

Amartya at his public lecture

His scholarly insights have a guiding relevance

AT a hugely attended public lecture by Amartya Sen, courtesy of Prothom Alo and CPD on Monday, the Nobel Laureate, made some path-shining comments of practical relevance to contemporary affairs in the subcontinent. In precise terms, he advocated development with a strong human content and democracy with liberty and free discourse.

He simply says that economic growth and human development are intertwined. Economic progress makes resource available for human development based on quantum and qualitative leaps in education and health sectors. Governments will have to invest there in a seminal way. For he underscores the point that in no country, without the government having made critical investments in universal education and healthcare systems, has the private sector come forward in such spheres. By keeping a larger proportion of people in ill-health and uneducated can economic progress be sustained in the long run?

Amartya Sen has had words of praise for Bangladesh -- we are ahead of India in terms of education spread, healthcare, women's empowerment and gender equity. So far so good, but in one respect, to our mind, both countries have a similarity which is in their highly skewed income distribution patterns.

On democracy, his observations are equally convincing. He thinks that democracy in India or Bangladesh will take time to reach a state of relative perfection. In any political discourse, the quest for improvement is important. If we are looking to improve democracy, there is no alternative to seeking it through discussion. But Amartya laments that the space for discussion is shrinking day by day. None can disagree with him.

Death of alleged arsonists

The manner of it is disturbing

WE find the explanation of the police regarding the death of the three alleged arsonists in Mirpur on Monday hard to believe. The pictures show that the three were killed with a vengeance. We have several clarifications to seek of the police in this regard. If the three died of mob beating, according to the police, suspected of being arsonists and caught while preparing to firebomb a vehicle, why do not the bodies carry evidence of torture? How come the three bodies have dozens of bullet wounds on them? Are we to believe that the mobs were carrying prohibited bore weapons and ammunitions in public? Even if the three were arsonists, do the police approve of mob justice and the macabre killings, since we have not heard of any arrests as yet made in respect of the three deaths?

The statements of the people of the neighbourhood suggest that they were killed in a planned and cold blooded manner, and the type of empty shells found around the bodies are not those that the public have access to, even those that possess licensed weapons. The indicators point incontrovertibly to the law enforcing agencies.

We must register our anxiety at the growing number of such killings which the law enforcing agencies have passed off as encounter killings or crossfire or shootouts. This is most disturbing. We believe that even the worst of criminals must have recourse to legal process.

We want to ask as to what is the remit of the police in ensuring public order? Can they become the judge, jury and executioner circumventing the legal process? The killings demand clarification by a thorough probe.

COMMENTS

"Contrasting politics in Dhaka and Delhi" (February 23, 2015)

Salim Ullah

No doubt, Arvind Kejriwal has so successfully displayed his political acumen, and that ultimately made him possible to win the heart of his people. Our leaders are so arrogant, so ambitious and excessively proud that they would not take lessons from anybody. As a result, they have still a lot to learn and our sufferings will continue.

Deep Purple Blue

Great educational piece for our politicians indeed. I have been following the anti-corruption movement and the Aam Admi Party's birth and growth in India, and I must say I am really, really impressed. Well, if Hasina were in Khaleda's place today she would have done more damage than Khaleda. After all, the 1995-96 and 2006-07 violence model established by her tells us what she would have done.

Barkat

Very meaningful and soul searching article for the people of Bangladesh. It's high time the common people of Bangladesh raised their head and cleaned the filth and immorality from politics.

"Now that I have come here overcoming all obstacles, all hurdles will go away..."

**--MAMATA BANERJEE,
West Bengal Chief Minister**

Salim Ullah

Bangladesh cannot afford to see that; her assurances to solve the long-awaited problem of LB and Teesta deal are greeted with utter disbelief.

PlainSpeaker

How does Bangladesh figure in India's Look East Policy?

WAHIDUDDIN MAHMUD

INDIA is looking for new economic frontiers in the East. In the face of continuing stalemate of WTO negotiations, countries are looking for alternative or parallel arrangements. The past decade has seen the flourishing of many such initiatives. As an emerging global economic powerhouse, India would obviously not like to be left behind.

There is the American-led 12-country Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in which neither India nor China plays any part; but both the countries as well as Japan are involved in the ASEAN-led 16-country parallel initiative called the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The outcome of these initiatives will depend on factors that go much beyond the nuts and bolts of trade into the realm of geopolitics. It thus makes sense that India is looking for alternative routes to link with the ASEAN, which is currently the focus of India's so-called Look East policy.

