

'Together, we can be a force for good'

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh and Turkey have shared historic and cultural roots dating long before the creation of independent Bangladesh. Despite the fact that Turkey sided with Pakistan during the Liberation War and expressed objections over the war crimes trial in 2012, the relations between the two countries have been growing rapidly in recent times.

In a recent conversation with The Daily Star, Turkish Ambassador (TA) to Bangladesh, Mustafa Osman Turan, shared various dimensions of the ties as his tenure here is nearing an end.

TDS: How did you overcome the previous issues and reach today's stage of the bilateral relationship?

TA: Our relationship has always been a very close one, because our countries share common values, culture and traditions. Though we had some hiccups in the past, we solved those through our friendship and honesty. Those issues were there as we don't want Bangladesh to fall into instability. In 2016, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina wrote a letter to our president, expressing solidarity, when there was an attempted coup to topple our government. Also, Turkey showed full support to Bangladesh during the 2017 Rohingya influx.

TDS: How do you define today's relationship?

TA: It is exemplary and excellent. Our trade is booming. In 2020, it was \$815 million, which has now reached close to \$1.5 billion. Also, the number of tourists from Bangladesh to Turkey has increased exponentially this year. Meanwhile, our investment is also growing. We buy a lot of jute yarn and RMG products from Bangladesh. We have our own RMG products. So, we would like to find complementary products that can add value. Our design capabilities are very good in the RMG sector. We may collaborate and have joint ventures in the future. We export mainly machinery in the RMG and agro industry, along with chemicals and cotton. Turkey is strong in the agriculture

and technology sectors. We also have light engineering and SMEs. There are also opportunities in the ICT sector. We have many opportunities for collaboration.

TDS: What are the challenges we face in trade between the two countries?

TA: Turkey has high tariffs on RMG as we want to protect our local products. If we can find complementary ways of RMG production, we can revisit and review those tariffs on selective products. There is big opportunity of Islamic fashion.

DS: There has been good cooperation in security sector. What are we buying?

TA: In January this year, two countries signed a security agreement on training law enforcers, exchanging information, and counterterrorism. We have another agreement on defence cooperation. Bangladesh has been procuring military hardware and defence systems from Turkey since before I came here in 2020. Multi-launcher rocket systems and armoured personnel carriers were also purchased by Bangladesh for the UN peacekeeping missions. Bangladesh will also buy drones, which we export to more than 20 countries, including Ukraine. We don't have any political agenda in this matter. Our relations are based on mutual trust and so, is becoming very strategic. In the future, we

can be a favourable source of procurement in the field of navy, patrol vessels and frigate.

DS: Global geopolitical polarisation is sharpening due to the Ukraine-Russia war. Developing countries like Bangladesh are being heavily affected. How can Turkey help in this regard?

TA: In the wake of the war, we are trying to bring Ukraine and Russia into a dialogue. We have been successful in brokering a grain deal. Of course, the real need now is cessation of hostility and armed conflict. We think Russia has violated the international law by invading Ukraine. On the other hand, we don't find sanctions on Russia having necessary impact in stopping the war. We will continue to play



SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO



One held over BNP leader's murder in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Police yesterday arrested an accused in connection with the murder of BNP leader AFM Kamal in Sylhet.

The arrestee, Aziz Hasan Kuti, 30, was the fifth person named in the murder case, said Azbahar Ali Sheikh, deputy commissioner of Sylhet Metropolitan Police (North).

However, the police did not give details about where Kuti was arrested.

On Sunday night, AFM Kamal, former health affairs secretary of Sylhet district BNP, was stabbed to death in the district's Barabazar area.

Forty-eight hours after the incident, his brother Moinul Haque filed a case with the Airport Police Station accusing 10 named and 4-5 unnamed persons Tuesday night.

Hours after the murder, BNP leaders and activists staged demonstrations on Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital premises Sunday night.

At that time, several motorcycles were burnt and a car was vandalised in Rikabibazar area where a clash broke out between some BCL and BNP activists.

Besides, pictures of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina were torn during the procession.

Later, police reached the spot and dispersed the protesters.

Four people were arrested in connection with the vandalism, said Mohammad Ali Mahmud, officer-in-charge of Sylhet Kotwali police station.

Two Palestinians dead in West Bank violence

AFP, Ramallah

Two Palestinians including a teenager were killed in unrest in the occupied West Bank yesterday, one of them in clashes during a visit by right-wing Israeli politicians to a sensitive religious site.

