

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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DHAKA WEDNESDAY APRIL 8, 2015

Greater transportation integration

Bangladesh-India treaty being modified

THE bilateral trade agreement that has existed between Bangladesh and India since March 28, 1972 is being modified so that Bangladesh can use Indian road, rail and waterways for transporting goods to Nepal and Bhutan; and India can send goods to Myanmar through Bangladesh. This also means Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar may take advantage of transporting goods over the territories of these two nations. Given the length of the term period, it is hoped that the movement of goods over land will be greatly facilitated and commerce will receive a significant boost in the region.

The real work will begin when member countries iron out terms both bilaterally and multilaterally, i.e. the fixation of road tariffs for foreign trucks travelling over Bangladesh territory using the specified Indian land corridor and vice-versa. Although the agreement has been in force for nearly three and a half decades (since 1972), bilateral trade between Bangladesh and India is skewed negatively towards the latter. It is estimated that import by Bangladesh over formal channels is about US\$5 billion and another \$5 billion is transacted through the informal sector. It is hoped that the revised deal would allow easier access for Bangladeshi products to enter the Indian market and beyond to somewhat redress this trade imbalance. Additionally, allowing foreign goods-laden trucks to use specific routes as detailed in the agreement should bring in significant revenue earnings for the national exchequer.

Chittagong under water, again

Voters want an end to water-logging

CHITTAGONG city, our second most important city, was practically flooded again after only an hour and a half of downpour on Monday. Pictures of people wading through knee-deep water are evidence of what Chittagong's residents face every time there are rains. This is a problem that has plagued this beautiful port city for years on end, despite the certainty of the rains that will keep coming for several months of the year.

This time the people of Chittagong are truly fed up and have slated water-logging as a major electoral issue in the upcoming Chittagong City Corporation elections. They are particularly indignant because the outgoing mayor had actually won the last mayoral elections against a formidable opponent because of his promise to voters that he would solve the water-logging problem. He even initiated a project to dig a three kilometre canal with an estimated TK 289 crore, an endeavour that is yet to be implemented.

Thus the outgoing mayor, who is contesting for the position again, will have a tough time winning over his disappointed voters because of his failure to solve a problem as basic as this.

Chittagong City Corporation has added that just digging canals and drains will not prevent the flooding of the port city. Unplanned urbanisation and the abandonment of the Chittagong Drainage Master plan the CCC says, are the root causes of the problem.

Chittagong is an important hub for trade and commerce as well as for the tourism industry. We hope that the next mayor will live up to the voters' expectations of a flood-free, functional city.

COMMENTS

"From office to court, then finally home" (April 6, 2015)

Zman7

So she has finally surrendered before the court and hence proved that no one is above the law.

"Mintoo challenges nomination cancellation" (April 6, 2015)

Zubair Ahmed

He is the most learned and experienced one of all the mayoral candidates but EC cancelled his nomination because he is a major threat for Awami League!

"Show cause notice to Khokon, Saifuddin" (April 5, 2015)

Hanif Repon

It's just the beginning, our politicians never care about laws!

"Who got what from Iran nuke deal" (April 4, 2015)

Snr Citizen

At least they sat together and thrashed out a deal that clearly puts Iran, a supposed threat to the west, into a monitoring regime of IAEA. It has practically put a brake to Iran's nuclear activity. Israel always is ready to spoil any progressive journey. Iran can only benefit from the lifting of trade sanctions. So, it is a deal of the West. Israel is behaving like a cry baby without any reason. Let this be an example for many other world issues where there are unnecessary conflicts to sell weapons, and make many other gains!

Bangladesh's Intractable Political Woes

M. ADIL KHAN

IN his book *The Art of Positive Leadership: Becoming a Person Worth Following*, leadership expert Retired Air Force General John E. Michel states that Caesar was able to triumph over Pompey with his "sustained commitment, decisiveness, courage to act, strong sense of fairness and discipline, trust and organisational strength through promotion of leadership by merit." These are the leadership qualities that helped Caesar triumph over a more cunning and militarily stronger Pompey especially at a time when his own soldiers were deserting him.

Bangladesh's two dominant leaders – Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia – do reveal some but not all of the qualities that Michel lists as key to Caesar's success.