But while pursuing the big ideas of economic partnerships, it would be a folly for India to lose sight of what can be achieved nearer at home. To start with, one could argue that India's Look East policy needs to look first within its own borders, so that its east and north-eastern parts can both be a vehicle and a beneficiary of the policy. Connectivity and economic integration with Bangladesh becomes important in that context. Consider this fact: most of the 30 border districts of Bangladesh -- out of a total of 64 districts -- are



among the most economically disadvantaged areas of the country. The Indian districts bordering Bangladesh are similarly lagging behind. Clearly, the cross-border economic synergies due to geographical proximity are not being fully exploited.

The potential of turning geography to economic advantage is obvious. This sub-region provides the land corridors for connecting India to East Asia, such as through the proposed trans-Asian road and train links. But beyond that, the connectivity is also important for providing access to seaports. The hinterland of Kolkata and Chittagong ports can extend beyond Nepal, Bhutan and the seven sister states of northeast India to large parts of inland China. As China's manufacturers move inward, it is exploring backdoor routes, such

as reviving the old Silk Route and looking for new ones. That is why Bangladesh in particular would like to see the success of the initiative called BCIM-EC, the acronym for Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar economic corridor.

There has been much talk about transit facilities for Indian goods through Bangladesh. The issue has been narrowly focused in terms of transit of goods only and not as part of sub-regional economic integration through which a number of things can happen. For example, supply chains can be developed to use the resources of the Indian north-eastern states by setting up labour-intensive processing industries in Bangladesh -- say, by Indian investors -- and exporting the products worldwide through Chittagong port

or to the rest of India. These may not be as big ideas as India's current Look East policy in terms of priority of the Indian policymakers at the centre; but the potential economic dividends can be high for Bangladesh and the North-eastern states of Bangladesh. The sub-regional integration can also benefit Kolkata -- a city that has not clearly lived up to its full economic potential, mainly because of its remoteness from the major Indian economic hubs.

For the same reasons, the South Asia Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ) comprising Bangladesh, eastern India, Bhutan, and Nepal deserves more attention and should be part of India's Look East policy. The region, compared to SAARC, enjoys geographical proximity, economic

complementarities, and socio-cultural similarities favouring greater economic integration. Previous studies have concluded that power trading within the SAGQ sub-region would confer major benefits on all four countries.

Realising that potential of economic integration will need huge investments in infrastructure. Scarcity of land in Bangladesh and the governance problem of implementing large projects are additional hurdles. The newly created Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) initiated by China has immense developmental promise for infrastructure development in Asia, particularly by bringing together the two Asian giants, China and India, and by providing China an institutional mechanism to deploy its large pool of accumulated reserves.

The main economic logic of India's Look East policy lies in the fact that South Asia generally has been left behind in the race to integrate into global supply chains, which is a particularly dynamic segment of world trade. India has seen an upsurge of its trade with some of the south-east Asian countries after it implemented the free-trade agreement with the ASEAN in 2010. The question remains whether there will be similar enthusiasm in India for fostering comprehensive regional economic integration with its immediate north-eastern neighbours.

The writer is Chairman, South Asia Network of Economic Research Institutes.

(Extracts from the speech delivered at the "Kolkata Dialogue" of the Look East Economic Summit organised by Indian Chamber of Commerce in Kolkata, January 9, 2015.)

Hype over Mamata Banerjee visit

ZIAUDDIN CHAUDHURY

MAMATA Banerjee came, saw, but did not quite conquer the Bangladeshi heart. But then, the last may not have been her plan. The trip was mainly a political play on her part -- to have a makeover of her not-too-friendly image in Bangladesh, and to assure opponents in her own state that she is not really a friend to the fundamentalist forces in her state that are opposed to the regime in Bangladesh. But most important of all, her purpose was to bridge her own relationship with Bangladesh that was shrouded in some doubts because of her stance on Teesta water sharing, and settlement of land border issues.

