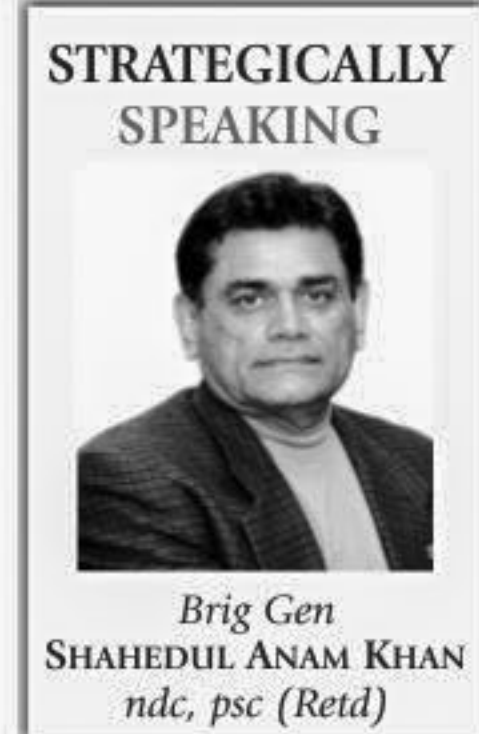


# Redressing an aberration



**A**T long last the last impediment to the implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement and the related Protocols has been removed. And one hopes that an irritant

between the two countries will soon disappear with the complete implementation of the agreement. The only remorse is that we did not get to see the kind of reaction cutting across party line in this country as we saw in India. On the other hand there was the usual telling off between the AL and the BNP. It was foolish of anyone to have expected otherwise.

The Indo-Bangladesh border is the most convoluted border between any two countries in the world. Not only was it whimsically drawn, the person responsible to fix the borders seldom, if ever, ventured out of the cool of his room to see what damage his pencil marks, sometimes drawn under pressure, on the map of undivided India was going to wreak in the conduct of relationship between the newly born independent countries of the sub-continent.

Mr. Radcliffe, who could not have been very popular among the Muslims or the Sikhs given the difficult nature of the boundary issues thus created, was advised in 1947 to stay away from either of the countries after partition. A 2011 article in The Economist, addressing the enclaves issues in the two countries, entitled The land that maps forgot, refers to a 2004 paper titled 'An historical and documentary study of the Cooch Behar enclaves of India and Bangladesh', in which Mr. Whyte, in reference to the intractability of the boundary issues at partition, asks whether India is still "waiting for the Eskimo". When in 1947 Mr. Feroz Khan Noon suggested that Sir Cyril Radcliffe should not visit Lahore for he was sure to be misunderstood either by the Muslims or the Sikhs, The

Statesman wrote: "On this line of argument, he [Sir Cyril] would do better to remain in London, or better still, take up residence in Alaska. Perhaps however there would be no objection to his surveying the boundaries of the Punjab from the air if piloted by an Eskimo." The reference to the Eskimo being made because the chance of an Eskimo piloting an airplane seventy years ago was as remote as the possibility of the con-founded border issues between India and Pakistan being resolved.

Thankfully, the intractable problem that Bangladesh inherited after March 26 1971 is on the way to being resolved finally though not quite done and dusted. That being so, one may take the liberty of indulging in retrospection on the issue of the enclaves, whose origin is mixed in both fables and history.

There are not only 162 enclaves measuring a total of 24,268 acres as per the agreed list signed in April 1997 at the level of Director General Land Record & Survey, Bangladesh and DLRS, India, there are 6,500 acres of land in adverse possession. And the enclaves also include about two dozen counter-enclaves (enclaves within enclaves), as well as the world's only counter-counter enclave -- a patch of Bangladesh that is surrounded by Indian territory...itself surrounded by Bangladeshi territory like in the sketch.

To say that the enclaves are an aberration would perhaps be an understatement, given the history of their origin and the indescribable misery that the people of the enclaves have suffered in the last sixty eight years. And the worst of the sufferings was not so much physical but psychological caused by having to live in a virtual state of statelessness.

But need they have gone through this for so long? My answer is no. And here are my reasons.

