

XI JINPING'S VISIT

Implications for Bangladesh-China relations

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

CHINESE President Xi Jinping's visit to Bangladesh is likely to be a landmark one owing to a number of factors. After three decades, a Chinese President is visiting Bangladesh, signifying growing importance of the country in South Asia's economics and geo-politics. A number of high profile investments and other business deals worth billions are expected to be signed during Mr. Xi's trip.

However, the implications of the visit go beyond economics. Dhaka maintains very strong military ties with Beijing. Geopolitically, we are witnessing growing rivalry between China and India, particularly in the era of weakening American role in the region. A new type of big power relationship is emerging in the region and relatively smaller countries like Bangladesh have to adjust with this changing scenario, maintaining balanced economic and geo-political relations, particularly with China and India.

In this piece, I will focus on a number of issues that concern Mr. Xi's visit to Bangladesh in particular, and China-Bangladesh relations in general.

Xi Jinping: China's most powerful and popular leader since Deng

President Xi is considered as the most powerful Chinese leader since Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China's miraculous economic growth. Xi assumed the Communist Party's leadership towards the end of 2012. Ever since he became the Commander-in-Chief, Beijing has witnessed marked policy shift in terms of leadership, economy and geopolitics. Given his command of all power, analysts argue that President Xi has distanced himself from Deng and his successors' practice of 'collective leadership', a governance paradigm based on accepted rules and norms.

Mr. Xi has changed the Chinese economic model, giving greater emphasis on consumption, innovation and service led growth, shifting away from traditional export and investment driven economic expansion. His fight against corruption, particularly against political and business elites, is seen as one of the most powerful campaigns in the country since the death of Mao Zedong. With nationalistic fervour, he has been more assertive in dealing with geo-political issues, de facto challenging America's supremacy in the Asia Pacific.

The Post-American South Asia: Living with the Dragon and the Elephant

There is no denying that the United States remains the top global power. However, the nation is in relative decline. This is largely due to the rise of China and a number of

other emerging economies including India. The global economy's shifting centre of economic gravity towards Asia is making China and India two powerful economic engines as well as geo-political rivals. India is visibly playing a greater role in South Asia, and Washington seems not too unhappy, given its strategic alliance with New Delhi. China, which considers US as its biggest rival in Asia and elsewhere in the world, is quietly celebrating America's shrinking role in South Asia.

countries resulting in more Chinese investment in Bangladesh. The country's steady urbanisation and six percent plus economic growth mean that it is in need of huge funds and technical know-how to narrow its mounting infrastructure deficit. It fares poorly in Asia's infrastructure ranking. Globally, China invested about USD 128 billion in 2015. Beijing showed huge interest to invest in Bangladesh's port, railway, highway, energy sector and other key infrastructure. President Xi's visit could be a

While Bangladesh has been given duty free access to a large number of products by Beijing, its export to China has not exceeded even one billion. Dhaka is likely to demand more soft provisions to access the trillion dollars worth Chinese consumer market. However, the fundamental drawback in this regard is that Bangladesh has one of the narrowest export baskets in Asia. The large and growing trade imbalance between the two countries can be reduced partly if China invests in Bangladesh's industrial sector,

institutions and channeling funds, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund, to support the largest undertaking since America's Marshall Plan, implemented after World War II.

The BCIM Economic Corridor, involving Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar, is also a part of OBOR. However, the progress of BCIM has been less than satisfactory, although its origin dates back to the 1990s, as China and India's strategic rivalry has slowed down the pace of BCIM. Dhaka needs to employ its diplomatic apparatus to integrate with China and other Southeast Asian countries, taking the institutional advantages of OBOR in general and BCIM in particular. Dhaka and Beijing should work closely to find ways Bangladesh can access the most dynamic region of the world, i.e. East Asia, through Myanmar, taking advantage of China's leverage over Naypyidaw.

Ocean economy development in the world's largest bay

China's plan to revive the Maritime Silk Route (MSR) and development of economic belts offer immense opportunities for Bangladesh. The plan of the 21st century MSR coincides with Bangladesh's demarcation of its maritime boundary with two of its Bay of Bengal neighbours - India and Myanmar. This gives the country an opportunity to build a blue economy in the world's largest Bay. However, given the massive undertaking, it requires the involvement of regional as well as global powers to develop a modern ocean economy.

China has expanded maritime cooperation in the area of ocean and climate change, marine disaster prevention and mitigation and biodiversity preservation with a number of countries. The China-ASEAN Marine Cooperation Center, the Indonesia and China Centre for Ocean and Climate, the China-Pakistan Joint Marine Center and the China-Sri Lanka Marine and Coastal Zone Joint Research Centre are some examples of how the MSR regions have amplified maritime cooperation. It is expected that both Dhaka and Beijing will sign agreements to forge greater cooperation involving blue economy during Mr. Xi's visit to Bangladesh.

The way forward

Bangladesh's relation with China is not only important from an economic perspective, it is equally critical to manage more balanced ties with regional and global players, thereby minimising geo-political risks. In this pursuit, President Xi Jinping's visit to Bangladesh could have far reaching implications.

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PM Sheikh Hasina with Chinese President Xi Jinping

PHOTO: STAR

Geo-political rivalry between the two Asian giants means Dhaka could face mounting challenges in managing a balanced relation with them in years ahead. Nevertheless, it is critical for Bangladesh to maintain balanced ties with India and China, preserving the country's national interests. Too much alignment with a single power risks the country becoming a vassal state.

Investment to get a big boost?

Bangladesh's economic relations with China have traditionally been dominated by trade. The former has not benefited much by the latter's rapid expansion of outward foreign investment. However, more and more synergies are emerging between the two

game changer as far as China-Bangladesh investment relation is concerned.

USD 30 billion Bangladesh-China trade by 2021?

The two-way trade between China and Bangladesh reached about USD 12.5 billion in 2014, according to the International Trade Centre. Bangladesh's exports growth to China has averaged about 40 percent per annum in the past five years. On the other hand, import growth averaged 23 percent annually. Going forward, under even a conservative trade growth scenario, a back-of-the-envelope calculation indicates that the two-way trade between the two countries could exceed USD 30 billion by 2021.

particularly relocating some of its low value added sun set industries. Goods produced in those industries could be exported to China.

One Belt, One Road: Linking Bangladesh with Southeast- and East Asia

Historically, China has been well-connected with its immediate neighbours as well as Europe, Middle East and Africa through the Silk Road for centuries. Beijing intends to reestablish this historical connection, creating a vast network of railway, energy pipelines, highways and modernising border points. Xi Jinping is the mastermind behind China's flagship plan under the aegis of One Belt, One Road (OBOR). About 70 countries have joined the project. Beijing is developing new

DEVELOPING ALONGSIDE CHINA

M.E. CHOWDHURY SHAMIM

PRESIDENT Xi Jinping, the then General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, while delivering his speech at 'The Road to Rejuvenation' exhibition in Beijing said, "China in future will move forward like an enormous ship against strong wind and giant waves. All party members must on evaluating the past remember that the backward journey will always pose risks. Only development will strengthen us".

The expectation of Xi Jinping from Chinese citizens, particularly from party members, echoes the expectations in Bangladesh. The ministers belonging to the party in power wants citizens to know that the country has leapfrogged and is already on the development highway. If the ministers truly believe what they say, the statement of the Chinese President equally applies to Bangladesh.

Xi Jinping assumed presidency on March 14, 2013. When he took over the presidency from his predecessor Hu Jintao, the biggest challenge that

he faced was corruption. The challenge of corruption has been tamed during his presidency. The most talked about issue during his presidency has been to establish China as a powerful nation.

The most significant national programme is that of the materialisation of what is now being termed as the 'Chinese Dream'. This is essentially a dream of Xi Jinping. He wants to see China in 2049 — on the centenary of her independence — as a rich, powerful, democratic and culturally advanced country, and a friendly nation with its century's old tradition and legacy. In his effort to translate his dreams into reality, he has now focused on building a skilled workforce to forward his country and nation towards the rejuvenation he had spelt out. One of the issues of prime importance to Xi is that of a political reform more in line with global needs that rebuilds China's own brand of socialism.

President Xi Jinping pledged to extend further facilities to friendly countries in order to boost its economy surrounding its continued

reform programmes. In a statement Xi Jinping declared on April 8, 2013, not to close Chinese doors to the outside world. China kept all her commitments to the WTO. China has kept her doors wide open for foreign investors to come and assess the market, examine the security of investment and return and decide. He reasonably expects open doors and similar treatments for Chinese investors in other countries.

Bangladesh is also looking to invite big Chinese investments. The Bangladesh government views President Xi Jinping's visit to Dhaka as an opportunity to negotiate such investments. Possible investment, in fact, may reach a colossal 40 billion US dollars.

China is strategically well groomed in its judgment of global politics and maintaining international relations. Both Russia and the United States are of great significance to President Xi Jinping who is also the commander-in-chief of the army. Russia comes first to China while considering geopolitical issues, nearness to ideals and

political philosophy and probability of strategic partnership.

Building a powerful China essentially requires closer ties with the United States. In a joint press conference with President Obama, Xi Jinping said, "We will graduate our military relationship with United States and build a new model of China-US military ties". Drawing attention to the proverb where there is a will there is a way, he said that both the countries have the political will to build a model acceptable to their nations.

Referring to 90 bilateral issues now under discussions at different stages, he suggests it would build the platform for the new model to work and flourish in both countries. He said, "I think both sides should work hard to build a new type of relationship between big powers. The two sides should cooperate with each other for a win-win result in order to benefit people from the two countries and the world."

A major goal of China remains the 'Silk Road Economic Belt'. For modern China, he envisions the

development of the Silk Road economic zone as essential. It will also build a network for regional cooperation. The great Chinese plan aims at including Eurasian, South Asian and West Asian countries within its fold. By developing a framework of economic cooperation among these countries, it will promote cultural communication and interaction among the people.

