

LBA on course

Ratification and implementation eagerly awaited

WE are happy to note that the Indian cabinet has cleared the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) Bill on Monday including Assam along with West Bengal, Tripura and Meghalaya as per the original accord. The bill seeks to operationalise the LBA between Bangladesh and India by resolving the decades-old disputes over un-demarcated border, transfer of adversely possessed land and exchange of enclaves located along the common border of both the nations.

Earlier the BJP seemed inclined to exclude Assam from the LBA Bill due to stiff opposition from its Assam wing in view of the upcoming Assam Assembly Polls. This politically motivated decision triggered protest both in India and Bangladesh, albeit in varying degrees. Thanks to Indian Congress and Assam Chief Minister Gogoi who intervened to get the accord on track. We are relieved.

Now the bill awaits approval by Lok Sabha after its passage through Rajya Sabha yesterday. It is over four decades that the LBA has remained unimplemented despite Bangladesh having ratified it in 1974. This one major obstacle in the way of radically improving Bangladesh-India relations is now being put behind. On its passage through both the houses of the Indian Parliament we expect its expeditious implementation on the ground. A settled border will enable both the countries to manage their common borders more effectively and peacefully and boost growth through increased connectivity and cooperation.

Misuse of public spaces rampant

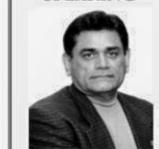
Parks are the first casualty

A city the size of Dhaka should ideally have 92 parks. In reality it has 54 and those too are under constant threat of encroachment by both public and private sectors. The need for open spaces for recreational purposes is mandatory for any urban centre. Yet RAJUK, the city authority which is entrusted to ensure greenery for residents has been one of the biggest flouters of environmental rules and regulations. According to urban specialists, an open space of four acres is needed for every 10,000 residents but in reality, all one sees is concrete jungle.

Karwan Bazaar, which is one of the largest wholesale and retail markets in the city, is a glaring example of mis-prioritisation. Less than a decade ago the place featured a children's park but the city corporation handed it over to traders. That commercial greed got the better of an essential civic interest couldn't be highlighted more. With greenery being systematically wiped out of the city's landscape, we are closing the door on healthy development of children and courting invasion of multifarious diseases, including cardiovascular ailments and diabetes even among non-adults. When we are informed by RAJUK that it is taking steps to protect existing parks from further grabbing, we do not feel particularly reassured. Actions are needed not words to undo the wrongs of the past so that the city's estimated 16million residents can breathe some fresh air for a change.

CAN THE MAYORS DELIVER?

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN nlc, psc (Retd)

WE have two new mayors of Dhaka following an election after a gap of 13 years. The long gap reveals the level of commitment of our leaders to the concept of local government.

Perhaps politics was behind the DCC as a whole, going without the elected head for such a long time, and perhaps it was politics too, that pushed the elections to be held so abruptly.

But politics or not, the question that occurs automatically, after the Dhakabashis were made to lump an engineered election is, what now. The 'combined show' in the three city corporations have marred the victory of some of the candidates who would have won even without the joint efforts of the EC, the administration and the police.

But be that as it may, we have a bagful of promises and commitments made by the mayors which they have neither the authority nor the capacity to fulfill under the present arrangement.

Dhaka city has come a long way since 1864 when the municipal government of Dhaka was established. The town was then a small urban conurbation with an area of approximately 20.72 square kilometres, running south to north and with a population of about 52,000. The Dhaka Municipality was entrusted to provide civic services which included maintenance of roads, conservancy, health services and education, and for

which it was authorised to levy rates and taxes and it received government grants occasionally.

Dhaka is the focus now, being the capital of an independent country, and where everything has gravitated. Since the time it became a municipality and now as a city corporation, the Corporations' responsibilities have changed and the list has grown much longer. One is not sure how the municipality used to function then. However, as any resident of Dhaka would say, its performance could be much better. But if it has not delivered then the fault is not entirely the Corporations'.

Before now, we have had two elected mayors since 1991 whose tenure had straddled the regimes of the AL and BNP. Late Mayor Hanif was elected during the term of the BNP and no one better than he could have recounted the great adversity a mayor not belonging to the party in power faces. Even after the AL came to power in 1996, the mayor's task did not become any easier. Sadeque Hossain Khoka is alive to give his views but his experience under the BNP tenure was not much different either than Hanif's under AL, except for the fact that Sadeque was given a ministerial rank.

The mayors have very little authority to deliver on the thirteen tasks that the City Corporation Act 2009, as amended in 2011, stipulates. Unless devolution of authority and, more importantly, the bureaucratic tangle is removed, the local government institutions, particularly, the city corporations, will remain basically a garbage clearing organisation. Even that is fraught with danger because the dumping grounds belong to RAJUK on which the Corporations' writ does not run.

Unfortunately, the local government institutions have been given the short shrift and there is an inherent propensity both of the bureaucrats and politicians against strengthening local government institutions. The idea of making city corporations more effective by setting up city governments has been floated by some quarters. Although the idea deserves consideration, it appears

It is a wobbly situation for mayors if they have to depend on 'political clout' or 'prime ministerial backing' because both could be transient.

that the government is sensitive to the word 'government' fearing that a parallel entity would emerge if the idea were to be implemented. Clearly, we are mixing up the terms city 'governance' and city 'government'. While city government may not be a bad idea, what we are interested in at this time is good governance of the city where the basic service delivery process can run without

impediments. And that is certainly not possible in a situation where 18 ministries and 56 government departments carry out development activities in the city area without a lead coordinating authority.

Outlandish promises have been made by the mayoral aspirants without realising their limits. And it is their so called political clout that they are depending on to deliver. "I will try to get those done using my political influence," said one elected mayor regarding his promises, while another said that he would try to, "coordinate with other organisations with prime minister's backing." The reality is that the mayoral pledges are not owned by the party that backed them, and the party may not feel obligated to fulfil those.

It is a wobbly situation for mayors if they have to depend on 'political clout' or 'prime ministerial backing' because both could be transient. What happens when a situation develops that sees the end of both?

Our local government institutions need strengthening, particularly the city corporations and even more the two city corporations of the country's capital. And politics should not come in the way of things that have to do with the safety and wellbeing of nearly fifteen million people. Give the mayors adequate powers to ensure that they become centre of all development activities of the capital. It is the system and not political clout or the prime minister's backing that they should have to depend on.

The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Britain heading for a HUNG PARLIAMENT AGAIN

MAHMOOD HASAN

BRITAIN goes to polls on May 7, 2015 to elect its 56th Parliament - new House of Commons. More than 3,900 candidates are in the fray, seeking votes from 45 million voters. Though the 55th Parliament was dissolved on March 30, 2015, the government of Prime Minister David Cameron will continue in office till the new House meets on May 18, 2015 and a new Leader of the House is elected. Leaders of political parties are currently busy with hectic election campaigning.

Though Britain has many parties, it has a bipolar political system and the contest is essentially between the two major parties -- Conservatives and Labour. The Labour Party is currently led by Edward "Ed" Miliband, former Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. As in the past, the campaign has brought forth several issues, which are of interest to the voters. Party leaders have released their manifestoes and took part in television debates to woo voters.

Britain's economy has done better than most EU economies. During 2014 the growth rate was 2.8 percent. Public sector deficit forecast for 2014-15 is £90.2 billion. Borrowing has become essential to fund public services. Both the Conservatives and Labour have promised to eliminate the deficit by the end of the 56th Parliament. Unemployment rate has come down to 5.7 percent (2014). Here too both have pledged to create new jobs. Inflation is down to 0.3 percent (Jan 2015) and wages have been rising faster (1.4 percent weekly average) than inflation. Both the parties have promised not to raise tax, but their approach is different on how to implement the existing tax regime.

Cameron, while campaigning on the economy, complained that he inherited a "disaster" from Gordon Brown in 2010. He claimed that the economy was doing much better now under the coalition government. Miliband retorted saying that the Tories were looking after the wealthy and not the lower income groups. Tories emphasise "economic competence", while the Labour stresses "making my family better off".

When the 2008 recession hit the Western economies, immigration became a hotly debated issue in Britain as unemployment rose significantly. Both the Conservatives and Labour have pledged strict control over EU and other migrants. The issue of refugees and asylum seekers entering Europe has become a big worry for Britain as hundreds of people perished on board at the Mediterranean while crossing illegally from North Africa. The problem of terrorists entering Britain has added a new dimension to the immigration problem. It is simultaneously a moral and security issue.

All the parties have been talking about strict border control and refusing

integrate health and social care services.

Education is also important for the younger voters. Lib Dems could not stop university tuition fees from increasing which prompted protests in 2010. Lib Dems and Labour are now talking of protecting the education budget against rises in inflation, while the Tories are being accused of cutting school funding.

Since the 2008 recession, the debate over EU membership has become an important element in British politics. Britain never joined the "Euro" zone, the common currency which is in deep trouble. It has caused economic collapse in a number of EU member countries, led to mass unemployment and deep recession.

conclude the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Agreement (TTIA) with US, and how to deal with rising China. Neither the Conservative nor the Labour have come out with any specific stand on these issues.

According to the latest opinion polls conducted by BBC and the Economist both the Conservatives and Labour are running neck to neck, with 34% and 33% respectively. What is new is the relegation of Lib Dems from third position to fourth with 8%. The United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) has gone up in popular rating to third position with 14%.

Projections are that the Tories and Labour will get more than 300 seats



From left: Nigel Farage, Ed Miliband, David Cameron, Natalie Bennett and Nick Clegg

benefits to unskilled newcomers. The anti-immigrant issue is contributing to the growing popularity of nationalist sentiments. Britain, along with other Western countries, has contributed to destabilising the Middle East and destroying the livelihood of millions. Many are seeking refuge in Europe from the wars in the Middle East.

Britain's National Health Service (NHS) is an extremely sensitive issue, particularly for the elder citizens. Over the decades with the number of patients increasing, staff shortages and insufficient resources - the debate for reorganising the NHS has become stronger. Both the Conservatives and Labour have promised billions of pounds and pledged to

David Cameron wants a referendum on Britain's renegotiated membership by 2017. He is strongly against joining the Euro zone. Labour wants a guarantee that there would be no further transfer of power from Britain to EU without a referendum. Most Britons favour leaving the EU. The question that remains unclear - will Britain be economically more powerful after leaving the EU?

Among the foreign policy issues facing Britain, the challenges are - the Iran Nuclear Deal, stemming the flood of asylum seekers from North Africa,

They also support the two-nation plan and see that the situation in occupied Palestine does not deteriorate after Benjamin Netanyahu's election victory,

each, but not an outright majority to form the next government. It will be a hung parliament requiring flexibility among the parties in the House to join either of the larger parties to form the next government. It will be the second time in post WWII that a coalition government is formed in Britain.

Interestingly to form a government one or more smaller parties will conveniently bend their ideological moorings and join either the Tories or Labour and get past the 326-seat threshold. Which party/parties will be the king maker and who will occupy No. 10 Downing Street will be clear after May 7.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary

COMMENTS

"EC observers find no irregularities"
(April 5, 2015)

Deep

What a farce! The word 'shame' has been sent to the museum by the current EC.

"Mockery with martyrdom"
(April 5, 2015)

Barkat

Where fake freedom fighters can hold high government jobs, where many fake freedom fighters are enlisted for petty benefits, it's no surprise that the word 'martyr' is used for Quader Molla. And if those who put this plaque are to be punished then those who issued fake freedom fighters certificates must also be punished.

"AL activist shot dead in city"
(May 4, 2015)

Shah M Billah

It is obvious that they will start attacking each other if they do not find a strong, opposition political party.

"She's [Khaleda Zia] like a serpent changing its skin to suit the circumstances, but her poisonous fangs remain intact."
-- Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu

OpeeMonir

Politics has reached a new level of low which is unprecedented; it is really a shame.

VNS

And what about you? Just go through your past activities. Hopefully you yourself feel ashamed.

Occupied FOOTPATHS

Footpaths of many areas of Dhaka are occupied by hawkers. As a result, pedestrians do not get space to walk. They walk on roads instead and bump into motorcycles, rickshaw, CNG-run auto rickshaws and other vehicles. Accidents are bound to happen. It is about time the authorities cleared the footpaths for pedestrians.

Tozo, Bonnie and Burun Niketon, Gulshan



PHOTO: STAR

Negligence about dementia

The number of people with dementia is presumed to enhance dramatically throughout the world. The scenario of our country is also alarming. It is estimated that there are about 4,60,000 people with dementia in Bangladesh in 2015 while the number will rise to 8,34,000 in 2030 and 21,93,000 in 2050 respectively. But it is a matter of sorrow that many people of our country do not consider dementia as a health care problem at all. Though, WHO has given first line priority to dementia treatment and care. We hope that the Bangladesh government would soon recognise the problem, come forward with the required budget to establish specialised hospitals and train physicians so that dementia patients of our country can get proper treatment and care.

Mobarak Ali Gopibagh, Dhaka