

Soft underbelly of connectivity projects?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

ONE would have thought that the much-heralded plans for regional, sub-regional and inter-regional connectivity projects should have added up rather than subtracted from each other. But that is not to be! This is because the projects have been primarily envisioned as mutually rivaling rather than complementary.

Take for instance, the OBOR of China and Big "B" of Japan that Bangladesh has agreed to be a party to. But India, though a part of the Japanese initiative, does not look kindly on the former, to put it politely. The sponsoring or leading country of such mega-projects nurtures an idea of expanding its sphere of influence through economic and trade blocs or groupings with like-minded countries joining in like a phalanx, as it were. This is, however, not to rule out the possibility for forging linkages between various infrastructures or co-option of one member country of a grouping into another bloc at a future date.

The realpolitik construct of the Cold War era between the two superpowers along with their allies gave way to détente in 1990's after the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. Realpolitik meant that each superpower pursued a policy of placing its material greatness and success over the other before all other considerations. In the détente that followed, an amorphous multipolar world seeped into the void that the era of disengagement had produced. Then the Trump presidency in the US abdicated the world's only superpower's role leaving a vacuum which China stepped in to fill by an open declaration. Chinese President Xi Jinping in his New

Year's message articulated his commitment to play an enhanced developmental role in the world. Now, we have embraced a geopolitical era in which a country positions itself in relation to other countries based on its assessments of effects and importance of its geographical location. In other words, a country's foreign policy is set in and to a large extent determined by its geopolitical realities. It can be said, just as Bangladesh's foreign policy has been shaped by its geographical position and historical evolution, so has its foreign relations been influenced by how other countries conducted their relations with Bangladesh. Examples of how Bangladesh's foreign policy and foreign relations have synchronised in challenge-response dynamics at the cusp of an eventful diplomatic year opening out to an equally, if not more, surcharged geopolitics in a new year. We left 2017 on a note of striking a point of equilibrium in our relations with big powers on the question of handling militancy, approach to ISIS and entering into an understanding with the EU to take back "illegal Bangladeshi immigrants" in lieu of a European commitment to help rehabilitate them in Bangladesh. In the immediate aftermath of Bangladesh's January 5, 2014 election, the EU Parliament adopted two resolutions of significance to Bangladesh's reputation. One clarifying EU's position on the trial in international crimes tribunal against the 1971 war criminals and collaborators; and the second, reiterating the EU's position on Jamaat-e-Islami. But the Rohingya crisis came about and continues to be a litmus test of Bangladesh's relations with countries it had otherwise made huge strides to befriend and secure partnership agreements with. After India, Bangladesh has assidu-

ously tried to draw cooperation from China and Russia, the two countries that were instrumental in providing crucial support to Myanmar against any effective UNSC resolution on the country to make it accountable for its genocide on Muslims in Rakhine state. In the face of mounting moral international pressure on Myanmar to behave, Bangladesh went so far as to accept China's mediatory role between Myanmar and Bangladesh to solve the crisis bilaterally. This has practically taken a trilateral form admittedly detracting from a full and binding internationalisation of the crisis. Beijing like Moscow could not countenance UN's direct involvement, although practically a UNHCR participation is considered crucial in carrying forward voluntary, safe and sustainable repatriation and rehabilitation of the Rohingyas back home. A datelined Kolkata Ashis Biswas news analysis carried in *Dhaka Tribune* on January 16, provided a new perspective on Indo-China rivalry on connectivity projects pertaining to Myanmar and interests of India and Bangladesh converging on the issue of speedy repatriation of Rohingyas from both countries. The fresh assertion of Chinese power in Myanmar "may negatively impact more than regional connectivity projects and economic development—what concerns India (as well as Bangladesh) is China's near total support to Myanmar on the Rohingyas issue." According to the analysis, when the time comes to discuss repatriation of the 40,000 Rohingyas currently on Indian soil, Myanmar may impose the same entry condition on India that it has on Bangladesh.

