

Land Boundary Agreement and Bangladesh-India relations

MAHMOOD HASAN

AFTER dillydallying for 41 years, the Indian Parliament finally passed the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) Bill on May 7, 2015. The Agreement is now ready for signature and ratification. Hopefully when Prime Minister Narendra Modi comes to Dhaka in June the Agreement will be signed. Ratification and implementation will then follow.

Why did it take 41 years for India to come around and dispose this nagging problem? The LBA was signed in May 1974 between Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Bangladesh ratified the Agreement in 1974, but India held back the process, saying it would require a constitutional amendment to implement the Agreement.

Actually the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975 created a tremendous trust deficit between Delhi and Dhaka that took its toll on resolving bilateral problems. Though relations between Dhaka and Delhi were marked by periodic ups and down, Bangladesh had never shown any apathy in resolving these disputes.

Although repeated assurances were made by Delhi, the trust deficit manifested in different forms - court cases against the LBA, opposition from state governments and of course power politics in Delhi. Delhi, it appears, was never serious to resolve the dispute. The so-called 'illegal immigration', 'security' and 'economic' issues seem to have motivated Delhi to conclude the LBA.

It was following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in January 2010 that the Congress-led UPA made a sincere effort to resolve at least two outstanding issues - the LBA and the

Teesta Water Sharing Treaty.

Sherpas (several political aides) of both countries met several times to find a solution to demarcate the border which was an extremely complex job. When Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Dhaka in September 2011, the Protocol related to the LBA was signed. Unfortunately UPA lacked the numerical strength in the Lok Sabha. When it planned to place the Bill in the Parliament, the BJP, then in opposition, stiffly opposed the move.

When the BJP-led NDA swept to power in 2014 with two-third majority, Narendra Modi was faced with the daunting task of passing the LBA Bill in Parliament. BJP leaders in Assam, which is one of the four states involved with the Agreement, opposed the bill stating that it would erode its chances in the state elections in 2016. At that point Delhi tinkered with the idea of leaving out Assam and passing a truncated Bill. The Congress-led Assam government however strongly opposed BJP's move. Congress, the main opposition party in the Lok Sabha, also put its foot down and warned that it will oppose Assam's exclusion. After bickering for weeks, a compromise was achieved between the BJP and Congress and finally the Bill went through unopposed in both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha.

It was interesting what Sushma Swaraj, Indian External Affairs Minister, said while presenting the Bill in the Lok Sabha. She said it would be beneficial for both countries. Though India seems to be ceding land to Bangladesh, it was "notional" as these territories were deep inside Bangladesh.

Swaraj, refuting allegations of India's "big brotherly" attitude towards South Asian neighbours, said, "One is 'big brother' which symbolises arrogance. But there is also the 'elder brother'

who is caring. Ours is a caring attitude. India will maintain the attitude of the 'elder brother' with our neighbours." Bangladesh does not need 'big' or 'elder' brothers - Bangladesh needs 'equal friends' in the neighbourhood.

Swaraj also said the Agreement, apart from demarcating the boundaries, would also help check "illegal immigration". Alas, BJP still thinks that there is migration from Bangladesh to India.

In order to check the movement of people, India has already built 3406 kilometres long fence along the Bangladesh borders. The total border length is 4097 kilometres. A large part of that fence is electrified.

Fencing the border is India's right, but is it really a 'friendly' gesture? Indeed it is a 'big brotherly' attitude. It may help in curbing smuggling and infiltration of Indian insurgents into Bangladesh from North East Indian States. With a stable and fenced border, Bangladesh should rightfully hope that BSF shooting of Bangladeshis on the border will now come to a complete halt.

On the humanitarian side, the people living in the enclaves had no clear identity so far. They enjoyed none of the basic amenities and facilities such as schools, hospitals, electricity, pure drinking water, etc. With the implementation of the LBA, these people will now have a proper nationality and access to state provided benefits.

According to a joint survey (2007), the total number of people living in the enclaves is 51,549, of which 37,334 are in Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh. According to the LBA Protocol, these people will be allowed to stay on and become citizens of the country in which the enclave is located or they can opt to migrate.

What is interesting is that Mamata Banerjee,

Chief Minister of West Bengal, has pressurised Delhi to give her Rs 3,008 crores for the rehabilitation of the people who will migrate to India. Earlier Mamata had openly opposed the LBA bill. But with Delhi's money she came on board to support the Agreement. One wonders how many of these people who have lived in their homes for generations will actually migrate.

