



Will Xi Jinping's visit to Bangladesh be a regional game changer?



MAHFUZZ ANAM

HOW much of a game changing impact will Chinese President Xi Jinping's recent visit to Bangladesh, 30 years after the last such visit, have on politics of this region and beyond?

What will be the impact on the ground of the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) for 34 projects amounting to an impressive USD 24.45 billion and a commitment of another USD 13.6 billion?

This is by far the strongest Chinese expression of confidence in this rising South Asian country. Unquestionably, the visit by Mr. Xi marks a watershed moment in Bangladesh-China bilateral relations, signalling a remarkable transition of ties that started from very shaky grounds in 1971, when China sided with Pakistan. China formally recognised our independence only years later after Pakistan and Saudi Arabia did the same, after the assassination of the founder of the state Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 1975. The fact that his daughter and the country's current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina deliberately overlooks these facts of history is a testimony to the rising importance that Bangladesh attaches to its relations with China, and her personal commitment in it.

So how much of a game changer is this new relationship between Bangladesh and China?

Internally, it marks a significant shift in our politics.

Traditionally it used to be the main opposition group, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) that was known to work for closer relations with China, primarily to counter Indian influence. On the contrary, the present ruling party, the Awami League, clearly preferred India for its closest ties, which was rooted in the latter's all out assistance in our freedom struggle resulting in nearly four thousand Indian soldiers laying down their lives for Bangladesh's freedom.

All that appears to be a distant past now. After her return to power in 2009, Sheikh Hasina has consistently shown a keen interest

in developing close relations with China even as she made vigorous efforts to win India's confidence.

On security, India biggest concern, Bangladesh has been very cooperative in removing all terrorist camps of Indian separatists groups that previously existed along our border. Connectivity through the Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian railway

between Europe and Asia.

Some trade issues still remain to be resolved. Issues relating to the sharing of water of more than 50 rivers that flow between our two countries still remain largely unsolved, with sharing of water from Teesta River being the most urgent.

Simply put, given the troubled past of Bangladesh-India relations, the present is

visiting President termed as a "strategic partnership"?

To Bangladesh's great relief, and diplomatic success, India has not reacted negatively, at least in public. However, it will be naive to expect that India will not have any reservations about it. Internally, Sheikh Hasina's government is in no position to upset India too much on account of China.

alter everything. The continuing cross border terrorism, which is destabilising Kashmir, makes for a tinderbox like situation in South Asia, with the possibilities of war at any time.

China's new scheme of rebuilding the historic Silk Route under 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR) project has not been fully welcomed in India though Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives have already signed up and Bangladesh welcomed it during Xi Jinping's visit. Some Indian think-tanks have termed the 'OBOR' as China's project to increase its sphere of influence and bring India's neighbours under its fold.

However, it has to be noted that bilateral trade between these two Asian giants have grown over the years and reached nearly USD 100 billion.

What role will the United States play in this new equation?

Given the rising tension over conflicting claims in the South China Sea, America's increasingly negative view of rising Chinese maritime strength and Japan's demands for tougher action against Chinese stance on the issue, the pressure on Bangladesh could mount to be less enthusiastic about getting close to China.

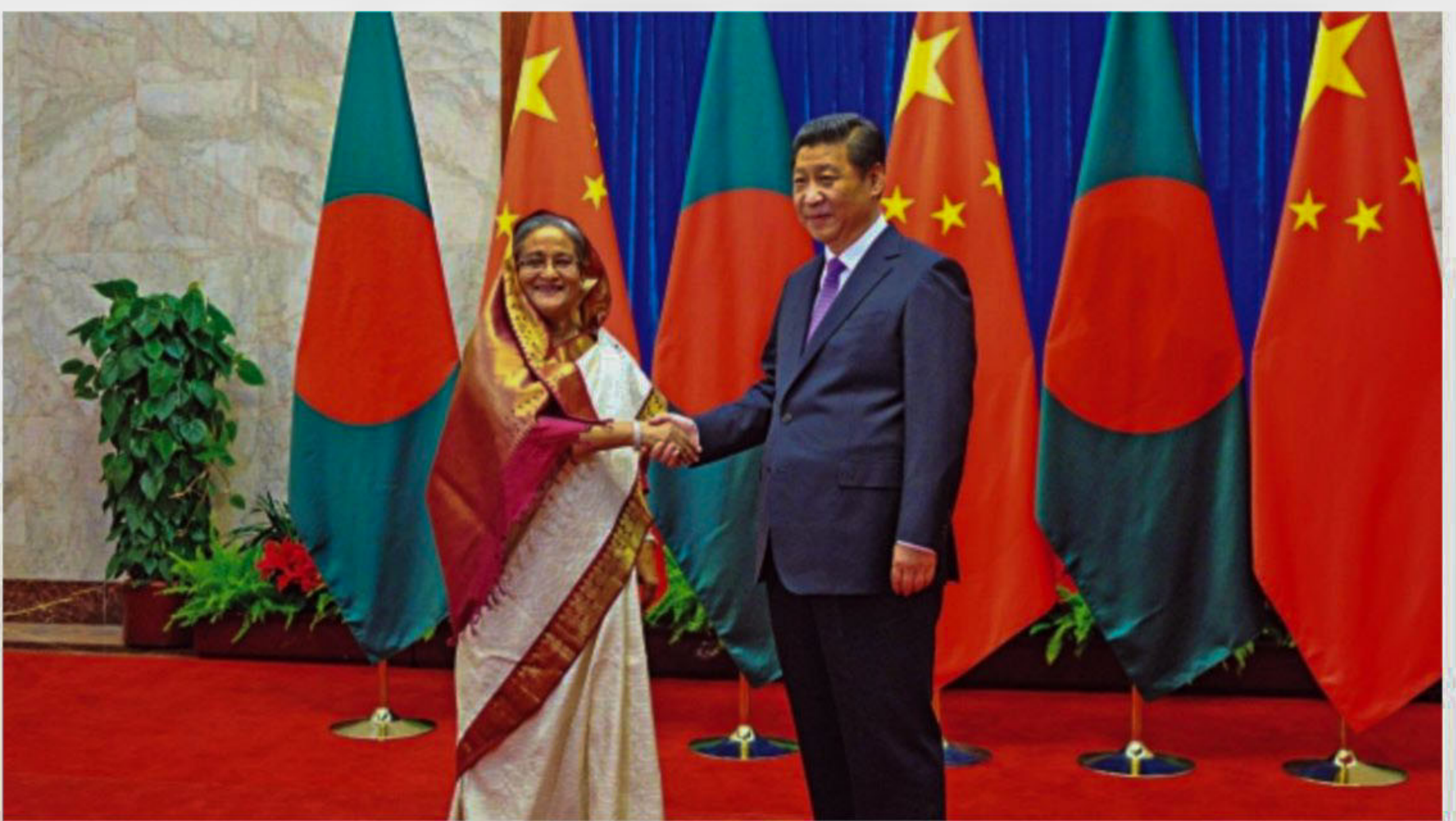
So the all important question is how will the rising friendship between Bangladesh and China work out, given that Dhaka's closeness with New Delhi is at an all-time high?

Bangladesh needs all the assistance it can get and India cannot for the moment match China in terms of the funds that Bangladesh needs. Bangladesh's one and only goal is development and it needs both India and China.

We have successfully stayed out of big power politics and regional power rivalry. We cannot and should not get even remotely involved with the bilateral problems of any other country. Bangladesh must pursue her own agenda for development and peaceful and cooperative relations with all, especially the two Asian giants, on whose development successes Dhaka must traverse.

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PM Sheikh Hasina with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

projects are now the priority visions of both the countries. The Asian Highway projects involve 32 member countries and the network extends from Tokyo in the east to Kapikule, Turkey, in the west, and from Torpynovka, Russian Federation, in the north, to Denpasar, Indonesia in the south. The Trans-Asian railway initiative, on the other hand, involving 28 countries, seeks to improve rail connectivity within Asia and

qualitatively different. And it is at this moment of Bangladesh-India relations that Bangladesh's relation with China is reaching unprecedented levels of cooperation and trust. Nothing would suit Bangladesh better than to be able to continue as presently conceived.

But the crucial question is how will India, given its troubled past, take Bangladesh's warming relationship with China that the

But the distance she has already covered in coming closer to China has impressed most of her critics and the international observers of South Asian politics.

To move further in this direction Sheikh Hasina will need all her diplomatic skills and persuasive powers. India's sudden, yet not too unexpected, deterioration of relations with Pakistan, and China's reassertion of its historic close relations with Pakistan may

THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

Clinton could not break the 200-year-old curse

SHAKHAWAT LITON

MISFORTUNE has been haunting Democratic Party's presidential candidates for the last 200 years. The latest one, Hillary Clinton, has become victim to it as she won four hundred thousand more popular votes than Donald Trump, but could not win the presidency.

By the time all the ballots have been counted, she seems likely to be ahead by more than 2 million votes and more than 1.5 percentage points. She will have won by a wider percentage margin than not only Al Gore in 2000 but also Richard Nixon in 1968 and John F. Kennedy in 1960, writes David Leonhardt in *New York Times* on Thursday.

The Atlantic in a report on Saturday said Clinton's popular-vote lead will grow, and grow, and grow: millions of mail-in and absentee ballots haven't been counted yet. They won't change anything, though.

Like her four more Democratic presidential candidates earlier faced the same fate since 1824. Before her Al Gore was the last unfortunate Democratic candidate. Gore won 5,39,000 more votes than Republican candidate George W. Bush in 2000 presidential election, but Bush won the presidency.

In 1876 and 1888 two more Democratic presidential candidates won more popular votes than the presidents-elect. But they had to concede defeat to Republican candidates in those elections.

None of Republican candidates have ever had to face such a situation in the history of American democracy. All the five incidents affected only the Democratic camp. The misfortunes show how the Electoral College system has appeared to be a curse for the Democratic Party over the years.

In the latest presidential election Clinton won the popular vote by a very large margin but lost to Trump due to the Electoral College system. Under the system established in the Constitution, in 1787, the winner is the candidate who wins the majority of electoral votes based on the state-by-state tallies, and that candidate is Donald Trump.

In some states the margin of popular votes between Clinton and Trump were so close prompting *The Boston Globe* to say that if just 53,667 people who voted for Trump had voted instead for Clinton, she and her team would be the ones transitioning

to the White House.

If 5,919 Trump voters did that in Michigan, 13,629 in Wisconsin, and 34,119 in Pennsylvania, Clinton would have won each of those states by the slimmest of margins of votes, said *Boston Globe*.

Wins in those states says the *Globe*, would have instantly swung 46 electoral votes from Trump to Clinton, giving her 278 in total, above the 270 needed to win the presidency, while he would hold the other 260.

In 1824 Andrew Jackson, a Democratic-Republican, won more electoral and popular votes than his rival. But he did not win the majority of electoral votes to become the president. He bagged 151,271 and 99 electoral votes. But 131 votes were required to get elected as the president.

His main opponent the then Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, obtained 113,122 popular votes and 84 seats.

According to the constitution, the contest went to the House of Representatives to determine who would be the president.

Under the rules of the Twelfth Amendment to the constitution, Henry Clay, who got 37 votes, was eliminated, as only the top three candidates were eligible. With Clay's support, the House decided on John Quincy Adams as president. Shortly after, Henry Clay was announced as the new secretary of state.

Jackson supporters were furious. They claimed that their candidate, despite having received the most popular votes, had been cheated by a "corrupt bargain" between Adams and Clay. They vowed to get even in the next election.

After the 1824 election, Jackson and his men began to form party organisations throughout the country. At first known as the "Jackson Party," it eventually became the Democratic Party. They won the 1828 presidential election and Jackson, founder father of Democratic Party, became the president.

In 1876 presidential election, Democratic candidate Samuel J. Tilden won two hundred thousand more votes than the Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes. Tilden won 184 electoral votes. But Hayes won the presidency with bagging 185 electoral votes.

The same thing happened in 1988 election. And again the victim was a Democrat, Grover Cleveland who

bagged nine lakh more popular votes than his rival Republican Benjamin Harrison. The Republican candidate won the presidency by winning more electoral votes than Cleveland.

TRUMP'S WIN PUT ELECTORAL COLLEGE IN CONTROVERSY!

According to the USA constitutional provision, in every state except Maine and Nebraska, the candidate who wins the most popular votes in the state receives all of the state's electoral votes.

The number of electors in each state is the sum of its U.S. senators and its U.S. representatives. In addition, the District of Columbia has three electoral votes. A candidate must receive a majority of electoral votes to be elected president. The magic number is 270.

The founding fathers of USA were against allowing people to directly elect president as they were afraid of democracy. They called for an extra layer, Electoral College.

James Madison worried about what he called "factions," which he defined as groups of citizens who have a common interest in some proposal that would either violate the rights of other citizens or would harm the nation as a whole. Madison's fear has been dubbed as "the tyranny of the majority" which was that a faction could grow to encompass more than 50 percent of the population, at which point it could "sacrifice to its ruling passion or interest both the public good and the rights of other citizens."

In defense of the Electoral College system, Alexander Hamilton writes "The Federalist Papers," said the constitution has been designed to ensure "that the office of president will never fall to the lot of any man who is not in an eminent degree endowed with the requisite qualifications."

"The point of the Electoral College is to preserve "the sense of the people," while at the same time ensuring that a president is chosen "by men most capable of analysing the qualities adapted to the station, and acting under circumstances favourable to deliberation, and to a judicious combination of all the reasons and inducements which were proper to govern their choice."

But the outcome of the latest presidential election triggered controversy over the Electoral College system as the president-elect is Donald Trump who has been dubbed as "a danger" to democracy. He won

the presidency with an ugly and negative campaign. His election sparked worldwide outcries.

Protesters demonstrating against the election of Donald Trump gathered in several US cities for a third night on Friday, hours after the president-elect praised their "passion". Thousands took to the streets in Miami, Atlanta, Philadelphia, New York, San Francisco and Portland, Oregon, voicing anger at Trump's inflammatory and often deeply controversial campaign

rhetoric about immigrants, Muslims and women.

Electoral experts have been calling for change of the electoral vote system in the wake of the prevailing situation. Even many of the protestors are urging electors, who will meet in their respective states on December 19 to cast their vote for Trump, not to elect Trump as the president. How things will take shape in the coming days still remains uncertain.

The writer is Senior Reporter, *The Daily Star*.

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