

BANGLADESH PRESIDENT’S NEPAL VISIT

Potential areas for both countries to benefit

KAMAL DEV BHATTARAI

NEPAL and Bangladesh—members of vital regional organisations such as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), sub-regional organisation Bangladesh, Bhutan India and Nepal (BBIN) and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)—share a lot in common and have huge potential for cooperation in various fields. The two countries also have similar position and views on other regional and international organisations.

The four-day official goodwill visit by the President of Bangladesh Abdul Hamid to Nepal this week, has once again highlighted the need to enhance bilateral relations between the two South Asian neighbours. Despite the close and trouble-free relations between the two countries, exchange of high-level visits has remained very minimal, though top leaders of the two countries frequently meet on the margins of regional and international meetings. The visit by Abdul Hamid is likely to break that tradition. His visit is likely to be reciprocated by Nepal’s President Bidya Devi Bhandari in the near future. To enhance cooperation in common areas, regular interaction at high-level visits is mandatory.

One of the major areas of cooperation between the two countries is in the hydropower sector. On August 10, Nepal and Bangladesh signed a much-awaited and historic agreement which has paved the way for energy cooperation between them. Nepal has huge potential to produce hydro energy and it could export that to Bangladesh which is in dire need of energy. Bangladesh has a fast-growing economy with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate between six and seven percent. Bangladesh should import energy to sustain its economic growth and further enhance it.

The new electricity guideline introduced by India last year has paved the way for Nepal to export electricity beyond India, mainly to



President Abdul Hamid at a meeting with his Nepali counterpart, Bidhya Devi Bhandari, at her residence in Kathmandu on November 13.

PHOTO: PTD

Bangladesh. The guideline, if implemented, will ensure reliable grid operation and power trade among South Asian countries. Bangladesh has plans to import 9,000 MW from Nepal by 2040. Bangladesh’s power demand is projected to double by 2030.

Even Bangladeshi private companies have shown interest to invest in some hydropower projects in Nepal. The prime minister of Bangladesh had requested for India’s cooperation in cross-border power trade with Nepal during her official visit to India in April, 2017. Not only Bangladesh, there have been efforts to sign energy cooperation in BBIN. And, Bangladesh is pushing for a BBIN electricity corridor. India should assist both Nepal and Bangladesh to cooperate in power and other areas.

Connectivity is another vital area where there is huge potential between the two countries. Bangladesh and Nepal are separated by 22 kilometres of Indian land. As a land-locked country, Nepal is seeking more and more access to the sea through India and China, but there have not been efforts to get the same facility from Bangladesh, which could be feasible in terms of both cost and distance. Following the opening of Kakarbhitta-Phulbari-Banglabandha transit route in 1997, Bangladesh has permitted Nepal to use the port facilities in Mongla. Bangladesh has also provided additional rail-transit corridor to Nepal via Rohanpur-Singhabad, but it has not been fully utilised. Various studies have been conducted regarding railway

connectivity between the two countries.

There can be trilateral cooperation between Nepal, India and Bangladesh. The agreement on bus service is already in place, and a trial bus service on the Nepal-India-Bangladesh route was flagged in April 2018 which needs to be made operational. The status of air connectivity is already in place with regular flights between Kathmandu and Dhaka.

Economic and commercial relations which have already been forged can be further expanded with better connectivity. Nepal exports yellow lentils, oil cakes, cardamom (large), wheat, vegetable seeds, handicrafts and pashminas. Nepal imports industrial raw materials, chemicals, fabrics and textile, jute products, electric and electronic items from Bangladesh. The trade relations could be

further enhanced in the days to come. Of late, the Nepali side has been complaining that there are a lot of bottlenecks to export some items to Bangladesh including medicine.

Though Nepal is importing 12 types of medicine, Nepal has not been able to export even a single type of medicine to Bangladesh. The Nepal-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission (JEC) was set up at the level of finance ministers in 1978. It has not met regularly nor explored new avenues of cooperation. The status of bilateral trade is dismal due to the lack of a long-term vision.

Tourism is another area which has not really materialised to the extent that was expected; instead the flow of tourists is declining. From January-October this year, a total of 19,279 Bangladeshi tourists visited Nepal which is 1.9 percent less than the previous year. In 2017, 29,060 Bangladeshi tourists visited Nepal. That declined to 25,979 in 2018. One reason for this decline was the crash of a US-Bangla plane in Kathmandu Airport.

The time has come to prepare a blueprint of comprehensive partnership between Bangladesh and Nepal. For that to happen, first there is a need of agenda-driven high-level visits between officials of the two countries. The top political leadership of both countries should provide a blueprint of bilateral relations amidst the changing regional and international scenario.

The two countries can also play a vital role in strengthening the various regional organisations. Both Nepal and Bangladesh are strong proponents of SAARC so they can both work in unison to activate the SAARC process which has been in a coma for the last three years—negatively affecting the process of regional cooperation.

The meeting between the Bangladeshi president and top politicians in Kathmandu has provided hope that a new chapter will begin in the relations between Bangladesh and Nepal.

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PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Global trade’s bright (green) future



PASCAL LAMY

trade system emerging.

The global shipping industry, which carries 90 percent of all global trade by volume, has started to acknowledge the urgency of climate change, and is taking steps to minimise its environmental impact. On January 1, 2020, cleaner fuel standards for shipping will take effect globally. After more than a decade of negotiations, member-state governments at the United Nations International Maritime Organization (IMO) have agreed to a new “global sulphur cap,” demonstrating that multilateralism is still possible. The method of powering shipping vessels will now undergo a change on the scale of the shift from coal to oil a century ago.

Under the IMO accord, the shipping industry will be required to reduce sulphur-dioxide and nitrous-oxide pollution on a massive scale. Among other things, the policy ensures that millions of children around the world will have a chance to live healthier lives. Over time, we have learned that these air pollutants can have a deleterious effect not just on our hearts and lungs, but also on brain development. Now that the cap is coming into force, we will soon benefit from

the extraordinary effects of a new, permanent global health dividend. We can expect to see data in the coming years indicating reduced health-care costs and improved educational outcomes from around the world.

In the meantime, governments will be collaborating on additional measures to reduce the environmental and climate impact of the global maritime trade system. Such efforts are essential to reach the targets outlined in the 2015 Paris climate agreement. As matters stand, the shipping sector, ranked alongside countries, is the world’s sixth-

largest greenhouse-gas (GHG) emitter.

The good news is that under an ambitious IMO agreement concluded last year, the shipping sector must reduce its GHG emissions to “at least” half of their current levels by 2050, while also taking steps to start reducing emissions before 2023. The bad news is that discussions over the best policies for achieving these goals have stalled. As important as mutually agreed targets are, they are no substitute for concrete action.

Still, policymakers have an opportunity to get back on track during a new round of

international talks in London this month on decarbonising global shipping. There, delegates to the IMO are considering a wide range of policy options that could make a significant difference.

For example, Denmark, Germany, and Spain have proposed tough, transparent “operational efficiency” regulations that could reduce carbon-dioxide emissions by up to 43 percent by 2030. In real terms, that means preventing a cumulative 3.8 billion tons of CO2 from being emitted into the atmosphere, which is the equivalent of shutting down 98 coal-fired power stations.

Still, there are also weaker proposals on the table. One put forward by Japan and Norway would lower CO2 emissions from shipping by only 1-6 percent by 2030, while still allowing for emissions to grow above their current levels.

Given ever-growing public demands for climate action—not to mention new data pointing to the pace and severity of climate change—a weak approach simply is not good enough. Besides, tough efficiency regulations would not make trade more expensive, as some detractors claim, because they would lead operators to acquire more fuel-efficient vessels. Fuel is now the single biggest operating expense in shipping, which means that early adopters of technologies that reduce fuel costs can offer better freight rates and achieve a competitive advantage.

A more efficient shipping fleet would not only make international trade less oil-dependent; it would also help to insulate freight rates against future oil-price spikes, such as the one that led to destabilising food riots around the world in 2008.

At any rate, the industry is ahead of governments on this issue. At a recent shipping industry gathering, industry representatives focused squarely on the question of how to power “global trade without the use of fossil fuels.” Moreover, many large shipping companies have already committed to commercialising full-size, zero-carbon vessels on deep-sea trade routes by as soon as 2030.

Beyond these current efforts, there are many promising new technologies being tested, from clever air-bubble lubricated hulls to wind-assisted propulsion and—crucially—carbon-neutral fuel types. When it comes, the shipping industry’s pivot to these fuels will generate massive investments in renewable energy in developing countries.

Finally, banks accounting for more than 20 percent of all loans to the shipping sector have committed to disclosing the carbon intensity of their loans every year, using transparency to drive capital toward more efficient ships and away from dirty ones.

Clearly, the private sector is stepping up. Now, governments gathering at the IMO summit in London need to do the same, by supporting clear, transparent, and ambitious short-term measures to reduce emissions. Only that can create the incentives for investment in zero-carbon technologies and carbon-neutral trade over the long term.

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Pascal Lamy, a former director-general of the World Trade Organization and EU trade commissioner, is a Global Ocean Commissioner.

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A container ship arrives at Yusen Terminals on Terminal Island at the Port of Los Angeles in Los Angeles, California, US, January 30, 2019.

PHOTO: MIKE BLAKE/REUTERS

QUOTABLE
Quote

GEORGE ORWELL
(1903-1950) English novelist, essayist, and critic.

In general, the greater the understanding, the greater the delusion; the more intelligent, the less sane.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Coarse files
6 Milk buy
11 “Awesome!”
12 City-based
13 African capital
14 Operative
15 Swimmer’s choice
17 UFO pilots
19 Genesis woman
20 Take the prize
23 Good name
25 Walking aid
26 Whatever the weather
28 “Deal — Deal”
29 Balanced
30 Reuben base
31 Letter before
32 Attempt

DOWN

1 Bird of myth
2 “So that’s it”
3 Alpine tree
4 Cruise stop
5 Affirmed in court
6 Tremble
7 Spur on
8 Penny prez
9 Sought a seat
10 Blasting stuff
16 Be due a refund,

perhaps
17 Slip
18 Visibly sad
20 What weight
watchers watch
21 Central
22 High maintenance
24 One, for Juan
25 Letter before psi
27 Puffy dessert
31 November
birthstone
33 Burlap fiber
34 River of Russia
35 Lass
36 Musician Yoko
37 Gratuity
39 Tic-toe connection
40 Skin woe

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YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

B	A	I	L	S		C	L	A	M
A	R	N	I	E		C	A	I	R
D	A	F	O	E		H	A	N	G
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C	O	L	T		L	E	I	S	
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BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott