

FOUNDER/EDITOR
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Indigenous women and girls need protection

Free the administration of prejudice

DESPITE the government's pledge to adopt a zero tolerance for violence against women and children, there has not been significant progress in the ground realities. Indigenous women and girls, particularly, are vulnerable because of prejudice in the administration. These were some of the findings revealed at a recent seminar.

According to Bangladesh Indigenous Women's Network, violence against indigenous women and children increased twofold between 2013 and 2014. This includes rape, abduction and murder. The recent plight of a Garo woman having to go from one police station to another to file her case of being gang-raped is an example of how state agencies show bias in the way they treat victims from these communities. The unresolved case of Kalpana Chakma who was abducted 19 years ago from the CHT region is an indication of how far back this discrimination can be traced to.

Despite various government initiatives to combat violence against women, the lack of coordination among the government's helpline service, victim support centre and one stop crisis centre, makes it challenging for victims to get the medical and legal help they need. For indigenous women, who often face hostile treatment from law enforcement agencies, it is even more difficult. Thus many cases remain unreported. Perpetrators of such violence invariably enjoy impunity due to their ability to influence the legal system, resulting in such crimes going on unabated.

The obvious first step is to make sure that the police stations and support centres work in unison so that victims of such reprehensible crimes can get immediate medical attention, file their cases and ultimately get justice. The government must also ensure, in all tiers of the administrative system, that there is no prejudicial treatment of indigenous victims which is contradictory and unacceptable to our democratic values.

Worsening flood situation

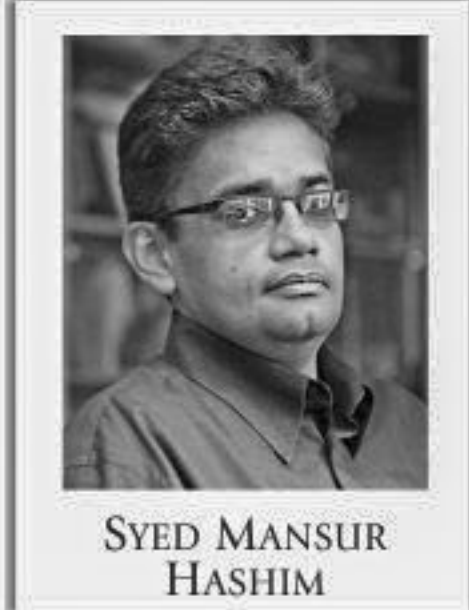
The government should reach out to the affected

A flood is raging in the north and northeastern part of the country, badly affecting the lives of thousands. A huge swathe of land has been inundated as some of the major rivers such as the Jamuna, Brahmaputra, Teesta, Dharla and the Dudhkumar are flowing well above the danger level at several places. Bhurungamari-Sonahat Land Port Road has been declared off limits to all heavy vehicles as torrential rain has claimed a strip of the important highway.

The government apparently has been taken unawares. It is not as though the situation was unanticipated given that areas upstream had been hit by heavy rains. It was imperative to take precautionary measures to relocate people to safer places and give them succour. Indeed potable water and medicine should be made available to them on an urgent basis.

The government relief agencies should raise their preparedness level, keeping pace with the surge of the monsoon; meteorologists believe that the flood situation might worsen. It is at a time like this that sustained cooperation in the exchange of metrological data between Bangladesh and India is of crucial importance.

Who needs Chinese investment?



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

NO country can match Chinese appetite for FDI. While the PM Modi's visit to Bangladesh has aroused much interest and a number of agreements have been signed on energy and other areas to the tune of some US\$2billion+, China has just signed 51 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and agreements with Pakistan to

the tune of \$45 billion. It covers everything from energy to key elements of infrastructure development – roads, highways, port facilities.

In line with the "One Road One Belt" initiative, financing has been finalised for some serious power generation deals for energy-starved Pakistan. These include a 1,000 megawatts (MW) Solar Power Park, two hydropower projects generating 1,590MW, and three wind power projects that will add 200MW. Concessional loans will finance the upgrading of a number of key highways and a deep sea port at Gwadar. From what has been published in Pakistani media, China is going to pour in about \$28 billion to start off projects immediately while the remaining \$17 billion will be in the pipeline subject to further studies and assessments.

Pakistan has been suffering from a serious energy crunch the last few years. Some parts of the country experience power load-shedding up to 12 hours a day. It is no wonder that Chinese investments are going into coal-fired power plants. MoUs have been signed to build 2x660MW coal-fired power plant at Port Qasim. Another power project will bring 2x330MW of power from coal. With about \$34 billion to be invested in energy projects and the rest \$11 billion in roads, a railway and other transport infrastructure including the Gwadar port. Should the bulk of these investments become reality Pakistan's economy will receive a boost of unimaginable proportions.

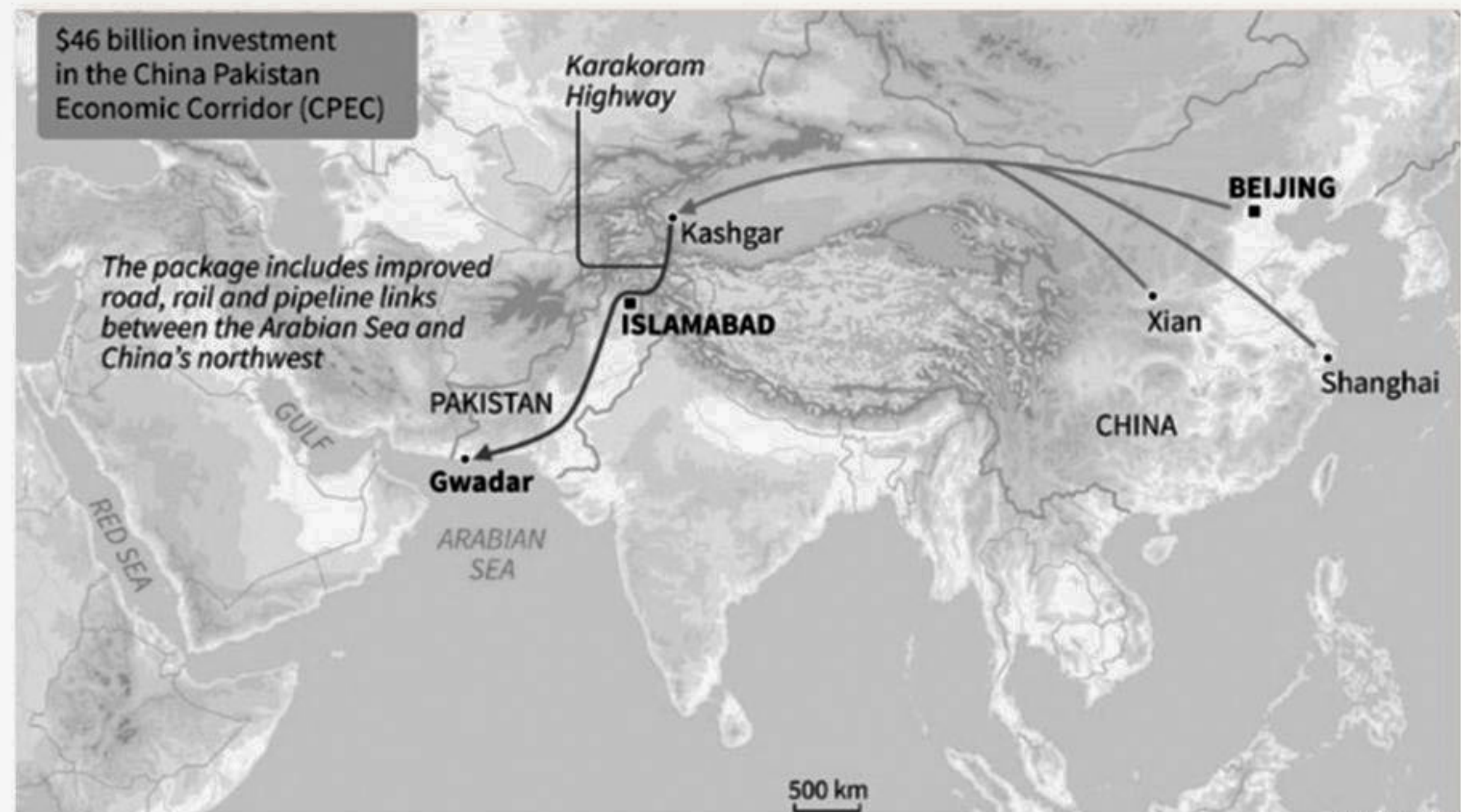
Indeed, Chinese largesse has the potential to transform Pakistan into a regional hub for trade and investment. Boasting infrastructure, the quality of which is seen in other ASEAN countries, will go a long way in reversing the country's fortunes, which, like Bangladesh, has been held back for years by a dilapidated infrastructure base. The economic corridor being built by China through Pakistan to reach the warm waters of the Arabian Sea will enable China to dramatically reduce transportation time and costs. For Pakistan, the benefits are obvious as stated by PM Nawaz Sharif during Chinese President's visit to that

country recently: "This corridor will benefit all provinces and areas in Pakistan, and transform our country into a regional hub and pivot for commerce and investment. It will also enable China to create a shorter and cheaper route for trade and investment in south, central and west Asia, the Middle East and Africa."

For years, Bangladesh has struggled with how best to get mega projects off the ground. We have been sitting on several projects which are crucial for connectivity and development. Some have languished for years; most notably, the Padma Bridge, metro rail, the Dhaka Elevated Expressway, and expansion of the railway

us from attracting these multibillion dollar investments that can free the country from power outages, help move goods freely across the country and beyond, provide our industry room for growth and boost exports?

We will need help in exploring our offshore resources, particularly oil and gas exploration. The country possesses neither the finance nor the technical expertise to expand into this uncharted territory. We require both technical cooperation and multibillion dollar investments to fully exploit our offshore resources. One must not forget that Bangladesh has two strategic partners in the region, India and China. Our



network are some glaring examples. China has been looking to collaborate with Bangladesh on a deep-sea port in the Bay of Bengal. What is interesting to note is that China has been open to the idea of a multinational participation in developing the port including India. Yet we have dillydallied on the issue for years.

Today, China is moving ahead with a deep sea port off Pakistan. It is helping to transform that country's entire economic backbone with collaboration on power, road-rail-water links, port facilities and cooperation on defence. A fraction of the Chinese investments being made in Pakistan could help our economy transform in the right direction. What stops

strategic location in the overall geopolitical scenario provides the perfect setting for both India and China to collaborate on trade and commerce. India for its part has been courting and getting Chinese investments. While we move ahead to form a regional trading that includes other SAARC countries, we should not turn a blind eye to Chinese involvement in future economic development of the country. The \$45 billion package China is embarking on with Pakistan should serve as an eye-opener for Bangladeshi policymakers. A balanced FDI outlook towards the two major regional superpowers can only work to our benefit.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

DEFENCE BUDGET 2015-16

Rising trend continues

AIR CDRE (RETD) ISHFAQ ILAHI CHOUDHURY

THE proposed budget for FY2015-2016 is little over Tk2,95,000 crore, equivalent to nearly US\$38 billion. This represents about a 29 percent rise in expenditure over the last year. The defence expenditure accounts for Tk.18,383 crore, i.e. US\$ 2.35 billion which is 6.15 percent of the national budget. Defence budget showed nearly 10 percent rise over the current year's revised budget of nearly US\$2 billion. The Finance Minister in his pre-budget press briefing admitted that the defence budget will sail through the parliament without much debate or discussion as it had in the past.

Debates and discussions on the national budget have been going on in the media for months. Various trade and professional bodies, pressure groups and civil society organisations are putting forward their suggestions on what should be the budget priorities and what fiscal measures government needs to take to accelerate the pace of development. However, there is virtually no discussion on defence spending.

The rise in defence expenditure is taking place in Bangladesh at a time when the government is finding it difficult to meet its commitment for development projects. The development budget compared to revenue budget has been going down in Bangladesh over the last two decades. In fact, after meeting the government's administrative and recurring revenue expenditures, there are relatively less resources left to meet the development activities. This compelled the government to scale down the forecasted growth in 2015-16 to 7 percent from last year's projected growth rate of 7.3 percent (actually achieved 6.51 percent). There was reduced resource allocation to vital sectors such as health that got 4.3 per-

cent of the GDP compared to last year's allocation of 4.8 percent. We continue to spend less in education -- 1.7 percent of GDP, compared to 3.8 percent in India and 2.2 percent in Pakistan. Against this backdrop, can a US\$2.35 billion defence budget be justified?

The primary mission of the defence forces is to safeguard the national sovereignty and territorial integrity from external aggression and internal subversion. The secondary missions include assisting in case of large-scale political disturbance or violence, coordinating disaster management, counter terrorist operations, operations against drugs and arms smuggling, what is termed in military jargon as "aid to civil power".

One of the tasks of the Bangladesh military has been to provide support to the UN in its peace-keeping and peace-enforcement missions. In these tasks, Bangladesh forces deploy globally and operate in diverse climatic zones, in a multi-cultural environment and often under extremely hostile conditions. UN missions are important because the armed forces so deployed act as our goodwill ambassadors and enhance the image of the country. Therefore, the need for a standing military cannot be denied.

It is also the duty of the government to provide a secure environment where citizens can live in peace and harmony and pursue their chosen way of life; this is termed as National Security which includes security not only from external aggression but also from hunger, disease, violence and internal chaos. Defence forces are important components in the national security team. In a developing country like Bangladesh, how much resource should be allocated to eliminate ignorance, hunger and disease, vis-à-vis allocation for the defence forces, is often a matter of debate.