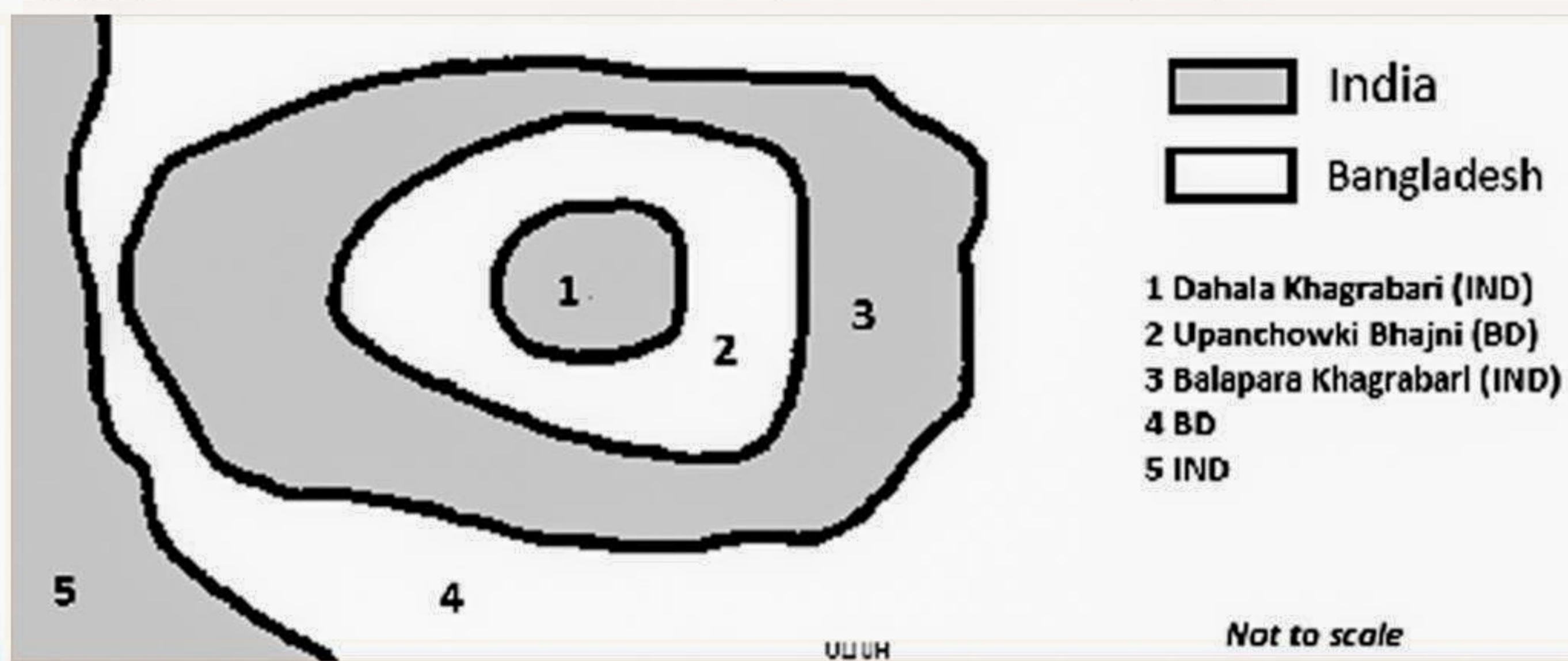
Swapping of enclaves was agreed in 1958 through the Noon-Nehru Agreement of September 10, 1958 which inter alia addressed the problem of Berubari as well of the enclaves and lands in adverse possession. Legal encumbrances prevented its implementation till the 9th Amendment to the Indian Constitution was made in 1960. The transfer of the enclaves between East Pakistan and Cooch Behar was scheduled for March 27, 1971. And we all know why that could not happen.

Therefore, Bangladesh, as an inheritor of all territories that constituted erstwhile East Pakistan and all such territory that deemed to have belonged to East Pakistan as a result of any bilateral treaties before March 26, 1971, had both ipso jure and ipso facto inherited the lands that were to come to it through such compacts which included the Noon-Nehru Agreement whose

implementation was delayed by a force majeure. Therefore, even if a new agreement, as was the Indira-Mujib Agreement of 1974, was necessary in this regard, one wonders whether there was at all the need for foot-dragging for 41 years on the excuse of legal compulsions.

Here is a remark of a distinguished Indian diplomat in a recent article in the Hindustan Times following the passage of the LBA Bill in the Indian Parliament which reflects the Indian establishment's views. He says, "The 1974 Indira-Mujib accord was approved shortly by the Bangladesh parliament. India did not do so as the acquisition or surrender of any territory required precise determination of the territory involved." Some scholars argue that according to the "1966 Indian Supreme Court (Justice Gajendragadkar) judgement in the case Ram Kishore vs Union that the Constitution (9th Amendment) Act of 1960 was wholly unnecessary because a law reference to Article 3 would have been adequate to implement the Noon-Nehru Agreement of 1958." And the details were in the 9th Amendment. Even otherwise, 41 years has been much too long a time for "the precise determination of the territory involved."

