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FOUNDER EDITOR
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Abducted or arrested?

Investigate who was involved

WITHIN the last two weeks, plainclothes men picked up six people under mysterious circumstances that point towards negligence and misuse of power by law enforcement agencies. All the incidents occurred in different villages of Jhenidah district. And even though one of those picked up have subsequently been freed and another shown arrested, four still remain missing.

After the abduction of one of the victims from his house, relatives received phone calls demanding ransom. He was later shown arrested. Another was picked up by plainclothes men who claimed to be from the police station, in the name of helping to find an accused person's location. He never returned, and the police station refused to accept a GD by family members.

Concerns over the police's misuse of power have been raised in the past. In 2003, the High Court directed that police officers need to disclose their identity and show ID cards on demand to the person arrested or those present at the time. The Supreme Court in 2016 upheld the directives, meaning police were barred from making plainclothes arrest under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

As the incident of an "abducted" person ending up in the police station charged with a drug case show, the practice of indiscriminate arrests continues. Either criminals are posing as policemen to harass civilians, or there are elements within the force who are abusing their authority. Either way, the police's response to these cases has been grossly negligent. The matter calls for a proper investigation into these incidents and steps by the police to ensure that its members are not involved in flouting the law. Here, the implementation of the court directives by the government is crucial.

Chemical attack in Syria

A condemnable act!

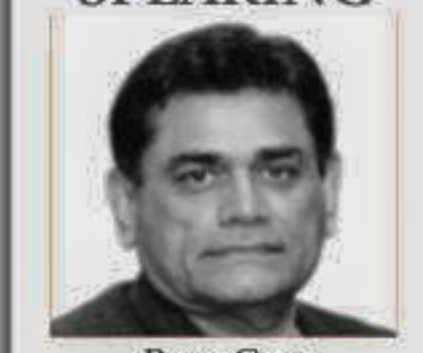
WE condemn, in the strongest possible terms the chemical attack on April 4 in rebel-held north-western Syria has killed some 70 civilians (mostly children) and left many others sick. The incident is outrageous and must be condemned by all. The US has blamed Damascus for the attack while the Assad regime has denied it. The Russians have denied that any of its military aircraft were involved in the strike and although the Russians have been fighting alongside Assad in the Syrian civil war, a Russian Ministry of Defence spokesman stated that the Syrian Air Force has destroyed a warehouse in Idlib province where chemical weapons were being produced and stockpiled before being shipped to Iraq.

All in all, a very confusing situation, and we are yet to ascertain as to who exactly carried out the strike and how so many civilians are now dead and many more suffering from the toxic attack.

One thing is certain though; this latest atrocity will do nothing to help the peace talks brokered by the UN, which has been going on for some time now. In its 6th year now, the Syrian civil war has killed more than 320,000 people and left millions shelter-less and indeed, state-less. It is time to take stock of the war which has now entered a very dangerous phase. If protagonists start to use chemical weapons in this conflict, we can expect casualties to grow exponentially. The war has been steadily fought to a relative stalemate with neither side strong enough to overpower the other. Is it not time we gave peace a chance?

Living with a big neighbour

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

SINCE its very birth, Bangladesh has been seized with the arduous task of determining the best ways of co-existing with India. Except perhaps Mexico, there is no other parallel situation. And perceptive Bangladeshis can very well understand the psyche behind the utterance of a Mexican President when he cried out, "Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the US", which was both an expression of frustration of dealing with a powerful nation as well as a rueful acceptance of

on details of any issue related to the visit has only added to the confusion about the nature of the likely compact in the defense sector.

In fact, our defense cooperation with India has predated our victory against the Pakistanis. There has also been increasing cooperation between the two militaries in recent years. And there have been memoranda on defense cooperation with other countries too. However, it is not so much the nitty-gritty of a likely deal or the character of the compact as the motive behind India's suggestions of a long term deal at all. What is its compulsion to ink a formal understanding when in fact all its security and strategic concerns have been more than adequately addressed by the present government?

