

New vista of Tokyo-Dhaka partnership

Speedy follow-up and implementation key

THE major elements of the Joint Statement on the outcome of the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Bangladesh sound clearly target-specific, programmatic and visionary. As these spell out shared intent, understanding and decisions at highest political level the rhetoric phase enters the substantive one. Now these fall squarely on the bureaucracies and private sector leaders to follow through, coordinate and implement the decisions.

We have often made a good start but when it came to follow-up measures we would be found wanting. The speed and competence with which we meet our part of the bargain can make all the difference between a half-way house and a fully gainful bilateral engagement.

The questions are: What do the Japanese want from us or aim at? How do we plan to meet their already aired expectations? According to Japan's China-plus policy, Tokyo wants to relocate its investment in and step up trade with a country like Bangladesh. It seeks special economic zone with emphasis on location, competitive incentives, improved infrastructure and labour supply as critical factors.

High-profile Japanese CEOs have made it clear that they look at Bangladesh as the next investment destination; already steelmaker Nippon is willing to open a factory in Chittagong.

The two prime ministers agreed on a direction of economic cooperation under the initiative of the Bay of Bengal Industrial growth Belt (BIG-B). Its three pillars are: Developing infrastructure, improving investment environment and fostering connectivity.

What we need to do is known; institutional linkages are in place, and now we have to strike the iron when it is hot.

Potential loss due to earthquake

Put remedial measures in place immediately

THE possibility that more than a quarter of a million people might perish, and more than 73 percent of the more buildings would collapse, if a major earthquake were to strike the capital should get our town planners and disaster management department moving. The potential degree of building collapse in percentage terms in Chittagong and Rajshahi is even more frightening. These figures emerged at a recent international seminar on seismic design and building retrofitting for safer cities.

The country has been fortunate that it has not been visited by a sever earthquake in many years and we hope that Nature would spare us from it. But the normal gap of 100 years has passed and experts can hear the alarm bells ringing from the many minor shakes we experienced in the last five or six years.

What worries us is the fact that these are very talked about figures at every discussion on disaster and disaster management for last so many years. Yet we have not witnessed any palpable action plan of the government on any aspect of the issue. If, as per the comments of a distinguished expert, 90 percent of the buildings in the country are non-engineered, then it is the government that must bear the major responsibility of adding to the aftermath of a disaster by allowing such buildings to come up.

We would hope that all aspects of the matter including building guidelines, rescue and recovery equipment, manpower training and the like are organised on an emergency basis.

Who cares for the roads where no VIP resides?

ABDUL MATIN

GENERAL Yahya Khan once went to visit a remote town in Pakistan while he was the president and the chief martial law administrator. He was later informed that the road leading to the town had been rebuilt only a week ago to facilitate his visit. In response he said, "If this is the way to build roads, I should be on the move all the time."

I remembered the quote while observing the plight of roads in Dhaka. Pictures of bumpy roads of the city are being published in newspapers almost every day. Even the roads of Gulshan are no exception. The Gulshan Model Town was the brain-child of G. A. Madani, former chairman of the Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT). He is no more but Madani Avenue in Baridhara bears his memory. Had he been alive today, he would have been shocked to see the present condition of his dream town which was supposed to be the most prestigious residential area in the capital city.

Gulshan lost its residential character long ago. Tall commercial buildings have sprung up all over the area. While only a single two-story building was allowed on each plot originally, high-rise buildings now dominate the town's skyline. The traffic in Gulshan has become a nightmare to any commuter. Street vendors occupy parts of many footpaths creating obstructions to pedestrians.

Some of the roads in Gulshan have become notoriously famous for big potholes. For example, if you drive along Road No. 104, you will have the experience of riding a roller-coaster (free of cost, of course)! Parts of the road have no footpaths or drains. As a result, it turns into a pool of water when it rains, making driving extremely risky.

Surprisingly enough, a few roads in Gulshan and other parts of the city are well maintained. They are paved regularly while others remain uncared for. They have excellent drainage systems and footpaths. One footpath in Gulshan has recently been renovated with ceramic tiles! How is it possible? Well, these are the roads where VIPs reside! They are popularly known as 'VIP roads'.

We tried our best to draw the attention of the city corporation on many occasions for repair of the roads where only commoners reside but who cares? I would, therefore, request all the VIPs residing in Dhaka to kindly move their residences to the non-VIP roads, periodically changing houses from one road to another, so that all the roads in the city gradually get repaired. We, the commoners, will remain ever grateful to them for this favour.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Turning dream of BIG-B into reality

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

APANESE Premier Shinzo Abe's long awaited but short return visit to Dhaka following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's May visit to Tokyo should be viewed on a broader geopolitical and strategic canvas than it appears on the face of it. For the present, he has reiterated the promise that Japan would extend financial assistance of around US\$6 billion to Bangladesh over the next five years to implement projects under the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B), an initiative the Japanese premier himself proposed during Sheikh Hasina's visit to his country. In exchange, Sheikh Hasina, too, has assured Abe of Bangladesh's support for Japan's candidature for non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council (UNSC) for 2016-17 term. Also, Bangladesh, which earlier announced that it would contest the UNSC seat from the Asia-Pacific Group, has opted out of the race in support of Japan as a gesture of friendship. At a time when its still greater ambition of getting the permanent membership of UNSC is being effectively blocked by China, Japan needs this non-permanent seat to represent the Asia-Pacific region in the UN forum in question. Evidently, against this backdrop, Japan greatly values its incumbent Bangladesh government's support in this respect. And this also fits well into the

wider framework of extending Japan's economic and diplomatic stakes from Pacific Rim to Indian Ocean Rim countries, the ground for which Abe has already broken during Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi's recent east-looking visit to Japan.