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



## Salahuddin appears in Shillong

Questions need to be answered

**W**E share the general relief at the news that BNP leader Salahuddin Ahmed, who has been missing for the last two months, is alive. With the continued denial of authorities that he had been detained by them the public had begun to fear for his life. The fact that he has now emerged, quite out of the blue in the capital of the north-eastern Indian state of Meghalaya, triggers a number of questions. Precisely how does a leading member of the opposition party and a former state minister simply disappear? Who held him in captivity? How did he end up in a neighbouring state? Given that there have been disappearances of other political figures, with no clue as to their whereabouts even now, Salahuddin's case has brought to the fore the ease with which certain groups can pick up people and make them disappear in total defiance of the existing law.

The typical reaction of the authorities is to deny having anything to do with the disappearance and then claim that they are 'investigating the matter'.

The government is obliged to make a full statement clarifying the circumstances in which Salahuddin was abducted and then presumably set free. The mystery of Salahuddin's case needs to be completely unearthed.

## Free internet access initiative

A beneficial reach out to the poor

**I**T is heartening to note that Facebook has launched its free online browsing platform internet.org in Bangladesh in partnership with a local mobile company. It will allow the subscribers free internet access to some local and international websites through mobile gadgets. This initiative has the potential to reach internet to poor people and enable them to benefit from increased connectivity with the world.

In this age of information, internet can serve as a great equalizer. As a powerful communication tool it brings access to jobs, education, agriculture and health related information that can create a huge difference in general people's life. In under developed countries like Bangladesh lack of easy access to information is a major barrier for development. A research shows that for every 10 people who gain access to the internet, at least one person is lifted out of poverty. Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, believes that the free internet service has the opportunity to uplift more than 10 million people in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh fewer than 10 percent people are connected to the internet. It happens due to the high price of internet and lack of infrastructure to provide the service. The initiative of free internet service will help bridge these gaps and make Bangladesh better connected. This sort of free internet initiative should be replicated by other internet providers in the country. Internet giants like Facebook should create more such opportunities for countries like Bangladesh and the government should facilitate these initiatives.

## Dhaka's Primacy: Rome without Empire?

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

**T**HE mayors of Rajshahi, Sylhet and Gazipur as well as a number of councillors have been dismissed by the government. Newspaper reports also show that a large number of Upazila and other elected representatives involved with the opposition politics are either in prison or on the run. The scenario contrasts with the government's promise to empower the newly elected ruling party-backed mayors of Dhaka and Chittagong, including granting them ministerial status.

The removal of elected mayors and councillors does not bode well for Bangladesh's local governance system. In the absence of a functional elected body in various cities and the grassroots, the ultimate sufferers are the common people deprived of a plethora of services. This also goes against the pledge of the government to strengthen the country's local governance allowing elected representatives to function with greater autonomy.

The experience of city governance of the country shows that in the presence of a strong centre that holds and exercises enormous power over city corporations and other apparatus, an effective local governance system remains a far cry.

Thus, the heart of the problem, be it city governance or overall governance of the country, lies in the country's de facto centralised governance system. Excessive concentration of political and economic powers to a handful of ministries and bureaucratic offices, primarily located in the capital, is making the country a highly centralised state.

This has led to the rise of power and resource gaps between the centre and periphery. The political parties that rule the country, for instance, is highly centralised from decision making process to

formation of party leadership. When it comes to economic concentration of power, the resource gap is mounting between the capital and rest of the country. The development budgets of the Dhaka City Corporations (North and South), for example, are 13 folds larger than that of Chittagong City Corporation, although the latter hosts about one-third population of the former.

The primacy of Dhaka, which is highly associated with centralised governance of the country, is overwhelming. The capital hosts 28 percent of the country's urban population and 25 percent of economic activities employing 35 percent of the total urban labour force.

A primate city generally dominates over other cities literary in all aspects - politics, economy, media, culture and education, inter alia. According to urban economists, unitary governments generally favour the national capital, creating a primate city bias in public services and infrastructure investments, among others. Rent seeking and urban bias by central government bureaucrats result in the centralisation. This favouritism draws in immigrants. However, according to a World Bank study, the degree of urban concentration in Bangladesh is higher than many of its comparators with Dhaka's primacy rate being 32 percent, which is much higher than its optimal (21 percent) level.

What are the costs of urban primacy of Dhaka for the periphery and the country in general? A number of studies show that the nexus between overexpansion of primate cities and economic growth is negative. Economic models suggest that centralisation increases urban concentration. Research also shows that when the primate city is the national capital, it is 25 percent or more, suggesting that resource centralisation goes with political centralisation.

More worryingly, over-concentration of political power, often in the capital, could make states fragile. Nassim Taleb, author of the best-selling title Black Swan argued that prior to its civil war, centrally governed autocrat Syria looked more stable than politically volatile Lebanon. However, Syria was exhibiting only pseudo-stability, its calm facade concealing deep structural vulnerabilities.