Nepal treaty of 1950.

While all the above factors may well be a motivation, those are not the only stimulus for India.

For that one has to dwell on the past and carry out an inquest of the opinions offered by the Indian strategic thinkers and think tanks regarding the security architecture of South Asia as perceived by them. And this has evolved over several millenniums, stemming from the thoughts of a famous Indian political thinker nearly two thousand years ago advocating a sphere of influence or the 'mandala'. South Asia is the India 'mandala'. And as we have said in the past there is, interestingly, a continuity of thought in the enunciations of Indian scholars and strategic thinkers, from that

This is a reflection of the threat potential of Bangladesh to India, which it thinks a military cooperation formalised through a long term understanding would remove.

But a defense cooperation with provisions for sale of arms could also be an effort on India's part to enhance its level of arms export and enlarge its participation in the international legal arms bazaar, reportedly, aiming to reach a figure of USD 3 billion, a twenty fold increase in the next decade.

Come April 7, our Prime Minister will be on her way to pay a second official visit to India in seven years as the prime minister. We are told 33 agreements and understandings are likely to be signed, but Teesta is not one of those. That the government is not in sync with the



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the fait accompli - the proximity of a big neighbour. But Bangladesh is not Mexico.

India has been intimately involved with our birth and the sacrifices of the Indian soldiers as well as the people can never be adequately recompensed. Consequently, determining and steering the course of our relationship have been one of our greatest foreign policy challenges. And it still remains so, a fact made so vividly clear by the flurry of activity in the diplomatic front related to the PM's visit to India in April.

The pressure that our PM finds herself in has been clearly evident from the very speculative comments, mainly from Indian commentators, on the likelihood or not of a 'defence agreement' between the two countries. The very loud reticence of the establishment on this and indeed

It will be very easy to ascribe India's position to the overall thwart - China policy aimed at reducing the Chinese strategic footprint in South Asia. And it makes that even more convincing when conflated with the American objective in South Asia vis-à-vis China, which is co-terminus with that of India. But we forget easily too that China has had a very significant presence in South Asia from the early seventies when every other nation in the region sought in it a countervailing force to perceived India's domineering attitude in the region. Admittedly, this has significantly deepened, particularly with Nepal coming out of the restraints of mutual understanding with India to forge greater strategic cooperation with China in recent times, notwithstanding the Indo-

of Panikkar, to Dixit to Raja Mohan. In the articulation of the latter two are reflection of the former's characterisation of South Asia as being under India's security orbit. And to ensure that the balance is not hampered by whatever means is a right that India has arrogated to itself.

For a good part of the last 46 years since the birth of Bangladesh, India had felt that it has had to contend with two fronts (both in its west and east), contrary to what it had hoped would be obviated by the changes in the regional geopolitical scenario following December 16, 1971. And a defense pact or treaty or understanding with Bangladesh, call what you will, may be an attempt to obviate the possibility of twin threats on either side of its flanks instead of one.

sentiments of the people when it comes to the issue of water sharing with India was once again exhibited by the dismissive and insensitive manner our foreign minister dismissed the Teesta issue, saying it mattered very little if it was not on the list of agreements.

It must be unequivocally stated that our equation with India and the tone and tenor of the bilateral relationship will be patently of a different nature from that with any other country because of our historical association with it. What that means is that we should be prepared to go the extra mile but not at the expense of our national interest. The only formula for a sustained relation with India is win-win for both sides.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

Here's what's on the table for India and Bangladesh



SYED MUNIR KHASRU

WITH Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visiting India from April 7, 17 agreements and bilateral MoUs have been finalised. Almost two years into Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to

Dhaka, it is time to reflect on the progress made and issues yet to be resolved.

In the last five years, trade between the two countries has grown by more than 17 percent with two way trade at USD6.8 billion in the fiscal year 2015-16. The trade is heavily in favour of India and Bangladesh imported goods worth USD 5.45 billion and exported USD690 million. Concerted efforts are needed to narrow the gap.

For facilitation of trade and investment Bangladesh has dedicated two SEZs in its northwest, bordering India. Trade ties are troubled by poor road and rail connectivity. The four operational 'border haats' along the India-Bangladesh border have been successful, with trade worth USD2,60,000 having taken place. However, there have been delays in the operationalisation of four more 'border haats' in Meghalaya, agreed upon during Prime Minister Modi's visit.

Launch of trans-shipment operations combining riverine and land routes last year have enabled India to deliver goods through Bangladesh to Nepal and Bhutan in a third of previous time and reduced transport cost by almost half. After turning power surplus last year, India has been working with Bangladesh to double the capacity of existing transmission interconnects. There are plans to set up a third link for increasing cross-border electricity trade for widening the regional market as new generation capacities come up.

Currently, India provides Bangladesh with 2,600 MW of power. The new line is expected to wheel power from hydel projects proposed to be built in the northeast which can be shared with Bangladesh as well. India's ONGC and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation are in negotiation to build a 6,900 km long gas pipeline linking

Bangladesh, Myanmar and northeastern states. There are ongoing talks of expanding energy cooperation to BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) framework.

Cattle smuggling across the border has decreased, with seizure of cattle by BSF decreasing from 1.5 lakh in 2015 to 1.2 lakh in 2016 in south Bengal frontier, known as the cattle corridor of India. However, border killings of Bangladeshi civilians by BSF have not ceased, with four killed in February alone. Since 2015, a total of 77 people have been killed and 108 injured by BSF. Cattle, even if smuggled, can't be worse than drugs, and fatal shooting of offenders is not

India to Bangladesh for purchase of military equipment. Some have questioned whether this deal is a response to the recent purchase of two submarines by Bangladesh from China. Given that India has a defence budget of around USD50 billion and shops around the world, Bangladesh with a meagre defence budget of around USD2.8 billion, with reliance mostly on Chinese built military hardware, should not be a concern for India.

While defence cooperation may be one of the major outcomes of the visit, bigger issues from the Bangladeshi point of view, such as the Teesta water treaty, are still at bay. Despite Modi's pledge and assurances by



The stakes are high for both sides.

justifiable when there are options for imprisonment, fines and confiscation.

Bangladesh has extended full cooperation to India for fighting insurgent groups along the border. During 2009-14 Bangladesh arrested at least 17 top leaders of various insurgent groups, with the surrender of eight more suspects. Some of the insurgents were also sent back to India.

Bangladesh and India are set to sign a five-year MoU for bilateral defence cooperation for joint initiatives in defence technology, research and maritime infrastructure development. Also on the cards is a USD500 million line of credit by

mercurial Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee of a Teesta deal the water-sharing agreement is being stalled.

This is the last official visit to India by Hasina before Bangladesh elections, therefore stakes are high for both sides. After all the positive steps Hasina has taken for improving Indo-Bangla ties, if the Teesta issue continues to be unresolved, it will hurt her credibility with her own people.

The writer is Chairman of the Bangladesh based international thinktank, the Institute for Policy, Advocacy, and Governance (IPAG).

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Electric cables stolen from the Moghbazar - Mouchak flyover

It is shameful that some people have resorted to stealing government properties of electric cables. These cables were installed to light up the newly constructed the flyover driveway for the safety and convenience of commuters. A lot of time has already been wasted in preparing this flyover for public use. The waiting period subjected people, especially residents of the area, to immense dust pollution and other inconveniences. Now that it is finally ready, these miscreants are causing further difficulties.

It is high time to engage security patrolling in the area. Concerted efforts of the authorities should be invested in catching the criminals.

Sirajul Islam
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Padma Oil Co Ltd., Dhaka

