalin/other substances. If it is possible to demonstrate at the field level that similar or more benefit can be obtained without mixing the chemicals, most would choose that option. This would be a 'win-win' method as it would allow the growers to reap the benefit of their hard labour and consumers to get untainted fruits.

I am curious to know and understand more about the scientific methodology being used, the basis; toxicity level in the samples tested; toxicity levels in the fruits grown in a controlled environment; the difference ("delta") between the two, and how this compares with statistical average. Transparency would build public confidence and support the growers as they would themselves take on the responsibility to ensure that their product is acceptable before they sell it.

Who calibrated the instruments that are used for testing? Are the tests repeatable? What is the resolution and tolerance of the measuring instruments? What is the confidence level for the results obtained? Is there any reliable reference, did anyone use them for the same purpose in the past and for how many years? If we are the first users, for how long was the trial run conducted to prove correctness, effectiveness, repeatability and confidence level? What was their feedback? What is the level of harmful substances in fish, raw vegetables and other agricultural products? When will the drive to test and destroy contaminated vegetables start? Please publish the data in a national paper or put it up on a publicly accessible web-site so that general population can appreciate the current drive even more.

The other day I was reviewing the "Environmental Performance Index" ranking of 178 countries. Bangladesh stands out with air quality score of 13.83 – the lowest among 178 countries. Does that mean we should all stop breathing now? This does not also mean we should accept fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products with toxic, harmful substances. What it means is that we have specific and critical challenges that require more involvement by the right people. More work is needed to understand the "what" and "how" of the methodology to drive a proactive campaign to influence the right behaviour.

These are great challenges and we need people with scientific background to work on them. We need to take a holistic view of the pollution and poisonous agricultural products in Bangladesh in general. This means engagement of critical stakeholders, e.g. environmentalists, agriculturists, chemists, toxicologists, economists to critically analyse the current situation and long term trends. The goal would be to lay out a sustainable plan to proactively tackle such issues. Let us shift the paradigm from blame and destruction to help farmers with what they do best – growth and production – the right way.

The writer is Professional Engineer, Project Management Professional, Canada.

New 'Republics' under Modi, Sisi, Poroshenko

MAHMOOD HASAN

DURING the month of May 2014 there were three rather important elections in three regions of the world. In South Asia, Narendra Modi was declared the winner in the Indian Lok Sabha election on May 16. In Europe, on May 25, Ukrainians elected Petro Poroshenko as their new president. And in the Middle East, Egyptians elected General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as their new president on May 27.

Since independence, Nehru's 'democratic paradigm' (first Indian republic?) was based on some broad ideals. He strongly believed in 'democracy,' 'secularism,' 'socialistic economic order' and 'consensus' to incorporate the diverse interests of multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-caste India. The Indian National Congress ruled for most parts of the last seven decades with Nehru's ideals.

With the overwhelming mandate will Modi deviate from the Nehruvian ideals? Will Modi change the political discourse and create a new 'Republic?' Will India be 'Modi-fied?'

The tone of Modi's maiden speech at the Lok Sabha was inclusiveness. He promised to fight poverty, change India's image from 'scam India' to 'skilled India,' convert development into a mass movement like Gandhi's freedom struggle.

Modi's passion for market-based solution for economic growth will no doubt strengthen the corporate houses of India. It will also help the growth of neo-capital that may accentuate the socio-economic divide.

By inviting the Saarc leaders to his investiture, Modi held out an olive branch to his neighbours. He has yet to outline his policies towards China and the West. Interestingly, he has appointed Ajit Kumar Doval as his national security advisor, who has strong views about so-called 'Bangladeshi infiltration' into India.

On the ideological, social and political front, the secular segment of the society is watching with trepidation how his ideological mooring to 'Hindutva' manifests itself.

Hindutva followers have termed Modi's rise as India's second 'Republic.' Some have described it as India's second independence. The contours of Modi's 'Republic' are

slowly emerging. Recent steps by Modi do not speak of inclusiveness.

As far as Egypt is concerned, the country has gone full circle from military dictatorship (first 'Republic' – Gamal Nasser) to democracy (second 'Republic' – Mohammed Morsi) and back to military 'democracy' (third 'Republic' – Al-Sisi).

The first Arab Spring ousted Hosni Mubarak in February 2011 and catapulted Mohammed Morsi of Freedom and Justice Party (Muslim Brotherhood) to the presidency through multi-party democratic elections in June 2012. In a weird reversal, a second Arab Spring thrust Morsi into jail and brought General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi to the forefront of the Egyptian political landscape.

