

# One Belt, One Road: We must secure our interest



PLEASURE IS ALL MINE  
SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THE ancient Silk Road, of which the Belt and Road Initiative is a gigantic new avatar, dates back to the Chinese Han Dynasty's westward expansion more

than 2100 years ago. The Road derived its name from the lucrative silk trade along the routes through which it branched into what are today the central Asian countries Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, as well as present-day Pakistan and India to the south. These routes eventually spanned 4,000 miles to Europe.

Interestingly, silk was regarded as more precious than gold as a commodity in those times as if to convey the misty romanticism with the old world charm about a fine fabric. At any rate, the Silk Road by no means offered silken smooth passage to travellers like Marco Polo, let alone caravans, as they had to negotiate the steppes, the nickname for Silk Road that tired travellers muttered in the company of their guides!

Bloomberg, in an article, has outlined the New Silk Road, the Proposed Silk Road Routes, the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Road on a composite map. The routes girdle Rotterdam, Venice and Moscow to the north-west; North Korea, Mongolia Kunming, Kolkata, Dhaka and Chattogram (shaded) to the east; and Nairobi and Jakarta to the south. The Chinese and the Portuguese had known of the Chittagong port since very olden times for its fame. It was named "a great port" or "Porte Grande" in Portuguese as gleaned from Dr Ainun Nishat.

On December 15, 2016 the media in

**Belt and Road**  
China's modern-day adaptation of the Silk Road aims to revive, and extend, the ancient routes

/ Silk Road Economic Belt - Maritime Silk Road Initiative



Source: Belt and Road Portal, China's National Development and Reform Commission

BloombergQuickTake

Dhaka and Beijing were abuzz with superlatives—"Dhaka, Beijing upgrade ties; sign biggest ever investment deals; agree on Silk Road Initiative"—on the occasion of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Dhaka.

Unfortunately, most of the ten major projects inked with Chinese assistance—Padma Bridge (Rail Link); Marine Drive Expressway; Expansion, Strengthening of Power System Network; Power Plant in Payra, Karnaphuli Tunnel—to name the obvious ones, remain metaphors for sluggish implementation.

It was during the Chinese president's historic visit to Dhaka that the Road and Belt vision was unravelled in clearer terms, including where Bangladesh fits into the envisioned

infrastructural paradigm shift. A *China Daily* report explained how China refocused on South Asia realising that "northern part of South Asia is key for the Silk Road Economic Belt while the southern part is important for the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road."

A report in the *People's Daily* on October 13, 2016 pointed out that "Bangladesh as an important South Asian country located off the Bay of Bengal, can be China's key partner in building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st century Maritime Silk Road."

The planned building of an economic corridor linking Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar despite initial commitments of the countries concerned appears to be witnessing a

certain foot-dragging on the part of Myanmar. The prospects for road and rail linkages in sub-regional terms which seemed realisable vis-a-vis Nepal and Bhutan are having to meet with Myanmar's unabashed diffidence. Now BCIM corridor has taken a back seat to Bimstec and BBIN; the last-named include Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal.

China in a latest overture has put forward an excellent open-ended proposal. This concerns running superfast Bullet Train on Kunming-Kolkata-Dhaka-Chattogram routes and back.

Since the announcement of the Belt Road Initiative by China in 2013, the proposed embellishments to trade, investment and travelling links have

been embraced, even owned up, by 34 countries and 70 organisations.

To scale down the "overwhelming" nature of the multi-dimensional undertaking, China has lately soft-pedalled the idea, if you will, saying it is not a "Chinese project" as such. On the contrary, it is a global undertaking with past roots and traces. Thus, friends and foes alike are welcome to join in. Clearly, the key to success of the intercontinental arterial networking lies in a consensual approach to and coordinated participation by the countries en route.

Although exponential growth in trade, investment, industry and technology is the most likely outcome for the countries embracing One Belt, One Road super-connectivity, China obviously stands to gain the most. For one thing, she is the largest exporter in the world, so will be a beneficiary of multiple trade options promised by the gargantuan venture. For the other, the heightened trade war between the US and China provides a justification for the project. It can be an answer to the rabid form that protectionism has taken on manifestly as an expression of economic xenophobia.

Of course, China's sphere of geopolitical influence will grow with the expansion of economic links, and the Chinese currency Renminbi may get a bit closer to replacing the US Dollar, an agenda China perhaps keeps close to its heart.

One only hopes that integrated infrastructure accompanied by primacy of economic development across the board will create conditions conducive to harmony and coexistence between communities. With that happening what now may appear as a maelstrom of religious extremism and terrorism will dissolve into the ether.

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## America First, Bangladesh Second

PRESIDENT Donald Trump said during his inaugural speech: "From this day forward, it's going to be only America First!"

Holland's late night comedy show, *Zondag met Lubach*, responded immediately to "America First, The Netherlands Second" so as to "get along" with Trump. What followed was a similar response from many late night shows around the world. The *Naveed Mahbub Show* on ATN Bangla, appealed to POTUS for the coveted second spot, stating stark similarities between the US and Bangladesh:

"Dear Mr President  
Bangladesh is as young as Melania Trump, but its ancient culture is as old as Bernie Sanders. The only war we fought was in 1971 and that was the only war that you didn't fight, thanks to Richard Nixon. You occupy countries, we occupy sidewalks. You're the Land of opportunities. We're the land of possibilities, oh, anything is possible. You had a million people on inauguration day. We have a million people on the inauguration of every day. We complain about vote rigging after losing an election. You do it after winning an election. On the streets you achieve, we relieve. That's why we have

heeeeeeee walls. On our border with India, there's also a HUGE wall, well, fence and we made India pay for it. Khan Academy founder Salman Khan and YouTube co-founder Jawed Karim are of Bangladeshi origin – somewhere, although Wikipedia doesn't say so. Fake news! But we love them as ours just as Kenya loves Barack Obama as theirs. We have the Royal Bengals, well, I think we

you by your bridges. We have bananas. You have Benzon, who has gone bananas. We make the best garments. You'll find them at Nordstrom. You'll love our USD 5 *Make America Great Again* caps. They're fantastic.

We eat with our hands. The smaller the hands, the better. It's a great way to eat. You should try it. We also clean ourselves with the hand. It's fantastic.

Bangladesh first? No, you may then want to bomb us, that is, if you can locate us on the map. Ok, ok, it's America First and Bangladesh Second."

But Trump HAS located us on the map and heaven knows what fire and fury has been unleashed that the world has never seen before. For we ARE number two—The Economist Intelligence Unit has once again ranked Dhaka as the second least liveable city while Melbourne is the second most liveable city in the world. Bangladeshis living in Melbourne can now claim to be number two right side up or upside Down Under.

Global Innovation Index 2018 has ranked Bangladeshis as the least innovative in Asia. Really? Haven't they seen our road warrior, the Laguna? Wait, is that why it just got banned in Dhaka city? You know who's sad? The mobile phone thieves!

But that's not all. Our innovation is up to challenging Google's claim of being able to provide information on earthquake aftershocks using artificial intelligence. We, using Bangladeshi intelligence, can provide that information—on Facebook. Didn't we just see that recently with a jolt? 5.3 on the Richter scale, 5.8 on the Robi scale—when the whole country goes 4G, Robi goes 4.5G.

We have even brought Tim Cook to tears as he realised that before they could inaugurate the new iPhones at the Steve Jobs Auditorium in California, we had inaugurated them at Motaleb Plaza.

We have even prompted Apple to incorporate into its new iPhone XS and XS Max the ability to function up to two metres below water so that we can use these phones on the streets of Dhaka during monsoon...

We have invented the technology for mass evaporation of elements and metals as seen in the case of minerals in Madhupur, Dinajpur and the coal of Barapukuria.

Our literacy rate has climbed to 72 percent. That means, 72 out of 100 are educated, while the remaining 28 walk across the road despite there being foot over bridges right in front of them.

We have even managed to stay out of WHO's list of laziest nations where Kuwait tops the list. Well, Saddam Hussain sure took advantage of that. The third laziest country is Saudi Arabia with 53 percent of its population lazy. I suppose the nation's 53 percent citizens are members of the royal family.

Bangladesh is not even in the top 10! That's because our lazy bodies are super busy...on Facebook. Maybe a reality show to find them—*Bangladeshi Idle*.

And last, but not the least (and jokes aside), the best claim we make today, is that Tamim Iqbal "single-handedly" helped Bangladesh win against Sri Lanka.

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PHOTO: SAUL LOEB/AFP

still do and you have the Cincinnati Bengals. America is rich, huge but has no room for [Syrian] refugees. We're poor, tiny and have taken in a million Rohingya refugees.

Based on fake news, the World Bank didn't give us a loan to build a bridge across the Padma River. So, we'll grab

You have the largest military with WMDs. We have the largest NGO, BRAC, with WMDs—Weapons of Mass Development.

Mr President, we completely understand that it's going to be America first. But since we have so much in common, shouldn't it also be

### ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



SEPTEMBER 21, 1860

BATTLE OF PALIKAO

The Battle of Palikao was fought at the bridge of Palikao by Anglo-French forces against the Qing Empire during the Second Opium War. It allowed Western forces to take the capital Beijing and eventually defeat the Qing Empire.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- 1 Wash thoroughly
- 6 Slammer Sammy
- 10 Place of action
- 11 Opium flower
- 13 Track events
- 14 Scarlett's last name
- 15 Seventh Greek letter
- 16 Knight's address
- 18 Peculiarity
- 19 Called or wrote, say
- 22 Inquire
- 23 Novel idea
- 24 Assume as a fact
- 27 Spoiled kids
- 29 Day in Tijuana
- 30 Restrained
- 35 Mess up
- 36 Opposing vote
- 37 Sprinted
- 38 Comedic
- 39 Scarlett's last name
- 40 Twisted material
- 42 Sub system
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