Recently Sayed Ashrafur Islam, Minister for Public Administration put emphasis on direct road communication with China. Referring to the fact that such communication prevailed before, the minister suggests that we should follow the same path.

While President Xi Jinping focused on the promotion of regional, international and bilateral relations, he was not oblivious to building the foundation of good governance in China. This political leader, who has emerged from the grassroots, knows well that unless the hopes and aspirations of the citizens are met, no initiative will sustain in the long run.

He is absolutely right when he said to his countrymen: "Happiness does not fall out of the blue and dreams will not come true by themselves. We need to be down-to-earth and work hard. We should uphold the idea that working hard is the most honourable, noblest, greatest and most beautiful virtue."

Analysts are of the opinion that the Chinese Communist Party obtained its legitimacy to rule over its economic achievements during the last three decades. A major share of the population has reaped the benefits of continued economic progress. Yet, the increasing rich-poor gap remains a cause for concern. Reforms in administration, calculated reduction in inequality and adequate development works will eventually reduce the gap and push the nation towards achieving the great Chinese dream. It is high time we embrace the Chinese development model tailored to Bangladesh's needs and develop alongside China.

The writer is President, Scholars Bangladesh Foundation and Centre for NRB Foundation.

QUOTABLE Quote



SUN TZU

Chinese general, philosopher

The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.

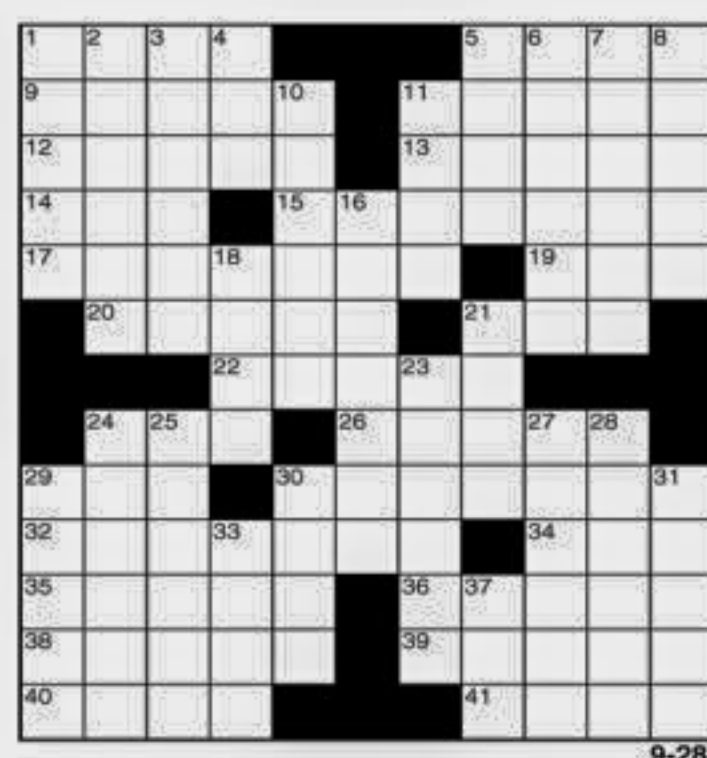
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 *Get lost!
- 5 Bidding option
- 9 Kayak's cousin
- 11 River area
- 12 Take as one's own
- 13 Consumed
- 14 Sea, to Simone
- 15 Entered uninvited
- 17 Hid away
- 19 Overhead trains
- 20 Irving Berlin's "Blue-"
- 21 Memorial Day month
- 22 Houston player
- 24 River blocker
- 26 Robust quality
- 29 Brief time
- 30 Seriously bad-mouthed
- 32 Had a fight
- 34 Singer Carly -- Jepsen
- 35 Circle spokes
- 36 Counting everything
- 38 Pecks and pounds
- 39 Art supporter
- 40 Big snakes
- 41 Garden sections

DOWN

- 1 Cons
- 2 West Point attendees
- 3 Pullover jacket
- 4 Spinning toy
- 5 Shooter ammo
- 6 Tennis great Gibson
- 7 Unwavering
- 8 Beach grains
- 10 Engraves
- 11 In need of recharging
- 16 Make good as new
- 18 Thailand, once
- 21 May honorees
- 23 Band aide
- 24 Presidential middle name
- 25 Maine park
- 27 Sentence part
- 28 Made better
- 29 Prepare for surgery
- 30 Not that
- 31 Valleys
- 33 Uses a sofa
- 37 Collar



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

L A Y S U P C H A W
E L A P S E H I R E
M A K E U P T E S T S
L A S E R
B A L L X R A Y
D O G S D A Y T O N
A G E B I N H U E
D U N C A N C O R D
S T A Y M A S S
R O S I N
W A K E U P C A L L S
E X I T O R D E A L
D E N S T O A S T Y

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