In developed democratic countries, the debates and discussion on budget, including defence budget, go on for months in

the Parliament. The budget, when passed, reflects the national consensus. In Bangladesh, unfortunately, there is little time for a healthy debate. The Parliament must pass the budget by June 30. Given the weekends and holidays, there is very little time left to engage in threadbare discussion on the budget. Moreover, with virtually no opposition inside the parliament, we can only expect speeches long on eulogy and short on substance. Issues brought out by the MPs continue to be those of their own areas or of their business or professional interest. We shall invariably see that the

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Defence Budget will be 'Guillotined' in the evening of June 30 with no discussion on the subject. Military issues have often been shrouded under the cloak of secrecy. There have been attempts by the present government to open up some of the military matters to the public forum, such as major arms procurement and their induction. The Government had introduced short introductory courses in the National Defence College (NDC) with a view to educate political leaders, journalists, opinion makers and top government functionaries on defence matters. This was a step in the right

direction. There is a Parliamentary Committee on defence. Neither are major policy or procurement decisions discussed there, nor are the details of discussions and decisions made public. Ordinary citizens are not privy to the inner dynamics of the defence forces. Every now and then we hear about "Forces' Goal 2021", but we are not aware of what the parameters are and what would be the end state in 2021.

Unlike countries such as China, India or Pakistan, we do not have territorial dispute with our neighbours. Our entire 4,000 km border, as well as the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) with India and Myanmar, is demarcated. Bangladesh enjoys excellent relationship with all its neighbours. Our very friendly relations with India and China, as well as special relationship with the West and the Muslim World, mean that we can worry less about external aggression. However, there is, in the horizon, clear danger of internal dissension, Islamist extremism, militancy and terrorism. There are a number of armed separatist movements active in the NE states of India that might use Bangladesh's territory as sanctuary or as a conduit of illegal arms supply. Illegal drug trafficking, and now human trafficking, is posing serious security challenges that might see the military's involvement in future. We, therefore, need a military that will be able to effectively deal with the security challenges in the present and the future. While we continue to grapple with scant national resources, making judicious use of the defence budget should be a top priority. In the decision-making and implementation process, transparency and accountability at all levels are vitally important. Striking the right balance between national development and national defence is, therefore, most important.

The writer is Registrar, East West University.

COMMENTS

"TIB for long-term steps to fight graft"
(June 14, 2015)

Zaman Khan

Such calls are only eye-wash to please the donors to continue the lucrative fund flow. These organisations hardly have an effective and efficient number of field workers to investigate and update reports.

"Blame it on the girls"
(June 12, 2015)

Anin Faisal

You couldn't find any girl teasing a boy addressing him as "very hot, sexy, wow what a figure!" And obviously these types of teachers who make questions like these are developing the sense of mutual disrespect towards the opposite gender.

Chandra Shekhar Durjoy

The problem lies in our mentality. We always like to blame women's dress and gestures.

Nil Nilaan

Can you prove it?

Abdul Hafiz Dewan

This is a stupid blame coming out of the benighted people. Men must be blamed for their instincts that they cannot keep restrained.

Sharif Chowdhury

Shocking and pathetic in so many ways, although that's nothing new that today these bigots are trying to impose their pathetic views on the school children.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Killings by BSF must be stopped

We learned from newspaper reports that 20 Bangladeshis were killed and 29 were injured by the BSF in the last five months. We are aghast by the news and abhor this action of BSF. This killing spree has been going on for a long time but the Indian government is not doing anything to stop it. India has borders with other countries but no one is killed there; they choose Bangladesh for their target practice.

We demand that the Indian government take the matter seriously and stop the killings immediately. This is not the way to act by a nation who claims to be a friend of Bangladesh.
Nur Jahan, Chittagong

Peaceful transitions of power contribute to political health

"What do Nelson Mandela, George Washington and a Roman consul have in common?" The 'ShareAmerica', in a recent issue of their newsletter, posed the above question followed by an answer -- "Each walked away from political power." South Africa's Nelson Mandela stepped down voluntarily after one term as the President in 1999. He followed the footsteps of Roman statesman Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus (519-430 BC), who on two occasions renounced near-absolute emergency authority to return to his farm. America's first President George Washington set a similar example by declining to run for the office of the President for a third term.

Michigan State University political scientist William B. Allen, while leaving office voluntarily said, "Peaceful transitions of power contribute to a nation's political health."

The above observations reflect the commitment towards democratic norms and values, and for the greater good of the nation. In developing countries like ours, perpetuation of such democratic values is essential to give democracy a chance to flourish through peaceful transition of power by holding elections in due time. Every government of the people should start its journey by retaining and forwarding people-oriented development programmes and projects undertaken by the previous government.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
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