Al-Sisi was 'elected' president with 93% votes. That election was clearly a one-horse race. The other candidate, left-wing Hamdeen Sabahi, was there to give the election a façade of legitimacy.

Significantly, the Mubarak era constitution was abrogated and a new constitution adopted under President Morsi. General Sisi further amended that constitution, banning the Muslim Brotherhood's political Islam from Egyptian politics.

The features of the first Egyptian republic essentially revolved around the personality of Gamal Nasser, the hero of the Arab world at that time. Anwar Sadat, riding on the legacy of Nasser, became immensely popular after the 1973 war against Israel. Hosni Mubarak, a 1973 war veteran, carried on without any challenge until the first Arab Spring.

It was under Sadat and Mubarak that the liberal capitalist elite emerged as an influential power group. They controlled the economy, while the military was left to handle national security and sovereignty. Mubarak maintained a balance between the two power groups. But as the elite group grew in size and wanted more power, Mubarak became increasingly isolated and eventually fell.

Morsi's 'Republic' was undone when the overzealous Muslim Brotherhood drafted a Sharia-based constitution. His Islamist agenda sharply divided the Egyptian polity and invited the second Arab Spring. When the army generals suspected that Islamist elements were trying to infiltrate and indoctrinate the army, he was overthrown. The elite capitalist group played their part in full during the second

Arab Spring. That ended Egypt's second 'Republic.'

General Sisi will now have to resurrect a third 'Republic,' which will require him to reunite the nation as a liberal, tolerant society; eliminate the remnants of Muslim Brotherhood; revive the badly battered economy; maintain Egypt's sovereignty; and reestablish relations with the West – particularly in view of what is currently happening in Iraq and Syria.

The woes of Ukraine are not yet over even after the presidential elections. Ukraine's current problems aggravated late last year because of massive public debt. Besides, rampant corruption had made the country almost bankrupt. Ukraine needed funds from the West to stay afloat. When President Viktor Yanukovich, a Kremlin protégé, refused a European Union loan, violent demonstrations broke out in Kiev. Unable to contain the situation, Yanukovich fled to Moscow in February 2014.

While Moscow openly supported Yanukovich, the demonstrations were instigated by the West in the name of democracy, freedom of speech, etc. The country today is badly split between those who support Moscow and those who want Western style government. The chaos led Crimea to break away and join Russia. Simultaneously, pro-Russian militants started an insurgency that threatens to break off eastern Ukraine and join Russia.

Billioneaire Petro Poroshenko was elected president with 54% vote. Poroshenko has several difficult challenges ahead of him. Firstly, he will have to earn recognition from Moscow. Secondly, put an end to the insurgency raging in the east. Thirdly, revive the economy and put an end to divisive politics. Fourthly, he will have to stamp out corruption from his government. Finally, he has to get a new loyal parliament through fresh elections.

Ukraine, an east European country, is caught in the geo-strategic war between Moscow and Washington. Success of Poroshenko's 'Republic' will depend on how he walks the tight-rope, balancing between Moscow and Washington.

It will be worth watching how these three leaders impact their respective regions.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

CROSSWORD

by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

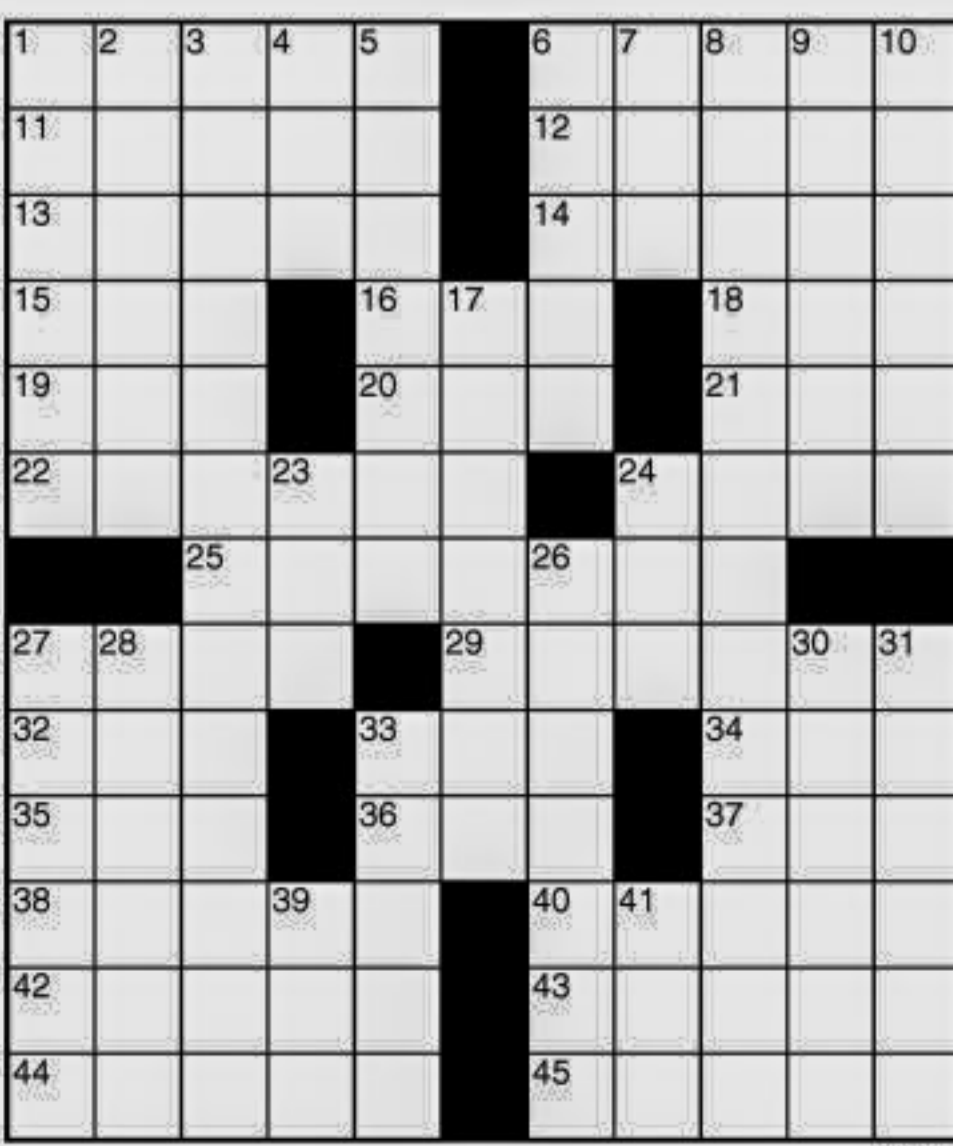
- 1 Patio cooker
- 6 Cheese choice
- 11 Zellweger of "Chicago"
- 12 Jousting need
- 13 Mayflower name
- 14 Annex
- 15 Letter after sigma
- 16 -- Salvador
- 18 Writer Levin
- 19 " -your loss!"
- 20 Ran into
- 21 Dog doc
- 22 Hunting dog
- 24 Broad
- 25 Given a new title
- 27 Tibia's place
- 29 Traffic jams
- 32 Pod item
- 33 Animation frame
- 34 In the style of
- 35 Maximum amount
- 36 Shelley work
- 37 Writer Stanislaw
- 38 Stoop
- 40 Rap sheet item
- 42 Follow
- 43 Painting base

44 Run-down

45 Consumed

DOWN

- 1 Free
- 2 Feel sympathetic
- 3 Factory owner
- 4 Golfer Trevino
- 5 Photogs
- 6 Bias
- 7 Hunk of gum
- 8 Self-reliant type
- 9 Got a goal
- 10 Capitol group
- 17 Filled with bubbles
- 23 Wallet bill
- 24 Petite
- 26 Odometer reading
- 27 "The Black List" star
- 28 Western Capital
- 30 Make happy
- 31 Strong fellow
- 33 New York's - Island
- 39 Spare tire
- 41 Grazing spot



Yesterday's answer



If the freedom of speech is taken away then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.

George Washington

CRYPTOQUOTE

JCS GFRL ESZNGF ACG KN SBPTOJSB KN JCS GFS ACG CON RSOZFSB CGA JG RSOZF OFB TCOFIS

-- TOZR ZGISZN

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: ALL THE GREAT THINGS ARE SIMPLE, AND MANY CAN BE EXPRESSED IN A SINGLE WORD: FREEDOM, JUSTICE, HONOR, DUTY, MERCY, HOPE.



Request For Proposals

The Study on Assessing the Market Size and Demand for Maize Based Starch and Glucose in Various Industries of Bangladesh

Katalyst, a pro-poor market development project implemented under Ministry of Commerce by Swisscontact and GIZ International Services and funded by a donor consortium, requests proposals from interested firms for carrying out the above assignment. Organizations experienced in market research/business research are encouraged to apply for this assignment.

Organizations bidding for the assignments are to submit their respective proposals consisting of separate technical and financial bids by 5.00pm July 17th, 2014. The detailed RFP can be downloaded from the following web-link: http://www.katalyst.com.bd/abtus_procurement.php