The visit was all sweet, warm, and full of bonhomie on both sides, but it yielded precious little because of misplaced reliance by Bangladeshis on a single person who has little control over settling issues between the two sovereign countries. The hype in Bangladesh media was all about the two long-standing thorny issues of water sharing and swapping of enclaves. It was as though the visit of Mamata Banerjee, who was seen as an obfuscating factor in the settlement of the disputes, would cement the agreements between Bangladesh and India; such a simplistic portrayal ignores the fact that Mamata Banerjee represents only a component state of Indian federation. She has as much authority to seal an international deal with Bangladesh as, say, the Governor of California signing a nuclear agreement on behalf of USA with India. Many of our people including our media (with some notable exceptions) treated the visit with such significance that gave people a false impression that the Chief Minister of West Bengal held the key to settling of our bi-national problems in her hands. But the shrewd and seasoned politician that she is, Mamata dealt with the topics adroitly, neither denying the problems nor accepting

the burden to resolve them herself.

The visit was a tour of goodwill at heart; Mamata knows that solving bilateral issues between the two countries is beyond her. Yet she is fully aware that an agreement on water sharing and land border between the two countries requires her state's cooperation and support. She played her role negatively on these issues with the previous government of India for political goals. But now she does not want to play the same role with the new government, and hence this attempt at an image makeover.

Unfortunately, the image makeover trip had one serious flaw. If the makeover was to revise her image in Bangladesh on the two central issues of Teesta and enclaves, the composition of her delegation did not give any indication of her concerns over these. Instead of a delegation of experts on the two subjects, she loaded it with cultural and business personalities who have little to do with the bilateral problems that affect the two countries. Indeed West Bengal as a state cannot sign treaties with another sovereign country; but if the intent of the Chief Minister was to show her change in mind over Teesta waters, least she could have done is to bring some experts from her state and send them to trip to the areas watered by the river. The visit therefore yielded results that any visit of goodwill would; mutual expressions of friendship, love, and more cultural exchanges.

An abiding misconception in Bangladesh is confusion of India as a country with West Bengal, one of twenty-nine states and territories of that country. In some sense this is a reality, because nearly three fourths of our land borders are shared with West Bengal; and much of our traffic and trade with India takes place with that state. To many people, West Bengal represents India, and the government there represents Indian government. In a country with no states and a unitary government, sometimes it is hard for an average

person in Bangladesh to think what West Bengal as a state can and cannot do internationally. For example, West Bengal cannot unilaterally enter into a cultural or trade agreement with Bangladesh however much the Bengalis on two sides of the border want without the involvement of the Indian government in framing and approving such agreement. The same way water sharing agreement or transfer of territories between the two countries cannot happen without the Indian government's involvement and initiative.

Fortunately, on the current issues between Bangladesh and India, much work has already been done. An agreement on Teesta did not finally happen last year because of

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West Bengal's reluctance. The transfer of border enclaves between the two countries is pending an approval from the Indian legislature. Mamata Banerjee herself may not have the signing authority of the agreements, but her support would be a key element in their final implementation. The West Bengal Chief Minister could not have pleased our hyped up expectations about these in her last visit, but she did try to cheer up our people by vocalising her support. But most importantly she tried to put up a friendly face and I think she succeeded in that.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Chess tournament

While all Bangladeshi eyes, and mine also were focused on cricket, 134 chess players did not let the hartals deter them from playing in the Sheikh Moni Memorial International Rated Tournament in the new more spacious BCF hall. Predictably, grandmaster Ziaur Rahman won the event though facing a strong challenge in one round from a very respectable blind player. Women's GM Rani Hamid in her seventies still sharp and consistent registered a strong performance. I, the lone American in the event, was relieved to survive against my 9-year old future chess star opponent in one round. The youngest

competitor was a boy aged 5 and a younger than teenage girl also participated.

Three Nepali players fared quite well in the final rankings, and a couple of Indian

players participated. This was a well-organised tournament.

Chess is a sport requiring neither size nor wealth, but only brain power. Hopefully, in Bangladesh, chess will receive due sponsorship and investment in order to nurture the budding talent so that Bangladesh can become a chess powerhouse.

Scott Elliott

On e-mail

"Few points to observe" and some relevant facts

I have gone through the letter "Few points to observe" by Nur Jahan published in your daily on February 13, 2015. Here she omitted some facts which should have been brought out. We all know that a certain person filed a case in the High Court against the caretaker government system. The High Court delivered a verdict which abolished the caretaker system, but at the same time it suggested that the parliamentary election may be held under a CTG once or twice more. So, it is not true that Awami League abolished the CTG. Rather, before the amendment of this bill, they called BNP repeatedly to discuss the matter but BNP didn't respond.

We need a strong Election Commission more than CTG.

Iqbal Hossain

Shankar, Dhaka