

2014: The year in review

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approved quantity. However, the matter seems to have been swept under the carpet, there being no progress in the enquiry in the shoddy affair.

An equally distressing incident was the revelation of senior public servants using fake Freedom Fighter certificates to get government perks and benefits.

DIPLOMATIC

Bangladesh's traditional links with countries like India, China, Japan, Malaysia was further strengthened by the visits of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to these countries and reciprocal visits to Bangladesh.

Economic cooperation between these countries was also strengthened with large commitment made for the development of Bangladesh. However, we are still waiting for the Indian prime minister's visit which, one can assume, will take place only if the LBA and Teesta deals can be finalised.

Election of the Speaker and an MP to the IPU and CPA respectively was made out to be the recognition of the democratic credentials of the country.

Our diplomatic front was once again focused on two countries India and the USA. Initial uncertainty about a Modi-led government was partly assuaged when his pre-election anti-Bangladesh rhetoric was toned down. There was also more proactive move on the part of India to resolve the two most pressing issues for Bangladesh -- the Teesta deal and the LBA. The positive aspect of the LBA is Mamata's acquiescence to go along with the exchange of land in adverse possession, but the Assam BJP has expressed its objection to land exchange.

The blast in Burdwan in India's Paschim Banga confirmed the deep liaison between the radicals and terrorists of the

two countries. It also reaffirmed the need for regional cooperation in combating extremism and terrorism.

Regrettably GSP from USA remains an elusive matter. (See pages 7 & 10)

ECONOMIC

In the economic front the estimated growth in the current fiscal is projected in the region of 6.2 percent. Per capita GDP also increased to USD 1,115 in FY2014 from USD 976 in FY2013, i.e. USD 139 increase (14.2 per cent growth; 7.6 per cent in real terms). With its latest economic feat, Bangladesh now stands fourth in South Asia in terms of per capita income. The country's FE reserve reached a high of 23 billion USD. That was so because of the slump in internal investment and import of capital goods, which reflected the uncertainty of the investment climate in the country. (See page 18)

The RMG despite many shortcomings continued to flourish with export reaching 25 billion USD which may even go up to 30 billion by end of December 2014. However, export to the USA dropped, a consequence of Rana Plaza that had imposed a constraint on the buyers. A redeeming feature is the effort of the BGMEA to make all the RMG factories compliant. And in this context the BGMEA has cancelled the license of 465 factories for failing to meet with compliance requirement. (See pages 21 & 23)

Leather and leather goods has joined the list of exports, which in the current fiscal reached a figure of more than 1.0 billion in ten months of the current fiscal. Likewise our pharmaceuticals have succeeded in market substitution such that only 3 percent of medicines are imported. And 30 pharmaceutical companies are exporting their products.



REGIONAL

The 16th summit of SAARC was held in Katmandu. On top of the agenda were three connectivity agreements on road, rail and energy, to be endorsed by the eight SAARC leaders. Only one of these - on energy - has been signed. The remaining two will be discussed again in three months, as Pakistan was yet to complete its "internal processes" to endorse them.

The region saw a change of Government in India with Modi's BJP winning a majority in the Lok Sabha. The Congress was wiped out and lost even the role of the opposition. (See page 7)

Pakistan saw the worst carnage in many years when the TPP shot and killed 141 students and teachers in a school in Peshawar run by Pakistan Army. It may be turning point for the country in combating extremism and radicalism by galvanizing the nation into one.

In spite of several border incidents across Bangladesh-Myanmar border in which several BGB and Bangladesh

national were killed the two countries continued to make efforts to enhance cooperation. Several high-level visits were exchanged between the two countries. However, the situation in Arakan, the plans of the government of Myanmar to disenfranchise the Rohingyas and stripe them of citizenship continued to create apprehensions in Bangladesh.

INTERNATIONAL

The international scene was hogged by the Middle East in particular the rise and spread of the Islamist Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) which brought a large part of Iraq under its control. An international coalition was arrayed against it but actions against IS was restricted to only aerial bombardment. The US had allocated 5 billion dollars to fight the menace. (See page 8)

SECURITY

The security scenario, internally, regionally and international, was influenced by radicalism fuelled terrorism.

The al Qaeda captured the attention of the people of South Asia with the Al Zawahiri's statement that it was going to intensify its focus in South Asia by setting up what he called Al Qaeda in South Asia.

The IS on the other hand had launched a recruitment campaign around the world and that included Bangladesh. This became very apparent when in September Bangladeshi police arrested a Bangladeshi born British in Dhaka on suspicion of recruiting jihadists to fight for the Islamic State in Syria. The arrest came just days after Bangladeshi police arrested seven Islamic militants who intended on travelling to Syria via Turkey under the guise of followers of the Tablighi Jamaat religious movement.

Over the entire period of 2014 the security forces arrested a large number of HUJI (B) and JMB cadres. Much of the credit for the relative secure environment in this regard is due to the law enforcing agencies effort to anticipate the radicals in time to thwart their plans.

If the greater part of the year was peaceful, threats of agitational programmes by the BNP and counter threats by the AL to prevent it does not portend well for the political climate in 2015. We witnessed a slight manifestation of it in the BCL's threat to prevent BNP holding a meeting in Ghazipur on 27 December.

Thus, as we step into another year we do so with the hope that democracy will find its full meaning and that peace will prevail for the country to progress further.