Bangladesh can ill-afford to miss this grand opportunity opened before it in the shape of Abe-proposed BIG-B. But to make that happen, the government must show that it is really serious and willing to remove the main roadblocks to FDI to reach us. The barriers include bureaucratic bottleneck, pervasive political as well as administrative corruption and poor infrastructures in the communication and power sectors.

This provides a huge opportunity for us, since Japanese investors are shifting their investment destination from China to Indian Ocean rim countries in a big way. India under Modi is poised to grab the largest chunk of that investment. Bangladesh can ill-afford to miss this grand opportunity opened before it in the shape of Abe-proposed BIG-B. But to make that happen, the government must show that it is really serious and willing to remove the main roadblocks to FDI to reach us. The barriers include bureaucratic bottleneck, pervasive political as well as administrative corruption and poor infrastructures in the communication and power sectors. The BIG-B envisages turning Bangladesh into a nodal point of regional growth. The said three pillars of that initiative revolves around development of infrastructures including construction of a deep sea port at Sonadia, developing a primary energy supply terminal at Matarbari and developing the arterial Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway for smoother transportation of goods and services. We believe the government will remove all the hurdles at the policy level to turn the dream of BIG-B into reality.

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1965 Indo-Pak War: Busting the myth

AIR CDRE (RETD) ISHFAQ ILAHI CHAUDHURY

THIS article is to recall the 17-day war of Sep 1965 between India and Pakistan that, among other things, helped to do two things as far as the Bengalis were concerned. One, it completely destroyed the myth created about the Bengalis being a non-martial race. And secondly, it exposed the lax preparedness for the defence of the eastern wing of the country. President Ayub Khan of Pakistan, in his book "Friends Not Masters", had exposed the discriminatory mindset of the Pakistani establishment towards their Bengali compatriots. The September War was an opportunity for the Bengalis in the armed forces to vindicate their military prowess.

Forty nine years ago on 6 September 1965, a full-scale war broke out between India and Pakistan. It was a short 17-day war that was virtually confined to West Pakistan and parts of the disputed territory of Kashmir. As the war unfolded, the Bengalis all over Pakistan were excited over the stories of heroism by the 1st Battalion, The East Bengal Regiment (EBR) in the defence of the key Pakistani city of Lahore. Also in the air, stories of valour by Bengali pilots of Pakistan Air Force (PAF) greatly inspired the Bengali youths. The West Pakistanis used to belittle the Bengalis by calling them a non-martial race; this was belied by the military prowess and bravery shown by the officers and men of Bengali origin. The war also exposed the eastern wing's vulnerabilities with so little military assets to defend it. The war is virtually forgotten in Bangladesh today, despite the fact that the Bengalis played an important part in it.

Pakistani leadership at that time had led the nation to a disastrous war that was fraught with serious political and military lapses. After the debacle in the border war with China in 1962, India started a massive expansion and modernization of its armed forces with generous aid from the Soviet Union and Western powers.

Pakistani leadership realized that the possibility of militarily pressurizing India was fast slipping away as the power balance tilted more towards India. They started planning a secret military operation to force India to come to a negotiated settlement on Kashmir.

In early August 1965, Pakistan launched a clandestine operation, code named "Operation Gibraltar". The aim was to infiltrate inside Indian held Kashmir and to demolish bridges, cutoff supply lines, etc to create panic among the populace. They also set up a radio station, called "Sada-e-Kashmir", purporting to be the voice of the Mujahedeen fighting for Kashmir's liberation.

The assumption was that the radio broadcast, along with the guerrilla activities, will trigger a general uprising among the Kashmiris. None of that happened. In fact, many of these infiltrators were arrested, killed in encounters and often handed over to the authority by the locals. By the end of August, Operation Gibraltar petered out; remnants of the so-called Mujahedeen tracked back to Pakistan.

