

The Teesta runs through it

DEB MUKHARJI

PRIME Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, is visiting India. This is her first bilateral visit to India since 2010. Being committed to a state visit to Japan, the Bangladesh prime minister was unable to attend the inauguration of Narendra Modi in May 2014, when the heads of government of SAARC countries had been invited.

There has been a significant and cumulative change in India-Bangladesh relations, and mutual perceptions, over the past few years. The tone had been set in the joint statement at the conclusion of Hasina's visit in January, 2010, which held out the vision of future partnership, overcoming past mutual concerns. The Framework for Development and Cooperation signed the following year during then-PM Manmohan Singh's visit, though under the shadow of the Teesta imbroglio, laid out a charter of cooperation encompassing a large spectrum of activities. The spirit of these mutually reinforcing positive approaches was maintained during PM Modi's visit in May, 2015, which also saw closure to the long awaited Land Boundary Agreement.

India is not a direct party to the issue of the Rohingyas of Myanmar, who continue to flee to Bangladesh, which now hosts over 1,00,000 in camps. Despite some international assistance, the Rohingyas pose a serious economic problem for Bangladesh. The visit may provide the occasion for an exchange of views on how the issue may be handled and whether India has a role in advising the friendly government of Myanmar to ensure that the flow of refugees is stemmed. Tangentially, India itself is involved as some Rohingyas have sought shelter in India.

With a great display of zeal, China has been seen to be active in India's periphery in promoting One Belt One Road and bilateral relations. They have received some setbacks in Myanmar and Sri Lanka in bilateral relations, but will surely pursue their objectives. Pakistan continues to be a willing accessory to Chinese desires to curb and contain India. Nepal had appeared to be moving sensibly towards positive relations with both her giant neighbours, until the ultra-nationalist K.P. Oli made it an either/or choice, which has done no good to Sino-Nepal relations as his successor's recently concluded visit to China demonstrated. China has had a stable relationship with Bangladesh and is a major provider of defence hardware. A slew of agreements were signed during President Xi's recent visit to Dhaka, including for the provision of substantial loans and grants. While carefully observing the

developing relations between Dhaka and Beijing, India should avoid a Pavlovian reaction.

Since assuming the reins of government in 2009, the Awami League has tried to ensure that anti-India activities are not carried out from Bangladesh's soil. This would not have been an easy task as elements within the establishment had been ingrained by previous administrations to promote such activities. There were, of course, areas of congruence. The Jamaat-inspired, Pakistan-supported terrorist elements had in their sights both India and the Awami League.

The Awami League government's continuing effort to deal with terrorists has not deflected it

Though the Jamaat remains the fountainhead of all terrorist outfits in Bangladesh, the frenetic efforts of their lobbyists abroad, including elements of the US government influenced by their Pakistani friends, have been desperate to provide cover and legitimacy to it and prevent Bangladesh from stabilising as a liberal, secular, progressive democracy. This was true of the US state department notably under John Kerry and intelligence regimes in recent years; it remains to be seen if Donald Trump makes a difference.

Indo-Bangladesh relations presently reflect both maturity and political will. Yes, much more requires to be done to take our relationship

supply of electricity from India is making a difference to the lives of people in Bangladesh. Above all, Bangladesh has ceased to be a sanctuary for elements inimical to the Indian state.

A single lacuna has been India's inability to deliver on the sharing of Teesta waters. It is possible that even without an agreement, Bangladesh may be receiving about the same quantity as was envisaged in the discussions. The issue, however, is as much about the quantum of water as Bangladesh's right to receive it. Not least, a demonstration of India abiding by its commitments. The present chief minister of Bengal may wish to recall that her distinguished predecessor, Jyoti Basu, played a signal role in the resolution of the Farakka Barrage issue two decades ago and earned encomiums from both India and Bangladesh.

In a recent public speech Sheikh Hasina recalled that prior to the general elections in Bangladesh in October, 2001, Indian intelligence officials in Dhaka had collaborated with their counterparts in the American embassy in discussing with Tareque Rehman (son of Begum Khaleda Zia, now in self-exile in London) how the Awami League could be defeated. Leaving aside the possibility of such discussions affecting the election results, such a charge coming from a friendly head of government has to be taken seriously. If true, it reflects sadly on Indian intelligence — considering the consistently and virulently hostile attitude towards India of the BNP government that followed.

Amends would have been made following the 2014 elections in which the BNP had chosen not to participate and India had reached out vigorously to foreign capitals to ensure that US-inspired pressures for the annulment of the elections did not succeed.