Some have described the passage of the Bill in the Indian parliament as a victory of Indian democracy. It is not quite true. If BJP had controlled the Rajya Sabha then the LBA Bill would probably have been passed in a manner unacceptable to Bangladesh. Besides, Indian democracy has taken 41 years to deliver the LBA.

Whatever the background, Bangladesh must give credit to Dr Manmohan Singh for his personal initiative to bring the negotiations to a conclusion during his tenure. Credit now goes to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for passing the Bill.

Looking back, the Congress government did not give any major concession to Bangladesh despite the general belief that Congress favours the Awami League government in Dhaka. The 1977 water sharing agreement of the River Ganges was done by Morarjee Desai of the Janata Dal government. The 1996 Ganges agreement was under the United Front government of Deve Gowda. And now BJP has delivered on the LBA.

The LBA has put the Bangladesh-India relations on a higher trajectory. Now that a major dispute is resolved, Bangladesh will naturally focus on the Teesta Treaty. There are other issues and problems, as is normal between neighbouring countries. But with a 'friendly' attitude such problems can be resolved peacefully and quickly.

The writer is a former Ambassador and Secretary.

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LETTER FROM JAPAN

Tokyo's policy of pacifism coming under threat

Shinzo Abe much heralded economic policy, dubbed as "Abenomics" by his enthusiastic supporters, had been able to lift the Nikkei to an all-time high in the last one-and-half decades. However, purses of the majority of the Japanese people still remain very tight.

MONZURUL HUQ

NOT all is going well these days with the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Overtly it might seem his boat is sailing fast in tranquil waters. It is true that his much heralded economic policy, dubbed as "Abenomics" by his enthusiastic supporters, had been able to lift the Nikkei to an all-time high in the last one-and-half decades and world-class Japanese enterprises like Toyota Motors were able to announce soaring profit margins reaching a new record high. However, purses of the majority of the Japanese people still remain very tight, as the good health of corporate Japan could benefit only those within that narrow circle. The proponents of Abenomics, happy with the statistical figures showing a glittering Nikkei and an all-smiling Tokyo, have virtually abandoned thinking about the less well-off segments of the society.

Branding this as a big success, Abe and his advisors now feel less beholden by economic issues, and instead are focusing more on their favourite topic of making Japan bigger and stronger. This they probably think is more important, as on the global stage the importance of Japan is waning fast with an emerging China quickly taking over the country virtually in every field. There is thus a need to show the world that Japan remains a formidable power, if no longer an economic one, then at least militarily; and the country is willing to throw away the shackles that once tied her firmly to the superficial idea of achieving the goal of a peaceful world by drifting away from the concept of military might. This was probably the clear message that the Japanese prime minister intended to convey to the world while addressing a joint session of the US congress last week.

The tone of the speech was set earlier at the two-plus-two ministerial-level meeting in Washington where Defence and Foreign Affairs chiefs of the two countries agreed on a revised text of defence guidelines. The revised text, among other clauses, is set to remove the geographic limits imposed on Japan on military matters and pave the way for Tokyo to exercise the right of collective self-defence. The revised guidelines, thus, would allow the Japanese Self-Defence Forces to join the US war efforts in global hot spots like the Middle East or in emerging contingencies like that of the South China Sea. The military agreement announced during Abe's state visit replaces the earlier guidelines focusing exclusively toward the defence of Japan. Japanese military forces, dubiously named the Self-Defence Forces to overcome the restrictions imposed upon by the constitution, would now be able to venture overseas to assist the US in 'war efforts' around the world.

So, it is no wonder that Japan's next door neighbours are cautiously assessing the possible outcomes of this latest Japan-US move and expressing uneasiness over Abe's congressional speech. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman termed the latest US-Japan move as a product of the Cold War era and said that the two countries now have the responsibility to prevent the alliance from undermining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

While China is more worried about the military aspect of the Japan-US alliance, South Korea is more focussed on how the Japanese leader would address historical issues. And they too were disappointed. In his speech in Washington, Abe acknowledged Japan's war-time misdeeds by saying that the Japanese military had brought suffering



to the people of Asian countries and expressed "deep remorse" for the suffering caused by his nation's wartime actions, but he offered no apology. The calculative omission of the word 'apology' from the speech had upset many in South Korea, and Dong-A Ilbo, a leading national daily of the country, did not hesitate to term the speech as a '40-minute deception'.

However, the Japanese delegation returned home in a triumphant mood as if something very significant with far-reaching consequences had been achieved. Meanwhile, the Japanese prime minister is now targeting the Japanese constitution to further cement this latest 'achievement'. Abe has already announced that his ruling party will now focus on ensuring a massive victory in next year's upper house elections that would guarantee a two-third

majority of the ruling coalition in the upper chamber. The ruling block is now enjoying a two-third majority in the lower house and need the same in the upper house as well for any attempts to revise the constitution to be successful. However, his opponents, who see a serious threat in the strengthening of the Japan-US security alliance that might eventually take Japan to war, are not sitting idle either.

A big rally was held at Yokohama on May 3, which in Japan is observed as the constitution day, where speakers warned the gathering crowd of a grave situation that might drag Japan not only to war footing, but also to real war fought in distant places. Speaking at the rally, Kenzaburo Oe, Nobel prize-winning Japanese author, expressed concern that under Abe, Japan is marching toward a third world war, and said

that Abe's policies of collective self-defence and proactive pacifism are mere self-justification for getting involved in a future war. Speakers at the gathering vowed to resist the attempt of revising the peace clauses of the Japanese constitution.

Thus, with the political situation in Japan gradually getting heated-up, the focus of attention is shifting quickly to how the proponents of constitutional amendment and their opponents are going to handle the issue from here on. As a result, the next upper house election, set for the summer of 2016, is destined to turn into a fierce battleground where the outcome most probably will decide the fate of Japan's pacifist policy centred on Article 9 of the constitution.

The writer is a Tokyo based Bangladeshi journalist. He also teaches at Japanese universities.

QUOTABLE Quote

"Accept who you are. Unless you're a serial killer."

Ellen DeGeneres

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Mediocre
- "Downton Abbey" valet
- Shortly, in poems
- "Shoo!"
- Dispatched
- Kenya neighbor
- Bigwig
- Second place winner
- Ranch group
- Much of N. Amer.
- Unbilled role
- Less loony
- "Aladdin" monkey
- Current unit
- Summon
- Ballpark cry
- Like this answer
- Khar-toum's river
- Veep before Biden
- Finished
- Ocean's motions
- Rating unit

DOWN

- Robe part
- "Dedicated to the--love"
- Musical number
- When raids start, in movies
- Started
- Visibly stunned
- Great weight
- Purpose
- Squid's home
- Allen's comedy partner
- Continental coin
- Celtic letter
- Manual reader
- Doa KP Chore
- Racket
- Forbidden
- Flightless birds
- Obscene material
- Tacks on
- Pretentious
- Steak-house order
- Alleviates
- Uprising
- Radius partner
- Equal
- Play division
- Letter before psi
- Spectrum color

Yesterday's answer

C	H	I	P		P	A	R	T		
L	O	N	E	R		R	O	D	E	O
I	R	A	T	E		A	L	V	I	N
M	D	S		T	A	G	L	I	N	E
B	E	E	L	I	N	E		S	I	D
S	C	A	N	T		P	E	N		
				C	A	I	R	O		
L	O	Y		G	O	O	F	S		
F	A	N		H	E	M	L	I	N	E
O	U	T	L	I	N	E		G	O	V
O	R	I	O	N		O	Z	A	W	A
L	I	M	I	T		S	I	R	E	N
S	E	E	N			P	O	D	S	

CRYPTOQUOTE 3-31

NZ YSBL SCCZBLCBL ORAN PIPDA ALLO ZCFD P ARMLHSZH VSCJ ZX BUSBPCLHD. -- ZRSJP

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THERE IS FAR TOO MUCH LAW FOR THOSE WHO CAN AFFORD IT AND FAR TOO LITTLE FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT. -- DEREK BOK

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

SEE IF YOU CAN HELP THOSE GUYS INSTALL THAT EXHAUST VENT

WAS SOMEONE COMPLAINING ABOUT THE COOKING ODORS?

NO, SARGE WANTED IT PIPED INTO HIS OFFICE

HENRY by Don Trachte

CLEFF MUSIC SCHOOL

A XYDLBAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.