On 1 September 1965, regular Pakistani troops crossed the cease fire line (CFL) and moved towards Jammu. The forces made quick advance and in the next couple of days threatened to cut Jammu-Srinagar road. The Indian PM gave a warning on 2 September that unless Pakistan withdrew its forces across the CFL, India would respond "at a time and place of its own choosing". The Indian response came on 5-6 Sept night when it launched attacks across Sialkot and Lahore. The Indian response was full one month after the Pakistani incursion. The Indian forces, besides threatening two key

the last 21 months since Abe assumed office, he himself as well as his top diplomats has been on a hectic tour of the capitals of different countries across the entire Asia-Pacific region. Japan's offer for cooperation with many of those countries like Vietnam, Philippines and Myanmar was not limited only to the economic sphere. They also expressed Japan's keenness to help build those countries' defence capabilities, especially in the area of naval power. This, again, relates to China's growing naval presence in South China Sea and perceived ambition in the greater Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

Bangladesh has little stake in the big power rivalry in the region. It should rather concentrate on making the most of its strategic geographical location in the region linking Southeast Asia with the rest of South Asia to invite as much Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as possible to build its communication infrastructure including ports, develop energy base and build industry. Our nearly inexhaustible supply of cheaper labour is definitely an attraction that no overseas investor including Japan can ignore. Given that Japan has been our dependable development partner since the day one of our independence. Even to till date, Japan stands as one of the largest foreign aid sources for Bangladesh. So, Bangladesh can count on this overture for more comprehensive economic cooperation with Japan made by Premier Abe during his visit.

But it is also time, we graduated ourselves from an aid recipient to the level of a worthwhile trading partner of Japan.

The Premier Abe's large entourage comprised of big business leaders from Japan.

This provides a huge opportunity for us, since Japanese investors are shifting their investment destination from China to Indian Ocean rim countries in a big way. India under Modi is poised to grab the largest chunk of that investment. Bangladesh can ill-afford to miss this grand opportunity opened before it in the shape of Abe-proposed BIG-B. But to make that happen, the government must show that it is really serious and willing to remove the main roadblocks to FDI to reach us. The barriers include bureaucratic bottleneck, pervasive political as well as administrative corruption and poor infrastructures in the communication and power sectors. The BIG-B envisages turning Bangladesh into a nodal point of regional growth. The said three pillars of that initiative revolves around development of infrastructures including construction of a deep sea port at Sonadia, developing a primary energy supply terminal at Matarbari and developing the arterial Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway for smoother transportation of goods and services. We believe the government will remove all the hurdles at the policy level to turn the dream of BIG-B into reality.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Netanyahu's reckless policies

The Netanyahu-led government's announcement of its decision to annex nearly 1,000 acres of Palestinian land in the West Bank between the Etzion settlement block and Jerusalem amounts to nothing less than a reckless and offensive act that only further undermines Israel's moral international standing and has dire future consequences. Netanyahu's hypocrisy was put on full display when he blamed Hamas for the abduction and gruesome murder of three Israeli teenagers, which subsequently led to the Gaza war only to expropriate land in the West Bank to punish the Palestinian authority. In fact, Palestinian president Abbas did everything in his power to cooperate with Israeli security forces in the search for the abductors and strongly condemned the abduction. Instead of rewarding him for his efforts to keep the calm in the West Bank throughout the war, for example by freeing some prisoners, Netanyahu usurped another chunk of Palestinian land.

The message Netanyahu sent clearly suggests that he has no scruples, and contrary to his public statement in support for a two-state solution, he has no intentions of ever allowing the Palestinians to realize their aspiration for statehood. Netanyahu's action will have ominous repercussions for Israel on many other fronts, which can be overlooked only by a man possessed by a demon which blinds him from discerning between right and wrong.

Does Netanyahu want to leave Israel as an occupying power existing in a constant state of war?

Dr. Alon Ben-Meir

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'Rice bucket challenge'

Recently, the ALS ice bucket challenge went viral on the social networks. A new form of it got introduced here in our country named 'rice bucket challenge'. The main objective of this challenge is to provide the poor people with some rice. Shakib Al Hasan, the well-known cricketer, recently posted on his official Facebook page about his completion of the challenge and inspired all his Facebook fans and friends to accept the challenge. Good work by Shakib. I think it's a new way to help the poor people.

Samiul Raijul

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Dhaka

Shareholders in dark about Cos' books

By going through the quarterly profit and loss statements of a listed company, the shareholders can assess its financial position. Normally listed companies publish their quarterly profit and loss statements on the website of Dhaka Stock Exchange four times a year. But it is regrettable that some listed companies do not publish their quarterly profit and loss statements at all and declare dividend at year end. As a result, the shareholders remain in the dark all the year about the financial position of the companies. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) should look into this matter and make all the listed companies to publish their quarterly profit and loss statements in public interest.

Khondker Asaduzzaman
Municipal Tank Cross Road
Khulna

Comments on news report,

"Uncared for, patient takes his life," published on September 3, 2014

A. K. Fazlul Huq Jr.

We don't realise someone's pain unless and until we experience it firsthand. Whether this man could have been saved is a different matter, but the fact is that he was denied proper treatment. Unfortunately, those who are responsible for this will never face such a situation in their life.

My prayers are with the bereaved family at their difficult time.

"Alone, she turns the tide" (September 3, 2014)

MH Khan

She is an ideal poultry farmer in all acceptable standards.

Wayne Bone

A very smart lady; congratulations.

"Only army gets back on right lane" (September 3, 2014)

Baz

Thanks to The Daily Star for publishing these pictures and registration numbers of these vehicles. Well done, Bangladesh army, for apologising and stating that this would not happen again.