

What to make of Biden's Middle East visit?



A CLOSER LOOK

TASNEEM TAYEB

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IN the wake of the upcoming Congressional elections this November, record high inflation, and poor approval rating at home – in the 30s, on par with the ratings of his immediate predecessor, Donald Trump – US President Joe Biden made his four-day Middle East trip last week, hoping to go back home with some significant political and economic wins. Unfortunately, it seems he has gone back home with very little to show for gains, and a lot of bad headlines that will haunt his media team for months to come.

In terms of political win, Biden's expectations were to secure a stronger, more commanding presence in the region and create a block of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-3 countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, plus Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq) against Iran, and push them to have a softer approach towards Israel. As for economic gains, he was counting on a concrete declaration from Saudi Arabia – the world's largest exporter of crude oil and founder-member of the OPEC cartel that accounts for nearly 40 percent of the global oil supply chain – to increase its oil pumping, which he had hoped would ease the four-decade high inflation at home. US citizens are unhappy having to bear the brunt of the 9.1 percent inflation (in June), the heat of which Biden is facing with his ever-growing unpopularity and falling approval ratings.

At the summit of Arab nations in Jeddah, as Biden laid out the US strategy for the region, perhaps the only statement that ironically stood out was, "We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China,

Russia or Iran." And his attempts to soften Israel's relationship with its Arab neighbours were met by logical counter by the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who suggested, "One of the most important sources of instability will linger unless Israel stops its violation of international law reflected in the building of settlements

and changing Jerusalem's character and in continuing to impose siege on Gaza... It is inappropriate for Arabs to keep making proposals while Israel's role is confined to rejecting them and increasing its intransigence." While Saudi Arabia has opened up its airspace to all air carriers, including that of Israel, and, according to a White House fact sheet, "committed to support global oil market balancing for sustained economic growth," the Biden

decades – first as a senator, then as US vice-president, and now as president – and reinforcing the US' "bone-deep" connection with Israel, that he said would grow "generation after generation."

Interestingly, the centrepiece of this visit was the signing of the non-binding "Jerusalem Declaration" between the two countries that focuses on deterring Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. To be noted, it is not a legally-binding

agreement or a treaty that holds much water. However, in a recorded television interview, Biden went as far as saying that, if required, the US would use force against Iran to prevent it from becoming a nuclear power.

And for Palestine, Biden had only some handouts in the form of aid, nice words and the blunder of lipped regarding Israel's plans and actions. But then, this was expected. Perhaps what took everyone by surprise was Biden branding himself as a Zionist, and by doing so denting a blow to his neutrality and credibility among the other states and nations of the region.

Moreover, his visit to Saudi Arabia – despite its apparent strategic importance – has essentially compromised his moral high ground, as he had called it a "pariah" nation during his presidential election campaign. His failure to openly condemn the killings of journalists Jamal Khashoggi and Shireen Abu Akleh, while fist-bumping with and back-patting their killers, has gone on to show how little regard the current US administration holds for human rights, and how little priority it gets over domestic gains.

Also, the failure of Biden's visit to create a more positive outlook towards Israel among its Arab neighbours will not sit well with the Israeli lobbyist groups back home, and it certainly won't help his cause in the upcoming November elections. After all, in the US Congress, if there is one issue that can unite both the Democrats and the Republicans, it is the unyielding, unshakeable US support for Israel and for its establishment as a strong nation in the Middle East.

The only reality that can now salvage this lacklustre and disastrous visit is the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) pumping significantly more oil – apart from the previously announced 50 percent planned production increase that came in June for the months of July and August – to support the supply chain in the US, which could ease the inflationary pressure on the government. And so, only in the coming months would we be able to see if this visit yielded any meaningful results for the US.

Apart from the photo-ops and the occasional faux pas, the rest of the visit was just lip service.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and US President Joe Biden bump fists upon the latter's arrival at Al Salman Palace, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on July 15, 2022. SOURCE: REUTERS

mispronouncing the name of the slain Al Jazeera journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, who also happened to be Palestinian-American. Biden also sidestepped her family's request for a meeting.

Biden's Middle East visit has not only failed to procure the achievements he was hoping for, but has also exposed him to controversies. For instance, while he had tough words for Iran's nuclear ambitions, he remained tight-

lipped regarding Israel's plans and actions. But then, this was expected. Perhaps what took everyone by surprise was Biden branding himself as a Zionist, and by doing so denting a blow to his neutrality and credibility among the other states and nations of the region.

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Challenges to our macroeconomic development



Ahnaf Shahriar is founder and CEO of Flagship Ventures.

