

The power of imagination

IN OTHER WORDS



AMITAVA KAR

WHEN the day is long and the night is yours alone, when you have decided you have had enough, hang on. Inspiration will come from the most unexpected sources, like two public servants, one civil, the other military. They both radiate an inner

light, a generosity of spirit, a depth of character which I have not achieved. That's something to work on before I say enough.

Colonel Nazma Begum has won a special UN award for outstanding leadership in the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, the West African country, torn by civil wars and conflicts since 2002. The first woman Army (Medical) contingent commander in the history of UN, she has also been selected for the "Military Gender Advocate of the Year-2016 Award". The UN said that it would remember the Bangladesh contingent not only for the medical services it provided but also for her leadership skills.

What motivates her? "I believe women are gifted with some special qualities," Col. Nazma says. "These human qualities can make a difference in any job including peacekeeping. Local populations, especially women and children, are more comfortable with women peacekeepers. As women, we can listen not only to what people say but also to what they don't or can't say."

Most heads would spin after such accomplishments, but when you sit down and talk to her, she speaks little of her achievements and shows impeccable manners and humility. "All the credit goes to Bangladesh Government and Bangladesh Army which recruits the best and trains them



What the people of Taragonj did is nothing short of a revolution.

PHOTO: COURTESY

to serve the nation and humanity with determination, commitment and courage. I have worked with Army personnel of many different countries. I can say that our officers and soldiers have the best professional and human qualities."

What was it like working in a high tempo operational environment of Côte d'Ivoire? "In any military operation, medical units are the first to be deployed and the last to be withdrawn. We were the last contingent to leave. One night it was raining, there was no

electricity and internet. There were threats of suicide attacks."

She used unconventional methods to keep the spirit of her contingent high. "I play guitar. I taught them how to sing. They were away from their families. There was a cultural shock. Singing helped."

Extremely well-read, Col. Nazma barely mentions that she has a PhD. She is also an acclaimed author and poet who has published more than fifty books on topics as diverse as medical science, nutrition,

children's literature, mystery and travel.

What's her message to the youth? "Expand the power of your imagination. Study hard. Read good books. Listen to good songs. Read poems. Dream big. If you nurture your dreams, they will become a reality. There will be obstacles. Don't give up. You will overcome them. Life never leaves anyone empty-handed." I have heard these words many times before. What makes them meaningful this time? She walks the talk.

The other character of this story is Jilufa

Sultana, the Upazilla Nirbahi Officer of Taragonj, Rangpur. She mobilised more than thirty thousand people who planted 250,000 trees of 40 different species in an hour. That's supposed to be new world record. How did she manage to inspire so many people to forget their differences and rally behind a common cause? "The preparation started eleven months ago. I went to each and every Union Parishad," she says over the phone. "I tried to explain to everyone that we don't have to shed our blood anymore. Our predecessors had given their blood for independence. What we need to do now is shed our sweat."

She sounds more pensive than excited, like someone with history on her mind. "I worried if my call would awaken them - physically and psychologically. Little did I know that they could barely sleep that night, they were so excited. They were waiting for the dawn and get to the job. What a beautiful scene it was! Patriotic songs being played through loudspeakers, thousands of people from all walks of life gathering along the 153 roads of the upazila to plant trees."

UNO Jilufa Sultana and Colonel Nazma have a lot in common. They both came from modest backgrounds and achieved extraordinary success by dint of perseverance, commitment and courage. They are multi-talented. Jilufa Sultana was a teacher and an award winning journalist before joining the civil service. Like Colonel Nazma's, UNO Jilufa Sultana's voice echoes resolve and modesty. "I could not have done it without the support of my bosses and the honourable MP. I think it was a revolution. If people of just one upazila could achieve this feat in just a day, imagine what could happen if all the people of the country responded to the call of duty."

Imagine.

The writer is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

Bangladesh-Myanmar relations Mapping new directions

MD. SHARIFUL ISLAM

TRUST deficit has been a major constraint in elevating Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. In fact, due to the trust deficit and lack of political will, Bangladesh-Myanmar relations could not enjoy the level of amity at both the state and people-to-people level. It is critical to promote people-to-people contacts, academic and media cooperation, increasing socio-cultural exchange programmes, opening up minds towards each other and sharing knowledge.

Despite the possibilities for cooperation, positive interactions between Bangladesh and Myanmar have been rare, slow to develop, and have often been limited to formal or symbolic actions rather than substantive engagements. As a result, trade between the two countries has been negligible. But, geographical proximity offers huge scope for growing bilateral trade and investment which needs to be utilised for the greater interests of the people of both countries.

The volume of annual bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar amounts to USD 100 million only while India's bilateral trade with Myanmar stood at USD 2.18 billion in 2013-2014. In fact, Bangladesh's bilateral trade can be increased manifold if proper long term policies are taken to harness the untapped trade potential.