For example, by shrewdly exploiting Khaleda Zia's several organisational weaknesses and leadership deficits, Sheikh Hasina has successfully scuttled the challenges that the opposition leader had thrown her way. In the process, she has somewhat subdued her rival but this hardly makes the PM a Caesar. Khaleda Zia is down but not out, not yet.

At the same time Khaleda is no Caesar either. During the last three months or so, the opposition leader has been waging a movement that had given the PM severe headaches. However, Zia's lack of vision in maintaining sanity and discipline in the movement has taken away much of its shine. Sheikh Hasina has thus been given

the somewhat justifiable opportunity to brand the movement that has caused over a hundred deaths and immense destruction of properties, disruption to transport and communication as a 'terrorist' movement. Moreover, due to BNP's alliance with Jamaat-e-Islam, the ruling party has been able to label the opposition as 'fundamentalist.'

True but the greater truth is that there is nothing 'terrorist' or 'fundamentalist' about the core issue that the opposition movement has been agitating for – the issue of democratic legitimacy of Hasina's government. Therefore, no matter how much the PM tries to duck it, her failure to come to terms with and not settle the issue of the formation of a legitimate democratic government through an inclusive and credible election will continue to haunt her. Most importantly, it will keep on piling mass discontent against her.

For now the honourable Prime Minister may have successfully muted her opponent but she would also do well to know that suppression is not victory.

Also the fact that her current regime lacks democratic legitimacy, and that it confers democratic rights only selectively, makes her a poor custodian of democracy. Moreover, under her rule, incarceration, disappearances and murder of political opponents have become daily occurrences.

In short, people are caught in the middle in this clash between Twiddle Dee and Twiddle Dum – rancorous leadership has become Bangladesh's Achilles heels. With a few exceptions, most of

Bangladesh's leaders – both past and present – had been/are more self-seeking than self-sacrificing, moronic than meritorious, divisive than inclusive, partisan than patriotic and confrontational than conciliatory.

What the country needs is a new generation of leaders that are young, energetic and original and are visionary and truly patriotic and most importantly, without opportunistic ties and contentious baggage.

As for the present, it is difficult to predict how the situation will shape up in the coming days. The good news is that several well-wishers of Bangladesh, especially the European Union (EU), are trying to get the two sides to talk to each other to come to a solution. EU representatives have already met Khaleda Zia and have apparently counselled her to adopt peaceful means to protest and negotiate with the government.

Given the vortex of mutual antagonism that exists between the two leaders, it may be appropriate to recall an excerpt from the *Babar Nama*, the autobiography of Babar, the founder of the great Mughal Empire in India. The pioneering Mughal gave this invaluable advice to his son, Humayun, in his deathbed: "My son, if you wish to rule India long and effectively, reconcile with and not antagonize your defeated enemy."

All the successive Mughal kings followed this advice, in letter and spirit, and ruled India inclusively and thus, successfully for several centuries, except Aurangzeb. We all know what happened then – the Mughals disappeared from the map of India.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Why Europe Backs Obama on Iran

There has long been a tactical difference between US and European policies toward Iran's nuclear program. At times, the US seemingly sought to eradicate any knowledge of nuclear technology from a country of which it is deeply suspicious, whereas the European approach was to seek reliable assurances that Iran would never develop a nuclear weapon.

WORLD AFFAIRS



CARL BILDT

Obama's administration, in the wake of the framework nuclear agreement with Iran. And yet the framework deal has been almost universally welcomed in Europe. What accounts for this disconnect within the West over a key regional and global threat?

Several factors are at work. One, certainly, is that Europe – or, more precisely, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France – has been engaged in the talks with Iran for more than a decade. Even as former President George W. Bush branded Iran a part of an "axis of evil," the key European Union members insisted that diplomacy was better than war.

And, step by step, the European approach has been vindicated. Critical to that outcome, of course, was the US intelligence community's reports that all the evidence pointed to Iran having long ago – in 2003 – abandoned concrete plans to develop a nuclear weapon.