In a recent article, Nassim Taleb also identified the lack of political variability as a source of state fragility. Genuinely stable countries experience moderate political changes, continually switching governments and reversing their political orientation.

Finally, excessive urban concentration leads to degradation of the quality of life owing to congestion, contamination of ground water and poor air quality, among others.

The next point to ponder is how to break the urban primacy of Dhaka? Experience suggests that in developing countries, urban concentration increases in the early stages of economic development. Thus, part of the problem is structural. In fact, most developing countries have witnessed the rise of primate cities-Bangkok in Thailand, Jakarta in Indonesia, Manila in the Philippines and Colombo of Sri Lanka are some examples of primate cities. But their concentration varies widely. Nevertheless, there are numerous ways to lessen urban primacy.

Externalities such as congestion or pollution arises from higher population density should be priced (through tax and other measures). This could lead to de-concentration. The lack of pricing or ineffective regulation means that immigration into the capital city is under-priced or subsidised.

Investment in modern intercity transport and communications may prompt urban de-concentration as

manufactures could locate their firms in hinterlands.

Globalisation could also help reduce urban primacy, provided trade and other reforms are carried out. The literature on new economic geography predicts that a country's exposure to trade may encourage hinterland development.

Finally, local political and fiscal autonomy could help in reducing urban primacy. Studies indicate that the key to a successful local political process is local participation in political processes (voting outside the influence of the central government and reasonably unconstrained by national-level party officials) and local determination of revenues and expenditure levels.

That said, history is full of evidences that over-concentration of political and economic power, often in the capital, leads to the fall of many kingdoms, empires and states. Citing the example of Pax Romana, urban economists discourage over concentration of power in capital cities. Rome used its political and military might to suppress potential competitors to its rule and to extract resources from its empire. The result was that the parasitic character of the Roman metropolis was not only responsible for a weakening of the Italian economy, it also played a central role in the collapse of the empire.

The outcome of power concentration is no different in other instances-Pharaonic Egypt and the Ming dynasty in China tightened the reins after, not before, they prospered, but this could not save their collapse. Dhaka seems to be following the same path. Taking lessons from history, the government should act now and show its commitment toward decentralised governance.

The writer is an economist, currently based in China. E-mail: shahid.imon@live.com

## COMMENTS

"How to solve a stinking problem" (May 10, 2015)

Niaz Mohammad

It is never a viable long-term solution. The government should just install adequate number of public or mobile toilets for the people on the go.

Fazle Monir Choudry

This is an innovative move to solve the problem of men using city walls as public toilets.

Romel Alauddin

People didn't get the message; they're only scared to desecrate the Arabic language.

Shahid Alam

We need to be innovative to solve other stinking problems like this.

Syed Najmul Hussain

Appalling! How could they think of resolving an age-old problem by a makeshift dupe test? We need pragmatic, permanent and efficient solution of problems.

Mohammad Rubab Hossain

This will never be solved in this way. At this moment, this secret no longer exists as secret. People already know the actual meaning of it. Also all the city wall users are not Muslim. Only sufficient and neat public toilets are needed to handle this situation.

Manzoor Husain Sarkar

Such a stupid idea; unrealistic an approach and far from solving the problem. The issue is about hygiene and cleanliness, not about morality or spiritual awareness.

Ershad Ahmed

Stop writing on the walls and make adequate public toilets on roads. It's a mockery of religious sentiment.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Tigers' performance during second test with Pakistan

Tamim really looked like he was set to score his second double century during the second innings of BD's second test with Pakistan. But he played an irresponsible shot outside the off-stump to get himself out. Why did he play that shot after he was set and looking so good? Just after he played a brilliant innings and convinced everyone that he had matured as a batsman, he went back to his old self and played the way he used to. Why? Only he can answer that question. Why was Taskin left out and of all people Shahadat brought back? Shahadat has actually lost matches for Bangladesh in the past with his poor performances and his bad luck continued in that



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

match. Mushfiq is known for his poor decision making in the past and this time was no different as he gifted Pakistan the match by opting to bowl first. I have one thing to say: India is coming and it is vital to beat them in order to earn their respect. For this, I hope all our players will bring their A game. Otherwise, we will never earn their respect. Aminur Rahim, New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

### What a farce!

After casting her vote in the city corporation election, our PM said, "It's pleasant to see one can exercise his voting rights in a peaceful atmosphere, free from any interference and fear." Unfortunately, we cannot agree with our PM because the reality was totally different. Through electronic and print media, we have come to learn about the massive anomalies and vote rigging in the polling booths. Journalists were assaulted and voters threatened while the ruling party men stuffed ballot boxes with stamped ballot papers. I wonder if power makes people so blind that they can't see anything. Torikul Islam, Dhaka University