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The Rohingya crisis came about and continues to be a litmus test of Bangladesh's relations with countries it had otherwise made huge strides to befriend. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

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SOAP OPERA

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



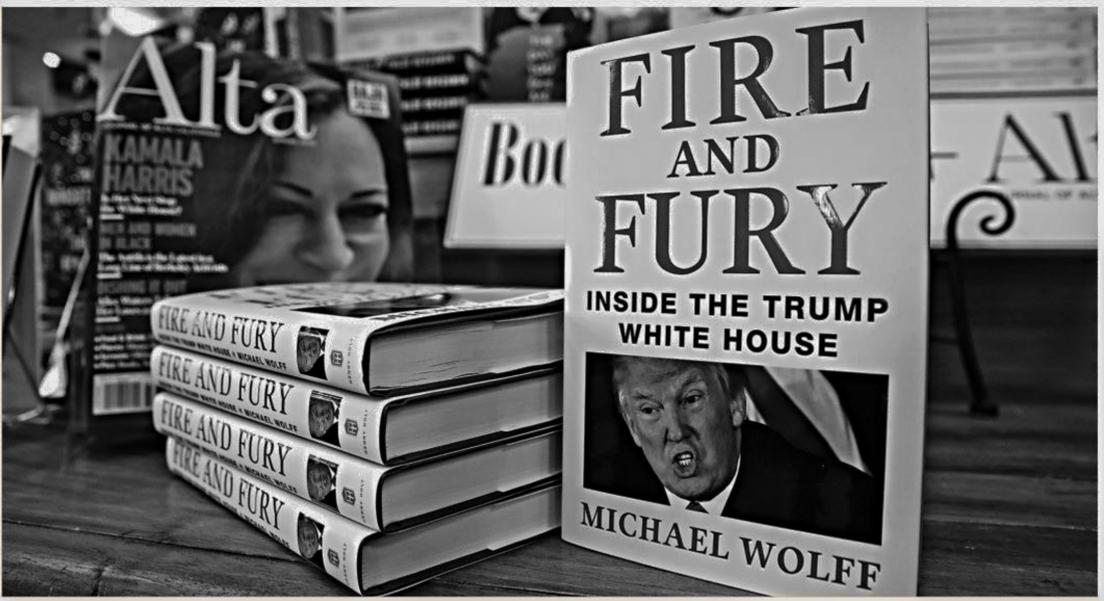
NAVEED MAHBUB

IN America, they put soap in the mouth of a kid when he uses swear words. The cussing has happened, he is a kid and the soap is out. But here's the catch: His daily dose of medicines include Propecia that prevents male pattern hair loss and it's not that he has just come out of being a fetus, but has blossomed like a lotus in what he himself calls a "swamp", into being a full bloomed POTUS, to the chagrin of the FLOTUS (according to the recent bestseller, *Fire and Fury*). Thus, when he refers to some African countries as, well, a word that is not print-worthy, but is surely presidential, the Lifebuoy remains unused and lets the former playboy be just a boy who can be a boy. So, he gets no soap as he chants away in cacophony in his very own opera. But in defence of President Donald Trump, one may argue that he acts in full adherence to the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights, albeit in his own street-savvy way as he perhaps recalls the saying: "The US Constitution is in English, the Bill of Rights is in English. If you don't want to speak English, please feel free to return to that !@#%&*~ of a country you left behind." Again, to be fair, Donald Trump may not be the first leader in America to refer to the countries of origin of some immigrants and would-be immigrants in such an illustrious way. The same may have been told to the ancestors of Donald Trump by Chief Apache in the THEN native language: "...if you don't want to speak my language, please feel free to return to that !@#%&*~ of a country you left behind. And please, take your guns and