It is easy to see why the Iranians would have done so. So long as Saddam Hussein, who had launched a brutal eight-year war against Iran in the 1980s, and whom influential Westerners openly accused of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, remained in power, the Iranian government's plan to develop nuclear weapons followed a certain realist logic. Once the US military ousted Saddam's regime in 2003, Iran's most acute

security threat vanished.

Moreover, there has long been a tactical difference between US and European policies toward Iran's nuclear program. At times, the US seemingly sought to eradicate any knowledge of nuclear technology from a country of which it is deeply suspicious, whereas the European approach was to seek reliable assurances that Iran would never develop a nuclear weapon. At the end of the day, the US recognised that any realistic policy needed European support, while Europeans saw preventing a rush to war by the US or Israel as a central policy objective.

It should also be said that Europeans have never been overly impressed with America's hardline approach toward that other charter member of the axis of evil, North Korea, and its nuclear ambitions. Refusing to negotiate with the North Korean regime, and imposing the most stringent sanctions on it, has not stopped it from either acquiring nuclear weapons or accelerating its development of both nuclear and missile technologies.

Among the significant issues that need to be sorted out before the end-of-June deadline for reaching a final deal with Iran is to agree on the details of the gradual suspension, and eventual repeal, of economic and diplomatic sanctions against the country. While this will be the subject of a fierce political battle in the US, it is likely that the European Union will be far more willing to move ahead.

Indeed, Europe has sound reasons to lift the restrictions on Iranian oil exports. Additional supplies of oil to global markets will keep prices down or depress them further. Apart from the economic gain for Europe's economies, low oil prices yield important strategic benefits – particularly with respect to constraining Russian President Vladimir Putin's revisionist ambitions in Ukraine and elsewhere.

Needless to say, the US and Europe should stick to a common approach on the sanctions issue. But were a more militant policy approach by the Republican-controlled US Congress to prevail, America might well find that it loses the ally that makes the key difference for the sanctions' success. Indeed, on this issue, the US might rapidly find itself isolated from all other global actors.

Europe is certainly not naive about the nature of the Iranian regime. France, with its historically strong convictions on issues concerning nuclear proliferation, has taken a particularly firm stance during the talks. But Europe is also acutely aware of the consequences of the rapid increase in violent conflict and suffering in its immediate neighbourhood; indeed, Europeans see those consequences daily in the flood of refugees trying to reach its shores. Another war in the Middle East is clearly not in its interest.

Finally, Israel is a key factor underlying the differences between the US and Europe when it comes to Iran. Though Netanyahu's shrill words still have an attentive audience in the US, most of Europe regards his position as being only a little short of ridiculous.

Thus, it is nearly certain that, assuming a final agreement with Iran is reached in June, Europe's backing for it will be unanimous – or close to it – and that it will be eager to support Obama in his battle with opponents of the deal at home. The framework agreement has vindicated Europe's approach to resolving the nuclear dispute. The West has every reason to maintain that approach in the months ahead.

The writer was Sweden's foreign minister from 2006 to October 2014, and was Prime Minister from 1991 to 1994, when he negotiated Sweden's EU accession. He is a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Europe.

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(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Defaming our country abroad

I have come across a news report which states that a Bangladeshi trainee diplomat was apprehended while trying to shoplift in The Hague. He was trying to steal a mobile phone from a shop and was caught red-handed. It puts our country to shame. Further, the thief also alleged that many of his colleagues also stole things from shops, but never got caught. These people need to be dismissed from service. We hope that the minister in charge of the foreign ministry will ensure their punishment.

Ashamed Bangladeshi
On e-mail

World Health Worker Week

World Health Worker Week 2015 is being observed throughout the world from April 5 to 11. World Health Worker Week is an opportunity to mobilise communities, partners and policy makers in support of health workers. Health workers operate the main health system particularly in the rural areas.

According to the World Health Organization, at least 83 countries lack sufficient health workforces to provide essential health services to their populations. It is estimated that globally at least 7.2 million doctors, nurses and midwives are currently needed. In fact, the farming communities of the world need a sound health system to work effectively to attain food and nutritional security for themselves as well as for the entire global population. So, we would request the governments to increase budgetary allocation for training and development of the health workers and to strengthen the health service pro-



viding system in every nook and cranny of the country.
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