

All pending issues to be solved: Modi

BSS, Dhaka

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said all pending issues between Bangladesh and India would be settled with the same spirit that helped solve the long-awaited Land Boundary Agreement.

The Indian premier expressed the hope when he called on Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid at Bangabhaban in the capital.

During the meeting, Hamid said connectivity between Bangladesh and India would help bring the people of the two countries closer, President's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said after the meeting.

Modi lauded the leadership of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and assured of continued Indian support for the development of Bangladesh.

Hamid expressed gratitude to the government of India, all political parties and its people for their cooperation during the Liberation War.

Hamid informed Modi that he was in Meghalaya of India during the Liberation War and shared his experiences about the way he organised the freedom fighters during the war.

The Indian premier signed the visitor's book kept at the Bangabhaban.

Address by His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi Prime Minister of India

Hosted by
University of Dhaka

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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivering a moving speech at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital yesterday during a programme jointly organised by the Dhaka University and the Indian High Commission.

PHOTO:
PIB, INDIA

HUMAN TRAFFICKING Gen Manas: A man with a dark past

THE BANGKOK POST ONLINE

Whoever writes the script for the movie of his life — which, by the way, someone definitely should do — will have to tone it down a bit and many viewers won't believe that just one man has done what three-star Thai Gen Manas Kongpan has done.

Lt Gen Manas, in the police version, has been trafficking in persons, trafficking children, abducting illegal aliens, ransoming illegal migrants, assaulting some and using mass graves to hide the evidence. There are other charges including the catch-all, "conducting transnational crime".

According to official records, Lt Gen Manas has been well rewarded in military terms for his work. He has shot from colonel to three-star rank. Before that, it appeared he might be colonel-for-life, at least until April 27, 2004.

That was the night of the very strange, coordinated attacks across the South by more than 100 men, many armed only with knives.

As security forces took rapid control of the situation, killing some attackers and sending many fleeing, 32 of the men ran into the Krue Se mosque in Pattani province and claimed they had the right of religious asylum.

Orders from Bangkok were to wait the siege out. But after seven hours, military got tired and sent their top operatives in to kill all 32 at point-blank range.

Modi, hopefully, is no Manmohan

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before would be made on this life and death issue for India's lower riparian neighbour. The ever talkative Mamata Banerjee stunned us all by hardly uttering a word on an issue she knew very well that she, her host, were very anxious to hear about, raising the question as to why? In fact, her silence and body language were more telling: It looked like a deliberate and unambiguous expression of her continued refusal to give our demand a fair consideration.

Our welcome to the Indian PM was practically with no holds barred. The government left no stone unturned. All political parties literally fell head over heels to meet Modi. BNP and Jamaat went public to say how they were never anti-Indian in their policies. The media went all out with full, uncritical and extensive coverage of the Indian prime minister's maiden visit. In fact, this paper itself went much further than it did ever before.

All of this is both due to our emotional nature and an intuitive belief that PM Modi will deliver where others have failed. This belief is based on two things -- the delivery of the LBA and, more crucially and impressively, the manner in which he was able to bring about the crucial constitutional amendment without a single vote of dissent. Given the varied nature of Indian parliament and the extremely divergent and sometimes contradictory regional interests that plague its legislative process, a unanimous vote was nothing short of a miracle made possible by a determined leader committed to giving Bangladesh-India relations a jumpstart.

An added reason for our all-out welcome is his stated policy of "neighbourhood first" which is music to our ears, but a music we have heard before. No Indian prime minister ever said anything other than being very attentive to her neighbours. But unfortunately, "neighbours" usually meant Pakistan and occasionally China, leading this writer to comment sometime back, in utter frustration,

that "India has only two neighbours -- Pakistan and China -- and the rest of us are mere geographic entities...." Extremely suspicious and wary of Pakistan, India, mistakenly, spent most of its energy trying to "mend fences" with it at the cost of the rest of the neighbours. It was, and continues to be, India's fundamental policy flaw. Though successive Indian governments repeated ad nauseam as to how concerned they were about India's small neighbours, very few practical steps were taken in this regard.

All this will be changed by Prime Minister Modi we hope, and we, in Bangladesh, must encourage him to do so, and do so fast. If PM Modi is sincere about his "neighbourhood first" policy and if we can seriously encourage India to shift from its Pakistan "obsession," then Bangladesh will naturally emerge as India's most important neighbour, keeping China aside for the moment. If that happens -- and we don't see why not -- then the sky is the limit for our bilateral cooperation.

