

Underperforming SoBs

Action should follow diagnosis

A day after the Finance Minister frankly admitted to the directors' failures in the state owned banks contributing to below par performance of these institutions, the central bank governor has come down hard on the manner in which these banks are being run. This of course is not news. The media has covered the issue extensively ever since the ill-fated loan sanctioning by one such bank in the Hall-Mark debacle. Volumes have been written on the subject; countless seminars held and the matter has been discussed to no end in electronic media. Hall-Mark was the first scam to hit the radar and there have been others since then and ironically, most of them involved state-owned-banks sanctioning loans on what inevitably turned out to be projects not worth financing.

Now that the most influential people at the helm of financial governance are admitting that most directors are incompetent and dishonest, what measures will be taken to counter their influence as Board members is what the public would like to know. We are informed that the Financial Integrity and Customer Services Department will be proactive in strictly monitoring and supervising the underperforming banks and non-banking financial institutions. Again, at the end of the day, the question that must be asked is whether the political will is going to be mustered to address the issue of removing incompetent directors who are allegedly political appointees. Will they be held to account, or, replaced by experienced bankers. Otherwise it is merely an academic exercise.

Can overloading be a right?

Passengers' safety should be the first consideration

LAUNCH owners at a meeting with BIWTA on Monday came up with the demand that their vessels be allowed to take more passengers than permitted during the upcoming Eid rush. Their justification is that if they are to strictly adhere to the government-set passenger limits, then the owners would have to incur losses. The proposition is ill-conceived, especially after last month's river tragedy, in which the ill-fated launch, Pinak-6, sank in Padma near Lauhajang with some 200 people on board. Needless to say, the disaster took place because of overloading four times the vessel's capacity.

The launch owners are certainly not so naive as not to understand that the limit to the capacity of a river-going vessel is not determined arbitrarily, but scientifically. We believe the authorities concerned have strictly followed the rules in setting the passenger-bearing capacity of their respective launches. In that case, there cannot be any question of compromising on the limits set for those vessels. In particular, travel on the launch's deck is better discouraged, because it portends the danger of tilting the vessel.

To ensure safe travel, the government must show zero-tolerance towards any lapse in strictly maintaining the rules at the loading and unloading points at every major terminal as well as onboard the vessels.

Since passenger rush during Eid is disproportionately high, BIWTA as well as private launch owners should consider increasing the number of vessels through spe-

Modi exudes maturity, optimism and confidence

ABDUL MATIN

I always wondered how Narendra Modi, once a tea-boy at his father's shop at a railway station, could become the 15th prime minister of India. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by him, won 336 seats out of 543 in the Lok Sabha in the last general election in spite of his past controversial credentials. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the Congress, won only 58 seats. What is Modi's magic?

Narendra Modi recently appeared at an interview with Fareed Zakaria of CNN. This was his first interview after assuming office. He did his homework well and talked without mincing words. He covered a wide range of issues, including the economic growth of India vis-à-vis that of China, China's influence on the East and South China Seas, India's commitment to democracy, the relationship with the United States, India's position on Ukraine and Crimea, violence against women and the threat from al-Qaeda. Lastly, he talked about Yoga and his relaxation.

When asked if India would be the next China, he asserted that India would remain India. He said both India and China were growing rapidly. On international disputes like those of Ukraine and Crimea, he suggested dialogues between the concerned parties. He said that because of historic and cultural reasons, the ties with the United States would deepen further in the future.

On violence against women, he said that the dignity of women is a collective responsibility and the problem should be tackled through empowerment and education -- without any erosion in the law and order situation. Communalism did not surface during the interview. On the threat from al-Qaeda, he is confident that the Indian Muslims would not dance to al-Qaeda's tune and they would live and die for India.

We had one notion about Modi before the general election. Now we see a different Modi -- very confident, matured and optimistic. He said: "If there were no democracy then someone like me, Modi, a child born in a poor family, how would he sit here?" He added: "Democracy is our commitment. It is our great legacy ... Democracy is in our DNA."

He believes the Indians have unlimited talent. He said confidently: "If I can win the confidence of the people of India, not from my speeches but by actions, then the power of 1.25 billion Indians will come together to take the country forward."

He said that he enjoys work and relaxes while working. He added: "Yoga synchronises the heart, the mind, and the body."

Now, the world will be waiting to see how he synchronises his optimism with reality.

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

INDIA-BANGLADESH JCC MEETING

More assurances, more waiting

ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

M R. Mahmud Ali, our foreign minister, rushed off to join our prime minister to attend the United Nations General Assembly in New York after meeting his counterpart Sushma Swaraj of India in New Delhi. He could not address our press on the outcome of the Third meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) in the Indian capital. All that everyone had was a copy of a joint statement by the two leaders on the meeting. Whatever impression was gathered by the people of the two countries was from this sole document.

But the joint statement reveals much of what has not been said in the meeting. It also tells us the pious wishes of India, which Bangladesh quietly agrees with. Hence, for all intents and purposes, the statement was a disappointment. There was great anticipation here that the meeting would let us know the progress that India has made on the two immediate concerns of Bangladesh. The first is the fate of the Teesta water agreement and, second, the progress made towards the ratification of the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) by India. On both these matters the joint statement has perfunctory remarks.

On the LBA, India informs us that the ratification process is underway. It expresses its wish that it will pave the way for resolution of the boundary related issue. The document does not inform us whether India gave any time line for its ratification. It is like we could have to wait through eternity. It is not that India did not provide time line on any other matter in the joint statement. On several other issues where India is interested in quick solution and implementation there are clear indications of a time line. The BJP, which is the party in power in India, now has the necessary majority in Lok Sabha to push the constitutional amendment soon enough and get the LBA ratified. Why is India shuffling its feet on this issue with which Bangladesh is concerned?

Again, on the matter of Teesta river agreement, there is only a single line sentence (para 24 of the document) which states that the sides 'reiterated their commitment to finalisation of the interim agreement for sharing of the waters of the Teesta and Feni rivers.' We are told that the Joint River Commission as well as the water secretaries of the two governments had agreed on an interim arrangement for 15 years till hydrographic survey is completed and then an agreement is reached. But what about a time line again? It seems that we have left it to the wishes of India to take its own time to decide on that.

The joint statement is full of assurances to us on various issues. An array of new elements has been added to the list of cooperation between the two countries. It gives an impression of how 'multifaceted' our bilateral relationship is evolving into. India can rightly boast that a new trajectory in relationship between Bangladesh and India is underway. But is that so? How much these new areas are going to serve Bangladesh's direct interest is debatable.

There is a strong feeling when one goes through the document that India is on the lookout for taking further

advantage from Bangladesh. The matter of land for a special Indian economic zone, the question of Bangladesh not allowing anyone to use its land for any activities prejudicial to India's interest are well and good, but what about similar assurances from India that its territory will not be used for any similar activities against the interests of Bangladesh? The recent 'chit scam' in West Bengal tells us that some elements across the border may be trying to use its soil to cause harm to Bangladesh. Another item that is curious is the matter of replacing the word 'transit' with 'connectivity' -- an innocuous formulation that does not carry any charges and revenue that are attendant with allowing transit of Indian vehicles.

In this connection, where is Bangladesh's request to India to allow it easy connectivity to Nepal through its territory? It seems that this matter was not raised by us and has been allowed to rest in peace. Why are we keen to have coastal shipping arrangements with India without sorting out the matter of transit first? This could lead us to put the cart before the horse in our negotiations on this vital matter. Also, discussions about cooperation in nuclear science and space, two sensitive areas, have been given a berth in our bilateral relations. Why are we keen on this before we have sorted out water sharing of our common rivers first?

There was no discussion about further easing and streamlining visa arrangements between the two countries. Although things have improved slightly from the past, it is nowhere enough to meet the legitimate demand of Bangladeshi travelling to India on a regular basis for tourism, medical treatment, private education or just people to people contact. We should institute arrangements whereby citizens of both countries can travel easily and without the fear of being denied a visa or being harassed by the numerous procedures put in place by India for entering and exiting its territory.

Perhaps one of the areas which deserves everyone's commendation is India's desire to train and build Bangladesh's capacity in several sectors. That India is helping us to train our firemen, railway officers, policemen and teachers is welcome. A reverse osmosis should also take place where Indians can come to Bangladesh and get trained in areas where we excel, like in human development, etc.