The Palestinian health ministry said Mahdi Mohammad Hashash, 15, died of "serious wounds caused by shrapnel... during the occupation's (Israel's) incursion into Nablus", the largest city in the northern West Bank.

The Israeli military said troops had been in the area to secure "the entrance of worshippers to Joseph's

An exam question to ignite bigotry

FROM PAGE 1

college students? Most importantly how did this segment creep into the question paper when there are specific guidelines about making sure no question is formulated that disrespects religion? Why didn't the moderator -- the last person who has the authority to critique a question and even scrap it -- remove the offensive section and alert their colleagues?

The education board has identified five teachers involved in preparing and moderating the question and a probe has been started. This is encouraging, though it does not erase the fact that this is not a one-off incident of how our national education curriculum has been tampered with. Unfortunately, there have been other attempts to "de-secularise" the national curriculum. In 2017, as if to comply with the demands of Hefazat-e-Islam, a Qwami madrasa-based group, some poems and prose by non-Muslims were excluded from school textbooks. link <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/the-big-picture/disturbing-deviations-childrens-books-1348375>

Writings of famous poets and writers were scrapped because the authors were either non-Muslim or the

content they wrote was considered to be somehow contradictory to Islamic thought. This includes Humayan Azad's poem "Boi" (class 5 textbook) that encourages students to read books and avoid texts that promote insularity and narrowmindedness. Gulam Mustafa's "Prarthhona" (Prayer) that pays tribute to the Creator, Jasimuddin's "Desh" (motherland), a philosophical song by Lalon Shah, Rangalal Bandhyapadhyay's "Swadhinota", Sunil Gangopadhyay's "Shakota Dulchhe" about childhood and friendship, Rabindranath Tagore's poem "Bangladesher Hridoy" (Bangladesh's heart), a patriotic poem about the poet's motherland and Kazi Nazrul Islam's essay "Bangaleer Bangla".

Funnily enough, it was virtually impossible to nail these deliberate attempts to communalise textbooks on anyone. According to a Prothom Alo report at the time, no one from the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) or the National Coordination Committee (NCC) or the editors and writers of the textbooks seemed to know how these omissions took place. This took place despite the fact that according to the rules, changes cannot be made to textbooks without the knowledge

of the NCC and the textbook editors.

As far as we know, these dropped texts that have been part of the school curriculum since independence and aligned with the secular values of Bangladesh's liberation movement and the constitution, have not been restored.

Eminent educationists and cultural activists have strongly objected to these illogical omissions, pointing out the dangerous effects it will have on young people who are the future leaders of this country. We are already facing serious challenges to our liberation spirit from religious extremists who sometimes resort to violence to prove their point. The horrific images of the attacks on Buddhist temples in Ramu, Hindu temples and houses in Narail, Nasirnagar, Cumilla, Noakhali and countless other places, are haunting reminders of how threatened our much-cherished communal harmony is.

But what is more frightening is the government's disturbing tolerance of bigotry and communal acts. Religious sentiments, however flimsily they can be interpreted, have taken precedence over freedom of speech and the right to practise one's own religion

(other than the majority's faith) as guaranteed by our constitution. This is why we have the abhorrent sections of the Digital Security Act that allows law enforcers to arrest anyone who is deemed to have "hurt religious sentiments" whether it is because of a post from a fake Facebook account or a metaphysical expression in a Baul song. Now our children are in danger of catching the communal bug through textbooks that omit the works of great minds who have promoted inclusivity, diversity, and tolerance -- all the values necessary for an enlightened society and which are integral to any education system. The much talked about question in this year's HSC Bangla question paper indicates a stealthy attempt to show Bangladesh as a communal nation where there is no place for followers of the Hindu faith or any other faith other than Islam.

So, what does all this mean? Is Bangladesh's national education curriculum being infected with the disease of bigotry? If so, why is the Awami League government, the champion of our Liberation War which was very much a movement against racism and religious prejudice, allowing it?

Pakistan roll over NZ

FROM PAGE 1

Pakistan last claimed the title in 2009 at Lord's in England when they beat Sri Lanka by eight wickets, and it has been a rollercoaster ride in Australia to make another final.

After agonising last-ball losses to India and Zimbabwe in the group phase, they bounced back to topple the Netherlands and South Africa and were only able to scrap into the last four only after the Netherlands had upset South Africa last Sunday.

New Zealand, who topped Group 1, were aiming to make the final for the second consecutive time, but their hunt for a maiden T20 title again fell short.

Teams batting first had won five from six games played in Sydney this tournament and when Kane Williamson won the toss he had no hesitation in asking Pakistan to bowl, but it proved to be tough going.