It has always been our belief that India's growth is an opportunity for Bangladesh and not a threat as propounded by some within us, frozen in a pathological anti-Indianism. We also believe that given a very well calibrated regional cooperation, Bangladesh-India relations can be exemplary for others. The crucial phrase here is "well calibrated," meaning it must clearly envision, at an early phase, to tilt towards Bangladesh. This temporary "positive discrimination" will ultimately benefit India as our per capita income will grow, along with our buying capacity, which in turn will make Bangladesh a bigger and more attractive market for her goods and services.

Crucial to all this is massive rise in our global trade in general and bilateral trade in particular, for which we need FDI from all over the world, especially from India. The two mega power projects are a good start though its details need to be thoroughly negotiated. And central to rising trade is the development of

infrastructure which lies at the heart of connectivity, for which a significant number of MoUs have been signed by the two countries.

It is given that connectivity without a serious policy guideline of "benefit to Bangladesh" will mainly help India supply its goods into Bangladesh and through Bangladesh to India's northeastern states. It is also contended that India's economy being bigger and stronger and having economies of scale will obviously be poised to benefit quicker and faster. Herein lies the case for "positive discrimination" and the true test of Modi's "neighbourhood first" policy. Will it be a policy to exploit the neighbourhood first or one to help them scale new heights of economic prosperity is the question. We believe that PM Modi's position is the latter.

The truly "game changing" process in Bangladesh-India bilateral relations that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina set in motion during her historic 2010 trip to New Delhi, which triggered a "paradigm shift" in India, now appears to be genuinely responded to. Sheikh Hasina has met every possible demand from India -- from removing all security threats to giving transit and from allowing the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports to the movement of Indian goods through Bangladesh to northeastern states. There is very little left for us to give.

It is now India's time to reciprocate. It is now Narendra Modi's time to reciprocate. The "leap of faith" that Sheikh Hasina took in 2010 without getting much in return should now be returned many times over in another "leap of faith" by her Indian counterpart.

That is our expectation from the new, visionary, pathbreaking, "thinking out of the box" Indian leader who seems to mesmerise people wherever he goes, as he did in his parting speech at the BICC. What a speech -- down to earth, disarmingly simple and yet so full of charm, humour, new thoughts and, of course, new hope!

Hard to get info from ministries

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on and off the record, and keeping them updated. India has been holding separate media briefings exclusively for Indian journalists during VVIP's visits for a long time.

In contrast, Bangladeshi journalists found themselves chasing their country's officials to get information, documents or any sort of briefings.

When the two countries signed 22 agreements, MoUs and protocol deals on Saturday, following official talks between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Modi, the Press Information Bureau (PIB) and Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of India uploaded details of the deals on their websites.

They also uploaded Modi's statement at the joint press briefing between 6:45pm and 7:00pm.

And the Bangladesh foreign ministry? It emailed journalists a list of documents signed, exchanged, adopted and handed over about five hours after the Indians had made the uploads.

In such a situation, the Bangladeshi press had to depend on the MEA and PIB websites for information.

Several foreign ministry officials had even suggested the local media to keep an eye on MEA website to get the documents.

Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar briefed the visiting Indian journalists Saturday around 8:00pm exclusively on the outcome of the official talks and details about the agreements signed.

Bangladesh foreign ministry did not arrange any briefing. Rather, its officials were attending a banquet when Jaishankar was briefing the Indian media.

Jaishankar held another briefing around 5:00pm yesterday.

In case of a major event, like the visit of a VVIP, the Press Information Department (PID) coordinates the media on behalf of Bangladesh government.

The PID asked journalists to contact the Prime Minister's Office for covering the official talks between the prime ministers. The PMO only let a handful of

selected journalists in. The Daily Star was left out.

The foreign ministry and the PMO do not have any official twitter and Facebook page, two vibrant tools for connecting with the rest of the world, whereas the MEA of India is extremely active on both the platforms.

The visits of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee have proved once again how Bangladesh foreign ministry is lagging behind in terms of connecting with the world.

Since the very beginning of their tours, Modi, PMO India, MEA spokesperson and Mamata made tweets one after another and updated their Facebook status several times.

Bangladesh media frequently quoted tweets of Modi and Mamata.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is known as one of the most tweeting politicians in the world with 12.8 million followers, as of June 7, 2015. US President Barack Obama has 60.1 million followers on his twitter account.

Teesta behind her silence

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plane at Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport and talked to journalists there.

She said how delighted she was at the hospitality Bangladesh offered to her and how significant the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) was.

"There is nothing new to say on the LBA. The enclave people got freedom after a long period of sorrows. The historic land boundary pact opened a new horizon for the people of the enclaves," Mamata was quoted as saying.