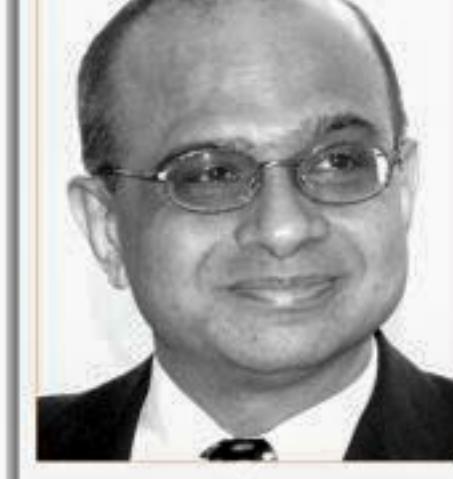
Our foreign minister had the opportunity to meet the top echelons of the government of India in this short visit. But did he take with him our deep concerns on certain issues like trade deficit, water sharing and LBA to the high level appropriately? BJP wishes to improve relations with all neighbours. This is indeed a good cue for us to push for the resolution of matters that have been irking us for decades. All these are in the realm of possibility if the Indian political leadership is ready to extend a helping hand.

Unfortunately, this time round, the third meeting of India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission did not have much to satisfy Bangladesh.

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America's never-ending war

ASIA



BRAHMA CHELLANEY

It is official: US President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Barack Obama is at war again. After toppling Libyan ruler Muammar el-Qaddafi and bombing targets in Somalia and Yemen, Obama has initiated airstrikes in northern Iraq, effectively declaring war on the Islamic State -- a decision that will involve infringing on the sovereign, if disintegrating, state of Syria. In his zeal to intervene, Obama is again disregarding US and international law by seeking approval from neither the US Congress nor the United Nations Security Council.

Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush, launched America's so-called "war on terror" to defeat groups that he insisted wanted to "establish a radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia." But Bush's invasion and occupation of Iraq was so controversial that it fractured the global consensus to fight terror, with the Guantánamo Bay detention centre and the rendition and torture of suspects coming to symbolise the war's excesses.

After Obama took office, he sought to introduce a gentler, subtler tone. Contending in a 2009 interview that "the language we use matters," he rebranded the war on terror as a "struggle" and a "strategic challenge." But the rhetorical shift did not translate into a change in strategy, with the Obama administration moving beyond security concerns to use its anti-terrorism activities to advance America's broader geopolitical interests.

Thus, instead of viewing the elimination of Osama bin Laden in 2011 as the culmination of the anti-terror "struggle" that Bush launched, the Obama administration increased aid to "good" rebels (such as those in Libya), while pursuing "bad" terrorists more vehemently, including through a "targeted killing" programme. When it comes to terrorist activity, however, such lines are difficult to draw.

For example, Obama initially placed the Islamic State in the "good" category, as it undermined Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's rule and Iran's interests in Syria and Iraq.

His position changed only after the Islamic State threatened to overrun Iraq's Kurdish regional capital, Erbil -- home to US military, intelligence, diplomatic, and business facilities. Add to that the beheadings of two American journalists, and suddenly Obama's team was using Bush's war rhetoric, declaring that the US is at war with the Islamic State "in the same way that we are at war with al-Qaeda and its affiliates all around the globe."

America's war on terror now risks becoming a permanent war against an expanding list of enemies -- often inadvertently created by its own policies. Just as covert aid to Afghanistan's anti-Soviet rebels in the 1980s contributed to Al Qaeda's emergence -- something that Hillary Clinton acknowledged when she was Obama's secretary of state -- the help that the US and its allies provided to Syrian

region's oil sheikhdoms, to train and arm thousands of Syrian rebels. It is not difficult to see the risks inherent in flooding the Syrian killing fields with even more and better-armed fighters.

The US may have some of the world's top think tanks and most highly educated minds. But it consistently ignores the lessons of its past blunders -- and so repeats them. US-led policies toward the Islamic world have prevented a clash between civilisations only by fueling a clash within a civilisation that has fundamentally weakened regional and international security.

An endless war waged on America's terms against the enemies that it helped to create is unlikely to secure either steady international support or lasting results. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the tepid Arab and Turkish response to America's effort to assemble an international coalition in support of what the Obama administration admits will be a multiyear military offensive against the Islamic State.

The risk that imperial hubris accelerates, rather than stems, Islamist terror is all too real -- yet again.

insurgents after they emerged in 2011 contributed to the rise of the Islamic State.

The US returned to Afghanistan in 2001 to wage an as-yet-unfinished war on the jihadists whom its actions had spawned. Likewise, it is now launching a war in Iraq and Syria against the offspring of Bush's forced regime change in Baghdad and Obama's ill-conceived plan to topple Assad.

It is time for the US to recognise that since it launched its war on terror, the scourge has only spread. The Afghanistan-Pakistan belt has remained "ground zero" for transnational terrorism, and once-stable countries like Libya, Iraq, and Syria have emerged as new hubs.

Obama's effort to strike a Faustian bargain with the Afghan Taliban, whose top leaders enjoy sanctuary in Pakistan, indicates that he is more interested in confining terrorism to the Middle East than defeating it -- even if it means leaving India to bear the brunt of terrorist activity. (In fact, Pakistan's ongoing war of terror against India also sprang from America's anti-Soviet operation in Afghanistan -- the largest in the CIA's history -- as the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence siphoned off a large share of the billions of dollars in military aid for the Afghan rebels.)

Similarly, Obama's strategy toward the Islamic State seeks merely to limit the reach of a barbaric medieval order. Moments after declaring his intention to "degrade

and destroy" the group, Obama responded to a reporter's request for clarification by stating that his real goal is to turn the Islamic State into a "manageable problem."

Making matters worse, Obama plans to use the same tactics to fight the Islamic State that led to its emergence: authorising the CIA, aided by some of the

region's oil sheikhdoms, to train and arm thousands of Syrian rebels. It is not difficult to see the risks inherent in flooding the Syrian killing fields with even more and better-armed fighters.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Restoring local investors' confidence vital

Nowadays the government is showing overenthusiasm about foreign direct investment (FDI). Political leaders are trying to attract foreign investors. By running after foreign investments, we may have forgotten to check domestic capital outflow. Every year a lot of cash flow out of the country. It has been heard that Bangladeshi investors are going to Malaysia, Singapore, and some other countries. It is not just big entrepreneurs, even small ones are going out of the country. Many companies have already built their permanent residence abroad. What all these Bangladeshi businessmen want is a comfort zone.

Lately, Japan's prime minister visited Bangladesh and expressed optimism about investing here. In order to meet the foreign investment requirements, the government should take immediate steps and prepare policies. The government needs to spend time to develop infrastructure and make a business-friendly environment for domestic and foreign investors. But shouldn't we first ensure local investment and then go for foreign investment? Murad Hossain Dipon Gas Co. Ltd.

Taking job recruitment tests online

All recruitment exams in the government and private sector are held in Dhaka. As we know, Dhaka is already plagued with numerous problems and it is the worst livable city in the whole world. Problems multiply when a huge number of applicants come here to sit for the exams including BCS exams. At the time of such exams the whole city comes to a standstill. Think about the transportation costs that all the unemployed youths have to bear to attend such exams in Dhaka. Although we talk about decentralisation, we never really think of implementing it. Nevertheless, now that Bangladesh is very much in the digital era, we can put an end to such problems easily. I think all the problems will be solved, if we can take the job exams online. Md. Toufequr Rahman Kushtia

When will 35th BCS preliminary test be held?

The 35th BCS preliminary test was supposed to be held in April this year. But 2014 is almost over. There are many candidates for whom this is the last year that they can take the exam because of age constraint. And when the exam procedure gets delayed in such a way, the talented students dreaming of becoming civil servants get demotivated. The onus is on the Public Service Commission (PSC) to arrange the BCS exams at the right time. How long should we wait for the 35th BCS preliminary test? We are running out of patience.

Rafik Alamgir
Chittagong

Comments on news report, "JMB targets to kill high-ups," published on September 20, 2014

Enayet Mowla

Now that they have been caught, the main problem begins. What do we do with them? Hang them? The whole world will scream. The HRW will be after us too. Send them to jail? For how long?

"Lawyers to boycott courts tomorrow" (September 21, 2014)

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Such form of protest is no longer a democratic right but a slap on the face of democracy. People must resist and condemn this outdated practice.

"Frustration turns fatal" (September 21, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

The children of our country still believe that both mother and father are part and parcel of their life. They cannot bear the pain of their parent's splitting up. I believe that the lives of those innocent angels could have been saved, if both of their parents were with them. Will the father live a peaceful life, after this enormous damage? What would be the fate of the mother who lived so far, for the kids only?

Truthteller

Can we start a suicide prevention line? People should be encouraged to call before they decide that suicide is the best way out from