diseases back with you." And perhaps he thought it was not inappropriate to compare those African countries with that specific part of the human anatomy where the sun doesn't shine. After all, THAT place (Africa) is where America gets a lot of its "gas"... President Trump isn't saying that the doors to the Land of the Free get closed. He adds that immigrants from countries like Norway should come to the US. Hmm. Let's see if there's a pattern here that suggests we apply a lot more Fair and Lovely... So, here's a president who continues nonchalantly with his golf when appraised of a ballistic missile strike in Hawaii. Here's a president who believes that other than Twitter feeds, the best defence against a missile attack is a golf ball. Here's a president who has made it through his first year in flying (orange) colours and is likely to make it through the next and the next and the next and the following four, judging from George W. Bush getting elected a second time (somehow I miss him...). Though there is the rumble that Oprah Winfrey may join the 2020 presidential race under the Democratic ticket, which, in that case, will see an election being fought not with votes, but with TRP, not to mention, see one billionaire after the job of another. But if he loses, he fears if his fate will be that of former President Barack Obama who was called in for jury duty at USD 17.25 per day. Relax President Trump, your retirement earnings will be just fine—America poorly pays the juror, but richly pays the joker. But one year is enough to bring out the bestseller *Fire and Fury* based on Trump, I mean, the REAL Trump. Wonder if that has to do with the recent fire breaking out at the Trump Tower in New York City—after reading *Fire and Fury*,

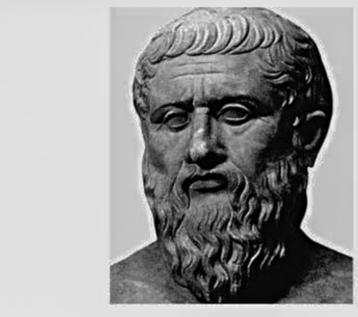
Trump is in fury that ignites a little fire... Sigh! Oh, on your birthday, I SO miss you, Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Like every year on the third Monday of January, America and the believers of equality observe your birthday. I wonder how Donald Trump would've greeted you on your birthday if you were here. Regardless, he probably is all smiles on this

auspicious day—after all, Alabama and Mississippi, on this same third Monday in January, commemorate the Robert E Lee Day... Naveed Mahbub is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ATN Bangla's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and ABC Radio's *Good Morning Bangladesh*, and the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*. Email: naveed.mahbub@gmail.com



Copies of the book *Fire and Fury* by author Michael Wolff are displayed on a shelf at Book Passage in Corte Madera, California. The controversial new book contains details about the inner workings of the Trump administration. PHOTO: AFP

QUOTABLE Quote

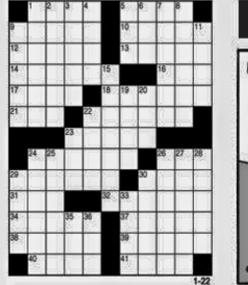


PLATO
Greek philosopher (427—347 BC)

Where there is an income tax, the just man will pay more and the unjust less on the same income.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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| ACROSS | 30 Rational | 9 Like a stray dog |
| 1 California wine valley | 31 Lincoln nickname | 11 Signing needs |
| 5 Open-handed hit | 32 Keyboard pro | 15 One seeing the sights |
| 9 Showy parrot | 34 Cap feature | 19 Rotten imp |
| 10 Hot poster | 37 Bother | 20 Reason for an R rating |
| 12 Even a little | 38 Stage comment | 22 Foot part |
| 13 Find darling | 39 "Skyfall" singer | 23 Lumber unit |
| 14 Buff buff | 40 Started a hole | 24 Braque or Picasso |
| 16 Clamor | 41 On this spot | 25 Infant outfit |
| 17 Amused look | | 26 Spat |
| 18 Fixate | DOWN | 27 Marked down |
| 21 Backer's vote | 1 Science study | 28 Entertainer Midler |
| 22 Most certain | 2 Maine park | 29 Volcano flow |
| 23 Dr. Seuss' environmental character | 3 Politician Sarah | 30 Digging tool |
| | 4 Piercing tools | 33 Casual assent |
| | 5 Relaxing retreat | 35 Keats poem |
| | 24 "Relax!" | 36 Valentine color |
| | 26 Dollop | |
| | 7 Battery ends | |
| | 29 Fencing moves | |
| | 8 Stickler, of a sort | |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

LIMO MAGMA
ATONE ALOES
ISLET RESAY
RED ABE ODE
SLEDGE ALOT
FREETHROW
BRAID
CABERTOISS
TORY ATRAIN
ARC BYE IDA
STARE ROLLS
TENET SWEET
EXECS EDDY

BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

