

Walking the talk

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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DHAKA SUNDAY APRIL 16, 2017, BAISHAKH 3, 1424 BS

Memory Eternal defaced

Stand against attacks on history and culture

FIRST a graffiti celebrating Baishakh and then a memorial commemorating those killed in 1971 have been defaced in the days preceding Pahela Baishakh. One was an attack against a shared heritage while the other seeks to deface our history. Memory Eternal, a memorial in the University of Dhaka with names of teachers, students and staff of the university killed in 1971, came under attack last Wednesday. The DU Vice-Chancellor blamed the "anti-liberation forces" for the vandalism.

Who are these anti-liberation forces? Judging from those who opposed our struggle for independence in 1971, they are those who want to see our country as a communal land, where minorities are under attack, where our cultural heritage is discarded, and our identities are defined only by our religion. In short, these are groups which oppose the secular values that the Liberation War enshrined. The two groups may not be the same, but their demands and acts are the same thing: subjugating our secular traditions and denigrating the Liberation War.

Writers and cultural activists are worried that we are bowing down to communal forces as their demands are getting louder. We may think removal of a symbol which stands for justice does not amount to much. But, who knows what the next demand might be? Our nation enshrines secular values that are epitomised by 1971. The secular cultural identity we fought for then, are now again coming under attack. It is our secular cultural heritage that is at risk of being defaced.

Today, as our celebrations are questioned, our artwork and history defaced, we must take a stand for plurality. Their words did not stop us from celebrating Pahela Baishakh and their words will not compel us to discard our secular values.

Diarrhoea kills 45,000 children yearly

Ensure safe drinking water

ACCORDING to the recently unveiled report by WHO titled "UN Water — Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water 2017", 500,000 people die globally due to diarrhoea. In this figure are 45,000 Bangladeshi children. The report published on April 13 cannot be ignored by policymakers.

Over the years, we have witnessed a population explosion as millions migrated to our cities in search of employment opportunities. We have also seen the rise of classes of unscrupulous and powerful business entities that have encroached upon our rivers and polluted them with impunity. Today, we face a crisis of diabolical proportions where the city municipal corporations are simply overwhelmed in their fight to supply safe drinking water to its residents. The burgeoning slums in and around Dhaka have little in way of piped water and must, in many cases, resort to drinking river water. Millions of residents are now forced to buy water jars that are supposed to be safe, but in many cases are not, because there is nothing in way of quality control.

Our rivers are now the dumping grounds for all sorts of waste, from untreated industrial toxins to human excreta. The only way to reverse this level of pollution is for government to make substantial investments in improved sanitation facilities and enforcing environmental protection laws (that exist on paper) to penalise errant industries. If we are truly interested in saving the lives of these 45,000 (under-5) children, there needs to be a substantial increase over the current USD 5 per head the government spends on water and sanitation per year.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The flashfloods are our own doing

The flash floods highlighted in *The Daily Star's* "Havoc in Haor" article is a result of global warming, caused to a large extent by the exhaust from motor vehicles, carbon emissions from power plants and methane released from waste being dumped in landfills. The chlorofluorocarbon of air conditioners is also likely to have played a part. The abundance of these gases in the atmosphere is causing the water in our rivers to rise and overflow from heat.

This sorry state of affairs is a result of our own collective actions. We must assume responsibility for it and adjust our actions accordingly before the damage to the environment becomes irreparable.
Syed Raiyan Abu Zafar
Independent University, Bangladesh

Protect our culture

On April 13, the photo captioned 'Cultural tradition under attack' published by *The Daily Star* showed graffiti art smeared with black lubricants at the Institute of Fine Arts in Chittagong University.

I don't understand how a person can besmirch the tradition, culture and heritage of the country in which he has grown up. They do not know the proper meaning of culture, which in reality has no contradiction with any religion or belief. Culture is the chain that binds human relationships from time immemorial. It is shameful that a country known worldwide for its hospitality has come to treat its own traditions in this way.

We do not want to lose our cultural heritage. So I urge the concerned authority to take legal actions against the miscreants responsible for these actions.

Shamir Sarkar, University of Dhaka



MACRO MIRROR

FAHMIDA KHATUN

BANGLADESH'S long dynamic relationship with India has many facets, ranging from economic to social to political. Trade, investment, power and energy, communication, education and health are areas where a bilateral relationship exists. During the past few years, there has been a visible attempt to improve this relationship. The recent visit of Bangladesh's Prime Minister to India during April 7-10, 2017 has brought the relationship between the two countries to a new level. Of course, the achievement has, to a large extent, been overshadowed by the disappointing outcome on the Teesta water sharing issue. As much as it was an outright rejection to a just and authentic demand of Bangladesh, the attitude of the leader of West Bengal towards the issue was equally insensitive. While the West Bengal leader wants to gain political mileage in her constituency, it's the suffering of Bangladeshis living in the region that has been completely ignored.

On the economic front, India and Bangladesh have signed 22 agreements in areas such as defence, civil nuclear energy, cyber security, power, skill development and developmental cooperation. Two lines of credit worth USD 5 billion were signed. One of the LoCs worth USD 4.5 billion is for 17 projects in infrastructure and power. The other LoC for USD 500 million is for the purchase of defence hardware. Also, the two countries signed 13 business-to-business pacts, mainly in power and energy valued at about USD 9 billion. Bangladeshi Prime Minister urged the Indian business community to invest in infrastructure projects, power and energy, food and agro-processing, and the manufacturing and transport sector.

The history of LoCs offered by India to Bangladesh dates back to 2010, when the first LoC worth USD 1 billion was signed. Later USD 200 million of LoC-1 was converted into grants which are being used in the construction of the Padma Bridge. LoC-1 was enhanced from USD 800 million to USD 862 million in 2015. A total of 15 projects are to be implemented under the first LoC. India signed a new credit agreement amounting to USD 2 billion to implement socio-economic development projects in Bangladesh in 2016 through LoC-2. The interest rate for LoC-2 was fixed at one percent annually with a 20-year repayment term, including a five-year moratorium. LoC-2 was to fund social and infrastructure development projects in the power, railways, road,

transport, information and communication technology, shipping, health and technical education sectors.

LoCs have the potential to contribute to the development of Bangladesh. However, disbursement of LoCs are lengthy and slow. Translating the agreements to project framework takes a long time which impacts the implementation of the projects. The Economic Relations Division has to prepare specific projects against the LoCs which are to be implemented by various ministries. Shortcomings, in case of preparation of project framework and speedy approval of project proposals, should be overcome if the LoCs are to be

scholarship opportunities so that bright Bangladeshi students can study in Indian education institutes, such as the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) and Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), leading medical colleges, nuclear science institutes and agricultural research centres.

Far more clarity is required in the implementation of investment deals. For example, how Reliance Power Ltd would use USD 1 billion to construct liquefied natural gas-based power plant at Meghnaghat, how can the standard of equipment to be used in power plants be ensured, and what will be the pricing of LNG, are critical issues to be considered.

reach out to its 'seven sister states' through Bangladesh. Also, Bangladesh is crucial for regional security and stability. However, in order to have a more meaningful economic cooperation, a number of unresolved issues need to be settled. Bangladesh's huge trade deficit with India is one of those.

In FY2016, Bangladesh's export to India was USD 689.6 million while Bangladesh's import from India was USD 5,452.9 million. Due to various non-tariff barriers, Bangladesh has been unable to take advantage of duty free access of its products in India's market. Other trade measures, such as anti-dumping by India on the export of jute from Bangladesh, are



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi after flagging off an Indo-Bangladesh train service, at Hyderabad house in New Delhi on April 8, 2017.

PHOTO: PTI

used efficiently. Conditionalities attached with LoCs, such as spending money for purchasing equipment and raw materials from India, are not favourable. Bangladesh currently has a foreign exchange reserve of USD 32.3 billion, which is quite adequate to undertake our own development projects. We could have survived without another LoC. Of course, cooperation in areas such as space technology, evacuation support at Rooppur, ICT training, establishment of medical colleges etc is well appreciated. Bangladesh also needs support to improve its technical knowhow and human resource capacity. We also need

Similarly, Bangladesh needs a LNG policy along with a LNG pricing mechanism. Clarity is also required in regard to coal-fired power plants as well as power tariff. On the other hand, initiatives, such as the establishment of Indian Exim Bank in Bangladesh, are likely to facilitate local Bangladeshi entrepreneurs to set up large projects with Indian origin capital equipment.

It is expected that the agreements signed between the two neighbouring countries will help improve trade and connectivity and ensure security. In the end, it can contribute towards bringing about economic well-being of the population in the region. India wants to

also harmful for us.

Full details of the agreements are yet to be made available in the public domain. On the face of it, these deals mostly look promising for both India and Bangladesh. The final outcome, of course, will depend on how they are implemented and how the balancing string is settled between the two countries. Sincerity is expected from both sides, especially India, to ensure that the attainment of "public good" from the projects is kept beyond narrow political interests.

The writer is Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

A historic visit



FABLEEHA BUSHRA CHOUDHURY

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina's recently concluded official visit to India during April 7-10, 2017 witnessed the signing of 35 bilateral documents (according to a statement released by the Bangladesh government), agreements and MoUs (Memorandum of Understanding) on a diverse range of areas including power, energy, defence, infrastructure and education. Ties between the two countries have continued to be on the rise for the last eight years, with four exchanges of visits at the level of heads of government since 2010. This visit has seen the scope of engagement between the two countries expanding from more traditional means of cooperation to exploring opportunities as well as developing on the success of previous

500 million in military assistance. Tariff and non-tariff barriers such as inadequate border infrastructure, bureaucratic and customs bottlenecks, delays due to manual clearance, visa problems, lack of banking services and warehouse facilities at the border have hindered bilateral trade.

Joint Task Forces by leading industry bodies of India and Bangladesh – Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) – have been set up to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers, and promote Indian investments in Bangladesh in the focus areas of infrastructure, education, healthcare, power, and tourism.

With an aim to improve road connectivity, trial run of the Kolkata-Khulna-Dhaka bus service took place on April 8. The old rail route between Kolkata and Khulna, which went defunct in 1965 due to escalating tensions in the region, was reopened. Passenger services are expected to begin in July, making

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order to facilitate cargo movement from northeastern states of India, an MoU was approved for dredging of the Ashuganj-Zakiganj stretch of the Kushiara River and the Sirajganj-Daikhawa stretch of Jamuna River. This will help reduce congestion on the Siliguri Corridor (or Chicken's Neck), a narrow stretch of land, located in the Indian state of West Bengal that connects India's northeastern states to the rest of the nation, with Nepal and Bangladesh lying on either side of the corridor.

Agreements between Reliance Power and Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), for phase I of the 750 MW liquefied natural gas (LNG) power project at Meghnaghat near Dhaka, were signed. This agreement was worth USD 1 billion out of a total proposed investment of USD 3 billion. Reliance Power also signed an MoU with Petrobangla to set up an LNG terminal at Kutubdia Island near Chittagong. For the Rampal Maitree Power Project, another USD 1.6 billion was pledged for debt financing through the agreement

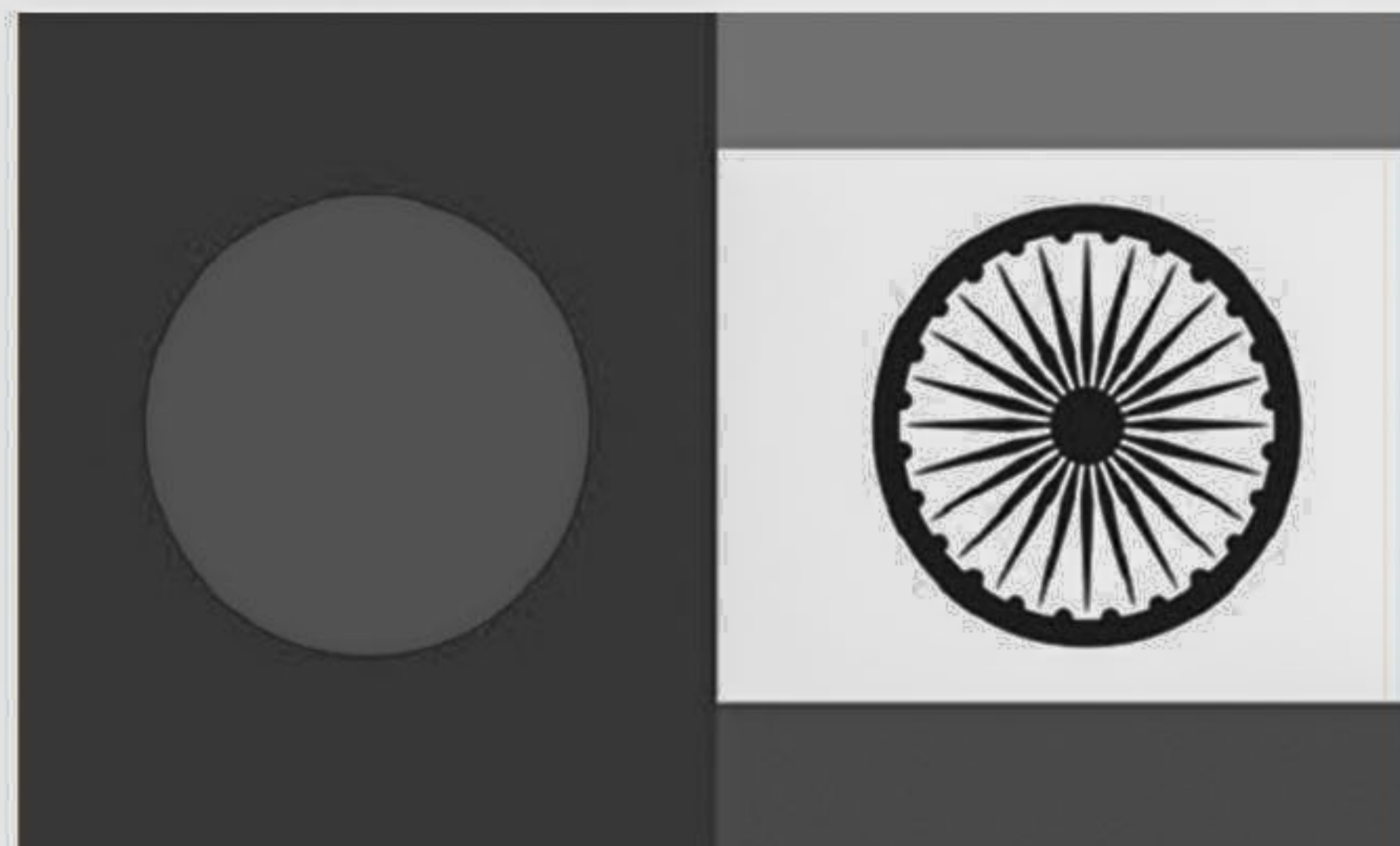
between Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company (Pvt) Limited (BIFPCL) and Exim Bank of India. Adani Power pledged an investment deal worth USD 2 billion and also signed a power purchase agreement (PPA) with the Power Grid Company of Bangladesh. Indian state-run National Thermal Power Corporation Limited (NTPC) and BPDB signed an agreement for supply of power from Nepal that foresees an investment of USD 3.15 billion.

Charting new avenues for cooperation and tapping fresh opportunities, nuclear energy agreements between India and Bangladesh have been signed for the first time. Nuclear energy agreements comprised of cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy, exchange of technical information and cooperation in the regulation of nuclear safety and radiation protection, and cooperation regarding nuclear power plant projects in Bangladesh. As construction of Bangladesh's first nuclear power plant in Rooppur is expected to begin later this year, the exchange of information with a neighbouring country like India, which began operating its own nuclear plant in 2014, will be advantageous for Bangladesh.

The BBIN (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal) initiative, which had been stalling for the last few years, also saw a restart as initiatives for road, rail, rivers, sea, transmission lines, petroleum pipelines and digital connectivity were laid out and discussed. The up-and-coming Bay of Bengal initiative was among the talks, as a roadmap for cooperation in the exploration of hydrocarbons, marine resources, deep sea fishing, preservation of marine ecology, and disaster management was also discussed.

There is no denying that India-Bangladesh relationship stands at the top of the foreign policy agenda in Bangladesh and is a priority for India. Although issues like the Teesta treaty and concerns about defence cooperation have cast a shadow over the visit, on balance, the outcome of this visit has seen more progress than ever before.

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collaborations.

India has declared to invest up to USD 10 billion in infrastructure and medicine, in a bid to decrease the large trade imbalance which is currently in favour of India. Another USD 5 billion in loans has been pledged, which includes USD

travel accessible and affordable for people across the border seeking education, treatment and pilgrimage. In terms of maritime connectivity, an MoU aiming to enhance cruise passenger services along the coastal routes between India and Bangladesh was signed. In