Sheikh Hasina has been a friend of India and has addressed India's critical security concerns with unambiguous firmness. While cognisant of her internal political compulsions, and always mindful of Bangladesh's national interests, she has welcomed the fostering of close economic relations with India. Her state visit provides an opportunity for both sides to assess the progress made on the many agreements reached in earlier years, as also provide guidelines for the future.

Beyond the defence MoU and credits and grants for commerce, and other routine ventures, what is essential is the underlining of shared trust and commitment to preserving mutual interests.

The writer was Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh from 1995-2000.

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SOURCE: AFP

from trying to bring to a close the consequences of the crimes committed in 1971. In this respect, Sheikh Hasina has kept the promise she had made to the electorate. But for this, she has had to face strong western criticism. The ludicrous argument has been advanced that incidents of terrorism in Bangladesh have been encouraged by the War Crimes Trial. As a noted Indian journalist recently commented, "Far, far away from the streets of Gulshan, where terrorists killed over 20 innocent people on July 1, their nominal patrons are using slick US and British lobbyists to discredit Hasina's efforts to battle radicalism and punish perpetrators of war crimes committed during the 1971 struggle for independence from Pakistan".

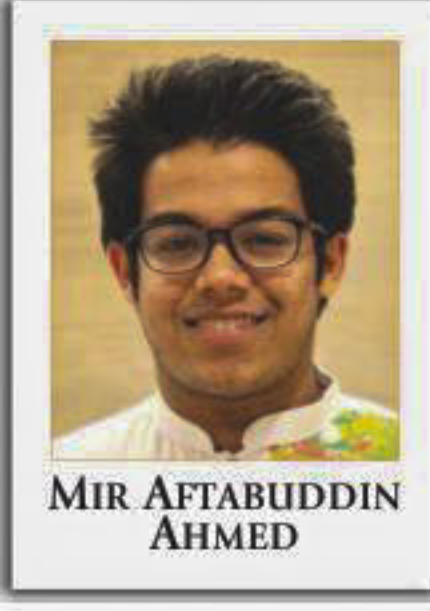
forward. But we also have to see the present in the context of the past: Only a decade ago, the current scenario of a cooperative framework of the relationship would have seemed impossible. Since then, the long-festering maritime boundary issue has been resolved; the international award favouring Bangladesh accepted gracefully by India. The seemingly ever-lasting land boundary question is behind us. Few note that the apprehensions of large-scale communal movements of peoples simply did not come true; people decided to remain with their land, albeit with a different nationality.

Meanwhile, communications have improved dramatically as also trade and investment. The

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PRIORITISING INVESTMENT IN HUMAN CAPITAL

A national resource that can no longer be ignored



MIR AFTABUDDIN AHMED

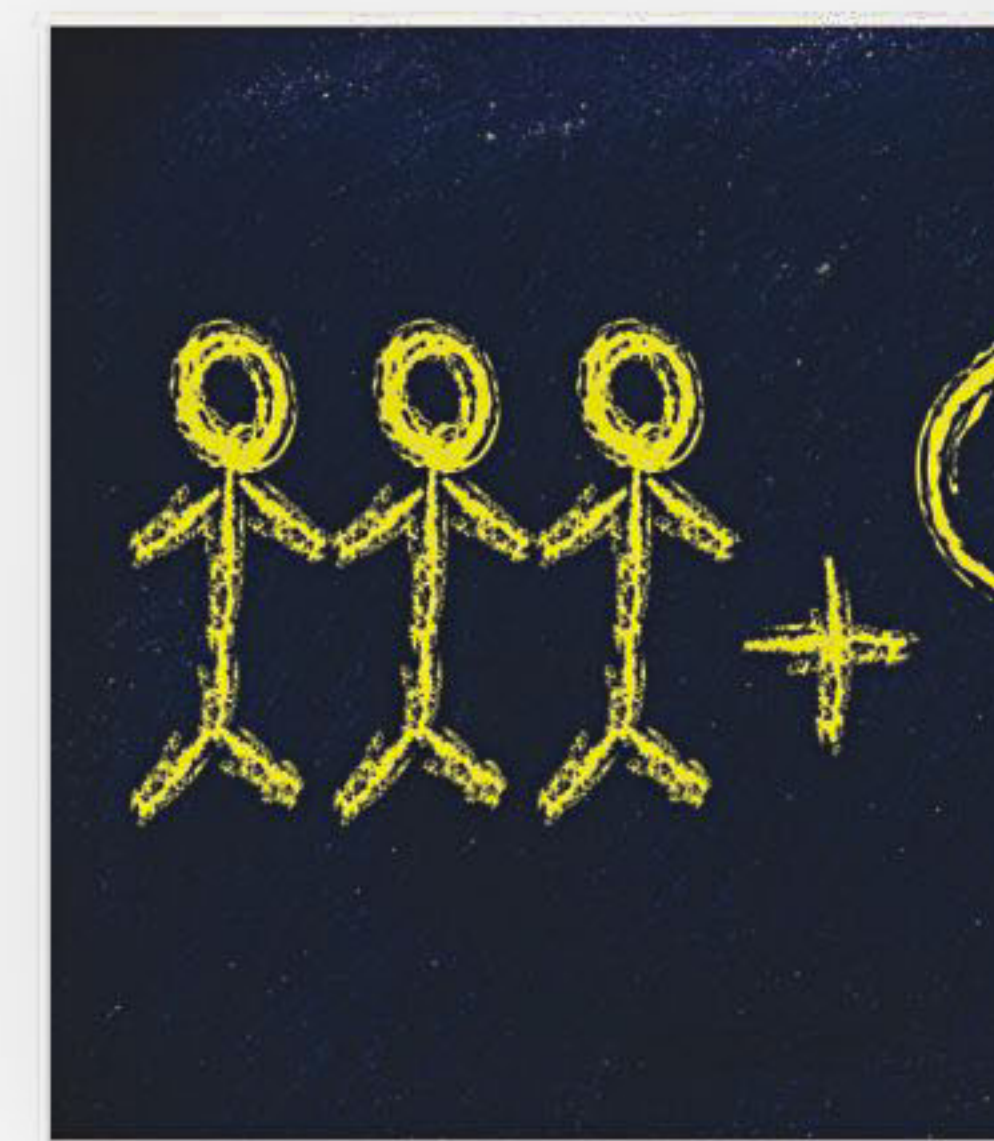
BD has been on a path of drastic economic development, characterised by a consistent GDP growth rate hovering above 6 percent in the last decade or so. Nevertheless, economists have

brought forth the key question of sustainability when it comes to assessing Bangladesh's economic future. Some have suggested that the nation's high dependency on remittance flows and an agricultural economy vulnerable to supply-side shocks are major causes of concerns for Bangladesh. On the other hand, competition from Cambodia and Vietnam are hurting Bangladesh's international competitiveness in the global RMG market. As such, the country needs to look for an alternative economic model which would ensure its continued success in the international economy. Interestingly, the answer according to many analysts lies with the high population of the country. Traditionally considered a severe impediment to development, utilisation of Bangladesh's high population through investment in human capital schemes, seems to be a plausible method to ensure the sustainability of the economy.

Human capital is defined as the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population, viewed in terms of their value or cost to an organisation or country. Popularised by the iconic American economist Gary Becker, human capital is an aggregate economic viewpoint illustrated by its intangible and sometimes indirect effects on society. Bangladesh ranks a paltry 104th

amongst 130 countries, according to the 2016 Human Capital Report by the World Economic Forum. Interestingly, Bangladesh fell five places down from 2015, and one wonders what the report will suggest in 2017.

Human capital measurements include an evaluation of the levels of education, skills and employment in society. Interestingly, whereas school enrolment rates in Bangladesh have gone up significantly in the past two decades, such is clearly not represented in the global



human capital measures. The current government has indeed gone on a path to increase the quantity and accessibility of education in Bangladesh, yet at the same time it is noticeable to observe a drastic stagnation, even a fall, in the quality of education provided to the citizens of this country. Noticeable printing errors in textbooks and a lacklustre national syllabus in contemporary Bangladesh undermines the quality of the

prospective workforce. A high number of GPA 5.0s in the SSC and HSC examinations are not transitioning into a fully productive workforce. O-Level and A-Level graduates jump at the first opportunity to go abroad for higher education, which leads to a severe skill outflow.

A significant number of Bangladeshi youth with high levels of formal qualifications end up unemployed, work in jobs that underutilise their skills or immigrate to other countries. Today Bangladesh has a high youth



unemployment rate of approximately nine percent, and this results in a misallocation and waste of resources that Bangladesh can ill-afford. Whilst criticising students for permanently emigrating to foreign nations or domestic graduates from refraining from government jobs, has some basis, at the same time there exists a severe lack of opportunities and possibilities for students to perform to the best of their potential within the Bangladeshi

workforce. It is for this very reason that state-level investment in human capital should be a primary focus for our policymakers.

Whether it be allocating state capital towards skill-based training, ranging from accountancy to management, or a complete reframing of primary school syllabi, the government has the resources and ability to enhance notions of human capital growth in Bangladesh. In Canada, for example, the federal and provincial governments provide stipends to governmental institutions and private companies to recruit students and recent graduates, to improve the employability and skill-set of the youth. Engaging the younger generation in national level programmes, associated with organisations ranging from the Election Commission to the Ministry of Water Resources, will create an avenue for a greater social mobility of a capable Bangladeshi labour force. It is indeed true that Bangladesh reaps the successes of a low skilled and low wage economy, which has supported the growth of the RMG sector, but with time this country cannot encourage talented and educated students to aim for low wage jobs. This country should not encourage its professionally educated youth to work in poor working conditions in the Middle East. In hindsight, the development of a successful economy based on an uneducated labour force was a by-product of the times Bangladesh had gone through post 1971. Yet modern-day Bangladesh can create a forum and a platform to encourage its youth to aim higher and utilise themselves to the best of their abilities.

The principal benefit of investing in human capital is in its accentuation of knowledge spillovers, which occurs when information and knowledge that are collected and shared for an activity ultimately generates

supplementary prospects for application in other environments. The spillover serves as the catalyst for the development of new ideas and vibrant intellectual discussions, often in ways that were never anticipated initially. As such, a highly skilled, trained, motivated and employable labour force will not only generate more ideas individually, but support an economy based on learning and experience, whilst allowing others around them to reap the benefits of knowledge sharing. This has been the case with the Malaysian economy of the 1980s and the modern-day Singaporean economy.

Knowledge creates further knowledge, and as such to foresee a diverse, vibrant and versatile Bangladeshi economy can only be possible if the government supports the development of its youth. We already observe this with the progress of small-scale software developers in Bangladesh and the ICT Ministry's tangible support to such entrepreneurs in this regard. One only hopes that this can stem onto other sectors as well, as the external benefit derived from state-supported human capital growth has historically been immense in other parts of the world.

Bangladesh does not operate based on a purely welfare economy. It does not provide handouts to people, neither does it commend lethargy. We live in a society which has an excess supply of labour who are willing and able to work. It is high time that we highlight the resource, rather than the industries those resources partake in, to ensure long-term sustainable economic development. As such, the prioritisation of this country's greatest national resource, its people and especially its younger generation, cannot and should not be ignored by the government.

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QUOTABLE Quote

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT
French novelist

The most glorious moments in your life are not the so-called days of success, but rather those days when out of dejection and despair you feel rise in you a challenge to life, and the promise of future accomplishments.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Humbled	33 Fuse together	10 Badminton need
7 Prayer finish	34 Nuisance	16 Spills the beans
11 100%	37 Courts	17 Aids in crime
12 Act the nomad	39 Eat a lot, in slang	18 Space sighting
13 Put in a box	43 Not active	19 Census unit
14 Song for two	44 Ask	21 Danger
15 Neatnik's banes	45 Turner and Danson	22 Cornered
17 Suffering from a workout	46 Small frog	24 Gets ready, briefly
20 Bumbling		25 Vacuum lack
23 Scary shout		30 Makes fun of
24 Black cat		33 Zigzag
26 Outback bird		35 Faux pas
27 Equip		36 Solitary
28 Mine matter		37 Funny fellow
29 Perfume counter		38 Shelley work
31 Telltales		40 Party staple
32 Exorbitant		41 Salt Lake City player
		42 According to

DOWN

1 Galoot	30 Makes fun of
2 Frank holder	33 Zigzag
3 Compass trace	35 Faux pas
4 Sordid	36 Solitary
5 Different	37 Funny fellow
6 Salon jobs	38 Shelley work
7 Impassioned	40 Party staple
8 Small opening	41 Salt Lake City player
9 Time for preparation	42 According to

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

P	E	S	T	R	E	L	I	C		
A	C	T	U	P	R	E	V	A	D	
W	H	I	T	E	C	H	A	P	E	L
N	O	R	D	U	E	S	A	T		
O	N	T	O	P	T	O	T	A	L	
D	U	E	L							
E	N	D	O							
A	P	T	A	L	E	T	A	U		
B	L	A	C	K	F	R	I	A	R	S
C	A	R	O	L	K	N	I	U	A	T
S	N	O	W	Y	S	A	T	Y	R	

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BEETLE, DON'T THESE AFTERNOON NAPS INTERFERE WITH YOUR NIGHT'S SLEEP?

NOT REALLY...

BUT I DO FIND A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP INTERFERES WITH MY AFTERNOON NAP

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WHAT'S THAT?

A BOOK ZOE HAS TO READ FOR SCHOOL.

IS IT ANY GOOD?

IT HAS SOME ADULT SITUATIONS IN IT.

WELL, SHE CAN PROBABLY HANDLE IT.

HE? YES. ME? NOT SO SURE!