

BANGLADESH-INDIA SUMMIT 2017

The case for holding back the chips

Bangladesh top denim exporter to EU

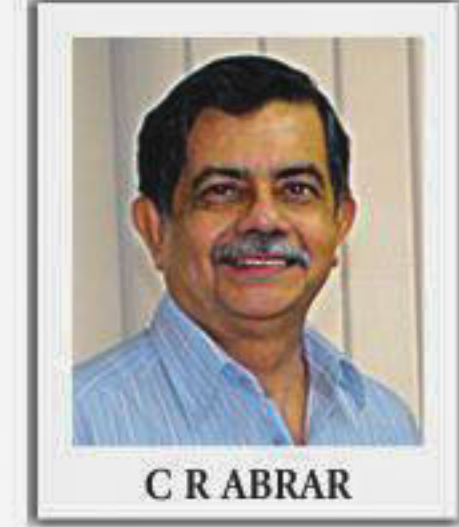
Sustain and better it

ANGLADESH has overtaken China to become the largest denim supplier to the European Union securing 21.18 percent of the market share. We congratulate those involved with the sector for its success and for their perseverance in the face of repeated setbacks. And we hope that the investment and the hard work put in by all concerned will only increase as Bangladesh establishes an even greater foothold in the international garment market, setting the highest standard when it comes to the quality of its product. We are certain that the performance of the denim sector will go a long way in reaching our RMG export goal of USD 50 billion by 2021.

At the same time, we hope that the fruits of success will be evenly distributed across the garments industry. It goes without saying that it is the garment workers who deserve equal credit for bringing such success to the industry and to our country. It is thus imperative that they are given the greatest support possible.

Their working conditions, although better now in comparison to earlier times, still need improving. Learning from the various tragedies that have hit the sector in the past, owners of garment factories and other high level managers must ensure safe working conditions for workers so that no such tragedies happen again in future. That, we believe, will encourage even more foreign companies and countries to look towards Bangladesh for products, increasing our market share across the world even further. And we hope that the government would do all that is necessary so that the success is sustained.

The government too should recognise the quintessential role of the garments industry and, as such, lend its full support which can guarantee that the garment sector achieves its target.



THE twice-postponed visit of Bangladesh's Prime Minister to India has been set to take place from April 7 to 10. If media reports are anything to go by then one can

assume that the much anticipated Teesta water deal would not be formalised even during this visit. While Bangladesh is made to wait on the Teesta accord, diplomatic sources inform that in preparation for the visit, more than two dozen agreements, MoUs and documents have been finalised for signing at the summit level meeting between the two prime ministers. Included among them are agreements for use of Chittagong and Mongla seaports "as part of greater connectivity under which India will get transit-transhipment facilities for transportation of goods through Bangladesh".

There is a perception among policy analysts of both Bangladesh and India that since 2007, in the stride to improve bilateral relations, Bangladesh has been responsive in addressing India's concerns more than that was reciprocated by its neighbour. The current Bangladesh government's all-out effort to mitigate India's security concerns, particularly those that had ramifications for the north-east Indian states, has been publicly acknowledged by the Indian officials. Likewise, the opening up of riverine and land routes to establish better connectivity between the mainland and north-east India has been a significant breakthrough in enhancing Indian national interest.

Despite such major steps from Bangladesh's side, India is yet to meet some of the major concerns of Bangladesh. Border killings continue; little tangible progress has been made in sharing the waters of scores of common rivers including that of Teesta; and bilateral trade facilitation remains way below the desired level. Although the much celebrated swapping of enclaves in July 2015 has been presented as a testimony of goodwill of current Indian leadership, history notes that Bangladesh had delivered on its commitment on the deal more than four decades ago, immediately after amending the country's Constitution in November

1974. It is also pertinent to recall that despite the 1974 summit level agreement between the two countries that the Farakka barrage would not be put into operation before an agreement was reached on sharing the dry season flow, India commissioned the barrage and continued unilateral withdrawal after Bangladesh allowed India to test the feeder canal of the barrage for only a 10-day period.

Bangladesh's recent procurement of two submarines from China has added interesting dimension to the conversation around the prime

China's strategic challenge of obtaining footholds in key countries in the neighbourhood and found it surprising that "Bangladesh under Sheikh Hasina should have given into this". He also went to offer the advice that instead of China, Bangladesh could have procured the submarines from Russia "as that would pose much less problems for India". Explicit in his statement was Bangladesh should have prioritised India's interest over its own in deciding where to source its submarines.

Participants at the talk wondered why

know the source of such information. Ambassador Sikri further thought it would be appropriate that the Bangladesh Prime Minister be reminded that China opposed Bangladesh's Liberation War and did not support "her father". In arguing the case for people-to-people contact between Bangladesh and India, the retired diplomat stated that ministers who make decisions could be "bought off and be put in pockets". She reminded the audience that the Chinese do have deep pockets.



Near the Teesta bridge in the northern district of Lalmonirhat, a boat is tied up to a pole where the river is dried up, giving rise to a shoal. People of Bangladesh keep waiting for the Indo-Bangla Teesta deal, which would ensure proper flow of water in the river on this side.

PHOTO: STAR

Vectors of death on the streets

Where is the police?

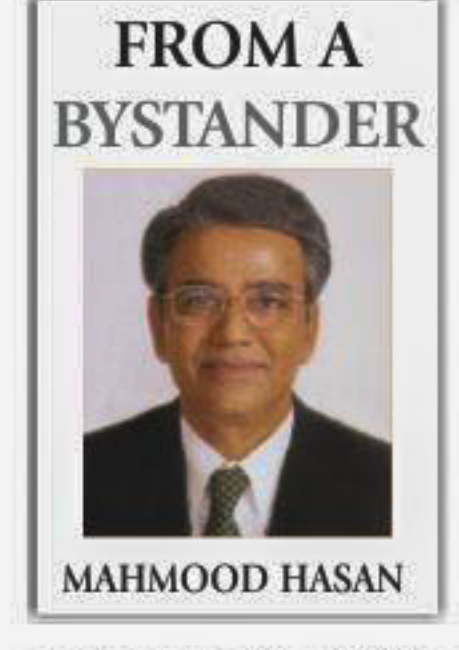
A picture on the back page of this newspaper says so much about the scant regard for public safety on our roads. The picture shows a vehicle carrying iron rods on a busy main road in the capital. There is nothing wrong with a truck carrying iron rods. But there was everything so dangerously wrong with this particular truck carrying iron rods because of the way the loads were being carried. The size of the load was twice the length of the vehicle carrying those, and they were protruding out so precariously as to be life threatening. And this is a very regular occurrence on our roads.

We wonder how such a dangerously laden vehicle came out on the streets in the first place. Aren't there laws barring carriage of loads that are larger than the body of the vehicle carrying those? It is surprising that such a high-risk vehicle missed the eyes of the police, and it was running on a stretch of a road which has more police per mile of road than any other roads in the city. We cannot believe that the police would be so little concerned about public safety and maintenance of road rules.

As it is, we have one of the highest road casualty rates in the world. We have to already contend with such dangers as unqualified drivers, unfit vehicles and these new carriers of death add to our worry. We would hope that the traffic police would act to stop this menace plying the roads.

INDIA STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

The saffron wave returns



FROM A BYSTANDER

THE Indian Election Commission on March 11, 2017 announced the results of five State Assembly elections. BJP swept the election in Uttar Pradesh (UP), winning 312 seats in the 403-seat assembly. BJP's vote share jumped from 15 percent in 2012 to 39.6 percent this time, securing three-fourth majority in the assembly. The party also gained a majority in Uttarakhand, obtaining 57 seats in a 70-seat assembly.

Uttar Pradesh's politics is extremely complicated, not only because of its backwardness and violence, but also because of stratified Hindu castes, OBCs, Dalits, and the largest Muslim

promises of development, people surprisingly believed Modi's invectives. Modi campaigned against young CM Akhilesh Yadav, raising a whirlwind of 21 rallies in the seven-phase UP election. All BJP stalwarts plunged into UP long before the election. BJP's president Amit Shah put together a well-oiled RSS cadre-based election machinery which delivered.

In this triangular election battle, BJP had advantages over SP and BSP in terms of manpower and money. BJP's "Hindutva" slogan was made more inclusive to include "non-Brahminical" segments of Hindus, and consolidated the communal Hindu vote-bank. BJP also played skillfully with the caste-based vote banks, focusing on upper caste Hindus, Jats in western UP, non-Yadav OBCs, and non-Jatav Dalits. Modi also cleverly exploited

Mayawati's BSP fielded 99 Muslim candidates and Samajwadi Party gave tickets to 56 Muslim candidates. Naturally, most of the Muslim votes went to SP and BSP. This time only 24 Muslims were elected as MLAs compared to 68 in 2012.

The SP-Congress coalition managed only 54 seats, while BSP got 19. The anti-incumbency factor worked against the Akhilesh-Rahul duo ('UP ke ladke'). Besides, Akhilesh's revolt against his father Mulayam Singh Yadav did not go down well with the older generations. Mulayam also was passive in campaigning. Now the SP could actually be staring at the possibility of a split. Mayawati lost out because the BJP stole her vote-banks.

In Punjab, Congress swept in with 77 seats in the 117-seat Assembly. Opinion polls indicated that the Aam Aadmi Party would get majority, but Arvind Kejriwal had to be satisfied with 20 seats. BJP lost miserably and managed only three seats, while outgoing Shiromani Akali Dal got 15 seats. The victory in Punjab means Congress is yet to be written off from Indian politics.

BJP turned Goa and Manipur into its bastion by forming governments, despite being second in polls. BJP, immediately after the results, lured the regional parties and independent MLAs to form coalitions in both states. In Manipur, BJP got 21 seats, while Congress picked 28 in the 60-seat parliament. In Goa, BJP got 13 seats and Congress 17 in the 40-seat Assembly. In Manipur, Biren Singh, once a Congress leader, has been sworn-in as the Chief Minister representing BJP, and Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar has become Chief Minister of Goa. These developments unleashed a bitter quarrel between BJP and Congress. Parrikar has already proved his majority with 22 votes. Congress has alleged that BJP had offered huge sums of money to the smaller parties in Goa and Manipur to form a majority. An outsider, however, could view this as a case of BJP outwitting Congress because it was caught napping.

BJP's victory is a sad development for the regional parties - particularly, the SP and BSP - which have been planning to put up a joint platform along with other regional parties against BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The voting pattern this time indicates that people were not

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impressed by the secular politics offered by the regional parties. Regional parties will have to stop bickering and move towards an inclusive and progressive narrative if they want to challenge BJP in 2019. As for Congress, it has failed to capitalise on its gains. It has to reinvent itself if it wants to be relevant in 2019.

This round of state elections was a mid-term referendum for Modi. The Modi-cult has passed the test with flying colours, firmly establishing BJP as an all-India political outfit. BJP now dominates 18 out of 29 states. This will significantly increase its tally in the Rajya Sabha, where it is currently a minority. BJP requires the majority not only to have its own candidate for presidency in July, when Pranab Mukherjee retires, but also to push legislation without opposition from Rajya Sabha.

BJP's victory in these elections has manifold ramifications for India. It is good that Indians have a strong leader in Narendra Modi. Will Modi's populist slogans like "Sabka sath sabka vikas" (collective effort, inclusive growth) and "achey din" (good days ahead) lead to a majoritarian style of democracy, when minority communities (for example, Muslims and Dalits) remain marginalised? What about India's neighbours? Will Modi reset relations with neighbouring countries?

After setbacks in 2016, the saffron wave is back with the slogan "New India by 2022", setting the ground to win a second term in 2019.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.



Indian PM Narendra Modi's star power is at the heart of BJP's big victory in Uttar Pradesh elections.

PHOTO: AFP

population in India. BJP ran the campaign without naming the prospective Chief Minister. After such a massive mandate while keeping an eye on 2019, the BJP wants someone senior as Chief Minister, who is in sync with the RSS but has appeal to all communities. Several names are in circulation and the swearing-in ceremony will be held on March 19 in Lucknow.

As in 2014, this was 'voter-catcher' Modi's victory rather than a BJP win. Though the BJP has not delivered on its

demonetisation as a poor vs rich class issue. He explained that poor people were not affected as they did not hold large denomination notes. The corrupt people of the richer strata, he claimed, would be caught and their illegal wealth would be used for the development of the poor.

Surprisingly, though UP has 40 million Muslims, BJP did not field a single Muslim candidate. Muslims were ignored as, in BJP's view, they would not vote for the party anyway.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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We need sustainable development

The government as well as the people of Bangladesh must decide whether immediate economic benefits are worth the environmental damage occurring every day. Although some experts prioritise development over management of pollution, most specialists recommend that the two should go hand in hand. First introduced in the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report in 1987, sustainable development was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Environmental laws of Bangladesh have clear guidance for ensuring environmental sustainability, but the requirements are not followed properly by development projects. It is imperative that all development projects ensure proper environmental governance to make them sustainable for our future generations.

Md. Arifur Rahman
 Environment Counselor
 Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority

Exorbitant price of internet!

One of the key components of 'Digital Bangladesh' is people's access to the internet, and this includes citizens from all walks of life. This vision is impeded by the ridiculously high rates of internet packages, the mobile phone data packages in particular. One GB data packages valid for a month are sold at a price of Tk 250-300. This is beyond the reach of low income people. The price of 1 GB internet should be lowered to Tk 50 only with one month validity. We would appreciate it if the government takes appropriate measures to ensure more affordable internet prices for all.

Md. Zonaed Emran
 Banker