AHNAF SHAHRIAR

reducing poverty have been reversed. While our government revels about Bangladesh's GDP growth, it is critical to understand that GDP is not a precise metric for measuring well-being, because it does not take into account investments made towards education and health, nor does it address income inequality. Other metrics, such as the Gini coefficient, are more precise. Bangladesh's Gini coefficient is at an all-time high, indicating that inequality is also at its highest.

The ongoing global economic climate has also been affected by the Russia-Ukraine war, which has caused prices of industrial and essential consumer goods, particularly raw materials, to skyrocket around the world. Bangladesh is no exception, with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rising from 6.17 percent in February to 6.22 percent in March – the highest since October 2020.

Matters were also made worse when Bangladesh lost the generalised system of preferences (GSP) for Bangladeshi products exported to the US, worrying many in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector. This contradicts the existing World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements, which allow developed countries to offer duty-free access to the LDCs. Had the US granted Bangladesh duty-free status in accordance with the WTO guidelines, as all other developing countries have, Bangladesh's exports to the US would have reached an estimated USD 15 billion instead of the current USD 7.3 billion, and potentially employed two more million people. Despite this, the country has made significant economic progress. Bangladesh has benefited from having GSP for their products in the EU, Australia, and Japanese markets. Negotiating preferential trade deals such as these with Latin American and Western European countries are vital to ease the transition from being an LDC to a developing country.

Migration, internal displacement, and climate change also hinder Bangladesh's economic prosperity. Climate adaptation must become a national priority moving forward, as the World Bank reports that the South Asia region will see 40 million internal climate migrants by 2050, with Bangladesh accounting for one-third of them. The displacement of Rohingyas, in particular, has placed an enormous socioeconomic burden on Bangladesh which requires urgent attention from the international community.

There are reasons to be optimistic about Bangladesh's future. However, following a long-term vision and monitoring implementation must become top priorities for our incumbent government. If we are to strive to be a better and more prosperous country, it must happen on all fronts – by improving human rights, our democratic institutions, eliminating corruption, and enforcing the rule of law.

With the recent arrival of the fourth wave of Covid in Bangladesh, the country faces numerous recurring challenges to maintaining its growth. The priority should be to develop a strong recovery plan, which ensures that protective healthcare services are provided to safeguard the economy. The public healthcare system must be supported to deliver more accurate assessment and medical treatment to build resilience against the coronavirus. Over the last two years, the production and distribution of goods have been repeatedly disrupted. The pandemic has also exacerbated income inequality by widening the gap between the rich and poor. As a result, previous gains in expanding income opportunities and

reducing poverty have been reversed. While our government revels about Bangladesh's GDP growth, it is critical to understand that GDP is not a precise metric for measuring well-being, because it does not take into account investments made towards education and health, nor does it address income inequality. Other metrics, such as the Gini coefficient, are more precise. Bangladesh's Gini coefficient is at an all-time high, indicating that inequality is also at its highest.

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Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Executive Engineer
District: Cumilla
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.1900.000.07.002.2021-3862

Date: 17/07/2022

e-Tender Notice
Tender Notice No: 02/2022-2023

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the Procurement of Works as stated below:

Sl. No.	Package No.	Name of Works	Tender/ Proposal ID No.	Document last selling/ downloading Date and Time	Tender/ Proposal Closing Date and Time	Method of Tender
1.	CCB/C/VR/W-66	a) (i) Improvement of Nawrota - Tek Market via Nukachar Road at Ch. 1165-2345m (Road ID: 419904022); a) (ii) Construction of 437m Protective Work on the same road; a) (iii) Construction of 9.625x0.600m 2nos. Culvert at Ch. 1857m & 2213m on the same road and Construction of 9.90x0.90m 1no. Culvert at Ch. 1273m on the same road; b) (i) Improvement of Sreepur Pucca Road - Sreepur Primary School (Muktijoida) Nural Islam School Road at Ch. 00-735m (Road ID: 419905101); b) (ii) Construction of 237m Protective Work on the same road; b) (iii) Construction of 8.6x0.60m 1no. Culvert at Ch. 684m on the same road under Monoharganj Upazila, District: Cumilla (2nd Call).	717942	02-08-2022 17:00 pm	03-08-2022 12:10 pm	OTM
2.	CCB/C/VR/W-67	a) Improvement of Hattiyanni Shahid Huj Bari - Mollabari via Hattiyanni Primary School Road at Ch. 06-357m (Road ID: 419904140); b) Construction of 752m Protective Work on the same road; c) Construction of 0.9x0.90m 3nos. Culvert at Ch. 223m, 647m & 870m on the same road under Monoharganj Upazila, District: Cumilla (2nd Call).	717943	02-08-2022 17:00 pm	03-08-2022 12:10 pm	OTM
3.	CCB/C/VR/W-68	a) (i) Improvement of Aakbar Bazar - Dhakkan Chandpur Road at Ch. 00-785m (Road ID: 419904096); a) (ii) Construction of 275m Protective Work on the same road; a) (iii) Construction of 2.00x2.00m 1no. Culvert at Ch. 367m on the same road; b) (i) Improvement of Shaktala Bazar-Badshah Utopara via Shaktala Primary School Road at Ch. 01-860m (Road ID: 419904131); b) (ii) Construction of 237m Protective Work on the same road; b) (iii) Construction of 0.625x0.60m 2nos. Culvert at Ch. 316m & 699m on the same road under Monoharganj Upazila, District: Cumilla (2nd Call).	717944	02-08-2022 17:00 pm	03-08-2022 12:10 pm	OTM
4.	CCB/C/VR/W-59	a) (i) Improvement of Kajastia Madanla-Battali Road at Ch. 06-1460m (Road ID No. 419905098); a) (ii) Construction of 271m Protective Work on the same road; a) (iii) Construction of 4.50x3.50m 1no. Culvert at Ch. 891m on the same road; b) (i) Improvement of Farua-Nodgar Road at Ch. 400-1464m (Road ID No. 419904035); b) (ii) Construction of 161m Protective Work on the same road; b) (iii) Construction of 0.90x0.90m 2nos. Culvert at Ch. 496m & 1230m on the same road under Barura Upazila, District: Cumilla (2nd Call).	717948	02-08-2022 17:00 pm	03-08-2022 12:10 pm	OTM
5.	CCB/C/VR/W-69	a) (i) Improvement of Shattipur Pucca road - Burpist Primary School via Nogaone Primary School Road at Ch. 480-2270m (Road ID: 419904134); a) (ii) Construction of 599m Protective Work on the same road; a) (iii) Construction of 0.90x0.90m 2nos. Culvert at Ch. 538m & 1325m on the same road; b) (i) Improvement of Binoygar Bridge-Manikpata via Binoygar Primary School Road at Ch. 06-1138m (Road ID: 419904130) (Salvage materials cost Tk. 3,29,841/-); b) (ii) Construction of 355m Protective Work on the same road under Monoharganj Upazila, District: Cumilla (2nd Call).	717945	03-08-2022 17:00 pm	04-08-2022 12:10 pm	OTM
6.	CCB/C/VR/W-70	a) (i) Improvement of Dajira Dakshinpara Mosque (Dakshinpara) - Bachi Dakshanda Road at Ch. 00-1828m (Road ID: 419904132); a) (ii) Construction of 447m Protective Work on the same road; a) (iii) Construction of 0.90x0.90m 2nos. Culvert at Ch. 1212m & 1707m on the same road; b) (i) Improvement of Dangpur Phalpakura-Daughar Road at Ch. 00-1012m (Road ID: 419904133); b) (ii) Construction of 357m Protective Work on the same road; b) (iii) Construction of 0.90x0.90m 1no. Culvert at Ch. 728m and Construction of 3.00x3.00m 1no. Culvert at Ch. 470m on the same road under Monoharganj Upazila, District: Cumilla (2nd Call).	717946	03-08-2022 17:00 pm	04-08-2022 12:10 pm	OTM
7.	CCB/C/VR/W-62	a) (i) Improvement of Coney-Mirha Road at Ch. 00-500m (Road ID No. 419904016); a) (ii) Construction of 166m Protective Work on the same road; a) (iii) Construction of 0.90x0.90m 1no. Culvert at Ch. 7m and Construction of 2.00x2.00m 1no. Culvert at Ch. 465m on the same road; b) (i) Improvement of Hatirasa Jamsir Shop - Hatirasa High School Road at Ch. 00-932m (Road ID No. 419904127) (Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 15,279/-); b) (ii) Construction of 320m Protective Work on the same road; c) (i) Improvement of Bhogai Uta-Chera Mia Shop-Shahpur Road at Ch. 00-1500m (Road ID No. 419905177) (Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 17,46,185/-); c) (ii) Construction of 625m Protective Work on the same road; c) (iii) Construction of 0.625x0.60m 2nos. Culvert at Ch. 800m & 1015m on the same road under Monoharganj Upazila, District: Cumilla (2nd Call).	717947	03-08-2022 17:00 pm	04-08-2022 12:10 pm	OTM

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no Off-line/Hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP Portal have to be deposited through online at any Branches of registered Bank.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

The Tender Notice will be available on the website: www.lged.gov.bd.

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GD-1392