At this point, keeping aside thorny issues like the Rohingya issue, trade and connectivity needs to be prioritised. It is a positive sign that Rakhaine traders have already asked the Union government of Myanmar to provide more than 1 billion kyat to complete a trading zone on its border to boost bilateral trade volume with Bangladesh by the end of 2016 (Htwe 2016). According to Rakhaine local businessmen, if implemented, the zone will allow local companies to rebuild trade ties with neighbouring Bangladesh and beyond. In addition, considering Myanmar's abundant land and market, some Bangladeshi industries can be relocated to Myanmar.

Bangladesh needs to increase its

investment basket in Myanmar in sectors like agriculture, energy, pharmaceuticals, information technology, ready-made garments, and hotel industries. Contract farming can be a new area of cooperation considering the vast scale of arable land in Myanmar.

In addition, only 12 percent of total land

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Myanmar n.d). In fact, considering the future food security of Bangladesh and its sole dependence on India, contract farming with Myanmar can be a good alternative.

Myanmar is endowed with various natural resources including gas, limestone, timber, and varieties of marine products. For

electricity to Bangladesh (*The Daily Star*, June 12, 2009). Such opportunities should be utilised. In addition, the present government of Myanmar welcomes foreign investors to invest in their energy sector.

Connectivity works as an important catalyst to deepen ties. In fact, it is argued that connectivity through sea, air, road, rail and

too has started running direct flights between Dhaka-Yangon. Novoair, a private airliner of Bangladesh, launched its maiden international flight on the Dhaka-Yangon route on December 1, 2015. It is expected that this will facilitate trade and business.

Though Bangladesh-Myanmar share historical ties, the people of Bangladesh and Myanmar know very little about each other. The long-standing Rohingya problem has also contributed to building distance between these two countries and its people.

The launching of direct flights is, thus, an important step towards improving relations. Tourism through official channels should be promoted. A culture of trust and friendship should be built between the two countries.

For a sustainable partnership, Bangladesh-Myanmar needs to promote cooperation at the academic level. Against this backdrop, memorandum of understandings (MoUs) between Universities and think tanks merit serious attention. Academic exchange programmes, MoUs and joint research projects are also critical in boosting relations between the two countries over the coming days.

Though Myanmar is an important country for Bangladesh, it is ironic that knowledge about Myanmar remains so little in Bangladesh. Hardly any scholarly work is found for instance, and people, whether in theory or in policy, hold next to no knowledge regarding Myanmar. In the 21st century, where knowledge is the cornerstone of societal prosperity, Bangladesh is seriously lagging behind. Thus, establishing a 'Myanmar Study Centre' in Bangladesh and introducing separate course on 'Myanmar Affairs' is important.

The prospects identified should be considered for improving Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. And to take the relation between the two countries to new heights, both governments should take into account the interest of its counterpart, especially in its foreign policy formulations.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina meets with Aung San Suu Kyi at the latter's parliament office in Naypyidaw, Myanmar.

PHOTO: AP

area in Myanmar is under cultivation and the liberal policy of leasing out land offers a great opportunity for Bangladesh to introduce contract farming with Myanmar. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Myanmar, foreign investors are allowed to use up to 50,000 acres of uncultivated land by the land regulation for agricultural purposes

instance, in June 8, 2013 Roben Farzad reported in *Bloomberg* that Myanmar has 7.8 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves (Farzad, June 8, 2013). According to the former foreign minister of Bangladesh Dipu Moni, a company in Myanmar was interested in setting up a 500-megawatt hydroelectric plant in Rakhine state to sell

banking will automatically remove gaps in Bangladesh and Myanmar relations. Though Bangladesh and Myanmar are close neighbours, the absence of connectivity is an issue.

Notably, when Myanmar opened its doors to foreign investors in 2010, many businesses set up their firms there. Biman Bangladesh

QUOTABLE Quote

ADAM SMITH

No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- June Austen novel
- European capital
- Brute
- Northern capital
- Final
- Black eye
- Mammal with a long snout
- Road-house
- Cuban dance
- Lustful
- Sales pitch
- Low digit
- Mineo of movies
- Beginning
- Trifling
- "Cabaret" director
- French friend
- Hit hard
- Announce
- Tragic king
- Made flat
- Homed goddess
- Air traffic devices
- European capital

DOWN

- First name in jazz
- Sound of agony
- Antiquated quality
- Go to
- The lion's share
- Everyone else
- Agitate
- Soup buy
- Need to pay
- Fighting
- One or more
- Indistinct quality
- Trounce
- Friend
- Shingle setting
- 23 -- Domini
- Sevilla setting
- Bank worker
- Pussy foot
- Designer Pucci
- Betting info
- Plane part
- Approximating phrase
- That ship
- Longoria of TV
- Cardinal color

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

B	A	B	A	S	P	I	C	S
A	L	O	E	S	P	I	N	A
S	T	U	N	T	R	E	N	D
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H	E	R	O	N	S	P	A	
B	A	T	O	N	G	R	O	O
I	C	O	N		E	U	R	O
T	R	U	S	T	P	A	G	E
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S	E	C	O	N	D	B	O	N
A	T	O	N	C	E	A	U	N
D	A	N	G	E	R	A	T	O

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott