

# Closer China-Bangladesh ties shouldn't worry India

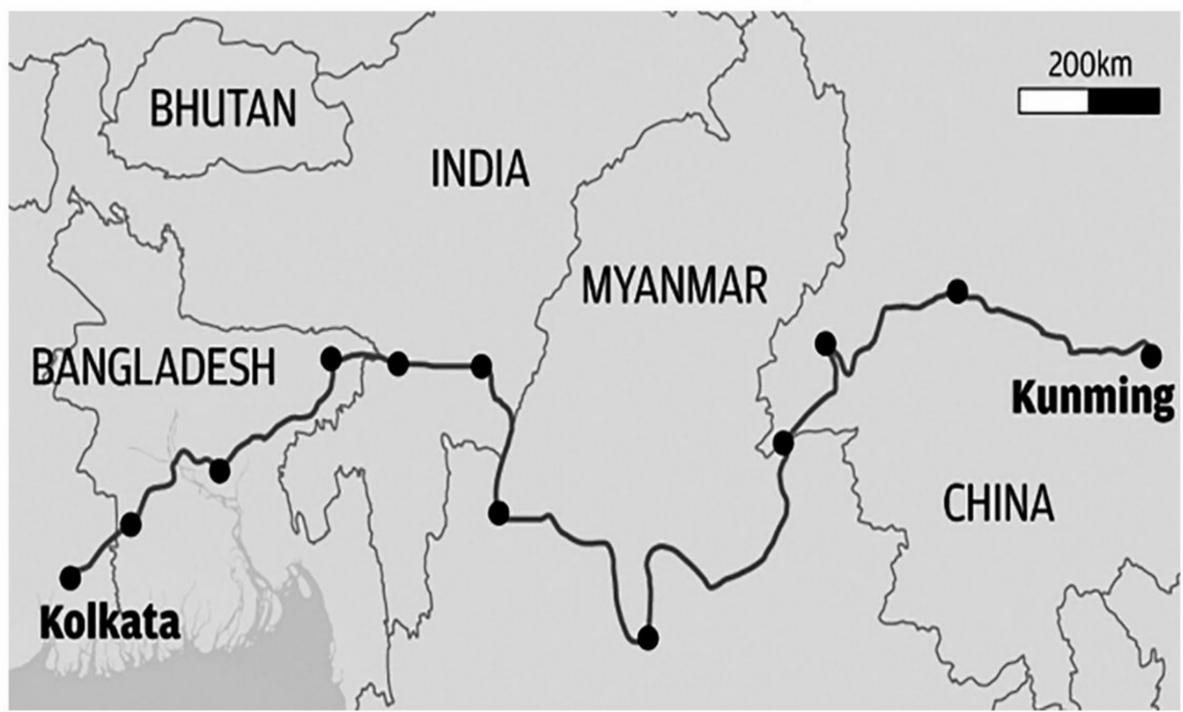
PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

IT would have passed as a purely academic event had it not been centred around Indo-Bangla relations and a thought-provoking remark made by an esteemed guest speaker from India. Professor Sabyasachi Basu Roy Chaudhury, vice chancellor, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata gave a special talk at the Asiatic Society auditorium in Dhaka on November 21. He spoke on the theme "Indo-Bangla relationship in the light of history" as reported in *Prothom Alo* the following day. Professor Chaudhury's speech stands out for an exceptionally candid, if not a politically impeccable, statement: "China is now a 'thorn' in the relations between India and Bangladesh."

Elaborating the point he said, "China is now Bangladesh's largest trading partner. Bangladesh purchases most of its arms and weapons from the country. Chinese President Xi Jinping during his visit to Dhaka declared a huge commitment to invest (USD 22 billion) in Bangladesh. The latter agreeing to part of China's massive One Belt One Road (OBOR) project has caused worries to India." All this is common knowledge and took



The BCIM Economic Corridor is a great opportunity to connect world's fastest growing economies—China, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

*We need to emphasise the importance of reworking China-India-Myanmar trilateral equations to be energetically responsive to Bangladesh's concerns over a snowballing multidimensional Rohingya crisis.*

years to reach the stage it has. But the professor's attention to detail speaks volumes about closer Indo-Bangladesh ties. We needn't however begrudge the "thorny" allusion to the China factor. These are the reasons why: -It may reflect inner Indian anxiety to settle some of the long-standing issues with Bangladesh so as not to give extra mileage to Beijing. -Professor Chaudhury has spoken as an academic so that his use of the metaphor for a country being a "thorn" between two countries can't be taken as an official Indian opinion. -India and China being two giant neighbours of Bangladesh, it is in Dhaka's interest to cultivate balanced and incremental relations with both countries. Yet it is not Bangladesh-driven alone. On the contrary, a

strong reciprocity of interest is evinced by both New Delhi and Beijing in Bangladesh's location-centred importance. Despite Doklam, India-China trade has topped the USD 90 billion mark and is projected to be around USD 402 billion by 2020. Trade balance is currently heavily tilted towards China with Indian imports far outstripping its exports to China. This is topped up by a diverse set of investment linkages between the two Asian giants Being a friendly neighbour to both India and China, Bangladesh too wants vigorous trade and investments with them. Thus there needn't be any reservations on such issues in this era of economic primacy. At one point, regarding financing of Sonadia deep sea port or any massive infrastructure project we made it clear we

would prefer consortium funding to individual country investment. This visualised partnership for progress with shared stakes. Professor Chaudhury, while recalling the achievement of Ganges water-sharing treaty of 1996, lamented the failure to resolve the problems of sharing waters of 54 common rivers (including Teesta). His recipe is to engage all countries and states—from the origins to the emptying-out points of the rivers—in discussion for a sustainable resolution of the water issues. One can only cite BG Verghese's famous book titled *Waters of Hope*. It advocated for regional or basin-wide cooperation for sustained equitable and multi-purpose utilisation of the region's water resources. At this point, we need to emphasise the

importance of reworking China-India-Myanmar trilateral equations to be energetically responsive to Bangladesh's concerns over a snowballing multidimensional Rohingya crisis. Experts in the west as well as in Asia have even likened the situation to Syrian and Palestinian crises in prospect. A stable and advancing Bangladesh economy is in the interest of both China and India. The issue of radicalism that large-scale persecution ignites will have to be put out. The region is exposed to risks of terrorism if the root cause which can be eliminated now with relative ease is allowed to unnecessarily escalate. The army in Myanmar has been termed as a "deep state syndrome". A Dhaka international meet has prescribed punishing the perpetrators of ethnic cleansing and a Human Rights Council meet scheduled at the UN for December 5 is likely to make a similar call to hold those responsible to account for their crimes against humanity in Myanmar. "India and China contest for influence over Myanmar" is the title of an analysis by Dr MS Prathibha in *The Kootneeti* published on October 4. China sees Myanmar as a gateway to the Indian Ocean while India activated its Look East policy since Narasimha Rao days in 1991 which is now in full gear aimed at establishing physical connectivity between its northern states and Southeast Asian countries via Myanmar. In this context, China is spearheading an initiative for Bangladesh and Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya repatriation question on a bilateral basis. Thus a responsibility devolves on China to bring the issue to a satisfactory conclusion. Finally, why don't we bring the connectivity projects to the table in which Bangladesh is a common denominator with Myanmar, India and China? What has happened to BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar) Economic Corridor? Shah Husain Imam is adjunct faculty at East West University, a commentator on current affairs and former Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*. Email: shahhusainimam@gmail.com

## Conflict of interest

*How the fossil fuel industry and corporate lobbyists delay climate action*



SHOOAHA TABIL

A heated debate is currently ongoing about the necessity to prevent Business and Industry Non-Governmental Organisations (BINGOs) representing Big Oil from disproportionately and wrongly manipulating, slowing and watering down climate policy and negotiations. OPEC countries and the fossil fuel industry that they often represent make gigantic returns from oil revenues and employ enough people to make a low-carbon growth model sound uneconomic as well as unviable. BINGOs, by representing many of the largest fossil fuel companies in climate talks, continue to hijack negotiations in regards to climate change. The interests of these corporations sometimes remain unspoken, but often also openly shield those that are protecting the old economic model that is coupled with the use of fossil fuels. This practice of protecting business interests in climate negotiations has been evident in every UN climate conference: the US Chamber of

Commerce, the National Mining Association (also American); Business Roundtable (USA); Fuels Europe; the Business Council of Australia; the International Chamber of Commerce, Shell, Chevron, BP, Exxon Mobil—all of these interest groups are being represented at the UN climate negotiations, like the one that took place in Bonn, Germany recently. Only 25 fossil fuel producers are responsible for over half of global emissions. Climate policy interference and barricading progress on climate negotiations by these very companies are considered to be among the top ten most obstructive lobbying practices the world over. In spite of these facts, the fossil fuel industry has secured a firm seat at the international climate negotiation table and leveraged its enormous economic supremacy. The UNFCCC, the United Nations body overlooking the climate talks, not only overlooks this obstructionism but salutes these industries and welcomes them with open arms, further legitimising them in the eyes of the world. The general public is guided by the misconception that governments are the ones who drive climate negotiations, but behind

closed doors, it is the industry that is most responsible for climate change that seems to be pulling the strings. "For decades, the US government has used the UNFCCC to advance weak deals and push fossil fuel industry interests ahead of the needs and rights of people." ("Polluting Paris - How Big Polluters Are Undermining Global Climate Policy, November 10, 2017, TruePublica). While people who contribute the

least to global emission are paying a big price as a result of the inaction with their lives and livelihoods and are bearing the daily consequences of climate change, many governments of the Global North are hindering the implementation and negotiation of international policy that is necessary to control the climate catastrophe. This delay is part of a big game that worsens global standards of living, provokes racial inequality and promotes unmanageable, unsustainable development. One of the most prominent discussions at Bonn this year was one that took a look at the conflicts of interest (CoI) between the fossil-fuel industry and the presence of their representatives at UNFCCC meetings. It is well-known that the UNFCCC climate talks and climate negotiations have been, for several years, biased towards corporate lobbyists and those with ties to the fossil fuel industry. Some eye-opening facts and information on how the representatives of "Big Oil" (fossil fuel giants) in Climate conferences—directly and indirectly—affect outcomes adversely have been highlighted again and again in the report "Inside Job: Big Polluters' Lobbyists on the Inside at the UNFCCC" by the international think-tank Corporate Accountability International (CAI), which was already published ahead of the inter-annual meeting of the UNFCCC in Bonn, Germany, in May 2017. Even very recently, at COP23, climate protesters gathered and walked out (on November 13, 2017) as the US government made an official presentation advertising the role of coal in a sustainable energy future. Activists with SustainUS who

harmonised the protest said more than 100 people walked out of the US session. The group's announcement said, "This White House panel of fossil fuel billionaires is a disgrace and an insult to the people of the US and the world who are moving forward with bold climate solutions and want to stay in the Paris Agreement." Pascoe Sabido, a researcher at the think-tank Corporate Europe Observatory, added: "Encouraging coal at a climate summit is like encouraging tobacco at a cancer summit." Many voices have been raised to demand the introduction of a conflict-of-interest policy for the UNFCCC. The UNFCCC has the authorisation to shut the doors that are allowing corporate lobbyists at the table of climate negotiations. So some vital groundwork and a binding conflict-of-interest policy can be a significant step forward in preventing corporate interest holders from dominating climate conferences. Parties must look to the abundance of established green practices all over the world and assemble, in a rigorous manner, for the UNFCCC observers to reveal and limit corporate influence in its many appearances. Shooaha Tabil is a student at Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology (BUET) and South Asia fellow at Climate Tracker.



Demonstrators take part in a so-called Climate March against fossil-based energy like coal on November 4, 2017 in Bonn, western Germany.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**HENRI-FRÉDÉRIC AMIEL**  
SWISS MORAL PHILOSOPHER, POET, AND CRITIC.

*Cleverness is serviceable for everything, sufficient for nothing.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

1 Conclude successfully	38 Boxing poke	19 Light lunch
6 Monster	41 Steakhouse choice	20 Skirt edge
11 Stand up	44 Anticipate	21 Chopping tool
12 Nimble	45 Banks of the Cubs	22 Auction action
13 Steakhouse choice	46 Is furious	24 Pot cover
15 Snaky fish	47 Pay for everyone	25 Mamie's mate
16 Used a couch		26 Ready to go
17 TV's Danson	<b>DOWN</b>	30 Astronomical sightings
18 Repairs	1 Ump's call	31 Mark of distinction
20 Convent attire	2 Lake near Buffalo	33 Spoil
23 Some surreal art	3 Volition	34 Rigging support
27 Way out	4 Employ	35 Corn Belt state
28 Similar	5 Mind a mutt, say	36 Pull along
29 Army doc	6 Prepared the hook	38 Flag Day month
31 West Point student	7 Nest item	39 Laos' land
32 Wanderer	8 "No Sunshine"	40 Sugar source
34 Comic Caesar	9 Gin flavoring	42 Bind up
37 Buddy	10 Watch over	43 Hockey's Bobby
	14 Painter Emst	
	18 Conform	

**BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER**

DID YOU TELL THE GENERAL I WAS HERE TO SEE HIM?  
YES, HE SAID HE'D SEE YOU IN A MINUTE.

GREG+NOPE WALKER

7-22

**BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT**

WANT SOME RECYCLED POPCORN, ZOE?  
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY RECYCLED?  
I FOUND IT UNDER THE COUCH CUSHIONS.  
EWWW! AS IF!  
I THINK THERE ARE A COUPLE OF M&M'S AT THE BOTTOM.  
WELL, MANBE JUST A TASTE...

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

M	I	T	T	O	P	U	S		
M	A	C	R	O	R	E	N	A	L
A	T	E	A	T	A	P	P	L	E
S	U	M	M	E	R	L	O	O	
T	R	A	P	A	U	T	U	M	N
S	E	N	V	I	S	A	G	E	
			C	I	D	E	R		
			B	E	A	N	E	D	
			W	I	N	T	E	R	
			A	C	T	S	P	R	I
			S	K	I	R	T	R	O
			P	E	C	A	N	O	V
			R	E	N	T	D	E	N