But the West Bengal CM did not utter a single word on the Teesta. She skipped talking to journalists throughout her Dhaka tour perhaps only to avoid questions on the issue, Kolkata-based journalists believe.

They said Mamata, a key stakeholder in the Teesta deal, agreed to come to Dhaka with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi only on the

assurance that the pact wouldn't be signed and no comments would be made on this.

The Teesta water-sharing agreement was all set to be signed in September 2011 during the then prime minister Manmohan Singh's Dhaka visit. But Mamata's stern opposition put an end to the proceedings.

However, during a visit to Bangladesh in February this year, Mamata assured Hasina of playing "a positive role" in resolving the Teesta issue.

Journalists, who were on Mamata's entourage this time, believe that she had talks with Modi and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the Teesta issue during her stay in Dhaka, but decided not to disclose anything about it to the media.

Citing sources, they said Mamata, during her meeting with Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office in Dhaka,

requested her to visit Kolkata to inaugurate a chair named after Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Kolkata University.

She also told Hasina that the West Bengal government had already allotted land for constructing a museum that too will be named after Bangabandhu.

According to the journalists, Mamata is not likely to say anything about the Teesta issue till the West Bengal assembly elections in 2016.

"She does not want to lose votes in North Bengal," said one of the journalists over the phone. The Indian part of the Teesta flows through the region.

"Bangladesh and India have no negative relations. But we cannot accept any one-sided decision because West Bengal's interest is my top priority and there should not be any deal overlooking the interests of North Bengal," Mamata said.

'No democracy in Bangladesh'

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level have been facing repression and harassment."

"We also told the Indian prime minister that people of the country expect to elect their representatives through a fair election and they want to get their voting right back," the BNP leader said.

Replying to another question, Moyeen said, "We talked to him [Modi] about the democracy of our country as he practices democracy and became the prime minister of India from the grass-roots level."

Claiming that Modi focused on regional development, Moyeen said, "We told him that democracy should be given a strong footing in the region to ensure regional development as sustainable development is not possible without it."

Asked about Modi's response to the current situation of the country's democracy, he said, "It won't be wise to tell anything about it. It's a matter of the Indian government."

Apart from the half-an-hour meeting in the presence of her party colleagues, the BNP chief had a one-to-one meeting with Modi that lasted around 15 minutes at the same venue, Moyeen Khan told reporters.

Wishing anonymity, a top BNP leader said during the close-door meeting the BNP chief assured Modi that the party's

alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami is merely an electoral alliance and that the two parties have nothing in common as far as ideology is concerned.

The leader said Khaleda sought Modi's help for a midterm election through which a government should come to power in a democratic process. He added that she also requested Modi not to worry about Tarique Rahman's links with Jamaat, saying that she would look after the matter.

During the meeting, Khaleda presented the Indian prime minister with a dhoti, the most traditional Indian dress for men, and a sari for his mother.

After Khaleda's meeting with Modi, Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar in a briefing said the BNP chief praised Modi's leadership and she sought his cooperation in establish democracy in this region. "She also sought the Indian premier's assistance to root out terrorism and extremism from this region."

"From our side we did made it clear that we are supportive of democracy and we are opposed to fundamentalism and terrorism," he said.

The BNP delegation included party standing committee members Tariqul Islam and Nazrul Islam Khan, and advisers Reaz Rahman and Sabihuddin Ahmed.

The motorcade of the BNP chief had

to wait a few minutes in Karwan Bazar area as it reached the venue around 10 minutes before the meeting was scheduled.

Before the meeting with the BNP-delegation, Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad met Modi at the same venue at 3:45pm.

Emerging from the meeting, Raushan told reporters that Modi assured her of resolving the Teesta Water Sharing deal.

Asked whether Modi gave any specific timeframe for the Teesta Water Sharing deal, she said, "No. He has told us everything will be resolved gradually."

She also said there was no discussion on the current political situation as they discussed bilateral issues and trade relations between the two countries.

Jatiya Party Presidium members Kazi Firoz Rashid, Ruhul Amin Howlader and Fakhru Imam and opposition Chief Whip Tajul Islam Chowdhury accompanied the opposition leader during the meeting.

Earlier, Modi had held a brief meeting with members of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Workers Party, two partners in the ruling Awami League-led government.

JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu and Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon led the delegation of their respective parties.



A young migrant who was found at sea on a boat shows a drawing of his boat trip at the Taung Pyo temporary refugee camp near the Bangladesh border in the Rakhine state of Myanmar yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP